

2016

Central American Youth Emigration: The Intersection of Insecurity and Corruption

Shannon Lydon

Connecticut College, slydon@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/hisphp>



Part of the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lydon, Shannon, "Central American Youth Emigration: The Intersection of Insecurity and Corruption" (2016). *Hispanic Studies Honors Papers*. 4.

<https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/hisphp/4>

This Honors Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Hispanic Studies Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hispanic Studies Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

Central American Youth Emigration: The Intersection of Insecurity and Corruption

Shannon Lydon

2016

Honors Thesis

Hispanic Studies Department

Connecticut College

Thesis Adviser: Professor Frank Graziano

Second Reader: Professor Joyce Bennett

Contents

1. A Note on Word Choice	3
2. Introduction	4
Part One	
1. Introduction	8
2. Physical dangers en route	12
3. Gang Violence en route	19
4. Human Trafficking	25
5. Corruption	32
6. Conclusion	38
Part Two	
1. Introduction	43
2. Economic Motivation	45
3. Political Violence Motivation	51
4. Gang Violence Motivation	57
5. Family Reunification	64
6. Street Youth	68
7. Conclusion	73
References	78

A Note on Word Choice

The word “youth” is used in place of words like “children,” “kids,” “adolescent,” “minors,” and “underage,” because it encompasses a larger group without age exclusion. The word “undocumented” is used to refer to those who migrate without documentation through Mexico into the United States, instead of the word “illegal,” which is imprecise and has marginalizing connotations. In legal terms, calling an immigrant without documentation “illegal” is inaccurate. It is a civil offense to be in the United States without proper documentation and it is a misdemeanor to enter the country without proper documentation. Additionally, the word “illegal” implies an unpermitted existence, stripping a person of their civil and workplace rights. The “Northern Triangle” is a geographical region that includes El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Although youth emigrate from various countries in Central and South America, this thesis focuses on those departing from the Northern Triangle. Finally, the term “*La Bestia*” refers collectively to the cargo trains that travel from the southern to northern borders of Mexico.

Introduction

“The [accident] is another example of the Mexican government’s abandonment of human beings who are on our national territory. According to our constitution, the government has the obligation to ensure the physical integrity of all the people who are on this land.”¹

In August of 2013, a cargo train derailed in the Mexican state of Tabasco, tipping eight of its twelve wagons. Five undocumented migrants who were riding on top of the train died and eighteen others were injured because of the crash. Weather conditions may have contributed to the derailment, but authorities believe that the main cause was metal plaques missing in the tracks. They had been stolen to sell for scrap metal. The theft of railroad parts like metal plaques and the iron nails that fix tracks to the ground have frequently been reported in the state of Tabasco. After this crash, the law enforcement authorities did not intervene to prevent thefts that can cause derailment, and their indifference allows other petty crimes to continue to place people in danger. Such official negligence adversely affects migrants who face dangers formidable in themselves and exacerbated by government inaction.

Although a seemingly isolated tragedy, this incident is a synecdoche for the larger intersection of violence, insecurity, and corruption marking migration through Mexico on freight trains. Each element of the Tabasco derailment highlights the complexities and insecurities of Central American migration to the United States. Youth migrants are forced to travel on clandestine routes by dangerous means due to their dire economic circumstances, lack of access to documented migration, and urgency to escape from their home communities. The uninvestigated theft of the metal plaques and iron nails from the train tracks suggest the many more significant crimes such as beatings, torture, rape, extortion, and death along the migrant

¹ The quoted passage is from http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/train-carrying-hundreds-migrants-derailed-mexico/story?id=20071646.

trail. Government corruption, negligence, indifference to migrants' rights, complicity in crime, and overarching inefficacy compound these crimes. The human rights of youth migrants are insignificant in the view of the Mexican government, as demonstrated in microcosm by ignoring scrap-metal theft that causes derailments and in macrocosm by ignoring or colluding with the violence directed toward migrant youth in transit. These youth are the focal point of violence, vulnerable to gangs and corrupt police officers due to their age and economic and political status as impoverished, undocumented migrants.

This focused example of danger en route to the United States illustrates in miniature the grand scale of violence, insecurity, and corruption that marks migration through Mexico for undocumented Central American youth. Each element mentioned previously interacts with the others to perpetuate a structure that empowers gangs and corrupt officials by taking advantage of desperation and vulnerability. The August 2013 train derailment is pivotal in illuminating the realities of emigration from Central America that thousands face each year, and it exemplifies the larger scale of crime, complicity of the Mexican government in illicit activities from local-level actors and organized crime groups, social exclusion of Central American migrants in Mexico, and resulting injury and death of thousands who are pursuing a better life in the United States. These dangers en route are accepted as inevitable parts of a journey that offers the hope of a promising future. Moreover, incidents of violence towards migrants are systemic. Tragedies such as this are most fully understood when viewed not in isolation, but rather as a part of the larger cycle of corruption, crime, and negligence that exploits migrant vulnerabilities.

Part One of this thesis analyzes the dangers en route that Central American migrant youth face on the system of cargo trains known collectively as *La Bestia*. These dangers include physical injury caused by falling off the train, as well as kidnapping, extortion, torture, and death

perpetrated by local-level actors, gangs, police and border patrol officials, train conductors, and other migrants. The human rights violations that occur en route are innumerable, with estimates noting high rates of violence towards migrants. In 2010, 11,000 migrants were kidnapped in a six-month period. Two years later, 70,000 migrants were disappeared in Mexico. Additionally, it is estimated that six of ten women are raped en route.² The horrors that migrants face while traveling to the United States not only reveal a common theme of inhumanity, but also the economies of migration that result in the commodification of human beings.

Part Two analyzes the context and motivations that force youth to emigrate. The focus is on Central American insecurity and violence as it relates to migration. Raised in an environment marked by poverty, the lingering consequences of civil war, gang recruitment, and domestic violence, youth emigrate from their homes to flee violence, follow family members, or pursue hopes for a better life. The decision to emigrate and the route through Mexico mark the intersection of political insecurity, economic instability, and violence for Central American youth migrants.³ Youths' motivations to emigrate raise a larger question concerning free will and whether the choice to migrate is truly volitional or forced by circumstances.

Both Part One and Part Two discuss the vulnerability of migrants and the human rights violations that they face in their home countries and en route to the United States. It is important to outline these vulnerabilities and violations as they pertain to Central American youth pre-transit and in-transit. Due to their age and stage of psychological development, youth are especially vulnerable. Their decision-making capabilities are not fully developed, making it very difficult to evaluate risk and assess important life decisions such as emigration. Additionally,

² Regarding these estimates see http://www.american.edu/clals/upload/CLALS-Working-Paper_CA-Migrants-in-Mexico.pdf.

