

# Out of Harm's Way: Understanding Kidnapping in Mexico City

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By  
Rolando Ochoa  
Department of Sociology  
St Antony's College  
University of Oxford  
MT 201

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyses the survival strategies that wealthy people in Mexico City have designed and implemented to protect themselves from kidnapping with special focus on household employment relationships. This particular crime has demonstrated a particular evolution in the last 20 years that deserves analysis. Once a political crime, it became an economic crime that at first only targeted wealthy individuals and then over time began targeting working class victims. Based on extensive qualitative fieldwork in Mexico City which included a year in the field, 78 interviews with employers, employees, kidnapping victims and members of the police forces and justice system and the creation of a news reports database this thesis presents a detailed history of the evolution of kidnapping in the period 1968-2009. This is followed by an in depth analysis of the strategies elites use to protect themselves from this crime. Special attention is focused on the hiring process of household employees, namely drivers, as evidence suggests that most kidnappings are organized or facilitated in some way by a close collaborator of the victim. The hiring process is approached as a problem of trust. Signaling theory is the main framework used for the solving of this problem, as well as some ideas found in transaction cost economics, namely vertical integration. The results point towards strategic behavior from the actors involved that seeks to minimize the risk of being kidnapped for the employer. Signaling helps us uncover the specific mechanisms by which employer establish their prospective employees' trustworthiness. The use of informal social networks made up of strong ties is one of the most salient mechanisms used to guarantee honest employees and this, together with a composite set of properties is signaled throughout. This thesis contributes to the literature on crime in Latin America as well as to the sociological literature on signaling, a branch of analytical sociology.

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*Para mi Mamá, Carmen*

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## Acknowledgements

To the outside world it could seem like a D.Phil is a lonely, hyper individual task, performed by one person, one very stubborn person, over the span of nearly half a decade. Nothing is further from the truth. Completing a D.Phil is a team effort if there ever was one. I do not believe that one single person could achieve this unaided, alone. I am and will remain always grateful to a large number of people who supported me throughout this effort.

I want to thank everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this project, especially kidnapping victims; their generously shared stories are the backbone of this work. Needless to say I would not be writing this without their cooperation and sincere help. I hope that this work does even a minute grain of justice to their experiences and suffering.

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fuelled diversion from the challenges of my research topic. Prof. Ana Laura Magaloni at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) is a great friend, supporter and colleague. Indeed some of the material used in this thesis comes from a project I collaborated on with her. I would probably not have chosen this path if not for the (good?) influence of Prof. Guillermo Trejo (then at CIDE, now at Duke) so a big thank you goes out to him too. My amazing friends in Mexico City and in the chilango diaspora (Rodax, Frida, Miris, Tanks, Chava, Malki, Alvarelo, Lorena, Le Poule, Habermas, Barry, Perez, Fabis, Guidu, Ga, Morongas y todísima la banda), who put up with me and love me, I am always grateful for being in your lives and in all these years abroad I miss you constantly. In Oxford and over the last six years I have managed to build a beautiful family of friends who have provided much needed support, fun, bike rides and many pints (and bike rides with a pint break in the middle and a pint stop at the end, for there is no good ride that does not end at the pub) throughout the D.Phil. Bernie, Jose, Arnoldo, Rachael, Kathrin, Adam, Karin were all “shipmates” so to speak and made my life in Oxford incredibly enjoyable and fun. The same goes for my colleagues in the Department of Sociology. Anne and Gil Loescher deserve a special mention; for over three years they were (and still are) our extended family. They supported me and my family through two D.Phils and helped keep us calm under stress and most importantly (and this is Anne’s work) taught me the joy of gardening and put up with my obsessive vacuuming. I look forward to actually having a garden one day so I can go back to digging and planting, and who knows, maybe become a gardener one day. They also provided enormous amount of support that I will always feel grateful for. I am proud to have all these wonderful people as lifetime friends.

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There. I am done. It is finished; I'll be out in the garden if you need me.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In July 2000, Paola Gallo, a 25-year-old psychology graduate and daughter of a Mexico City businessman, was spending a weekend with friends in her family's summer house in the town of Tepoztlán, a small historic village 45 minutes outside of Mexico City. The town is a famous tourism spot and is known for its relaxed hippie-ish atmosphere, warm weather all year round and a truly magnificent geographical setting among tropical flora and lush mountains. Many people from the City have second homes there and during the weekends the town becomes a vibrant, rich and colourful market that surrounds the centuries old church that serves as the town centre. After spending a day with good friends in town, Paola and her guests went to bed for the night. As she slept that night, a group of armed men broke into the house, violently tied and gagged her friends and took her hostage. Her father Eduardo, then in Mexico City, soon received a dreadful phone call demanding a large ransom for her freedom. His daughter had been kidnapped and her captors threatened to kill her should the ransom not be paid. Terrified, Mr. Gallo, a very driven, strong man, sprung into action. He contacted the Federal Police and demanded they help with the rescue and delivery of the ransom. The police agreed to provide support. Mr. Gallo gathered the money, a deal was made with the kidnappers and a drop-off was scheduled for a few days later. He spoke to his daughter one last time, only being able to repeat to her over and over 'te amo hija' (I love you my child). After the money was delivered, Mr. Gallo received a call saying his daughter would be freed soon. Time passed and no news arrived. Some time after, he received a call from the police. Paola's lifeless body had been found in a field, shot in the back. Nearby, the bodies of three of the kidnappers were also found alongside the

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untouched ransom money. They had been killed in what appeared to be a fight among gangs. His daughter had been executed in apparent retaliation.

Devastated and immensely angry, Mr. Gallo demanded the authorities investigate his daughter's murder with all the resources of the law. Two people were soon arrested; the police claimed they were the culprits and practically closed the case. Mr. Gallo refused to believe it. As he grew more and more impatient, the authorities grew weary and began ignoring him. Doors were closed, appointments cancelled, and he was being outright shut out by his own Justice System. Driven by the love for his daughter, as he tells it, he closed his office in Mexico City, hired two bodyguards, legally bought arms and dedicated the next twelve months of his life to investigating, on his own, the kidnapping and death of his daughter. He carried out interviews all over Tepoztlán and most other states in Mexico, drove over 75,000 kilometres all over the country, talking to anyone who had a story. He made connections in the police forces to gather inside information, got access to the files of his daughter's case and slowly began mapping out a story of crime, corruption, incompetence and murder that spanned two states and many more victims. His investigation was centred on a criminal known as "Apache II", who had been mentioned in an interview with one of those arrested for the kidnapping of his daughter. As the months progressed, Mr. Gallo identified every single member of the gang that kidnapped and killed his daughter. In all seven people - six men and a woman - were involved. In the end, Mr. Gallo detained, transported and delivered to the authorities all the members of the gang that kidnapped and murdered his daughter Paola. In short, he did the work his government refused to do. It took nine years

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for the last one of them to be sentenced. He was serving another sentence in another state for organized crime and thus could not be judged for the kidnapping.

This story makes two main points that feed into the questions raised by this dissertation. On the one hand Mr. Gallo believed it was an employee of his - a gardener - that, in cahoots with the kidnapers, provided information that led to the kidnapping and eventual murder of Paola. He also uncovered the fact that many people in the Tepoztlán community knew of this gang and their activities and some even knew the names of the criminals themselves and yet, in a perverse version of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*, fuelled by fear, refused to do anything about it. The breach in security that came from the person who gave information to the kidnapers is an example of the "treason phenomenon" (KNRD 2009), a name given by authorities for the fact that in up to 70% of cases of kidnapping today are in some form organized by a person close to the victim - an intimate relationship - in many cases an employee with access to information about the family. On the other hand it is also a narrative of inability on the part of the authorities. Mr. Gallo repeatedly denounced the corruption and incompetence with which Paola's case was investigated. No forensic analyses were carried out at the scene 'because it was raining', clothes belonging to one of the leaders of the gang were found splattered with Paola's blood and were subsequently 'lost', goods stolen from his Tepoztlán home and then found at the kidnapers' houses were not retrieved as evidence. The list goes on and on. Eduardo Gallo is now one of Mexico's

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foremost activists in matters of Justice reform, and crime/corruption fighting<sup>1</sup>. Through the most terrible experience a father can imagine he has become committed to justice reform.

The case of Paola Gallo is terribly illustrative of the kind of situations that, on both a personal and an academic level, fuel this dissertation. The fear, outright horror and feeling of powerlessness of this particular experience is felt all over Mexico to different degrees. This situation has led me to ask how people can deal with this fear and how can they protect themselves from this kind of crime when the State is incapable, or unwilling, to provide this protection. I hope this work does only a minute grain of justice to the suffering of kidnapping victims.

### **1.1: The Puzzle and Argument of this Dissertation**

Over the last decade crime has become one of the most salient social phenomena in Mexico (Mitofski 2005; Chambre Franco-Mexicaine de Commerce et d'Industrie 2004; Jimenez Ornelas 2000). The presence of powerful drug cartels, high poverty, inequality and a weak rule of law have all been shown by previous research to have contributed to a significant increase in the country's crime rates (Davis 2006:61; Magaloni and Zepeda, 2004; Bergman et. al., 2003). Among the many crimes that affect Mexicans, one stands out as the most commented on and feared: kidnapping. Studies show that Mexico is in the top three countries worldwide where kidnapping is most common (Briggs, 2002). In 2007, there were

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<sup>1</sup> I interviewed Mr. Gallo in Mexico City. His is the only real name I will use in this dissertation.

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112 kidnappings reported to the authorities in Mexico City alone (El Universal, 2008). Moreover, once the sole scourge of the wealthy, recent evidence from the City's Prosecutor indicates that kidnapping could be in the process of becoming more widespread and is beginning to affect sectors of the middle and working classes (PGJDF, 2007). In this context, wealthy people - the ideal kidnapping victims - have been able to design and implement strategies to avoid being victimized. They are now in fact more successful than other social classes at avoiding kidnapping. The question that arises then is how do potential victims design and negotiate survival strategies that protect them from this kind of crime? This question provides the central source of enquiry for this dissertation. Thus, this thesis aims to present an analysis that will shed light on: 1) the dynamics and history of kidnapping in Mexico City; 2) the mechanisms that wealthy people in Mexico City use to protect themselves from crime and kidnapping in particular; and 3) the impact of this phenomenon on relationships based on trust at the household level for this particular social class.

To achieve this, I will address the following sociological puzzle: *how do wealthy people in Mexico design and implement survival strategies to avoid being kidnapped? Why are wealthy people in Mexico City more successful at avoiding kidnapping today than members of other social classes?* I will argue that this can be explained by the fact that this particular group has implemented a series of informal protection strategies to avoid being targeted, which along with some State action, have had the above result. This is the central argument of this dissertation. In order to feasibly do this, I will present evidence on the mechanisms that wealthy elites in Mexico City use to assess and deal with the threat of kidnapping with special

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reference to their relationships with their household employees. The act of strategically hiring employees was part of a series of strategies that wealthy Mexicans implemented not just to protect themselves from kidnapping (a main concern for rich individuals) but also from other forms of crime. The appearance and perfecting of these strategies - which included interactions with the government and other protection mechanisms - preceded and in many cases were concurrent with a drop in the kidnapping rates of wealthy people as well as the rise in the rates for middle and lower class people that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s; I will elaborate more on this in chapter 3. The research is centred on drivers, although reference to other household employees (nannies, cooks, gardeners, etc.) will be made. On a first approach, it would seem that the relationship between employers and employees in the household is not very interesting; after all anyone who hires a person to work in their home must be careful when selecting him or her regardless of crime rates. Most people anywhere take good care when hiring an employee, be it a nanny in London or a driver in Mexico City. This apparently unexceptional work relationship becomes important because we know that around 70% of kidnappings in Mexico are, according to the National Prosecutor, planned or facilitated by either a member of the victim's family or a close employee (PGR, 2008). This means that a very high percentage of kidnappings are facilitated in some way by people in the victim's inner circle. Mexico's weak rule of law also means that contracts such as these have to be enforced informally. These facts give added importance to the hiring process. The costs of hiring the 'wrong' kind of driver - one that will cooperate with kidnapers or is a kidnapper himself - is extremely high and certainly higher than it would be under conditions of a stronger rule of law and lower crime rates, as can be the case in more developed countries. This is why I will focus on household employees. Here,



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however, a caveat is necessary; this is not to say that the success of wealthy people in avoiding kidnapping is due *only* to improved hiring strategies, as hiring is one of a series of strategies implemented by this group. As I have also mentioned, the State also has a role to play in this dynamic. Other strategies include, for example, cooperation and confrontation with the State at different times as well as more radical measures such as the hiring of professional bodyguards. In the empirical chapters of the dissertation, I will refer to these mechanisms in more detail. To achieve the goals set out herein, I focussed most of the qualitative research done for this dissertation on one of the City's 16 districts that, due to its historical crime rates and socioeconomic composition, makes for an ideal ground for the deciphering of this puzzle.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to existing literature on crime in Mexico and Latin America, as well as the literature on empirical work on trust and signalling theory. First, the empirical study of kidnapping in Mexico City will shed light on the nuts and bolts of this particular crime, as well as the environmental, social and institutional factors that make it so prevalent. While much has been written on the topic of kidnapping in the media and other outlets, a detailed, nuanced narrative of this crime has not yet been produced. Second, it will uncover the specific mechanisms that people use to protect themselves from criminals in a situation where the government does not fully provide protection, a situation that can be described as one of lawlessness (Dixit 2004). This point is of fundamental importance, as it helps us understand what happens in a context where citizens' protection, a government's most important task, is left unattended. Third, it seeks to explore how wealthy people within

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Mexican society make their decisions at the individual level when their security is at stake. This will be illustrated by analysing how decisions of household employment between the employer and the employee are made, specifically how employers screen their employees for the properties of trustworthiness and loyalty and how prospective employees signal that they possess these properties. In short, this dissertation will deal with the survival strategies that potential kidnapping victims implement, how they go about operationalizing them and how potential employees attempt to access work by giving out the correct signals.

## **1.2: Why Household Employees?**

The relationships between employers and household employees in Mexico City allow us to have a microscopic view of relationships based on trust. These relationships also give us a look into how people make decisions in a context where access to the State as an enforcer of contracts is limited. This lack of institutional support provides a rich laboratory where we can observe human interaction with less interference by third parties, thus making our potential for analysis greater. There are other reasons for this decision too. First, while security, policing and rule of law have been a central point of analysis for local and international researchers, the individual-based mechanisms used by people as a reaction to crime have been somewhat neglected in Mexico (important exceptions to this are found in the work of Ruiz Harrell (1998; 1996), Davis (1994), Buffington (2001) and Guerrien (2001)). I believe that this is an important area of research that deserves special attention from sociology in particular. Second, logistical constraints do not allow me to research

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survival strategies in general, making it necessary to focus on a specific set of relationships that illustrate the theoretical efforts of this dissertation.

By the same token, it could be argued that due to the nature of kidnapping the analysis of this thesis could also be focussed on family and friends of potential victims being that they also are involved in kidnapping. While a very attractive proposition, researching such deeply intimate relationships, especially when they involve the ‘treason’ of a sentimentally close member of the victim would have proven very difficult to carry out as a lone researcher. At the time of designing the research project for this thesis I decided to focus on drivers as this are also intimate but do not pose the psychological issues for the interviewees that researching kidnapping by brothers of victims would entail. With the field experience in hindsight I believe that this was the best choice. Indeed, because of under reporting and issues of shame perhaps, very little is known of family member kidnapping. If this research proved challenging focusing on drivers, it would have been almost impossible to do if the focus were on family and friends of the victim. This is also not to say that hiring is the only way, or even the most effective to protect oneself, as I will argue in coming sections potential victims only use this as one of many ways they have devised to become more difficult targets.

Many households in Mexico (and most of Latin America) employ a considerable number of people in diverse duties such as drivers, cleaning staff, cooks and nannies, some of which reside in the household. According to DeVos (1987: 515), around 8% of households in Mexico City “...contained a household member who was not related to the household head”,

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and most of these are employees. These types of employees are given very high responsibilities. They feed, transport and care for families and are often responsible for the well-being of children when their parents are working. Hiring someone to do these jobs is clearly, at the best of times, an important decision.

Mexico can very well be described as a “relation-based economy” (Dixit, 2004). In this environment, many activities, both social and economic, are carried out away from the government’s sight. Many labour relationships are based on informal, sometimes spoken contracts, which are very difficult to enforce by any government agency. Brambilla and Cazzavillan (2008: 1) define the informal sector as “as all the income generating activities that are unregulated by institutions”. Employer-employee relationships in households are a very good example of this. None of my respondents had a written contract with their employers/employees, or any desire to have one. All agreements are verbal and negotiations regarding wages, responsibilities and the like are carried out verbally between those involved. Most payments are given in cash and no taxes are paid on them. This kind of relationship is clearly very difficult to control for any government; the lack of tax records make it almost impossible to even know how many people are involved in this kind of work. In this environment of informality and low government control, these relationships acquire a very important weight. When we know, as mentioned earlier, that a substantial number of kidnappings today are facilitated in some form by either family or close employees, we begin to understand the importance of choosing correctly and of displaying the right signals on both sides.

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The most common form of household employee in Mexico City is the cook/cleaner. This is always a female (in no case during fieldwork did I observe a male cook/cleaner, nor have I ever met one in my 35 years of living in Mexico City) who is hired by the household to carry out tasks such as cooking for the family and the upkeep of the home, cleaning, washing etc. Until recently, drivers were only used by people belonging to higher social classes. Security and other factors, such as higher supply, have made it more common. The practice of hiring a driver has now become quite prevalent for a larger sector of the population. Some lower-middle-class families, for example, will even develop a long-term relationship with a specific taxi driver who will effectively become their personal driver. Some less affluent households hire staff that only work for one or two days a week. It is possible that the fact that wealthy families manage to vertically integrate their employees (Williamson 2005), thereby locking them within the family milieu, while middle- and working-class people cannot afford to do this, has an impact on how safe those families become. The exact income levels of households that use drivers are not known, but observation suggests that most middle-class families and above who are able to afford at least one employee may at some point hire a driver. These employees are mostly from a working-class background and are commonly accessed through the employer's social network; they are then tested on a number of factors that establish whether or not they are to be trusted. Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss this at length. Intuitively, this relationship would seem to pose a further kidnapping risk as employees have access to sensitive information about their employers (their everyday whereabouts and wealth for instance) that potential kidnappers might pay handsomely for, or be willing to use violence to learn. The employment arrangements that upper-middle- and

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upper-class people have with their household employees seem to, at least, not place them in any further danger of being kidnapped<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.3: Some Useful Definitions

Having stated the main argument of this thesis, some basic definitions are necessary. Kidnapping in Mexico takes different forms. For the purposes of this dissertation I will use part of Mexican law scholar Jimenez Ornelas' (2002) classification of kidnapping. He divides this crime into five different categories. *Simple kidnapping* is carried out for purposes other than extortion. In this case, there is no demand made to a third party be it the family of the victim or any other actor. An example of this could be a man taking his child and hiding it from the mother as part of a bitter marital dispute. Then there is *extortive kidnapping*, which refers to the taking of a person or persons against their will and holding them captive, conditioning their release on the fulfilment of a set of demands (Jimenez Ornelas 2002; 14). The important part of this distinction is the conditioning of the release. These demands or conditions can be in the form of monetary payment, government action or restraint, or any other action that the kidnappers demand of a third party being affected by the kidnapping. Jimenez Ornelas' then further classifies kidnapping as *improvised* and *professional*, based on the levels of sophistication of the people who carry out the kidnapping. I believe those are not definitions of kidnapping but rather of those who perpetrate the kidnapping and as such are not usable here. He also writes of the kidnapping of planes, cars and trains (Jimenez

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<sup>2</sup> Like many informal arrangements, these relationships do malfunction as in the case of Alejandro Marti, the teenage son of a very wealthy owner of a chain of sporting goods stores, who was kidnapped and killed in 2008. The police believe that someone 'close to the victim' organized the kidnapping (KNRD 2009).

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Ornelas 2002: 14), as there is no word in Spanish for hijacking. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will only refer to extortive kidnapping in the specific case in which the demand for the release of the victim is conditioned on a monetary payment, normally from the family of the victim. While other kinds of kidnapping do occur in Mexico, such as revenge kidnappings among drug gangs in northern Mexico (most of which end in murder), most of the kidnappings in Mexico City are of the economic extortive kind. Another clarification becomes necessary. I will not refer in this dissertation to what is now known as *express kidnapping*. This kind of kidnapping is becoming more and more popular as petty criminals see a potentially secure source of income from this type of crime. The victim is selected seemingly at random and with no prior research into her or his wealth<sup>3</sup>. Victims are normally taken as they enter their cars or get into taxis. They are then driven around the City (often in their own cars) for anything between two to eight hours and are forced to extract as much money as possible from their bank cards or credit cards. They are also relieved of their jewels and any other goods they may have on them, such as cell phones. Eventually, if all goes well, they are released when their kidnappers are satisfied that they have taken as much as is possible. Victims are often released in remote areas of the City and in most cases their cars are either returned or found nearby. In some rare cases, the express kidnapping

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<sup>3</sup> Surely some form of quick assessment is made by the criminals here to ascertain that their victim will at least offer some profit. Signalling theory could potentially be applied to this case to explain how express kidnappers choose their victims on such short notice. New research would be needed to develop this, probably involving interviews with jailed express kidnappers. This crime has become so widespread that in 2005 it was the source of a Venezuelan film called *Secuestro Express*, which became an instant hit in Latin America. The film depicts a very young affluent urban couple that are kidnapped as they leave a nightclub in Caracas. They are selected on the grounds that they drive a very expensive looking SUV and have very expensive clothes. Their ordeal eventually becomes a bona fide extortive kidnapping as the criminals decide to ask their families for ransom. Hollywood has also taken a shot at exploiting this crime with the film *Man on Fire*, where Denzel Washington plays a bodyguard to a wealthy girl in Mexico City. She is then kidnapped and he becomes, in true Hollywood style, a vigilante dishing out justice against those he believes are responsible for the crime.

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becomes a proper extortive kidnapping, as was the case with one of the victims I interviewed (EV1).

Social class is a concept I will use throughout and therefore it is useful to define some related terms. When I write about *wealthy* people in Mexico City, I refer to upper-middle- and upper-class individuals. In this sense, I will refer to Goldthorpe's characterization of social classes (1980), which can be relatively easily transplanted to the Mexican case. A small elite class stands at the very top of the schema where the top earners and business owners stand. In this category one finds Carlos Slim, the world's third wealthiest person who, in 2009, after the economic downturn, commanded a fortune of around 35 billion U.S. dollars according to Forbes magazine (2009). Goldthorpe's *service class* constitutes the top of the class structure (upper class) and contains the high service class and subaltern service class. People in this group are normally in the service or tertiary industry as owners or higher paid employees in administrative or strategic positions. The income within this class varies greatly in Mexico from a minimum of around five thousand dollars a month for, say, an entry-level executive, to many times that for the top earners. It is perhaps more telling that this sector of the population, the top 10% of earners, own 36.4% of the entire available income to Mexico's households. On average though, a household of this top 10% will earn around 5,000 U.S. dollars a month (INEGI 2008). The upper-middle class is composed mostly of white-collar workers (Goldthorpe 1980) and averages an income of around 2,000 U.S. dollars a month (INEGI 2008). Incomes below this fall rapidly. For example, a household in the middle 10% of the population averages around 700 U.S. dollars a month while a working



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class household of the lowest earning 10% will bring in less than 200 U.S. dollars a month<sup>4</sup>. As is normally the case with averages, these have to be taken with care. Mexico's high inequality means that average household incomes can be deceiving. Mexican society is so unequal that it is not uncommon to find on one end of the country levels of deprivation similar to those of the poorest African nations and on the other end wealth and development akin to any developed western nation.

#### **1.4: Theoretical Approach**

The act of hiring a driver in Mexico City is a very rich example of a problem of trust. A high crime environment with limited State protection makes the risk of running into a criminal more present than in other situations where the rule of law is stronger. A potential driver in this situation not only needs to prove his proficiency at the wheel and knowledge of the City's streets but, more importantly, must also prove that he will not betray his employer by facilitating a kidnapping or other crime to be committed against said employer or his family. He must prove somehow that he is willing to protect the family's private information regarding their wealth, plans, schedules and whereabouts, information to which he will certainly have access upon being hired. Once he is hired, a driver has almost instant access to this information and the family is exposed. This is why a clear assessment must be made before the decision is made. In a sense, he is hired not just to drive but also to protect information. Faced with the decision to hire someone, the potential employer must decide

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing 1 U.S. dollar = 13 Mexican pesos = 0.6 British pounds. These figures are approximate as exchange rates change rapidly.

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whether or not he can establish that the potential employee is who he says he is and has the intentions he claims to have. In other words, he must establish his employee's trustworthiness before he hires him. This must be done in an environment where there is incomplete information - the employer does not know for sure what the employees motivations are - and where there is a risk that a criminal may pass themselves off as a prospective driver or provide information to actual kidnappers. Thus the potential employer must make a series of trust decisions to determine if he is to hire the person in front of him. Since, in most cases, he will never have met the employee before, this decision must be made in a limited amount of time lest the hiring process be drawn out and too costly. What appears to be a menial decision turns out to be a sophisticated process.

The literature on trust (Gambetta (Ed.) 1988; Sztompka (Ed.) 1999; Cook (Ed.) 2001; Gambetta and Hamill, 2005, Hardin 2006; Cook and Gerbasi 2009) and signalling game theory (Gambetta 2009; Bacharach and Gambetta 1997, 2001; also see Spence 1975) will provide the theoretical tools for this dissertation. Employers face both primary and secondary problems of trust (Bacharach and Gambetta 1997) as, throughout the hiring process, they must establish if the prospective employee has the properties that they ascribe to a 'real' driver and also if the signs that tell him this are actually true or if he is facing someone passing themselves off as the real deal. How they solve these problems is the central focus of this thesis. Bacharach and Gambetta's (1997) outline of the trust game allows us to dissect the hiring process and look at it as a trust decision. In order to establish the potential employee's trustworthiness, the employer will look for certain qualities that he

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believes mean the other can be trusted. These qualities can be based on rationality, but can also be determined by cultural, religious or other structural factors.

The mechanisms through which this relationship is played out can be deciphered using signalling theory. A branch of game theory (Gambetta 2009), signalling theory has become in the past decades more salient as a potentially important tool for sociological analysis. The theory develops a framework within which to understand how people make decisions regarding the truthfulness of the information they are receiving in an exchange when the other person involved in the exchange may wish to misrepresent information. This is based on the premise that many of the things we need or would like to know about other people we engage with are not observable. For example, an employer would like to know that the driver he is hiring is honest; however, honesty is not really observable to the naked eye. It has to be established through time and repeated interactions. Many times, however, people do not have the luxury of repeated interactions before they make a decision. How can individuals solve this problem? This is the dilemma that signalling theory helps us address. We can solve the problem of how to interact with someone else by “establishing a connection between their perceivable features and their unobservable properties” (Gambetta, 2009; 170). These perceivable features can be any observable trait such as gender and race to more personal factors such as dress, body language, hairstyle and even one’s weight. They come presented in two manners: 1) as *signals* understood to mean purposive displays of features meant to convey a message or ownership of a certain trait (such as honesty) and 2) as *signs*, which can

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be anything in the environment capable of changing our beliefs or affecting our decisions (Gambetta 2009; 170). The decision to hire, I will argue, is based on the use of these tools.

To further support my work I will also refer to parts of transaction-cost economics, specifically Williamson's work on vertical integration (Williamson 2005). Vertical integration, understood as the decision to make or buy, can allow us to understand some of the hiring strategies of the elite in Mexico in regard to their hiring of numerous members of the same family, thereby locking in what could be called their *employee production*. I will also refer to the literature on protection and extra legal governance (Dixit, 2004; Gambetta 1996; Varese, 2001; Skaperdas, 2008; Skaperdas & Konrad 2004) to illustrate and explain the informal context in which the relationships I study are carried out, started and enforced. Moreover, I will also refer to work on kidnapping (e.g. Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza, 1998; Rubio, 2003; Levitt and Rubio, 2005) to illustrate the wider context of this crime.

While the quantity and quality of the literature on crime and kidnapping has been increasing in Mexico, especially in the last two years, a piece of research such as this one fills a void in the study of the micro consequences of macro processes such as crime, a weak rule of law and the State's struggles to impose a unified set of rules within a society. Studies of how individuals protect themselves from crime in Mexico are also rare (for an exception, see Guerrien 2000). Large developing urban centres such as Mexico City have very specific socioeconomic, institutional and geographical characteristics and thus also provide a unique testing ground for theories of the formation of relationships based on trust and protection. It

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also allows for the application of signalling theories in what can be described as an environment of relative lawlessness (Williamson 2005).

## 1.5 Methodology

### 1.5.1: Case Selection and Basic Information

The district that is the main focus of this research, *Miguel Hidalgo*, is located at the north-western edge of the City. It covers an area of 42.99 km<sup>2</sup> and is composed of 95 *colonias* or neighbourhoods (INEGI, 2005), with a population of 353,534 (INEGI, 2008). This district is one of the richest ones in the country and houses a large proportion of the City's economic elite. It is virtually (although not formally) divided in a wealthy southern side and a working-class northern end. Both sides have pockets of middle class neighbourhoods. Within this district, I focused my research on the neighbourhood of *Polanco*, located at the southern end. An ideal scenario would be to make a comparison between two neighbourhoods among which there is some variation. Another wealthy neighbourhood could potentially have different outcomes. More interestingly, an analysis of the survival strategies of communities in other social classes could also be carried out. This is a very plausible route for future research, but, at present, time constraints allow only for the study of a single case. Future research may be geared towards a comparative study.

There are a number of reasons why I chose this neighbourhood. First, it is home to a large number of wealthy individuals. Numbers are not available but, on observation, it probably

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houses the second largest number of wealthy people in any neighbourhood in the City, exceeded only by the neighbourhood of Las Lomas, which, due to its very large geographical size and the fact that it straddles both Mexico City and the neighbouring State of Mexico, was not chosen for this study. Historically, wealthy communities such as the Jewish, Lebanese and Spanish have settled and have lived in this part of the City for generations. *Polanco* is a high-class residential and business area that began developing in the late 1930s and has since been home to very wealthy people. Most old houses, once the majority of the buildings there, have been or are now being replaced with very expensive, super-safe condos. Security is such a salient issue in this neighbourhood that, in a survey of 33 buildings during fieldwork, it was found that all but five boasted private security as a matter of course in their sales pitch and adverts. Most news adverts for the sale of flats and houses there also mention the security arrangements for the building in question. *Polanco* is also a commercial hub known for its world-class restaurants, bars and designer shops that line the wide, clean, tree-lined streets of its south-west side. Property prices give us a good idea of the level of wealth of this neighbourhood; a two-bedroom flat will cost upwards of 500,000 U.S. dollars. A luxury apartment or house will set the buyer back at least 1,500,000 U.S. dollars. Second, due to its economic composition, this neighbourhood was especially targeted by kidnappers in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is known through police reports that both the Jewish community and the Spanish community in *Polanco* were until recently targeted by highly organized kidnapping gangs (KNRD 2009). However, as of 2007, there was only one kidnapping reported in this district, and we do not know for sure if it actually happened in *Polanco*. This drop in kidnapping rates fuels the enquiry presented herein. Third, the neighbourhood size and self-contained characteristics make it ripe for analysis of community-based protection

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mechanisms and also allows for observation of ecological issues. In sum, it presents an ideal laboratory for the purposes of this dissertation.

### **1.5.2: The Field Research**

Before starting the fieldwork, I chose to focus the research on the interpersonal trusting relationships between employers and employees. It was my desire to find out how people in Mexico City deal with the risk of kidnapping when they have a limited or deficient recourse to the State or other legal conflict resolution instances and how this is reflected in the process of hiring an employee or, on the other side, of being hired as one. Once in the field, I quickly realised that this was just one part of a very complex story. This made me reflect that, in order to understand the dynamics of kidnapping and the micro trusting relationships that people foster to protect themselves, one must, at some point, look at what role the State, and its interactions with society, plays in the development and pervasiveness of these factors. While I centred my field research on the elite's survival strategies I have discussed above, I also tried to take into account other factors in order to have a more complete view of the issue at hand. This led me to carry out interviews with law enforcement officials such as prosecutors, police investigators and district attorneys, along with the interviews with employers and employees. I also tried to include the view of kidnapping victims to assess what kind of effects having been a victim could have.

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The research questions driving this project are:

- How and why has kidnapping evolved in Mexico in the last 10 years and what are the factors that determine this evolution?
- How do wealthy people in the district of Miguel Hidalgo handle the threat of kidnapping?
- How do they select and recruit household employees? What characteristics do they look for that persuades them that a prospective employee will be loyal and will not divulge information to criminals or is a criminal himself?
- How do prospective employees make themselves more attractive to possible employers and signal their trustworthy qualities?
- How is the employer-employee relationship maintained and/or enforced?
- Under what conditions does this relationship break down and what happens when it does?



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Some exploratory hypotheses were:

- The risk of kidnapping has forced the wealthy to design and implement new and improved protection strategies over time to accommodate the heightened risk.
- The process of hiring employees has become more protracted and sophisticated as a result of the higher risk posed by kidnappers.
- Potential employers will seek to establish their employee's trustworthiness through a series of mechanisms that seek out characteristics such as honesty in potential employees. In this way, they will also try to uncover dishonest employees.
- Once trust has been established to the employer's satisfaction, hiring will result.
- Drivers will devise strategies to ensure the best employment possible such as working to establish their reputation for being discreet and establishing family links to other household employees. They will also endeavour to signal to the best of their ability that they are honest.
- Drivers are hired on the premise that they will be able to protect private information as the main concern of the employer.

### **1.5.3: Sensitive Research**

One of the first issues that deserves discussion is the sensitive nature of this research. The topic of crime, personal security and especially kidnapping (much more so for victims of

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kidnapping and the wealthy) can be classified as sensitive as it fulfils the methodological definitions of such topics. Lee and Renzetti (1990: 512) argue that:

*A sensitive topic is one which potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched, the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data.*

In line with Lee (1993), it became clear that the information I needed to obtain would be best accessed through an extensive period of qualitative research, as opposed to attempting survey work. I decided that most of the first-hand data collected would be accessed through long interviews with pre-determined groups. This holds especially where victims of crime are concerned. Lee (1993: 101) argues that, “even on a purely technical level, many topics, especially of a sensitive kind, remain ill-suited to study by means of the survey”. Surveys on sensitive topics, dealing with areas of a person’s life which may be “private, stressful or sacred” (Lee, 1993) sometimes fail to elicit truthful answers from the respondent or, due to a lack of trust, they may even bring on outright repulsion to their application. Thus, a long period of qualitative fieldwork became necessary. Based on this reasoning, the fieldwork revolved around four different data collection strategies:

- Interviews
- Observations
- Collection of literature
- Other documental evidence

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Interviews became the central part of the field research. Based on the hypotheses outlined earlier, it was decided that five groups needed to be sampled:

- Middle- and upper-class individuals in the district of Miguel Hidalgo who have been victims of kidnapping.
- Middle- and upper-class individuals in the district who have not been victims.
- Household employees working with victims.
- Household employees working with non-victims.
- Authorities that deal with this particular crime and others, as well as academic experts.

It was decided early on that these interviews would be, where possible, individual and semi-structured. This would allow me to build a rapport with my respondents, an important part of the researcher's task when performing sensitive research (Dickinson-Swift et al, 2007: 331), as well as develop some form of trusting relationship (Booth & Booth, 1994) that would enable my respondents to give me the information I would ask of them. I used a network or "snowballing" approach to gain access to the respondents I needed. I would start from an initial gatekeeper who would give me access to interviews, which in turn would give me access to more interviews and so on. This approach is especially fruitful when trying to access "hidden populations" (Lee, 1993: 45), such as crime victims and members of the police force, a secretive and sometimes hostile group (Hinton, 2006). These populations require the previous establishment of some form of trust with the interviewer. It is because of this that network-based recommendations have a positive influence both on the access and the

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quality of the information released by the respondent. It must be said, however, that snowballing methods have limitations. On the one hand, they sometimes offer a certain bias. Lee (1993: 66) argues that, when using this method, “one is still sampling with reference to the social structure, though this time in an implicit manner”. The type of respondents is heavily dependent on the social ties between members of the study population. This has a tendency to produce homogenous samples. In the case of this research, most kidnapping victims (by far the most difficult group to access) I was able to interview are, for example, members of the middle and upper class. I had a very difficult time gaining access to working-class victims, which resulted in the sample of kidnapping victims being biased towards the former groups. This is a reflection of my position, as a Mexican and a native of Mexico City, in the social structure and the networks I have more access to. In the end, the importance of this bias is reduced by the fact that this particular group did not offer substantially different information to the other groups concerned. On the side of the drivers this is addressed by the fact that except for one, no other drivers had any prior knowledge of me and I had no prior connection to their employers. In this sense I tried, within reason, to get connections as far away from me as possible. I also, with three exceptions, interviewed drivers independently, that is drivers with no connection to employers in the sample. It is still feasible to think that information I received (both from drivers and employers!) may have some form of filtration of information, that interviewees may not be honest or disclose fully. I believe that is always a risk in interview-based research<sup>5</sup>. It is up to the interviewer and his

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<sup>5</sup> The same could be said of interviews of people in jails (the only group I had no access to). What interest would they have in telling the truth to a researcher? Indeed one could assume they are in jail because they are not normally people who are honest. They may have an incentive to portray themselves as innocent or on the other hand to paint themselves as tough and bad hardened criminals due to their role in the prison or to exaggerate certain things and downplay others.

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skills to be able to get the information he needs from his interviewees and also to continue to carry out the interviews until the point of theoretical saturation, that is when the information he is receiving can be corroborated by as many interviews as possible, reducing the chance of filtration to a minimum. I believe I achieved this in this dissertation as I tried to gather as much information from as many interviewees as distant from me as possible to reduce the effects or presence of any filtration.

Over the year of fieldwork, I was able to conduct 78 interviews with the groups mentioned above. I attempted to audio record most of the interviews, but this was not possible all the time. In the informal environment in which a lot of the interviews took place, the presence of a voice recorder would have been, if anything, a distraction. In the case of law-enforcement agents, I was never able to record. I found that this particular group, more than any other, was reluctant to have a conversation recorded. This may be due to the fact that the police these days in Mexico are under constant scrutiny by society and the media, creating a certain fear within the institution of being named and shamed. Another explanation for this would be based on Hinton's work on the Argentine and Brazilian police (2006: 4), as she argues that, "even in developed countries, the police are hierarchically organized, have a secretive *esprit de corps*, [and] resist external interference..."; this could help explain their reluctance to be taped. Although most law enforcers spoke very freely (even, as we shall see, of their "negative" activities), they were never comfortable with recording of any kind. Given these circumstances, I tried to record as many interviews as I could, but could only get 25 on tape. I also kept a field diary, in which I noted most of the interviews and talks as soon as I could. I

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went back to it almost on a daily basis to record not just notes from conversations but also observations and thoughts. It has been a constant reference point as I wrote this dissertation. Although note taking has its risks (a researcher may forget parts of a conversation or give undue importance to some others), whenever possible I tried to triangulate the information with other sources (media, other interviews and research) in order to corroborate the authenticity of the information gathered in the field diary. A descriptive analysis of the interviews can be found in the Appendix to this chapter. I also had perhaps hundreds of conversations that I would try to steer towards my research questions. These happened in taxis, social gatherings, coffee shops, bars, shops and newsstands, with acquaintances and their families and friends, academics, journalists and many other actors. Most of these were set in an informal, impromptu environment. While I am not tallying many of these conversations in the final count of official interviews, they most certainly helped shape my vision of the narrative I will attempt to unfold here and the knowledge I acquired with them also informs this dissertation.

