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## **Order and Crime: Criminal Groups' Political Legitimacy in Michoacán and Sicily**

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## Chapter 4.

### **The Art of Dying Twice: Legitimacy Sources and Resources of La Familia and Los Caballeros Templarios**

Although the politics of legitimacy are usually relevant for political actors, in some instances armed actors might also seek to establish social order and acquire broad support. In particular, legitimacy becomes indispensable for criminal groups pretending to improve their “[...] self-understanding (‘who we are’) and [self] placement into a wider historical and societal context” (Schneckener, 2017, 804). This idea is useful to guide the analysis of Michoacán criminal groups’ legitimacy campaigns. By studying LFM and LCT’s politics of legitimacy, this chapter discusses: 1) their influence and participation in the definition of local social order; 2) the construction of a legitimacy audience; and 3) the sources and resources composing and building the group’s identity – inside the organization as well as how this identity was embedded in an extensive socio-historical context. In the case of Michoacán, local criminal groups made attempts, endeavors, displays, and practices that provide plenty of material for a study of the politics of legitimacy. In other words, LFM and LCT made use of the descriptive angle by attempting legitimacy without abandoning their illicit condition. Below, these efforts are systematized, explained, and analyzed across this chapter as empirical references related to the previous conceptual discussion.

From 2006 to 2014, both LFM and LCT developed a language of legitimacy (including speeches, messages, symbols, and rituals) which in turn shaped practices of legitimacy. How so? The answer does not rest exclusively on the shoulders of these illegal agents but in their contexts as well, including the other social agents involved in contesting legitimacy (together with their audiences). Therefore, the investigation needs to go from the general to the particular. In other words, it is first required to detect and describe the extended legitimacy context. It then becomes possible to situate the criminal groups’ legitimacy performance itself. The review of the general legitimacy panorama was made in the previous chapter, including the aforementioned formations of sovereignty contestation (Stepputat, 2010). Thus, here we can review and analyze the legitimacy endeavors performed by these criminal groups within that time and space. Most of the data come from fieldwork, specifically through semi-structured interviews carried out in the cities of Michoacán, Zamora, Uruapan, and Cherán — all in Michoacán and Mexico City.<sup>23</sup> In addition, material objects collected during fieldwork complete primary sources complemented with secondary sources such as local, national, and international newspapers, and specialized literature as well.

The analysis has been guided through the sources and resources of legitimacy categorized in the second chapter (Table 1), together with the concepts’ instrumentation previously

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<sup>23</sup> Given the topics of this research and the questions during the interviews, anonymity was promised to every informant independently of their willingness or not for being quoted anonymously.

discussed. First the "Symbolic" sources are explored, followed by the "Performance-centered" sources, and ending with the "Portrayal of the enemy" sources. Each type of source is later divided into subtypes, each of which consists of material and non-material resources depending on how each endeavor was empirically carried out. Afterward comes a special section, which consists of a detailed analysis of the LFM and LCT editorial production. During the period studied here, at least five books were written, edited, published, and spread on behalf of or supporting these criminal groups' activities and their members, especially its leader. This phenomenon is, at least, original within the specter of criminality around the world and in the recent history. These books run across the three types and subtypes of legitimacy sources identified within this research. Hence, symbolic, performance-centered, and representational portrayals of the enemy are identified and explained in this section. Even when several elements coming from these books take part in the first section, a particular revision of them is realized in the second section as an example of a legitimation attempt that cuts across the sources and resources of legitimacy (summarized in the Table 4).<sup>24</sup>

Table 4. Summarized Operative Distribution of Legitimacy Sources for Criminal Groups

| Main Source             | Subtype Source                                     |
|-------------------------|--|
| Symbolic                | Social Contract Offer                              |
|                         | Agenda's Spread and/or Justification               |
|                         | Symbols Spread                                     |
| Performance-centered    | Provision of Governing Institutions                |
|                         | Philanthropy<br>(Carrots)                          |
|                         | Coercion<br>(Sticks)                               |
| Portrayals of the Enemy | Expressions against Formal Authorities             |
|                         | Expressions against Other (non-formal) authorities |
|                         | Stance towards current Law                         |

#### 4.1. *La Familia* and *Los Templarios*: Sources and Resources of Legitimacy

<sup>24</sup> These editions are named here the "criminal editorial production". The analysis is conducted in the second section of this chapter and seeks to understand how the books worked for building the identity of the criminal group, constituting their narrative, and justifying their criminal agency and activities.

Before delving into the analysis of criminal groups and the war on drugs, three characteristics of the social context should be emphasized: religiosity, masculinity, and the Mexican social and economic crisis.<sup>25</sup> These elements need to be treated separately because they shape the general Mexican scenario, and not exclusively Michoacán. Moreover, their relevance is due to how they shaped the socio-political background in which, in this specific case, LFM and LCT displayed their legitimacy interest. In the first places comes religiosity. Mexicans are not becoming less religious but less Catholic. Although Mexico is one of the most Catholic countries, Catholicism is currently suffering a historical crisis of believers. According to the 2010 census, almost ninety-three million of Mexicans declared themselves Catholic plus eleven million more professing other religion (INEGI, 2010). At the beginning of the twentieth century, 99.5% of the total population in Mexico was Catholic; in 2010, the percentage decreased to 82.7% (DataR, 2018, with information from INEGI, 2010). In other words, it is not that Catholics stopped their faith altogether but that most of them converted to another religion or cult. In 2010, only 4.7% to 17.3% of non-Catholics declared themselves atheists; the rest were Protestants, Pentecostals, Evangelists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other sects (DataR, 2018, with information from INEGI, 2010). The national faith context is still Christian.<sup>26</sup>

The second element is *machismo*. This needs to be understood as result and producer of a generalized gender violence context. In addition to the enormous but countless cases (due to the lack of data produced by the denounces absence) of domestic violence suffered by women, the war on drugs context dramatically expanded the cases of women victims. Indeed, although during these contexts homicide victims largely consist of men, "[...] it does not imply that homicides against women have not increased" (Zepeda, 2016b). As a consequence, increasing homicide among men corresponds with the rate among women, although perpetrators tend to be men or, at least, violence happens in a context of hyper-masculinity (Interview in the field no. 6, 2017). As a reaction, together with NGOs' assistance, local congresses around the country had created and launched gender alerts, a public policy addressing to use human, legal, and financial resources in order to tackle the violence against women. So far, to the moment in which this research was worked, 56% of Mexican territory is under gender alert (Conavim, 2019).<sup>27</sup> Collaterally, this public policy strategy has become an indicator of how bad the situation within a given region is.

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<sup>25</sup> As social features of Mexico and Michoacán in particular (religiosity, machismo, and the crisis) have a dialectic function in the LFM and LCT legitimation performance: they make sense of many of these legitimacy practices, which in turn also produce consequences in the local social order.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this contextual factor is essential because LCT drew in their legitimacy claims of prior existing Christian symbolism and imagery (see Picture 1 in the Appendix).

<sup>27</sup> The Gender Alert against Women Violence (*Alerta de Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres*) is the public policy mechanism used in Mexico to face and eradicate violence against women in a given territory. It includes designing and promoting actions, protocols, and budgets to prevent and eliminate this type of violence. In order to be decreed, it needs to be requested by local, national, or international organizations based in diagnosis and should be approved by local congresses.

In Michoacán, gender alerts started in June of 2016 and were promoted by Circe López, a local NGO leader who later was accused of defamation after denouncing sexual abuse accusations against a university teacher who participated in the group in charge of promoting the gender alert (Redacción Animal Político, 2018). Finally, the last relevant social element to describe the context concerns the political and economic crisis that took place in Mexico during the eighties and nineties. In Galtung's terms, structural violence took the form of neoliberal economic transformations increased exclusion (1990). Along with the dismantling of social and economic rights, privatizations, and accelerated electoral democratization, also increased generalized crime, suicides, undocumented migration to the United States, and gender violence, as was the case in Ciudad Juárez (Fuentes Díaz y Fini, 2018, 14). The consequences of this crisis in the mid and long term were marginalization, humiliation, and denigration of the subjects, which generated structural violence that eventually led to both cultural and direct violence (Galtung, 1990, 295). In the case of Michoacán, this machismo and gender roles featured prominently in the behavior of the local criminal groups.

Now the analysis addresses the specific criminal groups' legitimacy attempts in which their influence is a more or less evident. This section pays special attention to "[...] capturing 'state effects' in a range of sites. This involves studying how state-like institutions and practices produce [...] 'isolation', 'identification', 'legibility', and 'spacialization' effects – creating publics, interpellating subjects, classifying and regulating collectivities and producing jurisdictions with territorial boundaries" (Jaffe, 2013, 736). As said before, this legitimation trajectory investigation starts in 2006, when LFM dropped their enemies' heads in a local nightclub. This action should be understood as the first legitimacy attempt. As a violent exhibition of beating the enemy, it also exhibited a sort of self-presentation by naming the enemy, i.e., who they are not. That was a traditional differentiation ritual between "them" and "us" (Todorov, 2007), but also as a distinction between "friend" and "enemy" (Schmitt, 2001). The argument of an external threat to the local interests (i.e., the local rivalry criminal group Los Zetas) motivated this first attempt at drawing the line between two allegedly different criminal groups. On the one hand, one with local roots and social cause (LFM), and on the other, a foreigner and selfish group non-engaged with local development, i.e., the Zetas – criminal group initially constituted by Mexican army former members (see about this Correa-Cabrera, 2017 as well as Aguayo and Dayán, 2018).

This argument was spread by LFM discourse, in which the Zetas played the role of the foreign threat that was exclusively taking advantage of the locals. A couple of months after the nightclub event, an insertion appeared in two local newspapers as a sort of peaceful introduction to locals (the entire text was transcribed in the last chapter). However, this message needs to be placed into the same legitimation track. In this case, the discourse inside this prose worked as LFM's explanation and justification of criminal activities in order to apprise locals of their reasons and origins. The two events launched this criminal political

legitimacy process that seemed to start declining as of the first half of 2014, when, Nazario, the criminal group leader was beaten. However, those attempts became intensified when LFM turned into LCT, as will be seen later.<sup>28</sup>

In the manifesto published in 2005 by LFM, the criminal group was self-described as "[...] native workers of the Tierra Caliente [...] organized by the necessity to get out of the oppression [and] humiliation" from other cartels. Moreover, following the same document, their mission was to "eradicate" crimes from Michoacán, and motivated by their "[...] love to our state [Michoacán]". Their objective, they stated, was to maintain "[...] the universal values of the people" (La Familia Michoacana, 2006). According to Wolff, "[...] the lack of regular and effective state presence in a given community is the primary condition under which some form of non-state entities will develop authoritative functions, whether in response to residents seeking order and material welfare or an imposition on them" (2015, 21). Criminals may or may not try to fill this gap. In this case, a complex overlapping and struggling between criminal groups and other local agents shaped the scenario.

