RUPTURED JOURNEYS, RUPTURED LIVES: CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRATION, TRANSNATIONAL VIOLENCE, AND HOPE IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

by

Wendy Alexandra Vogt

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents who all made difficult decisions in their own journeys for love and for family.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the processes by which Central American women and men face unprecedented forms of violence and exploitation as they migrate through Mexico. Central Americans are regularly subject to abuse, extortion, rape, kidnapping, dismemberment and death as multiple actors profit off of their bodies, labor and lives. In turn, the political economy of violence and security along the migrant journey permeates into local Mexican communities, creating new tensions and social ruptures. Going beyond a simple accounting of abuse, I engage ethnography as a lens through which to understand the social effects of historical and contemporary processes of war, displacement, economic restructuring and social dislocation as people move through local spaces. Throughout the journey, the logics of migration and violence rework social relations based on race, gender and nationality where migrants are both victims of and agents within the often de-humanizing processes of human mobility. I use a lens of gender in particular to understand the ways larger processes impact the intimate spaces of people's lives and the intimate labors they perform as parents, migrants, partners, laborers and activists. I also examine the ways violence is not simply destructive, but also generates new possibilities for solidarity and political action through social movements around humanitarianism and migrant rights. In particular, I examine the emergence of a movement of Catholic-based migrant shelters and a transnational feminist movement of mothers and families of disappeared migrants.

CHAPTER ONE—INTRODUCTION

The shelter is a dusty dirt lot with several makeshift structures: a kitchen, a chapel and a sitting room with an old tattered couch and one small television. Before the sun rises, the train passes by, and riding on top of it are the hopes and fears that have come to define this transit town. Mayra knows all the stories. I talk to her as she chops piles of yellowing but still edible broccoli donated to the shelter by market vendors from the next town over. She stands firmly on one leg, as the stump of her left leg rests on a white plastic chair inscribed with the words “coca cola”. When she smiles I can see several gold plated teeth shining in her mouth. Originally from Guatemala, Mayra left her abusive husband and set off to provide a better life for her children who are being cared for by her mother. Mayra has lived at the shelter for five months since her accident in a nearby town where she fell from the top of the train, dismembering her leg. She refers to it as “my accident” yet later tells me that it was not in fact an accident, but that she believes she was pushed from the train on purpose by a man who had been hostile and drunk earlier in the day. Mayra is in charge of the kitchen at the shelter, sometimes cooking for fifty people and other times for hundreds of people. She has a small room detached from the kitchen where she sleeps. She wants to return to Guatemala one day, though she is not sure how or when that will happen. For now, she is waiting to receive a prosthetic leg and plans to continue on her journey.

I go to the living area and see Marco, a twenty-five year old man from Guatemala City who is traveling to the United States with his childhood friend, Josie. He is filling up and throwing buckets of water onto the ground to keep the dust levels down while a few

other migrants sit on the couch watching a fuzzy telenovela on the television, escaping their reality for a few moments. Marco then helps Mayra boil a large chicken in a large metal vat over an open fire to prepare a soup. While doing so, he sings popular songs with English lyrics. At home in Guatemala City, he also cooks and sells food from a small stall and fire in the front of his house. Marco and Josie have already been at the shelter for three days and know they have reached their time limit, but are too afraid to continue along the train. Last week twelve women were kidnapped from the top of the train by four armed men in trucks. Padre José, who founded and runs the shelter, has suggested they take an alternative route as it is particularly precarious for women on the train these days. I ask them what their plans are and where they are going. "Wherever God sends us," Marco replies.

A young man whistles for me to come over and talk with him. Erik, from Honduras, asks me if I can help him pick the scabs off the top of his head. His head was cut open by the top of a machete by a robber several weeks ago while he was making his way through southern Chiapas. The top portion of his ear was also partially bitten off. He opens a pill of aspirin and pours the powder it directly onto the wound of his ear, hoping this will prevent infection. He wears a hooded sweatshirt to cover his head, to protect himself from the dust. Dust is a major issue at this time of the year and many migrants who were boarding the train that evening carried cardboard boxes to help protect them. I sat down next to Erik and he makes a few jokes before the conversation turns serious. I ask him where he is going and he says is first going to Matamoros where he has some family and from there will continue on to Houston, Texas.

“What is in Houston?” I ask.

“My mother” he replies.

“How long has she been there?”

“Sixteen years.”

“And how old are you?”

“I’m twenty”

I often return to that image of Erik, sitting on that couch in the shelter with no money, ear half bitten off and in search of his mother. I wonder if in sixteen years Mayra’s children will pass through this shelter on their way to search for her?

I go back to the kitchen. “The train is for the really poor,” says Rafael, an openly gay male in his early 40s who spoke with me in the afternoon before he left to wait at the tracks. He wears his pants rolled up and packs his backpack with neatly folded t-shirts. Rafael explains how important it is to maintain a clean appearance along the journey. He helps Mayra in the kitchen prepare *la comida*, the main meal of the day. When it is time to eat, he sits alone at a table in the kitchen, apart from the other migrants who seem to avoid him. Rafael is on his way back to Florida where he has lived for many years. This past year he had to return to El Salvador to take care of family business when his father became ill.

Mayra, Marco, Josie, Erik and Rafael are a few of the people I met in one day at a migrant shelter in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Their stories exemplify some of the complex motivations, desires and experiences that underlie the everyday realities of migration across Mexico. They represent a small human glimpse into the lives of

hundreds of thousands of Central Americans who risk their lives to cross Mexico every year.

A Cemetery without Crosses

Long before Central American migrants reach the U.S.-Mexico border, they travel for weeks, months, and even years through some of the most impoverished regions of Mexico where they ride on the roofs of freight trains, in second-class buses and tightly packed in the backs of trailers. In an increasingly militarized and violent Mexico, migrants regularly encounter physical assault, verbal harassment, intimidation, extortion, kidnapping, injury, dismemberment and death. Gendered forms of violence—that is, rape, sexual harassment, economically coerced sex, forced prostitution, and trafficking are also common. As migrants weave their way through Mexico's lush jungles, desert landscapes and gritty urban centers they also engage in informal work activities, meet travel companions, and seek food, shelter and medical attention in *casas de migrantes* (migrant shelters) that have been established along the way.

While Central American migrants have historically encountered suffering, abuse and violence as they crossed Mexico (e.g. Casillas 2001; Castillo 2003; Coutin 2007; Cunningham 1995; Hagan 2008; Kovic 2008; Mahler 1995; Nazario 2006; Ogren 2007; Vasquez 2006) in recent years direct violence and exploitation have become far more systematic and inescapable. A complex network of organized criminals, corrupt authorities and everyday people have been extremely successful in developing methodical forms of kidnapping, extortion and violence targeted against migrants. In

June of 2009, the Mexican National Human Rights Commission issued a report documenting nearly 10,000 kidnapping victims, most of them Central American migrants, over a period of six months (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos 2009). In 2010 that number rose to over 11,000 victims in six months (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos 2011). And in the wake of these controversial and condemning reports, the world was offered a brutal snapshot into this reality when the bodies of 72 mostly Central American migrants were found tied up and executed in a ranch in the northern state of Tamaulipas. As I looked at the images of these migrant's lifeless bodies, bloodied and bloated, the words of one priest I met during my fieldwork kept running through my mind: "Mexico is a cemetery for Central Americans. A cemetery without crosses."

Central Arguments

This dissertation examines the historical and contemporary processes by which Central American women and men face new forms of violence and exploitation as they migrate through Mexico. I argue that migrant journeys are critical spaces where transnational processes play out at the local level and impact local economies, social milieus and intimate relations. While research on migration and transnationalism has focused on the cultural, discursive and material flows and processes between sending and receiving communities and border regions, there is an empirical void in understanding the processes that occur in the spaces *in between.* I take the "trans" of transnationalism quite seriously by arguing that migration is not only a descriptive term to define a fluid

movement between nations, but also a literal, grounded and highly embodied experience of movement in space and place. In this way, I focus not only on the social and political dimensions of transit spaces, but also on the physical intimate realities of migration for individuals.

I argue that ethnographic attention to the landscapes of uncertainty, violence and hope for migrants in transit offers a lens through which to understand the social effects of historical and contemporary processes of structural violence, displacement and dislocation in Central America and Mexico. Violence against migrants is intimately connected to larger processes that systematically weaken the ability of millions of people to live in their home communities with safety and justice. Legacies of war and militarization, neoliberal restructuring, securitization initiatives and the more recent interpenetration of drug and human smuggling are all factors in precipitating migration and creating the conditions for violence to flourish in uneven ways. Simply put, present-day migration and displacement can be understood as the most recent iteration of centuries of exploitation of people in Central America and Mexico where violence is crucial to that exploitation and profit-making.

The core of my dissertation examines how the social, political and physical liminality of being in transit shapes the ways migrants become vulnerable to violence in what I describe as *la industria del cachuco* (the cachuco industry*),* a phrase used by one of my informants. It is while Central American migrants are in *en route* that their bodies, labor and lives may be transformed into commodities to be bought, sold, transported or disposed of within an industry comprised of both local and transnational flows of capital.

The commoditization of migrants coincides with the transformation of migrants into new consumers in transit spaces, where both processes feed off of and contribute to *la industria del cachuco*.

The intentional use of the word *cachuco*, which is a derogatory name for someone from Central America, recognizes the social and cultural forces of racial, ethnic and gendered othering that take place alongside economic processes during the journey. Markers of difference based on gender, race and citizenship are particularly important in understanding how people's roles, strategies and experiences of violence are bound up with both global economic flows as well as more localized forms of profit, exploitation and negotiation. I use a lens of gender in particular to understand the ways larger processes impact the intimate spaces of people's lives and the intimate labors (Boris and Parreñas 2010) they perform as parents, migrants, partners, laborers and activists.

The local political economic contexts of economic insecurity, out-migration and security concerns also shape the way violence and inequalities are reproduced within local communities, migrant shelters and the migrant rights movement. In these ways, multiple actors become both victims of and agents within larger processes that profit off of human mobility.

In addition to the fracturing aspects of violence, I argue that in response to violence, multiple groups have begun to generate new possibilities for solidarity and political action through local and transnational social movements around humanitarianism and migrant rights. At present, we are witnessing in Mexico both an unprecedented level of violence against migrants and a corresponding movement toward

humanitarianism and social justice. The relationships, tensions and contradictions that cut through and across these processes will be explored throughout this study.

Anthropology, History and Migration

> It is significant that much of the most accessible and influential work of the counter-hegemony is historical: the recovery of discarded areas, or the redress of selective and reductive interpretations *(Williams 1977:116).*

A central contention of this dissertation is that history and histories (Sider and Smith 1997) are central to understanding experiences of violence, migration and inequality in the present. A historically informed approach to migration challenges scholarship that assumes contemporary global processes, patterns, and arrangements of migration and transnationalism are new and novel (Fitzgerald 2006). It recognizes the historically significant situations, structures, power relations and linkages that produce and shape individual lived experiences (Axel 2002; Cohn 1987 [1962]; Roseberry 1994). Historical anthropology views the past not as "dead," but as very much alive in the present (Alonso 1988). It is less concerned with "doing a history" and more concerned with "focusing on how histories are, and have been, embedded in the ways people have built their lives and their hopes" (Sider 1993). In doing so, historical anthropology strives to study the social fields, processes and power relations that shape subjectivities at the global and local levels so as not to reproduce the ethnographic present—that is, writing of an authentic "Other" who exists out of time and history (Cohn 1987 [1962]; Comaroff 1992; Fabian 1983; Roseberry 1994). The avoidance of using what Fabian calls "oppressive time" (1983) is particularly important to a historical approach to transnationalism that traces the multiple

links and interconnections between peoples and societies across space and time (McCormick 2006).

As such, the movement of people from Central America through Mexico must be understood not as an isolated event but rather as a historical process. This process must capture not only the local histories of sending and receiving communities, but also place the movements of people within larger social, economic and political contexts. Theories drawn from the Annals historians (e.g. Braudel 1996) and world systems theory (Wallerstein 2004) are a useful starting point for conceptualizing migration as a global historical process. This marks an important break from much of the migration theory that dominated anthropology from the 1950s-1970s, namely neoclassical modernization theories that were largely ahistorical and focused on individual decision making (Kearney 1986). The Annals historians introduced the idea of a world-economy, the temporal conceptualization of the *longue duree*, and the need to move beyond the nation-state as the sole unit of historical analysis (Wallerstein 2004). This work, along with dependency theorists' focus on the extraction of goods and labor from the periphery to the core under colonialism (Gunder Frank 1969), influenced the work of world systems analysts. In anthropology, a focus on the global world system as historically produced was perhaps most importantly conveyed by Eric Wolf (1982) in *Europe and the People without History*.

Wolf bridges political economy and history by foregrounding the material processes and relationships that have linked people globally even before the onset of capitalism. While his approach has been critiqued for ignoring the agency of individual

actors (e.g. Krech 1991), Wolf's innovation in writing "their" history and "our" history as interconnected through political, economic and social contexts marked an important turning point in anthropology (Roseberry 1994) and influenced subsequent ethnographies on global capitalism.

While world-systems theories provide an important macroeconomic historical perspective, they do not account for cultural differences or the more localized and systematic inter-workings of capitalism (Cooper 1993; Roseberry 1994). In particular, macro-level accounts of violence may overlook the more everyday and cross-cutting examples of violence as it seeps into local communities and relations. So while I employ a historical political economic framework, I also seek to draw out some of the ways global markets, ideologies and policies intersect with the social and cultural aspects of local communities and intimate spaces and relationships.

Power and Violence

An analysis of violence along the journey must begin at a structural level and be conscious of the continuities between history and the present and between processes in people's home communities and in Mexico. Many of the Central American migrants who risk their lives to cross Mexico are the children of the civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s and suffer ongoing fear, violence and economic uncertainty in their home communities. Often, the violence they experience along the journey is not thought of as separate, but a continuation of similar processes that they have known their whole lives.

Through a conceptual framework that traces power and violence on multiple scales and within multiple temporal and spatial levels, we can begin to understand how structures of violence, and by extension, structures of impunity (Green 2004) operate along the migrant journey in Mexico. More often than not, the workings of power, violence and impunity, on the part of transnational and state actors and entities have remained veiled and difficult to pinpoint in relation to violence against undocumented peoples. At a broader level, a notion of hegemony is useful in understanding how and why violence against undocumented migrants has been largely met with indifference. William Roseberry builds upon the work of Gramsci (1971) and Williams (1977) to define hegemony as:

> a complex set of ideas, meanings, and associations, and a way of talking about or expressing those meanings and associations, which present an order of inequality and domination as if it were an order of equality and reciprocity, which give a product of history the appearance of natural order (Roseberry 1994:45).

Historical processes of economic and physical violence that displace people from their homes and propel them into conditions where they are further exploited and/or abused, appear as seemingly natural and inevitable features of the contemporary world.

I understand power as both historical (Gramsci 1971; Roseberry 1994; Smith 1999) and dialectical in underscoring the dynamic and often contradictory logics of transnational actors, institutions, and processes (Harvey 2003). I suggest that while direct violence against Central American migrants is enacted by individuals or small groups, it is also a form of state/political violence, tied to transnational forces of power and historically produced by processes of globalization, neoliberalism and militarization.

To make sense of these links, a lens of structural violence (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969) is useful for placing the ordinariness of direct forms of violence within a macro-level economic and historical context. Farmer's framework of structural violence emphasizes the importance of a "historically deep" and "geographically broad" political economic analysis to make the critical links between present day lived experiences and the way misery and "inequality is structured and legitimated over time" (2004:309). In order to understand the "inner workings of structural violence" (Farmer 2005), that is, the micro-level physically violent acts of rape, dismemberment, extortion and abuse that migrants suffer, and the everyday forms of violence local communities experience, we must look to the macro-level economic and historical processes that created the conditions to migrate and continue to perpetuate poverty and global inequalities.

However, as Wacquant points out, there is an analytic danger of collapsing multiple forms of violence—economic, political, physical, state, everyday—in a way that "diffuses responsibility" from the political regimes, state funding agencies and international bodies that must be held accountable for people's suffering (2004:322). In light of Wacquant's important critique, I draw conceptually on the work of Gavin Smith to understand how anthropology can make useful interventions into social processes and forces that are both concrete and abstract and move beyond the structure/agency dialectic. Smith uses the phrase "bridgeheads of power" (Smith 1999) to refer to institutions that are concrete and dynamic entities involved in social reproduction, though because they are neither materially concrete nor are they empirically visible, they are often occult, "off-stage" and difficult to pinpoint. These processes or "concrete abstractions" (Harvey 1985;

Smith 1999) must therefore be addressed to understand how institutions as bridgeheads of power are responsible for "facilitating certain practices, often by means of 'order' and regulation, and, just as surely, preventing other practices, closing certain social spaces, and inducing disorder and deregulation" (Smith 1999:11).

I focus on forces that span a realm of political, state and transnational institutions and policies involved in the facilitation, regulation and prevention of human mobility in Mexico. These include Mexican police and military, immigration organizations, human rights commissions, and religious and activist organizations. Mexican, US and transnational state policies and processes must be held responsible for systematically making Central American migrants vulnerable to conditions of exploitation and violence. As such, this dissertation explores how people are drawn into a global labor force, social inequalities are exacerbated, state governance is reconfigured and new spaces of violence are produced. In addition to the devastating consequences of trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA, I consider how Mexican migration policy along its own southern border dovetails with increased state militarization and securitization justified by the current drug war. The United States plays an important role in these processes through the formation of transnational security agreements that intend to protect "homelands" and in doing so, open new markets for the bridgeheads of power to control. This includes the Mérida Initiative and the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI).

In addition to an analysis of global processes and state policies—the bridgeheads of power—we must also attend to the more localized social inequalities and processes of differentiation (Sider and Smith 1997) that mediate everyday acts of violence and social

suffering (Bourgois 2001; Green 1999; Kleinman 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1992). I am influenced by Sider and Smith's (1997) approach that rejects a coherent and singular conceptualization of society for one that recognizes processes of differentiation and multiple 'histories'—the tensions, ruptures and contradictions among populations. During fifteen months of research along the journey in Mexico, I witnessed the less obvious ways uncertainty, chaos and desperation can create fractures within local communities, within groups of migrants and even within the migrant rights community. That is, structural and direct forms of violence reverberate through the social world in ways that manifest as rumor, accusation, discrimination and social rupture. This violence, not enacted from the powerful against the powerless, but is more horizontal in its nature, flowing across and between social groups, demonstrates the cunning ways power operates.

Tenuous Values, Precarious Lives

A central tension I examine throughout this dissertation involves the tenuous and shifting values embodied by Central American migrants in terms of their labor, bodies, and lives as they move through spaces of transit. In the context of both global and local economies, migrants may both gain and lose value depending on particular circumstances and conditions. Drawing on Marxist theory, I examine the commodification and disposability of migrants—in multiple senses, as dynamic and shifting processes that contribute to a climate of uncertainty along the journey and in people's lives. My understanding of commodification is inspired by the work of Marx (1967), Polanyi (2001

(1954)) and Harvey (2010a) and their emphasis on not only the economic aspects of commodification, but also the social dislocations that result from such processes. For these reasons, I think about disposability in terms of an exploitable and disposable surplus population that is central to the accumulation of capital (Marx 1967:632) as well as to the actual physical disposability of human bodies and lives that occurs through violence and death along the journey.

I also draw on the work of critics of globalization and neoliberalism who have identified the more recent growth of a growing global underclass of people, whom they have variously called "supernumeraries" (Robinson 2003), "disposable" (Bales 1999; Green 2011a; Sider 2006), "dispensable" (Pine 2008), "human waste"(Bauman 2003) and "nobodies"(Green 2011a)—people who are effectively rendered useless within their home economies and have a sense that their labor is replaceable (Pine 2008:30). Robinson explains that this "surplus population" is caught within "a mortal cycle of dispossession-exploitation-exclusion" (Robinson 2011). More recently, some scholars have begun to use the term "precariat" to describe a new social class defined by economic uncertainty that has emerged in the wake of failed neoliberal reform, particularly after the 2008 global economic crisis (Standing 2011). However, as Harvey notes, the 'precariat' has always been a part of the labor force (2010b:243).

Whatever term we may use to describe this population, migration is often a response to capitalist frameworks that give people few other options (Nash 2005; Sider

2006).[1] Migration becomes a survival strategy where people "are transformed into illegal aliens who accrue significant value as commodities" (Green 2011a:370). Through migration, migrants are actively resisting their own disposability (Green 2011a), yet at the same time, they are opening the possibilities for new types of exploitation and violence.

In light of these analyses, I suggest that within Mexico, as a site of transit migration and significant out-migration, migrants may become both more valuable—as commodities and consumers, *and* more disposable—both symbolically and literally. The shifting and tenuous nature of human values shapes also the precariousness of human lives.

Neoliberalism and the State

While my interests lie primarily in the experiences of Central American migrants, this study is also profoundly about Mexico. I examine the Mexican state's role in producing violence and the larger transnational webs of power within which it is embedded. Power, violence and impunity are dynamic processes of differentiation that are enacted not only from military and civilian elites, but also from state and transnational economic bodies and policies (Gill 2004). I understand the state and transnational institutions not as "things," but as forces of power (Smith 1999) and of agency not only in relation to the dominated, but also in relation to the powerful (Ong 1999).

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[1] I do want to recognize that migration can also be a strategy employed by elites. As I discuss later, some Central American migrants are well educated and many have a certain degree of social and economic capital needed to migrate.

Several theorists have proposed that with the rise of transnationalism, the power and relevance of nation-state has been threatened (Appadurai 1996; Hall 1997; Miyoshi 1996). Akhil Gupta argues that the "displacement of identity and culture from 'the nation' not only forces us to reevaluate our ideas about culture and identity but also enables us to denaturalize the nation as the hegemonic form of organizing space" (Gupta 2005:332). Michael Kearney goes as far as to suggest we are in a "postnational" age to signify a break from the modern phase (2004a). The quickness to dismiss the nation-state in this linear formulation overlooks the complex ways that the nation-state's power has been historically rearticulated as a result of global processes. Furthermore, such claims portray the nation-state as an *a priori* coherent and consistent fact that has only recently been contested. Scholars have started to problematize this conceptualization by pointing out how the nation-state is not a fixed entity, but has always been ideologically and materially constructed (Heyman 1999; Joseph 1994; McCormick 2006; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Trouillot 2003). Moreover, they point out how the nation-state's power is not necessarily declining, but rather reworked in different and contradictory ways, particularly in response to neoliberalism.

Globalization is not conceivable without a strong international state system comprised of both political and military protection (Harvey 2003; Trouillot 2003) and state governance dovetails with increased structural and political violence. For example, Sharma and Gupta (2006) point out how global capitalism weakens state regulations on trade and tariffs, yet increases state regulation on immigration and policing. Neoliberal structural adjustment programs in "Third World" countries make the state less

accountable in terms of redistribution of resources, while simultaneously transferring forms of governance and redistributive functions to new sectors of society through privatization (Sharma and Gupta 2006). As Robinson suggests, “unable to resolve the contradictory problems of legitimacy and capital accumulation, local states opt simply for abandoning whole sectors of national populations. In many instances, they no longer even try to attain legitimacy among the marginalized and supernumeraries, who are isolated and contained in new ways, or subject to repressive social control measures” (2003 :46). Mike Davis (2006) explains that as a direct result of market liberalization (such as the World Bank’s emphasis of privatized housing), the rise in the informal sector and the abandonment of the poor by the postcolonial state has resulted in a ‘surplus humanity’ that resides in urban slums. Lesley Gill (2000) documents similar processes in her analysis of the neoliberal Bolivian state that has failed to fulfill social obligations to the poor, thus increasing tensions and poverty and then responding to such tensions with increased governability—which often manifests in the form of militarization and “security” masked as development. Finally, Ong (1999:15) makes the important point that the nation-state continues to regulate, control and govern populations that are both in place and in movement.

Neoliberal policies and transnational security agreements between the United States, Mexico and Central America—such as the Mérida Initiative and the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) (which was modeled on the Mérida Initiative)—contribute to increased state involvement in the militarization, policing and discipline of everyday life. While the US Congress justifies financial support to

governments known to be corrupt by implementing provisions that supposedly address weaknesses in judiciary and investigative institutions, the rates of impunity in criminal cases remain upward of 90 percent (Seelke 2009). Scholars have also documented the ways state securitization measures have given Central American states and law enforcement units broader powers to control the populace. For example, Zilberg (2011) documents the zero-tolerance policies of El Salvador's anti-terrorist laws and Pine (2008) documents similar processes in Honduras' war on crime.

In sum, this dissertation attempts to address the links between transnational cultural and political projects *and* economic interests and frameworks, namely neoliberalism (Duggan 2003; Ong 2006). In this way, I hope to understand how social discourses about unauthorized migrant men and women work in relation to labor exploitation, neoliberalism and/or foreign interests. Analysis of such social processes serve as entry points in exploring the intersections between what Harvey (2003) calls the territorial and capitalistic logics of power in the new imperialism.

Constructing Difference in Space and Place

Throughout this dissertation, I adopt a transnational feminist approach that positions the production of difference in relation to capitalism and transnational processes and makes the intersections between markers of difference more visible in local contexts. Duggan states, "Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics" and "organizes material and political life in terms of race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion" (2003:3). Such an

approach is particularly apt in studying the production of difference at the nexus between global and local capitalist processes in particular spaces and places. I suggest the migrant journey is one such understudied space. Mohanty argues that "…issues of spatial economy—the manner in which capital utilizes particular spaces for differential production and the accumulation of capital and, in the process, transforms these spaces (and peoples)—gain fundamental importance for feminist analysis" (2003:141).

More specifically, feminist scholars claim that the focus on flows, circuits, capital and culture, as external social forms do not capture the dynamism of subjects mediating various meanings, movements and practices (Povinelli 1999). Individual subjectivities are constructed via transnational processes, with often contradictory consequences in people's material lives. For example, scholars have considered questions of intersectionality and inequality in studies of migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pessar 2003), neoliberalism (Duggan 2003; Ong 2006), global care networks and intimate labors (Boris and Parreñas 2010; Ehrenreich 2003; Parrenas 2001), international politics (Enloe 1990), the feminization of labor (Nash 1977; Sassen 2004a), transnational love and sex (Brennan 2004; Hirsch 2003), transnational adoption (Briggs 2012), transnational queer communities and migrations (Babb 2007a; Luibheid 2002; Luibheid 2005; Manalansan 2003; Povinelli 1999), travel (Kaplan 1996) and transnational feminisms (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003; Scott 2002). This diverse scholarship situates women's, family, and queer experiences not as peripheral, but central to global processes of transnationalism and inequality.

Much of this work has inspired my own understandings of the gendered dimensions of transnational migration. For example, Denise Brennan's (2004) account of Sosuan sex work in the global economy has influenced my own understanding of how globalized hierarchies of citizenship and mobility create unequal opportunities and uneven experiences at the local level. Mohanty's (2003) analysis of how "women's work" in border factories is as much about exploiting women's labor for political economic purposes as it is about producing subjectivities through appropriate notions of femininity and domesticity in terms of gender, class and race has also been influential. Such an analysis lends itself to understanding how violence against women in Ciudad Juárez, for example, continues to operate with impunity for the perpetrators and enablers of sexual assaults. Murdered factory women are not treated as victims by the Mexican state and media, but blamed for their own deaths for transgressing appropriate spatial, attitudinal and behavioral boundaries for women (Fregoso 2007).

I suggest that similar processes are at play in relation to the ways undocumented migrants are blamed for or at best ignored with regard to violence against them. It is here that we can make the links between the production of violence and impunity and wider social anxieties. Not unlike immigrants in the United States, Central American migrants in Mexico are often feared, demonized and blamed for any number of social ills; these associations are often framed in moral and gendered terms. Migrant men are associated with gang-related violence, delinquency and introducing vices like alcoholism and drug-use into local communities while women are associated with prostitution and sexual immorality. Local residents certainly do experience increases in fear and violence as new

flows of migrants, organized criminals, police and military pass through their communities. However, anxieties around unauthorized migration foreground cultural differences and not the political or economic conditions that contribute to violence or the actors that profit off human mobility.

While I did not specifically focus on the experiences of queer migrants, I did make some observations during my fieldwork with several migrants who openly identified as gay men. I also documented a heightened concern with regard to male-to-male sexual violence. Transnational arrangements and borders can be spaces where non-heteronormative identities and practices are constructed and regulated in relation to migrants and their bodies (Babb 2007b; Luibheid 2002; Luibheid and Cantu 2005; Manalansan 2006).

Finally, a feminist approach inspires my attention to the ways individuals resist, strategize and struggle against structural and systematic forms of inequality and violence along the journey. I hope to do more than simply invoke ideas of justice and liberation but "ask what they mean, where and to whom" (Grewal 2005). Through an analysis of the tensions and contradictions between structure and agency and history and the present we begin to understand how violence operates and how people are actively resisting it.

Illegality and Exclusion

An understanding the intricacies of violence for undocumented migrants requires special attention to constructions of legality and illegality. Because of the illicit nature of the migrant journey, this study holds what is legal and illegal in tension and through a

multi-scalar lens, examines the ways these two realms, practices and arrangements are constantly shifting and interlocking. Nordstrom (2007:xviii) uses the terms il/legal, extra/state in order to address the intersections between these terms to recognize activities that can be both at the same time. She provides examples of money extracted from criminal activities being laundered into the formal economy and of corruption that depends on holding political office. My approach also distances itself from purely moral or legal understandings of illegality, and instead, as Heyman argues, sees "illegal practices not as a category of abnormal behaviors, and especially not as the subculture of a stigmatized group, but rather as an option, a resource, that diverse groups use at varied times" and always within a set of social relations including class and state relations (1999:13). Through the interpenetration of legal and illegal markets and economies, the migrant journey offers insights into both the differentiating effects of neoliberalism, as well as spaces of resistance. As Campbell argues, "political-economic globalization and neoliberalism are not one-dimensional but instead create both domination and counterhegemony across international space and territory" (2009:9)

Constructions of illegality and citizenship that both reflect and reproduce the conditions for the abuse and exploitation of migrants in transit are interwoven with both social and economic forces. Ong argues that market forces have a significant impact on the ways individual citizenship is articulated or disarticulated for mobile subjects. She states, "those mobile individuals who possess human capital or expertise are highly valued and can exercise citizenship-like claims in diverse locations. Meanwhile, citizens who are judged not to have such tradable competence or potential become devalued and

thus vulnerable to exclusionary practices" (Ong 2006:7). Following this logic, Central American migrants in transit fit the latter category—as devalued individuals vulnerable to exclusion. Yet, along the journey, new market openings that profit off of human mobility may increase the value of transit migrants, but in ways that make them more vulnerable to violence.

The illegal/unauthorized nature of transit migration across Mexico creates a dynamic where migrants are both included and excluded and seen and unseen by economic and political forces. Scholars have conceptualized this paradoxical nature of unauthorized migration in the ways migrants are once invisible/clandestine and hypervisible (Coutin 2005; Coutin 2007; Kovic 2010). Coutin writes of the multiple erasures that undocumented migration creates and how they relate to the production of violence:

> Despite the ways that unauthorized migration has become key to certain economic and political processes, the erasures that illegal migration entails are potentially violent in nature. Human yet a good to be smuggled, illegal yet juridical persons, clandestine yet present, migrants are sometimes literally *dismembered*, their legs detached from trains, their lives separated from those of their relatives, their identity removed from their selves. (Coutin 2007:101)

It is at these junctures and tensions that I locate this study: to understand how the paradoxical nature of undocumented migration contributes to a climate of uncertainty, vulnerability and exclusion for people in transit.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I conceptually explore the significance of research in transit spaces, discuss the ethnographic context of my research, my methods and some of the logistical and ethical challenges I faced in the field. In Chapter Three I examine how migration is intimately linked to legacies of violence between Central America, Mexico and the United States, including militarization/securitization, war and economic forms of violence. This chapter brings together history, political economy and present-day conditions and policies to understand the forces that propel migration for individuals and families.

In Chapter Four, I examine the historical, political and economic contexts of transit migration in Mexico. This includes discussions of Mexican migration policies, economic neoliberalism and the drug war. In Chapter Five I concentrate on the everyday material conditions of the migrant journey through Mexico. I discuss the routes, strategies and transportation options for Central American migrants as well as the main obstacles and challenges people face. Chapter Six examines the dynamics of *la industria del cachuco* and how Central American migrants become especially vulnerable to processes of commodification and disposability. I discuss how violence against migrants has become more systematic particularly with regard to the rise in mass kidnappings and extortion.

Chapter Seven draws on feminist literature to understand how larger transnational processes are always gendered and differentially impact the intimate spaces and experiences of individuals, families and bodies. In particular, I examine dimensions

of transnational parenthood and the intimate labors people perform along the journey. Chapter Eight addresses how violence operates at the local level and the social tensions it creates between and among migrants, shelter workers and local community residents. Here, I examine some of the contradictions around notions of security and safety and how social inequalities based on markers of difference mediate uneven experiences of violence and discrimination. In conclusion, Chapter Nine focuses on the intersections between uncertainty and hope in creating new forms of rupture and spaces for social activism in people's lives. In particular, I examine an emerging transnational feminist movement of mothers and families of disappeared migrants, who through their refusal to forget the past, make important strides toward social justice.

CHAPTER TWO—ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE DEPOT: FIELDWORK WITH MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT

It was a hot and humid late afternoon as I walked along the railroad tracks with a group of four male migrants I met at the shelter earlier that day. There were hundreds of people, most of them from Central America, sitting and sleeping in small groups waiting for the next train to pass. Some people were laughing, making jokes while others tried to rest before they boarded the next freight train. On the horizon I could see a police truck with a pair of officers standing in the back wearing black bullet proof vests with their mounted machine guns haphazardly pointed to the street. One of the men in my group whistled to a local girl dressed in a pleated navy skirt, white shirt, white socks and penny loafer shoes walking home from school. We walked toward two young boys sitting alone with their backs pressed up against an abandoned train car. As we passed them their eyes turned down to gaze at the ground. We sat just a few feet away from them when we stopped to talk to an older man, who they called *tio* (uncle).

After a few minutes a large man with an unbuttoned shirt and a gold chain necklace approached us. In one hand he carried a steaming bag containing a whole roasted chicken and warm corn tortillas, and in the other hand he gripped the top of a two-liter bottle of chilled Coca-Cola. At first I thought he was probably a local man bringing food home for *comida* (lunch), and so it surprised me when he stopped where the two boys sat and started unpacking the food. The boys watched him closely and then without speaking a word grabbed the tortillas and stuffed them with the juicy chicken. They ate furiously. The man did not eat at all and instead began to make small talk with

the people in my group. “I’m from Honduras,” he said, “and I’m on my way North.” Something was amiss though, as he lacked the ubiquitous backpack and baseball hat that the other migrants wore, and his jewelry distinguished him from most of the other men and women along the tracks.

One of the men in my group, Jesus, leaned over and whispered in my ear, “he is Mexican.” I learned during my fieldwork that this was a way of informing me that he was not really a migrant, but a *pollero* (human smuggler). Earlier in the day we had watched several men leave a hotel in the center of town; Jesus pointed them out to me and told me they were *Zetas* going out to survey the tracks for potential victims.[2] Even though I was sitting closest to the alleged *pollero* he turned to Jesus and asked him “*Quien es ella?”* (Who is she?) Jesus replied, “I think she is some kind of psychologist or something.” Still not looking at me, he asked, “What is she doing here?” “She is just talking to us,” he replied.

The man finally made eye contact with me and asked if I would like a chicken taco. “*No, gracias*” (No, thank you) I said. “Are you sure? Here have one he said without a smile on his face.” “*No, gracias,*” I reiterated, realizing this was his way of letting me know he was watching me. I turned my attention back to the group I was with and saw that the other migrants were now smoking a joint and passing it around. It seemed that *tio* was in fact a local drug dealer. Politely, I declined the joint. At that point, I felt a sense of danger and Jesus must have felt it too since he stood up and asked me if I was ready to go

[2] *Los Zetas* are a highly sophisticated cartel in Mexico largely made up of ex-military personnel and police officers. *Los Zetas* are involved in organized crime, drug trafficking and since 2007 have begun to prey upon Central American migrants in Mexico.

back to the shelter. I said yes and we quickly walked back together leaving the others behind.

This experience occurred early on in my fieldwork. In the span of a few minutes I had entered a militarized zone where children were being smuggled, drugs were sold, local women were harassed, nationality was questioned and alleged organized criminals walked freely. On one hand, a climate of illegality and distrust permeated the air of diverted gazes and hushed voices. It was a zone of strained social relations that seemed to depend upon chaos and confusion. At the same time, people were laughing, eating, and drinking as if this was any other normal afternoon. I suppose for them, it was.

In order to make sense of the conditions that define the journey and systematically investigate themes of violence with people in active transit, I constructed my field location at various points where migrants congregate along the journey. I worked primarily within shelters where migrants may spend a few hours, days or weeks and came to conceptualize such sites as depots.[3] A depot may refer to a bus or train station, or it may more broadly refer to a transportation hub or storage facility for the loading and distribution of goods. Migrant shelters were depots in both senses as they were spaces where a highly fluid population of people constantly arrived and departed in the midst of their journeys. As undocumented and clandestine individuals navigating through dangerous territories, transit migrants in these spaces were also transformed into commodities where they were traded, bought, sold and distributed. Migrants in transit do not exist in a vacuum and so I also worked with some of the individuals and communities

[3] My conceptualization of shelters as depots was most greatly influenced by the late Michael Higgins, an anthropologist with decades of experience living and working in urban Oaxaca.

who work in and live near migrant shelters to understand the ways transitory movements have long-lasting impacts.

This chapter illuminates how research with people in active transit opens opportunities to capture the raw emotions, experiences and testimonies of individuals often ignored in migration studies. I argue that the migrant journey is a crucial and understudied space to understand how larger processes that propel human mobility play out at the local level and in people's everyday lives. Such an approach not only challenges traditional ideas of "the field" but also offers a unique perspective to study the intersections of migration and violence within conditions of chaos. In what follows, I provide a brief background, review some of the larger theoretical contributions of ethnography with fluid populations and discuss my experiences in choosing a safe and productive field site. I will also discuss some of the challenges of research with clandestine and vulnerable populations including power differentials, positionality and ethical issues of representation.

Conceptualizing the Migrant Journey: Embodied Movements

In anthropology, the topic of migration has been approached at both micro and macro levels of analysis ranging from neoclassical economic rational actor models to dependency and world-systems theories (Kearney 1986). Anthropologists have sought to bridge these approaches by looking at "both people and process" through recognizing the structural and historical contexts in which individuals make choices and act (Brettell 2003). However, the majority of anthropological analyses of migration tend to focus on

fixed communities of migrants or immigrants rather than on migrant journeys. For example, researchers have examined the economic dynamics of household-decision making within sending and receiving communities (Cohen 2004; Pessar 1984), or uneven access to health care in immigrant communities (Chavez 1992). To date, there are few anthropological studies that systematically and holistically investigate "the migrant journey" as a field site.

More recently, there has been a cross-disciplinary turn toward investigating the fluid links, flows and circuits between transnational communities (Basch, et al. 1994; Kearney 2004b; Portes 1999; Rouse 1996; Smith 2006). This scholarship grew out of an attempt to reject narratives of immigrant assimilation by focusing on the material, discursive and ideological circulations between migrant sending and receiving communities. Such analyses challenge bounded conceptualizations of identity and locality and instead explore how flows of people, information, capital, and identities are increasingly deterritorialized (Canclini 1995; Deleuze 1987; Rouse 1996).

As scholars argue for the existence of transnationality as a form of resistance, they risk losing sight of the meanings and material bases of such practices in people's lives. Sidney Mintz reminds us through his work in the Caribbean that the people themselves were not concerned with "becoming transnational; they were creating forms by which to live" (Mintz 1998). The language of flows, connectivity and deterritorialzation that frames much of the research on transnationalism also fails to account for the material realities of *how* people migrate.

Most of the world's migrants do not simply board a 747 jet-plane and land in their "receiving community" hours later. On the contrary, migrants may live in a liminal state of transit for weeks, months or even years as they attempt to cross national borders, earn cash, secure shelter, eat and make incremental movements toward their destination. Thus, I think about liminality in three ways: in terms of migrant's legal status as paperless/unauthorized, their social status as largely disconnected from core networks and family, and their physical status of being between home and destination. As such I argue that migration is not only a descriptive term to define a fluid movement between nations, but also a highly embodied experience of movement through local places and spaces. I critique more abstract models of transnationalism that focus on discursive flows, imaginaries and "scapes" and instead stress the physical and intimate reality of migration for individuals. By intimate, I mean the physical and social realms that implicate the body, which includes but is not limited to sex, as well as personal relations that involve closeness and familiarity.

Scholars of migration rarely conceptualize migration as a process that takes place at the bodily level. My fieldwork suggests that the intimate and embodied realities of migration, particularly as they relate to violence, are of primary concern to migrants in transit and shape both their immediate and long-term lives and histories. Here, I draw on theory that links space, bodies and social processes. Setha Low uses the term embodied space to refer to "the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form" (2003:9) where the body is understood as a biological and social entity. She argues that body/space/culture can be studied together conceptually "to

theorize and imagine the body as a moving, speaking, cultural space in and of itself" (2003:16). Csordas (1994) argues that the body is as much a cultural phenomenon as a biological entity and the body has history. In context of political violence, he states "the body appears as the threatened vehicle of human being and dignity" (1994:4). The notion that bodies have histories resonates with the experiences of migrants whose bodies have been inscribed with direct forms of violence—in scars, disease, disability, dismembered limbs—and the consequences of that violence on their personhood.

In light of these conceptual guides, I suggest that we must consider the migrant journey as a material and embodied space, where people's lives and bodies are implicated. Migrants experience direct pain and suffering and embody the failures of larger state projects and global processes such as neoliberalism and state militarization. By locating my research in transit spaces, I was able to observe some of these more intimate realms and access an otherwise clandestine and difficult to reach population to capture some of the raw emotions, immediate experiences and insights of people still very much in the midst of their journeys.

Transit Migration

Despite the turn to studying transnational processes in multiple locations, much of literature on migration examines a linear progression of migration from departure to arrival, integration and finally, assimilation without examining the transit migratory process in its own right. Notable exceptions include Sarah Mahler's *American Dreaming* (1995), Susan Coutin's *Nations of Emigrants* (2007) and Jacqueline Hagan's *Migration*

Miracle (2008). Mahler and Coutin include chapters highlighting the journey narratives of people who had successfully migrated to the United States. Hagan's work, which looks at the centrality of religion in migrant's lives, also shifts the focus to the journey and to practices in sending communities in contrast to most accounts that look at the role of religion in immigrant communities.

While comprehensive approaches to migrant journeys are rare, there has been due scholarly attention to border regions. This includes work on gender in border factories, the borderlands as a space of cultural hybridity and the historical production of inequality and illegality at the U.S.-Mexico border (Canclini 1995; Chacon 2006; Fernández-Kelly 1983; Kopinak 1996; Nevins 2002; Ngai 2004; Segura 2007). Some significant work has also been conducted on Central American migrants in Mexico's southern border region (Castillo 2001 ; Castillo 2003; Kovic 2008; Kovic 2010; Kovic and Kelly 2006; Martinez 2010; Vasquez 2006). My work seeks to add to this scholarship to understand how for Central Americans and the communities they pass through, the fear, violence and danger that people experience exist not only in border regions but also in the spaces between.

A growing number of scholars have recently begun to investigate the sociological and demographic processes of transit migration. They have studied transit countries and zones such as Turkey, Greece and Morocco where migrants temporarily reside and wait for entry into other countries. The focus of this work is typically on life during an indefinite stay in a transit country, not on processes that accompany the physical and active movement of people. For example, in her important book on transit migration, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008) conducted interviews with asylum seekers in refugee

camps in Athens. Lyons and Ford (2007) look at the demographic impacts of internal and international migration on the Riau Islands transit zone in Indonesia. Danis (2006) studied religious networks among Iraqi Christians waiting to enter Australia or Canada in Turkey and Akcapar (2010) studied the important role of social networks and social capital among Iranian transit migrants in Turkey. While these works look at step-migration processes, my work takes a fresh approach to transit migration by investigating the lived experiences of people actively in transit.

A central contention of this dissertation is that certain places, such as border regions and export zones, are particularly susceptible to changes in the global economy, increased regulation and militarization (Sassen 2004b) thus opening new spaces for violence. For example, "free trade" factory zones in Indonesia, which are largely dependent upon female labor, have been militarized, highlighting women's simultaneous oppression within structures of both capital and state repression (Ong 1999). Increased immigration enforcement and technology coupled with maquiladoras along the U.S.-Mexico border exemplify how global economic processes are closely linked to repressive state apparatuses and violence. I suggest that the migrant journey through Mexico is an example of the way global economic processes (e.g. trade, labor migration, drug and human smuggling) and state/transnational militarization intersect and shape specific spaces. Such an approach challenges work on globalization that focuses primarily on the cultural flows and circuits that defy the boundaries of the nation-state and open new spaces for imaginaries, subjectivities and local resistance (Appadurai 1996; Featherstone 1990; Hannerz 1996). Instead of focusing on the ways individuals create new

subjectivities and hybrid identities, I focus on the material ways globalization has in fact exacerbated inequalities and oppression, which are processes that have been operating since at least the 16th century through colonialism, slavery, and capitalist domination (Briggs 2002; Hall 1997; Mintz 1998; Trouillot 2003; Wallerstein 2004).

In sum, the physical bodily act of movement is a critical component of migration processes and one that is largely ignored in theoretical discussions of cultural, discursive and material flows. The social relations and experiences that occur *along* migrant journeys are not inconsequential, passing moments, but often shape people's lives in a multitude of ways. Moreover, as certain spaces such as migrant journeys are particularly susceptible to changes in the global economy, increased securitization and militarization they open new spaces for violence to operate. I argue that field sites along migrant journeys be considered spaces of methodological and theoretical analysis in migration studies providing a missing link to scholarly work that solely focuses on sending and receiving communities and border regions.

Fluid Ethnography, Ethnography of Fluidity

The analytic shift to studying processes along the migrant journey raises important questions for fieldwork with fluid populations. Anthropologists have advocated for multi-sited ethnography as a way to study the links, networks and processes of both emigration and immigration in transnational sending and receiving communities (Fitzgerald 2006; Marcus 1995; Schiller 2003). Others have deconstructed questions of travel and the dichotomy between "home" and "field" in ethnographic fieldwork

(Clifford 1997; Gupta and James Ferguson 1997; Kaplan 1987; Weston 1997). The preoccupation in much of this literature has been with the movement of the researcher and not the research subjects. James Clifford states, "Anthropology potentially includes a cast of diverse dwellers and travelers whose displacement or travel in "fieldwork" differs from the traditional spatial practice of the field" (Clifford 1997). Clifford's statement breaks open the possibilities of non-traditional spatial practices of both researchers and informants. Instead of entering a static field location with informants in situ, what does it mean when informants are actively in transit and flow through a field location?

There is some work that sheds light on non-traditional fieldwork with transient or unstable populations. Research has been conducted with displaced and re-settled refugee and migrant communities and theoretical discussions of processes of deterritorialization (Ager 1999; Daniel and Knudsen 1995; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Holtzman 2000; Kaplan 1987; Malkki 1992; Malkki 1995; Sommers 2000). In her work with homeless people in New York City, Joanne Passaro rejects the idea of constructing a coherent "homeless village" or conducting an ethnography of one shelter and instead combined a variety of activities in various sites (Passaro 1997). In her work with Hutu refugees, Liisa Malkki's discusses the value in studying "transitory phenomena" and "accidental communities of memory" in addition to the "normative" and "everyday" of coherent communities that is the subject of most anthropological investigation (Malkki 1997). While a study of violence along the migrant journey is in some ways the study of extraordinary events in individual lives, my work seeks to understand the ways in which such extraordinary and transitory phenomena can become part of people's everyday lived

experience. This is particularly crucial in understanding the ways that transit migration impacts not only the migrants themselves, but also the communities they pass through.

Given my project's focus on fluidity, when I first began to think about my fieldsite, I imagined traveling along the journey with migrants from south to north, observing and sharing experiences as they traveled between migrant shelters. During the exploratory phase of research I traveled to the Guatemala-Mexico border and toured various shelters and train yards through the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Veracruz speaking to migrants, shelter workers, activists and local residents explaining my project and the plausibility and possibilities of collaboration. However, after witnessing the complexity and chaos that define the various sites I visited, it soon became clear that studying people in transit did not mean that I needed to be in transit. On the contrary, I could establish myself in one or more fixed locations and through long-term research observe and study the physical and social movement of people across Mexico and the impacts it has on local populations. Thus, my approach was multi-sited and deeply grounded within a network of migrant shelters.

My work with undocumented Central American migrants investigates the daily experiences, movements and obstacles that migrants face to illuminate the complexity of what goes on in the weeks, months or years that may define an individual's migration journey. Central American migrants in Mexico are deeply intertwined with local relations and national politics. They engage in a number of activities and interact with local people as they procure food, shelter, transportation, medical attention or legal resources. Such an approach offers a unique perspective on the notion of migrant flows and streams through

documenting the everyday conditions of migrants actively in transit. Because I was positioned in the midst of the stream in locations I conceptualize as depots, I could observe and understand the recurring themes in people's lived experiences as they passed through. In turn, this allowed me to iteratively develop new questions and probe more deeply into such themes as new people moved through my field site.

Like fieldwork with other transient populations, with migrants in transit the fieldworker may only have a few days or hours to speak with and spend time with informants, which can hinder the ability to build rapport and trust. I often met people and interviewed them the same day or the following day. Nearly each day I had to explain my presence and intentions to the migrants who passed through. In contrast to researchers who set up interviews with their informants in advance, giving them time to reflect on and construct their life histories, many of my informants had little time to think about their answers before I asked them. Although at first I thought this might detract from my ability to uncover deeper levels of social processes and relations, I now believe I was able to capture the raw concerns, emotions, thoughts and strategies of people in the midst of an extremely unknown and dangerous process. The element of fluidity and perspective from people *en route* is something that sets this work apart from other work on migration and is critical for understanding a multitude of processes involved in human mobility and responses to violence.