Consent is always an important issue when doing the kind of fieldwork that this dissertation required. It is very difficult to get a kidnapping victim to sign-off a consent form. It is even more difficult to get the same form signed by a member of the police force or a district attorney. The presentation of such paperwork would only put a distance between the researcher and the respondent, which would hamper any positive outcome of the interview or conversation. Many of the conversations I had were of a very personal nature, more akin to conversations among equals than those of researcher-researched. For these conversations

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to work, it is important to build a certain rapport and trust with the interviewee, something that “...demands a measure of intimacy that goes beyond the normal relationship between interviewer and informant” (Booth & Booth, 1994: 417). In this sense, I will argue along the lines of Lee (1993) and contend that in cases such as the work presented here consent is a “developmental process” (pg 103) that takes time and, on occasion, repeated interaction. As he argues:

*Discussion of sensitive or confidential information is usually only possible in these situations once trust has been established between the fieldworker and the person being studied. Where this has been done consent becomes implicit. (1993: 103)*

The interviews in each group sought to explore a set of topics:

*The wealthy employer group (those who have been victims of kidnapping):*

- Some basic socioeconomic information such as income bracket, profession and levels of education.
- If possible, details of their particular case such as a description of the event including time of day, how the kidnapping was carried out, how long were they held for, how many kidnapers were involved, did they know the culprits, how was their release secured, did they contact the police or not etc.
- Information of the kind of household employees they had before and after the crime, such as:
  - How many employees do they have (if any)?

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- How do they establish if they can trust them?
  - What was the hiring process like?
  - Are they members of the same family/neighbourhood?
  - Where do the employees come from?
  - How do they hear about prospective employees?
  - What do they offer their employees and what do they expect of them?
  - What, if anything, changed in their household employee scheme after the crime?
  - What other protection strategies did they use before and after being victimized (e.g. alarms, specialized bodyguards, armoured cars)?

*The wealthy employer (who has not been a victim of kidnapping):*

- Some basic socioeconomic information.
- Information on the kind of household employees they have, such as:
  - How many employees do they have (if any)?
  - What was the hiring/screening process?
  - How do they establish if they can trust them?
  - Are they members of the same family/neighbourhood?



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- Where do the employees come from?
  - How do they hear about prospective employees?
  - What do they offer their employees?
  - What other protection strategies do they use, specifically to deal with the threat of kidnapping?
  - Why do they think they have not been targeted?

*Drivers and other employees:*

This group is mostly made up of drivers, although it also includes other household employees such as cleaners and cooks. I focused on drivers since they are perceived by employers as a bigger risk and are harder to control as they spend most of their time outside of the house. There is also a perceived sense that women (i.e. nannies, cleaners etc) are more trustworthy. This will be discussed in the empirical chapters. The questions I asked included:

- How did they come into contact with their job?
- Where do they live?
- Are more members of their family employed in this household (or another household that is related by a network to this one)?
- Are members of their household in the same professional area?

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- What do they offer their employers?
  - How do they perceive their responsibilities as drivers?
  - What is their impression of the threat of kidnapping and how does it affect their job?
  - How do they know their boss will be benevolent?

### *Law Enforcement Group*

These were more open and sought to explore their roles, formal and informal, in the dynamics of law enforcement in Mexico, as well as their opinions on the informal schemes that individuals use to protect themselves and their thoughts on kidnapping. I also sought to explore why and how these particular institutions have been involved in the evolution of kidnapping, clearly not just as perpetrators but also as part of a social system that has brought about the situation that fuels this research. In these interviews, I was also especially interested in looking at how the State perceives its role as a protector. This part of the fieldwork was also geared towards learning how institutions such as the local police forces interact with their environment and the individuals around them.

Interviews normally lasted for about two hours, but sometimes went up to three. They took place in diverse settings such as homes, coffee shops and restaurants. For the research on law enforcement, I was able to carry out interviews and observations in crime-investigating units both in Mexico City and the neighbouring Estado de Mexico. Around 200 hours of direct

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observation and close to 40 interviews were carried out in these agencies from September 2008 to February 2009. This was done through my involvement in a research project on the professional practices of crime investigation units in Mexico. The collection of relevant local literature took place throughout the fieldwork. Books on relevant topics were collected. Some examples of the kind of literature collected are books on kidnapping (Ortega, 2008; Cordoba, 2007), the legal provisions regarding kidnapping (Pares, 2008) and policing (Azaola, 2006), among others.

#### **1.5.4: The Kidnapping News Report Database, 1999-2008**

Given the difficulty of gathering data on kidnapping in Mexico, I also built a news report database. The media have made a habit in the last years of reporting intensely on crime and kidnapping and therefore there is a wealth of information being printed every day. This has resulted in a large amount of news reports on these topics. Two national newspapers, *El Universal* and *La Jornada*, were used to build the database. They are two of the most important newspapers in the country (Mexico City being the capital of the country has not really developed a local newspaper industry) and as such were important sources of information. Both newspapers were accessed through their Internet archives and at the newspaper depository of the National University (UNAM). All news reports containing the word *kidnapping* were selected and included in the database in the format of Rich Text Word documents and stored in a computer, subdivided by year. The database includes reports on press conferences made by authorities, reporting on kidnapping cases, statistics released by police, investigative journalism articles on kidnapping, opinion pieces on the

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same subject and other articles where kidnapping is mentioned such as criminal law reforms etc. The database consists of a total of 1,774 individual news reports.

This database is a vital source of information and its full potential has yet to be tapped. I believe it could be used in the future for other research on kidnapping. I will use the information taken from this database throughout the dissertation to illustrate the history of kidnapping in Mexico. I will also use it to help me reconstruct many of the informal survival strategies that individuals in Mexico City use. With it, for example, I was able to map and reconstruct rich information on kidnapping gangs and their development. Many instances of community protection strategies are also found there. Many of the ‘hard’ data actually available were also triangulated with the database to provide more trustworthy information. I will refer to this database using the acronym **KNRD** when citing information emanating from it. The Appendix contains descriptive analyses of the database. The database was used mostly qualitatively. While efforts were made to use it in a qualitative manner especially in the beginning, I quickly realized that the actual quantitative data that would come out of the database – due to its varied sources – would prove very complicated to corroborate and may therefore not be useful for this dissertation. There were also several gaps in such data. Having said this, when data was available through the database from more solid and verifiable sources it was indeed brought into the work. For example, kidnapping numbers found in the database could many times be traced back to a document or report, they could also be triangulated in to the thesis. In this sense the database is a hybrid and I was forced by its very characteristics to use as much information as I could qualitatively while reducing the

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quantitative use of it. The database serves as a source of contextual information and some data. It also helped me reconstruct the history of kidnapping I develop in Chapter 3. The coding was used as a tool to identify topic I was interested in within the documents of the database.

### **1.5.5: Coding Framework**

Both the news database and the transcribed taped interviews were coded after the fieldwork using the MAXqda software at Oxford. The database was originally organized on a weekly basis. For each week, all news reports would be copied into a Word document for future coding. The database was organized further by year and month. As suggested by authors such as Strauss and Corbin (1990), I systematically began with an open coding format that eventually evolved to selective coding (Bailey, White & Pain 1999). After the first few interviews were done in Mexico City, I reviewed the audio files and transcriptions in order to begin constructing different concepts and categories. These were mostly based on the theoretical tools I use but some were also inferred from the data. As research progressed, the coding became more and more specific.

I approached the interviews with some preliminary ideas of the concepts and categories I wanted to discuss but also with an open mind to be able to capture new information. Based on my theoretical tools and the topics of research, I decided upon a certain number of topics to be touched on in the interviews and later coded. The theory and research design provided

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me with some of the key concepts I was looking for, such as ‘trust’, ‘signals’, ‘signs’, ‘hiring process’, ‘fear of crime’, ‘employee-employer relations’, ‘signs of trustworthiness’ and ‘kidnapping’. Once these concepts were identified in the interview, further recurring themes and minor concepts (Bailey, White & Pain 1999) were identified through axial coding within those categories. These led me to identify, for example, people’s definitions of trust (the only constant here was, oddly, that almost no-one could really define it, exemplifying just how slippery such a concept can be). Selective coding followed when looking for very specific mechanisms and meanings in people’s words and phrases. As an example, a ‘chain of coding’ used in this dissertation looks like this:

Open coding > Axial Coding > Selective Coding

So:

‘Signs of trustworthiness’ > ‘Honesty’ > ‘Born in the interior’

or:

‘Kidnapping gangs’ > ‘impunity’ > ‘police involvement’

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Such methodological progressions were followed for the concepts used in the open coding process. Done systematically, this allowed me to uncover many of the micro mechanisms used by employers to establish their drivers' trustworthiness, as well as the mechanisms used by 'real' employees to signal their good intentions and expertise. Please refer to the Appendix for more details on the coding framework.

## **1.6: Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, as follows. The present chapter gives an introduction to the questions driving this dissertation, as well as the methods used to address the research questions presented. Chapter 2 gives a detailed outline of the theoretical framework of the dissertation, namely signalling theory and transaction-cost economics, and also presents the central hypotheses. Chapter 3 offers the reader the background on kidnapping in Mexico; it aims to present a solid and rich narrative of the development of this crime, as well as point to possible new trends in that crime. It also goes into detail about the scores of survival strategies that individuals and communities have devised to avoid being kidnapped. Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the core of the dissertation. In them, I will present an empirical study of the elite's survival strategies and link them to the theoretical tools developed in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 deals with the employer's view. In that chapter, I develop a nuanced analysis of the signalling exchanges that take place from the perspective of the employer. I describe and analyse his strategies for hiring and Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings and arguments, as well as possible implications for future research.

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In this chapter, I have introduced the reader to the puzzle that serves as the basis of this dissertation. I have also introduced the main arguments of the thesis, namely that the risk of kidnapping has forced the wealthy inhabitants of Mexico City to devise and implement new, more sophisticated protection strategies that allow them to be less likely to be kidnapped. I will argue that these have evolved over time as the risk of being kidnapped increased. I also presented briefly the theoretical framework of the dissertation, namely trust and signalling theory, which are the main tools used here for the development of the thesis. Key concepts were also defined in this chapter, such as kidnapping and social class. I have also explained in detail the qualitative methodology used for this research and the reasons behind the choice of an extended period of field research in Mexico City, a method best suited for the research of sensitive topics such as kidnapping and crime. I also addressed case selection issues and described the tools used to gather data (interviews and the creation of a news report database covering the period 1994-2009). An Appendix shows the descriptive analysis of both the interviews and the dataset. In the next chapter, I will outline and discuss in detail the theoretical tools I will use for the remainder of this dissertation.



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## Chapter 2:

### Crime, Signaling and the Concept of Trust

Signaling theory provides the core of the theoretical tools for this dissertation. As part of the work on elite survival strategies that I will develop in chapters 4 and 5, I will analyse trust-based relationships in Mexico City households and their relationship to kidnapping protection strategies. In particular, I will focus (although not completely) on wealthy families' hiring process for drivers. Theories of trust and signaling developed by Spence (1974), Frank (1988), Gambetta (2000), Bacharach and Gambetta (2001) and elaborated on by Gambetta and Hamill (2005) will provide the basis for the hypotheses and analysis presented herein. In this chapter, I will outline this theory and also derive the hypotheses that will drive this research.

Understanding complex social facts and the “social world” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:4) requires a specific approach that allows us to understand people's actions and decisions. Analytical sociology offers such an approach. This particular current within sociology focuses on explaining “important social facts such as network structures, patterns of segregation, typical beliefs, cultural tastes, common ways of acting and so forth” (Hedström and Bearman 2009: 1). It is based on identifying the particular *mechanisms* by which these facts occur or are produced. The main difference between this and other mainstream sociological analysis approaches is that it does not see as its end result the discovery of statistical associations as a

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means of explaining the social reality<sup>6</sup>. This particular approach seeks to explain how these correlations came about and how they sustain themselves over time, and it does so by looking at the specific mechanisms operating in each relationship. Another important distinction that needs to be pointed out is that a mechanisms-based sociological approach (as well as the core of analytical sociology) does not seek to find an overarching social theory; it is, in other words, sceptical of attempts to find a general sociological theory. In this sense, analytical sociology (and its mechanisms-based approach) is “firmly anchored in the Mertonian tradition” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:6) and puts much of its attention on the generation of “semi general middle-range theories” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:6). These middle-range theories have as their main purpose to serve as a tool for understanding specific social facts, their causes and consequences, and are less preoccupied with discovering an all-encompassing social theory. The usefulness of this theoretical approach lies in its flexibility and reality-based empirical basis. It gives the researcher the tools to be able to explain the facts she observes without the rigidity and constraints of a large general theory. It allows for reality, rather than theory by itself, to guide the researcher and her inquiries. This is based on what is referred to as structural individualism: “a methodological doctrine according to which all social facts, their structure and change are, in principle explicable in terms of individuals, their properties, actions and relations to one another... that emphasises action-based explanations” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:8). The motivation behind these action-based explanations is to reach the minimum unit of analysis (the microfoundations) of a social fact, that is human action. Human action is ultimately the basis for all change we observe in

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<sup>6</sup> It does, however give due recognition to the value of “...traditional experimental and nonexperimental approaches. Such methods are crucial for adjudicating between rival mechanisms and for distinguishing the relevant activities and relations of a mechanism from the irrelevant ones” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:6).

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society. Whether it is fuelled by beliefs, preferences, emotions, opportunities or even signals, all “relational structures are explained as intended or unintended consequences of individuals’ actions” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:4).

Another key factor within analytical sociology and the mechanisms-based approach is that it is based on the existence of micro-macro links. A macro property is defined as a property of a collectivity or a set of micro level entities that are “not defined by a single micro level entity” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:10). This is not to say that macro properties are explained or caused by the micro level entities. These micro level entities *make up or constitute* the macro level property. Thus, they do not have a causal relationship. Changes at the macro level are thus composed by changes at the micro level. Changes at the micro level from A to B (causal) have a “supervenience” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:11) relationship to changes at the macro level from X to Y. In other circumstances, a macro level property X may influence and thus have a causal relationship with the micro level at B. meaning individuals’ actions and decisions will be influenced by an observed macro property. This influence may be recognized and consciously taken into account by individuals or may also influence them in a non-conscious way. The mechanisms-based approach seeks to explain complex dynamics at the macro level through unearthing the most basic traits of their micro level components.

A mechanisms-based approach seeks to explain an outcome X by referring to the “types of entities and activities through which the outcome to be explained is believed to have been

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brought about” (Hedström and Bearman 2009:4). There exists a debate about the definition of a mechanism and many authors have explored this dilemma (see Elster 1989; 1999, Stinchcombe 1991, Hedström and Swedberg, 1998 inter alia), presenting their own definitions of what a mechanism actually is. For the purposes of this dissertation, we will, in line with Hedström and Bearman (2009), adopt Machamer, Darden and Craver’s definition (2000: 3). They state that “mechanisms are entities and activities organized such that they are productive of regular changes from start or set-up to finish or termination conditions.” This particular definition is, I believe, clear enough in that it allows us to understand exactly what a mechanism is and also opens up the possibility to analyse actions by individuals and explain them. Thus, a mechanism is composed of entities (for example an individual with certain properties) and the activities and relations that such an entity is involved in. This is compounded with its relations to other entities and their own activities, which will produce an outcome (change) of certain characteristics and regularity. We must also understand activities with regard to the function these have in relation to the outcome we are seeking to explain. Machamer, Darden and Craver (2000: 6) use a very simple example: the heart (an entity) pumps blood (an activity) by which it delivers (a function) nutrients to the rest of the body. In conjunction with other entities (the liver, the spleen) and their activities (and thus their functions), they produce a regular outcome: keeping the body alive (or not). This is a very good example of how a mechanism functions and of how we can use a mechanisms-based explanation to understand outcomes. Mechanisms can be used in a similar way in the social world. For the purposes of this thesis, we can use the following example: A wealthy person (an entity) hires a driver (another entity) to transport (an activity) him and his family and provide them with protection (a function). Crucially, here there is another entity, the driver,

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who also performs certain activities. It is the relationships of these two entities (and perhaps others) that may allow us to understand such events as the changes in kidnapping victimization rates and the like.

Based on these assumptions about the social world, I will present here a narrative of wealthy individuals' survival strategies and mechanisms, as well as an analysis of their hiring strategies for household employees. I will base my work in this dissertation mainly on signaling theory as it is used to explain a series of problems of trust (Gambetta 1996; 2009, Bacharach and Gambetta 1997; Sztompka (Ed.) 1999; Gambetta and Hamill 2005). This theoretical approach will allow me to analyse how individual behaviour has an impact on a macro level fact. Empirically, I will use it to analyse the hiring process of employees in wealthy households in Mexico City, with special reference to the risk of kidnapping. If we know that around 70% (a large majority) of reported kidnappings in Mexico City (PGJDF 2008) are facilitated in one way or another by a close associate of the victim (family member or employee), and if we assume (as we do and know) that wealthy people, kidnapping's ideal victims, know this fairly well from media outlets and word of mouth, then we could not be blamed for thinking that hiring a driver would be something of an unnecessary risk. Surely it seems almost irrational to do so in such an environment and it would seem the wisest choice would be to avoid having employees as much as possible<sup>7</sup>. Yet drivers (and other employees) are still hired and at no time during fieldwork was I confronted with anyone who had

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<sup>7</sup> This would leave us to deal only with disgruntled or otherwise evil family members, surely a large enough nuisance. I decided to deal only with drivers and other employees in this work as researching what has been called the "treason phenomenon" (KNRD 2009) or kidnapping carried out by family members of the victim by local police would have proven too difficult and sensitive to research.

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stopped the practice. Therefore, the selection process presents a good puzzle. In order to hire an employee, the employer must have a very high level of trust in him or her; otherwise, the relationship could be risky and have a less than positive end. This presents a typical problem of trust (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001) which can be solved through the use of signaling (Gambetta and Hamill 2005). I will focus my efforts on the selection process between employer and employee and the details of this relationship. Within a very informal setting, or institutional vacuum, selection processes become important as they serve to ensure, as much as possible, that the relationship will not have a negative outcome (for example, one where the employer becomes a victim of kidnapping by being ‘betrayed’ by his employee or where the employer is exploited). My argument on the importance of these relationships hinges on the fact that household employees are not only selected to fulfil domestic chores but also as *protectors of information*. I will argue that signaling theory is useful to understand how these relationships are formed in households and how the actors involved solve the problems of trust (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001) through such signals in a weak rule of law environment.

Signaling has been used on a number of academic fronts and has its origins in evolutionary biology (see Zahavi 1975) and, more importantly for our study, in the work of Michael Spence (1974), who used signaling as a means to understand employment in the labour market from an economic perspective. Spence argues that during the hiring process two actors are involved, namely the employer and the employee. These two actors under many circumstances have never met and have limited information about each other. In his own

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words, “the employer, in most hiring situations, is uncertain about the productive capabilities of the job applicant prior to hiring him, and usually for some period of time after hiring” (Spence 1974: 2). In simple terms then, it means that the employer simply does not know fully if the employee will actually be able to carry out the tasks he has been hired for in an adequate manner. In this context, where information is imperfect and much information is not public, the actors in the relationship engage in a signaling game.

Every time the employer hires someone, according to Spence, he is entering a lottery “whose outcome is the actual labour he receives” (Spence 1974: 6). What the employer is not certain about is whether or not he will in fact receive such labour and of what quality it will be. If the employer – as Spence argues – knows little of the past experience and intentions of the employee/candidate, he will respond in a number of ways. The employer will try to minimize his risk in hiring by looking for certain observable and non-observable signals from the employee that transmits to him his capabilities and credentials. These can be in the form of university diplomas, membership of a guild or professional organization, or more easily observable traits such as gender, age and race. The employer will use his past experience in the market (such as the times he has hired before, experience from other colleagues who have done so, etc.) to make sure, as much as possible, that his new employee will be of the best kind possible or, in Spence’s words (1974: 8), “to estimate the conditional probability of competence of the employee”. The employee will, on his side, try to generate the best impression possible by manipulating as much as he can the image he conveys to the employer. After all this, there will always be an element of uncertainty that may be minimized

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over time as the employee proves that he does indeed possess the qualities he has signalled. Spence's analysis describes quite well the situation I am analysing in this dissertation and serves as a good introduction to the issues I will deal with. An employer needs a certain type of employee and needs to establish whether a certain candidate will indeed be all that he promises to be. Signaling solves the communication problems that exist between them.

In terms of sociology, the use of signaling is not as widespread as in economics (Gambetta 2009), but I believe it provides me with the right tools to understand not just the economic motivations behind the signaling game but also what other social factors determine the outcomes of these interactions when there may be more to them than pure rationality at play. Thus, signaling will help me uncover the specific mechanisms that solve the trust problem in the hiring game from a sociological perspective.

## **2.1: Trust and Signaling in a Risky Environment**

As Seligman points out, "the existence of trust is an essential component of all enduring social relationships" (1997: 13). Mexico is a good illustration of this. Most of the relationships I will analyse in this research are part of an informal relation-based economic system (Dixit, 2004), are under no written contract and are governed by a limited rule of law (Magaloni and Zepeda, 2004). Dixit (2004) establishes a distinction between a rules-based economic system and a relation-based one. In the former, all actors in society assume a certain number of rules that govern their actions; these rules are controlled and established a



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*priori* and provide certainty of outcome for most actors. In most cases, these relationships are arbitrated by a third party or are at least enforced by one, namely the State. In practical terms, relationships are based on contracts enforced by an agreed upon third party. In the latter, there is no such governance structure. Relationships are informal and, to an extent, *sui generis* in that they do not all operate under the same rules and are not all enforced by the same parties. Formal enforceable contracts are rare in this case, and most relationships are based on different informal mechanisms. The establishment of cooperative relationships in this environment requires a particular approach from those involved in the relationship. In this situation, actors must use diverse mechanisms in order to establish, maintain and enforce cooperative relationships, since they know that the state or another party will not help in enforcing the deals they enter into. This is a problematic state of affairs since, on a first approach, it does not allow for a high level of certainty for anyone entering into a relationship. The establishment of trust among actors before entering into, and during, a relationship is one such vital mechanism that individuals can use to solve the issues of uncertainty in their relationships.

Trust has been pointed out repeatedly as one of the key ingredients for the better functioning of society both at the interpersonal and social levels (Seligman, 1997; Sztopka, 1999). Most relationships must be cemented in some form of trust lest they become costly situations “that can only be maintained by third-party enforcers” (Seligman, 1997: 4). Trust is the ingredient that keeps a society functioning in more harmonious ways. It is also a vital ingredient in making transactions and other contracts efficient and less costly due to the fact that trust (and

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other informal mechanisms such as arbitration) helps solve issues within the relationship without the use of state interventions. Indeed, it is very costly to go to the State every time there is a discrepancy between actors. Even in systems that do provide this service on a regular basis, research has found that firms and other actors will prefer to use informal channels of conflict resolution (Greif 1993) before going to the courts as a form of saving valuable resources. It has, because of this, been discussed and analysed from many academic fronts like anthropology, economics and sociology and using very varied tools of analysis such as rational choice (see Brennan 1997) and culturalist approaches (see Sztompka 1998) among others (Sztompka, 1999: 1). In line with Gambetta (2000: 4), I understand trust to mean:

*A particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both before he can monitor such action (or independently of his capacity ever to be able to monitor it) and in a context in which it affects his own action.*

A key component of trust is uncertainty about other people's behaviour: "It is related to the limits of our capacity ever to achieve a full knowledge of others, their motives, their responses to endogenous as well exogenous changes" (Gambetta, 2000: 4). In the words of Seligman (1997: 21), "trust involves a vulnerability occasioned by some form of ignorance or basic uncertainty of the other's motives". If actors could achieve full knowledge of the true intentions of other agents and could base their decisions on this knowledge, trust would be rendered mostly useless. Trust plays a key role in the success or failure of these relationships precisely because full information is rarely (if ever) achieved in interpersonal relationships. We can almost never understand or know the full range of motivations that the other has.

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Vulnerability refers to the fact that, in a relationship, agents are to an extent free to default upon or betray the other actor/s. Trust becomes important when we need to know if the person in front of us will betray us or not, given a specific situation. It is by solving this riddle that we can then enter into a relationship with the other person with some form of certainty of its outcome. Individuals involved in a relationship not based on a contract and in an environment of low law enforcement potentially have a high degree of freedom to act minimizing possible adverse consequences. In this situation, trust needs to be established to a high degree (Gambetta, 2000). Trust allows us to make sense of otherwise uncertain situations and to foresee scenarios and plan accordingly, thus giving us the certainty that we need in order to act.

Insofar as trust is “an aspect of a relationship between two or more actors” it is referred to as “relational trust”. Relational trust can take place between two individuals, as a dyadic relationship, and it can also be embedded in a “broader network of relations” (Cook and Gerbasi 2009: 220) that include other different actors. The commonality these relationships have is that, where trust is granted, it normally only involves one or a finite number of aspects of the relationship. To put it simply, normally Person A will not trust Person B on everything; he may trust her to mind his fish but not his children. C may trust D to drive him home after a party but not necessarily to do business with him. Thus, trusting relationships are mostly reduced to a single (or a few) aspect. Relationships based on trust where the actors are a part of a larger network of relations (including other actors) are very important for the purposes of this thesis. As I will expose in the chapters ahead, trust can be reinforced

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through membership of a particular network where other actors will serve as informal “enforcers” of the relationship. The employment of more than one member of the same family (which I will also refer to here as vertical integration) is a good example of this kind of network relationship. Another example is the extensive use of social networks to source employment and employees. The members of the network itself can, in these cases, become key players in the establishment of trust and in the enforcement of the relationship.

Cook and Gerbasi (2009: 222) dissect trust into a number of dimensions, namely “competence and reliability” and integrity and honesty. Competence can be simply defined as the relative capacities to carry out a certain task in an “appropriate manner” and integrity etc. can be defined as the “commitment to do no harm” (Cook and Gerbasi 2009: 222) in a particular situation. Competence can be easily explained; we would not trust someone to do something if they do not have the prior capacity to do so whether technical or otherwise (which is why sociologists rarely perform life-saving surgeries). Honesty and integrity are basically related to the need of a person not to be betrayed by the other in a specific situation.

This second point is of paramount importance when we analyse the hiring process. While technical capacity is important (drivers need to know how to drive), it is very cheap to acquire such an ability and therefore not too important for an employer. However, honesty and integrity are vital dimensions (which we will later refer to as properties) in this relationship. The employer needs to know that his employee will not betray his trust by harming him or

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his family through an information leak to criminals, or indeed by being a criminal himself. The very high cost of a betrayal of this sort gives us an idea of how important establishing this dimension is for the employer. However, our understanding of competence changes when we know that the work of the driver is not just as someone who (only) drives people around but also as an actor who has a stake in *protecting* the family of his employer and their information. Here, both dimensions acquire nearly equal importance and the employer needs to answer two questions: 1) can this driver protect my family and our private information? and 2) will this driver betray me and hurt me in the future? Indeed, it seems now that both questions require the same answer and can be posed as one: will this driver betray me and facilitate a crime against me? This question encompasses the facts that the driver needs to be a good and able protector and will have no inclination to betray his boss in this interaction. In this case, both dimensions of trust are intimately related and must both be fulfilled if the relationship is to be successful. How can potential employees answer this question?

## **2.2: Employers and Employees Playing the Trust Game**

Bacharach and Gambetta develop a theoretical approach to tackle the process of establishing a person's trustworthiness (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001). Their work forms part the theoretical basis of this thesis. Actors planning on entering into a relationship (contractual or not) must first go through a process in which they establish the trustworthiness of the other actor and decide whether to engage with him/her or not at all. Ideally, an agent would have full information about the other agent's intentions and preferences in order to

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make his decision. In reality, this condition is rarely (if ever) achieved and agents find themselves in an asymmetrical information situation in which the decision maker (i.e. the trustor) does not know what payoffs govern the trustee. They do know, however, what options in terms of strategies each other have (in the case of a driver to hire or not and in the case of the driver to cooperate with the employer or share information with kidnappers). In line with Bacharach and Gambetta (2001: 149), I assume that actors will have different ‘raw’ and ‘all in payoffs’. Raw payoffs are purely rational motivations to act. All in payoffs may differ from purely rational ones and are determined by different mechanisms. All in payoffs may or may not coincide with raw, rational payoffs. They can be otherwise determined, for example, as a moral inclination to behave within the law, or a norm-based aversion to damaging the family name. This is where an important asymmetry in information lies. The trustor must find a mechanism to fill the void that this asymmetry creates. In other words, he must define whether the trustee is governed by his all in or raw payoffs. Actor A (the trustor) must be sufficiently assured that B (the trustee) will perform the tasks he/she is advertising or promising; in short, A must trust B to do X, based on information he has on both their payoffs for the interaction. Bacharach and Gambetta (2001: 150) call this a *basic trust game*. This applies to a type of game in which it is in an agent’s best interest to cooperate but he would be better off if he did not if the other agent decided not to cooperate and it is also in his best interest not to. When the trustee has proven to the trustor that she is worthy of trust and therefore will do as expected by the trustor and the trustor has done likewise, an equilibrium appears in which both actors are fulfilling each other’s expectations (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001: 154). Establishing which set of payoffs (raw or all in) will prevail for the

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trustee in an interaction is what Bacharach and Gambetta (2001) call the primary problem of trust.

The primary problem of trust involves the truster establishing whether the trustee has a certain number of characteristics that the truster takes to mean that she is trustworthy. First, the actors must establish which “trust warranting properties” are valid for this particular interaction. These properties are “any property (or combination of properties) of a trustee in a basic trust game which suffices for him to be trustworthy” (Bacharach and Gambetta, 1997: 7). We must assume that the actors in the relationship know what properties signal trustworthiness for that particular interaction. Good communication between actors is a very important part of this exchange, but it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how good communication is between actors in all interactions (Good, 2000). Thus, problems of communication may also have to be overcome for the game to function. Trust warranting properties that are easily transmittable will be preferred in this case (the fact that they are easily transmittable does not mean they are easily mimicked, such as race or religious affiliation). Trust warranting properties can be any number of things and the decision of the truster to trust the trustee will emanate from the process of gathering information about them. Most trust warranting properties are unique to each interaction or situation; one may work in one context but be useless or even set off a red light in another. For example, a readiness to use violence can be a trust warranting property in the case of recruiting a member of a kidnapping gang but certainly not when hiring a nanny. A trustee is made trustworthy through many possible combinations of these properties. Rarely does only one

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property mean full trust is warranted. The more trust warranting properties a person has, the more trustworthy he may be appraised to be. Some properties appear through reasoning on the part of the trustee, such as the need for an income to support a family. Others can be value based or of a moral character, such as the inclination to obey the law we mentioned before or a personal need for recognition. All these properties transform the trustee's payoffs from raw to all in by overriding simple rational impulses. Punishment for defection itself may not be a straightforward property, but rather a propensity to respond to punishment, for example, may serve to make the trustee more trustworthy (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001). Thus, Bacharach and Gambetta (2001:151) call any property (or combination of properties) in a basic trust game that suffices for the trustee to be trustworthy a "trust warranting property for that game".

Once trustworthy properties have been observed, the secondary problem of trust arises. The truster must establish whether those properties on display by the trustee are to be trusted as real. In other words, the truster will have to decide if the properties on display by the trustee are indeed real or a front or disguise for someone passing himself off as something he is not. As these properties can be observable or not (Bacharach and Gambetta, 1997), it is possible for an actor to copy or "mimic" those properties to pass themselves off as the real thing in order to obtain instant, raw payoffs. Bacharach and Gambetta call this person an "opportunist" (1997: 10, also see Gambetta and Hamill, 2005). In order to discern mimics from non-mimics, trusters must carefully analyse and weight the special properties, as seen through the signs that trustees display (Gambetta and Hamill, 2005). Normally, the truster



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will know that there are signs that are very costly to mimic such as gender or race, and then others that are ‘cheap’ such as dress, or some documents. Costly signs will be hard to mimic and will therefore have a higher value for the truster in this interaction. Before making the decision to trust, the truster will therefore look for those signs that are costlier to copy for this interaction or a combination of them. Frank (1988) calls this the “costly-to-fake principle”. The secondary problem of trust is solved when the truster can say, with good certainty, that the person in front of him is indeed who he says he is.

The costly-to-fake principle (Frank 1988) is also elaborated on as the *cost condition* in signaling theory (Gambetta 2009; Gambetta and Hamill 2005). It is defined as follows:

*a solution in which at least some truth is transmitted, provided that among the possible signals is one,  $s$ , which is cheap enough to emit, relative to the benefit, for signallers who have  $K$ , but costly enough to emit, relative to the benefit, for those who do not. If it is too costly to fake for all or most non- $K$  signallers then observing  $s$  is good evidence that the signaler has  $K$  (Gambetta 2009).*

When the cost condition is fully accomplished, a sorting equilibrium arises, that is an equilibrium in which there is no ambiguity that the signaller indeed has the properties he claims to have. For example, ideally, only Oxford graduates can signal that they studied there. If only Oxford graduates and no one else can signal this the resulting equilibrium is sorting. Ideally, proving through signs that one studied at Oxford should be cheap if the person in question did indeed study there (letters from supervisors and an official degree for example), but extremely costly for anyone who did not.

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In reality, fully sorting equilibria are rarer than one would think. Things in the human world are rarely that black and white. Thus, there are signals which may be emitted by almost all individuals, whether they do indeed have the property being screened for or not. In this case, the equilibrium is called pooling (Gambetta 2009). Drawing from my research, a pooling equilibrium results from signaling the property of gender and, clearly, all males can signal their manhood in many ways. In fact, the signal is often always present and there is no effort needed on the part of the person concerned to further signal his condition as a man. In the case of a driver, the pooling results from the need of the employee to hire a man. However, he cannot make any other assessment from this signal in particular. Both evil and good drivers who are male can signal this. Thus a pooling equilibrium is achieved but one that may yield no more information. In this sense, it is better for the employer to select men during the hiring process but then disregard this property completely (Gambetta 2009).

The third kind of equilibria that may result from a signaling game is called a semi-sorting equilibrium. In this special equilibrium, signs  $S$  are emitted by all possessors of the property under analysis but *also* may be emitted by non-possessors. In this case, the information transmitted is incomplete but it is firm enough that the person making the evaluation may decide that it is likely that the property on display is actually possessed by the signaller. In the best of cases, very few non-possessors will be able to signal this property because “the higher the proportion of non-k signallers who use this signal, the less conclusive is the evidence” (Gambetta 2009:173). Many real life situations end in this kind of equilibria. In the case of hiring a driver, the most employers can hope for is a semi-sorting equilibrium.

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Because perfect information and sorting equilibria are rare, individuals making a decision based on signs must try to find a way to reassure themselves that they are not being duped. They will do so sometimes by using *composite* markers of trustworthiness. In these cases, they look not for one property but for a set of properties that, put together, maximize the likelihood that they will indeed pick the correct person for the job. These composite markers may be composed of signs that bring about pooling and semi-sorting equilibria. Clearly, a semi-sorting equilibrium would be preferred over a pooling one and, as such, people (in the case researched here, employers) will try to screen for as many signals as they can which may derive in a semi-sorting equilibrium. Of course, they will also be on the lookout for pooling signals, but will give preference to other, stronger and closer-to-sorting ones.

I will use an example from my research to illustrate this. In the specific case that concerns us, a verbal recommendation about an employee from a close friend or family member is impossible to mimic, but a written letter of recommendation from a stranger is not, and is therefore less valuable. A worthy letter will only be presented when the writer knows the prospective employee personally and knows for a fact that he is reliable, punctual and discreet. In this sense, mimics will find it very hard to display this particular signal. However, there is no guarantee that even someone with a recommendation will be honest, as there are always black sheep, but it does reduce the chance of this happening thus producing a semi-sorting equilibrium (Gambetta and Hamill, 2005; Gambetta 2009). This will be a preferred outcome for the employer as he seeks to maximize the odds that he is hiring an honest driver. An example of this would be the following: When a wealthy person (W1) is in need

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of a driver, he will contact someone in his close social network (W2) to enquire about it. W2 will then ask his/her trustworthy employee (E1) who might recommend a family member or acquaintance (E2). It is the sum of the good reputation of W2 and E1 that counts in this transaction. E1 would hardly recommend a traitor since he knows he will be punished if his recommended person betrays W1, and W2 trusts his/her employee's recommendation enough to pass it on as she has already established, *a priori*, her employee's trustworthiness proven by the fact that he is already hired. While there is always a risk that the recommended person might be a mimic or a weak link - a person who can be coerced to cooperate with criminals - this strategy seeks to assure that this risk is minimized. As we shall see in the following chapters, this strategy is very common when hiring.

This initial stage can be called a filtering stage. By using social networks to acquire information on and recommendations for prospective employees, trusters will save resources that would otherwise be spent probing deeper into a potential employee's identity when he is a complete unknown. Filtering through social networks allows the truster to begin on the right foot and reduce his selection pool to a manageable (and somewhat more certain) size. After this stage, the hiring process described above begins proper with the employer probing for the qualities he wants and the employer presenting such qualities. Enforcing this kind of relationship is an important issue and one that usually falls within the realm of coercion or a credible threat thereof, although "it falls short of being an adequate alternative to trust" (Bacharach and Gambetta, 2000: 5). The threat of coercion solves the dilemma not by bringing trust in but rather by making it unnecessary. Trust becomes necessary when other

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mechanisms to ensure cooperation are not available. In the specific case of the relationships described in this chapter, the employer must know what properties to look for when deciding to hire a prospective employee. Some of these properties might be, for example, a clean driver's licence, no criminal record, good health and freedom from addictions, as well as other less tangible ones such as punctuality, discretion and efficiency. A recommendation from a close acquaintance can be an example of a guarantee of these properties. It is important to mention that some of these qualities are not easily observable and sometimes can only be established after the person has been hired.

It is important to understand exactly what qualities an employer looks for in an employee and how exactly he/she can screen for them. It is also key to know how potential employees can present the qualities the employer wants. In Table 1 I present some ideal qualities that an employer might look for in a driver, as well as what might signal this quality followed by the screening process for each.

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**Table 1**

**Qualities, Signs and Screening Strategies**

| <b>Quality (From hardest to easiest to mimic)</b> | <b>Sign</b>  | <b>Screening for it</b>  |
|---|--|--|
| Discretion  | Keeping information secure by not divulging it   | Very hard to establish, relies heavily on recommendations and repeated interaction           |
| Efficiency  | Completing tasks fast and without involving many people at low cost  | Can be screened for only during test period  |
| Helpfulness                                       | Offering to do things in the household. Volunteering for tasks   | Only by observation  |
| Age   | Must be of a certain age, not too young and not too old (both are unreliable)                                | Proof by observation and papers  |
| Presence  | Certain physical appearance. Not too short, strong-looking, muscular. Clean-cut. Also formal by wearing suit | On observation   |
| Family man  | By communication and official proof  | Asking for children's birth certificates, proof of marriage                                  |
| Knowledge of the City                             | Getting to places without asking, knowing good routes in the City  | Can be screened for during test period through tasks, sending him off to pick things up etc. |
| No criminal record                                | Police files   | Check police files   |
| Drivers Licence                                   | A valid licence  | Checking licence   |

This list is by no means exhaustive but gives an idea of what actors will be screening for during the hiring process. The signs and attitudes listed might also be subject to mimicry, some to a greater extent than others. It is very difficult to pass oneself off as a 35-year-old person if you are 60, but it might be easy to obtain a clean police file in Mexico, with the

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right connections. These strategies and their possibility to be copied and faked will also be the focus of further analysis.