³ Regarding this intersection, see Yarris, Kristin, and Heide Castañeda.

these youth are vulnerable due to their economic backgrounds. Raised in poor communities, many Central American youth do not have access to a quality education and come from families rife with domestic violence. These deprivations and vulnerabilities affect their decision-making ability, and also contribute to youths' lack of access to human rights in the broad sense, including access to food, water, clothing, medical care, education, and safety inside and outside of their homes. In most cases, youth are not aware of their entitlement to human rights.

This thesis is based on research in various published primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include news articles and published interviews. Secondary sources include academic books and journal articles, reports from the U.S. Department of State, and documentaries.

PART ONE

Introduction

“This is The Beast, the snake, the machine, the monster. These trains are full of legends and their history is soaked with blood. Some of the most superstitious migrants say that The Beast is the devil’s invention. Others say that the train’s squeaks and creaks are the cries of those who lost their life under its wheels. Steel against steel.”⁴

One of the most common ways for Central American youth to migrate through Mexico is by way of freight trains. These trains, carrying various goods from Mexico to the United States, are marked by extreme risks, ranging from the physical dangers of riding a speeding freight train to gang and police violence. These trains transport a variety of products to the United States, including food, automobiles, transportation equipment, cement, chemicals, and plastic. They are operated by several private companies and work their way through various routes to different entries to the United States, including the U.S. border at California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Migrants risk both their lives and their limbs riding the cargo trains. Traveling on *La Bestia* requires changing trains up to fifteen times, with rides lasting from six hours to three days. Most who ride these freight trains expect an arduous journey in which, if they are lucky enough not to perish, often ends in physical and psychological trauma. Despite these expectations, migrants continue to embark upon the journey through Mexico to the United States with the hope that a promising future awaits them.

After leaving their home countries, the journey north for youth from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras begins at the Suchiate River at the Mexico-Guatemala border where

⁴ This quoted passage is from Martínez p. 53.

unaccompanied migrants pay a fee, typically around \$1.50, to cross on an inner-tube raft.⁵ Once they have crossed the border, migrants must walk 170 miles to arrive at Arriaga, Chiapas where they await the arrival of the freight trains. The walk across the border into Chiapas is one of the many stages of the long and dangerous journey through Mexico. Most migrants arrive in Chiapas impeded by swollen, blistered, and bleeding feet from the journey, which can last from ten to eighteen days.⁶

The two freight train stations closest to the Mexico-Guatemala border are located at Tapachula, Chiapas and at Tenosique, Tabasco. Both routes from Tapachula and Tenosique converge in the state of Veracruz and continue to Lecheria. Migrants loiter while waiting for *La Bestia*, in many cases unsure of which train to take and lengthening their journey if they choose incorrectly. Up to hundreds of migrants chase the approaching train to board at the same time. When trains do not arrive on schedule, as many as five hundred migrants accumulate on the tracks for days as they await a train's arrival.⁷ Waiting for the train forces migrants to idle in the elements, causing dehydration and hunger even before the journey on *La Bestia* begins.

After a thirteen-hour ride from Arriaga to Ixtepec, Oaxaca, the journey continues to various checkpoints, until those migrants who survive riding the train and avoid gangs, immigration officials, and deportation eventually reach a point at the border.⁸ Upon arrival in Lecheria, migrants choose a train depending on what part of the U.S.-Mexico border they intend to reach. Those migrants wanting to cross through the Rio Grande Valley and other points in eastern Texas take the gulf route; those wanting to cross into Arizona or California take the

⁵ Regarding crossing the Suchiate River, See Aridijis.

⁶ Regarding the problems related to walking through Mexico, see Sanchez.

⁷ Regarding migrants waiting for *La Bestia*, see Sladkova p. 18.

⁸ Regarding a map of migration routes, see <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-its-like-to-ride-the-train-of-death-from-mexico-to-the-us-2015-11>.

Pacific route; and those wanting to cross into Western Texas or New Mexico follow a train route through the center of Mexico. The reopening of the train route between Tapachula and Arriaga in 2014 after nine years of inactivity marked a major turning point; it is now a significant point of entry along the Mexico-Guatemala border for Central American migrants.⁹ Between 2013 and 2014, the number of undocumented Central American youth crossing the U.S.-Mexico border increased by 90 percent, owing in part to this reopening.¹⁰

Economic status affects the means of migration. Those who migrate legally have the resources to do so, similar to those migrants who can afford to pay a coyote to smuggle them into the United States. Central Americans require a visa to travel to Mexico; without documentation, traveling by bus or plane results in an almost guaranteed deportation back to their home countries due to the high volume of police patrols at bus stations and airports across the country. For the poorest migrants emigrating from Central America, riding *La Bestia* is the most promising option. Youth who ride the trains are those who cannot afford a smuggler to plan and execute their migration or purchase forged visas to travel on safer routes through Mexico. In terms of time and money, riding the trains is the most reasonable decision for youth because the ride is ideally free and faster than other routes. As a result, thousands who cannot afford to travel safely with documentation through Mexico, or at least with the guidance of a coyote, board *La Bestia* hoping to arrive in the United States.

Migrants find in transit that the journey is more arduous than they anticipated and various incidents with criminals and corrupt officials necessitate money for survival. The route entails riding several trains and frequently seeking refuge at shelters run by organizations that assist migrants in transit. These shelters generally offer food, water, clothing, and other supplies

⁹ Regarding train routes and supplement images, see Jacobs.

¹⁰ Regarding these statistics, see Perez.

migrants may need. Jesus el Buen Pastor shelter in Tapachula, Chiapas is an example of such a shelter. Located near the Mexico-Guatemala border, this shelter offers migrants medical observation, health care from professionals, and the basic needs of food, lodging, and clothing while migrants recuperate to continue their journey north. Many migrants are injured or debilitated en route but are refused medical care in hospitals due to their undocumented status and lack of financial resources. In response, shelters such as Jesus el Buen Pastor in Tapachula offer the medical, emotional, and physical support migrants need to survive and continue on their journey. After regaining their energy, some migrants resume the journey on the trains while others, demoralized, return home.

On *La Bestia*, physical dangers, gang violence, and corrupt police and border patrol follow migrants on and off the trains as they migrate through Mexico. I treat these dangers individually, beginning with the physical dangers of riding the freight trains and continuing with an analysis of gang violence, human trafficking, and various forms of corruption. This section also discusses the response from the Mexican and United States' governments to undocumented migration, and how this response has affected the migrant experience. Although this section treats the dangers en route individually for clarity of exposition, they are interactive and migrants face the challenge of navigating a complex web of dangers. Migrants face many, if not all, of these dangers while riding *La Bestia* and experience each danger differently. This section closes by questioning why youth continue to migrate despite the dangers and whether their choice to do so is made freely.

