AUTODEFENSAS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP AND STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN MEXICO

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Originality Statement

'I, Alexander Markendale Curry, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

Signed:

Date: 30th September 2019

Dedication

To my wife Andrea, without whose constant love and support this thesis could not have been written.

To the people of Tancítaro, with my respect and friendship.

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Abstract

The *autodefensas* (self-defence groups) that emerged in the Mexican state of Michoacán in 2013 have sparked a great deal of societal, media, and academic interest both within Mexico and internationally. Whilst significant attention has been devoted to the causes, events, and personalities involved in the autodefensa movement, comparatively little attention has been paid to the long-term impact that such groups have had in the communities in which they emerged. This study seeks to redress this deficit by exploring the effect that the experience of such groups – both participation within them, and living under their influence – has had on ideas and practices of citizenship and state-society relations more generally. Focusing on the municipal level within Michoacán, the project utilised semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and attendance at community events and meetings, to gain insights into the social construction of citizenship in a locale where *autodefensas* had been semi-institutionalised. By employing such methods, it was possible to discern the way in which the experience of the autodefensa rising – and the participation of the community within this – had generated the renewal of inter-personal relations and ideas of community identity. In turn, and combined with the relative security provided by the autodefensas, this phenomenon allowed for the emergence of citizen participation projects led by the Church which have generated new political and social inter-subjectivities, most notably via citizen councils implicated in the co-production of governance in the municipality. It is argued that the experience and continued presence of *autodefensas* has helped to construct an emergent localised sovereignty underpinned by a form of localised citizenship, and predicated on ideas of (in)security and narratives of unity and local identity. Thus, *autodefensas* have been productive of a reconceptualization of citizenship and a broader re-negotiation of state-society relations at the local level. As such, whilst based on the experiences at the municipal level, the thesis makes important contributions to the literature on citizenship and state-society relations in contexts of pervasive insecurity, with the key findings having a wider application to both contemporary Mexico, and Latin America more generally.

Key words: Autodefensas; citizenship; state-society relations; sovereignty.

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Introduction

The *caseta de vigilancia* (guardhouse) is built of stone and brick. It is two storeys with the second storey a lookout post with bricks to waist height. The bricks curve round into a turret-like structure and a banner hangs from it with two columns of names listed. The banner bears a sombre title: "Disappeared People of Aguacate Sur". There are 27 names divided between the two columns. The *caseta* has a metal roof and loopholes in the walls at the ground level. A *Virgin de Guadelupe* statue sits on an altar on the wall next to a poster of Dr. Mireles with the slogan "Dr. Mireles, We Support You!". As the sun begins to set there are five older men seated along a wooden bench to the side of the *caseta* chatting with each other, whilst another five younger men stand in the vicinity, watching the occasional passing cars and trucks, exchanging greetings with those that they know, carefully scrutinising those that they do not. The younger men all have assault rifles slung across their bodies or hanging from their shoulders, they are wearing jeans and t-shirts. The radios that are attached to their belts or slung round their necks emit periodic beeps and short bursts of conversation. When asked about the banner adorning the barricades[1] they explain that it is only those that have disappeared from this *rancho* (village or hamlet), not those who were murdered and left in the street. They say that the population of the *rancho* is around 300 people, and that previously, this corner of the municipality of Tancitaro, Michoacan, had always been a very tranquil place, the occasional drunken fistfight, but no more than that.

This changed though when the Army came one day in 2006 and told the residents to hand over whatever guns they had – pistols, shotguns and hunting rifles – in exchange for 'a handout'. Those who did not hand over any weapons then had their houses searched and any arms found were confiscated. A few months later, a group of heavily armed men entered the *rancho* and ordered the residents to assemble on the grass next to the basketball court. The leader of the group introduced himself as *El Arabe* of the *Zetas* cartel and explained that they were here to protect the community, and would be asking for a small contribution from residents to do so. The years that followed were filled with fear, extortion, death and disappearances. Reflecting on this in the fading light, Leonel, a member of the *autodefensa* (self-defence group) in this *rancho*, shifted his rifle into a more comfortable position and explained that the reason for their presence at the *caseta* was that the government does not do its job, so they have to step in to prevent the return of a cartel. Another of the young men, Jorge, said that this meant the government could no longer tell him what to do: "You

[1] The term *caseta* (guardhouse) and *barricada* (barricade) are used interchangeably to describe the *casetas de vigilancia* in the municipality, reflecting their origins as ad hoc structures composed of sandbags.

aren't going to tell me how many tortillas will get rid of my hunger; this is something that I decide". A boy of around 13 came up to ask Jorge a question, and Leonel explained that he wasn't a member of the *autodefensas* but rather was helping them at the *caseta*. When asked what the future held, Leonel and Jorge could not imagine a time when they would not have to take their turn at the *caseta*. One day the young boy helping them would join them in their vigil. As darkness gathered, we said our goodbyes and got back into Don Óscar's car. As we moved off, Don Óscar pointed to the small grass field by the road and said that previously, children had built their own barricades and had played at being *autodefensas*. The adults had soon put a stop to it though, because they said that it wasn't good for the children to be playing such a game.

Groups of armed citizens – who later came to be known as *autodefensas* – emerged in several towns of the *Tierra Caliente* (Hot Land) region of Michoacan, Mexico, in February 2013. They claimed to have risen up against the brutality and persecution of the local cartel *Los Caballeros Templarios* (The Knights Templar Cartel; LCT) and had been forced to take things into their own hands because the State could not or would not take action. The municipal and Michoacan state levels of government were seen as having been entirely corrupted by the cartel, and so they called on the Federal government to intervene and re-establish the rule of law in the region. From these beginnings, the *autodefensas* developed into a major force within Michoacan, coming to have a presence in 33 of Michoacan's 119 municipalities (CNDH 2015), with an estimated membership of anywhere between 7,000-20,000 people (Gil Olmos 2015; La Voz de Michoacán 2019a, 2019b). The *autodefensas* attracted a significant amount of national and international media attention and were the subject of sustained public debates within Mexico. Subsequently, they have generated significant policymaking and academic interest, and were even the subject of a Hollywood-produced documentary (Heineman 2015; Le Cour Grandmaison 2014; Fuentes Díaz & Paleta Pérez 2015; Guerra 2018; Guerra Manzo 2015).

The differing public and media reactions to the *autodefensas* has reflected the diversity of views within Mexico around the issues of crime and insecurity, such phenomena having gained increasing prominence since the turn of the century. Many people expressed sympathy and even admiration for the *autodefensas*, who had taken a stand to protect themselves, their families, and communities from a criminal threat to which the state had left them exposed. They were seen as a legitimate social movement that was taking the fight to the cartels on behalf of ordinary decent people who had become fed up with victimisation and impunity. As such, they embodied some of the finer traditions of Mexican history, with *el pueblo* (the people) taking up arms against oppression and unjust rule, as it had done in the 19th Century during the War for Independence and the French occupation, and in

the 20th during the Mexican Revolution. Others saw the *autodefensas* as a portent of a dangerous tendency towards vigilantism, and whose lack of respect for state authority and institutional channels which could only provoke further crime and insecurity within Mexico. Some even claimed that beneath the heroic façade of the *autodefensas* lay the influence of rival cartels, who used the autodefensas as a disguise to take control of territory from LCT.

In recent years, Mexico has experienced rising levels of violence and insecurity, at first concentrated in specific regions connected with historical patterns of drug trafficking, but latterly spreading across the country. This has left many Mexicans questioning whether any part of the country can be considered 'safe', and how such security can be achieved or indeed recovered. The connection between such insecurity and politics has been a major point of contention, especially given that the increasing levels of violence have been seen as connected to the democratic transition of the country, and specific government policies aimed at tackling drug trafficking, such as the militarisation of public security. Such generalised insecurity in everyday life, as well as the state's apparent lack of ability to address the issue – as well as its role in provoking such insecurity itself, or in concert with non-state actors – has provoked questions about the role and nature of the state. Specifically, what it means to be a citizen of Mexico when the state is unwilling or unable to fulfil its perceived duties in providing security and protection to its people, and is even seen as the threat to its citizens in some cases. What rights citizens have to take steps to defend themselves and construct their own security – both individually and collectively – has therefore, been a source of contemporary debate in Mexican politics and society. Such debates have found expression in political and civil society projects, formal legal arguments founded in the constitution and based on community identity and self-legitimation, as well as in informal everyday actions and organisation by citizens.

A key question, both from the public pronouncements of the *autodefensas* themselves, and their reception – both within Mexico and beyond – was what such a phenomenon demonstrated about the role and nature of the state in Mexico, and its relationship with its people. Such state-society relations have – theoretically and historically – been conceived of in terms of citizenship, whereby the individual surrenders or submits a part of their freedom in return for protection and membership of a society – broadly speaking, the idea of a social contract (see for example Hobbes 2017; Rousseau 2018; Kant 1983; Locke 2014). Traditions within political thought on citizenship and its nature can be traced back to conceptions of the ancient Greek polis, and the Roman city (see for example Aguilar Valenzuela 2012), but in recent history an influential 20th century vision of citizenship under western liberal democracy can be seen in the writings of T. H. Marshall (1950). He conceived of the relationship

between the state and its citizens as being one of rights and responsibilities, whereby citizens are granted certain rights by the state, but most also fulfil their obligations to the state by obeying its laws amongst other requirements (Marshall 1950).

In terms of modern conceptions of the nature and role of the state, the writings of Weber (1984) have been highly influential, especially on the rationality of the state and its monopoly over the legitimate use of force within its borders. This builds on the ideas of the social contract theorists around concepts such as internal sovereignty – whereby the state is *the* authority within its territory (Locke 2014) – and external sovereignty – whereby states are free from external interference (Kant 1983). The relevance of such ideas around the nature of the state, and the relationship between citizens and states, can be seen in the reactions to the *autodefensas*, and the questions that underpin them, such as: is it legitimate for people to take up arms to defend themselves? Why didn't the State protect them? And, how could the state allow such large numbers of its people to flout its authority by illegally bearing arms? Whilst such questions are undoubtedly important, there is also a key question – less frequently asked – around what participating in *autodefensas*, and living in areas under their control, meant for those people's concepts of citizenship and state-society relations.

Addressing such questions necessitates a focus on the local level in order to understand how such groups were understood, participated in, and how their influence was felt by people in their everyday lives. Doing so allows for an understanding of how such groups were formed, changed over time within specific political and social contexts, and how they interacted with local historical experiences and trajectories. Focusing on the local level is particularly important in a country as diverse – in geographical, social, cultural, and historical experience terms – as Mexico, where there are great variances even within individual states. Thus, an academic endeavour focused explicitly on the context of Tancitaro, also avoids the tendency in some studies within the political and social sciences to ignore the partial nature of the knowledge they generate in favour of claiming that their findings can be generalised. Likewise, contributions in these disciplines can often emphasise the novelty of the phenomenon subject to study, without acknowledging the importance of historical precedents and influences.

It is clear in the case of the *autodefensas* that the phenomena of violence and insecurity, armed civilians, and the practice of self-defence, are not new in Mexico. Indeed, in the context of Michoacan, and focusing only on the 20th Century, one can point to major ruptures such as the Mexican

Revolution, and the *Cristero* rebellion[2], as well as more quotidian labour union contestation, agrarian and community boundary disputes, and especially in rural areas, traditions of 'ritual violence' such as vendettas, *pistolerismo* (the law of the gun), and *juegos de honor* (matters of honour) (Guerra Manzo 2017). Similarly, the connection between violence and politics in Michoacan has a history which has continued well beyond the end of the *Cristero* rebellion, and has seen the deployment of the military (from the late 1950s), and organised violence more broadly, for political and social control (see for example Veledíaz 2010; Maldonado Aranda 2010). The post-revolutionary Federal state also armed and often organised civilians for the purposes of supporting its policies and its control of territory. The *Defensas Rurales*[3] instituted in 1929 being an important example of this, and one which had a strong presence in Michoacan historically (Larreguy, Riaño & Sánchez-Talanquer 2019; Proceso 2005). Whilst the aim of this thesis is not, therefore, to conduct historical analysis, it is nonetheless important to bear such histories in mind as highly relevant in understanding *autodefensa* groups and the contexts in which they arose, as well as for analysing what is different about this contemporary experience of such groups.

Theoretical framework and contribution

The goal of this section is to briefly explain the over-arching theoretical framework under which the project was conducted. The research project had as its goal a central preoccupation with the experiences of citizens on an everyday basis and from their own perspectives. As such, it was important to consider a theoretical approach that would allow for such perspectives to come through, without imposing an elaborate theoretical architecture that could silence or make less relevant these experiences in an *a priori* manner. Therefore, this section is not, nor intended to be, an exhaustive literature review, but rather indicates key areas of concern and the project's approach in a broad sense. Where literature is relevant to the point being discussed – as it emerges from an engagement with the primary material gathered during fieldwork – it will be raised throughout the thesis. This allows for the prevalence of participants' views and for insights to emerge organically, which can then be connected to, and contextualised by, the wider literature.

[2] The *Cristero* rebellion (1926-1929; also known as the *Cristiada*) was a major outbreak of violence in western Mexico against the post-Mexican revolutionary government's anti-clerical reforms, and more generally, resistance to the expansion of the Federal state's influence into regional circuits of power (see for example: Meyer 1973; Purnell 1999; Butler 2004).

[3] *Defensas Rurales* (Rural Defence Force) were armed militias formalised under the control of the Federal Army which could be mobilised at the request of state governments, and were under the direct control of regional Army commanders as "factors of order' for the preservation of 'public tranquillity'" (Rath 2013: 36; see or example, Rath 2013, 2014; Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional 1964).

The project adopted a broadly social constructivist theoretical standpoint in order to be sensitive to the way in which social and political subjectivities can develop through the interaction of different societal actors. Social constructivism – or social constructionism as it is referred to in some academic fields – is a movement which crosses disciplinary bounds (Holstein & Gubrium 2011), and has been particularly influential in the social and political sciences – for example in international relations, geography, and sociology. As such, it has been described as somewhat amorphous and characterised as a mosaic-like approach (Ibid). The core tenets, however, are shared across the different approaches and can be summarised as an anti-foundationalist tendency that posits reality as a socially constructed phenomena, rather than an objective truth (Berger & Luckman 1991). Thus, a key commitment of the approach is examining the world from the perspective of different actors and trying to understand how they make sense of this. Therefore, social constructivism forms not only the theoretical outlook of the project, but also informs its methodological approach.

The identity of actors and how they are constructed through interaction with others is a central concern of constructivism (Wendt 1992). Who the actors are often depends on the discipline or what is being examined, for example for Wendt, writing in Internal Relations, it is states and their interactions with one another and the international context which are key. Whilst for the likes of Holstein & Gubrium (2011), writing in the discipline of Sociology, the focus is on individuals and how they bring meaning to their everyday lives. The degree to which actors are entirely socially constructed and the extent to which they can re-construct their social realities, is a subject of debate within the academic disciplines in which social constructivism is utilised and has ontological and epistemological consequences[4]. Without wishing to be side-tracked by such debates, it is worth noting that the approach adopted in this project rejects the possibility of a positivist scientific approach being applied to the study of social life (such as is the case with Wendt's (1999) '*via media*'). Yet it does not stray so far to the post-modernist end of the constructivist spectrum that discourse analysis represents the only methodological tool. Thus, the vision adopted is one which tallies with Marx's (1956) vision, paraphrased by Holstein & Gubrium (2011: 342), whereby "people actively construct their worlds but not completely on, or in, their own terms". This approach allows for a consideration of the importance of context and the environment in which interactions take place. This has been emphasised by the likes of Lefebrve and Nicholson-Smith (1991) in terms of the social production of space, Agnew (1997) and Marston (2000) on the social construction of scale, and Brenner (1997a; 1997b) on the social production of space in relation to globalization and state territorial restructuring. Therefore, such an

[4] In international relations, for example, see the likes of Zehfuss (2002), Wendt (1992; 1999); Guzzini & Leander (2005); Kratochwil (2000); Guzzini (2010).

approach not only takes into account the intersubjective construction of identities by actors through interaction, but also how these are conditioned by, and relate to, the contexts in which they are embedded, both physically and socially.

This type of social constructivist approach has been applied to the study of citizenship, and of social and political interactions within and between communities. For example, Oxhorn (2011) has emphasised the importance of a socially constructed vision of citizenship, as taking into account which groups in society do or do not partake in the struggles around rights is essential to understanding the kind of citizenship that emerges from such contestation. Likewise, Holston (2008) utilises the idea of self-construction of citizenship and how this interacts with, and is formed by, the urban periphery of Brazilian cities. Such an approach is consistent with, and indeed essential to, his concern for the everyday nature of citizenship, which is not just a formal political institution but also a lived experience (Holston 2008). This concern with the everyday nature of citizenship and how it is constructed as a lived experience is a key focus of the project and is facilitated and underpinned by the broadly social constructivist approach outlined above. The interest in the everyday nature of citizenship and its nature as a lived experience follows the research agendas followed by the likes of Lazar (2004; 2007), Stack (2012a; 2012b; 2013), and Humphrey (2007), which have proved fruitful in interrogating the way in which citizenship is constructed in specific contexts, and what it means to those involved in such processes.

Turning to the academic literature on the *autodefensas* which has been published in recent years, one can note that it is voluminous and straddles a number of fields and concerns. Thus, investigations have looked at the manner in which decisions have been taken in autodefensa groups (Guerra 2018); how they represent a regional expression of the 'war on drugs' (Pérez Caballero 2015); their relationship to inequality and relationships of *caciquismo*[5] (Phillips 2017); how they are vigilante mobilisations influenced by the historical legacy of the *Cristero* rebellions (Osorio, Schubiger & Weintraub 2016); the changes in such groups from social movements to paramilitaries influenced by *neo-caciquismo* (Guerra Manzo 2015); how structural changes in the economy and organised crime actions help explain the emergence of such groups in distinct regions (Fuentes Díaz & Paleta Pérez 2015; Paleta

[5] The term *cacique* is associated with the idea of a 'political boss' and *caciquismo* with 'boss politics', in some form or other (Knight, 2005: 10). *Caciquismo* is identified with a certain kind of institutionalisation, one which is based less on formal rules and more on informal personal power, in this way it tends to be arbitrary and personalist (Ibid). It is also predicated on the ability to exercise violence, though the cacique also has other repertoires of actions to complement this (Ibid). It has been portrayed as operating at all levels of the political system in Mexico, though it has frequently been overlooked in many studies who have traditionally emphasised the central power of the Presidency (Ibid).

Pérez & Fuentes Díaz 2013); how such groups deployed the notion of state failure as a means for justifying their action and how this compared to such uses by other autodefensa groups elsewhere in Latin America (Curry & Ansems de Vries 2018); and how such groups help to illustrate notions of vigilante justice and can act as political intermediaries (Le Cour Grandmaison 2016; 2019). Aside from the work of Paleta Pérez and Fuentes Díaz (2013; 2015) and Le Cour Grandmaison (2016; 2019), there is little work that directly engages with the way in which *autodefensas* have influenced the relationships between the state and society in the contexts where they emerged. Indeed, there has been nothing written about how the experience of participation in such groups, and living under their control, has influenced ideas and practices of citizenship from the perspective of those taking part and inhabiting such contexts. This thesis, therefore, aims to address such a gap by examining how *autodefensa* groups emerge, consolidate, and are experienced by participants and populations in a local context, in order to understand the impact that such groups have on ideas and practices of citizenship. In a broader sense, such an analysis can help to understand the kinds of subjectivities and responses produced around the concept of citizenship under conditions of insecurity. Such an understanding is valuable given the increasing levels of insecurity felt by citizens within Mexico, but also more widely in Latin America.

Apparent increases in violence and insecurity, and the relationship that this has with politics, and in particular, with democracy, is an important theme in contemporary Latin America, and one which needs to be taken into account theoretically when approaching a subject such as the *autodefensas*. Perhaps the most important contribution in this sense in recent years has been from Arias & Goldstein (2010) in their work *Violent Democracies in Latin America*. In their work the concept of 'violent pluralism', which encapsulates the idea that Latin American societies are 'violently plural' as "states, social elites, and subalterns employ violence in the quest to establish or contest regimes of citizenship, justice, rights, and a democratic social order" (Arias & Goldstein 2010: 4-5). Therefore, and against much of the scholarship on democracy and democratisation, they sought to demonstrate that the high levels of violence in many Latin American countries are not due to some kind of failure to live up to democratic ideals that had somehow produced an 'illiberal' or 'imperfect' democracy. Instead, they utilise the concept of violent pluralism to try to understand the violence experienced in these societies in its own terms, rather than against an idealised notion of democratic norms embodied by the US and western Europe. They argue that this is necessary in order to understand how violence affects political subjectivities and practices, as well as its place as a key instrument for political rule and resistance. In doing so, they understand violence not as a failure of democratic governance, but rather as central to the functioning and configuration of institutions and their maintenance, whilst also being a key tool

for challenges to these. In the context of neoliberal democracy, they argue that violence is no aberration, but instead is integral to the institutions and policies that such a philosophy promotes, and a key tool in addressing the problems that emerge from this political and economic configuration. For example, they argue that the increasing turn to vigilante justice – such as the practice of lynching of suspected thieves by communities – is not indicative of a failure in neoliberal democratic governance, but rather the natural outcome of an ideology that preaches self-help and individual responsibility. The benefit of adopting such a framework is that it necessitates an engagement with the specific conditions and local contexts in which political, social, and economic practices are constructed and contested, in order to understand the impacts of such a relationship between violence and democracy.

This approach has consequences for the idea of citizenship, especially with regards to the impact of non-state armed groups, such as *autodefensas*, and their presence within Latin American societies. Arias & Goldstein emphasise the fact that non-state armed groups establish their own political and legal orders in the territories where they hold influence, and these interact with those of the state. In such contexts, they argue, the notion of citizenship as a widely held set of reciprocal rights and obligations becomes less useful, apart from conceiving of the ways in which the state has seemingly failed to live up to citizens' expectations – an approach which is portrayed as giving a one dimensional view. This is because in such areas non-state armed groups openly contest both state power and the rule of law, meaning that a simple citizen-state understanding of the relationship does not adequately capture the complexity of what is occurring. Instead, they argue that the interaction of multiple violent actors (including branches of the state) enable new forms of political order that constitute new modes of subjectivity and contestation. Violent pluralism as an approach is aimed precisely at trying to understand how this occurs and how forms of order are established and contested in areas where different actors are present.

Key definitions

Whilst discussions of the key literatures relevant to understanding the phenomenon of the *autodefensas* and their impacts are embedded within each of the chapters, it is important at this stage to give working definitions of the key terms that will be employed in the thesis. Specifically, it is paramount to define the following terms – 'citizenship', 'sovereignty', and 'the state'. It is not however, proposed that these definitions are definitive or beyond debate – especially given that these are broad concepts that have generated a huge amount of discussion – but rather that these are the interpretations that best help us to understand what is happening in this case, and how these concepts

are often understood within the context of Tancitaro. Consequently, the concept of citizenship is best defined as not simply a legal relationship of rights and obligations between the state and members of a national political community – as is often the case (see Marshall 1950, for example). Rather, it can also be a socially constructed phenomena within specific contexts – as the likes of Oxhorn (2011) and Lazar (2004) have argued – which goes beyond legally defined relations and the state as the sole focus of citizenship claims to encompass ideas of social belonging and comportment within communities, and operates at a number of levels – including the sub-national. In this respect the ideas of Trevor Stack (2012a; 2012b; 2013) with regards to citizenship are the most appropriate for this study, as they recognise that ideas of citizenship go beyond a simple legally defined relationship with the state, and can also involve ideas of belonging and social comportment – what Stack refers to as 'civil sociality' – within specific communities below the national level, hence the idea of being 'citizens of towns' is an important idea and one which is crucial in understanding how citizenship is understood in Tancitaro.

Sovereignty is often thought of in terms of a state's authority over a given territory and its population – internal sovereignty – and respect afforded to this, including lack of interference by other states – external sovereignty (see Locke 2014, and Kant 1983, for example). However, in appreciating the importance of sovereignty in the case at hand, the understanding of sovereignty proposed by Hansen and Stepputat (2006) is most relevant. They see sovereignty – particularly in postcolonial states such as Mexico – as an aspiration of the State rather than being the uncontested site of sovereignty, and therefore, they see sovereignty as being dispersed throughout and across societies (Hansen & Stepputat 2006). Therefore, they advocate:

> "…to abandon sovereignty as an ontological ground of power and order, expressed in law or in enduring ideas of legitimate rule, in favour of a view of sovereignty as a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy from the neighbourhood to the summit of the state" (Hansen & Stepputat 2006: 297).

This conception of sovereignty is important in understanding the case of Tancitaro as it allows for an examination of how sovereignty can be constructed at the local level, which is essential for understanding the impact that the *autodefensas* have had in the local context.

The nature of 'the state' as a concept, as well as an empirical manifestation, has generated significant debate in which the ideas of Weber (1984) have exercised a significant influence. Weber identifies the state as an institution or set of institutions which exercise a monopoly of legitimate force of a given territory (Weber 1984). As the likes of Knight (2002) – amongst others – has noted, this definition

poses the question of what can be considered 'legitimate' or not, as well as presupposing the separation of the state from society more broadly. The definition of the state that is most appropriate for this study accepts that the state does comprise physical institutions, but that these are far from monolithic. As Nugent (2007) argues, the state does not comprise a single governing entity but many different sets of governing practices and institutions that respond to varying pressures and forces over time and space. Furthermore, the state is not separate from society in any meaningful sense, however, the perception that the state is separate from society still exercises an important influence over how people imagine the state. As Mitchell (1991) points out, the 'boundary' of the state is not a true demarcation of the extent of state and society but is drawn internally in order to maintain a certain political and social order (Ibid: 90). In doing so, it allows people to conceive of the world in a binary way, whereby there are individuals on one hand and inert structures apart from them on the other (Ibid: 94). Thus, it is essential to conceive of the state not only as a set of institutions, but also acknowledge that ideas about what the state is, and its relationship with society at large, also exercise an important influence. This is especially important given the nature of this study as 'the state', and the experience of it, shapes citizenship practices in important ways (Eckert 2011). Crucially, the way in which citizens have two 'images of the state': one made by experience, and the other defined by how the state ought to be, is an important consideration (Ibid: 312). As such, the definition of the state in this thesis encompasses the state as a set of heterogenous institutions and governing practices, but also as an idea which exercises an important influence over citizens and societies.

The autodefensas of Tancitaro: the politics of (in)security and the construction of localised sovereignty and citizenship in a Michoacan municipality

The research project was guided by one over-arching question, with two subsidiary questions focusing on specific aspects, the answers to which nonetheless contributed to addressing the primary enquiry. These questions were specifically aimed at addressing debates and gaps in the literature that have been discussed above, and were the following:

1) *What impact do the competing regimes of violent governance that autodefensas represent have on ideas and the practice of citizenship?*
    a. *Why have citizens formed autodefensas and what political and legal orders emerge in such contexts?*
    b. *How have autodefensas been interpreted and received within the communities that they affect?*

By addressing these questions, the argument is made that *autodefensas* can have a profound impact on ideas and practices of citizenship in the contexts in which they have emerged and developed. Such impact is visible by the way in which *autodefensas*, in the case of Tancitaro, have been productive of a form of localised sovereignty underpinned by notions and practices of localised citizenship, in which the local society and community are the key referents. The emergence of such localised sovereignty under conditions of profound insecurity, and as a means to address such insecurity, may have represented a challenge to the sovereignty of the state (at the municipal, Michoacan state and Federal levels) initially, embodied as it was in the armed civilian action. But over time, the *autodefensas* have semi-institutionalised at the municipal level – partaking as they do in the co-construction of security with other state and non-state actors – and can no longer be seen as challenging the sovereignty of the state beyond the municipal level. Rather the localised sovereignty of which the *autodefensas* have been productive at the local level, is best thought of as being 'nested'[6] within the wider sovereignties of the state. Such findings make a contribution to the wider literature on citizenship and sovereignty by analysing how such notions, and the practices they engender, can be become connected and mutually reinforcing under conditions of (in)security at the local level.

It is also argued that the participation of the community within the *autodefensas* helped to foster the re-establishment of social links and community identity, which represented the first steps towards the reconstruction of social fabric (*tejido social*). Attempts at such reconstruction have been taken up by a Jesuit-led project in the municipality, the operation and space for which has similarly been assisted by the relative security achieved by the *autodefensas* in the municipality. Citizen participation in the co-construction of their own governance has been a key tenet of the Jesuit project, and is seen as fundamental in constructing durable security that goes beyond the use of weapons. Such emphases on participation and co-construction, as well as the focus on the local community and its identity, have served to reinforce ideas and practices of localised sovereignty and citizenship within Tancitaro. In exploring the Jesuit project, the thesis likewise contributes to the literature on the role of the Church in violent contexts within contemporary Mexico. In particular, how notions such as *buenvivir* (good living) and *la reconstruccion del tejido social* (the reconstruction of social fabric) have been transplanted from other Latin American contexts and combined in an attempt to redress the societal damage caused by violence and insecurity in contemporary Mexico.

[6] As per Humphrey's (2007) notion, discussed in Chapter 2.

Finally, the argument is made that the experience of the *autodefensas*, and ongoing concerns around a return to insecurity, helped to overcome existing political and social divides for a period and empower citizen participation through the institution of citizen councils to participate in municipal governance. Nevertheless, the *autodefensas* cannot be seen to have represented a break with past political and social divisions within the municipality, which have resurfaced as security has been maintained in the intervening years. In such a context party political competition has re-emerged, and contestation – reflecting historical trajectories in the municipality – has reinitiated around the role of citizens in their own governance. By examining this experience – and its interpretation within the municipality – the thesis demonstrates the connection between violence and insecurity, and shows how these have informed electoral and democratic participation and competition. As such, the experience of the *autodefensas*, and the continuing influence that such groups have had on social and political contestation and state-society relations in Tancitaro, offer a novel contribution to the literature on violence and democracy in Latin America.

Methodological overview

The social constructivist approach adopted by the research project, and the focus on the lived experience of people in the context of Tancitaro, necessitated the use of two key research methods. One was the interviewing of citizens, government officials, members of the *autodefensas*, and civil society groups, to gain an understanding of their perceptions and concerns. The second method employed was participant observation, which is often associated with ethnography[7] (itself seen as connected to anthropology). Ethnography can be described as a methodology encompassing a number of methods and a particular way of approaching social life. Indeed, ethnography cannot be reduced to a collection of methods but is better understood as a 'way of seeing', also because there must be an intentionality behind the pursuit of ethnographic knowledge (Wolcott 2008). Thus, whilst the goal was not to produce an ethnographic account, some of the insights that stem from ethnographic concepts were employed. Ethnographic influences also played a role in the interviews conducted, as attempts were made to record such encounters in rich detail, beyond the discursive register.

[7] Defining ethnography is challenging as it is somewhat ephemeral as a concept and is utilised differently within distinct traditions. Minimally, it has been described as an: "iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and producing a richly written account that respects the irreducibility of human experience, that acknowledges the role of theory, as well as the researcher's own role, and that views humans as part object/part subject" (O'Reilly 2005: 3).

Qualitative interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, whereby certain key areas of interest were raised as part of the interview – such as around ideas of citizenship. The benefit of this approach is in giving the interviewee a wide degree of freedom in how they reply, whilst also giving flexibility in how the interviewer can engage with and follow-up on their responses (Bryman 2012). Another important aspect of this approach is the way in which questions were phrased and structured so that they were open in nature. The benefit of asking open questions is that the respondents can answer in their own terms as they do not suggest certain kinds of responses from interviewees and so the respondents' understanding of issues, and the salience of these can be explored (Ibid). The interviews were recorded via Dictaphone, which is important in terms of having an accurate record of the encounter and to enable the correction of imperfect memories of what was said (Bryman 2012; Bernard 2006). However, recordings – whilst capturing what was said during an interview – also miss a lot of details and important impressions that are generated during interviews. Therefore, detailed notes – following Bryman (2012) and Bernard (2006) – were made immediately after interviews to capture the context in which the interviews took place, how the interview went, what feelings and emotions were experienced or detected during the encounter, and whether there were any silences or avoidance of certain topics. The use of interviewing is a widespread methodology within a large number of academic disciplines, and has been used by a number of researchers investigating topics such as citizenship (for example Stack 2012b; Lazar 2004; Humphreys 2007) and non-state armed groups (for example Payne 2000; Civico 2015; Mazzei 2009).

The second key method employed was that of participant observation. The advantage of participant observation, coming as it does during a prolonged period within a social setting, is that it allows the researcher to gain a footing in the social reality in which people live in the field site, which is not as possible through interviewing alone (Bryman 2012). It allows for observing features of society that go beyond simply what is said and may be taken as granted by interviewees, similarly there may be a reluctance to talk about certain topics in interviews but these may be observable or discussed in more informal manners once the researcher is embedded within the social world in which they are researching (Bryman 2012; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011). Thus it can be seen as more of a naturalistic approach when compared to formal interviewing, and one which allows for a sensitivity to context to develop over time, due to the interaction that one has as a researcher with people in different social settings (Emerson et al. 2011; Bryman 2012). Recording the contexts in which interactions happen and

participant observation occurs is a key aspect of writing a field diary[8] (Emerson et al. 2011). The maintenance of a field diary was a key aspect of the participant observation method. The work of Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) was central in guiding the practice of writing the field diary and subsequently analysing its contents. To this end the work of Bernard (2006) was also important in the management and analysis of the data gathered.

In practice, participation observation took place throughout the period of fieldwork in Mexico but was most important and relevant within the field site of Tancitaro. Participant observation was utilised to record impressions and facets of everyday social life in the municipality, but also at meetings and events. Doing so allowed not only for the capture of what was said at such events, but also the social comportment and interaction of participants within these. Key examples of such assemblies were educational classes for a *diplomado* (diploma; run by the Jesuit project), meetings of local government and civil society organisations, general community assemblies, and religious celebrations and gatherings. Similarly, and as discussed, participant observation was also employed during interviews.

In the conduct of interviewing and participant observation, as well as for the project as a whole, it was important to consider the ethical conduct and implications of such research in detail and develop strategies to deal with ethical challenges. In relation to interviewing it was important that interviewees were informed as to the purpose of the project – namely, that it was a purely academic study for the fulfilment of a PhD, and the topic related to citizenship. Explicit references to *autodefensas* were not made in the project description as this could have placed the interviewee and interviewer in potential danger given the ongoing insecurity within Michoacan. More generally, topics such as insecurity, drug trafficking and violence were not raised by the interviewer as this could have similarly posed a risk to both the interviewer and interviewee. Given the traumatic nature of the experience of violence and insecurity, from an ethical perspective it was important that interviewees raised such topics of their own free will, as and when they felt comfortable, and when it was relevant to do so. In order to be able to conduct interviews with populations that could be considered vulnerable – due to their marginality and previous experiences of violence – and in contexts characterised by insecurity, a

[8] The term 'field diary' in this thesis refers to the practice of taking ethnographic field notes on a daily basis. This corresponded to what Bernard (2006) describes as the 'diary' and 'field notes' taken during fieldwork. These were combined in a single daily entry which served to record events of the day, the participant observation conducted, and the researcher's own reflections on events. For important events or meetings, detailed field notes were made in their own right alongside the field diary. The observations recorded in the field diary are utilised throughout the thesis and the notes from specific meetings/events are formerly referenced where they appear.

training course was undertaken prior to fieldwork on the topic of 'Managing Challenging Interviews' at the Social Research Association (SRA).

The University of London's ethical standards were complied with when obtaining the informed consent of interviewees prior to the commencement of the interview. This involved detailing the nature of the research project and the identity and position of the researcher; that data obtained in the interview would only be utilised for academic purposes; that interview recordings would be held on the University of London's servers only, with local copies deleted; that the interviewer's identity would not be disclosed and their contribution anonymised; that the interviewee had the right to withdraw from the interview and/or withdraw their testimony at any point, and that the researcher would delete all copies of such data when such a request was received; that the interviewee had the researcher's contact information to be able to make such a request; and that they also had the contact details of the researcher's supervisors in order to make a complaint about the conduct of the researcher at any point should they which to do so. The positive affirmation of the interviewees confirming their willingness to proceed and their understanding of their rights in relation to the research project (as detailed above) was obtained verbally – an approach approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee.

As part of the research project it was also important to consider the position of the researcher in relation to their field site, and research subject. To that end, and whilst recognising the impossibility of objectivity, the researcher did not adopt an *a priori* stance towards the groups being studied nor the communities in which they were based. The researcher was not a member of any activist group in this respect nor had he any contact with people or groups within the field site prior to the commencement of fieldwork. Nevertheless, the way in which the field site was selected and the manner in which it was entered did have implications for the research project which are important to outline for the purposes of evaluating the project and recognising its limitations. Two key considerations guided the selection of the fieldwork site, one being the need to find a location where *autodefensa* groups were still active, given that by 2017 when fieldwork was to be embarked upon most of these groups had been either institutionalised into the *Policía Michoacán* (the Michoacan State Police), disbanded, or imprisoned. The second consideration was to find a field site where the security situation was relatively stable and allowed for the conduct of an academic investigation on such a theme. In order to find a site that fulfilled these two criteria, contacts were leveraged with academics working out of *El Colegio de Michoacán* who had conducted/were conducting research on similar/related topics in parts of Michoacan where *autodefensa* groups were/had been present.

Further contacts were made with other academics researching similar issues in the region, as were contacts with members of civil society projects working in Michoacan. Conversations and interviews conducted with these contacts helped to identify the municipality of Tancitaro as a viable option given the continued presence of *autodefensas*, and that academics were carrying out research – or had done so in the recent past – on related topics in the municipality. Contact was also made with a Catholic Church – specifically Jesuit – run project which also had a presence in the municipality, the contact for which had come from a civil society organisation based in Mexico City.

Initial entry into the municipality came accompanying a Mexican academic who had visited Tancitaro on several occasions. The possibility of interviewing the Jesuit priest leading the civil society project in the municipality provided a good reason to visit the town should one have been required. It also afforded the opportunity to attend a *diplomado* class that the Jesuit project had organised for those interested members of the community as part of the wider civil society project. The specifics of this project and the *diplomado* will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, however, for the moment the important point to note is that the way in which the researcher entered the municipality meant that they were associated and identified with the Jesuit project, to a certain extent, from the beginning. Whilst the significance of this was not immediately obvious, as fieldwork progressed and the nature of the municipality and its political and social divisions became clearer, the consequences of this became more apparent. Specifically, it made talking to those opposed to the Jesuits and the political elements critical of the project, far harder. The other side of this was that this informal association with the Jesuit project offered the opportunity to access the civil society project – especially the citizen councils aspect of this – in the municipality at first hand, and also gain access to the municipal government. Given the focus on citizenship, this provided extremely useful and important in exploring the nature and practices of citizenship in the municipality. But in doing so, it must be acknowledged that the thesis very much represents an 'institutional view', in the sense that many of the informants interviewed and meetings attended were associated in one way or another with the Jesuit project, the municipal government, or both.

It is also important to acknowledge that the time constraints of fieldwork, the methodological approach adopted, the interest in the everyday construction of citizenship, and the security environment in Michoacan, meant that the focus of the thesis was on a single municipality – Tancitaro. Whilst the wider experience of the *autodefensas* and the post-*autodefensa* situation in Michoacan are discussed – with other specific examples referred to where relevant – the overwhelming focus is on the case of Tancitaro. Therefore, it is important to note that the arguments

made from this are suitably couched in terms of its position as a single case, and the diversity of the *autodefensa* groups, as well as the varying experiences of them is duly acknowledged. This is not to say that such arguments do not have a wider significance or contribute in a more general sense to the literature on *autodefensas* and on citizenship. But the specific political and social context of Tancitaro has to be taken into account and the applicability and limitations of such arguments must be acknowledged where relevant.

The ethics policy adopted for the project meant that no real names of interviewees – both those interviewed in the municipality and within Mexico more generally – are utilised in the thesis. In some instances, certain non-material details have been omitted or changed in order to protect the identities of those who contributed. All names of interviewees have therefore, been replaced by pseudonyms. In some cases, it has been necessary to split interviewees into two people, in order to avoid their identification. Consideration was given to anonymising the location of the case study site, but it was decided that this was not necessary from an ethical perspective and would have been impractical. From an ethical perspective it is worth noting that the specific features of the municipality and the presence of *autodefensas* there is already in the public domain and indeed, has been covered extensively in the press and media nationally and internationally in recent times (See for example Parish Flannery 2017; Watson 2017; Fisher & Taub 2018; Envoyé spécial 2017; Alzaga 2017; Heineman 2015). Such specific features of the municipality that are discussed at length in the aforementioned coverage of the municipality make it impossible to examine their facets and characteristics of the local context without it being immediately identifiable, even if the name used in the study was anonymised.

A brief introduction to Tancitaro

The name 'Tancítaro' signifies 'the place of tribute' in Purepecha, as it was a centre for the collection of tribute for the surrounding areas under the pre-conquest Purepechan empire (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a). The 'conquest' of Tancitaro was undertaken by the Spaniards Pedro de Ysta and Hernan Pérez de Bocanegra, and the town was converted to the Catholic faith by the Franciscan order, who renamed it 'Tancítaro de San Francisco' in 1530 (Ibid). Under Spanish rule, Tancitaro initially retained its importance as an administrative centre, and also as a religious centre, with the foundation of a Franciscan monastery in 1552 (Escandon 2005). Gradually however, Tancitaro ceded its importance to the neighbouring settlement of Apatzingan – in the *Tierra Caliente* – as it grew as an agricultural and trading centre (Ibid). Concurrently, Tancitaro – and Michoacan as a whole – saw population losses due to the diseases brought by the Spanish, with the number of tributaries to

Tancitaro having declined to 1,200 in 1565, to 900 by 1580, and to 482 by 1632 (Ibid). During the 17th century the population declined to just 100 people, and Tancitaro had lost its importance as an administrative and religious centre (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a). In 1787 Michoacan was divided into four departments, Apatzingan became the *cabecera* of the region in which Tancitaro found itself with the status of municipality (Ibid). In 1860 Tancitaro was given the title of 'Villa' and in 1867 was renamed 'Tancítaro de Medellin' (Ibid).

During the 18th and 19th centuries Tancitaro remained a relative backwater, with some agricultural production such as corn, wheat, sugar cane, and chili. Whilst there had been plans to connect Tancitaro to the rail network that was expanding in the late 19th century, this did not happen, though the neighbouring municipality of Los Reyes was included thanks to the importance of its sugar cane industry (Estrada 1998). In 1892, Tancitaro was connected to Morelia and Uruapan via the telephone network, and a year later to Los Reyes, Periban, and a number of towns in the Meseta (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a). The end of the 19th Century also saw the auctioning-off of communal lands with large extensions falling into the hands of just a few local families (Estrada 1998). This had important long-term consequences in terms of the consolidation of a small rural bourgeoisie who would exercise control over communication routes, local trading, agriculture and local politics for much of the 20th century (Roman Burgos 2020). An important programme of public works was inaugurated in 1948/9 which saw piped water introduced, the electrification of the cabecera and various other *pueblos*, the paving of the cabecera, the building of classrooms for the Federal primary school, and the formalisation of a highway from Los Reyes to Tancitaro (Archivo de Ejecutivo 1948). Such investments were made thanks to the then former President, Lazaro Cardenas, as is explicitly acknowledged in the records, which note that such works were "…realised through the intervention of C. Gral. (General) Lazaro Cardenas" (Ibid).

As with much of Michoacan, the municipality was the site of contestation during the *Cristero* rebellion, during which there were various clashes including three concerted attempts to capture the town by the Cristero rebels that were beaten back (Gonzalez Mendez & Ortiz Ybarra 1980). The first agrarian committee – organised in order to make land claims – was formed in 1930, and the first *ejido* (communal lands) was granted in 1935 in the *rancho* of Apundaro (Ibid). Further ejidos were granted in the municipality in 1944, 1948, 1949, 1963, 1967 (Ibid). Though in contrast to other municipalities in Michoacan, the agrarian repartition of land did was at a very small scale within Tancitaro (Guzman Pardo 2010). By 1991, avocado cultivation had become the principal economic activity of the municipality – of the 2,433 land parcels dedicated to agricultural production, 1,237 of these were

dedicated to avocado production (Ibid). By the time of the reform of Article 27 in 1992 – which allowed the sale of communal lands such as ejidos – there were eleven ejidos and one agrarian community, covering 4,855 hectares or 6.7% of the municipality's total area (Roman Burgos 2020). Following the reform these communal lands were gradually sold off to private interests, especially following the start of avocado exportation to the USA (Ibid).

In population terms, by the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) the inhabitants of Tancitaro numbered 10,021 people, with the *cabecera* the only population centre of more than 2,000 people (Censo General de Habitantes de 1921). The population of the municipality grew gradually, reaching 14,483 by 1950 (Séptimo Censo General de Población 1950) and remained relatively stable for several decades, with the population registering 16,578 in 1980 (X Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1980). Tancitaro can be characterised as an overwhelmingly rural, catholic, ranchero, and mestizo municipality. During the 20th Century the majority of the population was spread across a large number of small ranchos, with relatively few settlements of over 1,000 residents. In the 1950 census, only one resident identified as non-Catholic, only two spoke an indigenous language, and 87% of the economically active people worked in agriculture (Séptimo Censo General de Población 1950). Over the decades these statistics have changed somewhat, but the overall picture has remained consistent (VIII Censo General de Población 1960; IX Censo General de Población 1970). Thus, by 1980 there were 86 localities in the municipality – the majority small ranchos – 162 people who spoke an indigenous language, 251 people who did not identify as Catholic – 1.5% of the total population, and 64% of the economically active worked in agriculture (X Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1980). As Roman Burgos (2020) has pointed out, whilst the municipality is geographically part of the Meseta Purepecha, Tancitaro is a mestizo population with only a very small number of indigenous language speakers, and in historical, political, and economic terms is linked to other mestizo communities such as Apatzingan, Los Reyes, Uruapan, and Periban. Historically, Tancitaro has been relatively poorer than these neighbouring municipalities (Gonzalez Mendez & Ortiz Ybarra 1980), and indeed in absolute terms, for example, in 1970 61% of families in Tancitaro shared a single room, whilst a further 22% of families shared two rooms (IX Censo General de Población 1970). Such poverty can be explained, in part, by Tancitaro's relative isolation, with the repair and paving of the main road to Uruapan only taking place in the late 1970s (Gonzalez Mendez & Ortiz Ybarra 1980).

Key historical trends and antecedents

Having given a brief historical overview of the municipality which forms the focus of this thesis, it is also important to highlight some of the key historical trends and antecedents which help to contextualise this study. Doing so allows for an appreciation of parallels – in terms of ideas, practices, and events – between different periods of Mexican history and the present, which helps to illustrate the extent to which the *autodefensas* (and the impacts that they have had) represent continuity or change in historical terms.

a. Municipal level political contestation in 20th Century Mexico

Given the focus on the municipal level within the study it is essential to analyse recent scholarship emphasising the historical importance of the local level as a focus of political action and competition in Mexico – even during the period of one-party hegemony under the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI; Institutional Revolutionary Party). The work of Smith (2014) and Gillingham (2014), helps to demonstrate that even during the periods of the 20th century when the PRI's rule was considered to be at its strongest, there was still a degree of electoral competition and, connected to this, a negotiation of rule at the municipal level. This is an important critique and clarification of the view – which Knight (2002) identifies as having become prevalent by the 1980s – that the Mexican state, and the President in particular, enjoyed immense and untrammelled power. As both Gillingham (2014) and Smith (2014) identify, the Mexican Revolution had included important demands for respecting local differences, and the figure of the autonomous municipality had been enshrined both within the 1917 Constitution as well as in official rhetoric. Thus, critiques of the post-revolutionary state's hegemonic system became focused at the local municipal level (Smith 2014), where a degree of political and electoral competition was tolerated (Gillingham 2014).

Whilst official opposition parties were not tolerated for much of the period, at the local level electoral competition remained – and was often fierce – albeit having been displaced to within the PRI (Ibid). Whilst the opportunity and mode of electoral competition varied across the period of PRI rule – Gillingham sees the changes to the selection of PRI electoral slates in 1950 as having reduced such open competition substantially (Ibid) – contestation and negotiation of rule at the local level remained to some degree, and often involved violence (Smith 2014; Gillingham 2014). Popular mobilisation was often an important repertoire both within elections and in the post-electoral environment where concessions to local demands, the negotiation of benefits, and the blocking of particularly unpopular candidates or caciques, could be accomplished (Smith 2014; Gillingham 2014). This complicates any simplistic notion of the state, and the PRI, being able to simply impose its will and mandate the rule

of preferred candidates, particularly in smaller towns, villages, and rural areas (Smith 2014). Thus, the idea and practice of municipal autonomy – at least to a certain degree – has a long history in Mexico, and one which was visible even during the period of one-party rule. This is important to bear in mind in order to understand and contextualise the case of Tancitaro as the study progresses.

b. *Cardenismo and neo-cardenismo in Michoacan*

Another key historical influence that is important to recognise given its significance for Mexico – and Michoacan in particular – has been *cardenismo*, and relatedly *neocardenismo*. *Cardenismo* refers to the ideas and legacies associated with the former President of Mexico (1934-1940) and Governor of Michoacan (1928-1932), Lazaro Cardenas del Rio. *Cardenismo* is primarily associated with the 1930s and Lazaro Cardenas's term as president, which was marked particularly by economic nationalism – for example the nationalisation of the oil industry – and land reform, with the granting of communal land to communities in the form of *ejidos*. Whilst Lazaro Cardenas – a Michoacan native – was not very popular during his tenure as Michoacan state governor (Gledhill 1991), his role in the development of Michoacan following his presidency, as the head of first the Tepalcatepec Commission from 1947, and then the Rio Balsas Commission from 1960 when this absorbed the previous commission, helped him to attain an almost mythical status. Within Mexico, and Michoacan in particular, he is regarded as embodying the best of revolutionary nationalism, and as someone who fought to improve the lives of the poor and disadvantaged especially.

Neo-cardenismo is closely connected to – and draws heavily upon – *cardenismo*, but principally refers to the movement that grew up in Mexico in the late 1980s in support of the bid of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas Solorzano – the son of Lazaro Cardenas – for the Mexican presidency in the 1988 elections. The son of a legendary president leaving the PRI and adopting the language of revolutionary nationalism – which had been largely abandoned by the PRI's candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gotari – in his election campaign was hugely important in a symbolic sense, and attracted a great deal of support, particularly in Michoacan (Aitken 1999; McDonald 1993). Many saw the election campaign as embodying the promise that the revolution could have turned out differently in the long-term – as the policies of Lazaro Cardenas had seemed to offer – and giving rise to the possibility of major social shifts (Aitken 1999). The 1988 elections thus represented a major rupture within Mexican politics – representing the first genuinely competitive presidential elections – and society, the legacies of which are still being felt in some cases. In Michoacan – which had seen significant support for Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the aftermath of the 1988 elections – and indeed subsequent political elections, were

characterised by fierce competition and (frequently violent) contestation between the PRI and the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD; Party of the Democratic Revolution) – which had formed in 1989 in the wake of the elections to embody the *neo-cardenismo* political challenge (Ibid). But to understand why *neo-cardenismo* gained such traction within Michoacan it is important to look beyond the general explanations – such as the connection of the Cardenas family to Michoacan – and towards the local level (Ibid). As Aitken argues, whilst such a familial connection did play a role, the way in which *neo-cardenismo* was received and interpreted at the local level, and within the context of already existing political and social contestation and competition, is of fundamental importance in understanding the scale of the impact that it enjoyed in Michoacan (Ibid). Specifically – and to a certain degree following on from the arguments of Smith (2014) and Gillingham (2014) – an absence of truly competitive political elections in the period prior to 1988 did not equate to an absence of local political and social conflict and contestation (Aitken 1999). Thus, at the community and municipal level within Michoacan there were numerous conflicts around local political and social power, and access to services and resources, that already existed prior to the advent of *neo-cardenismo* (Ibid). Prominent amongst these were anti-caciquil movements who sought to disrupt the hold on political and social power of local caciques in favour of historically disadvantaged and excluded social groups (Ibid). Many of these tendencies supported *neo-cardenismo* which they saw as an embodiment of their own struggles, and as opening up the possibility of achieving their aims. This involved projecting their own hopes and aspirations onto *neo-cardenismo*, the symbolism and ideologies of which they interpreted and redeployed within their own local societal contexts (Ibid).

The ability of people to interpret *neo-cardenismo* and tie it to their own political and social struggles helps to explain its widespread popularity in Michoacan, and represents an example of the way in which local political contestation connected to wider national politics and gave rise to hopes of wholesale political and social change (Ibid). This was the case in Tancitaro where an anti-caciquil tendency supported *neo-cardenismo* in the 1988 elections, including in the protests and occupations of public buildings which followed these. In Michoacan, and indeed elsewhere in Mexico, the conversion of this support for *neo-cardenismo* into a formal political party – in the form of the PRD in 1989 – was not necessarily a smooth process, and indeed in many cases involved disillusionment and conflict between the diverse social groups that had made up *neo-cardenismo's* support base (Aitken 1999). But as with the majority of localities in Michocan, in Tancitaro the PRD became the key political rival of the PRI, with whom it contested power in the subsequent decade, and indeed beyond. Thus, the advent of neo-cardenismo and the political and social conflict and contestation that it occasioned from 1988 onwards, had a profound impact on Michoacan as a whole and also within the local context

of Tancitaro specifically. Indeed, within Tancitaro the support that *neo-cardenismo* – and subsequently the PRD – gained provoked a rupture in the political and social life of the municipality which still exercises an important influence on the municipality to the present day, as will be discussed during the course of the thesis.

c. Vecinidad and citizenship

Another key tendency which requires acknowledgement is the historical connection between the idea and practice of citizenship in Mexico with being a member of a specific local community – that is a *vecino* (a neighbour). This category originated in Spain in the early modern period, and with Spanish dominion over Latin America in this period it also became a key facet of how the holders of political rights were determined in the region (Herzog 2007). The condition of being a *vecino* involved demonstrating your integration and loyalty within a specific local community, which could be accomplished over years of actions and behaviours which evidenceed suh commitment – such as local residence, buying real estate, and marriage to a local wife (Ibid). Whilst the condition of *vecino* already existed prior to the 19th Century (as discussed above) it took on particular importance following the codification of the Spanish Constitution of Cadiz in 1812 (Carmagnani & Hernandez Chavez 1999). This was because the Constitution enshrined the basis for citizenship of Spanish subjects throughout the empire.

Fundamentally, citizenship – and thus political rights – was dependent on the condition of being a *vecino* within a specific community (Ibid). Two key facets of being a *vecino* – which were codified legally – were living in the community and having an honest mode of living (Ibid). Thus, there was a specific territorial link in the qualifying criteria for being a vecino, and thus a citizen (Ibid). Furthermore, *vecinidad* – and consequently citizenship – had a moral element given the requirement to live in an 'honest' manner, and indeed, citizenship rights could be suspended for moral reasons (Herzog 2007). Thus, whilst the link between *vecinidad* and citizenship was clear, the criteria by which one was judged to be a *vecino* was subject to varying interpretations and requirements across the diverse political, social, and cultural landscape of Mexico (Carmagnani & Hernandez 1999; Herzog 2007). Given the connection between *vecinidad* and citizenship, this meant that citizenship in Mexico was organic to the local community level, and was thus, plural and differentiated (Carmagnani & Hernandez 1999).

How long such a clear relationship between *vecinidad* and citizenship lasted is the subject of some debate, with Herzog (2007) seeing it as being a cornerstone of Mexican citizenship until at least 1843, but fading in importance in the 1850s and 1860s. Carmagnani and Hernandez (1999) however, see the connection as persisting for far longer – up until 1911, when the link between citizenship and *vecinidad* was formally abolished in legal terms. Whichever reading is correct, it is clear that there was an important long-term link between *vecinidad* and citizenship during a crucial formative period for citizenship within Mexico, and one which saw plural meanings of citizenship imbued with moral overtones, but also fundamentally tied to ideas of belonging within local societies and territories. Whilst drawing a direct and clear link between such historical traditions and the form that citizenship has taken in Tancitaro – as developed in the thesis – may be an overreach, it is nonetheless important to recognise such historical experiences and acknowledge their potential indirect influence, as doing so helps to contextualise the novelty of such constructions of citizenship in the contemporary period.

d. Tumultos and defensive rebellions in Mexican history

A final historical phenomenon which is important to discuss, in order to properly contextualise the current study, is that of the defensive collective rebellion or *tumulto* (tumult) in Mexico. Collective rebellions by individual communities against what they perceived to be threats to existing relationships, or abuses by authorities, were an important feature of the political and social landscape in colonial Mexico (Taylor 1979). Such rebellions can be seen as differentiated from insurrections as, whilst both utilised collective violence, rebellions were mass attacks aimed at restoring customary relationships rather than offering a new vision or demanding far reaching changes, whilst insurrections can be seen as broader based regional movements which constitute wider political struggles between communities and outsiders in authority (Ibid). Taylor's (1979) study of such rebellions – which focuses on the period 1680 to 1811 – found that they frequently involved the entire community and utilised collective violence, but that they rarely involved generalised violence or looting. Rather they tended to be focused on specific targets and symbols of colonial authority. These acts involved the whole community whose signal for action would often be the ringing of church bells, and who would 'arm' themselves with rocks and sticks (Ibid). Such rebellions were short-lived and tended to end when villagers received assurances that their grievances would be reviewed by the relevant colonial authorities (Ibid). As such, they did not reject the colonial powers and dispute their authority to act, but rather disputed specific changes or impositions which they felt constituted abuses of authority, or which threatened major changes to the constitution and existing practices of communal life (Ibid).

Common grievances which were stated as underlying such rebellions were the imposition of new taxes or increases in existing taxes, any changes which threatened the community's lands or perceived territory, and any threats to the village's daily or seasonal routines (Ibid). Resistance to such changes were seen as expressions of community solidarity and their belief in separateness, as well as a distrust of powerful outsiders – in the form of colonial officials – who were seen as serving their own interests (Ibid). To reiterate, such rebellions did not represent outright rejection of the colonial state or the basis of its authority, but rather resistance to specific changes and indeed, these often constituted the opening salvo in negotiations with colonial officials over such alterations (Ibid). It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that the notion and experience of localised community rebellions against powerful outsiders and established authorities has a long history in Mexico – stretching back to the colonial period. Whilst direct connections between such histories and the case of Tancitaro may be too simplistic, it will be important to acknowledge parallels between such instances where they exist, in order to properly contextualise such contemporary instances and to gain an appreciation of both continuities and novelties within such phenomena.

Outline

The thesis is divided into four thematic chapters with each contributing to the examination of *autodefensas* and the ideas and practices of citizenship that are fostered by such groups in the areas over which they exercise control. The thesis is structured in a manner which presents a broadly chronological sweep of the municipality's history in recent years, whilst allowing for the progressive accumulation of layers of knowledge around the municipality, and the political and social processes therein. To this end the general context of Michoacan and the municipality specifically are first introduced before the key events and actors are the progressively introduced in a chronological manner as they emerge and become relevant.

The first chapter is entitled 'Avocados, autodefensas, and the fragmentation of society in Tancitaro'. It firstly examines the context of Michoacan and its recent history, before analysing the key facets of the *autodefensa* rising in Michoacan generally. It then goes on to examine the important role that the avocado industry plays in the municipality and how this has provoked social change and influenced the municipality's experience of organised crime. Subsequently, the role that the presence of avocados played in the *autodefensa* rising and the continued tensions around this industry in the municipality are explored. The argument being that the presence of avocado plays and has played, a key role in the political and social life of Tancitaro and is important in understanding some of its facets

and the subjectivities that are present. However, it is concluded that the *autodefensas* and their continued presence are not reducible to the existence of such an industry within Tancitaro in any straightforward sense.

The second chapter focuses on how the idea and practice of (in)security has been constructed in Tancitaro. It does so by charting the recent history of the municipality in its experience of organised crime, and how insecurity has been constructed spatially in the municipality subsequently under the *autodefensas*. The way in which security practices have been manifested through the co-production of security, between the *autodefensas* and other institutional and non-institutional actors, is examined to understand how (in)security is produced and perceived of on an everyday basis. How this can be conceived of is explored via the social construction of (in)security. It is argued that the practices engendered as a result of the *autodefensa* rising, the societal changes this has brought in identity terms, and the ongoing co-construction of security in which the *autodefensas* are engaged, have been productive of a form of localised sovereignty. The expression of such a sovereignty regime has implication for ideas and practices of citizenship in the municipality, and wider conceptions of state-society relations.

The third chapter seeks to understand the nature of the Jesuit project for the reconstruction of the social fabric for good living. To do so it contextualises the project within wider understandings of its philosophical roots – *buen vivir* (good living) and the *tejido social* (social fabric) – and their deployment in recent history and contemporaneously in Latin America and Mexico. Doing so underpins an exploration of the specific manifestation of the project within Tancitaro, especially via the operation of the citizen councils and its *diplomado* programme. This helps to garner an appreciation of the impact that the project has had on the construction citizenship in the municipality, and the relationship that this has enjoyed with ideas of insecurity and the *autodefensas*. It is argued that the Jesuit project has played a key role in the construction of localised citizenship in Tancitaro, through its notions of *buen vivir* and the *tejido social*, which have reinforced local identity and participatory practices. But it is the *autodefensas* who can be seen to have helped to start and underpin the reconstruction of social fabric. This is because the *autodefensas* began the socialisation process that can be seen as the first steps in the reconstruction of social fabric, and they have also helped to create the space and security in which the Jesuit project has operated. The Jesuit project itself has helped to legitimate the *autodefensas* to a certain extent, and the constant construction and participation at the heart of its outlook parallel and reinforce the notion of security as requiring constant production.

The fourth and final chapter examines the way in which a unity government emerged in Tancitaro in the wake of the *autodefensa* rising, and how such an experience and the ideas of unity that this generated allowed for such an administration. The political and social subjectivities of the municipality are then explored via the recent history of the municipality, and the institutionalisation of the citizen councils by the unity government. How this co-production of governance manifested itself and the way in which it was received, demonstrates important facets of the political and social situation of the municipality, and helps to understand the context in which the 2018 elections were contested. It is argued that whilst the experience of the *autodefensas* and perceptions of insecurity were fundamental to the ability to overcome party political differences, such political unity could not reproduce itself in the long-term. Likewise, citizen participation in the co-production of governance was clearly conditioned by, and subject to, political and social contestation which has historical roots in the municipality stretching back far beyond the *autodefensa* uprising. Indeed, such contestations can be seen as embodiments of wider clashes of democratic representation and participation, as well as modes of political practice in Mexico. Nonetheless the recent experience of organised crime and the *autodefensas* have helped reinforce ideas of localised citizenship that go beyond ideas of, or relations with, the state, and therefore, have continued to resonate despite an end to formal co-production in the municipality following the 2018 elections.

Chapter 1: Avocados, autodefensas and the fragmentation of society in Tancitaro

Introduction

The road from Uruapan to Tancitaro winds gradually upwards through the town of San Juan Nuevo Parangaricutiro – the original town of San Juan was destroyed by the emergence of the volcano Paricutin in 1943 – passing mile upon mile of avocado orchards on either side of the road. The single lane road takes two hours to traverse by bus – it is 56km – and the green and golden leaves of the avocado trees are only occasionally interrupted by pine trees or rows of corn. The journey takes a long time partially because the road is filled with curves and has a steep gradient, climbing as it does to the base of the *Cerro de Tancítaro* – an extinct volcano which towers over the surrounding countryside to a height of almost 3,800m – but also because of agricultural traffic. The bus has to share the road with large 16-wheeler trucks laden with avocados, tractors, and pick-up trucks hauling agricultural supplies or the *cuadrillas* (work gangs) who cut the avocados from the trees. The bus stops to deposit or pick-up passengers who live either in the avocado *huertas* (orchards) themselves, or in the small communities that intersperse the countryside, often connected by small unpaved roads.

The soundtrack to the journey is often the blaring *banda* music of passing pick-up trucks, which, depending on the time of day and direction of travel, are laden with workers, avocados, fertiliser or the empty pallets used to transport avocados to the packing companies. Just before the final *caseta* – the fixed defensive positions installed by the *autodefensas* – a sign welcomes you to Tancitaro the 'authentic world capital of avocados'. The 'authentic' moniker is to differentiate itself from Uruapan, the self-proclaimed world capital of avocados, but which the *Tancitarenses* argue produces an inferior quality avocado. Having passed the *caseta*, one is confronted by a 15-foot statue outlining the shape of an avocado with the world at its centre where the seed would normally be. A glance out the left-hand window of the bus reveals more avocado *huertas* with their accompanying signs detailing the cleanliness and phytosanitary requirements to comply with when entering them. To the right, is the imposing building of the *Junta Local de Sanidad Vegetal* (JLSV; Local Board for Plant Health[9]), with its extended car park which allows for the parking of its distinctive white pick-up trucks. These trucks are numerous and emblazoned with the JLSV logo. They are used to carry out the inspections of the

[9] The JLSV is an organisation, present across agricultural producing regions in Mexico but with specific iterations at the municipal level, that promotes the benefits of phytosanitary certification of agricultural products so that they may be commercialised for the national and international markets. In the context of Tancitaro, the JLSV plays an important role in the inspection of avocado orchards to ensure that they meet the requirements for ongoing certification. It has also been the umbrella under which avocado producers debate and discuss issues that affect them and more broadly organise themselves (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

huertas to ensure compliance with the standards for national consumption and international exportation. As the bus nears the end of its journey, it must navigate the one roundabout in the *cabecera* (the main town of the municipality) which, at its centre, has a statue displaying an avocado with a section removed and a mesh encompassing it with a partial map of the world displayed. On the corner is a shop selling fertilizer and young avocado trees ready for planting.