Ethnographic Context: Oaxaca as a Transit Space

Beginning in 2006, my research on Central American migration has taken me through northern Guatemala, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Mexico City and the U.S.-Mexico border region. While I traveled to all these places, I focused primarily on Central American migration through the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, which is a major gateway between Guatemala and Mexico City. The region that makes up the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in particular, includes the most narrow area between Canada and the Panama Canal. From a geographic perspective, this region acts as a funnel, where people, goods and drugs pass through. For these reasons, it is a strategic area to control and thus has become especially susceptible to violence.

Scholars have referred to Mexico's "light" North and "dark" South in reference to the uneven spatial politics of ethnicity in Mexico (Gledhill 1996:11). An estimated 80% of Mexico's indigenous population lives in southern Mexico, primarily in Chiapas and Oaxaca. There are fourteen indigenous languages spoken in Oaxaca, making up one-third of Mexico's total indigenous population. Indigenous groups are disproportionally marginalized in Mexico and so it is not a coincidence, that the southern Mexican states are more impoverished than their northern counterparts. Chiapas and Oaxaca are the two poorest states in Mexico, with poverty rates around 75% whereas the national average was around 51% in 2010. According to the 2010 INEGI *Censo de Población y Vivienda* (Population Census), 17% of Oaxacans over the age of fifteen cannot read or write while

the national average is about 8%. The 2010 census also stated that 78% of the population lives in urban areas and 22% lives in rural areas. Whereas rural areas in Oaxaca have been profoundly impacted by neoliberal policies that continue to displace small-scale agricultural workers, Oaxaca's urban capital has also undergone significant change in recent years. The 2006 social movement associated with the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) brought to the surface longstanding issues of social inequality and unrest. The state's repressive response to the movement and ongoing violence throughout Oaxaca has significantly impacted Oaxaca's important tourist economy.

Oaxaca is not only a transit country, but also a major sending region for migrants to the United States. Jeffrey Cohen argues there is a "culture of migration" in Oaxaca (Cohen 2004) and in the decade I have spent in and out of Oaxaca, it seems every family I have met has a family member in the US. Scholars have also studied the transnational dynamics between Mixtec and Zapotec indigenous Oaxacan communities and the US-Mexico border region, California and Oregon (Kearney 2004b; Lopez 2004; Stephen 2007; Velasco Ortiz 2005). These communities are particularly notable for the hometown associations and strong ties that are maintained transnationally.

In the context of these local and global dynamics, over a period of five years I developed relationships with and conducted research at several locations in southern Mexico. In 2008-2009 conducted a consecutive year of fieldwork primarily at the Casa Guadalupe[4] shelter in Oaxaca, Mexico. Casa Guadalupe is part of an organized network of migrant shelters that have been established in different locations throughout Mexico

[4] This is a pseudonym.

since the late 1990s. These shelters have dramatically changed the shape and logistics of the journey as they have become well known sites that not only offer food and rest, but serve as important centers to navigate through risk and danger, meet potential travel companions and obtain legal or medical assistanc

Figure 1: Map of Shelters in Mexico

Casa Guadalupe is not located adjacent to the railroad tracks. It is considered to be a relatively safe shelter where organized criminals and gangs have not (yet) infiltrated. For these reasons, in recent years it has become a more popular shelter to pass through, particularly for those who wish to bypass some of the most dangerous sections of the

journey where kidnappings have become the norm. Migrants generally arrive to the shelter by bus and are often referred by other migrants or by a network of priests and shelter workers who send particularly vulnerable migrants on this alternate route. This often includes women, children, and people who have suffered abuses and/or have made human rights denunciations. Migrants often arrive in groups of five or six people and in general there were not more than twenty migrants at Casa Guadalupe at any one time, however since completing my fieldwork this number has risen. This is significantly different from shelters located along the railroad tracks that might host several hundred migrants in one day. While it is known that smugglers do enter Casa Guadalupe, the lower number of people who pass through makes it easier to monitor who comes and goes from the shelter.

Casa Guadalupe was co-founded by a local Catholic priest and Maryknoll missionaries. Interestingly, the original land that housed the shelter was donated by a previous state governor, though the state government has no continued role in the shelter's operation. If anything, there are obvious tensions between the work of Casa Guadalupe and local state officials. For example, shelter workers have suffered numerous accusations made by immigration authorities and there are suspected cases of policing and intimidation near the shelter. Casa Guadalupe is not directly supported by the Catholic Church and has never received any money directly from the Archbishop in Oaxaca. The one exception was in 2010, when members of Casa Guadalupe's staff were allowed to collect donations on *Día del Migrante* (Day of the Migrant). In 2010, Casa Guadalupe was fortunate to be able to expand the shelter to respond to a growing number

of migrants that pass through. The funding for the new construction came from a donation of a coffee grower who received a federal grant which stipulated part of the grant was to be donated to a good cause.

Several weeks after I started volunteering at Casa Guadalupe it was time for me to be officially introduced to the external board members (*socios*) and local community members who support the shelter. Meetings are usually held in the eating room of the shelter in the evenings and people gather to drink coffee and eat cookies. Some members come from work in the city's center and others bring their children or their grandchildren with them. Over the course of the year I came to know these people quite well and learned about their individual stories of migration and why they chose to take time in their busy lives to serve migrants. Most everyone involved was a migrant at one time and/or has family members who have migrated to the United States.

In Zapotec there is a concept called *guelaguetza*. *Guelaguetza* is the name of a popular holiday and tradition where dancers from Oaxaca's seven regions come together to promote cultural identity and unity, but it is derived from the Zapotec word that means mutual offering or reciprocal exchange. As it was first explained to me, if you have a neighbor with a son getting married, you might donate a carton of sodas or a dozen chickens with the understanding that when it is time for your child to be married, that person will reciprocate with an equivalent offering. In the spirit of *guelaguetza*, the *socios* not only offered material resources, but also acts of generosity and service to help the organization and individual migrants. Many of them explained that because they were

migrants and understood the hardships of being undocumented in another country, they were moved to help the undocumented in Mexico.

Casa Guadalupe's board members include an accountant, a construction worker, restaurant owners and housewives. Fernando, who works in construction, offers migrants the opportunity to work for him on a daily basis. He picks the migrants up from the casa in the mornings in his large truck and gives them a daily wage. Maria, a widow and grandmother who lives above an internet café on the outskirts of the city, and was once an immigrant in the United States herself, regularly shows up at the shelter to read the bible and pray with migrants. When I first met her she would occasionally invite migrants to come to her house and help her clean though this came to an end when she suspected two migrants of stealing her mobile phone. She no longer feels comfortable having migrants come into her home. The tension between aid and distrust is something I will explore in more depth in Chapter Eight.

Methods

Working within established migrant shelters was a critical research strategy for several reasons. Most significantly, it provided access to undocumented migrants—a group that is otherwise extremely difficult to locate and systematically recruit for participation in research studies. The fact that many vulnerable migrants pass through Casa Guadalupe meant that I was able to speak to a diverse array of people. Through my affiliation with Casa Guadalupe I met and spoke with hundreds of Central American men and women over the course of my fieldwork. I also met and interviewed shelter aid

workers and volunteers, priests, public officials, local residents and Central American migrants who were temporarily residing in Mexico.

At the time of my research, Casa Guadalupe was split into two locations: an office and the actual shelter where migrants eat and sleep. I conducted systematic participant observation at both locations. My participation at the office included initial intake of migrants, leading orientations on the risks of the journey and helping migrants make phone calls to their families in their communities of origin or in the United States. Phone calls allowed people to update their often worried family members on their whereabouts and also request money transfers when needed. I also accompanied sick, injured or pregnant migrants to a local clinic where they received medical attention. At the office, I also assisted local Oaxacans searching for missing family members who had migrated to the United States. Searching for family members allowed me to understand the perspective of those who are left behind by migrants and some of the impacts it can have on individuals, families and entire communities. I was incorporated into the daily staff of Casa Guadalupe and regularly attended board meetings, events, conferences and gave presentations to local and foreign groups interested in migration.

Through long-term participant observation at the shelter of Casa Guadalupe, I was able to watch migrants' interactions with one another and participate in daily activities and conversations. The downtime at the shelter was spent sitting around and chatting, strategizing possible routes, playing cards, rummaging through donated clothing and supplies, cooking and eating with migrants. For people in transit, their primary concern is often how far they have come and how far they have to go. At Casa Guadalupe, I often

used a map of Central America, Mexico and the United States during interviews or while we sat around chatting for migrants to document their progress. It was often disheartening for migrants to visually look at a map of the relatively short distance they had completed versus the long distance they had to reach the border and even more so for people traveling to the northeastern United States. North Carolina and New York can be overwhelmingly far on a map for a person sitting in Chiapas or Oaxaca with few resources.

While many shelters are strict about permitting people stay for three days, Casa Guadalupe would often allow people to stay longer, particularly if they had medical issues, had no money, or were victims of human rights violations. This allowed me to foster stronger relationships with particular individuals and engage in multiple conversations and interviews with them. The casual setting at most shelters was conducive to sharing stories and information with migrants in a two-way dynamic that was not always possible in more formal interviewing approaches.

In addition to informal conversations with migrants, I conducted semi-structured interviews with migrants, migrant families, shelter workers, local community members and human rights workers. In some cases I digitally recorded interviews and in other cases I simply took handwritten notes during and after the interview. I recorded and transcribed interviews with approximately 50 people; due to the context of violence and human rights abuses, some of these interviews naturally took the form of oral histories and/or *testimonios*. Drawing on Eric Wolf, Schneider states that anthropologists must listen “for the histories that others produce for themselves” (1995:7). Several scholars

have advocated for the use of oral histories as a mechanism in understanding and writing about migration processes from an "insider's perspective" (Brettell 2003; Gmelch 1992). The methodology of *testimonio* is related to oral history, yet carries with it a explicit level of political engagement and "bearing witness" to the realities of people's lived experience that may otherwise be erased from history (Mallon 2001; The Latina Feminist Group 2001). Such an approach adds political weight to ethnographies of migration, particularly through the emphasis on exposing histories of exclusion, exploitation and violence. I also ran focus groups which were useful in cases where a group of people had experienced a traumatic event, such as a kidnapping or robbery, and could collectively discuss their shared and unique experiences, often building upon each other's descriptions, perceptions and commentaries.

I sum, my position as a full-time volunteer allowed me to be embedded within an established institutional structure as well as to have access to, witness and understand what migration means for people in the midst of transit. I was able to conduct more "traditional" long-term research with the people involved in running the shelters and local community members; some of these people became key informants. I collected data on the inter-workings of the organization—the main issues, concerns and challenges facing both migrants and aid workers.

In addition to research at Casa Guadalupe, I made trips to several other shelters in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, Mexico City and the Guatemala-Mexico border to conduct participant observation and interview migrants and

shelter staff. The Albergue Nazareth[5] located adjacent to the railroad tracks in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was particularly welcoming and I spent a significant amount of time at the shelter. The staff of Casa Guadalupe and Albergue Nazareth work closely together and I was therefore able to develop strong relationships with several shelter workers and the founder of the shelter, Padre José. In addition to these extended trips, I participated in a variety of public events and conferences with the network of shelter workers. As I expand upon in the conclusion, I witnessed a caravan of mothers from Central America who make an annual trip to Mexico to raise awareness about their children who have disappeared while crossing Mexico. I attended a shelter opening where local women dressed in their traditional clothing and made tamales to symbolically welcome the Central Americans that would be passing through their community. As such, working within the migrant shelter network allowed me to witness and document not only the violence that people had experienced but to also study a robust social movement. Finally, I conducted archival research at various institutions and archives in Oaxaca and Mexico City including the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) and the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

Upon my return to the United States I have maintained contact with several of my informants and shelter colleagues and friends through email and social networking websites (primarily Facebook). When I was in the field very few of my informants and colleagues were on Facebook but today it is a major source of communication and activity related to the migrant rights movement in Mexico. Shelters and priests have their

[5] This is a pseudonym

own Facebook pages. On Facebook people post articles, photos, announcements, press releases, and organize events related to migrant shelters and the migrant right's movement in Mexico. Email and Facebook are also used to post photographs and documentation of human rights violations and violence against migrants and shelters in local communities. For example, migrant shelter workers regularly post news articles and photographs documenting migrants who have been killed near shelters. I have received emails of photos of local authorities suspected to be extorting migrants and the vehicles they drive. I have also received photos taken with hidden cameras of the bus drivers who not only charge higher prices of undocumented migrants, but also work in collusion with corrupt authorities. In this capacity, email and Facebook have become online archives of the major issues, events, and actions of concern to migrant rights workers.

Ethnographic Research with Clandestine and Vulnerable Populations

In the field of anthropology there is a rich tradition of conducting fieldwork amidst conditions of fear and violence (Daniel 1996; Feldman 1991; Green 1999; Kovats-Bernat 2002; Kovats-Bernat 2008; Nordstrom and Martin 1992; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Sluka 2000). Several anthropologists have discussed at length the methodological and personal challenges of working in such settings and at times the necessity of abandoning entire projects (Hannerz 2006; Kovats-Bernat 2002). Because transit migration through Mexico has become a site of extreme violence and profit, I was not immune to dangerous field situations, threats, deception and intimidation. I took a variety of measures within and near the shelters in order to minimize risk and avoid being alone

with unfamiliar people. Shelter workers also employ a number of methods to reduce the number of human smugglers, organized criminals and weapons and drugs that enter the shelter. The caution I needed to employ on a daily basis in my interactions at shelters and in local communities also applied to the ways I talked about and presented my research. During one interview with a priest I inquired about the drug trade and whether it impacted local dynamics in the community. He said that it certainly did, but that is not something that is spoken about. "Why not?" I asked naively. He replied bluntly, "Because those who talk about it are killed."[6]

In navigating the realities and politics of violence, I struggled with wanting to be on the "frontlines" of dangerous situations because I assumed it would make for more compelling and exciting research. Initially, I envisioned riding on the rooftops of trains with migrants and accompanying them as they waited in train yards day and night. However, it quickly became apparent that my research would not only be safer but more robust and complex if I worked from within the established network of migrant shelters in Mexico. My goal was not to reproduce the journalistic snapshots of violence along the journey, but rather to investigate and illuminate some of the more subtle underlying social processes and contradictions that accompany mobility and ultimately reproduce inequality and violence.

One of the greatest challenges in conducting research with undocumented people in transit is that they must live a clandestine existence, often in the shadows and margins of society. They often prefer not to speak openly about their citizenship status.

[6] Mexico has one of the highest murder rates for journalists in the world. During my fieldwork several foreign activists and aid workers were killed in relation to violence in Oaxaca.

Undocumented migrants do not share the same rights as citizens and are thus particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation and injury, often making them wary of strangers. Working as a full-time volunteer and incorporating myself into the daily activities of the shelter importantly allowed me to build rapport with migrants. While my primary role was an observer and anthropologist, I was observed by my informants as well. To see me assisting—cooking, helping make phone calls, accompanying sick migrants to the local clinic and giving advice on the risks of the journey—allowed migrants to see me as not only a researcher, but also someone concerned about their well-being.

Although I took precautions to ensure the safety and anonymity of my informants, my position as a shelter worker complicated this situation. I received oral consent but did not have my informants sign any consent form documents as is customary in anthropological research. For research purposes, I did not collect any information that could potentially identify people's illegal presence in Mexico. However, it is standard practice for migrant shelters to document basic information about the people who enter the shelter and some shelters have people sign forms, take fingerprints and photographs. At Casa Guadalupe all these practices were employed during the initial intake. It was thus one of my main responsibilities to conduct short interviews with migrants to find out their full name, nationality, religion, names and phone numbers of family members, their destination, if they had been abused or experienced human rights violations and any physical characteristics that would possibly help identify them in case of disappearance or death. Personnel from other shelters regularly exchange such information in cases of missing migrants. At times migrants would refuse to have their photo taken or to sign the

intake form and I suspect that migrants regularly used fake names to protect their identities.

I made it clear to all the people I interviewed for my research that their participation was voluntary and separate from their involvement with the shelter. In my own notes I did not record people's full names or other identifying information. I only tape-recorded interviews with a select group of people I had established a significant amount of rapport with and even so did not use names in my recordings. With migrants this meant that it generally took a few days or in some cases weeks before I would approach someone about doing a recorded interview with me. I waited to conduct recorded interviews with shelter aid workers until the latter staged of my fieldwork. I felt the longer time to develop relationships and trust with informants allowed for more honest and in depth interviews. All the names of shelters and individuals, including public figures, have been changed in my written work to ensure the anonymity of my informants and field sites.

The vulnerable and clandestine existence that many of my informants embodied in addition to the makeshift and unpredictable nature of the journey meant that people constantly arrived and departed the shelter without notice and therefore I had to employ a highly flexible research approach that adapted to daily events. In several instances I arrived to the shelter prepared to do an interview or simply spend time with an individual to find out upon arrival that they had left. Travel plans are often serendipitous and can change instantly with the unexpected arrival of a money order, meeting a new travel companion or becoming alienated or threatened by current circumstances. In some cases

Casa Guadalupe received migrants who had been left by their travel companions. In one case a mother and her young daughter arrived to the shelter after they were robbed and abandoned in a remote village by the person hired to smuggle them across the country. The fact that migrants were not permanent residents in my field location also meant that they had a different relationship to and experience of violence than the shelter workers and local residents. It became clear that to truly understand the complexity of violence along the migrant journey, I would need to explore these differences.

Through my position as a shelter volunteer and alignment with the migrant rights movement in Mexico I was in a unique position to study the complexities and contradictions of violence and hope along the journey. However, as Hale has argued about “activist research,” this often drew me into the “compromised conditions of the political process” (2006:98). At times I found myself in the midst of the micro-politics of shelter life and tensions between and among migrants and shelter workers. I recall a group of men from Guatemala who refused to interact with the other men staying in their dorm room because they were from El Salvador since Salvadorans were known for being gang members and drug addicts. Migrants also confided in me about the unequal treatment they received from other shelter workers. One of my informants was a shelter worker who was later accused of smuggling a young woman. Another was accused of trying to recruit Central American women to work in the local sex industry. I was also privy to disputes between shelter aid workers.

Within this context, I needed to be cautious of my own positionality and maintain the intimate distance that is required in ethnographic research. I was careful to not be

subsumed by shelter politics and instead tried to see these difficult situations as analytical points of departure, with various levels of success. As I address more fully in Chapter Eight, through a lens that does not blame "bad" individuals but rather places disputes, tensions and accusations within wider contexts, I attempted to more fully understand the ways power operates through and across social relations. Through situated and contextualized analysis, ethical questions of representation of the potentially negative findings of ethnographic research were partially resolved.

My embedded role as a shelter worker allowed me to understand the complexities of shelter life, yet I was also interested in the impacts of shelters and migration on violence in local communities. The fluid movement of Central American migrants has had long-lasting effects in the daily lives of Mexican residents. During visits to various shelters I always tried to speak to local residents about how their lives have been affected by transit migration in terms of violence, fear, and economic concerns. While migrants shelters certainly are examples of hope and empathy my research uncovered that they are also highly contested spaces. Local residents often have mixed and ambivalent feelings about the presence of Central Americans in their communities.

Early on in my research I visited a shelter located in the state of Veracruz that was known for its extensive work with Central American migrants. When I arrived to the town people seemed rather shocked to learn of my interest in the shelter and hesitated to help me locate it. A nun I had met actually refused to tell me its location claiming that the area was full of *marijuaneros* (drug-addicts) and that it was no place for a young woman to be. When I finally found the shelter I arrived only to see the doors closed and the

building abandoned. I walked a few blocks down the road where the train passed through and hundreds of migrants congregated. I spoke to two local men who sold jackets, gloves and bags of bread to passing migrants. I asked them about the shelter and they told me that it has been closed after a migrant in the community raped a young girl and the neighbors protested, shutting down the shelter permanently.

A very similar situation occurred a few years later in the Oaxacan community where Albergue Nazareth is located. After a Central American man who lived in the community was accused of raping a six-year-old girl, local authorities threatened to burn the shelter down if the priest did not close its doors. I spoke to a young teacher from the neighboring town who explained her ambivalent feelings about the shelter. She remembered watching the local news with interviews of the local priest and the mother of the victim. She was unsure about the connection between the rape and the shelter and while she sympathized with the plight of migrants she was more concerned about the safety of her children.

Speaking to this woman and other local residents helped me to understand the multiple types of violence and chaos that have seeped into local Mexican communities as increasing numbers of migrants and people who prey upon migrants pass through. Such examples provide insight into the complex ways violence is (re)produced and causes fractures and ruptures in individual lives and communities. The transitory and fluid phenomenon of migration has permanent impacts on local communities that are central components to my ethnographic understanding of the journey.

My positionality as a young woman living alone in Mexico also impacted the way I related to male and female migrants. Approximately 80% of migrants passing through the shelters are male. I was regularly asked about my marital status, if I had children and why my husband would “allow” me to live in Mexico without him and *andar por la calle solita* (walk in the street alone). While I could relate to the women I met on many levels, many were surprised that I was did not yet have children. When I became pregnant while I was still in the field, it changed the way many women interacted with me. Some women offered me intimate advice about breastfeeding and foods to eat and others treated me with a special level of respect and status. For example, I was once asked to give a woman my worn t-shirt so that she could wrap her newborn baby with it in hopes it would cure the baby from colic.

Male migrants often joked with me about marrying them so that they could gain legal entry into the United States. In the introduction I described my meeting of Erik, the 20-year old migrant from Honduras who had part of his ear bitten off was going to Texas where his mother lived. He said he wanted to find his *mama*, that is, unless I wanted to be his new *mamacita*, a term of endearment used between couples. While many of these interactions and comments were made in jest, at times they created awkward situations and highlighted the power differentials based on gender, nationality and class that constantly need to be negotiated during research. However, as anthropologists have noted, it is sometimes through these awkward field situations that the most productive insights are uncovered (Hume 2004).

Finally, despite our location within shelter walls, the stressful conditions that migrants experienced outside of the shelter shaped my approach and interactions with them. Because most of my informants were still in vulnerable positions and had very little time to reflect upon or discuss their experiences in the middle of the journey, interviews were often very emotional and difficult. I found this to be the case particularly when discussing themes of gender violence. Interestingly, I found that migrants were very willing to tell me about *other* people they had met along the way who had been sexually assaulted, yet were reticent about sharing their own experiences.

In what I suspect was an important survival strategy, I collected mostly second-hand accounts of gendered violence including rape, torture, humiliation and sexual slavery. Upon reflection, my assumptions that people would be willing to speak openly about such violence to a stranger is rooted in my own feminist location where women are encouraged to speak out about rape and shame is turned into “empowerment.” This was not the case with many of the people I met, nor was it realistic to expect that people would openly and casually talk about such traumatic events while they were still very much at risk.

Trauma and Victimization

I begin this section with a fairly typical type of narrative taken from an interview with Padre Enrique who discussed a female migrant who made a significant impression on him and his work. I include this here to not only show how such stories impact the people who work with migrants on an emotional level, but also to provide a sense of the

ways violence and victimization are constructed along the journey and to think about the type of work this may do on the ground.

> *Someone who made a big impression on me was a young and pretty woman who was from Honduras. It took her three months to get to Oaxaca and in those three months, the story that she told me….in those three months she had been raped many times. They impregnated her and then they forced her to have an abortion. So can you imagine what this poor young woman suffered in three months. Because of her story and her experiences, she arrived here in very bad shape. Physically, morally, spiritually. She was a woman who left home with a dream and she didn't know what she would encounter, and with everything that happened to her, well, she arrived here destroyed. I will never forget her face. And the experiences that she told me, and the way in which she cried—and it makes you feel bad too, impotent in a situation like this. You don't think it is possible for so many bad things to happen to one poor woman. For me it was very painful to hear about her story, the way they had her and the way they abused her. For me it was something that has stayed with me, the story of this migrant.*

The particular dynamics involving research on gendered violence and collecting stories like the one above led me to think about my role as a researcher in contributing to constructions of victimhood. On one hand, depictions of all migrants as victims can be potentially harmful in the way it denies agency and perpetuates ideas of migrants, and particularly female migrants, as weak and/or shamed. On the other hand, in a larger political context where unauthorized migrants are only beginning to be recognized, victimization is a political project taken up by migrant rights advocates.

In their book entitled *The Empire of Trauma: an inquiry into the condition of victimhood*, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009) argue that there has been a historical shift in the social and scientific treatment of trauma, that it is now commonplace, a shared global truth where "victims" and those who had experienced trauma were once treated with suspicion. They pose an interesting problem:

> Our goal is rather to understand how we have moved from a realm in which the symptoms of the wounded soldier or the injured worker were deemed of doubtful legitimacy to one in which their suffering, no longer contested, testifies to an experience that excites sympathy and merits compensation. The point is to grasp the shift that has resulted in what used to excite suspicion now having the value of proof—the shift whereby what was false has become what is true. We seek to grasp the historic moment when suspicion ended (2009:5).

Fassin and Rechtman's argument is based on the assumption that there has in fact been a universal shift in the moral economy of victimhood and trauma. But, as I show in this dissertation, the historic shift in the moral economy of trauma is not universal and for many people the question of trauma and victimhood is an ongoing historical process and struggle.

For Central American migrants in Mexico, their victimization under the brutality of direct forms of violence and structural forms of violence is very much an ongoing debate and political project. The shift in subjectivity from political refugee during the conflicts of the 1970s, 80s and 90s in Central America to economic migrant in the post-war era has effectively de-victimized Central Americans; their trauma is less recognized and increasingly suspect. Because the perpetrators of violence are not as clear, and neoliberal logics based on individualism and free market capitalism are hegemonic, undocumented migrants fleeing poverty and new forms of violence are not regarded as victims. Moreover, their subjectivities are bound up with racial, class, gendered and nationalistic markers of difference that work in favor or against their victimization in local spaces. I argue that we must understand the conditions of trauma and victimhood in their historical contexts, as uneven and partial projects. And, as the case of activism surrounding migrants rights in Mexico teaches us, the making of "worthy" victims, that is

people deserving of victimhood is an ongoing project of humanization, of which this dissertation hopes to illuminate and possibly even contribute to.

Conclusion

Migrant journeys are critical and understudied spaces where social inequalities and multiple forms of violence are (re)produced. While there are certainly a number of challenges regarding safety, positionality and representation, ethnographic research methods are particularly adept to studying the fluid, serendipitous and often chaotic conditions of migrant journeys. Field sites located in migrant "depots" allow researchers to capture the raw and immediate lived experiences of people in transit as well as to understand the multiple impacts of transit flows on local populations. Such an approach offers a systematic and relatively safe way to study the intersections between migration and violence.

As people become increasingly mobile globally in response to neoliberal policies, conflict, financial crises and poverty, it is essential that scholars conceptualize and study the diverse migrant pathways around the world. With increases in securitization and militarization of border regions and transportation zones, the time it takes for people to cross transit countries like Mexico will only increase and become more dangerous. Undocumented migrants travel with few enforced legal protections and rights, creating the conditions for their exploitation and abuse. The manifold ways violence seeps into local communities can be equally devastating. For these reasons, ethnographic research

on migration journeys not only fills an important theoretical and empirical gap in the migration literature but also highlights a global human rights issue.

CHAPTER THREE—CHILDREN OF WAR: HISTORICAL CIRCULATIONS OF VIOLENCE, CAPITAL AND POWER

On a late winter afternoon a few weeks before Christmas, I sat in the living room of Casa Guadalupe with Hector, an indigenous Guatemalan who speaks *Mam*, a Mayan language spoken in southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. I remember Hector for his intensely black, tired looking eyes that hinted at a lifetime of hardship. As we sat together, he took out a crumpled plastic baggy from his pocket and unwrapped a small brown wallet. He opened the wallet to show me four passport-sized photographs of his wife and three children, two daughters and one son, all with serious expressions on their faces. The older daughter's photo looked to be from her high school graduation and was the only one printed in color. Aside from the photos, Hector's wallet was empty, no ID card, no credit card, no cash. Hector was in the Guatemalan military from 1985 to 1996 training lower-ranked soldiers on how to use various weapons. As we sat at the shelter he proudly listed off all the different weapons he knows how to operate, what it was like fighting the guerillas and the threat of communism. He told me that the reason Guatemala has so much violence today is because after the Peace Accords were signed under the presidency of Alvaro Arzu in 1996, the military was debilitated and no longer had the power to maintain order and control.

After Guatemala's military downsized, Hector was left with few economic opportunities, which is when he first made the choice to migrate to the United States. When I met him, he was on his third journey to the US and was accompanied by his teenage son and 18-year-old niece, who recently left her job working at a bar along the

Mexico-Guatemala border serving a primarily male clientele. Hector had already been deported from the US and knew that if he was caught again by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the "Re-entry of Removed Aliens" US Code, he would face up to 20 years in federal prison.[7] Hector decided it was still worth the risk to try crossing because he needed to help his youngest daughter continue her studies in Guatemala.

The broad contours of Hector's life history reveal some of the ways present-day migration from Central America is deeply embedded in histories of violence, economic insecurity and militarization. Hector was a member of a U.S.-backed military in a war that killed an estimated two-hundred thousand people, many of them other indigenous people. Hector had no support from his military and government, which he saw as largely corrupt and responsible for the economic crises and rise of violence and organized criminals in his community. As Hector tried for the third time to reach the United States to make a better life for his children, he was considered to be illegal and his act of migration, criminal. If he was caught, he risked spending the next two decades in a prison run by the government that indirectly supported him twenty-five years ago.

Inspired by the personal histories of Hector and others, the goal of this chapter is to trace how the historical circulations of violence between the United States, Mexico and Central America have impacted migration. While present-day migration is arguably tied to centuries of violence and exploitation in Central America, in this chapter I focus on developments over the past half-century including civil war and political repression,

[7] According to Title 8, Section 1326 of the United States Code, illegal reentry accounted for nearly half of the criminal immigration prosecutions in 2011. Prosecutions under this statue have continued to rise in the past twenty years, particularly under the Obama administration. For more information including statistics and charts, see http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/251/.

neoliberal structural adjustment, post-war “new violence” (Benson, et al. 2008) and transnational security and militarization projects. As I will discuss, these histories of blood, capital and power are interconnected and often transnational. Through a lens that bridges structural, political and everyday violence—in terms of both structure and agency—we can begin to understand the complex and historically deep conditions that shape individual decisions to migrate today.

Legitimate Victims: Political Refugees and Economic Migrants

Many of the Central American migrants crossing through Mexico today were born during or soon after the decades of war and repression in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and to a lesser degree, Honduras. Some migrants fought in the wars, others lost family members, and others have vivid memories of death and horror that defined their childhoods. For example, during an interview with Mari, a woman in her mid-thirties from El Salvador, she spoke to me about two memories that stand out from her childhood. In her words,

> *I remember when I was six years old and inside the patio where we lived, right there in the corridor there were dead people. They were in the trees, there were people hanging there who had had their skin taken off. The neighbors said they didn’t see anything, but there they were at dawn, tied to the trees without their skin. This is what I remember of my childhood.*

She went on to talk about another set of killings she witnessed.

> *I remember that it was the soldiers who were killing, they killed a boy from there, and they killed him unjustly. At this time, this boy was defending his brothers who were being recruited by the soldiers. His brothers didn’t want to go with the soldiers, and their older brother went to defend them and they pushed their mother and he hit one of the soldiers and the soldier just*

> *went up to him and put a bullet here, in the middle of his heart. And then he shot his brother. He shot a lot of people. That is all I remember.*

During the Cold War, Central America was an important region in global politics as violence escalated in these countries during the 1970s and 1980s. The US played a significant role during the conflicts in Central America supplying weapons, financial assistance and military training to Central American guerillas and right-wing governments. Under the Reagan doctrine, President Reagan sought to "rollback" the influence of Soviet communism around the world through supplying overt and covert aid to anti-communist guerillas and governments.[8] The U.S.-backed governments and guerillas in Central America killed and tortured hundreds of thousands of people during Reagan's eight years in office. Grandin describes Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua as the "Cold War's last killing fields" (2004:5) in a process he describes as the "violence of empire" (2006). It is estimated that a quarter of a million people died during these conflicts, tens of thousands were "disappeared" (missing victims of state terror likely tortured or killed) and millions more were displaced from their homes.

In what follows, I briefly outline the specificities of war and repression in each country for two reasons. First, I seek to highlight how categories such as economic migrant and political refugee are contested and depend upon larger transnational politics and alliances. Second, I want to draw out some of the continuities of US military and financial support during the civil wars and in the present war against organized crime.

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[8] The United States systematically trained Central American soldiers at the School of the Americas (now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) teaching counterinsurgency techniques, psychological warfare, military intelligence and interrogation tactics. The school was originally located in Panama at Fort Gulick but after the Panama Canal Treaty was signed in 1984, it moved to its current location at Fort Benning in Georgia (where it now trains Mexican police for the war on drugs).

The Guatemalan civil war, which was the bloodiest of all the wars in Central America, lasted from 1960 until 1996 when the Peace Accords were signed. Throughout the conflict the United States had a heavy hand in the violence. After the U.S.-backed overthrow of Arbenz which put the anti-communist military party in power, during the 1960s and 1970s the Guatemalan military modernized its weaponry, use of intelligence, paramilitary groups and torture techniques. In the early 1980s, in response to a rise in the insurgency movement and the formation of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (UNRG), the Guatemalan army stepped up its counterinsurgency tactics and warfare. Throughout the de facto presidency of ex-General Efrain Rios Montt from 1982-1983, the Guatemalan army initiated one of the most brutal and deadly periods during the thirty-six year conflict. Rios Montt led a "scorched earth" counterinsurgency campaign that committed genocide, torture, rape and disappearances of men, women and children. Many of the victims were indigenous Mayans who lived in the rural highlands. The "scorched earth" campaign ultimately killed two hundred thousand people and disappeared tens of thousands of others.

The civil war in El Salvador refers to the period of armed conflict between 1979 and 1992. However, social unrest, political violence and terror were rampant during the 1970s under the right-wing National Conciliation Party (PCN). The conflict was between El Salvador's military government and several left wing guerilla groups, most notably the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN). The US government had been training Salvadoran military soldiers and police since the 1950s and continued to support the military government throughout the civil war despite widespread human rights violations.

This culminated in a U.S.-supported military coup in October 1979 that ousted president Carlos Romero. Despite the change in leadership, political violence continued under the military government and its intelligence service, the National Security Agency (ANSESAL) and a network of paramilitary groups known as Democratic Nationalist Organization (ORDEN). These paramilitary death squads killed tens of thousands of people. Between 1979 and 1981 an estimated 30,000 people were killed. In an event known as the El Mozote massacre (Binford 1996), in just three days between December 11 and December 13, 1981 over a thousand people were murdered in six hamlets by the U.S.-trained and equipped Atlacatl Batallion. Throughout the 1980s the military government implemented a brutal counterinsurgency campaign. The conflict officially ended in January 1992 after twelve years of fighting and the signing of a treaty known as the Chapultepec Peace Accords. Over 75,000 people were killed during the conflict, the second highest death toll in Central America after Guatemala.

The history of U.S.-backed war and repression in Honduras differs significantly from that of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua in that Honduras did not erupt into full-blown civil war. Like its neighbors, it was revealed that the army was involved in repression, disappearances, torture and murder of suspected dissidents during the 1980s. In 1995, an award-winning series written by Gary Cohn and Ginger Thompson for the Baltimore Sun, exposed the atrocities committed by the U.S.-backed Honduran death squad called Battalion 316 (Cohn and Thompson 2004 (1995)). Battalion 316 was largely trained and equipped by the CIA and directed by General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez. The CIA trained members of Battalion 316 in surveillance and interrogation in the United

States and later, along with Argentine counterinsurgency experts, on Honduran bases. In the Baltimore Sun report, which was based upon newly unclassified government documents, the Reagan administration purposely misled and minimized the violence to the American public and to Congress to maintain the flow of congressional funding to Honduras. In 1981, President Reagan appointed John Negroponte, who was known as strong anti-communist, as the ambassador to Honduras, replacing Jack Binns who had complained about human rights abuses in Honduras. Although Negroponte denied knowing about human rights abuses and unsolved disappearances committed by the Honduran Army, government documents suggest he was aware of them and downplayed their significance. Honduras played an important role in the Central American conflicts and fight against communism as a base for the United States and the Nicaraguan Contras and from 1981-1985 the US increased military spending in Honduras from $4 million to $77.4 million a year.

Civil war in Nicaragua, often called the Contra War, refers to the period between 1979 to 1990. After decades of rule and repression under the Somoza family and National Guard (what is known as *Somocismo*) a broad class alliance formed under the movement known as the Sandanista National Liberation Front (FSLN). In July 1979 in the event known as the Sandanista Revolution, the FSLN overthrew the dictatorship of Somoza Debayle and opened a new period of revolutionary government. In 1982, counterrevolutionary forces, popularly known as the Contras, initiated warfare against the Sandanistas. The most notable of these contras was the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN). The Contras worked out of bases in neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica and

were heavily backed with arms from the CIA. In 1982, Congress passed the Boland Agreement which meant that the US could no longer support the Contras. However, in 1984 the United States illegally mined the harbor in Managua and a second Boland Amendment was passed. From 1985 until 1990 the UN declared a full economic boycott of Nicaragua. Despite these policies, the Reagan administration continued to fund, arm and train the Contras. Commonly known as the Iran-Contra affair, in 1986-1987, the US illegally sold weapons to Iran in exchange for US hostages and used proceeds from the sale of arms to fund the Contras. The FSLN won the 1984 election in Nicaragua but was voted out in 1990 when the National Opposition Union (UNO) party was voted in. The UNO received strong financial support from the United States. During the conflict tens of thousands of people were killed or wounded and hundreds of thousands were displaced from their homes.

Many Central Americans who fled state sponsored violence sought refuge in Mexico, the United States and Canada (Garcia 2006), but gaining legal asylum was often an uneven and drawn out process. Because the United States government financially and politically supported the right-wing governments of Guatemala and El Salvador, it rarely granted asylum to people fleeing political violence in those countries while individuals from leftist and Communist countries were more regularly granted asylum (Coutin 2007; Garcia 2006). During this period, the United States received criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its treatment of Central Americans. In 1997 people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua were finally allowed to apply for asylum under the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American

Relief Act (NACARA). It was not until 1999 that the US Department of Justice finally recognized people from Guatemala and El Salvador were fleeing from political violence and civil war (Coutin 2007).

The eventual recognition of repression does not erase the fact that for several decades, debates raged in the US about the labeling of Central Americans as political refugees or economic migrants. To become recognized as a "legitimate victim," refugee, or someone deserving of asylum, is a highly contested process that emerges through struggle. I want to suggest that similar processes are occurring today and Central American migrants are not simply "economic migrants." Rather, they are fleeing political, economic and social forms of violence produced both by state and transnational interests and processes. The "economic migrants" of today may very well be recognized as refugees in the future—and this is central to the present-day struggles of the migrant rights movement in Mexico and to some degree in the United States.

Threads of Violence: Transnational Gangs, Organized Crime and Insecurity

El Salvador is like a prison. The only way to gain liberty is to escape.
-Ever, Salvadoran migrant

In Guatemala they kill women like they are dead chickens hanging in the market.
-Lobelio, Guatemalan migrant

For many of the migrants I met who lived through or heard stories about the wars from their parents, present day violence in Central America and Mexico is not seen as separate, but a continuation of violence that has run through their entire lives. Others, like Hector, expressed that the present-day violence and insecurity are in some ways worse

than the violence during the war.[9] Naya, a female migrant from El Salvador, explained to me some of the differences between violence during the civil war in El Salvador and more recently.

> *The violence is different now because before it was between governments, between political parties that were fighting. But now it is between the people. It is something antisocial I guess. It is harder now because this is something that has come from nothing, the gangs are something from nothing.*

While Naya is making a crucial point about the ways violence is social and works not only from top-down, but between and across social groups, I want to further explore her suggestion that gangs come from "nothing". The idea that gangs are created randomly or for no rhyme or reason other than a desire to do harm belies the ways state and transnational processes produce the conditions for criminal organizations and gangs to develop, operate and ultimately profit off of conditions of insecurity. It is important not to distinguish political violence from crime as two distinct forms of violence, but rather to see the ways present day crime is rooted in the political violence of the past and socially produced (Bruneau, et al. 2011; Coutin 2007; Moodie 2006).

The legacy of political violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, coupled with widespread economic insecurity has created the conditions for what some scholars call a "new violence" to emerge (Benson, et al. 2008). State sponsored violence has been largely replaced by the de facto rule of law by transnational gangs, organized criminals and corrupt authorities As such, individuals continue to

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[9] In her interviews with Salvadoran immigrants, Coutin (2006:163) documents several people who said they felt safer during the wars than in the postwar period, including members of the far Left.

endure multiple forms of violence, fear and uncertainty (Green 1999; Koonings and Krujit 1999; Moodie 2010; Rotker 2002).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the so-called "Northern Triangle" of Central America made up of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala has the highest homicide rate of any region in the world (UNODC 2011a). Based on data from the UNODC, figures 2 and 3 provide a statistical look at the disproportionate levels of crime in Central America as compared to Mexico, the United States and Canada.

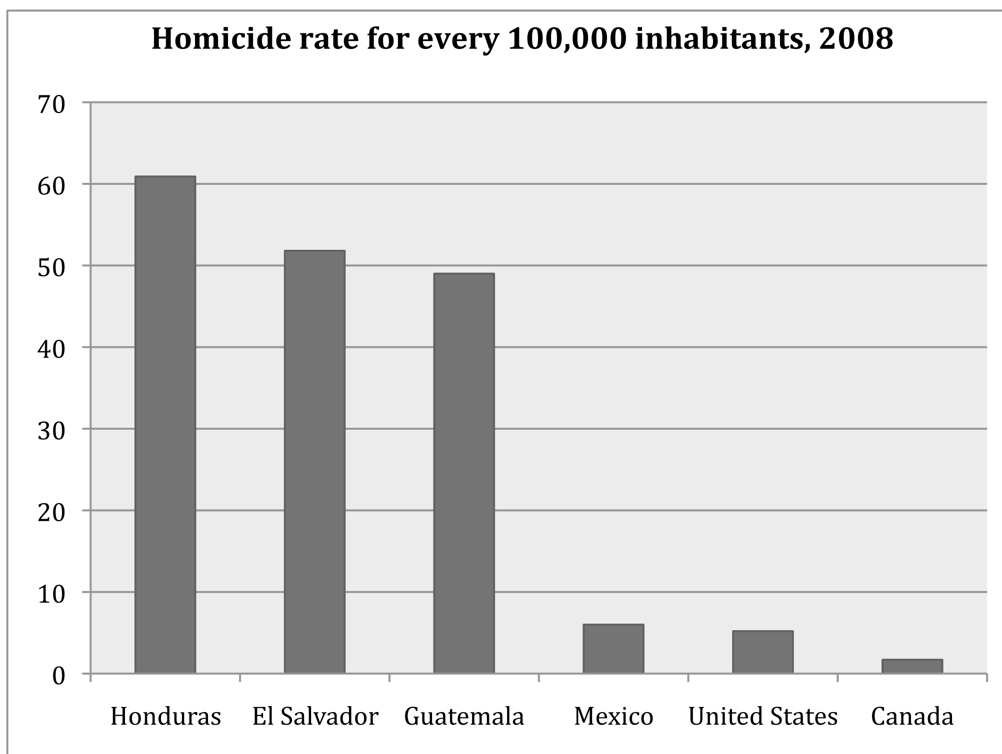

Figure 2: UNODC Homicide Rates 2008

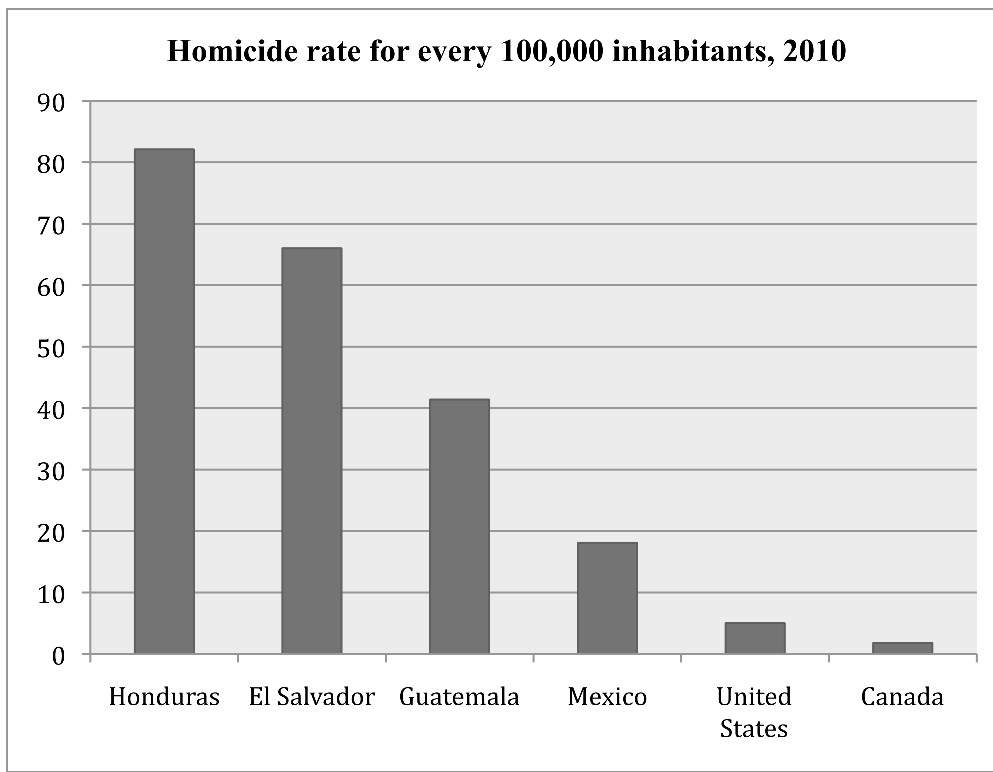

Figure 3: UNODC Homicide Rates 2010

A significant factor that contributes to violence in Central America is its strategic location for drug trafficking from the Global South to the Global North. According to the UNODC, the estimated value of the transnational cocaine industry from South America to North America in 2008 was USD $38 billion. The majority of this cocaine travels by boat to Central America or Mexico and then by land to the United States. The flow of drugs thus parallels the flow of migrants from Central America to the United States and it is almost logical that these two industries would become intertwined. It is estimated that human smuggling from Mexico to the United States generates more than $6 billion USD per year (UNODC February 2010).

Some experts speculate that the post-2006 increase in competition and violence between drug cartels and the extension of organized criminal activities into migrant smuggling, kidnapping and extortion may be connected to the recent slump in the cocaine trade due to a drop in supply and consumption (UNODC February 2010). In the United States, cocaine use among the workforce dropped significantly between 2004 and 2009.

In addition to Central America's strategic location within the drug trade, postwar violence is often blamed the rise of transnational gangs, most notably the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS) and *Barrio 18* (18th Street Gang), both of which originated in Los Angeles. These gangs, which were heavily comprised of youth recruited from the refugee and asylum population were then "exported" back to Central America via aggressive deportation campaigns in the mid-1990s. And while this narrative tells one story, as Zilberg argues, transnational gangs must be understood in the context of "the ongoing participation of the United States in the production and reproduction of violence in El Salvador" (2011:2). This sentiment was made by one of the founding members of the *Mara Salvatrucha* in a recent newspaper article:

> *In this country, we were taught to kill our own people, no matter if they were from your own blood. If your father was the enemy, you had to kill him. So the training we got during the war in our country served to make us one of the most violent gangs in the United States (del Barco 2005).*

Moreover, as Arias argues, Central American youth gangs are not solely the result of deported transnational gang members, but also arose locally in the aftermath of war. In countries like Guatemala, former soldiers, like Hector whose story began this chapter, found few economic opportunities after the war and many either migrated or turned to criminal activities (Arias 2011). Zilberg (2011:6) argues that in El Salvador, for people

who do not migrate or have remittances to depend upon, extortion may become an important source of survival in a neoliberal economy.

Finally, it is important to recognize that gangs have arisen in different parts of Central America under different conditions in the post-war period. For example, Nicaragua has had less penetration of transnational gangs like the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* than Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras (Arias 2011). Factors such as economic structural adjustment, migration and deportation patterns, political restructuring and state policing strategies have all been crucial to the variations in gang development.

While the structural and systemic causes of gang violence, organized crime and corrupt governments are complex and varied throughout Central America, I want to turn to the impacts of this multi-faceted violence on local people. Numerous informants talked to me about the ways criminal organizations and gangs wreak havoc in their neighborhoods by taking control of economic markets, businesses and individual livelihoods through systematic extortion, violence and intimidation. Clara, a female migrant from Honduras, recounted the ways her brother and sister were raped, murdered and set on fire in front of her entire family after an altercation with a local gang. Another migrant who lived on the outskirts of San Salvador explained how the local MS gangs kill people and display them as warnings:

> *They don't just sell organs, but take them just to show them off to the people. They throw them in the streets, there are parts of arms and hands, there are human body parts. They don't even sell them, but just waste them.*

Just as the death squads left their signatures on the murdered bodies of victims during the civil war, today gangs leave body parts in local neighborhoods to show their dominance and instill fear among residents.

Several migrants shared stories with me about family members and neighbors who were murdered when they did not pay the fees or taxes known as *la renta* imposed upon them by local gangs. It has become commonplace for dominant neighborhood gangs to systematically extort money from local people and business owners in exchange for immunity to violence. However, as Maribel explains, such immunity ends once you fail to pay *la renta*:

> *You can't walk alone, nor can you own your own business or anything. If they see that you have a business and are working peacefully, they put a tax on you. They make you pay la renta. The gangs put a quota on you that you have to pay to them on the day they demand. If you don't pay them, they start with your family. With your son or with your mother. They kill them. There was a case near my home. On the corner where I had my shop, there was another little shop. The woman who works there sells sodas and water and they put a rent on her of two-thousand dollars. Two-thousand dollars. The woman could not pay it and they kidnapped her son. For these reasons, we have to leave our own country, for the good of our families, our children.*

A fundamental problem throughout Central America and Mexico is that "state" violence and "criminal" violence are often difficult to distinguish from one another. That is, organized criminals and gangs do not operate outside the state system, but often in collusion with state authorities. During my interviews, migrants regularly discussed their lack of trust in their own governments as well as their fear and disgust with police and military. A particularly telling comment made by several informants was that they felt

silenced in their countries, unable to speak of the violations they experienced for fear of retribution. Ever, a male migrant in his early thirties from El Salvador, stated:

> *El Salvador is a war zone. It is not a war like Iraq with lots of explosions, but a silent war, where people cannot speak. Here in Mexico, the police still dominate the gangs. In El Salvador, the gangs control the police.*

Maribel recounted to me the impotency of her government to curb crime and violence. She used an example from her own family being robbed and her nephew being shot to explain how crime and impunity operate.