### **2.3: Vertical Integration**

Transaction cost economics presents us with what can possibly be an alternative way to explore the phenomena I analyse in this dissertation. Specifically, the concept of vertical integration (Williamson 1971; 2005) may help us understand how elites negotiate the risk involved in hiring employees. Vertical integration means that firms must make the decision whether to produce their own input resources or buy them in the open market (simply put, they must decide whether to make or buy their inputs). Following Coase's (1937) lead, transaction cost economics tried to deal with the flaws with the then-generalized idea in economics that transaction costs were zero. This assumption posed a number of problems with our understanding of phenomena such as externalities (Williamson 2005). Arrow (1969: 48) links the existence of vertical integration - borne out of the need to "replace the costs of buying and selling on the market by the cost of intra-firm transfer" - to the need to understand that "the costs of operating competitive markets are not zero". In an environment of lawlessness (Dixit 2004), vertical integration becomes a potential solution to problems of uncertainty and lax contract enforcement, since it provides an arrangement that is less risky and easier to control. In fact, Williamson (2005) argues that even in an environment of strong rule of law there is a need for a certain level of informal ordering and that most firms enter into such arrangements, leaving the courts (and formal contracts) as a costly and last

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resort option. In this context, whether to vertically integrate production is a decision all firms must make.

Mexico City can easily fit into the context described by Dixit (2004) as one of ‘lawlessness’. In this context, the government cannot, or will not, uphold the law (in terms of contract enforcement etc.) all the time. This generates a need for some form of ordering outside of the State. It also creates the need for other “workable arrangements” (Williamson 2005) for cooperation. Continued cooperation, or the need thereof, is a vital component of this approach. Indeed, governance demands that, in contractual relationships, “the continuity of the relationship is a source of value” (Williamson 2005). We can also draw parallels between this and the relationships I am analysing. With time, continuity of the employer-employee relationship gains value in itself. Non-continuity may not only be costly but also presents a risk since it exposes the employer to unknowns on a regular basis. This presents an extra incentive to seek stable contracts with employees. Wealthy elites in Mexico City can vertically integrate (as they indeed do) their household employees. They may do so by hiring members of the same family in full-time employment. In this way, the direct costs and other externalities of hiring are reduced. On the one hand, employees are locked in employment and so the risks of default from them are reduced. On the other hand, employing many members of the same family will enhance the benefits of vertical integration by adding a further dimension to it. The process of finding a new employee when necessary is simplified as they can be easily referred by members of the family already employed in the household. This also assures a certain form of control, since the family employed has incentives to only



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recommend “good” members of their family since a default by one of their members may mean punishment for all. There can also be mechanisms in place for employed families to punish and deal with possible defaulters within their ranks. This is reminiscent of Fearon and Laitin’s work on interethnic cooperation (1996). In their paper, they suggest that cooperation among ethnic groups may ensue when in-group informal policing leads to defusing of potential escalating conflict with another group. Fear of conflict will lead members of a group to deal rapidly with their own problematic members. Fearon and Laitin call this *spiral equilibria*. On the other hand, members of the other group (in our case employers) will ignore some minor transgression as they know that those will be dealt with by the employee group, something the authors call *in-group policing equilibria*. For this to work, the second group (employers) must know that transgressions against them will be dealt internally. In the case of the types of employment that concern us, an employee may want to vertically integrate a family into their employment if he/she knows that any default (or possibility of it) will be effectively dealt with by the employee group/family. This last mechanism works in favour of the employer who has a further incentive to vertically integrate employment.

Vertical integration, however, requires resources that may not be available to all. Wealthy families with high disposable incomes may be able to retain the services of a number of people (of the same family or not), full-time for an indefinite time. In this context, cooperation and continuity are important and may have a higher value. Middle-class families and below, on the other hand, may not have the necessary resources to achieve vertical integration. They may only be able to hire one part-time person, for example. This increases

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the risk of their employees coming into contact with criminals or of leaking information. It also means that the relationship may not be as continual as it should be, as the rewards for cooperation are less attractive, which puts these families at further risk. This may partly explain (along with other factors such as crime-fighting policy) why there seems to be a trend happening whereby wealthy people have ceased to be the main victims of kidnapping in disfavour of middle- and working-class individuals.

#### **2.4: Hypotheses**

Using the analytical tools described above, I expect to find that:

- The risk of kidnapping has pushed employers to perfect a hiring process that seeks to minimize the risk of victimization. This points to a *cognitive process* in which employers have learnt how to hire in response to riskier environments.
- The risk of kidnapping has meant that protection of the family's private information is a key component in the hiring process and a main concern for the employer.
- Employers and employees will attempt to solve the problems of trust via the following: Potential drivers will try to ensure the best employment possible by signaling their possession of certain characteristics which they know are trust warranting properties. By the same token, employers will look for certain signals of properties they deem to be trust warranting. Employment depends on achieving a sorting equilibrium.

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- Vertical integration of household employees will minimize the risk of kidnapping by ‘locking in’ household labour, thereby increasing the costs of defection.

In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical foundations of this dissertation based on signaling theory and illustrated how transaction cost economics and specifically vertical integration may help us understand the dynamics of employment I am analysing here. I have drawn out these particular theoretical approaches and their usefulness in deciphering trust decisions specifically in relation to the employment of household workers in upper-class sectors of Mexico City’s population. Signaling theory allows us to examine micro decision-making processes and pinpoint the specific mechanisms through which these decisions are made. In the following chapters, I will outline a history of kidnapping to place the reader in context and then proceed to the empirical chapters that deal with the hiring process proper.

### **2.5 Assessing some of the limitations of these approaches**

Capturing the full extent of social realities is a complex matter. The hiring process analysed in this thesis is no exception. While signaling may allow us to illustrate and understand the relatively short hiring processes it may fall short when attempting to explain how these relationships (employer-employee) develop and are maintained over time. The mutual dependency that develops as well as the intimate relationships that arise during and after these interactions requires other approaches to be integrated into the analysis. Indeed in regards to signaling once the initial period of trust building has been carried out and trust has

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been established the relationship may change to one of more straightforward strategic interaction whereby the rules are set for the maintenance of the relationship. These rules may not all be directly sign-based. Further research and work is needed to fully address the complexity of these kinds of relationships. Signaling allows us to understand how these relationships come about, how they begin and in some ways how they are maintained but we cannot claim that it explains the full wealth of the employer-employee relationship.

With regards to vertical integration we can point out that what it seeks to explain in the context of this work is only the decision that the employee may make to hire members of the same family as part of his strategy to find the safest employees. It is included as a tool to interpret how this decision may be made and how it may be carried out. As an mechanism to understand this process vertical integration helps us visualize and understand how this decision is taken as a way to minimize the costs of hiring and also of optimizing the use of other resources for the employer. It does not help us understand some of the other aspects of the process but allows us to identify what would otherwise be a complicated process.

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*"I dare say that in two years we will be at levels where we will see, at most, ten, or fifteen kidnappings a year, at most, if really exaggerated"*

José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos (1957-2008)

Mexican Federal Prosecutor for Organized Crime

November, 2003

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **The Threat: A New History of Kidnapping in Mexico City**

This chapter will present a detailed narrative of the evolution of kidnapping in Mexico, with a special focus on Mexico City. Since its first appearances in the 1970s as a means of political mobilization by armed left-wing groups, kidnapping has evolved in many ways. There is some evidence today that this particular crime could be in the process of a qualitative change that means it has now become an economic crime that, counterintuitively, affects mainly the working and middle classes as opposed to its traditional wealthy victims. In this chapter, I will present such evidence and construct a history of this crime based on research carried out in Mexico City. The main goal of this chapter is to give the reader a background to the foundations of this project. It is important to understand that information on kidnapping in Mexico, especially hard data, is not easy to find and when it is available it presents some problems of verification and inconsistency. Data at the district level is rare and non-systematic, and thus some claims about kidnapping must be made carefully. Enough

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information was gathered to construct this chapter, however, which should present the reader with a rich account of the evolution of this crime in Mexico along with the response it has generated from the authorities. This chapter also hopes to present a first attempt at a methodologically sound history of this crime. Much of the information presented here was extracted first from the KNRD (2009) generated specifically for this thesis, and then the information was triangulated with sources in law enforcement through interviews in order to corroborate the information as accurately as possible. This chapter tries to make sense of the vast amount of information and, sometimes, confusion that prevails surrounding this crime and its development, especially in the last few years when, through media overkill and government secrecy, disinformation has become commonplace.

Mexico has one of the highest kidnapping rates in the world. Along with countries like South Africa, Colombia and Brazil its (reported) figures reach well into the 100s, even 1,000s every year (Briggs, 2002). In fact, victimization surveys and other studies (for example, ICESI 2009, as well as Ortega 2008) put the actual figure into the 1,000s in Mexico City alone. In 2009, there were 1,128 *reported* kidnappings nationwide (ICESI 2010)<sup>8</sup>. Because of reasons I will discuss below, this crime has captured the imagination of the population and is now one of the most discussed issues in Mexico. The country, it seems, has developed an unhealthy obsession with this crime, a morbid fascination with the stories, the victims and the gangs that

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<sup>8</sup> In Mexico, only about 25% of crimes are ever reported and 97% of those remain unsolved (Magaloni and Zepeda 2004). A debate about the “real” crime rates is ongoing (ICESI 2009, 2010). Some sources put the number at almost ten times the reported figure (Magaloni and Zepeda 2004, Ortega 2008). It is not possible at this time to know the actual number of kidnappings, but it is safe to say that the actual figure will be higher than the reported one.

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permeate most conversations. Mexicans are normally known to be able to laugh about the direst of circumstances. In the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake that killed thousands, not 24 hours after, darkly funny jokes (some grossly inappropriate) were making the rounds in schools and bars, and the same happened after the massive LPG gas explosion that took place in the San Juanico neighbourhood in 1984 killing at least 500 people and severely burning some 5,000-7,000<sup>9</sup>. This is not the case with kidnapping. I struggle to find a single joke about it, perhaps because of the perceived real danger that one may be a victim, a less remote possibility than dying in an earthquake or a gas explosion. It is always a topic of discussion and the fear that this crime generates is also one of the main reasons that people in the City feel scared when carrying out their daily activities. Most of my respondents during fieldwork - indeed, 98% (victims included) -voiced a special fear of this particular crime over others such as robbery or carjacking. Interviewee OF7 referred to it as the “most horrible crime of all”. It is not unreasonable to believe that the prospect of spending what could possibly be one’s final days locked in a room in often inhuman conditions would create a very deep kind of fear based on the uncertainty of re-attaining one’s freedom. Interviewed victim EV2 described being taken:

*Then they got me into the house, and I saw other men, I don’t know how many. They got me up the stairs and stuck me in a little room, a child’s room, I remember perfectly it had a Mickey Mouse quilt, and Pluto, blue, and they had a TV on and the light on... and they put a towel over my head, so I could not see and god knows what... when I got to that room I did say to myself, shit, I am trapped...*

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<sup>9</sup> About the earthquake: “why is Mexico City called The Doughnut? Because it has no centre!” About San Juanico: A person holds a lit match and moves it from side to side, asking “what is this?” The answer: “A San Juanico person running!”

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The media has also had a very important role in the creation of the kidnapping paranoia. Stories abound in the newspapers and news channels about the conditions and horrors that kidnapping victims must endure. One such piece, for example, tells the story of a botched police rescue operation in which the leader of the kidnapping gang, upon finding out that the police had entered the safe house where the victim was kept (apparently because of the noise they made on arrival), opened fire killing two officers, the victim (a middle-aged woman who worked for a drug rehab centre) and then shot himself (KNRD, 2009). These types of stories are common in everyday life and fuel people's perceptions of the City and their place within it. Teresa Caldeira (2001: 19) introduced the notion of the "talk of crime", understood to mean "everyday conversations, commentaries, discussions, narratives and jokes that have crime and fear as their subject" and which are used in everyday interactions to explain the harsh reality of fear and crime. This kind of talk generates and maintains the perceptions and prejudices that, Caldeira argues, produce opinions and explanations which set the stage for social interactions. It is easy to find this kind of talk in Mexico City; it permeates all conversations as they almost invariably turn towards crime and fear of being a victim. At home, in the office, normal conversations are peppered with anecdotes and stories about crime. This type of talk is very well exemplified by one respondent: "(the situation) is dire, and I'll tell you why, I mean, you don't have freedom to go anywhere, you go around in fear all the time, I mean, absolute distrust of the whole world" (ENV3). The commonality of this kind of expression is staggering. Of all the interviews I was able to record on tape, 70% of people agree that they have some sense of fear permeating their everyday lives in Mexico City. This is consistent with the findings of national level surveys such as ICESI's (2007), which place the same number at around 74%. Indeed, most people I have had contact with



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in the City have some form of consideration of crime in their everyday decisions, such as where to live, when to go out and other such choices.

Among all this “talk of crime” (Caldeira 1998), kidnapping has become part of the cultural baggage of the country. Although this crime has been present for many years (it was used during the Revolution and other periods of Mexican history), it was not until the mid-1990s that it achieved the widespread notoriety it has now. Kidnapping was a very rare occurrence after the revolutionary period and, as such, it was rarely reported. During the 1930s to 1960s, Mexico was a relatively stable country with low levels of crime. Kidnapping resurfaced in an important manner in the 1960s and this is the period that I will call the modern history of kidnapping. The modern history of kidnapping in Mexico can be divided into three instances, or waves. The first one, what I shall call its political phase, took place during the late 1960s and 1970s. During this time, kidnapping was almost exclusively used by militant left-wing groups as a source of cash and as a form of political mobilization. The second stage took place from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, a transition period that also encompasses a period of deep change in Mexico, both in the political and economic arenas (electoral competition and economic liberalization being some of the main structural changes). In this second stage, kidnapping was reconfigured after the defeat of the guerrillas by the government, but it never disappeared. It was in this period that rampant corruption in the police forces sets the stage for the formation of the most prolific and professional kidnapping gangs that would take centre stage years later. These gangs saw their beginnings as part of the police force and there is even talk of a secret brotherhood among City Police that operates to

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this day in the City's criminal rings; there is, however, no proof as yet that this brotherhood actually exists. The third and current wave takes place from about 1995 to the present day. It began during the financial crisis of 1995, when it became evident that the economic reform that had by then swept the country had not been accompanied by necessary social reforms, a state of affairs which would indirectly lead to a rise in crime rates (Lustig 2002) and the destruction of the old police-originated gangs. In this period, less well organized, younger and family-based gangs begin to fill the positions left open by the sophisticated gangs already destroyed by the government. It is at this same time towards the end of the 1990s that elites began to assume a different attitude towards their safety and began to be much more proactive in the creation of strategies and plans that would protect them from crime and from kidnapping especially. This process corresponds also to the transition of victim type from wealthy individuals to less affluent ones, as well organized gangs were destroyed by the government. This made the face of kidnapping change from a rare, well organized crime carried out by 'professionals' to one that became routine for many gangs that see it as a complimentary source of income to their other illegal activities, such as car theft and drug dealing.

### **3.1: The Beginning: Left-wing Radicals, Planes to Cuba and Kidnapping as a Political Statement**

As stated earlier, kidnapping made its first appearances on the national stage in the 1960s (Ortega 2008). At this time, the country was experiencing the legacy of the political turmoil of the decade, especially the pro-democracy social mobilizations that led to the

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massacre of perhaps hundreds of students in a Mexico City plaza on 2 October 1968 (the year the Olympic Games came to Mexico City). As was the case in many countries in the region, Marxist thought (in its many interpretations) was taking hold of certain actors in the political spectrum (Bethell 1995). These actors, mostly students, teachers, radical blue-collar workers and peasants were set against the authoritarian style of government of the time, and managed to organize sectors of the population for political mobilization. The ruling party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party - PRI) had by then been in power in one form or another since 1929<sup>10</sup> and many actors in society, especially those of a more progressive nature, began demanding more democratic openness. Workers' unions and peasant organizations joined the students in their opposition to what they saw as an undemocratic regime completely intolerant of dissent. The tensions between the status quo and those who wished to change it, as well as the constant repression, forced many members of the social movements to seek a more radical avenue for the achievement of their revolutionary designs, both in the cities and rural areas of Mexico. During this time, several radical armed groups appeared on the scene, most of communist extraction. They were the product of the merging of radical political idealists, students and mobilized organizations that already operated in Mexico (Bellingeri 1993). Most of these groups were composed of left-wing hardliners who believed armed struggle to be the only way to depose the government. The perceived success of the Cuban revolution and all its cultural iconography was the very influential backdrop for these groups' actions (Bellingeri 1993).

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<sup>10</sup> The party would not be defeated in a presidential election until the year 2000.

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Clandestine Armed Groups (GACs for their Spanish initials), as they were known then, used kidnapping as a means not only of raising much needed funds for their attempts to overthrow the government, but also as a form of political protest by targeting economic and political elites. One of the most active GACs in terms of kidnapping was the Clandestine Workers Revolutionary Party and People's Union (*Procup*). This group operated in the poor and mostly rural southwestern state of Guerrero and claims to be the direct predecessor of the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR), an armed group still active in many areas of Mexico that as recently as 2007 successfully bombed and destroyed several State-owned oil and gas pipelines causing hundreds of millions of pesos in damages and forcing the army to evacuate thousands of people (El Universal, September 11 2010). The *Procup* are known to have carried out a number of kidnappings throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, most of the kidnappings recorded in the 1970s were carried out by the *Procup* and other similar armed groups (Ortega 2008). Mobilized peasants were not the only ones using kidnapping as a political tool; the Communist League 23 September<sup>11</sup>, an amalgamation of radical student groups and teachers that operated in urban centres nationally, were also involved in kidnapping. The Communist League kidnapped a number of businessmen in the 1970s in order to pressure the government into releasing students/activists held in prison for dissent since the late 1960s. In 1973, the *Fuerzas Revolucionarias Armadas del Pueblo* kidnapped Terrance Georges Leonhardy, then U.S. consul in Guadalajara, demanding the release of student prisoners and their transport to Cuba. In another instance, the League of Armed Communists (LCA) kidnapped a number of young people demanding a plane to Cuba and 4 million pesos. The case of the LCA became a source of national embarrassment when it

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<sup>11</sup> The date in the group's name refers to the date of a guerrilla attack on a military barracks in 1965.

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transpired that, on board the plane to Cuba, were the two sons of a governor as well as a U.S. consul. Added to this was the fact that the delivery of the money was televised. The money was delivered by the Chief of Police wearing nothing but his underpants, as demanded by the LCA (Castellanos 2008). In all, towards the end of the 1970s, close to 30 dissident armed groups operated in Mexico (Castellanos 2008). Most were unceremoniously dealt with by the government through military operations, forced disappearances and repression. Others simply ran out of revolutionary fuel and vanished. The Communist League 23 September and the *Procup* wedged themselves in the national imagination and are still remembered today, not least because they also formed a part of the basis for the Zapatista indigenous movement which gained international renown with their 1994 uprising in the southern state of Chiapas.

The Mexican government's first reaction to this first wave of politically motivated kidnappings was to give in to the dissident groups. Then President Luis Echeverria implemented a policy of payment and negotiation, providing money and the fabled planes to Cuba without fail. The victims were always important people: businessmen, politicians and other major actors in Mexican society. The government did not want to have the death of any of these people on their hands. On 17 September 1973, this would change. On that date, the Communist League 23 September attempted to kidnap northern businessman Eugenio Garza Sada, then one of Mexico's wealthiest men, a well-liked philanthropist and the founder of one of Mexico's largest universities. Garza Sada was shot dead at a road intersection when resisting the abduction; two persons who accompanied him were also killed. Garza Sada held

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a very important place in the business community and their organizations and was heavily involved in industrial growth in northern Mexico. In a significant break from their well-scripted relationship with the government, a cosy arrangement that allowed massive fortunes both political and economic to develop, the business community aggressively blamed the President for this attack. At Garza Sada's funeral, a very close friend of his gave a speech blaming his death on the lack of leadership in the government and on the President's recent populist verbal attacks on the business class, saying they did not pull their weight for Mexico. President Echeverria was put in a tight spot. For the first time in his presidency he was facing a very angry economical elite who also saw an opportunity to let him know they could not be embarrassed in public. Echeverria vowed never to negotiate with kidnappers again. Instead, he decided on the implementation of an "extermination policy" (Castellanos 2008) against these groups. This decision would be tested only a few months later when in December 1974 in Guerrero one armed group - the Army of the Poor and Peasant's Brigade Against Injustice led by legendary Mexican revolutionary Lucio Cabañas - kidnapped a senator and gubernatorial candidate. At around the same time, in Guadalajara, the People's Armed Revolutionary Forces (FARP) kidnapped none other than President Echeverria's father-in-law. This presented the best chance for the government to act or be publicly embarrassed. Echeverria stood by his word. He sent up to 16,000 troops to the Guerrero mountains to hunt down Cabañas and rescue the senator. The manhunt yielded the expected results and the senator was rescued (and then went on to become governor). The FARP was chased all over the State's notoriously inaccessible mountains<sup>12</sup> for weeks. Cabañas committed suicide as he was about to be captured by the army.

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<sup>12</sup> This area was then, and still is, one of the poorest areas in Mexico. The country's poorest municipality,

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In the case of the President's father-in-law, "repression landed in the popular neighbourhoods of Guadalajara" where the urban guerrillas operated. Not much is known about these operations but what is known is that the captive was liberated without fanfare (Castellanos 2008). At the time, Echeverria also strengthened what became known as the 'dirty war', a direct and clandestine war on GACs and other social movements orchestrated from the presidency's inner circles that resulted in one of the largest waves of systematic human rights violations in the modern history of Mexico and led to Echeverria, decades later, being subpoenaed on human rights violations charges in front of a special court. The Eureka Committee, an NGO that deals specifically with this issue, has 530 disappeared persons' files from 1969 to 1980 (C.E. 2007). While not comparable to the levels of violence that other Latin American regimes left in their wake, the Mexican one is distinctive for its selectivity and secrecy. The dirty war ended for all practical purposes the political phase of kidnapping. In those times, the power of the State and its intelligence organizations was still very firm and it had many resources at its disposal, which meant that many of the guerrilla groups, whether urban or rural, were no match for the forces of an authoritarian state.

### **3.2: The Hay Day of The Black One: Police as Criminals and the Formation of the Perfect Kidnapping Gang.**

During the 1980s, kidnapping became more common, although still a marginal crime by all accounts (Ortega 2008). During this time, criminals and mainly organized crime groups were in the process of discovering that kidnapping was a very profitable business. Ortega

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*Metlatonoc*, is found there (INEGI 2009).

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(2008) has counted “little more than 300 kidnappings in Mexico from 1970 to 1985”. The 1980s in Mexico were characterized by rampant corruption, economic crisis and the blurring of the distinction between government agents and criminals. The development of kidnapping is closely related to the internal dynamics of the police forces during this period. The Mexico City police is a particularly important actor in this process.

During the authoritarian rule of the PRI from 1929<sup>13</sup> to 2000, the police forces were used very often to help maintain the political status quo (Azaola, 2005). In fact, the enforcement of the law came second to the keeping of the political order. In essence, the police institutions were not really created to protect the populace, their goods and property, but rather to serve as part of the political machinery that helped maintain the same party in power for over 70 years. They were above all a source of social control. In this context, the police corporations became, as did most government institutions, subservient and fully dependent on the power of the Federal Executive, who single-handedly decided who the heads of the different police institutions would be, as well as how long they would remain in the job<sup>14</sup>. This was based on

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<sup>13</sup> The PRI was not always known as such. After its foundation in 1929, it was known as the National Revolutionary Party, and it then changed its name to Party of the Mexican Revolution in 1936 after an internal power struggle. It gained its final name in 1946.

<sup>14</sup> During this time, the President not only chose the heads of the police, but also most political positions, governorships, candidacies, and almost any post in the government. He also decided the next PRI presidential candidate, and as such the next president through a process commonly known as the *dedazo*, an expression that can be loosely translated as ‘hit from his finger’, whereby he chose, from his inner circle, the next in line. This was always shrouded in a democratic veil through elections that the PRI would always ‘win’ through a host of interestingly named practices such as “rollercoaster voting”, where PRI voters would be taken in trucks to as many polling stations as possible to vote as many times as they could; there was also the “ballot box impregnation”, when a PRI official would show up at the polling station and stuff the ballot box with pre-filled out ballots, all in favour of the PRI; last but not least were the “racons” or PRI sympathizers who would show up and steal ballot boxes where there was evidence of opposition advantage, to sometimes return them filled



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the extreme powers of the Mexican President, which went far beyond the constitutional powers given to him and have been called “meta-constitutional powers” (Carpizo 1978). These powers emanate from the fact that the PRI was created as an “institutional instrument” (Wiarda and Guajardo 1989) in 1929 by the winners of the Revolution (1910-1921), and basically performed this same function with each president, gradually losing power and cohesion through economic mismanagement and pressure from organized society from the mid-1980s (Meyer and Aguilar Camin, 1993) until its electoral defeat in the federal elections in 2000. Throughout this period, the police became a corrupt corporation, serving politicians and the wealthy elites and, in their spare time, pursuing criminal careers as drug dealers, kidnapers and bank robbers shrouded in corruption and government tolerance for their activities (Conklin 1989).

One of the most salient examples of police involvement in crime - and the origin of some of the most notorious kidnapping gangs - is the career of Arturo “El Negro” Durazo (his nickname means “the black one”, allegedly given to him due to the dark colour of his skin, but also attributed to his deeds). Durazo rose to national prominence when his good childhood friend Jose Lopez Portillo became president (1976-1982) and as a prize for his loyalty made him Chief of Police of Mexico City. This was back in the days when Mexico City was only the seat of the federal government and all its authorities were designated by the President. No City authorities were voted in at that time. It was not until 1996 when the City

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with PRI votes; dead people also had a knack for showing up to vote for the PRI. These are only some of the many practices used by the PRI machinery to win elections. Much more sinister ones included the intimidation and cooptation of opposition leaders and the curtailment of political and free speech rights (Carpizo 1978; Weldon 1997).

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was granted autonomy through a constitutional reform and elections finally took place there. This lack of democracy generated an environment of unaccountability that was skilfully exploited by people like Durazo to carve themselves almost mythical criminal careers.

During his six years in office, Durazo became notorious as one of the most accomplished gangsters in the country. Such were his powers, that he even gave himself a military title (General) even though he never had a military career, much to the dismay of the Army who did not get any answers when they complained about it<sup>15</sup>. He amassed a huge fortune (well into the hundreds of millions of dollars) through graft, kidnapping, outright stealing of public funds and drug trafficking (Gonzales 2002). He is, among other things, credited with starting the tradition of the *entre* or a monetary “cut” that higher officials in the police demand or rather, extort, on a regular basis (weekly or daily) from those in their charge. Interviewee LE19, a junior officer, confirmed that this practice is still prevalent in some areas of law enforcement, notably the police. Durazo also created the Directorate of Investigation for Crime Prevention (DIPD in Spanish), an investigative police unit notorious for harbouring the most corrupt and violent elements of the force, handpicked by Durazo himself. Members of DIPD were also known as *Madrinas* (godmothers) to many criminals. This basically meant that DIPD members sold protection to criminals. A criminal would then have his own personal *Madrina* who kept him informed of police movements and also turned a blind eye to his activities. Arrangements between *Madrinas* and their godchildren

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<sup>15</sup> The fact that not even the Army, one of the nation’s most powerful actors, could stop this shameful episode gives us an idea of the power wielded by Durazo over the President, who was willing to annoy the armed forces for the sake of his friend.

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was so deeply ingrained that, in some cases, criminals would even let themselves be captured by their *Madrina* only to be secretly let go afterwards, thus paying for their protection not only in money but also in prestige for their protectors, who would then be rewarded with pay raises and more important jobs. The concept of the *Madrina* has now evolved and generally also refers to people who are not members of the police force but ‘work’ with actual members of the force, or just people (mostly criminals) who mimic being in the force by presenting fake police documentation. The phenomenon of the *Madrina* and its evolution in recent times deserves, by itself, much deeper research.

Durazo created an empire of crime throughout the country by being literally untouchable. As we have seen, not even the Army could approach him. People in the City (myself included) still have memories of his power. His motorcade is an excellent example of this. An advance detachment of police motorcycles would close the entirety of his predetermined route, sometimes for hours, so he would face no traffic. This could be at any time and could cut off some of the main avenues of the City. After this, a motorcade of no less than eight new black cars, many more motorcycles and helicopters would cruise slowly through the City as bystanders and other drivers looked on. Gonzales (2002), a former bodyguard of Durazo, describes how he used the police force as his private labour force. Policemen served his guests drinks and food at his infamous parties held in his many multimillion-dollar mansions. One of them, high on a hill overlooking the ocean on the pacific coast of Mexico, was a replica of the Greek Parthenon, itself with a replica of the legendary New York nightclub Studio 54 inside. The grotesque palace still stands and, for a few pesos under the table (this is

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Durazo's home after all), the guard on duty will let people in to take a look. Durazo was also known to send his bodyguards to empty out entire restaurants so he could eat comfortably with his family. No one could say no to him. However, beyond his more folkloric actions, Durazo managed to create a criminal empire that generated millions in revenue. It is widely believed that, during his time, the foundations of Mexico's now legendary corruption and criminal collusion were laid, especially with regards to the police (Azaola 2005). He institutionalized criminal practices and protection schemes (robbery and the *Madrinas*) to an extent that survives to this day. When his good friend, Lopez Portillo, left the presidency in shame after presiding over one of the most corrupt and inefficient presidential terms in history and leaving the economy in a shambles, he was tried by the next administration and convicted of corruption, spending nine years in jail (Wilkie, 1989).

In terms of kidnapping, Durazo's legacy is clear. Under his auspices, some of the most accomplished kidnapers learned the ropes of a sophisticated crime. Alfredo Rios Galeana, one of Mexico's most notorious bank robbers and kidnapers, worked directly under Durazo in the mid-1980s (Ortega 2008). His criminal career spanned two decades and included some of the time's most notorious crimes. He started his career as a policeman but quickly turned to crime when his police unit was disbanded in 1981. He created a gang made up mostly of former policemen and policewomen. He was captured at least three times and escaped on all occasions, once being rescued from a courthouse by an armed commando. He would personally then go on to train at least two of the most important kidnapers who became active in the 1990s. He disappeared in 1986, only to be finally arrested in Los

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Angeles in 2005. It is unclear how many kidnappings he perpetrated, but it is known that part of his business (after large-scale robberies) was the kidnapping of wealthy individuals (KNRD 2009). He is indeed the godfather of modern kidnapping. In a sense, he is the ideal criminal for this; well connected in the police force, highly trained in the use of violence, armed and with access to trained recruits. The legacy of this man is discussed below.

### **3.3: 1995 Onwards: From The Earchopper and the Colonel to The Unexperienced Gang**

In 1994, Alfredo Harp Helú, one of Mexico's richest men, was kidnapped and subsequently freed after an unknown but surely substantial payment (KNRD 2009). This was arguably the beginning of a new era of kidnapping, in which wealthy Mexicans became the main target of what had by then become a non-political crime that was mostly driven by profit. Kidnapping became a business pursued by gangs whose leadership was in many cases trained in the police forces under Durazo, as is the case of those under the command of Alfredo Rios Galeana. These gangs were well organized from the start and dedicated themselves almost exclusively to kidnapping. The environment of unaccountability and corruption prevalent in the City's police forces until then was the perfect laboratory for the birth of these gangs. In 1995, Mexico experienced a deep economic crisis that exacerbated existing social tensions and helped increase crime rates all over the country (Kelly 2000). The increase in crime rates would bring about a societal reaction that will be explored further in this chapter. This reaction had as a result the decrease in wealthy individual victimisation.

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Table 1 shows the number of kidnapping reported to the authorities in the period from 1995 to 2009.

**Table 1:**  
**Reported Kidnappings in Mexico, 1995-2009**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Kidnappings</b> |
|-------------|--------------------|
| 1995        | 548                |
| 1996        | N/A                |
| 1997        | 1,045              |
| 1998        | 734                |
| 1999        | 590                |
| 2000        | 601                |
| 2001        | 521                |
| 2002        | 433                |
| 2003        | 436                |
| 2004        | 334                |
| 2005        | 325                |
| 2006        | 601                |
| 2007        | 436                |
| 2008        | 907                |
| 2009        | 1,128              |

Source: ICESI (2010)

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The table above shows that kidnapping at the national level exploded after 1995 (548 reported), to peak in 1997 at 1,045. From then, we see a steady drop that reaches a low of 334 in 2004. A slow but steady economic recovery, as well as local elections in Mexico City, which brought in a strong legitimate local government, may explain this drop. From 2004, however, we again see an increase in the kidnapping rates to a high of 1,128 in 2009. This increase at the national level can be attributed to the ongoing war on drugs, an event that has resulted in almost 25,000 dead in the last four years (Reforma, 2010). This increase is, as we shall see, reflected more in other states and not in Mexico City. Regionally, ten of the 31 states of Mexico are where 75% of all the kidnappings take place. Table 2 shows this pattern. These states are not concentrated in any particular region of the country and are well distributed in the north, south and centre. The state that stands out is Mexico City, which has almost 30% of all the kidnappings in the period 1997-2009. This may be because of the high concentration of population in the City. On average, there were 1.4 reported kidnappings a year per 100,000 people in the City for this period. The neighbouring State of Mexico (Edomex), which also shares a large part of what is considered the Greater Mexico City area, itself contains 13% of kidnappings. Almost 40% of all reported kidnappings take place in these two states. Data concerning the exact location of the Edomex kidnappings is not available; however, qualitative information from interviews in that state tells us that many of these do take place within the Greater Mexico City area (LE23), which concentrates large amounts of population. It is interesting to note that, at the bottom of the table with the lowest percentage of kidnappings, appear two states that have some of the highest concentration of drug trafficking activities. Baja California and Sinaloa are states in the northern part of Mexico and have long been strongholds of powerful drug cartels engaged in large scale

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trafficking of drugs into the U.S. I do not know why this is so, but a possible explanation could be that drug cartels engage little in kidnapping as the potential profits from it, as opposed to the profits from trafficking, are substantially smaller<sup>16</sup>.

**Table 2:**

**Kidnappings in Mexico, Top Ten States, 1997-2009**

| State           | % of Total Kidnappings |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Mexico City     | 27%                    |
| Edomex          | 13%                    |
| Michoacán       | 9%                     |
| Tabasco         | 9%                     |
| Guerrero        | 8%                     |
| Jalisco         | 8%                     |
| Tlaxcala        | 8%                     |
| Oaxaca          | 7%                     |
| Baja California | 7%                     |
| Sinaloa         | 4%                     |

Source: ICESI, 2006 with data from the PGR, 2007.

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<sup>16</sup> The drug trade in Mexico is estimated to generate anything between £5 and £16.9 billion annually (Cook 2007). Clearly no amount of kidnapping would ever match this.



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### 3.4: Kidnapping in Mexico City

In Mexico City, the story varies from the national level data. Official figures from local and federal authorities are used to produce Table 3. It presents the number of kidnappings in Mexico City in the period 1997-2009. As kidnapping rates fell nationally, those in Mexico City rose steadily throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. This was especially noticeable in 1999, when a 100% rise was reported. This can be related to the fact that 1999 (and part of 2000) was an electoral year (at both the federal and city levels) in which the ruling PRI party would lose power at the federal level for the first time in over 70 years. The weakening of the traditional institutional framework and the further loss of patronage to many social actors that this brought about, as well as the uncertainty of what would happen when and if the PRI lost, could have meant that a window of opportunity opened for criminals to maximize their income in this period. Going back to the data, although in 2005 and 2006 there was a decrease in the number of kidnappings, the numbers again rose in 2007 to 112 and again to 139 in 2008 (Reforma, 22 November, 2008). Surprisingly, the number of kidnappings dropped to 85 in 2009, a decrease of almost 62 percent. It is too early to tell exactly why this decrease occurred but an explanation could lie in the increased militarization of the City's security due to the ongoing 'war on drugs'. The presence of the military may well mean that the opportunity structure for this crime has changed. As the city becomes more policed by the military, gangs may find it harder to commit crimes and also, due to the army's more violent and institutional reputation their presence may also have increased the costs of committing the crime itself. More research is needed to establish if this is so or the effects of militarization on crime rates in the City.

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### 3.5: A Possible Shift in Kidnapping

Information gathered during fieldwork points toward an interesting development in kidnapping. It would appear that the wealthy ceased to be the only victims of kidnapping in Mexico City, meaning that, even as rates decreased at the national level, they tended to increase in the City (save for 2009). As Carlos Castillo Peraza, a centre-right intellectual and politician, put it as far back as 1999 in an essay titled “Kidnapping as Distinction” (Castillo 1999):

*Until a relatively short time ago, a ‘kidnappable’ was a person whose great riches constituted a certain promise of payable ransom. Or maybe someone whose social or political position was reasonably considered as sufficient cause for an abundant payment, not from the victim’s pocket but from that of his friends, partners, followers or fans. Well, it could be said that kidnapping was a sign of distinction of the victim... As we know things are no longer like this... for a few pesos criminals take even the least wealthy and the least powerful.*

In spite of the lack of district-level data, I was able to gather enough to construct Table 4 (KNRD 2009). This table was constructed using the news report database where I found press releases and other information released by the City Government. Indeed, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography recently released information regarding the number of people sentenced for different crimes, controlled by the place where the crime was committed at the municipal/district level. In this way, I was able to ascertain how many kidnappings had led to at least one arrest in each district. Evidently, the trustworthiness of these data is questionable; we do not know if perhaps more than one person was arrested for each crime. However, it does give us seven data points for each district and from those points we can clearly see a trend emerging: while the

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number of kidnappings dropped in *Miguel Hidalgo*, one of Mexico City's wealthier districts that historically had a high kidnapping rate, they rose in *Iztapalapa*, a fully working-class district with no wealthy areas.

***Table 3:***

**Kidnappings Reported to the Authorities in Mexico City, 1997-2009**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Kidnappings</b> |
|-------------|--------------------|
| 1997        | 22                 |
| 1998        | 66                 |
| 1999        | 120                |
| 2000        | 141                |
| 2001        | 148                |
| 2002        | 144                |
| 2003        | 136                |
| 2004        | 145                |
| 2005        | 103                |
| 2006        | 92                 |
| 2007        | 112                |
| 2008        | 139                |
| 2009        | 85                 |

Source: ICESI, 2010

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This gives us a general idea of a possible shift in the behaviour of kidnapping. The year in which this trend is most evident is 2007, when there was only one kidnapping reported in *Miguel Hidalgo* and 31 in *Iztapalapa*. We do not know if the only kidnapping for that year was actually of a wealthy inhabitant of the *Miguel Hidalgo* district or of a working-class person (there are working- and middle-class neighbourhoods in the district). However, the fact remains that kidnapping has steadily risen in a 100% working-class area and dropped in a wealthy area. Indeed, if that one kidnapping was of a working- or middle-class person, it means that no wealthy people were kidnapped in *Miguel Hidalgo*. More data needs to be collected in the future to prove or disprove this trend. For now, all we can rely on is qualitative evidence from the mouths of City authorities. For example, by the year 2000 it was widely reported and admitted by the authorities of the City that one of the most active kidnapping organizations in the country, *El Coronel* (The Colonel), had “as its main area of action the zone of *Iztapalapa*” (KNRD 2009). This new trend was also voiced by the kidnapping tsar for the City, Jesús Jimenez Granados, in 2002:

*The situation is not one of psychosis... however, any citizen is now susceptible of being kidnapped... among the improvised gangs... we have registered cases in which someone is deprived of their freedom for a ransom of 5,000 pesos<sup>17</sup>, which means that right now in kidnapping the targets are not just businessmen... and their families... with high monetary power (KNRD 2009).*

This could potentially be explained by the fact that it seems that success of the government’s policy towards the highly organized kidnapping gangs was overshadowed by the fact that, as a side effect of this, victimization increased in working-class areas of the City, as less sophisticated gangs took the place left open by the older, better organized gangs.