The journey into Tancitaro cannot help but impress upon one the scale of the avocado industry in the region, and the avocado as a focal point for local identity. This is felt both through the symbolic public display such as the statues, but also in the narratives of local people, for example: "…Tancitaro is something that we like, that we like when we leave to go to another place, though sometimes we are afraid to say where we are from, when we do say it we say it with pride, because you can say, I am from the authentic capital of avocados and not only of the municipalities, but of the world" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident 2017). The avocado industry and its growth in recent decades has had a profound impact upon the municipality and its people, and is inextricably bound-up with its experience of organised crime and *autodefensas* in recent years. As such, it is in some ways symbolic of the wider experience of Michoacan in the connection between the agro-export industry and organised crime. Michoacan itself illustrates some of the key changes that Mexico has experienced in recent years, with the growing influence of drug trafficking and its spread into organised crime more generally, as well as the policies that have been adopted to tackle these, such as the 'war' on the drug cartels, initiated in 2006. The *autodefensas* of Michoacan can be seen in some ways as a product of this context and policies. Indeed, the *autodefensas* portrayed the State as having failed in its duties and in some cases, as complicit with organised crime. However, it is also clear from the case of Tancitaro that it is hard to consider the *autodefensas* as a homogenous grouping, both in terms of their make-up and their goals. Similarly, the local contexts in which they arose – and the historical and contemporary political, social and economic processes within these – played a profound role in shaping the *autodefensas* within their specific local contexts, at the municipal and community level, as well as helping to influence how the *autodefensas* changed over time.

In terms of understanding the local context, it is essential to focus on the specific ways in which Tancitaro is embedded in transnational processes, as well as how local dynamics and histories affect the ways in which relationships to these phenomena are formed and interpreted. Doing so allows an appreciation of the relationship between the *autodefensas*, ideas of state-society relationships and citizenship, and their connection to Tancitaro's position as an agro-export enclave within a transnational economic network. At a municipal level, avocados are central to local conceptions of

identity as well as the basis for the local economy, and one of the reasons for the continued presence of the *autodefensas*. But avocados are also central to concerns around a loss of community, organised crime, and environmental concerns. Thus, it is important to understand the material and symbolic significance of the avocado industry within the municipality and how it is perceived, if one wants to understand Tancitaro, its recent history, and the way in which concepts of community, citizenship, and state-society relations have been locally constructed.

Figure 1: The entrance to Tancitaro

Source: Author's photo, June 2017.

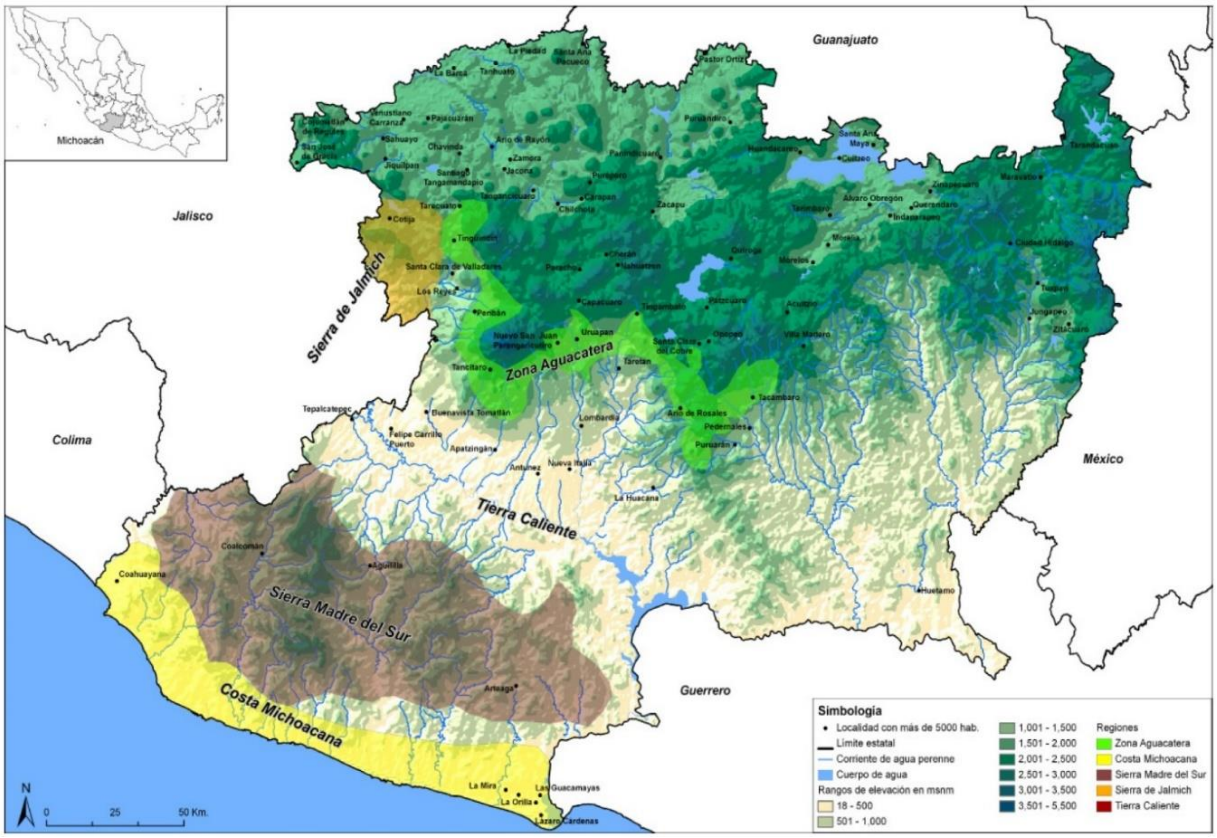
Michoacan: drug trafficking, organised crime, and the agro-export industry

Michoacan is a state located in the south-west of Mexico with an area of 58,599 km^2 (almost twice the size of Belgium), a pacific coastline, and borders with the states of Jalisco, Colima, Guanajuato, Queretaro, Estado de Mexico, and Guerrero. Broadly speaking, it can be divided into six geographical areas: the *Meseta Purepecha* (the Purepechan Plateau), a temperate region in the north of the state characterised by hills, mountains and lakes; the *Sierra de Jalmich*, a mountainous area on the border with Jalisco; the *Zona Aguacatera*[10] (the avocado zone) located on the southern fringes of the *Meseta*

[10] Categorising this area as the 'avocado zone' is a relatively recent phenomenon given that cultivation of avocados on an industrial scale only really began from the late 1980s/early 1990s. Its representation in this way

Purepecha; the *Tierra Caliente* (Hot Land) region characterised by its high temperatures and located in the centre and south of the state; the mountains of the *Sierra Madre del Sur* in the south; and the *Costa Michoacana* (Michoacan Coast) region bordering the Pacific Ocean. The state is one of largest producers of agricultural products in Mexico, producing goods such as avocados, strawberries, limes, corn, mangos, and berries for the domestic and international market. Other significant industries include forestry, mining and minerals, fishing, and an important port, Lazaro Cardenas, is located in the south of the state. Despite such apparent riches, Michoacan is the 5th poorest state in Mexico with a poverty rate of 55.3% (2016 – 45.9% in relative poverty, 9.4% in extreme poverty (CONEVAL 2016)). Michoacan has historically been the state with the highest number of emigrants to the USA, with *Michoacanos* comprising around 13% of the total Mexican immigrant population (Massey, Rugh & Pren 2010). This means that over half the population of Michoacan live outside of the state, the vast majority of whom reside in the USA (Cruz 2017).

Figure 2: The Geography and regions of Michoacan



Source: Maldonado Aranda (2012).

demonstrates the transformative impact that such cultivation has had. See the following for the history of the avocado in Mexico and its growth as an agro-export product in recent years: Echánove Huacuja (2008), Barrientos & López (1998), Aguilar Guizar (2000), Contreras-Castillo (1999), Salazar-García, Zamora-Cuevas & Vega-López (2005).

As well as being a cultivator of licit crops, Michoacan also has a long association with the production of illicit crops – specifically marijuana and opium from the 1950s and 1960s (Maldonado Aranda 2012; Astorga 2005). In recent decades, it has been a key site for the transhipment of cocaine and the production of methamphetamine. The port of Lazaro Cardenas in the south of the state, as well as the infrastructure – such as federal highways – associated with the agro-export industry, has proved attractive for drug trafficking purposes (Maldonado Aranda 2012; Malkin 2001). This involves the importation of cocaine from South America via the port, and chemical precursors for the production of methamphetamine from China (Fuentes Díaz 2015). The highways laden with agricultural goods for export to the USA, as well as the train line – run by the Kansas City Southern Railway Company – which connects the port of Lazaro Cardenas to major cities in the southern and central regions of the USA, provide important routes and methods for drug transhipment (Hernández Navarro 2014). Likewise, the substantial populations of *Michoacanos* in the USA provide contacts and networks for distribution within the USA (Maldonado Aranda 2012; Malkin 2001). Whilst the market for agricultural export products has boomed in recent years, the wider crisis in the Mexican countryside, occasioned by the structural adjustments of the 1980s and the country's entry into the North American Fair Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, precipitated higher levels of migration but also a turn to more lucrative crops such as marijuana and opium when traditional crops could no longer compete in the new free trade zone (Gledhill 1995; Stanford 1994, 2001a, 2001b; Maldonado Aranda 2012; Malkin 2001). However, it is worth noting that for areas suitable for avocado production NAFTA signalled the beginning of a production boom (Interview with members of the JLSV of Tancitaro 2017; Roman Burgos 2018). In such areas, land was given over to avocado cultivation rather than traditional or drug crops. Drug production and trafficking has historically been associated with the *Sierra Madre del Sur* and the *Tierra Caliente* region of the state especially (Maldonado 2012) but was also prevalent in what is now the avocado zone and in parts of the *Meseta Purepecha*.

The *Tierra Caliente* region extends beyond Michoacan and into the neighbouring states of Estado de Mexico, and Guerrero. It is a region which has long been associated with lawlessness, banditry, and a *ranchero*[11] identity of self-sufficiency and lack of respect for authority (González y González 1991).

[11] The term *ranchero* denotes those who hail from *ranchos*, which literally translates as 'ranch', and in Mexico is used to denote a unit of agricultural production, specifically land and cattle (Barragán López 1990). More generally in rural Mexico, *rancho* is used as a term to describe small villages and hamlets. *Ranchero* is seen however, as a specific identity formed by living in isolated areas, and characterised by individualism and autonomy, which became increasingly prevalent in the 19th Century (Barragán López 1997). Such an identity was associated with being a descendent of the *conquistadores* (the Spanish 'conquerors' of Mexico) or other *mestizo* (people of mixed (Spanish and indigenous) heritage) colonisers (Barragán López 1990). As such, the ranchero identity of independent, small rural proprietors, has also been defined against what they are not, notably '*indios*'

According to one visiting inspector in the 18th century the *tierracalenteños* could be characterised as: "'restless, insubordinate, drunken, double-crossing idlers, bent on unbridled lust, gamblers, ignoramuses, full of superstition'" (Ibid: 108). Historically, it has been a site for guerrillas, rebels and revolutionaries to coalesce and to hide out (Ibid). Indeed, Michoacan in general was one of the key zones for the *Cristero* rebellion in the 1920s, as discussed in the introduction. Similarly, it was a bastion of the *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN; National Democratic Front) in the 1988 elections (and beyond as parts of the FDN became the *Partido de la Revolución Democrático* (PRD; Party of the Democratic Revolution)) and experienced violent uprisings in the election's wake due to the perceived fraudulent victory of the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI; Institutional Revolutionary Party) (Calderón Mólgora 1994, 2004; McDonald 1993; 1997; Beltrán del Río 1993).

In relation to drug trafficking, the *Tierra Caliente* region is one in which – from the early 1990s – this type of business had been seen as becoming increasingly normalised and culturally embedded. For example, the likes of Malkin (2001), and Maldonado Aranda (2012; 2013), have charted the increasing importance of the trade in the region and its changing position within society, towards its widespread normalisation and social acceptance by many inhabitants. That is not to say however, that drug trafficking has not been associated with violence, but it was perhaps not seen as exceptional within a wider gamut of violences in a region of rural Mexico characterised by individualist *ranchero* culture, where large segments of the population had arms, and the settling of disputes, issues of personal honour, and inter-familial and community vendettas via arms was not uncommon (Gledhill 1995; Barragán López 1997; Veledíaz 2010; Guerra Manzo 2017). As in Mexico more broadly however, levels of violence and insecurity associated with drug trafficking – which had begun to register on the public radar due to high profile cases in the 1990s – started to increase in the early 2000s (Kenny & Serrano 2013a, 2013b) and especially from the presidency of Felipe Calderón, who famously declared 'war' on the drug cartels upon taking office in 2006 (El Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano 2015; Institute for Economic and Peace 2018).

How useful the term 'drug cartel' is as a description for those groups or networks participating in drug trafficking, and the way in which they are envisaged within narratives of the 'drug war', has been the source of some debate in the literature (see for example Zavala 2018; Escalante Gonzalbo 2009, 2012; Paley 2014; Osorno 2011, 2012; Snyder & Durán-Martínez 2009; Atuesta & Ponce 2017). Whilst important critiques, from the early 2000s there does seem to have been an emergence of groups with

(indigenous people), 'agraristas' (those who supported and received land from the government in the decades following the Mexican Revolution), 'poblanos' (urban dwellers), or 'gobierno' (the government) (Ibid: 75).

stronger corporate identities and increasing militarised conflict and competition between them (Grillo 2011; Kenny & Serrano 2013b; Rosen & Zepeda Martinez 2015; Osorno 2012). Some see this as having its roots in the end of PRI rule, which brought an end to the '*plaza*' system, whereby state institutions and PRI politicians retained control and ultimate authority over who ran the drug trade in different parts of Mexico (Watt & Zepeda 2012; Kenny & Serrano 2013a). Though there are differing accounts as to how exactly such a system was organised and worked – in terms of which institutions were involved, how regimented it was, and the period that it covered (see for example Aguayo Quezada 2014; Valdés Castellanos 2013; O'Day 2001; Knight 2012; Pimentel 2014; Serrano 2012). What is undoubted is that the perception of growing conflict between cartels brought a response in 2005, when the then President, Vicente Fox, deployed the military to the north-east of the country (Kenny & Serrano 2013b). Kenny and Serrano claim that such a deployment was instrumental in the militarisation of the conflict, though President Zedillo had also utilised federal troops against the *Arellano Felix* cartel in 2000.

Indeed, since the late 1990s the Gulf Cartel had started recruiting members of the Mexican army, its special forces, and the federal police, at first to act as an elite bodyguard for the then-leader of the cartel, but subsequently as an enforcement arm for its drug trafficking (Grayson & Logan 2012). This enforcement arm became known as the *Zetas*, and their power within the cartel quickly expanded as their numbers grew and their training and methods soon had a profound impact on the involvement of drug cartels in a wider range of activities (Grayson & Logan 2012; Grillo 2011). Their advanced skills and training enabled them to operate in a more counter-insurgency style which brought control of territory, and allowed for an expansion into a wider range of criminal activities such as extortion and protection (Grayson & Logan 2012; Manwaring 2009). Such military capabilities and approaches were soon copied by other cartels – notably the Sinaloa cartel who started their own armed wing – *Los Negros* – in response (Wilson Center 2010; Borderland Beat 2009). To compete, drug cartels across Mexico also began to branch out into other illicit activities beyond drug trafficking.

Michoacan, and in particular the *Tierra Caliente*, *Sierra Madre*, and *Costa* regions, have been a site of violent contestation between cartels since the early 2000s. The *Milenio* or *Valencia* cartel was seen as the key cartel in Michoacan in this period and represented a loose network of families who had a long history of involvement in drug trafficking (Maldonado Aranda 2013; Grayson 2010). The arrival of the *Zetas* in the early 2000s, aided by their Michoacan allies – *La Familia Michoacana* (LFM) – pushed out the *Milenio* cartel from much of the state. The *Zetas* then branched out from drug production and transhipment, and into extortion of licit businesses and kidnapping. LFM allegedly began in the 1980s

as a vigilante organisation in order to provide protection to poor neighbourhoods in the state from drug traffickers (Logan & Sullivan 2009; Astorga 2007), though there is little evidence to corroborate this. However, by the mid-2000s LFM had become a powerful organised crime group in its own right and in 2006 split from the *Zetas* provoking a series of bloody confrontations and contestations in the following years (Grillo 2011; Grayson 2010). LFM publicly justified their war against the *Zetas* on the basis that the *Zetas* were 'foreign' invaders, originating as they did in the north-eastern state of Tamaulipas (Grillo 2011). LFM also tried to differentiate themselves by the way they operated and cultivated a quasi-religious identity, citing their impartation of 'divine justice' on wrongdoers (Grayson 2010). Despite such a rhetoric, LFM adopted a similar operating model to the *Zetas*, supplementing drug trafficking income with other rents from the taxation of businesses, natural resource exploitation, extortion, and kidnapping.

LFM gradually became the dominant cartel within Michoacan, despite the fact that the levels of violent contestations had led to Michoacan being the site of the first large-scale Federal operations following the declaration of 'war' against the drug cartels in December 2006 (Gil Olmos 2015; Hernández Navarro 2014). Indeed, this 'war' was announced at the military base in Apatzingan – the capital of the *Tierra Caliente* region – and involved the deployment of 6,500 soldiers to the streets of Michoacan (Nava Hernandez 2008; Meyer 2007). Such deployments and operations were soon mirrored in various states across Mexico (see for example Solís 2009) and represent the adoption of militarised tendencies to the problem of drug trafficking. This has led to increased levels of violence across Mexico and a splintering of cartels into smaller groupings, which has led to even more violent contestation (Rosen & Zepeda Martinez 2014; Kenny & Serrano 2013b; Guerrero 2012; Ríos 2013). Whilst such levels of militarisation are often seen as unprecedented in post-revolutionary Mexico, it is worth bearing in mind that the military has been involved intermittently in tackling drug trafficking and revolutionary groups since the 1960s and 1970s (Veledíaz 2010; Castellanos 2007; Aviña 2014). Indeed, tackling drug trafficking has often been used as a coda for suppressing revolutionary and *campesino* movements, and political rivals in Mexico (Aviña 2014; Castellanos 2007; Guerrero 2012; Aitken 1999) – as indeed it has in other countries in Latin America[12]. This has been the case in Michoacan, where the army has been deployed in the *Tierra Caliente* and *Sierra/Costa* regions at various points since the 1950s to tackle drug cultivation and trafficking, but also as a check on the power of regional *caciques*, especially former president Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (Veledíaz 2010; Maldonado Aranda 2010). Thus, whilst the

[12] See for example the literature on the phenomenon in Colombia including: Ballvé (2012); Dudley (2004); Björnehed (2004) and Hristov (2009; 2010) on narco-terrorism and its selective application; Sánchez and Meertens (2001) on *bandolerismo* (banditry) and its historical application for political purposes.

novelty of such a phenomenon is debatable, Calderón's deployment represented a step-change in its intensity in contemporary Mexico.

LFM split in 2011, with the rump of the cartel forming a new group known as *Los Caballeros Templarios* (LCT; the Knights Templar), which soon became dominant in Michoacan. LCT maintained LFM's cultivation of a quasi-religious identity, portraying one of their leaders as a Jesus-like figure and building chapels in his honour. They maintained a discourse of respecting ordinary people with a written code governing the comportment of their supposedly teetotal members (Grillo 2016; Lemus 2015). Despite this, violence against the civilian population continued as did the taxation of businesses, goods and property, extortion, kidnapping, and the illegal exploitation of nature resources (Lemus 2015; Grillo 2016; Pansters 2015). The extent of their control over everyday life in parts of Michoacan – the *Tierra Caliente* particularly – was seen by residents as nearly total, with foodstuffs, the ownership of goods, and the conduct of everyday activities subject to cartel imposed taxation (Pansters 2015; Aristegui Noticias 2013a; Rompeviento TV 2013; Televisa 2013). The cartel was seen to have corrupted or coerced local governments, police and security forces, and even up to the highest levels of the Michoacan state government (Ernst 2015a; Aguirre & Amador Herrera 2013; Lemus 2015; Univision 2014a; Univision 2014b; Grillo 2016; Excélsior 2014a). In many parts of the state, they were seen to operate as a kind of parallel state with their own justice and governance system, and the police were seen to act as their lookouts and ran their errands (Ernst 2015a, 2015b; Grillo 2016).

The revenue streams of LCT outside of drug trafficking were significant. In particular, illegal iron ore mining and the taxation of licit mining (Lemus 2015; Grillo 2016; Fuentes Díaz & Paleta Pérez 2015; Excélsior 2014b). But Michoacan – historically an important agricultural producer – also underwent an agro-export fuelled boom in the last decade, which became another important source of income for the cartel. According to data from SAGARPA (Secretaria de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural; the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development), from 2008-2018 Michoacan increased its agricultural exports by 300%, much of which growth can be ascribed to the growth in avocado exports (Aguilar Guizar 2018). In 2018, avocado exports amounted to US $2.4bn (Blanco 2019), and from 2003-2016 avocado production in Mexico grew by 109% whilst exports grew by 723% (SAGARPA 2017). Such agricultural riches were subject to taxes imposed by the cartel per cultivated hectare, including on avocados, with estimates that LCT earned up to $2bn pesos a year from such extortion (Aristegui Noticias 2013b; Univision 2014c). Similarly, the scale of such agriculture also provided, and continues to provide, opportunities for the laundering of illicit revenues (Sin Embargo 2017; Noventa Grados 2019).

Another example showing the strength of LCT's control relates to lime cultivation – based in the *Tierra Caliente* – where the cartel imposed restrictions on the number of days on which limes could be harvested (Rompeviento TV 2013). This meant that LCT were able to reduce the supply of limes for the domestic market pushing up the price and so increasing their revenues (Fuentes Díaz & Paleta Pérez 2015; Vanguardia 2013; Aristegui Noticias 2013c). Such control over the local economy and the populations necessary to collect such rents, was enforced via the threat, or use, of violence – including 'spectacular' violence[13] to instil fear and elicit compliance. However, whilst the control of the cartel seemed to be absolute, in early 2013 rumblings of discontent from some populations in the *Tierra Caliente* began to make itself heard.

The autodefensas of Michoacan: history, interpretations, and reception

Groups of armed civilians who claimed to have risen up against LCT first appeared in the *Tierra Caliente* towns of Tepalcatepec and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (known as La Ruana, in the municipality of Buenavista Tomatlan) on 24th February 2013. They cited the repression and abuses of the cartel for their rebellion and either arrested or forced the cartel members to flee, along with members of the local police forces and municipal administrations perceived as complicit with LCT. Where the label '*autodefensas*' for such groups emerged is not clear, but some claim that it was journalists who first used this term before it was adopted by the groups themselves, who up until then had been referring to themselves as '*policia comunitaria*'[14] (community police) (Interview with Carlos, Mexican national level journalist, 2017). The term *autodefensas* soon gained traction and the phenomenon soon became known as 'the *autodefensa* movement'. Describing the *autodefensas* as a movement, however, is problematic, as it assumes a level of homogeneity which was not the case, as will be discussed later. Despite attempts by LCT to crush the rebellion, the *autodefensas* soon spread to neighbouring towns and municipalities in the *Tierra Caliente* region. A spokesmen for the *autodefensas*, Dr José Manuel Mireles Valverde, called on the Federal state to intervene to re-establish the rule of law in the region, and pointed to the fact that the local and Michoacan state institutions had been corrupted by the cartel (Prados 2013).

[13] 'Spectacular violence' in the sense that it is employed by Goldstein (2004) whereby violence is a spectacle used to instil fear. Such a notion has been employed in the Mexican context by the likes of Villarreal (2015).
[14] Indeed, the term '*los comunitarios*' is often still used interchangeably with the term *autodefensas* in many places in Michoacan.

Differing accounts of the origin of the *autodefensas* abound, with some stressing the genuine frustration of the population with the cartel leading to an uprising of the population (Interview with Luis, former member of the CEDH Michoacán, 2017; Interview with Carolina, former member of the CNDH, 2017; Hernández Navarro 2014). Others have pointed to the supposed involvement of the Army in distributing weapons under the direction of Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, a Colombian Police General who was then serving as the security assessor for the Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (Gil Olmos 2015). Thus, it is portrayed as a 'Colombian project', echoing the experience of *autodefensas* in Colombia, and aimed at tackling the power of the cartels through a (covertly) state-sponsored armed force (Ibid). This account is mainly based on a single source, specifically a family member of the ex-mayor of Tepalcatepec who himself had been displaced from his role by the *autodefensas* for his supposed links to LCT (Padgett 2014). Therefore, it is hard to verify its veracity, though other rumours of Naranjo's involvement, articulated by cartel members, also circulated in the region (Interview with Carlos, Mexican national level journalist, 2017). Whether the *autodefensas* were an explicitly state-backed project or not, they did enjoy some support from local Army units at crucial moments in their fights with LCT (Rompeviento TV 2013; Mireles Valverde 2017). Though it is also worth noting that the Army also attempted to – and indeed did – disarm and/or arrest *autodefensa* members at various points of the uprising (Aristegui Noticias 2014; Animal Politico 2014; Heineman 2015). This was especially the case for *autodefensa* groups which did not institutionalise or demobilise following the signing of accords between the Federal government and the *autodefensas* in April 2014 (Milenio 2014a). Thus, there was a somewhat ambivalent relationship between the Army and the *autodefensas*, often dependent on the interpretation of local Army commanders, who rotated frequently postings frequently (Mireles Valverde 2017).

Another explanation of the *autodefensas* – which at times found favour with different institutions of the State – was that they were a tool of a rival cartel – the *Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion* (CJNG)[15] – aimed at destabilising their rival – LCT. This was based upon the fact that some of the important leaders of the *autodefensas* – though not the most publicly visible ones – had connections to drug trafficking and the CJNG in particular. Chief among these was Juan José Farías Álvarez, more commonly known as '*El Abuelo*' (The Grandfather), a prominent figure in Tepalcatepec, who is often portrayed as a regional chief of the CJNG (El Universal 2018), though he denies this (Chouza 2014a)[16]. CJNG's

[15] Flores Pérez (2016) gives a useful overview of the CJNG's history and structure which traces its strong familial and historical links in and to Michoacan (see also Vanguardia 2018; Eells 2017; Salomón 2019; US Treasury Department 2018).

[16] *El Abuelo* was the local leader of the *Defensas Rurales* (described in the Introduction) in his municipality of Tepalcatepec and fought against the incursions of Los Zetas in the 2000s – supposedly alongside the Army (Chouza 2014a). He was also allegedly an ally of the Valencia and Sinaloa cartels (Grayson 2010).

support is seen as evidenced by when LCT attempted to blockade Tepalcatepec to choke-off the *autodefensa* rising, the road into the neighbouring state of Jalisco (Tepalcatepec is on the border of Michoacan and Jalisco) was always kept open, allowing vital supplies to arrive (Mireles Valverde 2017; Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017). Other *autodefensa* leaders such as Luis Antonio Torres González, '*El Americano*' (The American), a key leader from the municipality of Buenavista Tomatlan, are seen as being linked to drug trafficking and an emergent cartel known as *H3* (El Sol de Mexico 2018; Vanguardia 2014). As the *autodefensa* rising progressed, the involvement of groups linked to drug trafficking, and the role of former drug traffickers who switched sides to the *autodefensas* – known as *perdonados* or *arrepentidos* (forgiven ones or repentant ones) – became more pronounced, or at least more obvious. Indeed, some *autodefensa* leaders saw this as a reason why the *autodefensas* ultimately 'failed' in their objectives (Heineman 2015; Nájar 2014; Cambio de Michoacán 2019).

However, it is not possible to reduce the *autodefensa* movement – diverse and large scale as it was – to a fight between rival drug traffickers, as it also gained popular support and participation in a large number of municipalities in Michoacan (Le Cour Grandmaison 2019). Viewing the *autodefensas* through such a lens also fails to take into account the relatively normalised social and economic position of drug cultivation and trafficking in *Tierra Caliente*. This helps to explain how the *autodefensas* were against the cartel and its depredations, yet were never explicitly against drug trafficking per se. Indeed some of their leaders, recognising the longstanding nature of the trade in the region, simply wanted things to return to how things had been previously – people involved in trafficking drugs but without the persecution and taxation of the local populations (Rompeviento TV 2013). This was also an opinion frequently voiced in Tancitaro, where people wanted things to go back to how things were before. Whilst trafficking was not as normalised socially in Tancitaro, people nonetheless noted the difference between how this was previously conducted compared with its diversification into other areas:

> "…well this criminality now it's like it is more modern because before it was just very much about drugs, to plant drugs, marijuana, types of drugs, and it was nothing more than this. This was its only shot you could say, it was its only job, but after was this new mode with kidnapping, extortion and charging taxes and everything…" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils of Tancitaro, 2017).

The differing interpretations of the *autodefensas* reflected their diversity and complexity, especially as they spread across Michoacan. Such diffusion of the autodefensas took the form of uprisings copying the example from the original towns, but the *autodefensas* from Tepalcatepec and Buenavista

Tomatlan in particular, advanced from their home municipalities to respond to calls from populations in neighbouring municipalities appealing to be freed from LCT's influence. These *autodefensas* advanced at times on their own, but at other times were escorted by the Army and/or Federal Police. Upon entering a new town, the *autodefensas* would often combat or arrest any suspected cartel members and detain local police and public officials – if perceived to have been in league with the cartel. A meeting of the population would then be convened in the *plaza* to form their own *autodefensas* and to elect a citizen council to take over the governance of the town. According to the movement's spokesman, the new *autodefensas* would be armed and supported for a number of days, but then would have to take responsibility for the security of the town themselves (Mireles Valverde 2017; Heineman 2015; Rompeviento TV 2013). Such a sequence of events was not always the case given the diversity of locations and of the *autodefensas* themselves, but what is important to note is that each town essentially formed and organised its own *autodefensa*. Thus, whilst there was a level of coordination between such groups and overall leaders/spokesmen were identifiable, each *autodefensa* group had its own leadership structure and organising structure influenced by the specific dynamics – social, economic, political, historical, and geographical – in which each town was embedded.

By mid-January 2014, the *autodefensas* had been active for almost a year in the municipalities in which they had originated and had expanded to have a presence in 15 municipalities of Michoacan. The violence and insecurity brought by their contestation with LCT had resulted in an extra 2,500 members of the Federal forces – Army and Federal Police (Méndez & Pérez Silva 2014) – being deployed to Michoacan. In parts of Michoacan, such as Apatzingan – seen as the capital of LCT – Federal forces had taken over responsibility for security from the hands of the local state (Martínez Elorriaga 2014a). This was effectively replicated on a state-wide basis with the installation of a Federal Security Commission – announced on 15th January 2014 – headed by Alfredo Castillo Cervantes as commissioner. In essence, this took the tasks of security and dealing with the *autodefensas* out of the hands of Michoacan state officials (Pérez Silva 2014). Preceding the announcement, on the 14th January, the Secretary of the Government, Miguel Osorio Chong, called for the *autodefensas* to return home and leave security provision to Michoacan state and Federal forces, whilst simultaneously announcing extra funds for crime prevention in the *Tierra Caliente* and *Sierra Madre* (Martínez Elorriaga 2014b). This reflected the threefold nature of the announcement which was "not to tolerate those bearing arms without authorisation, combat organised crime and reconstruct the social fabric" (Ibid). This was mirrored in the announcement of the Federal Commission itself which had tackling crime as a key pillar alongside the reconstruction of social fabric (Muñoz & Castillo 2014).

An immediate issue for the commissioner was the personnel available to fulfil his brief, particularly in combatting LCT. Despite the presence of Federal forces in Michoacan, neither the Federal Police nor the Army were willing to put their troops directly under his command (Interview with Matías, Mexican academic, 2017). The Federal Police's reluctance stemmed from concerns around the unconstitutionality given the irregular nature of the Commission, and the Army's was unwilling to place its soldiers under civilian command (Ibid). Thus, the commissioner turned to the *autodefensas* themselves, especially the group within the *autodefensas* most experienced in combat and the most heavily armed, who were known as *Los Viagras*. *Los Viagras* were headed by seven brothers of the Sierra Santana family and constituted an armed mercenary group who had previously been allied to LCT, but subsequently joined the *autodefensas* of Buenavista Tomatlan in 2013. Their knowledge and experience was useful for the *autodefensas*, which was part of the reason they had been accepted into the *autodefensa* ranks as *perdonados* (Heineman 2015; Manzo 2018). They constituted a similarly valuable resource for the commissioner who supposedly justified their use by saying that "No hay peor cuña que la del mismo palo[17]" and "I have no problem using criminals to fuck over other criminals" (Interview with Matías, Mexican academic, 2017). This resulted in the formation of the group known as the G250 – comprised of 250 members of the *Viagra*-linked *autodefensa* group – which was tasked with hunting down the leaders of LCT and spearheading *autodefensa* advances.

Under the Commission, the *autodefensas* and the Federal forces often advanced in tandem, with the *autodefensas* offering important local knowledge in order to uncover, arrest and displace cartel operatives and activities. Advances were rapid with the *autodefensas* coming to have a presence in 33 of Michoacan's 113 municipalities (CNDH 2015). At the same time, the commissioner sought to contain and institutionalise the *autodefensas* bringing them under State control. He did this via the institutionalisation of some of the *autodefensa* groups into a new *Fuerza Rural* in mid-May 2014, giving the *autodefensas* arms, uniforms and placing them under Michoacan state control (Muedano 2014). They institutionalised under the Michoacan state rather than the Federation because the Army supposedly refused to institutionalise them as *Defensas Rurales* (Interview with Matías, Mexican academic, 2017), though this was mooted by the commissioner at one point (Castillo García 2014; Cano 2014b). *Autodefensas* not incorporated into the *Fuerza Rural* were to disband, and the *Fuerza Rural* was expected to stay within their own municipalities (Interview with Ernesto, Mexican academic, 2017). However, some *autodefensa* groups did not agree with such a disbandment and argued that

[17] This is a difficult phrase to translate directly but its meaning roughly translates as: 'there is no worse rival than one with the same provenance', and in this context is similar to the English idiom: 'it takes a criminal to catch a criminal'.

their role of 'cleaning Michoacan'[18] had not been accomplished, with many LCT leaders still at large (Badillo 2014; Waldenburg 2014). The dissident *autodefensas* were often disarmed and/or imprisoned, as occurred to the former spokesman of the *autodefensa* movement Dr. Mireles, and his *autodefensa* group in July 2014 (Chouza 2014b).

The intervention of the Federal Commission effectively supplanted the Michoacan state government and utilised the *autodefensas* for their local knowledge, whilst subsequently attempting to institutionalise and control them, bringing them under the auspices of the state, and punishing those who refused to obey. Members of the *Fuerza Rural*, or some of them at least, were subsequently institutionalised into a reconstituted *Policía Michoacán*. Pockets of *autodefensas* – such as on the coast, and in Tepalcatepec and Tancitaro – remained, where they refused to disband and the population mobilised to prevent their disarmament. The G250 group – made up of *Los Viagras* principally – were institutionalised into the *Fuerza Rural* but not subsequently into the *Policía Michoacán*. Indeed, when former members of the G250 and other non-institutionalised *autodefensas* staged an unarmed protest in Apatzingan – to complain about their lack of a permanent institutionalisation and payment as *Fuerza Rural* members – they were fired upon by Federal Police who allegedly shouted "Kill them like dogs!" (Castellanos 2015). A journalistic investigation counted sixteen dead and many more wounded, whilst the commissioner claimed that eight had died due to being caught in a crossfire between Federal Police and cartel members (Ibid). Insecurity and violence associated with drug cartels, has not abated in subsequent years in many regions of Michoacan, with new disputes between cartels – principally CJNG and *Los Viagras* – meaning that Michoacan has remained one of the most violent states in Mexico.

Tancitaro: The 'authentic world capital of avocados' under organised crime and the *autodefensas*

Avocado cultivation and societal change

The municipality of Tancitaro has a population of 31,100 people (INEGI 2019) and is located on the borders of the *Tierra Caliente* and the *Meseta Purepecha*, in the *Zona Aguacatera*. The *cabecera* of the municipality[19], also called Tancitaro, lies beneath the *Pico de Tancítaro*, the highest peak in

[18] Use of the verb *limpiar* (to clean) in this sense is interesting to note given the parallels with the expressions utilised by the Army since at least the late 1950s in dealing with drug traffickers and criminals (see for example Velediaz 2010; Maldonado Aranda 2012).

[19] The municipality in Mexico is a political and social entity with a legal status in its own right and constituting a formal legal body (*personalidad jurídica*) under the Federal Constitution, and state level law. The municipality is defined as having its own patrimony, internal liberty, and its own autonomous government elected by its

Michoacan. The rich volcanic earth and the altitude – which provokes rainfall and mist/dew – is what provides perfect growing conditions for avocados. As the municipality's terrains descend towards the south and west, the cool temperatures of the mountainous zone give way to more temperate climates, which requires that the avocado orchards are irrigated, at least for part of the year. The centrality of the avocado industry is not only obvious from the vast expanses of land given over to their cultivation, nor the symbolic statues dedicated to the industry, but also in the discourses of the residents themselves. The older generation of residents in Tancitaro speak of the transformation of the municipality that they have lived through over the last 30 years, from a sleepy *pueblo* (town) to a major hub in the transnational agro-industry. For example, one interviewee noted: "Well, it was like a small town, very tranquil, not civilised. But because of the avocado boom…it is like before, things were more tranquil and like a small town, and because of the avocados everything grew, everything" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Some people charted this change from around the mid-1990s: "it was in '95 more or less, they started to open up the US market and because of that the avocado prices started rising a little bit, there started to be more development, there started to be people with more money" (Interview with Antonio, Tancitaro resident, 2017). Whilst others saw such changes as dating from the early 2000s: "The avocado started, it was well-positioned, there was some flow of money, there was work, it was just becoming noticeable" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Whilst the *criollo* (creole) avocado is native to the region, commercial cultivation of avocados for domestic consumption began in the 1970s in the municipality following the planting of the Haas variant of avocado in the 1960s (Herrera Aguilar 2017; Stanford 2001), and the growth of the industry took-off with the entry of Mexico into the NAFTA agreement in 1994 (Interview with members of the JLSV, 2017). The Haas variety has its origin in California and has become the most popular variant for commercial cultivation and domestic consumption in the US and Mexico, with its comparatively thicker skin (than the c*riollo* variety) making it suitable for refrigeration and transportation (Román Burgos 2018). With the certification of the first *huertas* to meet the US phytosanitary requirements taking place in 1996, exports began to the US market from Tancitaro officially in 1997 (Interview with members of the JLSV of Tancitaro, 2017). Enhanced profits could be gained from the US market and

residents. Municipalities are divided into territorial areas based on their population size (thresholds dependent on whether the municipality is urban, semi-urban or rural) and often – outside of urban areas – include different settlements of differing size and status. The seat of the municipal government is generally found in the largest settlement, known as the *cabecera municipal* (municipal capital, often referred to as the *cabecera*). Smaller settlements and their surrounding areas are designated as *tenencias* (holdings) for towns (*pueblos*) generally speaking, and *encargaturas del orden* (order commissions) for villages and hamlets (*ranchos*). For further details see El Congreso de Michoacán de Ocampo (2017), and for the historical development of the municipality in Mexico see Instituto de Investigaciones Legislativas del Senado de la República (1999).

this provided incentives for increased cultivation of avocado *huertas*. For example, the overall value of avocado production in Michoacan increased from $1.5bn pesos in 1996, to $11.4bn pesos in 2008, a rise of 658 percent (Guzmán Pardo 2010). However, as with most crops on the world market, prices can fluctuate, and in the subsequent years there have been periods of lower prices as well as booms. Thus, in local narratives, whilst the avocado industry had changed the face of the municipality to a large extent and become *the* key local industry, they note that the real boom period in terms of prices and thus revenues really began in the mid-2000s, and it was from this point onwards that the lucrativeness of avocado cultivation became more apparent.

Such economic growth was seen as positive in some ways:

> "Well the avocado was a good source of development for and by the people, right? Because before there wasn't the same production here, the orchards weren't attended to as they are now. And, finally, we saw that there was good business there, and so we are giving sufficient care to this now, so that there will be this production" (Interview with José, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

But the manifestation of such wealth in Tancitaro was seen as problematic, as it generated a certain materialism and an attitude of 'what is mine, is mine'. This was especially marked through the purchase of consumer goods, such as designer clothes and new trucks in particular, giving rise to the idea that residents are: "Very materialistic people, we can call them this, materialistic. That is, good people, but very materialistic, right?" (Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal administration, 2017). This materialism was seen to come at a cost to ideas of personal development, and to have caused friction within the community:

> "But they (people from Tancitaro) no longer have personal growth, that is, they get stuck in luxuries, in cars, houses…and who these objects belong to; clothes, shoes. And everything has a (fashion) label, that is, here everything has labels. If you use things of this label, you have money, you're good, right? And there is this difference in the society, to say, you use only things with labels and you don't. So there are these kinds of frictions" (Ibid).

Increases in wealth and accompanying ostentation within the municipality have been seen to have had profound impacts on the social life of the community. Whilst the industry provided work for the people in the municipality, it also provoked sharp distinctions and growing inequality between those who owned land on which avocados were cultivated, and those engaged in the waged labour aspects

of the trade such as cutting avocados, processing, and packing the fruit. Thus, avocado had generated huge wealth in the municipality, but this was shared highly unequally:

> "I tell you that little by little you started to see more money, you could see it in the houses, in the cars, you saw it from people's clothes, in the trips they took, in the parties, in the weddings. In all that is the social area there started to be a change, but also a disparity because he who had a lot of money, well yes, started to have more money; but he who was an employee, kept on earning the same and so there was this inequality" (Interview with Antonio, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

Simply put, those who owned the land – the producers as they are called – could potentially gain significant revenue, obviously depending on the extent of their terrain. Around 70% of the municipality's producers are 'small' producers – that is, they cultivate 5 hectares of avocado or less (Interview with members of the JLSV, 2017). To put this into context, it is said to be possible for a family to live well on the proceeds from 0.5 to 1 hectare of cultivated avocado (Ibid). The biggest producers in Tancitaro cultivate thousands of hectares, and those involved in the packing and export of the fruit can gain exponentially more because of the structure of the trade itself (Ibid). For example, one trailer (i.e. one lorry) laden with avocados for export is worth around USD $1m in 2017 prices (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 21/08/17). By contrast, those who cut the fruit – which is extremely arduous work, especially if the terrain is not flat – earn around $250 pesos a day (roughly £10) in 2017 prices (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). This is considered a decent wage for agricultural labour, especially when compared to what day labourers are paid in the *Tierra Caliente* region. For example, lime cutters often earn far less due to the taxation of the cartels and the limitations that they place on the number of harvesting days. But even with the relatively higher wages in Tancitaro, what day labourers earn is still vastly less than what the producers and those involved in the export and commercialisation of the fruit earn.

Such differentials have been seen to give rise to growing feelings of inequality and fragmentation within the community over recent years, whilst also occasioning changes to the perceived culture and values of the municipality. One notable observation has been that with such wealth: "The people prefer to buy in other places, invest in other places, so that complicates things massively" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2017). Another is that access to avocado wealth has led to a devaluing of formal education amongst the offspring of avocado producers. This is often expressed by reference to the fact that such children and young people do not make any effort in formal education, referring to such education as pointless because their future wealth is already assured by avocado cultivation. For example, because of such lack of investment:

> "…I feel that the town hasn't prospered much…because they (the students) think that a *huerta* can give you more than you could get from a book, and I tell you that in the *Preparatoria* (High School) you hear: 'I'm here because I have to be, no it is because my parents they wanted me to work…because they told me that I will go to the *huerta* and so in a few harvests they make 1 million, 2 million (pesos), we live well so why study?'"; and "If they see the teachers have a small car or walk (to work) then 'studying has no use for me'" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

This lack of education idea is also expressed, in a less formal sense, around the kinds of comportments that such wealth has brought. Thus those with avocado wealth have been seen to have misspent their newfound gains: "But unfortunately it wasn't, from my perspective, well employed, because they began to splurge a little, they began to waste money, on parties, on vices, on things that maybe you shouldn't, but because you have the money and you can do it you say, 'well, I like it', huh?" (Interview with Antonio, Tancitaro resident, 2017). Such lack of *educación* – not education in the formal sense, but more around knowing how to conduct oneself – is often expressed, and is perceived as having negative consequences: "there are people who don't know how to have money, they go to excesses and this brings consequences and problems" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017). As another informant put it, speaking generally about the people of the municipality: "the *raza* (people) weren't ready for this amount of money". Such changes to comportment took place gradually and were expressed in differing ways: "I think it is in the last 20 years more or less when it has been more noticeable. Yes, since 20 years ago people could get a very nice car, drive strongly and bring money, consume alcohol…and up to drugs as well" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Such comportment and the inequality of wealth distribution was seen to have led to resentment and envy by those without, deepened by the alienating attitudes and behaviours of those with such wealth, thus causing division within society. The impact of divisions on society is frequently expressed as follows: "…equally, many people think that if you don't have a (avocado) *huerta* you don't count for anything…I say this to you because they have said this a lot, personally to my family" (Interview with Margarita, resident of Tancitaro, 2017). Such inequalities and frustrations were not only voiced towards others within Tancitaro however, as there is also a saying expressed as follows:

> "They say that Tancitaro is like a father to those from outside and like a step-father to those from here. It is a saying they use here, because many people, those who come from outside they have got rich and done very well, but many people from here haven't been able to get ahead like others or in terms of resources" (Ibid).

Whilst a saying with historical lineage going beyond the time of the avocados, it chimes with the fact that in some areas of the municipality it was those from outside – notably from Mexico City – who had bought up land and cultivated avocado on a commercial basis initially:

> "…in the '70s, many people, principally from Mexico City, and some foreigners, came to Tancitaro and started to buy land. The people from here worked in the woods, so with resin (tapping) and pine wood, that was their main economic activity…These people they bought land because in one part, I'm not sure where, they started to try planting avocado and they found it took very well, but they didn't tell anyone, they just bought lands and started cutting down trees. So now those who were the owners or children of the owners are now *peons* (agricultural day labourers)" (Interview with Francisco, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

This was particularly pronounced in Apo, one of the *tenencias* of the municipality, where many people sold their land – which had been cultivated with traditional crops such as corn, to outsiders who turned it over to commercial cultivation (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016). The wealth brought by avocados is also seen to have made Tancitaro an extremely expensive place to live: "…from the point at which the avocado started to be more valuable everything got very expensive here, very expensive. So, the land, the rent for houses; everything, everything is expensive, everything is more expensive here in Tancitaro" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). This was especially the case for those without avocado orchards: "…if you don't have an avocado orchard, maintaining yourself on a minimum salary is very difficult" (Interview with Margarita, resident of Tancitaro, 2017). Such divisions, inequalities, and the resentment that this bred, were seen as being important factors in what came to pass in Tancitaro in the subsequent years of cartel control.

Avocados and organised crime

The avocado wealth of Tancitaro is perceived as having played a key role in bringing the cartels to the municipality, and on the way in which their influence was experienced. The lack of *educación* of those with new found wealth, referred to above, led to perceived misspending not only on material things, but also on dissolute pastimes. One way in which this manifested itself was people from Tancitaro going to the *cantinas* (traditional Mexican bars) and entertainment venues of the *Tierra Caliente* – traditionally an area where people from the municipality went to enjoy themselves – and flaunting their wealth. Participation in gambling on cockfights and general big spending within *Tierra Caliente* were seen as spreading the idea that there was money in Tancitaro, and this soon came to the attention of the cartels operating in the region, with severe consequences:

> "In this case, all of it came from people from elsewhere starting to come here because they noticed that, yes, there is money here. Also, it was people who went there to the *Tierra Caliente*, well to the bars, to the *cantinas*, to the cock-fighting – carrying money to the cock-pits, mountains of it, to bet. So there they (the people of *Tierra Caliente*) found out that there was money here and so they came and they started with the kidnappings…" (Interview with Antonio, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

The idea of the avocado wealth attracting the cartels is a widespread idea within Tancitaro:

> "…the avocado is good and bad, that is, it has two parts: I can tell you it's good because of the economy, for the sustenance that it gives, but it is bad because it attracts too many gazes. That is to say there is a focus on the avocado, there is a lot of money here, a lot of money is managed here, everything is expensive. So to live in Tancitaro is a luxury because everything is expensive and because of this, the criminals had all of their attention on Tancitaro…" (Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal administration, 2017).

Therefore, the growth of the avocado trade is seen by residents of Tancitaro as having been a direct cause of bringing the cartels to the municipality, but it is also of note is how this is related to ideas of the way in which the trade has affected society and the moral claims therein. Thus, it is those with avocado wealth who not only caused divisions and social differentiation within the community, but also their dissolute spending of such new found wealth bears the responsibility for having attracted the cartel.

The influence and involvement of cartels within the municipality is generally dated from around the mid-2000s but is seen as having become far worse from around 2006/7. This was said to have occurred because of the entry of the *Zetas* cartel into the municipality, which happened shortly after an Army campaign to confiscate firearms:

> "…before they (the cartel) arrived, the soldiers came and they disarmed us because some people had guns in their houses…
>
> Interviewer: It was in 2006?
>
> Daniel: More or less. They found guns in the houses, they had equipment to do this and they took them away (the guns), and after that with what were we going to defend ourselves? It was…well it went to the extreme. And so now we can't believe (in the Federal government)" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Following their entry, the cartel gradually imposed a regime of extortion and taxation throughout the municipality. Thus, as in other parts of Michoacan, people talk about how taxes were imposed on the

sale of necessities such as food, the ownership of goods, and per member of the family – essentially the taxation of life:

> "One thing is that they tax you, for example, if you have enough hectares (of avocado orchards), maybe they charge you per hectare, which isn't good, but it is something that you can manage, but then they tell you: 'I'm going to tax you per member of your family', it's very hard" (Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal administration, 2017).

Avocado producers were subject to a tax that was levied per hectare of cultivated avocado, they were also extorted for money more generally, and had family members kidnapped in return for ransoms. Some avocado producers were also killed or disappeared along with their families, or were forced to flee to escape such threats. In such cases, the cartel was seen to have taken over such *huertas* and their associated revenues. By the time of the 2013 uprising, one of the leaders of the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro said that there were 3,000 hectares of avocado *huertas* that had no owner now that the cartel had fled (Notes from community meeting with Dr. Mireles – 02/07/17). Some of the larger producers in one area of the municipality were alleged to have some links to members of the cartel and thus escaped such victimisation, at least initially (Interview with Miguel, *autodefensa* leader, 2017). However, with competition between different groups and the *Zetas* being replaced and/or turning into first, LFM, and then LCT, they also fell afoul of such groups at some point and were similarly victimised (Ibid). Whilst the persecution began with the richer members of the community, notably the avocado producers, it soon became widespread with extremely negative consequences:

> "…first (they kidnapped) people who had the most (wealth), but little by little it started to snowball, because afterwards it wasn't just those with the most, but also the person who maybe had the prettiest daughter, who had the most sons to take to add to their ranks, train them, corrupt them, get them started on strong drugs as well. Drugs I think has been a detonator, well also for all of the barbarity that was lived through: dismembered bodies, bodies…" (Interview with Antonio, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

The narratives that come out of the experience of these various cartels also call into question the nature of such groups, and the disconnect between how they are perceived at the macro-level, and experienced at the local. As referred to previously, scholars have questioned the accuracy and usefulness of the 'cartel' label in its description of those involved in drug trafficking and organised crime in Mexico and beyond. Such critiques seem to be borne out to some extent by the testimonies of the residents of Tancitaro around their experience of such cartel-rule. Whilst *Tancitarenses* were

aware that there were a succession of groups that called themselves *Los Zetas*, LFM, and LCT, they often refer to the fact that they could be the same people within such organisations and the way in which they operated was the same. They also point to the fact that there were violent contestation between competing groups of *Zetas* in the municipality at one stage, thus belying the fact that being part of the 'same' cartel meant any necessary coherence or shared identity. Furthermore, when people talk about such groups and the period of their control they rarely reference their actual names, but simply call them 'the bad ones' or 'the criminals', and sometimes just 'them'. So, there is little actual differentiation between the groups by people on the ground. This would seem to complicate some of the more exotic accounts around the importance of cartel identities and practices – particularly around LFM and LCT, where much attention has been paid to their supposed religious identities (see for example Lomnitz 2016; Grillo 2016; Lemus 2015). The difficulty with such contentions being that if such practices and identities – while certainly not absent (see for example Vargas & García Tinoco 2014) – were so important, then why did no-one refer to any semblance of religious identity or practices by the cartel, despite talking about life under cartel rule in great detail. This hints at the fact that the coherence and visibilities of such identities and practices may have been over-stated, or at least that they were unevenly applied at the local level.

Avocados and the autodefensas of Tancitaro

The arrival of the *autodefensas* from the *Tierra Caliente* region in November 2013 – which sparked the formation of the municipality's own *autodefensa* mobilisation – was to some extent connected to the avocado industry. The final tipping point as far as cartel abuses went – "the drop that caused the glass to overflow" in local parlance – involved the abduction of the daughter of a large avocado producer (Cano 2014a). The girl was abducted and held for a ransom of $8m pesos. The father did not have that kind of money but managed to produce $4m pesos in cash and said that he would give them title to $6-7m worth of avocado *huertas* but that in return he wanted his daughter back. The $4m was handed over and the next day the cartel returned his daughter, but cut into pieces in a plastic bag. After this, the father vowed that he would do something and spoke to a friend who had also been thinking of taking action. Calls started to go out to the *autodefensas* in *Tierra Caliente*, appealing to them to come to Tancitaro, and people began to try to quietly organise themselves (Interview with Ángel, autodefensa member, 2017). Another account posits – in a not entirely contradictory manner – that it was some of the large producers from the municipality who started making such calls (Interview with Miguel, autodefensa leader, 2017). The reasons being that whilst they had enjoyed some links to a local leader of the previous iterations of cartel presence, the latest groups in their incarnation as

LCT, had also persecuted and extorted them (Ibid). Similarly, they were supposedly concerned that if they did not call the *autodefensas* and they arrived anyway, they may have been victimised by the *autodefensas* themselves for their previous links to the cartel (Ibid).

The presence of avocado wealth can be seen as having assisted the *autodefensa* rising in the municipality as – when not being extorted by the cartel – such wealth could be used to arm the populace, and provide funds more generally, for the maintenance of communal defence. For example, in comparison to other places: "…for example, in Apatzingan or that zone (*Tierra Caliente*), economic levels are far lower, so it is difficult for people there to purchase guns or if they would like to rebel and here, well fortunately everyone had the possibility to buy themselves arms" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). The producers had also been particularly victimised and so were motivated to participate and purchased guns on the black market (Vallarta Opina 2014). In some areas of the municipality large producers organised and armed the autodefensas themselves, but in other areas of Tancitaro *autodefensa* leaders deny that avocado producers or wealth were fundamental in funding the *autodefensas*. Instead they pointed to the way in which they indebted themselves to purchase weapons and buy fuel for their trucks to be able to mobilise (Interview with Miguel, autodefensa leader, 2017). Communal funding of the *autodefensas* was also evidenced in another of the *tenencias* of the municipality, where the continued presence of the *autodefensas* is paid for by the community as a whole, and not by avocado producers per se:

> "I'll give a statistic: eleven people stand guard by turns, of these eleven, three or four are in the *casetas* and the rest contribute $250 pesos per day for a shift of 12 hours, $250 pesos is to give food to those who take care of everyone, to buy a weapon and some other things. We are talking about, if there are eleven people every twelve hours, in one month, we are talking about $12,700 pesos, 250 multiplied by ten would be $2,500, $2,750 pesos per turn, we are talking about $5,500 pesos every day that is invested, in a month multiplied by thirty, we are talking about $150,000 pesos (sic: 165,000) that are invested every month to look after the town. Money that shouldn't have to be invested if there was security offered by the government" (Interview with Padre Martin, member of the Catholic Church, 2017).

Whilst not stemming from avocado producers directly, the fact that such communal collection funds are present, as were funds to build the *casetas*, could be attributed to the presence of avocado as providing a level of economic wealth and activity that allows for this. But it must be noted that *autodefensas* also armed and organised themselves in areas where there was no recourse to avocado

wealth, so such a resource cannot be seen to explain the *autodefensas* in any direct or straightforward manner.

More fundamentally perhaps, the presence of avocado wealth could also be argued to be a major reason why the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro have stayed active and indeed, why the *casetas* were established. The perception that Tancitaro remains a prize for the cartel is widespread in the municipality:

> "…I've heard various people say that the criminals said: 'the *plaza* of Tancitaro is the most desired'. That is, all of them wanted to be here managing this money. So it was one group of them wanted to be here, then others also wanted to get involved and those who had already come here didn't want to let them. So, because of this, the criminality was terrible…" (Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal administration, 2017).

Thus, the municipality suffered so badly precisely because of its riches, and cartels are seen as wanting to return. Whether levels of violence and extortion were comparatively higher in Tancitaro than in other areas is hard to tell, due to the lack of reliable data, but cannot be discounted. The local narrative was that there were 3,000 dead and disappeared over ten years, and whilst this may be an inflated figure, evidence from fieldwork suggests that it may not be so far from being accurate. For example, in the *rancho* depicted at the start of this chapter, there were 27 people disappeared (not including those killed) from a population of around 300. Similarly, virtually everyone I talked to during fieldwork had lost a family member, friend or neighbour – in many cases several – either killed or disappeared. People also talked about leaving their houses every morning to discover bodies on the street. Therefore, the presence of avocado wealth may have been a factor in causing higher levels of violence due to the fierce competition for control of such a prized *plaza*, which not only caused significant violence between different cartels but also between factions of the same cartel.

The continuance of the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro underpins not only the notion that the avocados have had an impact on their nature and longevity in the municipality, but also the fact that the *autodefensas* of Michoacan in general cannot be understood in any great depth as a coherent and united entity. In this sense it is similar to the difficulties of understanding drug trafficking and organised crime groups as cartels. As discussed, the avocado industry and its imbrication into the fabric of the local economy and society influenced the nature and features of the *autodefensas* that arose. This can be seen by the way in which the fractured nature of the community, dating from the experience of avocado wealth, but also reflecting historical political tensions between rival political factions (discussed in Chapter 4) which became reflected in the *autodefensa* groups. As noted, the

different patterns of wealth ownership influenced how the *autodefensas* were organised in different parts of the municipality, with the large avocado producers – particularly in the east of the municipality – forming and controlling *autodefensa* groups thanks to their position as funders and employers in their areas of influence. In this sense, there were parallels between this form of organisation in the municipality and the *autodefensas* in other areas of Michoacan, such as in Tepalcatepec where ranchers were seen as having an important influence in the formation of the *autodefensas*, as were the lime growers in Buenavista Tomatlan (Guerra 2018; Macías 2014; Rompeviento TV 2013). This has led academics such as Phillips (2017) to focus on how inequality can help explain such groups via a patron/*cacique*-worker dynamic. However, this is complicated by the fact that in other parts of Tancitaro, notably the southern and western *pueblos* and *ranchos*, the formation was more 'democratic', as the *autodefensas* were funded by communal collections, and leaderships emerged in manners less visibly reducible to economic *caciquismo*. Indeed, in Michoacan more broadly, such instrumental economic relations cannot explain the emergence of *autodefensas* and such popular participation within them, which some have equated to a form of social movement (Guerra Manzo 2015; Hernandez Navarro 2014; Gil Olmos 2015; Le Cour Grandmaison 2019). Thus, in its diversity, the *autodefensas* of Tancitaro also seem to mirror the diversity of the phenomenon within Michoacan as a whole. Whilst there was unity between the two broad streams of *autodefensas* in the municipality, in terms of defence from the outside, the theme of avocados provoked some internal – though not conflictive – tensions between them. Such frictions help delineate some of the key features of the municipality, but also illustrates the way in which the wider leadership of the *autodefensas* in Michoacan played a role in the municipality.

The leader of the *autodefensas* who came to Tancitaro in November 2013, and one-time spokesman for 'the movement' as a whole, Dr Mireles, continues to play an important symbolic and to some extent, moral leadership role over the *autodefensas*. This is because he is regarded as the liberator of the municipality. This was evident when he came to visit the municipality in 2017 during my fieldwork (Notes from community meeting with Dr Mireles – 02/07/17). His visit is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, but what is important to note here is the references he made to the avocado industry during this meeting. The meeting itself was held in the cavernous, modern meeting hall of the avocado producers, and whilst attendance was not strictly restricted to avocado producers, it was not public either, and had mainly circulated amongst avocado growers and key leaders of the *autodefensas*. The fact that attendees primarily comprised avocado producers was clear by Mireles' commencement, in which he noted that whilst the meeting hall had a plaque stating that it was constructed with SAGARPA's (Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development) assistance, in reality everyone knew

that the government had not really helped, and it was thanks to the avocado producers' own efforts that such a venue had been built (Ibid). Indeed, part of the reason for the meeting was for avocado producers to help pay for his Dr Mireles's medical treatment and provide him with bullet proof trucks due to the dangers that he still faced.

Of greater significance was Mireles recalling a conversation that he had had in the immediate aftermath of the *autodefensa* rising with the then-leader of the *Consejo de Vigilancia*[20], Jesús Bucio Cortés. The Bucio family[21] is renowned in Tancitaro as one of the families with the largest areas of avocado cultivation in the municipality. Don Jesús, as he was known locally (he was murdered in 2015 in a situation not linked to the *autodefensas* (El Universal 2015a)), whilst being the leader of the *Consejo* – was widely respected in the municipality (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Mireles recalled that Don Jesús had told him that with LCT having fled, they had found that there were 3,000 hectares of avocado orchards (other – less common – accounts refer to 1,300 hectares) that did not have an owner, as mentioned previously (Notes from community meeting with Dr Mireles – 02/07/17). This was a particularly pressing issue because the harvesting period was about to begin, and so who would arrange for the cutting of the fruit if there were no owners to do so. Mireles recalled counselling Don Jesús to arrange for the cutting of the fruit, and to use the money for the good of the municipality, saying that such a quantity of *huertas* gifted to the municipality could ensure that Tancitaro had the best schools, the best hospital, and the best public services in all of Mexico (Ibid).

Such a gifting of the *huertas* never occurred, and whilst one newspaper report – at the time of Don Jesús's death – noted that the *huertas* were returned to their previous owners (Proceso 2015), this continues to be the subject of controversy in Tancitaro. Thus, it was significant that Mireles, seen by many as having a certain moral authority, raised this point. The subject of the *huertas* without owners and what happened to them came up frequently when talking to residents and at meetings. People refer to the fact that no-one seems to know what happened to these *huertas*, with some accusing the then-leadership of the JLSV – who should have oversight of such issues – of never handing over an accounting of this. It is not seen as coincidental that the leadership of the JLSV at the time was

[20] The *Consejo de Vigilancia* are the self-appointed leaders of the *autodefensas* in the east of the municipality. The membership is comprised mainly of large avocado producers, with residents in Tancitaro referring to the strong overlap between the members of this *Consejo* and the perceived *caciques* of the municipality.

[21] Interestingly the commander of the newly formed *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard) – the security force created by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in 2019 which has a military-like organisation and has been initially staffed by members of the Federal Police, Army and Navy, who have been transferred into its ranks (BBC Mundo 2019) – General Luis Rodríguez Bucio (see for example Rojas 2019), originates from Condembaro, a *tenencia* of Tancitaro, and is a member of this family.

comprised of members of the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, and the suspicion is that the *huertas* were kept by them:

> "…afterwards they never did this part, it is said that there were 1,300 hectares of avocado *huertas* in the hands of the thugs, the *Consejo* in that part (of the municipality) has them. They never produced the records of these, nor how much fruit came from them, or anything at all. What is more they spent it (the proceeds) on the (*autodefensa*) movement, on arms and things like that, but to us, to my community, they didn't even give us a radio. We bought ourselves a patrol vehicle through by gathering donations from friends…we bought our radios, to us they didn't give a single penny" (Interview with Miguel, autodefensa leader, 2017).

This plays into the existing perceived divisions between the autodefensas – essentially, those under the control of the *Consejo de Vigilancia* and the rest of the autodefensas of the municipality, notably the *ranchos* to the south of the municipality – a more deprived area of the municipality associated with support for the PRD. Mireles' comments are seen by those opposed to the C*onsejo* as a form of moral condemnation of their actions, because they have essentially defied the will of the saviour of the municipality. Implicit in such a critique is the failure to use the captured *huertas* for the common good reflects the way in which the avocado wealth is hoarded by a few, to the detriment of the many. Thus, the *autodefensas* in this sense do not represent a break with such a tendencies or narratives in the municipality, but rather reinforce such ideas and the historical and political divisions that they underwrite and play into. Therefore, whilst the unity around ideas and practices of shared communal defence as a municipality has been extremely important (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4), the theme of avocado wealth and its distribution demonstrates the limits of this internally, and highlights the continuation of fault lines within the community.