Physical Dangers en Route

“The roofs of the train cars are where the undocumented Central Americans ride. These are the tracks where the wheels of steel slice through legs, arms, and heads.”¹¹

One of the most visible and pressing dangers on board *La Bestia* is physical injury, not necessarily due to violence but to the inherent risks of riding a speeding freight train.

Unaccompanied youth traveling on top of freight trains do not have anything to hold onto for support. As a result, it is very common for migrants to fall off due to a change in speed or being struck by an object such as a branch. Undocumented migrant Elvira Lopez, standing with the support of two crutches, recounted her story riding *La Bestia* through Mexico.¹² Five days into her journey from Guatemala she was knocked off the train by a tree branch after she had fallen asleep. She stands now on one leg, the other amputated, at the Jesus el Buen Pastor shelter in Tapachula. Migrant Jessica Ochoa recounts a similar experience.¹³ From El Salvador, she was twenty years old when she attempted the journey north to the United States. She fell off a cargo train and the wheel severed her right leg, after which she lost nearly half of her blood en route to the hospital. Such accidents are common, and most migrants are aware that they occur.

Another common cause of falling is derailment. Cargo trains frequently derail because their heavy weight causes tracks to shake, and also because of frequent theft of track parts. In August of 2013, a cargo train derailed in a remote area of southern Mexico, killing six and injuring thirty-five.¹⁴ Due to the difficult terrain, ambulances were unable to reach the accident scene where twelve cars overturned. Those migrants who survived fled the scene, avoiding

¹¹ This quoted passage is from Martínez p. 49.

¹² Regarding Elvira’s story, see Taylor.

¹³ Regarding Jessica Ochoa’s story, see Penhaul.

¹⁴ This train derailment story is from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-derailment-idUSBRE97O09Z20130825>.

police and immigration authorities. A year later another cargo train derailed, stranding thirteen hundred migrants. This derailment was due to a heavy rainstorm in southern Mexico that caused the tracks to shift. Authorities have encouraged train conductors to increase the speed of their trains to discourage migrants from jumping on board. However, this has only increased the rate of train derailments and has done little to discourage migrant boarding. These situations highlight the unavoidable physical danger that comes with riding *La Bestia*.

Migrants fight off exhaustion and physical pain to maintain their grip on the trains and stay awake. Many tie themselves to the train, often utilizing a belt or a piece of rope to allow themselves the relief of a short period of sleep.¹⁵ Fighting off exhaustion was the most difficult struggle for migrant Jaime, who dreamed of traveling to the United States to save money to purchase land in Honduras after a hurricane destroyed all that he once owned. His desperate need to rebuild his home and his life in Honduras with his wife forced him onto the trains towards the United States. Jaime, like many other migrants, could not fight off sleep forever. After hours of staying awake and holding onto the trains, Jaime gave in and closed his eyes. He awoke almost instantly to the sensation of his body plummeting off the train. Jaime was left on the ground, desperate and alone, with his right leg completely severed by the last train car. He remembered this moment as many other migrants do, stating: “I felt fine. It didn’t hurt.”¹⁶ At first, it does not hurt.

Migrants are frozen in shock from what has occurred, but eventually the pain is excruciating. In an interview with the National Public Radio (NPR), one migrant notes how he dealt with losing his leg when falling off *La Bestia*: “It feels like getting an electric shock in your

¹⁵ Here I am following Martínez p. 62.

¹⁶ Regarding Jamie’s story, see Martínez pgs. 54-56.

nerves. But you have to handle it mentally and not give in, even if it hurts.”¹⁷ Another migrant, José Luis, remembers his attempt to migrate to the U.S. when he was seventeen riding *La Bestia* most of the way: “Even though you know the risks you never think it will happen to you.” While riding *La Bestia* in Chihuahua, José Luis took his shoes off of his swollen feet, exhausted, and fell asleep. He awoke, plummeting from the train and losing his leg in the process. When he tried to pull it out from under the train he lost his arm. Jose Luis recalls that he would have died if a Red Cross paramedic did not get him to the hospital just in time. “I believe God left me alive for some purpose. I’m still searching for what that is. I think it’s to help these guys. That motivates me a lot.”¹⁸ Currently, he is the President of the Association of Migrants Returned with Disabilities, a support and advocacy group based in Honduras. Organizations such as these are integral for the physical and emotional needs of migrants wounded from the journey on top of these cargo trains.

After the shock wears off, the pain tears through the migrants’ bodies until it becomes unbearable, and they bleed to death unless someone rescues them quickly. Migrant bodies have been found lying near the tracks, left for dead after falling off cargo trains. Once they fall off the train due to change in speed, derailment, being pushed, or being struck by an object, migrants, especially youth, are at risk of abuse carried out by local-level criminals, organized crimes, corrupt immigration officials, and other migrants.

Migrants also face the elements while riding *La Bestia*.¹⁹ During the night, temperatures drop drastically and youth huddle together for warmth, making it impossible to sleep even if their grip is tight enough to the rails due to the cramped space and uncomfortable temperatures.

¹⁷ Regarding the audio clip from this interview, see <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/18/460300307/what-it-s-like-to-fall-off-la-bestia>.

¹⁸ Regarding José Luis’ story, see the audio clip in previous note.

¹⁹ Regarding weather conditions, see Sanchez p. 44.

Multiple layers of pants, shirts, and jackets, if migrants are lucky enough to possess them, are not sufficient to protect them from the cold temperatures. As a result, each evening youth migrants withstand freezing temperatures and sleep deprivation. During the day, heat from the sun burns migrants who cannot access shade. As a result, they face blistering heat and the threat of dehydration. Harsh weather conditions exacerbate an already exhausting situation in which migrants must simultaneously grapple with dehydration, starvation, and extreme temperatures, each damaging their physical wellbeing. Migrants rely on generosity and kindness of Mexicans who live near the tracks, of shelters, and of churches that offer medical assistance and sanctuary.

Las Patronas of Veracruz are a widely known group of Mexican women who assist Central Americans riding *La Bestia*. They were awarded Mexico's most prestigious human rights prize in 2013 for their work with undocumented migrants.²⁰ The Romero Vazquez sisters created this charitable organization one day while waiting to cross the train tracks with their groceries. After hearing migrants shout from the train about hunger and dehydration, these women began throwing bread and cartons of milk to migrants on the train. Over the past two decades, Las Patronas have helped tens of thousands of migrants traveling on cargo trains. Their organization compiles portions of rice, beans, and corn tortillas to throw to migrants as they pass on top of the trains and has expanded from producing thirty packages to hundreds daily for migrants.