Following Claessen, due to the short but intense period of disputes, LFM and LCT kept mostly in the track of legitimation rather than reaching the legitimate condition (1988). As a result, these criminal groups privileged the over-exposition as a visibility strategy towards building a legitimate authority. The following section explicitly attempts to describe and explain this process through the state-effects coming out from both LFM and LCT after that kick-off legitimation interest described before. During fieldwork, these practices were nuclear ideas to look for. Following the idea, those state-effects are also explained as practices of sovereignty and legitimacy that fill, compete, challenge, or withdraw authority presence in the local context. This methodological model structures the following sections. The first one centers the analysis in describing and analyzing Michoacán's criminal groups' legitimacy attempts through the effective distribution of legitimacy sources and resources for criminal groups explained in the second chapter (Table 1). Each practice is examined and categorized as legitimacy resources belonging to a particular legitimacy source. Symbolic

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<sup>28</sup> LFM and LCT efforts toward becoming self-published, publicly advertised and plainly notorious is a feature that distinguishes them from other mafias and criminal groups. Possibly the most prominent efforts in this regard rotate around Nazario Moreno, both groups former leader. A material and immaterial collection give prove of this and shape a collection of legitimacy sources and resources. Both LFM and LCT constitute a sort of *continuum*. Despite Aranda called LCT "[...] a new [criminal] group" (2013b, 62) this research encountered that both LFM and LCT took part of the same group given their legitimation continuity, but in different stages. Thus, in the most radical perspective, here we are not talking about two different groups, but two stages enclosed into one legitimation history. In the first place, the legitimation endeavors around the period from 2006 to 2010 correspond to LFM. Later, after Nazario Moreno's false assassination, the following legitimation events can be attributed to LCT and up to 2014, when government agents finally assassinated Nazario. Hence, this person together with his character robustly influenced the legitimating profile and process.

sources come first, followed by the Performance-centered sources, and finishing with the Portrayal of enemies sources.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Symbolic Sources

LFM and LCT continually promoted themselves as criminal or political groups, which offers material for an analysis of symbolic legitimacy. Initially, LFM displayed efforts to gain locals' sympathy. In this regard, secrecy and discretion did not seem to be an option; on the contrary, the most visible seemed the best option to announce the criminal group's presence and declare legitimacy as the collective accreditation of political authority. Symbolic sources played a relevant role. This phenomenon becomes interesting from the criminal and political legitimacy point of view: although criminals, both groups preferred to be publicly observed as part of their legitimacy strategy. Between not being perceived by formal authorities, and being seen by locals to gain acceptance, Michoacán's criminal groups seemed to choose the latter. Material and immaterial symbols were deeply relevant towards addressing this objective, either by promising or building social contract benefits for locals and spreading material and non-material discourses. Following Table 1, the symbolic sources are categorized into three subtypes: proposed social contract, agenda's spread and/or justification, and symbol's spread.

##### 4.1.1.1. Proposed Social Contract

The "proposed social contract" subtype source of legitimacy is expressed through a) granting public services (material resource), b) promoting belonging and cohesiveness, and a trustworthy mandate (non-material resources). In this regard, no material resources were detected in this research (in the sense of public services granting), whereas there were massive efforts fitting in the non-material specter. Here, social contract offering bases its symbolism on the criminal groups' endeavors for establishing the basis for a shared destiny understanding under their lead. Following this idea, belonging is probably one of the most apparent elements behind this legitimacy subtype source, i.e., the criminal group's offering of a social contract. This could even be understood as a negotiation with locals. Both LFM and LCT discourses are full of references to local elements – from introducing themselves as genuine *michoacanos*, to using local heroes and symbols as part of their discourse. Actually, is locality that built the political legitimacy *continuum* between LFM and LCT. Moreover, the discursive use of foreigners (blaming other cartels such as the Zetas or the local Valencia cartel for not taking care of Michoacán and its people) worked in order to consolidate this

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<sup>29</sup> With relative differences, and according to several interviews carried out, each of these attempts failed more sooner than later. Thus, locals realized that this criminal group was not different from "the rest", referring to other criminal groups. Hence, locals started expecting the same violence and abuses, which finished with any possibility of a trustworthy mandate. In this regard, the political legitimacy analysis mostly rests on those first attempts rather than in their further consequences.



local identity (Lomnitz, 2016b, 23). LFM and LCT pushed a discourse towards creating an othering conflict.<sup>30</sup> Within the manifesto published by LFM in November of 2006, the group introduced themselves as “[...] native workers of the Tierra Caliente region in the state of Michoacán” (La Familia Michoacana, 2006). This was the beginning of LFM and LCT local philosophy:

[LCT and LFM promoted] a very local philosophy, in which Michoacán has the right to protect ourselves, and we as Michoacán people have the right to decide on our future and that no external forces could come to harm us, or to control us. And it was a philosophy that consisted of loving our neighbor, and for looking after the poorest people [...] suddenly they seemed to have good intentions, and Nazario developed a whole doctrine with philanthropic aspects, he went into the communities [...] There were many communities mainly in Tierra Caliente that protested when Calderón said that he had killed El Chayo [...] then at the beginning it was very peaceful and everything seemed done with good intentions. [For instance] There were aspects in this regard such as the absolute prohibition of crystal-meth consuming (Interview in field no. 1, 2017).

Again and again, references to locality, protection, and belonging shaped a discourse attempting to build trust and reliability on the criminal group – starting from the idea of the family as a cohesive trustworthy unit. The idea of family works as a secure shelter. On the other hand, LFM did try to create a trustworthy mandate by spreading several statements expressing that they will not damage children, women, or “innocent people”. Ironically, LFM and LCT attempted to ban (certain) substances consumption, which in the end was the same as any legal government stands in the world. The banning of crystal meth consumption for local people and (especially) their members, is an example in this regard –despite, as said before, that enormous profits resulted from selling this drug mainly to the United States (Interview in the field no. 1, 2017). Moreover, the LCT code also forbade its members from drinking alcohol. In the same sense, but concerning LFM, according to local versions, this criminal group was chasing and punishing common thieves in the region of Tierra Caliente (Interview in field no. 2, 2017). Indeed, this feature concerns the security provision analyzed in detail later, but from the perspective of a trustworthy mandate, it was an action that pointed to achieving political legitimacy – this security provision also works as a material resource. These were actions linked to governance pretensions explained in their agenda.

#### *4.1.1.2. Agenda's Spread and/or Justification*

The "agenda's spread and/or justification" subtype source of legitimacy becomes expressed through a) publications and written codes (material resources), and b) founding narratives, songs, anthems, and public messages (non-material resources). Spreading a criminal agenda does not necessarily mean justifying it. However, in this case, both actions seemed to go with

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<sup>30</sup> As it is explained later as part of the “portrayal of the enemy” source, and in the criminal editorial production analysis, especially these criminal groups corresponded the Mexican federal government discourse during the war on drugs in terms of creating an artificial social division between “us” against “them”.

each other. Flashing back to this legitimacy trajectory, when LFM dropped their enemies' heads, the *narcomanta* accompanying them stated: "this is divine justice". This statement is relevant regarding several legitimacy sources and resources; it concerns a wide range of them, from a trustworthy mandate, a public message, justice managing (including security provision and sanctioning), fear spreading, and a general violence administration attempting. Moreover, values diffusion and moral beliefs were spread within the discourse when the *narcomanta* stated that, LFM, "[...] does not kill for pay, it does not kill women, it does not kill innocent people. Only those who must die will die". In the case of the published text in local newspapers, something similar can be appreciated. By publishing "About us", their "Mission", the main "Objective", and "Why" the group was made up, LFM fully spread and explained their agenda. Around these statements, contradictions took place between the criminal group's sayings and actions, but from an anthropological perspective, it does not matter if this was true or not but how these messages were displayed.

The LCT's superlative agenda's dissemination happened four years after the LFM newspaper manifesto and that first *narcomanta* in Uruapan. By distributing their code (*El Código de los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán*), a pseudo-religious booklet reviewed in detail later, LCT announced not only their creation but also their moral values and general objective. In this case, it is interesting to observe that the audience seems to point towards LCT's members rather than locals or the general population. However, this contrasts with the fact that the booklet distribution precisely aimed to reach locals rather than only or exclusively criminal group members. The booklet appeared in bus stops, outside houses, in local markets and minimarkets, and in public spaces (Interview in field no. 7, 2017). Indeed, for many locals receiving or only noticing the code, this was a sign of fear or alert. That was a reasonable reaction considering that, at this point, the criminal group (former LFM) had had bad experiences when managing other social contracts. Besides, violence levels in the whole state of Michoacán substantially increased during this period, i.e., from 2006 to 2010 (SESNSP and INEGI, figures one to five in Chapter III).

However, the agenda's spread went further beyond the *narcomanta*, the newspaper presentation, and the code. Every one of the published texts had a relevant aspect in this regard and attempted to publicize and underline the group's agenda. Each of these books is carefully analyzed below. Meanwhile, the criminal group leader's memoir offered a full explanation of his actions and beliefs together with his influence on the criminal group actions and decisions. The criminal group also allegedly paid a local journalist to "tell their truth" without being influenced by the federal government interests (Interview in field no. 1, 2017). Several videos currently available on YouTube were uploaded to several Internet sites. In most of them, Servando Gómez, nicknamed "La Tuta", the second leader in charge, showed himself escorted by several armed men while explaining, justifying, and making several statements around the so-called war on drugs launched by the Mexican federal government, including the criminal group's public security diagnosis.

Finally, regarding the “agenda’s spread and/or justification” as a source of legitimacy, LCT created and published an anthem, a non-material resource which takes part in the mentioned source. Even when folkloric songs dedicated especially to LCT were released, there is a singular video uploaded to YouTube, this is, the “*Himno OFICIAL de los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacan*” (OFFICIAL Anthem of the Knights Templars of Michoacán),<sup>31</sup> whose lyrics states as following while martial music sounds:

I am a Knight Templar,  
a soldier to the order of the temple,  
I do represent the oppressed peoples’ feelings in this nation.  
I am a Templar fighter,  
everything for a better world,  
I was pointed, I was rejected,  
and several times humiliated,  
that is why I am Now I am a rebel,  
A rebel from the heart,  
[...]  
I do have an impeccable conduct,  
because I do have to respect everybody  
protecting every Christian,  
and always looking for the truth  
[...]  
helping the helpless will always be the objective  
[...]<sup>32</sup>

Again, the “rebel” role is underlined by claiming to defend a social cause. The lyrics combine an implicit defense of a criminal stance, together with a portrayal of LCT as the representatives of the nation’s oppressed people. The war language is present as well by using the idea of the soldier. Religious references appear in these lyrics such as the Christian defense, but also by presenting an individual who was previously humiliated and came back as a social protector. The purpose of this anthem is not clear, but it clearly appeals to political legitimacy with these constituents. Of course, these attempts were complemented by the performance-centered legitimacy sources, which are more practical than symbolic.