The JLSV and conflict in the avocado industry

The dissatisfaction of many avocado producers, and the community in general, with the comportment of the previous JLSV leadership, can help to explain their defeat in the 2017 JLSV internal leadership elections. Such elections choose the holders of the key positions within the JLSV – the President, Secretary and Treasurer. The JLSV, whilst having an official remit to certify the health and phytosanitary conditions of the *huertas*, also acts as a wider body for the organisation and decision-making of the producers in Tancitaro:

> "…well strictly speaking the *Junta Local de Sanidad Vegetal* should only dedicate themselves to the implementation of norms for avocado cultivation. However, it has

> served as an instrument for the organisation of the avocado producers, there should be two different things: the organisation of the producers and the *Junta* as an instrument for the normativity around avocado production. But they have merged into a single entity and the *Junta* functions as though it was the organisation of the avocado producers. In this sense, it is there that decisions are taken by the producers to support certain things" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

JLSV leadership positions are therefore, important within the municipality, and have previously been dominated by larger producers, who many consider to be the local *caciques*. The new leadership committee elected in 2017, however, were not drawn from the ranks of the *caciques*. Instead, they were supported by more of the smaller producers and were seen as closer to the political elements – associated with the PRD party – opposed to the traditional *caciques* of the municipality – who are associated with the PAN (*Partido Acción Nacional*; National Action Party) and PRI parties. One of the key leaders of the PRD in the municipality went as far as to see them – the PRD, the *autodefensas* of the southern *ranchos*, and the new leadership of the JLSV – as being part of the same overall movement within the municipality, saying that "*we* won the JLSV elections". Thus there was a clear perceived connection between this takeover of the summits of the JLSV, the formation of a unity government against the wishes and to the exclusion of the *Consejo de Vigilancia* (discussed in Chapter 4), and the maintenance of self-governed *autodefensas* outside of the control of the *Consejo*.

The election of a new committee to head the JLSV was also seen as a critique of the previous leadership's practices, which were seen as having been abusive towards by ordinary members. This not only reflected the disquiet over the failure to account for the repossessed *huertas*, but was part of wider perceived mal-practice around the fees levied per *huerta* for JLSV membership:

> "This year (2017), this year the *Junta* changed as it happens with the municipal government (i.e. by elections), everyone was already questioning them (the previous *Junta* leadership), well they charged for the orchards that people had. All of the *huertas* are registered, but they never gave an accounting of this, they never handed over accounts. So there were strange things there and so now they changed the *Junta*, and so now it is new, and also it is different" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Further disquiet had also been voiced by avocado producers around the supposed need for independent third-party certification of the practices employed in avocado *huertas* that had been mandated as a necessity. Such certification was said to be required for the export of avocados to the

USA, and involved the company Global G.A.P.[22] certifying the practices employed in the maintenance and harvesting of *huertas*. Such third-party certification was seen as extremely expensive, at $25,000 pesos per producer (Interview with members of the JLSV, 2017). This requirement was contested by those who went on to became the newly elected JLSV committee, as they found a manner in which the requirements for export certification could be complied with via the JLSV, or the producer themselves, without recourse to expensive third parties (Ibid). Contestation and debate around the certification in the run-up to the JLSV election was an important point, but also one within a wider range of contestations within the avocado industry at the municipal level and beyond at that time.

The disquiet amongst producers in Tancitaro that began in 2015, and continued into 2016, not only revolved around certification issues, but also around the low prices that they were receiving for their avocados from the packing companies. Such companies act as intermediaries in the avocado industry, processing and packing the fruit for exportation to the US, domestic, and other foreign markets. Whilst the producers and packing companies are both members of a trade organisation – *La Asociación de Productores y Empacadores Exportadores de Aguacate de México* (APEAM; The Association of Avocado Producers and Exporting Packing Companies of Mexico) – and supposedly have equal voice and vote within this, the producers feel that they do not have a real voice within the organisation, and that it is run by and for the packing and export companies (Ibid). The result of this was the perception that such companies were colluding to arbitrarily fix the purchase price of avocados paid to producers, to artificially lower the price to around $19-20 pesos a kilo, which for many producers is the breakeven price for production (Interview with members of the JLSV, 2017; Milenio 2016). In July 2016, a cut in prices received by the producers caused them to mount a strike in which they stopped cutting avocados in protest, and so stopped the supply of the fruit to the export market (Milenio 2016). Given the high levels of Michoacan emigration to the USA, producers can monitor prices with information sent to them by the diaspora population, thus they could see that such a cut in the price that they received for their fruit had been arbitrary rather than caused by lower consumer demand and prices in the US (Interview with members of the JLSV, 2017).

The organisation of this fight for fair prices can be seen as linked to the experience of the *autodefensas*, as expressed by a producer: “This sense of unity that was generated by insecurity we are now taking advantage of to demand a fair price and for our work to be well paid” (Milenio 2016). This connection was affirmed by one of the leaders of the *autodefensas* in the municipality, who said

[22] More information on Global Gap can be found on their website: https://www.globalgap.org/es/what-we-do/the-gg-system/ (last accessed 20/09/19).

that 'we' – the *autodefensas* and the small producers – are "the same people and we support each other". The emphasis is especially on the small producers as it is much harder for them to negotiate prices than for large producers. *Autodefensas* guarding the *casetas* have also expressed a similar sentiment in terms of the link between avocado production and their actions: "We dedicate ourselves to the avocados and in our free time we give our support for security. We all know each other and those who come from outside we detain to question them, and so this is how we control who enters and who leaves" (Milenio 2016). The *casetas* not only function in the sense of controlling who enters, but also around the transport of avocados. For example, a *manta* (banner) hung at the *caseta* in Apo, on the border of the municipality, warns that vehicles transporting avocado into the municipality will be stopped and their papers reviewed. The issue being that avocado produced in *huertas* outside of the municipality which has not been certified for exportation could be brought into the municipality, mixed with the local production and exported to international markets. This could damage the municipality's economy if such exports had phytosanitary problems or were otherwise of low quality. Thus, the *casetas* function as a form of protection for the economic livelihood of the municipality on an everyday basis.

The *casetas* also played an important role during the producer strike over fair prices. This was demonstrated by the fact that at a pivotal moment in this contestation between the producers and the packing and export companies, the *Policía Michoacán* – from outside of the municipality – attempted to intervene and try to break the strike by pulling down one of the *casetas* protecting the municipality:

> "Personnel from the Policía Michoacán came with the task of tearing down our *caseta*. The people from the *ayuntamiento* (the municipal government) demonstrated that they were against this. There were around two thousand people and everyone decided that they had to detain these personnel" (Member of the Municipal Security Council (MSC) of Tancitaro quoted in Milenio 2016).

Thus, the producers' ability to protest was seen as directly related to the presence of the *casetas* and the ability of the municipality to resist outside interference. It is also important to recognise that the population mobilising to protect the *casetas* and resist outside interference from State forces – including disarmament of *autodefensas* – is a well-established repertoire of communal action in Tancitaro, enacted on numerous occasions during the *autodefensa* rising[23].

[23] Such communal actions also recall the kinds of actions detailed by Taylor (1979) in the colonial period in Mexico which he describes as 'defensive rebellions' and 'tumultos', as discussed in the Introduction.

Therefore, Tancitaro's system of communal defence and security, is not only central to its defence from organised crime's return, but also an ability to claim economic fair treatment, and contest the position in which producers are inserted into the transnational agro-export industry. The ability to resist the disciplinary forces of both the State, but also organised crime, was thus fundamentally connected to the experience and continued organisation of the *autodefensas*. Such contestations also spawned attempts by some avocado producers in Tancitaro to band together to cut out the intermediary packing and export companies from the supply chain, and export directly to the US (Notes citizen council meeting – Zone 2 (Apo) – 15/08/17; Milenio 2016). Thus, one can argue that the experience of the *autodefensas* in provoking the organisation of the community around key issues, as well as their continued physical manifestation, allows for the resistance of outside interference, has fostered efforts to reduce reliance on outside intermediaries, and directly impacts on economic contestation around the avocado industry.

Another benefit of the *autodefensa* presence for avocado producers can be seen in the end of the '*cuota*' (fee) system, where formerly they had to pay $1,000-2,000 pesos per hectare to the cartel (Interview with Miguel, an autodefensa leader, 2017; Aristegui Noticias 2013b). However, as one Mexican academic pointed out, the fact that the cartel is no longer able to levy the *cuota* directly onto the producers as previously, does not mean that there is no form of *cuota* paid (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017). Thus, *cuotas* are instead paid by the packing company, with these costs passed on to the producer via lower prices per kilo of avocado. The academic posited that this less personal form of taxation may have reduced the visibility of this issue and the affront felt by the producers at paying such a tax (Ibid). However, whilst this is not explicitly addressed by the producers in their complaints around the avocado trade, it could be seen as indirectly addressed by the campaign and strike against the low prices that they had been receiving. The setting up of their own packing and exportation companies by the producers of Tancitaro would not have expunged such *cuotas* per se, as trailers loaded with avocados would still have to pass through cartel-controlled territory on their way to domestic and international markets. Failure to pay some sort of *cuota* or protection money could easily lead to the hijacking and/or destruction of such shipments[24]. Therefore, the *autodefensas* have served to displace the *cuotas* outside the municipality, and this has served to depersonalise them, but they still exist and are a lucrative income for the cartels.

Avocado and the environment in Tancitaro

[24] Hijacking of avocado trucks has become increasingly frequent thanks to the high price the fruit is enjoying in export markets. See for example García Tinoco (2019a) and La Jornada (2019).

Whilst the negative effects of avocado on the municipality are frequently cited in terms of the inequality and rule of organised crime it was seen to provoke, there have also been concerns raised as to its environmental impact. Such anxieties relate both to the effect of intensive cultivation and loss of biodiversity on the physical environment of the municipality, as well as its effect on residents' health. In environmental terms, potential monetary gains from avocado cultivation have provoked the almost wholesale (and illegal) destruction of the natural species – notably pine trees – to make way for *huertas*. The frustrations of residents with such illegal pine felling and illegal land conversion – that is from forest to agricultural productive land – was expressed on numerous occasions during fieldwork. Such land conversion was seen as having deleterious effects in terms of a lack of water, especially in the lower areas of the municipality, as well as in the valleys below the municipality which depend on water from the *pico* (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2017). Similarly, it is also seen as causing rising temperatures, flooding when there are rains (Arrieta 2018a), forest fires (Arrieta 2016), and plagues affecting the remaining pines caused by the use of chemicals to fumigate the *huertas* (Estrada 2013; Molina 2018).

The everyday life of residents is also seen as being affected in concrete terms by the cultivation of avocado trees. This is not only felt in terms of wealth inequality but also the environmental impact of such cultivation, as one member of the Jesuit project put it:

> "…the mode of producing avocados here in Tancitaro is generating important environmental damages and enriching very few. And many continue mired in poverty, so despite the fact that much of the area is dedicated to avocados it isn't everyone's, this cultivated area. So I think from this the inequality gap is important and I think the environmental impact is also significant" (Interview with Francisco, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

But there are also significant impacts on individuals' health as well. One issue is the gastro-intestinal issues that such cultivation methods can cause, particularly in the periods of the year when fertiliser is used in massive quantities to nourish the trees. This results in clouds of flies which descend on the municipality and cause stomach issues through the introduction of germs and bacteria such as salmonella to the food consumed by people:

> "…there is a period in June, before the rains come when they put manure in the orchard, around the trees like a fertilizer…this generates many flies and the flies bring bacteria that are very damaging. Me, from where I'm from, in the State of Mexico, almost nobody knows about this kind of illness, I had heard of salmonellosis and that it is rare to find a

case of this, but here it is a daily occurrence" (Interview with Francisco, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

Such issues are said to be widespread, as are the health risks caused by the massive use of insecticides and herbicides to ensure a healthy and productive avocado crop. Spraying of chemicals to treat the trees, and the burning of avocado wood – for cooking and heating systems – is also seen as generating problems:

> "…there are people here who still cook with avocado wood. Well, they cook with wood ovens. So most of the wood available is avocado. So the avocado tree, its trunk comes impregnated with the chemicals used on it. And when you burn it, then, as well as the food and surrounding environment becoming impregnated with these vapours, when you are there well, you are also breathing in the poison. So this creates a big problem in the respiratory system. This, as well as when they fumigate, means that it is in the atmosphere too" (Ibid).

Another less obvious, but nonetheless serious, issue is the connection between the use of such chemicals and the prevalence of higher rates of cancer in avocado growing zones (Enciso 2015). Such a problem is not confined to Tancitaro, but instead is a trend that has been noted across the zone of intensive avocado cultivation in Michoacan. The scale of this issue is only just becoming apparent via the press, but by the time of my second visit to the municipality, in 2019, it was being discussed and commented upon.

In the intervening years between fieldwork and my visit to the municipality in 2019, it became apparent from both social media, and communications with informants, that concerns around the environment and specifically the felling of pines had generated mobilisation and protests amongst the local community. One informant told me that the people were organising around the slogan and idea of "Not one more pine (felled)" and were increasingly vocal in calls to the *ayuntamiento* to act, as well as taking their own actions. The form that such actions have taken were made clear by a video sent to me by an *autodefensa* leader, showing the *autodefensas* along with the municipal police force having stopped a trailer loaded with felled pines. Another protest act – against the municipal government's inaction – was realised by dumping a trailer of confiscated pine trees outside the *ayuntamiento* offices located on the main *plaza* of the *cabecera*. Whether the *autodefensas* were involved is not clear but seems likely. The presence of the *autodefensas* at the *casetas*, by its very nature, is geared towards the monitoring of the comings and goings from the municipality, therefore, transporting trailers of felled pines from the municipality without the *casetas* noticing is impossible. Whilst not all of the

autodefensa members may feel militantly about tackling such a problem, it has been perceived as a major problem in the discussions of the Municipal Security Council (MSC; discussed in Chapter 2) and, if motivated, the *autodefensas* can have a deterrent effect on such felling. Thus concerns around the environment, and steps taken to address these, are also connected to the *autodefensas* and the practices of security in the municipality.

Other citizen-led efforts relating to the environment have involved campaigns for replanting, which have been supported by the Federal government in conjunction with local schools (Nuestra Vision Noticias 2018), and efforts linked to the Jesuit project and the JLSV. Similarly, a civil society group calling itself "The Movement for the defence of the Woods and Water Basin of Tancítaro" (discussed in detail in Chapter 4) has been set-up on Facebook, and has been publishing information about the issue, ideas to tackle the problem, and has organised community meetings and actions. Whilst it is difficult to gauge the impact that this has had, the Group itself has 747 followers (as at 26/09/19) indicating that whilst not huge, it is not insignificant, and has grown significantly in recent months. Similarly, interviewees expressed the point of view that there was more conscientiousness about the environment in recent times:

> "And the reforestation is something that hasn't been seen before this, how can I say it? I have seen a lot of participation from young people, to try to know more about their own municipality…and the environment is mattering to people a little more. Obviously it won't change the harm that has been done for generations, and you can say, 'ah, tomorrow it will be done'…It is something that has to be done little by little, little by little. But, in broad terms I can say to you that we are going by very small steps and whilst we don't try to cultivate ourselves, we have to investigate what is being done by our governors in the questions that exist" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

Actions to discuss and tackle the problem of deforestation caused by the allure of avocado cultivation have not emerged from the *autodefensas* per se, nor are they reducible to their actions or presence. However, one can argue that the *autodefensas* have had a significant impact with regards to this issue. Firstly, the fact that people are able to talk and mobilise openly to attempt to stop such actions is likely only possible due to the security provided by the *autodefensas.* If not for their presence it seems likely that it would be organised crime heavily involved in such efforts[25], likely using violence to enforce their will, thus making criticism and mobilisation next to impossible. Secondly, the *autodefensa* presence

[25] The municipality of Cheran provides an example in Michoacan of a place whose forests were the target of organised crime exploitation, see for example Ventura Patiño (2012).

providing vigilance on the key routes in the municipality allows them to stop and detain those involved in illegal logging, albeit after the act. Thirdly, the memory and repertoires of actions forged and practiced during and after the *autodefensa* rising – which was perceived to have involved the whole community (as discussed in later chapters) – may foster greater mobilisation and community organisation around such issues. Specifically, because the *autodefensas* represent a successful example of such citizen mobilisation effecting positive change (as will be discussed in Chapter 2). Thus, whilst the idea of community organisation and protests are not reducible to the *autodefensas*, their organisation, associated repertoires of action, and the presence of *autodefensa* leaders and members in environment-related actions, show their ongoing importance in influencing social action and mobilisations.

Conclusion

Understanding the way in which the growth of the avocado industry has been seen to influence the economy and society of Tancitaro in recent decades is fundamental to contextualising and appreciating the significance of recent political and social events. Such growth is seen in the municipality as having brought great economic benefits, but their unequal distribution has fostered societal divisions. Furthermore, such wealth and the dissolute tendencies this is seen to have produced, are portrayed as a fundamental reason for the arrival of organised crime, and the level of depredations suffered by the population of Tancitaro under its rule. But whilst avocado wealth has played an important role in influencing the context of the municipality, it cannot explain either the emergence of the *autodefensas* themselves – which needs to be seen as part of the wider phenomenon in Michoacan – nor the form that they took in the municipality in any simple or totalising sense. Whilst the wealth from the avocado industry and the leadership role of the owners of such riches may explain the form that the *autodefensa* took in a direct sense in parts of the municipality. It did not play such a role throughout Tancitaro, and there is a diversity amongst the organising principles and funding mechanisms of the *autodefensas* in different areas of the municipality. As such, they reflect the diversity of the *autodefensas* in Michoacan more generally, which cannot be reduced simply to *caciquist* tendencies linked to economic interests, though this phenomenon certainly played a role. Such diversity also serves to depict some of the political, social and economic fault lines of the municipality which will be further explored in the coming chapters.

More broadly however, the presence of the avocado industry continues to influence the organisation of the *autodefensas*, and in turn, the experience of the uprising and its organisation has played a role

in contestation around the avocado trade locally and transnationally. Such wealth necessitates the continued vigilance and organisation of the *autodefensas* in order to stop a return of a cartel and the insecurity that characterised their rule. The presence of avocado wealth more generally, may be a factor in resources being present for such organisation – such as arms, radios, and the *casetas* – though the relative importance of this is hard to determine. What is more apparent however, is that the experience of mobilisation as part of the *autodefensas*, has proved important in contestations around the relative distribution of riches within the transnational trade, by local – particularly small – producers. This can be seen via the overlapping membership of such producers/*autodefensas*, the repertoires of action utilised, and the *casetas* as a focal point for action and contestation.

On an everyday level the *casetas* also play a role in the economic regulation of the trade by preventing the entry of unauthorised avocados to the municipality, which could impact upon its economic position and well-being. Therefore, the *autodefensas* – via the borders that they have erected in the form of the *casetas* – also play an important role in guaranteeing and promoting the economic prosperity and economic security of the municipality. Similarly, the experience of mobilisation of the *autodefensas*, has also played a key role in responding to the perceived environmental threats generated by such extensive cultivation of avocado in the municipality. The *casetas* are seen providing the mechanism through which environmental damage such as logging can be monitored and prevented. The continued presence of the *autodefensas* also provide the security in which societal mobilisations can take place aimed at stopping deforestation, and indeed undertaking reforestation. Therefore, the avocado industry is important in shaping the context in which the *autodefensas* continue to operate, whilst the *autodefensas* also influence the conduct and contestation around the avocado industry, both around its perceived benefits and the more problematic impacts that it is seen to have within the municipality.

Chapter 2: The idea and practice of (in)security in Tancitaro

Introduction

It was already dark by the time the bus I was travelling in from Uruapan to Tancitaro arrived at the final *caseta* at the entrance to the *cabecera*. The bus always slowed down somewhat before the *casetas* because of the speed bumps placed strategically in front of them, but tonight it slowed to a crawl and proceeded at walking pace. Usually this *caseta* had a complement of two or three men – sometimes visibly armed but often not, and frequently sitting around an open fire to keep warm. Tonight there were around ten men in two rows of five, one row standing beside the road and the other in the middle of it. The bus passed slowly between the rows and as it did so a hush fell amongst its occupants as they became aware of the rows of men. The men on the outside peered into the passing bus, scrutinising what they saw. I looked down from the window and from the light of the *caseta's* spotlight I saw that they were all heavily armed with assault rifles. They had their faces covered and most of them were wearing hats. One of the men was holding a *cuerno de chivo* (AK-47) and had a baseball hat on his head. But what most drew the attention was the mask covering half his face upon which was painted the bones and teeth corresponding to that part of the face. The bus continued on and picked up speed again once it had safely passed the lines of men, who had apparently been satisfied that the occupants presented no danger or were otherwise not of interest. I learned subsequently that the extra-ordinary security was due to the fact that one of the former leaders of the Michoacan *autodefensas*, and the man regarded as a saviour in Tancitaro – Dr Mireles – would be visiting the next day. The incident reminded me that whilst on an everyday basis the municipality seems 'safe', and the *casetas* sparsely occupied, there is a constant production of security, and the ever-present perceived and actual threat that a cartel could invade. The increased presence at the *caseta* and the feeling of being observed and scrutinised gave the sensation of crossing a frontier or border into another realm or state[26].

The chapter will examine the way in which (in)security has been constructed and perceived in the municipality, and how this has influenced ideas and practices of citizenship. In doing so, key

[26] Discussion in this chapter interrogates relationships around citizenship and state-society relations in respect of insecurity. It is therefore, important to clarify the various terms that are used to describe different aspects and levels of the state, especially as Mexico is a Federal republic. Therefore, 'the state' is used to refer in general terms to the state in its entirety (i.e. encapsulating all levels of government and institutions) and as a theoretical proposition; 'the Federal or Mexican state' refers to the Federal and national level of government and its institutions; 'the state government/institutions' refers to the organs of the Michoacan state government and its institutions; 'the local state/local government/local institutions/*ayuntamiento*' refers to the Municipal level government and its institutions; and when reference is made to 'the wider state' it is referring to the levels of the state beyond the Municipal level, i.e. the Michoacan state and the Federal state.

conceptions of (in)security and their local history will be explored to understand the form in which attempts to restore security have manifested themselves. An analysis of the key institutions – both state and non-state – fulfilling security functions in the municipality allows for a depiction of their role, features, and outlooks, as well as their insertion within the co-production of security on an everyday basis. The impact of such a co-production of security on practices of citizenship is important in understanding the sovereignty implications that this has. As the vignette above helps to demonstrate, through the provision of security and their identification as a key security provider for the municipality, the *autodefensas* are implicitly making a claim to sovereignty in the municipality. How ideas and practices of citizenship relate to, and combine with, the emergence and nature of such a localised sovereignty regime will be a central feature of the chapter and will offer an important contribution to the existing literature on citizenship and sovereignty.

Figure 3: The caseta at Uringuitiro, Tancitaro – Life under organised crime

Source: José, member of the citizen councils, 2018.

The organisation and practice of security in Tancitaro: The (in)security of cartel rule

Ideas of security and insecurity are mediated in Tancitaro by temporal and spatial referents. In temporal terms a key referent is the period of time that the municipality spent in the grip of the drug cartels before the entry of the *autodefensas* in November 2013. As mentioned in the previous chapter, local narratives talk of 3,000 victims – dead and disappeared – over a ten-year period. However, such a period was not seen as being consistent in the levels of insecurity experienced throughout, but rather from 2006/7 the situation worsened following the Army disarmament and the cartel's entrance, as previously discussed. This period under organised crime is characterised as a time of physical insecurity when family, friends, and neighbours appeared dead on the street – often dismembered – or simply disappeared never to be heard of again. A representative account of what happened in this period involved some public officials killed by the cartel:

> "And then, six months later they killed the (municipal) president and one of the *regidores*[27] with stones, they crushed his head, well they suppose it was done by one of the ringleaders (of the cartel) from here…they completely destroyed his head" (Interview with Claudio, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

In a similar vein, another interviewee stated:

> "…many of them (people in the community) lost their parents, children…it was very difficult. And also the form…because yes I understand in some ways killing someone…but it was the way that they did it so cruelly, dismembering people…" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

And another recounted that:

> "…all of this was degenerating more and more and more. I tell you, first they took those who had money, then they took other things that they wanted; they started to take orchards, they started to take houses, they started to take wives, they started to take daughters, sons" (Interview with Antonio, resident of Tancitaro, 2017).

The municipality is full of such stories, and they often come up in conversations relating to unconnected themes. It seemed like everyone has such a story, if not a direct relative, then of neighbours or friends. Thus, the scale of the trauma inflicted on the community, as well as its proximity

[27] A *regidor* (alderman) is a senior elected position within the municipal government. The number of *regidor* positions depends on the size of the municipality (Tancitaro has seven *regidores;* large municipalities can have more than 20). *Regidor* positions are allocated based on the popular vote during municipal elections, the winning political party are given the majority with the remaining positions allocated by proportional representation from the losing parties. Each *regidor* is allocated an area of responsibility within the municipal government which they oversee – e.g. public security, health, education etc. R*egidores* form part of the *cabildo* (effectively the parliament of the municipality and the ultimate source of authority at the municipal level) and have a voice and vote in the decisions taken during sessions of the *cabildo*.

in terms of time and memory, is very much evident. One example was of a mother whose son was disappeared years ago, but who still spends her days watching the front of his house from her own window, hoping that he will return. Such accounts help explain why references to security and insecurity are so commonplace and illustrate the depth of the trauma still present in the community.

Whilst levels of physical insecurity – for example being killed or kidnapped, or fear of this – are often referenced, they are not the only security-related characterisations of the period under cartel rule in the municipality. At times it is difficult to parse ideas and concerns relating to physical insecurity from more abstract ideas of insecurity, as there is a degree of overlap and connection between them. But this does not signify that less tangible ideas of insecurity have not played an important role. One of the cartel's rules was that doors could not be locked, and if they found a locked door there would be grave consequences for those inside. A story told to me was of the terror inspired by cartel members checking for locked doors at night, not knowing whether they were simply testing compliance or intended to enter and kill or kidnap the occupants. Another example of the fear of this period was the cartel's imposition of an informal curfew:

> "…there was a time in which when it went dark, well before it got dark you would already be alone (in the street), but when it got dark there was no-one in the street, no-one, normal civilians no, only the police who were criminals and the criminals. So everyone, although there wasn't an official curfew, it was that no one went out, no one went out" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

The cartel patrolled the streets at night in their trucks and anyone found out past 10pm might be warned at first, but then could be killed or kidnapped. People complied with this and other rules out of fear:

> "…I think that the majority of people when there was organised crime here, as they imposed certain conditions or certain rule, out of fear, almost everyone, we went complying with them, right? To not be in the streets at night, that the boys don't drive trucks close together and the rest of it" (Interview with Alejandra, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Such rules and compliance with them is not unconnected with a physical sense of insecurity, but people also talked about this as preventing them from socialising and enjoying life. By contrast, curfews have been utilised in other areas of Mexico as a solution to insecurity by government institutions and communities, where young people being out too late is seen as provoking insecurity (Agudo Sanchíz 2014). In Tancitaro, however, such cartel rules were seen to provoke significant insecurity around the reproduction of social life, as much of the social life of the community takes

place in the streets and *plazas*. Such cartel practices were widespread in Michoacan, and a prominent leader of the *autodefensas* in the region saw the restoration of social life in the *plaza* in the evenings as a key achievement of their mobilisation (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017).

The limits placed on socialisation by the cartel also help to explain why many people referenced the climate of suspicion and distrust that pervaded during this period. Exemplified by the phenomenon of people mimicking the cartel's use of telephone calls to try and extort money from residents. This raised the question of whether to pay such extortion, a decision which in itself could generate insecurity:

> "They talked to you five, six times: 'listen you have to pay protection and if not we are going to kill you', every day, it was every day, so you told all of them who were calling to fuck off, you didn't know which it was (the cartel call), right? The times we paid money in this period of 2008 and 2009, was because on one occasion they came to my house, two bastards with guns, and they knocked on the door and they left a message with my mother: 'call this number'. That was one time, so, but someone calls you on the telephone and you say to them: 'fuck your mother' no? So which was real? The other time, they came here to my office: 'you know what? We are going to wait for you by the bull ring'. I came in a truck and there were two truck outside, I carry a gun and it cost me that, because these were the ones you paid not the ones who just talked, to those ones I told them to fuck off. But many times as well, well you could have told people to fuck off who were really criminals from here, and this meant that everything heated up, right? And the atmosphere was…Well, because surely, you told people that yes were criminals, and yes were from here, to fuck off" (Interview with Miguel, *autodefensa* leader, 2017).

Interviewees saw this as a widespread phenomenon which had led to feelings of not knowing who one could trust in the community. This was heightened by the fact that the cartel members often wore masks and was hard to tell who was or wasn't involved.

Similarly, some people used the presence of the criminals to benefit themselves for example when there were interfamilial disputes, such as for inheritances:

> "For the inheritances, when those people were here (the cartel), some people said: 'well take my brother because I don't want the land to be left to him'. That is, we reached such a level, that is, it was something, well, it's something that is unthinkable, I can't conceive of it, maybe because I have nothing, right? But your own brother and you tell these people to kill him, to extort him, so that he gives things over. I mean, it's incredible, it is

> like it couldn't possibly be, but it was, it happened. So, this, they really got their comeuppance later though because the same people (the criminals) charged them: 'well, I helped you already, now you pay me, give me this from before', it was around 2008-2010" (Interview with Antonio, resident of Tancitaro, 2017).

Such feelings of insecurity go beyond a narrow sense of physical security and instead pervade social life and the interactions therein. This validates the idea that collective insecurity is a socially constructed phenomenon, as proposed by the likes of Carro, Valera & Vidal (2010), and Béland (2005). Specifically, whilst objective crime levels and physical threats play a role, other factors such as people's confidence in support networks, a sense of community, and psycho-social variables are also important (Carro et al. 2010). Assessing levels of physical insecurity through crime statistics is relatively straightforward (though the reliability of such data in Mexico is a major issue[28]), measuring these other less tangible factors is far harder. But given their widespread currency in Tancitaro, they seem to have been important in the construction of feelings of insecurity and the experience of this under the cartel(s).

The idea of (in)security in Tancitaro: temporality, spatiality, and the construction of community

Present-day Tancitaro

The arrival of the *autodefensas* and their subsequent development across the municipality is seen as a watershed moment in terms of (in)security in Tancitaro. A widespread perspective in Tancitaro is that the organisation of the *autodefensas* involved participation by the entire community. This involved heightened levels of social interaction which had been impossible previously and helped to generate inter-personal trust and a sense of communal unity – discussed in detail in Chapter 4. It is important however, to clarify what we mean when we talk about 'community' and its supposed attributes and sentiments, and indeed to acknowledge the problematic nature of the term. Scholars such as Amit and Rapport (2002) have noted the slipperiness of community as a concept, with its very ambiguity explaining its position as a widely utilised notion. Within anthropology, the notion of community has been problematized, its use changing over time to signify less of an obvious aggregation, and more as a result of a set of choices by individual agents (Amit & Rapport 2002). Anderson's (2006) notion of the 'imagined community' has been influential in envisioning the

[28] For example, the Michoacan state government has faced accusations of doctoring homicide figures (Cortés Eslava 2019). A wider problem is under-reporting of crime through lack of confidence in the police or fear of police involvement/complicity with criminals. In 2017, it was estimated that only 12.5% of crime was reported in Michoacan (INEGI 2018a).

national-level community as more of a category of social relations rather than based in everyday interactions. This is important in helping to understand how ideas of community can be constructed based on ideas of locality and/or identity and shared by people who do not necessarily interact. However, others such as Cohen (1985), have maintained that the idea of community is based on the immediacy and intimacy of face-to-face relations, which are key to the symbolic construction of the community. Cohen rejected, however, that the mutual recognition within the symbolic construction of community is synonymous with a homogeneity of views or interests (Amit & Rapport 2002). Thus, every community contains a host of identities and interests, therefore, it is difficult – and problematic – to unquestioningly report the views of individuals and groups as representing *the* outlook of 'the community'.

An engagement with the idea of community remains important however, as it retains a powerful symbolic, discursive and, at times, material weight in the way in which people conceive of and live their lives. By acknowledging the presence and power of socially constructed notions of community – however complicated and contextual these may be – it is also important to recognise the role that opposition and otherness plays in such constructions (Cohen 1985). As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have posited, community is an identity created through forms of exclusion and the construction of otherness, and so cannot only be about recognising cultural and social similarities and contiguity. Thus, as Barth (1969) and Cohen (1985) state, the construction of boundaries – based on any number of characteristics such as identity, race, class, geography – play a key role in the definition and constitution of notions of community.

When considering the impact such ideas of community have on the concept of (in)security, it is important to consider the socially constructed nature of security, which is predicated not only on objective physical security, but also less obvious processes of social interaction and social links (Carro et al 2010; Dammert 2007). Conversely, how ideas about (in)security have influenced the manner in which the community has been constructed, materially and discursively, in terms of its membership and key characteristics, is also crucial. In recent state-engineered strategies of citizen security in Latin America, the focus has very much been on involving the community as a key participant in the construction of security (Dammert 2007). But examples also exist where a lack of confidence in the ability of state institutions has led communities to organise their own citizen security efforts (Ibid). A relevant case in Michoacan is Cheran, where the community mobilised to stop illegal logging by

organised crime (Ventura Patiño 2012)[29]. Such organisation involved ideas of community identity, based on their status as indigenous Purepecha people, and their associated rights of self-government under the Mexican constitution[30] (Aragón Andrade 2015; Ventura Patiño 2012)[31]. Internally, the community was reorganised territorially from *barrios* (neighbourhoods) to '*fogatas*' (bonfires symbolising the nightly vigilance following the uprising against organised crime). The political parties, seen as provoking division and insecurity, were forbidden from holding power, instead communal government was (and is) managed by a communal council elected via assembly (Aragon Andrade 2015; Ventura Patiño 2012). However, those accused of being complicit with organised crime – based in other communities within the municipality of Cheran – were blamed for the deforestation, characterised as non-indigenous, and made to perform menial tasks as a punishment (Román Burgos 2019, 2014). Thus, the construction of community identity in Cheran, was based on certain characteristics and linked to considerations of (in)security, which privileged some members whilst denigrating and demonising others.

A similar process occurred in Tancitaro following the arrival of the *autodefensas*, as the idea of community was reshaped according to local residents' perceptions of (in)security. Specifically, the expulsion and judging of the remaining cartel members, as well as those who were as connected to/complicit with the cartel. These cartel members/associates were judged according to their past actions. Those who had not shed blood, had apologised, and asked for forgiveness, were pardoned, whilst those who did shed blood were not pardoned (Interview with Ísaac, Mexican academic, 2017). Those who were pardoned became '*perdonados*' – as discussed in Chapter 1 – which emerged as a new social category within the community. The 'not pardoned' category seems open to interpretation, but when this is probed residents explain that they fled or were expelled from the municipality. Another punishment may have been execution, but this is generally left unsaid. Though in one interview such occurrences were referred to:

> "…it's that there were many (*perdonados*), the people from here, yes there might be one maybe who is very bad, but the majority aren't criminals, nor do they cause problems. So

[29] The example of Cheran has also been cited explicitly by Dr Mireles as an example for the *autodefensas* of *Tierra Caliente* to follow (Revolucion 3.0 2014; del Pozo 2015). Also of note is the presence of the Jesuit project in Cheran; discussed in Chapter 3.

[30] Specifically, Article 2 which amongst other points states: "This Constitution recognises and guarantees the rights of the indigenous people and communities to self-determination and as a consequence, to autonomy" (Diario Oficial de La Federación 2016).

[31] Another important example of indigenous self-organisation for communal government and security can be seen in the neighbouring state of Guerrero, where indigenous community policing efforts began in the mid-1990s and have become institutionalised as the CRAC-PC (La Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias – Policía Comunitaria; The Regional Co-ordinator of Communal Authorities – Community Police), see for example Sierra (2015; 2014; 2005), and Alonso, Aréstegui Ruiz, and Vázquez Villanueva (2014).

> when they came from there, from *Tierra Caliente* (the autodefensas), yes they made many people flee who were criminals, but I think they killed or got rid of them, but the people from here as they weren't brave enough to do this, at least unless they were made to. So this, some stayed and so the people (*perdonados*) are there, but they haven't made them leave" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils of Tancitaro, 2017).

This comment is interesting as it voices the that executions did happen, but crucially were performed by the *autodefensas* from *Tierra Caliente* and not the local *autodefensas*. Thus, the continued presence of *perdonados* is explained by local people not having the bravery to execute them, and so reinforcing the differentiation between the municipality and the outside, and the identification of locals as non-delinquents and thus non-violent.

Those expelled from the municipality for their involvement with the cartel also extended to entire families in some cases:

> "…in Pareo there was just one family made to leave because…well we knew of others who were involved but not so directly, but yes this family they made them leave. Afterwards the lady (of the family) wanted to come back, actually she came back with her things and tried to move back in, but the same families who had lost people went and said we don't want you here because you were the cause of our sadness. She went away again but after another month or two she came back, but this time it was serious, and she would be responsible for anything that happened to her and her family because they (the families of the victims) were very hurt and she was the cause…well when she was seen by others it caused a lot of pain to us here. But now she has left and hasn't come back, but she made 3 or 4 attempts to come back. So yes, we knew that other people were involved as well but not so involved like them, who broadcast it. But yes it's…there is something that I think would have been good which would have been to throw out all of those who participated so that others could rest, as many of them lost their parents, children…" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Thus, the community continues to function as a filter and a self-regulating entity which decides who gets to be part of it and the status they enjoy. This status is bound up with whether or not the resident in question signifies a risk to security. Such delineations reflect a process of 'othering' and stigmatization that can be seen as efforts at community-based prevention through exclusion, that are seen as legitimate within the community (Dammert 2007). Thus, the social construction of the community is intertwined with the notion of security, itself a product of the social milieu within – and the historical experience of – the municipality.

The years following the *autodefensa* rising in Tancitaro have been marked by a partial dissipation in feelings of insecurity within the community, though some concerns around the presence of potentially dangerous elements remain. As one interviewee described: "...it is a relative security because yes we are safe, but from those who are outside probably, but not from those within. And there are still people here like that, not very trustworthy" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Similarly, another informant commented that: "Security as we have had it for seven or eight years, yes it (insecurity) has diminished, it has hidden between the rocks or in the carpet so that no-one can see it, but you can still hear it" (Interview with Margarita, resident of Tancitaro, 2017). Thus, despite such relative security from the outside threat to the municipality, behaviours remained that provoked feelings of insecurity, bound up with past experiences of the community, and visible to residents:

> "…maybe you coming as a foreigner or simply if you come from another place and you arrive here, you feel safe, that is, to walk until a certain time at night and you feel safe. But if you go to certain places or you see a large group of youths drinking and all the rest of it and it makes you feel uneasy. Because it is what remains of everything that was lived through previously, this uneasiness stays with you when you see things that look strange, like they will be drinking or they are parked on the corners for half an hour and you don't know why…" (Ibid).

Such feelings are not reducible to the presence of the *perdonados* but they also play a role in this as rumours circulate as to their responsibility for drug sales in the municipality, despite continued vigilance over them. Consequently, suspicion and social stigma attached to the *perdonados* continues, as the continued societal currency of the label itself would indicate. Therefore, security is perceived less of an end state to be achieved, and more of a constant process, whereby insecurity has been displaced – through the expulsion of cartel members – to the surrounding municipalities to a large extent, but not entirely. Thus, the biggest threats to security are currently conceived of more in spatial terms.

The spatiality of (in)security

Tancitaro is considered to have achieved a reasonable level of security for its residents. Whilst not being perfect, local narratives say that cartel killings and kidnappings no longer happen, and instead

of having one homicide a day there are now only 5 or 6 a year in the municipality[32]. Informants contrast this with the neighbouring municipalities of Uruapan, Apatzingán, and Buenavista, seen as extremely insecure with a strong presence of cartels. Thus, whilst residents now feel able to leave the municipality – as opposed to the 6 months following the *autodefensa* uprising when many considered it too dangerous – to do so is seen as carrying risk, as killings and kidnappings continue to occur in other municipalities. Therefore, an inside/outside conception of security has developed on a spatial basis in terms of where security and insecurity lie. This is also connected to the idea of who constitutes a potential security threat, which has also largely breaks along such an inside/outside distinction, that is, those from the municipality and those from outside.

Such ideas have also influenced how Tancitaro residents are received when they leave the municipality, with some preferring not to admit that they are from Tancitaro when outside of the municipality for fear of being targeted or stigmatized. For example:

> "…I tell you, here in the state (of Michoacan), many people distrust Tancitaro…but it's because they really don't know. I went to do a course, a diploma in Morelia, and my classmates they said to me: 'no, but they are criminals those (*autodefensas*) that are there' and I told them 'no they aren't criminals, they are people from here'; 'no but they have these trucks like this (large pick-up trucks)'; 'yes, it's because they are avocado producers and they have money and they have their trucks, but they aren't criminals'. So I tell you, right here in the state, many people think that some of them are criminals, but when the people come and see, I say, I don't know if they understand or not" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Similarly, an interviewee made the following observation:

> "…if someone sees us from the outside they see us as bad, they don't understand us, including when I am outside of the municipality it's possible that I wouldn't say that I'm from Tancitaro. I don't say that I'm from Tancitaro in every situation, truly. A man once made a comment – it seemed to me interesting how he made the comparison – that we here are living like caged birds, we are secure here in our cage in the municipality but when we leave to go to other places like Uruapan, Apatzingan, Los Reyes and other places

[32] The average rate of homicides in Tancitaro since the *autodefensas* (2014-2018) has been 4 per year (INEGI 2018b). Whilst not particularly low for a municipality of 30,000 people, it is at least four times lower than the years prior to this (Ibid) even without taking into account problems with official statistics. Another point is that in the context of rural Mexico – historically characterised by high levels of violence – security does not necessarily signify the total absence of violence. As noted in Chapter 1, there are different types of violence which are understood in socially distinct ways, with recent cartel violence being exceptional because of its breaking of social norms and indiscriminate nature.

> we are in danger. There we don't have protection from anyone." (Interview with Gabriela, resident of Tancitaro, 2017).

Thus the perception of inside/outside regarding the municipality and the identity that it has constructed, impacts on how residents are seen and portray themselves when outside the municipality. The in which Tancitaro has been constructed as a 'safe space' has had the effect of making the 'outside' an even more dangerous and insecure space, at least in this interviewee's opinion. Similarly, spatiality has also underpinned the views held of Tancitaro by those outside the municipality's borders. As Barth (1969) and Cohen (1985) have pointed out, the construction of imagined boundaries plays a key role in the constitution of a notion of community. In Tancitaro's case however, the boundaries or not simply imagined and are reinforced and demarcated territorially by the presence of the *casetas* and *autodefensa* members, which play an important role in signifying the municipality's difference and symbolising its identity as a safe space. This construction of a 'safe space' can be interpreted as fulfilling a need for people who have experienced significant periods of violence and insecurity and need to find comfort in such a space. Knowing that such a space exists – at least theoretically – and that you inhabit it, fulfils such a need for residents, and helps to explain the prevalence of such an 'inside/outside' conception.

The characterisation of places such as Apatzingan, and *Tierra Caliente* in general, as 'dangerous' places – in the inside/outside discourse – reflects, to some extent, wider historical discourses and constructs of this area as such (discussed in Chapter 1; see also Maldonado Aranda 2013). But this may also reflect a broader tendency to characterise areas and people within countries and societies, as sources of insecurity. This recalls Morris's (2002) ideas around the construction of underclasses, and the way in which Rodgers (2006a, 2006b, 2009) has explored how neighbourhoods and populations are constructed as gang territories in the Central American context, creating specific geographies and legitimating certain security approaches. Identities, and how these inform the construction of certain areas as marginal, are crucial in explaining particular experiences of contestation and violence, as demonstrated by the likes of Roldán (2002) focusing on *La Violencia* in Colombia, and in the context of Michoacan, by Gledhill (2015) and Maldonado Aranda (2010, 2013). Ideas of marginality and its perceived connection to security concerns have informed contemporary Mexican state security policies whereby certain states – including Michoacan – have been portrayed as sources of insecurity for Mexico as a whole (Guzik 2013). On an even greater scale, Mexico's apparent 'security failure' has made it a source of insecurity for its neighbours (Kenny & Serrano 2013c). In a similar fashion, the Tancitaro residents' conception of neighbouring areas as sources of insecurity represents a re-creation

of such ideas and discourses on a more localised scale. This is tempered somewhat by the continued bonds – familial and friendships – that still exist between residents of Tancitaro and those in neighbouring municipalities, and the sympathy that many in the municipality feel for those still living through the everyday violence and repression of cartel control. One can also note a paradox here, whereby *Tierra Caliente* is a source of insecurity, and yet the *autodefensas* who liberated Tancitaro originated from there. Despite this apparent contradiction, the construction of security/insecurity along inside/outside lines exercises a powerful influence in local discourses and imaginations.

A reason for the development of this inside/outside dichotomy is the idea that the cartel members initially came to the municipality from the outside. When interrogated further there follows an admission that people from the municipality were also involved with the cartel, but were not seen as being in the majority: "…here not all of the people were criminals, though some *perdonados* have stayed here, most people are working people" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). This seems reminiscent of Chatterjee's (2005) observation, from her study of an informal settlement in India, that: "Even as ordinary people often described in vivid detail the disastrous things that happened to them, they tended to attribute the reasons to some externalized (sic) cause, something that was purposive but beyond themselves" (Chatterjee 2005: 97). The explanation within the municipality as to why some *Tancitarenses* became involved with the cartels is seen as associated with the lifestyle and the idleness it involved: "Well there were people who were better with them (the criminals), well they lived off the bones of the rest of us taking money off us and having a nice life, and because they didn't like to work" (Interview with Claudio, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Consequently, those in the community who were involved in drug trafficking are doubly damned, both for taking part in cartel activities, and for being lazy and good for nothing in the first place. This is especially the case because unlike in parts of Tierra Caliente, in Tancitaro such activities were not seen as driven by economic necessity. Therefore, the experience of the *autodefensas* and the actions engendered as a result, have had a deep impact upon the construction of (in)security in spatial terms, upon identities within the community, and the construction and idea of the community in general.

Social comportment, the environment and the (re)signification of space

The ideas of (in)security within the municipality do not only revolve around the physical threat posed by the potential return of a cartel. Indeed, a physical sense is only one of a number of ways in which concepts of security are embodied in everyday practices. As explained in Chapter 1, for example,

deforestation is seen as a major problem and one which is fundamentally a security issue, due to the criminal elements involved, the existential threat that it represents to the municipality's future, and the use of the *autodefensas'* physical presence and mobilising tactics to tackle the issue (discussed further in Chapter 4). It is also noticeable indirectly when conversations dealing with issues of direct physical security segue into discussions of the environment and its destruction. This is demonstrative of a phenomenon noted by Carro et al. (2010), who contend that the quality of the environment impacts upon the perception of security in a community. Whilst their idea of the environment refers to the shared social environment as well as the physical environment, this is an example of how perceptions of the physical environment come to exercise an influence over the social ambit.

Social comportment more generally is seen as central to the construction of security in Tancitaro, a view particularly noticeable in perceptions of, and responses to, behaviours seen as deviant. Drinking in public spaces and drug consumption are seen as the biggest issues in this respect. Behaviour such as drinking in public spaces is seen as not only illegal but is also a potential security issues. Primarily, because it is associated with behaviours that provoked the arrival of organised crime in the municipality, a lack of respect for authority which characterised cartel rule, and as a legacy of their presence. As discussed in Chapter 1, drinking in public was linked to economic growth, but the knock-on effect was to have helped fill the ranks of organised crime in the municipality:

> "…the economic growth that the *campesinos* (peasant farmers) of Tancitaro had meant that their children grew up with the idea of freedom being related to access to things, freedom to consume and enjoy themselves, and this led to the parents losing their authority in the upbringing of their children. This meant that various adults and young people joined in the criminal groups and now there are difficulties with the self-regulation of freedom" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a: 34).

Thus, in the municipal government's own assessment of the security situation, consumption and freedom without social limits helped provoke insecurity, a view mirrored by interviewees. Such problematic behaviour is also seen as a legacy of the cartel's rule which is expressed in two main ways. Firstly, the idea that the experience of cartel rule, and the accompanying lack of effective institutional response, has generated a lack of confidence and respect for the State and its rules and laws (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a; Interview with Don Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Secondly, drinking in public also became associated with being free from cartel rule and the limits on socialisation – especially in public spaces – that had been imposed:

> "And we have worked a lot for security as well, the security of our *plaza*. After the organised crime left we felt so free, so comfortable, that it turned into debauchery. Then

> it lost the feeling of comfort…drinking, consuming drinks and listening to music at insupportable volumes and it lost this *convivencia* (living together/coexistence) or the family nature that it had before" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Thus, such drinking can be seen as threatening the security of the *convivencia* of people in shared public space. This requires a remedy, which in this case involved the formation of a group of concerned residents who take turns watching the square to stop such drinking, including in coordination with municipal police. Such a reclamation of the *plaza* is connected to the idea of reclaiming space and past practices which were impossible under the cartel, but also to the need to apply social constraints to comportment within such spaces. A frequent refrain in Tancitaro is that people want a return to how life was before the cartel. Thus, having reclaimed such an important public space and social practices in the wake of cartel rule, people were loath to surrender these to a group – the drinkers – who broke norms of *convivencia* and did not respect other residents' use of the space. This reflects an attempt to reverse the phenomena, as seen by Alvarado (2010), whereby criminality can reconfigure public space and also lead to the redefinition of the community. In this case, both public space and the community's identity – and permissible behaviours within this – are being reclaimed against such criminal influences.

At a municipal level, public drinking remains a major issue and one which is conceived of in security terms. This can be seen by the fact that it forms a major point of discussion and action in the meetings of the Municipal Security Council (MSC) (Notes from meeting of the MSC – 31/07/19), the key forum for security policy in the municipality (discussed in more detail later in the chapter), as well as one of the key lines of action for the citizen council's 'Peace commission' (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b) which forms part of the Jesuit project in the municipality (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). Action is seen to be required as permitting such behaviours is seen as potentially allowing/encouraging the return of the cartel. There is also the concern that such drinking can lead to fights and arguments which could degenerate into violence. Given the fact that most people have arms, this is seen as having serious security implications for the community. Worth noting is the fact that Tancitaro is not a unique case in perceiving alcohol consumption and the carrying of weapons as potential sources of insecurity. For example, Dammert (2007) has noted that such factors are often seen as central to policies of crime control and to the sensation of citizen insecurity. But one can say that given Tancitaro's experience under organised crime, these concerns are felt with particular force in the municipality.

Drug consumption continues to be a major issue in Tancitaro, despite the cartel's perceived displacement. Such consumption was explicitly named as a security threat in the annual security diagnostic undertaken by the municipal government (Notes from *Conversatorio* workshop – 25/08/17). It is estimated, by the municipal police force – the Cuerpo de Seguridad Pública de Tancítaro (CUSEPT; Public Security Force of Tancitaro) – that there are around 1,500 addicts in the municipality (Ibid). Whilst people who had participated in the annual religious missions in the municipality estimated that one in ten people in every community they visited were addicts (Ibid). In the past, addiction was seen to affect older people but now it is increasingly affecting young people which is of particular concern. Efforts to stem the supply of drugs has involved targeted operations mounted by the *autodefensas*, at times in coordination with the police, against those dealing drugs. Those caught who refuse to stop selling can be expelled from the municipality.

Drugs are considered a security threat not only because their presence demonstrates that the cartel(s) still have some access and influence in the municipality, but also because of fears around the behaviour of addicts and their effect on families and society as a whole. Drug cartels in the region have been known to utilise addicts, and recruit from their ranks, because their addiction means that they can be influenced into performing duties they may otherwise not be willing to undertake (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017; Lemus 2015). Thus, those with addictions have often been shunned by people in the municipality (Notes from citizen council meeting – Zone 2 (Apo) – 15/08/17). Indeed, during the *autodefensa* rising in a nearby municipality, addicts found in a rehabilitation clinic by the *autodefensas* were pressed into service and made to take up the most dangerous positions during advances (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017). As such, they were seen as expendable and their lives as being worth less than non-addicts. This is reflected generally in the region, for example in Apatzingan the central *plaza* acts as a gathering point for *crystal* (methamphetamine) addicts who are known as 'zombies' locally for their shambling comportment and vacant stares. The cartel periodically disappears these 'zombies' when their number becomes too great and they start bothering the local (non-addict) residents.

In Tancitaro, the Jesuit project has tried to change attitudes, from seeing addicts as potential security threat to be shunned, to seeing them as people suffering from an illness who need help (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016). Key to this has been the conversion of the former military base into a residential rehabilitation centre for the treatment of addictions (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2017). The significance of this in security terms is twofold. Firstly, it safeguards addicts from the insecure exterior of the municipality where they previously had to venture, and several were killed for

being addicts (Notes from citizen council meeting – Zone 2 (Apo) – 15/08/17). Such a concern had resulted in the municipal police having to escort addicts journeying to rehabilitation clinics in other municipalities (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2017). Secondly, it allows for vigilance over them in terms of their behaviour and comportment, whereas outside the municipality they could fall under cartel influence and be sent back to Tancitaro as a form of trojan horse. Therefore, as with public drinking, there is an attempt to regulate and provide vigilance over norms of social comportment to ensure that they are upheld, as breaking such norms are seen as having security repercussions. In the case of public drinking, this is expressed via the reclamation of public space and prior social norms from cartel-influenced practices, whilst in the case of drug addiction there is an attempt to reclaim addicts as people who can be reintegrated into the community and respect its social norms.

Municipal security providers and the everyday production of (in)security

There are three bodies that have a physical role in the provision of security in the municipality: the municipal police (CUSEPT), the local detachment of the *Policía Michoacán* (the State Police of Michoacan), and the *autodefensas*. Representatives of these three organisations, along with those of the municipal government, the JLSV, and the citizen councils, form the Municipal Security Council (MSC). Examining the three security providers is important in order to understand how security is produced in the municipality on an everyday basis.

The Municipal Police: Cuerpo de Seguridad Pública de Tancítaro (CUSEPT)

The municipal police force is known as CUSEPT, and differs in some important aspects from other local police forces in Mexico. The municipal police force that had been in place during the period of organised crime control fled or were expelled in the aftermath of the *autodefensas'* entry into Tancitaro, as they had been heavily implicated with the cartel in the eyes of the local populace:

> "…we were even extorted by the municipal police, it was chaos, right? And the people were unbearable and couldn't be satisfied. And you were there between a rock and a hard place. The people were exhorting you to impose order and so you draw the attention of the police to the issue and they threaten to kill you, because they were also criminals" (Interview with Claudio, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

The nature and composition of CUSEPT reflects a response to the perceived shortcomings of the previous municipal police force, but also responds to the exigencies of the avocado industry.

To be considered for CUSEPT membership, one must be a '*vecino*' – that is, have been born in the municipality or have been a resident for at least ten years – and be in good standing in the municipality (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017)[33]. All appointments are vetted by the MSC and so candidates can be vetoed by members of the council (Notes from MSC meeting – 31/07/17). The origin/residency requirement is novel as police in Mexico do not have to be local residents normally and can come from different municipalities. Secondly, CUSEPT are well-equipped and very well trained – by the Mexican Federal Police and Army. This differs from municipal, and indeed state-level police forces, elsewhere in Mexico who are normally very poorly trained (López-Portillo 2013). Thirdly, there are more members of CUSEPT than there would normally be in a municipality of Tancitaro's size. In 2017, there were 46 members of CUSEPT, though there is a budget for more members if required, and this is still less than the 100 that were originally planned (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

CUSEPT demonstrates several interesting facets of the idea and practices of (in)security in Tancitaro. One is that the avocado producers, via the JLSV, have made such a force possible by contributing 50% of the municipal security budget, with the municipal government contributing the other 50% (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 12/08/17). So whilst CUSEPT are the legally constituted municipal police force under Article 115 of the Constitution, a key municipal economic interest group exercises a crucial role in the production of security by co-funding the primary official police force. This opens up questions as to what extent this police force is for the whole municipality or just for the avocado growers. Indeed, parts of the international media have christened CUSEPT the 'avocado police' (Watson 2017), thus portraying them as a form of *guardias blancas*[34] of the avocado growers, a view shared by some academics (Interview with Ernesto, Mexican academic, 2017). The presence of *guardias blancas* has been noted in other areas of Michoacan, such as for mining projects on the coast (Lemus 2015), and in other areas of Mexico, such as Chiapas, where they were linked to the interests of cattle ranchers (Mazzei 2009). More broadly the private security industry, of which *guardias blancas* form a part, has boomed massively in Latin America in recent years (Dammert 2007).

However, the phrase *guardias blancas* is not heard within the municipality, as residents often see it as correct and fitting that the avocado growers make a contribution to the community's security given

[33] This parallels the requirements that defined the category of *vecinidad* in colonial Mexico, as explored by the likes of Herzog (2007) and Carmagnani & Hernandez Chavez (1999) (as discussed in the Introduction) but without the formal legal standing that *vecinidad* enjoyed historically.

[34] *Guardias blancas* translates literally as 'white guards', but effectively private police/paramilitaries/hired guns for the protection of economic interests.

their wealth. Indeed, during a meeting of one of the zonal citizen councils (the municipality is split into 11 areas from a citizen council perspective – discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4), there was a suggestion that avocado producers should contribute more to the municipality in general via a common fund (Notes from citizen council meeting – Zone 2 (Apo) – 15/08/17). Such an idea was also raised during a *diplomado* session (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 27/08/17), and indeed by Dr Mireles referring to the 3,000 hectares of confiscated *huertas*, previously discussed (Notes from community meeting with Dr Mireles – 02/07/17). This speaks to the way in which the avocado industry is perceived as provoking insecurity by its riches, as discussed in Chapter 1, and so it is seen as appropriate that the avocado producers contribute to security arrangements.

CUSEPT are seen as being largely trustworthy by members of the community, with comfort taken from the fact that its members are *Tancitarenses*. Thus, the idea of inside/outside is reinforced within the municipality by the constitution of its police force, which is based on the idea that only those from inside the community can be trusted with its safeguarding. This is tempered somewhat however, by the continuing lack of trust in authority more generally: "…there is a disappointment and a de-legitimisation of the institutions here in Tancitaro. That is, well for what they have lived through" (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). This precludes the option of entirely trusting the police to provide security alone, and guarantees the continuing relevance of the *autodefensas*: "Despite it being trustworthy (CUSEPT), still the people have a prejudice that says that the police isn't up to the task or that they can sort out their problems alone and even more so because they are armed" (Ibid). This was emphasised by *autodefensa* members guarding one of the *casetas*, who justified their presence by saying that the *autodefensas*: "…will have to continue because the municipal government does not do its job and there are not enough police". Therefore, whilst CUSEPT has a relatively good standing in the municipality, they are not seen as being able – nor is it seen as desirable to allow them – to take charge of and provide security alone.

Internally, there is an issue of CUSEPT members leaving to take up more lucrative positions in private security provision outside of the municipality that involve less danger (Interview with Roberto, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Part of the reason for this is that they do not receive benefits such as medical insurance, which in a potentially dangerous position such as a policeman, is highly desirable (Ibid). There is also the fact that being a policeman from the municipality itself can create its own difficulties: "…sometimes you have to get involved in conflicts in your own community, right? You also might have a little one (in the family), so, well maybe you have to arrest your cousin because he got drunk and is hitting him, and this is difficult…" (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project,

2017). The high level of training that the members of CUSEPT have makes them attractive candidates for positions with higher benefits and salaries in private security across Mexico (Interview with Roberto, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Thus, whilst the municipality can be perceived as different in the way it constitutes its police, and indeed how it conceives of itself vis a vis the exterior, this shows that it is still influenced and implicated in wider national and regional trends.

The way in which CUSEPT operates and portrays itself also demonstrates wider sensitivities that have surfaced with regards to security in recent times, particularly in relation to the Michoacán state government. Tancitaro is one of a few municipalities in Michoacan which has not signed up to the *Mando Único* initiative. This is an initiative (as a law it has still not been entirely approved, see Carrasco Araizaga and Davila 2017) introduced over a number of years in Mexico – but since May 2014 in Michoacan – whereby municipal police forces were subsumed into their respective state's police force in order to unify command structures within each state and supposedly fostering greater coordination. By the refusal to sign up to this, Tancitaro and its police are perceived as being outside the norms and control of the Michoacan state government, despite the fact that they have complied with aspects of the reform:

> "That is, they have seen us as somewhat rebellious to accept things to put it like that, like with M*ando Único* or things like this that for them (the Michoacan state and Federal governments) have been very important. We haven't accepted it, though yes we have accepted the co-ordination part, and to abide by the normativity within it, right? Like with the accreditation of the security force members, training, everything within this we have followed" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

The most important aspect of this refusal – from a State perspective – has arguably not revolved around concerns about material service provision for Tancitaro, rather how this has been perceived in wider circuits. Recent international media stories on Tancitaro – by the BBC (Watson 2017), The Guardian (Parish Flannery 2017), and The New York Times (Fisher & Taub 2018) – may have influenced the concerns of the Michoacan state government. These media outlets portrayed Tancitaro as being a zone of exception or inconformity, which in one view constituted a form of autonomy (Fisher & Taub 2018). CUSEPT, as 'the avocado police', were part of the focus of each of the stories, which emphasised their difference with other police in Mexico. Such difference was marked by the colour of their patrol vehicles and uniforms – black and green respectively – which departed from the normal blue of the *Policía Michoacán*, and indeed their name, CUSEPT, rather than just *Policía Tancítaro* (or indeed *Policía Michoacán* if they had signed *Mando Único*).

Following the publication of these stories, the municipal government came under pressure from the Michoacan state government to play down and obscure the exceptional nature of Tancitaro in this respect, especially its visible manifestations. This had a visible impact as members of CUSEPT exchanged their green uniforms for blue, the black patrol vehicles were painted blue, and the large 'CUSEPT' painted over, leaving only the '*Policía Tancítaro*' labels. All of this was a deliberate policy to tone down obvious differences in security provision between Tancitaro and other municipalities in Michoacan, presumably because it was seen as an embarrassment for the Michoacan state government. This is made clear by the following comment by a member of the municipal government:

> "As I told them with regards to the uniform, with regards to the patrol vehicles; we have already accepted the blue uniforms, already accepted that our patrol vehicles are also blue. So that, maybe takes away the pressure a little by looking as though we were part of the *Mando Único*, so that they don't get to proclaim that we have entered into it, but at least, the appearance is kept up" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Another reason given for the change in appearance of CUSEPT was that the Michoacan state government also wanted to be able to utilise them in operations outside of the municipality, and therefore, they should be similar to the *Policía Michoacán* in appearance. This is despite the fact that they had not signed up to *Mando Único* and therefore, are not technically part of the *Policía Michoacán*, but rather are under the municipal president's authority. However, given their high levels of training and superior equipment, they represent a potentially useful instrument for the Michoacan state government. Therefore, the perception and practice of security is constructed via interaction between different actors both within and outside the municipality. In this case perceptions of Tancitaro's difference in security provision had material consequences for the municipality's police force due to the concern of the Michoacan state government as to how this was viewed in wider circles. This demonstrates the important yet contested nature of who is seen as responsible for security, and how this is delivered. As such tensions have been provoked between the pressure from the community for security to be provided by its own members through CUSEPT, and the Michoacan state's concerns with appearances when such an arrangement is seen as impinging on its own perceived abilities and credibility as a security provider – and indeed as sovereign in its territory. Especially because, as noted previously, the provision of security involves a claim to sovereignty.

In this respect, whilst the municipality does not accept the Michoacan state government's sovereignty over its police force, by minimising the perceived differences between the municipality and the outside, there is not an overt challenge to the sovereignty of the wider state (that is the Michoacan

state and Federal state). This chimes with the ideas of Hansen & Stepputat, who emphasise that sovereignty is a performance, and one which is key to obedience and the suppression of competing authorities (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 2006). By agreeing to change the colours of the uniforms and trucks, the municipal authorities in Tancitaro can be seen to be obeying the preferences of the Michoacan state government and allowing it to perform its sovereignty without explicit challenge. In doing so, it raises the idea of a localised form of sovereignty as emergent in Tancitaro – as in essence the inconformity regarding *Mando Único* remained – but one which is nested with the higher sovereignties of the Michoacan state and the Federal levels[35] (as per Humphrey's (2007) idea of how localised sovereignties operate[36]) which are allowed to perform their sovereignties without overt challenge.

Figure 4: Municipal police trucks with CUSEPT markings

Source: Author's own photo (Tancitaro, 2017).

[35] The notion of 'higher sovereignties' reflects the often hierarchical ordering of sovereignties in the literature and popular perceptions, whereby the nation-state is the ultimate sovereign within its borders (see for example Hobbes 2017; Weber 1984).
[36] Humphrey uses the terms 'micro-world/realm' (Humphrey 2007: 423, 427, 428).