> *The government does not do anything. They do not do anything with respect to crime. Especially the police, they are afraid of the criminals. When there is a problem, like someone is robbed or someone is killed, the police show up two hours later. I know this well, in my family we had a case, two robbers entered my house and they had us all on the ground with guns pointed at our heads. One of my sisters was lucky and was able to jump out of a window and leave through the other side onto the neighbor's property. She left and advised the rest of the family, anyone who was close to leave because the robbers were there and they had guns and so everyone left. They left and called the police but they never appeared. In an instant the robbers left, taking all the clothes and valuables. My nephew arrived and he did not realize they were armed. He tried to take them down and the robber put his foot right there, and this is where he shot him. The robbers fled and my family chased after them but did not catch them. I came and returned to my nephew because he was still there sitting in the same blood. I carried him and everyone thought that I was the one who was shot because I was full of blood. At this time I had a minibus and I couldn't calm my nerves in the minibus. My nephew was in the hospital and three hours later the police showed up asking, "What happened here?" And can you imagine, I was so indignant that I told them to leave right now, that I didn't want anything to do with them. They said, "but look miss, you have to file a claim" But no, because tomorrow, they are going to come after all of us, it is better that we don't speak. One cannot speak. And this is what happened to us at my house. The majority of the homes in all of El Salvador and in Honduras it is like this, this is how we live."*

Alejandra chimed in during an interview to tell me about the embedded, everyday, and systemic nature of extortion and terror in Honduran society: In this passage she discusses her brother in Honduras:

> *The gangs had my brother like that with la renta. My brother has a little business there in Honduras and they had him with la renta. And when the first receipt arrived they said that if he did not pay by the date that they would feel very sorry for his daughters. It has always been like this, it is just more difficult now because now more people are left without work. Employment is really scarce. And the government does not do anything, they are corrupt and sometimes they are even involved. Yes, they are an organized gang. Just like here with Los Zetas who kidnap people. It's like that in Honduras, the only difference is that Los Zetas are interested in fast cash and not there, there, they you have to keep paying them for weeks, weeks, weeks.*

According to Alejandra, gang violence and extortion has worsened with increased economic insecurity coupled with a weak and corrupt state system. Violence and extortion are not haphazard, but have become part of daily life.

In response to this rise in "new violence," over the past decade, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have all implemented harsh "zero-tolerance" policing strategies. As Coutin points out, "public concerns about crime and increased stigmatization of gang members in particular authorized the reintroduction, under color of law, of measures that resembled certain tactics used during the war" (2007:175). She also argues that by describing violence on the ground "as criminal rather than political in nature legitimizes state security measures and suggests that perpetrators deserve to be repressed" (2007:152). However, in Central America such heavy-handed models have generally proved counterproductive in their attempts to curb violence (Bruneau, et al. 2011).

As briefly mentioned above, migration is considered by many young Central Americans to be the only viable option in avoiding a life of crime and gang involvement. As the quote that begins this chapter suggests, migration is conceptualized as an escape. In his ethnography of everyday violence among Honduran male youth, Woleth (2008) makes the crucial connections between structural forms of violence, physical violence and transnational migration. He states:

> In Honduras, the violent death of youths dovetails with structural violence, compounding the social suffering of young men who are acutely aware of the lack of economic possibilities and the ability for them to provide for their families' and their own future. Youths not only witness the physical death of their peers, but also experience their own social death. By social death I mean the extinguishing of hope in a future, the contracting of social spaces for youths, the diminishing of opportunities for advancement, and the chronic disinvestment in youths as a consequence of state policies which, ultimately, criminalize poor young men. (Wolseth 2008:314)

Woleth discusses transnational migration as one of the only responses to both physical and social death as Honduran youth grieve and make sense of the fact that they have no place in Honduras. It is only through "economic exile" that young men can reach their productive capacity.

For example, Ever fled El Salvador because the Mara Salvatrucha gang had threatened to kill him if he did not join them. When I met him he was traveling with his pregnant girlfriend, Carmen, and he explained to me that all he wanted was a safe place to raise his unborn child. During their journey Ever and Carmen had been swindled by a local woman whose farm they worked on in Chiapas, robbed on the top of a train, and Carmen had a moon shaped scar above her right eyebrow where she was hit with the back of a gun by the authorities that stole money from them near a military checkpoint. In

chapter seven I will go into more depth on the experiences of Ever and Carmen, but here the point I want to make is that despite all these negative experiences they decided to stay in Mexico to have their baby and not risk being separated by trying to enter the US. In Ever's words:

> *I'm on my way to the United States, this is my true struggle. I left my country because of the delinquency, being scared that they will kill me due to problems between gangs. I don't want to be a victim. Right now, we are looking to move forward, even though everything is really dangerous. I am bringing my woman and we don't want anything more than to find a better future to live. A place where I can have what I want, a normal life without the danger of being killed. And many of us are looking for the same thing, to arrive to a place, a better place where we can achieve something. Some will have a house, they will be able to have things that in our countries we cannot obtain…it is what we are all looking for. Even though on the journey we have to suffer a lot, we have the bad luck of falling into the hands of criminals and kidnappers, rapists, people who steal whatever one may bring, these are many of things that we all have experienced.*

Like Ever, another migrant from Honduras named Celestino spoke about migration in terms of fleeing conditions violence and not in terms of searching for a better future. Below is part of my interview with him:

> *E: In Honduras, the violence is really bad. At times one thinks it is better to leave the country to see if they may be saved from the criminals. Maybe one has a job or their own business, but what little you have, they will take it from you for your life. For a bicycle or a cell phone. They take it from you and if you are reluctant, they kill you.*
>
> *W: They kill you?*
>
> *E: Yes, they kill you. For a cell phone they kill you, for any fucking little thing.*
>
> *W: And do you know people who this has happened to?*
>
> *E: Yes, many. Many friends have fallen like this. And others, well, they do their tricks and they leave for other countries as well. There are many of us who leave our countries, not necessarily to improve our lives, but because*

> *we are fleeing, fleeing the justice system of our country and sometimes many here just end up failing because migration gets them, here they pass through and afterwards they just get locked up.*

I now turn to some of the more recent developments of transnational violence and state responses to violence. In recent years, the Mexican drug cartel known as *Los Zetas* has penetrated into Guatemala. The present-day *Zetas* not only have training camps and operate in Guatemala and along the Guatemala-Mexico border, but they recruit former *kaibiles*.[10] Some estimate the *Zetas* operate in over 75% of the country (McAdams 2011) and the Washington Post quoted an anonymous US official who estimated the *Zetas* controlled 70% of Guatemala's 550-mile border with Mexico (Booth 2011).

The dense jungle areas of Guatemala's interior are particularly strategic locations for drug traffickers to control. In December 2010, Guatemala's President, Alvaro Colom declared a "state of siege" and martial law in the Alta Verapaz Province where hundreds of troops in the town of Coban and surrounding areas were stationed. This area is the alleged base for *Los Zetas'* operations and local people have reported everyday lawlessness and intimidation, abuse, extortion and kidnapping (Booth 2011; McAdams 2011). *Los Zetas,* who infiltrated the area in 2008, reportedly drove around Coban in shiny new sports-utility vehicles carrying large automatic weapons while recruiting local men, including Guatemalan special forces (Booth 2011).

The *Zetas* presence in Guatemala was made clear with the murder of twenty-seven innocent farm workers at the Los Cocos ranch in the Peten region. Most of the farm

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[10] Kaibiles are members of the Guatemalan military's elite forces trained in counterinsurgency tactics and infamous for committing some of the most brutal human rights violations during Guatemala's civil war.

workers, who were tortured and beheaded, were not from the Peten, but from the Caribbean province of Izabel. They were migrants whose lives were taken by violence to send a message about power in the region. Soon after the massacre, President Guatemalan Colom declared "a state of emergency" in the region allowing military forces to operate with less restriction. Despite the Guatemalan military's efforts, Mexican drug traffickers continue to operate with impunity in Guatemala (Ramsey 2011). The month after the Los Cocos massacre, El Salvador's President, Mauricio Fumes revealed that his administration had proof that *Los Zetas* had penetrated into his country seeking to obtain weapons leftover from El Salvador's civil war. Decades after the wars and repression officially in these countries, we are still witnessing the historical continuities and circulations of violence between the United States, Mexico and Central America.

Economic Uncertainty in Central America

Direct forms of state-sponsored and everyday violence in Central America have been historically connected to economic forms of violence, most recently the acceleration of neoliberalism in both Central America and the United States. As Ellen Moodie points out about El Salvador, it is a clear case of Naomi Klein's "shock doctrine," "in which societies reeling from some kind of shock are reengineered for neoliberal economics (2010:41)." Klein discuses this "disaster capitalism complex" in relation to the war in Iraq, and Hurricane Katrina, but also indexes Latin America as the "first shock lab." Klein specifically refers to Chicago economist Milton Friedman's role in advising Chilean dictator Pinochet in free market capitalism and privatization, what he called aptly called

"shock treatment." Critics pointed out that the type of absolute free market capitalism Friedman supported was only possible through repression (Grandin 2006). "Many in Latin America," argues Klein (2007:7), "saw a direct connection between the economic shocks that impoverished millions and the epidemic of torture that punished hundreds of thousands of people who believed in a different kind of society." Neoliberalism in Latin America flourished under a region-wide return to democracy and with a few exceptions (such as Castro's Cuba and *municipios autónomos* in Chiapas), these democratic actors mostly work from within the neoliberal establishment, not in opposition to it (Hale 2005:12).

Scholars have documented the devastating effects of neoliberal processes of flexible accumulation and structural adjustment on the world's poor (e.g. Gledhill 1995b; Harvey 2005; Ong 2006; Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005). The flexibility associated with labor processes, labor markets, commodities and patterns of consumption exacerbate inequalities and contribute to insecurities across multiple sectors, including agriculture and manufacturing. For example, US commodity crops such as corn are highly subsidized and have flooded international markets, contributing to the displacement of small-scale agricultural workers.

In Central America, structural adjustment policies prevailed in the postwar period during the "transition to democracy" in the late 1980s and 1990s (Robinson 2003). In 2006 the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) was signed and implemented. DR-CAFTA solidifies neoliberal policies that eliminate tariffs and open markets, natural resources and labor for multi-national corporations to exploit. Scholars have documented the devastating social effects of neoliberal ideologies and

policies in the postwar period throughout Central America including an increased bifurcation between the rich and the poor, increased poverty, crime, drug abuse, interpersonal violence and a general deterioration of the social fabric (Moodie 2010; Moodie 2006; Pine 2008; Robinson 2003:2; Robinson 2008; Zilberg 2011).

The history of the United States' role in Guatemala demonstrates the interconnectivity between repression and neoliberalism. US government and corporate interests have shaped much of Guatemala's domestic and foreign policy over the past century. Large US companies including The United Fruit Company (which later became Chiquita), International Railways of Central America and the United Fruit Steamship Company were all major players in the early twentieth century (Guatemala Human Rights Commission 2011a). The United Fruit Company first bought land in Guatemala in 1901 and was hired to run Guatemala's postal service is was one of the most successful multinational corporations in Central America. After a half-century of prosperity, the UFCo's dominance was challenged with the 1952 Agrarian Reform Law under the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman who sought to expropriate land and redistribute it to landless peasants. Since Arbenz's leftist leanings were seen as dangerous to US interests, in 1954 the US supported a military coup d'état and Arbenz was forced to resign, marking the beginning of four decades of repression.

Following the overthrow of Arbenz, the United States continued to play a significant economic role in Guatemala. For example, in 1955 under the New Petroleum Code, sub-soil rights were given to foreign investors, resulting in an influx of US oil companies in Guatemala. Since 1996, as Green argues, the "Peace Accords facilitated the

successful rhetorical de-linking of two crucial instruments of violence utilized against the poor: impunity and free-market capitalism" (Green 2011a).

As part of neoliberal reforms, since the 1980s Central America has become a hotbed for foreign capital in mining and manufacturing. In addition to penetration by foreign mining companies, Central America is a prime destination for foreign-owned companies and factories, or *maquiladoras*. Urban factory workers are subject to the logics of flexible market capitalism and the never-ending search for cheaper labor. For example, Beatrice a Honduran mother of three young children, joined thousands of other workers who were laid off from their jobs working for the U.S.-based multinational Sara Lee Corporation making intimate apparel like bras and underwear in *fábricas* (sweatshops). She explained that she was migrating because the government raised the minimum wage (*el aumento*) forcing the factories to close rather than pay higher salaries. She said the f*ábricas* have historically been the main source of labor for the people in her community and their closure has left many unemployed. Some of the most devastating shocks in Latin America have resulted from the ability of capital to pick up and move, leaving behind ghostly industrial suburbs and fallow farmland (Klein 2007:454). Free trade agreements protect the interests of corporations to maximize profits, stamp out unionizing efforts and minimize worker protections.

Recently, Canadian mining companies, most notably Goldcorp, have moved into Guatemala and throughout Central America to extract precious resources. For example the Marlin mine in San Marcos Department has threatened five indigenous Mayan (Mam) communities. It was opened in 2004 by the US Glamis Gold company (who later merged

with Goldcorp) with a $45 million dollar loan from the World Bank. Only 1% of profits are given back to Guatemala in royalties. According to a report by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission, the Marlin open pit mine has had adverse health impacts on local communities including lung problems, water contamination, loss of water sources, cyanide in drinking water, skin disease, death of animals and a rise in miscarriages. Furthermore, there has been a rise in militarization, labor violations, unjust land appropriations and social conflict (Guatemala Human Rights Commission 2011b). Not unlike the case of Goldcorp in Guatemala, in Honduras, families were forced to leave their homes when the Goldcorp company built their San Martin mine which has also been linked to severe health problems in local populations (Paley 2007).

In sum, foreign mining companies and maquiladoras are examples of how transnational capital penetrates local markets, communities and lives in ways that displaces rural peoples and create new health and social problems. Such examples of contemporary economic-based imperialism in Central America contribute to new inequalities, social tensions and out-migration.

In addition to the opening of foreign capital in local markets, other types of neoliberal policies have negatively impacted Central America and Mexico's poor. For example, one of the most devastating impacts of neoliberalism throughout Latin America has been the restructuring of the agricultural sector. Transnational entities like the IMF and World Bank pushed hard for programs of agricultural liberalization, which opened markets, eliminated tariffs, and put Latin American producers at a competitive disadvantage to US producers, still largely subsidized by the government (Otero 2008). Part of this program has

been the introduction of biotechnology and genetically-modified food, which not only threatens biodiversity, but creates potentially harmful environmental and health conditions. One outcome of these changes has been the displacement of rural, often indigenous, farmers from their lands who have little other choice but to work as wage laborers or migrate (Barry 1995; Green 2009). In sum, the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture in Latin America has led to social polarization, an international division of labor between Latin American countries as they differentially engage the global economy and detrimental environmental impacts (Otero 2008).

The interconnectivity of global agricultural markets significantly impacts food markets and prices. The year 2008 marked one of the most devastating years for the poor in Central America as food prices spiked globally. In El Salvador between January 2007 and August 2008, prices of *la canasta básica,* or the minimum food and household items needed to maintain their livelihoods, increased by 20% in urban areas and 27% in rural areas, and the UN World Food Programme (2008) estimates this impacted the quantity and quality of food and nutritional intake for 87% of El Salvador's population. Ronald, a 45-year-old bus driver from Guatemala City, told me that in addition to the dangers associated with his job, he simply can no longer afford to feed his family as the most basic items such as bread prices are on the rise.

In El Salvador, neoliberal governance took shape in the mid-1980s during the peak of the civil war (Moodie 2010; Robinson 2003). In 1985 the US government began attaching conditions to its counterinsurgency policies toward El Salvador, demanding economic liberalization and a more open economy which led to the eventual dollarization

of El Salvador's economy in 2001 (Moodie 2010:42). Dollarization in El Salvador has had dire effects on local populations. Maribel, a female migrant from El Salvador explained that after the dollarization things dramatically changed in El Salvador. Maribel had a bachelor's degree in business and owned a small business selling artisan goods. She said men only make USD $4-5 a day and women are paid even less. She says it costs her USD $30/month just to transport her son to school. That left her with about a dollar a day to cover all her other costs including food and rent.

In light of such economic and food insecurity, people must increasingly depend upon the informal sector to make ends meet. Many of the women I met had worked in the informal sector as street vendors in Central America and Mexico. This type of work offers little security as such jobs are often the most vulnerable to neoliberal policies. For example, in 2011, El Salvador eliminated a gas subsidy, which has unevenly affected different sections of the population. A commonly cited example of those negatively affected include female *pupusa*[11] vendors who depended on cheap gas to run their small stalls.

Producing Humans for Export

The larger economic context of neoliberal reform combined with everyday postwar violence and insecurity creates the conditions for mass migrations from Mexico and Central America. In 2009, the Department of Homeland Security documented that people from Mexico (6.7 million), El Salvador (530, 000 people), Guatemala (480,000) and Honduras

[11] *Pupusas* are thick corn patties often filled with cheese, beans or meat and topped with shredded cabbage, popular in El Salvador.

(320,000) make up the largest number of unauthorized migrants in the United States. The number of undocumented immigrants from these countries exceeds the number of legal immigrants (Brick, et al. 2011; Hoefner, et al. 2009).

Nearly all of my informants cited both the economy and violence in their decisions to migrate. A common theme was the inability to keep up with rising prices of *la canasta básica*. As I heard repeatedly throughout my fieldwork, “where I come from, there is no work, there is nothing.” In addition to the simple fact of not being able to afford basic livelihoods, several people I met were in severe debt and risked losing their homes and land. Migration was seen as the only answer to make much needed capital. In the words of Hector:

> *We are migrating because in our country, in this time we are living in, the economy is very bad and the prices have risen. When the gas prices rose so did everything in the canasta basica, everything went up and now we can’t survive because even though all the prices went up, the salaries remained the same. Everywhere in Guatemala the salaries are the same and the companies, they exploit the workers. They don’t pay fair salaries and where we worked, we didn’t have any labor benefits. They contract people without giving any benefits. These are the conditions in which we come, craving the American dream, yes, that is what we are looking for. We are here not because we want to be here, but we are looking toward the future, to do something in life so that later our children can study.*

Hector’s comments were echoed by many of my informants who cited the simple inability to make ends meet as productive members of the working class as motivating their migration. Others talked about the combination of economic uncertainty and criminal violence. For example, I interviewed a man in his mid-forties from Chiquimulilla, Guatemala who could not continue to support his family as a farmer or even find local work as a construction worker. He said that he could have tried to move to a town with a

maquila (factory) or to the capital, where he might earn more, but that money would likely be taken by gangs. In his words,

> *I am migrating for work. In Guatemala what there is, is very little. The work is hard, it takes a lot out of you and they pay you very little. Work in construction, or in the fields, the milpa, beans and corn that they cultivate. There is more work farther, like in the maquilas where you can gain more, but there is a lot of extortion by los mareros, they put a tax on you and you have to pay them monthly. If you don't pay them, they kill you. Maras from 18th Street or MS, the Mara Salvatruchas. If you go to the capital, you have to give them half of your salary. If you don't give them half of your salary then they threaten to kill you. They give you two opportunities and the third one, well that's it. They stab you or shoot you with bullets. There is a lot of disorder in Guatemala.*

This statement reveals not only the real fear of violence by gang members, but also how economic markets are intricately bound up with violence. The incentives to move to capital cities and work in the *maquiladoras*, where wages are higher, are lessened by the state's failure to protect its citizens and instead open new arenas for profit-driven violence to flourish. Transnational gangs feed off of the market logics fueled by globalization and neoliberal policies that open trade and move business abroad. People who can no longer afford to maintain their livelihoods in their communities of origin are forced to either move to cities, live in urban slums and gain wages that they will likely have to split with gang members or perish. These conditions suggest that migration from poor and rural areas in Central America is not "new," but the ways violence has become a social reality before and during the migration process is unprecedented. Neoliberal economic insecurity coupled with violence at the local level has wreaked havoc in urban areas and it is notable that people are migrating not only from poor rural areas, but also urban centers throughout Central America (Castillo 2003).

Moreover, it is not only the poorest and least educated sectors of society that are migrating, but also educated and ambitious young people. In fact, the people who are able to migrate are often people who have some social networks or resources that can help finance their long journeys and border crossings. So if on a global scale we understand migrants to be among the poorest sectors of society, on a more local level, we see that the people migrating often have some amount of social and/or economic capital. This is not only for the poor and uneducated of Central America, but by people of many walks of life and from diverse places around the world. One young man told me,

> *I started university, but I didn't stay. I took a class on micro-computing systems but can you believe, there (in Honduras) you graduate and you are a professional let's say, maybe you are an architect or civil engineer or industrial engineer and the truth is that you will never practice your profession because it is so difficult. I know architects, doctors, industrial engineers who work as cashiers, one works as a bus driver. There, you are stuck, you can't move forward and so you have to migrate also. Here (at the shelter), people who are illiterate, who can't read or write pass through as well as people who can, who are professionals. Yet here we are all equal. Here no one is more than anyone else.*

This same young man told me that he is looking "for a quality of life with a little more dignity." His experience and impressions are evidence of the processes of the production of people and workers from multiple class sectors who are given little other choice but to migrate.

To make sense of these diverse narratives and experiences it is useful to employ a political economic analysis to situate individuals within broader economic and historical structures. Central American migrants are part of a growing global surplus population, embedded within a larger system of exploitation and dispossession in contemporary capitalism. As Robinson describes,

> There is the rise of a vast surplus population inhabiting a planet of slums, alienated from the productive economy, thrown into the margins, and subject to sophisticated systems of social control and to crises of survival - to a mortal cycle of dispossession-exploitation-exclusion. (Robinson 2011)

The cyclical demise of the working and poor classes is precisely what Central American migrants are both embedded within and resisting as they migrate (Green 2011a), in a sense striving to become part of a global latent reserve army.

To explicate more fully the relationship between a disposable labor force, the reserve army, and the accumulation of capital, I turn again to Marx:

> But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of the population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation. (Marx 1967:632)

Here, within the concept of the reserve army of labor, Marx identities several types of reserve populations—floating, latent and stagnant. If we were to conceptualize Central American migrants as a reserve army, it might be most accurate to label them as the "latent reserve," often people who have yet to be proletarianized such as indigenous and rural subsistence farmers, women, children and petty producers and artisans (Harvey 2010a). This categorization is most useful for this mobile population because the latent reserve is "potentially available everywhere, and the geopolitics of access to it through imperialist and colonial practices can play a very significant role" (Harvey 2010a:279). Harvey's link between capitalist systems and political processes of imperialism and colonialism are important in framing the ways Central American migrants are not only unable to maintain

their livelihoods in their home countries, but also why they are migrating to the United States. By this I refer to larger historical processes of war, social dislocation and violence that precipitate migration. The commodification and movement of human labor to new economies is of course not new. The separation of people from their sources of livelihood is a core feature of the move toward a free market economy, and the impetus behind what Polanyi calls "the great transformation" (2001 (1954)).

A structural lens also suggests that these people—who increasingly turn to migration—are quite beneficial to capitalism. As Bauman notes, "once it has been discovered that labour was the source of wealth, it was the task of reason to mine, drain and exploit that source more efficiently than ever before" (2000:142). In his discussion of this historical process as a crucial moment of modernity, he links the logics between the commodification of labor and the movement of people as elements for capital and profit:

> That momentous event was part of a more comprehensive departure: production and exchange ceased to be inscribed into a more general, indeed all-embracing, indivisible way of life, and so conditions were created for labour (alongside land and money) to be considered mere commodity and treated as such. We may say that it was the same new disconnectedness that set the labour capacity and its holders free to move, to be moved, and so to be put to different ('better'-more useful or more profitable) uses, recombined, made part of other ('better'-more useful or profitable) arrangements. (2000:141)

As Bauman argues, the rupture between production and exchange, the commodification of labor and the resulting disconnectedness that propels human mobility, are all important processes in understanding how profits are extracted under capitalism.

It is precisely this type of mining, draining and exploitation we are witnessing in labor migrations around the world—again, a process that is not new, but accelerated in particular places and spaces.

While companies and employers in receiving regions benefit from the flows of cheap labor, sending countries benefit as well. Remittances sent back home account for increasing levels of national income in El Salvador and Honduras, for example. As Gammange aptly notes, this is a process of "exporting people and recruiting remittances" (Gammage 2006). We see similar trends throughout the world, where certain countries are deemed export countries through illegal and legal means. The Philippines is a prime example where the state actively facilitates the "brokering of labor" through marketing Filipino workers in the global economy, such as "rebuilding" Iraq, for example (Rodriguez 2010). Parreñas uses a similar logic in her political economic analysis of global care networks. She refers to "care resource extraction" and the export of care to describe Filipino workers who migrate to work as nannies, maids and sex workers abroad (Parreñas 2001; Parreñas 2005).

Through their legal and illegal movements to urban areas, border industrial zones, and foreign workforces, surplus people cum migrants become the most exploitable type of worker as they are often disconnected from social and family networks. Undocumented migrants who live in the shadows of society without formal labor protections and/or comfort in accessing legal/police assistance when needed are even more exploitable. In these ways we see how through "illegal" practices such as undocumented migration, capitalist economies, states and elites are able to prosper transnationally.

In addition to the less visible economic roles of transnational capital and neoliberal ideology on the "free market" in Central America, I want to end this chapter by documenting the return to a more explicit political and financial involvement of the US in Central America. The US government has increasingly offered financial support, weapons and training to Mexican and Central American police and military forces. In Mexico, as James Cockcroft argues (2010:41), US-backed militarization does not protect the Mexican citizenry, but rather is the work of empire, where transnational corporations and foreign banks are being protected. While the discourse of the 1980s was couched in Cold War ideology and protecting democracy from socialism, the present-day rationale revolves around combating the war on drugs, human trafficking and terrorism. In both cases, the US government constructs its role as protecting Latin America from evil forces through increased militarization.

"A Shared Responsibility:" Plan Sur, The Mérida Initiative and the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)

In June 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton addressed a room full of heads of state and politicians at the Westin Camino Real Hotel in Guatemala City as part of the Central American Security Conference. In her speech, Clinton discussed the "shared responsibility" and growing concern over levels of violence in Central America as well as the pledge of the United States to build a transnational strategy to combat criminality and violence through funding and training police units, prosecutors and judges and supporting new technology, data and intelligence. Clinton cited the role of the US in Colombia and Mexico as successes in "turning the tide" on violence, calling upon Central American

countries under the Central American Integration System (SICA) to lead the way to fight corruption and impunity.

Through the notion of "shared responsibility" Clinton both rationalizes and justifies the continued heavy hand of the US in militarization in Mexico and Central America. While it is symbolic that she explicitly states that the US will follow the lead of SICA, the bankrolling of training programs and security initiatives clearly demonstrates the power of the US in shaping how policies and programs play out on the ground. For example, in June 2011, Panama along with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) signed an agreement to inaugurate the first anti-corruption academy in Panama to train legal and security officials from throughout Central America on combating corruption (UNODC 2011b). The academy, which operates under the auspices of the Central American Integration System (SICA), is located on Panama's aero-naval service base, next to the former Howard USAir Force Base (Lindsay-Poland 2012). According to recent reports and statements by Panama's Security Minister José Raúl Mulino, US and Colombian instructors will train Central American police units in border patrol, combating drug trafficking and combating "undocumented people" in a new school to be established in Panama (Lindsay-Poland 2012).

In 2006 under the Bush Administration, Congress passed the Mérida Initiative, which between 2008 and 2010 authorized over 1.5 billion dollars toward training, intelligence and equipment in fighting organized crime and trafficking in Mexico and Central America (State 2011). The Mérida Initiative has also been called "Plan Mexico" by its critics to bring

attention to the similarities between this initiative and the highly controversial Plan Columbia.[12]

According to the US State Department, the goal of Plan Mérida is "to produce a safer and more secure hemisphere and prevent the spread of illicit drugs and transnational threats" (State 2011). However, since Calderón took office, Mexico has become less safe, and drugs have not been curbed, but rather funneled through different channels and incorporated into other industries, most notable the human smuggling industry. Moreover, despite Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's recognition of the United States' insatiable demand for drugs that fuels the drug trade in Mexico, none of the money for the Mérida Initiative addresses drug prevention or rehabilitation in the United States or Mexico. The Mérida Initiative is clearly not addressing the root causes of the drug trade and as evidenced since it took effect, not helping to curb violence in Mexico. Critics of measures such as the Mérida Initiative suggest a more integral approach to helping combat drug trafficking and organized crime. Suggestions include reducing the demand for drugs in the US, recognizing drug use and abuse as a public health issue, supporting a prompt and expeditious judicial system to reduce impunity, a more egalitarian relationship between the United States and its southern neighbors and respect of human rights as defined in the US Constitution. For Central American migrants, the Mérida Initiative has indirectly created the conditions for their exploitation, recruitment into drug smuggling and new forms of violence against them.

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[12] Through Plan Columbia the US has spent over $5.6 billion dollars in military aid and coca fumigations to purportedly dismantle Colombia's cocaine production. However, more than a decade later, more Colombian farmers are planting coca today than before (Witness for Peace 2011).

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US legislation included some human rights requirements into the Mérida Initiative stating it would withhold about 15% of the funds until the US State Department provided reports to Congress on Mexico's progress in passing human rights reforms to its constitution and military code of justice. These reports have shown mixed and at times conflicting results. Critics, such as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and other human rights groups have provided memos to the State Department detailing the report's mischaracterizations and their own findings on how Mexico has failed to meet the human rights requirements as stated under the Mérida Initiative. While there have been some important steps with regard to human rights in Mexico, such as a 2011 Supreme Court decision to try military crimes in civilian courts, it remains to be seen how this decision will play out in court. In short, the Mérida Initiative's human rights requirements are only a small part of the total funds and so far, the Mexican government has not fully complied with them nor taken concrete steps toward implementing them.

The Mérida Initiative was intended to last only three years (2008-2011), yet the Obama administration has sought to continue military aid to Mexico in what is now being dubbed as "Mérida 2." President Obama and the State Department requested an additional $310 million dollars for the fiscal year 2011 and $290 million dollars for 2012. As of 2012, there is no end in sight to US funding militarization projects in Mexico that have contributed to a failed war against drugs and has resulted in an unprecedented numbers of deaths.

Beyond Mexico, the United States continues to fund and support militarization in Central America through aggressive policies. Under the Central America Regional Security Initiative, the United States has pledged at least USD $165 million to funding

and training Central American military and police as part of a larger goal of securing the region between the U.S.-Mexico border and Panama including the Caribbean. According to the CARSI information page on the US State Department's website[13], the initiative supports:

> Law enforcement and security force assistance to confront narcotics and arms trafficking, gangs, organized crime, border security deficiencies, as well as to disrupt criminal infrastructure, such as money laundering and trafficking routes and networks; Capacity enhancements for public security, law enforcement and justice sector actors and institutions, and rule of law agencies and personnel to provide the skills, technology and systems expertise to address the threats of the region; and Community policing, gang prevention and economic and social programming for at risk youth in areas adversely impacted by crime.

In Hillary Clinton's address to the SICA conference in 2011, she pledged another $300 million dollars from the US government to "Central-American led efforts to address deteriorating citizen security" (Clinton 2011).

Transnational security agreements between the United States and Latin American countries claim to promote peace and security for citizens, yet all evidence points to the contrary. For example, in 2012 Nobel Peace Prize laureates Rigoberta Menchú and Jody Williams completed a report that links US supported securitization and militarization in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala to increased insecurity and violence against women. Femicide rates in Central American countries like Guatemala far exceed those in Ciudad Juárez, the "birthplace" of the concept of femicide.[14] The number of unsolved cases of murdered women in Juárez has hovered around 400 women for several years. Countries like Guatemala have documented figures that exceed that each year. As Sanford (2008)

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[13] See http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2012/183561.htm

[14] In Chapter Seven I provide a more detailed explanation of the concepts of femicide/feminicide.

notes, the female homicide rate in peacetime Guatemala rivals the numbers of women killed in the early 1980s, at the height of the genocide. In 2005, 518 women were murdered in Guatemala, in 2006, over 600 women were killed and in 2007 nearly two women were murdered each day (Sanford 2008). And in a period of four years since 2007, Guatemala has seen 4,400 femicides (Stone 2011). Most of this violence occurs around Guatemala City, a hotbed for gang activity and replete with crowded urban slums. The number of women murdered in Honduras are also disturbingly high. Approximately 2,400 women have been murdered in Honduras since 2002, with 1,500 of those occurring between 2008 and 2011. In 2010 there were 351 feminicides, 407 in 2009 and 252 in 2008 (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2012). And in El Salvador, the numbers of femicides are also growing. In 2008 out of 4000 documented murders, 580 were categorized as murders of women (Stone 2011).

While the US government publically recognizes the unprecedented levels of violence in Central America and Mexico, in practice it has emphasized military force and training. Although the political discourse purports to increase security, the majority of militarization efforts have proven unsuccessful in curbing violence and instead, puts money into the hands of some of the most corrupt and brutal institutional structures. Moreover, securitization and repression are aimed at controlling some of the most vulnerable sectors of society, namely undocumented migrants.

The goal of this chapter was to begin to understand how multiple historical and structural forces such as war, militarization and economic neoliberalism have direct and concrete impacts on the ability of everyday people to maintain safe and dignified lives for

themselves and their families. The historical circulations of capital, weapons and ideology between the United States, Mexico and Central America have contributed to existing and new forms of violence from both state and local actors that propel migration. Through such a structural lens, we can see that migrants are not simply rational economic actors, but working within larger systems of inequality and violence. The disposability of Mexican and Central Americans in their countries of origin foreshadows their dehumanization along the migrant journey.

The journey offers a new space for the articulation of similar processes of fear, uncertainty and violence that they have known throughout their lives. For many migrants, the risk of violence in Mexico was seen in relation to political violence and crime they have experienced. In a great irony, during their journeys to sell their labor abroad, Central American migrants riding the cargo trains sit above the symbolic and literal fruits of neoliberal policies and free trade agreements that have displaced them and many local people in the poor communities they pass through in rural Mexico.

CHAPTER FOUR—LANDSCAPES OF VIOLENCE, LANDSCAPES OF HOPE: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXTS OF MIGRATION AND SECURITY

On a sweltering summer morning in 2006 I stood on the Puente Dr. Rodolfo Robles that connects the city of Ciudad Hidalgo in Mexico to Tecún Umán in Guatemala. As I looked over the side of the bridge down to the muddy brown water of the Suchiate River I watched as hundreds of people crossed the border between Guatemala and Mexico. Mexico's southern border spans a stretch of over 1,100 kilometers with Guatemala and Belize, much of it made up of thick jungle terrain. It has been called *la otra frontera* (the other border) or *la frontera olvidada* (the forgotten border) because of the limited attention it has received in comparison to Mexico's northern border with the United States. There are several popular crossing points along the Mexico-Guatemala border that shift according to local dynamics and dangers. Not unlike the geographical patterns of crossings on the U.S.-Mexico border, where people are funneled into the most dangerous stretches of land in the most remote areas, migrants in Mexico must also calculate the risks of different areas to cross. Risks include encountering immigration officials or military, robbery, extortion, rape, gangs, and difficult landscapes. Some areas are more porous than others; as a general rule, where there is more movement, there is more danger. Along the Suchiate, people, most of them Central Americans, boarded makeshift rafts made out of old tires amidst the vacant mud-filled concrete houses that were flooded a year earlier by the devastating Hurricane Stan. They crossed just a few hundred feet away from the official port of entry where people with proper documentation pass through the turnstile and get their passports stamped. Some people

with documents actually chose to bypass the port of entry and cross via raft as the border

Figure 4: People Crossing Suchiate River

authorities have been known to extort money from individuals. Despite warnings and instructions from a Guatemalan shelter worker on how much to pay, I was charged an "extra" fee for my entry into Guatemala. As I crossed the border both ways I was met by a large group of tricycle rickshaw drivers who offered to pedal me across the bridge. Like the border authorities and raft conductors, these tricyclists, who operate on both sides of the border, are infamous for charging unknowing foreigners—both tourists and migrants—exorbitant rates. The area overflows with people ready to take advantage of

nervous migrants who are unfamiliar with local protocols. It has become the *modus operandi* in this region to prey upon fear and vulnerability.

While the physical border is relatively easy to cross, the real dangers await migrants as they make their way through Mexico. What may be considered the "border region" continues to expand further north. In fact, the types of regulatory and security apparatuses and mechanisms that define the U.S.-Mexico border region are not solely confined to the border with Guatemala. Rather, militarization in the form of checkpoints, military patrols and detention centers extend throughout the southern Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Veracruz. Mexico has created a de facto border environment throughout much of the migrant journey.

This chapter will discuss some of the political, legal and historical contexts of the migrant journey in southern Mexico. I begin with a discussion of securitization of Mexico's southern border region, and contextualize it within some of the larger debates of unauthorized migration through Mexico including the threat of terrorism and Mexico's war on drugs. This history is important for understanding the landscapes that people pass through and how violence and inequality are reproduced in local spaces.

"Securing" the South

Since the 1980s the United States and Mexico have invested considerable attention and money to "secure" Mexico's southern border region in attempts to curb flows of refugees and migrants through various apprehension, deportation and drug interdiction efforts (Ogren 2007). In 2001, Mexico implemented Plan Sur, a program encouraged by

the US which further criminalized Central American migrants in Mexico through use of military and police (Casillas 2001) and resulted in mass deportations of Central Americans (Hagan 2008; Ogren 2007). Plan Sur signified a new phase in Mexico's treatment of migrant populations that until then had been largely ignored. The efforts of Plan Sur followed militarization projects on the U.S.-Mexico border in the mid-1990s, namely Operation Hold The Line in Texas, Operation Gatekeeper in California and Operation Safeguard in Arizona. Migrant detention centers have continued to increase in Mexico in the past decade. In 2008, there were 52 *estancias migratorias* (migrant stations/detention centers) in the country with two under construction and eleven more in the works (Johnson 2008). After his election in 2006, President Felipe Calderón created a new Border State Police Force in the state of Chiapas that aims to combat crime in the border region (Johnson 2008).

As part of Mexico's securitization and immigration effort on both borders, it established the Grupo Beta, the "humanitarian" branch of Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Migración (National Migration Institute, INM), that acts as an unarmed border patrol that is intended to protect and orient migrants. The first Grupo Beta unit was established in Tijuana in 1990. In 1996, Grupo Beta began operating along the southern border. From my own research, migrants had very little to say about Grupo Beta, and did not fear them nearly as much as they feared Mexican police, military or INM officials. In Mexico, the only two enforcement agents legally allowed to ask migrants for their documentation are the INM and the Federal Police (PFP), but this is regularly violated by municipal and state police.

Another interesting point to consider is that the INM does not use the word *detenido* (detained) but rather uses *aseguramiento* (secured) or the even more gentle, *ajolado* (sheltered). The INM uses the term *devuelto* (returned) and not *deportado* (deported). They also use the term *estancias migratorias* (migrant stations) as opposed to detention centers. Officially, this terminology is used to distinguish migrants who have violated immigration laws versus people who commit crimes (Johnson 2008), yet a broader reading suggests that the Mexican state aims to mask its migration policies as more gentle or humane compared to those of the United States.

For obvious reasons it is difficult to track the exact numbers of Central American migrants who pass through Mexico each year. In reports and articles, academics tend to cite the numbers of migrants "secured" and "returned" released by the INM. These figures can be misleading as some migrants may be apprehended and deported numerous times in one year and thus counted multiple times. Furthermore, the INM itself has received much criticism from the public due to internal corruption and its treatment of migrants, making it difficult to rely on their official figures. Nevertheless, Figures 5 and 6 provide a relative sense of the change in rate of migration over the past decade and the percentages of migrants coming from different countries. In general, the primary countries of origin of undocumented migrants moving through Mexico come from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, which generally account for over 90% of the total number of migrants apprehended and deported.

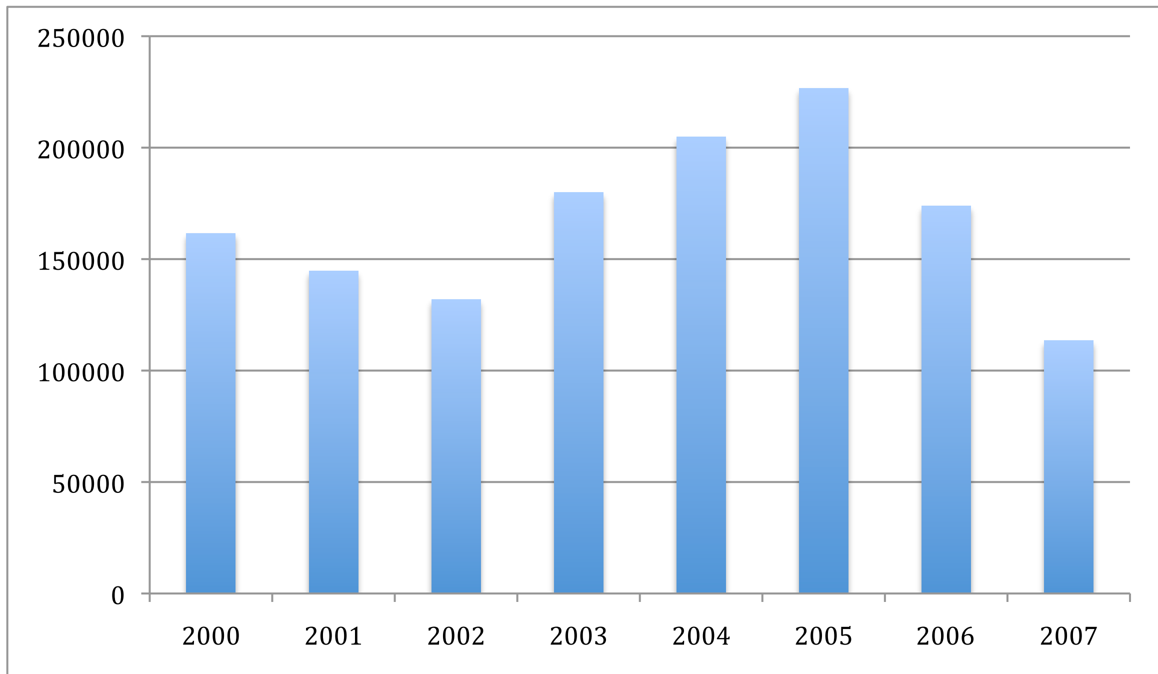

Figure 5: Central Americans Detained by INM

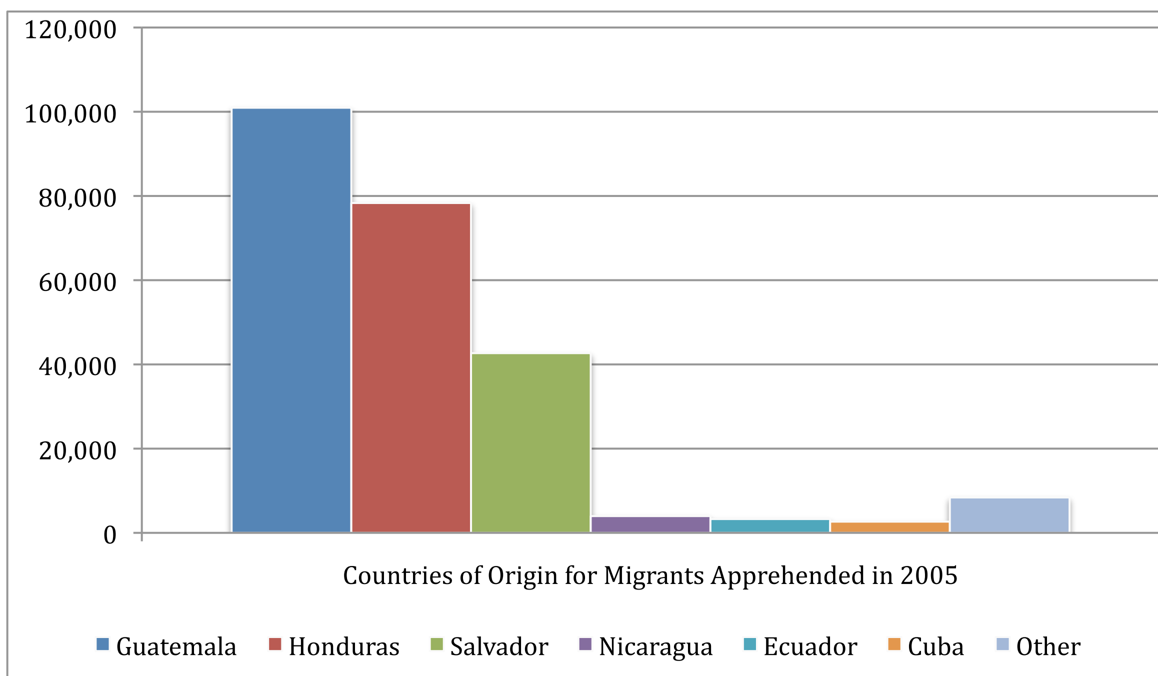

Figure 6: Countries of Origin for Migrants Apprehended, 2005

From the numbers released by INM (Migration 2008)[15], there appears to be a significant increase in the numbers of migrants crossing between 2000 and 2005, with a drop in 2006. The decrease may be explained by the economic crisis, though I want to reinforce my hesitation using these figures as accurate depictions of the actual volume of migrants crossing. Due to increases in violence along the journey, migrants may have greater success avoiding INM checkpoints and being apprehended, or alternatively the drop may reflect changes within the ways statistics are collected and documented by the INM. The massive numbers of migrants coming from Central America in the early part of the decade may also be explained by the natural disasters of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the Salvadoran earthquake in 2001, and Hurricane Stan in 2005, which precipitated out-migration from those countries.

Natural disasters, most notably Hurricane Stan, have also had significant impacts on the physical journey for migrants. Whereas the freight train in Mexico used to begin in Tapachula, in 2005 Hurricane Stan wiped out roughly 280 km of train tracks between the border and the town of Arriaga, Chiapas. To draw on another example of the influence of transnational capital, it is interesting to note that the train was owned by the transnational corporation, Genesee & Wyoming Inc. who in 2005 handed back their 30-year concession to operate the this portion of the Chiapas-Mayab railway.

Legal Context

Historically, Mexico has not been a major destination for immigrant populations and this was reflected in relatively liberal immigration laws. It was not until 1974, in

[15] For comprehensive reports on migration statistics from the INM, see http://www.inm.gob.mx/index.php/page/Estadisticas_Migratorias.

response to various demographic changes and pressures, including growing numbers of Central American refugees entering Mexico, that Mexico implemented a more restrictive set of immigration laws in the *Ley General de la Población* (General Law of the Population) (González-Murphy 2011). In 1974, unauthorized entry into Mexico became a criminal act with a possible prison sentence of up to ten years for persons found re-entering Mexico and a monetary fine.

In the 1980s, Mexico had to rethink its position on undocumented people from Central America, in light of the ongoing civil wars and pressures for asylum. In response to advocacy on behalf of Central American refugees, legal measures and policies were eventually passed to grant legal asylum to some refugees in Mexico, the United States and Canada (Coutin 2007; Garcia 2006). However, the contemporary violence that continues to wreak havoc on Central America, does not generally qualify as a legitimate reason for political asylum in the United States or Mexico. This has been contested by Central Americans in both countries. For example, I wrote an expert affidavit in a US asylum case for a Guatemalan man with legitimate cause to believe he will be killed by *Los Zetas* if he is deported. I also observed several shelter workers in Mexico advocating for asylum for Hondurans fleeing the country after the 2009 coup that overthrew President Zelaya.

The criminalization of undocumented migrants remained in place until 2008 when Mexico's congress voted unanimously to eliminate this part of the law. Despite this important step to legally decriminalize migration through Mexico, migrants remained largely distrustful and fearful of Mexican immigration authorities and police. The law did

little to decrease actual incidents of violence against migrants. On the contrary, violence against them increased during this period. Corruption and abuse on behalf of Mexican authorities continued to intimidate migrants and prevent them from reporting violations. In light of the increase of systematic violence against undocumented migrants between 2008 and 2011, activists and human rights officials continued to publicly criticize the Mexican state's role in violence, particularly what they consider a corrupt and inept INM whose officials had been linked to cases of kidnapping and selling migrants to local gangs. Particularly after the very public Tamaulipas massacre[16] and the consequent resignation of the INM president, the Mexican government was forced to respond.

In February 2011 the Mexican government passed a new immigration law, *La Ley de Migración)* on May 25, 2011. Mexican officials claimed the new law is intended to protect the human rights of undocumented migrants in Mexico, particularly Central American migrants. It includes provisions for medical attention and education for undocumented migrants in Mexico. However, as of 2012 this new law has yet to be implemented in concrete ways and continues to receive mixed praise from activists and human rights organizations. Some critics, such as Mexican priest and activist Padre Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, publicly argue that the most important step in ending a culture of impunity surrounding undocumented immigration would be to fully eliminate the INM.

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[16] For a more in depth description of the Tamaulipas massacre see Chapter Five.

Mexico and the War on Terrorism

Since 9/11 and the establishment of the United States Department of Homeland Security, much of the debate surrounding undocumented migration has been couched in discourse about homeland security and terrorism. The fear of terrorist infiltration into the United States via Mexico has been perpetuated repeatedly by media and government officials in the US even though there is no evidence that groups such as al-Qaeda are using such tactics. Without minimizing the reality of terrorism and war in contemporary geopolitics, I want to call attention to the ways such discourses divert attention away from the structural causes of out-migration, and the material realities of transit migration and human rights violations and instead work to conflate undocumented immigration with danger and terrorism.