#### 4.1.1.3. Dissemination of Symbols

The "symbols spread" subtype source of legitimacy becomes expressed through a) identity symbols in ornaments and documents (material resources), and b) rituals, values, moral beliefs, and religiosity (non-material resources). On the last floor of SEDENA’s (National

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<sup>31</sup> Available on YouTube, uploaded by the user “Guardia Michoacana CT”, on May 11, 2012, URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6RbZjP\\_h\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6RbZjP_h_4), consulted on June 12, 2018

<sup>32</sup> This is my translation from Spanish.

Defense Secretary) headquarters, in Mexico City, the Mexican Army created the Museum of Narcotics. Not open to the public, this place was designed to show the troops' and army's efforts to eradicate drug trafficking in Mexico. The last section in this museum is called "*Narcocultura*" (Narco-culture), and one of the main pieces is a shrine together with a saint image, a sword, and a golden book: pieces of the LCT material resources of symbols spread, i.e., the criminal identity symbols in ornaments and documents. The image is of Saint Nazario, and the book is the code. Gold and other expensive jewelry can be seen in the image, the shrine, beside a sword and the main edition of the code with its cover and sheets made of gold.<sup>33</sup> The religious side of LCT deserves special attention, especially the role of *San Nazario*, i.e., LCT leader's self-sanctification.

In this regard, together with the editorial production, LCT was original enough to develop their unique morality together with its religious symbols and rituals. The political legitimation relevance around these phenomena takes to the moral usage towards affiliating and convincing new and old members. After Nazario's "first death", in December of 2010, even when the person did not die, a saint was born, i.e., San Nazario. How do religion and criminal groups come together? When mixing Michoacán's case with the political legitimacy lens, interesting analytical advantages pop up. Across all these criminal group attempts to perpetuate their rule, one of them was produced from a religious perspective. Nazario consistently presented himself as a strong man and iconized leader, which also worked as a mechanism to legitimize him and the criminal group in general. By taking advantage of the confusion arising from that alleged death of its leader, this criminal group developed a religious narrative together with Christian-medieval imagery based on the personal-cult of this person, Nazario Moreno, now Saint Nazario.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the "Templar" seal needs special attention. Also known as the Order of Solomon's Temple, the Knights Templar were a Catholic military order active in Europe between the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. To some extent, the Templars were related to the crusades, historical battles in which the faith of Europe was decided between Christianity and Islam. Around the Templars had existed an imaginary of mystery, secret society and, furthermore, faith loyalty. There is no doubt about how this imaginary inspired, at least, the aesthetics of LCT and particularly Saint Nazario's creation. Michoacán criminals adopted the uniform and created discourses, symbols, and codes following this historical reference. The Saint Nazario phenomenon needs to be inserted into this context. Even when it is not possible to prove or

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<sup>33</sup> Additionally, gold made up medallions confected with the Templars' cross, as well as guns and rifles with the same characteristics could be seen in this Museum. See the Pictures 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

<sup>34</sup> The local context plays a fundamental role and, as explained earlier, Christianity continues to work as a powerful source of bonding. Beyond Nazario's commitments, across all religious settings, Christianity makes sense in a scenario in which strict the Catholic faith might somehow decrease, but in which people might still stick to a moldable Christian imaginary despite variations – as with Santa Muerte or Jesús Malverde (Aguilar, 2018).

not saint Nazario's and its cult success, the Templar religion sought recruitment (Lomnitz, 2016a), which reveals a substantive part of its political legitimacy perspective. Saint Nazario's cult developed the image of a white bearded man looking alike Jesus Christ, but wearing the medieval Knight Templars uniform with a big red cross in a white tunic.<sup>35</sup>

Together with the image of San Nazario, the *Código de Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán* took part in this religious display and legitimacy performance. The code worked in a similar way to the Taliban's code of conduct, the so-called *Taliban La'iha*, or the "criminal constitution" of the Brazilian criminal group *Primeiro Comando da Capital*. The former worked as the Taliban code of conduct. Even when in practice all kinds of abuses occurred, through the code the terrorist group controlled the rank while attempted to prevent or limit the emergence of rogue elements (Hamid, *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile, the criminal constitution from the *Primeiro Comando* set the limits on what members can do to one another or even to the local population (Hamid, *et al.*, 2018), very similar to the LCT code in this regard. Journalistic reports also described ceremonies organized by LCT dedicated to showing faith to Saint Nazario (Castellanos, 2012b). During fieldwork, at least one prayer dedicated to San Nazario (and also to God) was found, which is transcribed here:

Oh Lord mighty powerful,  
Free me from every sin,  
Give me blessed protection,  
By Saint Nazario.

Protector of the poorest,  
Knight of the peoples,  
Saint Nazario, give us life,  
Oh, blessed eternal Saint.

Blessed light of the night,  
Defender of the sick,

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<sup>35</sup> Currently, the Knight Templar reference also plays a role in European and North American extreme right-wing politics. An example of this is the "Knight Templar International", a Christian militant group based in the United Kingdom. It began in 2015 with a commitment to "combat" Muslim expansion and immigration coming from Islamic countries. The Templar symbolism serves as inspiration for this movement, whose reference to the medieval crusades help to shape the hate discourse. After Nazism and Fascism, far-right movements particularly in Western European countries find in the Templar's historical sense and iconography the sources for justifying hate, intolerance, and violence against Muslims, but not exclusively. Following Koch, these new twenty-first century "crusaders", "Crusader symbols and anti-Islamic rhetoric help to consolidate individuals, groups, organizations, parties and movements in Europe and in the United States (and elsewhere) under a transnational framework, by reviving the crusader heritage and presenting it as an appropriate response to Jihad, even though just for propaganda purposes. Thus, Christian symbols and rhetoric provide a religious justification and inspiration for a physical struggle against a religious enemy" (2017, 20). LCT and this far-right movement coincidentally got inspiration from the same source. However, what is interesting to highlight is that in two different contexts, and by two different collectivities with also different objectives, found in the same source, the Templar imaginary, the inspiration to justify atrocities based on social distinctions for their alleged "holy" mission.

Saint Nazario our saint,  
I always entrust myself to you,

Glory to Godfather,  
I dedicate you my rosary,  
Give us health and more work,  
Abundance in our hands,  
Let our people become blessed,  
I beg you, Saint Nazario.<sup>36</sup>

According to Stepputat, social relations do not have to be spatial; “They can also be temporal, with claims to sovereignty shifting between night and day, or they can be related to specific domains, such as the spiritual.<sup>37</sup> Religion, for example, can provide (sovereign) protection for members and representatives, but as it happened during the Guatemalan civil war, such protection may also break down” (2015, 132). In this regard, as Grillo said, “The pseudo-ideology, Nazario found, was a cement that could bind his criminal empire together” (Grillo, 2017, 250). At its time, political legitimacy interests motivated the creation of that cement. After all, as Tilly reviewed, the European modernity and the empire of the nation-state resulted only when the means of power became concentrated instead of religion (1985). Before, religiosity worked as a primary legitimacy source that enabled a sense of identity, essential to consolidate the State centuries later. With the sources for this research, it is not possible to talk or not about Nazario’s or LFM/LCT success in this regard. However, it seems that these illegal agents systematically spoke a sovereign language that had become criminally codified.

#### 4.1.2. Performance-Centered Sources

According to Grillo, led by Nazario, LFM “[...] installed an alternative justice system, in which local bosses judged and punished those who carried out ‘anti-social’ crimes such as robbing or raping [...] But the Maddest One added his *loco* twist. He pronounced in the name of the lord and punishment was in the style of Old Testament justice. Alleged criminals were flogged, like in Roman times, or even crucified” (2017, 261). This quote fairly illustrates how the performance-centered sources became materialized: by combining secular and

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<sup>36</sup> This is my own translation from Spanish. The original prayer is printed in the afterwards of the book *Palabra de Caballero. Los Caballeros Templarios. Un movimiento insurgente*, which is analyzed later in this chapter. See Picture 7 in the Appendix. The original text is presented here respecting the original drafting mistakes: “Oh Señor todo poderoso, Líbrame de todo Pecado, Dame protección Bendita, A través de San Nazario. Protector de los Más Pobres, Caballero de los Pueblos, San Nazario danos vida, Oh bandito Santo eterno. Luz Bendita de la Noche, Defensor de los enfermos, San Nazario Santo Nuestro, Siempre en ti yo me encomiendo. Gloria a Dios Padre, Te dedico mi Rosario, Danos salud y más trabajo, Abundancia en nuestras manos, Que nuestro Pueblo este Bendito, Yo Te pido San Nazario [sic]” (Morales, no year).

<sup>37</sup> Similar phenomena involving spirituality and authority building took place during the African civil wars. According to Duyvesteyn, “[...] in both Liberia and Somalia the form of rule was highly personalized during the wars. The leaders heading the factions were interested in getting to power. They used identities and religion or beliefs to strengthen their legitimacy” (2000, 110).

religious claims. In the end, these are sovereignty practices in all of them. In fact, the justice system was not the only alternative; every state-effect by LFM and LCT became an alternative. Later they became alternatives to other agents' statehood practices as well – such as *Autodefensas*. Following the Table 1, the performance-centered sources are subcategorized into three subtypes: provision of governing institutions, philanthropy (carrots), and coercion (sticks). The two latter are grouped into one unique section in order to sharpen the analysis.

#### 4.1.2.1. *Provision of Governing Institutions*

The "provision of governing institutions" subtype source of legitimacy is expressed through a) taxation and economy (material resource), and b) security and justice managing, as well as labor regulations (non-material resources). In Michoacán, the criminal provision of governing institutions claims did emulate the state institutions in four fields: 1) security provisioning, 2) justice system exercise, 3) imposing taxation (shaped by extortion practices), and 4) imposing economic and productive activities regulation. Each one of these was objectively materialized, and that happened in a two-fold manner. Either when 1) the criminal group did fulfill governance gaps that the legal authority left (presence vs. absence) or, 2) with the criminal group explicitly challenging legal authority (presence vs. presence) – and sometimes combining both scenarios, which interestingly, also fit into the symbolic sources. As security providers, LFM claimed the responsibility of taking care of minor criminals (such as street-robbers and small drug sellers), markedly during the first years. That shot pointed to control while monopolizing regular crime, drug selling, and drug consumption – as explained before in the case of crystal meth known as *hielo* (ice) *foco* (bulb) (Interview in field no. 2, 2017). Since 2006, some locals noticed that LFM members were managing to punish ordinary thieves (Interview in the field no. 7, 2017).