In the town of Tenosique in the state of Tabasco, migrant shelter La 72 houses as many as 250 people and is one of the largest shelters in the country. Created by Friar Tomás González Castillo, La 72 responds to the needs of migrants and the human rights violations they face on their journey to the United States. The shelter began with a few beds in a spare space behind a church and has now expanded to a compound of a half-dozen cinder block buildings. The walls

²⁰ Regarding the information concerning Las Patronas, see Grant.

are covered with artistic pieces depicting Che Guevara, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Zapatista bandanas, creating an atmosphere of power, revitalization, and hope. The shelter offers a map through Mexico that marks the areas that drug cartels control, helping youth and other migrants avoid potential areas of danger. La 72 is a sanctuary space, protected from the authorities who otherwise detain and deport migrants; however, officials are close by, waiting to arrest migrants as they leave the shelter and return to the migrant trail. Although most migrants only stay for a few days, the shelter offers food, lodging, and restoration of self-worth and dignity to those who have been disparaged by officials, border patrol, gangs, and segments of the Mexican community.²¹

The Albergue Jesus Buen Pastor del Pobre y el Migrante shelter in Tapacula attends to the needs of those who lost limbs or suffered other injuries falling off the train. This shelter was founded by Sister Olga in 1990, who invested her entire life savings to do so. The only “medical” migrant shelter in Mexico, this albergue fundraises by selling bread at church on Sunday, doughnuts on the streets during the week, and other food at community events. However, this is not enough sufficient to meet the rising debt the shelter now faces. The \$3,600 the shelter owes to the electric company does not compare to the organization’s overall \$50,000 debt. Sister Olga, along with others who run migrant shelters in Mexico, struggles to handle both the humanitarian efforts and financial problems that shelters face in order to serve migrants with insufficient budgets.²²

The risks that migrant shelters face are more than financial ones. Gangs do not tolerate church involvement in migrant human rights and send clear messages to church leaders on this

²¹ Regarding information concerning La 72, see Cottrell.

²² Regarding information on Albergue Jesus Buen Pastor del Pobre y el Migrante shelter, see <https://cronkite.asu.edu/buffett/chiapas/on-long-journey-to-the-states-migrants-find-brief-solace-in-shelter/>.

point. González and his staff at La 72 have received several death threats from Los Zetas, a gang based in Mexico.²³ The police provided him and the shelter with security, but the help was from the same police that compete and work with Los Zetas to terrorize and profit from migrants. Additionally, staff at the shelter reported some of the protection measures were not adequately implemented; on one occasion police protection was withdrawn without warning and only returned twenty days later. De facto, impunity for criminals is rampant in cases of gang threats; officials will not implement protection plans or formally report on the problem of gang violence against migrants. Despite these threats, shelters such as La 72 have continued to offer support to migrants and advocate for immigration reform, offering aid to migrants despite intimidation and terrorization from organized crime groups and complicit government officials.

Threats to shelters come not only from gangs, but also from other members of the Mexican community. These threats stem from a widespread hatred of Central American migrants. Shelters run by Roman Catholic churches are created in small neighborhoods across Mexico close to the railroad tracks. Consequently, residents come into contact with migrants who enter and leave the community daily. Migrants confront both racial and ethnic discrimination and social exclusion from Mexican residents who fear Central Americans, especially those who travel clandestinely through their country. They claim to be trapped in their homes while migrants litter their streets, raise crime rates, and assault women. Many residents gather and create neighborhood watch patrols to keep the crime they attribute to undocumented migrants in check. Conflicts between migrants and Mexican neighbors who oppose migrant sanctuaries in their communities perpetuate Central Americans' social displacement and insecurity in Mexico.

²³ Here I am following Jeffrey p. 29.

Mexican xenophobia resulted in the closing of many migrant shelters: the Casa del Migrante in Lecheria is a well-known example.²⁴ This shelter was a safe haven for vulnerable migrants on their journey. Residents of this community, fearing the migrants that inhabited the shelter, posted banners demanding the closing of Casa del Migrante. Later, neighbors blocked the door to the shelter, preventing people inside from leaving. Similarly, the San José de Huehuetoca shelter in central Mexico was forced to close in November of 2012.²⁵ This was the third shelter to close in four months due to resident complaints. Intolerance and xenophobia, coupled with the actions of organized criminal groups and corrupt government officials, intensify insecurity for migrants on and off the trains. Not only do youth face physical danger due to assault and injury, but they also face ostracism from the Mexican community, a feeling that reproduces experiences that they had hoped to leave behind them.

In 2011, a nun working with the Pastoral de la Movilidad Humana told the Inter Press Service (IPS) that their shelters and staff received death threats from organized crime groups and the authorities.²⁶ They reported that their electric generators had been sabotaged, their electricity cut off, and their windows broken. Similarly, the Casa del Migrante San Juan Diego on the outskirts of the capital was forced to close in July of 2012 due to protests from the local population. The shelter set up a new camp under a bridge where the cargo trains pass, but was later driven out by the same local community. Both of these shelters reflect similar experiences of hundreds of others across Mexico. Their experiences illustrate the harassment migrants face from criminals, the government, and the local Mexican community due to their ethnicity and

²⁴ Here I am following Shoichet.

²⁵ Regarding information on the San José de Huehuetoca shelter, see Sanchez, Mayela.

²⁶ Regarding information on the Pastoral de la Movilidad Humana and Casa del Migrante San Juan Diego's, see <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/08/shelters-for-undocumented-migrants-under-threat-in-mexico/>.

undocumented status. This is one of many obstacles faced by migrants on their journey to the United States, exacerbating an already dangerous route.

Gang Violence en Route

“Their secret is simply fear. They shake the bones of policemen and taxi drivers, lawyers and migrants. All you need to do to get someone to dance the dance of fear is to utter the famous, simple motto: we are Los Zetas.”²⁷

While migrating through Mexico, youth face violence from gangs and organized criminal groups. Undocumented migrants regard robberies and assaults as inevitable on the road to the United States. In Arriaga, Palenque, Tenosique, and Veracruz, Central American gangs charge fees of up to US \$100 to ride on top of the train.²⁸ Those who cannot pay are turned away, abused, or thrown off the train if it is already moving. Failure to produce payment at any point en route results in beatings, rape, forced joining of the gang, or death. Organized crime groups profit from human mobility and the vulnerability of youth traveling alone, objectifying their bodies as sources of economic gain. It is unlikely that youth who are able to cross the Mexico-Guatemala border and board the freight trains carry money. This is due to the fees they have already paid to cross the border into Mexico and to their economic status. Without the means to pay gangs such as Los Zetas to board the train, youth are targeted for forced labor such as sex work or drug trafficking.