For example, in 2008 multiple US newspapers ran a story put out by the Associated Press that discussed Latin America as a potential site to smuggle terrorists from Africa and the Middle East into the United States. In the article, Scott Hatfield, the unit chief of the Human Smuggling Division at Immigration and Customs Enforcement is quoted as stating, “There’s always that potential that a terrorist might use an established network to come to the US,” including smuggling rings through Central America (Sullivan 2008). And despite an unnamed senior intelligence official suggesting that there was little evidence of East Africans coming to the US to engage in terrorist activity, the US government focused new attention to smuggling networks from Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan because these are “known havens for terrorists, including al-Qaeda,” according to an undisclosed government assessment document (Sullivan 2008).

During one of my first visits to a migrant shelter near Tapachula, Chiapas, I met a man from the Sudan named Theo who according to these reports would be considered a potential terrorist threat. He had traveled to Central America on a ship on his way to the United States via Mexico. Theo could not speak any Spanish, though he spoke perfect English and French. His dark black skin and thin tall body made him stand out among the other migrants at the shelter. Theo and I sat in front of the shelter talking—he was happy to find someone he could communicate with—while he used local palm leaves and sticks to make various handmade crafts, impressing the other migrants around him. He told me about his life in Africa: that he was well educated with a degree in physiology, but that there was simply no work for him. He said that most of the men where he is from make their way to Europe to find work, but that he decided to try his luck in the United States. After boarding a freighter ship that traveled across the Atlantic to Central America, he made his way through Guatemala to the shelter on the Guatemala-Mexico border where he had been staying for several weeks. I did not have the opportunity to learn in more detail about Theo and about how he arranged his passage from Africa, but have come across news reports about smuggling rings from Africa and the United Arab Emirates that bring people to Latin America via Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, through Central America and to Guatemala.

According to a report issued by the US Department of Justice (2010), an Eritrean man who was given asylum in the United States was allegedly operating as part of an Africa-Central America-US smuggling ring. According to the report, migrants would be brought through Central America to Guatemala City, where someone would pick them up

and drop them off at the Mexico-Guatemala border. He would give instructions to the migrants about how to cross through Mexico and tell them that a smuggler would meet them in Reynosa, where he would cross them on inner tubes on the Rio Grande and eventually be brought to a "stash house" in Houston. The fee for the Guatemala City to Guatemala-Mexico border segment ranged from USD $700 to $800 and the fee to cross the U.S.-Mexico border was about USD $1800. The entire journey cost several thousand US dollars.

These countries of origin and of transit in these transnational smuggling rings include some of the most impoverished and war-torn countries in the world, where migration is one of few options. Instead of focusing our attention to these forms of structural violence that propel mass migration, the media tends to focus on unsubstantiated potential threats that do little more than perpetuate a climate of fear of "the other" that ultimately work to further institutionalize intolerance, discrimination and racism.

Neoliberalism, Poverty & Migration in Southern Mexico

As I argue throughout this dissertation, the experiences of a fluid and transit population cannot be understood without also understanding the local historical context through which people inhabit and move through. Mexican state and local processes are critical to understanding how and why violence is able to flourish in transit spaces. This section provides a brief historical overview of larger political economic processes that have taken place in Mexico in recent decades. The inability of everyday Mexicans to maintain

their livelihoods in formal markets increases the likelihood people will turn to informal activities and extra-legal activities.

Since Mexico's increasing incorporation into the global economy in the early 1970s, the country has been plagued by a deceleration of economic growth marked by small-scale agricultural crises, inequitable trade agreements and exploitative labor markets with minimal standards. As a result, the country has generally experienced a massive uprooting of the rural population, the feminization of industrial labor, environmental degradation, the penetration of globalized capitalism into rural areas and growing inequity between rural and urban Mexicans (Binford 1996 :71). Historic events, like implementation of the Border Industrialization Program, the 1980s debt crisis and the signing of NAFTA in 1994, have contributed to widespread social dislocations for Mexico's poor including an acceleration of migration, increase in poverty, and displacement of the rural poor from the countryside (Barry 1995; Cockcroft 2010; Harvey 2005; Monroy and Badillo 2009; Wise, et al. 2003). During the economic collapse in the 1980's, there was an eighty percent increase in the number of people working in the informal sector, many of the new workers being women (Gledhill 1995a).

Perhaps the most significant policy change under neoliberalism was the amendment of Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution in 1992 that ended land distribution and opened *ejido* lands to privatization and development. The Mexican government was no longer obligated to redistribute land in response to communal petitions, nor did it protect the inalienable rights of communally owned *ejidos*. This move put the rural sector and indigenous communities, particularly those in the south where communal lands are

plentiful, at risk of losing land and loss of subsistence agriculture. Article 27 was one of the hallmarks of the Constitution of 1917 and the Mexican Revolution. During the 1990s when it was amended, neoliberals argued that communal lands were inefficient and would be better utilized if privatized. These were the same arguments made by liberals in Mexico in the 1850s before the abolishment of Indian and Church corporate lands in the Constitution of 1857. This was also the same logic that underscored Porfirio Diaz's regime to liberalize trade, encourage development in the countryside and privatize communal landholdings (Hart 2000:436). Thus, we see the historical roots of privatization and its origins in nineteenth-century liberalism as well as the pendulum swing between privatization and centralization that has marked the past hundred years of Mexican history.

The consequences of adjustment policies continued to be disastrous for rural areas where agriculture and small and medium sized industry dominate. The government virtually abandoned its role in many small-scale farming sectors such as corn and coffee to the mercy of the world economy. For instance, the government cut subsidies and eliminated tariffs and price controls. Mexico's grain market was opened to US exports while the US fruit and vegetable market was opened to Mexican exports (Stephen 2002 :5). As price guarantees were eliminated small scale farmers found it difficult to compete with the subsidized US agroindustry which "dumps" its surplus products such as corn and beans into Mexican markets (Nash 2003).

In the 1990s, proponents of NAFTA argued that the new trade policies would improve life for all Mexicans, but nearly two decades after its implementation scholars agree

that the trade policies did more to hurt the poor and rural sectors of the economy than to help them (Wise, et al. 2003). NAFTA was closely followed by the 1994 "December mistake" when Mexico was forced to devalue its currency. The devaluation led to further economic disparities between the rich and poor, and increased levels of poverty.

In addition, Mexico's informal economy continued to grow as more and more workers were displaced from their land or unable to secure stable employment. In the first two years after the implementation of NAFTA, over two million jobs were lost and small and medium-sized businesses could not compete with foreign corporations. In 1996, 25 million out of the 35 million economically active population maintained their living through informal activities without the benefit of a social safety net (Stephen 2002). In 1998, the informal sector accounted for 64 percent of the total employment in the country and contributed one-third of Mexico's Gross Domestic Profit (International Labour Office 2002).

The increase in the informal sector, where people are afforded next to nothing in the way of social security, healthcare or childcare benefits, came at a time when the Mexican government was increasingly pulling out of the social sector. In 2005, the World Bank reported that the Mexican government was investing less and less in social protection programs and in the social sector in general. The World Bank cites a limited tax base (which is becoming more limited as unemployment rates and the informal sector grows) and low fiscal revenues as largely responsible. Public resources for poverty reduction programs were extremely limited and the poor are less and less capable of coping with their increasing vulnerability and risk (Aguilar 2005). Programs that did

seek to improve rural conditions, such as the National Solidarity Project (PRONASOL), ended up exacerbating wealth differences and local fragmentation (Nash 2001).

The World Bank (2003) documents other areas where NAFTA unequally impacted different sectors of Mexican society including between the North and South and rural and urban areas (The World Bank 2003). Nearly two decades after the signing of NAFTA and the devaluation of the *peso*, poverty rates remain outrageously high and continue to rise. In 2000 over 40 million Mexicans, three out of five people, lived in poverty (Gledhill 2004). In 2010 an estimated 52 million Mexicans lived in poverty and 11.7 million of them in extreme poverty (Wilkinson 2011). According to World Bank indicators, in 2010, 51.3% of Mexicans lived below the poverty line, up from 47% in 2005.[17]

Militarization and Mexico's War on Drugs

Between my first trip to the migrant journey in 2006 and the beginning of my fieldwork in 2008, there was a marked shift in the nature of violence against migrants. I argue this is partially the result of an increased interpenetration between drug and human smuggling and transnational securitization policies in Mexico. As these multiple markets integrate, they create new avenues for profit and violence. For example, migrants are routinely stopped by police and forced to strip down naked so that their clothing may be checked for money and valuables. Here, a female migrant who was forced to strip on her second attempt to cross Mexico explains her experience as demonstrative of a larger shift along the journey:

[17] For more economic indicators on Mexico, see http://data.worldbank.org/country/mexico

> *I came three years ago on the train, but everything was much calmer then. I traveled close to Tenosique and Palenque. Yeah, they charged us to ride to train, to get on it and everything, but I was never assaulted and I never had to take of all my clothes and all that. This is new. If I had known that the journey was like this now, I would never have let myself be exposed in this way, or my husband be exposed in this way.*

Manuel, a young male migrant on his third trip across, explains the shift:

> *Before on the journey, there were robbers and everyone knew that they would steal whatever you had on you but then they would leave you in peace. But now, with these groups that are kidnapping, well it's a whole other level, now they are organized together with the police and they carry weapons, heavy armory…the same police that denounce them protect them. It's the same group that you see on the news, the ones who kidnapped the 32 (referring to the 32 migrants held captive in Puebla in 2008). They have not been around long, I think it was just this year that it all began, or maybe two years. For them, they are better off extorting migrants and not with what they used to do, they used to be dedicated to other things, but now they know they can get more. Imagine, they kidnap 20, or 10 or 5 and they ask for 5,000 dollars for each one. And they know that they will send money even if they don't want to.*

The rise in organized crime in Mexico that Manuel refers to can be understood as linked to political economic processes in two important ways. First, the displacing effects of war and neoliberal policies in Mexico and Central America undermine the poor to such a degree that pursuing illegal economic activities becomes a question of livelihood (Zilberg 2011). Second, in response to rises in crime and unauthorized migration, states like Mexico legitimize the implementation of state policies—framed as securitization—that in effect create new forms of violence to flourish. Christine Kovic (2010) characterizes this dynamic as the "violence of security" where through security policies, migrants are equated with drugs, weapons, terrorists and gangs (2010:94). She states, "…rather than being included in these security measures, migrants are seen as illegitimate weapons attacking the nation, and they become targets of legitimate state violence" (Kovic 2010:96). In this context, multiple

actors vie for power in the movement of commodities—drugs, weapons, and people—northward to the United States.

To understand the present-day systematic violence against Central American migrants, we must situate it within a larger context of violence and low-intensity conflict that has increased in Mexico since President Calderón declared a "war on drugs." Since 2006, over 50,000 people have been killed in drug-related conflicts and violence in Mexico. Scholars and military experts have recognized the insidious nature of what are called "low intensity conflicts," "small" or "new wars" (Kaldor 1997; Reyna 2009), where the distinctions between armed conflict, organized crime and large-scale human rights violations are blurred (Kaldor 2006) with devastating social consequences. Furthermore, the very entities designed to protect the most basic human rights of individuals are responsible for some of the most gross human rights violations. In 2009, Amnesty International issued a report on the human rights abuses committed by the Mexican military, including torture (Amnesty International 2009).

In his analysis of the drug war on the U.S.-Mexico border, Howard Campbell (2009) uses the phrase "drug war zone" to capture the fluid cultural space where drug traffickers and law enforcement agents contend for power and control. I suggest that while such zones are often concentrated in border regions and urban spaces, they are increasingly permeating rural Mexican communities, particularly where large flows of undocumented peoples flow through. These drug war zones are not unique to Mexico but spans across the Americas, in terms of the production, transportation, distribution, purchase and consumption of illegal drugs and weapons. The commodity chains of illegal

drugs and weapons, and as I argue in this dissertation of human commodities, must be understood within a context of transnational crime, violence, policies, laws and economies.

Low-intensity conflict in Mexico has captured the attention of the international media, policymakers and human rights groups, especially as it threatens to "spillover" into the United States. The majority of reporting and accounts of the violence have tended to use a bi-variable lens with drug cartels on one side and the Mexican government and military on the other side. I suggest that such analyses have overlooked the complexity and far-reaching impacts of this increased violence, in particular, the silent conflicts and everyday forms of domination occurring along the migrant journey.

As journalist John Gilbler points out, one of the defining features of Mexico's drug war is that the names of the victims remain unknown as do the specifics of the perpetrators of violence. Silence is crucial to the operation of impunity, what he calls a "special breed of paramilitarized-narco-silence" (2011:23) in a context "where murder is part of the overhead in an illicit multibillion-dollar industry" and "impunity becomes a fundamental investment"(2011:19). And if Mexicans remained unknown, even more so are the Central Americans who perish on Mexican soil.

The culture of security and militarization connected to Mexico's drug war shapes transit migration in important ways. Migration routes are highly monitored and militarized. In fact, some of the most feared sections of the journey are connected to official immigration checkpoints. Perhaps the most infamous checkpoint is La Arrocera, known for rapes, abuse and extortion of migrants. One priest explained it to me, there is

not just one La Arrocera, but many "La Arroceras" throughout Chiapas where security forces, criminals and local people take advantage of migrants. Here I provide several stories from migrants who passed through La Arrocera and comment on its notoriety as a place where women are raped.

Brenda, a female migrant from El Salvador told me about her fear when she passed through La Arrocera after hearing the story of a man who claimed to own land nearby and rapes women in front of their husbands. She states:

> *Well, there in La Arrocera, there is a man who says he is the owner of the land near there and he rapes women. When I was in Arriaga, two sisters arrived with their husbands and they said that this man raped them in front of their husbands. They said he had a shotgun and he told them that if anyone moved that he would kill them. And so he got on top of one of the women and then he went on to the other. Like that, the two sisters were raped at the same time in front of their husbands. This is what frightens me.*

A couple told me about a story they heard while staying in a shelter in Chiapas where they met a young Honduran woman who was raped near La Arrocera.

> *The other story that we heard about was when we were in Arriaga, was of a young Honduran woman who was raped by five Salvadorans when she was crossing the place called La Arrocera. She was three months pregnant yet the rapists told her that it did not matter she was pregnant. It did not bother them, they did not care. She lost her baby. She was staying in the shelter when we met her. She told us that even though this happened to her, she would still continue her journey.*

In another conversation with a group of three male migrants from Guatemala, they recounted many similar stories about women being raped and men and women being forced to strip down naked while their clothes and body parts were checked. They felt fortunate that they were "only" robbed by a local Mexican man who lives near the checkpoint. According to them, they were lucky because all they had to do was pay $1800 *pesos*, which

they did so that he would not assault them any further. We see how there are various perpetrators, including local Mexicans, who take advantage of Central Americans as they pass through.

In this final testimony, a migrant discusses the injustice around situations like La Arrocera and the failure of Mexican law to protect Central American migrants:

> *There have been many women raped, including women who were raped and then sometimes afterwards still deported to their countries. There is no compassion for these women. For example, there is a young women who came with me and she was raped by three men at La Arrocera. We have been talking about La Arrocera for several years, the assaults and everything. We, the migrants, those who migrate to Mexico so that we can cross to the United States, we are just like every other Mexican who wants to cross to the Unites States. I don't know why there is not a law, something that helps us to do that. I think it is unfair that Mexican law sees so many things and does nothing for us, we are not here to do anyone harm, we just want to cross. If the North American immigration catches us, that is one thing, we made an intent to cross, but it is not fair that here in Mexico that so many things happen to us. The many rapes of woman and everything else. Because our intention is not to harm anyone. In my case, I cannot return right now, there is nothing for me. Yes, I miss my family, and it hurts me to leave everything behind but I don't want to disappear from this world alone without doing anything, without knowing my first born child. That's what I am saying, we do not come here to do any harm, each one who comes here comes to search for an exit out of poverty, and we just wish that out of anyone, in Mexico that they would give a little room to breath so that we could move forward, that they didn't attack us so bad. We don't want to be attacked like this in this way, no one wants to be a part of this, violated, victims.*

This passage highlights a central contradiction that many migrants noted regarding Mexico's immigration policy. Mexican government officials have publicly expressed their concern for the treatment of Mexican nationals migrating to the US, yet implement their own strict immigration measures and fail to protect the basic rights of people in transit.

Abuses on behalf of Mexican officials do not occur only at checkpoints. In January 2011, migrants' rights defenders denounced the Mexican immigration and federal police for continuing to conduct raids on moving trains and trains running at night. They cited one case of a raid near the town of Chahuites where authorities approached a moving train, causing widespread panic in which one migrant, a 25-year-old man from Guatemala fell off the train and his right foot was cut off. The most despicable fact, according to the advocate, was that the authorities did not even help the man who had fallen off the train. They left him along the side of the tracks bleeding until he was found by some local ranchers who transported him to the hospital. The advocate said that he visited the migrant in the hospital, but that he was extremely distraught with what had happened and said he no longer wanted to live (Avendaño and Morales 2011). This young man's story exemplifies the web of violence within which he was embedded. Structural forms of violence propelled him to migrate in the first place, state militarization policies that directly target certain marginalized groups and finally corrupt authorities that through negligence and/or impunity perpetuate violence on an interpersonal level.

Spaces of Hope: Sanctuary in Mexico

> *Señor, danos un corazón acogedor. Ayudanos a ser compañeros de los que sufren, de los que caminan; que nos ayudanos todos/*Lord, give us a welcoming heart. Help us to be companions of those who suffer, of those who walk, so that we can help everyone
>
> *Que nuestras vidas se gastes por nuestros seres queridos, trabajando y sirviendo a los más necesitados/*That our lives will be spent on our loved ones, working and serving those in need

> *Que los que sufrimos y los que caminamos en la tierra encontremos albergue en otros/*That those of us who suffer and those of us who walk on this earth will find shelter in others
>
> *Señor, vuelve a nacer, día a día, en los corazones de nosotros, haznos mas humanos/*Lord, continue to be born, day after day, in our hearts, to make us more human
> *Amen*
> *--Prayer spoken at Casa Guadalupe*

The establishment of sanctuary and shelter for people displaced from their home countries in Central America is not new. During the armed conflicts of the 1980s, millions of people from Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador were internally displaced or sought refuge in Mexico, the United States and Canada. Known as the "sanctuary movement," a robust social movement led by religious and secular groups developed in response to the Central American crisis. Religious advocates and aid workers throughout Central and North America publicly documented the human rights abuses and organized food and medical relief for victims and refugees (Garcia 2006). Many of these individuals were targeted by political forces and killed; perhaps the most notable was Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador who was assassinated in 1980 shortly after asking the US to withdraw military aid to El Salvador.[18] While it was not characterized as so, we might be able to conceptualize this sanctuary movement as a transnational movement to emphasize the mobility and links that brought people together across national boundaries.

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[18] In 2011 President Barack Obama visited the grave of Bishop Romero in a symbolic gesture, yet made no official apology on the role of the United States in El Salvador's war.

Inspired by the work of sanctuary in the 1980s and liberation theology, in Mexico today there exists a diverse group of formal and informal organizations and individuals dedicated to humanitarian aid and rights-based advocacy on behalf of Central American migrants crossing Mexico. The influence of liberation theology in Mexico began with the Vatican II in the 1960s and the subsequent 1968 Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellin, Colombia. Perhaps the most notable of Mexican bishops active in human rights has been Bishop Samuel Ruiz, who was accused of "turning red" and marginalized from the Catholic Church, yet continued to make important strides in Chiapas, before and throughout the Zapatista uprising, bridging religion and social justice among indigenous populations (Womack Jr. 1999). Catholic liberation theology emphasizes a preferential option for the poor and an explicit focus on social justice in civil society. To mark the 50th Anniversary of the Vatican II conference, in 2011 there was a conference held in Mexico City entitled "Hope of Liberation and Theology" that included several prominent priests who are part of the Central American migrant shelter movement in Mexico.

In 2003, the Catholic bishops of Mexico and the United States issued a historic binational pastoral letter on migration. The joint letter contextualizes contemporary migration within historical movements of peoples through the America, argues that migration is a necessity and consequence of globalization and calls for the reform of both US and Mexican immigration systems, Here is an excerpt:

> *We stand in solidarity with you, our migrant brothers and sisters, and we will continue to advocate on your behalf for just and fair migration policies. We commit ourselves to animate communities of Christ's disciples on both sides of the border to accompany you on your journey so that yours*

> *will truly be a journey of hope, not of despair, and so that, at the point of your arrival, you will experience that you are strangers no longer and instead members of God's household (no. 106, 2003 Pastoral letter)*

In addition to this official Church position, other religious groups such as the Scalabrini, Jesuit and Maryknoll missionaries have made important contributions on behalf of the rights of Mexican and undocumented migrants in Mexico.

Perhaps the most important work conducted on the ground involves the network of migrant shelters that serve undocumented migrants in transit through Mexico, mostly Central Americans, and migrants deported from the United States, both Mexican and Central American. While the numbers are always in flux due to local violence and politics, there are approximately fifty migrant shelters that have been established across Mexico. Most of the shelters cluster around the northern and southern borders and in areas with high rates of transit migration, particularly in towns located on the railroad. New shelters continue to open across the country in response to local community action.

Most individual shelters were founded by religious leaders and local people who see need in their communities to help and serve migrants passing through. Several priests and shelter workers have become important public figures in Mexico's migrant rights movement. I was fortunate throughout my fieldwork to meet and interview several of these important figures and observe and work with several different models of care, advocacy and activism. For example, some shelters simply provide food and shelter while others have partnerships with local clinics and human rights offices.

Many of the shelters in Mexico are a part of a transnational organization called *Movilidad Humana* (Human Mobility), which is comprised of the Catholic bishops from

North America, Central America and the Caribbean. In Mexico, *Movilidad Humana* is an organization of the Mexican National Conference of Bishops, the official leadership of the Catholic Church in Mexico. *Movilidad Humana* held their first national conference for the pastoral care of migrants in September 2000 in state of Mexico. During my fieldwork I was able to attend meetings for the "Zona Sur" (Southern Zone), Oaxaca region, and the Mexican National conference of *Movilidad Humana*. In such conferences, representatives of shelters from throughout Mexico meet for several days of meetings, workshops and solidarity building events. My participation in these conferences included listening to a presentation on how to file an official human rights claim, a session on threats to shelters and shelter workers and a tour of the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

In addition to the shelters and work of *Movilidad Humana*, the *Misioneros de San Carlos Scalabrinianos* have been extremely active in sanctuary for migrants in Mexico. The Scalabrinis started working in Mexico in 1985 to bring attention and care to migrant populations and officially established their migrant shelter network in 1999. The Scalabrinis have shelters located along the U.S.-Mexico border and the Mexico-Guatemala border. While the Scalabrini missionaries have their own congregation, they also work closely with *Movilidad Humana.*[19]

While the network of shelters are connected through *Movilidad Humana* and share a common thread of Catholicism, the Catholic Church in Mexico does not officially fund migrant shelters. And so where does the money and resources come from to run these shelters on a daily basis? Each shelter is responsible for finding its own funding.

[19] For more information on the Scalabrini International Migration Network, see http://www.simn-cs.net/. For more on Movilidad Humana, see http://www.movilidadhumana.org/

Some priests are very successful in building relationships with local parishioners who donate volunteers, food, and money. The Scalabrini shelters have their own internal system of funding. Other shelters look for external sources of funding from private donors and international organizations. The visibility of several Mexican priests has allowed them to make important connections with funders that directly help with their operation costs. US Catholic Relief Services, the official relief and development branch of the US Catholic Bishops, which has offices in Mexico City, have historically supported and donated money to shelters and to *Movilidad Humana*. For example, several years ago they provided donations to support a *Movilidad Humana* campaign about human trafficking in Mexico. Consequently, this movement is also transnational in its formal structure, as linked through the Bishops of the US, Mexico and Central America, and how it links the lives of people from throughout the Americas and beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE—THE LOGICS, LOGISTICS AND STRATEGIES OF CROSSING MEXICO

On August 24, 2010 Mexican marines in the northern state of Tamaulipas were approached by 19-year-old Luis Fredy Lala Pomavilla, a young man from Ecuador who had been shot in the neck by a group of armed men who identified themselves as *Los Zetas*. Pomavilla led police to a ranch in the town of San Fernando where they discovered the bodies of 72 people, 58 men and 14 women, who were murdered execution style. One of the women was pregnant. The victims were blindfolded with hands tied together and shot point blank, one by one. Pomavilla explained that these were migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Brazil who were kidnapped on their way to the United States and purportedly killed for refusing to help the *Zetas* in their criminal activities. It is difficult to know if this was indeed the true motivation for such a massacre; undoubtedly the situation was more complex. The fact that the ranch was abandoned and large quantities of ammunition and supplies were left behind suggest that there may have been an unplanned and chaotic end to this large-scale operation. And yet, massacres of this kind are not unique. Since then over 500 additional bodies—of both Central American and Mexican migrants on their way north—have been recovered in mass graves in the states of Tamaulipas and Durango.

While these deaths have largely been written off as an unfortunate consequence of border violence and random cartel brutality, I want to suggest that such violence against migrants is more systematic than random and connected to larger economic and social hierarchies of inequality and indifference. It was the culmination of processes of

suffering, exploitation and abuse that began long before those 72 individuals reached the U.S.-Mexico border.

As I read about the Tamaulipas massacre in 2010, I could not help thinking about the men from El Salvador and Guatemala I met in Oaxaca two weeks earlier who had planned to cross the border near Brownsville, Texas. As we sat in the migrant shelter waiting to make phone calls to family members, they took turns holding and playing with my 5-month-old daughter as they told me about their travels plans to El Norte. Deterred by the recent implementation of the immigration law SB1070 in Arizona and the sweltering summer temperatures, these men had decided it better not to cross through the desert as they had initially planned, and opted instead to cross the border in Texas via Tamaulipas. I thought about the journey between Oaxaca and the U.S.-Mexico border and wondered if they had faced already corrupt officials, violence, extortion or kidnapping? I knew they were trying to avoid the most dangerous sections on the train tracks, but did they have enough money to continue on by bus? Or had their families in Central America received phone calls asking for thousands of dollars in ransom? And worst of all, were they among the bodies that were blindfolded with hands tied and then shot, point-blank, to be left in the dirt pushed up against the concrete brick walls of the abandoned ranch? I will never know if these men were successful in their attempt to migrate to the US, were still making their way through Mexico or had faced a darker fate.

This chapter focuses on the various logistics, logics and strategies of crossing Mexico including some of the physical and emotional demands of the journey. The goal of the chapter is to deepen our understanding of migration as a complex embodied,

material and social experience that is non-linear, uneven and often life changing. It works to complicate journalistic and academic representations that portray migration as a generic experience shared by people regardless of race, class, gender, or nationality. Finally, it also writes against depictions of migrants as hopeless victims and of violent incidents such as the Tamaulipas massacre as nonsensical or random tragedies. We must interrogate the many processes, social relations and conditions that allow for such violence to occur and to occur with impunity.

Migration as a Multi-directional and Makeshift Process

Within the context of increasing violence, militarization and a general distrust of Mexican legal protections, undocumented Central American migrants have developed numerous strategies for crossing Mexico. However, migration strategies and practices involve a tremendous amount of variability and as I argue here, are at times highly differentiated processes based on economic and social capital. My goal is to dispel the assumption that there is only one way to migrate in Mexico or that all individuals have the same opportunities or face the same risks. While there are certainly recognizable patterns, travel routes and general parameters around migration strategies, differentiation based on the color of one's skin, the money in one's pocket and the social relations developed along the journey have a major impact on the ways people move through Mexico. For example, the ability to obtain false documents, hire a smuggler, afford alternative modes of transportation, stray from more common migration routes, or pay off corrupt authorities and/or organized criminals are all crucial factors. Migrants who are

visibly black or indigenous, speak with a strong non-Mexican accent, or travel in easily identifiable groups of migrants are more easily targeted and discriminated against than migrants who are able to “blend into” Mexican society. While no migrant is immune to violence and suffering, the most economically vulnerable individuals are often the most vulnerable.

In attempts to classify migration into neat and logical patterns of human circulation, scholars risk overlooking the intricacies and complexities of migration journeys. While at a community or national level there are discernable patterns of migration flows, an individual’s migration trajectory is largely makeshift and dependent on a variety of factors and experiences. The physical act of migration is not a structured process that can be traced neatly from departure, journey, arrival to assimilation or integration. Instead, specific migration processes are often unknown to migrants in transit and tentative at best (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008:5). While Central American migrants often have a final destination in mind before embarking on their journey (though sometimes this is as vague as “the United States” or “North Carolina”) they do not necessarily have concrete plans or itineraries for their time in Mexico. This is not necessarily due to a lack of understanding; rather, the journey demands an ability to shift plans according to local conditions, social relations and happenstance. For example, the kidnapping of twelve women from the train in Oaxaca had significant repercussions on the trajectories and choices of several people I met. I met several male migrants who had witnessed the kidnapping and stayed in Mexico to make human rights denunciations. I also met people who had met others who witnessed events like this kidnapping and

decided to change their plans and not continue by train. One couple recounted the horrible story of hearing about the train being stopped, and armed men actually detaching the last train car so that the women could be taken from the top and put into their vehicles. Human smugglers may also shift their plans according to local conditions. I met several migrants who had been traveling with smugglers who either changed their transportation plans, and instead of traveling by train decided to go by bus or who had simply abandoned them along the journey.

In theory the entire journey could take as little as a week to cross Mexico, but with unreliable train schedules, deportations, financial setbacks, the high incidence of robbery and endemic violence, people often travel for weeks or months. As I discuss later, many people stagnate on the journey, caught up for one reason or another and end up living in Mexico. Some people settle in Mexican towns while others roam between shelters and transit points along the journey, many of them dependent in some way on the economy that has evolved around the migrant journey.

The journey is not a one-way flow but multidirectional, often circular; sometimes people must go "backwards." For example, I met two young men from El Salvador who escaped kidnappers in the state of Veracruz and then returned to Oaxaca where they reported the crimes to the CNDH with the assistance of Padre José at the Albergue Nazareth. Padre José then accompanied them to Casa Guadalupe after he helped them acquire legal regularization documents to travel in Mexico. Others travel between and among different shelters and cities in search of work or to meet family members. Here, the case of Alfredo demonstrates the multi-directional nature of the migrant journey.

I met Alfredo early on in my fieldwork during a typical afternoon working at Casa Guadalupe. When Alfredo walked into the main office, I was impressed by the tattoos that marked his body as well as his shaved head and baggy clothing. To me, Alfredo looked more like a man from the United States than from Oaxaca and so I was not surprised when I learned that he had just recently been deported from the US after living in the city of Los Angeles for forty years. Alfredo's family was originally from Mexico and his mother brought him to the United States when he was only 2 years old. He grew up in East Los Angeles, was divorced and had two children who are US citizens.

Alfredo knows some Spanish, but did not speak it well. When he found out I was originally from Los Angeles as well he was relieved. As he explained it to me, he felt like a "fish out of water" in Oaxaca. Alfredo made his way to Oaxaca after being deported from the United States to Tijuana. Over several conversations Alfredo revealed that he had been in prison in the US after being convicted of several crimes, and was subsequently deported to Mexico even though he had very few social or family connections. Since he knew he had an uncle who lived in Chiapas, he was slowly making his way down south. He was in Oaxaca renting a small room from a woman and trying to find some work to help him on his journey south. As he explained to me, it was hard for him to find anyone willing to employ him because of his tattoos. Even though he was Mexican, he said people discriminated and made assumptions about him. Alfredo came to the shelter every few days for several weeks and then left Oaxaca. When I didn't hear from him, I assumed he had made his way down to Chiapas. Several months later I was making a visit to the Albergue Nazareth in the Isthmus and there was Alfredo in the midst

of a group of migrants. He was happy to see me and when I asked him why he was here he explained that he was still traveling and had never made it to Chiapas. He had planned to go to Cancún or to Rosarito in Baja California to work in a bar that caters to tourists, but that because it was February it was too cold to go. It was curious to see him still in Oaxaca and it crossed my mind that he may have found work related to human smuggling at the shelters or that he may simply have no other place to go. Before I could ask him, he was gone.

A return flow of migration is not only caused by individual circumstances, but can also be precipitated by larger global trends and events such as an economic crisis or increased U.S.-Mexico border militarization. I met several migrants, Mexican and Central Americans, who voluntarily left the United States due to the economic crisis of 2008. During my fieldwork local Oaxacan newspapers regularly had stories about the number of migrants returning from the United States. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 2009 marked the first decline the numbers of unauthorized immigrants living in the United States after two decades of steady increase. In 2007 there were an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States; in 2009, that number dropped to 11.1 million. In 2010, the number remained steady at 11.2 million people (Passel and Cohn 2011).

The numbers of apprehensions of unauthorized migrants to the US has dropped in recent years according to Border Patrol statistics. In 2010, the Border Patrol apprehended 448,000 people on the U.S.-Mexico border, and in December of 2011 that number was down to about 327,500 (Aguilar 2011). Theories on why the levels of apprehensions have

dropped include the economic recession, increased border enforcement and skyrocketing smuggling fees (Aguilar 2011). I would add that the systematic and increasingly inescapable nature of violence and extortion of undocumented migrants is also a significant factor in the decrease of people risking the journey to the United States.

In addition to these national trends, on a more micro-level, individual movements of migration are shaped by a number of factors that affect undocumented migrants. Nunez and Heyman (2007) have documented the historical development of "processes of entrapment" for undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States due to increased risks associated with border militarization. In such processes, individuals are constrained in their physical movement as police and other state authorities threaten to detain and deport them. Similarly, throughout Mexico and in southern Mexico especially, Central American migrants are subject to processes of entrapment as they are regularly pursued as targets of legal and illegal processes of detention, exploitation and abuse. Migrants cannot easily travel by bus or car without the risk of encountering immigration checkpoints which are intentionally set up along popular migration routes. Central American migrants therefore shift their movements to travel in specific spatial fields, which may elude authorities or act as official sanctuary zones. For example, the railroad tracks in certain towns act as official local sanctuary zones where people cannot be apprehended by police, although these agreements are often tentative at best and may change unknowingly. Police and military often exercise intimidation tactics in such areas, patrolling nearby areas with machine guns mounted.

Figure 7: State Police Patrol, Oaxaca City

And of course, organized criminals, robbers, and corrupt authorities do not respect such agreements. Consequently, migrants are equally at risk in highly populated areas or remote zones. Finally, the use of sanctuary zones necessarily creates non-sanctuary zones, which are often located in desolate areas where crimes against migrants are more likely to occur without witnesses or recourse.

Hierarchies of Risk: Modes of Transportation

In 2006, ten Guatemalan migrants en route to the United States died in Raudales Malpaso 20 miles northeast of Tuxtla Gutierrez in Chiapas. The migrants were packed into the back of a truck with seventy other Guatemalans when the truck hit another truck in a head-on collision on a bridge. At least 16 other people were injured. In 2007, the

bodies of fifteen Central American migrants were recovered off the Pacific coast of Oaxaca near San Francisco Ixhuatan. According to one of the few survivors, there were more than 20 Central Americans on the overcrowded boat that capsized. In 2009, a van carrying migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador and China was shot at by state police officers in Chiapas and subsequently crashed into a tree. Three people were killed and another eight were seriously injured. In 2010, a cargo train carrying 300 Central American migrants was stopped by Mexican soldiers and immigration officials who detained 92 people. Shortly thereafter, the train was held up by ten armed men dressed in black causing extreme havoc. Approximately 190 people disappeared after the second attack and it is still unknown if they are hiding, injured, kidnapped or dead.

Stories like the ones outlined above are not extraordinary. In southern Mexico, headlines featuring the suffering and demise of Central American migrants traveling by bus, truck, boat or train regularly appear on the pages of local newspapers and television screens. They offer a sense of the multiple forms of transportation migrants choose in crossing Mexico as well as the unique and inescapable forms of risk and violence that they face. In this section I explore the risks associated with different modes of transport. I argue that the ability to choose particular forms of transport is a highly differentiated process based on economic and social factors. Sometimes this means having enough money to buy a first-class bus ticket, while in other cases it means being given information about a less traveled road or address of a migrant shelter. In what follows I provide a brief description of the various modes of transport undocumented migrants take in southern Mexico.

The most common mode of transport is to ride on the top of freight trains, what has been dubbed *La Bestia* (The Beast) by migrants because of its ability to mutilate and dismember bodies and its more recent association with kidnappings and robberies. Since train schedules are irregular, migrants wait near train depots and when the train starts to move, they jump onto the moving ladders and climb to the top where they may strap themselves on for protection. The areas near the train where migrants sleep, wait, eat and socialize are simply referred to as *las vias* (the tracks) and are often patrolled by local gangs searching for potential victims. People rarely stray far from the tracks in part because they do not want to risk missing the train but also because the areas near the tracks are often considered sanctuary zones where migrants are protected from local police.

Figure 8: Migrants Riding Freight Train in Veracruz

Riding *La Bestia* does not require purchasing tickets up front and thus attracts the most economically vulnerable migrants yet this mode of transport is anything but free. For example, migrants may have to pay a fee to coyotes or other organized criminals to pass through a train depot without being harassed or kidnapped. Those who cannot pay are subject to kidnapping and ransom. As I discuss in more depth in chapter Six, kidnappers often work in conjunction with corrupt authorities and train conductors who stop the train so that they may rob and kidnap people in the most remote areas. This practice has become increasingly common as documented by individual testimonies by migrants and official reports by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). In addition to the train routes being the epicenter of mass kidnappings, in recent years Mexican authorities have been conducting immigration raids of trains.

The dramatic rise in kidnappings and raids along the train routes has impacted the decisions of many migrants to search out alternative modes of transport. Those who can afford it will opt for bypassing some of the most dangerous sections and take a bus, *combi* (mini-van) or pay for a smuggler with private transportation. In some cases migrants are encouraged to avoid the train and travel by bus or *combi* by shelter workers who may even help raise money or pay for their safer passage. This is most common for people who are considered more vulnerable, namely women, children and people who have been threatened or who have made human rights claims and fear repercussions. In general, alternative modes of transport are more costly *up front*, but may allow migrants to more safely travel across the country.

Mexico has an extensive bus system with different classes of travel from second-class, first-class and luxury buses. Second-class buses and combis are cheaper yet travel on local roads where they make multiple stops to pick up passengers and encounter more immigration checkpoints. First-class and luxury buses travel on toll roads where there is less likelihood of having to stop at immigration checkpoints, although this does still happen regularly. Immigration checkpoints are run by the Mexican military who board buses asking for identification and/or conduct searches in people's luggage.

While first-class buses offer less chance of being hassled at checkpoints, there are other risks for migrants in riding a first-class bus. First class buses have a more intense form of surveillance than do second-class buses. When you board a first class bus a security guard may check your bags and body for weapons. Nearly all companies videotape the faces of every passenger before departure. This highly intimidating practice is supposedly to protect passengers, but there is speculation that the videos are reviewed to identify possible migrants who are later harassed by authorities at checkpoints along the road. A systematic example of this practice was revealed along a road close to Albergue Nazareth that connects the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to the Sierra Mixe region of Oaxaca. Although indirect, many migrants leaving Albergue Nazareth took this less traveled road on their way to Casa Guadalupe. On this route, bus drivers regularly tipped off corrupt authorities about the presence of Central American migrants on board. The bus would then be stopped and police would enter the bus to single out the migrants to step outside where they would extort money from them and threaten to deport them.

Although taking a bus or *combi* costs money up front and makes migrants vulnerable to extortion or increased risk of deportation, they are at least protected from large scale kidnapping operations and risk of mutilation from *La Bestia*. Here we see how economic choices and conditions differentiate migrants, exposing them to different types of risk and violence. Large-scale human smuggling and trafficking operations, such as being packed into a tractor-trailer or boat, on the other hand, do not necessarily offer a safer option for migrants and are generally more expensive.

Embodied Movements: The Physical, Mental and Material Demands

Given that the physical demands of migrating across Mexico are extremely difficult, we must understand how migration is not only a descriptive term, but an embodied experience. By the time Central Americans reach the U.S.-Mexico border they have already experienced extreme physical and mental exhaustion. The experience may include days trekking through sweltering jungles or dense urban landscapes, running from authorities or criminals, staying awake on a moving train, being crammed into tight spaces (such as in the back of a trailer or boat) and surviving with very little food, water and rest. Many people arrive to the shelters without having eaten or slept for several days. Minor and severe injuries and ailments are not uncommon. Those who fall off the train are often left dismembered.

Others suffer from cuts and bruises, urinary tract infections, parasites and dehydration. For example, early on in my fieldwork three couples arrived to Casa Guadalupe together: Victor and Suli from Honduras, Alex and Vero from Guatemala and

Elena and Elvis, also from Guatemala. I will go into more depth about these couple later, but here want to focus on the physical ailments they experienced. All three of the women arrived to the shelter concerned about various ailments and so I took them to the local clinic. Elena, a 38-year-old mother of five sons, was desperate to know if she was pregnant. She said that she had not had a period in five months and a doctor told her she was pregnant several months earlier, but was not sure if she still was after the difficulty of the journey. She was particularly concerned because she previously had two pregnancies that ended in miscarriages around five months. At the clinic the doctor told her he did not feel a baby and he took a blood test to be sure. The following day, her pregnancy results came back negative, yet she did have a severe infection and needed to purchase medicine for an injection into her lower abdomen. Suli and Vero both received ultrasounds at the clinic. Suli had bad stomach pains, nasal congestion and was concerned about the placement of her intrauterine device (IUD). The doctor discovered a vaginal infection and both she and Victor needed to take antibiotics to clear their respective infections.

Vero's ailments were a bit more worrisome. In the past she had used the contraceptive injection and recently stopped. She said her period had returned to normal when she was still in Guatemala, but since embarking on the journey, had had her period for a month straight. She confessed that when she was scared, nervous or startled she bled more. She also had internal pain that she associated with the bleeding. The doctor also found a vaginal infection and parasites in her stomach and asked her to come back for a

vaginal ultrasound to determine if the bleeding was hormonal or caused by some type of internal rupture.

The physical condition of individuals impacts social relations and overall migration experiences. For example, women, children, overweight and older migrants are often perceived to be detriments to a group of traveling migrants because they cannot easily run from authorities and bandits or withstand days of walking through the harsh landscapes. I interviewed one man who was caught by kidnappers after the train he was on was stopped. He was the only man caught along with several women and blames his disabled leg from preventing him from running fast enough.

Migrants along the journey are not only plagued with physical exhaustion and ailments but may also suffer from psychological or mental fatigue and trauma. Constant fear and insecurity is the modus operandi for many migrants. People are not only on edge about the possibility of being robbed or kidnapped but also unsure about the next time they will be able to sleep or eat a meal. Intimidation by local police and military patrols make walking on the street or making a phone call dangerous and risky activities. Migrants are often wary when meeting new people and find it difficult to trust others since deception and trickery are common tactics used by organized criminals. Even within the walls of migrant shelters, a climate of fear and anxiety exists as migrants share stories about the violence they have witnessed or experienced. In addition to this everyday fear and insecurity, some migrants exhibit symptoms characteristic of post-traumatic stress such as nightmares, difficulty sleeping, depression, unresponsiveness, and high levels of anxiety.

For example, Marco, one of the most friendly and warm migrants I met during my fieldwork (and someone I still occasionally keep in contact with through social networking sites and email) had several mental breakdowns in the weeks he was staying at Casa Guadalupe. I originally met him at Albergue Nazareth, where he was traveling with his female friend, Josie. Marco and Josie were not a couple, but very good friends from the same town in Guatemala who had strategically decided to migrate together. Marco's brother lives in Houston and that is where they were both headed. I got to know Marco and Josie during the weeks they stated at Casa Guadalupe. They were very curious about life in the United States and asked a lot of questions. In general Marco was upbeat, helpful, and engaged with other migrants and shelter workers. Josie was sweet, but a bit more restrained, not letting her emotions show as much as Marco. Marco spoke openly about his life in Guatemala, and the challenges he and his family have experienced, particularly with respect to paying *la renta* (the rent) to local gangs. I knew he grew up with extreme violence and insecurity, but was not made fully aware of his inner turmoil until one evening at the shelter.

I was at a pharmacy purchasing medicine for another migrant when I received a phone call from Mauricio, the director of Casa Guadalupe, asking me to come back as soon as possible because there was something wrong with Marco. When I arrived, I found Marco in the women's dormitory room, sitting on a chair and crying with his head in his hands. He was shaking. Josie was in the room with him and told me that about an hour earlier she found Marco lying on the ground in the back garden and was not responding to her. Mauricio carried Marco into the house. I sat next to him and he said

flatly “Hello, Wendy.” He was able to speak through his tears. I asked him what happened and he said that he could not feel his arms or his legs and that he didn’t know what to do because he had no money. Earlier that day his brother who lives in Houston had called the office and told us that he would be able to send some money to Marco soon. When I told him this, he momentarily snapped out of his depression and asked for more details. But when I said that we needed to call him back, he put his head into his hands in despair, saying, “but I don’t have any money to call him.” Mauricio and I reassured him that we would help him make the phone call; Mauricio even gave him a phone card. This seemed to cheer him up a bit, but he requested that I take him to the local clinic.

Apparently several nights prior some worrisome symptoms started to arise. Marco could not sleep and when he did finally wake up, he couldn’t breath well. Josie said that he hadn’t eaten anything for two days and that she was extremely worried about him. When I asked Marco if he had ever experienced anything like this before, he said he did when his mother passed away. She was only 38-years-old and died of complications related to diabetes. At the clinic, Marco spoke to a psychologist, though because he was only temporarily in Oaxaca, there was no type of long-term treatment or relationship to build. While Josie and I waited for him in the waiting room, Josie began to silently cry. This was the first time I witnessed Josie crying as she was usually seen as the strong and collected one of the pair. The stress, anxiety and uncertainty were palpable.

For some migrants, the trauma, physical exhaustion or material demands of the journey are overpowering and they must make the decision to return home or continue

one. This is often difficult for migrants as there is a sense of failure and the dread of returning home to family and children with empty hands and pockets. This can be especially devastating for people who are left with physical or emotional scars from the journey such as dismembered limbs. I have met migrants who planned to pay for buses to return home, others who rode the train in the opposite direction and some migrants who willingly went to military or immigration checkpoints so that they may be deported. This is often necessary for people who have no money at all.

While some people chose to return to their communities of origin after experiencing traumatic physical or mental stresses, others persevere and continue the journey. Some of these migrants simply cannot face their families and friends after their experience. Some women, for example, are too ashamed to return home after being sexually assaulted. Others simply do not want to let their families down. To counteract the fears, ailments and multiple stresses many migrants carry crosses and bibles with them and often invoke their faith in God as protection and reassurance that they will arrive to the United States.

Living the Journey

To survive along the journey and pay for transport and food, migrants may depend upon money saved, borrowed or sent to them from family members. Others travel with few resources and work along the way. Migrants and their family members may go into debt to pay for the journey with no guarantee that they will successfully arrive. In 2008, the going rate for crossing the U.S.-Mexico border with a *pollero* was between

USD $1500-$2000. The price to be smuggled from Central America to the United States was around USD $6000-$7000. These are extremely large sums of money and many migrants cannot afford to hire a smuggler for such prices. Some hire a smuggler for only parts of the journey. For example, many migrants I met decided to travel on their own until they reached the U.S.-Mexico border region where they would hire a smuggler to help them cross the border. Some had money sent to them while others planned to find work in northern Mexico until they saved up enough. The majority of migrants I met in Chiapas and Oaxaca could not afford to hire a smuggler from Central America, although I suspect some people I met who posed as migrants were in fact smugglers. I did meet several people who had been abandoned by smugglers or had friends or family members who paid exorbitant fees to cross Mexico.

Despite the common practice of borrowing money, many people simply lack such resources or opportunities available to them. It is a common strategy for many Central Americans to slowly travel through Mexico by stringing together money made from various odd jobs in the informal sector. For example, Blanca was a female migrant who lived in Mexico for several years and she explained:

> *I sold peeled oranges, orange juice, and I sold Herbalife products. It was really difficult because no one wanted to give me work anywhere. I would go out looking for a job and they would ask me for recommendations, but where was I going to get recommendations if I didn't know anyone? So that is how I came to work as a street vendor.*

One of my first interviews was with a man from Honduras in his mid-40s called Edwin. Edwin was well-educated and trained as an electrical engineer. He had a decent job working as a manager in a *maquila* but left his country after discovering that his wife

was having an affair and falling into a deep depression. He left Honduras with no money. When I asked him what his plan was for traveling through Mexico, he confidently told me that he came prepared to work in Mexico. I assumed he meant mentally prepared to work until he brought over a medium-sized blue duffel bag and unzipped it in front of me on the floor. The bag was filled with various tools: wrenches, screwdrivers, hammers, work gloves, and other gadgets to conduct electrical work. Because Edwin was trained as an electrical engineer explained to me that he could work his way through Mexico as a skilled electrician.

I exchanged email addresses with Edwin we have continued to communicate over the years. After leaving Casa Guadalupe he was apprehended at a immigration checkpoint outside Oaxaca City and was deported back to Guatemala. He immediately crossed the border again and found work in Huixtla, Chiapas where he obtained work collecting garbage. This area of Chiapas is known for being dangerous for Central American migrants but Edwin explained to me that because he was well-educated, he could often avoid some of the stereotypes and abuses that most Central Americans suffered.

Over a year after I met Edwin we had a brief exchange over email. He told me that he was still in Huixtla and thanks to God, he has been able to find slightly more technically advanced work doing electrical installations, painting houses, fixing roofs and plumbing. In the afternoons, he taught a mathematics tutoring course and had five students. He said that he charged $20 pesos/hour (less than USD $2/hour), which is very cheap but he enjoyed the work. He cannot find work as an engineer because potential

employers ask for his papers and there is a lot of egotism. Edwin was disappointed that he did not make much money given his training. He also said he still dreamt of going to the United States one day, but was not sure when that would be.

In many ways Edwin's experience in Mexico was rare in that he had the foresight to bring his tools with him and the training to take advantage of local markets. On the other hand, his experience is representative of a number of Central Americans who decide to try their luck making a living in Mexico before venturing on to the United States. I met several people who adopted this strategy especially after hearing about more crackdowns on the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexico, they felt, still offered more opportunity than in their countries of origin and they were willing and occasionally able to take advantage of local opportunities. Many people I met also planned to make their way to the U.S.-Mexico border region where they would try and secure a job to earn some money to either send home or pay for a *coyote* to help them cross the border.