There were stories of several youngsters accused, beaten, and publicly exposed in local public spaces coincide – indeed, as a case of overlapping, this feature also fits into the symbolic source of legitimacy. This alleged security also worked as a demonstration of power and business control. From another angle of security provision, these criminal groups attempted (and sometimes succeed) to take control of highways, ports, and strategic communications around the state of Michoacán. By controlling paths and routes, LFM and LCT consolidated the presence of their mandate while controlling territory. Paradoxically, instead of making highways secure due to the criminal group's control, they became particularly insecure hot spots around the Michoacán, as well as in many other parts of the country. In this regard, it becomes relevant to underline the highways' role in Mexico's economy and its link to criminality. During Felipe Calderón's administration, not only was the war on drugs launched, but also the so-called "biggest highway infrastructure project in the country's history", i.e., an extensive national highway development program. These projects built or renewed more than fourteen thousand kilometers of highway, three thousand less than what

was initially promised. More than 351 billion Mexican pesos were expended on this project, more than double in comparison to the former government, in a country that was already lacking trains and other transport infrastructure apart from highways (Martínez, 2012).

As a consequence, control of criminal highways became a trend in several Mexican states such as Guerrero and Morelos in the South (Peña, 2014 and 2017). Michoacán was not the exception in this regard. As explored in the cartographic analysis, many of Michoacán's municipalities with the highest levels of criminal violence coincide with the main highways. The worst were municipalities with highways connecting 1) with central regions inside the state, 2) with neighboring Mexican entities, 3) the highway to the United States, 4) the roads in the coastal zone and 4) the highway to Lázaro Cárdenas port, consistently have high crime rate levels – the case of the port is profoundly relevant for the local and national economic productivity, as will be explained later.<sup>38</sup> The modus operandi in order to ensure highways control was usually to install more or less developed random checkpoints. Even when it is not easy to determine criminal group's success or not in this regard, those high levels of violence on the highways reveal them as disputed zones.

Indeed, this control works as a display of visibility and power, useful for creating legitimacy. When traveling around highways during fieldwork two elements are standardized. First, there is an advanced practice for locals related to developing expertise on which road is secure and which is not. Additionally, people know what time is the best for traveling in this regard. Secondly, several busy or abandoned checkpoints could be seen on the highways (especially in the smaller ones). Almost everyone installed them — not only criminal groups, but also the municipal, local, and federal government, as well as locals around *meseta purépecha*, the Mexican army, vigilantes (in *Tierra Caliente*), and social movements such as students near the capital city.<sup>39</sup> Controlling paths and highways needs to be understood as a contested sovereign practice in which several social agents participate, and which is not related to a security provision discourse (indeed, highways become more dangerous as a consequence), but as a power display by becoming visible. Furthermore, there was a small jump from managing security to also administering justice. According to local NGOs members' testimonies interviewed, criminal groups' members in Michoacán used to wait outside rural Public Ministers (the official local justice branch in Mexico) to wait for specific victims. The objective was to offer them the justice that they could not find with the legal officers. That was the case with *Tierra Caliente* women who were suffering from domestic violence. In this context, *machismo* persists. Hence, several cases like this appeared every day (Interview in the field no. 6, 2017).

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<sup>38</sup> See Michoacán map in the Appendix.

<sup>39</sup> During interviews, informants reported that criminal groups have developed several checkpoints in Lázaro Cárdenas port. However, given the security condition, it was not possible to attend this zone in order to conduct fieldwork there.



After asking for justice from the town judge, and not receiving it or being re-victimized, members from LCT waited outside for women in order to offer immediate “justice” to their problem. Most of these women were suffering from physical, emotional, and economic violence. It was justice that official authorities denied or simply could not offer. A brutal example in this regard was the case of women whose were asked to keep weapons in their backyards (this point is analyzed below as part of the “coercion” subtype resource of legitimacy). In this case, the criminal group attempted to convince her that they were making a social revolution (Interview in the field no. 6, 2017). Whether to accept or deny criminal group’s justice administration became almost irrelevant; in the end, their approaching was intended to create a link that could immediately benefit their illegal interests. In this regard, these practices made use of the legal authority’s mediocre justice administration. However, despite the pragmatism behind these actions, criminal groups followed operating by a political legitimacy code, which possibly was poorly managed in the long run given the locals’ loss of trust.

We knew about the case of a woman who suffered violence at home. So she went with the judge to denounce him [her husband]. In the presidency, public officers told her: "you are lying, you have no witness", all this shit that they say to women. This woman came out, and someone approaches her and asks to tell her concern. Of course, women are so sensitive, crying, and desperate [...] so they [criminal group members] start telling her: "I do understand you, and I do believe you [...] we do know about you, where you live, your husband’s name". The woman said: "I went here to ask the authority to give a lesson to my husband. Not to kill him, only to scare him, but no one listens to me, because I am tired that he is always taking off my money, beating me, etcetera". This woman did trust in these guys who belong to *narco*, and they indeed scare the husband without killing him. That is why they are organized because they do know how to manage these problems. Then, the woman did trust on them and spread the voice. These women did not think that someone would ask for paybacks. However, the payback was to keep drugs, weapons, protect gang members (Interview in field no. 6, 2017).

Finally, the practice of extortion deserves special attention connecting two subtype sources of legitimacy under the performance-centered category, i.e., governing institutions providing both carrots and sticks to local society (philanthropy and coercion, reviewed above). Concerning the former, rather than taxing administrators, both LFM and LCT were mostly violent extortionists. Extortion is a practice that embodies a singular state-effect. In the sense of providing governing institutions, in this case extortion means performing the sovereign practice of an alternative institution of taxation, administration, and security. Extortion is a frequent illegal practice in Mexico and Michoacán, which increased in the context of the war on drugs (see Figure 5). Moreover, in this context it acquired both practical and symbolic meaning. The rent extracted from extortion victims has a practical relevance (in the end this is real profit for criminal groups), but the symbolic act of portray as a non-elusive authority in the front of local people becomes even more relevant –this concerns the sticks and carrots subtype legitimacy sources. Regarding the institution-providing dimension, by extorting, LFM and LCT did attempt to substitute the formal and legal taxing and security providing

authorities especially with street vendors and farmers.<sup>40</sup> LCT in particular attempted to make this “official” by issuing *papeletas*, i.e., receipts in saying the payment occurred “in time and form” (Interviews in the field no. 1 and 7, 2017).<sup>41</sup>

#### 4.1.2.2. *Philanthropy and Coercion: Carrots and Sticks*

The “philanthropy” subtype source of legitimacy is expressed through a) gifting (material resource), and b) promises and hope generation (non-material resources). On the other hand, the “coercion” subtype becomes expressed through a) weapons and ammo control (material resource), and b) fear and use of threat or violence (non-material resource). Not only in Michoacán, but also in the whole country, extortion carried out by a criminal group is known as *cobro* or *pago de piso* (floor charge or floor payment). As said earlier, extortion has a practical function of giving earnings. It also helps to develop a political legitimacy interest of providing alternative institutions to those of the state. Nevertheless, the case of Michoacán (and especially LCT) is one of those in which this practice was taken further beyond as a legitimacy source because of their *piso* victim’s range, and how this crime went from a friendly introduction (carrots), to an extreme violent practice (sticks).

Following Tilly’s definition of legitimacy as the probability that other authorities confirm the decisions of a given authority (1985, 171), *piso* in Michoacán attempted to give LFM and LCT authority over other authorities. As a result, victims of extortion included businesspeople, smaller food vendors, farmers, and even public officers.<sup>42</sup> Quantitatively, *piso* in Michoacán was not very different from in the rest of the country. However, qualitatively, it was bribery masquerading as a tax. LCT charged *piso* to rich businesspeople, *taquerías*, and food vendors selling in the street corners alike. Sometimes, *piso* charging did not start with violent threats but with the promise of benefits. This was the case with *tortillerías* business (tortilla selling stores), which received the offer of being helped to expel foreigners’ competition from Jalisco, the neighbor state, who were gaining clients against Michoacán’s *tortilleros* because of their house delivering system. LFM first created hope and later became violent:

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<sup>40</sup> Regarding the farmers, according to journalist reports, as a matter of interest of the “provision of governing institutions” subtype resource of legitimacy, LCT in particular promoted aggressive labor regulation systems for peasants working in avocado and berries fields (Aranda, 2013b, 53; Padgett and Martínez, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> That paper configured a state-effect by converting a regular paper with symbols and seals into an “official” document with real effects regarding possible violence consequences for those who did not pay the *piso*. As can be seen, many of the empirical references as is the extortion can be framed in more than one source of legitimacy. For instance, in this case, the *papeletas* entails with a relevant symbolic charge despite that here it has been tagged into the performance-centered sources.

<sup>42</sup> Some of the local business that suffered *piso* charging that were mentioned when carrying out fieldwork, and that match with journalistic reports, are cafeterias, restaurants, night clubs, public transport operators, and *tortillerías*, among others. Moreover, the violence increasing reached levels that caused *autodefensas* reaction: “If you did not want to [pay] *piso* they would say, well, we will get your business [...] and in the case of Tepalcatepec [...] they started to take things away from you, and later women, and then not only women but also their daughters [...] and that is why they rebelled” (Interview in field no. 7, 2017).

When these guys [LFM] began to expand, they went with local *tortilleros*. [LFM] built structures in each city, where there was a "head guy" of the "plaza", who reported to the dome in Tierra Caliente [...] They called the *tortilleros* and told them: "We are here, we are *La Familia Michoacana*, we belong to the people, we do not kill children nor women, we come to eradicate the other groups, and we want the best for Michoacán. That is why we are asking people for what problems you have". At that moment, the problem of *tortilleros* was the unfair competition of tortilla sellers from Jalisco [...] Michoacán *tortilleros* said: "Well, these [Jalisco] bastards are our problem, because we do not know how do these fucking *jalisquillos* do to sell tortilla kilos for only eight pesos, while we can barely sell it at ten pesos" [...] Of course, the authority did nothing [...]. Thus, [LFM] told them: "give us a week and that problem will be over, we will take care of it". Later, [LFM] went to *jalisquillos*, and told them: "from now on, you will stop selling tortillas here, if not, we are going to kill you off". After doing so, LFM came back with local merchants: "It is done. We are not going to charge you money, we come to help you". However, later there was a quota [*piso* charge], but later they did loose control and became violent" (Interview in field no. 1, 2017).

Local farmers also suffered the transition from a "friendly" *cobro de piso* to a violent way of doing so. This was the case with avocado and berry producers, which, as said earlier, are two of the main economic activities in Michoacán. Avocado producers were asked to pay a percentage of the profits but, initially, some received promises of advantages as a result of paying the *piso* such as security provision and better access to new markets. However, this quickly changed, and farmers received threats and robberies from the criminal group members themselves. For instance, LCT arbitrarily calculated the total farmer profits and the extortion percentage and killed those who did not pay. Another extortion practice was forcing to regulate avocado production in order to manipulate the final price through the offer and demand variables, i.e., speculate with the price (Interviews in field no. 3 and 5, 2017). Initially, some farmers were convinced to participate in this price manipulation by promising better profits resulting from the price increase.