Autodefensas and the everyday production of security

Since their formation in the wake of the arrival of *autodefensas* from *Tierra Caliente*, the municipality's own *autodefensa* groups have played a key role in security provision in Tancitaro. Over time, the once make-shift barricades of sandbags have been replaced by the brick, stone and concrete constructions of the *casetas* which stand guard over all of the major roads in the municipality. In a similar manner, the *autodefensas* have institutionalised to a certain extent within the municipality's governance structures, with representatives of the *casetas* sitting on the MSC where they have both a voice and can vote (Notes from meeting of the MSC – 31/07/19). This semi-institutionalisation represents a reduction in the power and authority of the *autodefensas*, who, in the wake of their initial mobilisation were seen as *the* authority within the municipality and exercised wide-ranging governance functions. Nevertheless, the *autodefensas* continue to play a highly visible and material role in the provision of security in Tancitaro – both through their manning of the *casetas* and involvement in key decision-making processes around security via the MSC.

The perception of how security is produced on a daily basis by the *autodefensas* varies depending upon who you talk to, and the area of the municipality one is talking about. Some see the *autodefensas* as simply operating as an outer ring of security through their presence at the *casetas* (Interview with Santiago, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). But this narrative is complicated by two factors, firstly, the *casetas* are at the entrance to all of the main *pueblos* and *ranchos* throughout the municipality irrespective of whether they are located on Tancitaro's borders or not. Secondly, and more importantly, the existence of an *autodefensa*-operated radio network throughout the municipality:

> "Now I see the barricades more as a symbol than something that really contributes. What do I notice that does contribute? I see that what contributes is the participation of many people who are not on the barricades, some of them are at the barricades, but many are not and they carry their radio. They are watchful and they take note of things and report them over the airwaves by their radio so everybody is aware of it. Those that have a radio are then informed as are the police and so they can see whether it is necessary to go and attend to something" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

The relative importance of the *casetas*, in a material sense versus their symbolic role, also depends on their location within the municipality. Specifically, the *casetas* near the borders of the municipality often have a greater presence of *autodefensas* – and they are more obviously armed – especially when the town is near the borders with the *Tierra Caliente* region municipalities such as Buenavista

Tomatlan and Apatzingan. This reflects the reputation of the region as the heartland of cartel activity, and so the threat from these routes is perceived as high. But such an enhanced presence also reflects the fact that such outer-lying *ranchos* were seen as harder hit by organised crime in the past (Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal government, 2017). Those in the outer-lying *ranchos* feel that they bear a disproportionate share of security responsibilities due to their position, and they see the inner-lying areas of the municipality as being able to be more relaxed at their expense. Thus, the variation in *autodefensa* numbers, and whether they are visibly armed or not, reflects the uneven perception of (in)security within the municipality. The fact however, that the *casetas* exist deep within the municipality reflects the point that whilst they coordinate and communicate, they are a decentralised and hyper-localised organisation, with each *pueblo* or *rancho* manning its own *caseta(s)* to protect its settlement. Thus, whilst ideas of defending the municipality are important, the fundamental idea is the protection of their own homes, families, and community (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017). So rather than being 'just' an external ring of defence, they also form rings of security for their own towns/villages within the municipality.

Whilst the *casetas* still form a potentially important defensive line in a material sense, over time their everyday contribution is seen more in the hosting of relatively small numbers of *autodefensas* equipped with radios. Thus, as the previous quote indicates, it is now the radio network that is perceived to be central to providing security. As a member of the *autodefensas* stated, even where it looks like there is no physical presence at the *caseta*, they are very rarely vacant and someone with a radio will be monitoring and broadcasting on the radio, so when cars enter that they do not know people will be alerted throughout the municipality (Interview with Roberto, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Likewise, if people around the municipality and at the *casetas* see something suspicious they will report it on the radio and people will turn out to assist and investigate (Ibid). This network is regularly emphasised in conversations about security in the municipality as being fundamental for vigilance and as a defence mechanism. For example, when the *Viagras* cartel attempted to enter the municipality in strength in June 2018, the radio network sounded the alarm and 500 *autodefensas* were mobilised to resist the incursion within an hour. Likewise, when the Michoacan state and Federal forces have attempted to disarm *autodefensa* members or pull down *casetas* – as they has at various points in the years following the *autodefensa* uprising – the radio network has been utilised to mobilise other *autodefensas* and the population at large to resist such actions (see for example Noventa Grados 2018).

Figure 5 – The caseta at Uringuitiro, Tancitaro – the autodefensa rising

Source: José, member of the citizen councils, Tancitaro 2018.

The presence of the radio network throughout the municipality also involves a regulation of security within Tancitaro's borders. People going about their everyday lives – shopping, drinking a coffee, loading avocados – can be seen with radios attached to their belts, and so can respond to threats from the outside, but can also report on anything suspicious in the *pueblos* and *ranchos* themselves. Thus, vigilance is not something that is confined to the *casetas* but is also carried out continuously throughout the municipality by those sporting radios. As one interviewee reflected on the various uses of the radio network:

> "Maria: What has helped a lot is that there has been, for example, if trucks of people who look strange come to the municipality, and the barricades have radios, so they communicate with each other, and so if someone sees a truck, so it has served for this or if someone loses a truck that…And everyone talks and communicates and so they look for it.
>
> Interviewer: It is like a vigilance network?
>
> Maria: Yes, it is a vigilance network. So it is like this, one time, for example, I think some young kids, some little girls they thought had been kidnapped, so they talked on the radios and they looked for them and they found them. So when there is some activity like this, yes they get together to mount an operation like that. Or, for example, there was one time when the (state) government came, from Apatzingan. There is an unpaved road that goes down that way towards Apatzingan. So the governor (of Michoacan) came from Apatzingan to get rid of some of the barricades, there was a vigilance partol (that saw them coming), so all of the *autodefensas* went there because they shouldn't let them get rid of them (the *casetas*)… So it has worked for other things like this…But normally, with problems in a community or something, in those moments yes they help…" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Whilst the police monitor and utilise this network, it is not the same as dialling a police emergency number because the *autodefensa* members – at the *casetas* or elsewhere – are also monitoring and can respond. The radio network is also not akin to an emergency number – though they can function as such – because of the constant 'chatter' which takes place over it. This involves the *casetas* reporting the various movements of people in and around the municipality to one another. The radios can also function – according to a senior member of the municipal government – as a form of control and regulation of the actions of the police, as well as to make up for the fact that the police have limited numbers:

> "For us (the municipal government) it helps us that there are people like this so that the police act with respect and don't abuse and there aren't abuses that there might be in other places. Here there is very little of that, if it happens at all, right? Well, at least with our municipal police. And this helps because we know that the people are aware, that they are watching. And for the police it works because it is extra help for them, there are many eyes, they are CCTV cameras with a sensor that reacts immediately" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Therefore, whilst the headline explanation of the radios is in case of the return of organised crime/security threats from outside, they are also used constantly in everyday vigilance and security monitoring within the municipality's borders as well, including exercising some social regulation over police actions.

It is also important to ask why, especially in the case of the municipal government official interviewed, there was such an emphasis on the role of the radios relative to the *casetas*. This can be seen to relate to the municipality's relationship with the Michoacan state and Federal governments, and the fact that radios are not illegal, whilst the guns at the *casetas* and in peoples' homes certainly are. As a member of the municipal government described:

> "We just talked about this, for example, with members of the Army who came. Officially there are no *autodefensas*, officially. In reality, I can say that there aren't any, right? But there are citizens who help us with vigilance, who have arms in their houses, that some of them carry arms, right? But we also know that they themselves (the *autodefensas*) have understood how to show themselves in front of the institutions, it is important that they don't overdo things and put such tools to good use, these arms. I think that they are understanding more and more, it isn't me bragging, it is not to say we can do everything ourselves. And I think they (the Michoacan state and Federal levels of government) are gaining understanding, yes? That it is to look after ourselves and to look after the rest, to support the institutions. I think they are gaining understanding" (Ibid).

Thus, the municipal government official is keen to emphasise to the Army that they are in compliance with the official Michoacan state line at the time[37], and that there were no *autodefensas* in Tancitaro, and only people who helped with vigilance. Whilst the official acknowledges they have arms he is quick to emphasise their nature as an auxiliary force which is discrete and careful about their use. This is to demonstrate that the *autodefensas* do not represent a challenge to the State, nor an attempt to deny the State its ability to perform its sovereignty in the municipality. This is reflected in informal agreements with the Federal Police and Army, whereby *autodefensa* members on the *casetas* do not display their arms when these units pass by, instead they leave them inside the *casetas*, thus not embarrassing the authorities and forcing them to take action. Other agreements in this sense were described as follows:

> "Here in Tancitaro, we have to respect certain accords; one of them is that arms should only be at the barricades. That people from outside (the municipality) can't go around

[37] The Michoacan state government has stated on various occasions that there are no *autodefensa* groups in Michoacan, and those civilians who are armed are simply criminals (see for example Sierra 2016; Animal Politico 2016; El Occidental 2019).

> with guns and, what's more, if you're drinking, you shouldn't be carrying a weapon. So, respecting this and the rest of the laws, so from this they have come to respect a little the way in which we have organised ourselves in the municipality" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Thus, the form that localised sovereignty takes is mediated and negotiated within the boundaries of the higher sovereignties of the state in which it is nested, as per Humphrey's (2007) notion. In this view, localised or 'micro' sovereignties can emerge in which characteristics of sovereignty, such as control over life and death, and symbolic instantiating authority, are present (Humphrey 2007). Such micro-polities are constructed through everyday actions and are saturated with the 'ways of life' that give meaning to local political action (Ibid). These emergent localised sovereignties are not in conflict with, nor negate, the 'higher' sovereignties of the wider state but instead have to be understood as 'nested' within these and responding to local subjectivities and meanings (Ibid). In the case of Tancitaro, even when state forces explicitly attempted, and on occasion still attempt, to disarm the *autodefensas*, this is resisted in a manner which does not challenge the State's sovereignty explicitly. Thus, the state forces attempting the disarmament are surrounded by people drawn from the entire community, not just the *autodefensas*, and the only arms that are present at such confrontations are sticks and machetes – that is, 'weapons' which do not constitute a material threat to the state forces.

The presence of the *autodefensas*, and the informal accords reached between the municipal government and the wider state in relation to them, as well as their general position within the municipality, speaks to Paleta Pérez's portrayal of Michoacan in its experience of armed groups:

> "We are talking about the coexistence of regular and irregular armies that together go towards supporting the construction of a grey zone, understood as those ambiguous spaces where clandestine relationships are established 'a blurry area where the normative limits dissolve, and the actors of the State and the political elites promote and actively tolerate or participate in the production of damages' (Auyero 2007)"
> (Paleta Pérez 2019: 10-11).

This reflects how ideas of legality and illegality have become blurred in the case of Michoacan in its experience of regimes of violent governance – by cartels, the state, and the *autodefensas*. It also indicates the porous and blurred boundaries between state/non-state actors in this context. In the case of the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro, their ability to control territory and create a form of security seen as legitimate by the local population has allowed for their partial institutionalisation and the negotiation of their presence and role with the wider state (i.e. the Michoacan state and Federal levels

of government), despite the fact that they constitute an illegal armed group. As such, and reflecting the informal accords discussed, the *casetas* can be conceived of as a form of liminal space between the local sovereignty of Tancitaro and the wider sovereignties in which it is nested, but also between the legal and illegal. The *autodefensa* members themselves recognise such illegality, saying that their actions and armed presence are not legal but are necessary, effective, and legitimate within and on behalf of the community (Notes from meeting of the MSC – 31/07/19).

Whilst the *casetas* may be less important in terms of material security than they were previously – thanks to the development of the radio network – they still exercise a key role in the construction of identity and security in symbolic terms. By marking the boundaries of the municipality and the *pueblos/ranchos* within it, they have been instrumental in forging a new sense of identity in the wake of the *autodefensa* rising. Indeed, the physical manifestation of boundaries is important in generating a sense of community (Cohen 1985), which is significant in itself, but also plays a role in the social construction of feelings of security that are intertwined with the idea of 'being a local' and belonging (Walklate 1998). Therefore, whilst the radio network has prominence in security provision at present, the *casetas* are central to the reinforcement of the boundaries of the municipality and local identity.

The continued operation of the *casetas* and the radio network help to demonstrate how security is, and is seen to require, a constant production and performance. Thus, whilst the barricades and *autodefensas* have established a certain level of security, its maintenance requires constant vigilance and participation. The acknowledgement that the idea of Tancitaro as a 'safe space' is more of a construction than a lived reality – but also that a security response could be required at any moment – was also clear from the fact that one of my informants – an *autodefensa* member – feels the need to carry a concealed pistol during his everyday life within the municipality.

The Policía Michoacán

The *Policía Michoacán* are the third security provider in the municipality and are the Tancitaro detachment of the Michoacan state police. As such, and unlike CUSEPT and the *autodefensas*, they not only correspond to the municipality but also are part of a hierarchy that extends beyond the municipality's borders. They have a permanent base in the municipality, attend the MSC, and their membership also have their roots in the *autodefensas*. This is because the *Policía Michoacán* in the municipality is largely comprised of those *autodefensas* who chose to institutionalise into the *Fuerza Rural*, which subsequently became the *Policía Michoacán*. Within the municipality opinions vary about

their trustworthiness as a security force, with many people expressing a lack of confidence in them. Partially this is based on the fact that they represent a state government largely seen as incapable or unwilling in security tasks. Rumours also circulate that it is the *Policía Michoacán* who are responsible for the circulation of drugs in the municipality. Their leadership is seen as being linked to the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, which means that in certain parts of the municipality they are viewed with a certain lack of confidence for this reason. Similarly, it is said that several members of the force failed the confidence tests that now form part of checks performed on the trustworthiness of police in Mexico. Therefore, whilst the Michoacan state government does have a form of representative within the security institutions of the municipality, it is treated with suspicion by much of the community. In terms of numbers the force can also be seen to be less significant than both the *autodefensas* and CUSEPT. Having examined some of the key security providers in the municipality and their key features, it is now important to examine how security is co-produced within the municipality through interactions and contestation between a host of state and non-state actors. This first necessitates an understanding of the broader ideas and theories of coproduction.

The co-production of security and localised sovereignty in Tancitaro

The theory of co-production

The involvement of both State and non-state institutions and actors in the provision of security in Tancitaro recalls the idea of the co-production of public services. This is the idea, following Ostrom (1996), whereby public services are not simply provided to the citizenry by a government institution, but citizens actively participate in service provision through their own associations and civil society organisations. This idea has had particular relevance in Development literature, being utilised to examine the public service provision in Latin America in areas such as water supply in Ecuador (Goodwin 2018), urban infrastructure in Brazil (Ostrom 1996), waste-picking and recycling in Chile (Navarrete-Hernández & Navarrete-Hernández 2018), and sanitation services in Venezuela (McMillan, Spronk, & Caswell 2014). Co-production in relation to security provision is not as unusual as one might expect, given the prominence of a Weberian conception of the State as having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and the centrality of the modern state as *the* security provider (Weber 1984). For example, there have been initiatives involving the co-production of security in places as diverse as Mexico City, the USA, and Karachi in Pakistan (see for example: Velásquez 2006; Brewer & Grabowsky 2013; Masud 2002; Joshi & Moore 2004). The idea of co-production of security has a long history, but came into focus with the concept of citizen security, which developed in the 1990s. This posits that

the citizen is no longer simply an object to protect, but rather an active subject in the provision of its own security (Blanco and Vargas 2006; Dammert 2007). The timing of this emergence – in the 1990s – and its growing relevance is perhaps not surprising when one considers that it can be seen to resonate with neoliberal appeals for individual responsibility, and indeed the down-sizing of the state. Such neoliberal state transformation has been charted by the likes of Harvey (2006; 2007), and in relation to Mexico, by Gledhill (1995, 2004, 2015).

The form and nature of co-production varies, and even definitions of what constitutes co-production can differ. An early definition sees it as citizens "…requesting assistance from service agents, by cooperating with service agents in carrying out agency programs, and by negotiating with service agents to redirect agents' activities" (Whitaker 1980: 240). Further development to the definition of co-production was undertaken by Innes, Roberts, Innes, Lowe and Lakhani (2011), who posit that citizens co-produce crime control through two fundamental modes. The first involves situations where "police act to deal with issues brought to them by the community" – such as via emergency calls, and consultations. The second where "police identify an issue, but enable or encourage community based actors to deal with it…(be it) through material/practical support, or more tacit forms" – such as neighbourhood watch programmes and reporting regimes (Innes et al. 2011: 39).

In reviewing such definitions, Brewer and Grabosky (2014) note that both, fundamentally, see this type of co-production as being the citizen as the service recipient, and the police playing a key role as the 'controlling agent' by defining and responding (Brewer & Grabosky 2014: 142). They go on to note debates around whether a higher degree of citizen involvement – both in scope and intensity – than that defined above is desirable, as it may have negative implications with regards to interpersonal trust, privacy, and minority rights (Ibid: 143). Complicating this however, is the notion that part of the measurement of success of citizen security projects is the extent to which they are able to motivate citizen participation (Arias & Ungar 2009). Accordingly, there is a fine yet unclear balance to be struck between generating participation in such initiatives, and the State retaining a guiding influence and control. The difficulties and tensions in this are embodied by the argument in favour of 'security from below' (Abello Colak & Pearce 2018), which calls for citizens to take an active role in demanding and participating in security policies that affect them, yet which the authors state must be, ultimately, state-guided and controlled. More generally, it is important to note that coproduction can also be a site of political struggle rather than a technical process of public service delivery (Goodwin 2018: 2). Here Goodwin is endorsing Mitlin's critique of much of the co-production literature, which she argues included little political analysis and did not appreciate its emancipatory or transformative potential

for marginalised groups (Mitlin 2008). This calls for a focus on the wider implications of co-production in the contexts in which it occurs, rather than a simple focus on the measureable outputs of service provision.

It is also worth noting that there is an implicit 'othering' – indeed in a double sense – in the concept of co-production. On the one hand, co-production necessarily assumes at least two defined and separate entities that collaborate for a common purpose or reason. Thus, 'the State' and 'civil society' are presented as two bounded, meaningful, and separate entities which arguably is an idealised notion, and one which underplays the complexity of social relations. On the other hand, and particularly in respect of security, there is an othering in the sense that co-production is defined against 'the other' – such as 'the criminal' and/or 'the security threat' – which may be individuals, or other groups in society. Therefore, co-production can also feed and reinforce narratives and practices of what constitutes 'the community' and how it is constructed in the popular imagination and in a material sense, for example, through exclusion. Thus, co-production can influence the emergence and nature of governance regimes around the provision of 'security', and the conceptualisation and constitution of such orders.

Finally, it is important to envisage how Mexico has experienced co-production of security and how this has changed in recent years. Specifically, how state institutions and cartel relations can be conceived of as informal relations of co-production. As discussed in Chapter 1, the growing power of cartels in recent years has enabled their penetration of municipal, state, and Federal institutions to an extent that has constituted a co-production of governance in parts of Mexico. But such co-production does not only occur through cartel penetration of state institutions, but also through mimicry, the filling of perceived gaps in service provision, and physical presence. Michoacan has been one such example, where LCT were seen as particularly successful in suborning local and regional institutions to their will, as well as mimicking and paralleling state structures (Ernst 2015a, 2015b; Grillo 2016; Lemus 2015). Whilst such a relationship may not fit easily with definitions of co-production at face value, its illegal nature precluding any official collaboration, it can nonetheless be seen as such. This is because it involves more than one actor – drawn from both institutional and non-institutional areas – collaborating to provide a form of governance, albeit in a way in which the conception and object of security may not be coterminous with generally conceived notions of the public good.

Such informal co-production between the cartels and some parts of the State have raised questions of sovereignty for some scholars. Davis (2010) for examples has characterised such a phenomenon as

'fragmented sovereignty', whereby non-state actors utilise violence to enforce governance and control of territory, thus challenging the nation-state's sovereignty, in effect fragmenting it between different actors. In a similar vein, Pansters asserts that in Michoacan there have been "triangular dynamics of sovereignty-making among organized crime, the state, and armed citizens" (Pansters 2015: 144). Such a concept seems particularly important when considering the co-production of security, precisely because it seemingly involves the dilution or sharing of the State's perceived monopoly on the legitimate use of force. But the concept of sovereignty itself is not unitary and there are significant debates and varying ideas about what sovereignty is, and how it is constituted that are important to delineate before returning to relations of co-production in the context of Tancitaro.

Theories of sovereignty

Traditionally, theories of sovereignty have operated at the level of States and nations, and sovereignty itself is often defined as: "the capacity to determine conduct within the territory of a polity without external legal constraint" (Humphrey 2007: 418). In this definition the 'polity' is the nation-state, and the territory is "a geographical space bounded by state frontiers" (Ibid: 418). In much of the International Relations literature, sovereign States are said to exist in a Hobbesian 'anarchy' as they do not recognise any authority above them nor moral code (Ibid). Within the State, the sovereign authority can take various forms such as tyranny, monarchy, or elective democracy, and studies have often focused on the legitimacy of these different models (Ibid)[38]. Agamben's (1998) writings have offered an influential conception of how sovereignty is constructed. This view posits that sovereign power, both in pre-modern and modern times, is the ability to simultaneously include both fully constituted members of society, allowed to participate in the political and social life of their society, alongside other members who are not granted such participation and exist merely as biological beings (Agamben 1998). Such members constitute a form of 'bare life' as they are shorn of political and social rights and status. Thus, sovereign power is at its essence a form of bio-politics which rests on the ability to define who is a fully human member of society and who is included as 'bare life', which involves a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from political and social life (Ibid).

From an anthropological perspective, Hansen & Stepputat (2006) have focused on the idea of *de facto* sovereignty rather than legal sovereignty. In doing so they define *de facto* sovereignty as "the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity", whilst legal sovereignty is seen as "the legitimate right to

[38] For differing points of view on this, one can refer to the classic texts of social contract theory such as Hobbes (2017), Locke (2014), Rousseau (2018), and Kant (1983).

govern" which is "grounded in formal ideologies of rule and legality" (Hansen & Stepputat 2006: 296). They see legal sovereignty as always being an unattainable ideal, but one that is particularly problematic in postcolonial states (such as Mexico) where, historically, sovereign power was distributed among many forms of local authority (Ibid: 298). Therefore, they see it necessary to question the idea that sovereignty is only located in the State, and instead posit the need to examine how sovereignty is dispersed throughout and across societies (Hansen & Stepputat 2005). As such, there are localised and informal sovereignties that are not entirely penetrated by the State in Latin America – both historically and contemporaneously (Ibid). Their 'key move' in conceiving of this is:

> "…to abandon sovereignty as an ontological ground of power and order, expressed in law or in enduring ideas of legitimate rule, in favour of a view of sovereignty as a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy from the neighbourhood to the summit of the state" (Hansen & Stepputat 2006: 297).

This does not dismiss the role of the State as a key actor which attempts to enforce its sovereignty, but rather opens up and complicates the notion of sovereignty by acknowledging its socially constructed nature, and the lack of a State monopoly over it. They make this case with particular reference to Latin America by highlighting the role that local strongmen, vigilantes, armed groups, and criminals have played in constructing local forms of sovereignty historically in the region (Hansen & Stepputat 2006). In a similar vein, Humphrey (2007) has made the case for localised sovereignty that can be nested in higher sovereignties, as previously discussed. Such localised sovereignties may themselves be seen as exclusions from the central state but are able to construct quasi-juridical terms by which exclusions can be made from their own body (Humphrey 2007). Buur (2005) demonstrates how localised sovereignty can function in practice with his examination of local justice administration by a non-state actor in South Africa. However, he sees the popular justice initiative as not simply a localised form of sovereignty, but an outsourcing of sovereignty by the State to the local community (Buur 2005). His sees such outsourcing by the state as being presented in the name of historical rightness and moral superiority, and being possible where there is a perceived shared interest between the State and the community. However, he sees such outsourcing as including incorporation into the State as well, when the State sets limits or fosters structures to allow it to claim that it is governing.

A fruitful way to engage with the idea of co-production – and the sovereignty implications that this has in this case – is through the idea of shared sovereignty. This idea has been discussed at the national

and international level by scholars such as Krasner who sees shared sovereignty entities as being created "…by a voluntary agreement between recognized national political authorities and an external actor such as another state or a regional or international organization" (Krasner 2005: 70). He sees this as a potentially useful and novel policy option for States, but only at the national-supranational level as: "Only national political authorities can legitimize shared-sovereignty institutions" (Ibid: 76). However, the presentation of this as a novel phenomenon has been critiqued by Agnew (2009: 81), who sees it as part of an idealised 'sovereignty game' centred on the idea of the Westphalian State's monopoly over territorialised sovereignty. Rather, Agnew sees sovereignty as always having been more of a tool for debate and conflict rather than an actual condition. Specifically, he rejects the novelty of shared sovereignty, claiming that "Sovereignty has always been 'shared' with other actors, foreign and domestic" (Ibid: 82). Indeed, he claims that state territorial sovereignty has always co-existed with other actors and has never been simply territorialised (Ibid: 91).

Whilst useful in critiquing the idea of an indivisible State sovereignty and demonstrating the relatively widespread nature of shared sovereignty, Agnew likewise focuses on the international and national levels. In respect of Mexico, anthropologists such as Gledhill have pointed out that "rule was negotiated between the political centre and both elite and popular actors in the regions of a very diverse country" (Gledhill 2015: 108[39]). This has been useful in critiquing the view of the PRI-run Mexican state as a 'leviathan' or pyramid ruled over by a president as monarch (Ibid: 108)[40]. But such critiques are not coterminous necessarily with sovereignty, nor with how local shared sovereignty can emerge. To understand how such ideas of sovereignty can be seen to have developed in Tancitaro, and the relationship that this has enjoyed with co-production, it is important to examine the specific nature and form that such co-production has taken in the municipality.

The co-production of security in Tancitaro

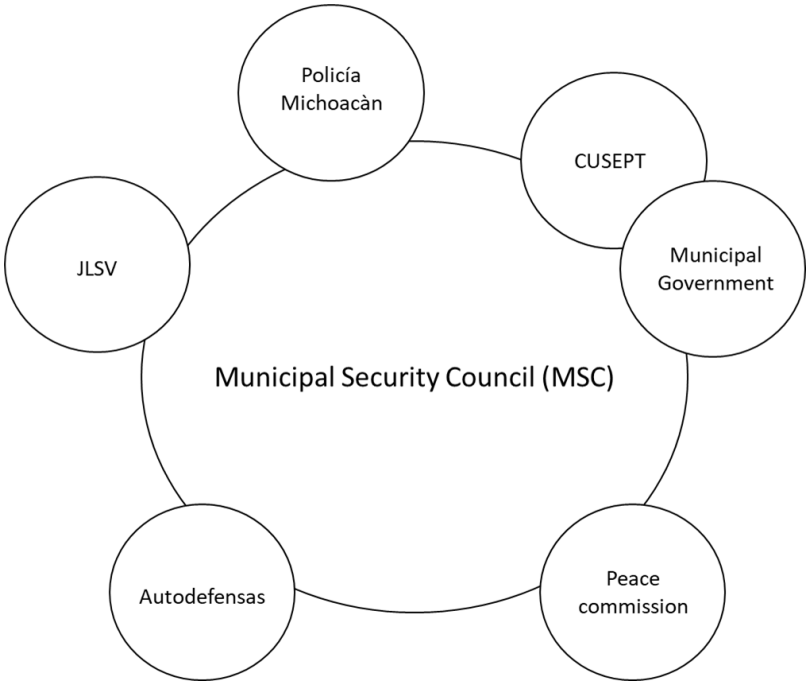
The provision of security in Tancitaro meets the definition of co-production as it involves both local state and non-state actors working – to some degree at least – in cooperation with one another. Such co-production is evident not only from everyday observations – the *autodefensas* at the *casetas*, CUSEPT and the *Policía Michoacán* patrolling – but also from the constitution and workings of the MSC. The MSC meets on a monthly basis to discuss the security of the municipality. This body is not

[39] In doing so Gledhill (2015) also points to the work of Lomnitz-Adler (1992), Joseph and Nugent (1994) and Rubin (1996).

[40] Indeed, the recent work of Smith (2014) and Gillingham (2014) (discussed in the Introduction) demonstrate the extent to which rule was contested and negotiated at the local level even in the heyday of the PRI.

unique to Tancitaro, but rather is enshrined in Michoacan state law, and indeed in other Mexican states, as one of the bodies responsible for ensuring public safety at the municipal level (Congreso de Michoacán de Ocampo 2014). However, what is novel in Tancitaro is the composition of the council, with its members reflecting the diversity of security actors in the municipality. Specifically, it comprises representatives of the municipal government – the Municipal President, CUSEPT, the *encargados de orden* (order commissioners) and *jefes de tenencias* (holdings chiefs)[41] – as well as the *Policía Michoacán*, representatives of the *autodefensas*, citizen council members (via their peace commission, part of the wider Jesuit project in the municipality), and members of the JLSV. The involvement of the *autodefensas* represents an attempt to institutionalise them to some degree, thus allowing for co-ordination, unified decision-making, and potentially the airing of grievances between the different actors. Such inclusion also reflects the fact the *autodefensas* are important local security actors whose views should to be represented. But this co-production reflects the current status of the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro, and not how they were originally experienced in the municipality. When the *autodefensa* groups were first formed in the municipality, as in other municipalities, they came as a challenge to, and a mimicry of, local authority in order to fill a perceived gap and override corrupt institutions. Therefore, participation in the MSC serves to demonstrate the change in their function and nature over the intervening years.

Figure 6: The Municipal Security Council



[41] *Jefes de tenencia* and *encargados de orden* are auxiliary municipal officials who have a responsibility for "the maintenance of order, tranquility, peace and security of the inhabitants, as well as ensuring compliance with the legal, administrative and regulatory orders of the municipality" (Ayuntamiento de Morelia 2017).

Source: Author's own elaboration.

A key theme in the literature on the coproduction of security, discussed previously, is the position of citizens as the junior and auxiliary partner to the 'controlling agent' status enjoyed by state authorities (Brewer & Grabosky 2014). This relationship can be seen to resemble that of the *autodefensas* with the municipal government, where the senior municipal government official emphasised that it was the official institutions that needed to assume responsibility (Notes from MSC meeting – 31/07/19). This specifically related to proposed operations to tackle drinking in public spaces and the sale of alcohol outside of legally established hours. The government official stressed that the *autodefensas* could help with this, but only if they were called upon by CUSEPT, under whose guidance they should operate if required. This would seem to put the *autodefensas* in a subservient position in line with this vision of co-production from the literature. However, there were tensions around this hierarchy in the meeting, as it was clear that not all of the *autodefensa* representatives were confident in the abilities of the police. Specifically, their competency was challenged when the CUSEPT representative detailed the number of people that they had detained in the past three months in relation to public drinking. One *autodefensa* leader was scathing about the numbers quoted, saying that he and his *autodefensa* companions could capture that number in a single day: "We could come from the barricades and *limpiar* (clean-up), by sending them back to their homes or taking them into custody as we know where they all are" (Notes from MSC meeting – 31/07/19). Such competency on the part of the *autodefensas* was seconded by another *autodefensa* leader who noted that if they had been able to make organised crime run away, then why they could not also solve such a comparatively small issue such as public drinking. The CUSEPT representative replied in an exasperated tone: "And what are we (the police) supposed to do when so many of them are armed and you come from the barricades to round them up?" (Ibid).

Such an exchange illustrates that whilst the municipal government seeks to establish itself as the senior partner in the relationship of coproduction, this was not entirely certain, with the local state's authority and effectiveness open to challenge to some extent from the *autodefensas*. It is revealing in sovereignty terms as there is not an unthinking acceptance or deferral to the State's authority or capacity in such matters of security. Another example of inconformity came with the recognition in the meeting that there was a problem with on-duty *autodefensas* drinking at the *casetas*, which was perceived as dangerous and irresponsible, but also breaking the accords with the State (Ibid). This calls into question the affirmation of the senior municipal government member – quoted previously – that the *autodefensas* entirely respect the informal accords reached with the local and wider government

institutions and/or are capable of self-regulation. This perhaps reflects a continuing lack of respect for authority in the municipality, which was especially prevalent immediately after the *autodefensa* uprising, and remained marked when the municipal government (2015-2018) first took office: "I could even tell you that it was anarchy, an empowerment of the *autodefensas* to the point where they didn't understand the institutions, they saw them just as the one that wants to harm me" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Such a fractious relationship between the *autodefensas* and the municipal government had also been evident in the case of the previous municipal government (in office 2011-2014):

> "the municipal government wasn't in agreement with us (the *autodefensas*), but in any case the government, well in the final reckoning it couldn't do anything, because the people already had arms and so he (the municipal president), well he had no police, so he was just a president with his words" (Interview with Miguel, autodefensa leader, 2017).

In the prior period the *autodefensas* were empowered by their possession of arms, coupled with the lack of a local police force. The partial institutionalisation of the *autodefensas* and their inclusion in the MSC has been seen to have helped the situation, as has the formation of CUSEPT. For example, the same senior municipal official (of the 2015-2018 administration) contrasted the situation with the *autodefensas* upon taking office to the situation in 2017 as follows:

> "And so if it was the case, for example, that the municipal police arrested someone for some reason, immediately they (the *autodefensas*) would gather and they would stop them (the police) from doing their job. With the passing of these two years, I can say that this practically doesn't occur anymore, though there are still calls made, they themselves exercise self-control: 'why did you take him?'; 'it's because he was drinking in the street'; 'ah! So let them take him'" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Taking all of this into account challenges any notion of Tancitaro as representing a straightforward example of co-production imposed in a top-down fashion by the state, as is prevalent in the literature. Rather, such relations have come about due to the strength and legitimacy of the *autodefensa* presence in the municipality, and the lack of confidence in the state being able to effectively provide security or to be trusted to do so alone. Such lack of confidence stems from the experiences under organised crime, as well as the perception that the municipal government, whilst being more trustworthy than the wider state, does not have the resources to provide security to the communities. The notion of co-production in this example is also complicated by concepts of both illegality, and the

multiple identities at play. For example, some of the members of the MSC representing the municipal government are also members/leaders of the *casetas*, and it is not always clear who they are representing in the forum. Similarly, the members of the peace commission who sit on the MSC, do so because they have experience as *autodefensa* members. The JLSV members present are there representing an economic interest group but also as funders of the local security budget. Thus the vision of the co-production of security and how this is envisioned and put into practice, is a negotiated and complex process characterised by tensions, contradictions, and conflict. The nature and extent of this coproduction also gives rise to questions as to its implications for sovereignty, and the extent to which the State's sovereignty is diluted, mediated or fragmented, thus allowing for a form of sovereignty not wholly coterminous with the State's boundaries to emerge at the local level.

The emergence and construction of local sovereignty in Tancitaro

The *autodefensas* can, in certain ways, be considered a form of emergent localised sovereignty, based on their role in constructing ideas and practices of security and community in the municipality. The autodefensas can be seen as a form of authority grounded in violence as per Hansen and Stepputat's (2006) definition, and one which has been able to make exclusions from the socially constructed community based on the kind of quasi-juridical terms espoused by Humphrey (2007). Whilst they do not constitute a legal sovereignty – the autodefensas being illegal – they have enjoyed a *de facto* sovereignty through their ability to generate legitimacy for their authority in the municipality (discussed in Chapter 4). And whilst they may be illegal formations under state law, they have enjoyed a working relationship with the municipal state institutions. Indeed, they have been partial institutionalised at the local level, as previously discussed. In this way, Tancitaro can be considered to be a form of micro-polity as described by Humphrey (2007), which operates on its own terms and has its own 'laws'.

Nevertheless, the *autodefensas* continue to demonstrate features of sovereignty in their own right, and crucially, provide the platform for a wider-based local articulation of sovereignty. On one hand, the *autodefensas* – through institutionalisation and a narrower governance role (since the time when they were seen as *the* authority) – have ceded much of their former role to the municipal government. However, they retain an influence through participation in the MSC, and importantly, maintain an armed presence at the *casetas* throughout the municipality. This allows them to monitor movement to/from and within the municipality, thus acting as a kind of filter, as demonstrated in the example of the family who tried to return to the municipality. In doing so, they continue to demonstrate, to some

degree, their ability to condition who gets to be part of the community, one of the key signifiers of sovereignty. Similarly, they continue to exercise vigilance over the *perdonados* living within the community and keep track of their movements. Their armed nature means that they still exercise a form of control over life and death, a key signifier of sovereignty. An anecdote related by *autodefensa* members during a visit to a *caseta* is illustrative of this. A report over the radio network was received stating that two armed men on a motorbike had passed by an outlying *caseta* and were heading in their direction. The *autodefensas* jumped in their truck and drove out to confront the men. They swiftly disarmed them and asked why they had come into the municipality carrying weapons. The explanation given was that somebody in the municipality owed them money and they were going to collect it, the arms being to ensure compliance in case they met resistance. Upon hearing this the *autodefensas* called CUSEPT to inform them, so that they could come and arrest the detained men. Whilst this demonstrates that they now hand over minor offenders to the authorities, it doesn't seem unreasonable to question whether cartel members would have been treated in the same manner. Thus, *autodefensas* may still exercise a control of life and death, but whether they would be able to exercise such an ability with impunity – an important qualifier for sovereign power – is open to question. However, there is also the fact that the memory of the origins of the *autodefensa* groups works as a powerful reminder – referred to by members – of their ability to exercise authority grounded in violence, as in doing so they were able to successfully expel the cartel through force.

Through such an expulsion of the cartel and their continued presence, as well as the narrative of unity (discussed in Chapter 4) and the inside/outside conception that has been generated, the *autodefensas* have contributed to a form of localised sovereignty constructed through interaction between several sources. On one hand, the municipal government – whilst still nested in the higher sovereignty of the wider state – has exercised a form of sovereignty in its governance role. This is evidenced by its refusal to implement the *Mando Único* initiative, and its incorporation and institutionalisation of the Jesuit project and the citizen councils into its governance regime (discussed in Chapter 3 and 4). On the other hand, economic capital within the municipality – represented by the JLSV – also plays a role in the constitution of local sovereignty via its participation in the MSC, and its funding of 50% of the CUSEPT budget. This new role for economic capital in the production of sovereignty can be seen to mirror wider trends, whereby traditional attempts to subordinate the economic to the political in sovereignty have proved increasing difficult, thus eroding the nation-state's sovereignty (Brown 2017). The role of various actors in the co-production of security, but also in wider governance, speaks to the way in which the municipality has constructed a form of localised sovereignty whereby those institutions and community members within the local context have the final say over issues that affect them. This does

not deny the importance of the wider state, nor blind to the very real influence that it has within the municipality, for example, through the presence of the *Policía Michoacán*. Rather it is best considered as the creation of a space of local politics where "'the politics from here' as opposed to the (less legitimate) 'politics from there'" is key (Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 24). Such space is created by the kinds of transformations in the form the state takes under neoliberalism and the pushing of competencies to the local level which has formed part of this.

The *autodefensas* have thus created the conditions and space in which an alternative local political and social order has emerged. But their involvement in questions of space within the municipality, and how this relates to ideas of local sovereignty, has also involved reclaiming and re-signifying space. The reclamation of space is clearly associated with the *autodefensas* and indeed is memorialised as such. The "Day of the Community" is an annual commemoration of the *autodefensa* mobilisation in the municipality, falling on the day when the *autodefensas* from *Tierra Caliente* entered (16th November 2013). On this day, in 2017, the *plaza* of Pareo was renamed as "Freedom Square" in honour of the 'liberation' of the municipality by the *autodefensas* (see Figure 7, below). Indeed, Dr Mireles attended the unveiling ceremony, thus re-emphasising the resignification of this important space for social reproduction as intimately connected to the foundational act of the *autodefensas'* entry. This Day of the Community represents a temporal – i.e. it recurs annually – and spatial reinforcement of the reclamation of space from the cartel, and the ability to define and construct the community. In doing so, it mixes the secular, in the form of official recognition of the government, as well as the religious – the blessing of the *casetas* by priests is a key event on this day (see Figure 8, below) – in the reinforcement of the continued relevance of the *autodefensas* and *casetas*, as well as the construction of the municipality's identity.

Figure 7: Freedom Square dedication plaque – 16th November 2017

Source: Tancitareando in La Nueva Revolución 2017.

The idea of local sovereignty is also relevant to Tancitaro as the *autodefensa* rising had its own ways of "instantiating symbolizing authority, which imposes a specific kind of relationality with its subjects" (Humphrey 2007: 435). Thus, the erection of the permanent *casetas* not only signifies the boundaries of the municipality – in itself significant as enclosure can be a founding act of political sovereignty which moments of its dissipation or transformation (Brown 2017) – but they also symbolise the authority of the *autodefensas*. Coupled with this is the continued presence of armed *autodefensa* members at the *casetas*, which represents a symbolic and material reminder of the violence in which sovereignty is grounded (Humphrey 2007; Hansen & Stepputat 2006). Similarly, the idea of sovereignty as organised around a mythical act of foundational violence (Hansen & Stepputat 2008) can also be seen as being present in Tancitaro. Specifically, the entrance of the autodefensas from *Tierra Caliente* under the leadership of Dr Mireles – which involved firefights with LCT (Univision Noticias 2013) – and the subsequent armed uprising and expulsion of the cartel from the municipality, can be seen as just such a foundational act. This is evidenced by the way in which it has been memorialised institutionally and socially with the Day of the Community, as discussed above.

The Day of the Community also incorporates public commemoration services for those who lost their lives during the years under cartel rule, as well as those who fought in the ranks of the *autodefensas*. The blessing of the *casetas* and security personnel – such as CUSEPT and *autodefensa* members – by

the local clergy is an important aspect of the day's events, as touched on previously. Such a religious blessing of the *casetas* in particular, has important symbol meaning, representing the legitimacy that the *autodefensas* have in the eyes of the local Church. This blessing of the symbolic manifestation of local sovereignty cannot be seen as the appropriation of religious registers by sovereignty in the way that Brown (2017) suggests, but rather is demonstrative of how religious institutions such as the local Catholic Church and the Jesuit project are implicated in the construction of local sovereignty. Having examined the way in which autodefensas are implicated in, and helped initiate, the emergence of localised sovereignty, it is now important to understand how this has connected to and influenced ideas and practices of citizenship in the municipality.

Figure 8: The blessing of the autodefensas and casetas on the Day of the Community

Source: José, member of the citizen councils, c.2015.

Sovereignty and citizenship

The *autodefensas*, whilst implicated in the co-production of security within the municipality, have a more ambivalent relationship to the wider state. In one respect they are illegal formations yet there are informal accords with the wider state mediated by the municipal government. It is, therefore, important to interrogate how participation in the *autodefensas* is perceived, as well as its ramifications on state-society relations. Specifically, because citizens are seemingly undertaking tasks which are generally considered to have been central to the State's legitimacy, self-conception, and indeed sovereignty. To do so, ideas of citizenship within the municipality and their interaction with ideas of

security both on an empirical and theoretical level, are important to analyse. And within this, the relationship between sovereignty and citizenship.

The rehabilitation of addicts into the community, the expulsion of undesirable elements, and the labelling of *perdonados*, indicate certain key facets of sovereignty. But this raises the issue of what relationship this concept enjoys with citizenship. For Agamben (1998) the ability to strip away citizenship rights to create 'bare life' is the key aspect of sovereignty. Whilst the *perdonados* are 'othered' to some extent, and kept under vigilance, they cannot be categorised as representing the creation of 'bare life' within the community, as this label hasn't signified their loss of formal political or social rights. Hansen and Stepputat (2005) see citizenship as a correlate of sovereignty, in which sovereignty has been embodied in citizens, at least from a political theory perspective, since the 18th century. In this view:

> "The crucial marks of sovereign power – indivisibility, self-reference, and transcendence – were now embedded in the citizens. Violence was now fetishized as a weapon of reason and preservation of freedom of the citizens vis-à-vis the threats from outsiders, from internal enemies, and from those not yet fit for citizenship – slaves and colonial subjects." (Blom Hansen & Stepputat 2005: 8).

However, they see this as more complicated in colonial states where territorial control was more uneven and patchy, and often outsourced to local leaders, or chiefs (Ibid: 26). Thus, historically there was an emphasis on the production of subjects rather than citizens in the colonial world (Ibid: 26). In the postcolonial world however, attempts have been made to produce national citizenries, though in Latin America the fragmented nature of sovereignty has continued, with various informal sovereign bodies challenging the state or attempting to produce legitimacy and 'perform' the sovereignty of the state (Ibid: 30-32).

Nevertheless, modern states not only continue to try to produce responsible citizens amenable to rational self-governance, but also attempt to make citizens the bearers of sovereignty – i.e. the "sovereignty of the state is the sum of, and expression of, the aggregate of each individual citizen" (Ibid: 36). Yet violence and its performance remain central to modern sovereignty, which is still an exclusive project, and one which depends on the production of the poor, marginalised, ethnic others or outsiders "who are not yet ready to become citizens or included in the true political-cultural community" (Ibid: 36). Despite its efforts, the state is seen as only one of several competing "centers (sic) of sovereignty that dispense violence as well as justice with impunity – criminal gangs, political movements or quasi-autonomous police forces that each try to assert their claims to sovereignty"

(Ibid: 36). The implication of this for citizenship is that whilst its construction may continue to be contingent, exclusive, and intimately tied to sovereignty, it is not necessarily tied to the state. Thus, if other centres of sovereignty exist, then these may also generate their own forms of citizenship which may not correspond necessarily to traditional understandings of state-society relations.

The emphasis around participation, and a concern that people should take part in the *autodefensas*, and more generally in society, is an important theme within the municipality. This reflects the fact that many people in Tancitaro see participation as embodying the idea of citizenship, and given the context, this has a direct relationship with the notion of security. For example, during a *diplomado* session the convener asked attendees what citizenship meant for them, and the Tancitaro residents attending replied: "A responsible person, who is part of society, and participates"; "The feeling of belonging to a place"; "Sharing a similar sense of life" (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 16/07/17). Therefore, the idea of participating and helping within your community, of being a useful part of society, keeping yourself informed of happenings, and falling into line with ideas of social comportment were seen as the key referents of citizenship. This can be conceived as being in line with Stack's 'civil sociality' vision of citizenship (Stack 2012a). Within 'civil sociality', the primary referent for citizenship is not the state, nor a traditional understanding of the rights-responsibilities relationship between state and citizen. These are not absent but are not the principal referent in understandings of what citizenship entails. Residents of Tancitaro often reference ideas which resonate with the concepts of 'civil sociality' and its correlate, 'being in society', as the cornerstones of what constitutes citizenship. For example, one interviewee replied to the question of what it meant to be a citizen as follows:

> "…for me, to be a citizen is to be part of something, but to be part of something real, that is, that you can really identify with, with something that you really represented by, committed or happy to be part of. Because if not, that is, I don't conceive of someone as being a citizen when they destroy a tree, when they litter, when they make the street dirty, the river. To me this is what I say, that well, we aren't being citizens, we are being the destroyers of society, of an environment and I think that citizenship has to be more like this, the one that you really feel part of, in all aspects: in the political aspect, in the social aspect, in the religious aspect…So like this, to be a citizens is like this, feel committed to something, with your community, with your people, with the place where you live" (Interview with Antonio, resident of Tancitaro, 2017).

Other interviewees responded that: “To be a citizen, is well, to be a member of the community, it is more like a community” (Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal administration, 2017). Whilst another stated that:

> “…citizens in these terms, a little more scientifically, well for me it is an individual with rights and obligations within a community. If you see it in a personal manner, a citizen is someone who keeps themselves informed within a community of the different ways in which they can assist to help it develop…” (Interview with Margarita, resident of Tancitaro, 2017).

And, finally:

> “…a citizen is a person who is integrated into a society, who has their respective obligations, their rights, necessities, and who has to be collaborating with everyone. I refer to the fact that being part of society isn’t about being individuals who can live by themselves. So here my role as a citizen is to do what it falls to me to do, obviously without, I don’t know, corrupting laws, without violating rights, supporting in what has to be done…I don’t really see it there (in the state), I see it much closer…more here and not elsewhere…more here than outside of here….but of course in reality I’m part of Mexico and an entire world, aren’t I?” (Interview with Gabriela, resident of Tancitaro, 2017).

Thus, whilst the state and ideas of rights and responsibilities are present, the fundamental focus of citizenship is the local community, and specifically participation within and knowledge of this ambit. This reflects Stack’s findings – from fieldwork in Jalisco (bordering Michoacan to the north) and Zamora, Michoacan – that people’s understandings of what it means to be a citizen are encapsulated in concerns around “being in society” and social comportment therein (Stack 2013). This is an important parallel to note with Tancitaro, because the *autodefensas*, and their idea of security and how this is embodied in the community, have significant impacts on the ordering of society and social norms in the municipality.

Stack’s ideas of civil sociality (2012a) and being ‘citizens of towns’ (2003) reflect this idea to some extent by noting that the primary referent for citizenship is not necessarily the state nor the nation-state, but rather there are socially constructed and localised forms of citizenship. But this can be taken further by enriching this idea with the concept of sovereignty to look at how alternative and nested sovereignties are constructed at the local level, and what ideas and practices of citizenship such localised sovereignties generate. Such an outlook does not negate the wider context or ‘higher’ sovereignties, nor citizenship as membership of a larger political community – as Stack says such

memberships can feed into "a broader horizon of moral universalism" (Stack 2018: 206) – but it is nonetheless important to first understand such regimes and ideas in the localised contexts in which they have developed. By engaging with 'ways of life' under sovereignty, as Humphrey (2007) suggests, it is therefore, possible to enrich accounts of sovereignty, and by extension citizenship, through an exploration of the "actualities of relations" (Humphrey 2007: 420) that exist in society. In doing so, and more broadly exploring local sovereignties, it is also important to bear in mind the role of prior experience and previous 'states of imagination' (Nugent 2001; Hansen & Stepputat 2001). This is because such alternative sovereignties come into existence for specific reasons and often in resistance, opposition, and/or interaction with other competing sovereignties.

It is also the case that "Sovereignties are saturated with 'ways of life'" (Humphrey 2007: 435) so emergent sovereignties are not homogenous. Therefore, examining the context and historical milieu from which emergent sovereignties develop is crucial. For example, in Buur's case studies on outsourced sovereignty, it is not possible to understand and account for such an outsourcing without understanding the real and perceived void in crime control in South African townships in the early 1990s (Buur 2008). Thus, only by having an appreciation of the previous 'outsourced' sovereignty of the LCT – in which parts of the Michoacan and Federal state institutions were active participants and others seemingly idle observers – and its local manifestations, can one understand the *autodefensas*. In particular, appreciating how and why the *autodefensas* were central to an emergent form of sovereignty and its articulation through interaction with other societal actors, as well as how they conditioned the context in which ideas and practices of citizenship and community have been constructed.

In the context of Tancitaro, the connection between practices of citizenship and the state is influenced both via the theoretical understanding of the wider state, as well as concrete interactions with state institutions. The local ambit, is perceived as the site in which citizenship is primarily experienced and where there is the possibility of action and effecting change:

> "To be a citizen means you have the right to raise your voice when something happens that shouldn't. And that's what we are doing, well that's what I feel we are doing with this. Many people say that Peña Nieto…well there we can't do anything, but here yes, we can do something. One can stand up to a *regidor* and say 'here you aren't doing things right', even to the (municipal) president just that he – that we have to thank God – sometimes I've said things to him and he listens and he takes meaningful action.

> But to be a citizen is to have your eyes open and to see that things move forward" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

And:

> "…we must see or fight or make people aware that we shouldn't care what happens at state and federal level, we have to see what benefits us here in the municipality, what suits us here in the municipality, because in any case at state level, they don't help us much, look at the road (laughs), and (the) federal level (they don't help us) either. That is, maybe it affects the country, maybe it has affected us here a little, here a little bit, but the most, the most that you feel or that is going to affect us, is what is here" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Whilst there is perceived to be little chance to effect change on a broader scale, beyond the municipal level, the wider state outside is nonetheless seen in many respects as inescapable by local residents. A sentiment that I often heard during my time in Tancitaro, with regards to the wider state in matters of security, was summed up in the following statement: "the government is not responsible in what it should do and so it is not acting democratically. So if the government is not doing its job, we aren't protected. So as citizens we have to organise to achieve things and the government should be made to respect our town and our differences" (Notes from diplomado in municipal administration – 12/08/17). The idea of educating as to the municipality's difference was seen as especially important to how the wider state should be approached.

But local practices of participation in the *autodefensas* to preserve security, underpinned by the civil sociality, also came into conflict with the wider state on various occasions, particularly during attempts to disarm the *autodefensas* and tear down the *casetas*. Here also, the need to resist such disarmament did not take the form of openly challenging the state's sovereignty in an armed sense, as previously discussed, but rather through mobilisation of the population to demonstrate its will and communal unity. Such resistance was not an outright rejection of the state and its sovereignty in favour of outright autonomy. Rather it was the delineation of a boundary within which the community and citizens have a say over fundamental issues that affect them, such as security. It also shows how the *casetas* can be seen as a symbolic and material space for the contestation and negotiation of state authority and state-citizen relations. This was illustrated in a description of one such confrontation between the *autodefensas* (accompanied by the general population) and the Army, whereby a member of the *autodefensas* pointed to the list of the names of disappeared people hanging on the *caseta* (see Figure 9, below) and said that they were refusing to disarm because the last time the Army disarmed them this list of disappeared people and the other dead were the consequence. The idea of

'respecting our difference' is thus a fundamental idea in the community, and demonstrative of the way in which the social construction of community, citizenship, and security also takes place in interaction with the wider perception and practices of the State.

Figure 9: The Caseta at Aguacate Sur

Source: Author's photo, Tancitaro 2017.

Consequently, the construction of a localised sovereignty regime in the municipality is founded upon a conception of citizenship which has the local community, and belonging within this, as its focal point. Participation in the *autodefensas* is one of the key citizen practices in the municipality where (in)security remains a central theme, and in which only those from the local community are able to construct a secure environment. Yet this does not entail a total rejection of the wider state, nor does it represent autonomy to any great extent. In a legal sense, the municipality has no formal autonomy – as do some indigenous communities in Michoacan such as Cheran (see for example Aragón Andrade 2018). Similarly, there is no denial of Mexican or Michoacan identity in the municipality, nor a denial or challenge to the wider state's authority to a large extent. However, where the state is seen to threaten the foundations upon which community security has been constructed, then the sovereignty of the local community to decide on such primordial matters – in which the state has proved ineffective – has to be defended, albeit through repertoires of action which do not threaten the state's higher sovereignty more fundamentally. Or perhaps more accurately, which no longer challenge the state's sovereignty, as the initial comportment and repertoires of the *autodefensas* were underpinned by an outright rejection of much state – local, Michoacan, and even Federal – authority. This, however,

has changed over time as the *autodefensas* have become engaged in the co-production of security with other state and non-state actors at the local level.

'Authoritarian' and 'resistant' citizenship in Tancitaro

Having examined the way in which citizenship interacts with ideas of sovereignty, it is also important to explore the impact that the role of security has had on the lived experience of citizenship within the municipality. Specifically, what the influence of the autodefensas on local society, and the ideas and practices of citizenship they engender, tell us about wider debates on citizenship. On one hand, the influence of the *autodefensas* can in some ways be seen to embody what Pearce (2017) defines as "authoritarian citizenship" – especially as it pertains to the construction of security and social ordering in the municipality. Authoritarian citizens are those "...citizens who would refuse rights to others in the pursuit of 'security'" (Pearce 2017). Such authoritarian citizenship needs to be minimised in order to generate true citizen security (Dammert 2007). The idea of authoritarian citizenship would seem to fit with some of the practices of the *autodefensas* in establishing security in the municipality. Specifically, the expulsion of those associated with the cartel, the stigmatisation and surveillance of the *perdonados*, and social pressure applied (at times) to encourage participation in, and support for, the *autodefensas*. For example, one interviewee stated that:

> "Before they (the *autodefensas*) said: 'it's that the people who don't go to the barricades have to help in some way; with food, blankets etc'. But afterwards it began to become an obligation, as much as you want to give support, no: 'you go and if you don't go we will take you out of your house because you aren't supporting and so we won't support your family'. And you say, I work from this hour to that hour, but I work, well, if I should be at work and I don't go (because I am helping the barricade) then they could sack me and if I don't work then obviously my family can't support itself. And so it started to become this habit. My brother is the only man in the house, we are ___[42] women including my mum, so he was obliged to go (to the barricade)…And they (the autodefensas) said to my brother: 'if you don't go, you know what? We won't support your business or your family'" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

Similarly, the the *casetas* can involve the impingement of rights of free transit, as cars arriving from places in *Tierra Caliente* can be stopped and searched (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017). And as one *autodefensa* member put it, even where such transit is free: "So everyone can enter but it doesn't mean that they can leave. If there is an issue or people see something that they don't like,

[42] Redacted to preserve anonymity of the interviewee.

then they get on the radio and people will turn out" (Interview with Roberto, member of the citizen councils, 2017); and this is before mentioning the suspected role of the *autodefensas* in extra-judicial executions of those who were 'not pardoned'.

On this reading, the *autodefensas* represent a clear case of authoritarian citizenship. However, this is complicated by the way in which some actions and members of the *autodefensas* can also be seen to be examples of the supposed antithesis of 'authoritarian citizenship' which Pearce (2017) characterises as 'resistant citizenship'. Resistant citizens are those "…who continue to denounce the violences to which they, their families and communities are victims and to seek solutions which don't reproduce further violence" (Pearce 2017: 137). Thus, resistant citizenship is "exercised non-violently and with an emphasis on the rule of law rather than punishment and reprisal. It is 'resistant', because it holds firm against the normalising of violent responses to violence and crime" (Ibid: 152). The *autodefensas*, whilst armed and technically illegal, operate in conjunction and cooperation with the municipal authorities and so, in a contradictory sense, do respect the 'rule of law' as it is locally constructed. Similarly, the security generated by the *autodefensas* has guaranteed civil society space in which the Jesuit project operates, whose very aim is to stop the reproduction of violence. In doing so, many of the citizen council members who participate to achieve this end are also *autodefensa* members. One such citizen councillor and *autodefensa* member described his interest in the Jesuit civil society project thus: "Then I saw that there was a plan that looked beyond simply having arms, and this interested me greatly" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Many *diplomado* attendees (discussed in Chapter 3) are also *autodefensa* members and leaders. A key aim of the Jesuit project is to create community organisation which fosters long-term security that goes beyond the merely physical and instrumental security of arms (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016).

An engagement and empirical grounding also helps to overcome the conception of authoritarian and resistant citizenship in terms of binary opposites. The context of Tancitaro demonstrates that such notions can often be in tension with each other and simultaneously manifested in the outlook and practices of individuals and groups of citizens. Similarly, the proportion of one aspect in relation to the other – whilst remaining in tension – can change over time. More authoritarian ideas and practices of citizenship abounded when the *autodefensas* were new and the security situation was seen as extremely precarious, a situation one interviewee (quoted previously) described as a form of 'anarchy', and evidenced in the kinds of practices adopted in this period by the *autodefensas*, such as around entry to the municipality:

> "And when they wanted they would make us get down (from the bus) and you could see lots of soldiers and armed people who would say to you: 'look, we are going to check you so all of you get out your identity cards'. And they asked you: 'where are you from? What are you doing here?'; 'I live here, I'm from here'. And they were people who knew you, that is that…And all of this they asked you in a way that was really rude you could say. Obviously, the words that they could have said: 'oh! Please, could you give me your identity card, where are you from?', but no, and with the gun almost right here (pointed directly at you)" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2017).

But over time, initial tensions subsided, and more resistant forms of citizenship were also able to emerge. Such changes may reflect Arendt's (1970) sentiment that regimes based solely on violence do not tend to last. It is also crucial to take into account the multiplicity of identities at play when exploring authoritarian and resistant citizenship. Doing so, demonstrates not only how resistant/authoritarian tendencies are embodied within individual citizens, but also how these interact within wider social constructions of society and governance. In Tancitaro these seemingly opposed notions become complicated and intertwined, and can be seen to be expressed, and to differing extents embodied, within the *autodefensas* and the Jesuit project. These contrasting ideas of citizenship were temporally influenced with authoritarian citizenship in the immediate aftermath of the *autodefensas*, gradually giving way to practices resonating with resistant citizenship as the cartel was expelled and security consolidated.

Pearce's (2017) concepts are useful insofar as they help to interrogate how citizens and their practices can be conceived of in broad terms, and in demonstrating that citizen-citizen relationships can be as important as state-society relations. There are, however, several issues with these ideas. The overarching goal is to interrogate how violence control can construct political subjectivities and so can strengthen or undermine citizenship (Pearce 2017). Whilst Pearce acknowledges the problem of conceiving of citizenship of rights and responsibilities and a straightforward notion of state-society relations – by engaging with Arias and Goldstein's (2010) work on violent pluralism – there nevertheless remains a normative yardstick, implicitly based on Western democracies, throughout the argument as to what citizenship entails or should be – primarily formal democratic participation. Thus, the state's centrality is made explicit when Pearce says that in Latin America "non-state armed actors (death squads, paramilitary, vigilantes) have often filled the vacuum where the State should act alone and legitimately" (Pearce 2017: 146).

Whilst the state's actions are problematized to some extent – through the idea of perverse state formation[43] (Pearce 2010), and support for authoritarian citizenship – it remains the primary and indeed, only 'higher' referent for citizenship. This is problematic as it fails to appreciate how citizenship is constructed not only in relationship to the state, but also and especially at the local level, how this involves the emergence of competing and nested micro-sovereignties. Thus, whilst the state remains an important actor, it is not the only, nor primary, referent in the construction of citizenship, and is often characterised by diffuseness and fragmentation at the local level. For example, a local teacher described the continuing relevance of the *autodefensas* as authority figures for local children and in general:

> "Martha: …still they say: 'it's that those from the barricades have been advised of it'. If there is some kind of conflict or problem, well then there is nothing for it but to tell those who are at the barricades, so that they are alert or attentive to the situation.
>
> Interviewer: Those from the barricades can be involved in more functions than just vigilance then?
>
> Martha: Hmhm, yes. Because in some moment they were considered an authority or that they can do something right? To solve a conflict" (Interview with Martha, teacher in Tancitaro, 2017).

This continuing authority of the *autodefensas* in the eyes of the population was also confirmed by others (Interview with Roberto, citizen council member, 2017; Interview with Ísaac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). An engagement with sovereignty is crucial in such contexts to explore what such categories as authoritarian/resistant mean in the local experience, and how they are constructed. Such construction has both spatial and temporal element which have to be taken into account, and this can be achieved through an engagement with sovereignty. Thus, the categories of authoritarian/resistant can be enriched and complicated by appreciating the viewpoints of the empirical citizenry, and their wider ideas of legitimacy and governance, rather than remaining as top-down, idealised normative yardsticks – however laudable such normative convictions may be. Therefore, whilst notions of authoritarian/resistant citizenship help in conceiving of the connection between violence, democracy, and citizenship, an engagement with sovereignty allows us to appreciate the wider political subjectivities within which they are constructed and experienced empirically.

[43] Perverse state formation refers to the way in the trajectory of Latin American state formation through democratisation has facilitated the rapid reproduction of violence (Pearce 2010: 286). The 'perverse' referring to the fact that democracy and democratisation should, over time, diminish rather than exacerbate or reproduce violence (Ibid).

Conclusion

Through an exploration of the various actors involved in security provision in the municipality, and of the recent experience of insecurity, this chapter has depicted the key debates around (in)security within Tancitaro. Key to this has been an understanding of (in)security as a socially constructed phenomenon involving physical, psychological, social, economic, and political elements. This allows for an appreciation that (in)security in Tancitaro goes beyond purely physical manifestations and encompasses social relations and community as key factors in the conception of security. Security as an idea and practice is thus seen to incorporate a wide range of factors such as social comportment, the physical environment, and interpersonal relations. The *autodefensas* are seen as fundamental in having constructed security in the municipality, and indeed continue to do so, though now the radio network is seen as more important in this sense than the *casetas*. The continuing importance of the *autodefensas* in such a regard reflects continuing distrust of the state, particularly the Michoacan state and Federal government. However, despite opting out of *Mando Único*, and the discourse of 'making the state respect our difference', the municipality remains implicated in wider networks of security provision and cooperation, and so cannot be considered autonomous. Yet, the way security is co-produced in the municipality – between a range of institutional and non-institutional actors – is novel in many respects. Whilst such co-production is formally achieved via the institutional mechanism of the MSC, it still blurs the line between the supposedly dichotomous relationship between state/non-state. This case also represents an example of co-production manifested 'from below' – by the *autodefensas* – rather than in a traditional, top-down, form implemented by the state.

The wide-ranging notion of security in Tancitaro is important in understanding how security governance, and social relations more broadly, are constructed in the municipality. Thus, the physical environment, social comportment, and economic activity – such as the avocado industry – are often seen through a security lens. Thus, deforestation is seen as a security threat because of potential ties to organised crime and implications for the municipality's future. The consumption of alcohol (in public spaces) and drugs are seen as security issues because of their direct – in the case of drugs – and indirect ties to the cartels. In the case of alcohol, the link is indirect via concerns around social comportments which are seen as connected to the community's experience under cartel rule. The protection of the municipality's economy is also connected to security given the role of the *autodefensas* in not only preventing the cartel's return, but also acting as protection against non-certified avocados from outside the municipality. Thus, the *autodefensas* – whilst not reducible to

economic interest groups, such as the avocado producers – do play a role in safeguarding the economic security of the municipality.