Kidnappings perpetrated by gangs are just as common as migrant assaults, and frequently occur in groups. Los Zetas execute what is known as the “kidnapper express,” capturing many migrants at once and holding them for ransom. Óscar Martínez recounts a kidnapping story at the

²⁷ This quoted passage is from Martínez p.114.

²⁸ Here I follow Isacson.

hands of Los Zetas in his novel *The Beast*. Los Zetas kidnapped fifty-two undocumented migrants and kept them crammed in a house in the town of La Victoria.²⁹ The gang demanded \$1,500 to \$5,000 per person, beating and raping migrants and killing two who attempted to run away. Families in Central America recount similar stories in which their children or other family members leave for the United States and months pass without notice of their whereabouts. Families who are contacted about their loved one who was kidnapped generally receive information from a third party demanding money. A family member is given a bank account number and coerced to transfer money. Even after fulfilling the gang's demands, family members may never hear from the migrant.³⁰

Additionally, boys are commonly recruited to join gangs, sometimes forcefully. Families will go months without hearing from their sons, who later call their parents to inform them that they work for one of the cartels. Youth are targeted by gangs due to their vulnerability, undocumented status, and lack of a clear destination. Los Zetas recruit boys with limited economic opportunities, infiltrating shelters and targeting those who are most vulnerable. Once kidnapped, youth are forced by threat of death to work for the cartels. In some cases, migrant boys are simply approached by gang members and asked to join them. Honduran migrant Samuel Alberto Centeno Vazquez remembers how he was approached to work for the Zetas while he was making his way to catch *La Bestia*.³¹ Carrying pistols, members of the gang offered him \$1,000 monthly salary, girls, and drugs. Centeno Vazquez notes how he was offered the money to help the Zetas in their criminal activities, including murder, drug trafficking, kidnapping, and

²⁹ Here I am following Martínez p. 111.

³⁰ Regarding information about migrant kidnappings, see McPhail.

³¹ Regarding Samuel Alberto Centeno's story, see

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/07/17/in-mexico-cartels-recruit-vulnerable-migrants.html>.

extortion. Although he declined, Centeno Vazquez knows many that have joined their ranks, lured by the money, sense of family, and hope for a better future.³²

The human rights violations of migrants perpetrated by gangs in transit through Mexico are disregarded through government inaction, especially in cases of disappearances. It is estimated that between 70,000 and 120,000 migrants have gone missing in transit in Mexico since 2006. Almost 50 percent of these disappearances happened between 2012 and 2014, indicating an upsurge in recent years.³³ Los Zetas are frequently connected to the discovery of mass graves across Mexico. The San Fernando massacres are an example of these discoveries, two instances of mass kidnapping and murder of migrants in San Fernando in the state of Tamaulipas. In 2010, members of Los Zetas murdered seventy-two migrants from Central and South America. Fifty-eight men and fourteen women were shot in the head and piled together in a ranch; they were discovered later due to information provided by a surviving Ecuadorian who escaped by faking his death.³⁴ In April and May of 2011, 193 bodies were discovered in forty-seven clandestine graves in San Fernando, all belonging to migrants kidnapped and murdered by Los Zetas, some because they refused to work as drug mules.³⁵ The mass kidnapping and murder of over two hundred migrants in San Fernando proves the control of organized crime groups such as Los Zetas over the Mexican state and the gravity of their expanding illicit activities.

Another form of disappearance, referred to as enforced disappearance, occurs when state agents participate directly in abductions, or indirectly through support or acquiescence.³⁶ In most

³² Violence carried out against women is found in Corruption section.

³³ Regarding information concerning this Caravan of Mothers, see <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/17946>.

³⁴ Regarding the kidnapping of seventy-two migrants, see Valencia.

³⁵ Regarding the death toll from the San Fernando massacre, see Aguirre.

³⁶ Here I am following <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/02/20/mexicos-disappeared/enduring-cost-crisis-ignored>.

cases, authorities fail to promptly and thoroughly search for the victims or investigate the case. In November of 2011, armed men in Coahuila abducted twenty-three undocumented Central American migrants and forced them into pick-up trucks. One migrant who escaped filed a formal complaint with the federal prosecutor's office, joined by another migrant a few weeks later. He arrived at the federal prosecutor's office with a human rights defender, but the prosecutor would not allow the defender to be present. The prosecutor would not take the migrant's testimony and turned both the migrant and defender away. This migrant's experience exemplifies the impunity that corrupt government officials benefit from in cases regarding migrant disappearances, demonstrated by not allowing the migrant access to the resources he has a right to, such as a human rights defender.

Migrants generally do not report gang-related abuses, and for a variety of reasons. Due to their transitory status, migrants continue on their journey with haste and cannot report abuses having already departed from the location of the incident. Additionally, and more importantly, they are reluctant to speak to authorities for fear of repatriation. As the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances states, undocumented migrants "are particularly vulnerable to enforced disappearances due to their undocumented status and the lack of financial resources, effective laws, protection schemes, and judicial remedies available to them."³⁷ Although disappearances are mainly carried out by organized crime groups, government collusion to this illicit activity allows migrants to continue to face these threats and discourages them from reporting any cases to the authorities.

³⁷ This quote is from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/02/20/mexicos-disappeared/enduring-cost-crisis-ignored>.

The Caravan of Central American Mothers in Search of Their Disappeared Children publically confronted the lack of human rights and respect of migrants in 2013.³⁸ Thirty women from Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador traveled through the states of Tabasco, Veracruz, Puebla, Oaxaca, Mexico City, Tlaxcala, and Chiapas to raise awareness of the forced disappearances and the human rights violations on the trains, on the streets, in shelters, in prisons, in brothels, and at the hands of organized crime groups and government officials such as corrupt members of the Mexican National Migration Institute. Although some parents are never reunited with their children, they nevertheless denounce the abuses of migrants in Mexico during frequent trips and humanized the hundreds of victims of disappearances across Mexico.

Los Zeta's control of a region is nearly comprehensive, including almost all aspects of life and of crimes ranging from kidnappings to extortions, murders, drug trafficking, and pirated movies.³⁹ Migrant kidnappings take place in close proximity to the rails because gang members await the migrants who are their victims, and city and state officials permit the abductions because they know there are reprisals for interference. Gang members also pay off officials to not interfere in their illicit activities. Jorge Andrade, who works at the San José migrant shelter, notes how gang members wait as migrants get off the train and are charged a toll to walk the twenty kilometers to reach the shelter. The San Jose migrant shelter later closed due to threats received by staff from Los Zetas.