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<sup>17</sup> This is equivalent to around £250.

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**Table 4:**

**Kidnapping at the District Level in Two Mexico City Districts, 1997-2008**

| Year | Miguel Hidalgo | Iztapalapa |
|------|----------------|------------|
| 1997 | 25             | 19         |
| 2001 | N/A            | 30         |
| 2003 | 10             | 4          |
| 2004 | 16             | N/A        |
| 2005 | 0              | 1          |
| 2006 | 2              | 7          |
| 2007 | 3              | 31         |
| 2008 | 1              | 40         |

Source: KNRD, author's own (2009), INEGI (2009).

It could be argued that the higher kidnapping rates in *Iztapalapa* are a function of its population size. *Iztapalapa* has a population of 1.3 million and *Miguel Hidalgo* about 550,000. This issue may be addressed by looking at the numbers of kidnapping as a percentage of the district's population. As the numbers of kidnappings are low, these percentages tend to be very small. For *Iztapalapa* in 2007, it amounts to 0.002% of the population and for *Miguel Hidalgo* it amounts to 0.0003%. In order to visualize this better, the number of kidnappings for every 100,000 people can be calculated. These figures tell us much more, as they show that the kidnapping rate in the working-class district is significantly higher. Table 5 shows this important difference from the data available by district. We can see that there is a considerable difference between the two when controlling for population:

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*Table 5:*

*Kidnappings for every 100,000 People in Two Mexico City Districts, 2007*

| District       | Kidnappings for every 100,000 people | % of Total Kidnappings, 2007 |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Miguel Hidalgo | 0.2                                  | 0.67 (1)                     |
| Iztapalapa     | 1.7                                  | 20.77 (31)                   |

Furthermore, in a press conference in 2008 the Federal Prosecutor revealed that ransoms had devalued from previous years. Now, he said, the *highest* ransoms hover at an average of £15,000. In the mid-1990s they *started* at £160,000 (KNRD 2009). This further highlights that victims are no longer extremely wealthy. This downward trend would continue unabated (Ortega, 2007) to this day, resulting in an increase in the kidnapping rates of people in working-class areas. The veracity of this shift in the behaviour of kidnapping needs to be further verified through better data and over a longer period of time. If this shift is indeed in place, and it seems to be so far, a number of potentially interesting questions could be asked regarding the causes of this pattern. This, however, will not be addressed at the present time. The following section explains the three factors that, I believe, explain why there was this shift and also what caused it. I argue that three factors brought about this change: 1) The success of the state in destroying older, more sophisticated gangs, 2) the same state's failure in securing a strong rule of law to ensure no new gangs would fill in the void left by older gangs and 3) the success of a series of strategies implemented by wealthy elites to avoid being victimised such as pressing the state to act against the gangs. This includes, but is not exclusive to, the perfecting of hiring strategies when it came to household employees. The

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lowering of kidnapping rates in wealthy communities was a result of this process as I will expose in the following section and in Chapter 4. The sequence of events can be seen as follows. As kidnapping of wealthy people increased in the late 80s and early 90s, potential victims began a process of designing and implementing a series of strategies that included both hiring practices and pressuring the government into taking action. As a result of this the state destroyed the existing gangs who left a void in the criminal market that was quickly filled by younger less experienced gangs. Since at this time wealthy people had already made themselves harder targets these new gangs began victimising less affluent people who had not (or could not) afford the strategies wealthy people implemented. This resulted in the scenario described above.

### **3.6: The Fight Against Kidnapping Gangs**

#### **3.6.1: The State**

One of the most important objectives of the State is to provide protection for its members' personal integrity and property. When a government cannot provide this ideal service (Varese, 2001), it faces a serious challenge to its legitimacy, for what good is a State that cannot fulfil its most basic function? The Mexican justice system is afflicted with this problem. It has proven in past decades to be highly ineffective and suffers from considerable corruption. Corruption and inefficacy, together with a weak rule of law, allow for crime to remain a profitable and somewhat safe activity. In an interview, a high-ranking Prosecutor admitted to knowing who under his command was involved in protection rackets with car theft gangs, as well as to knowing how they operate and how much money they were making

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off the racket. However, he was unwilling to risk his life or job security to do anything about it (ILE 3). In another case, a protection racket was arranged by the investigative police who received payment from criminals on a monthly basis to refrain from carrying out arrest warrants against them (ILE 5). As was the case with the car theft racket, this happened with at least the knowledge of higher ranked officials, with most of them having no intention whatsoever of dealing with the problem. This corrupt deadlock is a common occurrence in Mexico. Corruption is so rampant that it has indeed become part of the country's cultural existence and permeates all areas of life (see Varese 2000). In this light, the State is unable to provide a secure environment and the corruption of state officials is one of the most important fuels for this situation.

On a more specific level, the Secretary of Social Development (2006) has calculated that around 97% of crimes are unpunished in Mexico. If crime ever pays, it definitely gives a good return in Mexico City. Furthermore, when the judiciary does act, it seems to jail mostly petty, non-violent criminals (Bergman et. al., 2003). The incentives, Bergman's study shows, are for police and judges to dole out prison terms for they are rewarded by the quantity and not the quality of the criminals they capture. Their rewards include promotions, recognition or just the fact of being in their superiors' good books, a resource that may prove useful in the future should layoffs happen or opportunities for promotions arise. Therefore, it is clear why 50% of criminals in the states in Bergman's study<sup>18</sup> are in prison for crimes that have the monetary equivalent of up to only 2,000 pesos (or roughly £100). It is also evident that many

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<sup>18</sup> Mexico City, Morelos and Estado de Mexico, which all border each other.



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high-ranking criminals are not caught and those who commit crimes of a high monetary value tend to remain free.

Although it is not the lowest nationwide, it is worth noting that, out of the very small percentage of crimes reported in the Federal District, only 33.1 percent are efficiently investigated by the *Ministerios Públicos* (Magaloni and Zepeda, 2004). This leaves out a staggering 66.9% of crimes that are not investigated up to regular international standards of quality. Observations of this process made during research in Prosecuting Agencies or *Ministerios Públicos* in Mexico City during 2008 and 2009,<sup>19</sup> revealed that, in most cases, prosecutors tend to follow strict bureaucratic guidelines that impair criminal investigations. These guidelines are firmly set in the organizational culture of the *Ministerios* and those who stray from them are normally informally punished. Following the guidelines religiously actually allows the MPs to act in an unaccountable way, as they can always argue they do exactly as they are told. Therefore, there is no incentive to actually solve a crime, but rather the bureaucrat in charge needs to fulfil a checklist of *diligencias* (orders, steps) before passing the case to the next bureaucrat along the line. The result of this is that, in cases where actual police investigation is necessary (i.e. where the perpetrator of a crime is unknown), most of the cases end up in a file box. In an interview, a Junior Prosecutor stated: “I know that if the file comes *sin detenido* (without an arrested person already), it goes directly into the *archivo* (literally, file, where unsolved cases are stored)” (LE6).

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<sup>19</sup> This was as part of a project that sought to evaluate the work practices within the *Ministerios*. The project was coordinated by Prof. Ana Laura Magaloni of the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas in Mexico City. I am deeply indebted to Prof. Magaloni for allowing me to join her team.

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In fact, prosecutors rarely leave their office, leaving most investigations to the Ministerial Police, who *de jure* should only follow the Prosecutors' orders but who *de facto* design and implement investigations according to their own particular preferences and strategies. While at times this situation opens the door for more rapid and creative investigation by the police, it mostly means that the only corporation within the justice system that can exercise any control from the State over the criminal world is the Ministerial Police (also known as *Policía Judicial*). They choose who to arrest and who not to, when to serve a warrant and when and how to investigate a crime. It seems from this perspective that the Ministerial Police is an almost autonomous body, whose goals at times coincide with the goals of the State and at times do not. In the words of one Ministerial Police Commander, "we basically tell the MP what to do" (LE 12).

A notable exception to this rule is when politics are mixed up in police work. When a high-profile case arises, for example if the son of a politician has been robbed or kidnapped, the case is normally given full attention, a proper investigation is carried out and many times the culprits are found (LE2). This is done when "the *Procurador* (Prosecutor) phones..." (LE2) and orders the case to be treated as a priority. In this case, all actors within the force cooperate neatly (the *Ministerio* agents, the police and coroners). It is not hard to understand why this happens. All actors have an incentive to cooperate and solve the high-profile cases because this will mean not only good publicity for them (they are doing their job), but also that, once the case is solved, this institution can go back to business as usual.

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Corrupt exchanges, in a narrow sense, involving at least one member of the State, take place every day in Mexico City. Bribery is common at many levels of government and especially amongst the judiciary and law-enforcement agencies. We find two main types of corrupt exchange: those that seek to obtain special treatment from the authorities and those that aim for said authority to perform its normal functions (Varese, 2000). On the other hand, one finds exchanges in which special treatment is bought from a government agent. An example of this is the payment of *mordidas* or “bites”<sup>20</sup> to an official in order to influence a decision, avoid a fine or give special expediency to a bureaucratic process. Furthermore, there are acts that go beyond these two and can be characterized as offspring of a state of *pervasive corruption* (Varese, 2000); these are acts that are perpetrated by members of the government (in the case of my research law enforcement agents), but that are far more complex than those acts described above. The process of bribing a government agent in Mexico is not as straightforward as it would seem to be; it is generally a ritualized, tightly scripted (and time-consuming) routine, with very clearly defined roles for each actor. It can be best described as a performance where the agent plays the part of the hard-to-get, businesslike, stern, rule-abiding government representative, and where the corrupter (Varese, 2000) plays the part of the semi-helpless, needy, desperate but respectful citizen.

In Mexico, it has been estimated that almost 10 out of every 100 transactions between the government and citizens involve an act of corruption, mainly bribery (KNRD 2009); the same source states that, from October 2002 to October 2003, over 100 million corrupt

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<sup>20</sup> Widely used Mexican slang for “bribe”, hence the also popular expression that refers to policemen as “*mordelones*”, i.e. “biters”.

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transactions were estimated nationwide, based on survey data<sup>21</sup>. The State's weak capacity to enforce the rules it has devised for society allow for a set of interactions "in the shadow of the law" (Dixit, 2004). Corruption and an inefficient police (except when pressured by political reasons) feed into a vicious circle where it is difficult to enforce the rules, leaving the door open for a host of criminal activities, including kidnapping, to become common occurrences. The risk of being caught is very low in Mexico City, unless you victimize the wealthy or the powerful. This may well be another reason why criminals have begun to target the poor; they may need to kidnap more to get the same revenue but the risks are lower.

### 3.6.2: The Law

Mexico City, or the Federal District as it is known in the National Constitution (D.F.), was, until 1997, under the direct rule of the federal government. The *Regente* or head of government was directly appointed by the president and there was no local Assembly, with the President also appointing the Chief of Police. An important Constitutional reform enacted on 22 August 1996 set the grounds for a significantly more autonomous City. The reform provided for the direct election of a *Jefe de Gobierno del D.F.*, basically a Mayor/governor, and also for a local Assembly much like the ones operating in the other states in the country. From that moment on, the City was in large part responsible for public security within its borders. It is interesting to note that the D.F. authorities adopted the Federal Penal Code as their own and published it with barely any changes in 1999; it was not substantially changed until 2002 (Parés Hipólito 2007:57). All policing and crime fighting as

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<sup>21</sup> Transparencia Mexicana, "Encuesta Nacional de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno 2003", Mexico City.

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well as prevention were thus carried out based on the Federal Penal Code (Parés Hipólito 2007:57), which later became known as the New Penal Code for the Federal District. Kidnapping was described as a crime since the early inceptions of this law both at the federal and City levels. At this moment, kidnapping became a *local* crime to be prosecuted by local City forces. However, as this crime became more prevalent it became necessary to change this law to encompass the diversity of this particular crime. As organized crime had achieved a wider presence in Mexico, the federal government passed through Congress, also in 1996, the Federal Law Against Organized Crime (LFCDO). This law was designed to allow the federal government to more effectively prosecute organized crime groups. In the specific case of kidnapping, the crime will be a federal offence when:

- It is carried out by persons involved in groups who are engaged in the trafficking of drugs, guns, people and organs or terrorism and counterfeiting.
- When the victim is a foreign diplomat, a federal public servant or a foreign public servant.
- In both cases, the Federal Prosecutor must exercise its *faculty of attraction* and decide explicitly to investigate the crime.

The law then defines organized crime as:

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*When three or more people agree to organize or organize themselves to commit, in a permanent or a reiterated fashion, conducts that by themselves or together with other conducts have as an end or result the commission of one of the following crimes, they will be sanctioned by that fact alone, as being members of organized crime: robbery... kidnapping... child trafficking... (LFCDO)*

In all other instances, however, the crime of kidnapping is a *local* offence and is prosecuted by the City authority. It is unclear when exactly a kidnapping is not committed by an organized group, but the current agreement in the courts (*jurisprudencia*) is that, in order for the crime to become a federal offence in the light of the LFCDO, it must be committed by an identified criminal organization and the Federal Attorney's Office must decide to *attract* it. Although the D.F. (as do other states, but not all) has its own Law Against Organized Crime that makes these crimes a local issue, the practical consensus is that all organized crime acts are of a federal nature. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve any further into the legal implications of this.

Within this legal framework, the Mexico City government, with ample assistance from the federal administration, has since the late 1990s been attempting to implement successful policies targeting kidnapping. As a response to the citizens' demands for better security and specifically for protection against kidnapping, the City Government attempted to destroy the gangs that operated in many parts of the City and victimized its wealthy inhabitants. Evidence gathered throughout this research reveals that, especially after 2005, the police were able to carry out this objective with a measure of success, especially when the federal government attracted the cases.

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### 3.6.3: The Gangs

The story of kidnapping in the second half of the 1990s belongs to a small number of gangs that became known throughout the country. These gangs carried out most of the kidnappings in the City and areas around it. They were specialized criminal groups that victimized wealthy members of society such as businessmen and the like. They were spearheaded by strong leaders who, in some cases, had previously been members of the police or the military. In a style concurrent with the behaviour of other organized crime groups (Reuter 1985), these gangs often competed with each other and ‘passed the baton’ between each other over time, or briefly overlapped. When one was successfully destroyed by the police, another one surfaced to take its place. This was the case with the three most renowned gangs of the late 1990s and their story illustrates very well the dynamics of kidnapping.

Daniel Arizmendi, a.k.a. *El Mochaorejas* (The Earchopper), a former state policeman, was the leader of a particularly vicious gang known to cut off its victim’s ears and send them to his or her family as a means of pressuring them into paying. Over two hundred kidnappings are attributed to his group according to the then Federal Prosecutor Jorge Madrazo (KNRD 2009). However, Arizmendi’s notoriety was at the root of his downfall as well. It was his exploits and seeming untouchable status that made kidnapping the most talked about crime in Mexican society. One of his preferred target groups was the wealthy Spanish community of businessmen; some of the oldest fortunes in Mexico belong to this group. The notoriety he acquired mostly through extensive media coverage of his activities and the police hunt that

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ensued had as a side effect an increase in social demands for his capture. The Federal Police, using special faculties, took the case and Arizmendi became one of the country's most wanted men, along with the most dangerous drug barons. His arrest became a top priority for the government; he became a political issue to an administration that was still then recovering from financial meltdown and a sceptical electorate who saw in Arizmendi all that was wrong in Mexico. Here was a former police officer engaged in kidnapping and murder, operating with impunity in front of the country's eyes and doing so with particular viciousness. Following a successful Federal Police operation which involved phone tapping, the cooperation of many of his victims and a protracted legal process, Arizmendi was arrested on 18 August 1998 as he was preparing to collect a ransom from the family of a victim his gang had already killed (El Mundo, 19 August 1998). His son and wife were already in jail on kidnapping charges. Secondary evidence gathered suggests that he could no longer afford to extend his known network of protection within the police to the Federal Police once his case became a political and not simply a police issue (KNRD 2009). Even though his gang had an important influx of cash, they could not afford the protection that drug traffickers can afford, and were thus unable to corrupt the higher echelons of the Federal Police for protection. Also, his capture became of such paramount importance for politicians that the police had no choice but to do its job properly. As we have seen in the example of the *Ministerios*, the only thing that trumps the status quo is political need. The Federal Police in this case was able to organize its resources and use them to their full capacity to capture a known dangerous criminal. This case begins to illustrate an important point, namely that, given certain circumstances, the police are able and willing to do their job. Sadly, this seems to happen only when political leaders step in to demand this, under pressure from their



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moneyed friends. In an interview, a District Attorney in Mexico City admitted that political cases are almost always given priority under orders “from above” (LEI, 2008). That is to say then that the police seem to know their job is determined by hierarchy rather than the actual crime itself. The justice system is still used as a selective political tool, as opposed to an instrument for the universal protection of citizens, a state of affairs that continues to be to the detriment of those who do not have resources.

Arizmendi’s baton as the foremost kidnapper in Mexico City was promptly picked up by a man by the name of Andres Caletri, a career criminal with some links to State police forces who had already been jailed twice under charges of homicide, robbery and illegal gun ownership; twice too he escaped from prison, in 1986 and then again in 1995. It is unclear when exactly he became a kidnapper, but his first known case was the kidnapping of businessman Eusebio Carranza in December 1996. Among his victims we find a high-ranking Chrysler executive named Elliot Margolis kidnapped in 1998 and two men by the name of Zaga, one of them the owner of a Mexican textile and clothing manufacturer and his son.

Unlike Arizmendi, Caletri did not have police training and his career evolved from petty crimes to robbery (he is said to have robbed at least two banks) to kidnapping. His career is also illustrative of how criminal markets and actors evolve in response to outside pressures. Caletri learned the ropes from one of the most famous criminals in modern Mexican history, Alfredo Rios Galeana, who used to work in Durazo’s DIPD. He was a former police

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commander who in the early 1980s became a full-time criminal, forming a dangerous gang that carried out some kidnappings, bank robberies and murders (KNRD 2009). Caletri was one of his associates during the early stages of his criminal career (KNRD 2009). He operated in a more sophisticated way than Arizmendi. In what can be seen as the perfecting of kidnapping, he formed independent criminal cells in Mexico City and elsewhere and sub-contracted victim research and 'storage' to other gangs with no direct connection to himself or each other (KNRD 2009). This points to a level of organizational sophistication that is more akin to the structure of organized crime groups and even terrorist groups than mere gangs (see Krebs 2002; Sanderson 2004). Furthermore, his case also highlights the fact that, as actors that held a near monopoly on a criminal activity (be it drugs or kidnapping) are eliminated from the scene, this creates a vacuum that is quickly filled by other actors wishing to enter such market. Caletri stepped up his kidnapping game just when Arizmendi's gang was in the process of being neutralized by the actions of the Federal Police. This again is consistent with findings in other criminal markets (Reuter 1983; 1985), such as the drug trade. Caletri's victim profile is also consistent with that of Arizmendi: executives, wealthy manufacturers and ranchers in neighbouring states and other rich victims were preferred. Although he possessed a long criminal career, his kidnapping career was a lot shorter than that of Arizmendi. Caletri was arrested in February 1999, only six months after Arizmendi. A specialized unit made up of 70 officers from the Yaqui specialized group (a group made up of highly trained officers with secret identities), the Federal Preventive Police, the Federal Judicial Police and the Special Organized Crime Unit, many of whom had worked in the capturing of Arizmendi, were solely devoted to the capture of this one man and his associates

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(KNRD 2009). The resources employed in the capture of Caletri point towards the seriousness with which the government responded to this particular threat.

*El Coronel* quickly followed in his predecessor's footsteps. An old member of one of Caletri's cells (KNRD 2000), he also used a decentralized structure to achieve greater efficacy. At the time of his arrest, the Federal Prosecutor claimed that he was in charge of at least five criminal cells operating in diverse sectors of the City and other states (KNRD 2009). In this way, *El Coronel* was not ever directly involved in the kidnappings but served as the brains behind those gangs, also collecting most of their income. His organization, like those before him, mostly targeted wealthy businessmen and their families, especially those in the jewel trade. Many of their victims were members of the Jewish community of Mexico City. Evidence gathered in fieldwork points out that this particular gang, headed by a man named Marcos Tinoco Gancedo (who presented himself as a former army Colonel, hence the nickname), was behind at least nine kidnappings of members of this community, for which he allegedly received up to 30 million pesos in ransom money<sup>22</sup> (KNRD 2009). According to the Federal Prosecutor (PGR), this gang was involved in at least 11 kidnappings in 1999 alone (KNRD 2009). The case of the Jewish community is a very interesting one and I will refer to it in the section of this thesis devoted to the protection strategies used by elites. The victims of these gangs included the son of the owner of a famous restaurant chain, the owner of a textile company and his son and other wealthy individuals. The elite police group that was responsible for the capture of Arizmendi and Caletri was also tasked with the capture of

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<sup>22</sup> This is equivalent to around £1.5 million today.

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El Coronel and his inner circle. Again, the Federal Police used its specialized units to acquire this target and finally arrested him in the year 2000.

In the space of three years (1998-2000), the three most notorious, specialized and effective kidnapping gangs in recent Mexican history were dismantled. This was facilitated by a mixture of social unrest and demands from very powerful actors (the Spanish and Jewish communities have close relations with political elites) which may have pushed authorities to take action. The decision of such political actors to act and resolve a problem and, very importantly, the ability of a small group of law enforcers at the federal level who were able to remain out of the power of these criminal organizations and effectively investigate and prosecute them. Whatever their specific activity, the thread joining all the victims of these gangs together was wealth. Reports suggested that the ransoms demanded by these gangs started at a minimum of a quarter of a million dollars in this period (KNRD 2009). When they were arrested in 2000, members of the gang of *El Barry*, another well-established kidnapper, were in possession of two victims, for which they were demanding three million dollars in ransom (KNRD 2009).

After the destruction of these criminal organizations, we see the beginning of a shift towards more numerous kidnappings. The success of the Federal Police in dismantling highly organized and efficient gangs opened the way for other gangs to appear. With the leaders and lieutenants of the large kidnapping gangs largely behind bars, new kidnapers with new strategies surfaced. However, these new actors were not as sophisticated as the original

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criminals. The new gangs were composed by younger elements that ‘evolved’ from other crimes such as car theft, robbery etc. and saw a new, profitable market opening in kidnapping. By 2001, Jesús Jiménez Granados, Special Prosecutor for the City Government regarding Citizen Security (the department in charge of kidnapping), pointed in an interview to precisely this. He spoke about the success in the dismantling of specialized kidnapping gangs. This, he said, resulted in the fact that kidnappings began to be carried out by less skilled people, even sometimes as an afterthought of robbery. He also pointed out in the same interview that, as was the case before, kidnappings that still occurred were commonly facilitated by employees or members of the victim’s family (KNRD 2009). I found no evidence that a gang as well organized and sophisticated as El Coronel’s or Caletri’s was operational in Mexico City after 2002.

The optimism of both the City Prosecutor (Jesús Jiménez, cited above) and the Federal Prosecutor (quoted in the header of this chapter) was to be short lived. It seems that they operated under the mistaken impression that, once the major kidnapping gangs were destroyed, the crime in which they engaged would disappear. In June 2003, Jose Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, Federal Organized Crime Tsar, declared that ‘this crime phenomenon (kidnapping), in maybe two years, will no longer be a topic to discuss in press conferences’ (KNRD 2000). By 2007, Jesús Jiménez, now the Specialized Kidnapping Prosecutor, talked about the complete disappearance of highly organized kidnapping gangs; instead, he stated, he saw “copycat kidnappings” carried out by young petty criminals who are “...inexperienced and abuse the use of force”. He also mentioned what he called the “treason phenomenon” in

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kidnapping, where family members or close collaborators of victims (workers, neighbours) perform or are instrumental to the kidnapping. This phenomenon is behind the decision to study the hiring process of household employees. In the Prosecutor's own words, "I can assure you that the big kidnapping gangs are practically extinct; there will be some groups that are better armed and more sophisticated, but the constant is young people, rookies, people close to the (victim's) family" (KNRD 2009).

### **3.7: Perception**

At the national level, only around 28% of Mexicans believe that the "battle against crime" is being won. According to Latinobarómetro (2004), Mexico also ranks highest when people are asked if it is easy for anyone to bribe a policeman in order to avoid arrest or a judge to influence favourable sentencing, with 67% and 56% respectively (Ochoa 2006). This gives us an idea of how ordinary people perceive the authorities. A total of almost *two thirds of the population* think it is possible to bribe two of the most important members of the government, judges and police. In order to place this number in context, it is important to say that Mexico scores the highest percentages on these two questions out of all the countries of Latin America polled by Latinobarómetro. By comparison, the lowest one is Chile with 20% and 22% respectively. This makes even more serious the fact that, in 2004, two out of ten Mexicans were victimized by criminals (ICESI, 2005; Ochoa 2006).

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Mexico City is in first place when it comes to perception of insecurity; survey after survey place the figure as high as 84% of *defeños* who feel that their City is unsafe (ICESI, 2003; 2005; SEDESOL, 2006), equivalent to close to 6.8 million people feeling unsafe at the same time (Ochoa 2006). This is clearly affected by the already mentioned, and well founded, perception that the authorities are not doing well in the fight against crime and that denouncing a crime is, quite literally, “a waste of time” (Magaloni and Zepeda, 2004).

The many surveys carried out in Mexico also find that 50% of men and 55% of women feel that the state they live in is somewhat or very unsafe (ICESI, 2003). Very significantly, over 50% of men and women polled by ICSI report feeling at least unsafe in public places, mainly on the streets and public transport, although markets and highways also rank highly. As a result of this, we see that 22% of men and 28% of women have ceased to perform activities that they used to or normally would perform for fear of becoming a victim (ICESI, 2003). Three years later, 85% of Mexicans state that they feel crime rates have either remained the same or increased (ICESI, 2005). An interesting piece of information states that 22% of people report having started a programme with neighbours to act against crime. The same survey for 2002 stated that one in every four people altered their normal habits due to insecurity. This fact is key to the work presented herein, as it gives sustenance to the claims made in the next section. It indicates that people have made safety a primary consideration in their everyday lives. It also begs the question: how have they changed their common practices to include security considerations and how successful have these measures

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been in helping them avoid being victimized? The next two chapters will look in detail at these survival strategies as utilized by Mexico City elites.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter constructed the background for the next section of the thesis. In it, I described in detail the development of kidnapping from a politically motivated crime in the 1960s and 1970s to a much more common occurrence that could be on its way to becoming a crime that not only affects the rich. The chapter also presented a history of kidnapping gangs as well as a narrative of the efforts the State has made to fight them. The next chapters will analyse how elites in Mexico have reacted to this, making it harder for them to be victimized.



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## Chapter 4:

### **Good Help is Hard to Find These Days: Elite Protection Strategies, Signalling and Household Employment.**

In the following two chapters, I will develop the core of the thesis. In them I will analyse the survival strategies of elites in Mexico City with special reference to their household employment relationships and the risk of kidnapping. I will focus my efforts on the strategies that these groups in Mexico City have utilized as a means to protect themselves from crime and specifically from kidnapping. Wealthy Mexicans have, over time, developed a number of strategies and actions that are designed to avoid the risk of becoming victims. This is the product of a steep learning curve that began with the second wave of kidnappings described in Chapter 3 and was also fuelled by the government's lack of response to crime issues. As a result of being victimized or perceiving that there was the potential for this to happen, wealthy individuals and their families devised a series of *survival* strategies aimed at avoiding victimization. This particular social class has considerable resources at their disposal, both political and economical. This has allowed them a certain freedom to act as well as to capture the actions of the state and use them to their collective benefit. This is certainly something working-class Mexicans and even middle-class ones are unable to do due to lack of resources. In the first section of this chapter, I will focus more broadly on the survival strategies at the community and the family levels and then, in the final part, I will focus on the process of hiring household employees, namely drivers. As I have stated before, this apparently trivial activity becomes important when we know that a significant amount of

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kidnappings are carried out or facilitated by an employee or by a close collaborator of the victim. This claim is not only supported by secondary sources such as the KNRD. Indeed there are in the database at least 5 instances when a driver - and another one where another *male* employee - are implicated in a kidnapping and there are no mentions of maid or nannies being involved. Interviews also support this information, interviewees ENV9 and ENV10, for example, discussed instances of kidnapping in their families where a driver became the main suspect in the organization of the crime. While theft and other minor crimes are sometimes attributed (rightly or not) to other, mostly female, staff kidnapping seems to be dominated by males thus the focus on drivers. This is also supported by Vilalta and Fondevila's study (Forthcoming) that states that a very large majority of people in jail for kidnapping are male. Signalling theory allows us to analyse the full extent of these relationships by looking at the micro-mechanisms and motivations that fuel and support them. It is a useful tool for analysing how employers and employees enter, maintain and end relationships of trust where institutional state support for those relationships is scarce or non-existent. Before looking at the specific relationship between elites and drivers, however, I will recap the ways in which Mexican elites have developed their protection strategies.

#### **4.1: The Elite Learn to Protect Themselves**

Through a long and costly process, wealthier individuals, - the typical victims of kidnapping - have protected themselves more effectively from this threat. This does not

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mean that they are no longer victims, but rather that they are victimized less<sup>23</sup>, as has been illustrated in Chapter 3. This section will illustrate and discuss this process and will serve to introduce the next section of this dissertation. For clarity, I will divide this sub-section into three parts. First, I will discuss how communities dealt with the threat of kidnapping, then I will narrow down the focus to a ‘meso’ level where I look at how family units changed their behaviour to protect themselves from crime and finally I will discuss micro level strategies at the individual level, which will include the process of hiring of employees as part of a protection strategy and serve as the introduction to the micro analysis of employer-employee relationships. These strategies were successful insofar as they managed to contribute to the reduction in the rates of victimization.

#### **4.2: Social Organization as a Means of Protection**

In the mid-1990s, several wealthy communities in Mexico City were repeatedly victimized by kidnappers. The wealthy Spanish and Jewish communities were particularly badly hit. As security became a fundamental issue for wealthier individuals, communities began to organize and alter their behaviour and environment. In other words, their ‘survival strategies’ changed (Migdal 2001). As has been noted by Caldeira in Brazil (2001), higher crime rates cause a process of self-segregation on behalf of middle class, upper-middle class and wealthy people that remains to this day. The appearance of high-security walled communities became a fixture of the city, not just in Mexico but also in most Latin American

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<sup>23</sup> A case in point is the kidnap and murder of the 14-year-old son of a wealthy businessman, Alejandro Marti, who was kidnapped in June 2007 and whose body was later found inside a car, a month after the ransom (500,000 U.S. dollars according to reports in the press) had been paid.

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countries. Middle-class neighbourhood associations all over the city banded together to build gates and pay private security firms to look after their communities as they faced instances of robberies and theft on their streets. A certain level of paranoia was also to blame for this privatization process. It became normal to see springing up, literally from one day to the next at times, fences and *casetas* (small private security booths) at the entrance of streets that were once public spaces. This was in many cases not legal and led to confrontations between the government and those communities. Mostly, in the case of smaller streets, the government adopted a *laissez faire* attitude, allowing many streets to be closed off by those who lived there. Buildings both public and private were also closed to the public and made safer with private security personnel, video cameras and electric garage doors. Safety became a way of life in the City and a priority for all communities. Caldeira argues that this process of spatial segregation brings about higher inequality, as justice and citizenship rights become contested as individuals jostle for control of spaces and access to security (Caldeira 2001: 40). It is certainly the case that building walls generates a strong *us vs. them* mentality; walls are meant not just to keep people out but to keep people in as well. As a mechanism for protection it may be useful but the social cost of such behaviours, as argued by Caldeira, is high in terms of segregation and inequality. In this sense, Caldeira's argument is sound. In the case of the neighbourhood of Polanco, the focus of much of the fieldwork presented here, a survey of 30 apartment buildings there revealed that all but one had extra security measures (private security, electric doors, controlled access, CCTV etc.) However, rooted in this segregation are the beginnings of new kinds of relationships that I will discuss in upcoming sections.

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Beyond the very visible creation of private spaces out of what used to be public areas and the escalating segregation, there are other ways in which communities reacted to crime in Mexico City. In previous research (Ochoa 2006), I dedicated time to the informal strategies different communities adopted when dealing with crime. One of the communities under study was at the time very susceptible to kidnapping and actually one of their members (a well known television presenter) had recently been abducted and freed after a large payment. One mechanism that appears evident from such research and new interviews with upper-middle- and upper-class Mexicans is that they decided to take advantage of their privileged position as a community, to protect themselves better from kidnappers. This mechanism is rooted in the inequality persistent in Mexico<sup>24</sup>. It is based on the fact that money can in many instances buy actions (or inactions) from state actors and on the willingness of wealthy people to use such power to their benefit. The negative impact of this dynamic on democratic development is well researched (see the work of O'Donnell 1998, 2001 inter alia) and has largely concluded that the rule of law cannot be applied fully in such conditions of inequality.

One of the most salient mechanisms used by these communities to protect themselves from crime is to privatize their security. As trust in the government and its security forces fell during the 1990s (ICESI 2003; 2005), the number of firms offering private security to the City's population grew. The City's Minister of Public Security (SSPDF) has registered 2,820 private security companies in Mexico City alone (SSPDF 2009) although, it says, only 514 are actually active and properly registered according to government protocol. The sector

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<sup>24</sup> This inequality has also led to an increase in crime, as has been extensively studied (Blau and Blau 1982; Fajnsylver et. al. 1998; Frühling et. al. 2003, among many others).

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employs (in 2007, when the latest figures are available) 11,892<sup>25</sup> people and has over 7,000 clients that include residential areas, industry, commercial establishments, homes and individuals. The same report from the SSPDF states that this industry also uses 1,366 vehicles, 765 of which are armoured or bulletproof. The SSPDF has also licensed nine such firms to use 8,111 firearms. There are also 71 licensed dogs in the industry and there are 171 persons licensed to train and evaluate members of these firms. Income figures for the private security industry for Mexico City are unavailable, but at the national level in 2008 the private security industry reported an income of 40 billion pesos (about £2 billion), making it one of the top earning industries in the country. The period of bounty that these firms have enjoyed and profited from has become exacerbated by the ongoing war on drugs. More and more people are resorting to hiring these services as they see levels of insecurity rise.

It is common practice for wealthy communities to hire these companies to provide them with extra security. Gated communities are the living quarters of choice for the city's elite and more and more homebuilders are marketing smaller, less safeguarded communities to middle-income families that want to have the added protection. In one case (Ochoa 2006), a very wealthy gated community hired up to 80 private officers from a single firm to provide them with security. Their services include screening all access to the compound, patrolling inside the compound, maintaining control over employees of the homes in the compound

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<sup>25</sup> This number is still minuscule compared to the size of the Mexico City Police, the largest in Latin America. Its Preventive Police branch (uniformed policemen/women who patrol the streets) has 30,800 officers. To this, one must add the 44,950 officers that make up the Auxiliary Police, which services financial and commercial institutions as well as manufacturing industries. This is a total of 75,750 police officers in the City. This number does not take into account the Judicial (Investigative) Police, which has 3,964 members of its own.

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(checking their bags when they leave and checking for identification) and identifying anyone who wishes to access the community. This is one of the most secure communities I have encountered. It is totally walled in and has electronic gates that can be operated only by those in the compound; all other visitors must announce themselves at the gates and give their ID to the guard (which he keeps until they exit). In an interview, the director of the tenants' association for the compound at the time (himself a famous actor) explained their choice of private security and how they function. Interestingly, this compound did not hire the most expensive and sophisticated private security firm (money is clearly no problem in this community), the director Mr. X explained that they did not want highly trained people there because "they might be too bright and start getting ideas". They felt safer knowing that whoever is caring for their security is good enough to do that job, but really has no other aspirations in terms of wealth or job prospects. This is an ingrained, if grossly classist, security policy for the community. The same community also has a policy of exemplary punishment. Even the most minor incident (an employee steals something of little value for example) is denounced to the police and criminally prosecuted, even if this process is many times more costly than whatever the person stole. Their lawyers' informal role, he admitted, is to intimidate those who break the rules and also to make sure the justice system does its work when they denounce a crime.

In a system where pervasive corruption (Varese, 2001) is present, it is easy for the wealthy to pressure the state into certain behaviours. This exacerbates the inequalities explored by Holston (2007) and Caldeira (2001). She states: "in recent decades security has become a

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product bought and sold on the market...” (2). This applies not only to private security and protection but also to the capacity, through corruption and other legal and illegal tactics, to coerce government actors into certain actions or into remaining static. Many of my later interviewees also admitted to being organized with their neighbours to hire private security for their streets or small communities in an attempt to make them safer. In some cases, they paid a monthly fee to have a private policeman guard the entrance to their street (ENV 13). Others also provided regular serving police with “tips” so that their street would be given preferential treatment on their patrol duties (ENV 11). Thus, the police are basically hired by individuals and communities to give them preferential service in protection. It is also common practice for Preventive Police (regular, uniformed police) to ‘ask’ for a monetary gift from the places they guard. Most landlords comply knowing that, should they not, they risk being targeted by criminals or indeed the police themselves. These protection schemes are an old and accepted way for regular people to have access to the best protection they can afford. The middle classes benefit from this, as it is normally cheaper than it would be to hire a private protection firm full time. This also points to evidence of a racket in which police extort business owners with protection in a style congruent with mafia groups elsewhere (Gambetta 1993, Varese 2001). Indeed, the police, as we have seen in Chapter 3, do tend to behave in ways that resemble a mafia group. They sell protection, extort and engage in other crimes as well. More research is needed to establish whether this behaviour is widespread and how exactly these rackets work on an everyday basis. What we do know now from fieldwork is that the police do offer their services on the private market sometimes by asking and also by waiting to be asked by individuals or communities to give them better treatment.



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The wealthy, our main unit of analysis, in many cases (not all of them illegal) are able to ensure the state and its actors act in a certain way. In other words, they manage to shape the state itself through their actions (Migdal 2001). There are a number of examples of this shaping or capturing of the state by wealthy communities in regard to security and protection. In the aforementioned interview (Ochoa 2006), the same person stated that the association he represented had held a meeting with the Mayor of Mexico City where they strongly voiced the need for better security and more patrols in their area. Members of the tenants association include the owner of one of the two national television broadcasters, politicians, and important businessmen. The government within days responded by allocating more patrol cars and installing new street lighting to the surrounding area. The community in exchange offered to buy water tanks for a neighbouring working-class community. Clearly the possibility of angering a media mogul and his wealthy associates was not a risk the Mayor was willing to take. He also got to supply water to the other community; an added bonus the rich were willing to pay for. This is a prime example of how matters of security are solved when they become a political issue. The interviewee also spoke of having a “direct line” to the highest government officials and of being able to get an appointment with those officials with a day’s notice. This privileged access to high political spheres means that action taken by the wealthy is much more effective than action taken by the poor. Inequality in Mexico is also heavily present in terms of access to justice and state protection. However, relationships between the government and the wealthy are not always based on cooperation. An interesting finding in this case is that elites are always strategic, using threat and cooperation in their relationship with the government according to their needs. They are very aware of their

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power in an unequal society based on informal relationships. A good example of this is the next case, researched in 2008.

An interesting case of these community-based efforts to acquire protection is the action of the Jewish community of Mexico City. After a long-running series of kidnappings that victimized members of this community (KNRD 2009), they decided to take direct action. The Committee for Social Action (CAS in Spanish) was created in 1999 with the sole mission of protecting the community from kidnapping and ensuring that the cases that did happen were properly investigated, solved and punished. The group is made up of around 25 volunteers from the community who “...include lawyers, psychologists and other specialists” (KNRD 2009). Their identities are kept secret to protect them. They also keep secret files on all the kidnapping gangs they research. In an interview, the head of the Central Committee of the Jewish Community in Mexico said that members of the CAS keep a close relationship with the relevant police forces and that they are committed to following up on all cases without exception. They are a task force that becomes active once they learn of a possible kidnapping in the community; they work with the families of the victims and gather information about the kidnappers for police. They also perform informal investigations on kidnappings, lobby the authorities to carry out solid and thorough investigations of their own and use their legal clout to make sure that once the kidnappers are jailed they never get out; as the interviewee stated, “for us, someone in jail will remain there” (KNRD 2009). He also stated that, due to the efforts of the CAS, there are virtually no more victims within the Jewish community, with only two known cases in the last few years, both of which were solved and the culprits jailed.