Whilst Tancitaro is constructed as a 'safe space' compared to 'outside' the municipality there is a need for constant vigilance and continued participation, both through the *casetas* and the radio network. This speaks to the fact that security is perceived of as being a process that is in constant construction, rather than an end state that can be reached. As such, Tancitaro offers an interesting illustration of the way in which state-society relations and ideas and practices of citizenship can be conceived of in a context of (in)security. The *autodefensas* can be seen to have played a key role in the construction of the community through social categorisation and expulsion. This coupled with their position as a key security provider, represent how the *autodefensas* have been constitutive of an emergent form of localised sovereignty. This has been underpinned by ideas of citizenship which have local society as their key referent and can be seen as a form of 'civil sociality' (Stack 2012). Thus, the case of Tancitaro helps to show citizenship can be tied to sovereignty but is not necessarily tied to the state. It also demonstrates how the idea of civil sociality can be further enriched via an engagement with the idea of localised sovereignty, the construction of which at the local level helps to generate ideas and practices of citizenship. In terms of wider ideas of citizenship, the *autodefensas* have in some respects manifested forms of authoritarian citizenship in the exercise of security activities – especially when they initially mobilised. But gradually they have also become conducive to, and indeed embody to some degree, the idea of resistant citizenship. This has served to complicate the notion that authoritarian/resistant citizenship are necessarily opposed, as the experience of Tancitaro demonstrates that they can be embodied simultaneously in tension with one another, with the balance between such tendencies changing over time to reflect changing contexts and identities.

The *autodefensas* were central to the initial emergence of localised sovereignty, which over time has come to be constructed in interaction with local institutions and actors including the local municipal government, the citizen councils, the local Church, the Jesuit project, and the JLSV. The idea of Tancitaro's 'difference' from the outside has been symbolically constructed through territorial demarcation in the form of the *casetas*, as well as the memorialisation of the *autodefensas* through the rituals undertaken during the Day of the Community. Whilst the reality of any community makes it hard to talk about '*the* community' in a simplistic sense, there exist powerful narratives that circulate in the municipality which help to construct an inside/outside conception, and share a foundational myth in the unity through socialisation that the *autodefensas* brought (discussed in Chapter 4). Such

narratives are important to the way in which localised sovereignty has been constructed, but it is also important to acknowledge the 'higher' sovereignties in which such a regime is nested.

Whilst the *autodefensas* acknowledge themselves as being illegal, they see themselves as necessary and legitimate in the eyes of the community in a way the state is not. Whilst the municipal state has been recuperated to some extent, especially as there is now oversight in its security provision via the MSC and the co-production of governance it represents – the wider state is seen as untrustworthy and a potential source of insecurity. However, this does not amount to a dismissal of the sovereignty of the wider state – the Michoacan state and Federation – which is often manifested through the presence of the Army and Federal Police in the region, and they are seen as inescapable in many respects. Indeed, through informal accords the wider state is able to perform its sovereignty in the municipality without challenge. But localised sovereignty posits that the wider state should 'respect the difference' of Tancitaro and the way its governance, particularly in respect of security, has been constructed. Thus co-operation with, and acknowledgment of, the wider state is not precluded, but it is the citizens of Tancitaro who should have the final say in matters that concern them, above all in the provision of security.

Figure 10: The caseta at Uringuitiro, Tancitaro – life after the autodefensa rising

Source: José, member of the citizen councils, 2017.

Chapter 3: The Jesuit project for the reconstruction of the social fabric for good living: organisation, citizenship, and autodefensas

Introduction

The sound of exploding *cohetes* (rockets/fireworks) were the first indication that the procession was approaching. A crowd had gathered along the sides of the road leading to the church and now they waited patiently in the blazing sun for the arrival of the Saint. The sound of a band could soon be heard, and the procession came into view heading past the plaza and down the slight hill towards the church gates. It was led by children of around 7-10 years old, all dressed in white t-shirts and holding white pendant flags. Every few steps they would shout "¡*Viva Cristo Rey*!" ("Long Live Christ the King!") in unison – the old battle cry of the *Cristeros* – as the musicians continued to play *banda* music behind them. As the children got closer it was clear that they had slogans written on their flags such as '*Viva Maria*' and '*Viva Cristo Rey*'. Behind the children came four men carrying a statue of Christ on the cross adorned with flowers, and behind them a further four men carried the two-metre-high reliquary of José Sánchez del Río[44]. Made out of wood and festooned with yellow balloons, it depicted the newly canonised child in a painting on the front and back, holding a rosary in one hand and a palm in the other. Bloodied footsteps trailed behind him and across his chest a sash was emblazoned with the words that (legend has it) he uttered to convince his mother to let him join the *Cristero* rebellion: "Nunca ha sido tan facil ganarse el cielo" ("Never before has it been so easy to earn a place in heaven").

Once the members of the parade had filled the church there was no room left inside the church and many people remained outside in the sun listening via loudspeakers to the mass given to celebrate the life of Sánchez del Río. The mass was given by the Bishop of Zamora who was visiting the parish especially for this celebration. He emphasised the role of youth in the Church and said that this was a priority that had been signalled by Pope Francis himself. To this end, young people needed to be engaged with and made to feel part of the church. The bishop then moved on to wider themes, highlighting the fact that nobody accomplished anything by themselves, nor should anyone be made

[44] Born in Sahuayo, Michoacan, in 1913, Sánchez del Río, a devout Catholic, joined the *Cristero* rebellion, which was then raging in western Mexico, in 1926. He was captured by state forces in a battle near Cotija and subsequently transported to Sahuayo. Having refused to renounce the *Cristero* cause or apostatise, the bottoms of his feet were cut off – a typical sentence for captured *Cristeros* – and he was made to walk through the streets of Sahuayo. As he walked, he recited the rosary and proclaimed "I will never give in. Vivo Cristo Rey y Santa Maria de Guadalupe!". Upon reaching Sahuayo's cemetery he was executed. The date was 10th February 1928 and José Sánchez del Río was 14 years old. He was canonised as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church on 16th October 2016.

to feel alone, and therefore, it was essential that people accompany one another. He said that this was particularly relevant given the violence of the "difficult times" that the community had passed through, and there was a continued need for togetherness.

Religion and religious celebrations hold an important place within Tancitaro. This is evidenced not only by the commemoration of exceptional events, such as the celebration of Sánchez del Río's canonization, but in the everyday practices and sayings of its residents. It becomes evident when residents talk about the priest who was especially loved in the communities of his diocese, not only because he founded the Sanctuary of the Virgin of the Rosary in Apo – itself now a site of religious pilgrimage – but because every time he came to say mass in one of the *ranchos* he brought the rain with him that nourished their crops. The religious festivals and saint's days of communities form important reference points for people and are seen to give identity and a sense of togetherness to residents (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016). Masses are well-attended, and the religiosity of people compared to other places is remarked upon by priests posted to the municipality, and the Jesuit missionaries alike. Priests themselves are seen as having a huge amount of influence within their communities. In part, this is due to the fact that this is south-western Mexico, where religious faith and traditions are seen as being particularly strong, even by Mexican standards. But it is also connected to the experience of violence and insecurity in recent time in the municipality, during which the Church was the only institution not seen as corrupted, and God the only authority who could seemingly intercede. In the aftermath of the *autodefensa* rising a Church-promoted project, run by the Jesuits, and aimed at healing the wounds inflicted by the cartels came to the municipality hoping to find fertile ground for its ideas to forge a lasting peace and security in the community.

This chapter will explore the Jesuit project for the reconstruction of social fabric for good living. It will provide an examination of the way in which the project was organised in the municipality and the intellectual origins of its key ideas, specifically the *tejido social* (social fabric) and *buenvivir* (good living). The way in which the project attempted to reconstruct citizenship within the municipality will be explored through the analysis of the work of the citizen councils – which the project helped to set-up and empower – and the *diplomado* (diploma) in municipal administration. How the project's vision conceived of, and interacted with, the ideas and practices of the *autodefensas* will also form an important aspect of the chapter as it helps to demonstrate key facets of the context of the municipality and ideas of (in)security. Overall, it will be argued that the project sought to re-vindicate and remodel citizenship in the municipality as a key part of its vision of reconstructing social fabric. The vision of *buenvivir* was central to these attempts, as was the role of the citizen councils in providing a

mechanism through which the education and ideas provided by the diploma could be put into practice. There were, however, significant limitations to this given the socio-political context of the municipality, which meant that whilst the Jesuit project attempted depoliticised interventions, that were in some sense technocratic, such actions were nonetheless deeply political and were interpreted as such. Furthermore, it will be argued that the *autodefensas* and notions of (in)security were fundamental to the project's vision and the way in which it emerged and continued in the municipality. As such, the *autodefensas* can be seen as the first step in the reconstruction of the social fabric and they continued to allow the space in which the project could develop.

Figure 11: The parade of José Sánchez del Río reaches the Church in Tancitaro

Source: Author's own photo, Tancitaro 2017.

<u>The Jesuit project: emergence and organisation in Tancítaro</u>

The Jesuit project has been in place in Tancítaro since the installation of the 2015-2018 municipal government in early 2016. Padre Jorge Atilano González Candia (known as Padre Atilano) – the Jesuit priest in charge of the project – was the key figure in bringing the project to the municipality. His connection to Tancitaro dates back to 2008, when he had been in charge of fomenting youth groups connected to the Jesuits throughout Mexico, one of which took root in Tancitaro (Interview with Santiago, member of the Jesuit project in Tancitaro, 2017). One of the youths from this group went

on to become involved in politics in the municipality and was engaged in the election negotiations for the unity government (discussed in detail in Chapter 4) that followed the *autodefensa* rising (Ibid). As one of those involved in the negotiations described:

> "…there was a moment in which Padre Atilano started to get involved, he already had people here that he knew and it was maybe in the fifth or sixth meeting (that he first came)…In the first meetings, he presented to us his project, someone had said why couldn't he come and present the project, that he was a Jesuit priest who had knowledge around the theme of security, who had participated in Cheran, who had a full knowledge of the situation in Cheran. A little about Colombia, Chile. We said, go head, let's get to know him. On the religious side he already knew three people here, but for us it was more in the area of politics or the experience and profile that he had that were areas that were of interest to Tancitaro, because the truth is we didn't know him. But we started to get to know him and his experience started to interest us greatly, his ideas, and it was he who supported the idea of the unity candidate. So from then on we talked with him and the rest of the colleagues about how we could go about generating the participation of the citizenry" (Interview with Eduardo, senior municipal government member, 2017).

From such involvement – and with the permission of the local church and unity government-elect – stemmed the Jesuit project's presence in the municipality. However, Padre Atilano is not a permanent presence in the municipality, instead this is left to the representatives of the project, known as *profesionistas/misioneros* (professionals/missionaries – the official label is *profesionistas*, but amongst the populace and the team members they are known as *misioneros*). The missionaries are employed by the project – which is part funded by the Jesuit organisation (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016) and the municipal government – and are in charge of running the central project areas. The profile of the missionaries is that they are young and well-educated (i.e. degree level), with specialist training in the area of the project for which they are responsible. The project has a physical base in the municipality – located in the *cabecera* – where the missionaries live, and where the project office is housed, and this is open to the public during their office hours.

The project has five key thematic areas which are: eco-communitarian spirituality (*Espiritualidad eco-comunitaria*), familial reconciliation (*Reconciliación familiar*), education for good living (*Educación para el buen convivir*), communal government (*Gobierno comunitario*), and social solidarity economy (*Economía social y solidaria*) (Ibid: 226-233). Each area comprises concrete organisation and action with and amongst the community, as well as a related education branch covering each of the five key areas of the project through the teaching of *diplomados* (diploma courses) to those interested

community members. The missionaries are each in charge of one of the distinct branches of the project. The diplomas are organised by the members of the Jesuit project but also involve classes by outside academic speakers and experts in the given subject matter. The diplomas are accredited by the ITESO (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Universidad Jesuita de Guadalajara; Western Institute of Technology and Higher Education, a Jesuit university based in Guadalajara) and so represent a formal qualification. There are diplomas connected to four of the project areas (the eco-communitarian spirituality area realises its work in the community via Church groups in the various communities rather than a *diplomado*) and are as follows: familial reconciliation – '*Diplomado en Orientacion Familiar y Reconciliacion*' (Diploma in family orientation and reconciliation); education for good living – '*Diplomado en Educacion para el Buen Convivir*' (Diploma in education for good living); social solidarity economy – '*Diplomado en Alternativas Socio Economicas para el Desarrollo Comunitario'* (Diploma in alternative socio-economic and community development); communal government – *'Diplomado en Administracion Publica Municipal'* (Diploma in municipal public administration).

For the communal government branch of the project the intervention in the community comes in the form of the organisation and support of the programme of citizen councils, whilst the education programme in this area is represented by a diploma course in municipal public administration. In the social and solidarity economy area the involvement within the community comes in the form of helping to start and support community micro-businesses and initiatives that aim to diversify production away from simply avocados grown under neoliberal export business models – i.e. other products such as coffee or products derivative of avocados but produced in an environmentally friendly manner e.g. avocado oil – and improve environmental conditions and consciousness in the municipality. Examples of this include involvement in developing a coffee growing micro-business, reforestation initiatives, and education sessions for avocado producers on organic production methods. The education side of this area underpins these efforts as the diploma is on alternative socio-economic community development.

The eco-communitarian spirituality area runs groups connected to the local church that aim to foster renewed connections within and between the community and the earth, and community connections with the church and religion. The 'eco' prefix reflects two key facets of the project, one is an appreciation of the growing climate change crisis, which is seen as being driven by contemporary capitalism. The second, connected to the first, is an appreciation – informed explicitly by the theologian Leonardo Boff (2014) – that "The Earth and humanity form a single entity" (Boff 2014: 65,

quoted in CIAS (Centro de Investigación y Acción Social por la Paz) 2017a: 13). The idea of humanity's connection with the earth is explicitly informed by "the knowledge of the indigenous communities (*los pueblos originarios*)" (Ibid: 9). This is reflected in the concept that – "The Earth is our mother" – and humanity's need to perceive it as such and not as a commodity, which is seen as achievable via a social conversation (Ibid: 9). Indigenous cosmo-visions are also emphasised in the Jesuit material in this area whose text ends on a *Nahuatl* (an indigenous people in Mexico and Central America) blessing (Ibid: 18). More generally, the project's materials are suffused with indigenous symbols and symbolism. The practical teachings in this area seeks to foster connections between people in the community and to the church and religion.

The education for good living area runs a project called 'assemblies for peace' in a number of the schools in the municipality. This allows the children to discuss issues and come to accords about behaviour and how to treat each other in a forum governed by the children themselves. The focus on schools is seen as central to the promotion of good shared living (*buena convivencia*) particularly because they have territorial structure within neighbourhoods, allow for inter-generational dialogue, and represent a space for training that is recognised by the community (CIAS 2017b). This area also has a *diplomado* which engages with local teachers on how such an education can be imparted, and what methods can promote community values and social cohesion.

The familial reconciliation area provides community outreach programmes and counselling for families with a range of problems, including addiction to drugs and alcohol. Its services are run from the CAFIT (Centro de Atención Familial y Integral; Centre for Familial and Comprehensive Attention) centre which is co-funded and resourced by the Jesuit project and the municipal government, with the building utilised donated by the local Church. The diploma in family orientation and reconciliation aims to support the creation of a 'therapeutic community' (following Tavera Romero's (2016) ideas) in which the community itself comes to self-heal the traumas it has experienced. In doing so, social and familial relations (which include elective relationships and not only blood-relations (CIAS 2017c: 8-9)) fragmented by violence, addictions, and family disputes, can be re-forged. This is seen as helping to create a secure environment. Key action areas in support of this revolve around a need to understand and connect with the collective memory of ancestors, with the mother earth (*madre tierra*), and with God (Ibid: 9).

The Jesuit project and the municipal government

The Jesuit project's relationship with the municipal government and the wider state (Michoacan state and Federal) will be analysed in detail later in the chapter. However, for the moment it is important to describe some of this relationship's basic features. Specifically, to note that the Jesuit project has enjoyed a close relationship with the municipal government and indeed, that the ideas of the Jesuit project have been institutionalised into the key strategies of the municipal government itself. This is evidenced by the fact that the first strategic line of the municipal government in its municipal development plan was precisely the reconstruction of the social fabric (see Figure 12, below). Indeed, the Jesuit project played a key role alongside the municipal government in the elaboration of the development plan, which involved the re-zoning of the municipality into eleven zones for the purposes of the project's citizen councils. Thus, the project and the municipal government enjoyed a close relationship, firstly, in order for the project to set-up in the municipality, and secondly, for the way in which the project's structures act in conjunction with local state apparatus. Indeed, the project receives some municipal funding. The theoretical and practical underpinnings of the project mean that the collaboration of the municipal government is crucial for its implementation, as the participation of the community in their own governance – via the citizen councils – is a fundamental cornerstone of the project. This necessitates the acquiescence of the local state and its members to such a project if citizens are truly to be involved and exercise some form of oversight.

Figure 12: The reconstruction of the social fabric within the municipal development plan

Línea Estratégica 1. Reconstrucción del tejido social.

Objetivo	Estrategia	Línea de acción	Acción Específica
Recuperar la Identidad Municipal, Los Vínculos de cohesión social y mecanismos comunitarios para tomar acuerdos, que posibiliten el Buen Convivir.	Atender las causas culturales y estructurales de la fragmentación del tejido social y realizar alianzas entre los diversos actores del municipio.	Capacitación a los integrantes del Gobiemo Municipal para trabajar en la reconstrucción del tejido social	Implementar talleres de capacitación que permitan profundizar en las maneras que se fragmenta el tejido social y cómo se puede apoyar su reconstrucción.
		Reconciliación familiar.	• Integrar y capacitar un equipo de Terapeutas Familiares. • Elaborar un diagnóstico sobre las problemáticas familiares por zonas. • Implementar la estrategia por zonas para trabajar en la reconciliación familiar en coordinación con otras organizaciones sociales.
		Educación para el buen convivir.	• Integrar y capacitar un equipo de mejoramiento de la convivencia escolar con maestros del municipio. • Elaborar un diagnóstico sobre las problemáticas escolares. • Articular las secundarias y preparatorias para la implementación de esta acción específica .
		Economía social y solidaria.	• Integrar y capacitar a un equipo impulsor de una economía social y solidaria. • Elaborar un diagnóstico de recursos y problemáticas económicas • Elaborar programa de fomento a una economía social y solidaria.
		Fiestas Comunitarias	• Recuperar el sentido de las fiestas. • Capacitación de los encargados de las fiestas. • Promover Festivales del Buen Convivir.

Source: H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a: 35.

Having briefly described the project's key features and given an overview of its place within the municipality, it is now important to understand some of the key ideas within the Jesuit project.

The idea of the *tejido social* and its use in Mexico

The different areas of the project and its scale reflect the fact that at its heart, the project sees the social fabric of the community as extremely deteriorated. The way in which such deterioration has occurred in the municipality is explored in detail within the project's book (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016) – both in theoretical and concrete terms – focusing on the *pueblos* of Apo, Pareo, and Tancitaro (the *cabecera*). Mexico in general is seen within the Jesuit text as having suffered from a long-term deterioration in the social fabric, which is not simply reducible to the violence of the relatively recent emergence of cartels and the 'war' against them by the state. Rather, the commodification of life, as part of the wider project of modernity, is seen as a central underlying factor for the corrosion of the social fabric. Such deterioration can be repaired, according to the methodology of the project, through an engagement with the tenets of *buenvivir*, which can help communities to recuperate their identities and re-establish communal and social links. Thus, the concepts of the social fabric – as a diagnosis and manifestation of the problems affecting Tancítaro – and *buenvivir* – as an outlook and method through which such damage can be reversed – are central to the project, and so it is important to examine their provenance and deployment within the project in detail.

Much existing literature treats the idea of the *tejido social* (social fabric) as self-evident. The *tejido social* can be weak or strong, fragmented or in the process of reconstruction, without the concept requiring any further unpacking. Therefore, many works employ the idea frequently, but its definition is only revealed indirectly and often implicitly. In the case of Beristain and Dona (1999), who wrote an influential work on the reconstruction of social fabric – based largely on work conducted in Colombia – the social fabric can be seen primarily as the ties that bind families, neighbours, and communities together. As they are psychologists, much of the book focuses on the ways in which psychosocial networks of support can be established in a co-operative manner – between humanitarian and other 'outside' actors and communities themselves – in order to deal with the individual and collective trauma caused by the violence of armed conflict. Through assistance and collaboration, the social fabric, degraded by the experience of armed conflict, can be reconstructed.

Despite its influence, Beristain and Dona's work does not elaborate its ideas of the social fabric to any great extent, concentrating instead on actions that would foster its development. Thus, defining the concept is left to subsequent academic and civil society works. One such publication comes from the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP; Centre for Popular Investigation and Education)

which is a Jesuit-led organisation founded in Colombia in the 1970s, dedicated to the creation of a more just and equal society through the promotion of sustainable human development. CINEP has been involved in the promotion of peace in Colombia, often through working with the communities most affected by the country's decades of armed conflict. One such project, involved the education and accompaniment of a civil society project which had the goal of transforming and reconstructing social fabric in eastern Antioquia, a region long afflicted by the Colombian armed conflict (Villa Gómez 2007). In the document compiled as a record of the project and its evaluation, the social fabric is defined as follows:

> "The social fabric is understood as the interaction of the network of relationships and everyday links in specific local and social spaces – such as the in the municipality, the village, the neighbourhood – where its inhabitants, as social actors, contribute to processes of participation, organisation, citizenship, culture, the accumulation of knowledges – individual and collective – that interact in a macro-social environment" (Ibid: 50).

Such a definition offers a far richer and more detailed vision of the social fabric, encompassing not just familial and neighbourhood links, but the networks of social relationships and interactions at a municipal level. In this vision, the recuperation of the individual following their experience of violence and/or loss, is central both for the individual, and the collective, insofar as such a rehabilitated individual is able to reintegrate and contribute socially (Ibid). Such reintegration allows participation in the social life of their community and thus they contribute to the reconstruction of social fabric through interactions with people which foster ties, interpersonal trust and generates further participation. This vision of the social fabric as a kind of glue that holds families, neighbourhoods and communities together through interaction and social relationships, is one which is shared – largely implicitly – in a lot of the academic literature on the *tejido social*.

Much of the literature has focused on Colombia – possibly because of the country's problems of violence and ongoing conflict – and specifically, on how the social fabric is reconstituted in the wake of the impacts of the armed conflict, such as mass displacement, deaths and disappearances, and the violent social control exercised by the guerrillas or paramilitaries. Thus, Villa Gomez and Insuasty Rodriguez (2016) have explored whether social fabric is best restored 'from below' – by the community itself – or 'from above' – by the Colombian state through its programme of reparations. They argue that a genuine reconstruction of social fabric has to be led by the community itself – often in resistance to state programmes, which, whilst utilising the language of citizen participation, often

lead to a dependency on assistance and an individual focus that is detrimental to the social fabric (Villa Gomez & Insuasty Rodriguez 2016: 461). In a similar vein, Morón Campos, Tezón, Garrido Ochoa, and Cruz Torrado (2017), through a case study of a community forcibly displaced by paramilitaries in northern Colombia, seek to understand the impact of such violence on the community and how it can be rehabilitated. They emphasise the need for broad-based reconstruction of the social fabric as opposed to straightforward material reparations for losses, which they see as negating a wider reconstruction at best, and at worst helping to recreate cycles of violence (Ibid). Meanwhile, Meertens and Stoller (2001) have examined gendered aspects of displacement in Colombia's armed conflict and its impact on people's conception and experience of the social fabric. They argue that it is possible for the displaced to become part of a social fabric in a new context individually or reconstruct social fabric collectively in a new context. But the ability to do so is affected by various factors such as gender roles in communities which affect what experiences and resources can be drawn upon in the new context.

The tools utilised to reconstruct social fabric in the wake of violence is the focus of Henao Fierro, Vergara Vélez, and Ortiz Fierro's (2014) work in eastern Antioquia, Colombia, where the use of communitarian television to such an end was explored. Interestingly, as a result of television's status as a mass media outlet, the authors see such efforts as located in a wider context of a national social fabric, in which television plays a role socially and culturally. This conception of a national social fabric is distinct from many other of the more localised ideas of the social fabric which focus on everyday physical interactions. Zuluaga Nieto (1996) also deploys the idea of the national social fabric to claim that it is "profoundly decomposed" in Colombia, largely due to the state's position as the object and source of corruption (Ibid: 153). This is particularly the case as the state operates in a context of – and generates – endemic and multiform violence that deteriorates the social fabric further (Ibid). An important point to note about this literature is the way in which it has been directly related to the experience of violence and its aftermath in the context of civil conflict, specifically the Colombian experience. This means that the notion of the social fabric in the literature is inherently bound up with ideas of security and violence, and how these impact and are experienced by communities, both at a local and national level.

The social fabric as an idea in Mexico

The term *tejido social* has been increasingly deployed by the Mexican state in recent years to help describe the impact of increased violence and insecurity on Mexican society. Thus, whilst it was not absent during President Fox's tenure in office (2000-2006), its use became more frequent during

Felipe Calderon's presidency (2006-2012) in which the term became directly associated with security policies. This is clear within the government's *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2007-2012* (PND; National Development Plan) in which drug trafficking is portrayed as degrading the national social fabric:

> "Drug trafficking generates insecurity and violence, degrades the social fabric, damages people's integrity and puts at risk the physical and mental health of Mexico's most valuable asset: the children and the young" (Presidencia de la República 2007: 58).

Government programmes are therefore, required to recuperate the social fabric, and so generate a favourable security environment and combat drug trafficking:

> "To strengthen the culture of legality and combat drug-trafficking and drug-selling (narcomenudeo) by strengthening the social fabric. The participation of society as a whole is necessary to defend the integrity of the family which is threatened by crime and addictions" (Ibid: 75).

In this context, the culture of legality is seen as the respect for and adherence to the law within society, whereby citizens are obliged to adhere to the law in order to guarantee social co-existence and only exercise their rights in compliance with legal provisions (Ibid: 64-65). To strengthen this culture there is seen as a specific need for educative programmes for citizens to recuperate and strengthen civic values (Ibid: 65). The above quotation demonstrates that the strengthening of the social fabric is placed as a central strategy to combat crime and insecurity, with the participation of society as a whole a fundamental building block of this plan. Consequently, the responsibility for security in Mexico is not only the work of the state and elected government, but also civil society as a whole, and individual families within it. This is reminiscent of Agudo Sanchíz's (2014) argument that responsibility for (in)security has been effectively outsourced – in conceptual terms – to the family in recent years. Such tendencies became more pronounced in government discourse during Calderon's presidency and as the violence in Mexico worsened. Specifically, the *tejido social* is related directly to crime and security in both the *Acuerdo Nacional por la Seguridad, la Justicia, y la Legalidad* (National Accord for Security, Justice, and Legality) of 2008 (Secretaría de Gobernación 2008), and the *Programa para la Seguridad Nacional* 2009-2012 (National Security Programme) (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública 2009). In the National Accord, criminality is portrayed as not only having penetrated and corrupted parts of the state tasked with security, but also: "Crime has damaged the social fabric and has found shelter within families and entire communities" (Secretaria de Gobernacion 2008: 2). Thus, responsibility for the damaged social fabric is placed squarely on society, as families and entire communities have been complicit in this with criminals. Therefore, the Accord sees civil society as having a key task and responsibility in alleviating the situation: "That society legitimately claims rigorous and forceful laws

in the areas of justice and public security to combat crime and, especially, crimes that damage the social fabric like kidnapping" (Ibid: 4). This would seem to signal that the culture of legality requires not only the involvement of society, but also would seem to justify certain forms of violence in the response to crime, whereby security is grounded in violence.

Thus, during the Calderón presidency the social fabric represents a manner of visualising the impact of crime, violence and insecurity on society, as well as a mechanism for combatting such phenomena, the responsibility for which lies with not only the state but society as a whole. Such a vision represents a parallel between the state and the Jesuit project (as will be discussed in a later section), as both see repairing the social fabric as a task for the whole of society, though there are different logics at play in each. The state's emphasis on the role of citizens in the recuperation of the social fabric – both individually and as members of civil society – is clear in the National Accord (2008), which whilst being an accord involving the three levels and branches of government and society as a whole, civil society has a key responsibility in providing vigilance over the Accord and its fulfilment (Ibid: 3, 9). Specifically:

> "The agreement must fundamentally include the citizens, civil society and its most representative organisations, including unions, businesses, and religious organisations" (Secretaría de Gobernación 2008: 2).

Such a tendency to assign key responsibilities to civil society in the combatting of violence and insecurity, fits with neoliberal logics of personal responsibility and the transformation of the state in terms of its responsibilities. Within the state itself, as the likes of Coole (2009) have discussed, what responsibilities remain are pushed towards the local level rather than being retained at Federal or National level. One could argue therefore, that in some senses the *autodefensas* represent an embodiment, and response to, such calls for citizens to take responsibility for, and become involved in, their own security. Though given the nature and scale of the *autodefensas*, and the perceived loss of authority on the part of the state that they are seen to represent, one can perhaps think of such groups as more of an unintended consequence of such narratives.

As a major civil society actor, it is notable that the Catholic Church in Mexico has largely reflected the vision of the social fabric espoused by the Federal state, though it was simultaneously highly critical of the security strategies adopted by the Calderón administration. The Church also sees violence and insecurity as intimately linked to the deterioration of the social fabric, whilst the social fabric is also a key source of security for people:

> "Violence is intimately connected to the vulnerability of the population. As community life deteriorates due to the climate of insecurity provoked by fear, isolation and

> discourages participation in common life, the social fabric that provides security to the members of the community is weakened" (Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano (CEM) 2010: 28).

But the Church has also been highly critical of both the Mexican state's security policies in generating further insecurity and damage to the tejido social (Ibid: 19), and of the coverage of violence and insecurity issues by the telecommunications media (Ibid: 31). This can be seen to mirror the vision of the Jesuit project, but the CEM's vision departs from that of the Jesuit project in that the CEM sees the social fabric as most damaged in cities. The Jesuit diagnostics, mainly based in smaller communities, would seem to challenge, or at least complicate this, as they demonstrate the high level of deterioration in the social fabric in rural municipalities such as Tancitaro.

The connection made in State discourses between the social fabric and the impact of violence and insecurity provoked by organised crime continued in fundamentally the same form under President Enrique Peña Nieto. Indeed, it perhaps became even more prominent, as seen in his inaugural speech: "'I am convinced that crime is not only combatted with force. It is essential that the state undertakes a comprehensive effort to reconstruct the social fabric'" (Enrique Peña Nieto quoted in Excélsior 2012). Such an effort provoked the reorganisation of government departments to give explicit responsibility to the Secretaría de Gobernación (Government Secretariat) for "'policies designed to prevent crime and reconstruct the social fabric of the communities affected by recurrent or generalised crime'" (text of proposed reform, quoted in Melgar 2012). But whilst the discourse has remained essentially the same between administrations, there is also the question about what such attempts to reconstruct the social fabric have meant in concrete terms.

A key example of this was the Federal government's intervention in Michoacán in the wake of the *autodefensa* rising. This intervention took the form of a Comisión para la Seguridad y el Desarrollo Integral de Michoacán (Commission for the Security and Comprehensive Development of Michoacan) under the leadership of a commissioner – Alfredo Castillo Cervantes – which in effect became the *de facto* government of the Michoacan state for a period. The responsibility of the Commission included an explicit duty in relation to the social fabric as part of efforts to re-establish security:

> "Formulate and execute policies, programmes and actions aimed at the prevention of crime, institutional strengthening, the reconstruction of social fabric, the re-establishment of security and comprehensive development in the State of Michoacan, and applied in co-ordination with federal, state and municipal authorities" (Presidencia de la República 2014).

But whilst new funding was supposed to accompany the martial aspects of the intervention (Quesada 2014), this did not represent new funds, but was simply a reiteration of the usual Federal transfers to the Michoacan state level (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017; Quadratin 2014). Therefore, whilst the idea of the social fabric has been important in terms of the public discourse of the State, it is not clear how such discourse has translated into material actions.

The idea of the social fabric has remained important in the discourse of the Michoacan state government – which has been under the PRD governor Silvano Aureoles Conejo since October 2015 – even after the end of the Federal intervention in September 2015 (Presidencia de la República 2015). Thus, at Michoacan state level the social fabric has been likewise seen as evidencing the damage of violence and insecurity, and as a tonic for this. Attempts to construct the social fabric have been seen as the motivating factors behind a disparate range of policies, such as the inauguration of cultural centres in areas affected by high levels of violence, as well as heavily militarised security operations. Specifically, in the recent *Operación Limpieza* (Operation Clean-up) – inaugurated on 23rd July 2018 – the reconstruction of the social fabric was presented as a permanent complement to security operations: "…the Governor stressed that in Michoacan the combatting of crime, as well as the reconstruction of the social fabric, have been permanent processes and Operation Clean-up is a strategy that will continue until criminal cells within the entity have been eradicated" (Gobierno de Michoacán 2018). However, despite the fact that the idea of the reconstruction of social fabric has been associated with these differing policies and actions, it is still seen as something of an empty rhetoric.

Specifically, the development programmes linked to generating security and rebuilding the social fabric have been seen as having little material backing (Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic, 2017) and have been criticised for this. For example, in the *tenencia* of Santa Maria de Guido – a *tenencia* of Morelia, the state capital – the local *jefe de tenencia* expressed the following:

> "'Yesterday in the Security Committee (Mesa de Seguridad), they informed us that they haven't worked in the areas of action (ejes) that look to restore the social fabric, foment the economy and social development. I haven't had success in this sense because there are not clear public policies in these matters, there is no training, there is no orientation and with those who are in charge of these areas, there is no contact nor any real communication'" (Wilberth Rosas Monje, quoted in Envila Fischer 2017).

Thus, the idea of the social fabric has been deployed in a similar manner, and given similar prominence, by both the Michoacan state and the Federal government. Despite its centrality however,

there are doubts, and indeed critiques, around the disconnection between the discourse around the social fabric and how this is actually achieved in material terms.

The Jesuit project, whilst critical of the neoliberal transformation of Mexico over the past 30 years, shares certain visions and assumption with the Mexican state around the social fabric, but for different reasons. A core belief of the Jesuit project is that the recuperation of the social fabric can only be achieved through the involvement of the whole of society, and that the state cannot be expected – nor trusted – to do so alone. Likewise, they locate the response to the deterioration of the social fabric as fundamentally having to come from the local level – individual communities and municipalities. Unlike the state vision however, this does not reflect the logics of neoliberalism but instead the vision of *buenvivir*, that is, the need for the recuperation of identity and trust has to come from personal interaction and accords between community members for it to be legitimate and durable. Thus, whilst the Jesuit project is discursively critical of the neoliberal changes that Mexico has undergone in recent history, through its practices it is not directly contradicting or entirely opposing such tendencies. Indeed, in some ways the project has benefitted from the empowerment of 'the local' – at least in formal legalistic terms if not in resources – under neoliberalism, which has allowed municipal governments the latitude and powers – facilitated also by the lack of interest/concern of the wider state – for such a partnership with civil society projects. Another important point of difference between the Jesuit project and the state – both the Michoacan state and the Federal government – in its approach to the social fabric, has been around the deployment of material resources and concrete steps taken. Whilst state efforts have mainly remained at the discursive level, as discussed, the Jesuit project encompasses a wide-ranging set of projects and initiatives that it has mobilised at the local level. Such efforts mean that there are concrete actions taken to try to rebuild the social fabric that are commensurate with its rhetorical and ideational significance. To understand this, it is important to examine the way in which the ideas of the *tejido social* and *buenvivir* have been utilised in the key text of the Jesuit project.

<u>The key ideas of the Jesuit project to reconstruct the social fabric for good living</u>

The book which describes the Jesuit project's approach and the areas in which it operates in Mexico – Mendoza Zarate and González Candia (2016) – defines the idea of the social fabric as follows:

> "The notion of the social fabric makes reference to the configuration of social and institutional links that favour the cohesion and reproduction of social life. From the three components of community security proposed by González Candia (2014), are defined

> three 'descriptive indicators' that permit the systemisation of information and analysis of the process of transformation and configuration of local contexts: links, identity, and agreements" (Ibid: 29).

Much like in other definitions, reference is made to the cohesion of society and the fact that it is influenced both by society itself and institutions. Unlike in other definitions however, there is an explicit reference to the reproduction of social life, which is often left implicit in other visions of the social fabric. A seemingly novel point is the systemisation of factors which influence and determine the extent and quality of social fabric in local contexts. But a point of similarity is the direct line drawn between 'community security' and the way in which the social fabric can be described and measured via 'descriptive indicators' (Ibid: 29). As such, it directly links the idea of the social fabric with the notion of security, as has been the case in its deployment within Mexico and Colombia previously.

The project systematises the way in which the social fabric can be measured – that is how strong/deteriorated it is – through the identification of key determinants at the communitarian, institutional, and structural levels. These key determinants are – identity, social links and accords – the dimensions of which, and factors that influence these, can be found in the institutions – in the formal and informal sense – found at the local level (Ibid: 30). These are located within an over-arching structural level of determinants of the *tejido social*, which are seen as having an influence on the institutional and communitarian levels and thus on the social fabric (Ibid: 218). The structural determinants are categorised into four key areas: socio-economic, politico-juridical, elective family, and educational-cultural (Ibid: 218). Each of these determinants are seen as embodying an internal tension between modern ideals – such as individual happiness, individual autonomy, reason and progress, the nation-state, and politics as power – and traditional ideals, as embodied by indigenous communities (Ibid: 218). The modern ideals have been seen to attempt to totally eclipse traditional values, and in doing so have robbed communities of their institutive and emancipatory possibilities (Ibid: 218). Thus, under modernity, capitalism has imposed its logic of economic accumulation, the free market, and subordination to the political (Ibid: 218). The impact of contemporary capitalism, therefore, is seen as nothing more or less than the commodification of life (CIAS 2017a: 3). Such a commodification of life is seen as the common root for both the loss of social skills, which previously allowed for harmonious coexistence, as well as global warming (Ibid: 3). Loss of social skills has also caused the problems found in families, schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces (Ibid: 3). Whilst climate change is provoking the extinction of thousands of species, migration, environmental problems, and forced displacement from the land (Ibid: 3). Visualised graphically, the structural determinants of the social fabric are seen to interact with the other levels in the following manner:

Figure 13: Determinants of the tejido social: communitarian, institutional, and structural

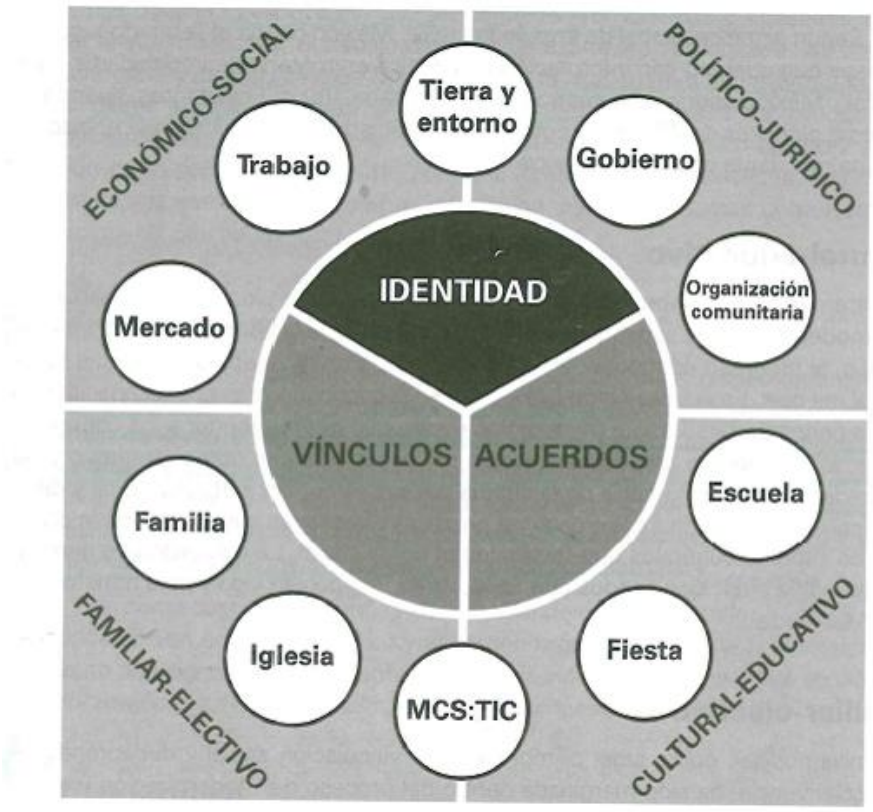


Ilustración 6. Determinantes estructurales del tejido social

Source: Mendoza Zárate &González Candia 2016: 220.

Thus, the Jesuit conception of the social fabric goes beyond the idea of it being 'the glue' that holds society together, and instead presents a detailed and systematised idea of the concept and how it can be measured. Importantly, whilst the idea of security is central to the idea of the social fabric in the Jesuit project, its deterioration is not simply seen as a result of the recent violence and insecurity related to drug-trafficking and responses to organised crime. There is an acknowledgement that the social context of Mexico is "characterised by insecurity, crime, and territorial control by organised crime" (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016: 29). Yet this is then qualified as only being the visible signs of a deeper social fragmentation that affects both the individual and collective (Ibid: 29). Indeed, the fragmentation of the social fabric has been caused by the logics of modernity, and a symptom of a wider crisis in modernity (Ibid: 203-204). This broader crisis of modernity has been developing for decades since the institution of neoliberal policies in Mexico which have promoted individualism, the loss of traditional identity, the atomisation of the nuclear family, and the fracturing

of society. Therefore, the recuperation of 'traditional' values is central to the project, and hence why the project is couched in terms of reconstructing rather than constructing. As such, the project would appear to contain fundamentally conservative ideas, premised on a return to a bygone era where 'traditional values' – as embodied by indigenous communities in the present according to the project's vision – still reigned supreme. The portrayal of indigenous communities as being fundamentally conservative is obviously questionable, and indeed the classification of communities as indigenous, and the characteristics and features which underlie this, have been questioned in recent times (see for example López Caballero & Acevedo-Rodrigo 2018). Similarly, whilst the Catholic Church can be considered to be a generally conservative institution, it is also diverse and has included more radical currents such as liberation theology (see for example Gutiérrez 2001). Indeed, the Jesuit project itself, whilst seemingly conservative in nature, also includes a staunch critique of contemporary capitalism framed in a vision of the commodification of life which recalls Marxist theory on the commodification of labour and nature (see for example Marx 1990; Castree 2008). Therefore, whilst such concepts and institutions may be seen as conservative, they may not be entirely so, and this is important to bear in mind when examining the concrete manifestation of the Jesuit project in Tancitaro.

The multi-faceted deterioration of the social fabric gives rise to the need for an equally comprehensive and wide-ranging response from the Jesuit project perspective. This is envisaged through an engagement with the concept of *buenvivir* (good living), which comes from the Andean region of South America and is based on the cosmo-vision of various indigenous peoples in countries such as Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador. *Buenvivir* is therefore, a key reference point for the Jesuit project, which utilises the concept of *buen convivir*[45] (good living/harmonious co-existence) as the ideological horizon and end goal of the project to reconstruct the social fabric: "…a Programme to Reconstruct the Social Fabric that has as its outlook the political utopia of Good Living" (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016: 223). Therefore, the idea of *buen convivir* is fundamental to the Jesuit project, and so it is important to understand some of the history of this term, and to appreciate its role within the project in Tancitaro.

Despite holding such an important place within the project's outlook, the concept of *buen convivir* is afforded little space within the Jesuit project's book, where it is described as: "…a communitarian process, its concrete manifestation can only by defined by the community itself; it can be described as an experience of connecting with others and with the environment which generates an ethic of care" (Ibid: 224). Thus, whilst it is founded in encounters within the community, a sense of life, and a

[45] In the project *buen convivir* is treated as a synonym for *buen vivir*.

relationship with the world, how these manifest themselves concretely is determined by the community itself through interaction. This cannot be legislated or imposed but has to emerge organically from conversations within and between the community (Ibid: 224). In the context of the project, the term has been understood – through internal *conversatorios* (discussions) as:

> "…'the construction of social, economic, and political conditions that promote the care of life, reinforce the feeling of communal and festive life, and foment care for the earth, nature and the environment' (Ignation Discussion, August 2015)" (Ibid: 224).

Therefore, *buen convivir* can be understood both as the end point – that is what the project ultimately hopes to achieve, which is synonymous with a reconstructed social fabric – and also the over-arching methodological vision of the project. It is portrayed as a 'utopic' vision that gives meaning to actions and organisation within communities, allowing an understanding that everything is connected and that we cannot disconnect from the social dimensions of life (CIAS 2017d: 15). It is seen as an outlook for life that "orientates the practices and meanings of families, schools, governments, spiritualties and businesses" (Ibid: 15). Its relationship with the social fabric is seen as one of enablement:

> "…Good Living becomes an outlook for life that seeks conditions for the experience of harmony between people and their environment that goes beyond the horizon of development, and implies a training and an organisation that goes towards the improvement of common life, with the intention of strengthening a citizen ethic that permits the reconstruction of social fabric" (Ibid: 15).

Therefore, through the vision of *buen convivir* and its accompanying practices, the social fabric can be reconstructed. There is also a mutual dependence and reinforcement between the two as per the perceived need for organisation which implies the existence of some level of social fabric to allow this. There is also no one single definition of what represents *buen convivir*, and instead this must be determined in specific local environments: "…it is the localities themselves who define and signify the specific meaning of Good Living as principle and foundation of its existence" (Ibid: 15). Consequently, whilst *buen convivir* is the over-arching shared vision under – and through which – the social fabric will be reconstructed, its specific manifestations and nuances must be determined by local communities. This is crucial in ensuring that the forms of organisation and moral codes underpinning these have relevance and legitimacy, and so that there are agreed processes to correct behaviours deemed as going against this (Ibid: 15). How this vision fits with already existing understandings of *buenvivir* is important to understand, as are the origins of the concept, which together help to contextualise its use by the Jesuit project.

In an influential definition of *buenvivir*, Hidalgo-Capitan and Cubillo-Guevara (2015) state that it is fundamentally a trinity: "living in harmony with oneself (identity), with society (equity) and with nature (sustainability)" (Hidalgo-Capitan & Cubillo-Guevara 2015: 24). However, they also note that there are three broad types of good living perspectives theorised in Latin America, specifically, 'indigenist/pachamamist', 'socialist and statist', and 'ecologist and post-developmentalist' (Ibid: 23). Each has common elements but are differentiated by their priorities. The indigenist version prioritises identity; the socialist and statist – equity; and the ecologist and post-developmentalist prioritises sustainability (Ibid: 25). There are also synthesised versions that combine different aspects of the three main variants. In recent years in Latin America the idea of *buenvivir* has become increasingly influential, especially in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia, where versions of its key tenets have been incorporated into political constitutions. These examples can be seen as the 'socialist and statist' forms of *buenvivir* which correspond to these countries' (notionally) socialist governments (see for example – Bolivia: Boron 2010; Gudynas 2011; Acosta 2013; for Ecuador see: Gudynas 2011; Cortez 2011).

However, 'indigenist/pachamamist' variants of *buenvivir* have also been prominent in these countries since the early 2000s, amidst growing calls from indigenous movements for self-determination and representation (Simbaña 2011; Hidalgo-Capitan & Cubillo-Guevara 2017). Within these, a focus is placed upon identity, which itself is often strongly associated with spiritual elements of *buenvivir*, and the recovery of ancestral (and perceived ancestral) traditions (Hidalgo-Capitan & Cubillo-Guevara 2017; for further details see Huanacuni 2010; Maldonado 2010; Macas 2010; Medina 2011; Bautista 2010). The 'ecologist and post-developmentalist' version of *buenvivir* gained force in the late 2000s due to discontent with modern developmentalism, and the emergence of social movements challenging such development (Hidalgo-Capitan & Cubillo-Guevara 2017: 28-29). A key emphasis of this version of *buenvivir* is on "creating local processes for social participation so that each community can define its own concept of Good Living or good co-existing by making environmental sustainability an indispensable requirement to building the said 'Good (Co)living) (Gudynas and Acosta 2011b)" (Ibid: 29). This promotes the role of civil society and social movements in constructing and implementing ideas of *buenvivir* (Ibid: 29)[46]. The main versions of *buenvivir* and their respective influences have been visualised in the following manner:

[46] Notable contributions in this vein include: Acosta (2010), Gudynas (2009), Svampa (2011), and Quijano (2011).

Figure 14: 'The intellectual wellsprings of Latin American Good Living'

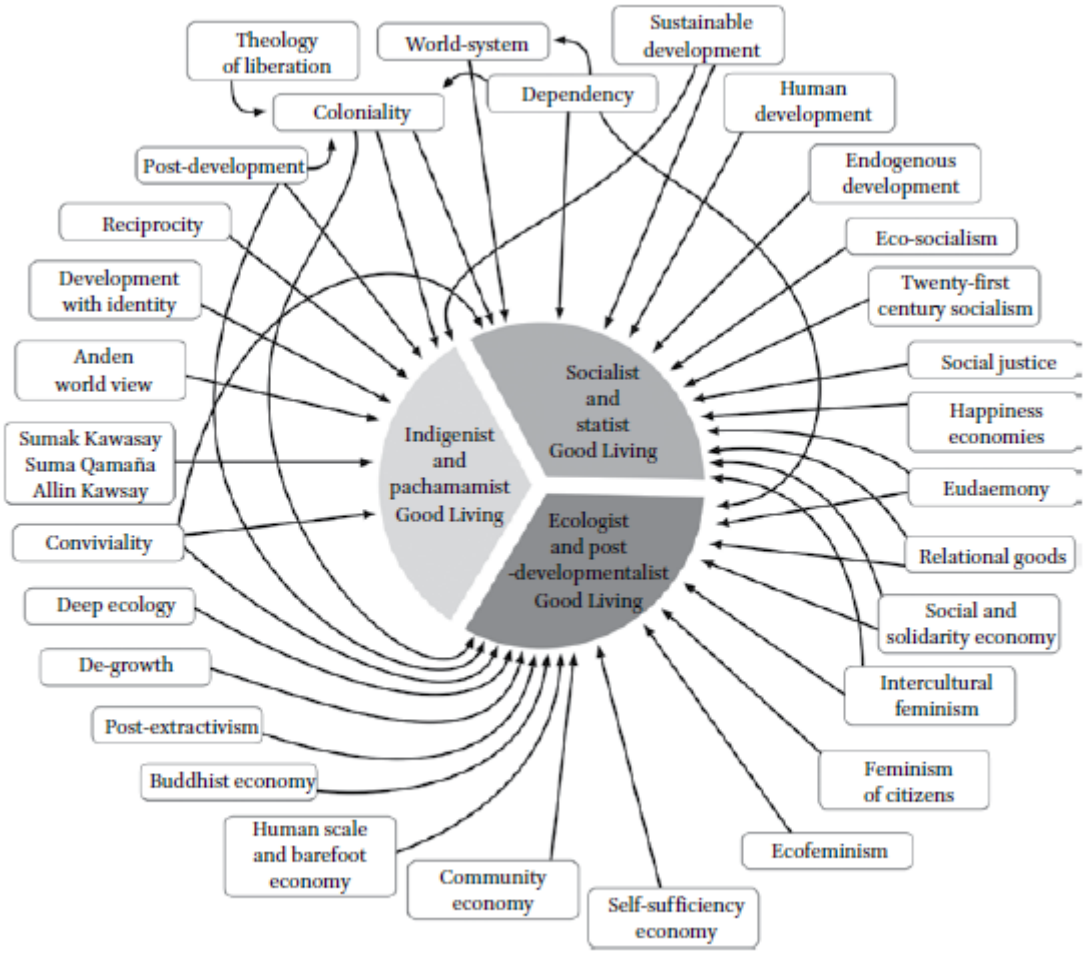


FIGURE 3.2 *The intellectual wellsprings of Latin American Good Living.*

Source: Hidalgo-Capitan & Cubillo-Guevara (2017): 31

Academic and state appropriations of 'indigenist/pachamamist' concepts of *buenvivir*, represented by the 'socialist and statist' and 'ecologist and post-developmentalist' versions, have been subject to critique as a form of colonisation of the idea of *buenvivir* (Altmann 2019). Such critiques argue that the indigenous people who developed such ideas are presented as merely the 'pre-history' of the concepts and in a spiritual rather than a political sense (Ibid: 4). Similarly, whilst the translation of *buenvivir* into different languages (originally Sumak Kawsay in Quechua) retains some of the original ideas such as critiques of capitalism, growth and development, and an emphasis on a harmonious relation with nature, other key concepts are lost, especially its specific conception of community and territory (Ibid: 11). By contrast, Altmann sees *buenvivir* as "a radically alternative project outside political and intellectual power, defined as a radical alternative by people inside the power-structures,

albeit not dominating" and sees its use by – predominantly Western – academics and states as reducing it to "…some type of ecological new deal with some references to academic radicals like Amartya Sen or Martha Nussbaum" and represents "what Ramón Grosfoguel considers epistemic extractivism." (Ibid: 11).

Having examined the key streams of *buenvivir*, the ideas and tendencies underlying them, and key critiques, the Jesuit project's vision of buenvivir can be contextualised. In summary, it represents a synthesised version of *buenvivir* which incorporates elements from each of the three main tendencies, but especially from the indigenist and ecologist trends. The influence of these can be seen in Figure 15 (below), which shows the key areas and influences of the project to reconstruct social fabric. Specifically, reference is made in the Jesuit book to: "The actual use of the notion of Good Living takes up elements of the worldview (cosmovision) of the Quechuan, Aymaran and Guarani peoples (Albó, 2009, 2011)" (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016: 223). However, weight is seemingly given to the Ignatian dialogues (following the teachings of Saint Ignatius de Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits) which were used to develop the understanding and conception of *buen convivir* used in the project (Ibid: 223). This may reflect the fact that whilst the idea of the 'mother earth' is retained in the Jesuit project vision (CIAS 2017a), the role of God as 'the creator and the merciful' is also central in the Jesuit vision (Mendoza Zárate & González Candia 2016: 226-228). Examining the key tenets of the project, however, one can see key parallels with existing notions of *buenvivir* even where they are not explicitly acknowledged. Thus the notion of people being in harmony with the land, the connection between the land and the spiritual realm (Viteri 2002) – and so non-human actors being part of the community (Blaser & de la Cadena 2017: 186) – can be seen to also be present in the Jesuit project's vision of *buenconvivir*. Similarly, whilst Altmann (2019) criticises many translations of *buenvivir* to non-indigenous contexts for having lost the importance of community and territory, this is arguably not the case with the Jesuit conception of *buen convivir*, which explicitly and repeatedly emphasises the centrality of the construction of community and how this is linked explicitly to territoriality (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016: 227-228; CIAS 2017d: 16).

Figure 15: The reconstruction of social fabric

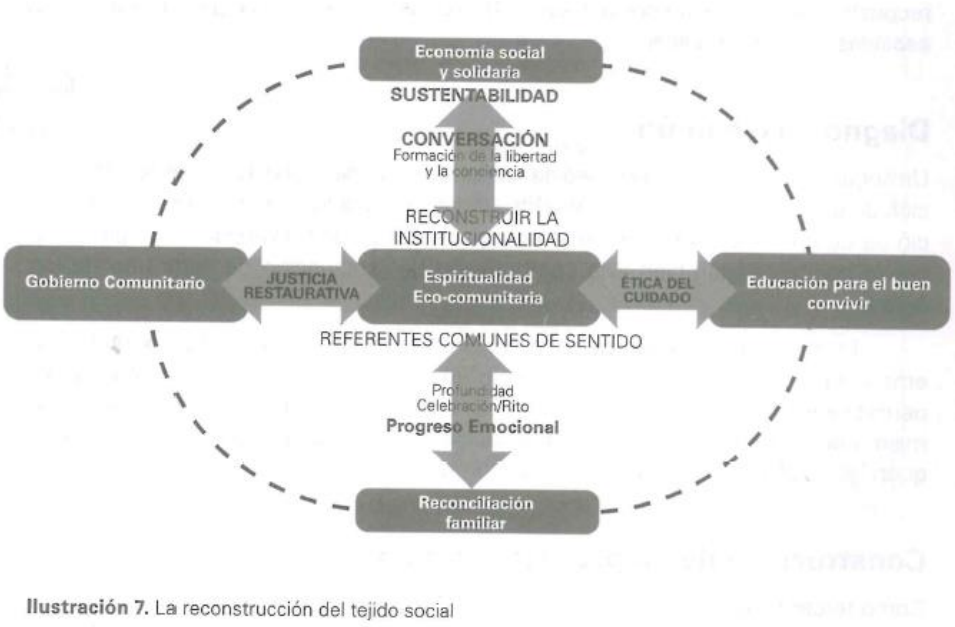


Ilustración 7. La reconstrucción del tejido social

Source: Mendoza Zárate and González Candia (2016): 233.

It is however, also important to bear in mind, as González and Paleta Pérez (2019) point out, that the idea of *buenvivir* at play in the Jesuit project in Tancítaro is contingent and dependent on how the community decides to interpret its tenets. In doing so they emphasise that the project in Tancitaro subscribes to the concept of Gudynas (2011) insofar as it is a non-essentialist and live form of *buenvivir* (González & Paleta Pérez 2019). The implication of this is that: "…the citizenry's commitment to Good Living in Tancitaro can't be understood without taking into account other circumstances (that go beyond those that question the conventional model of economic development) and other actors (that go beyond indigenous peoples)" (Ibid: 2). Therefore, a large range of influences and actors, and the contexts in which they interact need to be taken into account when understanding and evaluating the Jesuit project in Tancitaro. So, whilst the wellsprings and tenets of *buenvivir* are important influences on the project's vision and methodology, the contingent and interactive nature of its vision of *buenvivir* also means that it is not reducible to these philosophical and methodological sources. Therefore, the role of *buenvivir* and the project more generally, is best treated as a socially constructed phenomenon which is informed by and takes place within a specific socio-cultural and historically contingent ambit, in which local and global influences play important roles.

There remains, however, a question-mark over the extent to which the notion of *buen convivir* in the Jesuit project conforms to the idea of *buenvivir* as "an element of political struggle" which establishes rules "for an autonomous life without the state" and thus can be seen as an "'axis of a real self-

determination' (Viteri 2003: 84)" against state power and the dictates of the market economy (Altmann 2019: 9). As such, *buenvivir* can be considered as defining demands "like territorial autonomy, protection through self-governed zones in the indigenous territories, and connection of identity and territory" that "go beyond radical otherness" (Ibid: 10). Certainly the conception of *buen convivir* as a "political utopia" (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016: 223) whose form is constructed through the interaction of citizens at the local level and the accords that result from this, would seem to confirm the political nature of the idea and would not seem to prohibit its deployment as the basis for autonomy. But neither does it advocate this explicitly, and its vision of requiring "institutionalisation from above", as a necessary complement to "moral consensus from below" (CIAS 2017d: 15), would hint at the requirement for a certain degree of relationship with the state. Therefore, whilst there are concrete proposals and methodologies within the Jesuit project's vision of *buen convivir* that are clearly identifiable and can be traced to certain tendencies within existing literature on *buenvivir*, there are also areas of ambiguity that are open to interpretation and construction within local ambits. As such it is important to examine the manifestation of the project itself within the context of Tancitaro empirically.

The Jesuit project and (in)security

The Jesuit project sees one of the key outcomes of the reconstruction of social fabric as being the creation of a form of communal security that goes beyond arms and is instead found in the organisation and shared identity of the citizens. Therefore, the project's vision of security is important to understand as it informs its interaction with broader ideas and practices of (in)security within the municipality. The project itself has sites in different parts of Mexico, and in particular in areas where violence and insecurity have been high. Specifically, it is currently operating its reconstruction of the social fabric project in: Cheran and Tangancicuaro (Michoacan), Leon and Celaya (Guanajuato), Chilon (Chiapas), Huatusco (Veracruz), Parras (Coahuila), and Chalco (Estado de Mexico). The project aims at addressing underlying issues that cause violence and insecurity, thus helping to bring a degree of social peace. This does not imply the absence of conflict, but rather the acknowledgement that conflicts can be turned into positive outcomes via dialogue – an outlook explicitly influenced by John Paul Lederach's work on 'conflict transformation' (Lederach 2009). The Jesuit in charge of the project, Padre Atilano, has a master's degree in Social Ethics and Human Development from a Chilean university, and his thesis (González Candia 2014a) examines different local public security projects in Latin America – specifically in Chile, Colombia, and Cheran, Mexico – that have aimed at tackling high levels of crime and insecurity in neighbourhoods. Key concepts and their development within the

thesis are important to trace as they have informed the Jesuit project's theoretical and methodological approach embodied in the project's text (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016), and influenced the *diplomado* teachings.

The thesis is self-consciously influenced by the literature on criminology, such as Garland (2005), and Fernández (2013), as well as the theories of community as developed by Putnam (2001) and Torres Carrillo (2013). Garland's portrayal of the neoliberal state is seen as particularly important in describing the recent trajectory of state formation, and specifically the impact that this has had on citizens' views of security. According to Garland the citizenry doubts the state's ability to win the war against crime, and so citizens accept crime as an everyday part of life and blame the state for not providing effective policies to tackle this issue. The criminal is thus portrayed as ungovernable, dangerous, and unrepentant, and thus mass incarceration is seen as the only response. The link between security and governance is made explicit in the work of Virta (2011) and Simon (2007), who see security as a part of the political methodology and practice of governance. Thus, crime becomes a fundamental strategic factor in the exercise of authority. Within such a context however, Atilano sees socially based theories of security as offering alternatives to these policies based on governmental rationality. Specifically, the idea of human development as presented by Angarita Cañas (2013) offers a more systemic vision of how security can be produced via seven human development factors: personal, economic, alimentary, health, environment, community, and political. The working definition of security in the thesis reflects this influence:

> "…security is understood as the construction or defence of minimum social conditions that permit people to develop themselves individually and collectively, depending upon their own interpretation and its realisation within the cultural contexts of each human group. That is to say, it is inscribed through a social and human logic" (González Candia 2014a: 18).

The ideas of security at play here revolve round the idea of social conditions and development that are formulated and defined by their culturally specific contexts. This is reflected in another article by Atilano (González Candia 2014b) in which he analyses the ideas and policies at play in the debates around insecurity in Latin America. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the political, social and economic factors both in the generation of insecurity, as well as the policies aimed at tackling it – specifically the way in which security and arms industries that aim to tackle drug trafficking help replicate violence and insecurity – he also points to the cultural factors at play. Crucially, he sees an over-emphasis on self-determination in today's culture, whereby individualism is causing the

disconnection of people from their environments. Such self-determination, when coupled with the loss of legitimacy of authority, helps ensure that violence becomes the manner in which conflicts are resolved. The social and cultural aspects at play are thus seen as being crucial in the construction of security and, following the analysis of the different community-based projects in Chile, Colombia, and Cheran, this is borne out in the studies key finding, which states that:

> "From the findings obtained, it is demonstrated that the effectiveness of the long-term security strategies depended upon the existence of spaces within neighbourhoods where neighbours can constantly renew trust relationships and expand the culture of care, favouring the de-toxification of memory and emotional progress of people. And through this, the strengthening of community identity in a manner which permits the creation of conditions to repair damage committed to the victim and restore the life of the victimiser" (González Candia 2014a: 7).

Such a conclusion does not dismiss nor discount material factors and policies in the construction of security, but rather emphasises that successfully generating long-term security depends more on social relations, cultural factors, and the forging of collective identities. Perhaps this is unsurprising given the explicit community-based focus of the piece, but it is worth noting as it has been a key influence on the Jesuit project in Tancitaro and its view of security. Another important point is that the long-term focus is not the only temporal reference in the extract, as it also mentions the "de-toxification of memory" (Ibid: 7). Thus, how the past is conceptualised is seen as an important influence on how relations that contribute to security can be built in the present and the future, and so reinforces the temporal construction of notions of security. Another point is how such an outlook chimes more broadly with some of the literature critiquing the idea of community, as discussed previously. The notion of community employed in Atliano's work does not reify or presuppose the existence of a community per se, but rather sees it as emerging as a social construction based on everyday interactions.

The discussion of Atilano's work thus far, reveals a notion of security that goes beyond immediate physical security to encompass ideas of environmental and economic security, which would represent a parallel with contemporary approaches to citizenship security that likewise go beyond the purely physical (see for example Dammert 2007; Carro et al. 2010). Similarly, this would also seem to mirror the wider conceptions of security present in Tancitaro, which encompass the environment and social comportment, such as drinking and drug taking, as discussed in Chapter 2. Such links between physical and public security on the one hand, and economic security on the other, are made both in the core

text of the Jesuit project (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016) but were also elaborated in the *diplomado* teachings. Notably, changes in the centrality of certain crops in the Mexican countryside were used to demonstrate the key changes to the rural economy which brought about changes in the social fabric (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration - 18/06/17). Specifically, the historical change from corn to sugar, represented a move away from traditional agricultural self-reliance to a cash crop economy based on commercial exploitation and exportation. More recently, from the 1980s, the neoliberal changes in the economic model of Mexico provoked a move from sugar to crops such as marijuana and poppy due to the crisis that such change provoked in rural Mexico. In the context of Tancitaro, the change to avocado was portrayed as having provoked the disintegration of the social fabric over time:

> "In the past people were very poor but they had solidarity, but with the entry of economic development with the avocado producers, things changed and it became more about individualism including in relation to the Church, the government, and even within families. From this individualisation and decline of solidarity comes the insecurity and lack of values which allowed organised crime to enter. There is now a need to recuperate identity after all these changes" (Santiago, member of the Jesuit project, Notes from *diplomado* in public administration – 18/06/17).