Nevertheless, LCT's friendly request quickly transformed into a violent claim, as it was with *tortilleros* and street vendors (Interview in field no. 5, 2017). As a result, during certain periods, avocado and lime prices rose dramatically in the whole country (Staff Reforma, 2014; Interview in field no. 20, 2016 and no. 5, 2017). Indeed, the avocado was not the only product involved in this criminal economic dynamic. At least lime, berries, grapefruits, meat, chicken, and pork did suffer the same consequences. In some instances, such as what happened in Cherán, local criminal groups managed to cut down trees and profit from the wood and seed more avocado plants that increase the so-called green gold profits explained in the last chapter. In this regard, both LFM and LCT developed marijuana and poppy seed fields that constitute the "regular" drug trafficker's primary source of income (together with crystal meth). As seen before, the *cobro de piso* practice was not only a taxing administration

activity but also worked as a protection system from other potential extortionists and robberies (Interview in field no. 3, 2017), as well as an economic and productive regulation.<sup>43</sup>

That is why, although fitting into the performance-centered sources, it came accompanied by symbolic sources. The *piso* influenced in the attempt for regulating significant economic activities for Michoacán such as the local agro-industrial activities, mining and the port control to more common activities as small food shops and even piracy commodities selling (Interview in field no. 3, 2017). The cases of mines and the port control deserve special attention. By 2012, Michoacán was the number one iron producer in Mexico. More than 27.2 percent of total production was from Michoacán mines (Secretaría de Economía, 2013). As a result of iron's price increase during the first decade of the twenty-first century, Michoacán's iron extraction rose as well. By 2014, around fifteen percent of the mining territory in Michoacán was granted to non-Mexican companies such as Ternium, Arcelor Mittal, Endeavour Silver Corp, and AHMSA (Hernández, 2014). However, LCT took control of several extraction stages, concretely in the mines between Tierra Caliente and Lázaro Cárdenas port. From that moment, their criminal authority over taxing, regulation, and governance began.

When it came to mining, carrots also quickly transformed into sticks. In the first place, LCT managed to charged *piso* to mining companies for safely transporting their shiploads. Sooner they also dealt with non-granted mining companies in order to allow them to exploit already working mines usually administered by transnational firms. This "criminal granting" mirrored the state by organizing and establishing minimum quotas for interested companies. Moreover, LCT pushed mining companies to pay more to *ejidatarios* (landlords) for continuing the concession; of course, the criminal group's profitted from this as well (Hernández, 2014). Finally, the role of the port begins here. LCT not only controlled the Mexican customs in Lázaro Cárdenas ports, but also used the port in order to establish commercial exchanges with China. LCT sent iron and received inputs to produce crystal meth in exchange, that is, chemicals to develop the same *foco* that the criminal group banned to be neither sold nor used by locals. Lázaro Cárdenas' port location on the Pacific Ocean makes it a privileged spot in commerce between North America and Asian Pacific countries. In this case, the absence of official authority was relative, given that customs officers still worked there but were commanded by a criminal authority compelled through violence, corruption, or both.

These methods also spread through how the local criminal groups administrated justice and courts for locals. Previously, it was explained the case in which LCT attempted to punish

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<sup>43</sup> Given these situations, the high extortion levels in Michoacán explored in the last chapter (see Figure 5) are not surprising, even considering that these figures correspond to the cases reported to the local official authorities.

accused perpetrators of domestic violence in one woman's case. The case was not only relevant to the governing institutions' provision perspective. This action also has a sticks and carrots analysis angle. On the one hand, Michoacán's Templars justice complying became translated for this woman (and any other individual in more or less similar conditions of impunity) into promises to generate hope. However, as happened in the other cases reviewed, this carrot quickly became a stick. Providing solutions and justice turned into an inevitable payback for LCT, in the form of hiding weapons and ammunition in the women's backyards. Indeed, as seen in Table 1, guns and ammo control is a particularly relevant aspect of the "coercion" subtype source of legitimacy. Finally, before continuing with the last legitimacy source, below is a case that sheds light on another angle of the performance-centered source phenomena. As part of their political legitimacy interest, LCT developed a particular relation with legality and illegality.

Some criminals may politically deal with their "illegal" condition, and some others may not pay attention to this. Their decision has symbolic consequences concerning their standing towards the law. In the case of LCT, a bizarre combination of positioning and ignoring formal law could be seen. According to testimonies collected during fieldwork, the criminal group used to violently occupy ranches and haciendas. The owners were kidnapped and threatened with murder if he did not to sign papers to transfer the property to LCT members. However, after signing the documents, the owner was usually killed anyway (Interview in the field no. 9, 2017). Despite the atrocity in these narrations, the knotty legal-illegal dealing becomes clear: there was a bizarre interest in legality, i.e., to correctly transfer the property to the criminal group according to the current law, while performing several illegal actions in order to achieve this objective. Both LFM and LCT transformed philanthropy into coercion.

#### *4.1.3. Portrayals of Enemy Sources*

As part of an interview with Channel 4 News from the United Kingdom, Servando Gómez "La Tuta", LCT leader after Nazario's "second" death, said: "[...] we are a needed harm, here we are unfortunately or fortunately, otherwise, here there would be another group" (Channel 4 News, 2018). The interview happened in January of 2014, i.e., in the final stretch of the political legitimacy trajectory studied here. However, quoting "the enemy" is useful to start talking about this last legitimacy source: portrayal of the enemy. The idea of a "needed harm" is more or less transversal to the general LCT portrayal of the enemy. Behind this sentence, there is a whole pessimistic discourse pointing out that worse threats could come to Michoacán. Given that, LCT criminal governance attempts became represented as a sort of least worse-case scenario. In this regard, and following Claessen again, the constant necessity of pointing and blaming "enemies", speaks to how these criminal groups spent more time in the process of becoming legitimate, rather than being legitimate. Following Table 1, portrayal of the enemy sources are subcategorized into three subtypes: expressions against formal authorities, expressions against other (non-formal) authorities, and stances

towards the current law. In this case, the three subtype sources of legitimacy are expressed through a) documents (material resource), and b) negotiations and confrontations (non-material resources).

#### 4.1.3.1. *Expressions Against Formal Authorities*

A couple of years after the Mexican federal government launched the war on drugs in Michoacán, the former president, who declared it, became himself a new enemy – initially, only the Zetas were the enemy, as will be analyzed below as part as the expressions against other non-official authorities.<sup>44</sup> This statement was explicit in the book *Palabra de Caballero* (Morales, no year). Despite the fact that several references like this could be found in other books, in this alleged independent journalistic report, LCT is supposed to tell "their truth". As part of that truth, the author criticized several official Mexican institutions such as the armed forces and the Federal Police because of their actions in Michoacán. For instance, the federal government is accused of launching a "cowardly attack" against LFM, whose members were only complying "[...] with the exercise of their freedom to watch over and give security to local population given the alert of Zetas' comeback [to Michoacán]" (Morales, no year, 52). This quote is particularly interesting regarding the *continuum* between LFM and LCT as a sole political legitimacy trajectory. These are lines defending LFM in a book dedicated to defending LCT prestige.

Five pages later appears a chapter titled “¿Cuál fue el delito?” (What Was the Crime?). By defending LCT members, the author also suggested that the official authority unnecessarily criminalized a social leader (i.e., Nazario), rather than a criminal (Morales, no year, 57-58). What is interesting is that neither the federal nor the local government were “enemies” in the first place – or at least there were no references addressing them. On the contrary, in the first message displays made by LFM, the discourse across the manifesto, the *narcomantas*, and etcetera did not address but other non-state organizations. These other social groups were criminal groups, the Zetas (the foreigner criminal group), and Valencia (but, according to LFM discourse, not acting in favor of locals' best interests). Both references are analyzed below, and shape cases of expressions against other non-formal authorities, the second subtype source of legitimacy under the “portrayal of the enemy” source.

#### 4.1.3.2. *Expressions Against Other (Informal) Authorities*

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<sup>44</sup> According to Barnes, relations between criminals and official authorities oscillate between confrontation (high competition), enforcement-evasion (low competition), alliance (low collaboration), and integration (high collaboration) (2017, 971). This typology helps to look at how LFM and LCT oscillated between these stages depending on the agent involved. For instance, while confrontation shaped the relation with the federal authority, when dealing with local authorities the relation was closer to integration or, at least, alliance. This sort of interaction shaped relevant sides of this criminal group's enemy portrayal.

The first statement regarding a stance against an enemy, in general, was Uruapan's severed heads event. In that case, the Zetas were the perfect scapegoat to build the first statement against an "enemy". In other words, before confronting any official or legal authority, LFM first went against another criminal group. In 2006, LFM launched a campaign to "expel" the Zetas from Michoacán. Following what LFM argued in public messages including the manifesto published in the newspaper, the Zetas were working together with remaining forces from the Milenio cartel. This was also the case of the Valencia cartel, which also had a presence in Michoacán. Usually, the language of Mexican security institutions used to explain this through territoriality. Fighting for the "plaza", a euphemism for the "place" in this logic is the event in which two or more criminal groups or gangs dispute the control over a specific territory. In this logic, "control" essentially means the faculty of defining who can and who cannot do illegal business in that place. Fighting the "plaza" is almost automatically understood as violent confrontation. In this regard, the severed heads event in Uruapan indeed matched this formula.

#### 4.1.3.3. Stances Towards the Current Law

LFM as well as LCT enemy portrayal was also developed indirectly, i.e., by not addressing "the enemy" explicitly but implicitly. By doing so, both criminal groups displayed stances against the official law and attempted to define their own. However, this was neither automatic nor instantaneous. Initially, when LFM published their manifesto in the local newspaper, the group explicitly stated in their mission to "eradicate" from Michoacán a set of crimes such as theft and kidnapping (2006). In other words, to some extent, the first LFM stance towards the current law implied compliance with it and urged others to enforce it. However, as part of this criminal group's mutation into LCT, the stance changed towards creating (and implementing) their law. That happened by indoctrinating potential members. The aim of this indoctrination was to inspire local loyalty to LCT, and not to "the enemies". These enemies included the official state authority (and especially the federal government), as well as other criminal cartels such as Los Zetas (foreign) or Los Valencia (local).