Many migrants staying at Casa Guadalupe were actively looking for local work for a few days to garner enough money to pay their bus fare to Mexico City. I met people who found work in construction, cleaning, and at restaurants and churches. Some migrants would venture to the large outdoor market to see if they could find work hauling fruits and vegetables and goods for the vendors. Others found local residents who needed landscaping work done.

Labor in Mexico is gendered and this thus offers different opportunities and constraints for men and women. Women, especially women traveling alone, often hoped to find work cleaning or cooking in homes, churches or restaurants. They were not

generally considered for more manual types of labor whereas men found work mostly as day laborers. When migrant shelter volunteers asked around for work for migrants, they would specify if it was a man or woman who was looking.

In several cases throughout my fieldwork I met Central American migrants who decided to settle in Mexico and find more permanent work. Near a shelter in Mexico City, I met a woman from Honduras who was hired to work as a waitress at a bustling food stall in a local market. Another man found work as a watchman at a local seminary.

Some shelters incorporate migrants to work as volunteers. For example, Mayra worked as the cook at the Albergue Nazareth after her leg was dismembered by the train. I met other migrants who assisted Padre José and Padre Enrique in the daily activities of the shelter or of the local parish. This was particularly the case for migrants waiting for their immigration papers to arrive after making denunciations with the Mexican National Human Rights Commission for abuses they suffered. Local shelter workers often facilitated this type of agreement for people who are willing to speak up and make public denunciations. One of the most disheartening aspects of my fieldwork was witnessing cases where migrants who had been trusted to work in the shelters were found to also be profiting off of migrants. While I discuss these examples in more detail in chapter eight, the point here is that many people who had originally intended on migrating to the United States unexpectedly found themselves living in Mexico.

While migrants are able to secure these odd jobs or more stable type of work, it also reveals how easy it can be for people to become desperate and be recruited to illegal types of work. For example, one day at the shelter an older male migrant from Guatemala

came in to talk to me. He brought a flyer that he found. The flyer promised him $500 pesos/week. There were no details on what the work entailed, only the address and date and time of an information meeting at a local hotel. This migrant was tempted to go to the meeting, but eventually decided against it. Scams like these prey upon the desperate, vulnerable and underemployed promising quick and easy money in a struggling economy. They may lead to participation in illegal activities such as drug laundering or prostitution or could be another type of trap linked to Mexico's feared organ trade, for example.

I also documented cases of migrants being exploited and cheated by their employers. For example, in Chiapas Ever and Carmen were offered a job working on a farm in the countryside, caring for livestock and crops. They stayed with the owner for a week and when it came time to pay them for their first week of labor, she refused and kicked them off her land. Because they feared legal repercussions and deportation, Ever and Carmen were not able to go to the local authorities and report this injustice. Instead, they made their way to the next migrant shelter and sought help from the local priest.

Thus, for some, the journey through Mexico does not have a clear end, whether that means a successful crossing to the United States or deportation back to their countries of origin. Rather, migrants comprise a segment of the population that literally lives indefinitely along the migrant journey in Mexico. Many of these people live off the economic mechanisms of migratory processes or simply do not have other options available to them and must circulate between and among the network of shelters and migrant transit locations.

Religion plays a prominent role along the journey and in the everyday language used by migrants. Jacqueline Hagan (2008) has written about the role of faith and religion for migrants before, during and after they migrate. In addition to the explicit religious language and iconography used in migrant shelters, I also found that migrants themselves drew on Catholicism and their faith in making sense of their experience. Migrants often invoked God in discussing how they would survive the many hardships and arrive to their destinations. A religious perspective offered comfort to migrants and a common language spoken by both migrants and shelter workers.

One strategy that migrants utilized to protect themselves in the likelihood of a robbery was to hide their money, valuables and family phone numbers on the inseams of their pants, shirts, or shoes. Unfortunately, this was such a common practice that now authorities and thieves know to check for such secret compartments when they force people to strip down naked and search their clothing and body parts. Some migrants make a point of memorizing important phone numbers of family member in the United States, but the majority of people I met had phone numbers scrawled out on tiny pieces of paper or written on the inside of small bibles or notebooks. In the photo below, a migrant shows me the inside of his bible with a note written to him by his brother which reads, “Goodbye brother and see you soon.” On a piece of tape are the names and phone numbers of family members in the United States.

Figure 9: Personal Bible with Phone Numbers

Guarding one's possessions is not necessarily a new strategy but a practice that predates the journey. For example, Elena, the 38-year-old mother from Guatemala, carries all her money and phone numbers inside her bra. One day when we were leaving the shelter together, she noted that a woman in Guatemala would never carry a large purse like the one I had because of the likelihood it would be stolen. The seemingly neutral act of carrying a purse was an indicator of the ways people think about and respond to violence around them.

Social relations and traveling companions are also crucial components to a person's migration strategy and experience. Some migrants travel alone, but most travel in small groups that offer protection and guidance. Some people meet travel companions in their communities of origin while others find groups at shelters along the way. I met

two women who were traveling together from same village in El Salvador. One woman was 17-years-old and the other was in her late 30s. These two women, who were in very different life stages and did not socialize together in El Salvador, bonded together as soon as they found out that they were each considering making the journey to the USI also met a couple who was no longer together romantically and yet decided to travel together and offer each other companionship and protection until they reached the United States where they had family members living in different states.

It is a fairly common strategy for men and women to enter into "protective pairings" along the journey where women are offered protection from male migrants and males receive "womanly" duties such as washing clothes, procuring food and engaging in intimate sexual relations. Several migrants I met were adamant about traveling alone on the journey. According to them, traveling alone was the safest and quickest way of getting north because you do not attract too much attention and you do not worry about trusting anyone. Others discuss the benefits of traveling together in a group. One migrant woman from Nicaragua explained her experience traveling together in a group with five other migrants:

> *People come from each of the countries in Central America. There are people who come, people who are very serious and they do not talk to anyone because they are distrustful. They do not make friends with anyone. And there are others who come and say, "hey, where are you from?" and "look, I come from Nicaragua, and him, he is from Honduras, and what's happening is that we are forming a little group so that we can take care of one another." And it goes like that and we make a group and nothing else. And we continue on the journey with one looking out here and another over there. And sharing, do you understand? We share a soda, the whole group shares a soda, it shares bread and we all eat. We share, that's the relation we have. And we go together. It does not matter if you are black, white,*

> *brown, guerito, whatever, it doesn't matter to us. It is a gesture of solidarity and of friendship.*

Traveling companions can significantly change the overall outcome and day-to-day reality of a migration experience. The most obvious example is falling into a trap or con by a human trafficker or kidnapper and thus being impeded from continuing the journey as a migrant and instead be forced or coerced to enter the sex industry. Apart from such extreme examples, people have different monetary resources that they are able to share with their companions and different experience levels. It is often beneficial for a first-time migrant to travel with someone who has already journeyed to the US and who may know where shelters are located, how to avoid military checkpoints or how to navigate the complex transportation system in Mexico City. Figure 10 is a photograph of a handwritten map made by a migrant who was documenting the locations of checkpoints and migrant shelters for future reference.

In general, knowledge of geography, transportation, local obstacles in Mexico, laws, migrant houses, customs, language, etc. equals power on the journey. The more knowledge an individual has, the more power he/she has in making decisions for themselves and within group contexts. I met several people who were completely unfamiliar with the dynamics of the journey in Mexico and thus had to rely upon someone they had just met along the way. This type of dynamic sets up highly unequal situations with coyotes who are hired to transport people and have a great deal of power

relationships and allows people to be exploited or abused. This is most obvious in

Figure 10: Migrant's Map of Journey with Local Information

over how people travel, what they eat, where they sleep and what risks they take. Relying on coyotes can leave the migrant completely unaware of their surroundings, who is driving them, where they go, and what types of situations they become involved in.

On Being a Paperless Other in Mexico: Discrimination and Exploitation

As Central Americans pass through Mexico, and seek work in informal sectors, their labor, as cheaper and thus more exploitable than Mexicans, creates increased competition and potentially resentment among local populations. Global processes that

create migration abroad may contribute to increased nationalism and racism, particularly among working class populations (Harvey 2003). Before the 1970s when large numbers of Central American refugees began entering Mexico to seek refuge and work mostly on coffee farms in Chiapas, their status as racialized “other” or non-citizen was not central to Mexico’s national imaginary. Processes of racialization and the social construction of the illegality and otherness of *los indocumentados* (the undocumented) only increased from the mid-1970s, paralleling the legal criminalization of foreigners in Mexico under the 1974 *Ley de la Población.*

Central Americans are constructed as “others” in Mexican society and often associated with delinquency and violence based on assumptions and fears about race, ethnicity and nationality. Barker (2009) explains how discourses—both spoken and unspoken—about “otherness” allow people to name their fears of people, places, events, and place them within larger social meanings. This social organizing also cause fear for those who are themselves categorized as the threatening “other” (Barker 2009:267). The history of war in Central America and the subsequent refugee program and camps in Chiapas, Campeche and the Yucatán form part of the historical underpinnings of such stereotypes. Guatemala, Mexico’s largely indigenous southern neighbor, may be constructed as a less sophisticated, inferior nation of Indian peasants, in contrast to the modern nation of Mexico. El Salvador is also feared for being war-torn country that breeds gang activity. In these ways we see how Central American migrants are both fearful and feared.

For undocumented Central Americans passing through or living in Mexico, many

encounter discrimination in transit communities. Elizabeth Colson (2004) notes that displaced peoples often encounter hostility and resistance from members of the receiving community:

> Those resettled as communities may find themselves in a hostile environment, for previous occupants of the area are rarely compensated for having to share local resources with the newcomers, and the community is seen as a rival political entity operating within the space formerly controlled by local political figures (Colson 2004:108).

Experiences of discrimination and disrespect for Central American migrants must be understood within the context of Mexican ethnic politics that racialize migrants as paperless others. Just as theorists have considered the production of gender, sexuality and race in intimate colonial settings (Stoler 2001; Stoler 2002), or in the construction of citizenship (Lowe 1996; Luibheid 2002; Luibheid 2005; Ngai 2004; Yu 2001), I argue that we must understand how racialized and gendered processes are occur in transit spaces and reproduce social inequalities. I understand racial formation as a social and historical process (Omi and Winant 1994) and racialization as the "historically and geographically specific meanings or practices that construct particular groups as racially inferior" (Castañeda 2003:250). Indeed, Mexico has a long history of racializing indigenous groups, mostly from southern Mexico, and I argue that indigenous, non-indigenous, black and mestizo Central American are also racialized and constructed as "the other." Within local communities, Central American migrants experience what Bourgois (1988) calls "conjugated" oppression, where people are oppressed both as wage workers and as members of a discriminated ethnic minority" (Binford 1996:66).

In the context of southern Mexico, Lynn Stephen has addressed "how dominant

representations of the dangerous, the subversive, the worthless, the marginal, and the unimportant become linked to making particular groups of people susceptible to violent abuses that allow them to be treated with less than human respect and dignity" (Stephen 2000:823). While Stephen focuses on "indigenous suspects" from Mexico, her analysis is useful for understanding similar processes of suspicion and othering conducted by the military, police and local residents who control the checkpoints and roads that migrants pass through.

While there has certainly been an increase in fear and violence in local Mexican communities, violence is often blamed directly on Central Americans and not on state or security forces who foster xenophobia by treating migrants like criminals or on the multiple actors who profit off Central Americans in transit. Edwin, the electrical engineer who settled in Huixtla, Chiapas explained to me how Central Americans face discrimination:

> *The situation for Central Americans here is Mexico has become more difficult. There are less work opportunities and they always denigrate us. We are labeled here. Of course my case is a little different, but the majority suffer greatly on Mexican soil. I thought Barack Obama was going to help us, but it has been the complete opposite. The wall on the border is still being built and the mechanisms against illegal Hispanics are worse and so denigrating, there is more racism, just like in the times of the KKK.*

I found it interesting that Edwin made a seamless connection between the conditions for Central Americans in Mexico and the presidency of Barack Obama and border policy on the U.S.-Mexico border. Indeed, I believe these things to be connected as well, but it is important to understand the local historical context of Central Americans being exploited and experiencing decades of violence in southern Mexico.

Brenda, a woman from El Salvador talked about the discrimination she experienced trying to secure work in Mexico. When she arrived to Tapachula, Mexico she said "*me trataron de la patada*" (the treated me like dirt) because she was Salvadoran and did not have papers. Her first job was washing cars but the car wash owner eventually fired her because she was the only woman working among men and she became a "distraction." She eventually found work as a seamstress with a woman in Tapachula who helped her get FM3 documents to live in Mexico. She explained:

> *While its true that some Central American women come to steal husbands away from Mexican women, we all have to pay for those. They think of us all as prostitutes, and yes there are prostitutes and so I imagine that is why they don't want us. Where I worked, my co-worker hated me until the day I left. She was the daughter-in-law of the boss and when I was making my food, she came in and put soap in it.*

As Brenda explains it, gendered stereotypes about Salvadoran women as prostitutes was central to why she was discriminated against. Deblyn, also from El Salvador, had a similar experience in Oaxaca. She explained to me her attempts to find work in the large outdoor market in Oaxaca, Central de Abastos. She said she went from stall to stall inquiring about potential work and one stall owner asked her if she was from Chiapas. She said no, and told her she was from El Salvador. The stall owner demanded to see her papers or identification. Deblyn did not have any identification and the woman accused her of having something to hide, that she had done something wrong. She came back to the shelter that afternoon in low spirits and as we talked she told me that women from El Salvador are often associated with prostitution and that she has been solicited several times while in Mexico to engage in sexual acts with men. I asked her if she had suffered any form of physical sexual abuse during her time in Mexico. She responded, "No, but

the abuse and discrimination I have suffered is just as bad." Other migrant women reported being solicited to perform sexual acts in exchange for cash with residents and with other migrants. As I discuss in more depth in the following chapters, the discrimination that Central American women experience can be understood as historically connected to Mexico's sex work industry as well as deep-rooted social anxieties about sexual morality and racial otherness in Mexico.

In addition to anxieties that reflect racial and gendered stereotypes of people from Central America, I also documented fear and discrimination against Mexicans who had spent significant amounts of time in the United States. This was particularly the case for migrants who returned to Mexico and were perceived as affiliated with U.S.-based gang culture. Earlier I discussed the case of Alfredo, who had spent the majority of his life living in Los Angeles and was deported to Mexico after serving a prison sentence. Alfredo claimed that his poor Spanish language skills and visible tattoos contributed to his inability to secure employment in Oaxaca because people did not trust him. When I met him at the shelter, he was hoping to borrow a donated long-sleeve shirt that would help cover up his tattoos. In fact, the shelter workers refused to let him in at first and did not let him sleep at the shelter because they were fearful of him.

Migration Strategies: "Soy Mexicano"

In light of such discrimination, one of the most important migration strategies that Central Americans employ is learning to "pass" as Mexican. This is more difficult for some people, depending on their racial background. For example, a person of Afro-

Caribbean descent will have a more difficult time passing in Mexico, which has a very small black population. For many Central Americans though, there are common strategies used. For example, people use specifically Mexican vocabulary and try to avoid words that are obviously Honduran or Salvadoran. For example, in Mexico the word for bus is *camión* or *urbano* and in Honduras it is simply *bus*. Some migrants purposely use Mexican slang words such as *güey*, *pinche* and *cabrón*.

Central American migrants may also create an alias while in Mexico. They may use a different more "Mexican" name, such as José, Fernando or Maria. Because certain names common in Central America are distinctly non-Mexican, their real names printed on tickets may tip off a bus driver or immigration official. As part of creating a false Mexican identity while in Mexico, many migrants develop a personal narrative about where they are from. They take the time to learn the names of towns in southern Mexico and local facts such as who the current governor is, what types of food are produced and what people commonly eat. This is important because immigration officials often quiz undocumented migrants about where they are from to determine if they are Mexican. In anticipation of such questions, Central American migrants memorize or carry pieces of paper with information about Mexico and their fake Mexican identity scripts with them. For example, they document certain words that Mexicans use that differ from words in Guatemala, who the Mexican president is, what their address is, major Mexican holidays, or recipes for popular dishes etc. Figure 11 shows several scripts that have been recovered from the bodies of Central American migrants found dead in the Arizona desert.

Felipe Calderón Hinojosa.-
Ex Presidente de México.-
Vicente Fox Quesada.-
Gobernador de Chiapas.-
Juan José Sabines Guerrero: Gano las elecciones por el PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática)
Cuantos estados tiene la Republica federal de México.-
Tiene 31 Estados y un Distrito Federal que en total hacen 32 estados.-
Cuantos Colores tiene la Bandera de México.-
Tiene Tres Colores: Verde, Blanco y Rojo.-
Cual es el escudo de la Bandera de México.-
El Águila.-
Como esta el Águila.-
Esta parada sobre un nopal Devorando una Serpiente.-
Cuantos gramos tiene un Kilo.-
Tiene 1000 Gramos.-
El medio Kilo tiene 500 Gramos: en México no se dice Libra.-
Un cuarto de Kilo tiene 250 Gramos.-
La talla de Camisa es 36 o 38.-
La talla de pantalón es 32 o 34.-
Cuantos Grados de Estudio hay en México.-
Kinder, Primaria, Secundaria, Preparatoria y Universidad.-
Como se llama el transporte en donde se viaja.-
Se llama Camión o Autobús.-
Como se llama el que maneja o lleva el Autobús.-
Se llama Conductor o Chofer.-
Cuantos [illegible] el Estado de Chiapas.-
Tiene 118 Munic[illegible]ios.-
Cuanto Pesas.-
Yo Peso 80 Kilo.
Cuanto mides.-
Un Metro con se[illegible] y cinco Centímetros.-
Que Numero Calzas.-
Numero 5 o 6.-
Cual es la Capit[illegible]l de Chiapas.-
Tuxtla Gutiérrez.-
Comidas Típicas de México.-
Mole, Tacos, [illegible]
En México no se [illegible]facciona: La refacciona es para los carros.-

Coro *Himno.*
Mexicanos al grito de guerra
el acero aprestad y el bridón.
Y retiemble en sus centros la tierra,
al sonoro rugir del cañón.

Estrofa I
Ciña ¡oh Patria! tus sienes de oliva
de la paz el arcángel divino,
que en el cielo tu eterno destino
por el dedo de Dios se escribió.
Mas si osare un extraño enemigo
profanar con su planta tu suelo,
piensa ¡oh Patria querida! que el cielo
un soldado en cada hijo te dio.

Estrofa II
En sangrientos combates los viste
por tu amor palpitando sus senos,
arrostrar la metralla serenos,
y [illegible] muerte o la gloria buscar.
Si el recuerdo de antiguas hazañas
de tus hijos inflama la mente,
los recuerdos del triunfo tu frente,
volverán inmortales a ornar.

Estrofa III
Como al golpe del rayo la encina,
se derrumba hasta el hondo torrente,
la discordia vencida, impotente,
a los pies del arcángel cayó.
Ya no más, de tus hijos la sangre,
se [illegible] en contienda de hermanos;
sólo encuentre el acero en sus manos
quien tu nombre sagrado insultó.

EN MEXICO SE DICE	EN GUATE SE DICE
Chamarra.-	Chumpa.-
Mezclilla.-	Lona.-
Cinturón.-	Cincho.-
Cierre.-	Ziper.-
Agujeta.-	Correa.-
Corcholata.	Tapita.-
Popote.-	Pajilla.-
Boleto.-	Ticket.-
Extensible.	Pulsera.-
Autobús.-	Bus.-

Figure 11: Script used by Undocumented Central American Migrant

An important part of "passing" is having the appropriate gear to blend into Mexican society. Despite stereotypes about migrants being "dirty" and uncouth, having appropriate clothing and a well-maintained appearance is a major preoccupation for many

migrants. This serves a dual purpose of protecting migrants through the harsh terrains as they cross. Migrants value warm clothing including jackets, gloves and hats especially when riding the train at night in areas of higher elevation. Also important are sturdy shoes that will minimize blisters and allow one to run. Several women I met were traveling with flimsy sandals or high-heeled shoes and it caused them great distress. Tennis shoes or construction boots were the most valued type of shoes and migrants spent hours at the shelter scrubbing their shoes or went out to the *zócalo* (central plaza) to pay a few pesos to have their boots shined.

During my fieldwork on several occasions I accompanied migrants who wanted to go shopping for clothing. This took me by surprise, that people would chose to spend their money on clothing rather than on saving it for food or other emergencies they may encounter. One young educated man from Guatemala received a money order from his parents and spent nearly all of it on a pair of hiking boots and a nice sweater. It was clear that he valued the importance of quality clothing and thought it was a good investment for crossing through Mexico. At some migrant shelters community members and foreigners donate clothing for traveling migrants. The acquisition of new clothes at the shelter is appreciated, but also causes some competition and tensions between migrants. Of course the ability to acquire such items is uneven and there are migrants who “fit” the common stereotype of young man with a baseball cap and backpack. People with less resources are at a disadvantage in comparison to people who can afford suitable gear. Ultimately an individual’s physical stamina and access to material items prove critical to survival yet by no means ensure it.

In conclusion, this chapter provided a context for some of geographic, material and social conditions and strategies that shape Central American migration through Mexico. Migration is a highly differentiated process with multiple variables that may impact an individual's experience. Migrants draw upon different strategies to maximize their chances of success, but as we are all too aware of, no one is immune to violence.

CHAPTER SIX—LA INDUSTRIA DEL CACHUCO: VIOLENCE, COMMODIFICATION AND DISPOSABILITY

Un cachuco is a derogatory term used for Central Americans in Mexico and roughly translates into "dirty pig." During my fieldwork a priest who runs a migrant shelter in Oaxaca, Padre José, talked to me about *la industria del cachuco* (the cachuco industry). Instead of simply blaming the dramatic increase in violence against migrants on "bad" individuals, gangs or cartels, he spoke of the growing economic industry that surrounds the steady movement of undocumented Central Americans in transit in Mexico. Organized criminals, gangs, corrupt police, military, immigration authorities and local residents profit off the smuggling, trafficking, kidnapping and exploitation of Central American migrants. The word *cachuco* has even been transformed into a verb, "cachuquear," which means to exploit Central American migrants.

Migration has been conceptualized as an industry (Castles and Miller 2003) or business (Salt and Stein 1997) and transnational migrants as commodities (Kyle 2000). However, such a framework tends to deny agency to individual actors (Spencer 2009) and obscure more locally specific social and cultural processes. My use of the phrase *cachuco* industry thus bridges structural and agentive/local analyses by highlighting how larger transnational processes open the possibilities for actual bodies, lives, and labors to be exchanged in local economies. The term *cachuco* also implies the racial, ethnic, gendered and nationalistic elements of vulnerability to commodification and exploitation. The *industria del cachuco* is not a neutral or purely economic process, but also reflects social and cultural assumptions about undocumented people that operate amidst political,

legal and economic forces that not only fail to protect basic human rights, but may actively undermine them.

Mexico has become an important site of profit-making whereby value is being extracted from this mobile and disposable reserve army. The contradiction is that in their attempts to sell their labor abroad, migrants both unwittingly and at times, deliberately open the possibilities to having their labor and/or their lives further commodified and disposable. I define commodification as an historical process by which migrants, their bodies and their labor gain value where they were previously rendered useless. Marx (1967) defines commodities as objects of utility and depositories of value, where value is acquired via social and historical processes, namely exchange. And while migrants' bodies are not necessarily produced to be sold, since they are exchanged and sold on the market, their supply and demand are real (Polanyi 2001 (1954):76).

This chapter explores the political economy of *la industria del cachuco* by examining how violence is a crucial mechanism in profit from human mobility. To do so, I focus on two significant and often related processes: the transformation of migrant bodies, labor and lives into commodities to be exploited, and the emergence of the migrant journey as a site for new flows of goods, capital and migration-related services that profit both local and transnational economies. In this sense, migrants are not solely commodities, but also transformed into consumers. My goal is to describe these dynamics and to address the implications of these processes on individuals and communities. Several actors, particularly migrant shelter workers and activists participate in and/or threaten the business dynamics of *la industria del cachuco*, creating new tensions and ruptures in local relations. As such, I

argue that the openings for commodification, exploitation and profit often create new and/or exacerbate existing forms of social dislocation at the local level.

Human Cargo to Cash Cow: The (Gendered) Business of Commodification

Along the migrant journey in Mexico there is a continuum of ways people are commodified and not all migrants are valued equally. There are different ways people are perceived, packaged and exploited while they are in active transit; as cargo to smuggle, gendered labor to exploit, sex to sell, organs to traffic, and objects to exchange. While in years past migrants faced robbery, dismemberment, rape, extortion and abuse, the political economy of violence has become more coordinated and sophisticated. One of my main informants, Padre Enrique, explained the economy of the journey like this:

> *These days, narco-trafficking is a business and next comes human trafficking. Because migration has increased, so has the business of taking advantage of it. We could say that everyone wants to cash out on migrants…from the coyote, from the people who run transportation, those from the train, from immigration, transit, police, everyone. Yes, there has been a big extortion of migrants. It is a big business.*

Padre Enrique went on to say that the motivation to profit off transit migrants is the result of Mexico's own economic insecurity. That is, local residents are preying on people due to their own need.

In what follows, I focus on several processes involved in different types of commodification including smuggling, extortion and kidnapping to highlight the ways such processes de-humanize migrants in transit and intersect with multiples types of gendered inequalities. I utilize use a feminist lens to understand two important elements of *la industria del cachuco*. I consider how markers of difference and social anxieties impact opportunities

for work and labor. I examine how violence against migrants is normalized and often met with indifference. As feminists have long argued, markers of difference based on race, class, sex, gender, nationality and disability, are always in tension and central to the ways individuals and groups are marginalized. These factors both reflect and reproduce social anxieties. As such, I argue that migrants' legal status as unauthorized/undocumented and their economic value as commodities cannot be understood outside the context of other markers of difference. These factors are crucial in either increasing or decreasing the value of migrants and their bodies as commodities. Particularly important are intersections between gender, race and citizenship as they mediate to what extent people are treated as commodities, laborers or consumers in local economies.

Smuggling

Through human smuggling, Central American migrants are transformed into human cargo (Coutin 2007:111) to be exported to the United States from Central America in exchange for large sums of money. In 2008, the going rate to be smuggled from Central America to the U.S.-Mexico border typically ranged between USD $6000-$7000. Just to cross the U.S.-Mexico border can cost from USD $1500-$2500, particularly as increased militarization makes crossing more difficult and time-consuming for smugglers. Large scale smuggling operations offer migrants an alternative to riding on the cargo trains, yet they must endure inhumane, dangerous and often deadly conditions. Central American migrants traveling with smugglers are often treated as objects to transport. Most notorious have been the discovery of migrants packed into the

backs of large tractor trailers like sardines or found in crowded and dirty "safehouses" where people are treated more like prisoners than paying customers. For example, in 2007, six migrants were killed near Juchitán, Oaxaca when the weight of tons of bananas crushed the hidden compartment of a tractor-trailer that was carrying nearly 200 Central American migrants. These migrants had paid thousands of US dollars each to be smuggled from Central America to the United States.

One migrant woman, Rubi, explained to me that at the shelter along the Mexico-Guatemala border, smugglers regularly hang out in front of the shelter looking for people to recruit. This is an issue that several shelter workers talked to me about. In general, many shelters prohibit Mexicans from entering the shelter because it is more likely they are in fact smugglers preying on migrants. It is a daily task in some of the larger shelters to kick out smugglers. With that said, it is often very difficult to determine who a smuggler is and while shelter workers often suspect someone is a smuggler, they do not do anything about it.

Although it is easy to demonize human smugglers, there is a complex dynamic between migrants, smugglers and organized criminals. Migrants often need smugglers or guides, who in some cases turn out to be a friend or family member, in their journeys. The complexities of this almost symbiotic relationship was explained to me by Jesus, a migrant originally from Honduras who lived in Pennsylvania for sixteen years, where he has six children, including young twins. Jesus was deported from the US and because he had committed a previous crime, faced up to 20 years in federal prison if he was caught re-entering. He said that despite this risk, he must try to reunite with his children. As Jesus

described, migrants pay thousands of dollars to a coyote to help them cross Mexico, not necessarily because they need help navigating the territory (although this is certainly a factor) but more for protection in navigating the social and criminal elements that control the journey. He explained that coyotes must work closely with *Los Zetas* in Mexico and that their role is actually to protect migrants from being robbed or kidnapped. The coyotes work out agreements with *Los Zetas* and pay them taxes for the migrants they bring with them and in exchange, they are free to pass through. Jesus also told me that many of the people I meet in the shelter are not in fact migrants, but really coyotes just pretending to be migrants so that they can eat and sleep for free.

While migrants are often considered to be desirable commodities in their potential to be smuggled, during the smuggling process, migrants may lose value according to local conditions. I met three women from El Salvador who were abandoned by their coyote at a migrant shelter in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Apparently the coyote already had two children traveling with him and felt it was too risky to have two children and two women. Because of the increase in women on the train to be targeted for kidnapping, the smuggler made the economic choice to leave the women behind at the shelter. The women were relieved that at least they had not yet paid him the USD $4000 he was charging.

Several other migrants I met were abandoned by the people hired to smuggle them after they had already paid large portions of smuggling fees in advance. For example, I met Clara who was traveling with her five-year-old daughter, Melinda. Clara's husband left her in Honduras several years ago to go to the US and work in North

Carolina. He left her with Melinda and another younger daughter who barely remembers her father. Clara explained that she had no intention to go to the US, but three days before she left, she received a telephone call from her husband telling her that he had arranged for her to go with a coyote and he had paid for it and she had nothing to worry about at all. She said she didn't have much time to pack or anything, but just put some stuff together. According to Clara, her younger daughter refused to go with her mother and Melinda saying that she hated their father and did not want to go see him. Clara told me that Melinda loved her father and was excited but could not convince her younger daughter to go. She left her youngest daughter with her mother-in-law.

A coyote came to her town to pick her and Melinda up. He was already traveling with two young women around 16 years of age. The five of them traveled for two-weeks together in a private automobile. Clara's impression was that the coyote was very nice and had a nice face—that everything was fine. They would drive to the outskirts of towns, never enter towns and there would be houses where they would stay and sleep and eat. She said that he didn't abuse them at all and that they didn't have any trouble with police or gangs. As they drove when they would come close to a *caseta* (checkpoint), like La Venta, they would get out of the car and there were men on *motos* (scooters) who would pick them up and drive them around the checkpoints. Once in Oaxaca, the coyote informed the women that he knew someone in the town of Mitla and that they would stop there. In most towns he would drop the women off at a private house where they would eat and rest. But in Mitla he took them to a cantina where he bought them food and where he started drinking and smoking for the first time on their journey. The coyote told the

women he needed to go outside and before they knew it, he was gone. The women waited at the bar for hours, but he never returned, taking all their belonging with him.

When they realized he was not returning, the women decided to split up. The tow young women were adamant about continuing and decided to hitchhike in the back of trailers and trucks if possible. Clara decided it was too dangerous for her and Melinda to travel this way. She was scared, upset and disoriented and with no other choice began to knock on people's doors asking for help. She met an older indigenous woman in Mitla and asked her to help her buy bus fare to travel to Honduras. The woman who knew that Padre Enrique worked with Central American migrants decided to help her locate him in the city. She accompanied Clara and Melinda to Casa Guadalupe where they stayed for several days while Clara worked cleaning houses until she made enough money to travel back home.

Based on my interviews with people who have been smuggled, they are often treated like people who are kidnapped and given very little freedom under the control of smugglers. One migrant I interviewed likened the process of being transported by a smuggler across Mexico and into the United States to being a prisoner. He was on his way to Phoenix, Arizona and there were various people who would accompany his group to the next location. He said they were kept in random houses and held at gunpoint. According to this migrant, who was eventually deported, smugglers would not let you free until family members had paid the smuggling price in full.

Another migrant I met in Oaxaca explained his perilous journey crossing the Sonora-Arizona desert. He was with a group of about ten people who were each ordered

to carry two gallons of water and forced to take undisclosed pills before they began walking. Apparently the smuggler explained that these pills would give them the energy they needed to walk, but one of the men in the group had a negative reaction to the medicine and could not walk any more. They left him under a tree in the middle of the desert, presumably to die.

Through these stories, we see the ways migrants are de-humanized as commodities to be transported, even when they initially provide their consent to be smuggled. Their vulnerability stems from their status as unauthorized and the necessity to travel clandestinely. This speaks to larger structural conditions of inequality and violence that underlie undocumented migration across Mexico.

Extortion

Migrants who avoid large scale smuggling operations are subject to other processes of exploitation and abuse in Mexico as they travel on their own or with groups of other migrants. Whereas smugglers often have ties to local robbers, organized criminals or authorities, and pay "taxes" to these entities in exchange for passage along particular segments of the journey or train, individual migrants must fend for themselves in interactions with these groups who control the journey. It is not an exaggeration to state that nearly every migrant I met during my fieldwork encountered some form of extortion during their journey. This often begins as soon as they cross the Guatemala-Mexico border as they travel on makeshift rafts and inner-tubes across the Suchiate river, and continues as they make their way whether they are walking, taking a bus, taxi or train. Extortion is not

something new for migrants in transit, as extortion has skyrocketed throughout Central America in recent years. In fact, many migrants I met were escaping from conditions of endemic extortion, often called paying *la renta* (the rent) in their attempts to migrate.

I begin with Blanca, who first migrated in 2001 before the train tracks were destroyed near Tapachula, Mexico. She explained the complex system of payment to ride on the train:

> *Before it was really ugly, more ugly than today because the train started in Ciudad Hidalgo and there I paid $500 pesos to the garroteros, that's what we call them, the men who wear blue uniforms and carry a club, I think they are from the state, I'm not sure. But to them I paid $500 pesos just to let me get on the train, and then I paid $300 pesos to let me stay below the motor of the train, inside a train car so I could sleep and apart from that I had to pay $200 pesos to stay near the inside so I would not fall out the side*

Local bus and *combi* drivers were often the most notorious for exploiting and extorting migrants passing through. A common occurrence that I documented throughout my fieldwork was that bus drivers have a different price for undocumented people. If they did not pay, they threatened to call immigration to pick them up. Several Guatemalans I met explained that during a bus trip in Chiapas, the bus driver charged them $100 pesos each and only charged the Mexicans $16 pesos. When they refused to pay this outrageous price, the bus driver called the police and had them detained. In some cases they work closely with immigration officials or police who intimidate and further extort them. Often, if migrants pay, they are allowed to continue on their way. From an economic standpoint this makes perfect sense, as migrants can be extorted continuously during their journey. For corrupt authorities who extort migrants, there is not a great incentive to deport them. Yet on

the other hand, they also know that the migrants will likely return and pass through several days later.

As I briefly discussed in the previous chapter, nearly every migrant I spoke to who traveled by bus between Albergue Nazareth and Casa Guadalupe encountered systematic extortion. This alternative route for migrants became an extortion racket coordinated between bus drivers and local police. As it was explained to me by several shelter workers who went “undercover” as migrants on the bus, the bus driver called the police and reported what the migrants looked like, how many were on the bus, where they were sitting and what they were wearing. Then, about thirty miles away from the bus terminal, they were stopped by the police who boarded the bus with their large weapons and extracted each of the migrants from the bus. Outside, the police demanded money, often asking for $1000 pesos per person or group, if possible. Once the police received the money, they would allow them to get back on the bus and continue along their way. It was assumed that the bus driver received a cut of the money.

On numerous occasions I asked the migrants if the other people on the bus made any type of protest. The answer was always no. How can we understand this complicity, that people are not outraged that this is going on right in front of them? First, it is important to understand the culture of militarization in southern Mexico. Checkpoints, police carrying guns and inspections are extremely common. I have been woken up in the middle of the night taking first class buses in Mexico and asked for my passport by Mexican police. I have also been asked to step off the bus with other passengers so that our bags could be checked by police. People do not protest in these cases. Such intimidation and policing is

normalized. Second, there is significant fear and distrust surrounding Mexican police and military. This fear, on behalf of both Mexicans and Central American migrants, prohibits many from resisting in such cases or even making more formal denunciations when other violations occur.

Returning back to Blanca, in a subsequent interview, she went on to tell me about her experience on this trip through Mexico. In the years since 2001, Blanca was actually able to secure a Mexican FM3 visa[20] to live in Mexico legally. She worked as a seamstress in Chiapas before deciding to try and make it to the United States. On this trip she was traveling with her husband, Alberto, who also had a visa, and her brother who was undocumented.[21] Here she explained what happened to them while they were riding a bus that was stopped by armed men during the journey:

> *They stopped us, and told us to get off the bus and I took the time to get my papers in order, but they didn't care, all they wanted was money. They threatened you, if you did not get off the bus and I said, "Sir, I am trying to get my papers in order" and he said "No, get down, do you hear what I am telling you." And so I got off that very moment because he was pointing his finger in my face and he said, "you are polleros", and we are not polleros, "he is my brother and he is my husband" I told them but they still demanded $300 pesos for each one of us. But we didn't have that much money, we only had $450 pesos and we asked if that would be enough to let us go because I was scared. I was not scared because they accused me of being a pollera, because I am not a pollera. We are not polleros, but I was scared because there we were all alone, it was really deserted, there were no houses, just mountains, and for that reason we gave them the money. They were armed and these men did not wear uniforms nor badges, they drove a regular car, and that scared me that they were Zetas or others who were going to kidnap us and kill us and all the things that we have been told about in the migrant shelters. So I told him that if we gave them the money that after they would let us leave, because they had already told the*

[20] An FM3 visa is a temporary visa to stay in Mexico for up to one year.
[21] I return to Blanca in Chapter Seven where I discuss protective pairings and the complicated relationship she had with her husband.

> *bus driver to leave us, and they did and we ran so hard to catch another bus. Can you imagine, having your FM3, being legal and to them it doesn't matter, all they want is money.*

Blanca's story highlights the fear of violence for Central Americans in Mexico, even for migrants who are legally there. The emergence of *Los Zetas* and rise in mass kidnappings marks a new phase in systematic violence against migrants that I turn to next.

Kidnappings

In recent years, several points along the major migration routes have become important nodes in organized crime operations as drugs, humans and body parts are circulated through and across the country. Networks of smugglers, organized criminals, cartels and corrupt authorities have been extremely successful in developing methodical forms of abuse, kidnapping, extortion and violence targeted against migrants. The rise and success of *Los Zetas* in Mexico has been a major factor in the rise in kidnappings and commodification of migrants.. As stated earlier, they have ties to former *kaibiles*, elite Guatemalan military forces trained in counterinsurgency tactics and infamous for committing some of the most brutal human rights violations during Guatemala's civil war. *Los Zetas* have diversified their economic activities to not only smuggle drugs, but also prey upon Central American migrants to kidnap, hold for ransom, or coerce to participate in drug/human trafficking. In 2007, the *Zetas* began to use Central America, primarily Guatemala, as the base from which to import cocaine and methamphetamine chemicals through Mexico (Grupo Savant 2010). Shortly thereafter, the *Zetas* began targeting Central American migrants, supported by a

number of actors including local authorities. The 72 migrants who were murdered in Tamaulipas were allegedly killed for refusing to work for the *Zetas* drug cartel.

In these ways we see how undocumented and vulnerable migrants have become sources of big business to drug cartels and gangs, either as commodities to exchange or labor to exploit. Mass kidnappings of migrants via coordinated acts of violence have become commonplace, particularly in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Tabasco. In 2009, the Mexican National Human Rights Commission issued a report citing nearly 10,000 kidnapping victims, most of them Central American migrants, over a period of six months (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos 2009). In 2010, the CNDH documented 214 cases of mass kidnappings of migrants and in a six-month period

Figure 12: Migrants Waiting to Board Freight Train

documented over 11,000 incidents of individual kidnappings (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos 2011). Mass kidnappings have become increasingly common in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca.

Mass kidnappings are often systematic operations coordinated between train conductors, heavily armed organized criminals and Mexican authorities in remote areas. For example, in December 2010 a train run by the federal-government owned Ferrocaril del Istmo de Tehuantepec that was carrying nearly 250 people was stopped by Mexican immigration officers, police and military personnel between Arriaga, Chiapas and Ixtepec, Oaxaca. Several migrants were detained and the rest continued on after the train conductor demanded money from them. They thought the worst was over, but shortly thereafter the train stopped again and was approached by heavily armed gunmen who robbed, beat and kidnapped 40 individuals.

Local shelter workers received death threats when they publicly denounced the incident and stated that witnesses told them that the kidnappers had ties to *Los Zetas*. The Mexican government initially denied the kidnapping and later retracted its statement after the Foreign Ministry of El Salvador denounced the attack. In early 2011, the United Nations urged Mexico to seriously investigate the attack to see if the Mexican military and/or police were in fact complicit in the kidnapping.

It needs to be explained why Central American migrants, who are coming from desperate and dire circumstances, are targeted by kidnappers. Kidnapped migrants' lives become valuable commodities to be exchanged for handsome ransoms and their bodies or body parts may be sold, trafficked or discarded. Many migrants have family members

already established in the United States who lend them money to help pay for them to migrate, whether this means sending them a sum up front, paying for a *pollero* or wiring money when they are robbed in Mexico. Since migrants also borrow money from family members in their home countries and once people reach the US, they are often extremely indebted to one or several family members and must repay their debts before they are able to save up money to send back to their own families. This can be a vicious cycle. Kidnappers know that migrants are often embedded within deep social networks and likely have contacts in the US that they can manipulate and extort money from.

For obvious reasons I was not able to interview a large sample of people who were kidnapped, though I did conduct interviews with several different people who had escaped their captors or narrowly escaped being kidnapped. I also interviewed several people with family members they suspect had been kidnapped as they received phone calls asking for ransoms to be paid. Here, a migrant explains the story of a friend in the United States who paid a coyote to transport his wife to the United States:

> *Yeah, so he paid the coyote so that he would bring her and they took the train, the coyote together with the señora and then they kidnapped her, a group of them. They called him at his work asking him if he knew his wife had been kidnapped and they asked for a specific amount of money from him and it was bad because he did not have the money, he looked really bad and now he is even worse because not he has not heard anything about her, He does not know if she is alive, he does not know. No one picks up the phone, no one returns his calls. She has not turned up in Honduras, she has not turned up anywhere.*

This story was profound in the way it demonstrates some of the rippling effects of kidnappings, fear and uncertainty on the families of migrants. Kidnapping and ransom are economic transactions, but they also radically shift social structures and individual lives

beyond those who have been kidnapped.

I interviewed two men, Roland and Pedro, who were kidnapped with a large group of people while waiting for the train near Medias Aguas, Veracruz, what has become one of the most fear sections of the journey. Roland and Pedro were from Honduras and had traveled overnight on a train from Oaxaca to Veracruz with a group of four other migrants. When they arrived early in the morning to the town of Medias Aguas, they were tired and disoriented. They were approached by a local couple who told them they would help get them some food and that it would be best for them to wait a bit further up on the tracks. They said the woman was a street vendor who could provide them with coffee and breakfast.

Roland and Pedro took their advice and waited in the shade on the tracks, however later realized they were set up in a trap. There were several other groups of migrants also waiting near them, a group of seven Hondurans, four Salvadorans and the other four people in their group. They said that as they waited a truck of military soldiers passed by, about eight men and shortly thereafter a group of kidnappers arrived—men they described as Hondurans, Salvadoran and Mexicans, all carrying cellular telephones in their hands. At first, they tricked Pedro and Roland and the other migrants by pretending to also be migrants and telling them they were looking for kidnappers who had kidnapped a woman migrant and that everyone should get together in a group for their own protection. Once the smaller groups of migrants were all together, they took out their weapons and instructed them not to run and to take off their shoes or they would be killed. Roland explained that this is when they realized they had been deceived and were

going to be kidnapped.

It took two hours of waiting before the trucks came to pick them up. Roland and Pedro described those hours as excruciating, that the kidnappers told them about how they torture people who do not obey them, and how they take people's organs in order to get them to give up information. Roland said he was sure he was going to die. When the trucks arrived Roland and Pedro were the first ones thrown into the back of a pick-up truck that had a canvas cover, the type of truck that normally carried fruit or animals in the back. This turned out to be a key factor for Pedro and Roland, who after being packed into the back located a space between the canvas cover and the front cabin where they were able to fit their bodies through and jump off the moving truck, which they said was going about 80 or 100 kilometers/hour. Their bodies were badly scraped and bloody. The two men were the only ones to escape, as far as they knew, and spent the night hiding in the bushes and hills on the road nearby before making their way back to the shelter in Oaxaca where Padre José took them to the hospital where they stayed for several days. The local media found out about their escape and in the days following there were several newspaper articles on the two men.

As Roland and Pedro explained their experience to me it became clear that the perpetrators of violence had exploited the conditions of chaos, fear and uncertainty that define the journey in order to achieve their goals. Through deception and intimidation, these perpetrators momentarily gained the trust of these migrants, which was all they needed to round them up and hold them captive. In this way, we see how violence and fear can be used to create the conditions to reproduce more violence.

Commodities and Consumers: Informal Economies and Western Union

In addition to understanding the ways migrants are commodified along the journey, I focus on how the conditions of the migrant journey transforms migrants into new consumers that yield profits in both local and transnational settings. The business of migration profits firms in formal sectors of local, national and transnational economic markets such as grocery stores, money-order businesses and transportation companies. It also profits businesses in the informal sector, such as food stalls, carts and money exchangers who operate in transit areas where migrants congregate.

Undocumented migrants traveling through Mexico must interact with local economies to purchase basic clothing, hygiene and food items yet they are often scared to do so. On numerous occasions I accompanied migrants to buy such items and in some cases I went out to buy them on my own. One female migrant was desperate for contact lens solution for the hard lenses she wore and so relieved when she received a newly purchased bottle. These seemingly mundane and bodily issues are often of most concern to migrants who cannot even meet their most basic needs.

During one of my first trips to the railroad tracks in Veracruz, Mexico I met and spoke not only with Central American migrants, but also the local vendors who sit day after day and sell to migrants. For example, I met a Mexican man who walks up and down the train yards pushing a makeshift cart that held large stacks of currency. He carried money from throughout Central America as well as pesos and US dollars. Because migrants are often fearful of moving outside of specific zones near the train

yards and lack Mexican identification, they have little other choice but to exchange with informal vendors if they need Mexican pesos.

Also during that trip I met a Mexican man who operates a wooden stall located adjacent to the railroad tracks. This was a particularly good place for me to observe the social scene, as many migrants sat near or around the stall. This man had clear plastic bags filled with white bread rolls, second-hand jackets and cheap cotton gloves that hung from his stall. He explained to me that migrants coming from Central America are usually only prepared for warm weather and bring very few clothes. During the next stage of the journey, between Veracruz and Mexico City, the temperatures drop particularly during the night. Migrants often need to purchase warmer clothes at this point. In addition, along the tracks in transit areas, it is common to see local people selling a variety of food snacks such as tacos, tortas and bottles of coca-cola to migrants passing through.

While these economies are important to local people in the informal sector, we can also see how local and transnational businesses profit in the formal sector as well. Here, I share some thoughts on the business of sending and receiving money orders to migrants in transit. The first day I visited the Albergue Nazareth, Melchor, one of Padre José's most trusted workers, asked me if I wanted to accompany him on an errand before he dropped me off at a meeting for the local volunteers. During the afternoon various migrants one by one handed him small slips of paper with information on them, mostly names, numbers and cities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Melchor collected these tiny slips, often written on scrap pieces of paper or the backs of receipts and we set

off on our errands. As we parked his truck in the downtown area of the town, Melchor told me to wait in the car while he took care of some business. He entered a money order store and was inside for close to fifteen minutes. Through the painted glass windows I could see he was making a number of transactions. When he finally emerged from the store, he had a huge wad of pesos split between his fingers according to the amounts sent to each migrant. As a Mexican resident, Melchor was allowed to have money orders sent to him with his Mexican I.D. card.

Since undocumented migrants are not able to receive money orders in their name, they must depend on local residents or shelter workers who agree to pick up orders. At Casa Guadalupe, this was a regular part of daily life; because I do not have an I.D. card, I was not able to pick up orders. It fell upon the Mexican employees to walk to the local Elektra store[22] which has a money order store inside. Money orders are often crucial to people's migration strategies and some people plan in advance to have money sent to them by their family members at different points along the journey. This prevents them from carrying all of their money at any one time because of the near guarantee that they will be robbed. And because migrants need some cash to continue on their journeys they must either find some type of work that will pay them to continue or have money orders sent to them.

According to Western Union's website, the company has more than 18,000 agent locations in Mexico alone and 47,000 agent locations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2007, the company earned nearly a billion dollars a year in "helping"

[22] Elektra is a large home appliances company owned by the Mexican conglomerate Grupo Salinas.

migrants send money across the globe (Deparle 2007). Western Union occupies a contradictory position in US politics as it is seen as both an exploiter and supporter of immigration to the US. For instance, Western Union donates money to immigration rights groups. However, a New York Times article documented some of the insidious ways Western Union directly profits from undocumented migration, including hosting lunches and marketing events in shelters and deportation centers. According to the article, Western Union gave away t-shirts, bandanas and fliers with the company's toll-free phone number in Spanish to migrants who were in holding areas and about to be deported (Deparle 2007). In this example we see how the large multi-billion dollar company of Western Union is dependent upon and directly profits off of the flows of migrants between and across national boundaries.

Moreover, activists in Mexico have condemned Western Union in front of Mexico's Attorney General for their complicity in the kidnappings of migrants. People who must pay ransoms in exchange for the release of their loved ones send money orders through Western Union, facilitating such illicit transactions. Activists believe this needs to be addressed by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission.

Padre José describes the shift in the way migrants are implicated in local economies as well as how they are seen as consumers and people to exploit rather than deserving of charity. He suggested that migrants initially felt that being robbed was justified because they were the ones breaking the law and constructed as criminals.