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Another of my interviewees (ENV 8) in the same neighbourhood also told me that, beyond the actions of the CAS, the Jewish community had also carried out a strong lobbying campaign to make the government provide them with more security in their neighbourhoods (a large percentage of this community lives in the *Miguel Hidalgo* district I analyse). He told me that the community had made threats to the government, saying its members would start leaving the City and closing their many businesses if the government took no action to stop the kidnapping of their members. The success of this strategy can be attributed to the extensive network of this particular community in the political sphere, as well as their economic power which affords them easy (albeit unfair) access to the justice system as described conceptually by O'Donnell (1998). In a country where the rule of law is weak, this kind of social organization seems to be one of the most effective responses. Their success needs access to important monetary resources and the political connections that come with it. Without it they could not have the same level of contact with the government. Through these actions, it became very costly for kidnappers to victimize Jews. The government did indeed respond to their pressure and now the *Miguel Hidalgo* neighbourhood is now one of the most secure parts of the city. This group of victims probably presented to criminals the highest likelihood of being caught when compared to other social groups. At the same time, the state was busy putting together the elite police group that would destroy the old kidnapping gangs. With their ability to organize themselves and cooperate as a community and also to influence the actions of the state, they achieved levels of protection that are not available to all members of Mexican society. The dark side of this is that it opened the door to a rise in the total number of kidnappings in the City, as new gangs appeared and began kidnapping less "valuable" victims more often. The gangs that were successfully destroyed

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with the cooperation and pressure of groups like the CAS left a market for kidnapping open to less organized and, thus, more inexperienced criminal groups.

It is important here to make a distinction between self-defence and the concept of protection. It would appear that the CAS is a self-defence group. Self-defence appears to be a strategy used *a posteriori*, once the person/community is under attack; protection is normally acquired *a priori*, to avert a *likely* attack. The decision to get protection and/or get organized is based then on a personal analysis of the likelihood that one will be attacked in the future. Within this distinction, the CAS is a case of self-defence; a group formed by a community under attack in order to better defend its members. Over time, however, it has become a protection agent, developing expertise to avoid future attacks as they still consider themselves to be likely victims. According to CAS itself, they have been successful at protecting their community as the rates of kidnapping have been reduced to almost zero for that community. The success of these strategies is reflected in the fact that, not only did they force the state to act but also made them harder targets to acquire. This also applies to hiring practices, which may be interpreted to tackle the intimate characteristics of kidnapping in Mexico City.

#### **4.3: Family-based Protection**

Families and individuals also devised *ad hoc* strategies of protection. Everyone I interviewed admitted to changing their everyday activities and practices due to crime and specifically as a response to being victims of kidnapping or perceiving themselves as potential

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victims. This could be characterized as strategic behaviour (Gambetta and Hamill 2004), since individuals perceive themselves as potential victims and take measures to avoid actually becoming victims.

*I was never afraid before, I mean, I was very, I went to University came back at three in the afternoon, three in the morning, I went, I mean, no, no, no; As a matter of fact now I go at night and... it transformed my life so much, well, I mean, I have worked it out, and... I go out in the street and I walk all day, but I am very careful, I mean I am aware of who is around, and... who is close to me, I am super aware, for example late at night, alone, I do not go out. I get home and I lock myself in, and, my whole life I planned it, it does not mean nothing will happen to you no? But I planned it, I live and work in a one-block radius.*

These are the words of a kidnapping victim (EV1) describing the effect the experience has had on her in particular. While it is obvious that her experience and those of others like her is one of the most extreme cases of a life being affected by crime, it illustrates a lot of the feelings I heard throughout the field research for this dissertation. It draws out a clear strategy to avoid being targeted. This particular victim re-constructed her world after being victimized so that she would have to physically move as little as possible in her everyday life. She lived in a central area where everything was close and worked every day in an office she rented very near her home (a three-minute walk). Another victim (EV4) who was held for eight days made the more radical choice to leave the country after suffering intense post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>26</sup> that needed therapy to be resolved. She now resides in the U.S. and is not certain she has any desire to return to Mexico. Her case illustrates the most radical decision one can

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<sup>26</sup> This was triggered, she said, not by the kidnapping itself, but by years later being robbed violently in a Mexico City street: "I thought, it has already happened to me, nothing can happen again..." The experience shattered a sense of safety she constructed after being targeted and when it did she decided to leave the country.

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take. Leaving family, friends and one's home because of an experience such as being kidnapped is indeed a hard choice. The interviewee did state that she missed all the things mentioned above, but could not deal with the thought of going back due to the stress and fear it caused her.

Since the mid-1990s, both victims and potential victims engaged in series of transformative practices that would alter the way they carried out their lives and would eventually also contribute to making them harder targets to attack. I have mentioned before how communities themselves organized to fight kidnapers and criminals in general through political influence, monetary capabilities and community-based organizations. Individuals and families also engaged in these practices. Most of my interviewees claimed to have adopted safety measures to counteract the risk of kidnapping at one point or another. There are a number of protection mechanisms that are common to most people and families. The first of such mechanisms was that people *stopped sharing information* about themselves or their family. In some cases, casual chatter, such as at the supermarket or elsewhere, began to be seen as suspect as discretion became a family policy.

*I have forbidden my muchacha (maid) to give out any information, about the Señora, nothing, nothing. Who lives here, how many are we, nothing. Even I, when I answer the phone I say hello, who is this? Who do you want to talk to? If they say anything, I just say 'wrong number' and hang up; I do not give any information about anything. (ENV4)*

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This is a version of many similar responses I got when asking for specific protection strategies. Keeping family information as secret as possible is seen as critical for staying protected. One interviewee (ENV12) believed that her family was in danger because her bank statements had not arrived in the post as usual. Her fear was that someone was stealing them to assess her family's monetary value. She believed the threat to be so real that she took the case to the bank and investigated if the statements had been actually misplaced or disappeared: "the post did not deliver them, and it is the first time in a very long time that I see (this), on top of that, they were the envelopes (statements) of our most important investment account, and they disappeared" (ENV12). After a subsequent break-in (when no one was at home), the family decided to hire private security for their home; this included CCTV and a guard. Kidnapping in its 'classic' form was always based on good information. Gangs required extensive gathering of such information to choose their victim, plan and execute the kidnapping. All members of the household in *all* of the interviews are under some form of instruction to keep basic information about the family secret. Clearly a certain level of discretion about family affairs is always a given, however, the emphasis and the extent to which this practice is now carried out in Mexico City goes beyond this; it also involves lying about one's job or income when directly asked or giving out wrong addresses and telephone numbers when the necessity arises.

Other strategies include more practical matters such as the purchase of bulletproof vehicles.

A businessman/dentist I interviewed talked about the need for this:

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*Well, for example, we changed, and, and, our cars are bulletproof for example... Yes, that part is not nice, you have to make an expenditure that no, you should not be making... No, it should not be, hmmm, I do not know why it was [the decision to buy the bulletproof cars], it was someone, a case we heard of, a patient or something like that [who was victimized] and it was not the first one, so we decided [to get the cars].*

Another interviewee, a father whose 25-year-old daughter was killed by kidnappers (the case I refer to in the introduction) and who, after authorities had shown no results in the investigation, quit his job and dedicated a year of his life to tracking down and bringing to justice the gang that kidnapped and murdered his daughter<sup>27</sup> said:

*At some point, in our case, well, obviously, mmm, we entered the system of 'escoltas' (bodyguards) and guns, however, there comes a time when you realize that this is not the way in which you want to live and you break free of them, you break free of the 'escoltas'... you break free of the guns and you say: it is not that it will not happen to me, or that it will not happen to me again, simply, I will not be a hostage of criminals; so I changed the way I lived, to the way I want to live, if it happens to me it happens, if it does not it does not, I will be as prepared as I can if it does happen again, to defend myself with what I have within my reach, but I will not sacrifice my way of life...*

He did, however, admit to taking precautions and to have changed some of his practices:

*In moments of risk... I take precautions and when I go to a restaurant I do not turn my back to the door, I see who is there and maybe I get stubborn and I leave... you do take certain precautions... but I have not accepted becoming a fearful person who modifies all his conducts.*

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<sup>27</sup> He was more successful at this than the authorities themselves. By the time of the interview, he had personally found five out of six gang members, whereupon he contacted authorities to make the arrest. He financed and did all investigations with no police cooperation.



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Clearly, and with very good reason, this interviewee had modified his actions to a degree. He had implemented a set of mechanisms and strategies that are also common to other people interviewed: 1) being overtly aware of the surroundings as an automatic reaction, observing people around oneself keenly for certain signifiers of danger which include “young men, kind of typical Mexican, thin, shortish, dark hair and baseball cap” (EV1), or “four (men), black SUV, tinted windows, driving aggressively...” (EV3); 2) avoiding going out at night to unusual and far-off places; and 3) keeping one’s social activities to a clearly limited geographical area: “we don’t go around everywhere at night” (ENV13).

#### **4.4: Drivers, Trust and Signalling**

Another important protection mechanism involves the process of hiring household employees. This is central to the arguments presented here. As I have described in previous sections, a high percentage of kidnappings occur with the participation of either a member of the victim’s family – what has been labelled the ‘treason phenomenon’ by the City Police (KNRD 2009) – or a close employee such as a driver, gardener or business employee. This figure could be as high as 70% according to press releases by the police (KNRD 2009). With this in mind, it is clear why it is of the utmost importance for anyone who has employees at home (drivers, cleaning staff and cooks are all common in higher-middle-income houses and above) to make sure that the people working in the family home are trustworthy. In an environment of high kidnapping rates such as the one described in this dissertation, it is my contention that one of the primary roles of these workers is, beyond their ‘actual job’, to protect the family’s information and become *gatekeepers* for the family. In the next two

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sections of this dissertation, I will analyse this process in detail and present evidence to support the hypotheses developed in Chapter 2, as well as drawing out the implications for our understanding of the establishment of trust in a risky environment. Signalling theory is useful because it has actually been used in the past to analyse the hiring process (Spence 1974) or processes where the parties involved hold private information (Kreps 1990: 83). It therefore provides us with a solid framework that allows us to understand more fully the process under scrutiny.

Before I begin the analysis, I must first address the following question: why drivers? Many upper-middle- and upper-class families in Mexico have these types of employees. Exact figures of how many are not available, but qualitative evidence suggests that an important amount of these families do employ them. All of my interviewees (employers) had a driver at one point. In some cases, this employment is part time. An example of this is a driver I interviewed (WNV12) who, for a few days a week, freelanced as a driver for one of my other interviewees (he had been doing so for at least five years) and also drove a taxi the rest of the time. This kind of arrangement is more common in middle-class homes. Upper-class households have more resources and are able to keep their staff employed full time. This may also reduce the risk of being victimized by locking in or vertically integrating household employment (Williamson 2005). We will come back to the importance of these arrangements later on. In a more or less crime-free environment where law enforcement institutions work efficiently (or more efficiently), drivers would have a small (if logistically important) role in a family's life. However, in an environment such as the one I have

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described in Mexico where crime is common and kidnapping has become an important source of fear, these employees acquire a different role.

There are many reasons for this. A family driver is normally involved to a great extent in the everyday life of the family he works for. He will drive the husband and wife to work and the children to school and other extracurricular activities, and he will also run any number of errands for the family, such as paying bills, going to the bank, shopping etc. Drivers sometimes spend more time with their employer's family than they spend with their own. They also spend time in the family home and have ready access to most areas of it. This personal involvement in the family's private affairs gives him/her very privileged access to important and otherwise very private information, such as the whereabouts and schedules of members of the family, knowledge of security arrangements and accurate estimates of the wealth and resources of such families.

Therefore, the driver of an *empresario's* children is the owner of information that kidnappers might pay handsomely for, possibly much more than his average monthly salary, creating a strong temptation for the driver to default on his contract. The driver might also be forced by criminals in his community to divulge this information. This was the case in the kidnapping and eventual murder of a rehab centre worker in 2009 that I mentioned earlier. A driver that worked for her became involved, through a personal friend, with kidnappers in his neighbourhood. They knew he worked at the centre and that he had access to information on potential victims there. They convinced him to facilitate their kidnapping by

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offering him money to give them information about the victim. They also attempted to intimidate him into cooperating. After having second thoughts about the crime that was about to be committed, the driver was then forced to stay quiet by the criminals who threatened to kill him if he spoke out. He apparently tried an anonymous call to the police but this led nowhere. The victim was kidnapped and eventually shot dead in a botched attempt by the police to rescue her from the safe house where she was being kept (KNRD, 2009).

This story gives us an idea of the risk that hiring a driver may entail. Therefore, this relationship cannot be characterized only as a straightforward master-servant relation. The fact that the employee is, for all practical purposes, entrusted with protecting his employer's family makes this relationships much more complex. The protection of the sensitive information the driver has access to must be cemented by large amounts of trust and highly effective enforcing mechanisms. This is especially so due to the fact that there is a limited rule of law and credible threat of prosecution from the government should a default occur, a scenario described by Dixit as "lawlessness" (2004). Recourse to an efficient and fair legal system that punished contract defaults would make trust somewhat unnecessary as a mechanism, since the threat of enforcement would ideally sustain the relationship. However, as Williamson (2005) states, even in contexts where contracts are properly enforced by the state there is a need for informal arrangements that cement and guarantee cooperation. Many of the relationships I look at here are of this sort. In Mexico, both employers and employees must resort many times to informal non-institutional mechanisms to sustain their contracts.

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The driver is not only offering his services as just that, but rather *he becomes an agent in the protection of the people he drives*. In other words, he is also employed to *protect information*. As an interviewee put it: “trust (in the hiring context) means you are caring for something that is mine” (ENV8). This distinction is key because it allows us to establish drivers as providers of protection, even if this is not their real job description. This is not to say that they explicitly offer this service but it is understood that in most cases the provision of such a good is expected as part of the employment agreement. The element of risk in this relationship makes it an ideal venue to explore trusting relationships and their development in an environment where there is no constant institutional enforcement. Evidence from most interviews carried out with employers during field research (over 90% of them) suggests this security issue is the primary concern of the employer when hiring. If a driver is to enter a long-term contract, he must sell to his employer the idea that he is a skilled protector of information and worthy of trust. The employer must also be sure that his prospective employee is not a mimic (Gambetta and Hamill, 2005), passing himself off as a fake driver, or someone who may be looking for information to use in the commission of a crime. It is a driver’s ability to protect this information that is his best asset, both at the time of the initiation of the relationship and also in further negotiations of their contract. In an environment of high crime and impunity, both employer and employee must reach a solid agreement because the costs of default can be very high for both.

Following rational choice theory, there are two principal means of enforcement of a relationship such as this one. The first and ideal one is when the relationship becomes self-

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enforcing (Dixit 2004); this is achieved by reaching a situation in which it is in both parties' main interest to cooperate, mainly because the future costs of defection are larger than its immediate benefits (Axelrod 1984). If this is the case and actors are aware of such a mechanism, an equilibrium is achieved through which cooperation ensues. If an employee is to consider defecting from his employment contract and providing information to kidnappers, his payoffs from this particular transaction must be higher than those he obtains from sustained cooperation. It is the mostly the responsibility of the employer to make sure the costs of defection for his driver *always* surpass the payoffs. It is here where diverse mechanisms come vitally into play. The employer must make sure the correct motivations are operating in the potential employee. His first task is then to figure out if the potential driver in front of him is governed by short-term "raw" payoffs or longer-term "all in payoffs" that also take into account the employer's preferences and payoffs (Gambetta and Hamill 2004: 4). Given the right conditions, these actors will cooperate, otherwise the relationship must be enforced by a third party. In most cases, the state plays the part of making sure that the costs of defecting are such that it becomes very difficult to do so. One such mechanism is, of course, the courts. If an employer and an employee enter into a contract, a defection on said contract can be punished by law. This, however, becomes more difficult to do in a situation where we find a lack of enforcement by government institutions and prevalent informal relations.

The first task for the employer during the recruiting process is to establish whether he can trust his prospective employee before he hires him. This is of paramount importance, as it is

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the first step towards entering into a relationship. The employer must establish whether the person presenting himself as a potential driver is who he says he is and has the intentions he claims to have. Because the cost of hiring a ‘fake’ driver – someone passing themselves off as a driver who has a criminal intention – in this case could be extremely high (such as the eventual kidnapping of a member of the family), most employers are willing to go to great lengths to check prospective employees’ trustworthiness. In this sense, they engage in a *basic trust game*, as has been explained in the Chapter 2 of this dissertation (Gambetta and Hamill, 2005), and must solve both primary and secondary trust problems (Bacharach and Gambetta, 2001). First of all, the employer must discern whether or not the potential driver will operate under his “all in” payoffs or if he will not be able to resist the attraction of his “raw” payoffs (Gambetta and Bacharach 2001). In this relationship, the “raw” payoffs would be the immediate benefit of betraying the employer-truster and giving away his private information or facilitate a kidnapping. His “all in” payoffs would ideally include sets of norms, values and perhaps fear of punishment that would override the “raw” motivation to defect, thus creating a protective environment. The establishment of the driver-trustee’s trustworthiness will be achieved by determining if he (the trustee) is in possession of a number of qualities or properties that the employer believes to mean he is trustworthy. In the case that concerns us, hiring, the process may be split into two steps. First, the employer must actually find potential employees. The second step requires the further establishment of a person’s trustworthiness. All this is done through a process by which the employer screens the potential employee for signs or signals of certain properties. If the employee displays the signals the employer is looking for, it is then up to the employer to solve the secondary

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problem of trust (Bacharach and Gambetta 1987) and establish whether those signals he is watching are indeed true or just a front for a mimic or impostor.

#### **4.5: The Small World of Mexico City's Social Networks**

In *all* the cases interviewed, the first step in getting access to a driver, or any other employee for that matter, is to use one's social networks for recommendations. This was not always so. In the past, people used other ways to get access to the help they needed. One such example would be newspaper ads, which were a cheap way to advertise a need for a driver or cleaning staff. People used to even hang signs on their home's door advertising their need for hired help. Those signs were a common sight up to the late 1980s and their use decreased after that. Today this does not happen at all anymore. Hiring an unknown person off the street is now considered dangerous and risky.

The first step in the evolution of hiring was to close off, or filter access, through one's own network. Interviewee ENV14 stated: "Generally, my wife, does not hire people she does not know, I mean... she hardly would hire anyone who is a complete unknown, I mean someone who enters the house is not easy, normally it is people who know us". Similarly, interviewee ENV8 stated, "someone would have to recommend you... (if you were to be hired)". ENV3, a housewife also said "I got all my employees through friends, yes, all through my friends". This is more so with regards to employers who have been victims of kidnapping. Victim EV5, a 34-year-old art curator, stated that "now more than ever" she only goes through



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personal recommendations. These words echo the opinions of all the employers interviewed. In no case did an employer interviewed find a driver through any other means. Receiving a recommendation from someone in one's social group when looking for a potential employee is very valuable and also cuts down on the costs of establishing how trustworthy this person is, assuming the individual recommending him or her is already worthy of trust. In this sense, a first trust-warranting property and the only way to enter into possible employment is by presenting or coming through a *personal recommendation* of a personal friend or relative of the employer or someone in their direct network. Thus, the first signal screened for is established; employers use both their strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1983) to search for potential employees, although they tend to focus on their strong ties such as family members and close friends. This particularity makes the process safer as it keeps information more open and also makes access to jobs via a fake recommendation very costly indeed if the employer does not have access to this network. People who do have access to it may display it at low cost, thus fulfilling the cost condition for a semi-sorting equilibrium (Gambetta 2009). In any case, the close-knit social circles such as those prevailing in the Mexican upper class serve this purpose very well since they are smaller networks where communication is very easily transmitted at a very low cost. Thus, the procedure for hiring a driver begins with an exploration of one's own networks. Asking friends or relatives if they "know of anyone" will normally turn up one or two recommendations. As we saw in the theoretical section, the value of the recommendation rests on the already acquired trust of the person making the recommendation to the employer and sometimes *also* on the already acquired trust of an employee of the person

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making the recommendation. An illustration of this case is when the employer asks a friend who in turn asks of his employee for a driver.

Once a recommendation has come through the employer's network, the one-on-one hiring process begins proper. Clearly, having been backed by a recommendation the prospective employee has already displayed a key sign of trustworthiness and, in fact, without this particular sign there is no chance of being hired. This is not, however, a final sorting equilibrium (Gambetta and Hamill 2004). Indeed, in this particular case there is no such thing. Further screening takes place where the employer decides if he is to finally employ the driver. In this secondary screening phase, the employer seeks to establish for himself whether the employee possesses some of the other properties he deems to be signs of trustworthiness. In a sense, he is also double-checking that the recommendation he received is actually a good one.

Some of the most obvious ways to assess a potential driver (or any employee for that matter) are also the easiest to mimic by criminal opportunists (Gambetta and Bacharach, 1997: 10). One of the first things one could ask a potential employee to do, for example, is to provide some form of identification that would establish their ability as a driver and his identity. Obtaining a fake driver's licence in Mexico is not hard, if one is so inclined. The same applies to birth certificates and passports<sup>28</sup>. This situation forces employers to look for hard-

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<sup>28</sup> In Mexico City, there exists an entire neighbourhood where one can purchase fake documents of any kind, from birth and death certificates to university diplomas. This area, known as Plaza Santo Domingo, is in the old

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to-mimic traits in potential drivers that would be prohibitively costly to mimic for anyone else. Over time, employers have worked on a series of mechanisms that allow them to best discern between potential fakes, weak and honest employees. An interviewee (ENV6) told me: “I believe that this situation [crime], hmmm, forces you, regardless of your resistance to do so, to incorporate certain measures, changes, to avoid this kind of crime [kidnapping]”. This is not a cheap or short process. This points to a cognitive process where employers have learned what is best practice when hiring. Many things have changed from the time when the need for a driver or other form of help would be advertised by hanging a sign on the door to the time when only employees recommended through the social network have any chance of being hired and this was a process that began in the late 1980s but carried on into the 90s.

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centre of the city and is known to almost everyone in the city. Originally it was a place (and officially still is) where the paper and print industry sold their goods. Around it an informal trade of *escritorios* also developed. These were basically people who, then using typewriters, would write letters and fill in forms for people who could not read and write for a fee. Print shops also settled there. Those who ‘work’ there do not often openly offer forged documents there to passers-by, but a few questions will point most people in the right direction. Recently, the government has tried to expropriate the area so as to put an end to this illegal industry. No research has been done on this particular industry but see <http://www.univision.com/content/content.jhtml?cid=1166601> for news reports on it. I have been personally to this Plaza a few times in my life (for legitimate purposes!) and have been offered fake documents by people working there.

**Table 1:**

**Most Common Properties Screened for by Employers**

| <b>Property (From hardest to easiest to screen for)</b> | <b>Mentioned by (%)</b> | <b>Sign</b>  | <b>Screening for it</b>  |
|---|-------------------------|--|--|
| Membership in Network/family                            | 100%                    | Recommendation   | Verbal or written and verifiable   |
| Discretion  | 100%                    | Keeping information secure by not divulging it, Proxies: being from outside the City, not too chatty         | Very hard to establish, relies heavily on recommendations and repeated interaction/observation |
| Efficiency  | 20%                     | Completing tasks fast and without involving many people at low cost  | Can be screened for only during test period  |
| Helpfulness   | 100%                    | Offering to do things in the household. Volunteering for tasks   | Only by observation  |
| Age   | 74%                     | Must be of a certain age, not too young and not too old (both unreliable)                                    | Proof by observation and papers  |
| Presence  | 100%                    | Certain physical appearance. Not too short, strong looking, muscular. Clean-cut. Also formal by wearing suit | On observation   |
| Family man  | 69%                     | By communication and official proof  | Asking for children's birth certificates, proof of marriage                                    |
| Knowledge of the City                                   | 24%                     | Getting to places without asking, knowing good routes  | Can be screened for during test period through tasks, sending him off to pick things up etc.   |
| From another state                                      | 25%                     | Documents, Accent  | Screened immediately   |
| No criminal record                                      | 100%                    | Police files easy to fake  | Check police files   |

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Another major problem that employers face is that some of the characteristics they look for in a driver can only be known over time or are not easily observed (Gambetta and Bacharach 2001; Gambetta and Hamill 2004). This poses a serious problem when making a decision that is potentially risky. What are the most common properties employers screen for? Table 1 shows some of the most common signs/signals that employers look for in a driver. This is based on fieldwork interviews and observations and are the most common properties mentioned by employers/trusters. Discretion tops the list of such qualities. All interviewees mentioned it as a top priority when hiring and this quality comes out on top of regular traits such as presence and punctuality. Discretion also happens to be the most difficult property to screen for. While many interviewees had a hard time even defining the term, most were close to “not disclosing family information” (ENV1). We will keep this simple definition for discretion henceforth, as it illustrates the employer’s main concern.

#### **4.6: Hiring**

After the potential employee has been screened for the primordial membership signal and he has been able to display it to the employer’s satisfaction, he is hired and on most occasions the hiring process entails a test period. In this time (which can take from a day or two to three weeks depending on who you ask), the new prospective employee is observed and tested on many fronts. The largest variation found in this research was actually regarding the length of the test period; a businessman interviewed claimed to have a long test period in which the new driver would be entrusted with progressively more important tasks. In the first few days, he would just be “standing around” not doing much and in this time he

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can show his helpfulness and initiative by doing things unasked, a good signal of helpfulness and efficiency. Eventually he would be sent on minor tasks, such as going to the grocery store, and then he would be sent to the bank, eventually progressing to a level where the employer/truster would be comfortable with him driving his family around. During this period, which could take a few weeks, the driver/trustee would be under observation; he would be assessed on all the properties not immediately observable. This complex hiring process is rare and can only be achieved by someone with resources, or enough of them to pay someone to stand around for a few weeks. Other wealthy people, however, are more trusting from the start, or rather they have better screening processes. Interviewee ENV13, a businessman, said: “when you start (work) you start right away, you take money, people everything...” In his case, the hiring process was a lot shorter, which did not mean there was no screening, it was simply done in a faster (and perhaps more efficient) manner. The fact that none of these businessmen had been betrayed so far perhaps attests to the success of their different strategies regardless of the fact that the longer one is costlier than the other. What all interviewees accept is that there is no perfect system, you “do what you can”. This means making decisions based on some public information (Spence 1974) in the form of the recommendation and a screening process of variable length. Let us look at the particular signals and how they are screened for.

*Discretion.* This property is very hard to screen for and can only be established fully by repeated observation. This non-observable trait is vital to every employer. Employers solve this problem partly through their recommendation system. Discretion is one of the traits they

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always ask for in a new employee when they search their networks. A recommendation as a discrete person from a relative or close friend of the employer is a very good mechanism to deal with this. As we mentioned above, it is very costly or almost impossible to fake a recommendation from a trusted source. This allows employers the opportunity of being able to hire someone and then keep him in observation for further signs of discretion. ENV13 spoke candidly about the recommendation process: “I think of these things... someone asks me to recommend someone and sometimes you don’t even want to take the risk you see, you ask what if he does something, I better not even recommend anyone, so you are careful...you think about it...” This gives us an idea of the importance people give when asked for a recommendation; they do not want to recommend a lemon, so to speak, as their own reputation and the safety of someone they care for, or at least have an interest in, will be at stake. Also, they may be in a situation when they will be asking their network for recommendations in the future too, making this a sustained cooperative arrangement. This property constitutes then the first and very important filter for employers.

As Table 1 above shows, this property is tricky as it sometimes entails what could be called a non-signal, meaning that it is easier to observe by what the employee *does not do*. For example, a sure sign of indiscretion is being on the phone a lot (ENV1) and someone who is very chatty and talkative is also taken as probably indiscreet (ENV1). It is interesting to note that most of these signs are proxies at best (silence = discretion is not foolproof), as there is no absolute sign that leads to a fully sorting equilibrium. This is one of many imperfect signals (Gambetta 2009) that result in trust in these interactions. I did not find any one signal

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that achieved near perfection. Employees also have to display the correct amount of silence, as someone who is too quiet can be seen as conniving and thus untrustworthy. ENV2 posed a further complication to screen for discretion. She stated: “there is a saying: a new broom always sweeps well” meaning once hired, employees will always try their best to showcase how good they are and it will take time for their real personas to come out. However, repeated and constant observation makes faking even this complicated for someone who is not actually discrete. They will normally be betrayed by a number of expressions and even gestures and practices (Frank 1988). This reinforces the need for observation, and most respondents boasted of being very good observers. Interviewee ENV2 spoke of her training in psychology that, she claimed, she used to ‘read’ specific body language and attitudes in people. Some other employers do not have this training, but have also designed ways to measure discretion. Most respondents describe a composite of many signs that tell them someone is discreet. As I have mentioned, not being too talkative is part of this and another factor is also related to age; older people in a range from 30 to 50 are seen as more discreet (ENV2), even though they are also believed to be able to work less. Employer ENV11 mentions not hiring people over 35 for this reason. Avoiding gossip in the household is also seen as a good measure and many times, and this is an important mechanism, other more senior employees are used as agents, or grasses, observing the new arrival and reporting to the employer. This is an important source of information that is also related to vertical integration.



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If the household has vertically integrated its employees (Williamson 2005), employing them full time, the observation of new members of the household becomes easier as they are under observation constantly by the employer or other employees, enhancing control and minimizing risk. This gives wealthy people an advantage over other social classes who may not be able to employ people full-time or employ many members of the same family. Thus, another way of establishing discretion and screening for it is through one's own employees. By displaying membership of a family, a driver may benefit from his family's reputation. Furthermore, he may also be tied up in a set of norms and behaviours that are kept and enforced by other members of the family. The employer has a greater incentive to be discrete if he knows that any indiscretion may bring shame and other costs to his family. The family of employees may also be able to deal with threats to their livelihood by black sheep by a measure of self-policing. This is beneficial to the employer, as it transfers the costs of enforcement and discipline to his employees.

Another advantage of vertical integration is that, once the driver has been hired and is working full time, he also becomes a form of deterrent for potential criminals. This is an advantage that wealthy people have over middle-class individuals, as the latter cannot afford to vertically integrate employees and thus have access to this form of deterrent. A case in point is that of an upper-middle-class victim I interviewed (EV2). She was kidnapped outside the home of a friend by what appeared to be "not very well organized" criminals. In fact, so poorly organized were they that "they needed to make a phone call but the idiots did not have their cell phone charged!!" After driving around for many hours - and stopping at a

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convenience store to buy a payphone card – she was taken to a safe house in what she describes as a “not very nice neighbourhood” where another woman cared for her. After many hours of tense negotiation, threats and a sexual assault by a kidnapper who argued he was “looking for a tracking chip”, she was released after her kidnappers found all her cards blocked (her friend had witnessed the kidnapping and called her family) and decided, for unknown reasons, not to pursue the kidnapping further. She negotiated her release directly with the criminals and led them to believe that they could not make much profit from her. She was finally dropped off in her car and drove home. Her family had already contacted the police, who made her denounce the crime. She never heard from them again and never knew who the culprits were. This victim could not afford a full-time driver, in fact interviewee WV1 worked for her part time and part time as a taxi driver and courier. Although it is unknown if he was involved (probably not as proven by the fact that the kidnappers had little information about her), it is safe to say that had she been able to keep WV1 working for her full time there is a chance that the episode might have been avoided as drivers also serve as deterrents and are in fact hired as such on many occasions. It is more difficult to attack a female victim if she is accompanied by a male driver who, for all the criminals know, could be armed as a bodyguard. Furthermore, if vertical integration includes also hiring the members of the same family this is considered to be the safest option, as employers then have even more sources of control both from the employer and from their own families. If employers are lucky (as was interviewee ENV12), the employee (and family members) will stay with them for a very long time, making screening for this property of discretion less necessary. She states: “I have been very lucky as my hiring experience has been limited; the people I hire are with me for 15, 20 years!”

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Geographical origins are also mentioned as a sign of discretion. In many cases, originating from a poor rural area of the country (i.e. not having an urban background) is taken to mean the person is more discreet. This is based in the historical conception of rural people as noble, meek and hard working. The city is here seen as the great corrupter and people who have lived there are believed to be more likely to be potential traitors, their trusting rural ways having been compromised by the city's dog-eat-dog environment. Having this "pueblo experience", as interviewee ENV12 called it, is considered an asset in this case. Whether this is true and indeed people from outside the city are more discreet or if this is only a city folk prejudice remains to be seen. However, it is mostly taken as a fact by employers/trusters. There is a rumour among the security industry that men from the southern state of Oaxaca make "the best bodyguards" (Untaped Interview, Law Enforcement 2008) because of their fierce loyalty and extreme fearlessness. *Oaxacos*, as they are referred to, have built a reputation for this, although whether it is deserved or not we do not know. Only one interviewee named ethnicity as a factor in a context different to the screening for discretion. He (ENV6) stated that "(he was) racist... and would not have an indigenous person as a driver... they have their... rights and all but in the driving of a motorized vehicle... may be a little strange for them... not something they are familiar with, (and that) is probably my fault!... but it is a fact". Thus, signals of discretion as described by employers include membership of a social network or a family of employees (the latter if the employees are vertically integrated), by far the best signal due to its cost relationship (Gambetta 2009), a propensity to communicate less or to seem less chatty and a certain geographical origin.

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*Helpfulness and Initiative* are properties also screened for in all cases interviewed. This is defined normally as a disposition to do things and carry out tasks. A helpful person will offer assistance even when it is not necessarily needed. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this is an almost costless signal to display, but long-term interaction normally brings out whether it is true or not. Interviewee ENV7, a housewife, stated: “also he could have initiative, even though I do not tell him what to do... do X or Y, he does it on his own, without me saying anything... he could have this service attitude... that when I get home I notice things have been done without me asking”. As with discretion, helpfulness can only be identified through observation, although it is easier to identify and establish because it entails readily observable actions. Basically, the employee needs to keep active and offer assistance as this is a prime way for him to signal helpfulness. Interviewee ENV13 spoke of helpfulness in this way: “I realize for example when my wife gets home... if he goes and says ‘can I help you get your things out of the car?’... that attention (is important)”. Initiative is also getting the job done, as interviewee ENV13 put it: “you are hired to do a job, and you do it, and I see you do it, then it works...” This underlines the importance of constant observation, and in the case of the driver, of signalling this by taking certain actions. Most people claim to be able to know if a person “will work” very quickly after observing them only for a few hours or at most, days. The next chapter will deal with how drivers manage to signal adequately to keep their job.

*Presence* is another property found to be important. This means a driver must have a certain look, but also a certain physique, an image to portray. He must be able to send a message to others by virtue of his presence alone. While a look in the fashion sense may be easy to

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mimic, indeed a suit can be purchased anywhere, there are signs of presence that cannot. A certain set of physical attributes is preferred when hiring and some interviewees speak of height as a good sign. Short men are not favoured as they are seen as being weaker and less intimidating than tall people. These are more signs than signals as they are on display all the time regardless of the intentions of their owner (Gambetta 2009). Men with larger muscle mass are also preferred. The prototype for this property would be a tough-ish looking, large man, clean-cut who wears suits. ENV13 put it nicely: “sure... you do not want someone coming looking like shit, all dirty; that puts you off right away”. These properties actually filter out a large percentage of people and, while it doesn’t tell employers much about how trustworthy they actually are, it does narrow down further the pool of candidates, making it easier to screen for vital properties that do matter. There is not much a driver can signal to make himself taller (platform shoes notwithstanding), but he most definitely can get a haircut and buy a suit. The relatively low cost of these signals is also why employers pay more attention to other signals, such as discretion for example.

*Age, a family, a clean criminal record and a driver’s licence* are the next items that were most mentioned during fieldwork. As I mentioned earlier, age is a factor always mentioned and also a property costly to mimic. Men in their late 30s up to their late 40s are mostly preferred as they are seen as more responsible than younger men. They are perceived to have more stamina and the level of maturity that the job requires. This is also compounded with the fact that men in this age group tend to be family men. Men with a family are seen as more responsible and with “more to lose” (ENV4) should they decide to betray their employer’s

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trust. Again, having children is a difficult thing to fake, especially if the employer is keen on crosschecking the information provided by the potential driver. Crosschecking information is also an option regarding police files and criminal records. No one interviewed bothered to make criminal record checks, perhaps because of the lack of faith in government institutions that issue such documents. In this case, the network recommendation seems to be good enough to vouch for the lack of criminal inclinations on the part of the potential driver.

All these properties, as seen by their respective signs and deliberate signals, make up the bulk of the signalling game of hiring. Employers look for these signs in particular as they represent, for them and under these circumstances, the best way to ascertain a person's trustworthiness. Thus, we can construct the "ideal type" driver. He would be in his mid-30s, married with children, of large build, from outside the city, clean-cut, articulate but not too talkative and should readily volunteer for work. From the perspective of the employer, we can see that the way to solve the problems of trust (Gambetta and Bacharach 2001) is to screen for a number of factors that, mainly, signal discretion. The recommendation system in place assures them that a minimum standard of trustworthiness will be likely kept as the recommendation itself is riding on the reputations not only of members of the network but also their employees or families. This minimizes risk substantially. Once this has been achieved, the main goal is then to establish the trustee's trustworthiness via observation and repeated interactions.

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I have described above the decision process by which a person is hired under specific circumstances of insecurity and need of protection. Once the decision is made and both actors enter into a relationship or ‘contract’, new mechanisms come into play that enforce this relationship. Let us go back to our driver; he has proven to be convincingly trustworthy and has been hired. Now his employer must use mechanisms to keep him from defaulting. The first mechanism would be obvious to many; it is *sheer monetary power*, which can also be described as the possibility of coercion. In this sense, the threat must at least be credible (Gambetta, 2000: 5). In a society where the justice system functions as an almost private entity, money can very convincingly buy prosecution for a crime, or for the eventual default on an informal contract. This would be a simple way of looking at it: a driver defaults on his (informal) contract, the wealthy employer goes to court, buys court support and therefore the contract is enforced in ‘legal’ ways. However, this is not very efficient; it is costly not just in terms of time but also financially too. Also, given the characteristics of the Mexican justice system, the result may turn out to be sub-optimal or the threat of it not very credible. The best way to avoid this is to establish a trusting cooperative relationship. Consistent with the hypotheses presented in Chapter 2, I have described how employers have designed and implemented strategies to avoid being victims of crime. One of the most salient mechanisms and one that may deserve research on its own is the massive amount of faith which employers seems to have in their social and family network. While they do screen for other properties, it would seem that the recommendation virtually guarantees employment (as long as they signal other properties described). While none of the signals and signs described here is fully sorting (Gambetta 2009), taken together they assure the employer of a certain level of trust that he can live with. These relationships then evolve over time. In the next chapter, I

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will go into detail regarding the views of the employees. I will deal mostly with how they perceive and signal those properties that they assume employers will be looking for, showing, in other words, how they get the job.