Areas not controlled by Los Zetas prove equally violent because they are suitable for attacks by local-level actors. Local bandits assault and rob migrants on and off the trains in areas where Los Zetas have not established their dominance. In a town known as El Escopetazo in the state of Chiapas, local bandits hide beneath a bridge over which the train passes. Here, they wait

³⁸ Regarding the caravan of mothers, see Petrich.

³⁹ Regarding Los Zeta's control, see Martínez p.117.

for migrants who get off the train to pass and assault them, demanding money and beating and raping those who do not comply.⁴⁰ Due to combinations of lack of resources, negligence, and complicity, Mexican governmental officials do not confront migrant assaults carried out by local-level actors, hindering migrants from fighting for their own rights. As a result, migrants face insecurity throughout their entire journey, even in spaces where organized criminal groups are not present.

Los Zetas, in addition to other gangs in Central America, creates a culture of fear that facilitates their criminal enterprise. People will not even speak openly about Los Zetas for fear of retribution. As one anonymous journalist commented, “No one even honks their horn in the streets here-- you might anger the wrong person. And now, every thug with a pistol says he’s a Zeta because he knows it terrifies people.”⁴¹ This culture of violence and fear is particularly dangerous for undocumented migrants, who are most vulnerable. It is impossible to escape the culture of violence Los Zetas created because they control the routes to the border, making it impossible to cross without their permission; this permission has a steep price that does not always require money.

Migrants’ experience with violence can be traced back to their home countries and their reasons for fleeing. As Wendy A. Vogt notes, “many migrants do not conceptualize the violence they experience along the journey as new or unique but as a continuation of processes they have known their whole lives.”⁴² Violence is rooted in structural flaws and historical processes that marginalize groups of people and reduces safety in their homes and on the streets. Migrants’ entire lives are shaped by violence. Fear of the state and day-to-day crime and violence in their

⁴⁰ Regarding the violence in El Escopetazo, see Cuevas.

⁴¹ This quote is from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113388071>.

⁴² Regarding information on commodification, see Vogt p. 765.

homes follow migrants, indicating a larger structural violence. The frequency of such violence leads to its normalization and justification, which mark all criminal activity and human rights abuses en route to the United States.

Human Trafficking

“With these women, everyday words take on new meanings. The word sex means rape. The word family refers to a fellow victim. And a body is little more than a ticket from one hell to another.

It’s called “The Trade”: thousands of female Central American migrants, far from their American dreams, trapped in prostitution rings in Southern Mexico.”⁴³

A profitable system dominated by drug cartels and perpetuated by police corruption and impunity, human trafficking takes many forms and preys on the vulnerability of youth. By utilizing various physical and psychological control mechanisms, organized crime groups generate millions of dollars through the commodification of the human body. Each aspect of the migrant body is commodified, transformed into an object to sell and exchange. There are various forms of human trafficking and ways in which a person can be exploited. The human trafficking industry is dominated by groups such as Los Zetas and creates thousands of cases of human rights violations with the complicity of the police.

The Tahirih Justice Center defines human trafficking of migrant youth by outlining two types of exploitation: labor and sex.⁴⁴ In both cases, there are three structural elements: a process or action, the means through which this process is carried out, and the particular end result. This includes recruiting, harboring, moving or obtaining a person by force, fraud or coercion for the

⁴³ This quoted passage is from Martínez p. 67.

⁴⁴ Regarding information concerning UAC survivors of human trafficking, see the Tahirih Justice Center.

purposes of involuntary servitude, debt bondage, slavery or a commercial sexual act. The average age of youth targeted by traffickers is twelve to fourteen years old. Trafficked youth are forced into domestic services, servile marriages, construction, agricultural fields, and brothels, and they are controlled through various mechanisms, including confiscation of legal documents, isolation, creation of inhumane living conditions, threats of deportation, physical or sexual abuse, and threats to family members. In addition to these mechanisms, traffickers take advantage of youth migrant's fear of law enforcement and repatriation.

The perpetrators of human trafficking exploit the vulnerability of undocumented youth migrants in Mexico. These migrants are powerless not only as a result of their youth, but also of their precarious circumstances and legal status. Due to these vulnerabilities, organized crime groups lure migrants into a situation in which they are forced to accept undesirable terms of service. Human traffickers generally target individuals desperate to migrate due to their economic situation. Many do not realize they are being victimized.⁴⁵ This was the case with Liliana when she decided to leave El Salvador in search of work. A family friend promised to take her to the United States, but deceived her and brought her to Mexico. Members of Los Zetas caught Liliana after she ran away, offering her work and food if she joined them. Tempted by this promise, Liliana joined and was later forced into prostitution and drugged constantly until her aunt in El Salvador ransomed her freedom.⁴⁶ Perpetrators manipulate migrants and gain their trust, promising safe passage to the United States and giving false hope of employment. Lacking the means to challenge their exploiters, undocumented youth are forced to accept illicit work against their will in fear of their traffickers.

⁴⁵ Regarding migrant vulnerability to trafficking, see Staudt, Payan, and Kruszewski p. 170.

⁴⁶ Regarding Liliana's story, see <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013/210546.htm>.

Human trafficking of undocumented migrants in Mexico is an extremely profitable system due to the country's location as a bridge for migration flow to the United States. Although it is impossible to calculate the exact value of the human trafficking trade, the U.N. estimates the global industry is worth \$32 billion a year.⁴⁷ Models for human trafficking are sophisticated and work is divided into various specializations, such as recruitment or transport, for a range of criminal groups involved. Drug cartels, facing pressure in the drug industry, have shifted resources to the business of human trafficking due to its profitable opportunities. Jaime Montejo, a spokesman for Brigada Callejera, a sex-worker support group in Mexico City, notes how the networks that traffic women in Mexico have made pacts with drug cartels; those that do not work with cartels cannot survive.⁴⁸ Criminal groups that target migrants generate millions of dollars by selling them into human trafficking, kidnapping them for ransom, extorting them, charging passage fees, and carrying out other forms of exploitation. Payment to free migrants from captivity ranges from hundreds to thousands of dollars, and the amounts are often not feasible for the victim's families.⁴⁹ The economic success of human trafficking for organized criminal groups is attributed, in part, to the corruption that is widespread across Mexico.