> *Before no one took their money because they thought well, they are poor. They didn't take advantage of anyone or steal their clothes or there shoes, but later, they started making a business by selling to them. Right, they would sell to them in the place of giving to them or gifting them things like*

> *water, bread, tortillas. They started to sell and making a business off of them. Selling to them in the place of giving to them, and from selling went to extortion. Because they were illegal and were treated like criminals under la Ley General de Población (the General Population Law), they felt like they were guilty. And so they admitted to everything, and gave everything they had and said that we deserve this because we are in a country that is nor ours, and so we should give them money, they believed this. After simply robbing people they went on to abuse people.*

In this description, Padre José offers a chronological narrative of abuse from pity to robbery to physical violence. As he suggests, the political economy of the migrant journey cannot be understood as separate from violence along the journey. I argue that violence is the crucial mechanism by which economic transactions, arrangements and profits are made. Thus, I turn to some of the concrete examples of gendered violence along the migrant journey next.

Gendered Commodities & Gendered Violence

Violence against migrants is always gendered. Thus, a gendered lens is crucial for understanding the shifting and different dangers and values assigned to undocumented migrants who are susceptible to assault and kidnapping. Migrants index sexual violence, and rape in particular as one of the greatest risks and fears as they migrate. Women are more at risk of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases and being contracted into sex work and/or domestic work where sexual violence is prevalent (Caballero 2002). Men are also targeted as sexual objects in Mexico, their bodies commodified and subject to sexual violence. Much of this violence occurs in the form of sexual humiliation. Several men recounted their horror and fear as they were forced to strip down naked in front of one another as ants and mosquitoes preyed upon their exposed skin. Gendered violence also illuminates the complex

power dimensions and uneven ways men and women experience violence along the journey. Finally, understanding lived experiences and silences around gendered violence along the migrant journey offers a lens through which to engage the ways people cope with violence in their lives.

An important contradiction that emerged from my research surrounds the prevalence of sexual violence along the migrant journey. When I first proposed to conduct this research I intended to focus mainly on women who had been raped or sexually assaulted. From what I could glean from the literature and my initial interviews with activists familiar with the journey, the statistics on sexual violence were extremely high. Scholars estimate that the majority of women crossing some of them traveling with children, are sexually assaulted on their way to the United States. Some estimate six out of ten women are sexually assaulted (Vásquez 2006) and others as high as eight out of ten women. Others simply discussed the high rates in terms of the birth control injections being taken prior to migration to prevent pregnancy. Before going to the field I was certain that I would document and record countless stories of gendered violence experienced first-hand by women, but this was not the case. I certainly did meet and interview women and men who talked to me openly about being raped or sexually assaulted, and I share some of their stories here, but I also encountered a curious phenomenon where many people told me about close calls they had with almost being raped or about the details of other people who were raped. A colleague who also worked with Central American migrants and had a similar experience in her interviews with migrants. As she suggested to me, perhaps these silences, what women and men were not

saying about their own experiences, but were eager to tell us about other people's experiences, can tell us something important about how people cope with fear, trauma and violence in the midst of their journeys.

Another interesting observation I made during my fieldwork was that it was important for several of my informants to point out the fact that it is not only women who are raped, but men also. In an interview with Padre José has discusses sexual violence:

> *They started to abuse women who were the most vulnerable. They began to rape them and mistreat them, and then they started with the men. Yes, here men have passed through and they will not tell you in public because it is very shameful, very painful for a man, but young men have passed through who have cried to me, and have told me they have been raped. You actually know one of these men but I am not going to tell you who, but you know him Wendy, and these men have cried with me, they cry because of what has happened to them.*

Padre José distinguishes between sexual violence against women and men, implying that the rape of men and the subsequent trauma and displays of weakness are more serious and unexpected than the rape of women. The rape of women has become normalized, while the rape of men is an abomination. It is often reported in the media that because women are aware of the likelihood of being raped, they receive birth control injections before embarking on the journey. While there was not a sentiment that women necessarily deserved to be raped, it was something that was almost normalized. Migrants and activists displayed more disapproval when a woman was raped in front of her husband. This was a violation not only of the woman, but of the husband's masculinity. This type of rape represented a more symbolic exertion of power than it did a bodily act. Finally, men raping men was the ultimate display of domination and power over another

human. The rape of men signifies an even greater crime as it not only violates the individual person, but also transgresses social norms.

Whereas both male and females migrants may be held for ransom, and both may be recruited to smuggle drugs or work for organized criminals, it is generally female migrants who are considered to be more valuable in terms of being sold into the sex industry. As Central American women are highly sexualized objects in Mexico, some find work in Mexico's prolific sex work industry (Kelly 2008). Many women told of being recruited into working in the sex industry or about other women they knew from their villages who ended up working in the industry in Mexico or along the Mexico-Guatemala border. Others are raped, coerced, or kidnapped to be sold into the sex industry. The sex industry is highly profitable as women and children can be sold more than once (Cockcroft 2010:79). Being sold into the sex industry is perhaps the most prevalent fear expressed by female migrants (and often their partners) as stories circulate about women kidnapped. Female migrants are tracked to be kidnapped in train yards and even within the walls of migrant shelters.

In a cruel twist, such tracking may be conducted by other migrants who are coerced by local gangs to work for them. I first began to understand the such dangers through two events that occurred early in my fieldwork. The first event involved several migrants I met at Casa Guadalupe who were recently involved in a kidnapping scheme. Isabel, a 35-year-old mother of three children from Nicaragua, had arrived to the shelter one afternoon with her husband. After fifteen days of traveling and being extorted multiple times, they arrived to another shelter in southern Oaxaca where they befriended

a young man who told them he could help them migrate as he knew the way through Mexico. Isabel said at first they got along with this young man and trusted him. He told them that the train would be leaving early one day and convinced them to leave the shelter earlier than the other migrants were leaving. At first they did not think much of it and followed him to the train tracks closer to the center of town. However, soon this young man met up with three other men and started smoking a marijuana joint. Isabel overheard them talking about kidnappings and drugs and then heard their "friend" talking about two of the other female migrants who were currently staying at the shelter, Lucy, 16, and Rosalba, 30.

Lucy and Rosalba were traveling together from the same community in El Salvador and were not part of a larger group. This man was describing precisely what the two women were wearing and which train car he thought they would be on so that they would be easy to identify. Isabel said several of the men then starting asking her if she had any family in the United States and where she was going. She explained that she then started to panic, realizing that this friend of theirs was probably not a migrant, and was likely a *Zeta* who was deceiving them. They told Isabel that they wanted to take her husband somewhere without her. She knew something was amiss and so she started to fake having severe stomach pains and told them she suffered from gastritis. She said that they needed to go to the hospital immediately and flagged down a taxi. They jumped into the taxi, which took them back to the shelter and not the hospital. Back at the shelter, Isabel warned Padre José and Lucy and Rosalba about what had happened. Padre José called Casa Guadalupe to inform us of the situation as well and to tell us that all these

women would be arriving in the next few days. Isabel and her husband came first, they decided to not continue on the train and take a bus. Several days later, Lucy and Rosalba finally arrived to Casa Guadalupe where they confirmed the story. They actually only stayed at the shelter for several hours before departing. Since they had enough money to continue on to Mexico City from a job washing cars in Chiapas, they decided to get as far as they could before stopping again.

The second event solidified the scope of the targeted kidnapping of women. In November 2008, twelve Central American women were kidnapped from the top of a cargo train near the town of Las Anonas, Oaxaca. I heard about the kidnapping while I was at Casa Guadalupe and planning to go to Albergue Nazareth in the Isthmus that week. It was there that I met several migrants who had witnessed the kidnapping. Sergio, a migrant from El Salvador who was on his way to Tacoma, Washington, where he was involved in a custody battle for his daughter, was on that train. He explained that the train was stopped by four men in camouflage who gave the impression they were trained as soldiers. Since they were driving a white truck, he surmised that the train conductor was involved in the operation. He said there was chaos and that people started jumping off the train and running. The soldiers were screaming at people, calling them various names and he said they started shooting. The twelve women were forcibly taken onto the trucks. As far as I know, several of the women managed to escape and returned immediately to El Salvador. The remaining women were never located. For Sergio and his group, they had to hide in the nearby brush for several days and then were rejected by a priest at a church before finally being given a floor to sleep on by a local woman. He talked about how cold

it was that night sleeping on the ground. Sergio finally made it to the shelter with Padre José, who he said took great care of him, and brought him to the hospital.

Women are considered to be valuable to be sold for their organs, into the sex industry, for pornography or for ransom. At Albergue Nazareth I participated in a meeting with local community members who offer support in various capacities. During the meeting, people openly discussed the recent kidnapping and passed around photos of several of the women. They spoke about the particular vulnerability of female migrants and how in Mexico women have a certain value and are treated as if they are merchandise.

In addition to being kidnapped and exchanged as commodities, kidnappings are often correlated to sexual violence. Here, I include two stories of people I interviewed who were kidnapped and raped during their journeys. The first was a woman called Jessenia. I met Jessenia a few hours after she arrived to the migrant shelter in Oaxaca where I was conducting intake interviews as part of my fieldwork. Jessenia was a thirty-two-year-old mother of three from Honduras who left her children behind to look for work as a nanny or housekeeper in the United States. Unlike some migrants who have family members who can make loans to pay for smugglers to help them cross Mexico, Jessenia had to work her way along the journey. She lived and worked in Chiapas for four months before being deported. She waited for eight days along the Guatemala-Mexico border before crossing again and returning to her job in Chiapas. It was just after she completed her night shift at her job packing mangoes when her life changed. Jessenia was kidnapped by a local man one night when she was walking home. This man held her

captive in his home for fifteen days where he drugged her, repeatedly raped her, and eventually impregnated her. She described to me those weeks of sleeping on crates used for soda bottles, being forced to take pills and being given very little food or water. After sexual intercourse, Jessenia's captor would force her into the shower and make her bathe before raping her again. She said this would sometimes go on all night and then he would leave. She said in those days, she did not see or speak to anyone but him.

When I met her, she had already decided not to terminate the pregnancy, though with some ambivalence. When I accompanied her to a local clinic in Oaxaca to get her first ultrasound I asked her if she wanted a boy or a girl, she looked at me and said definitely a boy because she would never want to have a daughter who was susceptible to experiencing what she had experienced. Jessenia told me that she had not told her family about her experience or the pregnancy because she was too ashamed.

The second example of kidnapping and sexual violence I documented arose through conversations with a male migrant I met called Emilio. At Casa Guadalupe we received three migrants who had made public denunciation to Mexico's Human Rights Commission regarding a large-scale kidnapping they had witnessed while riding the train in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Whereas two of the migrants had only witnessed the kidnappings, Emilio had actually been kidnapped, raped, abused and sequestered for three days until the house where he was kept was raided by Mexican Intelligence Officers (AFI). Emilio was an openly homosexual man who occasionally cross-dressed and when I met him, was waiting for his regularization papers to come through. He was somewhat

ostracized by the other migrants and by some shelter workers who believed Emilio actually wanted to be kidnapped. In his words:

> *It is hard, hard to talk about what happened….When I saw the women and how they raped them I screamed. And when I screamed they started doing it to me. To me. Eight men. And all eight passed through me. Can you imagine how I felt? I was in the hospital for a week. The priest kept me in the hospital, ten days later I left the hospital and now I can sit down like I am sitting now, I healed physically, but here (in his chest) something stayed, something stayed, a trauma and I still cannot sleep well. I lie down and barely close my eyes and I see the men who grabbed me and opened me up and raped me. And when one was done, another would say "I'll go", and another, and when he was done, "I'll go now" and another….I wish they used a condom but they had nothing and so now I am scared that one of them gave me a disease. I've already done a ton of tests and they came out negative, but who knows with time.*

Emilio eventually escaped his kidnappers after a showdown between the cartel and intelligence officers at the safehouse where they were kept. His story of kidnapping and multiple rapes highlights the inhumanity that many Central American migrants experience as they are transformed into objects to be abused and exploited. It exposes not only the actual horror that individuals endure but also the lasting impacts, both physical and psychological. In one study, scholars documented an increase in risk of HIV for Central American migrants in southern Mexico, particularly for young women (Caballero 2002). Through disease and post-traumatic stress, people like Emilio who survived acts of sexual violence still face extreme suffering. Illnesses like HIV can lead to death as well as cause a great deal of shame for individuals. Feelings of shame were common in many of the responses I solicited from migrants who had suffered such forms of abuse.

Zones where migrants are held captive are spaces where migrant's lives and bodies become commodified objects to violate, exchange or discard. One shelter worker

described for me a safe house that he discovered with the helped of several migrants who had escaped. As they entered the recently abandoned house they found backpacks lying on the ground, empty bottles of wine, a radio, and used condoms outside. He explained that these items were used for kidnappers' "orgies" with migrant women. He also described there was a deck of cards, money from several Central American countries and the I.D. cards of several migrants. Also telling were the pieces of paper with the names and phone numbers of family members in the United States along with receipts of money orders. These artifacts were presumably used to extract ransoms.

As scholars have noted, gendered violence is not an act of pleasure, but rather an act of power, whereby "rape becomes a public secret (Taussig 1999) that enforces an important dimension of the oppression of women in everyday life (Bourgois 2004). Padre José echoes this point:

> *The same evildoers on the journey, the criminal groups, are the ones who rape the women. Various people, and look, they do not rape them for pleasure. It is not pleasure that they want to feel, it is a gender violence, a terrible gender violence.*

If we conceive of women's bodies as the embodiment of "nation"(Alarcon 1999), then harm to the bodies of individuals based on citizenship and ethnicity signals a particular type of social domination. The rape of female migrants serves to emasculate the men around them who are seen as unable to protect their women, thus rendering them powerless.

A female migrant describes this dynamic from the experience of a Salvadoran couple she met at a shelter in Chiapas. The woman was traveling with a group of men, including her husband, when they encountered four armed men who robbed them and raped her:

> *Yeah, she told me that when the robbers asked them who is the husband of this women, no one said anything, they said none of us are, because as she told me, if someone said "I am" then they would call him up and kill him. First they would make him watch that they do to his wife and after they would kill him. So they didn't want to run the risk.*

Much of the sexual assault and abuse that occurs along the journey is initiated by Mexican security forces such as military, police, or migration officials, and legitimated through procedures that are intended to maintain security, but in reality, contribute to new forms of violence. Mexican security forces use their power to abuse women and men by checking for tattoos on their body (which might signal gang involvement) or drugs in their clothes and genitals. Migrants are forced to strip down naked for their bodies to be checked for valuables.

The everyday violence and gendered violence that occurs along the journey is often at the hands of security forces and criminals. I return to Ever and Carmen, the pregnant couple from El Salvador. During their first attempt to migrate across Mexico ten months ago, they were near the infamous checkpoint La Arrocera in Chiapas when they were approached by four armed men. They had two other women traveling with them. They explained that the robbers forced the other women to strip down totally naked so they could check their clothes and bodies for valuables. They said they checked inside both of the women's vaginas for money. They said they did not check Carmen's body (just her clothes) but threatened her by saying they were going to rape her. Carmen told them that she rather they kill her than rape her. In response, one of the men hit her with back of his large automatic weapon above her eye, causing her to bleed profusely. Ever explained that after this happened he started screaming and actually ran to the checkpoint

for the immigration officials, who they were initially trying to avoid, to help them. Ever said that the officials did nothing to help him. The robbers ended up stealing $6000 pesos from them and shortly after, they were caught by migration and deported.

Another example illuminates the complicity of Mexican security forces in gendered violence. On my second day working at Casa Guadalupe, three migrants from Guatemala arrived. This group included a middle-aged man called Edgar, who had lived in the United States for 19 years and had been recently deported to Guatemala. He was traveling with a couple, who he explained was his cousin and his cousin's wife. They were younger, in their early 20s and more visibly indigenous than Edgar. Edgar explained how the journey had changed since he originally migrated in the 1980s as well as about his life in California and then in Oregon working heavy machinery in a wood factory. In the US he was arrested for drunk driving and had a photo radar speeding ticket in California. Apparently, the police harassed him after being pulled over in Oregon when he was in his car driving to pick up medicine for his sick daughter. His wife and daughter were in the car and both started to cry as he was being arrested. His wife jumped out of the car crying, and one of the police officers said, "Bitch, get back in the car." He was brought to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and deported back to Guatemala on a plane. In Guatemala he tried to find work, but only earned USD $4/day. He compared this to the USD $24/hour he made working at the wood factory, and the USD $36/hour he made if he worked overtime.

Edgar agreed to accompany his cousin and wife to the US, since it was their first time on the journey. Neither one of them made eye contact with me nor spoke. Edgar did

all the talking, partially explaining why the couple was hesitant to speak directly to me by telling me about what happened to them the week before in Chiapas. They were in the countryside when a man on a horse came up to them. He at first was telling them to be careful because there was *migra* up ahead, so they believed he was genuinely helping them. Then he dismounted with a machete and held it up to the girl's neck and told them all to give them their money. They made the young girl undress while they looked for money. They also made the men take off their belts and shoes. He said that they didn't do anything else to the girl, but that she was quite traumatized. Later when they went to a church in the Sierra Mixe, there was a man who offered them some breakfast. The girl and her husband refused to go with him because they didn't trust him. It was clear to me when I met them that they had suffered something traumatic and the violence they experienced stayed with them.

In another example, a female migrant I interviewed described her experience at a militarized migration checkpoint on her first migration attempt in 2001 where she was inappropriately assaulted. Here is part of an interview transcript:

> *Everyone was there, migration, the army, the Federal Police were there, there were so many of them. And they checked me, and as I was the only woman who had come on the train, how they touched and groped me until I urinated on myself. I urinated because I was scared that they were going to rape me and since there were only men to check and see if I carried weapons or tattoos. I don't have any tattoos I told them, I'm a mother with a family and I don't have any nor do I have weapons, much less weapons, but it did not matter to them. They checked me everywhere, they took everything off me, they took away my clothes.*
> *W: You were naked?*
> *E: Yes, they took my clothes and this is why I urinated, because I thought they were going to rape me. That was in 2001, but they touch you. In all of my parts. They didn't rape me but they wanted to see me. Well, I say they didn't rape me because we did not have sex, but they touched me*

everywhere to see if I was carrying drugs in my genitals. Yes, until I urinated. They didn't have to check me, and if they did a woman should have been the one to do it, not the one who did among so many soldiers and police. And immigration was there, the ones with blue uniforms and green also, we call them zotacos (derogatory for short man) or garroteros (guards) and immigration.

In this example, we can see the intimidation, fear and humiliation that can accompany everyday practices of militarization. These state officials clearly used their subject positions as men and as authorities to violate this woman.

Next, I provide part of a transcript with an interview I conducted with two other women who were forced to strip down by armed men who they suspected were military or police due to their short haircuts and their sophisticated weapons:

W: Can you explain what happened with the robbers, the people who assaulted you?
E: They had us for about three hours and they took all of our clothes, everything, everything to check to see if we had brought money hidden in them.
W: Were the men and women together or separate?
E: No, the men were apart from us. But they took our pants and everything we brought with us. Everything, everything, and if they didn't take it off of us, we had to take it off because they told us to. We could not talk, nothing, because they were armed. They had us like this (she makes a gesture of a gun pointing to her head)
W: They held guns at your head?
E: Yes.
W: And you weren't crying?
E: No, because for them that is the thing that bothers them the most. If someone cries or something, that is when they start to hit and beat people up.
W: And did they check your body as well?
E: No, because they checked our clothes really well since we had to take everything off. We were left with nothing. They checked our clothes to see if we had brought money, oh, and my hair, and since my hair is really long. They checked it like this.
W: How many were there?
E: There were four.

W: Mexicans?
E: I think they were Mexicans because of their style and attitude. They were the same as the police, just like the federal police, and they carried the same types of weapons. A regular robber would not have those types of weapons. They were wearing regular clothes, but had short hair like the police.

Padre Enrique explains some of the ways migrant women are deceived and coerced along the journey to enter the sex industry sometimes by Mexican security forces,

They threaten them. If they have women captive they tell them that they can agree to be exploited (in the sex industry) or that they can refuse, but if they do, they will turn them in to immigration. And just like this, they coerce them. There is certainly a lot of this going on, a lot, there are many ways to deceive them. And so in this way many women migrants stay in Mexico. And it is the same police, same immigration officials that abuse them and leave them, or that kidnap them for their services. It is a sad reality.

While much of the systematic violence against men and women that occurs is at the hands of corrupt security forces and organized criminals who abuse their positions of power, gendered violence permeates multiple types of social relations. One migrant who was talking about abuses against female migrants and when I asked him where these abuses take place, he responded:

It happens out on the road. Sometimes it is civilians, and on occasion it is the same Central Americans who come with us on the journey who are the ones that abuse the women. And other times it is the police, the same ones who rob and extort.

Padre José told me about abuse between traveling migrants.

About 20 days ago two young women, one Salvadoreña and one Hondureña passed through and were staying at the migrant shelter. They passed through and were caught at the checkpoint at la arrocera. They were with two or three men that they had met and were traveling with along the journey who were helping them. But look at the cruelty of what happened. They took all the money from the Hondureña and then they let

> *her go and for the men, they took all their money and let them go and told them to get out of there. But they kept the Salvadoreña. She was pregnant and they saw that she was pregnant yes, because, look, and you know what, they hit her and raped her and left her bloody. And this women, ……she asked for help at a house and a señora (older woman) took her in and kept her for three days, curing her and taking away the blood, cleaning her, but she was still very ill. She had a fever and an infection so the woman took her to the hospital and the baby she had carried inside for three months was dead.*

These stories tell us about the ways violence is reproduced along the journey. The clandestine nature of unauthorized transit migration creates spaces of vulnerability for migrants to be abused and exploited by multiple actors. Violence is not only enacted by criminals or by corrupt authorities, but also by traveling companions and local people. While there are many different perpetrators of violence against women and men along the journey, one thing is clear, that they are mostly able to act with impunity and without fear of being caught.

Social Dislocation and Disposability

> To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society. For the alleged commodity "labour power" cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this particular commodity. In disposing of man's labour power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity 'man' attached to that tag. Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation. (Polanyi 2001 (1954):76)

Polanyi makes the linkage between labor power as commodity and the notion of disposability not only in relation to labor, but also to individual personhood in the context

of larger processes of social dislocation. He imagines a world where the market is the sole director of human fate, without the protective coverings and of the state and "cultural institutions." I wonder if this is not at least partially explaining what we are witnessing in places like El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Honduras. In these countries states have moved toward greater privatization under neoliberalism, and protective or even repressive bodies like police and military are largely corrupt. Is this how we can explain, at least partially, the escalation of violence throughout the region?

Moreover, going beyond formal market economics, what happens when large segments of the population are engaged in labor and exchange in illicit local and transnational markets of drug and human smuggling? In these markets, who are the regulating forces or protective institutions? Perhaps it is the absence of protective institutions that contributes to the unyielding growth of the migration industry and its interpenetration with drug smuggling, which in turn, contributes to the production of new forms of commodification and disposability.

David Harvey analyzes the social effects of neoliberalism by making the crucial connection between a disposable labor force and the ways social dislocations contribute to the formation of alternative forms of solidarity, including criminal cartels:

> Neoliberalization has transformed the positionality of labour, of women, and of indigenous groups in the social order by emphasizing that labour is a commodity like any other. Stripped of the protective cover of lively democratic institutions and threatened with all manner of social dislocations, a disposable workforce inevitably turns to other institutional forms through which to construct social solidarities and express a collective will. Everything from gangs and criminal cartels, narco-trafficking networks, mini-mafias and favela bosses, through community, grassroots and non-governmental organizations, to secular cults and religious sects proliferate (2005:171).

This astute analysis helps us to understand multiple dislocations and responses to dislocations in both Mexico and Central America. Economic insecurity and social isolation may explain the proliferation of criminal activities in Mexico and Central America as seen through the fast rise of groups like *Los Zetas* and corruption on behalf of police and authorities. As Harvey importantly points out, social solidarities are not only sought out in the realm of the illegal, but also through religion and social activism. The participation of local residents in migrant shelters and church groups offers a sense of meaning in people's lives apart from their social status as productive laborers.

And yet, we cannot disregard the economic motivations that shape social dislocations and solidarities. While Harvey is emphasizing the social aspects of dislocation—how people respond to their isolation and seek out new avenues of solidarity, whether it be criminal, religious or activist inspired—we must also understand how these social worlds intersect with economic worlds. That is, the choice to participate in a local gang or in a human trafficking ring and for that matter, in a migrant shelter, is both socially and economically motivated. In some cases, migrants are actively rejecting lives of organized crime to seek meaning and economic survival through migration. However, I demonstrate that these initial motivations may be compromised or blurred while on the migrant journey and new realities and opportunities come to fruition.

Inspired by Polanyi and Harvey, I suggest the notion of disposability is useful on multiple scales in understanding the consequences of Central American migration

through Mexico. On a global level, we must understand the movement of large segments of the population as a result of their labor being rendered disposable. However, what I argue here is that the metaphorical notion of a disposable labor force cannot be separated from the literal disposability of human bodies and lives. Here, I draw on the work of Zygmunt Bauman (2003) and his formulation of the concepts of "wasted lives" and "human waste."

In Bauman's view, modernization and globalization have contributed to a global human waste disposal problem.[23] Such problems are evidenced by the rise in security fears, asylum and immigration problems. Bauman states that human waste differs from unemployed sectors or Marx's "reserve army" of labor, who may be called back into active service at any time. According to Bauman, the destination of human waste is the waste yard where waste is the "dark, shameful secret of all production" (Bauman 2003:27). Arguably, the journey across Mexico is one site where human waste is deposited.

For example, migrants may be abandoned by the people hired to smuggle them or killed by their kidnappers. Such cases demonstrate how the relationships between value, use-value and exchange value of a commodity are always dialectical (Harvey 2010a:24). The shifting and transitory nature of commodification and value for migrants highlights their vulnerability within a system of state and transnational processes that not only fail to protect their rights, but actively undermine them.

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[23] Bauman argues that there are no longer global outlets to export humans as was the case with colonialism and conquest.

It is here that a central contradiction emerges: migrants may gain value in local and transnational markets of labor, mobility, sex and smuggling, but such value is tenuous as their lives remain ultimately disposable. The surplus of paperless, anonymous and moving bodies along the journey is precisely where profits are derived. Such economic processes not only reflect, but depend upon, de-humanizing state, legal and social practices that construct migrants as unwanted criminals and racialized and gendered others.

The Tamaulipas massacre and subsequent mass graves are particularly brutal examples of the commodification and disposability of migrants labor and lives and the normalization of violence against them. Feminist scholars first used the concepts of femicide and feminicide to describe the murders of women factory workers in the border town Ciudad Juárez where hundreds of women working in outsourced multinational factories have been found murdered, mutilated and their dead bodies dumped throughout the city (Prieto-Carrón, et al. 2007). Both the terms femicide and feminicide are used to describe this violence against women. According to Sanford, feminicide has a more explicitly political meaning as it attributes blame not only to the male perpetrators of violence, but also to the state and judicial structures that normalize violence against women (Sanford 2008).

These women—part of a dispensable workforce who must follow global capital to eek out a living—are quite literally being disposed of without recourse, as their murders go largely uninvestigated. One of defining features of femicide is the impunity that accompanies such violence against women; very rarely are these cases investigated by

authorities, leaving the perpetrators unpunished. As Fregoso and Bejarano (2010:5) argue, feminicide is founded on a gendered grid of power relations that span both the private and public realms, implicating both state actors and individual perpetrators and is rooted in systems of social, political, economic and cultural inequalities. Feminicide must be considered a state crime "because the authorities who are omissive, negligent, or acting in collusion with the assailants perpetrate institutional violence against women by blocking their access to justice and thereby contributing to impunity" (Lagarde y de los Rios 2010:xxiii). Through her extensive research as the president of Mexico's Special Commission on Feminicide in Mexico in the Mexican legislature, Lagarde y de los Ríos (2010:xx) also points out that violence is aggravated for women in conditions of social exclusion or minimal or nonexistent citizenship.

Like the women of Juárez who are killed because they are women, Central American migrants are killed because they are constructed as illegal, racialized and gendered others whose value is ultimately dispensable. And as the deaths of women in Ciudad Juárez and Guatemala go largely uninvestigated, so are the deaths of Central American migrants. Moreover, while scholars have documented the growing rates of feminicide in Central America and on the U.S.-Mexico border, less attention is given to the rates of feminicde on Mexico's southern border. According to a report by the Commission for Equality and Gender and the Senate Commission for Human Rights, the registered numbers of women killed on Mexico's southern border surpasses the number killed in Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana. From January to May of 2004, there were 154 registered murders (Sin Fronteras 2005).

The normalization of violence against migrants and indifference to their deaths reflect larger social anxieties. Not unlike immigrants in the United States, Central American migrants in Mexico are often feared, demonized and blamed for any number of social ills. These associations are often framed in moral and gendered terms. Migrant men are associated with gang-related violence, delinquency and introducing vices like alcoholism and drug-use into local communities whereas women are associated with prostitution and sexual immorality. And while local residents certainly do experience increases in fear and violence as new flows of migrants, organized criminals, police and military pass through their communities, the anxieties around unauthorized migration focus on cultural differences and not the political or economic conditions that contribute to violence or the actors that profit off human mobility. Central American migrants are part of that global workforce whose lives teeter on the edge of disposability in an economic sense, but also in an immediate embodied sense.

As the Tamaulipas massacre shows us, disposability through murder, endangerment and impunity is an extreme outcome to the commodification of migrants. However, the transformation of their bodies into commodities with relative values is also exemplified by a gruesome and common occurrence along the migrant journey: dismemberment by train. One of the most feared risks of crossing Mexico is riding *La Bestia* and falling off of it to have arms or legs caught under the large fast-moving steel wheels to be literally dismembered. While some die when they fall from the train, many simply from the amount of blood they lose, others are found and rescued by local people or other migrants. As I discuss in more depth in the next chapter, near the Mexico-

Guatemala border in the state of Chiapas there is a shelter that is dedicated to migrants, both men and women, who have been dismembered by the train. During a visit to this shelter, I sat and talked to several migrants and learned about their accidents, their hopes to receive prosthetic limbs, and dreams to either return home or continue North. Behind the migrants was a poster on the wall (shown in Figure 13) with pictures of migrants who had passed through, many of them wrapped in bandages in hospital beds.

Figure 13: Poster of Dismembered Migrants in Shelter

These migrants, many of them quite literally cut in half, physically embody the brutal consequences of transnational migration and the global processes that create them. Through dismembered limbs, economic and structural forms of violence are inscribed onto migrant's bodies.

The changing values of these dismembered migrants tells us how the migrant journey has become a site of violence and commodification where migrant's bodies may both gain and lose value. In more extreme cases, as the Tamaulipas massacre and mass graves suggest, the use value and/or exchange value of migrants may diminish to the point that they are no longer profitable to their owners, leading to their disposal.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that through illicit markets that move bodies, drugs and weapons, Mexico has become a de facto "free trade" zone where Central Americans are transformed into commodities to be bought, sold, distributed, exchanged and disposed of. In addition to the commodification of their bodies, lives and labor, Central Americans are also transformed into an important pool of consumers along the journey for local, national and transnational businesses in informal and formal markets. In these ways, we can see the multiple ways capitalism profits from undocumented migration.

Through an analysis of the ways human beings turn into commodities and consumers along the migrant journey, I complicate accounts of violence against migrants that simply blame "bad" individuals or groups without situating them within the larger conditions within which they are embedded and the ways such processes threaten even the most tightly knit social bonds. To understand the inter-workings of direct violence and commodification that individuals experience along the migrant journey we must consider how violence operates on multiple levels and through connected, circulatory trajectories. That is, new forms of present-day violence are produced by historical

conditions and their social consequences. The ability to profit off the commodification of migrant labor, their bodies and their lives contributes to the growing *industria del cachuco*.

CHAPTER SEVEN—BODIES IN TRANSIT: TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND INTIMATE LABORS

The first time I really started to think about the interconnections between gender, migration and intimate labors in the context of the global economy was during the winter break of one of my first years in graduate school. I had spent the previous summer in Oaxaca for a history seminar. During the seminar I was helping a colleague conduct research in the Oaxacan countryside and we took a trip to a Zapotec village to interview the members of a community band. We stayed with a family where I learned about several relatives, including a daughter and son, who both had illegally and successfully migrated to Los Angeles. Upon leaving I promised the mother that when I visited my own family over the holidays I would make my best effort to track down her son and daughter and share with them some photos I had taken of the new construction to their house that was largely financed by the remittances they sent home.

I was able to first track down their daughter, Wilma, who gave me her home address. Since she lived off a major street east-west boulevard in LA, I assumed she lived east of downtown, but as I exited the freeway and started tracking the numbers, was quite surprised when I ended up in Beverly Hills. Wilma had been adamant about me coming in the middle of the day and as she opened the front door of the home, with Hanukkah candles and decorations around a beautiful house filled with photos of a family that looked so different from her it was clear that she was their live-in nanny. We sat on the plush couch and shared the photos of her family and village. She cried as this was the first time she saw the new house construction, the thatched roof on top of concrete brick

walls. At one point in our discussion she asked me exactly what her mother had prepared for me to eat. *Un tlayuda con tasajo*, a large flat and slightly crisp corn tortilla the size of a pizza filled with long strings of fresh *queso oaxaqueño*, cabbage, avocado, chipotle salsa and salty flat strips of steak cooked over the outdoor griddle or *comal*. I remember that meal well. Wilma had not seen her parents for nearly two years and did not know if and when she would see them again. She lived in Beverly Hills taking care of another mother's children and cleaning their home, yet she was not able to freely travel back and forth to visit her own family. I had the privilege of eating her own mother's cooking and she could not. That afternoon she gave me the phone number of her brother, Osorio, who lived somewhere in south Los Angeles, not in Beverly Hills.

I knew from their father that Osorio was continuing the family tradition and playing the brass horn in a band in LA. I called him to ask if he might be playing music somewhere where I could meet him. For reasons I would only understand later, he was hesitant at first, but eventually gave me the name of a restaurant in Long Beach and told me he would be there on Saturday night. I didn't think much of his initial reluctance and brought along my younger sister who was a sophomore in college. As we drove to a rather seedy part of Long Beach I assumed we would end up at a Oaxacan restaurant, but instead we pulled into the parking lot of a bar with no windows. Still not thinking much of it, we entered the bar and sat down. We ordered coca-colas (my sister was not even of legal drinking age) and saw there was a large band of perhaps ten men playing on one side of the bar. Osorio was the youngest of the band members and he caught my attention when we walked in the door. They were in the middle of a set, so we sat and waited. In

the dim light, I noticed the only patrons were men and that all the women who were there were all dressed the same. Okay, I thought, interesting. I was focused on the band and eager to take a photo to share with his parents back home as I already had my next trip to Oaxaca planned. I took one photo, the flash lit up the whole room and all eyes were on me. One very large man sitting at a table near me looked me straight in the eye and brought his index finger up to his face and waved it slowly while shaking his head. “No” he was saying with a disapproving look. Not a moment later a police officer came to our table and asked me to step outside with him. We found this strange, yet obliged and went outside with him. He asked me what we were doing there. I explained the situation, and rather naively showed him the photos I had printed of Osorio’s family in Oaxaca. The police officer seemed perplexed yet told us this was not an appropriate place for us to be and suggested we leave immediately.

In that moment, I realized that we were in what is known as a *fichera* bar, where women are contracted to sit at the tables of men, who buy them drinks at an elevated cost. *Fichera* bars are illegal but common in Los Angeles, and most of the *ficheras* are Latina women and their clients are often undocumented male immigrants. I do now know if people were engaging in sex work at the premises, but it was clear there was a highly sexualized and illicit element. Interestingly, the policeman was there to watch over and protect the people within this space and in this scenario my sister and I were out of place and breaking the social norms. We left soon after speaking to the police officer. I managed to catch Osorio’s attention and leave the folder of photos for him before we left.

I tell this story in detail because I think my experiences meeting the members of

this family in three locations: a rural Zapotec village, a Beverly Hills home and a *fichera* bar illuminate some of the complex ways transnational migration is bound up with the intimate spaces of family and sex. The political economic dimensions are equally important in understanding how and why people migrate, where they go and the gendered consequences of these movements. For example, it was an awkward feeling to be sitting inside the home of a family who did not know I was there. There were no pictures of Wilma on the walls of this home yet she lived there, helped feed the children, keep it clean—she was part of the daily maintenance of the home, yet not a part of the family. Her family lived in a house she was helping to build through monetary remittances, yet the conditions of her illegality prevented her from visiting.

Visiting the bar in Long Beach gave me a rare glimpse into the world of the intimate labors of escorts and sex work in a U.S.-based economy among undocumented Latino men and women. The man who waved his finger clearly did not want me documenting what was going on at that bar nor who was there. I assume most of the people working in the bar were undocumented, living outside the legal system, but also potentially transgressing culturally constructed norms of behavior for men and for women. These women and men who may or may not have partners and families back home engage in economic and intimate exchanges, crossing boundaries that they may or may not have crossed before they migrated. However, within this context, working as a *fichera* or soliciting paid sex may become the new norm. As an unauthorized immigrant living in the shadows of society, people become more vulnerable to different forms of exploitation.

This chapter explores some of the intimate and gendered dimensions of migration through Mexico for both male and female migrants. I argue that that migrant journeys are crucial spaces where gendered violence is reproduced, gender relations are negotiated, and intimate labors are performed. I consider how these processes are bound up with both global economic flows as well as more localized forms of profit, exploitation and negotiation. Gender is articulated by migrants, in conjunction with other markers of difference—primarily race and nationality—as key to the reproduction of inequality along the migrant journey.

This includes a discussion of the uncertainty, heartbreak and many contradictory aspects that define transnational families and motherhood in particular. Many of my informants had just recently left their families behind and were still uncertain as to whether they would "make it" and be able to support them from afar. For them, the decision to migrate is quite separate from the reality of migration, which for many, is a long and difficult process that involves participation and subordination within multiple processes of inequality. The implications of these choices and movements are profound and speak to some of the many violences wrought by structural, state and local economic processes.

My research uncovered several ways in which intimate relations have become commodified in truly transnational spaces, as well as how migrants are both agents within and victims of global and local processes that exploit vulnerability and reproduce inequalities. I highlight multiple "intimate labors" performed by Central American men and women along the journey, and explore how they are crucial to both individual

strategies and to the global economy. These intimate labors are performed by multiple actors along the journey as they negotiate their movements and their lives. Such intimate labors include sex work, care work, protective pairings, even smuggling as a form of care and a practice of exchange between strangers, friends even within families. I suggest that intimate labors both reflect and reproduce inequalities based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, citizenship and gender.

In sum, this chapter complements the growing literature on gender and migration by showing the specific and grounded ways gender is negotiated by individuals in transit. It also examines how gendered inequalities and violence are reproduced in the temporal, spatial and discursive fields between sending and receiving and core and periphery as opposed to works that focus primarily inequities between the Global North and the Global South. I consider some of the rippling effects and embodied histories of violence in people's lives. More broadly, I suggest that the commodification of migrants and the intimate labors they perform are key to understanding how people's everyday lives are bound up with both global and local and forms of profit and exploitation as well as collective struggles for humanitarianism and social justice.

Gendered Migrations, Women's Labor and Globalization

One core feature of economic globalization and neoliberalism since the 1980s has been the feminization of migration, that is, the increased movement of women from their countries of origin to work in labor markets abroad. The migration of women in global labor flows has been documented by scholars as having its own unique features

and characteristics in comparison to migration by men (e.g. Boris and Parreñas 2010; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Fernández-Kelly 1983; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Ong 1999; Sassen 2004b). This is largely due to the fact that women enter into more precarious jobs involving exploitation and vulnerability including sex work and domestic work and are likewise more vulnerable to human trafficking (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Sassen 2004a; Staab 2004). As Saskia Sassen has theorized, women are crucial to processes of globalization, in particular to the expansion of capital in global cities and in "survival circuits"—the economic strategies of Third world countries that profit on the backs of women through trafficking, low wage work and prostitution (Sassen 2004a). Scholars have also made the links between gender, globalization and violence, particularly in relation to feminicide in Ciudad Juárez and increasingly in Central America (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Prieto-Carrón, et al. 2007; Sanford 2008). Such analyses make important connections between women's labor, subordination and violence in the global economy. As I argued in Chapter Six, the migrant journey is a crucial space where women and men are subject to commodification and violence as they engage in global economic flows and processes.

As the links between gender and the global economy have come into focus, feminist scholars have been central to debates around the commodification of the intimate. For example, in recent years important work has been conducted on transnational domestic care, adoption, sex work and cross-border marriages (e.g. Boris and Parreñas 2010; Brennan 2004; Constable 2009; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Boris and Parreñas (2010:2) argue that "intimate labor" is a useful category of analysis to understand power relations based on

race, class, sex and gender in the context of larger global economic transformations. By situating commodified intimate labor as work within both informal and formal labor markets, feminists make important connections between the impacts of globalization and the neoliberal state on women's labor, family formation, welfare, care and sex work (Boris and Parreñas 2010).

While much of this work focuses on commodified relations that emerge from transnational movements and connections, the literature largely accepts migration as a social fact. It is something one does or does not do. People choose to migrate or they choose to stay home. Yet, even after people make the choice to migrate, there is no guarantee they will be successful in their migration or that if they do arrive to their destinations, they will be able to create a sustainable life for themselves and their families at home. My work speaks to the first point by highlighting the host of social processes that accompany the very intimate and embodied act of migration that we cannot take for granted. These processes are negotiated by individuals in their attempts to migrate, to participate in the global economy, and in doing so, they are re-inscribed into localized economies that have their own logics of inequality and violence.

My point is that individual migrations are relative and fall into a continuum of success as people move through space and place. As such, we must consider commodification as not only gendered, but processual and a phenomenon that occurs while people are in active transit. In thinking about women and men in the global economy, we must then look at the grey areas, the conceptual and physical spaces where individuals reside on the margins before they are even incorporated into more formal

economic markets. I suggest that active transit and "failed" migrations are two such realms where women and men are implicated in global processes of differentiation that are often unaccounted for.

To elucidate this point, I introduce Norma. Norma was the first Central American woman I met in Mexico. She was a strongly built woman in her early 30s, from Honduras and traveling with her five-year-old daughter who had the most infectious smile and laugh. Norma had no legs. She lost both of her legs after falling from the top of a cargo train in northern Chiapas. Thankfully her daughter was not involved in the accident and was uninjured. Norma was a single mother and in addition to her daughter that accompanied her, she had two more children at home in Honduras living with her mother.

I met Norma at the shelter I briefly described in chapter five that is dedicated to helping migrants who have been dismembered by the train. We spent the day sorting through huge garbage bags of clothes that had been donated to the shelter by local and foreign groups. There was such an overabundance of clothing that only some would be saved for migrants in need and the rest would be burned in a large pit behind the dormitories. While the donations likely came from people who cared about the plight of migrants, these particular migrants needed much more than clothing. Most of the people staying there were waiting for to receive prosthetic limbs.

On this day I had come to interview the woman who opened the shelter, Doña Carmen, but she was caught up at the local hospital tending to a migrant that had been in an accident the night before and was waiting to be amputated. When she did show up later in the evening to participate in a small mass for the migrants held in a modest and

tiny chapel, she was tired and frazzled. Norma was the only woman at the shelter that she shared with about ten other migrants, most of them new wheelchair users. In the open air courtyard of the shelter migrants pass by in their wheelchairs or on wooden crutches, adjusting to their new embodied realities. When Doña Carmen made it back to the shelter that evening, we sat in the small chapel to and sang songs and prayed together. Norma only had the very uppermost parts of her thighs left intact and when I met her, she had already been at the shelter for several months waiting to receive prosthetic legs. Her plan was to return home to Honduras and reunite with the children she left behind to be cared for by her mother.

Norma's story captures one of the larger paradoxes of processes of migration and commodification in Mexico. Norma set out to provide a better life for her family only to return several months later with a devastating disability. If she was already rendered redundant in the context of the local economy in Honduras, she will be doubly so as a wheelchair user, particularly in the job sectors that require workers to engage in physical labor including maintaining long hours in *maquiladora* production lines, one of the few opportunities for women in the formal sector in Central America. In addition to an economic structural analysis, Norma's story also brings to light the ways the economic realm is central to families, motherhood and bodies in transit.

Neoliberal Motherhood/Fatherhood and the Transnational Family

When you come here it is only your body. You leave your heart behind.
-Esmerelda, mother from El Salvador

As scholars have theorized the global phenomenon of transnational families, much of this literature revolves around a central tension between the continuities and ruptures created by such arrangements (Goulbourne 2010; Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2003; Parreñas 2005; Pribilksy 2012). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila use the term "transnational motherhood" to define the arrangements, meanings and priorities of Latina immigrant women who work and live in the United States and have children who stay in their countries of origin (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2003).[24]

By thinking about transnational motherhood/fatherhood as a product of neoliberalism I am making an explicit connection between the ways mothers and fathers must live their lives transnationally and within the differentiating processes of global capitalism. I offer a slightly new perspective on transnational parenthood by examining some of the dynamics for mothers and fathers who are in active transit. Most have just left their children and in a liminal state where they are still uncertain as to whether they will succeed in providing for them. Others are parents who have been deported and are desperately trying to reunite with their children. Transnational parenthood involves both these processes of leaving and returning, both of which are made more difficult in light of increased securitization. I found that the heartbreak of these processes can also be a motivation for people to push on and continue their journeys. For many parents, their children gave meaning to the suffering they encountered on their journeys.

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[24] The woes and heartbreak for children and migrant mothers has been addressed in popular media such as the 2008 film *La Misma Luna* (Under the Same Moon) and the book, *Enrique's Journey*, by journalist Sonia Nazario.

The events that take place along the journey may in turn impact the ways mothers and fathers interact with their families. Jessenia, the mother who I introduced in the previous chapter who was kidnapped and brutally raped, explained to me her reasons for leaving Honduras and her hesitation to return home,

> *I left to help my mother and my three children, that is the only thing I have. My oldest is fourteen-years-old, the next is thirteen and the other is eleven. For them, I left. My eldest said to me, "Mami, I want to be a doctor." This career is very expensive. So, I said, "Look Papi, the only way that I can do that is to cross into the United States because here the work only covers enough for food and not anything else. The money will not be for me, but for them. For me, nothing because I also have the burden of my mother, and so it was for them that I left.*

For Jessenia to return home before making any money in the United States would mean that she suffered all this violence for nothing. In the eight days after she was first deported I asked her if she returned home and she said no, that she could not do so, that she returned immediately to the border to try and cross again. In addition, Jessenia explained to me that she has not told her three children or her mother about her pregnancy and that now she does not want to return to Honduras. She says she fears that they will be resentful of the baby.

The sentiment to keep going was common among my informants because there was a sense of shame at returning home empty handed. In Oaxaca, where there is significant out-migration, there is an unspoken expectation that when family members return home, they will bring gifts of televisions, clothes, even a truck, to show how successful they were as a migrant.

The refusal to return home empty handed is something that Brenda, a single mother from El Salvador, expressed to me. After leaving behind her daughter in 2001, Brenda had been in Mexico and trying to find a way to the United States for over 7 years. She

explained to me that her own father died in the civil war in El Salvador in 1989 and this caused her mother and eight siblings much hardship. The difficulty her mother faced as a single mother influenced her own decision to leave El Salvador and look for work. She hoped that her own daughter would have more opportunity in school and employment so that she would not have to depend upon a husband to provide for her.

While not common, occasionally I met couples who both decided to migrate and leave their children behind. Victor and Suli, who I introduced in Chapter Five decided it best to both travel to the United States together rather than one of them going and leaving the other behind. They planned to stay in the United States for only two years and then return home. According to their logic, they would be able to return to Honduras faster if they were both working in the US and making money. They had a significant debt to pay and Victor said he could work paying off the loan while Suli worked to make enough money to send home and use to help them build a life there. They commented that many parents leave their children never to return and hoped to distinguish themselves from these parents.

If parenting involves multiple types of intimate reproductive labor including breastfeeding, bathing, caring, feeding, homework etc., what does it mean for mothers and fathers, who in order to maintain their families, must leave them behind for others to care for? Some migrants expressed guilt at denying their children “a mother’s love” and leaving them with grandparents or other relatives to be cared for. Others, particularly single mothers, feared their children would be taken by their fathers or recruited to gangs or even worse, killed. Clara told me the story of a woman from her village who migrated to the US and

when she returned she found that both of her children, a son and a daughter, had been killed by gangs. This, she said, would not happen to her, thus justifying her decision to take her daughter with her.

While some may argue that parents who leave their children behind are abandoning these intimate duties, during my fieldwork it was profound to see the ways mothers and fathers conceptualize their choice to migrate as the ultimate act of caring for their children. For many, it is the only means by which they can provide materially for their children. Yet, parents and mothers in particular who leave their children behind are often met with disapproval and demonized by society at large. Parreñas (2005) examines the ways transnational families in the Philippines, particularly in cases where mothers migrate and leave their children behind, disrupt gender conventions about what is proper and moral. Public and political discourses tend to disapprove of these women as “bad” mothers while ignoring the nation’s dependency on female labor migration (Parreñas 2005:39). Coutin explains how despite El Salvador’s economic dependency on migrant remittances, migrants are blamed for a number of social ills including eroded families which lack discipline and morals that lead to criminal involvement for younger generations (2007:138).