Eventually, other social agencies that also disputed political legitimacy became potential enemies, especially for LCT – such as *autodefensas* or the case of the indigenous movement in Cherán. Indeed, these indoctrination methods were used to recruit new members, or to threaten local public-officers to collaborate with the criminal group. According to testimonies, a bus took attendants to Morelia, where they stayed for a week studying *Pensamientos* (the book with Nazario's thoughts), eating only rice and beans, and waiting for Nazario, who attended on the last day, giving them a speech while dressed in white (Interview in field no. 7, 2017). That was how Nazario's rules "[...] kept troops in line and gave the movement a semblance of purpose, a mission. His *narco* hit men were not just carrying out wanton murder. They were waging holy war" (Grillo, 2017, 262-263). Countless violent confrontations occurred around Michoacán and beyond, motivated through by

“enemy” struggle, while negotiations with “enemies” were not registered during this investigation.

#### 4.2. Across Legitimacy Sources and Resources: The Forbidden Books of Michoacán

At least five books were printed and distributed under the “publishing seal” and signature of LFM and LCT. Across this criminal editorial production, the three types and subtypes of legitimacy sources were identified. Publishing dates are not clear but all of them were done within the period analyzed here. Amazingly, LFM and LCT legitimacy interests were written down and constitute what here is called the criminal editorial production in Michoacán, which condenses the propaganda methods carried out by these groups.<sup>45</sup> All of these texts were apparently written by criminal group members (especially their leader, Nazario Moreno), as well as supporters. None of the texts were sold but were freely distributed across the state of Michoacán, at bus stops and local stores (Interview in field no. 1 and 7, 2017). The intention was to advertise the criminal group’s ideas, agenda, and identity.

These books run across the three types and subtypes of legitimacy sources identified within this research. Therefore, symbolic, performance-centered, and portrayal of the enemy elements are identified. The books attempted to spread and justify the criminal agenda, while they promoted belonging and cohesiveness. It also contains elements of founding narratives and served as a vehicle to promote and spread images, values, religious and moral beliefs, and a whole identity setting. Moreover, the books work together performance-centered sources by proposing the provision of governing institutions. Finally, the books also made stances towards the enemy, including formal and non-authorities as well as stances towards the current law. In other words, the criminal editorial production should be analyzed as a transversal case in which legitimacy is pursued through a wide range.

Before delving into the aggregate analysis here I present a quick overview of each of the books, together with a general description focused on the narrative style as well as the alleged author. These are: 1) *Me dicen “El más loco”* (They Call me “The Maddest One”), Nazario’s autobiography allegedly written by him; 2) *Nazario ¿Idealista? ¿Renovador? ¿Justiciero? Usted juzgue* (Nazario Idealist? Renovator? Justice Man? Judge yourself), written by J.J. Colorado but with a similar drafting style to the former book; 3) *Código de los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán* (Code of the Knights Templars of Michoacán), with no author; 4) *Palabra de Caballero. Los Caballeros Templarios. Un movimiento insurgente* (Knight’s Word. The Knights Templars. An Insurgent Movement), written by Edgardo Morales

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<sup>45</sup> Five is the number of editions that were encountered during this research. However, other texts may be added to this criminal editorial production, such as the newspaper insertion mentioned earlier in this chapter and other random texts supposedly written and spread by these criminal groups, for instance, the *narcomantas*. Hence, for the effects of this research, these five books make up the analysis corpus. All the quotations are my own translations from Spanish.



Shertier; and, 5) *Pensamientos de La Familia Michoacana* (Michoacán Family Thoughts), supposedly written by Nazario as well.<sup>46</sup> All of these texts present different narrative voices (heterogeneity) but addressing towards the building of one truth, i.e., the legitimization of their criminal agenda (homogeneity). From a political legitimacy lens, what could be analyzed is a set of written and dispersed legitimacy efforts developed by many discursive routes.

Each of these five books is in a different literary genre. This means that they have completely different narratives, and the prose indeed varies from text to text. From a legitimacy perspective, these texts connect criminals' political discourse interest with moral justifications, ethical assessments, obedience guidelines, the portrayal of enemies, and the apologetic portrayal of a leader, i.e., Nazario. Moreover, when official authorities banned these books in order to stop LFM and LCT spreading (especially *Me dicen "El más loco"* and the code) it only increased a sort of mysticism around them.<sup>47</sup> Independent of gaining or losing any kind of legitimacy, these were political attempts to gain traction in terms of legitimacy among their constituents. The literary genre within these books goes from the first person tale in Nazario's memoirs (reference 1) to the third person propaganda (reference 2), and the "external" journalist investigation (reference 4). Within this corpus, there is also a moral dictation and conduct rule (reference 3) and random thoughts on self-improvement (reference 5).

#### 4.2.1. "El más loco": Nazario's Memoirs

Possibly the most politically relevant text from LFM and LCT is Nazario Moreno's autobiography. This book, together with *Usted Juzgue* condenses the legitimacy endeavors based in charismatic authority attempts in the Weberian sense (1964). This book was published, printed, and distributed around Michoacán, particularly within the zone of *Tierra Caliente*. The Mexican Army prohibited both reading and carrying this book. Moreover, the army and the federal police banned it, and argued that it promoted apology for crime. A quick reading of Nazario's memoirs shows messianic prose combined with a stereotypical heroic bandit. Nazario seems to be playing Jesus Christ role or a random Catholic saint because of the book's moral ideas. Moreover, this holy role mixes with Robin Hood (Nazario presents himself as a social vindicator of the people, his people, which is a long-standing practice in Mexico during the post-revolutionary period). In this regard, he may be seen as an example

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<sup>46</sup> The author had complete access to four out of five of these books. In the case of *Pensamientos de La Familia Michoacana*, only random pages were consulted; thus, there is no clarity on the extension or physical characteristics of this one. However, these pages together with fieldwork data let discuss its implications in the criminal legitimization process and consequent editorial production in Michoacán.

<sup>47</sup> Initially, the books were founded by the Mexican army in *casas de seguridad* (security houses), a euphemism for drug traffickers' hideouts, together with illicit commodities such as drugs, guns, cash, and cell phones. Onwards, the army elements associated carrying these books with being part or support LFM or LCT, which caused an aura of illegality and for forbid mysticism (Interview in field no. 7, 2017).

of the traditional bandit displayed by Hobsbawm: an agrarian leader who is willing to make sacrifices for the good of his people. Pancho Villa is one of the examples Hobsbawm offers (2000).<sup>48</sup>

However, these are just the superficial aspects. There is much more behind the book in terms of legitimacy. Nazario's memoirs show a figure that is more than Hobsbawm's bandit and a dangerous serial murderer self-styled Robin Hood, which is a close description to what he was (2000, 2-3). Nazario's memoirs are narrated as an autobiography reported by a self-declared hero, who quickly started his narration introducing himself and speaking about his birth: "My name is Nazario Moreno González, my friends and family call me Chayo. Now, suddenly, I decided to write the most important events of my life; both the good and the bad, because like every human being, I have made mistakes and successes" (Moreno, 2011, 4).<sup>49</sup> Some pages further, he continues giving details on his birth: "I was born on March 8, 1970, at 5 o'clock in the morning. I think that is why I like to get out of bed at that time, a habit I have had since I was a child" (Moreno, 2011, 10). Moreover, Moreno described the poverty in which he was born: "[...] there was simply no hope at all" (Moreno, 2011, 5).

Finally, Nazario also explained his nickname's origins, "*El más loco*". According to him, people portrayed himself as a brave child and man who was crazy enough to face challenges that required fearlessness — either riding a bull in a local town festival or fighting against bigger and stronger guys. Early in the book, Nazario denies that his is writing in order to justify his actions and portray himself as "a little angel". Those who think that, he continued, "[...] are wrong and will check it as they move forward in reading these, let's say, confessions, experiences or reasons for my actions towards society" (Moreno, p. 4). However, his words contradict himself even more quickly as he starts justifying his actions and decisions: "First of all, I find myself in the imperative necessity of explaining the truth about my conduct to the Mexican people, since it has been altered maliciously by the PAN [National Action Party, Felipe Calderón's political party] government and its journalists [...] who have attacked me viciously, misrepresenting my actions and my desire to bring a change in the conditions that prevail in our homeland, since so far the only thing that is offered to my compatriots is desolation, hunger and injustice" (Moreno, 2011, 5-6).

Nazario also described his life as a journey towards becoming a famous character at the moment of writing, but underlining his humble origins. The story starts with his childhood, followed by his travel to California as an illegal migrant together with his brother as a youngster, and his return to Michoacán as a successful and wise person who was ready to

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<sup>48</sup> In the case of Nazario, it was not Pancho Villa but Emiliano Zapata, the other revolutionary Mexican *caudillo*, who appeared like an influence for the criminal leader in particular and the group in general. As an example of this, is Zapata one of the characters who appeared in the cover of *Usted Juzgue*, another book of the criminal editorial production that is reviewed next. See Picture 5 in the Appendix.

<sup>49</sup> I have translated all quotes from LFM and LCT books to English from Spanish.

bring justice, progress, and benefits to his people. Nazario wrote in the middle of the war on drugs in Mexico. Thus, his background prose let him start telling his truth about his actions. Besides, in Nazario narrations, there is an individual claiming discourse in which poverty and scarcity work as the foundational beginning. Nazario, for instance, underlined his penurious situation explained through a poverty discourse, which eventually is heroically surpassed by turning weakness and setbacks into strength and braveness. In his words:

We, those who were born with the saint upside down, that is, those of us who were poor, suffered and fought a lot and on countless occasions we exposed our lives to earn money, even illegally, and although I admit that we were outside the law, we did not have another way, because all the doors were closed to us due to our ignorance and lack of office because schools and culture were closed to us"; also, because (sic) we did not care a damn for the government or anyone (Moreno, 2011, 7).

Furthermore, *Me dicen "El más loco"* has a particularity that deserves special attention: an epilogue included at the end of the book and entitled as *Capítulo de lágrimas y luto* (Chapter of tears and mourning). One hundred and one pages compose the whole book. However, this epilogue starts on page 84 and follows until the end. The prologue's context off from the text itself is fascinating in this regard. At this point, the narrator stops being Nazario, and a third narrator, a high criminal group commander explains on behalf of the other commandants that Mexican federal forces have killed Nazario and that they have agreed to do not make changes on the original manuscript. The murder description takes eight out of eighteen pages in the epilogue and is composed of heroic exploits developed by Nazario on the day of the attack, together with the funeral honors made after he was murdered. Full respect is expressed to the former LFM leader: "It was so much our pain and regret that many of us let the tears go out and we militarily salute him [Nazario's dead body] as a sign of obedience and respect towards his bloodied and mutilated body" (Moreno, 2011, 90).