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## Chapter 5:

### Getting the Job: The Employee's Perspective

This chapter will address the hiring process described before from the other side, offering the perspective of the employee. In Gambetta and Hamill's book (2008), the focus is on how taxi drivers can establish their customers' trustworthiness. The authors deal in a section of the book with the other actor in the relationship, namely the client taking the taxi, or "when the passenger is the truster" (Gambetta and Hamill 2005: 16). In it they recognize that sometimes the passenger is the one who has to make a decision about whether or not the taxi she is about to take is a safe bet. Mimics, that is, criminals passing themselves off as taxi drivers, do exist but in the end, the authors argue, it would have proven impractical to focus on both sides of the relationship, especially since in their countries of study taxis are well regulated and so mimicking is difficult and thus somewhat rare. This is not the case in Mexico, where taxis are only loosely regulated and are quite often the vehicle of choice for robbers, rapists and kidnappers. *Express kidnapping*, which I have described before, is regularly carried out in taxis, making the taking of one perhaps just as dangerous for the user as it is for the driver. Further research on this would no doubt yield interesting outcomes. In this dissertation, I also make an attempt to look at both sides of the problem. However, I focus more on how drivers signal their trustworthiness as opposed to how they decide whether to trust the employer or not<sup>29</sup>. The assumption is that employers will want to find a good employee, as we have seen in the last chapter, and that employees will want to gain

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<sup>29</sup> Although this is also a component of the process.

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employment with a ‘good’ employer (there will be more on what ‘good’ means here later). All of this happens in an environment of uncertainty about the other’s intentions and abilities (Spence 1974: 6).

By looking at the process from both sides, we get a clearer picture and a more nuanced analysis of the process involved in this particular trust game. Employees are also betrayed. They may be unduly fired, underpaid and treated badly. Their work is by nature potentially dangerous. On a first approach, there is the risk of having an accident in which one could be hurt or worse, killed. Mexico’s roads are dangerous and sometimes poorly kept which means accidents are common and the country is in the top ten countries worldwide for fatal road accidents (Milenio 2009). Moreover, Mexico City also has a serious drink driving problem that exacerbates the fact that many people die in road accidents every year<sup>30</sup> and has made the City Government take steps by setting up a breathalyzer programme in the City’s busiest streets, particularly on weekend nights. The penalty for being caught is a fine and 24 hours’ detention in the police station<sup>31</sup>. According to the City, this has made driving there safer. However, driving there remains somewhat risky in this sense.

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<sup>30</sup> In 2005, there were 10.9 road deaths for every 100,000 people nationally (INEGI 2009). In that same year, traffic accidents were the number one cause of death for males between 15 and 34 years of age. For the sake of comparison, the U.K. had in 2006 a rate of 5.4 deaths per 100,000 people (Office for National Statistics 2009, accessed here: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1208>), half that of Mexico.

<sup>31</sup> Sadly, as is often the case in Mexico, wealthier people manage to escape such punishments by virtue of corruption or by intimidating officers. The City has tried to fight this by appointing ombudsmen, who along with representatives from the local Human Rights Commission are present in all checkpoints and make sure that corruption is avoided, as well as rights violations of those checked and eventually arrested. It remains to be seen if this has actually solved the corruption problem.

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Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter 3, Mexico City is not a particularly safe place. It is not uncommon to hear of drivers being hurt or killed during the commission of crimes such as car theft and kidnapping. In a very famous case of kidnapping where the 14-year-old son of a prominent businessman was kidnapped and murdered it transpired that his driver was also taken with him, tortured for information and soon after killed (KNRD 2009). The fact that drivers are regularly in the company of potential kidnapping victims makes their job more risky and this is a factor they do take into account when doing their job. Regardless of this, the competition for these jobs is sometimes quite fierce. There is always a steady supply of labour in Mexico City, especially for this kind of work. They are normally well paid compared to other jobs and also have a certain cache when compared to other jobs, especially of the manual kind. On average, a driver in a wealthy household will make about £400 a month, a good salary in a city where the lowest wage is around £100 a month. In an interview (WNV6), a driver admitted that he saw his work as a more sophisticated affair than just driving a car. He liked the fact that he was responsible for people and that his work was valued, as well as the idea of taking care of the family and having contact with “important” people and driving good cars. In fact, almost all drivers interviewed saw these issues as a key aspect of their work. So, how do they get the job?

Here I will look at the properties employees will want to display to secure a job, as well as the signals they use to display such properties. This will be done according to the order of importance established in the findings of my fieldwork. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I will look here at the specific mechanisms that start and maintain this relationship. Signalling

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theory will enable us to understand the micro level processes that allow employers and employees to solve their problems of communication and secure, to the best of their abilities, a beneficial outcome. A trustworthy employee will have a vested interest in showing and keeping his reputation as one, and also in closing the door on potential mimics or impostors as they make the job-hunting process much more difficult for him. In a job market that may be mimic-beset (at any one point there may be criminals lurking and seeking potential victims), getting a job as a driver will be a more complicated, protracted process. In this sense, a potential driver will try to display trustworthy qualities that are costly to fake for people who do not have the property but will be cheap enough for them to produce, fulfilling the cost condition for this interaction (Gambetta and Hamill 2005) given the employers' designs. We shall see how, on many occasions, these signalling relationships achieve a semi-sorting equilibrium, providing the employer with a trustworthy driver and the driver with a job. The signalling game in this case is used as a means for the employer and employee to communicate as efficiently as possible and, as such, reduce the risks inherent in hiring (or increase the odds of *winning* Spence's (1974) lottery). In this chapter, I will look at how employees display those properties and the mechanisms through which they do so, as well as how they perceive their role within the relationship not only as drivers but also as providers of protection for the families they work for.

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### 5.1 All in the Family: Networks and Vertical Integration

In a similar manner to the employer trying to get access to employees, prospective employees attempt to gain employment through their own personal networks before entering the formal market. In this case, and contrary to Granovetter's propositions (1973; 1983), it is through the person's strong ties (i.e. family members, close friends) that jobs as drivers are most commonly accessed. Acquaintances are also used, but to a lesser extent. This is because, as we will see, a potential driver will often use a family member's good reputation to access a job. This is the first step in the hiring process. Of all drivers and domestic employees with recorded interviews during fieldwork (14), only one did not get his job through this kind of network. Almost all the others did it through a family connection. In one case (WNV1), the driver was hired after he married the daughter of a woman already employed in the household (the daughter also worked for a time there). When asked specifically about this, he agreed that his job was a product of that particular link:

*I was three, four months unemployed [after he arrived from Tlaxcala, a state in central Mexico] then I tried to look through my family members, they tried to help me they got me into department stores, well you know, the usual... and my wife was already working here and she told me: you know if you don't mind what happens to you, you can work here, no?... it was my first job in the City, I did not know how it worked, how the movement was... I knew my wife worked here but I did not know the family*

In another case, a driver was responsible for recommending his cousin's husband as well as other members of his close family (WNV6). Most drivers corroborated what employers had been telling me, namely that in order to get a job the employee must have access to a certain network, mostly family based, that allows them to be considered. The potential employee

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needs to have a close relative already working for the new employer or at the very least with a close friend or relative of the new employer.

Thus we arrive at the first and probably the most important signalling mechanism through which a driver may prove his trustworthiness: *membership* of a certain family or group whose reputation has been proven over time by a number of different employees. Mexico's environment of informality and low contract enforceability by state institutions makes membership an important asset that is mainly based on reputation. This is important to our understanding of the hiring process and also helps us visualize an important mechanism used in an environment of informality to secure good employees/work. In the absence of courts or contracts, a family's reputation is a vital measure of trustworthiness. By the same token, membership of a certain family is extremely difficult to mimic. One cannot pass oneself off as someone else's cousin when the "cousin" in question is present in the room, unless they have a prior agreement to defraud the employer. One could think of someone marrying into the family to acquire the reputation and then commit a crime but, even in Mexico, this seems too outlandish to be feasible and is certainly unheard of, at least in the realm of kidnapping. In general the costs of mimicking or faking membership into the network are very high. On the one hand wealthy individuals have, as we have seen in past chapters, a wealth of resources that they are willing to use to influence the outcome of a transaction they are involved in. They can sometimes pressure the government into acting and into solving crimes in their favour and if they choose to they may be able to persecute the criminal using such resources. The law in Mexico City allows for almost 50 years of prison time for kidnapping

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(LFDCO 2009). If kidnapping a wealthy person has such high costs it makes sense to think that potential criminals may look elsewhere. This leads us to think that victimizing a wealthy person has a higher cost, in terms of the likelihood of being caught than victimizing a middle or working-class person. This is strengthened by the fact that in order to get hired the potential criminal would have to not just fake membership into a family or network but also potentially show their face for a large amount of time, making the odds of being caught even larger. Finally, because of the long term character of the work relationship, even a very accomplished con artist would find it difficult to maintain the fake membership over the long term. Members of the network are bound to eventually catch on to him and blow the whistle on him. All this would make a potential criminal

Thus, the first signal that must be emitted by a potential driver is membership of a family or a group of people that have proven over time to be good employees. This is consistent with the argument I presented in the last chapter about vertical integration (Williamson 2005) as a protection mechanism. By vertically integrating household employees, the hiring process becomes more efficient and, ideally, the results are also safer. It is also a good thing for the employees, since they are guaranteed income as a family and are also less likely to be abused. Going back to Spence's work (1974), we can liken membership of this network to the act of belonging to a professional guild. If the employer is aware of the reputation of such a family because of positive past experiences he has had, he will welcome an employee who signals in a clear and verifiable way his belonging to this network through a recommendation.

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The types of network discussed above are not small or easily formed. As I observed them in the field, they may span many families and a number of generations both on the employer and the employee sides. In a context in which the employer may not be able to observe the past behaviour of his prospective driver first hand - a fundamental uncertainty in the job market as described by Michael Spence (1974) - the observed past behaviour of other members of his family is a good enough proxy when added to other mechanisms that solve the problems of trust. In certain cases, this is also compounded and strengthened by the reputation of the person making the recommendation to hire the employee (i.e. a family member or close acquaintance of the employer). I understand reputation as a “characteristic or an attribute ascribed to (a person) by his partners” that is based empirically on “his observed past behaviour” (Raub and Weesie 1990: 629, see also Kreps and Wilson 1985). A positive reputation (of discretion, for example, as in: “X is likely to be discrete in interaction Y”) once acquired becomes a valuable asset for the person who owns it. A compounded family reputation may be even better and provide an incentive to maintain this reputation and also to make sure members do not tamper with it. Actors must take into account the fact that their current actions not only have an effect on the present but also on the future, with “longer term consequences due to the effect of his current decision on his future reputation” (Wilson 1985: 28). The cost of sacrificing this reputation for short-term gain will influence the decision-making process of all actors involved regarding future actions (in this case to uphold the reputation or break the employer’s trust). In the words of Raub and Weesie (1990: 229):

*If the actor anticipates that his current behaviour will affect not only the immediate consequences he will face in the actual situation but also the later behaviour of his partners(s) and thus his own future consequences, then he*



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*has an incentive for a trade-off between the short run effects of present decisions and their long run effects on reputation. This trade-off can significantly affect the actor's behaviour.*

In terms of our topic of analysis, a reputation (proven by membership of a family in this case) is the first filter and one of the most important assets a potential driver has and thus the first sign the employer screens for. A good reputation proven through signalling membership is only constructed over long periods of time. In some cases I became aware of during my research, the process began up to ten, even fifteen years before, when in a different environment a person was given employment in a household. These “pioneer” employees acquired good reputations with their employers through hard work and good behaviour shown in countless interactions in a safer and less demanding environment<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, in some cases - although certainly not all - they became members of a convivial social group, sharing in their weddings and other important family events (ENV1). Then, when another employee needed a driver or other household worker, it was the pioneer’s good reputation that made them the sources for employment for their sons, daughters, son-in-laws and other family members. By virtue of genetics, a second generation of workers acquired a good reputation that they knew (as some mentioned in interviews) they needed to uphold or risk high costs not only for themselves but also for their kin. In this way, wealthy employers and their employees, their families and close friends become enmeshed in a complex but informal network that, over the space of many years, was created as a mechanism to: 1) secure safe employment on behalf of the employees; and 2) procure respectable employees that will be

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, the environment in question may well be such as the one I described when the social context in Mexico allowed people to openly hire in the market, sometimes by advertising for help.

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able and willing to protect a family's information and safety. Driver WV1 (a kidnapping victim's driver) spoke in the following way about reputation when asked if being trusted in his job was difficult:

*In some cases, yes, but nooooo really eh! I mean, more than anything, as, as I have arrived with a recommendation with some people, it's a bit less. Ok, you still have to earn the trust of these people, and [they] have to see how you work, so they give you more [responsibilities], but from the start you already have something that speaks for you, your image, no?*<sup>9</sup>

This is not to say that this mechanism works all the time, as the number of kidnappings in Mexico where a member of the victim's family or a collaborator is involved show (KNRD 2009). My argument here is that through a protracted weaving of a network, over a period of time wealthy individuals in Mexico City are today *better* equipped to avoid this than other social classes who were less likely to be able to forge these kinds of connections over the longer term.

So, employees need to signal their belonging in a network in order to be considered for a job and vertical integration (Williamson 2005) may well help explain this as well. As shown in the last chapter, wealthy individuals and households have resources that enable them to employ more people on a full-time basis. By 'locking in' these employees full time, wealthy families reduce the risk of the employee defaulting or betraying their trust by raising the costs of future defaults. By using this mechanism, employers also reduce the cost they would incur when looking for a new employee since they have a more secure in-house supply of labour;

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their risks are consequently reduced by not having to hire unknown people in the open market. These long-term linkages also allow, in many cases, for deeper more personal relationships to be formed between the employer and the employees, which also make the environment safer. In one case (WNV4), a worker who had been at a household for over a decade spoke of this relationship in these terms:

*Well, she [the employer] is always looking out for me, so the days I don't come to work she is phoning me: why did you not come? Well it is because I am sick, well I am worried [she says] that something happened to you; in case I get hit by a car or something.*

In another example of this kind of relationship, a driver was even given a signature and access to a household bank account so he could take care of payments and other home expenses (WNV1). This clearly denotes a high level of trust in the relationship and concretely in the person. The driver had two members of his own household working for the same family and he was the last to be hired eight years ago. While these examples may seem anecdotal, they serve to illustrate what the majority of interviewees displayed. During the fieldwork, all the employees I talked to had or were trying to develop this kind of relationship with their employers. The perception voiced by employers that this was a better way to do things was thus echoed by the employees. Both groups agreed that having this type of relationship makes cooperation more feasible and is also beneficial for all concerned when it functions properly. In the words of the same interviewee (WNV1):

*...it is very important, and it is also more relaxed and secure for them (the employers) because they know there is someone who can respond in their household, whether they are here or not, I mean, with them... all their family have really good comments about me, like 'with him it's all good, perfect'.*

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*And for me this is very important and gratifying because then I can do my job better... in exchange for this I know that when I need something, like a letter of recommendation, it will be perfect.*

From the employee's perspective then, a vertically integrated work environment means gainful work for more members of their family (in one case I interviewed, up to four members of a household), which equals better earnings for the family unit as a whole. This situation also has the added advantage of reducing certain costs for the employees; these may include transport as well as the more hidden but higher costs that finding a job outside the network would entail for other members of the family. An added advantage to this mechanism is that employee families may also be inclined to self-regulate if there are incentives to do so. A vertically integrated family of employees may find it in their best interest to deal with potential issues such as criminal risks within the family, before they affect their source of income and work (see Fearon and Laitin 1996). In terms of security, this is an important aspect of the employer-employee relationship and should not be overlooked. A betrayal by one member of the family may bring about consequences for all the members of the family employed there. This may help answer a logical question: why are not more criminals using/coercing employees to give out information for kidnappings? This would be cost effective for the criminals since they would not need to mimic or risk being identified. They could use employees as (willing or not) moles in the household. yet this does not happen often and self policing in these communities may offer an answer as to why this happens.

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However, this self-policing mechanism is not easy to dig out in interviews. During fieldwork, it proved difficult to discuss or assess the presence of this self-regulating mechanism in employee families. The closest mention of it was when a driver admitted to knowing people he had grown up with in his community who were involved in crime (he would not say what kind) and that he made every attempt to stay away from them and that they were normally ostracized from his family's intimate circle (WNV5). In term of mechanisms of control, ostracizing someone from the family for criminal intentions or other negative behaviour is apparently common. In this sense, most of the punishment mechanisms are norm-based and may include denying the offender access to certain goods and benefits inherent in membership in the family, such as loans and other pooled resources. Another interviewee (WNV10) also mentioned that many people in his community knew who these individuals were and left them alone as long as they did not interfere with their regular lives. This included their jobs. This knowledge of criminals and their activities in working-class communities is not new in Latin America and elsewhere; Arias documents this phenomenon in Brazil (2008) and from my own research I can conclude that it is also a common occurrence in some of Mexico City's working-class neighbourhoods<sup>33</sup>. Self-policing in certain communities is not unheard of in Mexico. In fact it is a common occurrence in many areas of the country and happens both in urban and rural settings. Lynching as a form of self-policing is also somewhat common (Davis 2006). All this evidence added to the information I gathered during fieldwork interviewing drivers could point us in this direction. I will not dig

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<sup>33</sup> This is reminiscent of the Gallo kidnapping case I described in the opening chapter of this dissertation. The reader will remember that, during his investigations, Mr. Gallo discovered that many people in the community where his daughter was kidnapped and killed knew about the gang's activities but did nothing about them. Perhaps the family's status as outsiders in the community (they only owned a weekend home there) made them easier targets. More research would be needed to explore and test this point.

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deeper into this particular mechanism here as I believe more research needs to be carried out to successfully explore it. What can be said now is that self-policing seems to be present in some cases and is also used as a form of control by certain communities in order to secure their jobs and their environment. Thus, membership of a family or a certain group of people gives rise to a semi-sorting equilibrium (Gambetta 2009) in which the signal  $X$  (membership) is emitted by all potentially *noble* drivers. The equilibrium is semi-sorting, however, because there are, in some cases, individuals who will display  $X$  but will not be *noble* drivers; these people are the black sheep who will risk the reputation of their group or family and betray the employer's trust by facilitating a kidnapping or other crime. This is the reason why employers cannot hire based *only* on the mechanism of membership. A person may be a member of a family but not really care about it, or he may also fall out with his family for other reasons and take revenge by hurting their work environment. Alternatively, he may also develop a gambling addiction and end up indebted to criminals. There are many scenarios such as these to think about and thus the relationship remains where most in real life do: no one signal is fully mimic proof. In any case, there is no way to obtain full information or certainty (Spence 1974), meaning that the ideal in this situation is simply to minimize the risk inherent in hiring.

## 5.2 Signalling Trustworthiness

In order to secure a job, potential drivers and other employees must, besides proving membership of a certain family or group, convince their potential employers that they have the other trustworthy properties that the employers are looking for. All signals then must

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satisfy the cost condition particular to the interaction (Gambetta 2009). Their proving membership of a group or family does not mean immediate employment, even if it does get their ‘foot in the door’. This section will discuss the vision of the employee regarding the trust-warranting properties discussed in Chapter 4. I will use the same format as the last chapter to discuss said properties and how prospective employees signal them to their employer, as well as how they arrive at the conclusion that that is what employers want. Because most signals in this case are semi-sorting (Gambetta 2009: 175), a set of various signals must be transmitted that will satisfy the employer. Table 1 (based on Table 1 of Chapter 4) lists the properties that employers normally screen for, besides the membership one discussed in detail above. We will see that they are all part of a set of signals of properties that employers have constructed over time to mean trustworthiness.

Table 1:

Qualities to be signalled by the employee

| Quality                 | Sign  | Mechanism                                  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Discretion              | No divulging                                  | Time commitment                            |
| Honesty/Disclosure      | Accounts, telling the truth                   | Full-disclosure                            |
| Efficiency              | Quick to complete tasks with little resources | Anticipating needs. Not too many questions |
| Helpfulness             | Offering to do things without being asked     |  |
| Age                     | Proof   | Self-evident or birth certificate          |
| Presence                | Dress, hair, demeanour                        | Self-evident, body language                |
| Family (non membership) | Dependents                                    | Documental proof, personal introduction    |
| Clean Record            | Police files                                  | Papers, not important                      |
| Drivers Licence         | Valid Licence                                 | Producing license, not vital               |

*Discretion.* From this side too, this factor is seen as vital to securing a job. A family needs to have a reputation for discretion, but individuals must also prove they have this quality in order to be eligible. Unfortunately, qualities such as these can only really be asserted through repeated interactions or through longer-term direct observation. Thus, the employee needs to try to convince the employer as quickly as possible that he is discrete. Employees, however, do not directly mention this factor as often as employers. When asked directly,



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they seemed to be more comfortable defining it as protection, or simply referring to it as the process of “gaining their confidence” (WNV2). Related to this process, WNV1 said:

*I take care of the house when they leave... the other guys [other workers in other households] come and say to me 'let's go party' and I say just: have a good time! I stay here, when they [the employers] phone I am always here.*

This driver's notion of trustworthiness is a good example of how it is constructed by employees in general. They are aware that they cannot prove themselves immediately and so use medium-term behaviours that prove to the employer that they are to be trusted. Most employees are held to a high standard in terms of their responsibilities. Some take it more seriously than others and some may be able to go out more. This may only mean that in this particular case we are dealing with a very disciplined driver. This does not mean that These behaviours may be ingrained in them through socialization since their childhood and therefore more a sign than a signal (Gambetta 2009), but they may also be conscious actions taken with the purpose of keeping the job.

Beyond the obvious “not talking to anyone about the bosses”, at least in the boss's presence (WNV3, WNV 4), there are other mechanisms that transmit commitment to the job and to the demand for discretion. One of these mechanisms is related to how employees manage their time and how much of it they commit to the job. Employees sacrifice large amounts of their own time to prove their commitment to their employer. They are always available and ready to work. They give up birthdays and weekends to take care of the employer's homes

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and cater to their needs. This is not a short and easy process; it involves sacrifice and, in the case of WNV1, many weekends on his own<sup>34</sup>. WNV2 spoke along the same lines:

*Yes well, taking care of their house, and, especially when they leave because they travel a lot, always take good care of their home; not because they are not here we are going to go away or not show up! They notice, they know when they leave they can call and they always find us here.*

In this way, employees signal to their employers that they have their best interests at heart and, more importantly, that they are concerned about the security of their home. In a way it is an act of selflessness that may seem somewhat backwards and reminiscent of a master/servant relationship, but that in effect signals a preoccupation that is at the core of employers' decision-making processes. Being available most of the time is perceived by employees to be part and parcel of their work activities, and all interviewees pointed in that direction in one way or another. It also means that they must strike a balance between letting their employers know they are taking care of their interests and keeping them from being abused. The risk for the employee here is that his new employer will abuse this situation and exploit the employee. In this, the employers play a part in acknowledging these issues and by giving the employee something in return. Most interviewees who were happy at work

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<sup>34</sup> Regardless of what both parts may feel about overtime it is true that sometimes this may add up to exploitation of the driver in the sense of not getting paid overtime. Not all drivers I interviewee received overtime pay and although it never seemed that they saw themselves as exploited, it is important to note that, legally, they should be getting paid overtime fees. This practice is somewhat prevalent in Mexico, not just for drivers or household staff but across many professions especially those that take place in the informal, unregulated economy. Indeed even in the formal regulated arena of government work, interviewee LE1, a public prosecutor, told me that "everyone here is divorced or single" because of the long hours they work, he saw this as part of the job and rarely did he bother to mention overtime pay to his bosses, he knew that this job entailed long hours. As expressed in this chapter, drivers also know that the job entails long hours. More research is needed into this kind of work practices.

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reported a form of reciprocity in exchange for their time and resources. Interviewee WNV7 had been working for the same family for eight years and felt that he received a good deal even though he worked many odd hours driving for an elderly person, especially on the weekends. He echoed a statement heard many times over that his employers “took care of him” in matters of loans, vacations and even participation in family events. Of course, this status was not achieved overnight and the driver in question had to invest a lot of time to get to that position. It was clear to me that he had his employer’s full trust. When asked how he got it the reply was: “through time and doing my job well, treating (my employer) well and his family”. Most employees interviewed were willing to sacrifice a substantial amount of their time for this goal, a high cost<sup>35</sup>. The result of this may ultimately be that bad employees or mimics realize that it is not cost-effective to pretend to be good for so long in order to gain the confidence of the employer. This is a subtler example, one that is reminiscent of Robert H. Frank’s case of Mormon nannies in New York City (1988: 111). Frank writes of how affluent couples in that city began advertising for nannies in Salt Lake City newspapers, having decided that local governesses could not really be trusted and that a Mormon upbringing signalled honesty and good will, necessary qualities for child care. Frank argues that a mimic or impostor would find it very difficult to fake being a Mormon. This very high cost would make hiring someone with that faith a fairly safe bet. Mormonism in this case would be very nearly a perfect sorting signal<sup>36</sup>. This does not mean that there are no Mormon

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<sup>35</sup> It is useful to remember here that when I speak of *cost* in terms of signalling I do not refer to the cost of the signal per se but to the “cost differential between what the K [property] signaller can afford relative to what the non-K [non-property] signaller can afford; and both cost relative to the respective benefits obtained from the receiver’s response [employer] if the receiver is persuaded”. (Gambetta 2009: 181.

<sup>36</sup> A criminally inclined person could potentially come up with ways to dupe New York couples. A New York local could respond to a Salt Lake City advert (if it is online for example) posing as a Mormon and, depending on the employer’s security checks, could potentially pass off as one if she had the racial attributes typical to

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criminals or that they could not fake being honest (with good childcare credentials) Mormons to take advantage of their reputation. This is why there is *no such thing as a perfectly sorting signal in this case*, although it is close an element of uncertainty always remains. Thus, in the case that concerns us here, a reputation for discreteness acquired through one's network is strengthened and reinforced through sacrificing time to take care of an employer's goods, as well as by very visually not divulging sensitive information. By being perceived as protectors of more tangible things, employees prove that they are discrete and protect information.

*Honesty and disclosure* came up in all interviews as a way in which employees prove their trustworthiness. An intangible property by definition, honesty is highly valued by employees (and expected by employers). I call this property *honesty/disclosure* because in the field these qualities always seemed to go hand in hand and it is therefore useful to analyse them as such. To be *honest* in this case is to reveal the facts about one's life and situations. The working signal that transmits this is basically disclosing to the employer verbally and in documents whatever situation may affect the work of the employee. The other side of the coin would be to lie or conceal information and risk being caught, or at least make the employer think the employee is hiding something that would put his job at risk. The market for drivers is competitive as there is a significant supply of drivers, but very good ones (i.e. with a lot of experience, brilliant recommendations etc.) are rare. Therefore, the incentive for exceptionally good drivers, given that employers have a limited amount of information about them, is to give out as much information as possible to distinguish themselves from

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Mormons and could somehow mimic a Utah accent. A Salt Lake City criminal could also tap into this. Difficult and costly perhaps, but not impossible.

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other less desirable ones. This is consistent with some of the findings of Harbaugh and To and (2007) in their study of university professors' disclosure of their credentials. As an example, during the hiring process most drivers with a very good CV will try to disclose it. This information may include names of people they have worked with or high profile jobs they might have had. One interviewee (WNV6) was very keen on disclosing that he had worked in the security detail of one of Mexico's richest men (he left because of an internal policy that does not let anyone in the detail remain for more than three years, lest they get too familiar with other employees) and he could provide names and documentation to prove it. This clearly gave him an advantage over others who may not have such impressive credentials and also would force those other drivers to disclose their own information or risk being thought of as being less good than they actually are. In another case (WV1), a driver working for a kidnapping victim did his best to disclose the fact the he had worked for a widely recognized Mexican corporation where he was sometimes in charge of transporting the payroll to different branches across the City. He described his professional progression from driving a taxi and, through luck (as he put it), developing an informal contract to drive an executive who worked in the firm and lived near his taxi base, to driving for the owners of the firm. This high responsibility job, he believed, gave him an edge over other drivers who did not have that experience and he was keen to make it public; indeed, he claimed that the firm's owners would pick him to do personal tasks (like drive their children) over the firm's other drivers. Signalling honesty and credentials in this way is cheap for those who have them but, in general, prohibitively costly for those who don't.

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These examples follow the logic of the full disclosure principle (Frank 1988; Board 2007; Lewis 2007; Harbaugh and To and; 2007). The full disclosure principle basically states that: “lack of evidence that something resides in a favoured category (good employees) will often suggest that it belongs to a less favoured one” (Frank 1988). Employees in this market have an incentive to disclose information about themselves not only while being hired but throughout the course of their employment, because employees who do not openly disclose their situations and skills are normally thought to be suspicious or unskilled, even if they are nothing of the sort. As is expected, proof of the facts disclosed is necessary to give the information any value. It is of no use to say that one has worked with Z if one has no way of proving it. Information is only as good as the evidence provided. Letters and the contact details of people are used regularly for this purpose and the employer will then use his own mechanisms to verify this.

Once the employee has been hired, the trend continues. Disclosure of any issues and problems that the employee may have are thought by them to be conducive to proving their trustworthiness to the employer and to strengthening the relationship. This mechanism can be visualized as one of constant disclosure. The logic is that the more informed the employer is, the better it will be for the employee. This proves his/her honesty, as well as a propensity to avoid lies and deceptive behaviour. It also helps build and reinforce the reputation of the family of employees or the individual employee. Interviewee WNV2 spoke like this about this concept:

*For example, if I have to do something, a family problem that might take time, in this way, it would be talking to them: you know, I have this problem*

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*and it will take me two, three months, four let's suppose... if you wait for me [and keep my job secure], we go ahead, if not, well, we look for a way to solve it.*

Most successful employees adhered to this policy. This, they believed, generates in the employer a sense of trust and confidence that if something goes wrong they will find out about it. Over time, this may develop into a solid long-term trusting relationship.

Clear, penny-pinching accounting is also used as a signal to convey honesty. For example, giving back the exact change from money received and always asking for and providing receipts is normal. Employees gave special attention to small change, believing that letting their employers know that they will not even keep 5 pesos (25 pence) of change signals extreme honesty: "I go, here is your change, 7, 8 pesos, all the coins, here is your receipt... clear accounts" (WNV5). It is widely believed by employees that if the employer figures out they are keeping the small change from, say, groceries, he/she will begin to wonder what else they are doing or what else they are keeping. Small signals such as this one may convey a lot of information. They are also not costly or almost costless. The immediate benefits of keeping £3 are far outweighed by the long-term benefits of signalling honesty in this way. The employee also believes that, in this way, a reciprocal relationship is strengthened.

A good example of the long-term benefits of establishing a trust-based relationship with an employer is access to medical care. In many cases (almost all the cases I interviewed), the

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employee will need access to money during their employment on at least a few occasions. Because employees do not make a lot of money, savings are rare<sup>37</sup>. They also have little access to bank loans and, in many cases, their relatives are in the same situation. The social safety net in Mexico is also notoriously weak, with its public health system being famous for its variable quality and accessibility. This makes many Mexicans (28% of insured people) prefer to pay for private services; worse still, up to 48 million people (almost 50% of the total population) have no insurance at all, being forced to buy medical care (of very variable quality) in the private market (Barraza-Lloréns et.al. 2002). In this context, a serious illness in the family of an employee may well be a catastrophic event that could potentially bankrupt the family. Even a small expenditure for an ambulatory procedure may prove too expensive. In these scenarios, the employee may ask his employer for a loan or some form of help. If the relationship is a good one, the employer may help at no cost or give the employee more freedom to repay, through work for example. Some interviewees did describe a situation where their employer will help by buying medicines or paying doctor bills, without asking the employee to pay it back. During fieldwork I observed this dynamic many times. Employees consider this a good tradeoff for the services they give. Employees ENV2 and ENV3 were candid about this topic. They generally received this kind of help from their employers during illness or even in other less serious but still expensive events such as their children's graduations, baptisms, etc. Less successful cases where this is not achieved were hard to find since in those cases the relationship normally breaks down as the employee cannot keep working or needs to find money elsewhere. Naturally, this may help explain the seeming bias towards more successful cases during fieldwork.

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<sup>37</sup> The low savings rate in Mexico generates a host of issues, such as those discussed by Ortega (2008).



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*Efficiency.* This property is understood as the ability to carry out a task in a reasonable amount of time with minimum possible use of resources. In practical terms, this means that a driver will carry out tasks in a way that does not interfere with other household activities, doing his job quickly and with a minimum amount of fuss for the employer. As with any other job, this is an important part of a successful work relationship. Having said this, efficiency is not very costly to signal and because of this it is not a property that carries a lot of weight in itself. The tasks assigned to a driver, especially in the beginning, are rarely very complex and should therefore be relatively easy to perform by almost anyone. Of course, there will be very inept drivers who will not be able to perform properly even at this stage and they are normally not around for very long. Efficiency, however, is a necessary characteristic to have when other more complicated tasks are given. Employee WNV1 was a poster boy for efficiency. He has a family of four (his wife and two school-age girls) and he regularly worked between 10 and 18 hours a day, some weekends included. He not only drove for his employer - taking her children to school, doing errands etc. - he also drove for his employer's company as a courier. At the time, he also gave his employer's teenage daughter driving lessons. He believed that, having dropped out of school, he needed to work extra hard:

*...if you don't take advantage of it [work], since, now, due to one's bad decisions... one did not finish university ..., then you get married and all that... the situation is not easy to be [wasting opportunities].*

As if to prove this hard-working philosophy, he also worked some nights, with the blessing of his main employer, driving a famous artist around to her dinners, shows and other functions. This meant that he had to sleep in his car in the company's parking lot (he always carried a spare suit in his trunk), under the watchful eye of the security guards. While this may seem

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exploitative to some, he did not see it that way, seeing it simply as taking advantage of the fact that he had a good reputation and had access to large amounts of work. His employers did not seem to mind this and recognized that he was particularly good at multitasking, usually displaying high amounts of trust in him.

Other employees thought that being able to anticipate the employer's needs was a good sign of efficiency (WNV13, WNV10). By showing initiative and doing tasks before being asked they believed they were displaying this quality. In the previous chapter on employers, I described how initiative is an important property for them. Employers are pleased to see that jobs get done before they have to ask for them to actually be done. In this way, drivers signal a somewhat cheap but necessary property to their employers and, together with other more necessary properties such as honesty and membership, reach the necessary equilibrium. In this sense, even if signalling efficiency is "partially contaminated" by overuse (Gambetta 2009: 174), it is still credible and cost-effective for good employees to use it insofar as, from the employer's perspective, it is necessary even if it is not sufficient itself to attain a job.

*Helpfulness.* This property is closely related to efficiency, but is different in itself. A person may be helpful but extremely inefficient<sup>38</sup> or even disruptive. By the same token, someone can be very efficient when they act but fundamentally unhelpful. Employees understand this concept as a way of "being there" (ENV3) for their employer. It is difficult to establish

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<sup>38</sup> A not very nice way to describe such a person can be found in the popular Mexican saying: "there is nothing worse than an idiot with initiative".

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helpfulness at the time of hiring, much like other properties being analysed here. Thus it is important that past experience on behalf of the employer be used to establish this, as well as any other information he may have (Spence 1974). Employees try to signal this by adopting a certain disposition that is sometimes very hard to gauge. Besides the act of actually offering to do something for the employer, it is hard to measure someone's helpfulness. In this sense, reputation goes a long way. A very good way to signal this is through a recommendation that expressly speaks about this quality. This is a cheap signal for drivers who have a good reputation already and have had good working experiences with people who are willing to put their own reputation on the line in making a recommendation, but very costly for someone who does not have that prior experience.

Moreover, helpfulness is very costly to fake. Basically, only a recommendation (public information about the employee) can attest to an employee possessing this quality. Employees know that employers do check for the veracity of their recommendation when they do not know the recommender, but most of the time the employer already knows the person making the recommendation. This, as we have seen, reduces the pool of potential employees and makes recommendations very reliable. It also makes them virtually impossible to fake. By closing the circle like this, both employers and employees make sure that only good employees will make the cut, underlining the extent to which the recommendation is a vital tool. On top of this, the employer will also look to verify its truthfulness during the beginning of the relationship. Good employees will, on a regular basis, offer their time and work to carry out different tasks, especially those that are outside

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their job description. An employee (WNV2) of an employer (ENV6) I interviewed told me how she had offered to walk with her employer to the place where we had agreed to meet “in case anything happened...because she was nervous...she did not know who you (me) were!”

*Gender/Age.* Preferences on these particular properties vary. When it comes to drivers, only men will do. In a year of fieldwork I did not find a single woman driver to talk to. Indeed, in all my life in the City I have only met one female driver. She was the driver/bodyguard of the daughter of a local politician. She was highly trained and carried a gun. Gender is basically a sign on display all the time. It is readily observable all the time and the employee needs to do nothing to display it. A driver will be too old generally when he is above 45 and too young before he gets to 28-30. The only thing needed perhaps is that they be a certain type of man, that is not small and with a certain presence that may indicate a propensity for both violence and loyalty, but I will say more on this later when I analyse the property referred to by interviewees as *presence*.

However, there seems to be a general bias both from the employer and employees against young women that should be discussed. In both camps, being middle aged and male is equal to being more trustworthy, with older women having this quality too. Employees interviewed during fieldwork spoke about their own lack of trust in younger women, not because they may be ill intentioned but mainly because they are seen as gullible and easily manipulated by ill-intentioned people. Of course, this betrays a sexist and ageist attitude, but it is present nonetheless.

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Driving is certainly a profession that is male dominated, not only in Mexico. One only needs to look at the number of male drivers with signs waiting for their clients at an airport, or taxi drivers in general (Gambetta and Hamill 2005) to have an idea that it is a profession dominated by men. Sexist attitudes and preconceptions as well as practical matters to do with signalling a potential for violence make the hiring of a man over a woman a straightforward choice for employers.

*Presence.* This property was in one way or another mentioned by almost all employees and employers interviewed. Used as slang in Mexico, to have “presencia” is to look good, professional and ready for the job, but also to have a personality that stands out from the rest, to be noticeable. The meaning of the word ‘presence’ in this context is linked to many different dimensions. On the one hand, it refers to certain physical attributes of the employee such as height, build and posture, factors they can perhaps do little to change. On the other hand, it refers to characteristics that are easily changed as well, such as dress, hairstyle and hygiene. More than this, however, there is also a third dimension that is harder to quantify or describe, having to do with the attitude of the driver, how he conveys to others that he is there to protect his employers and also that he has the capacity to withstand and exercise violence. Taken together, they make up his “presencia” with regards to the job. I will deal with these dimensions separately.

Men working in this profession tend to self-select. Because of the demands and risks of the job, employers will normally demand men who are bigger and taller than average. These are

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the first categories for self-selection. Rarely did I find a small, thin, puny male driving for a wealthy Mexican. Thus, most drivers entering the market will have these physical characteristics. As we know, physical attributes are normally costly to mimic. One cannot make oneself taller, except by wearing certain type of shoes that are readily identifiable. The case for largeness is similar; one can only alter one's muscular composition by hard work at the gym or by eating a lot, and both are time-consuming activities. Signalling these attributes is costless for those who carry the properties but this is not so for those who do not. However, physical traits are tricky as a basis for hiring. Also, because most drivers in the market will have these attributes anyway due to self-selection, they tend to have diminished value as signals. This is where the second dimension of presence comes in. Employees know that, in order to be hired, being large helps but does not guarantee anything and so they will also try to alter and mould their appearance. Cleanliness is one signal they display for the purpose of making themselves more attractive to employers. A clean appearance, with short well-washed hair and a clean-shaven face are all good signals that convey discipline, structure and health. Most employees I talked to tried to make sure they always have this aspect of themselves well taken care of. Wearing suits completes the package. On all occasions the driver is responsible for the acquisition of the suit, which they can buy at relatively low prices in Mexico City's old centre or other locations they may sell them also on credit, keeping their immediate cost down. Employers do not provide suits to them as it is assumed that the employee will be responsible for their clothing. On no occasion did I meet a driver that did not meet this description. Drivers WNV9 and WNV6 (cousins working for the same person) told me about this and of the importance that having a certain look had for them. In particular, they were keen to look more like bodyguards than drivers. In fact, one of them

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(WNV6) usually referred to himself as an “escolta” or bodyguard, preferring this to being known as just a driver. In a sense, the new demands made of drivers forced them to professionalize and adopt a perhaps more corporate look. Thirdly, as the market for drivers became more demanding in terms of the risks involved, potential drivers incorporated new attitudes and strategies to attract employers. Before the times of high crime rates, not only were drivers less common but those who were around were also drivers in the more simple sense of the word. They needed to keep information safe, but the notion of protection itself was not as important. Drivers know that nowadays this is not sufficient. All of them recognize that their job is a dangerous one. ENV6 noted that he was regularly out at night and that he “needed to keep well awake... when driving A around, when she goes to a party or something like that”. Most drivers now must at the very least look like somewhat dangerous persons, to convey the possibility of violence and even have a certain ingrained belligerence. They must not be afraid to risk their personal integrity, or at least they should signal it convincingly. One employer even asked his driver (half-seriously) to make gestures that made him look like a bad person. Apparent physical strength is a good way of signalling this, but drivers also use body language and somewhat threatening behaviour towards others to signal this. I observed this countless times in Mexico City. A driver would be standing near the car of his boss while she had dinner and he would normally seem to be on the lookout and not very friendly, with a serious face, even a frown sometimes. A respectful but not particularly friendly attitude towards others seems to work best according to many observations I made. As is the case with many other properties, this one is only really known after many interactions.