One priest I met blamed a “culture of single motherhood” in Central America for the increase in women who abandon their children. He explained that in Central America, women were less likely to be married to the father of their children, a more proper and favorable arrangement, and therefore were the ones who had to migrate and leave their children behind. I suggest individual anxieties about the demands of providing basic necessities in everyday life are also wrapped up in larger discourses and anxieties about

the roles of mothers in society. Leyla Keough documents how Moldovan women who migrate to Turkey are demonized in their home communities:

> Blame for social disorder in Moldova is placed upon migrant women- especially those who choose to work in Turkey, who are represented as irresponsible mothers, immoral wives, and selfish consumers. Migrant women themselves counter that local disorder and their migrant labor is caused by economic dislocation. They argue that in going abroad to work, they are selflessly sacrificing for their children and thus are more resourceful and better mothers (even if transnational ones) than those who stay. (2006:432)

In the United States there is a history of Latina mothers who have been constructed, along with African American and Native American mothers, as “drains” on the system through welfare programs. Briggs describes how beginning with the Reagan and Bush administrations, racialized minority and eventually white mothers were demonized as lazy, morally irresponsible and intellectually inferior, responsible for creating damaged children namely “crack babies,” if they accepted government assistance (2010:52). The converse to this demonic character was the good neoliberal mother who displayed personal responsibility through her ability to take care of the family both within and outside of the household, perhaps something akin to Sarah Palin’s “hockey mom” image. Now, if Latina mothers who do not work and allegedly “drain” the system are bad, what of those mothers who migrate from Latin America, often alone, and leave their families behind in order to supply them with the food and medicine and school uniforms they need through widely embracing the neoliberal capitalist cash economy? Their labor is not only needed to allow capitalism to flourish in the US, but also allows mostly white middle and upper class mothers to leave their own homes and work, all while the money they make is sent back in the form of remittances to Latin America, offering an important

source of foreign income where their own economy has failed (Gammage 2006). Yet, these mothers continue to be demonized, not just as drains on the US economy as undocumented migrants, but within other moral economies where they are characterized as unloving for abandoning their own children. These discourses circulate in the media, in political discourses, in society and also by individuals, including other migrant women.

While not a topic that has been well theorized, I want to briefly address some of the dynamics of transnational fatherhood. Pribilsky (2012) has written about the particular challenges for transnational Ecuadorian fathers in New York City who negotiate their own new consumption desires and their duty as fathers in sending remittances back to their families. The fathers I met were transnational in the sense that they were actively moving between countries in order to either provide for their children, or reunite with them after being deported. As much as migrating women talked to me about needing to provide for their children, so did migrating men. It is true that migrants did at times distinguish between mothers and fathers, suggesting that it was more difficult for a mother to leave her children, because it was less natural than a father leaving, which has historically been accepted as a normal gendered practice.

To illuminate some of the complexities of transnational fatherhood, I return to Sergio, one of the migrants who escaped a mass kidnapping from the train. When I met him, Sergio was desperate to get back to the USA man in his early 30s and originally from El Salvador, Sergio had lived in the US for about five years. He grew up in El Salvador where he studied for three years to become a lawyer, but he never completed his degree because the prospects of actually practicing were very low. He also had a cousin

who was involved in a complex extortion ring and went missing, so Sergio decided it would be best to leave also. At the time, he was a single man in his late-20s and it was a fairly common expectation that he would migrate.

The first time Sergio migrated he crossed through the Arizona desert where he walked for eight days. He said he would not cross this away again; he had escaped death once and would not risk it another time. Sergio made his way to Tacoma, Washington where he was able to secure work. He met his wife and mother of their three-year-old daughter, who was born in Seattle and is therefore a US citizen. His wife is also a US citizen. Sergio explained that when he first moved, he applied for refugee status in the US, but was unsuccessful. Subsequently, he lived and worked two jobs undocumented. He woke up at 4am on most days to work in a *carniceria (meat market)*, where he stayed until 1pm. Then he would go to his second job working in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant. He explained that his relationship with his wife was not working out, so they split up. The reason he was eager to return was because there is a custody hearing for his daughter and he needed to be present in court. Sergio was close to tears several times during our interview, particularly when he was talking about his daughter. A few days after our interview, he got himself into a bar fight and ended up drunk and beaten in the hospital. When the shelter workers went to pick him up he was crying and screaming his daughter's name.

I share Sergio's story because it tells us something about the many different types of arrangements and movements involved in transnational parenthood. The majority of the literature on transnational motherhood looks at the South-North movement of migrant

women, the majority who leave their children behind. But, as immigration laws in the United States become more repressive, and people are deported in mass raids that have steadily increased in recent years, we must now address the new family dynamics and ruptures for families with children, often US citizens, who live in the US and have parents living in their countries of origin. This reversal of sorts has significant implications for research on migration as well as on the everyday lives of thousands of people spanning multiple countries.

In sum, most of the parents I met described their choice to migrate as the ultimate show of love in providing for their children. And yet migrants, and women in particular who leave their families behind, are trapped in a double-bind of cultural assumptions and stereotypes. If they stay home they may not be able to produce for their families and watch their children suffer. If they leave, they are considered to be denying their children the "love of a mother." Either way, these mothers are demonized, which exacerbates the guilt and pain that accompanies a parent's choice to migrate. Many of the migrants I spoke with hard a difficult time even speaking about their children and their choice to leave them. At Casa Guadalupe, when given the opportunity to call their families on the telephone some of the women simply wept, while others opted not to call. As several women voiced to me, it would be too painful to hear their children's voices. If they heard them they might not be able to muster up the will to continue.

Intimate Labors

I now shift my focus to the ways processes of violence and commodification shape social relations and intimate forms of labor along the migrant journey. In this section I discuss several of the unique social relations and migration strategies that I documented along the journey and use the concept of "intimate labors" to understand how these relationships are formed. I also examine how they fit into intimate, local and transnational economies of care and labor.

Transnational feminist scholars have drawn on the concept of commodification to discuss how intimate and personal relations become linked to commodities and cash economies (e.g. Boris and Parreñas 2010; Brennan 2004; Constable 2009; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich reference these "global care networks" to explain how families in the Global North depend upon the labor of women from the Global South to meet their own domestic labor crises. As Laura Briggs has argued, "We have understood neoliberalism to be about states and economies, but it is at least as true to say it is a story about families tied together by intimate labors" (2010:60).

Intimate labors as a core feature of globalization depends upon the movement of people across *multiple* borders, yet the risks associated with the actual movements—and particularly when these movements are unauthorized—rarely come into the conversation. I want to extend Boris and Parreñas' notion of intimate labors to look not only at the intimate relations between the Global North and Global South, but also at the specific ways personal relations and bodies are implicated for people who are in active transit in truly transnational ways. I suggest multiple "intimate labors" are performed by Central

American men and women along the journey including sex work, care work, protective pairings, group travel and smuggling. These intimate labors create both continuities and ruptures in the social fabric where the lines between victim and perpetrator and exploiter and exploited are often blurred. Also blurred are the lines between smuggler/migrant, spouse/partner and family/client.

To begin, I discuss sex work performed by Central American migrants as a form of intimate labor. While sex work may not be a choice for victims of kidnapping and trafficking, there is a continuum of agency in relation to sex work. Some Central American women view sex work as a necessary strategy to earn money to continue north. The Guatemala-Mexico border region in particular is known for its prolific sex work industry. Rodolfo Casillas (2005) has documented the ways the border environment contributes to the local sex work economy in ways that make conditions more difficult for women. For example, in recent years, younger women minors have become more desirable to male clients, thus changing the social and commercial networks within which people are implicated (Casillas 2005).

As several migrants and local residents explained to me, Central American women are highly desired in Mexico as racialized and sexualized others, which in part explains their value, and also their marginalization. One of my good friends in Oaxaca, Ronald, is a taxi driver. As I soon discovered, taxi drivers often have a vast knowledge about the less visible aspects and dynamics of a city. When I was planning out my dissertation research and talking through some of my ideas and thoughts with Ronald he said to me, “There are Central American women prostitutes here, you know.” He explained to me

that he knew of a house where the women lived where you could see them coming out of their houses at dusk, when they were presumably waking up to start the evening shift working at a bar. He drove me to the site of the house and pointed it out to me. He then drove me to the outskirts of the city to some of the bars and sex clubs where many of these women find employment. Ronald told me about a friend of his who is a lawyer and represents undocumented sex workers who have suffered abuse, but when I tried to contact him he did not respond. Ronald indicated that his friend did not want to become involved in talking about this aspect of his work.

Anthropologist Patty Kelly, who worked with sex workers in Chiapas, explains that Central American women are often stigmatized and constructed as filthy/immoral even within the sex worker community for being more likely to perform "special" services including oral sex, anal sex and watching pornography (Kelly 2008). During my fieldwork I documented several cases where shelter workers were approached or caught recruiting women to work in local strip bars and clubs. Women migrants also described being approached by people to recruit them during their journeys and meeting other women who ended up staying in Mexico working at bars. And while we cannot ignore the questions of agency and livelihood strategy, the transnational desires that fuel economies for sex work and that depend upon the intimate labor of Central American women are embedded within unequal power relations based on politics and citizenship. Migrants' status as desired subjects in these local economies is intimately linked to their status as paperless and undocumented.

One of the most important points that emerges from the "intimate labors" literature is the way that labor travels between women. For example, a middle-class white woman's child is cared for by a woman from the Global South while her children are simultaneously cared for by her mother. The labor of caring for your own children often becomes displaced as women are forced to perform intimate labors in new capitalist markets. I found this travel of labor to be particularly interesting in the case of Alma, a woman who runs a shelter for the children of prostitutes in Oaxaca. Alma is an energetic Mexican woman in her 50s, a grandmother herself who has five adult children who help her. During our interview she explained to me that most of the mothers need her help as they do not have established familial social networks to care for their children when they work, particularly during the night shift. Most are indigenous Mexican women who have left their families in rural areas, or are Central American women. She explained that some of the mothers did not speak Spanish very well (they can only speak their native indigenous language), and that increases their vulnerability to becoming involved in the sex industry.

The day I arrived to the shelter to meet Alma, one of the mothers was working in the kitchen. This mother had worked as a sex worker on and off since arriving to Oaxaca several years ago. Alma stated that while she encourages mothers to come and visit, they rarely do. When I arrived, the children were thrilled to see me the other volunteers. They ran up to us, hugging us, yearning to be held. Many of the children call Alma "mama." For some of them, she has been their primary caretaker for their entire lives. What began

as a simple act of babysitting a neighbor's child who was a sex worker soon turned into a fulltime commitment for Alma and her family to caring for the children of sex workers.

Alma explained to me that she has had quite a few undocumented women and their children. Many of the children at Alma's shelter do not have birth certificates and thus cannot be enrolled in Mexican schools. During my interview with Alma, she also told me about an undocumented woman from El Salvador who she tried to help get her regularization papers. She talked about the micro-level discrimination and suspicion she was treated with at the *Registro Civil* (Civil Registry) in Oaxaca City and how intimidated she was. The man working behind the desk treated her poorly, asking her where he could find her on the street. Alma said that the women who are undocumented are particularly vulnerable to ending up in exploitative relationships with men. She also talked about how women without papers are too scared to go to the hospital and give birth to their children in small rooms of private homes without proper medical attention.

Alma shared some other stories with me that highlight the poverty and desperation for some of these women. For example, there was one Honduran woman from San Pedro Sula who arrived a few months ago and who brought her daughter to Alma. Alma told me that when the girl arrived she noticed that the skin on her body was two different colors. When she inquired into why this was, she found out that the girl had been badly burned by a pot of hot soup at her grandmother's house. According to the mother, she arrived to her mother's house and found her daughter on the bed covered with flies. The grandmother said that she did not take the girl to the hospital because it was not her

responsibility to do so. Alma told me about another case of a woman who had two kids who were starving and that one of them eventually died of starvation.

Alma explained that other members in her family and of her community do not understand why she would want to help "this class" of people. Alma seemed to have ambivalent feelings about many of the mothers—at once realizing their situation and their poverty, but also being a little bit critical of them and their interests in making money and getting involved with men. However, she also expressed a lot of sympathy for women who have been shamed by their families and who literally have no one to depend upon.

Sex work as a form of intimate labor for transit migrants in Mexico reflects gendered and racialized constructions of Central American women and embeds women within local economic and social conditions that have a myriad of effects. For some, sex work is seen as a migration strategy, and for others, not a choice at all. As the case of Alma shows us, the intimate labors that sex workers perform may also displace some of their labors, as mothers, onto other women in local spaces.

Protective Pairings

Another common type of intimate labor is the formation of "protective pairings" between male and female migrants, a term more commonly used to describe relationships between prisoners (Donaldson 2004). At a basic level these relationships tell us something about survival in conditions of desperation and violence. Along the journey, and particularly along the train routes, male migrants exchanged security and protection for female performance of "domestic tasks" such as procuring food, washing clothes,

tending wounds and sexual intercourse. To combat stigmatizing stereotypes, maintaining a clean appearance is of utmost importance to migrants in Mexico. Thus, the tasks of hand-washing clothes and shoes, of which they only have one or at most two sets of, become central forms of carework. This is not to say that men do not perform these duties out of necessity—they certainly do, but it is often considered preferable to engage in a protective pairing where the female partner shares the work. Such strategic relationships offer intimate labors in the form of actual work as well as companionship and intimacy.

Here, the story of Jessenia and Abel describes one such protective pairing. I introduced Jessenia in the previous chapter, as a woman I met at Casa Guadalupe who had been kidnapped and held captive for several weeks where she was repeatedly drugged, raped and eventually impregnated. On the day I accompanied Jessenia to the clinic for her ultrasound, she told me about her kidnapping but also about Abel, the man she was now traveling with across Mexico. In the wake of extreme violence and her status as a pregnant woman, Jessenia felt it necessary to "hook up" with Abel in an exchange for protection. Abel was not a smuggler, but another migrant who was trying to return to his own family in Maryland where he lived and worked for over sixteen years before being deported.

In Chiapas, Abel and Jessenia informally agreed to work together and act as a couple as they traveled north and she seemed grateful for his protection and support. As several migrants explained to me, it is much easier for male migrants to travel with women in order to receive charity from migrant shelters and strangers along the way. In addition, because of the gendered stereotypes of migrant men and women as gang

members and prostitutes, to travel as a pair, as a married couple, brings a sense of legitimacy and respectability. And so Abel carried Jessenia on the front of a bicycle for three weeks as they maneuvered around military checkpoints in their journey north. She washed his clothes and cooked food for them and he defended her when she was offered $10 pesos (USD $1) to have sex with another migrant staying at a different migrant shelter. Jessenia referred to Abel as her "esposo" (husband) but she feared that he would tire of her and abandon her for another female migrant.

Another case of protective pairings was elaborated by an arrangement I encountered between two migrants, Alberto and Blanca, who I introduced in chapter Six. I met Alberto, Blanca and Blanca's brother Wilson in the spring of 2009. From our initial interview, Alberto and Blanca explained to me that they were married in a civil union and both had their FM3 documents, but because Wilson did not have an FM3, they were all traveling together clandestinely. I conducted one interview with all three of them and a separate interview with just Blanca. The information I received during the two interviews were at times at odds and it appears that Alberto and Blanca's relationship was not a permanent one. Both referred to each other as esposa/esposo, but they were traveling to separate places. Alberto claimed they were all traveling to Georgia, but when I spoke to Blanca, she said that she and her brother were going to Houston where they had family. She also spoke in depth with me about why she never wants to get married again and that she does not want any more children. Alberto has a one-year-old baby with another woman. During the group interview, Alberto and I had an exchange about gender roles that reflecting back upon it now, may have been demonstrative of his relationship with Blanca. Here is a partial

transcript of our conversation where he is explaining to me that some women exchange sex for protection from male migrants:

> *A: For necessity, they have to travel with men for money or for a ride.*
> *W: They have sex or cook, or…*
> *A: Sex.*
> *W: Are women with many men or just one man?*
> *A: Just one man.*
> *W: And they stay with that man during the journey?*
> *A: Sometimes they stay with one and sometimes there are different men. Sometimes on the journey a man gets bored with the woman and so he leaves her and she has to look for another man.*
> *W: A woman cannot go on her own?*
> *A: On the train, no. All the other men will want to take advantage of her.*
> *W: So women do not travel alone on the train?*
> *A: In reality, never. The majority say that they are with their husband so that the rest do not bother them.*
> *W: And this is just until they arrive?*
> *A: Yes.*
> *W: And what about women with children?*
> *A: Some of the other women who came with us had babies, one brought a young girl like her [girl staying at shelter] and another a little older on the train. On this train there were three.*
> *W: And so women use men, more or less for protection, and men use women for….*
> *A: Look, what I'm telling you is that it helps them both out. For men who are traveling alone, they don't help them in the casas (homes) sometimes they don't give them anything to eat or a place to sleep, but if a man is with a woman asking for something to eat at a house, they regularly give. So that man is responsible for the woman just as the woman is responsible for the man who protects her. And it really helps the man out because it makes it easier in the homes of individuals and to arrive.*

Alberto went on to say:

> *Women do it as an arrival strategy. It is not because in their country they are prostitutes or something, they need to do it to arrive. There are prostitutes also, I'm not going to tell you that there are not, there are a lot, but generally the prostitutes don't come with us. A prostitute doesn't go with one man, what they do is look for someone in Chiapas, a Mexican who has a trailer, who drives a trailer or something and with them they come. The prostitutes from Central America, they almost never come with someone, they come alone. And they don't menstruate. Since they know*

> *what is coming, they take care of this in advance. The others (non-prostitutes) don't, they come with the hope that they will arrive and at best, join with one guy for the whole journey and not have to go from man to man. Yeah, because the prostitutes only go from man to man.*

In addition to these heteronormative pairings with relatively clear gendered roles that often involve the exchange of sex, I also want to note that migrants pair up and travel together in a number of arrangements including female-female and male-male partnerships and groups between and among men and women.

Smuggling as Intimate Labor

While protective pairings can be crucial yet unequal migration strategies, now I turn to some of the more explicitly unequal and exploitative forms of intimate relations. I argue that smuggling can also be a form of intimate labor that may involve exploitation and the exchange of capital and services between intimate relations. During the weeks it takes to cross Mexico, male and female smugglers also often pair up with a migrant of the opposite sex to pose as a married couple when seeking a place to eat, sleep and in some cases recruit more people to smuggle. At the shelter where I worked I met several women who claimed to be traveling with their husband and then later it was revealed, either by the women themselves, or other migrants, that these men were in fact their paid smuggler or guide.

For example, one November afternoon, seven people arrived to the shelter including three men and four women. They arrived just a few weeks after twelve women had been kidnapped from the train in Las Anonas, Oaxaca and claimed that they chose to bypass the train for fear that the women would be kidnapped. Out of the four women, one

woman, Dora, sat alone, apart from the other three women and was visibly scared and nervous. I asked her if I could conduct an interview with her and she agreed.

Dora was 27-years-old and from Guatemala. She had no children and decided to migrate in order to send back to her parents, who still live in Guatemala. During the interview, she repeatedly talked about her fear, how scared she was and how she was constantly sweating and trembling. When I asked her specific questions about where she was going, she gave me vague answers saying she wasn't sure, but that Erik, her husband, knew. She said she was just following him and going where he tells her to go. Not long after the interview started, Erik came into the living room and joined the interview. At this point, he started answering most of the questions and she sat quietly beside him. During the interview we discussed them being robbed on the bus between shelters, how they warned Padre José that there were people accusing him of being a coyote, and how they hoped to receive help from Erik's cousins who live in Phoenix, Arizona to cross the desert. Dora and Erik, had planned to take the train all the way from Chiapas to Mexico City but changed their plans during the middle of the journey when they heard about the kidnappings. According to Erik, he feared Dora would be targeted as a woman so they decided it better to take more time and a less traveled route to bypass the risk of danger along the train route.

The following day I conducted an interview with the three other women, who were all from El Salvador. Two of them had known each other in their villages and decided to migrate together. As we spoke, they told me that Erik was not a migrant, but a coyote. They said that he approached them to help guide them to the United States for a

fee of USD $3500 per person. The women said that they were scared of Erik and were just praying that he will leave the shelter immediately and not harass them any more.

These cases exemplify how intimate pairings may be more directly associated with the exchange of capital for services in highly unequal power relations. Moreover, the intimate bonds between smugglers and migrants are tenuous. In an earlier chapter I introduced Clara and her young daughter who had been traveling with a smuggler who was paid several thousand dollars by Clara's husband to transport them from Honduras to North Carolina. Clara, her daughter, two other Honduran women and the smuggler traveled together for three weeks staying in various homes and hotels and driving a private car together. Because the group was constantly traveling through military checkpoints on the road, they developed a sense of solidarity with one another and for those few weeks, had a common goal and shared daily practices. Clara told me that she liked and trusted the smuggler very much, that he was quite kind and funny. She also likes the other women she was traveling with and they helped her care for her daughter. She was surprised when after several weeks of traveling together in a small private car, the smuggler abandoned them all in Oaxaca. Left with no money or possessions, Clara had to knock on the doors of strangers asking for help. In this example we see how such social relations may involve quite a bit of day-to-day intimacy as migrants and smugglers travel, eat and sleep in the same spaces for weeks.

In addition to the pairings between smugglers and migrants, I also documented several cases of family members acting as "guides" in exchange for money to smuggle their kin across the country or border. In one notable case, I met a couple who work as

smugglers and use their two very young children to aid them in gaining access to shelters and private homes as they moved along the journey. This story speaks to how intimate labors and relations even within families can be stressed under the pressures of global economics that profit off the movement of humans.

Lives Intertwined: Intimate-Partner Violence and the Journey

In this section I discuss the ways intimate-partner violence can be a motivating factor in individual choices to migrate, but also contribute an added dimension of complexity to the migrant journey. As in the case of protective pairings, social relations developed and maintained along the journey profoundly impact people's lives.

Here, I begin with two single mother's stories to highlight the ways violence at home may impact the choice to migrate. Mayra explains the reasons she left Guatemala.

> *I am from Guatemala and my reasons for leaving my country are primarily problems with my first husband, family problems and a lack of employment. I've worked a lot, but the salary is little. I have worked in various things, watching children, cleaning, washing, ironing, I have also worked in comedores (food stalls) and the last thing I had was a little restaurant where I worked for myself, but after I separated from my husband, he was furious with me, left me with nothing. And so, seeing the violence from him toward me, I was scared that he would grab my children and that was when I decided to migrate. I didn't have the will to confront my problems at home but I knew that if I stayed there, that my problems would continue, and it wouldn't just affect me, but it would affect all my family. And that is why I left.*

For Mayra, intimate-partner violence and the fear such violence may affect her children were crucial factors in her decision to migrate. Mayra left her children in Guatemala to be cared for by her own mother, she felt this was safer than leaving them with their father. Interestingly, she felt

she could better protect them by leaving them and securing work abroad as opposed to staying with them and keeping them away from their abusive father. Another single mother explains her story:

> *I had a house that my brother sold me and I gave it to my ex-husband, the father of my daughters. Then he brought another woman into my house. And so I took my things and my daughters and now I am renting and my salary is not sufficient. What I earn is not enough to pay the rent. If I have enough for the rent, there is nothing for food, if there is enough for food there is nothing for rent. If someone gets sick, you have to take care of the illness yourself because there is no money for medicine. For these reasons I asked God a lot to help me make it through, and maybe get some my own land or a little work or cobacha (small house/shack) as we say. I don't want a house of luxury, but my own land, because when you rent, people look at you and think you are worthless, many things can happen. So for these reasons I decided to come. I didn't come because I wanted to or I want to be with someone, no, I came for necessity.*

In this mother's story, we see how marital problems and the fracturing of family led to her choice to migrate. The realities of being a single mother in Central America where there are few opportunities and the lure of carework opportunities abroad contributes to the rise in the feminization of migration.

In chapter three I introduced Ever and Carmen, the couple from El Salvador who were fleeing gang violence and seeking to live and work in Mexico so that they could raise their soon-to-be-born child in safety. While I focused on their histories and motivations to migrate, I will now return to their story as it exemplifies some of the heightened complexities of life as undocumented and vulnerable in Mexico. Through the help of shelter workers and Padre Enrique in Oaxaca, we were able to secure a small two-room place for Ever and Carmen to live and work in a seminary school on the outskirts of the city. Ever was hired as the school's cook and Carmen helped him out. When they first

moved, Ever and Carmen were excited to have their own space, as their relations with some of the Casa Guadalupe staff had become strained in recent weeks. The staff complained that Ever and Carmen did not follow the house rules, they slept in the same bed when they could and they were not helpful around the shelter with cleaning, gardening or cooking. Ever and Carmen felt they were treated poorly at the shelter, surmising that they were being discriminated against because they were from El Salvador.

I was able to observe the relationship between Ever and Carmen over a period of eight months and became quite close to them. In the first few months I knew them, the main contact I had with them revolved around Carmen's pre-natal care and during long waits in clinic waiting rooms and bus rides across the city. They shared more with me about their experiences living in violence in El Salvador and multiple attempts trying to cross Mexico. As I discussed earlier, Carmen has a significant moon shaped scar above her eye, where she was hit with the back of a gun at a military checkpoint in Chiapas. Carmen had also been held in detention centers in the Southwestern United States, including Arizona and California for several months before she was deported. Ever had a brother who worked at a Black Angus Steakhouse in San Bernardino, CA, and they were in contact with him periodically, though Ever felt as though he could not rely on him for any substantial help. When they were given opportunities to make phone calls, it was almost always Carmen who called her family at home in El Salvador. At one point, Ever contemplated returning to El Salvador to help Carmen's younger sister who was being threatened by gang members in their home neighborhood and their family was being

threatened with paying *la renta*. He eventually decided it best not to go. Carmen's older sister, Rosita, did however make the journey to Oaxaca a few weeks before the baby was born, to offer her help and support.

I became fairly close to Rosita, who lived in the tiny two-room house with Ever and Carmen. Rosita was much more extroverted than her sister, who often let Ever do the talking for the both of them. Particularly when I first met Carmen, she was extremely soft-spoken and rarely looked me in the eye, yet would interject important details into the stories Ever told form time to time.

Several months after they had been working at the seminary, Ever and Carmen's daughter Lila was born, through the help of an outstanding doctor in Oaxaca who was willing to help her have a natural birth (at the clinic we worked with, every woman must have a cesarean section). I met their tiny daughter when she was just a few weeks old. We chatted about the possibilities of the two of them receiving their Mexican regularization papers because their daughter was officially a Mexican citizen. From the outside, all seemed to be going very well for Carmen and Ever, though as I soon learned, things were much more complicated.

The complexities of Carmen and Ever's relationship really began to come to the surface for me the evening after my husband Nick and I had our *boda Oaxaqueña* (Oaxacan wedding) in the town of Mitla, Oaxaca. The *socios* (board members) from the shelter hosted a party for us, with lots of dancing, delicious food and wonderful wishes. Ever and Carmen were invited to the wedding and arrived with an entire tea set wrapped in plastic for us—a more than generous gift, that in some ways symbolized their new life

in Oaxaca and ability to purchase things—new clothes and gifts. Lila, who was now about 6 weeks old, was dressed in a beautiful magenta ruffled outfit, and all the *socios* had a great time passing her around. At that time another couple from El Salvador were staying at the shelter, and the five of them seemed to hit it off quite well, sitting together and dancing together at the party.

The next day, I arrived to the shelter and was surprised to see Rosita there. I walked into the kitchen where she was helping to steam vegetables and asked her how she was doing. "Triste" (sad) she replied. "Why?" I asked, "Because I am sad for the baby," she replied. She had been staying with Ever and Carmen, and so this was a surprise. Apparently, Carmen had also been there, but had already left. This is the story of what happened as told to me by Rosita:

After the wedding, when Ever, Carmen, Rosita and baby Lila were on their way back home, Ever said that he wanted to stop by a cantina to get some more drinks. The sisters said they did not want to go, especially with the baby, but he forced them to. Apparently the sisters asked Ever for some money to pay for a taxi back to the house and he became upset with them. One thing led to another and Ever ended up pushing Carmen forcibly, and she nearly fell. Rosita was holding the baby and Ever kicked her multiple times. The two women were extremely upset, crying hysterically and called two of the shelter workers to come and pick them up immediately.

The women and baby stayed at the shelter that night, but the next day Carmen called Ever the next day to pick her up. Apparently, Carmen's breast milk was not enough to feed the baby and she needed Ever to help purchase her formula. He arrived to the shelter

apologizing and promising never to do this again. They left and Rosita stayed. Rosita told me that while Carmen said this was the first time he had pushed her, it was not true. According to Rosita, Ever had a history of alcoholism, his father was a violent alcoholic and he hit Carmen in the past. I told her that I had never noticed any physical signs of domestic violence and she said that he is very smart, he knows not to leave marks on her face or her body. She claimed that he regularly verbally abused Carmen, called her bad names and claimed that the baby was not even his. He also forced her to do things for him. She gave an example from four days after the baby was born and Ever was screaming at Carmen demanding that she wash his shoes for him. Rosita claimed that she knew Ever was cheating on Carmen because she saw text messages on his phone, but has not told her sister.

When I inquired about why Carmen stays with Ever, she elucidated how complicated the situation was. At the most immediate level, Carmen needed Ever to help her to pay for the baby to eat. He controlled all the money. She also said that Carmen has been extremely loyal to Ever, and the two of them have been through so much together in their multiple migration attempts. While Carmen wanted to leave El Salvador with Ever in the beginning, she was starting to change her mind, and talked about returning home. Rosita herself was preparing to return to El Salvador where she had two children and had recently learned that one of them was sick and needed to be cared for. Rosita wished that Carmen would go with her. Carmen did not return to El Salvador with Rosita, and as far as I know, is still living with Ever in Oaxaca, where they are raising their daughter. They were able to obtain their Mexican immigration papers and live legally in Mexico.

Through the story of Ever, Carmen and Rosita, we see some of the multiple types of intimate labors performed between partners and family members. Rosita took the risks of migrating from El Salvador to Oaxaca in order to support her sister in the birth of her first child. To do so, she left her two children at home in El Salvador to be cared for by their mother. We also see the complexity of intimate partner violence in the relationship between Ever and Carmen, and how being undocumented without a strong set of social ties and relations exacerbates an already difficult and unequal situation. On the night Ever pushed Carmen, she had no one else to call and help her except for the migrant shelter workers. They were also the people there to support her during her labor and birth, and even paid for significant portions of her care. And in this, we also see the intimate labors performed between local residents and undocumented migrants. It is this dynamic I turn to next.

The Intimate and Gendered Labors of Mexico's Migrant Rights Movement

Trabajamos en las vias con lágrimas, pero con corazón
We work on the tracks with tears, but with heart.
--Doña Alicia, Chiapas

Everyday throngs of Mexican and international tourists venture to the lush jungle in the northeastern corner of Chiapas state to visit the spectacular Mayan ruins of Palenque. The town of Palenque bustles with internet cafes and restaurants catering to the constant flow of youthful backpackers and tour buses that fill up the large sprawling hotels and resorts lined along the road to the ruins. Just a few kilometers away there is another type of high-intensity movement of people passing through the area, yet of a very different nature. Palenque is home to not only one of the most impressive archaeological

sites in Mexico, but is also located on a train route from the Guatemala-Mexico border in the Petén jungle.

In recent years the region has attracted a large number of Central American migrants, many of whom are trying to avoid the more traveled border crossing near Tapachula. The train runs on the outskirts of the city where you will see dozens of groups of men and women lying on their backpacks or sitting alongside the tracks waiting for the next train to leave. Police and military trucks patrol back and forth while local people talk about the criminals who have invaded. Migrants wait in this run-down neighborhood, and if they are lucky, maybe stumble across the shelter that may or may not be open and line up for a modest bowl of beans and tortillas that has been prepared by one of the local church groups. Across the tracks another line forms, where tourists eagerly wait to enter the ruins, completely oblivious to the scene that is unfolding. Both groups of foreigners share a sense of anticipation yet of a very different nature. Like the tourists I describe above, I had visited Palenque several years before and had no idea that it was a major transit zone for Central Americans.

After traveling on a grueling overnight bus from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec I made it to Palenque I was eager to see this new shelter. Despite the fact that it was only February, the small town that sits at the edge of dense jungle was extremely hot and humid. I had been given the phone number of woman named Doña Alicia and that morning I called her cell phone to make initial contact and see if I could meet her sometime over the next week.

“Where are you?” she asked. I responded, “In the center of town.” “Where exactly?” “In front of Panaderia Estrella.” “Okay, I’ll be there in fifteen minutes” and she abruptly hung up the phone. And so my husband, Nick, who was traveling with me, and I stood in front of the bakery and waited and fifteen minutes later a pick-up truck pulled up in front of it with a man driving, a middle-aged woman in the front seat and a girl about twelve years old in the back. Nick jumped into the back of the truck with Doña Alicia’s daughter and I sat up front in the cab with Doña Alicia and her husband. She said we would go to the shelter directly and as her husband drove us she talked about the formation of the shelter, the role of her church group in getting it established and her dedication to helping migrants.

A few years ago, Doña Alicia and a group of other women would get together to prepare food for the migrants on the railroad tracks and with the help of a Brazilian nun, they decided they should open a shelter there. When we visited they were using a temporary house and were trying to raise the funds to build a more permanent shelter. Doña Alicia’s husband did not say anything during the ride and when we arrived to the shelter, he dropped us off and immediately drove away. My initial impression from his silence was that he was not totally supportive of his wife’s involvement in the shelter.

The shelter was a located directly in front of the railroad tracks. It was a wooden shack with a few panels of *lamina* (laminate) that were used to patch up a hole near the roof. You could literally see through the walls in several places. When we entered the fence, there were about twelve migrants sitting on logs and concrete stones in the front yard. There were eight men and four women when we initially arrived. One woman stood

out to me because of how scared she looked sitting, almost cowering in the corner next to a male migrant. Later in the day when we sat to chat with the migrants, she was the only person who did not say anything.

The shelter was dirty inside and the kitchen, main room had a metal stove, a few tables with non-matching dishes, some wooden chairs and an altar with the virgin of Guadalupe. The back wall of the shelter was plastered with newspaper like wallpaper. There was a cardboard box with some medical supplies and a calendar that listed the names of the various church groups that would be donating *la comida* (the main meal of the day) on each day of that month. We walked to the back of the house where there is a *bomba* (water storage tank) and two extremely dirty toilets covered with pieces of ripped cardboard as lids. Even though it was the middle of the day, we passed by another small room where migrants were sleeping on the ground. At the shelter I met Don Mario, a small, older man in his 60s, who was from the neighborhood and watched over the shelter. Doña Alicia said they pay Don Mario a small stipend to take care of whatever needs to be done.

Doña Alicia said that while most people immediately around the land seemed to be accepting of the general idea of the shelter, the neighbors have expressed indifference or annoyance with migrants. She gave me a few examples of people telling the migrants to move away from their homes. She also mentioned an incident where a local person pretended to help a migrant retrieve a money order and failed to give the money to the migrant. Subsequently, to prevent such incidents, Don Mario receives all the money orders.

Doña Alicia and her daughter led me through the narrow rows between old train cars where small groups of migrants huddled together in the shade. Far from treating these men and women as dangerous criminals or undesirables, Alicia marched up to each group to ask them how they were doing and if they were hungry. In several cases, the migrants seemed taken aback by her forward attitude and hand extended out to greet them all personally. In those moments, the very simple act of handshake seemed radical. Most of the migrants said they were in fact hungry and lined up out the door to the tiny kitchen in the wooden shack that was the temporary shelter. Some did not come. One of the migrants who had been at the shelter for several days explained to us that there was a great level of tension on the tracks, that people were scared. Several days earlier there was a violent kidnapping involving *Los Zetas* nearby. The migrants suspected that there were *Zetas* around the tracks now, and not just Mexicans, but *Zetas* from Central America. This migrant said that it was hard to trust anyone because you never know who might be involved. In light of the recent violence, some of the migrants I met decided not to continue on, but return to their homes in Honduras and Guatemala.

Figure 14: Local Woman Greeting Migrants

Late in the afternoon three migrants arrived to the shelter. They were extremely hungry and grateful to be offered a bowl of beans. They sat in silence eating in the room with the virgin of Guadalupe. I remember one of the men particularly well as his face was bloated and red and he had a terrible rash all over his body. I accompanied Doña Alicia to buy him some antihistamines at the neighborhood pharmacy. I donated the money for him on that day, but if I was not there, I suspect Doña Alicia would have paid out of her own pocket. As I left Doña Alicia at the end of my visit, I spoke to her more about my project and its focus on the violence along the migrant journey. She gave me a puzzled look.

"You are only studying the violence?" she asked

"Yes", I responded.

"But, Wendy, you can understand violence without also understanding hope. They are two sides of the same thing."

Inspired by this exchange with Doña Alicia, my work examines the multiple types of intimate labors performed along the journey, not just by migrants but by local residents and shelter workers. I suggest that intimate labors are performed not only as economic strategies for migration and livelihood, but also as strategies in struggles for humanitarianism and social justice. In this way, I turn to some of the more productive aspects of global processes of human mobility in creating possibilities for solidarity and hope amidst conditions of violence. These intimate labors are performed in the private realms of kitchens, churches, shelters and patios by local residents and in the public realms of streets, train yards and rallies as a growing transnational network of people have begun to resist and speak out against violence and impunity along the migrant journey in Mexico. I will return to the transnational aspects of the movement in the final chapter, but here I emphasize the daily labors of shelters.

A central tension I examine is the highly gendered dynamics of intimate labors and carework performed members of the shelters. Most of the public leaders of this movement, particularly in Mexico, are Catholic priests, all men. Yet, much of the everyday labors that take place in the shelters and during activist events are performed by women, many of them mothers of children who have migrated or have disappeared or perished along the way. The migrant rights movement both reproduces and challenges patriarchal hierarchies at a local level—through intimate carework at shelters, women are performing traditional "womanly tasks"—the second or even third shifts of their daily labor. And yet, through these everyday

forms of intimate labor, women are moving their labor outside their immediate households and challenging larger systems of social differentiation and dehumanization that sometimes surface even within their own families and communities.

For example, Doña Alicia's husband was quite ambivalent about her involvement with the shelter and worried for her safety. Araceli, a single mother of two children, spent her days at Casa Guadalupe, educating migrants on the risks of the journey, helping them make phone calls to their families and accompanying them to the local clinic. Like Doña Alicia, Araceli said her family did not understand why she chose to do this type of work, and was horrified when her name was mentioned in a local newspaper because she feared the stigma it might bring to her family.

In the state of Veracruz, there is a community called "La Patrona" where local women have organized to prepare small bags of food—simple tacos and bread and bottles of water—to throw to migrants sitting on the tops of the train as it passes through their town. In 2006 when I first went to search for these women I had heard so much about, I traveled through several nearby villages where I met people who explained to me that they used to organize and help migrants, but that was before they became overrun with delinquents and drug addicts.

Maria, herself once a migrant to the United States, was a grandmother in her late 60s who took the time several times a week to bring her bible to the shelter where she read and prayed with newly arrived migrants on their way north. The very simple gesture of holding hands alongside migrants during prayer is a powerful act of humanity that resists larger societal stereotypes that deem migrants as subhuman and something to fear. And finally, by

caring for migrants who have lost limbs in train accidents, Dona Carmen is a powerful example of the difficult and trying intimate labors that women perform.

It is through these intimate labors and firsthand experiences working with migrants that women have increasingly become involved in civic engagement and public activism. For example, at regional meetings, conferences and public events organized around migrant shelters and migrants' rights, women often outnumber men. In the intimate spaces of dormitories and shelter couches and the public spaces of train yards, these women at once conform to and resist their traditional gendered roles as caregivers as they seek to bring a small bit of humanity to the everyday uncertainty and fear that permeates the journey for migrants in transit—even when it may be looked down upon or met with ambivalence by their families and communities.

CHAPTER EIGHT—(UN)SAFE SPACES: THE PARADOXES OF SECURITY, SANCTUARY AND VIOLENCE

We picked up our plastic white chairs to move them away from the men's dorm room so that the migrants resting inside would not be able hear my interview with the padre. As we resettled them in the dusty lot on the other side of the fence Padre Jose resumed his story, this time with a hushed voice. He was telling me about why his life was spared after the *maras* (gang members) who dominate the area had vowed to kill him. According to the gang's second in command, they decided it was best to keep him alive because if they killed him, the shelter would surely close. The shelter's presence was already highly contested in the community. Two years earlier, a migrant from Central America was accused of raping a young girl and community members threatened to burn the shelter down. The gang leader admitted that if the shelter closed it would be much harder to track down Central Americans to traffic and recruit into their business of smuggling drugs, weapons and bodies. As much as the migrants needed the shelter to stay alive, the gang needed it to maintain their operations.

This sobering realization of inter-dependency between the groups that exploit and abuse migrants and those who serve and defend migrants is one of the central contradictions revealed in my research. Migrant shelters are intended to be spaces of respite, healing and solidarity and for the most part they are. However, they are also increasingly sites of new forms of violence and micro-differentiation within and outside their walls.

Due to a number of factors and conditions, tensions arise between and among shelter workers, migrants and outsiders on a daily basis. Central American migrants are not a homogenous group with inherent trust and respect for one another. Humanitarian aid workers and shelter are not always well received within local communities. Finally, the migrant rights movement can be divided and fractures arise between shelter workers and advocates.

This chapter focuses on the rippling effects of violence within and near shelters. I begin with a conceptual discussion of the anthropology of violence and particularly on the ordinariness of violence. I then offer specific examples of the fractures, conflicts and chaos that take place along the journey; direct violence as well as rumor, accusation, suspicion and discrimination. I will discuss case studies from two shelters in southern Mexico, one from Oaxaca and one from Veracruz to provide a sense of some of the challenges shelters face and responses by local communities. Finally, I analyze the tensions, suspicions and fractures that develop within the larger migrant rights movement in Mexico.

My goal in this chapter is not to undermine the critical work of migrant shelters or the movement, but rather to understand how structural conditions including the larger landscape of ordinary violence, militarization and the lack of state-supported resources and policies creates strains and pressures on migrant shelters and individuals. In turn these forces create the conditions for existing and new types of inequality and marginality to be (re)produced. This offers an important perspective to the anthropology of migration that almost exclusively focuses on the experiences of migrants themselves and rarely on

the reverberating effects migration may have on other populations. Migrants do not travel in a vacuum, but rather become deeply intertwined in relations, economies, and social climates of the communities they pass through, communities that are also extremely marginalized within Mexico. In these ways, we can see how violence travels both vertically and horizontally across social groups.

The Ordinariness of Violence

In southern Oaxaca, there is a sense of ordinariness of violence against migrants that both echoes larger anxieties about violence in Mexico and in Central America and situates the migrant journey as a particularly perilous space. My use of the term ordinariness is inspired by Michael Higgins and Tanya Coen's (2000) phrase "the ordinariness of diversity" in relation to the ways certain groups in urban Oaxaca use their marginalization in everyday life as points of political resistance and mobilization. Along the migrant journey, violence both separates people and brings people together. Conceptually, I draw on literature in the anthropology of violence, and particularly on everyday violence and suffering (Green 1999; Kleinman 2000; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), to understand the cascading effects of structural and direct forms of violence in social relations. These scholars suggest that social indifference to violence and injustice stems in part from the ways violence becomes to be seen as ordinary and everyday.

At a local level, southern Mexican newspapers have documented the demise and death of undocumented migrants in short, factual articles that provide little context or history. Rather, they tend to blame violence on "bad" individuals or unfortunate

"accidents" and conditions—the capsizing of a boat in a storm, weak floorboards that crushed migrant bodies or "falling off" a train. Specific incidents of violence are often treated as isolated cases, effectively de-linking them from larger state and structural forces.

Since 2006, local incidents involving migrant deaths and kidnappings are increasingly accompanied by media coverage of Mexico's drug war and "random" violence in southern Mexico. In Oaxaca city for example, there was a major story when the head of a taxi driver was found at the bottom of a popular tourist spot called El Fortín with a note signed with a "Z" (for *Zetas*) attached to it. Oaxaca has been the site of numerous high-profile arrests of top leaders of *Los Zetas*, events that are always big news in Mexican media. One of the more disturbing media stories featured photographs of two students who were gunned down and killed in 2010 on the steps in front of the idyllic Plaza de Santo Domingo which lies in the heart of Oaxaca City. For anyone who has been to Oaxaca, the images of the dead bodies lying on the ground in front of the peaceful agave garden and towering Cathedral are hard to reconcile.

My point is not to discount the very real increase of violence in Oaxaca or in Mexico, but to think about how representations of violence reflect larger political and social processes. Pine (2008), has written about the bombardment of 'random' gang violence portrayed through the Honduran media that contributes to a culture of everyday violence as normal. As Straight has noted, "So long as violence is chronic, piecemeal, and affecting minorities, it is quickly forgotten, if noted at all" (Straight 2009). The everyday media exposure to death works to normalize suffering (Kleinman 2000:226) for

undocumented peoples. As Binford (1996:4) argues, it is only within the parameters of crisis or scandal, usually involving a massive loss of life, that the poor become visible. For Central American migrants in Mexico, that crisis manifested in the 2010 spectacle surrounding the Tamaulipas massacre, an instance where the poor and undocumented became visible, yet in a way that obfuscates the decades of suffering that Central Americans have endured in Mexico.

For migrants, shelter workers and residents, the uncertainties of the journey and fears of kidnappers and other perpetrators of violence have become normalized. With regard to everyday fear and terror in post-war Guatemala, Green states, "The routinization of terror is what fuels its power. Such routinization allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a façade of normalcy, while that terror, at the same time, permeates and shreds the social fabric" (Green 1999:5). Key in Green's statement is not only that people live in a state of fear, but also that such fear creates ruptures in social relations. A conceptual lens of violence must not look over the "microeconomics of difference" and the multiple ways violence is reshaped at the local level (Green 2004). Through tracing the local impacts of transit migration and violence in Mexican communities we can begin to understand how global and structural inequalities are reproduced in new spaces.

Finally, violence both within and outside of migrant shelters largely depends upon conditions of chaos and confusion. Sider and Smith argue that chaos is the turmoil and tumult created by cultural and physical violence that is always crucial to the continuing

exercise of power (Sider and Smith 1997). Attention to the fractures and ruptures in society are key to understanding its historical dynamic (Sider and Smith 1997).

Militarization of Daily Life

Much of the fear and terror experienced by citizens and non-citizens alike stems from the militarization of everyday life, in part resulting from state forms of violence and intimidation. For example, how do we make sense of the ordinariness of police and military patrols with soldiers holding large machine guns aimed toward people on the streets? Or how can we understand why there is no public outcry when undocumented people are routinely removed from buses to be extorted in broad daylight and then allowed to re-board the bus and continue on their way?

For the poor and marginal classes, this is just "terror as usual" (Taussig 1992). Poor, indigenous and undocumented people in Mexico have experienced intimidation, policing and corruption on behalf of Mexican police, military and immigration for decades in Mexico. Here, I insert an example of such intimidation that occurred one block away from Casa Guadalupe. This is an incident told to me by Araceli, the administrator of Casa Guadalupe:

> *I want to tell you about something that happened 15 days ago on Saturday. Eight migrants arrived to the shelter, we did their interview, you know, everything you do, and they asked me permission to leave to buy socks and a few other things. A little while later Mauricio was going to pick up a money order for a migrant and when he returned he said to me, "Araceli, can you believe this, on the corner there is a patrol truck with the migrants" they were the three that asked me if they could leave. I know that the police are not allowed to detain them unless they have committed a crime, so I decided to go and see what had happened. I went and when I*

arrived they had the migrants surrounded, the police were there with their pistols out and everything. I asked them what had happened and a woman cop asked me why I wanted to know, was I a family member or what? I told them that I was the administrator of the shelter and they said to me, what shelter? They sent me to go and talk to the commander in chief. And at this moment there were three more patrols and they surrounded all of us. I was sent to the commander and he asked me the same questions. I explained who I was and I asked him why he was holding the migrants. He told me that he had received a report from the neighbors that there were suspicious looking people outside but we have never had problems like this before with the neighbors. I asked him what they did and why they were holding them. The commander wanted to know where the shelter was located and other details, like he asked me my name. He handed them over to me and told me to tell them not to go out again. It was intense. After, I couldn't believe that the police would let the migrants go. They were so scared! But in the end, grateful that they were not robbed and that they didn't take them to immigration.

This incident speaks to several important dynamics in the ways militarization has become normalized. In areas where there are migrant shelters, there seems to be an increased presence of security patrols, even though most shelters have tacit agreements with local forces regarding sanctuary zones. In fact, Casa Guadalupe and the local INM office had recently reached an agreement that they would not patrol the area near the shelter.

However, the uncertainty that comes with such agreements fuels fear and doubt among shelter workers and the migrants who pass through. Moreover, while Araceli doubted it was truly the neighbors who called the police to report suspicious looking people, a seed of doubt was still planted. Other shelter workers expressed their worry to me that the shelter had not sufficiently collaborated with residents in the neighborhood to garner their support. Were the neighbors really involved or were the police simply racially profiling migrants walking near the shelter? And while this round-up not only

served to scare and intimidate the migrants and the shelter workers, they were also able to extract personal information about Araceli and the shelter. Araceli was later involved in an accusation by local immigration that she participated in human smuggling—which led me to wonder if these incidents were related. Finally, from the perspective of the migrants, this story exemplifies that even the act of purchasing socks for tired and blistered feet is a potentially dangerous act.

As demonstrated in this incident, the fear experienced by migrants and locals stems from the constant patrolling and acts of intimidation exercised by Mexican police and military. The supposed protectors of society are often the most feared as corruption and brutality are rampant. Police patrols are a regular aspect of daily life in much of southern Mexico, especially since the 1990s. There are several reasons for this increase. In Chiapas, the Zapatista Revolution created intense national response of militarization and with it, in the words of Lynn Stephen, the creation of "indigenous suspects" (Stephen 2000). As discussed earlier, Mexico has also received considerable pressure from the United States to do its part in curbing migration flows and more recently, drug and human trafficking. As discussed earlier, the first major militarization project in southern Mexico, Plan Sur, was implemented in 2001. Since then, largely with funding from the United States and the Mérida Initiative, Mexico has continued to militarize both its southern and northern border regions.

In the state of Oaxaca, the 2006 social movement that left at least 15 people dead, hundreds wounded and disappeared, dramatically changed both the rural and urban landscapes with an increase in military and police presence. In Oaxaca City, it is not

uncommon to see fully dressed riot police lining the streets that surround the *zócalo* (central plaza), during public events and protests. The local government has used tactics of intimidation with excess. During the social movement, helicopters regularly circled above the historic downtown neighborhood. Two blatant examples of state repression during the social movement include when former governor Ulises Ruiz released state police, helicopters and tear gas to break up a crowd of sleeping teachers and children at four am on June 14, 2006. And after several months of protest largely organized under the newly formed Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO), President Vicente Fox authorized the deployment of the Federal Police (PFP) into Oaxaca City. This resulted in bloody clashes between the PFP and local members of the movement, including the infamous "Battle of Oaxaca" that took place for eight hours near the University Benito Juárez. The events of 2006 resulted in several large mega-march protests and months of barricades of protestors occupying the city center. Well after the last barricades were eventually taken down, Oaxaca continues to be patrolled by federal police. In addition to the militarization of Oaxaca city, military checkpoints were set up along the major roads that lead into the city, for example during the famous Guelaguetza summer festival.