Indeed, the paradigm of modernity is now seen as being in crisis and the signs of this have been made visible in Tancitaro through division, inconformity, competition, egoism, and an individualism expressed as 'I can do this myself' (Ibid). The visible products of these traits were described as being violence, death and ecological disaster, whilst the invisible impacts were inequality and abuse of power.

Therefore, the Jesuit teachings make a clear and explicit link between physical and public security, and economic security, whereby untamed capitalist accumulation and competition is seen as wrecking devastation via inequality and environmental destruction. The programme to reconstruct the social fabric is a holistic response to such threats, aimed at fostering links and a sense of community and local identity through participation. Doing so allows for the formation of localised forms of meaning and a rediscovery of community togetherness which goes against individualism. The construction of community, via the outlook of *buen convivir* with the aim of reconstructing social fabric, is central to providing security through the accords, organisation and participation of the community. Such notions seek to go beyond the use of arms to generate security, but nonetheless in the context of Tancitaro one can see important parallels with the notions and practices within the *autodefensas*. Specifically, the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro are seen to be a key example of the community coming to an accord

(discussed in Chapter 4), and likewise have necessitated the organisation and participation of the community in a wide-ranging sense. Therefore, whilst the philosophy of the project may not explicitly endorse the *autodefensas* and their methods, particularly the use of arms, it nonetheless can be seen to recreate and legitimate important aspects of the *autodefensas* and the narratives that accompany them.

The rediscovery of notions of community can also help foster economic alternatives to the current neoliberal model, as embodied in the social and solidarity economy area of the project. Such an alternative model seeks to redress the growing inequality and unsustainable destruction of the environment that underlie such a model, which are seen to destroy the social fabric and the environment (CIAS 2017e). In the context of Tancitaro, this area of the project has sought to promote the need to diversify economic production away from simply avocado production for exportation by creating small-scale businesses and co-operatives focusing on other produce. Doing so seeks to address the two of the major security issues provoked by the avocado industry, that of the inequality it generates, and the ecological destruction involved.

As part of the analysis of the wide-ranging conception of security in the Jesuit texts that underpin the project, it is important to look at the role of the family and gender relations within this. Part of this is due to its explanation of the emergence and involvement of people in drug-taking and organised crime, the explanation for which stems from the fracturing of social ties and identities (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016). As discussed previously, such fracturing has been provoked by the nature of modernity, which is seen as leading to the breakdown of the traditional family unit, values systems, and sense of community (Ibid). It is worth noting the role of family breakdown in this, which essentially refers to the fact that economic changes have forced mothers to abandon their traditional role as care-givers and instead go to work. In some ways, this can be seen to mirror Mexican state discourses (discussed in Chapter 2) which have sought to identify the family unit as both a key source of the social issues which have led to such insecurity, but also responsible for rectifying the situation (Agudo Sanchíz 2014). In doing so, the state has been able to shrug off some of its responsibilities in this respect as well as shift debates that have previously been seen as relevant in the public arena, into the private and familial space (Ibid). Thus, whilst not explicitly couched in such terms, there is a certain gendering of security debates and perceptions when one of the key drivers of insecurity is seen to be essentially 'bad mothering' (Ibid).

Whilst the discourse of the Jesuit project is often critical of the state – portraying the state as something that cannot necessarily, nor should be, relied upon – it also recreates and subscribes to state discourses and statist tendencies. This may reflect the broader sense in which the Church has in many ways seen to supplant the state as a key institution in areas afflicted by violence (Ibid). However, despite the central role of the breakdown of the traditional family – and within this the role of the mother – according to the Jesuit vision, there is no specific approach to gender detailed within the project, nor a specific gender-based solution. By implication there seems to be an underlying yet implicit idea that the return of the mother to the family (from employment) could provide the solution to some extent. This seem to be an implicit mirroring of the state's idea – as portrayed by Agudo Sanchíz (2014) – that insecurity is at least in part down to essentially 'bad mothering'. Therefore, whilst the project's key text makes little explicit reference to gender, through its silences, implicit stances, and exhortation to a return to 'traditional values' (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016) it can be seen to have a conservative vision of gender roles. Delineating the development of the Jesuit project's concept and approach to (in)security helps to depict its underlying influences, as well as how its broad appreciation of sources of insecurity helps to explain its holistic approach to the reconstruction of the social fabric. It is, therefore, now important to turn to how such efforts manifested themselves in Tancitaro.

The Jesuit project and the construction of citizenship in Tancitaro

A key aspect of the Jesuit project, both explicitly and implicitly, was the need for participation by the community as citizens, both through interaction with each other, and through engagement with and involvement in the governance of the municipality in conjunction with the local state. Thus, the project was engaged with a form of re-foundation and renewal of ideas and practices of citizenship through which – under the over-arching tenets of *buenvivir* – the social fabric could be reconstructed. Consequently, the role of citizens, in both conceptual and material terms, and through active participation, was fundamental to the project's goal at the level of the municipality and within individual communities.

The Citizen Councils

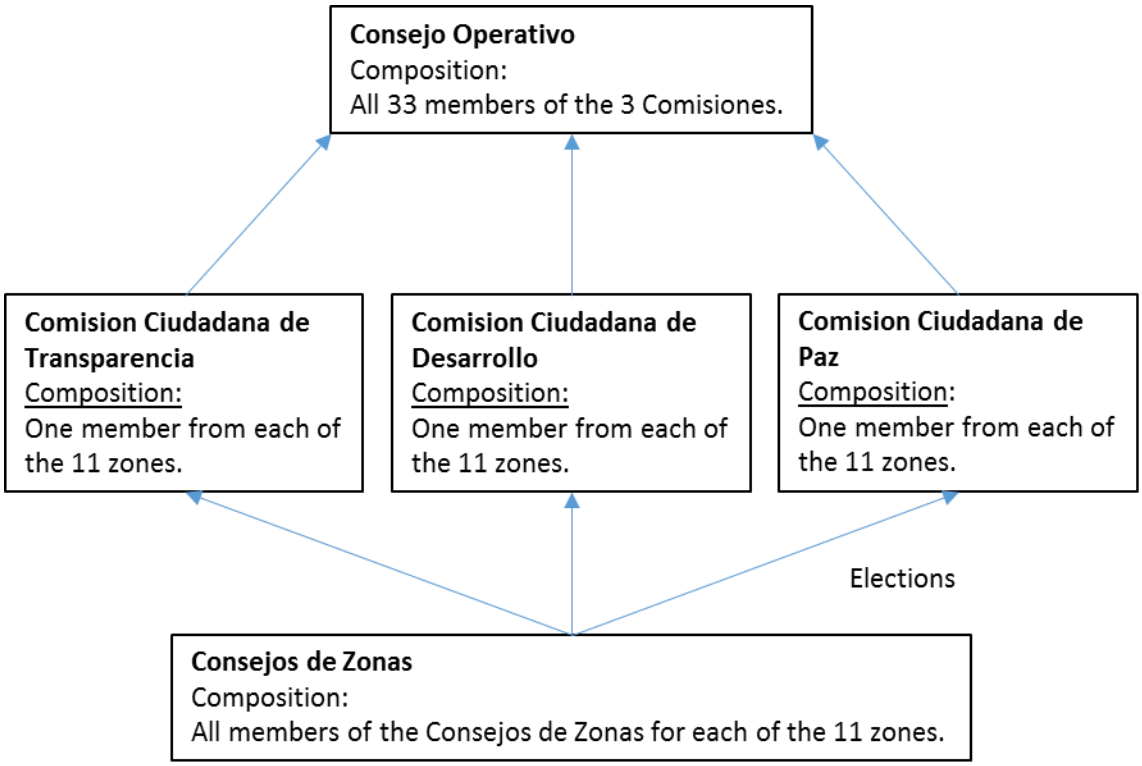
The institution of citizen councils in Tancítaro was the centrepiece of the eco-communitarian government area of the Jesuit project in the municipality. It represented, along with the associated *diplomado*, the key efforts by the Jesuit project in the reconstruction of ideas and practices of

citizenship in Tancitaro. For this reason, the operation of the citizen councils, and the lessons imparted in the *diplomado*, formed important opportunities to gain an understanding of the ideas of citizenship at play, as well as the wider concepts of state-society relations envisaged by the project and how these found expression and were received and interpreted in the local socio-political context. Thus, the methodology employed to investigate this was to attend the *diplomado*, citizen council and other relevant meetings, and interview members of the citizen council, the municipal government, and the community at large about their participation in this, and their general outlooks.

A detailed description of the organisational structure of the citizen councils is included in Chapter 4, in which the role of the citizen council in the negotiations around electoral politics will be discussed. This will not be duplicated here, but rather the way in which citizenship was conceived of and practiced by the *consejo operative* (operative council) – the highest rung of the citizen council project in the municipality – and its constituent functional commissions (the peace, development, and transparency commissions) will be interrogated to understand how the project's ideas were interpreted within the local political and social context. To do so, it is important to look briefly at the composition of the councils to help understand their perspectives and outlook, and to locate them within the political, social and economic context of Tancitaro.

The membership of the citizen councils tended to be comprised of small business owners and professionals (such as teachers), in their 40s, 50s and 60s age-wise, and predominantly male. In socio-economic class terms the councillors were drawn from the working, lower-middle, and middle classes of the municipality. This may reflect the fact that the project offered a chance to change the existing practices around political and social interactions, and so was unlikely to appeal to the elite/upper classes of the municipality who would tend to be satisfied with the status quo (Interview with Ivan, Mexican academic, 2017). Likewise, the unpaid nature of the work undertaken by the citizen councils, and the travel involved (meetings of the *consejo operativo* took place in the *cabecera*) – in a municipality the size of Tancítaro (716km^2 which is nearly half the size of Greater London – 1,569km^2) and which has variable road conditions, and very limited public transport – made it unlikely that the poorest members of the municipality could participate outside of the more local level councils (i.e. outside of the *consejo operativo*). As one of the citizen councillors described: "Well, the problem there in the zone where I am, is that the economic level of people is lower so sometimes people don't make it to the meeting because they don't have the means to get there" (Interview with Maria, citizen council member, 2017).

Figure 16: The structure of the Consejo Operativo and Comisiones



Source: Own elaboration based on information from H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b.

In terms of the division of work between the three functional commissions, the nature of the transparency and development councils favoured those with higher levels of formal education as it involved reading and writing official reports and analysing financial information. This is not a trivial point considering that 12% of the municipality's population over the age of 15 are illiterate, 41% did not complete their primary education, and the average years of schooling is 5.7 year against a Michoacan state average of 7.4 years (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a: 30). Again, this may have been a barrier for the poorer members of the municipality, who are the ones who were more likely to have had to forgo schooling. The same does not go for the peace commission however, as the main qualification for being part of this was having taken part in the barricades/*casetas* in your respective *pueblo/rancho*. The councillors were elected to each commission via an assembly of all of the councillors in the municipality, and depending on their perceived qualities: "That person who has always been committed to the barricades, fulfils (their responsibilities), I think they would make a good member of the peace commission. And someone who is more interested in accountability and making claims of the government, so they are proposed as councillors for the transparency commission" (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

The focus of the commissions on transparency, peace, and development, reflected the key concerns of the citizenry expressed in a municipal assembly – which itself drew on local assemblies realised in the eleven zones of the municipality – held on the 23rd November 2015, to debate the key action areas of the then-elect unity government (2015-2018):

> "From the three primary concerns that citizens raised in different assemblies, which were corruption, security, and comprehensive development, there will be formed three commissions within the Citizen Councils for Good Living: transparency commission, peace commission and the development commission" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a: 13).

The Transparency commission's aim was to provide citizen oversight of the functioning of the municipal administration. This was to prevent corruption regarding the appointment of municipal personnel and the use of municipal funds and resources. This reflects the frequently voiced perception in the municipality – and in Mexico in general – that public administration, is a hotbed of corruption and those involved, politicians and public servants alike, use their positions to enrich themselves, their family, friends and allies. As one member of the commission put it: "The general perception of the state, of the government, is corruption, generally and in the whole of the country, the corruption. Hence the government institution is totally devalued, it is perceived that if you enter into this it is to be a parasite and in some places, to be complicit with organised crime" (Interview with José, citizen council member, 2017). Therefore, the commission had a role in overseeing the recruitment process for municipal staff to ensure a fair and open competition so that the candidate best qualified for the role was appointed:

> "…well when there is a job that has to do with the *ayuntamiento*, well they speak to us in the transparency commission and we go and we see when this will be, they put out a call for applicants for the job, right? Like when they change directors or workers that they put out requests (for applications) like this. Like recently we were in this, when there was a call for applicants for addictions, we had to go to the interviews of the people who were applying and we were there assessing them" (Ibid).

The commission also reviewed the work done by the *regidores* who are responsible for functional areas of the municipal government (e.g. such as education or transport). This formed a key part of the wider evaluation of the *ayuntamiento*: "Within the rules that were written for transparency, was to do an evaluation of the *ayuntamiento* every six months" (Interview with Alejandra, citizen council

member, 2017). Finally, the commission also reviewed the execution of public works to assure that funds were not misappropriated: "…it was the issue to take care of how (local) officials conduct themselves, that takes care that there isn't any corruption, that there isn't stealing, or bribes and that there is an adequate use of resources" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

The Development commission fostered involvement and citizen oversight in the budgeting and distribution of public works in the municipality. Specifically it had responsibility for:

> "Collecting the needs and problems put forward in each locality and zone, to encourage the organisation of each locality and to undertake corresponding actions before the forums of the a*yuntamiento* and other local institutions…" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 13).

Public works occupy an important place in the public imagination around the work of municipal governments, as one interviewee put it: "…a municipal government is measured by its works" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Indeed, people often talk about past municipal governments exclusively in terms of the works that it realised in office, as remarked upon by a Jesuit missionary: "I remember really clearly one comment: 'it's because the PRD they did the road for us'" (Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). Those involved in municipal governments also see it as a key barometer of success: "…we were a good administration, we did a lot of works" (Interview with César, PRD member, 2017). The formation of a development commission was not only due to the importance of public works, however, but also because it is an area seen as often influenced by political party and clientelist considerations (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Politicians heading up the local government have often been perceived to reward the *ranchos* and *pueblos* that voted for them, and/or the communities from which they originate[47]. Public works are also perceived as a major area of potential corruption – via siphoning off of funds, and/or the clientelistic/nepotistic distribution of the project work involved. To address such concerns, the unity government not only committed to the transparency commission, but during its campaign had refused to engage in clientelistic promises around public work

[47] The characterisation of relationships as clientelistic is a complex and debatable phenomenon, as the works of Auyero (2001; 2012) demonstrate. How apparently obvious cases of transactional clientelism, such as attendance at a political rally in exchange for material goods/assistance in future, are interpreted by those involved and witnessing it, is often dependent on the social and political context in which they are based (Auyero 2001). Thus, whilst an observer may perceive it as blatant clientelism, those 'inside' so to speak may contest such a depiction, and instead interpret such an apparent transaction as part of a broader and more complex relationship of affinity and interdependence (Ibid).

distribution: "…our promise was: 'we are not going to promise a public work, but what we will commit to is that we are going to help you to organise yourselves'" (Ibid).

The institution of the peace commission reflected the importance of citizen security concerns, and it had the following role and constitution:

> "**The Citizen Peace Commission** will be made up by representatives of each zone and will be the body for the evaluation and planning of security policies for the municipality. They will be called upon by the municipal president and will form part of the Municipal Security Council under the terms of the applicable regulations" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 16; original emphasis).

The commission was named as 'peace' rather than 'security' because: "...it was decided to not call in security, but rather a more positive word like 'peace' and so it was called the peace commission" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). This may reflect the language of the Jesuit project which consciously focuses on the construction of 'peace' rather than 'security' (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016). The continued peace and maintenance of security remained a key sentiment within the municipality, as evidenced by a member of the peace commission discussing the characteristics of potential candidates for the 2018 municipal elections: "The security of the community has to be the primordial value of the candidates" (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). Therefore, it was seen as fundamental for citizens to be involved in the monitoring and production of security in the municipality, not only via the *autodefensas*, but also via the peace commission.

Whilst the constitution and theory behind the commissions is important to understand, it is also vital to examine how they operated in practice. The transparency commission faced difficulties in attempting to fulfil its functions, and its members expressed frustration as to their ability to effect changes. The plan was for the commission to publish a review of the *ayuntamiento* every six months, but: "In March (2017) if I remember correctly it was a year since we had done the first evaluation and it has been the only one" (Interview with Alejandra, citizen council member, 2017). The recommendations made in this evaluation have yet to be actioned: "So in this (evaluation) some recommendations were made, right? And we were meeting (with members of the municipal government), I think two or three times, until they told us: 'Well, as it is a lot that needs to be corrected, look, why not give us a chance? Wait for us'. So, from then up until now we continue waiting" (Ibid). The lack of willingness of some of the *regidores* to engage and face scrutiny has also been a source of frustration, as they often do not attend meetings and just submit poorly written

reports. Another source of frustration has been the lack of ability to punish those in the *ayuntamiento* seen as not working properly:

> "…in one of the meetings they (members of the commission) said: 'it's that this person…' the *regidor*, right? 'The *regidor* isn't complying, he doesn't do this, he has to leave (his job)'. And so everyone we all raised our hands and that, and they said: 'that can't be done because it is an elected position'. So it goes like this, right? It's like you say 'ah! It's that we need to do…', but no, no you can't: 'they have to sign a resignation letter beforehand, so that if they don't comply…'; 'no you can't do this either'. And this is how it has gone for us, so this part, this part, well now the *regidores* who are there by popular election are going to be there, but there are other people who can be sacked if they aren't there (doing their jobs). And then they say: 'yes, but you have to compensate them and we don't know the cost for the *ayuntamiento*…'" (Interview with Alejandra, citizen council member, 2017).

Therefore, there is frustration with the lack of mechanisms by which the commission can discipline or foster cooperation. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that *ayuntamiento* workers, and *regidores* in particular, are seen as being comparatively well paid in exchange for few working hours:

> "…the law only demands that they have the obligation to go at least every 15 days, to a session of the *Cabildo*…and they have very reduced working hours and this bothers people, right? Because, well, a day labourer working in avocados earns $200 pesos a day and they (the regidores) earn $35,000 pesos (a month) and many of them just go to the session of the *Cabildo* and sit there on their phones, right? Well, for a small municipality, yes $35,000 pesos is a lot of money" (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

Thus, there are few legal obligations on *regidores* to fulfil their functions, and some had other jobs alongside their *ayuntamiento* responsibilities. There was also a sentiment – expressed by citizen councillors and indeed, a member of the municipal government (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017) – that there were many more employees in the *ayuntamiento* than was necessary: "…there are many employees in the *ayuntamiento* that some think don't have a reason to be there. That is, we don't know, but it is how some people feel, but in reality we don't know" (Interview with Alejandra, citizen council member, 2017). An overall frustration with the engagement of some of the *ayuntamiento* officials in respect of the project was voiced by a member of the Jesuit project:

> "…well we counted on the personnel of the *ayuntamiento* being of more help, that they would be more committed with this and participate more. If it had been like this, well the activities, the processes would have functioned better, but it wasn't like this. That is, for lack of capacity or willingness or interest, who knows, it wasn't like this" (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

Despite such difficulties, however, the transparency commission – and the Jesuit project as a whole – has been seen to have had successes:

> "My personal perception is that the municipality is changing in a distinct manner, with everything and with those who are at the top, that is the (municipal) president and *regidores*, they are drawn from some political party and they are working for personal interests and not for the people. However, I think that in general, it is a work, a form of working that is distinct to other municipalities. The very involvement of the Jesuits within the municipal government's structure in Tancitaro means that at least it is less bad, less corrupt. Great value is being placed on the community itself, the communities present what are their priorities and so the *Ayuntamiento* structures its support to the community, and not what it is just thought of in the centre. It is the unity of agreements in the organisation of every community. And so they go giving priority to what it is that all of the people say and not what occurs to a single neighbourhood, or a family, or an influential person. I perceive that this style of doing things that is being used in Tancitaro should be the general style of good government. The people propose their candidates, pick their governors and they propose to the governors what kinds of service the people need, so that the government responds. And I think that that is the work, that is the task that is being carried out here. I don't know what it will be like with the new cycle of government (from 2018), but at the moment it seems to be a very healthy way…"
> (José, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Thus, despite the problems and issues outlined above, there has nonetheless been perceived successes in bringing together the local government and community in issues of governance, to ensure that the *ayuntamiento* is more responsive and takes the needs of the community into account.

The development commission has exercised an important role in overseeing and executing the division of public works throughout the municipality. This has followed the agreed upon methodology laid out in the municipal development plan, whereby the necessities in terms of public works were discussed and put forward via local council meetings in each *rancho* or *pueblo*. These were then

reviewed and prioritised by the zonal level councils (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a: 58). The criteria upon which works were prioritised were as follows:

> "Each Zonal Council reviewed its zonal diagnostic and the problems and needs were weighted (1-10) at the zonal level taking into account the following criterion:
>
> a. Priority is given the basic necessities like water, housing, alimentation and education.
> b. Priority is given to urgent necessities in the community and consideration is given to solidarity with communities that are most in need.
> c. Where there are the most beneficiaries" (Ibid: 58).

By the time of my fieldwork the priority areas had been refined to piped running water, basic sanitation, and electricity. Each community within the municipality was able to choose one public work per year and this was decided via public meetings of the community, subject to the above criteria. This didn't represent the entirety of the public works for the municipality as a whole, but rather the participatory budget element. The idea behind this being that the municipal government puts forward 80% of the funding whilst the community puts up the remaining 20% of the public work cost (Notes from *diplomado* in public administration – 27/08/17).

The development commission had issues and frustrations around its ability to perform its role, and the willingness of the *ayuntamiento* officials to engage with the project, as well as around engaging with the communities:

> "As much as with the people in the communities, with the municipality it also took a lot of work because the administration, the government, well the ideas were very good or they were very good, but as well at the moment of taking office as the government, well many of them carried on in the same manner as before, they were used to do things how they had done before, not do something different" (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

Therefore, accomplishing the goals of fostering community participation and monitoring the work of the *ayuntamiento* in respect of public works has been doubly difficult:

> "…as a councillor in the communities it took a lot of work to motivate (people), but also from the government we don't have, in some cases yes, we do get responses, but it also cost us a lot (of work), the same as with the communities, where they are accustomed to be given (things by the government) or that they do what the government wants. Here (in the *cabecera*) they are used to that too, they (the government) don't give up so many accounts or take us into consideration like that, so for example, the transparency commission, they don't give much to them, they don't bear them in mind much" (Ibid).

Therefore, the existing political practices and decision-making practices around resource distribution – both from the point of view of the community and the *ayuntamiento* members – has been seen as a major difficulty to overcome for the commissions. Nevertheless, there have been perceived successes in terms of the public works being more evenly distributed throughout the municipality, and not simply being used to reward communities for voting for a particular party, or going to the largest communities where most votes are concentrated and works are more obvious. Similarly, there was a sentiment that the work performed by the commission was valuable as there was a need "to be vigilant while the work is being undertaken to make sure that it is done right and that they don't try to take money from it" (*Diplomado* participant, notes from *diplomado* in public administration– 27/08/17). Similarly, a perceived benefit in this area has been that the commissions review how well the work has been executed: "Previously there weren't social audits performed and the government didn't check how well the works turned out" (Ibid). Such reviews were seen as particularly important to check for the siphoning off of resources via the use of cheaper resources or simply not finishing the planned works.

The issue of community decision-making has been particularly fraught in some communities, such as in the *cabecera* where – at the time of fieldwork – no public works had been initiated due to a lack of accord amongst the population (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). Similarly, there were some challenges to the criteria by which public works were prioritised. Both of these issues can be seen in some way to stem from the methodology espoused by the Jesuit project around the way in which citizenship is reimagined. The first issue reflects that central idea that accords have to be reached through dialogue within the community, and that such agreements demonstrate the new found unity of the people (Mendoza Zarate & Gonzalez Candia 2016). But such a requirement for unanimity is in practice difficult to reach where there are competing ideas and tendencies at play. As such, the project can be seen as having something of a problem with how to manage such diversities, a point that has itself been raised as an issue by one of the Jesuit missionaries: "…the approach is that diversity is a problem and it has been up to me to confront this view when we have been discussing things as a group" (Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). This was seen as evidenced by the project not incorporating the other religious groups in the municipality – specifically small groups of Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants:

> "…one time I said to him, to Santiago (member of the Jesuit project), I said: 'listen here, I think that for the meeting you want to organise, there is also a need to talk to a representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses and to a representative of the Protestants'. He said to me: 'no, wait, not yet'. But so when will the answer be yes? And it is something

> that I have been very insistent about, I say, we have to involve the non-Catholic community" (Ibid).

The reluctance to involve another religious group reflects the fact that the project sees religious diversity as having been a source of division and conflict in its diagnostics within Mexico (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016). But the missionary critiqued such an approach because there was a need for the community to:

> "…understand that this is a project that goes beyond a pastoral or parish project, it's a project of the community. And not all of the community is going to accept what comes from the Priest…I see it as being that if it is the Priest or the pastor invites them, it gives recognition to it as their community and with that it gives them (the priest) power, and so they continue wanting to keep this power and this social capital" (Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

And:

> "So where are we sending all of this social capital? Again to the Church…So it doesn't stop being an evangelical project in this way…they don't want to give up their privileges and, to the contrary, they do this change, but their privileges are going to get even stronger, even bigger. So what happens to the people who have no relationship (to the Church)?" (Ibid).

Therefore, whilst unity is a central tenet of the project, it also involves exclusions in its construction of who gets to be involved in the creation of this re-vindicated community. It is also worth noting the view that even within the project itself, there are fears that whilst the project emphasises the community as the focus, in its practice it could lead to the accumulation of social capital in the hands of the Church alone, which could be a source of division and inequality.

The issue around the prioritisation of public works was evident in some citizen council meetings and was expressed as a dissatisfaction with the limited options available – i.e. sanitation, running water and electrification. In one citizen council meeting a male councillor in his 60s or 70s, expressed his dissatisfaction to one of the *ayuntamiento* worker present by saying: "If I ask for a shirt, why am I given trousers?" (Notes from meeting of citizen council – Zone 3 (Agua Zarca) – 14/08/17). His point being that he didn't agree with the fact that they could only select one of the named options when he thought that the community should be able to choose a more visible and impressive public work – "something that calls the attention" (Ibid). In doing so, he questioned why the *ayuntamiento* were conditioning such a decision when it should be up to the people of the *rancho*. Following the meeting

on the journey back to the *cabecera*, the *ayuntamiento* workers voiced frustration that there was an interest in such – to their minds – superficial works when more fundamental and necessary works were required (Ibid). Thus, there was a perceived need on the part of the municipal government workers to constantly talk to the community members to explain and explain again until they came round as, for them, a sewage system was obviously more necessary and urgent a public work than paving the road or putting a roof on the basketball court (Ibid). One may have some sympathy for such a view, but it nonetheless underlines the paternalistic outlook of both the *ayuntamiento*, and to some extent the Jesuit project, towards the inhabitants of the municipality. Thus, citizen participation and decision-making was able to take place to some extent, but always within certain limits defined by the perceived knowledge and outlook of the *ayuntamiento* and the Jesuit project, which in some ways was seen to surpass and have the ultimate say over (supposedly) citizen-led decisions when these clashed with such perceived wisdom. Therefore, at times a tension existed between the idea that citizens should have the final say about their own governance, but with the *ayuntamiento* and Jesuit project exercising a sort of veto over this when it did not correspond to their ideas of what was best for the people of the municipality. This would seem to represent something of a continuity – in terms of paternalism – rather than a break in the way in which citizenship is practiced, at least to a certain extent.

The peace commission of the citizen councils operated on a slightly different basis to the others. Its role was to help to foster peace and security in the municipality, and to do so its central method was its participation in meetings of the MSC. As discussed in Chapter 2, the MSC comprises a number of actors involved in the provision of security within the municipality. The members of the peace commission are citizen councillors, drawn from each of the eleven zones of the municipality, who were participants or leaders of the *autodefensas* in their *ranchos*, and so are seen to have experience in the area of security and something to contribute in this area. The peace commission does not meet separately from the MSC, but rather contributes in this forum which is the main forum for the co-production of security within the municipality, as discussed previously. Thus, they are able to comment and vote on cases or decisions brought before the MSC – such as plans to deal with criminal or anti-social behaviour, the recruitment and vetting of new members of the CUSEPT, and the role that the *casetas* play in policing operations:

> "…yes they (the commission members) have a vote, they have a voice and a vote (in the MSC). So they make recommendations, their vote counts…They can make observations, suggestions, so within this, the citizen councillors of the peace commission have the same

> power as the (municipal) president, as the president of the JLSV, as the *Consejo de Vigilancia* members" (Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

The role of the commission represents the Jesuit project conferring legitimacy onto the *autodefensas*, given that in its selection criteria experience in the *autodefensas* is seen as qualifying these councillors for a key role in the co-production of security governance in the municipality. Thus, whilst the Jesuit project aims to foster security beyond the use of arms – achieved through the reconstruction of the social fabric – it nonetheless incorporates and empowers a commission whose members are drawn from the ranks of the *autodefensas*.

Judging the impact of the peace commission is difficult, as its work cannot be disaggregated from the wider co-production of security embodied in the MSC. However, and as discussed before, the perception that the municipality is safer than the 'outside' neighbouring municipalities, and the fact that they have enjoyed recent years of 'relative peace' indicates that the MSC, and within that the peace commission, has achieved some measure of success. The peace commissioners see their participation in the MSC as key to monitor the activities and performance of the other security providers in the municipality. Thus, the commission embodies the Jesuit project's ideas around the need for citizen participation and the requirement to not allow the government to operate alone or unsupervised. This is seen as having particular benefits according to one of the members of the Peace commission:

> "But all of these efforts are worth it because we are seeing a different way to work, because the politicians always say that the people and the authorities can do great things, but really it is just a discourse that one hears always and it is worn out. But here in Tancitaro, yes, it is happening and it is important. And the relationship with the authorities is close because there is a structure that I think has been difficult but has achieved things" (Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils, 2017).

There was also a perceived connection between the *autodefensas* and the councils in terms of how it makes the municipality different, in a positive sense: "The barricades are what made us different from (insecure) places like Apatzingan and Los Reyes, and now participation is what continues to makes us different as well" (Daniel, notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). In this sense, the peace commission offers continuity and connection between the *autodefensas* and the citizen councils, and it is different from the other commissions as it is able to participate more directly in the municipality's decision-making processes. This reflects the importance of security in the municipality, and both the legacy of the *autodefensa* uprising, and their ongoing presence. Having examined the role of the

citizen council commissions in the Jesuit project, it is important to analyse the ideas and practices of citizenship within the *diplomado* in municipal public administration.

The reconstruction of citizenship through education – the diploma in municipal public administration

The *diplomado* in municipal public administration formed a key part of the communal government area of the Jesuit project. The diploma sessions were held every Saturday morning for four hours in a school classroom in the *cabecera*. The attendees were mainly drawn from the local government – both elected officials and administrative staff – and the citizen councils, though there were also people who attended out of their own interest. Whilst the *diplomado* was open to all, to be accepted onto it a letter of motivations had to be submitted, and there was a qualifying caveat that the person applying to join must be broadly supportive of the aims of the Jesuit project. Thus, on one level there is openness, but on another a reluctance to include those of a more critical perspective, which seemingly further bolsters the idea of the fear of diversity (of affiliation and viewpoints) within the project. The cost of the *diplomado* – $200 pesos per session – was also a barrier to entry for many as was the time commitment involved. As such, the *diplomado* can be seen as somewhat exclusive in the context of Tancitaro:

> "And who can pay $200 pesos to go to classes, when we have a context in which young people leave school after secondary school, and they don't have a custom nor a tradition around investing in their education, because after all education isn't valid for a person from the lower class" (Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project, 2017).

The *diplomado* sessions offered an insight not only into the political and philosophical teachings of the Jesuit project in this area, but also into the relationship and interaction between the members of the *ayuntamiento*, the citizen councillors, and the general citizenry present. This provided a window into the nature of state-society relations in the municipality, notions of the state, and the ideas and practices of citizenship in the local context. It also allowed for a deeper understanding of the Jesuit project's attitudes and teachings, and how this was couched in philosophical but also historical terms in the Mexican context. The teaching itself was either undertaken by the members of the Jesuit project themselves, or subject area specialists from the ranks of academia, civil society organisations, and community organisers. The *diplomado's* curriculum included education on the practical mechanisms of local government in Mexico, the wider tenets of the Jesuit project including its philosophical and historically informed vision, and the implications of this for the construction of the social fabric and community through active citizen participation. Thus, some sessions explicitly dealt with the role and

powers of local government, whilst others focused on the theoretical underpinnings and interpretations of history within the Jesuit project, and other sessions dealt with subjects such as the idea of citizenship, municipal finances and organisation, and the history of political parties in Mexico. The *diplomado* was therefore, an important forum for the impartation of the practical skills of local government, but also allowed the informal socialisation and exchange of views between its attendees – i.e. *ayuntamiento* members, citizen councillors, and the citizenry more generally.

The attendance of *ayuntamiento* members was instructive as it helped demonstrate the attitudes of the political parties to the project. The PRD sent its key members of the municipal government who also were the leaders of the party within the municipality more generally. Whereas the PRI and PAN representatives were drawn more from its middle ranks. This reflects the fact that the leadership of the PRD saw themselves as having been those who had been key to bringing the Jesuit project to the municipality, it being one of their members who had been the key contact with Padre Atilano. Thus, whilst all the unity parties had supported the institutionalisation of the project in the municipality, it was seen as especially important and valuable by the PRD, and perhaps something over whose success they felt a certain responsibility. One PRD leader saw it explicitly as being part of a general shift towards the ordinary people of the municipality having more of a say in the politics and general running of the municipality. This was in resistance to the continued rule of the *caciques* of the municipality who were linked to the PAN and PRI parties.

The fundaments of the Jesuit project, and their impartation through the *diplomado*, help explain why such teachings were received with different reactions across Tancitaro's political spectrum. The emphasis of the project was on the centrality of active and collective citizen participation in order to reconstruct social fabric, via communal security through organisation, and governance based on the interests of the community as a whole. To this end, one diploma session explicitly dealt with different ideas of citizenship and how these contrasted with one another (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 16/07/17). Civil citizenship was seen as being focused upon the individual rights, culture and education, which was seen in contrast to social citizenship, characterised by feelings of responsibility towards society and being part of society as a citizen. The forms of citizenship seen as most conducive to the aims of the project were active and emancipatory citizenship. Active citizenship explicitly pertained to the public sphere – that is, everything outside of private life – and individual citizens were expected to take an interest and participate in this. This was seen as being able to foster an active and participatory political and social climate in the municipality, in line with the project's aims. Emancipatory citizenship was seen as moving away from 'assisted citizenship' (i.e. by the state)

which only focused on the individual, to a model where both individual and community are taken into consideration, solidarity and communal interests are prized. Under this, responsibility for decisions, and the taking of them, is done by the citizenry and not for them by the state. Achieving such a vision was predicated on community organisation via bodies such as collectives, civil society/associations, political parties, and NGOs (Ibid).

Such visions of citizenship were also commensurate with the project's critique of *liderazgo* (individual leadership), that is – dependence on an individual leader to give direction and solve problems (Ibid). By extension, this also can be seen as a critique of *caciquismo*, which can be depicted as fostering exactly this type of reliance on an individual leader/authority figure. The diploma taught that *liderazgos* were still prevalent in Mexican politics and society and acted as a brake on Mexico's development as a nation (Notes from diplomado in public administration – 16/07/17). *Caciquismo* has deep roots in Mexico, where the entire political system constructed by the PRI in the wake of the Mexican Revolution is often seen as relying on circuits of *caciquismo* from the local level upwards, with the President as the central *cacique* (Knight 2005). In Michoacan, *caciquismo* can be seen as an important historical trend providing part of the explanation for the *Cristero* rebellion in the 1920s – as an attempt to preserve *caciquist* power (Butler 2005) – through the governing style of Lázaro Cárdenas whilst governor, then president, and even after his retirement from politics (Veledíaz 2010; Calderón Mólgora 2004, 2005; Mastretta 1990). Such *caciquismo* was often seen to go hand in hand with assisted citizenship, whereby networks of patronage helped to ensure sufficient support for *caciques* whilst the assistencialist state helped to maintain people at a minimum level of subsistence to avoid social rebellion. Such tendencies have been used to explain why Michoacan has never developed the kind of strong social movements that can be seen in southern states of Mexico like Oaxaca and Chiapas (Interview with Jésus, leader of civil society organisation in Mexico City, 2017).

The espousal of an active citizenship coupled with a critique of *liderazgo* and *caciquismo*, could be part of the reason as to why the project was supported by certain political tendencies, whilst being greeted with suspicion by others in the municipality. The leadership of the PRD saw bringing the project to the municipality as one of several victories against those who they saw as the traditional *caciques* of the municipality[48]. This complemented the other successes such as the resistance of many of the *autodefensas* (especially located in the south of the municipality, seen as a bastion of the PRD) to being ruled by the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, and the victory of the anti-*cacique planilla* in the latest

[48] The PRD itself in Michoacan having been born out of the anti-caciquist struggles that had supported neo-cardenismo in the late 1980s (Aitken 1999).

JLSV elections, as discussed in Chapter 1. By way of contrast in the east of the municipality, especially the *pueblo* of Condembaro and its surrounds – where the *Consejo de Vigilancia* hold sway – the citizen councils project did not gain any traction at all, and the Jesuit project only really operated there in areas linked to the Church, religion, and social care but not political organisation. This would seem to indicate that there was resistance to the ideas and methods of citizen participation as espoused by the Jesuit project in these areas.

It is important to note then how the project's teachings and practices were interpreted and received by the different political tendencies within Tancitaro, especially because it styled as having a politically neutral stance, at least in party political terms. Indeed, the history of Mexican political parties was explored in one *diplomado* session to emphasise that they all started off with good intentions, but corrupt tendencies emerged through the way in which they were allowed to operate in Mexico and because of the lack of citizen participation in oversight (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 16/07/17). The answer to this was education through courses such as the *diplomado*, where public officials as well as the citizenry in general could be trained in the practical workings of municipal administration, as well as the ethics and philosophy of participation to ensure adequate engagement in, and vigilance over, the system's functioning. Thus, it represents a manner of doing local politics and municipal administration which aims to transcend party political differences and the current and historical inadequacies of the Mexican political system. Whilst neutral in party political terms, the project's interventions – both via the citizen councils and the *diplomado's* teachings – were deeply political, both in terms restructuring municipal governance, and the way in which the project's teachings were received and interpreted in the political and social context of the municipality. Further evidence of the deeply political nature of the Jesuit project, and how it was interpreted as such, is also visible through its conception and portrayal of the state.

Diplomado attendees tended to regard the state – and particularly the Michoacan state and Federal government – with deep suspicion and scorn, perceiving it as utilising the law for its own corrupt ends: "The law is being used by the government to protect what it is doing, for example its corruption", and "They (the government) make the law in their own favour" (*Diplomado* attendees, Notes from *diplomado* in public administration – 16/07/17). They saw the state as fostering a paternalism that has become deeply ingrained in society and so had fostered dependency: "The state makes laws which reinforces its role as a benefactor and we stay in our homes with our families and we don't get involved" (Ibid). Similarly: "…paternalism was used to solve things and not the citizens, and so citizens don't have the knowledge of the tools that they have to do things" (Ibid). A situation that they saw

the State and media as actively encouraging because: "The state and the media don't want citizen participation" (Ibid). These ideas were also expressed in the teachings of the *diplomado*, especially by members of the Jesuit project, who portrayed the state as keeping people at a minimum through basic programmes, but not fostering true development or participation. They taught that a minimalist idea of democracy – i.e. seeing it as simply voting periodically – had hollowed out institutions, left the government with all the power, and meant that the citizenry did not constitute an effective counterweight. The result of which being that: "'*Papa gobierno*' stays with all the power and this causes the fragmentation of the *tejido social*" (Member of the Jesuit project, Notes from diplomado in public administration – 16/07/17). Therefore, "By seeing democracy as just voting encourages minimalist ideas of democracy which help to foster paternalism that isn't healthy for democracy. We need to participate more and with conscience" (Ibid). How far the critiques of the state by the citizenry – in terms of paternalism and fostering a culture of dependence – were simply a reflection of the Jesuit teaching on this issue, is obviously open to some debate. However, such a belief was also expressed by people in the municipality who did not participate in the citizen councils or the *diplomado*. For example, one representative statement by a resident pointed to government programmes like *Sin Hambre* and *Prospera*[49] as causing people to just stay in their homes watching TV, something that was seen as being bad for people's health in the long-term, and a strategy by the government to keep people quiet. But clearly the Jesuit project could also have had an influence in reinforcing and elaborating such ideas for those in attendance at the *diplomados*.

Discussion of the *autodefensa* uprising was also instructive as to the Jesuit project and attendees' conceptions of the state. The *diplomado* teaching on this topic connected the *autodefensa* mobilisation directly to the failure of the state, emphasising that if that state had done its job properly then the *autodefensas* would not have been necessary (Ibid). Whilst this idea is also present in the municipality – it was notably expressed in similar terms by a local priest (Interview with Padre Martin, member of the local Church, 2017) – many residents take it further, and see the state as not having simply 'failed' in its job, but having been an active (or at least were complicit) part of their experiences under organised crime, as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet there is also a certain lack of knowledge as to the operation of the wider state – i.e. the Michoacan state and Federal government – and how the different levels of government interact and divide responsibilities. For example, during a session on citizenship, a Jesuit team member asked people if they could name the municipal president, the

[49] *Sin Hambre* (Without Hunger) was a government hunger alleviation programme for those living in poverty (see Diario Oficial de la Federación 2014). *Prospera* (Thrive) was a government conditional cash transfer programme (previously known as *Progresa* (Progress) and *Oportunidades* (Opportunities)) to help alleviate poverty. It was ended in 2019 (see CEPAL ONU 2019).

sindico[50], and the *regidores* of the municipal government. All replied in the affirmative, but when it came to their Michoacan state and Federal level representatives nobody knew who they were. Similarly, during a session on local government, an attendee criticised the local government for prioritising the building of a new public security building over a long-awaited hospital (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration 27/08/17). However, the academic leading the session had to explain that the provision of a hospital was not in the remit or responsibilities of the municipal government, but instead its provision pertained to the Michoacan state and Federal levels (Ibid). The Jesuit project's view of the state beyond the municipal level was similar to that of the residents' – discussed in Chapter 2 – whereby it represented an inescapable but somewhat threatening presence. Thus, engagement with the wider state was inevitable and necessary at some point, but only in the future when the project was well established (Interview with Santiago, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). This reflects the project's view that there needs to be strong ideas of local identity which underpin and enable the reconstruction of the social fabric, and this must be accomplished at the local level through interaction, coming to accords, and shared narratives. But it also reinforces the idea of the potential threatening nature of the wider state, whose intervention before such processes have gained traction could threaten to undo attempts at the reconstruction of social fabric.

The *autodefensas* and the reconstruction of the social fabric

Given the role of the *autodefensas* in the context of the municipality – both in terms of their uprising and their continued role in security – it is important to interrogate how they were viewed by the Jesuit project and their involvement more generally in the reconstruction of the social fabric. The Jesuit project's book (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016) discusses the violence and conflicts experienced in three locations within Tancitaro – the *cabecera*, Apo, and Pareo. Whilst the fracturing of social fabric and the generation of conflict in the three communities is seen as being slightly different, in the *cabecera* and Pareo, the *autodefensas* are portrayed by those interviewed for the Jesuits' book as important in socialisation processes and the beginning of a rediscovery of linkages between people in the community. This was also voiced on various occasions during the *diplomado* sessions and also in interviews. For example:

> "This whole bond of brotherhood was created where there were people in the community who did not speak to each other, but they didn't speak because of some kind of conflictual situation, they didn't speak to each other, but when we were there (on the

[50] The *Sindico* is a senior position within municipal governments in Mexico and has the responsibility for overseeing and protecting the interests of municipal interests. Thus, it is a quasi-juridical role which also sees the *Sindico* as an important mediator in disputes within the municipality.

> barricades): 'listen, you are looking after your life and my life, I am looking after your life and my life'. So how are we not going to speak to each other, right? And this is how things became settled, and the same happened at the municipal level, right? So, you are in the PRI or PAN or the PRD or you don't have a party as they say, but we are looking after the same cause. And this created such a strong bond that we started to look at what we could do to make sure that this wasn't disrupted" (Interview with Ángel, member of the autodefensas, 2017).

Therefore, insofar as the *autodefensas* have made a positive impact upon the community in terms of generating social links and peace – which under the terms of the project approach signifies a form of security – it is not simply via arms or radios, but more with regards to generating social cohesion and trust. This can be seen to be commensurate with the ideas – prevalent in the citizen security literature – that (in)security is a socially constructed phenomenon, and that a lack of cohesion and interpersonal trust in a community is often a factor which generates feelings of insecurity, which organised crime groups take advantage of to penetrate communities (Jasso Lopez 2013). Thus, the rediscovery of inter-personal trust and social links that took place as part of the *autodefensa* rising can in some ways be considered the first steps towards the reconstruction of social fabric, by the terms described in the Jesuit project's own book.

However, whilst the idea of the *autodefensas* as having generated this renewal of society in the municipality was a common refrain amongst members of the community, this view of the *autodefensas* is not uniform. This can be seen from the case studies in the Jesuit book, where there are also some negative views around the impact of the *autodefensas* on the municipality. Whilst in Pareo the *autodefensas* are seen in a positive light and are explicitly said to have brought security, in Apo they are perceived with little confidence and are not seen as necessary. This is due in part to those who led the barricades in Apo, who were often not seen as overly trustworthy within the community (Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). In the *cabecera*, whilst the *autodefensas* were seen as positive in the beginning, there have been concerns that they have become places where alcohol and drugs are consumed – something which is associated with organised crime-type behaviours (Mendoza Zárate and González Candia 2016). Another aspect of this was that at some points participation in the *autodefensas* may not have been wholly voluntary by all, which clashes with the idea of unity somewhat, as discussed in Chapter 2 (see also CNDH 2015). Thus, there is a certain ambivalence towards the *autodefensas* and their role in establishing security/peace, as whilst they had an important impact in fostering socialisation through participation they can, and have the

potential to be, sources of further conflict and discord. This is especially the case given that in the long-term, enthusiasm for participation on the *casetas* has dissipated in many places, and thus funding their continued presence can be perceived as an imposition. Instead, long-term peace (security) according to the Jesuit project is accomplished through a cohesive and united community which is achieved via three key factors – identity, links, and agreements. This is based on the idea that the fragmentation of society has been facilitated by an absence of local identities, a weakening of social links, and the loss of the ability to construct social accords (Ibid: 209).

This is complicated by the fact that despite having some problematic aspects, and not being universally perceived as a positive aggrupation, the *autodefensas* represent a key example of the community coming to an accord, and a key signifier around which a reconceptualised idea of local identity is forged. This can be seen by the way in which the *autodefensa* rising is commemorated in the municipality as the 'Day of the Community', as discussed in Chapter 2, in which the Jesuit project – as well as the Jesuit priest – is intimately involved. Whilst the project aims to promote a form of security that goes beyond the use of force as symbolised by the *autodefensas*, they are nonetheless a crucial reference point for the construction of community identity and the narrative of unity. As per the Jesuit project's vision, such narratives are fundamental to the construction of identity and therefore, key to the way in which the citizens of Tancítaro imagine themselves.

The emergence and continued presence of the *autodefensas* can also be seen as fundamental to the arrival of the project in the municipality and its ability to undertake its work. There is a clear link between the *autodefensa* rising and the Jesuit project coming to the municipality, because it was only through the negotiations around the unity government (discussed in Chapter 4) – itself a product of the socialisation on the barricades – that first brought the Jesuit Father to the municipality. Similarly, in a municipality with such avocado riches the continued vigilance of the *autodefensas* is central in preventing the return in force of a cartel. Such an occurrence would likely have serious consequences for the ability of the Jesuit project to operate, particularly given that they work towards reducing drug addiction and the citizen councils are involved in the local government, a key target for organised crime. Therefore, not only were the *autodefensas* key in bringing the Jesuit project to Tancitaro, providing one of the key reference points of identity for the community, and being an example of unity, but they also provide the physical security for the project to operate. Through the composition and institution of the peace commission, discussed previously the Jesuit project can also be seen to have legitimated the presence and experiences of the *autodefensas* within the structures of the citizen councils project. Thus, whilst the project looks beyond the provision of security through the ability to

project physical violence, it is nonetheless intimately linked to this through the ideological and material manifestation of the *autodefensas*. Similarly, both the local Church and the Jesuit project have often emphasised the need for continuing community participation in the *casetas*, and that a relaxation of vigilance could result in the return of the cartel. So whilst in the long-term it is hoped that a security beyond arms can be constructed, the *autodefensas* remain very much a 'necessary evil' (Interviews with Santiago, member of the Jesuit project, 2017; Interview with Padre Martin, member of the local Church, 2017).

Conclusions

The Jesuit project for the reconstruction of the social fabric for good living has played a key role in the post-*autodefensa* uprising context of Tancitaro, exercising an important influence on ideas and practices of citizenship in the municipality. This can be seen both from the practical institution of citizen councils – and the functional commissions in the areas of transparency, peace and development as part of these – but also the impartation of *diplomados* which have disseminated the theoretical ideas and practical methodologies of the social fabric and *buen convivir*. Both the social fabric and *buen convivir* are presented as being in need of constant construction rather than an end result. As such a parallel can be drawn between such notions and the production of security in the municipality, which is likewise in need of constant construction and participation. The concrete proposals for the reconstruction of the social fabric by the Jesuit project have *buen convivir* as their guiding principle and ultimately as their substance. Whilst *buen convivir* draws on the key tenets of *buenvivir*, and its accompanying literature developed in other parts of Latin America, there is an emphasis on the need to construct the precise meaning of *buen convivir* in defined local ambits. Thus, the idea of *buen convivir* has helped to reinforce ideas of localised citizenship that were already present in the municipality, and which can be seen as connected to the *autodefensas* rising.

The practices and structures engendered by the projects in their attempts to reconstruct social fabric similarly emphasise the notion and practices of a localised form of citizenship through participation. This can be seen from the focus on dialogue and coming to accords at the community and municipal level generating social links and reaffirming local identities. Similarly, the formation of councils and the commissions within these foster citizen participation at the community and municipal level, and implicate citizens in the co-production of their own governance at the local level. These practices have thus played into and bolstered ideas of citizenship based on a civil sociality (Stack 2012) outlook, whereby the community and belonging and participation within this are the central referents. Indeed,

the organisation and identity of the community through the principle of *buen convivir*, is what allows the reconstruction of the social fabric, and thus what guarantees long-term security beyond arms.

The project has depended on its institutionalisation at the municipal level – in line with the tenets of *buen convivir* – to allow for citizen participation in the co-production of governance and efforts to reconstruct the social fabric. This institutionalisation from the top complements the mobilisation of citizen participation from below. But the horizon for such action is limited to the local level, and whilst contact with the state beyond the municipal level may be inevitable in the long-term, this can only be envisaged once local identities and accords have been well-established, and the social fabric reconstructed to a large extent. A parallel can be drawn here between the project in this sense and broader feelings about the state as a whole, particularly around the idea of difference at the local level. Thus, the project's teachings also mirror the wider suspicions of the state as being a source of potential threat towards the articulation of local subjectivities.

The project's teachings emphasise that the state does not want real citizen participation and has its own interests when intervening at the local level, which chimes with residents' experiences of State interventions to disarm the *autodefensas*. Therefore, whilst the wider state is as inescapable for the Jesuit project as it was in the imaginations of local people around security concerns – discussed in Chapter 2 – there was a similar emphasis on the legitimacy of, and need for, locally constructed ideas and practices of citizenship and governance. In the words of one resident: "The barricades are what made us different, and now participation is what continues to makes us different as well" (Daniel, Notes from citizen council meeting – citizen council 30/07/17). Therefore, the Jesuit project was seen as contributing to the construction of local difference through the mobilisation of citizen participation which had been started by the *autodefensas*, but now expanded into a wider arena of local political, social and economic organisation.

In a broader sense the *autodefensas* can be seen as having provided the space and security in which the project could operate, and indeed represent the beginning of the reconstruction of social fabric representing as they do an accord at the community level, and through the reestablishment of society that they fostered. Whilst the Jesuit project, like the local church, has something of an ambivalent attitude towards the *autodefensas*, seeing them as a 'necessary evil', it nonetheless is similarly involved in the construction of security in the municipality. Whilst the emphasis is on the construction of a form of peace whereby it is the organisation and the social links within a community rather than the use of weapons that provide security (Mendoza Zarate & González Candia 2016), the teachings

and activities of the Jesuit project nonetheless sought to foster continued participation at the *casetas*, and the peace commission represents a legitimation of the *autodefensas* by the project. Continued vigilance and participation was explicitly called for through the call "to remember your dead" (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 18/06/17) in order to provide motivation and ensure that cartel abuses did not happen again. The emphasis on continued participation within the Jesuit project, and its emphasis on the memory of past insecurity to foster this, can be seen as connecting to important facets and motivating ideas of the *autodefensas*. In this way, but also through the inclusion of *autodefensa* members on the peace commission, the Jesuit project can be seen to be legitimating the *autodefensas* and the role that they play in the municipality. The vision of security at play in the project, however, went beyond that of physical security and included ideas of the environment, and social comportment connected to economic inequality as having an important influence. As such, there was a parallel between this expanded vision of security and the vision present amongst the community, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, where the avocado economy and social comportment were seen as closely related to insecurity.

Figure 17: A cross from the annual missions within Tancitaro[51]

Source: Author's own photo, Tancitaro 2017.

[51] The cross is painted red as a reminder to people of the blood that was split under the rule of the cartel.

More broadly, whilst the Jesuit project seemed conservative in many aspects, for example its emphasis on traditional values, it also included a critique of contemporary capitalism and the impact that this had on the social fabric. Nonetheless, it can be seen to have benefitted from the neoliberal transformation of the state in Mexico, whereby increasingly competencies of the wider state have been pushed to the local level, and indeed the state has transformed in some areas of responsibility and competency. This has opened up space for the articulation of alternative local projects of governance which the Jesuit project seeks to promote. However, the project does not reflect the logics of neoliberalism in its outlook, and indeed goes against its ideas of individuality and the primacy of economic logics. Rather, the horizon of *buen convivir* emphasises the connections between people, between people and their environment, as well as recuperation of social ties and identities, and a need for a shift away from the commodification of life and the environment in economic terms. Thus, the project represents an attempt to reform capitalism to bring it under societal control at the local level. Such a goal has proved challenging in an environment dependent on the transnational avocado trade, where such a project depends to some extent on the goodwill and resources of avocado producers. How the Jesuit project, and their citizen councils, thus related to the political and social life of the municipality and played into existing divisions within Tancitaro is important to analyse, and will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: The government of unity: citizenship, politics, and the Citizen Councils

Introduction

The *ganadería* (cattle hall) is a large meeting space in the middle of Tancitaro located behind the church. On this day it was gradually filling with a few hundred people who had come together to talk about the prospect of the 2018 elections and the position of the citizen councils towards these. As members of the Jesuit team set out chairs for the attendees, Don Fernando approached to welcome me to the gathering, "It's a good turnout, right? We invited the *jefes de tenencia* and the *encargados de orden* from the whole municipality to attend as well as us councillors. We need to show our muscle to the political parties before we enter into negotiations with them". The meeting was soon brought to order by Padre Atilano, who was visiting the municipality specifically to facilitate this meeting. He began by emphasising the need for organisation in the face of the elections which would bring challenges, as well as exhorting participation as the way in which democracy can be achieved. One of the citizen councillors then stood and addressed the gathering. He began by reminding everyone that there could not be division amongst the people of the municipality as "we are all citizens of Tancítaro". He emphasised that the situation they were living through was an extraordinary one, and that the years of peace enjoyed recently could only be continued through the participation of the citizenry.

Such was the mood at one of several meetings that took place between the citizen councils and the *jefes de tenencia/encargados de orden* within the municipality to discuss their stance towards the 2018 municipal elections. The themes discussed and decisions taken in these meetings were key in defining the stance of the councils in their negotiations with the political parties around the conduct of the elections, and the form in which the citizen council project would continue post-elections. They also revealed the deeper-lying features of the political and social life of the municipality. The discussions at such meetings illustrated key ideas and practices of citizenship which had developed during the years of the unity government (2015-2018) and the citizen councils. They speak to important themes of citizenship and how this is conceived of and practiced in an environment characterised by conditions of (in)security at the municipal level.

By examining how the unity government emerged from the experience of the autodefensa movement it is possible to depict some of the key features of the political and social life of the municipality. Similarly, the key narratives and contestations that accompanied such an emergence demonstrate the importance of political party identities within the municipality, their historical roots, as well as how

the unity government was able to overcome these (to a certain extent) thanks to the ideas of (in)security that prevailed following the *autodefensa* rising. Such concerns are key to understanding the institution of citizen councils and their involvement in the co-production of governance in the municipality under the unity government. Likewise, the events building up to the 2018 municipal elections demonstrate how ideas and practices of citizenship, and citizen participation, developed over time and were fundamentally tied to ideas of (in)security. The experiences of the citizen councils, the political parties, and the relationship between them during the unity government are central to understanding the stakes of the 2018 election negotiations, and in appreciating why the unity candidature could not continue into the new administration.

Such trajectories, and the ideas and practices that they demonstrate, help to contribute to contemporary debates on the nature of citizenship in contemporary Latin America, and its construction and experience at the local level. Thus, it will be important to place the experience of Tancitaro within the existing literature on citizenship and citizen participation in order to understand its contribution to furthering our appreciation of such ideas. Specifically, how citizen participation and co-production of governance in contexts of (in)security and violence can be productive of – and interact with – political identities and subjectivities. Whilst these are constructed at the local level and are historically and contextually contingent, they nonetheless contribute to wider discussions of citizenship and political participation in contemporary Mexico, and Latin America more generally.

Emergence of the Unity government

The autodefensas and the perception of unity

The unity government's origins are intimately connected with the arrival of the *autodefensas* from *Tierra Caliente* in November 2013 and the subsequent organisation of Tancitaro's own *autodefensas*. Initially, the entrance of the *autodefensas* provoked fear and confusion:

> "…we didn't know what was happening. So, they entered and they were shouting a lot of things that I can't remember now, but yes it made you afraid because you said, what is happening? Right? And what's more, all these things have already happened; all the businesses shut because they didn't know what was happening, they shut the shops, everything. The town was like a desert…" (Interview with Elena, municipal administration worker, 2017).

Gradually however, and apparently thanks to the intervention of the town's priest – who explained to people that the men were *autodefensas* and should be supported – people began to come out of their houses and started to organise into *autodefensa* groups. In some of the outer-lying communities the arrival of the *autodefensas* and the subsequent confrontations provoked panic and many fled to the *cabecera*. This generated issues, for a number of days, of how to accommodate and feed these internal refugees:

> "The Sower's House, that is here amongst the Parish (buildings), well it gave lodging to the people it could, to those who didn't have anywhere, and so it got full of people: that is, women and children who were the most delicate, right? And the men started to join together in the (*autodefensa*) movement. So it was like this, including people from here, from the *cabecera* they gave lodging to families, whole families because there was this…they were collecting supplies, clothing, shoes, everything that they could and whoever could bring food as well to those people who had nothing, well that is what they did. And it was a good movement as well, because the community became aware of the situation and supported each other a lot" (Ibid).

Such gestures were particularly important given the climate of fear and suspicion which permeated social relations under organised crime, and so marked a watershed moment in the narrative of the community. Thus, the entrance of the *autodefensas* into a context of chronic insecurity, was seen to have provoked a nascent re-emergence of community bonds and inter-personal trust which had been impossible under the cartels.

This phenomenon was also experienced amongst the new *autodefensa* members on the barricades where there was a similar process of socialisation. Participation in the *autodefensa* rising was very much split along gender lines, with men manning the barricades whilst women provided auxiliary services: "…and the women they also for their part organised themselves…'We (the women) have to give them something to eat because they are there (on the barricades) looking after things'. So there were three meals a day…" (Interview with Ángel, *autodefensa* member, 2017). This split in roles was not necessarily the case in the *autodefensas* more widely in Michoacan, where women also played more of an armed role (Excélsior 2014c; Univision Noticias 2014d; Murata 2014; Heineman 2015). During my stay in the municipality I never saw women on the barricades, and only saw one woman carrying a radio. When asked about the participation of women in an armed role in the *autodefensas*, one male *autodefensa* member stated that "fortunately this was not necessary" but emphasised that women had nonetheless played an important logistical support role. Thus, whilst the narrative of the *autodefensa* rising emphasised the participation of the whole community, the split in responsibilities

also reinforced traditional *ranchero* values around gender roles. Namely, men in an armed role protecting 'their' women and families, with women performing support tasks traditionally ascribed to women in such communities. Therefore, the *autodefensa* rising can be seen as a re-inscription of gender roles and identities through performance, as per the ideas of Judith Butler (1988) who emphasises the importance of such performances in constructing and maintaining such gender roles and identities. The importance of gender roles was not confined to Tancitaro, however, and indeed these can be seen more generally in the *autodefensa* rising in Michoacan. Specifically, the immediate reason presented by the *autodefensas* for taking up arms was the systematic rape of women and young girls by cartel members (Rompeviento TV 2013). Violence against women and girls – either rape and/or murder – was frequently presented by *autodefensa* groups in different locations as the reason for taking up arms, and this was also presented as being the case in Tancítaro (as discussed in Chapter 1). Thus, the *autodefensa* narrative was gendered in a way that touched on and played into important *ranchero* values and identities.

The importance of the socialisation on the barricades and the perceived unity that this provoked was a central and widespread narrative in the municipality, referred to in meetings, interviews, and everyday conversations about the *autodefensas* and the community in general. This 'brotherhood', as one interviewee (quoted in Chapter 3) put it, was seen as transcending political party differences and "created such a strong bond that we started to look at what we could do to make sure that this wasn't disrupted" (Interview with Ángel, *autodefensa* member, 2017). To understand the significance of this transcendence of political party antagonisms in the municipality – and indeed, more widely in Michoacan and Mexico – it is necessary to understand some of the history of divisions.

The political divisions in the municipality stem initially from the rise of the PRD in the late 1980s. As touched on in the Introduction and Chapter 1, in the 1988 presidential elections the incumbent PRI faced a strong challenge from the FDN which was composed of mainly dissident PRI factions. The FDN – which would go on to become the PRD in 1989 in the wake of the elections – was particularly strong in Michoacán as it was led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the iconic former President and Michoacan native, Lázaro Cárdenas[52]. The PRI candidate – Carlos Salinas de Gortari – won the election under controversial circumstances, leading to allegations of electoral fraud. This generated a huge amount of protest, including in Michoacan, which had voted heavily in favour of Cárdenas (McDonald

[52] But as Aitken (1999) argues, such widespread support within Michoacan also needs to be understood by the way *neo-cardenismo* played into, and was adopted within the context of, existing political and social contestation at the local level. Support for *neo-cardenismo* was particularly pronounced amongst *anti-caciquil* factions within municipalities in Michoacan.

1993; Calderón Mólgora 1994; Aitken 1999). The PRD subsequently participated in the 1989 municipal elections in Michoacan which saw serious contestation and often violent confrontation (Calderón Mólgora 1994). Tancitaro was no exception in this respect, and the protests against the election result involved the armed taking of the offices of the municipal government with some accompanying violence[53]:

> "…when the party was founded in 1988, the PRD in this moment, they organised with others from the communities, well there had always only ever been the PRI in the municipality. So they organised, there was an armed uprising, they got rid of the municipal president, the Army came…So from then on, well it has been a struggle, right?" (Diego, senior member of the PRD in Tancitaro, 2017).

In subsequent years, the southern region of Michoacán (*Tierra Caliente*, the *Sierra*, and *Costa* regions) became militarised, and PRD militants were violently targeted by government security forces (Maldonado Aranda 2010; Aitken 1999). In Tancitaro, murders of PRD members in this period were also attributed to this political struggle which had played into existing resistance to, and contestation of, *caciquil* rule (Diego, senior member of the PRD in Tancitaro, 2017). This political struggle has been seen as having been taken on by the younger generation within the PRD:

> "So little by little, in some manner we came to bear this cross, right? They didn't want these people, the people from here (the *cabecera*) who had money. Well the people of the PRI made it a major problem because they saw it (the PRD emergence) as them coming and taking something away from them…For them it was a curse, because it divided the people, they felt abused because something was taken away from them. However, here in the *cabecera* well yes, they (the PRI) had done many public works, here they spent money, but not on the communities (outside the *cabecera*)" (Ibid).