John Salt and Jeremy Stein outline a model for human trafficking as part of the global migration business, dividing trafficking into three stages: the mobilization and recruitment of migrants, their movement en route, and their insertion and integration into labor markets and host societies of destination countries.⁵⁰ Mobilization involves the recruitment and organization of migrants, both of which require considerable planning. Migrants are recruited in various manners, offering them the hope of employment and money. For undocumented youth, the

⁴⁷ Regarding the net worth of the human trafficking industry, see Grillo.

⁴⁸ Regarding the relationship between trafficking networks and drug cartels, see Grillo.

⁴⁹ Regarding information concerning kidnapping and payment, see Johnson.

⁵⁰ This human trafficking model follows Salt and Stein.

prospect of a job and income is, in many cases, too good to decline. In other cases, migrants are mobilized through kidnapping.

Salt and Stein also explain how trafficking involves a clear set of organizational roles for the management of migrants. This requires the complicity of border and immigration officials. In the case of human trafficking of undocumented migrants in Mexico, organized gangs have the complicity of corrupt border patrol officials and INM agents to facilitate their illicit activities. Gangs easily transport migrants for trafficking due to the culture of fear that their violence has established and maintained, thereby discouraging residents and officials to act out against them. Gangs also bribe immigration officials at checkpoints to cross with trafficked migrants. Los Zetas developed an organized system of trafficking that includes a network of contacts along common trafficking routes.

During insertion and integration in forced labor, traffickers continue to exploit migrants through debt bondage. Salt and Stein explain how migrants continue to be exploited as factory workers, prostitutes, drug carriers, or virtual prisoners until they or their family members pay the full cost of the traffickers' demands. Those who escape their trafficking situation frequently are silent concerning their traffickers in fear they will be found and killed. This model demonstrates organized criminal groups' control of migrant mobility and migrant routes through Mexico, and it explains how their power is augmented by corruption. Through Salt and Stein's model one can see how migration is an international business of movement that profits from the commodification of the migrant body and feeds off of government corruption.

Human trafficking continues to be a serious threat to undocumented migrants due to the increasing presence of organized crime groups along migration routes and the decreasing safety measures taken to protect them. As Óscar Martínez describes in his novel *The Beast*, there is

nobody to assure the safety of migrants in Mexico.⁵¹ In cases of mass kidnappings or murders, the police and military generally do not assist or file a report. Most are cognizant of the presence of migrant kidnappings, nobody acts, and the kidnappings continue. Undocumented migrant Manuel comments on gang violence and government complicity, stating: “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 artillery. The same police that denounce them are the ones who protect them.”⁵² Manuel’s insight outlines the intersection between local and global economies that profit from human mobility.

The U.S. Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* of 2014 outlines how official complicity in the human trafficking industry in Mexico is a concern, later noting how government funding for specialized victims services and shelters is inadequate and practically nonexistent in much of the country.⁵³ The rise in criminal organization’s control over activities of human trafficking gives way to corruption among authorities, which in turn facilitates the operation of Mexico’s vast and powerful criminal-business enterprises while simultaneously debilitating the State’s efforts to confront them.⁵⁴ As a result, human trafficking is perpetuated by a lack of state involvement and continues to be a present threat to migrants on routes throughout Mexico. The increasing power of organized criminal groups and impunity that they take advantage of exposes migrants to danger and transforms them into objects of commodification.

⁵¹ Regarding the lack of safety measures for migrants, see Martínez p. 93.

⁵² This quote is from Vogt. p. 764.

⁵³ Regarding flaws in the Mexican government’s response to human trafficking, see the “Trafficking in Persons Report 2014.”

⁵⁴ Regarding information on the results of corruption, see Davila.

Migrant bodies, labor, and lives are transformed into useful objects of exchange and exploitation. They are valued as cargo to smuggle, gendered bodies to sell, labor to exploit, and lives to exchange for cash.⁵⁵ Violence through human trafficking is a mechanism through which vulnerabilities are produced and profits are derived for organized crime groups. Local and global economies work together and independently to exploit and exchange migrant bodies, using violence as the main method to derive profit from the commodification of the human body. Migrant bodies are stripped of their humanity and reconstructed as statistics for immigration authorities and government reports. Although youth do not conceptualize this violence as new, but rather a continuation of the violence they have known their whole lives, they face inescapable structural forces and historical processes that undermine their success in life and ability to live safely in their homes.

Human trafficking and kidnapping of migrants objectifies youth into types of commodities that gain and lose value with local conditions. Youth's legal vulnerability as undocumented and social vulnerability as demonized outsiders contributes to their vulnerability to commodification. Additionally, migrants riding *La Bestia* are at a higher risk of violence and commodification due to their clandestine routes. In her work on commodification, Wendy Vogt notes how commodification and profit create new or locally existing forms of social tension.⁵⁶ The temptation of profit derived from commodifying the human body affects migrants and shelter workers as well as criminals. Across social groups, violence and exploitation are reproduced. This is well illustrated by the story of Jamie, a migrant-kidnapping survivor in Mexico. Jamie was found trying to recruit a migrant woman to work in a strip club. Jamie's story exemplifies the indistinct lines between victim and perpetrator. This blurring is due, in part, to

⁵⁵ Regarding information about commodification, see Vogt.

⁵⁶ Regarding commodification and profit, see Vogt p. 776.

desperation and need, but also to the culture of violence and insecurity that marks undocumented transit through Mexico. Migrants trying to survive are affected by their experiences of violence and terror at the hands of organized crime groups and corrupt officials, in some cases transforming themselves from the oppressed to the oppressor.

Human mobility has historically been linked to violence, tracing back to the transatlantic slave trade and persisting currently with asylum seekers fleeing genocide and war. This connection between mobility and violence marks migration for undocumented Central American youth presently. Although it is not a contemporary phenomenon, the connection between human mobility and violence has taken a different form for migrants today from Central America. Human trafficking is one of the many human rights violations that marks migration to the United States from Central America. As Jennifer Johnson points out in “Perilous Journey: Kidnapping and Violence against Migrants in Transit through Mexico,” “The fact that migrants are forced by their undocumented status to travel clandestinely, have limited resources, and are in an unfamiliar region makes them more vulnerable during each and every stage of their journey.”⁵⁷ The statistics and personal accounts regarding the violence and human rights violations migrants face in Mexico, in addition to the complicity of corrupt officials in the actions of organized crime groups, are a shocking reality that illustrates the peril of migrating to the United States from Central America. With a considerable amount of these cases reported and even more unreported, the perpetuation of such violations seems inevitable and unstoppable. Migrants will continue to confront the threat of human trafficking unless the proper resources are offered by the Mexican government to challenge drug cartels and the trafficking industry.