As the case of Oaxaca demonstrates, the militarization of daily life has become far more visible and far-reaching, including classes not normally affected by such terror. It is only in recent years, that we are beginning to see this ordinary violence become transformed into something extraordinary. Nancy-Scheper-Hughes argues that extraordinary state violence occurs when "violent tactics are turned against 'respectable'

citizens, those usually shielded from state, especially police, terrorism (Scheper-Hughes 2004:177).

Exemplary of the ways violence is turned against ‘respectable’ citizens are cases where migrant shelters and priests conflict with local police and authorities. Amnesty International released a report detailing acts of intimidation and assault at a migrant shelter in Tijuana when thirty heavily armed federal police tried to enter the building supposedly in search of a missing criminal they believed to inside. According to the report, the priest was accused of being a pedophile and taking advantage of migrants. A lawyer who works at the shelter was accused of protecting “criminals.”

In 2011, a shelter located close to the Mexico-Guatemala border in the state of Tabasco issued a press release about a recent incident of harassment by local INM agents. The shelter claimed that INM agents shouted derogatory slurs at the migrants, stole their clothing and confiscated their identification documents. The press release called the INM agents xenophobic and unjustly criminalizing migrants. The shelter workers make an important point that these actions are not isolated events, but rather they are representative of a larger political system, represented by the INM, and attitudes about migrants as worthless, dangerous others.

Another important example of the way such ordinary violence becomes extraordinary is in the case of Padre José, who has been arrested and detained multiple times in the past five years for his involvement defending migrants, including in an incident related to community protests against the shelter and migrant rights march. Like Araceli, he has also been accused by the INM of smuggling and abandoning migrants.

His arrests and the accusations against him have garnered national and international attention. The state violence against Padre José is seen as extraordinary, while the violence against the people he is defending is still considered ordinary.

“Money is thicker than blood:” Tensions Within Shelters

One of the most heartbreaking contradictions from my research is that along the journey, spaces of refuge become incorporated into larger processes of violence, exploitation and profit. Mexican migrant shelters not only serve the immediate needs of migrants, but are also spaces of hope and resistance in larger struggles for human rights, migrants’ rights, and social justice. However, they are increasingly being infiltrated and compromised by a number of actors.

To understand the proliferation of violence in migrant shelters, it is useful to place them within local and transnational political economies. As discussed in previous chapters, shelters are highly important nodes in the economic industry of the migrant journey. In the same spaces where migrants receive the most basic of needs (i.e. food, shelter and sleep) they are also able to obtain money orders, hire smugglers or be recruited to work in legal and illegal industries and services. For example, shelters have become spaces to recruit potential people to smuggle, traffic or recruit into local sex industries. It is a daily challenge for shelter workers to identify possible *polleros* or criminals who have entered the shelter in hopes of preying upon migrants. Migrants are often approached near and within shelters by *polleros* looking for new “*pollitos*” (literally “little chicks”) to transport.

Padre José explained that he must ask suspected *polleros* to leave at least once everyday. One day when I was at the shelter, a large group of people began to flow in after the train arrived. This included a male migrant carrying a large hiking backpack, not the usual small school backpack that most migrants carried. This man stayed to himself, near the back of the shelter and did not appear to be traveling in a group, like most of the other migrants. He also appeared visibly "dirty," long hair in knots and tangles and soiled clothing. After lunch, I saw Padre José go up and have a chat with this man and several minutes later he started to pack up his things and go. When I asked Padre José about this later, he simply told me that since he was Mexican, not Central American, he was a *pollero* and had to leave.

Migrant shelters have different philosophies around how they maintain their own security and the security of the migrants. Some shelters have rules that migrants are not allowed to stay inside the shelter during the daytime. In such cases, many of the migrants congregate in the areas in front of the shelter and neighborhood, easily identifiable to residents and potential smugglers. In one such shelter, I interviewed a woman who explained to me that a smuggler lived in a house across the way and had violated her in some way, but she did not go into further details. I met her because at first she asked me if I could help her file an official denunciation against him. I told her I absolutely would, but when I later asked her the details, she told me she decided against making the denunciation and that she preferred to just continue on her way.

The abundance of opportunities to profit off of migrants occasionally tempts both other migrants and shelter workers. I interviewed one shelter worker named Mauricio in

Oaxaca who had a second job playing the electric keyboard and guitar in a local music band. Mauricio's band usually played at restaurants or for private parties, and occasionally in bars. One night Mauricio had a gig at a local bar near Oaxaca City when the owner of the bar found out that he worked at Casa Guadalupe. The bar owner expressed his interest in having Central American women work as dancers in his strip club and asked Mauricio if he would be willing to help funnel in women, for a fee of course. Mauricio rejected this offer, but explained how tempting it was due to his financial circumstances and concern about providing for his own family.

In some cases, people who are victims of violence become facilitators and perpetrators of new types of violence. I documented several cases where people volunteering at migrant shelters became actively complicit in the exploitation of migrants. For example, I met Jaime, a migrant from El Salvador, who was waiting for his regularization papers and volunteering at a local parish. Jaime would visit the shelter occasionally and as it was revealed later, was caught trying to recruit women from the migrant shelter to work in local strip clubs. Jaime was asked to leave the shelter immediately and was forbidden to return.

In another case, one shelter worker who I came to know quite well, Miguel, a young and bright man from Guatemala who had dreams of reaching the United States and attending college, was found to be assisting a woman he befriended at the shelter to cross Mexico in exchange for money. Because Miguel effectively began to work as a smuggler he could no longer be trusted to work at the shelter. To my surprise, after several months of not being at the shelter, Miguel returned and began to work again. I have subsequently

spoken to other shelter workers who suspect Miguel may still somehow be involved with organized crime in the area. While such cases are certainly not the norm, they exemplify how the line between victim and perpetrator of violence is blurred and how political economic opportunities at a local level work to reproduce violence and exploitation through and across social groups.

The temptations and opportunities for shelter workers to become involved in illicit activities is real, and yet there have been other cases where shelter workers claim to be falsely accused of acts of human smuggling, abandonment, and sexual violence. Such accusations have been targeted at multiple levels of shelter employees and volunteers, both Central Americans and Mexicans. In at least one case I am aware of, a Mexican priest was accused by a female migrant of sexually abusing her when she passed through his shelter. I will discuss this case in more depth where I examine the fractures and ruptures that develop within the migrant rights movement.

In addition to direct forms of violence and exploitation related to local economies, shelters can also be spaces where insecurities and fear reflect discrimination and stereotypes between and among migrants and shelter workers. Central American migrants are not a homogenous group who share an inherent sense of solidarity or unity. On the contrary, everyday tensions and forms of differentiation may come to the surface within the enclosed spaces of migrant shelter. For example, I remember one afternoon talking to several people from Guatemala who said they did not trust the other migrants in their room because they were from El Salvador and people from El Salvador are drug addicts and *delinquentes* (delinquents/criminals). I also spoke to a woman who said she could not

sleep at night because she was afraid one of the other women in her dorm room was a *bruja* (witch). While not the norm, at times the fractures between migrants were palpable. Here is part of an interview I conducted with a male migrant from El Salvador:

> *W: Is there a sense of friendship between Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans?*
> *E: Oh no, there are problems. The Guatemalans don't like us and we don't like them. Look, those from Nicaragua, Salvador and Honduras we stick together. But when we are in Guatemala, they rob us. They rob us. We do not get along with Guatemaltecos or Costa Ricans.*
> *W: Including migrants?*
> *E: Migrants and non-migrants. It's like this, look, we (pointing to a female migrant) are united, for example if I have 10 pesos and I buy food and she is c*lose *to me, I will share with her. The Guatemalans, no. They are just out for themselves. Just for them. They are really egotistical and don't know how to share. And Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, yes, we three stick together.*
> *W: Interesting*
> *E: The Guatemalans don't get along with us. Sometimes there is one that will, every once in a while. But no, they don't like us and I don't like them either.*
> *W: And why is this? What is the history there?*
> *E: I don't know. For my whole life, they haven't gotten along with us. Maybe it is an old thing, but Salvador and Honduras had a military war and they still like us, but with Guatemalans, we have not had a war with them but they still don't like us. And we don't like them. But Nicaragua, Salvador and Honduras, yes we get along.*

And while this migrant specifically addresses citizenship as a factor in distrust and discrimination, other migrants described their distrust and fear of other migrants in broader terms. A single woman from Nicaragua talked to me about her choice to travel alone on the journey:

> *I travel alone. Alone, because I cannot trust anyone anymore. I cannot trust anyone. I cannot trust anyone, not Salvadorans, nor Guatemalans. You don't know them well, how they are. You don't know what type of person they are, are they going to leave you, what will they do. If they see you have a suitcase, they will assume you have money and they may do something*

> *bad to you like rob you…*

A male migrant explains some of the everyday problems that may develop among migrants. He says,

> *Sometimes there are problems. Like in Juchitán, some guys arrived drunk and they ended up fighting. And sometimes over women, for example if I come with her and then some other guys arrive and they want to take the woman away from someone else.*

And as in the case of Mayra, who was pushed off a moving train by a fellow migrant, at times interpersonal tensions can result in direct forms of violence. I also spoke to several women who were sexually harassed by other migrants staying at the shelter during the night. Cristina, a Salvadoran woman, told me about an incident at a shelter:

> *It's better to travel in a group because, well, I had a problem when I was at the Albergue Nazareth. There was a guy that was also there, because you know at that shelter there are all types of people, good people and bad people, and he seemed like he was a gang member, he was Salvadoran, and so when I was there, I was sleeping on the couch because at that shelter there are no beds or anything. So when I was there, he approached me on the sofa and almost raped me. If it hadn't been for another one of the guys there, one of the guys from my group who had gotten up to go to the bathroom, who knows what he would have done to me.*

Cristina went on to tell me how traumatized she was from this incident and how she was too scared to ride the train because she feared the man who almost raped her would be waiting for her. Cristina's story demonstrates how even in the "safe" spaces, migrants may be subject to fear and violence. Many shelters have separate male and female dorm areas to prevent such incidents. As a general rule, sexual relations are not allowed at shelters, but people find ways. For example, shelter workers explained to me that despite rules against showering together, they find that people may have sex in the bathroom, or in some cases go to a nearby hourly motel to have sex. Such liaisons may or may not be consensual.

I end this section with a story that illuminates how violence and exploitation occurs not only between and among groups of migrants and shelter workers but can create ruptures even within families. One Saturday morning I arrived to Casa Guadalupe just in time to witness an explosive scene unfolding in the main *sala* (living room). A Guatemalan family who had arrived to the shelter the day earlier was engaged in a screaming match of accusations and insults. Raul, a man in his 60s, and his wife, Lydia, 25, were being accused by Lydia's family of stealing their money after promising to take them to the United States and instead abandoning them in Oaxaca. Apparently they had a new opportunity to smuggle 15 "*pollitos*" who were waiting for them in Tapachula on the Mexico-Guatemala border. Raul and Lydia vehemently denied the accusations but when Lydia's brother said he was going to call the authorities, they quickly scooped up their possessions, their two very young children and fled the shelter. According to Lydia's sister Carla, Raul and Lydia make a living as polleros smuggling migrants across Mexico and they used their children, who were filthy and dressed poorly, to garner sympathy and handouts along the journey. Carla said that Lydia was riding on the top of the cargo train when her first child was just 8 days old. I asked her, "Why would your own sister abandon you?" She summed it up for me by responding, "Money is thicker than blood." I tell this story to demonstrate how economic interests can turn even one's own children into commodities to exploit. It also highlights the ways such economic processes reverberate through social relations and, in this case, incite deception, betrayal fractured families.

Fear, Insecurity and Distrust at Migrant shelters

In August 2011 a 19-year-old indigenous Mam migrant from Guatemala named Julio Fernando Cardona Agustín, set off to Mexico as part of the "Paso a Paso Hacia La Paz" (Step by Step Toward Peace) caravan in search of his brother who had gone missing along the journey. An activist I met during my fieldwork participated in the peace caravan and sent me a message with photos of Julio Fernando's body with eyes swollen shut, blood behind his head and the chilling sight of zig zag stitches running across the length of his thin bare chest. Julio was found near the railroad tracks near the community of La Lechería on the outskirts of Mexico City. He had been a participant in the peace caravan and there were also photos of him before his death, one a headshot routinely taken at migrant shelters and another of him on a bus holding a blue and white striped Guatemalan flag. You could see that same youthful and kind face under the blood and swollen lips and cheeks.

There were several stories circulating about what happened to this young man. The local police claim he fell off the train, but his body had none of the signs of having fallen and he was not in a zone where migrants typically board trains. Eyewitness accounts from other migrants claim that he was sleeping in front of the local migrant shelter when he was picked up by a local police patrol. Some suggested that he was sold by the police to local thugs for a sum of $400 pesos to kill him. During the night migrants heard him being beaten in the distance and in the autopsy it appears he died of blunt force to the head. In the morning his body was found near the railroad tracks. Two days after his body was found, 60 migrants staying at the migrant shelter where he was found marched in the

streets demanding justice for their fallen brother. A few days after I received the initial email and photographs, I received an official press announcement signed by a number of organizations, shelters and individuals in Mexico demanding an end to the injustices suffered by migrants by state and local actors. In their announcement, they specifically proclaimed the Mexican state's role in violence against migrants and shelter workers. In a climate where migrants are often blamed for conditions of violence, they make the explicit point that migrants are not responsible for violence, but rather, state and local authorities are culpable for failing to guarantee the security of local communities.

A few months later, I received another email from the same friend. This time, his message included five photos of the body of a male migrant found in the early morning close to Albergue Nazareth. From the photos it appears that the migrant was beaten to death with a large concrete brick. In his message, he wrote:

> *These lamentable acts prove to us that this continues to be a zone of insecurity for migrating people. And we are just one day away from receiving the caravan of mothers looking for their missing children. What are we going to say to these mothers? That their children continue to be murdered?*

The discovery of dead migrants near migrant shelters is an unfortunate reminder that spaces of safety and refuge continue to be transformed into spaces of violence. Migrant shelters, railroad tracks and bus stations have become clearly defined zones to prey upon people in transit.

Given that migrant shelters have become in many cases epicenters for people to prey upon and recruit migrants and because shelter workers have become embroiled in local politics, shelter workers have become subject to violence, intimidation and threats.

International organizations like Amnesty International who have ties to some of the more public movement figures have issued urgent action statements on behalf of shelters and the individuals who have been threatened or targeted. On several occasions members of the *Zetas* and other organized criminal have harassed and threatened shelter workers at Albergue Nazareth for protecting migrants. Several migrant shelters have had to rethink their own securitization practices. For example, Padre José now travels with personal bodyguards.

In other cases, fear and threats are less direct and contribute more to a generalized chaos and level of uncertainty around shelter life. In the following example, Araceli explains the confusion and fear she experienced after an incident at the shelter the day before:

> *Yesterday was a very stressful day because a migrant arrived who was supposedly kidnapped with his wife by Los Zetas, and when he arrived to the shelter he was asking for me, he wanted to speak to me. I wasn't there because it was my day off. When I did speak to him, he told me that had to look for a reporter because he brought a message from Los Zetas and that the condition for them to release his pregnant wife was to announce something in the newspaper, but he needed my help. I didn't want to know more about the message because as you know, these are serious things. I spoke to Movilidad Humana to find out what to do, if I should ask a few more questions to find out more about him, but our lawyer suggested that I shouldn't investigate any more and that I ask him to go to human rights, and that he should make his denunciation and then leave the shelter. There are things that didn't make sense, it was illogical in some things. But, in order to not have problems with the law and with them it was better that he leave. According to this man, there are 40 Zetas in Oaxaca. I couldn't sleep last night thinking about this and how I don't want to put Mauricio's family and the migrants at the shelter in danger. It was incredible. I don't understand why he arrived asking for me and who told him about the shelter.*

This passage demonstrates the elements of confusion, fear and chaos that shelter workers and migrants experience on a daily basis. Araceli was torn between helping this migrant who was supposedly kidnapped and had a pregnant wife still kidnapped and falling prey to a possible scheme that might put her or the people at the shelter in danger. She was unsure if she should trust this man, and was particularly concerned with how he knew her first name. Her name had recently been published in the newspaper after a recent scandal where two migrants had claimed she was complicit in trafficking migrants. Had he read about her in the paper? Did they still have his wife? Were the *Zetas* on to her? What was their message?[25]

The extent of violence in Mexico and politicization of the migrant rights movement, particularly after the Tamaulipas massacre, has contributed to a new level of security and even militarization for many shelters and members of the peace and human rights movement. While it is not new for public figures to need private protection, the fact that priests and shelter workers that defend the rights of undocumented migrants must have armed guards surrounding them tells us something about the larger political and social climate in Mexico, especially how migration relates to drug-related violence.

This point was made clear to me one week after the massacre when I attended a conference in Nogales, Sonora with approximately 100 religious leaders and volunteers who work with migrant shelters and human rights groups throughout Mexico. The

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[25] This example echoes growing concerns in Mexico over the use of the press and media by drug cartels. Groups like *Los Zetas* are sending messages via the media. Mexico is the second most dangerous countries for journalists to work after Iraq. Journalists who cover the drug war wear bulletproof vests and in some areas drug cartels control the media. For example, after the Ciudad Juárez edition of El Diario newspaper has had several of its reporters murdered by drug cartels, it had to shut down its operations.

conference participants were warned not to go out of the hotel on their own due to the potential dangers of violence along the northern border. There was concern that some of these individuals might be targets of organized crime groups operating in the area because of their association with migrants and public denunciations of the massacre. As a group, we attended an event in the construction site of a new shelter that was to be opened along the border. As everyone listened to the speeches I walked around the perimeter and noted several private security guards toting large weapons. The federal police also arrived in their black pick-up trucks with machine guns positioned in the back. No one else but me seemed to note the extra guns and security surrounding us since these are commonplace in the lives of local politicians and high-profile figures who are public targets. Just a stone's throw away on the other side of the border fence I spotted several US Border Patrol trucks. Border Patrol agents are trained to stop the very people that these migrants' rights defenders dedicate their lives to serving and yet here we were, not a hundred yards away from each other, both sides with their trucks and weapons.

Finally, I want to address some of the micro politics and tensions that arise within shelters, particularly how they may cause new types of fractures between and among migrants and shelter workers. There is a perception among some shelter staff that some migrants may use the concern surrounding violence against them to make false claims of abuse for personal reasons. For example, it has been suggested that they may be looking to make a human rights *denuncia* (claim) so that they can get their immigration regularization papers to travel freely through Mexico for their own passage or to work as a *pollero* (smuggler). Others may make accusations in order to create rifts between

shelter workers, to chose sides, to get access to a shelter when they were previously denied or to have more favorable treatment when it comes to the distribution of newly donated clothing. Throughout my fieldwork, shelter workers warned me to be careful about what I believed from some migrants, that they are just using violence as a way get me on "their side." In several cases, we documented migrants who told conflicting stories to different shelter workers and in one case, even managed to extort money from a shelter worker by claiming she had been kidnapped. It is difficult to know how common such practices are, but from an anthropological standpoint, it is important to recognize how these practices create new types of fractures within the safety of shelter life.

In addition to the micro-politics and deceptions that occur in shelters, more serious accusations and suspicions can be common between groups of migrants, between shelter workers, between priests and between activists. In some cases, these rumors and stories of violence involve shelter workers. Whether or not the rumors are true or not, they perpetuate uncertainty and fear among migrants and shelter workers.

While I was somewhat accustomed to hearing accusations and stories about abuse and exploitation in the interpersonal relations between migrants and from shelter workers to migrants, I was less prepared when I heard the news that one of the priests I knew quite well was accused of sexually assaulting a female migrant. I heard the story from two different people, one who works with the priest and another person who knew the accusing migrant. Both people were passionate about their side of the story. The accusation has caused a significant fracture between the two shelters and particularly in the relationship between the priests. Members from the shelter where the accused priest

works were disappointed that members from the other shelter would believe a migrant over his word. And yet, the priest from that shelter decided it best to not make this a public story or file an official claim. Moreover, there were rumors circulating that the accusing migrant may also work as a *pollera* (female smuggler), and perhaps was trying to garner sympathy after being kicked out of the shelter. While I will likely never know the truth about what happened, what is important here is how accusations, distrust, rumors and acts of violence circulate between multiple actors in shelter networks. Shelter workers are both defenders of migrants' rights and also accused violating migrants rights through committing violent, unjust or morally wrong acts from the smallest everyday infractions to larger and more serious crimes of sexual abuse, smuggling and corruption.

In contemplating the validity of some of the claims made to me by migrants, it occurred to me that perhaps it was less important to uncover the "truth" about whether or not someone was a smuggler or working with *Los Zetas*, and more important to think about the work that such stories do on the ground. Furthermore, what does it do within the migrant community and within the migrants rights community to have stories about priests raping migrants in circulation? As Kirsh states, the work of rumors, may actually be a tactic of perpetrators of violence,

> Through rumour people both concretely *experience* the threat of political violence and *express* their concerns about it. Yet these rumours may also be exploited by the state, exacerbating local fears. The resulting narratives have a property that is worth noting in advance: even though they constitute a reaction to terror, they may also generate or amplify it in their wake. (Kirsch 2002:57)

Accusations, rumors and stories of violence that take place both outside and within shelters speak to the ways people both cope with violence and how violence is

reproduced in social relations. As the lines between truth, testimony and fiction become quickly blurred in the bunk beds and common spaces of migrant shelters, their presence exemplify the constant tension between distrust and solidarity that permeate shelter life.

Beyond the Shelter Walls: Dispatches from Mexican Transit Communities

In this section I examine the social dynamics in local communities as they reorient around increased flows of "non-native residents" including migrants, *polleros* and organized criminals. I focus on the experiences of local Mexican residents and migrant shelter workers whose lives intersect with migration flows on a regular basis. There exists a wide range of attitudes and responses to Central American migration and associated violence in local communities. I documented cases of people who had difficulty sleeping knowing that there were migrants hungry and tired close by but also cases of local community members so frustrated and enraged by the presence of migrant shelters and the violence associated with them that they threatened (and in some cases succeeded) in shutting them down. Mostly, though, I documented a widespread ambivalence toward Central American migrants—sympathy for their plight, but a general uneasiness with their presence.

At a broad level, migration has rippling effects in home and receiving communities that manifests in social inequities. The world is not only becoming more global, but also more fragmented and unequal between and within countries (Trouillot 2003). Global processes that displace people abroad create new insecurities at home, mostly for the working and industrial classes (Sider 2006) and this often manifests itself

in the form of a renewed nationalism and racism targeting immigrant groups (Harvey 2003). For example, Sider (2006) documents how working class African American citizens have been largely displaced by more "cost effective" Mexicans and Central Americans workers in rural North Carolina, creating new tensions and forms of differentiation based on nationality and race. Bauman discusses how alarms about deteriorating security shift public concerns away from the economic and social roots of trouble and towards concerns for personal (bodily) safety (Bauman 2003). I documented similar tensions and discrimination in Mexican communities where large numbers of Central American migrants pass through. Central Americans are viewed not only as competition for jobs, but migrants and shelters are feared and blamed for the violence and crime in their communities causing new forms of social rupture.

"Ya no damos" (We don't give anymore): Searching for Hope in Veracruz

In 2007 I conducted exploratory research among several communities located along the train tracks in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. After reading the book, *Enrique's Journey* (2006), I was interested in locating the groups of women who were known to throw food to migrants passing by on the train. While I later learned that there were some people who still organized in their communities to throw food, I did not encounter any of them on this trip. What I did find was community members who explained that they used to provide food to migrants, but ceased to do so after fear and violence associated with transit migrants crippled community organizing efforts.

When I first arrived to Orizaba in Veracruz, I went to the tourist office to see if I could find out information about where to locate the local migrant shelter located in a

nearby *colonia* (neighborhood). I met a young woman sitting behind a large desk. I told her about my project and seemed to be shocked, but wanted to help. She first explained to me that the shelter had closed down two years earlier after a 5-year-old girl was reportedly raped by a migrant passing through. However, the priest who ran the shelter still worked at the local parish and continued to help migrants. When I asked her where I could talk to migrants, she said I could find them along the railroad tracks. “How will I know who are migrants and who are not?” I asked her. “It is obvious,” she replied. “You can tell by the way they dress and by the way they talk. They talk differently.” At the time I was skeptical of her assessment, but such sentiments were repeated to me by local residents throughout my fieldwork and language and dress ultimately became crucial aspects of the orientations I led with migrants on how to help them blend into Mexican society. While she did not specifically reference race, I also believe race was is an important factor in distinguishing between migrants and Mexicans. The tourist office woman gave me a small slip of paper with the name of the community and the church on it and told me to give it to a taxi driver to take me there. It was about a 15-minute car ride from the center of town. As I was leaving she warned me, “be careful, I would be scared to go there.”

During the ride I spoke to the taxi driver about his thoughts on migration and Central American migrants. He was also familiar with the migrant shelter and the rape case. The taxi driver expressed an ambivalence that I encountered throughout my fieldwork over the next several years. He first talked to me about his sympathy for migrants and the troubles they face along the journey, but also how upset he was that they

would create problems like committing rape or other crimes. He explained to me that while local people used to help, they no longer do because they fear repercussions from the police for assisting migrants even though it is technically legal to provide humanitarian aid.

I later spoke to some of the migrants congregated along the tracks. There was a group of nine people: four of them were women and each was paired up with a man. Most were from Honduras, but there was also one man from Guatemala and one man from El Salvador. There were small groups of migrants up and down the tracks as far as I could see in both directions. Having met along the journey, the group had been traveling on the train and getting on and off together. They had met in Tenosique and passed through Palenque before arriving in Veracruz and were on their way to La Lechería on the outskirts of Mexico City. They said that the police did not bother them as long as they stayed along the tracks, but also that they feared going into town because of the police.

As we sat in the late afternoon sun a man pushed a cart carrying huge stacks of colorful paper. As I looked more closely I realized they were stacks of currency from different Central American countries and Mexican pesos. Some of the migrants joked with the man that if he let them borrow some money on credit they would pay him back. The atmosphere was jovial, but it led into a discussion about some of the true costs of migration, the thousands of dollars it takes to pay a coyote and the possible loss of life from falling off the train and being dismembered. The street vendors told me about how migrants stole from the priest's rosary box and this contributed to the reason why the shelter eventually closed down.

The next day, I visited a smaller town where I had heard women organized together to throw food to migrants passing through. I walked up and down the railroad tracks and spoke to local residents. The tiny houses were lined up right next to the tracks. I passed by a family of four in their small, enclosed patio just feet away from the tracks, the youngest child playing on a small tricycle and the mother sweeping dust away. I came upon another house and found a woman called Edna alone in her front patio shredding chicken, pulling the pieces of boiled warm flesh from the bones and into a large plastic bowl. I greeted her and told her about my project, she invited me to come and sit with her. Edna explained to me that the women in her community, neighbors who live along the tracks, used to prepare food to give to migrants but no longer do. The parish also used to organize food drives and bring large bags of bread, crates of fruits and vegetables and rice and beans for the locals to cook and put into small plastic bags to throw up to the migrants. She said there was one older woman from the community that was the main organizer, but she passed away several years ago. Edna added though that the people who would come and bring the food have stopped coming. She thought that it was because of the Mara Salvatruchas and the rape of the young girl.

Every now and then she might throw the migrants a bottle of water, but nothing like before. She said that her community was far more dangerous now because of the Mara Salvatruchas, and she suspected that they lived in the community. Edna said that migrants occasionally came to her home to ask for food and water. She said that while would give them a glass of *agua fresca (fresh fruit water)*, she would never lets them stay with her anymore. It was far too dangerous. It was clear talking to Edna her sense of fear

surrounding the flow of migrants, but mostly the gang members that had infiltrated the community. In her eyes, they are all part of the same processes and events and she prefers to be separated from them all. She called the migrants *pobrecitos (poor things)*, expressing sympathy toward them, but because of fear, she and most of the other community members, choose not to interact with the migrants any longer.

Albergue Nazareth

I first visited the space near the railroad tracks that would become the Albergue Nazareth in 2006. I had been invited to a traditional Zapotec wedding in a nearby town and someone at the wedding told me about a priest who had just begun helping Central American migrants. A friend and I made out way to the makeshift area where we encountered about ten migrants, all men, sitting around a plastic table. This was before the shelter was officially opened and at that time, there were no buildings, just the table, a few chairs around and an outdoor fire with a tarp above it to cook on. When I visited there were several Mexican university students volunteering with Padre José and they lived with him in a house that he rented in town. I spent the afternoon talking to these migrants and sharing my map of Mexico with them as they planned and plotted the routes they would take. And while they talked about being robbed and the difficulties of the journey, there was no talk of *Los Zetas* or kidnappings, topics that would come to dominate my conversations with migrants in following years.

By the time I returned in 2008 and 2009, the shelter had developed significantly. Now there was a concrete chapel with a large statue of Christ on the cross, imposed on a bright pink wall. They were beginning to build concrete buildings for dormitories for the

migrants and for Padre José. These were not the only major changes at the shelter in the time between my two visits. The year before I returned, the shelter had become embroiled in a major conflict with local politicians who organized a protest of the shelter and threatened to burn it down after a migrant allegedly raped a young girl in the community. Some believed it never actually happened and the migrant was tortured into admitting it.

When I returned about a year and a half after the rape incident, I was invited to stay with a local family in an adjacent town. One of the family members, a local teacher named Pedro, picked me up in his car from the bus stop and as I explained to him my research interests he told me about seeing Padre José on television. He was watching a news show that presented both the priest's story of what happened and the mother's account. He shook his head, clearly lamenting the entire situation, but also the fact that he was unsure who to believe. He said he believed both sides of the story. This reaction was common among local residents and points to the element of confusion and uncertainty that contribute to everyday forms of fear and distrust.

According to Padre José, in the aftermath of the alleged rape, the politicians constructed a narrative that the entire community was opposed to the presence of the shelter, but that in reality this was not true. Padre José enlisted local university students to conduct a questionnaire of local community members to ask them their feelings about the shelter. He said that 90% of people were in favor of helping migrants and 58% of residents reported feeling no threat from the presence of the shelter or of their local opportunities in light of the flow of migrants. He said that only small percentage of the people believed the shelter should be closed.

In my own interviews with local residents, I found ambivalence on the part of local people. Many of the people I met, and particularly those who were affiliated with Padre José, were in favor of the shelter and expressed sympathy for migrants. Those with little or no affiliation with the shelter were more conflicted. For instance, I spoke to a young mother who expressed sympathy for the hardships migrants face but also resented their presence. She talked about community organizing efforts to build a bridge across the railroad tracks so that their children did not have to walk through the throngs of Central Americans waiting for the next train to pass. She worried each day because her son had to pass by the shelter on his way to school and she feared for his safety.

In my own observations at various transit points I witnessed migrants making catcalls to young girls passing by, people drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. These migrants were not by any means representative of the majority of migrants I met, but were easy scapegoats that could legitimize fear and resentment of migrants in general. This is not the result of an inherent racism or nationalism per se (though these processes certainly shape the social and cultural climate) but often a more direct effect of the ways migration routes have become sites for new types of violence. Migrants are often perceived as perpetrating or perpetuating violence, and can easily be blamed for other social ills and competition for jobs.

Padre José has received a number of death threats from organized criminals and gangs in the area. He recounted a story about an incident where he had discovered several large packages of cocaine and marijuana near the shelter and subsequently informed the military and local government. When the media picked up the story, the next day several

articles were published stating that Padre José denounced the drug runners. He began to receive threats along with several shelter workers. He told me of one young female Mexican volunteer who had been working at Albergue Nazareth and was robbed and received death threats. Apparently the gangs had mistaken her for being Padre José's daughter because she had the same surname as him. The volunteer, a young woman that I met two years earlier, was so shaken up by the incident that she resigned from her position.

I want to end with final example from Albergue Nazareth that speaks to how violence and migration permeate the lives of local residents in ways that extend beyond their immediate surroundings. During one of my visits to the shelter I was invited to a local prayer group at the house of one of the women who help Padre José. It was a warm afternoon, since I had just returned from the shelter with no other plans, I joined a group of twelve older men and women from the community. We sat in a circle and people read passages from the bible and discussed several themes. At the end of the meeting everyone closed their eyes and went around in a circle to say an individual prayer aloud. Almost every person in the group used this time to pray for their family members, especially children who live in the United States and others prayed for both general and specific cases of violence in Mexico. In some ways these prayers were unremarkable, but for me they spoke to the ways violence and migration seep into the most intimate and sacred spaces of everyday life.

Conclusion

Violence along the migrant journey works in horizontal ways and depends up conditions of chaos, distrust and confusion. This in turn, creates fractures within local communities, within groups of migrants and even within the migrant rights community. For these reasons, migrant shelters are often highly contested, representing spaces of hope but also danger and opportunity. Moreover, the people who risk their lives to serve and defend migrants at times become both willing and unwitting accomplices in economic exploitation and violence. This type of violence feeds off of social differentiation at the micro-level, and is enacted not from the powerful against the powerless, but across and between social groups. In these relationships, the line between victim and perpetrator of violence is often blurred. In such a climate, friendly bus drivers quickly become the enemy, "safehouses" are regarded as unsafe, and the supposed protectors of society can be the most feared.

In addition to exploring the contradictions and tensions of violence among and between multiple actors, rich ethnographic examples about the penetrating local effects of violence help us understand how structural and state forms of violence play out in people's lives. As these examples demonstrate, fear and violence is not only experienced by migrants but also by local community members whose lives are profoundly affected by increasing flows of migration. By exploring the contradictory dynamics between transit migration, shelters and local Mexican communities, I explore how transit migration has created new opportunities for hope and solidarity as well as spaces for violence to be reproduced. Ultimately, it is around this tension that we see the

contradictory and less obvious ways violence is reproduced through and across social groups.

CHAPTER NINE—LEGACIES OF UNCERTAINTY AND HOPE: TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISMS AND THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING

We walked into the small comedor (eatery) located just a few yards away from the international crossing point on the outskirts of Nogales, Sonora. The long benches were filled with around fifty people eating, mostly men but also a few women. Our group of shelter workers who work mostly in southern Mexico packed into the small space on the perimeter. Many of the migrants did not make eye contact with us, but instead kept their heads down and continued to eat. Several volunteers, both Mexican and American, walked around handing out warm tortillas from plastic shopping bags. One of the nuns who runs the *comedor* stood up in front of the crowd to welcome our group and explain to the migrants that we all had experience working at migrant shelters throughout Mexico. Her point was that we were not simply their to gawk at their misfortune.

The nun asked the migrants if anyone would like to share their story. One stout man stood up. He came up to the front and took the microphone. He gave us his name, Jesus, and told us he was from Veracruz. A few people smiled and whistled in the audience, perhaps other Veracruzaños. Jesus had lived in the United States for seven years and had a wife and two children still living in the US. Earlier in the year he had to return to his home in Mexico because his father was sick and it was his responsibility to take care of the family business. On his return to the US, he was caught by immigration officials. He said that he thought he had a chance to remain in the US because he was a resident and had family, but the ICE officials gave him a choice—they said that he could argue his case and try to stay in the US but that it was not a guaranteed process and

would take 2-3 months for his case to be processed, during which time he would have no communication with his family. Or, he could voluntarily be deported, but be able to speak to his wife and children immediately. He chose to be deported because he could not bear to have them not knowing if he was dead or alive. He said he would now return to Veracruz and then send for his wife and children to live with him in Mexico.

Another man walked up to the front of the room and took the microphone. He was from the state of Morelos in Central Mexico. He explained that since he had been caught once before for crossing into the US, on this attempt he was sent to a US federal prison. He had just been released after serving six months in federal prison for the offense of attempting to re-enter into the US and nothing else. His voice cracked as he talked about the difficulty of being imprisoned in the US and how he would never risk crossing again because he would not risk being sent to prison again.

One of my fellow visitors called out from the back and asked if a woman would be willing to share her story with the group. Many of the women put their heads down and purposefully did not make eye contact with the nun. The nun directly asked one woman if she would be willing to talk, but the woman said no. None of the women came up to speak. As we were leaving, Araceli, from Casa Guadalupe, asked two women sitting by the door where they were from. They said El Salvador. They exchanged knowing glances and nods. We knew what it meant for these women to be from Central America and to have made it to the U.S.-Mexico border. We knew what they had likely experienced, namely, sexual assault, exploitation, abuse. They surely must have lied to the US Border Patrol and told them that they were Mexican—a technique used by non-

Mexican migrants so that they will not be deported and flown back to their countries of origin. These two women were not interested in going back home; they would likely attempt to cross again. They smiled at us and continued to eat their lunch.

There was a palpable difference between my brief visit to this *comedor* and the feeling at migrant shelters in southern Mexico. In this *comedor* there was an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty and for some, devastation. In southern Mexico, while people face great risk and danger and are actively crossing some of the most brutal sections of the journey, many still carry a great amount of faith and hope that they will succeed in their migration journey. The people at the *comedor* are the people freshly deported, the people who have just failed in their journey and who must face the reality of what to do next in the inhospitable, difficult and increasingly dangerous landscape of Mexico's northern border.

Uncertainty and Hope

Uncertainty defines people's lives long before, throughout, and long after their migration journeys. Uncertainty is a motive for migrating: the uncertainty of making enough money to fill hungry bellies, purchase mandatory school uniforms or buy medicine for a coughing child. Uncertainty greets migrants in the United States: as hearts beat faster when police drive by, when arriving to work in fear of an ICE raid, of making enough money to pay the bills and have something leftover to send home. Perhaps the most painful form of uncertainty when people migrate is the uncertainty of knowing when and if they will ever see their children, husbands, wives, siblings or parents again.

This form of uncertainty is transnational and shapes not only the lives of migrants, but of their families as well.

And yet, on the other side of this uncertainty, there is also hope. Over the course of my fieldwork I came to understand the many facets of hope along the journey. While fear and violence characterize much of the experience of the migrant journey, it is hope that often fuels the decision to migrate. People expressed the hope of education for their children, the hope of seeing a loved one, the hope of living in safety and with dignity. In the midst of their journeys, it is this hope that motivates people to keep going even when they face imminent risks. Hope is often expressed through spirituality and religion. Many migrants used their faith in God, and in God's plan to communicate their hopes for crossing with safety and reaching their destinations. During the course of their journeys, migrants encounter hope in the generosity of local people and in migrant shelters. At times this hope is captured in the gift of a roll of bread, a bottle of water, a prayer, or in the simple act of a handshake. Small acts of kindness do wonders to combat the overwhelming de-humanization of migrants in Mexico.

As I conclude this dissertation, I want to meditate on the intertwined aspects of uncertainty and hope as together they underscore so much of what I describe in the proceeding pages and continue to do so in peoples everyday lives. Through examples from local and transnational social movements along the journey, I will consider some of the ways that people make sense of loss and struggle to create social spaces of civility and tolerance**.** I will also discuss some of the historical threads of activism and hope that are echoed in present-day movements for social justice. In sum, this chapter seeks to

address some of the crosscutting and contradictory ways that hope and violence feed off one another in individual and collective struggles for livelihood and family.

Searching for the Missing

My understanding of the interconnectedness between uncertainty and hope was influenced by my encounters with families of missing migrants. Through Casa Guadalupe, I was assigned various projects to help local Oaxacan families in their search for family members who went missing during their journeys or who they lost contact with once they had already arrived to the United States. In the best scenario I was able to locate the son of a family who had been in prison in California and we were able to send several letters back and forth. This was an unusually happy ending and not the norm for such cases. One father was known at Casa Guadalupe for coming by every few months to check on the case of his son who went missing in 2005. His family had sent in a DNA sample to the Medical Examiner's Office in Tucson in hopes of finding a match for their son with the unidentified bodies of migrants found in the Tucson sector where he was last seen. In a more difficult case, I met Doña Tere, an older Oaxacan woman who had a son named Beto who had lived near Dallas for several years. The summer before I met her, Doña Tere received a disturbing phone call stating that her son had been killed near the border in Texas. She was devastated yet refused to believe this was fact and was determined to travel to Dallas herself to interview Beto's friends and neighbors. She proposed driving around the city with a loudspeaker asking if anyone had any information about her son. Doña Tere did make it to Dallas, but after a series of

confusing and conflicting reports, was offered no closure on the case of her son. She said she would not change the locks in her house because who knows, Beto could come through the door.

Finally, I share the details from another case in order to demonstrate the rippling and lingering effects of migration on the families of migrants. At times, the uncertainty that accompanies a missing migrant can create ruptures within families and in local communities. The Marquez family who live in a Zapotec village in the Valle of Oaxaca did not want their son Antonio to migrate to the US, but two other young men from the village, David and Alex, had made contact with a coyote who was going to help them cross. This coyote recruited migrants through the central speaker system common in small rural Oaxacan villages.

Several weeks after their departure, David and Alex returned to the community without Antonio. They had been detained and deported by US Immigration after being caught in the desert just north of Ajo, Arizona. Because Alex had been separated earlier, David was the last person to see Antonio, and was the one who had to tell his parents what happened to them during their four days crossing the desert.

Araceli and I visited David in his family home. We entered his house and were greeted by an older man with a terrible eye infection and two young children dressed in dirty clothes. They led us into the main room, where chickens roamed on the dirt floors. David was willing to talk to us about his experience, but the conversation was difficult. As he spoke he plucked dried kernels from an ear of corn and shook them in the palm of his hand, periodically throwing them on the ground for the chickens to eat. He told us

about their journey crossing the desert, and that their coyote gave Antonio and Alex pills to take which he promised would give them more energy. He said once they reached Ajo, Arizona the coyote told Antonio he was going to leave him there, he was in no condition to continue but that Antonio wanted to go on. Eventually though, he became so weak and dehydrated and could not continue. He then begged them to leave him. David described Antonio lying underneath a tree in the desert with his jacket wrapped around his waist. He said he was still breathing when he left, leaving some hope that he may have survived. David also said that before they left Antonio, the coyote took his Antonio's wallet and took all his money, leaving only his identification card.

Since his return, David has had a difficult time emotionally. Antonio's family blames him for leaving Antonio in the desert and does not understand why he could not carry him with the rest of the group. As David spoke, he said that they do not understand how tired and weak he was after walking for four days with almost no water. He barely survived the journey himself. David's father said that Antonio and his parents were in a dispute before he left, and perhaps he simply has not called because he was still angry with them, but he is somewhere in the United States, perhaps California. They also tried finding the coyote from their village, but found his house unoccupied. We spoke to Antonio's parents as well. They were distraught, asked many questions and his mother cried profusely. They asked how long it would take to find him, what is the normal amount of time? There were no easy answers to their questions. We collected as much information as we could, filed his case with the appropriate institutions in the US, but as far as I know, his case remains unresolved. I tell this story because it exemplifies some of

the uncertainty and heartbreak experienced by families of missing migrants, but also the ways migration can create fractures within local communities. Antonio's family still held out some hope they would find him, that he might even return. At the very least, they hoped to find some closure and to bring his body back home where he belonged.

Transnational Feminisms

My work with the families of missing migrants in Oaxaca offered me a glimpse into some of the dynamics and aspects of uncertainty and hope that families of migrants experience. For Central American families, they must grapple with the uncertainties and dangers that go along with crossing Mexico in addition to the U.S.-Mexico border. The first time I arrived to the city of Tapachula near the Guatemala-Mexico border and walked through the bus station I was taken aback by all of the missing person's flyers pasted on the walls. As I looked more closely, I noted that along with the photos and clothing descriptions of these young men and women were phone numbers in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. This was the work of families in search of their loved ones. The experience has become so common that an emerging movement has grown out of the collective organizing and efforts of the families of missing migrants.

In Chapter Seven I discussed some of the intimate labors performed by local Mexican women in shelters and transit spaces. In recent years, their work has intersected with a transnational feminist movement of mothers and families of missing and killed migrants from Central America. Across Central America and Mexico the families and mostly mothers of missing migrants have joined together to raise awareness of the

brutalities of the migrant journey and demand new avenues for social justice. I conceptualize this as a transnational feminist movement for the ways it brings attention to the experiences of families and mothers in particular within a larger context of migration, globalization and violence. Some had children go missing only a few years ago, others had children missing for decades. Caravans are bringing international visibility to human rights violations in Mexico and publicly challenging the state to act and end the many forms of systemic impunity. Through testimonies of individual mothers and family members, women in the caravan are bringing their shared experiences of injustice, loss and mourning into the political sphere.

This movement operates through coordination between organizations based in both Central America and in Mexico. In Mexico, members of these mostly Central-American based groups retrace the path of the migrant journey in a caravan that stops in key sites where they hold rallies and marches where they share their stories and speak out about violence and impunity in Mexico (see Figure 15). During these caravans, mothers and family members also literally search for clues and seek information that will provide them answers on what happened to their children. The spatial movements of the caravan, as they physically retrace the steps of their missing children and loved ones, symbolically transforms spaces of violence into spaces of hope and empathy but also of solidarity as they witness and recognize the many hardships and obstacles. The caravans are re-appropriating spaces of violence and transforming them into spaces of hope as they demand social justice and an end to cultures of impunity.

I was fortunate during my fieldwork to participate in one such caravan and interview several family members who are part of the Salvadoran organization Comité de Familiares de Migrantes Fallecidos y Desaparecidos El Salvador (Committee of Families of Dead and Missing Migrants, COFAMIDE). During a public march, one mother handed out flyers to local residents with the photo of her missing son on it. While this mother was making a larger and symbolic point to put a human face on her suffering, she also still held out hope that she would find her son. During a caravan in November 2011, one mother was actually able to locate her son who had been imprisoned in Chiapas for the past seven years.

Latin American women have a strong historical tradition of drawing on their roles as mothers and caregivers to make strategic alliances in various political movements. Examples of such women's activism include most famously the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo who protested against their disappeared children in Argentina's dirty war (1976-1983) and the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador "Monseñor Romero" (CO-MADRES) who protested their missing family members in El Salvador's civil war (Stephen 1995). As Briggs documents in her analysis of feminist organizations opposed to transnational adoption, organizations of families of missing children in Latin America have emerged as some of the most important groups in demanding legal accountability for war crimes (Briggs 2012:163).

Figure 15: Public Caravan of Mothers, Oaxaca

In the ways these women occupy public spaces, and draw on the historical traditions of feminist movements throughout Latin America, the mothers and families of the migrant journey caravans are bringing much needed attention to the silent war against Central American migrants. While these women are not protesting the forced disappearances of family members as a tactic of state repression, they are still demanding an end to violence and impunity on behalf of the Mexican state. According to groups like COFAMIDE, it is the responsibility of the Mexican state to investigate the cases of their children who have gone missing during their journeys and maintain a DNA database to help identify dead bodies.

The work of these organizations have shaped the ways in which transnational actors make claims about human rights and citizenship rights to the state. That is, non-governmental organizations are making claims to the Mexican state about the rights of transit migrants who are outside their national territories. Such work might be conceptualized as an example of what Ong describes as the "territory of citizenship" when she states,

> the national space of the homeland, has become partially embedded in the territoriality of global capitalism, as well as in spaces mapped by the interventions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Such overlapping spaces of exception create conditions for diverse claims of human value that do not fit neatly into a conventional notion of citizenship, or of a universal regime of human rights. In short, components of citizenship have developed separate links to new spaces, becoming rearticulated, redefined, and reimagined in relation to diverse locations and ethical situations. Such de- and re-linking of citizenship elements, actors, and spaces have been occasioned by the dispersion and realignment of market strategies, resources and actors (Ong 2006:7).

In this passage, Ong suggests that when we look more closely at the exceptions created by neoliberalism, we see how transnational markets and forces can reconfigure citizenship and human rights claims. In this way, we can link the dynamics of illicit markets that prey upon migrant vulnerability and the emergence of religious humanitarian organizations that utilize discourses of human rights, both of which impact the ways citizenship, mobility and il/legality operate along the journey.

As stated, a central component of the discourse within the movement is an end to impunity. People talk about impunity in relation to the Mexican state and the ability of state and non-state actors to systematically commit violence against migrants without recourse. Yet the tactics and practices of solidarity and social justice within the

movement tell us something more about how impunity is resisted. Green argues that impunity must be understood as more than a legal process, but a social process defined by a mix of silence, memory, "historical amnesia and widespread indifference" (Green 2011b:22). Building off this definition, we can begin to locate sites of resistance to violence and to impunity in the work of social memory and public collective struggle. Through making their own histories known, these women refuse to let their children be forgotten. Furthermore, while the women who are at the frontlines of these movements for migrant rights are suffering, they are not suffering alone nor solely in private. Rather, they are making their suffering highly visible, through the media, in public marches, events, and their annual caravan, to compel people to see not only what they have gone through, as women and family members who have lost a loved one, but to raise awareness on the structural and state conditions that contribute to violence against migrants.

In the context of human rights activism along the caravans, hope is expressed in the vision of a future without violence and an end to impunity, but also in the possibility of finding closure on the location or demise of disappeared family members. In this way, much of the movement crosses boundaries between the private and public through interweaving narratives of deeply personal loss and experiences with public critique of local, national and transnational structures, institutions and practices. The "personal is political" lies beneath much of the discourse of the movement and tells us a lot about how violence in Mexico has penetrated the most sacred and private spaces of family life. These women are openly critical of state and transnational processes that contribute to

their personal suffering and the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Central American migrants who pass through Mexico each year. Out of migration histories of violence, loss and impunity these mothers offer us concrete examples of hope and solidarity.

The caravan of mothers exemplify some of the ways violence is not only a destructive social force, and mechanism for the commodification of human bodies, labor and lives, but can also be the basis for collective struggle. The intimate labors performed by both these groups are connected to transnational economies of violence and exploitation, but also of hope. A larger goal of my work is to present the more nuanced and gendered dimensions of migration that highlights the complexity of motivations, strategies and negotiations of migrants in transit to show how they are both victims of *and* agents within the well-worn paths of capital and power. Global economic processes like neoliberalism and migration can be traced to histories of war and social dislocation, new forms of profit and exploitation, as well as the intimate histories of families, bodies and transnational solidarities.

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