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An example of this dynamic is the following story I was told by a driver (WNV9). While driving his boss home one day and only a few hundred metres from the house, he was very aggressively overtaken by a group of men in a truck, causing his boss to yell out and him to almost crash. At that moment, he thought they were being attacked or that it was an attempted kidnapping. Swerving violently he avoided the truck and left. Obscenities were exchanged between them and he drove his boss home. Upset about the incident, he and another driver working at the household quickly left to look for the men in the truck. They found them parked nearby, eating at a food stand. One of the drivers pulled out a gun he carried and both of them confronted the men who happened to be carrying machetes (a tool used at work for many Mexicans). The drivers threatened the men in the truck (some four of them according to the driver) to “be careful and watch out” who they were messing with. According to what he recalled, he said to them: “because if not, you or I, someone is going to die”; the men in the truck eventually backed down and left. The drivers returned home and *told their boss about this*. This deeply angered the employer, but in a sense it also reassured him regarding the loyalty of his employees. What the driver was signalling to his employer by telling him this story was that he had the potential to use violence when necessary in the employer’s defence, even if it meant compromising his own safety. He was basically signalling that he was not afraid to die in a confrontation. While in this case there could always be the possibility that the driver was connected to the would-be kidnappers but pretended not to be - thus a mimic - it seems unlikely that if that was the case they would have failed so blatantly in kidnapping the boss. In any case what the drivers were doing was strategically signalling to their boss (by telling him, true or not, of the event) that they took his security seriously.



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During the hiring process it is easy to establish presence through physical traits and, as we have seen, through other easy-to-acquire goods, such as a suit. The employers can also trust that the employee will have some prior information about them and also that he will have some experience in character-judging from his prior experience in the driver market, should he have any (Spence 1974).

*Family.* I mention this because employers give it some importance when deciding whether to hire a person. I refer specifically to the issue of having children. It is regularly thought that men with children will have larger incentives to worry about the future since they have more responsibilities. In this sense, it is believed, they will find it harder to betray their employer and jeopardize their long-term prospects. For the purposes of this chapter, having a family is an asset for the driver but is also an asset for a potential mimic as well. Also, a driver having a family is no guarantee that they will actually care about it but it is a good measure to consider when assessing the risk of hiring someone. When confronted with drivers of equal skills and more or less similar CVs, employers will normally hire the one with the family as I explained in the last chapter. However, signalling this is straightforward and costless if a driver has a family, but it is costly if he does not. Faking having children would be complicated. One could potentially produce photos and fake birth certificates, even present an associate's children as one's own but this would be too costly given the likelihood anyone would be hired just because they have a family. More importantly, having children is something that employees do not really link with getting the job. They do, however, link it to a certain behaviour they deem more responsible. Most drivers do feel the responsibility of having

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children and seek financial stability. Interviewees WV1, WV2, WNV5, WNV6 and WNV7, all family men, mentioned that having children increased the importance of a good job and a steady income. WNV3 spoke of “moving to the City... so my children could get educated... I have given an education to my daughter...” This shows the clear importance of a job in these terms. Thus, my fieldwork found consistencies between the expectation of employers about the effects of this particular property and how drivers and other employees perceive the effect that having children has on their job situations and the importance they put on keeping said job.

*Geographical origins.* As mentioned earlier in the thesis, men from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca are said to make the best bodyguards. They have a reputation for loyalty, ferocity and bravery. How well deserved this reputation is may be up for debate. Oaxaca is indeed a land with a Wild West feeling, ruled by a subnational authoritarian regime where violence is high compared to other states. At least one guerrilla group operates there. Research specifically on the *Oaxacos*, as they are known outside their state, could potentially confirm this reputation. In general, however, people from the interior have a mixed reputation, likely fed by centuries of rivalry, prejudice and historical regionalisms. On the one hand, they are seen both by employers and fellow employees as naive and therefore easily duped. WNV2 spoke like this of people from the interior: *“and many come from afar, from the interior and well they don’t even know the things that happen here in the City”*. That said, this perception seems to be aimed more at women than at men and sexist preconceptions of women probably help form these views. Interestingly, Mexico City is a city

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of immigrants. Many of its inhabitants were not born there or are the children of people who came looking for a better life, especially in the 1940s and 1950s (Knight 1990). Employees make no special effort to signal where they come from. Of all the employees I interviewed, close to half came from other states. No particular state was over-represented. While most mention their origin voluntarily, they do not see it (at least when it concerns themselves) as relevant.

*Clean Record/Drivers Licence.* Producing official-looking documentation is very easy in Mexico as it is very cheap to fake any kind of document, from a university degree to a drivers licence. As I explained in the last chapter, anyone can go to the old city centre and there, in the *Santo Domingo* plaza, one can have relatively easy access to fake documents. This is why not much weight is given by either employers or potential drivers to documentation. The informal and illegal environment in the City, or the fact that much takes place “under the shadow of the law” (Dixit 2004), makes this situation a very real one. It is a legal requirement to have a drivers licence in Mexico for insurance purposes and to drive a vehicle, so all drivers must produce one. Getting a licence is a simple and straightforward process in Mexico City; one only needs to go to the licence office (there are many all over the City), pay a fee and receive a drivers licence. No driving test is necessary, no questions are asked<sup>39</sup>. The licence and any other documentation such as a police certificate therefore have little value in this interaction.

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<sup>39</sup> There used to be a written test requirement, which the candidate had to take every time she renewed her licence, at least every five years. Because of rampant corruption in the licence offices (people would pay to skip the test), the local government decided to abolish the test and make the licences permanent, effectively making the drivers licence office into a copy centre and a cash cow for the government.

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### 5.3 When the Relationship Breaks Down

The focus of this dissertation has been on the hiring process for drivers and how they and their employers solve the problems of trust through signalling mechanisms. The times when these relationships break down, while not central to the analysis of these last two chapters, are of interest. Indeed on a first approach it is clear that kidnapping is what happens when the relationship breaks down, these are the hard to interview negative cases. Kidnapping occurs on two specific occasions: 1) when a mimic successfully fools an employer and gets hired; and 2) when good employees themselves fall prey to criminals who pressure them into divulging information. In the first scenario, we know what happens; the mimic gets the information needed to carry out the kidnapping, transmits such information to his peers and colleagues and the crime takes place. In the second one, an honest driver (or any other employee) is threatened by criminals into giving them information through different mechanisms. I described cases such as this one in Chapter 3. However, beyond these two situations there are times when the relationship becomes unsustainable and breaks down. These relationships break down when there is a perception from the employer that the employee is no longer trustworthy, evidenced, for example, by excessive absenteeism or perceived carelessness. When the employee stops displaying some of the necessary signals, employers become suspicious. If employees become less cooperative or their appearance deteriorates it is sometimes taken to be a sign that something is amiss. It is not common that, once into the relationship, the break-up will come from the employee's side, especially if other members of his/her family work in the household. When breakdown occurs, the employer tends to provide a monetary pay-off to the employee as the relationship terminates,

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apparently in an attempt to buy future loyalty. If that is the case, the fact that other members of the family work in the household helps maintain this.

On the side of the employee, sometimes they will not “click” with the employer’s way of doing things, they may be too strict or too neurotic for them. In this case, if the employee is honest and quits, informing the employer of his reasons (without of course being too direct or insulting), there is normally no harm done and the search for a driver begins again. It is in the best interest of both parties that the relationship ends well. Employers do not want angry former employees and employees do not want to harm the reputation of their recommenders, as they will soon be in the job market again. Employees who leave their jobs angry may be seen as a liability by their old bosses as they may have fewer doubts about using their information for criminal purposes. In many of the cases I interviewed the employer will make efforts to carry out the severance of the relationship in good terms even if he/she is unhappy about the employee’s behaviour. The idea at work there is that once the relationship is over the employee will not have incentives to act in a bad way. This can be done through a severance pay that is generous and also by avoiding conflict purposely by the employer. As mentioned earlier there is an attitude of avoidance of conflict in the termination of the relationship that, assuming most drivers and most employees are honest, serves both their interests. This clearly is not always the case and acrimonious terminations may happen. In this situation both actors need to display the appropriate muscle in order to get what they want. Employers may signal their ability to have access to police and other resources the employee does not – as mentioned earlier in this thesis inequality in access to

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justice means that a legal case supported by an employer may prosper even if unfounded – and employees may also try to represent how unsafe it is for the employee to treat them poorly. Even in this case a small scale *détente* may ensue where both players may back down knowing that the other has strong cards to play against them. Much more research into the breakdown would be needed to ascertain the full veracity of these claims.

#### **5.4: Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to look at how the employee or prospective driver contributes to the resolution of the trust problems during the hiring process. I have described in detail what the tools are that they use to acquire a job and how they choose to display signals that tell their future bosses that they are the real thing. Not surprisingly, considering that hiring is a process that has been repeated many times over a long period, we see a certain degree of harmony between what the employees now display and what the employers want to see. This is evidence of a cognitive process that has developed over time on both sides of the relationship. It is clear that, in most cases, employers and employees will find each other and that in most cases the relationship will be successful. The drop in the rate of kidnappings of wealthy people may serve as evidence of this success. A risky environment has forced employers to explore what signs to look for when assessing a driver's trustworthiness and potential drivers have devised ways to signal to their future employees that they can be trusted. Complex signals such as membership of a reputable family have developed over time and are purposely displayed by those who have access to this secure

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network. This process has been almost organically devised to close the door on mimics/kidnappers and make wealthy people safer and workers' jobs more secure.

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## Chapter 6:

### Conclusions and Questions for the Future

#### 6.1: Motivations

This dissertation was borne out of a desire to explore the impact of kidnapping on Mexican society. Crime in many variants is a problem that besets most countries in Latin America and Mexico is, sadly, no exception to this. Information gathered from surveys shows that, during the last ten years, crime and unemployment/economic growth have been the top two concerns for Latin Americans. In fact, in many countries of the region, concern about crime and security is the citizens' top concern, trumping employment and economic issues. In Mexico, crime comes second only to economic issues of employment and stability (Latinobarometro 2009). This reflects a situation in which some of the basic concerns of citizens in Latin America, such as personal safety and protection of one's property as well as the provision of a dignified life, are not being sufficiently addressed by governments today. During my first 29 years as an inhabitant of Mexico City, I personally witnessed the rise in crime described in this dissertation and many of the changes this brought about. The changes the City has undergone defy description. Its population has not significantly increased in those years (it sits at around 8 million with a total of 21 million in the Greater Mexico City area) and yet the social dynamics of the City and its inhabitants, its ecology and its socioeconomic composition, have seen important changes. I witnessed the privatization and ultimate loss of public spaces to crime and the fear it generates. During this time, crime became prevalent, especially in middle- and upper-class areas of the City, and is now part and



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parcel of everyday life. I also witnessed how individuals began trying to deal with this problem in many different ways. As the environment changed, so did people's attitudes and habits. Kidnapping then made an *en force* appearance (although as we have seen it never really left after the 1970s) in the decade of the 1990s and soon became one of the most talked about topics in the country. Kidnappers during this time became almost larger than life figures, true embodiments of the ultimate evil and of people's worst fears. The exploits of kidnappers such as the infamous Earchopper became daily fodder for the media and a blemish on the government's reputation. The crime itself, kidnapping, showcased many of the Mexican state's most salient shortcomings in terms of its ability to protect its own citizens from what is arguably a preventable terrible fate. This was because of the particular characteristics of the crime in terms of media attention, the fear it generates in citizens, the clear and endlessly proven involvement of agents of the State in it and the very public debate about it that resulted<sup>40</sup>. My interest in this crime emanated from these observations. News of wealthy people being kidnapped and also hearing stories from friends and acquaintances became more and more common and created an environment that became heavy with fear for some people<sup>41</sup>. The available evidence spoke of a change in kidnapping. Wealthy victims seemed to be targeted less and kidnapping in poorer areas of the City was on the rise (KNRD 2009).

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<sup>40</sup> There is now important social pressure to implement the death penalty in Mexico, mostly due to kidnapping.

<sup>41</sup> Some people I spoke to (OF6, OF3) did not voice much concern over this, and there is among a certain part of the population a feeling that, beyond common sense precautions, there is not much one can do to avoid being a victim. A certain fatalistic view also allows people not to care much about it and in this sense they argue that they need to go out, work and carry on with their lives so they try not to think about it too much.

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Furthermore, one very interesting fact I found that ignited my curiosity was that, according to authorities, about 70% of kidnappings in Mexico are facilitated by either a family member of the victim or a close collaborator such as an employee (PGJDF 2008). This fact in itself puzzled me very much. While some may agree with Douglas Coupland (2001) that all families are psychotic, and also know that crime does happen within families, I believe that the level of organization and deceit involved in organizing the kidnapping of a member of one's family went beyond any crime of passion, fraud or likewise. Unfortunately, in the end I had to settle for researching employees as family kidnappings proved impossible to work on at this time. I realized too that very little has been written on kidnapping in Mexico, a strange thing since it figures so much in the collective imagination. While some attempts have been made to analyse this phenomenon, they were few and far between, as well as of questionable academic rigour. They mostly come from organized social groups and NGOs and while they are certainly important documents in denouncing and challenging this crime, they lacked a methodological approach that would validate them as academic work. The task was not an easy one; data on kidnapping is inconsistent and not very trustworthy at the best of times. Kidnapping is a very sensitive topic that people may not be able or willing to discuss for a research project. Indeed, one faces a challenge of trust right here as some interviewees voiced doubts about my intentions (ENV11 and two more people who refused to be interviewed due to this). However, this topic gave rise to very interesting questions that I thought were worth taking the risk to answer. I began asking myself how, in the absence of effective protection from the State, citizens protect themselves from crime. How do they negotiate risks that are many times almost unavoidable? How do potential victims design *survival strategies* that are successful enough that they enable them to go about their daily

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lives as safely as possible? More specifically in relation to this dissertation, how do wealthy people hire their employees knowing that they could well pose a risk to their security and that of their family? I was interested in individual-level responses to these questions and was thus interested in trying to dig out, from individuals themselves, these survival strategies. This dissertation is an attempt to do this.

Thus, the central question I addressed was: how do potential victims design and negotiate survival strategies that protect them from being victims of kidnapping? In order to practically manage the central question, I posed the following sociological puzzle as a guide for the design of a research agenda: *how do wealthy people in Mexico City design and implement survival strategies to avoid being kidnapped? Moreover why are wealthy people in Mexico City more successful at avoiding kidnapping today than members of other social classes?*

Departing from that single question, I presented an analysis on three fronts:

- 1) I presented the dynamics and history of kidnapping in Mexico City.
- 2) I explored the mechanisms that wealthy people in Mexico City use to protect themselves from crime and kidnapping in particular; and
- 3) I analysed the impact of this phenomenon on relationships based on trust at the household level for this particular social class, focusing on the hiring process of drivers in wealthy households in Mexico City.

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## 6.2: The Toolkit and Hypotheses

Signalling theory, trust and certain parts of transaction cost economics, namely the idea of vertical integration, provided me with a very fitting theoretical toolbox to answer the questions posed in the research design. Apart from a thick description of the survival strategies of elites in Mexico, I wanted to understand how potential employers decide whether they can hire a person  $X$  applying for a job with them. In other words, I wanted to know how they decide if the person applying for the job can be trusted to protect their information and not give it away to kidnappers or not be kidnappers themselves. Basically, I wanted to know how employers solve the two basic problems of trust (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001). When confronted with the decision to hire someone to work in their homes, employers face a typical trust decision. First, they must figure out if the person in front of them asking for a job is actually who he says he is. Then they must figure out if the signals that tell him that the person in front of him is honest are actually real or a front put up by a fake. Good, noble drivers will want to make the employer believe they are just that; the problem for the potential employer is that kidnappers or bad drivers (mimics) want to do exactly the same.

Signalling theory allowed me to examine these micro decision-making processes and pinpoint the specific mechanisms through which these decisions are made and trust given. More specifically, it allowed me to identify the exact mechanisms by which employers decide if a driver is the real deal or not. A hiring process normally has many unknowns. The actors in the relationship have little information about each other and have often never met before

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(Spence 1974). Signalling helps these actors solve a very basic problem of communication (Gambetta 2009). By looking for specific, costly-to-mimic signs of different properties, employers could reduce the risk inherent in hiring a new person to work in their household. Using signalling as a framework for the dissertation allowed me the depth of individual-level analysis that was needed for this research project. Signalling theory has never been applied, to the best of my knowledge, to the context of Mexico, a context of low state-backed contract enforcement and very high levels of informality, as well as high crime rates. It is, in short, an environment of many uncertainties. Using signalling theory as a tool of analysis here opens the door to new explorations of exactly how people carry out their business as usual in a context where the State does not protect citizens' interest fully, or at least does so in a very unequal manner. In an environment of high crime and informality, efficient signalling and communication flows (Spence 1974) acquire a newfound importance when the wrong choice can, and indeed has had, life or death implications.

Vertical integration (Williamson 2005) also provided a possible answer to the puzzle of survival strategies. Based on the economic decision of whether to buy or make, vertical integration applied to the households provided a way of understanding how wealthy potential victims protect themselves. In this case, the employers vertically integrate their employees, in effect locking them in through full-time employment. This ideally reduced the risks of them being in contact with criminals or having to look for money somewhere else. By doing this with family units (when many members of the family work in the same household), the employer guarantees more control and a safer result. As I have mentioned before both

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approaches have some limitations in the extent to which they may be able to help us understand the richness of detail that this set of relations have. However they allow us to understand, through the use of mid-range theories, how and why employers hire and through what mechanisms they choose who to hire.

Based on these empirical puzzles and theoretical tools, four *hypotheses* were presented:

- 1) Kidnapping has forced employers to perfect their hiring practices through a cognitive process.
- 2) Kidnapping has meant that protection and security are the main concerns of the employer when hiring.
- 3) Both employers and employees will try to solve this problem by engaging in a signalling game. Employees will try to signal certain properties of trustworthiness that the employer actively looks for. These will be cheap enough to emit for the employees who have them, but too costly for those who do not, given the benefit prospective employees can acquire from displaying them if the employer believes them.
- 4) Employers will try to further minimize the risk of kidnapping by vertically integrating their household employees.

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In order to address this puzzle, I designed and implemented a qualitative research agenda that took me to Mexico City for the best part of a year (2008-2009). I centred the fieldwork on one of the City's richest neighbourhoods where, until recently, many people were being kidnapped. The name of the neighbourhood is *Polanco* and it is one of the wealthiest areas in Mexico City and indeed in Mexico as a whole. The fieldwork consisted of two main avenues of research. On the one hand, I re-constructed the history of kidnapping through interviews and secondary source research. Because of the lack of hard data on kidnapping, I designed and constructed a database of news reports about kidnapping. The database covers a period of twelve years (1995-2008) and includes about 1,800 news reports that include the word *kidnapping* (*secuestro* in Spanish) from two national newspapers. The items in the database include news reports, press releases by government agencies, interviews with authorities, opinion pieces, investigative journalism and other articles. The process of gathering the data was, in itself, a very interesting lesson in history and took up a large amount of time. This database was a very useful tool in constructing the historical part of the dissertation and also in providing further evidence of the arguments I presented. Concomitantly, I conducted interviews with wealthy individuals, kidnapping victims, household employees and a number of government agents involved in the fight against kidnapping. The interviews allowed me to investigate the personal motivations and cognitive processes of individuals when dealing with the context described above. The results of this fieldwork are discussed below.

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### 6.3: A New History of Kidnapping in Mexico

The first product to come from this dissertation, and one that is a first in Mexico, is a short and historically accurate narrative of kidnapping during the modern history of Mexico in the period 1960-2009. While Ortega (2009) produces an attempt at recounting the history of this crime, he does so from a political standpoint and with little or no analysis. The narrative I constructed here reveals the historical development of kidnapping without the politics and in a methodologically sound manner. Through an extensive literature review, interviews and the use of the KNRD, I was able to construct the recent history of this crime. Kidnapping first made an appearance in the late 1960s as a political tool used by certain radical left-wing organizations to raise much needed money for their struggles and also as a form of protest. The late 1960s were a very politically active time in Mexico. Social movements were forcefully demanding democratic openness and human rights. As a response to government repression, some of these organizations took up armed struggle and headed for the countryside, while others remained in the cities. These groups carried out kidnappings of important businessmen and politicians (even going as far as kidnapping the father-in-law of the President at one point). In the beginning, the government's response was to pay up and negotiate the hostages' freedom. This was a costly mistake that made these radical groups realize that kidnapping was a profitable affair. It was not until the murder of one of Mexico's most respected and important business moguls that this policy changed. The government attacked these groups with all its (not inconsiderable) power and eventually destroyed most of them (though not all of them). In any case, kidnapping as a political tool was abandoned. Then the bad news began.



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During the presidency of José López Portillo (1976-1982), a period of extreme corruption in the police force of Mexico City under the auspices of Gen. Arturo Durazo led to the formation of a number of criminal gangs made up of current and former members of the police force who regularly engaged in robbery, kidnapping and extortion. These were the first organized gangs to use kidnapping with *only* an economic motivation. They were highly organized, sometimes decentralized gangs. They targeted mostly rich businessmen in Mexico City and ranchers in the interior. Some of these gangs operated in a decentralized cell structure consistent with some terrorist organizations and organized crime groups (Reuter 1985; Sanderson 2004). Social pressure, especially from the wealthy, made the federal government react by designing a strategy to destroy these gangs. They created a secret elite police unit to deal with all kidnappings perpetrated by these gangs and also aided the local City Government in fighting this crime. Their plan succeeded and by the year 2000 most of these gangs were destroyed, their leaders dead or in prison. What happened next is also in line with Reuter's (1985) postulates regarding organized crime groups and their destruction by state forces. The void left by the old style professional gangs was rapidly filled by other less specialized and more opportunistic gangs that evolved from other crimes into kidnapping. The profile of these newer gangs that began to take up kidnapping was different. They were mostly younger criminals with few prior connections to kidnapping and to the more sophisticated gangs of the past. Mexico's weak rule of law but relatively strong state meant that while the government succeeded in fighting some gangs, it failed to close the windows of opportunity that other younger gangs rose up to exploit this. This led to a scenario where more kidnappings were occurring, and because of the inexperience of some of the new gangs, more victims were dying. Newly available information sustains the

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hypotheses that wealthy people are being kidnapped less and that this crime's new victims are middle- and working-class people, which has had the above-mentioned results. By strategically making themselves harder targets through this period, the wealthy contributed, perhaps indirectly to this dynamic. If they had remained unprotected, as they were before, maybe it would have been easier to kidnap them even from the viewpoint of an inexperienced gang.

In Chapter 3, I presented preliminary evidence of this shift taken from the KNRD, triangulated with data from the City Government and interviews with law enforcement personnel, including high-level prosecutors at the city level. New information reinforces the shift argument; Vilalta and Fondevila (Forthcoming 2011) find that most interviewed kidnappers in jail started off as thieves and robbers, further reinforcing the argument that they are no longer professional kidnappers. Indeed, the authors found that 89% of the kidnappers interviewed actually had a legitimate job at the time of their arrest, mostly in construction or factory work, which points to them being unprofessional criminals. The study also reveals that, in total since 2002, the kidnappers jailed made around 42 million pesos in ransoms, or 2.1 million pounds. If we remind ourselves that, in the 1990s, the average ransom started at around 156 thousand pounds, we could say that less than 10 kidnappings would have made the aforementioned total of 1.2 million pounds. Vilalta and Fondevila interview over 200 kidnappers; even if some belong to the same gang, the number of probable kidnappings between all of them is higher and, if they all pooled 1.2 million pounds together, then it is clear that their kidnappings have had lower payoffs in the 2000s than in

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the 1990s. This could also point towards less wealthy victims (more kidnappings for less money). All this information points towards this shift in the behaviour of kidnapping being real; however, more information is needed to ascertain this in a scientifically sound manner. While it is still too early to confirm 100% that this shift has taken place, further research will, I believe, no doubt confirm it. I present as much evidence as was available to me at the time of research.

To conclude, Chapter 3 presented to the reader a historical overview of the crime of kidnapping using a number of mixed sources. One of the most interesting results of this process is the discovery of new directions in the behaviour of this crime. Counter-intuitively it would seem that now the majority of the victims of kidnapping are not wealthy individuals, capable of paying large ransoms, but rather middle- and working-class people who have few resources to pay a substantial ransom. Another interesting finding is the fact that it was actually the City Government, through its police forces, that was responsible for the first wave of kidnapping by protecting and supporting criminal behaviour within its ranks. This chapter allows us to trace the evolution back to the days of authoritarian rule and high corruption of the 1980s, when the Mexico City police was at it worst. This chapter also set the stage for the development of the second part of the thesis, where I analysed in detail the survival strategies of wealthy people in the City, focusing in the end on their hiring strategies for household employees, namely drivers. In two empirical chapters, I described and analysed the relationship between employer and employee and focused on the hiring process as a problem of trust. The core of the analysis looked at the hiring process of household

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employees in Mexico City and how both employers and employees solve the problems of trust when going through this particular process, taking into consideration the security issues raised by kidnapping.

#### **6.4: Survival Strategies**

Chapter 4 of this dissertation described and analysed the survival strategies of wealthy elites in Mexico City, as well as the decision-making process by which a person is hired under specific circumstances of insecurity and need of protection. I focussed in this section on the employers. This chapter was based largely on interviews and its findings confirm my original hypotheses. I discovered that, through a cognitive process that took many years, wealthy elites devised a set of strategies that helped them deal with the risk of kidnapping. These strategies can be divided into three main levels. First, at the *community level*, wealthy communities organized themselves to achieve two goals: 1) to alternatively negotiate with and threaten the government into protecting them more and 2) to collectively deal with the threats they were facing. The process of negotiating and threatening the government (a carrot and stick approach) allowed elites to use their economic and political power to secure an outcome they desired from the government. If one viewed this in a more radical way, it would seem as if Marx's view of the State as the representative of the interests of the bourgeoisie is correct (Marx 1906/2009). Although I will not go deeper into what can be a risky assertion, it seems that the elite did indeed find a way of getting what they wanted from the government in this particular case. The choice between carrot and stick was often dependent on what specifically triggered the interaction with the State. Violent acts such as

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the kidnapping of a member of the community brought about a stick approach, as evidenced in the threats from the Jewish community towards the government. More mundane things, such as wanting more lights on their streets, were approached with a carrot. By the same token, these communities organized themselves into formal and informal organizations that had as their main goal dealing with the issue of crime and, sometimes (as in the case of CAS), directly with kidnapping. These strategies were quite successful, as is evidenced by the fact that those communities (such as the Spanish and Jewish) were indeed targeted less by kidnapers as time went by. This chimes with the idea that communities learned from past experiences and decided to protect themselves proactively and, more importantly, strategically. The fact that they have access to vast resources also meant that they were able to, in this case, play an active part alongside the government in their own protection. Lower social classes do not have access to these resources or influence, which may explain why they became more common victims of kidnapping, as indeed they have historically been of other crimes. The middle and working classes cannot pressure the government as effectively as the elites do. Protests largely go unnoticed by political elites and the environment of strong inequalities that pervades Mexican society, as well as corruption, ensures that access to justice and security is not egalitarian but is reserved for those who can afford it (Holston 2007; Zepeda 1994).

Second, at the *family level*, elites also learned to alter their behaviour in order to avoid being victimized. Many wealthy families in Mexico went through a stage of privatization of their spaces and activities. They also modified their behaviour by limiting their outside

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movements. Life became, for some, somewhat limited in scope as they were forced (or believed they were) to avoid certain behaviours like going out late at night alone, or avoiding certain parts of the City. While this may seem normal in any city, what makes this different is that these would be places where they had been able to go to in the past or behaviours they used to display. Arms, bodyguards and armoured cars are also common means of protection. These also added a significant cost to their expenses (armouring a car at least doubles the original cost of the car), but were sometimes seen as an unavoidable expense. These are all risk-managing strategies. Individuals have a belief that implementing them will make their chances of being a victim more manageable. They know also that there is a good chance they will be victims one day but, as was said in many of the interviews I did, until that day an armoured car or a skipped outing provides them with peace of mind. There is a constant fear of crime in all the people I spoke to; it is experienced to varying degrees, but it is always there and these strategies provide individuals with the mental calm to make the most of their lives. Despite all this, and this is a good finding, life goes on, people try to assume the cost and get on with their lives. The highest cost to pay is to be afraid to go about one's business and life for fear of being victimized.

Thirdly, the *individual level* takes us to the more analytical part of the thesis. In this part, I looked at the hiring process for drivers, drawing mainly from the interviews but also from observations in the field and my experience as a researcher living in Mexico City. Gambetta and Hamill (2005) divide their taxi driver's actions into precautions, screening and probing. The first two sets of strategies described here can be linked to the *precautions* section. They

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involve specific actions taken independently outside of any specific relationship in order to avoid victimization. These precautions are strategic, in that they actively seek to reduce the risk individuals perceive to be under as potential victims.

### **6.5: Hiring and the Signalling of Trust**

One question that might arise regarding the hiring process is why do people in Mexico have to do anything different when hiring a nanny or driver than people in the United Kingdom or Sweden? Would it not be sensible to be very careful in any case regardless of place? The short answer to this is yes. One should always be careful when hiring a person who will have the keys to your home and be with your children mostly unsupervised for long periods of time. It is only sensible to do so. However, Mexico and countries like it face extra challenges that make this decision more sensitive. On the one hand the issues faced by Swedish employers are less. Swedish crime rates attest to this, the odds of an honest citizen of facing a criminal in Sweden are lower than in Mexico City. To put it bluntly, the odds of a London family being duped into hiring a kidnapper instead of a real nanny are slim, or at least substantially slimmer than they are in Mexico. On the other hand, but tied loosely together to the previous point, the U.K. and Sweden have a strong rule of law. A contract between a nanny and her employers in both countries may indeed be defaulted upon; however, in those countries it is more likely than it is in Mexico that the grieving part in question would get a fair hearing in the courts. This is not so in Mexico.

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The results of the research I carried out in Mexico City support the hypotheses I proposed in the introduction to this dissertation. On a first level, I argued that employers had devised hiring strategies that would help minimize the risk of being kidnapped. Second, protection of information and of the family's safety was a vital ingredient in the hiring process. Thirdly, I argued that, through signalling, both employers and employees tried to solve the problem of trust inherent in the lack of information in a hiring process. Finally, I argued that vertical integration would be an optimal complement to these strategies. The evidence gathered supports these hypotheses. All the employers interviewed said at some point that one of the most important, if not the most important, value they looked for in a driver was the capacity to protect the family's interests and safety. They also perceive themselves as potential victims and act accordingly, even if they claim not to really care about crime<sup>42</sup>. In terms of hiring, I first identified the trust-warranting properties that employers look for and then "unpack(ed) the knowledge and reasoning behind their choice of these properties" (Gambetta and Hamill 2005: 193). Because the hiring process described here is more protracted than the process of selecting a passenger is for a taxi driver, employers can screen for different, more hidden properties such as honesty or even generosity. In this particular case, there are only two possible equilibriums that may result from the signalling process. On the one hand, I found a set of signals that produce pooling equilibriums - when both honest and dishonest drivers may signal this property if they have it - and on the other semi-sorting ones, where all honest

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<sup>42</sup> An example of this is interviewee ENV11, who claimed not to care much about crime and went out a lot, even at night, whilst doing it in a bulletproof, fully sealed BMW. He told of being stopped by police on his way home one night; suspicious of them, he locked his car and refused to come out or open his car (he had done nothing improper or illegal), only showing them his papers through the window. He said that after a while and very frustrated the policemen let him go. It is not possible to say if the police then had a good or bad intention, but it is a good example of the "security" that such a good brings to those who can afford it.



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drivers can display this signal, but some dishonest ones can too. Here I present a comprehensive list of the properties that employers screen for as they were discovered during fieldwork, as well as the kind of equilibriums they tend to produce:

**Table 1:**

**Properties and Type of Equilibrium Resulting**

| Property                          | Type of Signal/Equilibrium |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Member of Network over Non-Member | Semi-sorting               |
| Discrete over indiscrete          | Semi-sorting               |
| Men over women                    | Pooling                    |
| Physically large over small       | Pooling                    |
| With family over single           | Pooling                    |
| Middle-aged over old or too young | Pooling                    |
| Clean-cut over scruffy            | Pooling                    |
| Open over no disclosure           | Semi-sorting               |
| Helpful over lazy                 | Semi-sorting               |
| Generous with time over stingy    | Semi-sorting               |
| Honest over dishonest             | Semi-sorting               |

These are the main properties screened for during the hiring process (and after in the case of more concealed properties). There are clearly other properties that the employer could screen for (geographical issues such as neighbourhood of provenance, health records etc.); however, over time the ones mentioned here have been selected by most employers as

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signals of trustworthiness and a kind of guarantee of safety for their families and information. The employers know that this is not an exhaustive list, just as well as they know that these only serve to minimize the risk for their household. They are very aware of the fact that there is no 100% safe bet, but they strategically choose these properties to make their odds in the hiring lottery (Spence 1974) better.

As I mention in Chapter 4, employers have a choice of what kind of employer they wish to be. Most of the employers I interviewed were of the benevolent type. They were well aware of their employees' worth and took care to maintain a good relationship with them over time. They tended to help them out in times of need (especially those who had a long-standing relationship) and treated them well in terms of pay and work demands. There is, however, another option. Employers may choose to be "bad employers"; they may be aggressive or distant and harsh with their employees in the hopes that, through fear of their economic power, the employees will cooperate with them and do their jobs well. I did not find many of these "rule by fear" Machiavellian-type employers. They may be a dying breed, leftovers from a more feudal attitude towards people not perceived as being of the same class. Those employers may well have already been selected out of the networks (Hedström and Bearman 2009) through having a bad reputation. A selection mechanism works over time to remove from a pool those agents that lack a certain property or characteristic that is valued for that interaction. Because there is a limited amount of desirable drivers, most employers will seek to keep their own for a long period of time. In order to do this, there must be a cordial relationship. Vertical integration also makes this scenario more likely, as families become

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more involved with each other as employers and employees. Also, in most cases no employee will stay for long in an abusive or unpleasant work environment, leading to potential problems for the employer as his pool of drivers of quality is reduced over time, thus leading to drivers of less than ideal qualities having to be hired, exacerbating a potential risk. It is clear then, that employers will generally seek to establish a reputation for being at least decent employers. This assures them a number of things: 1) good employees will want to work with them; 2) other employers and people in their network will want to engage with them and/or recommend employees to them; 3) employees once hired will stay longer with them, reducing the risk of releasing an employee with all the information he has acquired over the period which he has worked in the household; and 4) they will reduce risk by locking in employees and by spending as little time as possible changing them. This also reduces the long-term cost of repeating the hiring process and all it entails many times over.

Gambetta and Hamill (2005) raise an interesting point regarding statistical discrimination (Arrow 1998 cited in Gambetta and Hamill 2005). Phillips and Phillips (1993), assert that, during hiring processes in firms, the employers will use easily observable characteristics to categorize and statistically discriminate against certain types of candidates. Thus, they may use gender, ethnicity or age to limit the pool of candidates as they believe that a certain group (e.g. “young people”) may have some characteristics that are undesirable for the position. In the case analysed in this thesis, there is some evidence of this, mostly to do with gender but also related to physical attributes and presence, as well as network membership. Due to the fact that many of the attributes screened for are not readily observable, it is more difficult to

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statistically discriminate against someone based on the majority of the properties employers give importance to, such as honesty and generosity. However, employers do statistically discriminate along a number of lines: 1) gender, all drivers are male and women are not really encouraged to search for these jobs; 2) Network membership, this is another relatively easier to observe property based upon which employers discriminate. In no case did I encounter anyone who got a job, or looked for one, outside their intimate social network; and 3) a clean-cut appearance is used to separate possible candidates (once they have proven their membership of the social network) from undesirable ones.

Using this logic I can, following Gambetta and Hamill (2005), construct the ideal driver type. He will have the following characteristics: *Male, physically strong, middle-aged, with children or at least married, clean-cut, open and honest, helpful and discrete and, very importantly, he will be a member of the employer's network.* Interestingly, some of the characteristics that lend themselves to statistical discrimination, especially gender and size, or in other words most pooling signals, are also associated with criminals. Although some kidnapers are female, the vast majority are male and judging from images gathered of kidnapers, many are also large or at least not small. However, most are not clean-cut or have a particularly attractive appearance<sup>43</sup> (KNRD 2009). Vilalta and Fondevila (forthcoming 2011), in a three-wave survey of incarcerated criminals, interviewed a total of 232 kidnapers. They find that the average kidnapper is a male of over 35 years of age, which is very consistent with the age

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<sup>43</sup> This observation is based on photos of kidnapers being “presented to the press” by police authorities and published in newspapers. While the objectivity of this is perhaps questionable, I believe it gives us a good idea of what they do look like.

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and gender properties that employers look for. This would point towards a weakness in their hiring strategies. If the ideal kidnapper is a male of 40, then the best way to avoid being duped into hiring one would be to hire a female driver, or no one at all. Why do employers not do this? Surely this would be the safest bet. This apparent irony tells us a lot about how signalling mechanisms function in the real world. First, it points to the fact that there is no fully sorting equilibrium ever attained in a relationship such as this one. Size or gender by themselves tell the employer very little about the person sporting those signs. Indeed, they may, under different circumstances, actually sound alarm bells for the employer. This points to the fact that the value of signals and signs and the message they convey may be very different from one case and context to the next and that trustworthy signals in one case may be signs of the opposite in another. Trust in the case of hiring a driver is warranted under a *composite* of various properties, none of which is fully sorting (Gambetta 2009). Each of these properties has a precise part to play in the process, and most are necessary but not sufficient to gain employment. In all interactions that assume some sort of risk (such as employment), these *composites of properties* allow those in the relationship to know beforehand the right combination of signs to look for and thus save time and resources. Developing over time a working composite proven to work over a number of situations makes the decision-making process easier, as well as making the cost of gathering information for all parties involved less. I believe the *membership in a network* property seeks to minimize the risk of hiring a male while maximizing the benefits in terms of presence and future protection from attack of having a male as a driver. Indeed, the fact that men self select for the driver market and that few women enter into it at all makes this point

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moot, as employers do not have a large choice regarding the gender of those they choose to hire.