As one person who had been part of the first generation of the PRD struggles put it, describing the political struggles, but also the *autodefensa* rising: "We are still fighting the same struggle, just now with a few modifications". It is also worth noting the long historically experienced connection between political mobilisations and violence in Michoacan, such as with the *Cristero* rebellion against the central state[54] (see for example Butler 2004, 2005; Purnell 1999; Meyer 1973), and the targeting of

[53] See also Calderón Mólgora 1994: 103.

[54] Whilst the *Cristero* rebellion was not directly referred to by residents, some remarks made during fieldwork did seem to allude to the influence of such a violent historical experience. For example, one member of the municipal government referred to the fact that hid grandfather had always told him that: "If you ever work for the government that makes you the enemy". Another informant (a member of the *autodefensas*) told me that his grandfather always advised him to: "Always make sure that you have a gun, because you never know when you will have need of it to defend yourself and your family".

the then ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas's political supporters under the presidency of López Mateos from 1959 onwards (Veledíaz 2010; Maldonado Aranda 2010).

In Latin America more generally, support for political parties, the identities constructed around these, and electoral competition, can lead to long-running violent confrontations as well as reproduce conflict over time. Indeed, the work of Montoya (2015, 2018) focusing on El Salvador, has demonstrated that the roots of political parties in civil war identities has led to the continued mobilisation of ideas and identities from within this conflict in contemporary democratic electoral campaigns. In the Colombian context, Roldán (2002) has examined how party-political membership and its perceived connections to broader identities helped to fuel the period known as *La Violencia* in the region of Antioquia. In a broader sense, Arias and Goldstein (2010), through their concept of violent pluralism, have demonstrated how democracy and democratic practices in Latin America are intimately connected to, and often expressed through, violence employed by both state and non-state actors. Campaigns for democratisation in both Mexico, and Latin America generally, were intimately bound up with, and expressed through the idea and discourse of citizenship since the 1970s (Assies 2002; Stack 2013; Dagnino 1994). Such contestation around democratisation and citizenship rights was not inherently violent in Mexico, but there were episodes of violent repression and contestation when the PRI's hegemony was challenged, and which reflected the role of violence and coercion in the articulation and maintenance of the Mexican state more generally (Pansters 2012). The case of Michoacán in the 1988 and 1989 elections and their aftermath are an example of such contestations (see for example Pérez Ramírez 2009; Calderón Mólgora 1994; Maldonado Aranda 2010; Sevilla 1997; Aitken 1999), and one which helped forge party identities which continue to exercise an important influence in local politics. This is important to note in order to appreciate both the significance of ideas of unity in Tancitaro, and the historical connection between violence, insecurity and electoral competition in Michoacan, Mexico, and Latin America.

Tancitaro, which had been split between the PRI and the PRD since 1989, suffered a further division in the following years with a schism in the PRI leading to the PAN's emergence in the municipality (Interview with Diego, senior member of the PRD, 2017). Party loyalties and identification is seen as being strong in the municipality, with people talking about how people have the parties in their bones (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration 12/08/17), and certain communities and even surnames are seen as being intimately connected to certain political parties: "…it is like this, the PAN has some families or the same people from certain communities and in the PRD it is more or less the same. And the PRI the same…" (Interview with Maria, citizen council member, 2017); and "…the

people identified certain communities as being more of one party, and others more with another. And sometimes even up to their surnames" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017)[55]. Whilst it is problematic to simply extrapolate national ideological tendencies to the local level, it was clear that for members of the PRD – traditionally a party on the left of the political spectrum – the self-perception that they represented the interests of the marginalised in the face of the *caciques* of the PRI and PAN was extremely important. Likewise, in certain parts of the municipality, the local Catholic Church was seen as being close to the PAN, as it has often been at the national level. However, at the local level especially one has to recognise that party political allegiances reflect and are often mediated by specific histories, networks of clientelism, and the individual reputation and agency of candidates.

In recent years, party polarisation within Michoacan has been re-emphasised under the inauguration of the 'war' on the drug cartels – announced in Apatzingan – initiated by President Felipe Calderón in 2007 (Trejo & Ley 2016). Some claim this was launched by Calderón to gain legitimacy in the face of accusations that he won the presidency via electoral fraud (Aguilar Valenzuela & Castañeda 2012). Others claim the Federal deployment to Michoacan – via *Operación Conjunto Michoacán* – which was the war's initial act, was a genuine response to the security situation that faced the new president, and indeed had been called for by the citizenry of Michoacan and their then-governor Lázaro Cárdenas Batel (Astorga 2015). However, a Federal judicial intervention in Michoacan on 26th May 2009 – which became known colloquially as the *Michoacanazo* – saw the detention of 22 public servants of the Michoacan state government, and 10 municipal presidents[56]. This was justified as an operation against those with links to organised crime but was widely interpreted as a political intervention by a PAN-led Federal government against the PRD (principally) in order to damage their chances in upcoming elections (Ramírez Sánchez 2012: 24-25). Therefore, political party divides have deep roots in Tancitaro, and Michoacan generally, but recent interventions have also served to deepen polarisation and reinforce the perceived connection between politically motivated Federal interventions couched in terms of (in)security and drug trafficking.

In the context of Tancitaro, the history of party-political division, conflict, and entrenched identities, demonstrate the remarkable impact of the *autodefensas* in forging links and generating feelings of

[55] Such geographical/party political connections recall the work of Montoya (2018) and Roldán (2002) where such associations are forged because of histories of conflict between such allegiances. In Mexico, one can see some similar associations, for example, Michoacan with the PRD (Ramírez Sánchez 2012; McDonald 1993; Aitken 1999), and PAN with the north of the country (Shirk 2000) and with the Catholic Church (Camp 1994).
[56] The then PRD Governor of Michoacan, Leonel Godoy Rangel, was given no prior notice of this intervention.

communal unity. Such ideas of unity in Tancítaro were not only seen to overcome party differences however, as the mobilisation and socialisation of the community also brought about a realisation of how fragmented the community had become:

> "…it was a very fragmented community. That is, I didn't know the neighbouring community very well, that is the people of my neighbouring community. I haven't always lived in the *cabecera*, I was near to a community, so I found that there wasn't really this shared co-existence, this is one of the really great changes, very big, because they didn't know each other, so now with the (*autodefensa*) movement, this was how all these connections started to be made, right? Like this…It was the southern community to the eastern community, that is, totally connected and it has been mentioned on various occasions that the people they say, well I didn't have a clue that you existed and we are part of the same municipality, so living through the criminality was something that was a very strong experience for the community to live through, but when they organised it was also like a connection with the municipality. That is, it is a very big change that I have noted and it is something good" (Interview with Elena, municipal administration worker, 2017).

This quote demonstrates the significance of the *autodefensa* rising in generating knowledge about the community and connections between people within it, thus laying the basis for the emergence of ideas of unity. It also exhibits how this was underpinned by a new appreciation of the territoriality of the municipality, specifically the existence of other communities. A lack of previous knowledge may be related to a combination of the size of the municipality (which is half the size of Greater London) and the fact that there are over 59 official communities within its border (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016a), though locals refer to there being over 70 in reality, and which are often poorly connected. Thus, the experience of the *autodefensa* movement amongst the population created knowledge of the municipality's territoriality and affirmed its borders. The conditions of relative security that the *autodefensas* helped achieve allowed for this socialisation and knowledge construction to take place. Consequently, the *autodefensas* can be seen as provoking a resignification and revalorisation of the community and its existence as a notionally united body.

The significance of this is particularly striking given the historical divides, as previously discussed. But it can be seen as even more profound when it is considered that such divides reflected not only differing political outlooks, but also socio-economic factors and power-relations. Such differences have often been expressed geographically, with the east of the municipality seen as a richer area with plentiful water for avocado cultivation, whereas the south is far poorer and requires water to be

pumped to it from the higher reaches of the municipality. Therefore, the creation of links and knowledge between people of different communities in the municipality helped to override differences relating to party identification and socio-economic status, at least for a time.

Prior to the *autodefensas*, and due to the municipality's size, the *pueblos* and *ranchos* of the municipality may have had a closer connection with towns in other municipalities rather than the *cabecera*. For example, historically, Apo looked to the municipality of Los Reyes, the east of the municipality to Uruapan, and the south to Apatzingan. However, the experience of insecurity connected to the exterior of the municipality, which was cemented in the months following the *autodefensa* rising when people were too scared to leave the municipality (as discussed in Chapter 2) – has provoked a reappraisal of such external connections. This illustrates the importance of the construction of territory – in terms of the local and regional differentiation of physical space through agricultural development and infrastructure – in explaining social and spatial differences between populations (Maldonado Aranda 2010). And yet, in the case of Tancitaro, the perception of (in)security in the post-*autodefensa* rising is also of crucial importance in such construction as it influences ideas of territory, agricultural production, and the connections between these.

The negotiation of a unity government

The feeling of unity that was generated within the municipality found the beginnings of a political expression in 2014, when the Group for the Peace and Unity of Tancitaro began meeting. This was composed of citizens looking for ways for the unity of the *autodefensas* – which had fostered security and stability – to be preserved:

> "…the people organised, decided to take up arms, rise up in arms, without distinguishing between party membership, nor creed, nor any type of thinking or ideology, rather the necessity to have security and stability in the municipality. So this is what moved us to undertake the shared candidature…" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Such unity was seen as having a historic and profound character: "There hasn't been a stronger, more united moment in the history of the municipality of Tancitaro than what was lived through in 2013" (Interview with César, member of the PRD, 2017). But such unity was perceived as fragile, especially in the face of the upcoming elections in 2015:

> "I first went (to the Group's meetings) as a citizen, but later when the electoral process was approaching, well we had this, well the Group was like this, there as leaders (of

> parties) and others who weren't leaders but were citizens that had the concern that this unity that we had needed to be preserved. That the electoral process wasn't divisive…Why? It is because later the people get passionate, right? 'I want this candidate' and the other person on that side, so it divides, things get polarised and so all of this unity that has been constructed, it would be undone by the passion of the electoral process, right? And by a desire to be the government. So, in this moment, unity had to be presented, right?" (Ibid).

Similarly, another interviewee noted:

> "…what we had to do was invest in this and not divide, because we thought that, in the campaign, well some party would start to attack another one or bring some ideas, other candidates would bring other ideas. And many people would get involved, supporting one, many people start to see the other as bad, and this starts to generate rivalry" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Therefore, a key fear was a return to the tribalism of elections would result in disunity. This was also connected to the fear that such divisions could then be exploited by a cartel to re-enter the municipality. This reflects the perception in Mexico that organised crime groups frequently intervene in elections, often by funding candidates and/or attacking and intimidating rival candidates[57]. Such a fear in Tancitaro was reinforced by the past experience of cartels murdering its public officials, specifically a municipal president in 2010 (Torres 2010), and members of the citizen council which governed when the municipal government resigned *en masse* in 2009 (Proceso 2009). Such a history reflects the close and intense relationship that politics and violence – whilst not being novel – have been seen to have in recent years especially. This trend has been present, to varying extents, in a number of Latin American contexts in recent years, for example in Nicaragua, Honduras, Venezuela, and Guatemala.

Having started as a discussion amongst the citizenry at large, the formal talks started to be led by representatives of the three main parties – PRI, PAN, PRD – as the 2015 elections approached. Only once the three parties had agreed that a common candidate was the solution were the smaller parties invited to attend (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Aside from a common candidacy, a formal alliance between the three parties at the municipal level had

[57] For example, the 2018 election cycle saw 120 political candidates killed during the campaign season (CNN Español 2018). A recent newspaper article also estimated that 554 municipalities in Mexico are under the control of organised crime (Reyez 2019), whilst an estimated 71 percent of municipal governments are under its influence (Proceso 2010). Maldonado Aranda (2010) has also noted that financing of political parties by drug traffickers has a relatively long history in the neighbouring *Tierra Caliente* region.

been discussed, but was seen as being overly burdensome and time-consuming to organise. The common candidacy approach required approval from the parties' respective Michoacan state party apparatus. The PRI and the PRD were able to obtain their Michoacan state parties' blessings for this approach – though in the PRD's case only after some warnings about the ramifications regarding local-state party relations should they disapprove of the approach by the municipal party representatives:

> "…I told them: 'I, as a senior member of the Tancitaro branch of the PRD, see things in this way and this is what is necessary in Tancitaro, but if you at state or federal level, want something else or want to want to jump on the will that we have, as the electoral process will be in Tancitaro, you will be the ones who will be responsible for what happens here, for not respecting our will. If you don't respect the accords that we have come to at the municipal level, you will be the ones responsible for what happens here'" (Interview with César, member of the PRD, 2017).

By contrast, the PAN's wider party administration refused to formally support such an approach, but the local party proceeded nonetheless (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Both these examples – the PRD and the PAN – show the importance of the idea that local input and vision takes priority, and how this valorisation of the local was intertwined in important ways with the idea of the unity government. Another important point to note here is the fact that the political parties, whilst having local branches, also have state and nationwide entities that have hierarchies located outside of the municipal level. Given the emergence of ideas of localised citizenship and perceived insecurity outside of the municipality, this would play an important role in how the parties would be conceived of in the post-*autodefensa* rising environment.

The election of the common, or as it became known, unity candidature, was via the parties putting forward individual *planillas* (literally translated as 'worksheets' in English, but effectively the electoral slate of a political party) detailing their proposed candidates for the main positions in the municipal government (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). These were then debated between the parties to divide the roles between them for the election campaign – and for the municipal government should they be victorious. The PRI put forward Dr Arturo Olivera Gutiérrez as their candidate for the municipal president, and this found support amongst the other parties as he had previously held the role in the early 2000s and had been open to working with other parties, and was otherwise well respected. The remaining positions – such as *síndico* and the *regidores* were then divided between the PRD, PAN and PRI respectively, with the final number each would get depending on the actual results of the election, as some positions would be allocated to opposition parties on a proportional basis. Reaching such accords had required long hours of negotiations and

hadn't been without controversy. In particular, the *Consejo de Vigilancia* (discussed in Chapter 1) had wanted their own position within the division of posts:

> "…the *Consejo de Vigilancia* said: 'and us? Where is our place? Give us a space within this as well', and they also said to us: 'no, but it is us from the *Consejo*, we too have to be given the possibility to represent this candidature'. And you remember I told you that this *Consejo de Vigilancia* well they had not been legitimated" (Ibid).

The desire on the part of the *Consejo* to be the fourth party in the division of posts, was seen as an attempt to preserve and even enhance their influence in the municipality (Ibid). In this they were seen as having the support of the PAN, with whose membership their leadership overlapped to some extent. The other two parties responded that the *Consejo* could give its opinion but could not vote, nor be a formal part of the unity government as it was not a political party, nor was it viewed as a legitimate representative of all of the *autodefensas* in the municipality. This illegitimacy stemmed from the way the Consejo was constituted:

> "So from this point (the beginning of the *autodefensas*), well the *autodefensa* it wasn't coordinated, organised, though they were in all the localities, but there was no structure. And these people it occurred to them that why wasn't a *Consejo de Vigilancia* formed. Unfortunately the error was made whereby this wasn't done in a democratic manner, rather they started with the idea, they said, well you organise in your community and in your community, you are going to be…" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

And in a similar vein: "…this *Consejo* was never legitimated by the people. They put themselves there because they wanted to be there..." (Interview with Ángel, *autodefensa* member, 2017).

The *Consejo's* failed attempt to carve out their own position within the unity candidacy is very revealing as to the social and political relations in Tancitaro, and the limitations of the idea of unity within the municipality. Specifically, that whilst the *autodefensas* were seen as having provoked a socialisation process and feelings of unity, these only went so far and very real divisions based on ideas of class, political affiliation, and the historical exercise of economic and political power quickly resurfaced. Although the idea and narrative of this unity enjoys an important place in how the formation of the unity government is portrayed, it is important to recognise its very real limitations in what occurred during the political negotiations around this. Similarly, whilst the *autodefensas* are often described as a united formation in the municipality, this unity only goes so far as a shared interest in stopping the re-entry of the cartel from outside. Whilst unity may have existed in the initial phase of the *autodefensa* rising, the *Consejo's* perceived illegitimate actions meant that a division

arose and over time this has settled into a form of grudging mutual recognition of differing zones of influence. Specifically, the *Consejo* holds sway over much of the east of the municipality, and the rest of the communities in the municipality organising their own leadership in each community and co-ordinating amongst themselves, most notably the southern *pueblos* and *ranchos* of the municipality.

What is also significant about the *Consejo de Vigilancia's* actions, is that it demonstrates at least part of the *autodefensas* attempting to institutionalise themselves as a political force at the municipal level. Although the *autodefensas* cannot be seen as the origin of this political and economic interest group – perceived as representing the *caciques* of the municipality – it represents an example of how such a group sought to utilise the *autodefensa* movement as a moment of political opportunity justified by their participation and (claimed) leadership of such groups at the municipal level. Therefore, the reality of unity also reached its limits with the *autodefensas* who were likewise split in relation to these already existing identities of political party allegiance, which were also expressed geographically within the municipality.

The disjuncture between the widespread idea of unity, and its realisation through the political process of the elections, was also illustrated by the initial exclusion of the other political parties from the discussion. It was only after the unity candidate position had been agreed that the smaller parties – Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico (PVEM; Ecologist Green Party of Mexico), MORENA (Movimiento Regeneracion Nacional; National Regeneration Movement), Partido del Trabajo (PT; Work Party), and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC; Citizen Movement) – were invited to participate. Such an involvement of the smaller parties did not meet with success, and there are two interpretations of this failure. The three main parties blame the opportunism of the smaller parties who – they say – saw their alliance as a chance to take the positions reserved for the opposition parties:

> "Some parties opted that it was better to go alone: 'with the few votes we will get, we can put a representative in the *Cabildo*'. And it wasn't that they weren't in accordance with the unity (candidate), but rather they simply saw the opportunity or option that they could make themselves represented as a *regidor*" (Interview with César, senior member of the PRD, 2017).

Meanwhile, the smaller parties saw the unity candidature as simply an agreement between the big parties, and not really representing unity:

> "…they (the bigger parties) excluded us. That is, Verde, Movimiento Ciudadano, and MORENA, we lose, we have no faculties, we have no rights, we have none of this, that's how they managed us. So they did the first meeting where they invited us and so I asked

them: 'where is the unity government? If first you come to an agreement between you and then later you invite us'. So only afterwards with us, is when they invited all the parties" (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

Which explanation is true is less important than the fact that this discord represented an important counter-narrative to the unity government's legitimising discourse. Specifically, that whilst the unity government presents itself as kind of apolitical act and imbued with a certain nobility of putting aside party-political differences and interests for the greater good of the municipality, this is not an uncontested nor uncontroversial concept.

The 2015 election campaign and the unity government

Having finalised a *planilla* comprised of members of the three main parties, the election campaign was embarked upon. The campaign approach taken by the unity candidature was seen by those involved as being distinct from normal political campaigns in Mexico:

> "…when we were in the middle of the campaign, sorry, in the electoral period, we, what is normal in Mexico, I don't know about other countries, but the campaign promises they say: 'well I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that'. Or a candidate goes to a community and in that moment he makes a commitment, he tells them: 'I am going to construct a (football/basketball) pitch or I am going to pave this road'. So, for this reason it generates some possibilities for people, hopes that they will fulfil this promise. Many people already, the truth is that they already don't believe, but others hope that yes they will fulfil it. So we didn't do this" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government).

Instead of making such promises, the unity candidature instead committed to the following:

> "...in the campaign, our promise was that: 'we will not promise public works, but our commitment is that we are going to help to organise ourselves'. And well, an organised people is stronger and can claim or ask the government if there is an opportunity, now for our part, what we are going to do is this or that thing, better if we decide this together tomorrow. That was our promise or commitment of the campaign" (Ibid).

This commitment to help organise was directly linked to obtaining physical benefits from the government, but was seen as an important distinction, by those involved, from promising specific works. As discussed in Chapter 3, public works are a key function of municipal governments and are frequently perceived as characterised by clientelistic practices on the part of political parties. This is true more widely in Mexico (and in Latin America more generally) as the promise of concrete material

benefits, or appreciation for their prior realisation, are important factors in election campaigns as can be seen from the work of Lazar (2004; 2008) and Montoya (2018)[58]. Indeed, the idea of political promises and their lack of fulfilment have also been used historically by the PRI in Mexico, such as in the 1994 presidential elections, where they used their own history of unfilled promises – such as failed land reform, unattained workers' rights, lack of access to healthcare and education – to prey on voter fears and insecurities that the PRD were likely to do the same (McDonald 1994).

The tension in the above quotation around voters' hopes and their fulfilment recalls the idea of the state – through its promise of development – as a hope-generating machine (Nuijten 1998), but one which in the current context of marginalisation, precariousness, and low-intensity citizenship in Latin America, appears to have stopped working (Assies 2002). In the context of the *Tierra Caliente* of Michoacan, the state has been portrayed as having retired from assistencialism in the early 1970s, with the vacuum having been filled by clientelist networks of *caciques*, drug traffickers, and PRI clientelism (Maldonado Aranda 2010). However, one could argue that the experience of a paternalistic state – often associated with the image of Lázaro Cárdenas and his leadership of the developmental commissions of the Río Tepalcatepec (1947-1958) and Rio Balsas (1962-1970) (Calderón Mólgora 2011) – continues to exercise an important demonstration of what the state can be in the popular imagination of residents of Michoacan. Indeed, the clientelism of the political parties can be seen as an echo of such paternalism and assistencialism. This recalls Eckert's (2011) idea of the two images of the state, namely the image made by experience and the image of how the state ought to be. Such ideas are important to bear in mind in the case of Tancitaro to understand the interplay of historical and ideological factors when considering practices of clientelism and perceptions of the state.

The 2015 municipal election saw the victory of the unity candidate with 55.6% (4,139) of the votes, from a total of 7,851 votes cast, which represented a participation rate of 40.7% of eligible voters. Despite the apparent margin of the victory it is important to contextualise this in order to appreciate the way in which the unity project was received.

Figure 18: Results of the 2015 Municipal Elections in Tancítaro

PAN	PRI	PRD	PT	PVEM	PNA	PMC	MORENA	PES	PH	Candidato Común*	Votos nulos
1,485	1,415	952	342	994	89	1,343	630	21	49	128	399

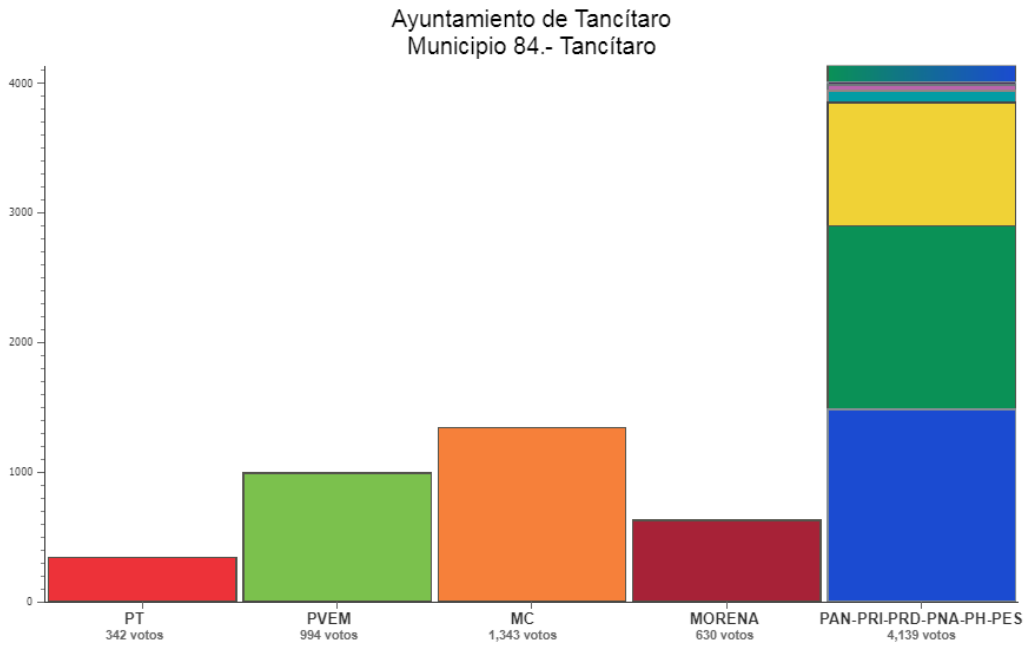
[58] Though as discussed in Chapter 3, the works of Auyero (2001; 2012) caution against simplistic readings and interpretations of clientelism.

* Candidato común (common candidate) listed as comprising the following parties - PAN-PRI-PRD-PNA-PH-PES.

Source: Table adapted from original Instituto Electoral de Michoacán (2019a) data.

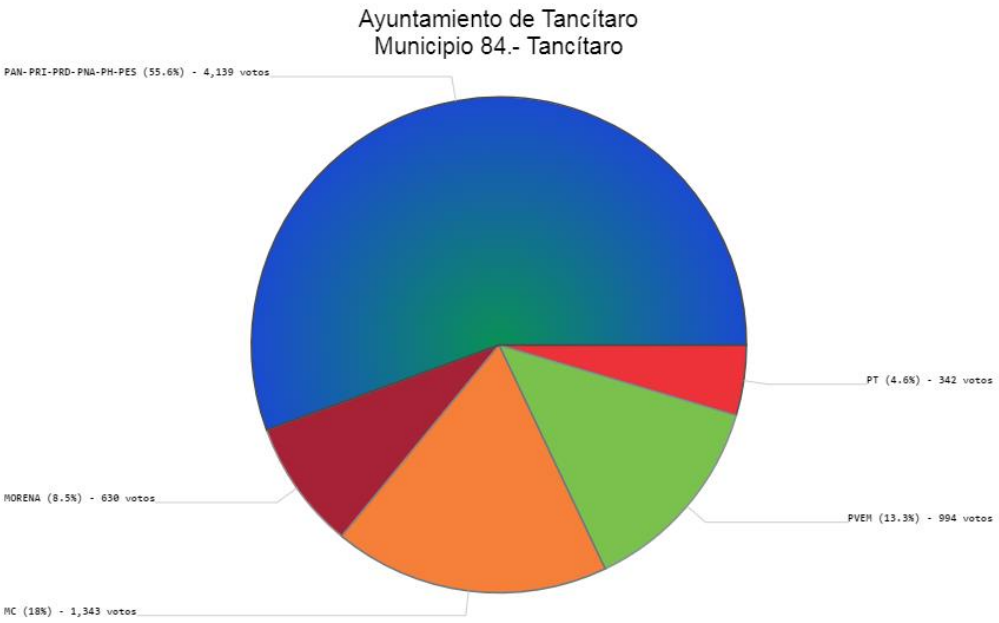
The results can also be represented graphically as follows:

Figure 19: Results of the 2015 Municipal Elections in Tancitaro (bar chart)



Source: Instituto Electoral de Michoacán (2019a)

Figure 20: Results of the 2015 Municipal Elections in Tancitaro (Pie Chart)



Source: Instituto Electoral de Michoacán (2019a)

The above demonstrates that alongside the 'big three' parties, the unity candidature also included the Partido Nueva Alianza (PNA; New Alliance Party), the Partido Humanista (PH; Humanist Party), and the Partido Encuentro Social (PES; Social Encounter Party). However, these parties are extremely small and comparatively new in Mexican politics and so they did not register in discussions of the unity candidate in the municipality. A striking feature from the election results is that the *Candidato Común* as a specific ballot paper option garnered just 128 votes. Therefore, votes were cast for the parties which formed part of the unity candidature, bringing the vote tally to over 4,000 between them. Given the overall victory this seems to be a small point, but given past histories it hints at the continued rigidness of party divisions and loyalties in the municipality. Specifically, voting for the common candidate – both explicitly and by voting for one of the parties involved in it – also involved voting for two other parties which were the bitter rivals of your own party.

Examining this in light of previous and subsequent elections helps to contextualise this phenomena. An interesting point to note about the tables (below), is the relative stability of support for the three (historically) main parties – PRI, PAN, PRD – as they have consistently received the largest vote share. Thus, at the local level in this example, whilst MORENA has increased its support, it didn't dominate in the same way it did at the national level in 2018, not did the three traditional parties see their votes collapse.

Figure 21: Results of the 2011 Municipal Elections in Tancitaro

PAN	PRI	PRD	PT	PVEM	PMC	PNA	PAN-PNA	PRC-PMC	Votos nulos
3639	2082	3363	210	-	18	15	28	14	344

Winner: PAN-PNA coalition - 3682 votes.

Turnout: 9,717

Source: Instituto Electoral de Michoacán (2019b)

Figure 22: Results of the 2018 Municipal Elections in Tancitaro

PAN	PRI	PRD	PT	PVEM	PMC	MORENA	PAN-PMC *	PRD-PVEM*	PT-MORENA **	Votos nulos
2663	2835	2300	186	384	216	822	58	71	54	545

* = Common candidate

** = Coalition

Turnout: 10,135= 57.9%

Winner: PAN-PMC coalition - 2,937 votes

Source: Instituto Electoral de Michoacán (2019c)

Whilst the total votes received by the unity candidate in 2015 (4,139) exceeded that of the winner in 2011 – PAN-PNA (3,682) – and in 2018 – PAN-PMC (2,937), it still represented a significantly lower tally than the 'normal' vote share of the three main parties in the municipality. Thus in the 2011 and 2018 elections – competing separately – they won 9,084 votes (2011) and 7,798 votes (2018). Therefore, the unity candidate election saw a significant drop in votes for the three main parties compared to prior and subsequent elections. The fall was particularly pronounced for the PRD whose vote fell below the thousand mark, garnering less than MC or the PVEM. This may reflect the unpopularity of the common candidate due to its association with having to – at least implicitly – also vote for a rival political party. Such sentiments may also be evidenced by the fact that voter turnout was significantly higher in both the 2011 and 2018 elections. Thus, many of the supporters of the three traditional parties may simply have refused to vote when faced with the prospect of voting in part for a rival political party.

The changing vote share of MC is particularly noteworthy and requires explanation, varying as it does from 18 votes in 2011, up to 1,343 in 2015, and back down to 216 in 2018. An explanation of this is the party's close association with the *autodefensa* movement, which was perceived as explaining its spike in popularity within the municipality (Notes from citizen councils meeting – 26/08/17). This is due to the fact that *autodefensa* leaders such as Hipólito Mora, and Dr. Mireles' sister – Virginia Mireles Valverde – stood for political office under the party's banner, and the party campaigned for the release of Dr Mireles and incarcerated *autodefensas* generally (La Voz de Michoacán 2015; Movimiento Ciudadano 2017). Indeed, Mora also visited the municipality during the election campaign as an MC candidate (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). As the party had barely registered votes prior to 2015 and had a very small number of militants (Ibid), the association with the *autodefensas* would seem to be a reasonable explanation for its rise. Therefore, whilst the unity candidature could trace its origins – materially and rhetorically – to the *autodefensa* movement, it did not have a monopoly on such a connection, nor even perhaps the strongest claim in some senses. MC's subsequent decline can be attributed to its decision to ally with the PAN at the national level, and the fact it is no longer so closely associated with the *autodefensas*, with Dr Mireles having stood as a MORENA senate candidate in the 2018 elections.

Speaking to members of the municipal government, and citizens more generally in Tancitaro, helps to explain why the unity candidate received a comparatively low vote share: "…they (Tancitaro residents) took the unity proposal as a kind of offence, as if it was just a slap to the face. Yes, as if we were doing this to commit one more abuse, many people took it this way" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). In this interpretation, the lack of a real choice of candidates, and true party-political competition was seen as a continuity in the curtailment of rights and freedoms suffered under the cartel (Ibid). A similar but distinct view was that this was a form of collusion between the three main parties to ensure that they got to win the election (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Thus, some residents saw it as not a 'true' unity government, but rather a ploy by the three main parties dressed-up in noble intentions (Notes from *diplomado* in public administration 16/07/17; Notes from citizen council meeting with political parties – 24/08/17). Looking back on the unity election, one of the leaders of the smaller parties in the municipality went as far as to say that the way in which the municipal president had been elected – i.e. via the unity candidature – made him an illegitimate president (Notes from citizen council meeting with political parties – 24/08/17). The idea of illegitimacy was not a widely held view, but a certain dissatisfaction was registered with the various factors discussed, such as low turnout. Therefore, the limitations of the unity narrative are reached in its meeting with concrete political considerations and

competition, as unity was not necessarily seen as desirable if it curtailed electoral options, and indeed involved prejudicing one's identity through the act of voting for a rival political party.

Balanced against this, however, was the new forms of governance and openness to citizen participation fostered by the Jesuit project, some people's appreciation for the perceived sacrifice of their interests, and the unity government's record in office. For example: "The unity government has been more responsible than we thought it would" (*Diplomado* attendee, Notes from *diplomado* in public administration – 16/07/17); "It was a great thing that the three great parties came together" (*Diplomado* attendee, Notes from *diplomado* in public administration – 30/07/17); "…I see it as being very good. And I hope that something similar can continue, and each time it can be getting better…" (Interview with Gabriela, resident of Tancitaro, 2017). Its supporters saw the unity government in a positive light for setting aside traditional rivalries and potential conflicts for the good of the municipality as a whole. Those who had helped to formulate the unity government thought that it had been a worthwhile and valuable effort, despite the way in which it was interpreted by some of the population. Specifically, they pointed to the fact that there was no organised crime interference within the election, which was one of the principle fears of electoral competition (Interview with César, member of the PRD, 2017). They also expressed pride in the fact that this was an historic undertaking, as such a common candidature between the PRI, PAN and PRD, was without precedent: "…maybe you know that in Tancitaro this was historic, that these three parties came to an accord is something historic, that has never happened in any other municipality, election for Deputy, for Senator, for Governor, or for President of the Republic" (Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). And point to the media attention it garnered: "…it was something which attracted national media, they came here during the campaign to do interviews and take note of what was happening" (Ibid). Fundamentally, the unity candidature was important as it was seen to have overcome – to some extent – traditional party-political rivalries in the municipality. This was seen as a continuation of the unity that had been created through the experience of the *autodefensas*, and the ongoing importance of (in)security. Therefore, whilst party political divisions remained, and generated a certain lack of enthusiasm for the unity candidature, the *autodefensas* can be seen as the only way in which such deep-lying divisions could have been overcome.

The institutionalisation of the citizen councils in Tancítaro

The fulfilment of the unity candidature's promise to organise the community and involve them in their own governance came via the institution of citizen councils, as part of the wider Jesuit project.

Therefore, in order to understand some of the impacts of the unity government within the municipality, it is important to understand how its flagship policy was institutionalised and developed in Tancitaro. The institutionalisation of the Jesuit project, and the citizen councils as part of this, took place when the unity government took office in early 2016. It was accomplished by the setting up of citizen councils under a municipal government *reglamento* (rulebook/bylaws) with input from the members of the Jesuit project. As discussed in Chapter 3, the project informed and was included within municipality's development plan (*Plan Municipal de Desarrollo*) for 2015-2018, as evidenced in the language and methodology adopted in the plan. The *reglamento* is an important document as it encapsulates the relationship between the councils, the municipal government, municipal residents, and the wider state – i.e. at Michoacan state and Federal level.

The focus of the new administration and the councils is clear from the reglamento's cover which bears the motto: "For the Peace and Unity of Tancítaro" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 1), thus representing a continuity from the *autodefensas* and the election campaign. This is reinforced by the reiteration of the connection between unity, peace, and the security of the community (Ibid). The Jesuit project's emphasis on the need for community links and citizen participation is clear in the document and the purpose of the citizen councils is explained as being:

> "…to promote and to organise citizen participation in the localities and zones of the municipality to work for the reconstruction of social fabric, linked to the families, neighbourhoods, institutions, schools and other subjects that make up the community" (Ibid: 4).

The councils are defined as a representative body – from the popular will of the people through election – whose relationship with the municipal government is consultative and collaboratory, and on a permanent basis (Ibid: 4). This collaboration is not only described in abstract terms such as the 'integration and linking up of members of the community', but rather the practical role of the councils in the co-production of governance is also delineated (Ibid: 5). Specifically, the councils are to document problems and necessities in the communities and so contribute directly to the elaboration of the Municipal Development Plan (Ibid: 5). Furthermore, the councils play a role in supervising the execution of public works and *ayuntamiento* organised activities in each zone; bring transparency to the working of elected officials, public servants, and the council members themselves; and evaluate the security situation in the municipality and make proposals to improve the situation (Ibid: 5). Thus, the councils have a substantive role in the municipality which can be seen as a form of co-production of governance, and which includes fundamental areas of citizen concern such as security and public works.

Citizen participation lies at the heart of the council's raison d'etre and the vision of citizenship enumerated in the *reglamento* is explicitly along traditional conceptions of rights and obligations (Ibid: 5). Such a vision corresponds to the ideas of citizenship outlined by T. H. Marshall (1950) who stipulated that citizenship was comprised of a set of rights – civil, social, and political – that governed the relationship between the state and the citizen. Within the *reglamento* this traditional vision is reinforced by noting that it is right of the citizens to collaborate in the plans and programmes of development in the municipality, but only as far as doing so does not impinge upon the government's authority: "Co-operate in the formulation of plans…without prejudicing the powers of the municipal authority" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 6). Thus whilst citizen collaboration and participation is encouraged, the state – in the form of the municipal government – has the ultimate authority. This is in line with commonly understood ideas of co-production in the literature on the topic – such as Abello Colak and Pearce (2018), and Brewer and Grabosky (2014) (as discussed in Chapter 2) – whereby the state involves other societal actors but remains the instigator and ultimately controls the co-produced governance. This is an interesting point to highlight here and to examine further later on to analyse whether such a vision held true in the actual execution of this co-production.

The depth of the councils' involvement is made clear in the *reglamento* as whilst the councils perform annual diagnostics of the needs of communities, these are then utilised by the councils in collaboration with the municipal government to elaborate the Annual Operational Plans (Planes Operativos Anuales) and the Municipal Development Plan. On a zonal level, the councils also help to plan the Zonal Development Programmes (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 7). Whilst the emphasis is on the subordinate nature of the councils in their relationship with the municipal government, it is also noted that the council should: "…supervise the proper functioning of the *ayuntamiento*, and the municipal public servants" (Ibid: 8). Thus, whilst not impinging upon the authority of the *ayuntamiento*, the council does have something of an oversight role (as discussed in Chapter 3), and so in some ways cannot be seen to be as simply subordinate in all senses to the municipal government. Consequently, the relationship of co-production is one in which those citizens participating are not simply 'receiving' the official citizenship of the state (Salman 2002) in the form of rights and obligations but are actively involved in the social construction of such citizenship and governance.

Ideas of localised sovereignty and of a citizenship that goes beyond a state-focused rights and responsibilities vision (discussed in Chapter 2) are also evident in the *reglamento* document. Allusions

to local sovereignty can be seen in the way in which the people of Tancitaro are referred to as "The citizens of the Municipality" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 6). Normally citizenship is thought a national characteristic – i.e. one is a citizen of Mexico – and so the literature often focuses on the concept of Mexican citizenship (see for example Aguilar Rivera 2004; Fox 1994), rather than one based on more localised identities. Therefore, the reference to being a 'citizen of the municipality' recalls Stack's (2003) writings on being 'citizens of towns' which involves the civil sociality idea of citizenship (discussed in Chapter 2) where belonging and contributing to local society rather than a more traditional rights/responsibilities vision is central. This serves to reinforce local identity and sovereignty by making the locality the primary socio-political unit of reference. Though Stack is also careful to point out that there is not a simple dichotomy between the registers of being a citizen of a community and of the nation, and that one doesn't necessarily preclude the other (Stack 2003). Rather, he argues that 'being from here' enabled citizens to have an opinion and some agency in the local ambit, in contrast to their comparative lack of influence on Mexico as a whole, and this resulted in different practices being associated with being a citizen of a town than those associated with being a citizen of a nation (Ibid). The idea of civil sociality based on local belonging and interaction is represented in the rules around who can form part of the citizen council, specifically, a councillor must be: "…a neighbour (*vecino*) within the municipality and living within the community, sector, zone or neighbourhood in question", be "…well known in the community…" and specifically be known for "…having a good reputation and being honest" (H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro 2016b: 8-9)[59]. Thus, upstanding membership within local society conferred agency on citizen participation in the co-production of governance, which would chime with the key tenets of civil sociality.

The *reglamento* also prohibited people becoming citizen councillors who were members of the *ayuntamiento*, senior members of a political party, and those occupying any position requiring popular election. Such requirements guard against conflicts of interest but also demonstrate a desire to avoid party political competition and influence within the citizen councils, which is seen as a potential source of conflict and discord. The citizen councils themselves, and the domicile and party-political rules within the *reglamento*, can be seen as an attempt to reform the practice of politics within the local ambit. It seeks the minimisation of identities associated with conflict and (in)security, such as political

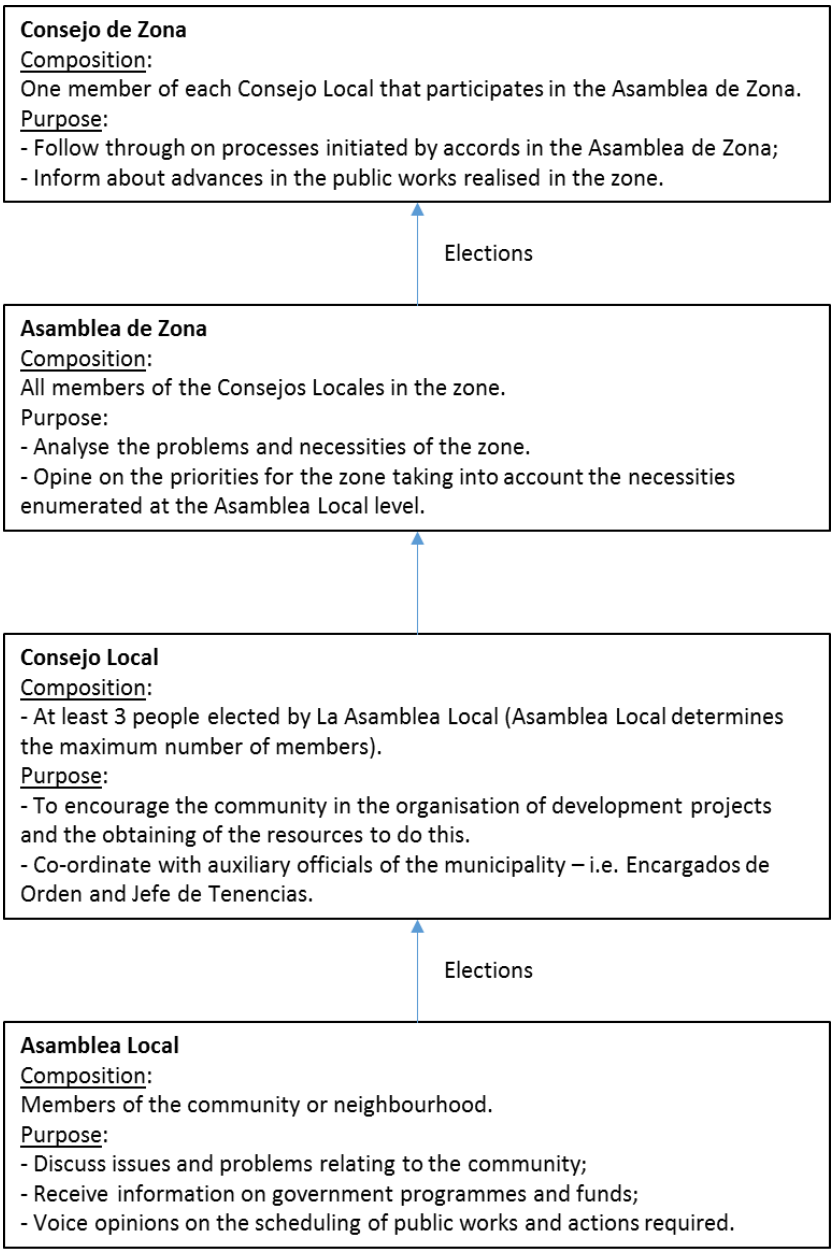
[59] Such a description of the characteristics of being a vecino recalls the writings of Herzog (2007) and Carmagnani & Hernandez Chavez (1999) on the notion of *vecinidad* in the colonial period. Indeed, there are striking parallels between the contemporary *vecinidad* and that of the colonial period, including in relation to moral qualities, residency requirements, commitment to the community, and the subjective judgements based on locally contingent notions used to judge these. This perhaps hints at an underlying continuity of understandings of *vecinidad* at the local level despite the formal legal abolition of a direct link between *vecinidad* and citizenship having been enacted over a century ago.

party allegiance and people from outside the municipality, as well as the end of clientelistic practices through the empowerment of communities and citizen co-production of governance. As such, the institutionalisation of the citizen councils represents an attempt to break with past forms of political practice in the municipality, as well as to move away from conflictive party political identities towards identities based in the kinds of accords and links fostered by the *autodefensas* and continued by the unity government project.

Despite its emphasis on local identity and the centrality of locally constructed political practices, the *reglamento* is also at pains to demonstrate that it is formulated under, and complies with, Michoacan state and Federal laws and regulations. This is evidenced in the references to the codification of citizen participation under Michoacan state laws such as its Constitution and Municipal Organic Law (Ibid: 21). Along with the detailed incorporation of rules from these Michoacan state laws is the recognition that the *reglamento* is in accordance with the Federal Constitution (Ibid: 2). In doing so, the reglamento, whilst novel in its specificities around the incorporation and institutionalisation of the citizen councils, simultaneously seeks to downplay such difference and emphasise its conformity with Federal and Michoacan state law. This is further evidence of the municipal government's attempts to manage its relationship with the Michoacan state and Federal governments (as discussed in Chapter 2) by emphasising its recognition and compliance with its laws. Thus, Tancitaro's difference and localised sovereignty is contained at the local level and is explicitly not impinging upon the sovereignty of the wider state. Such nested sovereignty is also indicative of the manner in which Tancitaro's attempts to construct a differentiated form of political praxis at the municipal level cannot be interpreted as autonomy to any meaningful extent.

An important point feeding into the wider implications of the citizen councils is the way in which they have divided the municipality into eleven geographical zone (as touched upon in Chapter 3). This is detailed within the *reglamento* which details the zones and the communities that they contain, the *cabecera* – which has the largest population has been divided into two zones – whilst other zones contain up to 13 smaller *pueblos* and *ranchos* (Ibid: 10-11). This has been done in a way by which each zone contains a similar size of population, and the councils are structured as follows at the local (community) and zonal level:

Figure 23: The organisation of citizen councils at the local and zonal levels



Source: Author's elaboration with data from H. Ayuntamiento de Tancítaro (2016b: 10).

The importance of this from a local citizenship and sovereignty perspective is that it represents a re-imagining of the municipality both geographically and politically, as the councils are implicated in municipal politics and governance. Thus, in the creation of 11 zones within the municipality the project is engaging in a re-territorialisation of communities, and in doing so is creating new political units, interactions, and subjectivities. A parallel can be drawn here with the example of Cheran, where in the aftermath of the uprising of 2011 against the illegal logging of the cartel, there was a similar territorial reorganisation (as referred to in Chapter 2). In place of the traditional four *barrios* of the

town, there was instead a reorganisation of its territorial demarcations, and the people living within them, into new units called *fogatas* (bonfires), recalling the nightly vigilance against the cartel's return. Such a reorganisation can be seen as directly linked to the uprising and concerns around security, both in terms of its timing as well as its symbolism. Given that the Jesuit project is also present in Cheran, this may have influenced the institution of the zonal system of citizen councils in Tancitaro. Similarly, the example of indigenous community authorities such as Cheran, also serve to emphasise the importance of participation, as their legitimacy and style of governance – via the *asamblea* (the assembly of the community's residents for decision-making) – is grounded in such participation (see for example Gledhill 2004). In a similar manner to Cheran, the re-territorialisation in Tancitaro also can be seen as connected to security, stemming as it does from the *autodefensa* rising, via the unity government, and the need to find a way of doing local politics which reduces conflict.

The re-territorialisation of the municipality has sovereignty implications as territory is central to the concept of sovereignty (as discussed in Chapter 2). Whilst a Weberian notion of sovereignty may be seen as more of a myth than a reality (see Agnew 2009) – in the sense that the state never held a monopoly of violence in a demarcated geographical area – it has been an important, and indeed hegemonic idea as Eckert (2011) has noted. Such a hegemonic position has influenced the connected concept of citizenship, specifically valorising the vision of citizenship as being one of rights and responsibilities in the imagination of citizens (Eckert 2011). But Eckert also sees the territorial connection with citizenship as having been eroded in recent years by the 'flexibilisation' of citizenship – through negotiation and uncertainty around membership and legalisation (see for example Soysal 1994 and Ong 1998) – as well as processes of neoliberal globalisation (Eckert 2011: 311; see also Assies, Calderon & Salman (2002); Hopenhayn (2002)). Conceptualising and indeed redressing such a disjuncture have come in the form of Soysal's (1994) idea of post-national citizenship – which emphasised how migrants could draw on transnational rights outside the nation-state which made national citizenship less relevant – and Ong's (1998) concept of flexible citizenship. Such flexible citizenship sees increasingly transnational populations (such as immigrant and migrant populations) and ideas – such as universalizing criteria of neoliberalism and human rights – creating the terrain whereby rights and mobilisations are realised on an increasingly international basis and articulated through references to globalised concepts (Ong 1998; 2006). However, the likes of Salman (2002) have critiqued these kinds of de-territorialized citizenship proposals for failing to satisfactorily answer the question around democratic control in transnationalism, in lieu of a territorialised citizenship. Whilst transnational organisations such as NAFTA and the OEA may have democratic discourse and freedom of speech, in practice they have resulted in a kind of 'thin citizenship', whereby some rights may be

created on paper, but fall short of being substantial rights which encourage participation and give citizens the kind of influence whereby transnational political communities could be formed (Linklater 1998: 130; Salman 2002: 127). Thus, such transnational organisations cannot be seen as being able to provide effective of substantial guarantees of rights (Faist 2000). Therefore, cosmopolitan citizenship cannot be seen as making up for the erosion of citizenship rights and practices that have taken place within nation states (Falk 2000).

Tancitaro's position as a key hub in the transnational agro-export industry, and – as with Michoacán in general – a community with a long and significant history of transnational migration, would seem to be an ideal context for the exploration of links between territory, sovereignty and citizenship – and the resonance of post-national and flexible citizenship. But one can argue that such notions have little resonance in Tancitaro as the zonal demarcation of citizen councils can be seen as a rejection of such influences in favour of a reterritorialization of citizenship on a local basis. Thus, citizenship practices are founded on and organised through territorial belonging and participation as both a member of a zone (through the zonal assemblies and councils), and as a citizen of the municipality as a whole (through the municipal assemblies and operative and functional councils). Such a localised response in terms of citizenship practices which would seem to implicitly reject notions of transnational citizenship. Crucially such a rejection in favour of localised citizenship is fundamentally tied to notions of insecurity, especially in a context resembling Hansen and Stepputat's (2001) depiction of a reduced and fragmented neoliberal state at the local level – exacerbated in this case by the experience of organised crime – which has undermined the notion of the state as a guarantor of social order. Hence necessitating the turn to locally constructed ideas and mechanisms based on localised citizenship practices that are seen as legitimate and coterminous with community-based ideas of social comportment.

The end of the Unity government

My stay in the municipality during 2017 coincided with the presentation of the second annual report of the unity government. Under Mexican law, municipal governments present such a report to the public which details the work undertaken, the municipality's financial status, and its expenditures over the past year. It affords the citizenry an opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the work of the *ayuntamiento* as the report is presented at an open assembly of the populace. It is an important milestone for municipal governments, and in the case of Tancitaro in 2017, its realisation seemed to signal to those involved in governance in the municipality – both in the municipal government and the

citizen councils – to start looking towards the upcoming elections. Although scheduled for mid-2018, such elections require the registration of candidates, the organisation of *planillas* and the planning of campaigns in advance. This provoked debate within the citizen councils about the position to adopt in relation to these, as demonstrated in the vignette that opened the chapter. Attendance at such meetings, combined with a short visit to the municipality in 2019, have enabled the charting of the trajectory of the unity government and its aftermath in Tancitaro.

The citizen councils and political parties on the eve of negotiations

The stance of the members of the citizen councils towards the elections became clear during the meetings I attended and conversations that I had with councillors. The remarks of the citizen councillor that opened this chapter were representative of such a stance, notably the need to preserve the unity of the "citizens of Tancítaro", and to remember that they were living through an extraordinary situation (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). This 'extraordinary situation' referred to the peace that they had enjoyed following the *autodefensa* rising, whilst the violence and security continued in neighbouring municipalities. It certainly speaks to the context in which the municipality is embedded that it is peace rather than violence which is seen as the extraordinary situation. The councillor went on to emphasise that such peace could only be achieved by sustained participation and the continuance of the citizen councils. Another councillor then told the story of how the unity government came about, highlighting how the parties had prioritised the good of the municipality over their own interests. Further contributions expounded the primordial nature of security concerns, a sentiment echoed in interviews and other meetings.

Of note here is the continuing perceived connection between insecurity and political/electoral competition, which threatened the unity generated by the *autodefensa* uprising, and which had been continued with the unity government. The perpetuation of citizen participation in the co-production of governance was therefore, seen as key in preserving Tancitaro's difference. Whilst such co-production had not been without its frustrations and limitations (as discussed in Chapter 3) it was nonetheless fundamental that participation was maintained, and the government not left to govern alone. Finally, the shared identity as residents of Tancitaro was emphasised as key to unity and the preservation of peace, and something that sectional interests – such as those of the political parties – should be sacrificed for. Indeed, such past sacrifices allowed for moral claims on the parties to once again put aside their interests for the greater good of the municipality.

The political parties however, had little appetite for a renewal of the unity government in the coming elections. This came through clearly from talking to members of the municipal government, in part due to the difficulties of working as a unity government. Such difficulties manifested themselves in terms of cross-party co-operation with regards to the daily running of the municipality. But also, in attempting to satisfy the desires of a demanding populace, and, thanks to the councils, one that was very participative. As one senior member of the municipal government put it – whilst rolling her eyes – "yes, the people here are very participative". The demanding nature of attitudes towards the municipal government is ascribed to the general lack of confidence in authority generated by their experiences under organised crime, and fears of a return to insecurity if people relax and allow the municipal government to govern alone.

The unity government's composition generated dissatisfaction as each party only received a third of the posts it would normally have governing alone (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). The relatively low vote totals received had also shown the parties the unity government's lukewarm reception amongst their own supporters (Notes from citizen councils meeting – 26/08/17). However, some party members were open to the unity government's continuance, pointing to it having achieved its fundamental aim of maintaining the peace and unity generated by the *autodefensas* (Interview with César, member of the PRD, 2017). Relatedly, some PRD members feared a return to traditional electoral competition could cause division, risking the continued peace of the municipality. Thus, the parties' Tancitaro branches should again be willing to defy the will of their regional and national hierarchies if the municipality's interests were best served by another unity government (Ibid).

This outlook was not widely shared however, and political positioning and campaigning – albeit somewhat clandestinely – was perceived to have started within the municipal government during my fieldwork. Though the line between doing one's job in the municipal government and campaigning can be somewhat blurred (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). As a municipal administration worker pointed out, referring to the PAN's wok within the municipal government: "So at the moment, the activities that they are doing, are probably towards this end, looking towards the elections, probably yes, but apart from this they are helping people" (Interview with Josefina, public servant in the municipal administration, 2017). This refers to the photos which invariably accompany any event, or provision of goods or services by a *regidor* to citizens or a community, which whilst evidencing the work of the *ayuntamiento* is also seen as a form of political campaigning. This is especially the case because of how such events are covered (or not) by the local

media outlet, which is associated with the PAN. As one of the Jesuit missionaries described, even a request for pens and crayons for a school art project was conditioned on the children posing for photos with the official who granted the request (Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project, 2017). Therefore, the line between political campaigning and the practices of the assistencialist state were not, and are not, altogether clear nor necessarily mutually exclusive. In summary, with the election approaching the prospects of another unity government appeared bleak, which raised the question of what implications this would have for the election campaign and the continuance of the citizen councils.

Negotiations for the 2018 municipal elections

The negotiations between the citizen councils and the political parties around electoral conduct and the continuance of the project offer an important insight into the political life of the municipality, and the impact of the citizen councils on ideas and practices of citizenship. From the first citizen council meeting (referred to in the opening vignette) to discuss their approach to the elections, one can discern important facets of the attitudes and strategies that were adopted. Firstly, the extension of an invitation to the *jefes de tenencia* and *encargados de orden*, to demonstrate 'muscle' ahead of negotiations, speaks to a suspicion of the political parties and a sense that the situation could become confrontational. Hence, a demonstration of strength to establish a favourable bargaining position. The ability to bring together these officials (*jefes/encargados*) – elected by their communities and the day to day face of local authority within them – speaks to the territorialisation of the citizen councils throughout the municipality, and their strength and embeddedness within the communities in being able to call on such support. It also reflects the importance of the idea of unity and its connection to security, not only in demonstrating a united front in the face of the parties, but also that those charged with the day to day maintenance of order and peace in their communities were participating alongside the councils.

a. The 'best people' approach

A potential approach to the elections, tabled by a citizen councillor in this first meeting, reflected a desire to elect the 'best people'. The councillor stated that whilst the unity government had been more open than traditional municipal governments, which had been positive as citizens now had a say, there was a need for the 'best people' – rather than just political party nominees – to be in the government (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). Characteristics of the 'best people' were

seen in the subsequent discussion as being those who participated in their communities, were of good standing, put the needs of the community above personal interests, and who had shown themselves as supportive of others. Such a characterisation – perhaps unsurprisingly – mirrors the ideas of the municipality's residents what makes a 'good' citizen (as discussed in Chapter 3). Thus, conceptions of good citizenship were now being operationalised in the vision of the citizen councils as determinants of political participation. This perhaps reflected a critique of the unity government from the *diplomado* sessions, whereby although a unity government was positive, it was still just an alliance of political parties rather than a 'true' communitarian government (Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration – 16/07/17).

A method of electing the 'best people' was put forward by the Jesuit father overseeing the meeting. Specifically, each *rancho/pueblo* could choose candidates from those most committed to the community and not necessarily people in political parties (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). The parties would then select candidates from this pool of committed citizens. Another method, suggested by citizen councillors, was for each community to elect a *planilla* via assembly. Candidates for the overall municipal *planilla* would then be selected from amongst these community *planillas*. A prevalent desire was for the candidates to be "from the community" to avoid people who are just interested in themselves – seen as being the same type of candidates "as always" (Ibid). Thus, whilst the Jesuit father's approach did not specifically exclude members of political parties from taking part, the approach suggested by the citizen councils would seem to do so. Both would replace simple internal party elections with community-based selection processes. Advantages of such a change were seen as not only giving responsibility to the community to pick the candidates, and also the power to remove them (Ibid). Such ideas would seem to go against the reality, charted by the likes of Lazar (2008), that once elected it is often very difficult to hold officials to account in Latin America. A mechanism to revoke authority would seem to affirm the idea – raised by informants in Stack's (2013, 2018) fieldwork sites – that politicians have somehow broken free of the collective bounds of civil sociality, which is problematic for the wider society. Whilst such an election process could not change the rules around recalling elected officials in Mexico (which make it a difficult task), the idea that having a more direct connection between the electorate and elected – without the intermediation of the political parties – would make officials more accountable, is interesting in itself. Thus, the method proposed aimed to ensure that whoever was elected remained bound within, and responsive to, the community, rather than the political parties and their partly external hierarchies.

Another interesting aspect of the need to elect 'the best people from the community' was its juxtaposition against the typical political candidate, implicitly portrayed as not being from the community in some way. This did not mean that previous candidates had not been municipal residents, but rather that they were not perceived to necessarily have the good of the community and its residents as their key motivating factor; resulting in them being 'othered' from the community in some respects. Therefore, conceptions of (in)security and of the municipality as an exception, have helped to create space for a local politics, namely, as (Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 24) describe it "the 'politics from here' as opposed to the (less legitimate) 'politics from there'". In this case, the 'politics from here' are represented by the citizen councils and the emphasis on mechanisms bounded by ideas of civil sociality, whereas the 'politics from there' is represented by the parties conducting politics through patronage, clientelism, and the interests of individuals.

The proposed changes to the election of candidates also broadly replicate the methods for choosing the citizen council members and thus, speak to the important influence the project had had on the conceptions of political practices and their legitimacy, at least amongst its members. It also reflects the territorialisation of the citizen councils throughout the municipality. Specifically, the fact that each community – independent of size – would have an opportunity to influence on the selection of the candidates. This can be seen as moving towards a wider based participatory democratic approach, albeit one still bound within a representative democratic election. Indeed, it would seem to highlight a form of collective participation, echoing longer histories of corporativism. Under the PRI's regime, for example, political activity in Mexico was restricted and involvement in politics was generally exercised through corporativist organisations rather than on an individual basis (Pérez Baltodano 1997; Lomnitz 2001).

In terms of the effect of corporativism on citizenship in Mexico, Pansters (2002) points to two broad politico-cultural discourses within Mexico that have been mediated historically, socially, and regionally. Firstly, the pyramidal political culture orientated towards the centre, which is vertically structured and cemented by a personalist culture (Ibid: 301). Such a structure requires collective support, and this is realised via corporatism rather than the participation of citizens as individuals (Ibid: 301). Secondly, the key politico-cultural discourse of citizenship, which has been conceived of in the democratic and liberal tradition in Mexico (Ibid: 301). This has been orientated towards multiple centres of power – emphasising federalism over centralism – and structured horizontally by institutions, including discourses of citizenship focusing on both individualism and pluralism which refer to the principles of liberalism (Ibid: 301). Power is seen as delegated throughout the political

system rather than being centralised, and there is a need for counter-weights, whilst law is applied in an impersonal way rather than being motivated by personalist preoccupation as in the pyramidal vision (Ibid: 301). Both cultures have exercised an influence historically and contemporaneously and have been in tension with one another, with different historical periods/regions reflecting one or both cultures to differing extents. Therefore, the citizen councils themselves, and the methods they suggest for the election of candidates, can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between these two cultures – through collective participation but within the constraints of an electoral system geared towards individual participation and representation. Thus, also representing an attempt to bridge the often tense gap between representative and participatory democracy.

Another important qualifier for the election of the 'best people' was voiced as being their willingness to receive training for their roles. Commitment to the community was therefore key, but insufficient in and of itself, as the technical skills of governance were also seen as being important. This may have been indicative of the influence of the *diplomado* programme – both in terms of its content emphasising learning and knowledge – but also its revelation of the inner complexity of the municipal administration to the citizen councillors. This complexity is indicative of the increasing responsibilities and requirements that have been shifted to the municipal level under the neoliberal transformation of the state in recent year. This was noted in the context of Tancitaro by an official whose instance in municipal public office spanned recent decades:

> "Now the requirements (exigencies), the normativity from the Federal, (Michoacan) state levels is changing. Now there are greater requirements, to be here in the administration requires greater preparation and so those of us who decided to participate didn't exactly know about these requirements and there come situations where sometimes we don't have the capacity/ability for this level of requirements, but the requirements marked out by the standards. There are many transparency requirements, planning requirements, programming, executing accords around what was planned and justifying it…That is, there are many things we are not trained for, so it costs us a lot of work, but not because we aren't willing to work, but because we aren't trained for it and it is something new" (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017).

In such a context, another (implicit) idea behind training may be to ensure that best practices are implemented, thus reducing and guarding against political interventions – including from the wider state – and critiques of clientelism and/or sectoral interests. Consequently, an openness to training not only reflected the practical complexity of local governance, but also represented a technocratic

shield against the return of potentially divisive political criticisms or external interventions in municipal affairs.

A critique of the 'best people' approach voiced in meetings was the impractically of obtaining the acquiescence of the political parties. An alternative method was proposed, as part of this critique, aimed at instituting a 'real' communitarian government, specifically a Cheran-style governing citizen council (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). However, councillors were quick to point out the dangers of such an approach, specifically in associating the councils directly with popular elections in which they could be accused of participating for personal gain. It had necessitated a huge effort at the start of the councils to convince people in the communities that the citizen councils were for the community and not to advance the position of its members (Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils, 2017). Therefore, such a direct link between the councils and the election was seen as something to be avoided. It was also pointed out that Cheran is one – albeit relatively large – community, whereas Tancitaro contains over 70 separate communities, thus complicating such self-government. Thus, both the territoriality of the municipality, and the dangers of perceived self-interest – as opposed to the greater good of the community – were seen as imposing limits on the ability to move towards a more autonomous style of municipal governance.

b. The 'Procedimiento'

A second approach to the upcoming elections was suggested by the Jesuit Father, who first stressed the need for unity as a citizen movement in the face of the elections, and stated that the key issue was how to have the elections without generating problems (Notes from citizen council meeting – 30/07/17). He emphasised that the councils could not support a political party as this was prohibited by the *reglamento*, but they could formulate a documented *procedimiento* (process) to be followed by whichever political party won the election, and which would allow for the continuation of the citizen councils. The necessity for formalising this was seen as being the untrustworthiness of the political parties, who would make commitments whilst campaigning, but who could then renege on once in office. In doing so, the Father reinforced doubts – already prevalent in the community – around the trustworthiness of political parties. This represented a continuity with Jesuit teachings in the *diplomado* (as discussed in Chapter 3), but nonetheless, his willingness to say this in a large public meeting was interesting. Similarly, and as part of the *procedimiento*, the Father suggested an oversight role for the citizen councils in the conduct of the elections themselves. This reflected the concern, discussed previously, that the political and social heat generated by political campaigning could cause

disunity, generating conflict and insecurity in the municipality. A widespread concern of the citizen council members at the meeting was specifically around the need to have 'clean' elections.