In the remaining pages in the epilogue the narrator switches to several people who assumedly met Nazario when he was alive. This section is entitled "Opinions of People who met and dealt with Nazario Moreno in his Various Life Stages". Indeed, his mother, a "friend, and advisor", a "collaborator", and a "combatant" gave some of these testimonies. This book was published in 2011, and Nazario was supposedly killed in December of 2010. However, he was not truly assassinated until 2014. Thus, random timing occurred with this epilogue's content and intention. In any case, either talking about the text or the epilogue and even if it was Nazario himself who wrote it, the legitimation interest is still there. In the end, telling his own story is a self-empowering action, which reinforces the legitimacy interest by a) introducing the group/leader; b) justifying actions, intentions, beliefs, and plans; and c) spreading the agenda. Moreover, there is an enlightened spirit in being able of telling the own story: not everyone has deserved to do so, which stands for concede the intelligence of those who did it. Besides, especially *Me dicen "El más loco"*, exhibits an individualist perspective

by giving the impression that Nazario can and actually had improved his circumstances together with those of local people.

#### 4.2.2. “Usted juzgue”: *The Third Person Perspective*

The second published book by LFM/LCT is *Nazario. ¿Idealista? ¿Renovador? ¿Justiciero? Usted juzgue*.<sup>50</sup> The invitation to judge the criminal leader is rapidly resolved in the text, prologue shows admiration for Nazario after reading his memoirs: “From the day I finished reading the book *Me dicen el más loco* by the authorship of Nazario Moreno González, I had a huge desire to know more details of this singular character who had intentions to improve the situation of his family, his acquaintances and of all humanity, inspired by fictional characters” (Colorado, 4). According to Grillo, Nazario did not attend school; however, he was moved to learn to read by Kalimán, a cult Mexican radio-comic from the seventies (2017, 239-245). Kalimán was a wise superhero that wore a white dress and turban, with mental powers and was a martial arts expert. As expected for a character like this, he always fights and defeats evil, while stating wise phrases in each of his heroic adventures. Nazario’s admiration for Kalimán became explicit in the cover of *Usted juzgue* (see Picture 5 in the Appendix), where his disseminated face appears above Kalimán’s, but also shares space with Ernesto Che Guevara (revolutionary leader in the Cuban revolution), José María Morelos y Pavón (Mexican insurgent hero during the Independence war), Emiliano Zapata (Mexican insurgent hero during the Revolution), and Porifirio Cadena, a Mexican *radionovela* hero less known than Kalimán. There, Nazario shared and actually led the constellation of national and super heroes (see Picture 5). Indeed, Nazario confirmed himself Grillo’s hypothesis:

I never attended the school for the simple reason that the one I had on my ranch never had a teacher, as it happened in many of the rural areas. I grew up practically wild. I learned to read and write only when I was more than ten years old in order to be able to read Kaliman and other fashion magazines [...] Kaliman's words were famous about that the most powerful thing was "patience and the human mind", and because of that, I practiced [a sort of hypnosis] with animals [...] now that I am an adult I feel like if I have something strange in myself that make me understand some things in animals. In certain occasions, I know in advance what they are going to do [...] I cannot explain that phenomenon, but that is the way it is [...] (Moreno, 2011, 16-19).

This book’s prose is excessively baroque, including constant positive adjectives around Nazario’s virtues together with those of “his group”. Actually, these adjectives seek to justify violence and crime — again, working toward legitimacy. Nazario, said the author, was the “[...] boss of a well-organized group of men determined to carry their ideals, as they say, to the triumph [to the point that they defeated] other bands of dangerous drug traffickers” (Colorado, 9), referring to *Los Zetas* and the initial events in 2006 and before. Moreover,

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<sup>50</sup> In fact, *Usted juzge* drafting is quite similar to *Me dicen “El más loco”*: with excessively long and wordiness sentences and constant typos and deficient orthography. Moreover, the font and edition work look very similar as well when comparing both texts.

Nazario and the group were described as people who, while trying to defend their territory, “fell into the scope of crime” (Colorado, 9), a euphemism to avoid calling them criminals and drug traffickers. In this regard, Nazario and LFM repeatedly relativize: our work “[...] has two faces: everything depends on the color of the lens with which they are seen [...] given that you cannot live with madmen that attack peaceful families with no mercy [hence] I applaud and approve, also with no mercy, the justice applied by Nazario. It is historical and biblical justice: ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’” (Colorado, 13-14). Naturally, the third person voice, supposedly external agent in this context, is supposed to contribute to the argumentation legitimacy.

Nazario is or was [here, the author doubts on the truthiness or falseness of his death in 2010] an idealist who covers himself with the skin of a wolf in order to defend himself from traps and betrayals, but in his heart, he is cheerful, playful, charismatic and of noble heart. Energetic to impose fear, jovial to the laughter and extroverted to tell jokes or funny details that have happened. All this is clearly shown or between lines in the book of his authorship.

[...]

To Nazario Moreno there are things that torture his heart that is why we have to understand him more for his feelings than for his actions. He is made up of flesh, bones, blood, and feelings, apparently in the same proportion. What occurs is that he hides his inner and intimate feelings, perhaps believing that if he exposes them he will be considered as a man with weak personality.

[...]

Violence is justified morally when all other paths are closed and cover the path of ideals, progress and social justice. That is why the revolutions supported by the people may be illegal at the beginning, but historically they claim themselves, as they are strong because of their moral basis. (Colorado, 24-27).

In *Usted juzgue*, Nazario is explicitly compared to Robin Hood.<sup>51</sup> The author does not hesitate to associate him with those who “[...] fought against the established order, helped the poor, imposed their particular concept of justice on the territory dominated by them, who were defamed, [and] persecuted by the law representatives” (Colorado, 5). Even when the book is supposedly written to offer an impartial overview of Nazario and his group, and keep open the title question (*Usted juzgue*, judge for yourself), the author solved it in the page 24 out of 103. Naturally, the judgment is positive, and more than a criminal, both Nazario and LFM are brave men fighting for ideals rather than criminals, kidnappers, murderers, etc. It is especially interesting the description made of Nazario: “[...] an idealist who covers himself with the skin of a wolf in order to defend himself from traps and betrayals”. To support this point, the author drafted a justification that works as a legitimacy discourse because he morally justifies violence and calls the criminal group actions “social justice”.

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<sup>51</sup> In fact, besides the Robin Hood comparison, the text makes some other associations whose characters deserve to be enlisted here. In this regard, within *Usted juzgue*, Nazario and the myth of his death are compared to Adolf Hitler: Pedro Infante (famous Mexican singer and actor during the middle XX Century); Jorge Negrete (a close profile to Infante); Carlos Gardel (Argentinian Tango singer and composer); Cantinflas (Mexican comedian and actor); Emiliano Zapata (Mexican revolutionary leader); Pancho Villa (Mexican revolutionary leader); Mahoma; and the pharaohs of ancient Egypt.

#### 4.2.3. *El código: Criminal Commandments*

Among all the books produced as part of the Michoacán criminal editorial production, the *Código de los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán* is probably the most serious and ceremonious one. Across its twenty-four pages, fifty-three commandments and one final oath are addressed to group members. They are identified as the Knight Templars order, a simile of the medieval Templar crusaders (whose image appears in the code's cover) and whose origin was explained earlier. In this regard, the explicit moral and commanding drafting recalls the Christian Ten Commandments. Since then, LFM stops being mentioned and LCT appears: "LCT of Michoacán was born on March 8, 2011, its main mission is to protect the inhabitants and the sacred territory of the free, sovereign and secular state of Michoacán" (1). Notions of "good" and "bad" are sharply distinguished across the prose by combining theological and secular references with behavioral directives. From a political legitimacy perspective, it is intriguing to whom the code was speaking to. Even when since the first commandment the code's audience supposedly is the order members, local people in Michoacán were possibly the secondary audience given the distribution made either in public spaces and neighborhoods in Michoacán.

Moreover, perhaps local people were the first audience and the code worked as an agenda-spreading tool. There were at least two editions of the code. The one which was spread was a small easy-reading booklet, but the Mexican army seized a book edition golden made-up (some ideas about this are coming later). Grillo and Sicilia's description of LCT as New Age mafia are in the code. A wide range of values and ideologies are promoted across the commandments: God's existence; fight against "materialism"; "injustice and tyranny across the world"; "moral values" defense; patriotism; freedom of expression, consciousness, and faith; as well as the "natural justice", i.e., the "right of peoples and nations to govern themselves". This set of positions is complemented by other attitudes expected from the members such as humility, courage, nobility, courtesy, honesty, dignity and honor (1-11). Moreover, the code forbids group members conduct such as brutal violence. "Offensively drunk" behavior (8) and drug consumption are prohibited as well – the code obligated the members to pass anti-doping tests. Kidnapping is forbidden and lethal force is regulated through Council member's authorization since pleasure murdering or murder for money are not allowed (16-17). LCT's code is the document that proves how this criminal group became a modern criminal and political organization, which created a discourse combining religion thoughts and messianism with human and political rights.

Punishments are stipulated as well: if a member commits a fault or loses his loyalty towards the group, he will be killed together with his relatives, and his belongings will be seized by LCT: "In the case that, unfortunately, I betray my oath, I beg to be executed by the order as a traitor [...] I consent, if I fail my word of honor, to be executed by the arms of good companions or be devoured by the wild beasts of the forest" (23-24) (this fragment was

written in capital letters in the original text). Of course, that empirical evidence exhibits all kinds of contradictions between these commandment expectations and actual violence and crime activities carried out by the criminal group. However, rather than looking for consistency between practices and what was professed in these books, the interest here is to understand the legitimacy angle in this story. In this regard, the fact of combining medieval rites with philanthropic activities together with violence, drug-trafficking, extortion and the creation of an alternative justice system and taxing managing may be, indeed, contradictory, but shapes the silhouette of an atypical criminal political legitimacy case. Hence, the code is a material synthesizer of these phenomena, together with an instrument of internal discipline and a public warning to locals of who rules.

#### 4.2.4. *Palabra de Caballero: The (Independent?) Journalist's Angle*

The fourth book analyzed here is *Palabra de Caballero. Los Caballeros Templarios. Un movimiento insurgente*. This baroque text has a different narrative style. Edgardo Morales, a local journalist, was marginalized by Michoacán's journalism guild after publication (Interview in field no. 1, 2017). Presented as the result of an independent journalistic research work, Morales and his book was an original work of propaganda, useful in a legitimacy strategy because of his independence. In 2012 he denounced threats and harassment from a Mexican army commander as a result of his book, and defended his work as a literary production, which should be protected under the freedom of expression that any journalist should be granted (Castellanos, 2012a). However, the propaganda tone is addressed by justifying the text as LCT replying right. Thus, Morales is attempting to provide “the third position” reasons and arguments in the context of the war on drugs (no year, 4). According to him, the first position is the government's, the second is society's, and the third is the organized crime stance. Interestingly, this is the first (and possibly only) LFM or LCT reference as “organized crime”:

"[...] in this process [of the war against organized crime] there is the third position], the so-called organized crime, the one that must have its reasons and fundamentals, the one that perhaps has something to manifest to the society and that, like everyone, I believe they must have the opportunity to defend themselves. That is why the idea of carry out a journalistic research work arises from the framework of our freedoms, [a work] which gives society the basis to deliberate its position and achieve a clear vision of this war announced by the [Mexican] government (Morales, no year, 4).