As was exposed initially by Spence (1974), employers in the job market have an advantage (for example over taxi drivers) because they have more time to make their decision and this may also allow them to have access to information that could be helpful, or “public information” about the driver. In spite of this, they still need to make a hiring decision within a reasonable amount of time. Spence argues that, at this point, the employer’s past experience in the job market may prove helpful. In many cases (actually in all I interviewed), employers already had experience hiring and this helped them decide when to hire someone or not. Employers agree that after a while “they learn” to read people better and see what kind of person may spell trouble, such as someone who is uncomfortable disclosing information about himself. This experience is very valuable and, added to the protection acquired by hiring through a personal network, provides much more stability and better outcomes. As I argued, over time employers have strategically perfected the hiring process in order to minimize the risk of being victimized. The fact that, as I have stated, there seems to be less wealthy people being kidnapped lends at least partial support to my argument<sup>44</sup>. I will discuss in detail the main conclusions regarding the properties and their signs or their “sources of knowledge” (Gambetta and Hamill 2005: 203). The first five are made up of easy-to-observe signals or cues that are “costless to display for those who possess them” and,

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<sup>44</sup> As I explained in Chapter 3, the protection and hiring strategies of wealthy families are only one of the factors that explain the behaviour of kidnapping. I believe there is a limit to what informality can achieve and that these strategies on their own (especially only hiring) only go so far.

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in this sense, “reflect the separating equilibrium condition of signalling theory, which guarantees that truth is transmitted even when there is an interest to mimic” (Gambetta and Hamill 2005: 205). Often, these require no action on behalf of their possessors to be manifested. Having said this, it is important to stress that, because of the protracted nature of the hiring process, cues are important but not as significant in categorizing a potential employee as other properties may be, although they do serve to make an initial approach and filtering and secure passage to the next level in the hiring game where other, hidden properties need to be signalled before the driver is to be hired.

- **Network Membership.** This is the closest to a fully sorting signal that could be found in this interaction (Gambetta 2009). Although still a semi-sorting equilibrium, its strong relationship to successful hiring is beyond doubt. In no circumstances did anyone hire a driver outside of their own personal network. A verbal recommendation from a close acquaintance or family member is the preferred signal for this, as it is close to impossible to fake. The fact that many kidnappings are organized by an employee makes this the most important of all properties. This filters out a large percentage of potential employees and makes the selection process much easier for the employer. Proving membership of a network like this requires little effort from the employer (and also for the employee who is indeed a member), which makes this a very cost-effective mechanism to expedite and make safer the hiring process. All employers interviewed during fieldwork had access to their drivers in this way, making it the most important mechanism in the process.

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- **Male.** Gender produces a pooling equilibrium. Once gender has been displayed and observed there is no more information being transmitted and as such the employer will have to keep looking for further signals. All interviewees prefer a male driver. During a hiring process, gender is impossible to mimic and very easily observable. The fact that almost all driver candidates are male makes this a less vital signal that does not get too much particular importance given to it by employers. Even so, males are also preferred over females because of the inherent male reputation to be better at the use of violence and also more intimidating to potential criminals. Many preconceptions and crude cultural stereotypes of women fuel these conceptions as well. Mexico is famously a land of macho culture, where women are routinely discriminated against; this is reflected in the job market in the resilience of “male only” professions. Of course, it should be stated that not many women would actually like to be a driver, perhaps for the same reasons. Once again, no interviewee spoke of a preference for female drivers. I recorded a very clear gender division in household work; women are normally in charge of household tasks such as cleaning or cooking and men monopolize the market for other activities such as driving and gardening.
  - **Large/muscular.** This is also a self-evident property and generates a pooling equilibrium (Gambetta 2009). Height and width may potentially be mimicked by a skilled disguise-maker, but would be impossible to sustain in the long term. This is given some importance by employers who feel that a large man is more intimidating than a short one. It is actually an example of the employee trying to send out a signal to potential criminals. A big driver signals to those who see him physical strength and



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perhaps fitness, which can be deterrents for anyone seeking to victimize the employer. Such qualities are a sign that he is well protected. On the other hand, smaller thinner men display a comparative weakness which employers may be reluctant to display. This is not to say that smaller men cannot be good at dishing out violence (as indeed some are), but in terms of image and signal display they do have a handicap that employers are wary of.

- Age. Middle-aged men are generally preferred and this also produces a pooling equilibrium. This is consistent with a view that young men (in their 20s or early 30s) are more prone to betray their employers by engaging in illegal activities. This contradicts evidence from Vilalta and Fondevila's study (Forthcoming 2011) that states that most kidnappers are around 35 years old. As with other easily observable traits, this is only a first filter in the hiring process. A male of these characteristics will be chosen over others when this is compounded with other observable traits. Thus a small 40-year-old man has less of a chance at being hired than a large 40-year-old man, and this one has less of a chance than a large 40-year-old man with a family and so on. The more of these properties a person has, the more likely he is to be hired. As far as older people are concerned, the story differs. They do not get hired for the same reasons as smaller men do not get hired. An old man gives the impression of frailty that may not be enough to scare off a potential attack. An old man with a gun is potentially more dangerous than a young one without a weapon but, since most interviewees agreed they were not keen on having guns around, they prefer the deterrent effect of a fit younger man.

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- Clean-cut. This is yet another pooling equilibrium generated by an easily observable characteristic of the employee. Criminals in Mexico have a reputation for being scruffy and not very presentable. True or false, this is a notion that informs the employers' perceptions of what an honest person looks like. Thus, a clean-cut image will help in the hiring process. However, this property is easy to mimic; a kidnapper or other criminal only needs to get a bath, a haircut and a shave and buy a suit to look presentable. Therefore, while being clean-cut will not guarantee a job, I noticed in fieldwork that in no circumstance did any employer hire someone without this characteristic. Once again, this is compounded with other traits to make someone the ideal driver.
  - Family. Signalling that one has a family produces a pooling equilibrium. There are other considerations beyond this that the employer takes into account before hiring. Having a family is good but it certainly does not generate even a semi-sorting equilibrium. Employers prefer this property, as they see it as a proxy for responsibility. They figure, correctly most times, that a man with children and a wife will be less likely to betray them. A family man has potentially much more to lose from a one-off criminal act than he stands to gain from sustained honest work. Signalling this can be tricky, as we know that fake birth certificates and other official documents can be easy to obtain if one is so inclined. Thus, employers, as a form of screening, will at least seek to be introduced to a driver's family, sometimes going as far as either going to meet them at their home or sending a trusted employee to do so. Vertical integration may also help solve this problem by having all the family under one roof. In due course, many employers do meet their employee's family

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members at least once and this serves to strengthen the links between employer and employee.

- Discrete. When properly established, discretion may generate a semi-sorting equilibrium in this relationship. Indeed, employers may be willing to bypass some of the pooling equilibrium-generating signs in favour of this particular property, which is of more value to them. This is important to understanding the puzzle presented in this thesis. Discretion is perceived by employers as the best measure of how well the employee will guard important information about the family. Employers want someone who will not, under almost any circumstance, divulge their information, even to non-criminals. Discretion is the best way to measure this disposition. Employees look for references and also screen for this in the long term. Other trusted household employees may serve as grasses in this task, informing the employer of any indiscretion by the new arrival. Employers also look for inconsistencies in the employee's behaviour. Making too many phone calls may be a bad sign. Observing them talking to strangers on the street is one mechanism employers use to assess discretion, as they assume that anyone who will talk to anyone may at some point be tricked into giving away information. A driver that is too chatty may also be likened to an indiscrete person, as well as someone who parties too much or goes out drinking, as it is believed that drinking makes people boast about their job, or who they work with and how much money they have among other things. This is always an ongoing process and normally a dishonest person will slip up and reveal himself, as it is hard to fake discretion all the time. Vertical integration also serves a purpose here, because by having many members of the

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family employed the employer encourages self-policing by other members of the family of their less discrete members. Having a family vertically integrated may also reduce the possibility of information leaks, as they are all members of the same “team”.

- **Honesty and Disclosure** also produce a semi-sorting equilibrium (Gambetta 2009). A good mimic can pretend to disclose and to be honest for a period of time and thus signalling this property is important but a decision cannot be solely made on this basis. These not readily observable properties are given high levels of importance by employers. When a driver is willing to open up about his problems or indeed his qualifications, it is seen as a sign of “having nothing to hide”. Full disclosure as discussed in Chapter 5 helps explain the importance of these properties and their signals. These findings have some consistencies with the idea behind the “full disclosure principle” (Frank 1988). In the hiring context, drivers have incentives to disclose all their information, especially those with the best credentials, as exceptionally trained drivers are rare in a market that is full of average drivers. This forces all drivers to disclose their information, resulting in a better situation both for employers and for the best-qualified drivers, making the decision-making process more transparent for the employer. Documental evidence of credentials is demanded as a proof on most occasions. Employers demand letters and the contact details of former employers, and do regularly check those references. A reference from an unknown employer is normally regarded as less valuable than one from a person known to the employer, further strengthening the argument about the importance of social networks in this case. Openness about money or family problems, such as

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illness, is valued by employers, and often rewarded with help. To the employer, this signals a willingness to discuss important issues and a feeling that the employee has “nothing to hide”. In terms of mimicry, one could potentially fake a sick relative in order to get money from the employer. However, employers can get around this easily, offering to buy medicines themselves and/or taking the sick relative to their own doctor and thus avoiding giving out cash directly, although over the long term they may on occasion give cash once high levels of trust have been established.

- **Presence.** This is one of the most interesting aspects of the hiring process and one that produces an intermediate equilibrium (Gambetta 2009). The notion of presence was raised by all the employers I interviewed. It is a composite of physical and non-observable characteristics that employers look for that signal to them that the employee is their ideal type. The more tangible parts of this property are physical and easily displayed and have to do with gender, size and general appearance (hygiene, hairstyle etc.), all characteristics described above. These need to be complemented by a certain look, feeling or appearance that conveys two things: 1) a readiness to use violence or at least not to seem afraid of it; and 2) a countenance that inspires respect in others. This has to do with facial features and expressions as much as with attitudes and the way drivers carry themselves around. It is described as a property that makes a person stand out from others. Employers look for drivers with presence, because through it they themselves are signalling to potential attackers that they are well protected.

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- Efficiency is also one of the most important properties and one that may produce a semi-sorting equilibrium (Gambetta 2009). Doing tasks quickly with little use of resources is part of the screening process for the employers and one that goes on for a long time. Employers look for this because they need to know that, when something happens, the driver will do what it takes to solve it in the best possible manner. Signs of this are anticipating the employer's needs and doing things unasked quickly. For example, if something in the house needs fixing or the car's tank needs to be filled with petrol and the employee does what it takes to solve the problem without telling the employer and without interfering in other household duties, this is considered to be highly efficient. Doing one's tasks cleanly and quickly is also a good sign. As I explained in Chapter 5, this sign is cheap to display but prone to mimicry and, in that sense, employers do not give it too much importance in terms of trust but they do state that efficiency is always necessary to get and keep the job.
  - Helpfulness/Generosity. These may produce a semi-sorting equilibrium (Gambetta and Hamill 2005). These two properties go hand in hand for the employer and they prefer to screen for these properties, as they signal not just trustworthiness but also signal a possible good working relationship with their employee in the future. Offering to do things unasked and a gentlemanly behaviour, especially towards the women of the household, go a long way towards signalling this property. Once again, a recommendation from past employers (especially those known to the new employer) is a cheap and hard-to-mimic way to signal this property for those who have it. In the long term, employers gauge consistency in behaviour from the employees under the premise that mimicking helpfulness all the time would be hard for a fundamentally selfish and

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unhelpful person. The same goes for a lazy individual. It is difficult to hide one's own reactions to work or to being asked to do something when under constant observation. Eventually, laziness comes up and employers notice it in the way things are done by the employer or in his reactions to what the employer asks of him. Lazy people will do tasks in a sloppy manner or leave them unfinished. Body language is important here and was mentioned by many employers. Hunched shoulders and a sad look may be a sign of laziness and lethargy and slow, clumsy movements may signal this as well. While not explicitly, perhaps, the employers are operating under the assumption that certain signs of emotions (as in "bugger off I do not feel like doing this") cannot be completely concealed and eventually show up, even in a semi-hidden way. Frank calls these signs "partial emblems" (1988: 131) of emotions that humans cannot always hide and which provide "useful clues of emotion". Generosity is also a signal screened for. Employers look for generosity in the way employees use their time. A committed employee will be generous about using his time to help out in the household. He will also be open to sacrificing his own time for the sake of the employer or his family. Employers believe this to be a sign of trustworthiness, as they associate it with commitment, self-sacrifice and selflessness, traits that are found in someone the employer would be willing to trust. In exchange for this, I described how many employers are willing to help out their employees in times of need. In this way, a reciprocal relationship is formed where the employers gets a good employee and the employee acquires a sort of safety net that is otherwise hard to access for him and his family.

It is important to stress that employers will never make a decision based only on one of these properties; even the strongest one - network membership - is not sufficient in itself to

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guarantee hiring. A composite that jointly looks for all of them is always preferred and some of the signals that lead to a pooling equilibrium may be forgotten if, and only if, the employee is particularly strong in displaying the signs that lead to semi-sorting equilibria.

### **6.6: The Employee: Getting and Keeping a Job**

Chapter 5 addressed the trust problem from the perspective of the employee, mainly dealing with how employees perceive their jobs and also how they signal that they possess the properties employers look for or if they even knew what employers wanted from them. Firstly, it is safe to say that drivers (and employees in general) are very aware of the particular demands their job has these days. More importantly, they are largely aware that their work has an important security component and that their future in the job largely depends on being trusted by the employer on this front. I found that, due to the fact that these kinds of interactions have been happening for a long time, they have also had time to evolve together. Once more, the importance of social networks and of strong ties especially, contrary to Granovetter's classic argument (1983), is central to the interaction described in the hiring process. Under no circumstance did I encounter a driver or any other employee who did not access his job through strong ties. Family referrals are a classic example of this and also illustrate very well the environment of informality prevalent in Mexico, an environment also described as "relations based", where economic activity is based not on institutional and government-backed rules but on personal relationships and informal arrangements (Dixit 2004). It is clear that, in most cases, employers and employees will find each other and that in most cases the relationship will be successful. Evidence suggests the evolution of a



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cognitive process by which employees design and display certain signals that convey to their employers that they are trustworthy. Thus, I found an important harmony between what employers look for and what employees perceive themselves as offering. In terms of signalling (successful), employees routinely display, purposely or by default, signals that reinforce to the employer their trustworthiness.

The first and most important signal, not surprisingly given what I discussed above, is membership of a certain family or network. By having access to a recommendation from a family member or, better yet, from a family member already employed or close acquaintance of the potential employer, employees stand a significantly better chance of being hired. In fact, without this membership mechanism it is virtually impossible to get a job. Gaining membership of this network is defined by two key factors: 1) Luck, being a relative of someone in the network may grant access to the network; and 2) a long process by which a first generation of “pioneer” employees formed this network, maybe decades ago, with a group of employers. By earning their trust over a long period of time in a context that was not as competitive and unsafe, they achieved a stable arrangement that subsequent generations benefitted from, as demonstrated by the example of the son of a cleaning lady driving for the daughter of his mother’s employer. Membership is displayed in a very straightforward manner, though oral recommendations mostly, cheaply transmitted through the network as well as through written, verifiable recommendations. Both of these signals are cheap to produce for those who do have them, but almost prohibitively costly to mimic for those who do not, given the employers’ expectations. In this sense, it is the closest we may get

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in the analysis of the hiring process to having a signal that produces a perfectly sorting equilibrium (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001; Gambetta 2009). While some may be able to fake membership (as some indeed do sometimes), the mechanism has evolved in such a way as to make this as difficult as possible. Nonetheless, we must remember that these networks are based on informality and there is only so much informality can accomplish. Having said this, both employers and employees know that membership is a valuable asset to have. It also allows for more efficient hiring and reduces the pool of possible competitors for each job. As long as the network keeps operating and no one in it tarnishes its reputation, this mechanism remains operational. Reputation is indeed the basis of these networks, as I explained in chapters 4 and 5.

The physical attributes of the drivers are less important, perhaps because they tend to self-select according to the employers' view of what a good driver looks like. Thus, I found that most drivers squarely fit the employer's ideas (presence, clean-cut, build etc.) of what they should actually look like. This is reinforced by a series of statistical discriminations on behalf of the employers, for example against small puny-looking types. This also raises the bar on the importance of not easily observable properties such as honesty, discretion and efficiency. As I described in detail in Chapter 5, employees try to signal these properties through their behaviour. Discretion is signalled in different ways used as proxies. Sacrificing their time and being perceived as caring for their employer's property seemed to them to signal care for the family's wellbeing in general and thus for the demand for discretion. Making sure the house is well taken care of when the employers are away is seen as a good way of signalling

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discretion, and may be loosely related to the handicap principle (Gambetta 2009). In this sense, the employer is putting himself in a more vulnerable position to prove to the employee that he can trust him, but also to reinforce that he need not be scared to make him responsible should anything happen. Honest employees normally take advantage of this situation by making sure nothing goes amiss during this time, as it is their opportunity to signal to their employer that their trust is deserved. As I have explained above, full disclosure is also used as a signal of honesty and as a tool to develop a close relationship between employer and employee. These kinds of relationships may thrive in relations-based systems (Dixit 2004) and are indeed the basis of much economic activity. As in the case of the employers, I discovered good evidence of an evolving cognitive process that saw employees react to the evolving needs of employers. Although trust was always needed in household employment, exogenous events such as rising crime rates and kidnapping in particular forced both actors into a constant re-evaluation of their needs and preferences, making the process a more complex one. Employers in this context began demanding more and more difficult-to-fake signals and properties from their employees in order to trust them. Employees responded in turn by strengthening their ties to each other and providing the employers with most of what they needed in a clear response to demand.

This is not to say that every move or step these actors take is purposeful or strategic. Life for employers and employees would be very taxing if they had to analyse and strategize every move. The actors we are looking at here do not operate in a vacuum; they are involved in a dynamic and multifaceted society and have many ongoing concerns and thus they cannot

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devote too much time to these processes. This is why mechanisms such as network use guarantee that their choices will be the safest possible, with little cost to them. The use of a network is very cost effective for both employers and employees. Both drivers and employers stated that they were generally trusting people (except one, ENV11), that they would give people a chance or the benefit of the doubt. Especially on the side of the employers, however, there is a need to reduce risks as much as possible, given the huge potential costs of making the wrong decision. This forces them to be strategic most of the time, especially during the hiring process and the initial part of the relationship. Once trust has been satisfactorily established, they can “shut off” (Gambetta and Hamill 2004) their concern mechanisms. Employees, on the other hand, may behave honestly due to a natural inclination as opposed to a need to signal something to the employer. Through norms or socialization they may be inclined towards honesty regardless of the context. Let us not forget that the vast majority of drivers (and employers) are honest people and that they suffer from a few rotten apples that make their jobs difficult to get and dangerous to carry out.

Another point that arises from the analysis is that of self-policing. It is curious to see that criminals do not co-opt or coerce employees into facilitating a kidnapping more often. As we saw in this dissertation it does happen but, given the intuitively low costs of this for criminals, especially in relation to mimicking it is surprising it does not happen more. Criminals could potentially threaten an employee without much difficulty, especially those living near the employee in working class neighbourhoods. Self policing may answer this puzzle. As I mentioned in chapter 5 many communities in Mexico City have used self policing to control

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criminals in their communities (see Ochoa 2006). Lynching is a mechanism used in those cases. As I stated here drivers are many times aware of criminals in their communities and of their activities providing evidence that at least at the community level there is some contact with criminals. Evidence from fieldwork suggests indices of some forms of control of criminal elements within communities that somehow prevent criminals from damaging their honest neighbours' source of income. The evidence however is inconclusive and more research is needed to fully establish this.

### **6.7: Concluding Remarks**

This dissertation has contributed to two main areas of research. On the one hand, it has added to the existing literature on crime in Mexico and Latin America by showing the historical nuts and bolts of kidnapping, a crime that has captured the minds of significant numbers of people in this geographical area. By providing a methodologically sound account of the evolution of this crime, we are in a better position to understand how criminals, their victims and the State interact in this milieu, as well as of the environmental, social and institutional factors that make kidnapping such a prevalent event in Mexico. The uncovering of elite survival strategies allows us to understand how community and individual-level decisions are made in this environment and also how non-state actors can have a large impact on how crime develops. The stress on social networks as a source of security is one of the main findings of this work. In an environment of informality and low state protection, a network becomes a good tool for many tasks such as reducing the risk of hiring a dishonest

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driver (through mechanisms of reputation and self policing) and efficiently and with a very low cost transmitting information that is verifiable and trusted.

This dissertation has also provided an empirically rich qualitative implementation of theories of trust and signalling to a context of high crime rates and high levels of informality. It has shed light on how potential victims to a most horrible crime negotiate the risks of being victimized with the need for certain types of employees and has illustrated the processes behind decision-making in this informal context. It has also made sense of decisions (such as hiring a driver) that would at first glance seem risky and to some eyes even irrational. By making the hiring process secure through different mechanisms, employers acquire the extra benefit of protection for their family and themselves. This points to a strategic process by which individuals decide whether to trust the signs they see on display as a prerequisite for trust. Signalling in this case has allowed us to understand how trust problems are solved in household employment processes, and how employers and employees use signals to reduce risk and secure, on the one hand, gainful employment and, on the other, a good driver.

### **6.8: Future Directions, New Questions**

Sometimes, in the course of research, one is left with few answers and many more questions than when one started. Fascinating questions arise at every turn when one observes reality and carries out research. This project has not been an exception. There are some interesting questions posed by this research that could possibly be explored in the future.

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The first one that arises is related to the patterns followed by kidnapping in the last few years. It will be interesting to explore and confirm whether or not the shift in kidnapping I pointed towards in this dissertation can be confirmed over a longer period of time and with better data, if such data became available. Extensive and probably resource-intensive research will be needed to prove the existence of this pattern. Most importantly, hard data that is consistent over time would be ideal to answer these questions. Promisingly, the government of Mexico City is now publishing crime information at the district level. It is hoped that kidnapping will soon be included in this new information source. At this point in time, however, it is possible to say that it is likely that this shift in kidnapping is happening, but with the caveat that more research will fully answer this question.

Comparative exercises are also interesting ways of developing the findings presented herein. It would be very useful to carry out studies such as this one in other Latin American countries to see whether the dynamics are similar or not. Brazil is a case in point. Cities like Sao Paulo have many similar socioeconomic circumstances to Mexico City. They are both mega cities of over 20 million people in the greater city area, they are central to the development of their respective countries and command a good percentage of each country's GDP. They also have important inequalities between rich and poor and high crime rates and are both in large Latin American countries. These similarities would make a case for comparisons solid. Do these structural similarities between cities mean that the micro mechanisms of survival strategies (even hiring) will be similar? Not necessarily as this does not "imply that two collectivities with an identical macro-level property will necessarily have

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identical micro-level properties” (Hedström and Bearman 2009: 10). In another continent South Africa would be an ideal site for comparative work. Cities like Johannesburg have very high kidnapping rates (Briggs 2002). Once again it would be interesting to see if those structural similarities are reflected at the microsocial level. Both Brazil and South Africa have important racial elements that Mexico does not have, perhaps this could produce different outcomes. It would be very interesting to see if this crime and indeed society’s response to it has evolved in a similar manner or if we are to see any important differences. Studies in other areas of the developing world will surely yield important and interesting results.

The all-important social networks used to have access to employees and jobs may also warrant some future attention. As a mechanism for guaranteeing a certain quality and reputation, they seem to operate in similar ways to older networks of trade (Greif 1993). The inner workings of these networks would make a fascinating study topic for the future. Reputation once again seems to be a key ingredient in the success of the hiring process. The mechanisms by which it operates and also how it is enforced in the network deserve more attention than I could give it here. The fact that they tend to cut across traditional class divisions may yet tell us many interesting things about this type of society and also about the relationships that people establish in a context such as Mexico’s. The importance of family networks (or strong ties) is also worthy of more research, as it may illustrate well what individuals do in a context of lawlessness (Dixit 2004) and high levels of informality so as to have access to high quality services.



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The question of what happens to bad employers and dishonest employees is also worthy of attention. A possible way to understand why honesty in employees and good employers may prevail over their bad counterparts in these situations may come from analysing them from the perspective of a selection mechanism (Hedström and Bearman 2009). Honesty and a good working environment will have been preferred for many iterations of the hiring process. Thus, by valuing honesty and good treatment over other characteristics, a selection mechanism may ensure that, after some time, those with such characteristics will become more and more frequent and prevalent, as those properties “perform better in the environment”. I am in no position right now to say if this is so, but from a sociological perspective this seems like a good challenge to undertake.

The narrative of kidnapping addressed in Chapter 3 also raises some interesting questions. More research is needed in the area of kidnapping gangs, as some essential questions about their composition and operation remain unanswered. It is argued by Vilalta and Fondevila (Forthcoming 2011) that a large percentage of the gangs engaged in kidnapping now are family- or friendship-based. The first question that comes to mind therefore is when do families decide to enter into the kidnapping business? How do they recruit other members of the family or other people in their social circle? How are these groups structured? How do they plan their attacks? A family would in some cases make a very good kidnapping gang, with loyalty issues somewhat already resolved by kinship relations and family loyalty. Yet families can sometimes be conflictive and unprofessional, and one only needs to look at family feuds involving money in the newspapers to get an idea of how badly things can go

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within families when money is involved. It is not for nothing that there is a saying in Mexico that loosely translates into: “clear accounts, long friendships”. Thus, the role of the family-based gang (not to be confused with the family-based mafia, a very different phenomenon) remains a topic to be explored and analysed in depth. Right now, we know much more about the old kidnapping gangs than we do about the newer generation of kidnappers and these questions could be addressed in further research.

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## Appendix

Here the reader can find descriptive analyses of the data used throughout this dissertation. It includes a comprehensive list of the interviews and codes for them, as well as a breakdown of information about the interviewees across different categories such as class, gender and age. This section also includes a description of the KNRD, as well as the coding framework for the data used.

**Table 1: Interviews By Group**

| Group           | Interviews | % Female |
|-----------------|------------|----------|
| Employers       | 29         | 62       |
| Employees       | 14         | 40       |
| Law Enforcement | 27         | 22       |
| Other           | 7          | 50       |

For security reasons, as mentioned in the methodology section of this chapter, and at the behest of many of the interviewees, I decided on providing anonymity to all people interviewed. I coded each interview according to a set of parameters per group as follows:

- *Employers* who had been victims of kidnapping were coded as “EV” followed by the interview number (for example EV1, EV5).
- *Employers* who had NOT been victims of kidnapping were coded as “ENV” followed by the interview number (for example ENV3, ENV22).

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- *Employees of non-victims*<sup>45</sup> were coded as “WNV” followed by the interview number (e.g. WNV3).
  - *Employees of victims* were coded as “WV” followed by the interview number (e.g. WV1).
  - *Law Enforcement* interviews were coded as “LE” followed by the interview number (e.g. LE3, LE16).
  - *Other* interviews not belonging to the groups described above but also used were coded as “O” followed by gender “M” or “F” followed by the interview number (e.g. OM3, OF4).

The following tables present detailed information about the interviewees. The district of Miguel Hidalgo has been shortened to “MH” in the Location column.

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<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that I did not interview all the employers of the drivers I spoke to. Nor did I interview all the drivers of the employers I talked to. I was able to do so in a number of cases (4), but those interviews did not show any important variation *vis a vis* the rest, which is why I only report this in a footnote.

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**Table 2: Employer Interviews**

| Code  | Occupation       | Age | Gender | Location | Taped |
|-------|------------------|-----|--------|----------|-------|
| ENV1  | Home             | 64  | F      | MH       | N     |
| ENV2  | Imports          | 60s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV3  | Home             | 50s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV4  | Retired          | 60s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV5  | Business         | 60s | M      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV6  | Business         | 70s | M      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV7  | Real Estate      | 60s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV8  | Marketing        | 60s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV9  | Home             | 70s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV10 | Accountant       | 47  | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV11 | Manufacturing    | 45  | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV12 | Academic         | 62  | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV13 | Dentist          | 40  | M      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV14 | Student          | 60  | M      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV15 | Pollster         | 64  | F      | MH       | Y     |
| ENV16 | Business         | 55  | F      | MH       | N     |
| ENV17 | Artist           | 27  | M      | MH       | N     |
| ENV18 | Academic         | 44  | F      | MH       | N     |
| ENV19 | Actor            | 50s | M      | MH       | N     |
| ENV20 | Advertising Exec | 50s | F      | MH       | N     |
| ENV21 | Software design  | 20S | M      | MH       | N     |
| ENV22 | Researcher       | 30s | M      | MH       | N     |
| ENV23 | Professor        | 35  | M      | MH       | N     |
| ENV24 | Business         | 60s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| EV1   | Architect        | 35  | F      | MH       | Y     |
| EV2   | Home/Business    | 37  | F      | MH       | Y     |

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|     |                  |     |   |    |   |
|-----|------------------|-----|---|----|---|
| EV3 | Finance/Activist | 55  | M | MH | Y |
| EV5 | Art Curator      | 34  | F | MH | Y |
| EV6 | Student          | 20s | M | MH | N |

**Table 3: Employee Interviews**

| Code  | Occupation      | Age | Gender | Location | Taped |
|-------|-----------------|-----|--------|----------|-------|
| WNV1  | Driver/Handyman | 30s | M      | MH       | Y     |
| WNV2  | Cleaning        | 50s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| WNV3  | Cook            | 70s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| WNV4  | Cook            | 50s | F      | MH       | Y     |
| WNV5  | Driver          | 29  | M      | MH       | N     |
| WNV6  | Driver          | 46  | M      | MH       | N     |
| WNV7  | Driver          | 44  | M      | MH       | N     |
| WNV8  | Cook            | 39  | F      | MH       | N     |
| WNV9  | Driver          | 30s | F      | MH       | N     |
| WNV10 | Driver          | 30s | M      | MH       | Y     |
| WNV11 | Cleaning        | 50s | F      | MH       | N     |
| WNV12 | Driver/Taxi     | 40s | M      | MH       | N     |
| WNV13 | Driver          | 35  | M      | MH       | N     |
| WV1   | Driver          | 35  | M      | MH       | Y     |
| WV2   | Driver          | 30s | M      | MH       | N     |

**Table 4: Law Enforcement Interviews<sup>46</sup>**

| Code | Occupation                           | Age | Gender | Location     |
|------|--------------------------------------|-----|--------|--------------|
| LE1  | District Prosecutor                  | 46  | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE2  | District Official                    | 36  | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE3  | State Prosecutor                     | 47  | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE4  | Prosecutor                           | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE5  | Prosecutor                           | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE6  | Junior Prosecutor 1                  | 27  | F      | Mexico City  |
| LE7  | Junior Prosecutor 2                  | 29  | F      | Mexico City  |
| LE8  | Junior Prosecutor 3                  | 33  | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE9  | Policeman 1                          | 25  | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE10 | Policeman 2                          | 20s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE11 | Admission Clerk                      | 40s | F      | Mexico City  |
| LE12 | Investigative Police Shift Commander | 44  | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE13 | Inv. Police 1                        | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE14 | Inv. Police 2                        | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE15 | Inv. Police 3                        | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE16 | Homicide Prosecutor City             | 50s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE17 | Homicide Jr. Prosec. City 1          | 40s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE18 | Homicide Jr. Prosec. City 2          | 40s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE19 | Homicide Jr. Prosec. City 3          | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE20 | Junior Prosecutor 4                  | 30s | M      | Mexico City  |
| LE21 | File Manager                         | 40s | F      | Mexico City  |
| LE22 | State Prosecutor                     | 50s | M      | Mexico State |

<sup>46</sup> None of these interviews were taped. Notes were taken throughout.

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|      |                             |     |   |              |
|------|-----------------------------|-----|---|--------------|
| LE23 | State Kidnapping Prosecutor | 60s | M | Mexico State |
| LE24 | Junior State Prosecutor     | 30s | F | Mexico State |
| LE25 | Crime Victim 1              | 25  | M | Mexico City  |
| LE26 | Crime Victim 2              | 20s | M | Mexico City  |
| LE27 | Crime Victim 3              | 30s | F | Mexico City  |

**Table 5: Other Interviews**

| Code | Occupation                  | Age | Gender | Location    |
|------|-----------------------------|-----|--------|-------------|
| OM1  | Building Admin              | 46  | M      | Mexico City |
| OM2  | Mechanic Shop Owner         | 60  | M      | Mexico City |
| OF3  | Food vendor                 | 55  | F      | Mexico City |
| OM4  | District Employee           | 36  | M      | Mexico City |
| OM5  | Federal Government Employee | 36  | M      | Mexico City |
| OF6  | Grad Student                | 30  | F      | Mexico City |
| OF7  | Academic                    | 37  | F      | Mexico City |
| OF8  | Activist                    | 32  | F      | Mexico City |

The following table presents the coding framework of the interviews. Although the table seems to separate the coding process clearly, in practice it is a fluid, ongoing process, especially in regard to the relationship between open and axial codes. Selective codes imply the most micro level of analysis, where mechanisms become clear.



**Table 6: General Coding Framework of Interviews.**

| Open Codes                | Axial Codes  | Selective Codes   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Socioeconomic Information | Class self-perception<br>Income<br>Family<br>Status<br>Professions   | Upper-middle<br>No one is upper class.<br>High income<br>Married/Single etc...<br>Business/Art/Home etc.  |
| Crime                     | Fear of crime<br>Kidnapping<br>Out of control<br>Corruption<br>Impunity  | Permanent fear<br>No law<br>Criminals rule<br>Criminal Politicians<br>Fear of kidnapping<br>We all know someone<br>Police always involved<br>No use denouncing<br>The Earchopper etc. |
| Trust                     | In government<br>In others<br>In society<br>Definition<br>Signs of<br>Identifying<br>'The Sixth Sense'/cognitive process | Zero trust in government<br>Declining trust in others<br>No community<br>No one helps<br>Paranoia<br>No one can define trust<br>No one trusts except me etc.                          |
| Employee relations        | Like Family<br>Social Distance<br>Inequality<br>Deep relation  | Keeping distance is safe<br>Becoming family is safe<br>Etc.   |

|                            |  |   |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Hiring Process</p>      | <p>Social Networks</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>First impression</p> <p>Vertical integration at the family level</p> <p>Signalling</p> <p>Employee's version</p> | <p>Recommendations Only</p> <p>Test period</p> <p>Body Language</p> <p>Looks</p> <p>Papers easy to fake</p> <p>From the interior/less evil</p> <p>Family networks (vert. integr.)</p> <p>Age</p> <p>Gender</p> <p>Threat etc.</p> |
| <p>Survival Strategies</p> | <p>Lifestyle change</p> <p>Buying protection</p> <p>Radical Measures</p> <p>Cynicism</p> <p>Government Relations</p>   | <p>Leaving country</p> <p>Arms</p> <p>I do not care anymore/no change</p> <p>Govt. carrot</p> <p>Govt. stick etc.</p>   |

**Table 7: General Coding Structure of KNRD**

| Open Codes        | Axial Codes  | Selective Codes  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Kidnapping        | Evolution<br>History<br>Federal Crime<br>Local Crime<br>Mexico City<br>Gangs<br>Policy<br>New gangs<br>Victims/profiles  | Political-Economic<br>Authoritarian past<br>Laws<br>‘Caletri Gang’<br>‘El Coronel Gang’<br>‘El Mochaorejas Gang’<br>Spanish Community<br>Jewish Community<br>Lebanese Community<br>Working-Class Victims |
| Police/Government | Corruption<br>Police involvement<br>Policy<br>Federal Strategy<br>Local Police<br>Official Discourse                     | Change to local police<br>Santiago Vasconcelos<br>Police Protection<br>Police<br>Success/Failure   |
| Trust             | In government<br>In others<br>In society<br>Definition<br>Signs of<br>Identifying<br>‘The Sixth Sense’/cognitive process | No trust in government<br>Declining trust in others<br>No community<br>No one helps<br>Paranoia<br>No one can define trust<br>No one trusts except me etc.   |

|                     |   |  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Employee relations  | Like Family<br>Social Distance<br>Inequality<br>Deep relation   | Keeping distance is safe<br>Becoming family is safe<br>Etc.  |
| Hiring Process      | Social Networks<br>Assessment<br>First impression<br>Vertical integration at the family level<br>Signalling<br>Employee's version | Recommendations Only<br>Test period<br>Body Language<br>Looks<br>Papers easy to fake<br>From the interior/less evil<br>Family networks (vert. integr.)<br>Age<br>Gender<br>Threat etc. |
| Survival Strategies | Lifestyle change<br>Buying protection<br>Radical Measures<br>Cynicism<br>Government Relations                                     | Leaving country<br>Arms<br>I do not care anymore/no change<br>Govt. carrot/Mobilisation<br>Govt. stick etc. /Protest   |

Both tables (6 & 7) based on Gaudin and Strauss (1990); Bailey White and Pain (1999).

In this section, I present basic descriptive statistics for the KNRD. As mentioned before, the database contains **1,774** news reports from two national newspapers. The newspapers were chosen on a number of factors: 1) their coverage of kidnapping; 2) Their accessibility (due to the limited fieldwork time, this was an important factor to consider. Both newspapers have accessible web pages and databases searchable by topic); and 3) Both papers have a different

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reporting style, which means that news reports are less likely to be repeated in each newspaper. All efforts were made to make sure the database is clean and no repetition or double reporting is made, however, given the limited timeframe, I cannot guarantee this with 100% certainty. This weakness is addressed during coding as it is in that process when double reporting is also easily identifiable and dealt with. The quantitative use of the database proved problematic for a number of reasons. The data collection process proved very difficult. Newspapers do not report homogeneously across time and this leads having missing information regularly. The quality of data available is not only inconsistent but also of general poor quality. I have spoken to local experts (academics working on crime and with experience in data gathering) and was repeatedly told that great care needed to be taken when using the data available as it is notoriously unreliable. Survey and census data, as well as the data gathered on **KNRD** would be risky to use quantitatively as its solidity could be put into question. I have used as much quantitative evidence as I can gather at this time from the database and such information is well spread throughout the dissertation. It is found in chapter three where I present kidnapping data, it is also in the empirical chapters 4 and 5 when I talk of the evidence suggesting a large amount of kidnappings are organized by family members and employees of the victim.

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**Table 8: KNRD, 1999-2008**

| Year | News Reports |
|------|--------------|
| 1999 | 33           |
| 2000 | 99           |
| 2001 | 156          |
| 2002 | 175          |
| 2003 | 96           |
| 2004 | 266          |
| 2005 | 219          |
| 2006 | 163          |
| 2007 | 100          |
| 2008 | 467          |

Source: Author's work with data from *El Universal* and *La Jornada* dailies.

As is visible, there is a steady increase in the reports from 1999 to 2002, an unexplained lull in 2003, and then the numbers jump again to 266 reports in 2004. This year saw an important rise in overall crime rates and a number of high-profile kidnappings, which may have made the media more aware of the topic. The reporting then goes back to early 2000s levels until 2008, when there is a massive increase to 467 reports in the database. This is due to one factor. In that year, the teenage son of a very prominent businessman, Fernando Marti (owner of a very large chain of sports clothing stores), was kidnapped and murdered over a ransom of close to six million pesos (around £300,000). The boy's father made the case extremely public and this caused a massive public outcry, mass protests and the involvement of political actors including the President of Mexico, who made a point of attending the

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funeral of the boy (his name was Fernando) and proposing a series of reforms to tackle crimes like these. The fact that a federal policewoman was involved in the kidnapping made the matter even more outrageous in the public's eyes. The National Council for Public Security, involving all levels of government, was created after this incident as a response to Mr. Marti's harsh criticisms of everyone in government. His phrase, said in front of the President, "if you can't do it (solve the crime problem)... quit!" has since become a war cry for anti-crime activists.

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