A key aspect of the *procedimiento* is that it gives an insight into Padre Atilano's perception of the stakes involved in the election, which were nothing more or less than the survival of the citizen councils. His very presence at the meeting was testament to its importance, as he is not ordinarily resident in the municipality. It can also be seen as an admission that there was little possibility of another unity government. Therefore, the return of electoral competition was seen as having the potential to create levels of conflict that would erode the very unity which served as the basis for the citizen councils' existence. Another interpretation would be that the elections could herald the arrival of a political party into power hostile to the project, or at least the aspect of political participation that the citizen councils represented. For example, whilst not a political party the *Consejo de Vigilancia* were seen as close to the PAN and had been against the idea and practices of the citizen councils from the start. This demonstrates the fragility and contingency of the citizen councils to a certain extent, and their reliance on a supportive municipal government for the ability to participate and engage in the co-production of governance in the municipality. It also demonstrates the primacy of such local institutionalisation as a key facet of the *buen convivir* vision.

The prospect of the elections and a return of party-political competition also demonstrated the limits to ideas of unity, how far such narratives could be sustained, and for what purposes. The citizen councils saw themselves as a representation of the unity of the municipality, drawing their lineage and legitimacy from the unity and participation that sprang from the *autodefensas*. However, the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, who also drew their origins from the *autodefensa* rising, were seen as being hostile to such an expanded notion of political participation and were keen to reassert their own authority and sectional interests via the retaking of the municipal government. Therefore, the *procedimiento* sought to reaffirm the citizen councils project as a non-partisan project which did not take sides in political disputes. However, the very nature of the citizen councils, and the act of involving citizens in the co-production of governance, is innately political and was bound to be interpreted as such by various political tendencies. The support of a unity government – and indeed its very existence – spoke to the extraordinary situation and concerns around the security environment in the period leading up to its election. But there had been something of a relaxation (to a certain degree) once the situation of security lasted over time. Thus, the years of relative peace experienced in the municipality and the experience of the unity government had served to seemingly alter the calculations of those

involved in party politics, who posited that the security situation was sufficiently stable to bear the potential conflicts and division of a traditional election campaign.

c. The independent candidate

The final key proposal for the conduct of the election emerged from a dissatisfaction with the previous two proposals. This strategy suggested that the citizen councils, *jefes de tenencia*, and *encargados de orden*, should back an independent candidate, with a supporting *planilla*, to be the next municipal administration, in direct competition with the political parties. This represented the most radical proposal as it represented a break with the prior suggestions which contained notions of managing the relationship with the political parties or seeking to temper electoral competition between them. The ability to run as an independent in political elections is a relatively recent phenomenon in Mexico (which began in 2014 (Gobierno de la República 2014)) but has gained ground with the election of Jaime Rodríguez Calderón as the independent governor of Nuevo Leon in 2015 (El Universal 2015b), and his subsequent candidacy 2018 presidential elections, in which Margarita Zavala (a former first lady) also ran on an independent ticket (Lafuente & Beauregard 2018; Beauregard 2017).

The independent candidate was seen as having the advantages of electing the 'best people' without the issue of having to pact with, and trust, the political parties. This derived in part from the practical solution that had been mooted to achieve the 'best people' strategy. Namely that once the final *planilla* – drawn from the individual community *planillas* – had been selected to contest the election, the political parties would then 'lend them their shirt' to actually contest the elections (Notes from citizen councils meeting – 30/07/17). Given the lack of confidence in the political parties, this was seen as a problematic method of achieving the 'best people', not only because it involved trusting the political parties, but also could jeopardise the position of the citizen councils by associating them closely with the political parties. The independent candidate was also portrayed as representing 'a new start' and a different way of doing things. It would also limit the influence of party hierarchies outside of the municipality on local municipal branch parties as presently "there is always someone above them" (Ibid). By contrast, the independent candidate would be a local political project which would correspond to ideas of the municipality as a secure space, and finesse concerns around outside influences on the electoral process. Thus, the citizens of the municipality would select the *planilla* directly with no intermediation or involvement by the political parties. In doing so, its backers portrayed it as being superior to the *procedimiento* strategy in that no trust in political parties was necessary. Similarly, they said that if the independent candidate won, the *procedimiento* would be a

moot point as the *planilla* would be organised and promoted by (if not necessarily comprised of) members of the citizen councils, thus guaranteeing the project's continuation. Direct participation via the independent candidate also allowed for a degree of influence over how the election campaign was conducted, so that it would not adversely affect the security of the municipality and cause unnecessary conflict and division.

There were, however, palpable concerns around the independent candidate strategy voiced by members of the citizen council in various meetings. The central fear was in associating the citizen councils with direct involvement in popular elections. As discussed previously, such involvement could lead to allegations of self-interest, an accusation frequently levelled at politicians by councillors themselves. Therefore, contesting political office so directly was something that many of the councillors were keen to avoid. Another fear of the councillors was that supporting an independent candidate could lead to the municipality being punished financially by the Michoacan state government when it came to apportioning municipal funding (Notes from citizen council meeting – 26/08/17). One of the supporters of the independent candidate idea sought to reassure his fellow councillors by saying that they should not be afraid of voting for an independent candidate, because the state government was bound by law to provide funds to the municipality in any case. This was a rare example in the context of Tancitaro of someone making reference to the law, and indeed that it could be relied upon. Unlike in Stack's (2013) research, informants made far less direct reference to the law and the ability to enforce it. The experience of the people in the municipality under organised crime may help explain such a lack of reference to the law, as they saw those who should enforce the law – at each of the levels of government – openly collaborating with the cartel and flouting the law. Similarly, when asked about the possibility of obtaining justice for the crimes committed against the community by organised crime, the most frequent response by residents was "from whom?".

The influence of party political allegiances on government funding was seen as important, as people referred to previous experiences of PRD municipal administrations that received less money because they were being excluded/punished for not being the party that was in power at the Michoacan state or Federal levels at the moment (Notes from citizen council election meeting – 26/08/17). Similarly, a member of the municipal government referenced the idea that the comparative lack of funds from the Michoacan state level in the last year could be because the municipality continued to withhold from signing the *Mando Único* initiative, a situation which they 'hoped' was not the case (Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). In a wider sense, some people in the municipality felt that such a defiance, represented also by the continuation of the *autodefensas*,

had led to Tancítaro being wiped off the map as far as the governor and state governor concerned: "What is really being learned, and heard, is that you can say that Tancitaro has been rubbed off the map because they (the Michoacan state and Federal governments) never mention it" (Interview with Margarita, Tancitaro resident, 2019). Thus, political allegiance and policy decisions at the municipal level were crucial political and strategic choices because they could lead to disciplinary or punitive measures on the part of the wider state.

This idea finds support in relation to security in Mexican policy-making, where academics have argued that party differences have impacted on the ability for Federal authorities to coordinate with sub-Federal authorities – such as state and municipal authorities – who were of a different political party to the Federal government party (see for example Urrusti Frenk (2012) and Ríos (2015)). Trejo and Ley (2016) agree that such party differences have indeed had an impact but argue that party political allegiances have been central in deciding where the Federal government decides to make security interventions, and where it does not. The idea being that the absence of such interventions will allow violence and insecurity to continue unabated, which the citizens will then blame on the rival party in government in that region or locality (Trejo and Ley 2016). Therefore, the prospect of an independent candidate was regarded with some trepidation by many of the citizen councillors, and was consequently treated as something of a fall-back position to be adopted if the political parties proved to be intransigent or untrustworthy when discussing the other two possible approaches.

The negotiations

Negotiations between the citizen councils – represented by members of the operative council – and the political parties – represented by their respective leaders in the municipality – were fraught from the beginning. Whilst the leaders of the political parties were positive about the contribution of the citizen councils and the broader Jesuit project to the municipality, they were unable to explicitly commit to their continuance following the upcoming elections (Notes from citizen council with political party meeting – 24/08/17). The stated reason for this – by the leaders of each party – was that there were as yet no internal structures in place for the upcoming elections, for example the *planillas* had not yet been considered. More generally they were reluctant to speak for their parties as a whole as they had yet to consult them on the issue. Internal political party discussion were thus necessary before reaching a decision on the citizen councils. Indeed, a similar response was given to the 'best people' approach when it was mooted by the citizen councillors. The leaders of the PRD and MORENA parties were personally open to non-members being candidates potentially, whilst the PAN

and PVEM leaders were open to this if it proved to be in line with internal party rules. But again, they declined to speak on behalf of their parties more generally for the same reasons stated above.

Such non-committal responses to the proposed strategies were a source of irritation for the citizen councillors, who saw them as evidence that the parties were being evasive and not trustworthy (Ibid). Indeed, citizen councillors wasted little time in reminding the political parties that they were viewed with suspicion by the majority of the people in the municipality. Forthright exchanges such as this led to an interesting intervention by the PRD leader who expressed a desire for discussions not to become heated. He emphasised that political parties could not be allowed to divide the people again and pointed to the fact that it did not matter what party you were part of when you were on the barricades together. Such a call appealed to the memory of participation in the *autodefensas* as a means of emphasising the need for continued unity despite party differences. In doing so, the PRD leader replicated the kind of moral claims on the political parties voiced by the citizen councils, whilst simultaneously accepting that party political divisions had a direct connection to insecurity.

The citizen council's strategies represented problematic proposals for the political parties, both because of the lack of authority of the party leaders to agree to such commitments (as discussed above), but also because such arrangements were likely to be extremely unpopular with the party memberships. Most importantly, the memberships would expect opportunities to form the next *planillas*, but instead they would (notionally) be replaced by whoever the communities selected from the general population. These memberships had already suffered a relative lack of posts in the previous election cycle because of the unity government, which was one the reasons why there was little appetite for its repetition. Thus, the 'best candidate' proposal would upset – to an even greater extent – the networks of patronage and clientelism through which parties often attract and maintain membership and support. Consequently, adopting such an approach could be seen as leading to an existential crisis for the local party as it would essentially negate its existence in a meaningful sense, and convert it into an apolitical (in electoral competition terms) mechanism through which the community put forward its 'best people'.

As negotiations continued, however, there was seemingly some semblance of agreement around a *procedimiento* for the continuance of the citizen councils post-election and the conduct of the elections. However, there were continuing concerns from the citizen councils as to how to trust what the political parties said. This, and a wider dissatisfaction with the existing political system, meant that the idea of an independent candidate, both as a metaphorical stick with which to beat the political

parties, and as a genuine potential option, continued to be discussed by the councils. The political parties were obviously not keen on the idea of an independent candidate, which represented a threat to them and their interests. This was made clear, in a negotiation meeting, by one party representatives who reminded the councils that "this is not Cheran, here we have a political party system". There was also an increasing disquiet amongst some of the parties about the role of the Jesuit project in the elections, with some seeing the Jesuits as 'doing/becoming involved in politics' (Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government, 2017). Such a critique had also been levelled at the Jesuit missionaries by representatives of the local Catholic church, who warned them against continued involvement in election discussions, and politics in general, advising them instead to start attending more masses. This came in apparent response to the decline in mass attendance at large in the municipality, a phenomenon which some of the local priests saw as being provoked by the over-involvement of the missionaries in political concerns and happening. As a result, the decision was made that the missionaries should stop attending election meetings and would instead let the citizen councils continue such negotiations alone.

After some months of negotiation without a clear resolution, the clamour for an independent candidate grew within the citizen councils. This came to a head in the build-up to the election, when the municipal government's *cabildo* cut-off the municipality's financial contribution to the citizen council project/Jesuit project for a period. Funding was only subsequently re-established when an agreement was reached with the political parties whereby the citizen councils did not stand an independent candidate, and the political parties agreed that the citizen council project would continue whoever won the 2018 elections. Given the deterioration in the relationship between the citizen councils and political parties it is perhaps surprising that an independent candidate was not put forward. Indeed, the independent candidature had reached the stage where a provisional *planilla* had been chosen before it was cancelled. The explanations for such a cancellation demonstrate some interesting facets around the politics of participation in the municipality.

When the provisional *planilla* for the independent candidate was elected – via the participation of citizen councils and communities at large – the names filling the three key positions – municipal presdient, *sindico*, and government secretary, were very familiar to followers of politics in the municipality. Specifically, they had been key members of previous PRD municipal governments, and some also had been in the unity government. Part of the explanation why they were standing as independents stems from the fact that they had left the PRD due to dissatisfaction with the direction taken by the national party, namely its alliance with the PAN and MC parties (Arrieta 2018b). The

alliance with the PAN was seen as particularly problematic by the PRD members given that they had always been seen as being as fierce rivals and at the opposite end of the political spectrum. How these former leaders of the PRD in the municipality came to form the independent candidate *planilla* was explained by people as down to their political experience, specifically their ability to express themselves clearly and engagingly through cogent discourses when representing themselves and their ideas to the assembled people. As one former member of the Jesuit project in the municipality put it, the ability to be able to talk well at gatherings is greatly prized within the municipality, especially when it comes to positions of political intermediation. Their candidacy can also be explained to some extent by the fact that the PRD leadership in the municipality had always been sympathetic and engaged with the Jesuit project (as discussed previously) which may have enhanced their standing amongst members of the citizen councils.

The election of this *planilla* however, was not without its detractors as soon became clear within the citizen councils supposedly supporting such a candidature. Complaints centred on the fact that they were the same candidates as always, and so limited the extent to which the independent candidature represented – and could be seen to represent – a break with past practices and personalities. This could also reflect the sentiment (previously discussed) that those habitually involved in political parties do so primarily for their own benefit rather than that of the municipality, so they were not necessarily the 'best people' for the job. Such disquiet caused concerns amongst the prospective *planilla*, who interpreted such critiques as demonstrating a lack of unity amongst their supposed backers. This perceived disunity was seen by the prospective *planilla* as being fatal for the independent candidature's prospects. Therefore, the decision was taken by the prospective candidates not to continue with the independent project thus signalling its end.

The demise of the independent candidature revealed the recurrence of the idea of unity/disunity as the key factor in the determination of success or failure of the project. As such it represents a microcosm of the wider concerns around unity/disunity, and the relationship of political and electoral competition to this, in the municipality. Indeed, it mirrors the wider narratives in the municipality stemming from the idea of unity as the key characteristic representing the *autodefensas*, and thus the salvation of Tancítaro. Such unity contrasted with the disunity – in part blamed on political parties and competition – that had resulted in the subjugation of the municipality under the rule of organised crime. Therefore, whilst (in)security and the *autodefensas* are not referenced directly, there seems to be implicit concerns relating to such themes, as represented by the use of language intimately connected to the experience of these phenomena. Thus, they continue to permeate and exercise an

important and implicit influence on discourses and practices of political representation and participation. The continuing relevance of tensions and concerns around political practices and citizen participation, and their connection to ideas and practices of (in)security, can also be seen through an exploration of the results of the 2018 elections and their aftermath.

Results and post-election impact

The 2018 campaign was seen by residents as a return to the previous style of election, both in terms of the open competition between political parties, and the content and nature of the campaign. The campaign was perceived to have been characterised by partisan competition and the trading of increasingly personal attacks between the parties, especially between the perceived favourites – the PAN and PRI. The content of the election also returned to past practices as candidates promised specific works to communities in order to try to ensure their vote. The political parties had stated that they would support the continuation of the citizen councils whichever party won, but opinions differ over what was actually said by the eventual winner – the PAN candidate – during the campaign around citizen participation. Some claim that the soon-to-be municipal president – Araceli Solórzano Solórzano – was explicit in her criticism of citizen participation, saying that it had been too involved under the unity government, causing confusion and conflict, and so it was time to return to a government which made the decisions. The point being that a local government was elected precisely to do this and so it should be left to get on with the job that the citizens had entrusted it with, recalling past paternalistic forms of government. Others, however, notably an ex-missionary of the Jesuit project, stated that the municipal president, as a candidate, had praised the councils and citizen participation during the election campaign, and this was one of the reasons explaining her electoral victory. Such differing accounts are hard to reconcile, but there may be two explanations for such discrepancies in the accounts. The first being that there may have been different messages for different electorates – i.e. one for those people/areas who had been seen as particularly supporting the Jesuit project, and another for areas where the citizen councils were less popular or seen to have been less successful in their aims. Another explanation may be that those who said that there had always been critiques of citizen councils in the campaign may be projecting the post-election approach of the PAN government backwards into the election campaign. Whilst there is not a definitive answer to this, it shows that ideas of representative democracy and participatory democracy, through the citizen councils, were seen as an important factor in the election, and a key source of conflict and contention.

The election results themselves were extremely close, with barely 100 votes separating the winning PAN-MC candidature from the second placed PRI, and another 100 votes separating the PRI from the third placed PRD-PVEM candidate. The PAN victory represented the worst possible outcome for many members of the citizen councils. This is because the PAN are (as previously discussed) seen as close to the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, who were against the citizen councils project. The election was therefore, interpreted as a victory for them in taking back some of the influence that they had lost in the 2015 elections, as well as a blow to the participation engendered through the citizen councils. In a wider sense, the elections were interpreted as a return to the values of clientelism and assistencialist government, with a government promising to sort out the problems of the population and securing votes through the promising of specific public works. Such clientelism was seen as being reflected more broadly in the membership of the PAN party, whose support base is seen as being comprised of the workers of the big avocado interests in the municipality, who tell their employees for whom to vote. This carries echoes of the more patron-based and corporativist participation in politics which has historically been a hallmark of Mexican politics, and which still has some resonance in Mexico generally, and Michoacan specifically, as the likes of Stack (2018) have argued.

Whilst the Jesuit project has remained in the municipality post-elections – albeit now staffed by local people who have taken on the role of being the project's 'missionaries' – the citizen councils are effectively dormant. Whilst officially the citizen councils have been allowed to continue, they have been defunded by the municipality and have little access to the municipal administration, meaning that can no longer meaningfully participate in the co-production of governance. In particular, the functional commissions – in the areas of transparency, peace (security), and development – depended on such access and collaboration from the municipal government to execute their governance functions. Therefore, whilst certain parts of the Jesuit project – such as the treatment of addicts – have continued, the more political aspects, represented by the citizen councils, have effectively been 'paused'. Thus, citizen participation in the co-production of governance has effectively been curtailed, with the MSC no longer meeting. Similarly, the zonal councils have lost much of their purpose with the end of the equitable division of public works between the communities, and citizen participation in choosing works has also been ended.

The 2018 elections and their aftermath have thus constituted a retrenchment of the clientelist practices of previous administrations, and a reaction against the practices which the unity government and citizen councils represented and sought to engender. Interestingly, one of the reasons given by a member of the unity government as to why it could not reproduce itself, was precisely the fact that it

did not distribute public works in a manner that generated a solid base of support. Specifically, he pointed to the fact that not only were works divided equally amongst communities depending on their needs and not their level of support for the administration, but also the larger and more obvious works were not realised in areas that were well traversed or obvious to the majority of the population of the municipality. Also, where communities could not come to an accord over which public works to choose – such as in the *cabecera* (particularly relevant given its population size) – few works were realised.

Overall, this serves to demonstrate the fragility and contingency of the project of citizen councils. It also underlines the strength of political party identities, as well as the sections of the population and interest groups which underwrite them. It also represents the strength of the political culture of clientelism and the difficulties encountered when trying to engender new political subjectivities to challenge this. However, such outcomes also point to the remarkable nature of the government of unity, its ability to overcome such influences due to the depth of feelings around (in)security, and the importance of the narratives of unity stemming from the experience of the *autodefensas*. These allowed entrenched identities and histories of contention to be subsumed – temporarily – by the overwhelming need for the construction of the municipality as a secure space, which precluded traditional repertoires of competition and conflict. Building on this sense of unity and the need for security – through the Jesuit project and citizen councils – were not however, interpreted as being politically neutral. Indeed, it was opposed by those seen as the *caciques* of the municipality, who saw it as a means by rival political factions to dilute their power – even the Jesuit missionaries, although connected to the Church, were not saved from being branded as meddling in local politics. Coupled with this was the fact that over time the *autodefensas* themselves – whilst helping to maintain the municipality as a secure space – also became disunited (at least internally), with two main tendencies emerging that similarly fell along traditional political and social divisions within the municipality. Indeed, one could argue that the emergence of such a peaceful split within the *autodefensas*, and the continued maintenance of the municipality as a relatively secure space, indicated that a return to political competition was possible without provoking the kind of insecurity with which it was previously associated.

The continuance of citizen participation

The arrival of the PAN municipal administration has not entirely curtailed citizen participation in the municipality. This has been demonstrated by the emergence of the *Movimiento por la defensa del Bosque y Cuencas de agua Tancítaro* (The Movement for the defence of the Woods and Water Basin

of Tancitaro, henceforth 'the Movement'), a citizen-led initiative attempting to campaign for and safeguard the natural environment. Concerns around the environment and citizen participation around this are also fundamentally bound up with ideas of (in)security, and relatedly, the experience and continuance of the *autodefensas*. As discussed previously, environmental issues are conceived of within the broader ambit of security, both in terms of potential organised crime, but also concerns around the consequences of environmental degradation on the current and future life of the municipality. Within this, the expansion of avocado growing has been seen to represent an existential threat to the municipality since 2017, with a far wider and more vocal perception of the impacts of climate change. Connected to this, the Movement has sought to prevent the illegal felling of pines, have participated in actions which have forcibly prevented illegal timber exiting the municipality, and promoted reforestation efforts. Many of the key members of this movement are former citizen councillors, who are assisted in this by a former Jesuit missionary who has remained in the municipality. They view their participation as continuing the engagement fostered by their time in the citizen councils, and as putting into practice what they learned during this period and through the *diplomado*. They also utilise the experience, connections, and repertoires of actions that have been prominent in their participation in the *autodefensas*. Thus radios are used for coordination, and the *casetas* have been used as choke points for identifying and stopping illegal movements of felled pines, as well as preventing the movement of machinery used for cutting down the trees.

Their participatory nature has precipitated a complicated relationship with the new municipal administration, of which the Movement has been highly critical for its failure in tackling environmental damage. Whilst the new administration was a government in waiting, one of the soon to be functionaries – responsible for the environment – had a number of discussions with the Movement over a period of months. However, once the municipal government was in place, and a point of contention in such discussions arose, the new municipal president said that she had not been privy to the previous discussions and so they should begin again. This was a source of great frustration for the members of the Movement, as were repeatedly cancelled meetings by the municipal government. Another point of contention was the Movement's organisation of a reforestation effort which the municipal government subsequently took credit for (via its Facebook site), despite having failed to provide any resources or personnel for such efforts. This is indicative of a wider perception in the municipality around the fact that the current administration is adept at using social media to present itself in a positive light but is largely ineffective and hostile towards citizen participation.

The difficult relationship with the local government has led to members of the Movement – according to them – being labelled as the '*revoltosos'* (unruly ones) by the municipal government. However, rather than spend three years in conflict with the *ayuntamiento*, the members of the Movement have decided to continue to manage their projects without recourse or engagement with the municipal government. They describe it as being an approach whereby "we will manage things from our side, and they (the municipal government) can manage their things" – that is, separately and without the need for constant conflict and contestation. Such an idea parallels the way in which the division within the *autodefensas* is expressed and managed, with the southern autodefensas and the *Consejo de Vigilancia* managing their own areas. Therefore, in the area of security – still seen as the primordial concern – there is a precedent for such an arrangement based on territorial control (by the *autodefensas*), and one which has not led to more conflictual situations. This allows for members of the Movement to adopt such an outlook and wait for the next elections when they hope to help elect a government that is more responsive to citizen participation.

The Movement's methodology for denouncing deforestation is revealing as to the construction of citizenship in the municipality in recent years. To deal with such acts the Movement would call a meeting of the population in the *rancho* where they have occurred and ask those responsible to attend. They would then publicly present evidence of such acts to those responsible and ask for the assembled members of the community to opine on the matter. The idea being that the community members denounce such actions and shame those responsible into reversing the damage. Members of the Movement would then be able to advise and help organise reforestation efforts. Depending on the *rancho*, and their connections within it, the members of the Movement might have taken a sizeable contingent – including some more active members of the *autodefensas* – to such meetings. This is to ensure that they were taken seriously and have some protection if the situation had turned conflictive. This is not to suggest that they sought to pressure community members into action through weight of numbers or visible arms, but rather an acknowledgement that they were engaged in accusing people of wrongdoing, which could have had serious economic consequences for those responsible. Connected to this is the fact that in the context of Tancitaro virtually everyone has access to arms. This arrangement acknowledged that such actions carried a degree of risk. Indeed, moderate members of the Movement have had to dissuade more radical members from taking more drastic actions – such as uprooting illegal avocado *huertas* or burning machinery used for deforestation – that could have led to serious levels of conflict. As such, conditions of (in)security have also imposed limitations and conditions over citizen participation and the repertoires of actions employed. This makes separating violent and non-violent acts difficult, which in itself has a knock-on effect on wider

conceptions of citizenship which depend upon such distinctions – such as Pearce's (2017) idea of authoritarian and resistant citizenship (as discussed in Chapter 2).

The Movement demonstrates that citizen participation has gone beyond a relationship with the municipal state, given that both the formal channels of co-production of governance (via the councils and commissions), and informal channels (via discussions and informal collaboration), have been closed off by the municipal government. This participation has also moved beyond the auspices of the Jesuit project, as it has no formal ties to the project for the reconstruction of social fabric. However, in its membership, key organiser, and behaviours, the Movement demonstrates the formative nature of citizen council participation. This is evidenced in how its repertoires of action, such as convoking assemblies, seeking dialogue, and coming to accords within communities in order to tackle issues, echo the teachings of the Jesuit project. The Movement also demonstrates that the primary referent of citizenship in the municipality continues to be the community and social comportment and behaviours within this – demonstrated by members of the community being asked to judge and determine sanctions for perceived wrongdoing within the physical ambit of the municipality. The public manner of this emphasises that it is the social comportment norms of the community that are at stake, rather than the formal breaking of the law, which may also be the case, but is not the primary referent for judgement and punishment.

The experience of the *autodefensas* has been key in providing the experience of organisation and collaboration, as well as the confidence that citizens of the municipality working together can solve its problems. Indeed, the continued presence of the *autodefensas*, in providing a relative degree of security to the municipality, enables such interventions which would be extremely perilous in other neighbouring municipalities where the expansion of avocado production is seen as intimately connected to organised crime. Even so, such interventions within Tancitaro are also seen as carrying some risk given the widespread availability of arms in the municipality. This also impacts the approach taken in terms of necessitating a degree of armed organisation – for self-protection in the last resort – when undertaking environmental interventions. Thus, even in areas such as the environment which does not immediately call to mind issues concerning (in)security, such considerations do condition the context in which citizen participation can take place, and affects the repertoires of action employed and the way in which they are organised and engage the community.

Conclusion

An exploration of the political life of Tancitaro in recent years, and the experience of the citizen councils within this, allows important observations to be made around the notions and practices of citizenship. The experience of the *autodefensas* and the feelings of unity which emerged from these, as well as the association of party-political competition with insecurity, were foundational for the emergence of the unity candidature in 2015 and its victory in the elections. Given longstanding divisions around political parties in the municipality, but also more generally in Michoacan and Mexico, such a unity government was remarkable and testament to the role of (in)security in generating conditions perceived as extraordinary by the populace. Such ideas of security – generated by the *autodefensas* in the municipality – and insecurity – surrounding the municipality and represented by a range of 'outside' actors including political party hierarchies – were key in overcoming the polarisation of political party identities. Yet the election results themselves also signalled the continued prevalence, and likely re-emergence of party-political identities in the future.

The institutionalisation of the citizen councils by the government of unity represented an important example of the co-production of governance at the local level, and one provoked and underpinned by the conditions of (in)security experienced by the populace in recent years. The *autodefensa* uprising had demonstrated that a mobilised and participatory citizenry could make a difference, and indeed that the government could not and should not be allowed to govern alone. Such ideas of participation were underwritten by key teachings of the Jesuit project and went against the kind of paternalistic and clientelistic governments that have been prevalent in Michoacan, Mexico, and much of Latin America both historically and contemporaneously. This was reflected by the fact that alongside security, it was the use and distribution of resources by the municipal government which were the focus of the commissions of the citizen councils. As such, the citizen councils and their efforts can be seen to have embodied, and sought to transcend, debates and tensions between participatory and representative democracy that has been prevalent in Mexico's political traditions. However, given the historical experience of the municipality and the conditions of (in)security, such efforts were circumscribed to the municipal level and have to be understood within this rather than as attempts to effect change on a greater scale. Thus, demonstrating that the ideas and practices of citizenship at play in the councils were anchored in the local context and bounded by the concept of civil sociality (Stack 2012), whereby the primary referent of citizenship is the local society and not the state.

The re-territorialisation of the municipality through the citizen councils helped to reinforce ideas of local identity whilst also reconfiguring the basis for political participation. Such participation sought a communal and collective involvement in decision-making, as reflected not only with the election of the councils themselves, but also the way in which the public works of the municipality were distributed and chosen. The perceived equity of this model of public works distribution, which went against previous clientelistic models, was particularly significant given that municipal governments are primarily judged on the execution of such works, and so political parties depend upon them for their political reproduction. This speaks to the importance of the co-production in which the councils were engaged, and the depth of commitment to this from the unity government. Through their operation, the citizen councils helped to reinforce ideas of local identity and belonging within the social norms of the community as fundamental to participation. In doing so, such participation attempted to reduce the influence of party politics within the ambit of local political action. A key goal of this was to reduce the levels of conflict and contestation around political practices in order to maintain the peaceful conditions enjoyed within the municipality. Such a re-territorialisation, together with locally defined and constructed political practices, also went towards reinforcing a form of localised sovereignty within the municipality.

The contingency and fragility of the citizen council project was laid bare by the experience of the negotiations for the 2018 municipal elections. The re-emergence of party-political competition showed the continued importance of such identities, as well as the depth of traditional ideas and practices of politics around networks of patronage and clientelism. Similarly, the continuance of the relatively peaceful conditions in the municipality despite the internal division amongst the *autodefensa* groups, demonstrated that whilst ideas of unity remained important towards the exterior, the municipality could seemingly bear some level of contestation and division without this leading to wider conflicts. The very way in which the unity government sought to change political practice – through citizen co-production and the non-partisan distribution of public works – meant that it was unable to reproduce itself politically, nor could it satisfy the clientelistic needs of the constituent parties because of its constitution, and the presence of the citizen councils. Whilst the citizen councils were extremely wary of a return to party competition and distrustful of political party commitments, their proposals for the election were ultimately fruitless. This was not only due to lack of trust in the political parties, but also the fundamental incompatibility of the councils' civil sociality-based methods based on collective participation and identity, with the clientelistic and individualistic models of the political parties. The current 'pause' in the citizen councils reflects the fact that they were seen as a political threat to the parties, but ultimately did not displace them. Similarly, it

demonstrates the reliance of the citizen councils and their co-production on a supportive municipal government for both funding and access, which itself reflected the tenets of the *buen convivir* methodology discussed in Chapter 3, which depended upon local institutionalisation.

Nevertheless, the influence of the citizen councils experience has continued to reverberate through citizen participation within the Movement for the protection of the environment. The repertoires of action and confidence to participate – learned both during the *autodefensa* uprising, and through citizen council participation – are reflected in the organisation and methodology of this Movement. As is the presence of a citizenship beyond the state (Stack 2012), which is founded on the precepts of civil sociality, and as such has its primary referent in the local community and its social norms. Because of this, it has proved resilient despite its lack of connection to the local state in funding or societal legitimation terms. Similarly, as the environment is seen as a question of (in)security in the municipality, it is able to mobilise participation and speaks to primordial concerns of residents, thus ensuring its relevance. The ability of the Movement to operate is fundamentally connected to the relative security that the continued presence of the *autodefensas* are able to provide from the insecure 'outside'. Yet the way in which the Movement has to take into account the armed nature of residents speaks to the relative nature of such security when acting internally. The Movement's strategy of seeking consensus and moral judgement on a societal basis speaks not only to the civil sociality at the core of its vision of citizenship – which represents a continuity with the citizen councils – but also represents such concerns around potential insecurity which prohibit more radical or unilateral actions. Thus, (in)security continues to act as an important conditioning factor for repertoires of citizen participation and political action in the local context.

Conclusion

The road from Pareo to the *cabecera* climbs up the face of a mountain affording spectacular views across the Tierra Caliente, which Pareo borders. The sun had set and night was falling fast as Don Óscar drove us slowly up the mountain in his aged car. As we went he told us about the Pareo fiesta, which is famous in the municipality as being one of the biggest and best, but also from around 2000 (and up until recently) one which also had a slightly dangerous reputation: "In the past, people said it wasn't a proper fiesta until someone had been killed". This was normally as a result of a fight and meant that, "People got nervous in the last days of the fiesta if no-one had died yet. It was strange, as though people wanted a death so that they could call it a 'proper' fiesta". But this had now changed as no one had died during the fiesta in recent years. As we were talking we rounded one of the many bends in the road and were confronted by a line of school girls standing across the route. There were about ten of them and they were between eight to ten years old with no adults in sight. We slowed to a stop and they came to the windows of the car, explaining that they were selling raffle tickets to help fund their church choir. Don Óscar jokingly asked them if they were there to kill us, and then when they asked us to buy tickets he asked them whether they were going to hang us or abduct us if we did not pay up. Their response at first was to look shy, but then one of the older girls eventually played along and said that they would hang us if we did not buy some tickets, at which Don Óscar laughed. We bought some tickets; the first prize was a $1,000 pesos, the second prize a bottle of tequila. As we said goodbye and pulled away Don Óscar pointed to where a lone tree stood, telling us that this had been the spot where 7 policemen had been killed by the cartel. "In the past they couldn't have been out there like that…not even in the daylight…".

Key findings

The *autodefensa* rising has had a profound and complex impact upon the municipality of Tancitaro and its residents. By focusing on the lived experience within communities in which *autodefensas* arose, as well as the groups themselves, the thesis has explored what ideas and practices of citizenship emerge in such contexts, and how these influence political and legal orders. This represents a novel contribution to the study of the *autodefensas* of Michoacan, through the examination of their longer-term impact on the communities in which they arose. Focusing on a single case has enabled an in-depth study of the social and political contexts in which *autodefensas* have been embedded and demonstrates the complexity and contingency of the phenomenon. Adopting a constructivist theoretical framework enabled an outlook in which the construction of ideas of community,

citizenship, and the interaction of different, and often competing, regimes of governance can be fully accounted for and interpreted. The employment of methodologies such as interviewing and participant observation were fundamental in exploring the lived experience of citizens, and in understanding how perceptions of, and participation in, the political and social life of the municipality were informed.

As part of these concluding remarks it is important to reflect again on the methodology employed in the study to properly contextualise and clarify its results. Given the concern with the everyday construction of citizenship, and the security environment within Michoacan, it was necessary to focus on a single municipality – Tancitaro. Whilst the wider context of Michoacan and the broader history of the *autodefensas* have formed part of the discussion of the thesis where relevant, the focus has been on Tancitaro. Consequently, the arguments made in this study have been couched in terms that recognise their basis within the specific local context and history of Tancitaro. This is not to say that such arguments do not have a wider relevance, but rather that it is important to recognise the roots of such arguments within the political and social context of Tancitaro. Indeed, by doing so, this study is making the case for the importance and relevance of such studies to give important insights into the current conditions of (in)security within contemporary Mexico, and as such, is a response to some of the deficiencies of more macro-level research on the subject.

It is also important to note some of the limitations of the study as a piece of research on the politics and society of Tancitaro itself. As discussed in the Introduction, the position of the researcher and the manner of their entry into the municipality had a number of implications for the study as a whole. Most importantly, the association that the researcher had with the Jesuit project was important in terms of understanding the project itself – an important factor in the local context – but also in gaining wider access to people within the community. Nevertheless – and as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 – the Jesuit project was not necessarily perceived as a neutral proposition from a political perspective and was received differently by the respective political tendencies within Tancitaro. As such, being associated to a certain degree with the Jesuit project – especially through attendance at its *diplomado* sessions – helped to grant access to political factions sympathetic to the project's aims, notably members of the PRD, as well as the members of the municipal government in general. But such an association also made it difficult, and potentially problematic, to gain access to those political factions who were less supportive of the project and its aims. As such, it is important to note that the thesis represents an institutional view, at least to some degree, and insofar as many of those interviewed were associated in some way with the municipal government, the Jesuit project, or both. Whilst

limitations are inherent in any study it is nonetheless important that they are acknowledged explicitly so that readers can form their own opinions around the value and contribution of such a thesis.

A key point emanating from the study is that the *autodefensas* of Michoacan have been characterised by their diversity, meaning that such groups have to be understood within their specific local contexts. This is indicative of the fact that the organisation and role of *autodefensa* groups have also varied over time, with different outcomes and developments in different places. Thus, whilst *autodefensa* groups have remained active and are seen as important security providers for some communities, in much of the *Tierra Caliente* region, *autodefensa* groups either institutionalised into the *Policia Michoacán* or disbanded, with a number of such groups being seen as part of one cartel or other in the region. The importance of local context was evident in Tancitaro by the way in which its society is perceived to have been transformed in recent decades through its experience of avocado cultivation, and the economic and social consequence of this. Therefore, its experience of the rule of organised crime was seen as stemming from the presence of avocado riches in the municipality.

Similarly, the *autodefensa* rising and the need for continued vigilance in its wake, as well as the general appreciation of the municipality's security situation – in a physical but also environmental and economic sense – was also bound-up with Tancitaro's place as a key hub in the transnational agro-export industry. However, the experience of the *autodefensas* and the impact that this had in the organisation and repertoires of action present within the community, have also been deployed to contest and improve Tancitaro's position within such transnational networks. Whilst the presence of the *autodefensas* has helped to protect avocado producers from the previous forms of cartel extortion, the relationship is symbiotic as the resources that such an industry provides has also been seen as important in the maintenance of the *autodefensas*, and community security more generally – for example through the partial funding of CUSEPT – at least to a certain extent. But, the organisation and continued presence of the *autodefensas* cannot be reduced to, or entirely explained by, the presence of the avocado industry in the municipality. Indeed, whilst there are some parts of the municipality where there is an obvious connection between avocado cultivation and the funding of *autodefensas*, this is not uniform across Tancitaro. Therefore, the *autodefensa* phenomenon varies even within a single municipality, reflecting different mechanisms and financing of participation, thus necessitating an appreciation of the local contexts in which such groups are embedded, and which contests broad narratives and explanations of the *autodefensas* of Michoacan.

The *autodefensas* have exercised a key influence over how (in)security is perceived and constructed in the municipality. The idea of the municipality as a safe space, and the construction of community – both physically and ideationally – have been influenced by the *autodefensa* presence, which has reinforced a hyper-localised form of citizenship. Such citizenship conforms to a civil sociality vision (Stack 2012a), whereby local society, and belonging within this, are the key referents. Ideas and practices of localised citizenship have also been conditioned by a continuing distrust of the state – particularly beyond the municipal level – and an appreciation of insecurity, which has spread far beyond merely physical insecurity, but also encompasses concerns around the physical environment and social comportment. The semi-institutionalisation of the *autodefensas* via the MSC has allowed for their involvement in the formal co-production of security governance within Tancitaro in co-ordination with the municipal state. Such localised governance has not involved an outright rejection of the wider state (the Michoacan state and Federal government) or its sovereignty, but resistance to interventions by the wider state that are perceived to go against the interests of the municipality is seen as legitimate[60].

Such resistance has been particularly pronounced in the area of security governance, notably resistance to disarmament of the *autodefensas* and demolition of the *casetas*, but also in the rejection of *Mando Único*. Thus, a form of localised sovereignty has emerged whereby it is seen as legitimate that key decisions around matters seen as fundamental to the local community – such as security – are taken within and by its members. Central to this is the preservation of the municipality's 'difference' in terms of its benign security conditions, especially in comparison with the insecurity of surrounding municipalities. The wider state is seen by residents as being unable to provide such security, evidenced by the municipality's recent experience under the rule of organised crime. Yet *Tancitarenses* also consider that the wider state is inescapable to some extent, and therefore it must be educated as to Tancitaro's 'difference' and made to respect the locally derived legitimacy of such arrangements. Hence, whilst there is a localised sovereignty with which the wider state cannot be allowed to interfere, it does not represent a challenge to the performance of sovereignty by the wider state. Indeed, the wider state is free to perform its sovereignty within the municipality, and the more visible or problematic aspects of Tancitaro's difference (from the wider state's perspective) have been deliberately toned down or are subject to specific accords. Such localised sovereignty is nested within

[60] Such resistance and negotiation of rule with the wider state are not entirely novel – as evidenced by the works of Taylor (1979), Smith (2014), and Gillingham (2014) discussed in the Introduction. But the form and nature which this has taken in Tancitaro – involving as it has done a long-term mobilisation of the autodefensas, and the participation of a range of social, political, and economic actors in the co-production of security – does demonstrate some novel facets.

the higher sovereignties of the wider state (as per the ideas of Humphrey's 2007) and underpinned within the municipality by hyper-localised forms of citizenship in which social comportment and participation are emphasised. Thus, whilst citizenship is tied to sovereignty, it is not necessarily tied to the state, but instead to the local society and belonging within this. As such, the concept of 'civil sociality' can be enriched via an engagement with ideas of localised sovereignty and the impact that such construction of sovereignty has on ideas and practices of citizenship in the local ambit, and in contexts conditioned by insecurity.

In the context of Tancitaro, idealised categories of 'authoritarian' and 'resistant' citizenship become blurred and difficult to tell apart, especially due to the multiplicity of identities at play. The *autodefensas* have played a key role in the emergence and preservation of this localised sovereignty, both through the construction of security in which they are involved, but also through their influence on the constitution of the community and the values therein. Similarly, the way in which the *casetas* demarcate the boundaries of the municipality, and the ritualization and symbolic reinforcement of their role and legitimacy through the Day of the Community, as well as the resignification of space within the municipality, have likewise contributed to and reinforced the emergence and maintenance of localised sovereignty.

The Jesuit project represents a novel combination of ideas whereby the concept of 'good living' (*buen (con)vivir*) is deployed as the outlook and guiding methodology through which the social fabric (*tejido social*) can be reconstructed. The project's presence within Tancitaro allows for an insight into how such theories are deployed in concrete contexts, which also helps to highlight important facets of the local society and its politics. The emphasis of the project on the local context, and generating links, identities and accords within this, is guided by the outlook of *buenvivir* which, whilst having core tenets, is a malleable concept which must be given meaning and significance within and by the community. Therefore, through its exhortation for participation, and its revindication of local society as the locus for decision-making and legitimacy, the project has served to reinforce ideas of hyper-localised citizenship as well as the regime of localised sovereignty. Whilst the project has a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the *autodefensas* – on the one hand stressing the need to move beyond arms as *the* source of security, on the other exhorting continued participation and vigilance at the *casetas* – they can be seen as the first step in the reconstruction of social fabric in the municipality. This is because they represent the kind of accords and rediscovery of local links described as essential for the reconstruction of social fabric in the project's own terms. But they have also been important in providing the security necessary to give space for the development of the project in the

municipality. Such a connection is evident through the words of one resident who described the *autodefensas* as helping to make Tancitaro different, and now that difference is being continued through participation in the project. The project has also legitimated the *autodefensas* through their inclusion of *autodefensa* members in the peace commission, which sits on the MSC, and – along with the local Church – via the blessing of the *casetas* and *autodefensa* members on the Day of the Community. Similarly, the Jesuit project's outlook of *buen convivir* in order to reconstruct social fabric, emphasises unity, coming to accords within the community, the participation of the citizenry, and the importance of not letting or trusting the state to govern alone. This serves to recreate, reemphasise, and legitimate important ideas and discourses of the *autodefensas* in the context of the municipality.

The Jesuit project also offers an interesting window onto Church efforts to counteract the impacts of the violence and insecurity that has characterised everyday life for many people in Mexico in recent years, as well the perceived underlying causes of this. Thus, whilst the project can be seen as relatively conservative in some respects – such as in mirroring state discourses around the perceived diminution of the traditional nuclear family as being central to generating insecurity – it was not entirely so. This is evidenced by its critique of contemporary capitalism which constitutes one of the core theoretical pillars of the project. Within this special emphasis was placed on inequality and materialism as having caused the deterioration of the social fabric. Ironically however, the project can also be seen as having been a key beneficiary from the restructuring of the state under neoliberalism. This is because the transformation of the state in certain areas of governance, including the pushing of competencies to the local level, has created the conditions in which such a project can have a greater latitude for action and organisation in local contexts. Indeed, one can also point to the connection between such transformation and the ideas/state discourses around the need for citizens to involve themselves in their own security, which the *autodefensas* can be seen as a response to in some respects. In terms of the social fabric, whilst this has also been a discourse utilised extensively by the Michoacan and Federal state in reference to actions required to tackle violence and insecurity, the Jesuit project is differentiated by the fact that it goes beyond the discursive level and has established a holistic and wide ranging set of actions under a defined methodological approach. The space to operate at the local level has enabled the project to be institutionalised at the municipal level – seen as important in implementing the *buenvivir* methodology – ensuring its influence and reach within the municipality, and the ability to implement such a wide-ranging programme.

The *autodefensa* uprising and its aftermath, and the influence of this on localised citizenship and sovereignty, have had far-reaching implications for political and social interaction and contestation in

Tancitaro. The ideas of unity generated through participation in the *autodefensas*, and continuing concerns around insecurity, allowed for the creation of a unity government that would have been impossible under normal circumstances. But whilst the narrative of unity and its experience against an 'outside' characterised by insecurity has remained powerful, socio-political and party-political divisions soon resurfaced in the municipality, and indeed became reflected in the organisation of the *autodefensas* themselves. Likewise, the intervention of the Jesuit project through the institution of citizen councils introduced new forms of participation and the construction of new political subjectivities in the municipality. The organisation of the citizen councils aimed at a re-territorialisation of citizenship practices in the municipality, and at meaningful participation in governance through co-production at the individual community and municipal levels in various aspects, but especially in the three key functional areas – security, transparency, and development. Such reterritorialization and co-production similarly derived from, and played into, ideas of localised citizenship and sovereignty regimes, and likewise reflected a concern around the need to not allow the state to govern alone. Such a sentiment was not only fuelled by the experiences of the local community under organised crime, but also reinforced by the teachings of the Jesuit project through its diploma programme. The mixed experiences of the citizen councils showed the difficulties of fostering meaningful participation in a context where patronage and clientelism have been important historically and remain so contemporaneously. Similarly, the practical difficulties of managing a unity government, comprised of differing political parties, imposed a level of complexity and competing interests which further complicated the co-production of governance by the citizen councils and the *ayuntamiento*.

The re-vindication of local identity and the ability to achieve difference on a local basis that the *autodefensas* represented, together with the continued suspicion of the motives of the political parties, their links to the insecure 'outside', and the difficulties of making the citizen councils fulfil their role, occasioned political frictions in the municipality. These were expressed most concretely in the negotiations around the conduct of municipal elections and the continuation of the citizen councils. Such negotiations demonstrated that concerns around insecurity remained a key issue, but one which was no longer coterminous with an absence of party-political competition. The continuing relevance and legitimacy of locally derived identities and actions, coupled with continuing suspicion of political parties and the possibilities of a return to paternalistic and clientelistic tendencies to the exclusion of citizen participation, combined to give rise to the attempt by the citizen councils to put forward an independent candidate. Such efforts were ultimately unsuccessful but signalled the potential threat of such citizen participation to the traditional practices and interests of the political

parties, and the socio-economic elites of the municipality. Those seen as the traditional *caciques* of the municipality, whose membership overlapped to a large extent with the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, were perceived as never having been supportive of the influence of the Jesuit project and the citizen councils. Therefore, with the change of *ayuntamiento* and the victory of the PAN, the citizen councils have been allowed to continue in name only, thus ceasing to exist to any meaningful degree. Consequently, whist the perception of the need for unity towards the exterior has remained, the historical political and social fault lines of the municipality have resurfaced both within the *autodefensa* movement, and more generally within Tancitaro's borders.

Unity remains however, in terms of the security of the municipality from potential outside interventions which could compromise this. Such potential threats come from both the Michoacan state and Federal government, but also non-state actors such as cartels. Thus, there is a sustained need for the manning of the *casetas* by the *autodefensas*. Similarly, whilst the official citizen councils project has effectively been suspended to all intents and purposes, the wider Jesuit project remains active in areas not seen as so politically sensitive, such as the treatment of addictions and the more religious and family-centred areas. Despite the curtailment of the citizen councils project the participation and underlying teachings that this involved, together with the experience of organisation and the repertoires of action from the *autodefensa* uprising, have continued to exercise an influence in the municipality. This can be seen with the environmental movement which has gathered force in the municipality, and which represents a form of citizen participation beyond the state that is seeking to address a key concern of the community, and one which continues to be intimately linked to security considerations.

The wider significance of the thesis and its findings

The way in which the *autodefensas* have contributed to the emergence of a localised form of sovereignty, underpinned by localised ideas and practices of citizenship and citizen participation, and embodied in the co-production of governance, helps to demonstrate the connection between sovereignty and citizenship that can occur under conditions of insecurity. But the case of Tancitaro also raises wider questions around what political forms such experiences in the co-production of governance and localised sovereignty bring about. The emphasis on participation on the part of the citizenry, both in the co-production of security and of governance in a wider sense, would seem to suggest a possible avenue for addressing the kinds of violence that the state has failed or been unwilling to address. Indeed, as noted previously, the participation of the citizenry in *autodefensas*

could in some ways be interpreted as an acceptance of the population to involve themselves in their own security, in line with state policies exhorting such a commitment. Nevertheless, the Mexican state has baulked at endorsing this kind of participation to any meaningful extent, especially given the armed nature of the *autodefensas* and the scale of their uprising. Indeed, the Federal intervention in response to the *autodefensas* aimed at demobilising such groups, having first utilised them to combat the cartel, but also served to demonstrate that such top-down initiatives fail to resolve the underlying and fundamental issues at stake. This is because they often fail to understand – or take an interest in – the complexity and diversity of conditions and contexts at the local level, thus failing to account for, and respond to, locally constructed ideas of meaningful and legitimate action and forms of social regulation within communities.

Similarly, the guiding principle of such institutional interventions are frequently couched in terms of 're-establishing the rule of law', and whilst this appears to be what some of the *autodefensa* leaders were explicitly calling for at the beginning of the uprising, it is not overly helpful as a conceptual approach. This is because in the context of the *autodefensa* affected regions of Michoacan, the state itself has often been seen as a transgressor of its own laws both historically and contemporaneously – one can point to the rule of the LCT and the seeming complicity in this of various state actors at the municipal, Michoacan state, and even Federal levels. Therefore, the re-establishment of the rule of law of the state is at best an ambivalent concept in these contexts. Contrast this to the legitimacy and perceived effectiveness that the (illegal) *autodefensas* in Tancitaro are seen to have in the eyes of the local population, and one can see that clear concepts of legality/illegality are problematic as a guide for meaningful action to tackle insecurity. All of which is to say that cases such as Tancitaro demonstrate the importance of paying attention to locally constructed ideas of security and how these can be legitimately achieved in the eyes of the local population. This is especially the case in such contexts given that security in local terms is unlikely to be coterminous with a complete absence of violence, but rather that such violence needs to be socially understandable and subject to some social norms and control. Central among these being that episodes of violence do not threaten the *convivencia* and social reproduction of community life, in the way that the generalised violence of cartel rule with its seeming lack of boundaries was seen to do. This does not mean that there are prohibitions on drug trafficking under such ideas however, but rather that the consequences of involvement in such activities are felt only by those involved in it, and that it should not expand to generalised extortion and victimisation of the community as a whole. Thus, the case of Tancitaro would seem to endorse the ideas of Lambek in his call to understand the local as not simply in relation to the global nor as only a spatial phenomenon, but rather "in terms of ethical life, as a conjunction of

activities and all their consequences" (Lambek 2011: 197). Doing so helps to emphasise the importance of the local as a key site of political action, which the case of Tancitaro and its experience of localised sovereignty serves to reinforce.

The case of Tancitaro also raises interesting questions about the significance that the Catholic Church – in the form of the Jesuit project – may have in contexts characterised by insecurity. This is especially interesting given that the Jesuit project has been promoting an alternative form of doing politics at the local level, and approaches this with a theoretical approach informed by indigenous ontologies and a more holistic vision of security. A key question, therefore, would be around what the implications for citizenship are of such involvement if the Church starts taking a greater role in defining the conditions of political participation and what (in)security signifies. Such a question is particularly relevant given that members of the transition team of the current Mexican President, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, visited Tancitaro to learn more about the Jesuit project, and Lopez Obrador himself has indicated a willingness to work with the Church in issues concerning security and the pacification of the country (El Financiero 2019). Thus, there seems to be important questions around the future of church-state relations, and the impact that they could have on citizenship and state-society relations more broadly, especially in a country like Mexico which has often been characterised by turbulent relations between the Church and state[61].

Finally, the use of the idea of the reconstruction of the social fabric within the Jesuit project in Tancitaro, raises a wider question around the circulation of knowledge within Latin America. This refers to the fact that (as discussed in Chapter 3) such a concept has been deployed frequently in Colombia in contexts of violence and insecurity by the Church and civil society actors. Members of Church projects in such contexts have also visited the Mexican Church to share experiences and methodologies (Interview with Padre Javier, member of the Catholic Church in Michoacan, 2017). More broadly, the example of Colombia and its experience of insecurity – particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s – has frequently been compared to that of Mexico, and so an understanding of how Colombia – supposedly successfully – tackled this insecurity can, it is claimed, offer insights into the Mexican case. There are a number of issues with such comparisons, but it has nonetheless exercised an important influence not only in academic literature and the media, but also amongst policymakers. This was most obvious with the appointment of Oscar Naranjo (a Colombian Police General) as Enrique Peña Nieto's security advisor, but has also been reflected by the training of Mexican police in Colombia

[61] See for example: Bailey 1974; Meyer 1973; Solís Cruz 2015; Becker 1996; Fallaw 2013; Blancarte 2014; Smith 2012.

(La Jornada 2011; Milenio 2014b)[62], and the presence of Colombian security advisers in Mexico. In the case of the *autodefensas*, as discussed, some have labelled them as a Colombian project of Naranjo (Gil Olmos 2015) and so posited a direct connection. Similarly, in terms of projects to rectify the kinds of societal damage that such approaches have invariably wrought, Colombia has again been an example of praxis for the Mexican example, with the idea of the reconstruction of social fabric being one such example. Thus, there appear to be questions to answer, and fruitful grounds for a study, around the international circulation of 'drug war' knowledge and practices within Latin America, and the wider political and social changes and contestations that these provoke and play into.

Final thoughts

In recent weeks debates around the *autodefensas* in Michoacan have reignited in the context of highly visible displays of violence – such as the murder and public display of 19 people in a single day in Uruapan, some of whom were hung from a bridge – attributed to territorial contestation between the CJNG and an alliance of Michoacan cartels, most notably *Los Viagras* (García Tinoco 2019). Such narratives of cartel on cartel contestation underplay the complexity of what is happening, and the multiplicity of actors and interests involved. However, it has again served to place Michoacan in the spotlight, as did the temporary detention of members of an army patrol allegedly by *autodefensa* members in La Huacana in *Tierra Caliente* in May 2019 (Excélsior TV 2019), and the attempted entrance of the CJNG to Tepalcatepec in September 2019, which was supposedly met by a wide-ranging reactivation of the *autodefensas* (Sin Embargo 2019; Santiago 2019). Such violence and contestation has come against the backdrop of the roll-out of President Lopez Obrador's new security strategy under his 'fourth transformation'[63], most notably with the deployment of the new *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard) who deployed to Michoacan in June 2019 (Espino 2019).

Such events have served to again raise questions around the continued presence of *autodefensa* groups in Michoacan, their legitimacy, and what the approach of the new security strategy should be towards them. The statements made by the different actors within the state at large have served to demonstrate the complexity of the issue as well as the disjuncture between differing interpretations

[62] Indeed, members of the *autodefensas* in Michoacan were also sent to Colombia and other countries for training.

[63] The 'Cuarta Transformación' (Fourth Transformation) is President Lopez Obrador's vision for his presidency of Mexico and speaks to his ambition to change Mexico profoundly, referring as it does to the three great transformative periods in Mexican history. Namely, the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821), *La Reforma* (The Reform period) mainly under President Benito Juarez in the mid-19th Century, and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) (see for example: Fuentes 2018; Nájar 2018; Rubli Kaiser 2019).

and appraisals of the *autodefensas*. Such perspectives have fundamentally revolved around whether the *autodefensas* are legitimate interlocutors who should be negotiated with, or whether they should be forcefully disbanded and potentially arrested for flouting the law, or indeed whether they are simply cartels in disguise. The possibility of negotiating the demobilisation of *autodefensa* groups in return for economic development programmes and state-provided security was presented by the *Sub-Secretario de Gobernacion* (Government Secretary – essentially the vice minister of the interior), Ricardo Peralta, in his meeting with the leaders of such groups in La Huacana, in *Tierra Caliente*, where he attended a meeting to discuss a regional development plan in which the government, national and local companies would participate, with the goal of pacifying the region (Venegas 2019). Such efforts however, were criticised by the governor of Michoacan, Silvano Aureoles, who claimed that legalising or institutionalising such groups would only encourage them to break the law more, citing the previous attempts at institutionalisation under the commissioner Alfredo Castillo in 2014 as having demonstrated this (El Sol de Puebla 2019). He also described the visit of Peralta as having rewarded such groups with money for having broken the law in detaining the Mexican Army personnel (Expansión Política 2019). Subsequently, the President has publicly stated that such a meeting between representatives of the Federal government and leaders of the *autodefensas* was "an error" which he was not in favour of, stating that such actions "…don't correspond with what is established under the Constitution, nor an authentic state of lawfulness, that states that it is the State that has to guarantee the security of the citizens" and that the presence of groups such as autodefensas carrying out security functions "demonstrates the incapacity of the State" (President Lopez Obrador, quoted in Rosas 2019).

Such debates evidence the difficulties that such groups are seen to represent for the Mexican state as a challenge to its sovereignty, and an embarrassment to its capabilities. But they also underline the problems of conceiving of *autodefensas* groups in general terms without understanding the local contexts in which they emerged and operate, and the reasons that underlie such a mobilisation and continued presence. It is only within such local contexts and embedded within the specific historical experience of each localities, that such groups can be understood and conceived of. As this study has shown, through engaging with the lived experience of such groups in Tancitaro, they can be seen as productive of forms of localised citizenship and sovereignty. Whilst at face value this would seemingly represent a challenge to the wider sovereignty of the State, this is not necessarily the case in material or ideological terms, but rather reflects an appeal for the wider state to respect local forms of organisation which are imbued with legitimacy in the eyes of the local population, and which correspond to the community's values and social norms.

Appendix 1: Acronyms

APEAM – La Asociación de Productores y Empacadores Exportadores de Aguacate de México (The Association of Avocado Producers and Exporting Packing Companies of Mexico).

CAFIT – Centro de Atención Familial y Integral (Centre for Familial and Comprehensive Attention).

CEM – Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano (The Mexican Episcopal Conference).

CEPAL – La Comisión Económica para América Latina (The Economic Commission for Latin America).

CIAS – Centro de Investigación y Acción Social por la Paz (Centre for Investigation and Social Action for Peace).

CJNG – Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (Jalisco New Generation Cartel).

CNDH – Centro Nacional de Derechos Humanos (National Centre for Human Rights).

CONEVAL – Consejo Nacional de Evaluacion de la Politica de Desarrollo Social (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy).

CUSEPT – Cuerpo de Seguridad Pública de Tancítaro (Public Security Force of Tancitaro).

FDN – Frente Democrático Nacional (National Democratic Front).

GDP – Gross Domestic Product.

H3 – La Tercera Hermandad (The Third Brotherhood).

IMF – International Monetary Fund.

INEGI – Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografia (National Institute of Statistics and Geography).

ITESO – Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Universidad Jesuita de Guadalajara (Western Institute of Technology and Higher Education, a Jesuit university based in Guadalajara).

JLSV – Junta Local de Sanidad Vegetal (Local Board for Plant Health)

LCT – Los Caballeros Templarios (The Knights Templar).

LFM – La Familia Michoacán (The Michoacan Family).

MC – Movimiento Ciudadano (Citizens' Movement)

MORENA – Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement).

MSC – Municipal Security Council

NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement.

NGOs – Non-governmental organisations.

ONU – La Organización de las Naciones Unidas (The United Nations; UN).

PAN – Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party).

PBI – Producto Bruto Interno (Gross Domestic Product; GDP).

PES – Partido Encuentro Social (Social Encounter Party).

PH – Partido Humanista (Humanist Party).

PNA – Partido Nueva Alianza (New Alliance Party).

PND – Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (National Development Plan).

PRD – Partido de la Revolución Democrático (Party of the Democratic Revolution).

PRI – Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

PT – Partido del Trabajo (Work Party).

PVEM – Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico (Ecologist Green Party of Mexico).

SAGARPA – Secretaria de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural (the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development).

SRA – Social Research Association

USD – United States Dollars.

USA – United States of America.

Appendix 2: Interviews and notes of meetings

Interviews:

Interview with Alejandra, member of the citizen councils. Tancitaro, 8th August 2017.

Interview with Ángel, autodefensa member. Tancitaro, 23rd August 2017.

Interview with Antonio, resident of Tancitaro. Tancitaro, 5th August 2017.

Interview with Carlos, Mexican national level journalist. Mexico City, 24th March 2017.

Interview with Carolina, former member of the CNDH. Via Skype, 25th April 2017.

Interview with César, PRD member. Tancitaro, 24th August 2017.

Interview with Claudio, senior member of the municipal government. Tancitaro, 1st September 2017.

Interview with Daniel, member of the citizen councils. Tancitaro, 11th August 2017.

Interview with Édgar, member of the Jesuit project. Tancitaro, 31st July 2017.

Interview with Eduardo, senior member of the municipal government. Tancitaro 22nd August 2017.

Interview with Elena, public servant in the municipal administration. Tancitaro, 8th August 2017.

Interview with Ernesto, Mexican academic. Puebla, 24th March 2017.

Interview with Francisco, member of the Jesuit project. Tancitaro, 22nd August 2017.

Interview with Gabriela, resident of Tancitaro, 2017. Tancitaro, 2nd August 2017.

Interview with Gerardo, senior member of the municipal government. Tancitaro, 1st September 2017.

Interview with Isáac, senior member of the municipal government. Tancitaro, 1st September 2017.

Interview with Ívan, Mexican academic. Michoacan, 7 June 2017.

Interview with Jésus, leader of civil society organisation. Mexico City, 9th May 2017.

Interview with José, citizen councils member. Tancitaro, 21st August 2017.

Interview with Josefina, public servant in the municipal administration. Tancitaro, 11th August 2017

Interview with Luis, former member of the CEDH Michoacan. Morelia, 21st May 2017.

Interview with Luisa, member of the Jesuit project. 30th August 2017.

Interview with Margarita, resident of Tancitaro. Tancitaro, 1st September 2017.

Interview with Maria, member of the citizen councils. Tancitaro, 12th September 2017.

Interview with Martha, teacher in Tancitaro, Tancitaro, 9th August 2017.

Interview with Matías, Mexican academic. Michoacan, 24th May 2017.

Interview with members of the JLSV. Tancitaro, 19th June 2017.

Interview with Miguel, *autodefensa* leader. Tancitaro, 3rd September 2017.

Interview with Padre Javier, member of the Catholic Church in Michoacan. Zamora, 15th June 2017.

Interview with Padre Martin, member of the Catholic Church. Tancitaro, 21st August 2017.

Interview with Roberto, member of the citizen councils. Tancitaro, 9th August 2017.

Interview with Santiago, member of the Jesuit project. Tancitaro, 17th June 2017.

Meeting and *diplomado* class notes:

Notes citizen council meeting – Zone 2 (Apo). Tancitaro, 15th August 2017.

Notes from citizen council meeting. Tancitaro, 26th August 2017.

Notes from citizen council meeting. Tancitaro, 30th July 2017.

Notes from citizen council meeting with political parties. Tancitaro, 24th August 2017.

Notes from citizen councils meeting. Tancitaro, 26th August 2017.

Notes from community meeting with Dr. Mireles. Tancitaro, 2nd July 2017.

Notes from *Conversatorio* workshop. Tancitaro, 25th August 2017.

Notes from diplomado in municipal administration. Tancitaro, 12th August 2017.

Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration. Tancitaro, 16th July 2017.

Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration. Tancitaro, 18th June 2017.

Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration. Tancitaro, 21st August 2018.

Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration. Tancitaro, 27th August 2017.

Notes from *diplomado* in municipal administration. Tancitaro, 12th August 2017.

Notes from citizen council meeting – Zone 3 (Agua Zarca). Tancitaro, 14th August 2017.

Notes from meeting of the MSC. Tancitaro, 31st July 2017.

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