After presenting that justification, Morales narrated how he received a letter from an LCT member with the criminal group positioning towards the current political context on Mexico and Michoacán. Days later, on March 6, 2012, Morales describes receiving a phone call from a person called Marcos. According to Morales, Marcos told him that the LCT member's interest in a face-to-face conversation to discuss LCT's general positioning (Morales, no year, 14). Two hours later, they met up in an agreed point of Michoacán and traveled towards the region of *Tierra Caliente*. After minutes driving, at some point, Morales was asked to lie

down on the van's couch and to cover his face with a mask in order to keep the secrecy of the meeting place, i.e., LCT headquarters. Despite the possible tension, Morales does not hesitate in saying that he felt secure at all times: "In the end, I was sure that they had only invited me to know his position and [afterward] I would return safely to my home" (Morales, no year, 16). Later, Morales said he received food and, then, the conversation started even when he never said the name or the names of the people with whom he met, but who spoke on behalf of Michoacán's people: "'Don, I express to you the true feeling of the majority of Michoacán's about the government's actions'" (Morales, no year, 21).

This book adds another layer to the LCT, which is the existence of a social organization, political aims, and social mobilization. Along the conversation that Morales had with these supposed LCT members, the criminal group was called "insurgency", "people's movement", "civil resistance", "fraternity", and "Social Organized Movement" (capital letters in the original text). Moreover, several political legitimacy elements shape the prose. For instance, Morales quotes the interviewer when he explains that this "movement" emerges as a "[...] reconnaissance of all men and women who, from the bowels of the lands of Michoacán, [...] defend the ideological principles of those who truly sought order, justice and freedom for our people" (Morales, no year, 39-40). After his interview, the journalist wrote a set of brief chapters in which, motivated by his data, he posed questions around LCT. One of them is "What was the crime committed by Chayo [Nazario] to die that way?" to which he responds:

[...] there are precedents which [point that], rather than the society, it has been the government who undertakes a campaign against those who, according to them, are criminals and do not fit into their form of government, [this statements, according to] peasants, professionals, students, leaders of opposition to the Mexican political system and other society sectors (Morales, no year, 57-58).

Journalistic discourse has legitimacy built in. Although in this case the text was more fictional than journalistic, it's supposed objectivity and truth made it seem like actual reportage. But leaving aside the contradictions and lack of rigor, what is of the first relevance is the legitimacy function displayed in the text. After declaring the government guilty of pursuing LCT, Morales finished his book by stating that he had already gave "voice" to each of the "positions". Therefore, by doing so, he concludes that LCT is an insurgent movement defending a marginalized society by appealing to Nazario's postulations (Moreno, 62).<sup>52</sup>

#### 4.2.5. "Pensamientos": *The Doctrine*

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<sup>52</sup> Together with the statements describes, this book also includes in the four last chapters, a set of texts dedicated to make a critique of how the Mexican and Spaniard far right wing is affecting and may be dangerous to the country's development. As a result, the prose emerged was a mixture of facts and fiction.



The last book analyzed as part of this corpus is *Pensamientos*. Although this research had restricted access to the full text,<sup>53</sup> still there is a political legitimacy interest in this manuscript, which is studied here. That is, how Nazario explicitly used this book as a teaching instrument during forced courses in which the attendants were local public officers, criminal group members, and local entrepreneurs, among others. These courses were designed as spaces for spread either LFM or LCT agenda -especially from a moral belief viewpoint. The courses used to last days or even a whole week. *Pensamientos* is a book of Nazario's thoughts expressed in short statements, using the language of self-improvement, allusions to God, and instructions on how to overcome life's difficulties.<sup>54</sup> A typical sample sounds like this: "If you want you can become a good Christian [...] [to do so] you should not worry about building walls or barriers, but bridges to unite peoples" (Moreno, no page). Grillo, Nazario himself, and informants interviewed during fieldwork, all talk about the self-improvement learning that the criminal leader received at rehab centers in California (Grillo, 2017; Moreno, 2011; Interview in field no. 7, 2017). Nazario also uses Messianic language and biblical connotations that locate Nazario as a source of confidence and inspiration, as well as a leader who deserves a following.

I asked God for strength and He gave me difficulties in order to make me strong [...] I asked for wisdom and gave me problems to solve [...] I asked for prosperity and [He] gave me muscle and brain to work [...] I asked for courage and [He] gave obstacles to overcome [...] I did not receive anything that I asked for, but I received everything I needed.

[...]

Everyone sees the suffering as an evil, I do not think so, because when the pain becomes peace liberation is when you can learn to live with it and, curiously, that pain disappears and becomes peace. Blessed are the sick because they will be healed; blessed are those who mourn in solitude because they will be comforted by the word of God.

[...]

If someday you feel like if you want to cry, talk to me, I do not promise to make you laugh, but I can cry with you [...] If someday you feel sad, look for me, I do not promise to make your day happy, but I can be with you. If someday, you want to have someone, come running to me because maybe I can listen to you, my friend (Moreno, no pages)

This collection hints at elements outside the texts that also relate to legitimacy, a discourse beyond the texts themselves. For instance, in *Me dicen "El más loco"*, the red cover with Nazario's face in black tones presents the leader's face in propagandistic language, like the covers of Mao Tse Tung's red book or Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* –indeed, a coincidental propaganda element across totalitarian regimes with charismatic leaders. Moreover, this face is recovered in *Usted juzgue's* cover, where "*El más loco's*" face is surrounded (but clearly above) Kalimán's, Che Guevara's, et al. Additionally, *Usted juzgue's* background cover is

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<sup>53</sup> The only pages analyzed were included in a Power Point presentation, so the selection is not personal while also the entire composition and extension of the book is unknown for this research. Power Point slides were obtained during fieldwork from an informant.

<sup>54</sup> Actually, each of these thoughts appeared signed by "*El más loco*" (The maddest one).

made by the colors of the Mexican flag and shield as patriotic symbolism. A last but equally relevant example is the Code cover and general material composition. Even after several people gave testimony of the Code's paperback distribution in zones of Michoacán, the Mexican Army confiscated an edition with a golden cover. According to Gerard Genette, in a literary text, there was an accompanying production that "[...] surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it" (2001, 1). He called this the paratext, a set of heterogeneous practices and discourses residing in the external presentation of the book, but linked to its text. In his words:

"[...] the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary of a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or [...] a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text) [...] Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimate by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, and influence that -whether well or poorly understood and achieves- is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (Genette, 2001, 1-2).

In the case of Michoacán's criminal editorial production, that "vestibule" or "undefined zone" appears constantly. Propaganda could start either in the cover, in the quotes, or across every symbol printed; but also in the actions surrounding the production and distribution of these peculiar editions. Moreover, it is steadily dialoguing with the criminal agenda even without mentioning it or even avoiding to do it. Elements of legitimation rest both inwardly and outwardly. For example, the code and its bloody conduct rules were masked under golden and pseudo-sacred pretensions. Certainly, official authorities participated in this phenomenon by creating an aura of controversy and mystery when they banned and burned those books, especially in the case of Nazario's memoirs. Even though each book had an audience and a different narrative style, it is also relevant to analyze how every element works in the overall political legitimacy attempt. In other words, the strategy to which it responds deserves attention as well. In the end, neither the text nor the paratext works alone.

What matters most for this discussion is the legitimacy intention over, inside, and beneath these texts, observing these books as an entire cultural production. This criminal editorial production condensed a discourse launched by LFM and boosted by LCT combining religious thoughts, messianism, and modern political values, accompanied by an attempt for building a feudal regime based on nationalism and localism but with capitalist and global criminal business visions. Having this case in mind, the Sicilian mafia is reviewed in the following chapter. This review combines both context and criminal group analysis into one single chapter to portray the Sicilian mafia's political legitimacy profile. As said earlier, Michoacán is the primary analysis case within this research; however, the Sicilian case

becomes deeply helpful to generate an interesting comparison regarding the conceptual research interests. Later, the sixth and last chapter focuses on both research cases comparison. In the end, together with their differences and similarities, both contexts lead to a fundamental question: why and when do criminal groups seek political legitimacy?

### 4.3. Closing Remarks: Chapter IV Summary

After elaborating on the particular LFM and LCT political legitimacy efforts, the following are closing remarks derived from this fourth chapter. In the first place, LFM and LCT took part in one sole legitimation history. In other words, independently of the debate about if LFM did or did not turn into LCT, both criminal groups did shape one single political legitimacy continuum. Moreover, this legitimacy sequence took place in the same context (the Mexican war on drugs with the particularities of Michoacán) and the corresponding local history. Furthermore, the case of these criminal groups of Michoacán is atypical due to their interest in becoming publicly and widely noticed. Although criminal, both groups preferred not to become unnoticed but publicly observed as part of their legitimacy strategy. Between not being perceived by formal authorities, and being seen by locals to gain acceptance, Michoacán's criminal groups seemed to choose the latter. Preferring visibility LFM and LCT kept mostly on the track for legitimation never reached their goal.

Material and immaterial symbols were deeply relevant towards addressing this objective, either by promising or building social contract benefits for locals and spreading material and non-material discourses. Regarding the symbolic sources of legitimacy, belonging was the angle in which both LFM and LCT spent the most effort. The element of locality was a discourse articulating the general legitimacy endeavor structure. To push it, both criminal groups also pointed enemies, first against other local and foreign local criminal groups, and later against the Mexican federal government and concretely the former president, Calderón. In this regard, these groups followed the artificial discursive distinction between “us” and “them” initially promoted during Calderón's administration to justify the war. LFM and LCT were also particularly active when spreading their criminal agenda, including a varied set of material and non-material symbols. Particularly since the emergence of LCT, these symbols became explicitly religious. The image, general iconography, and social context of Saint Nazario give proof of this.

However, the political legitimacy profile launched was far from becoming purely religious. Finally, regarding the sources, LFM and LCT stood against non-state enemies, while later the official State authorities eventually became enemies. While reviewing the criminal editorial production, this chapter found how the general LFM and LCT legitimation discourse mixed elements of political modernity with pre-modern and modern values. As a result, eventually LCT became a post-modern political agent who created a discourse combining religious thoughts and messianism with human and political rights; initiation rituals and

prohibitions with progress promises for locals; as well as a feudal regime based on nationalism and localism but with a capitalist and global criminal business vision. This post-modern combination contained one a constant: bloody criminal behavior with no respect for human dignity. In the end, despite the particularities, both violence and legitimacy endeavors were embedded in a context of disputed authority, as well as contested versions for defining the social order.