⁵⁷ This quote is from Johnson p. 3.

Corruption

“They control everything, every institution. Notice how so many of the kidnappings in Tenosique happen near the rails, right in front of the migrant trail. City and state officials know that one of them will die if they do so much as lift a finger. Better to Keep quiet and take what Los Zetas pays them.”⁵⁸

Gang violence, especially that of Los Zetas, feeds off of corruption. Gang members recruit soldiers, policemen, mayors, businessmen, train conductors, and even migrants. Corruption comes in many forms and presents itself in various outlets. It ranges from government negligence to official complicity in illicit actions. Gangs pay off officials to not interfere in their work; in some cases they are paid to participate. Additionally, government officials carry out their own illicit activities against migrants, using their own power to profit from migrant vulnerability. As a result, corruption forms the base and driving force for insecurity and violence against migrants as they move through Mexico.

Several stories of migrant kidnappings are highlighted in the actions of train conductors who stop trains at certain locations so gangs can board them. Pedro’s story atop a freight train is similar to those of many other migrants riding *La Bestia*.⁵⁹ Pedro saw a group of men carrying large bags on top of the trains after they paid the conductor to stop. Believing these bags were filled with clothes the men were distributing to migrants, Pedro was shocked to find that these were members of Los Zetas, extorting everything of value from the riders and carrying with them an arsenal of weapons. Luckily, these men only took Pedro’s ten pesos and shoes instead of his life; however that was all he had left. Train conductors not only accept money from gangs and local bandits to stop the train, but also demand bribes from migrants. Frequently, train

⁵⁸ This quoted passage is from Martínez p. 117.

⁵⁹ Regarding Pedro’s story, see Terrio.

conductors will require women and families with youth to pay to board the train before it starts moving.⁶⁰ Conductors are complicit in gang violence and also profit independently from migration.

One well-known example of government impunity is the running of Hotel California.⁶¹ The Hotel California in Tenosique is widely known as Los Zetas territory. In this hotel, located down the street from migration offices and the train tracks where migrants frequently disappear, the gang stores arms, drugs, and migrants. Los Zetas hire small-town women, Central American migrants, policemen, politicians, and businessmen to work for them; the remaining are fearful of the gang and do not intervene. Óscar Martínez's informant in his novel *The Beast* notes: "It's a conservative estimate that 40 percent of all state police units have been bought by Los Zetas."⁶² This estimate comes to life in stories about raids where the local police and gang members work together to kidnap migrants. For example, one military raid resulted in the discovery of twenty-four kidnapped migrants. However, when the military arrived, the municipal police were the only ones there; Los Zetas already left. Most are aware that the majority of officials are corrupt and in many cases specific corrupt officers are well known, but they are never named publicly for fear of reprisals. Corrupt officials are deeply involved in the widespread illicit activities of Los Zetas that occur daily, but this only surfaces when the government leads a crackdown and arrests a few officers.

Fear drives this silence. Coupled with insecurity, fear is the base of the deep infiltration of Los Zetas in Mexico that has left the country in a state of fear and hopelessness, two emotions migrants carry with them on their journey. Even the media is under the control the cartel, which

⁶⁰ Regarding information concerning corrupt train conductors, see Villegas.

⁶¹ Regarding Hotel California, see Martínez pgs. 121-123.

⁶² This quote is from Martínez p. 123.

threatens journalists and other employees of newspaper companies with death if they publish reports critical of Los Zetas' methods. By using excessive violence, Los Zetas send a clear message: they will do whatever is necessary to maintain their control of an area and its population. Additionally, their tactics of fear are used to expand their forces to achieve maximum profit.

Government corruption is not limited to involvement with organized criminal groups. Apart from complicity with criminals operating in the country, Mexican authorities carry out their own corrupt activities, including utilizing untrained law enforcement agencies and carrying out arbitrary and discriminatory detention policies.⁶³ Authorities extort migrants, frequently retaining or destroying their identity and travel documents. United Nations Special Rapporteur for Migrants' Rights Gabriela Rodríguez Pizarro visited Mexico in 2002 and found that official corruption ran deep; migrants she interviewed factored bribe money into the cost of their trip, knowing that those without money are the most likely to be detained. Bribes range from three hundred pesos (US\$30) from agents of the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) to one hundred pesos (US\$10) from customs agents and state and local police. This is an unattainable amount of money for most undocumented youth migrants.

Monetary transactions are not the only form of bribery that officials demand from migrants. INM agents and other authorities and state officials may demand payment in the form of sexual acts from female migrants. In addition to government officials, gangs, bandits, and many others also rape women along the migrant trail. Paola, a migrant from Guatemala, told Óscar Martínez, the author of *The Beast*, that she expected to be raped while traveling. While en route to the United States, a group of men jumped out of a nearby brush with shotguns and

⁶³ Regarding government corruption in the following four paragraphs, see Ogren pgs. 221-232.

machetes, negotiating who would have her first: “You can give her a fuck first. I’ll go next.”⁶⁴ Luckily, Paola managed to escape by lying about having AIDS; however most female migrants are not as lucky. She cites that her life saving resource was her good wits and will, exemplified by lying about having AIDS, helping her endure years of prostitution in Guatemala and hundreds of attackers on the migrant trail in Mexico. After this interview, Martínez later learned of a Honduran woman who had been raped in La Arrocera two days previous. She said it was the people she traveled with who raped her, claiming to be migrants wanting to walk together. She was pregnant at the time and her fetus died as a result of the abuse. The bandits beat her until she lost consciousness, and left her completely alone. She managed to survive and walk to the highway for help when she regained her consciousness.⁶⁵

Rape is a main component of human trafficking in Mexico, an industry that is supplemented by the corruption of the Mexican government. Trafficking survivor Karla Jacinto estimates that she was raped 43,2000 times.⁶⁶ She remembers how thirty men a day, seven days a week, for four years would rape her. A trafficker lured her when she was twelve, using kind words and a fast car. Migrants are generally emotionally vulnerable; traffickers prey upon this vulnerability, connecting with women emotionally to gain their trust and later forcing them to perform sexual acts. Karla was rescued in 2008 during an anti-trafficking operation in Mexico City. However, she, along with thousands of other women, retains memories of pain that will stay with her as long as she lives. Statistics for rape and sexual assault of migrants are unclear, ranging from 60 percent of women to 80 percent. Most women will not report rape because they

⁶⁴ This quote is from Martínez p. 27.

⁶⁵ Regarding this story, see Martínez pgs. 47-8.

⁶⁶ Regarding Karla’s story, see: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/10/americas/freedom-project-mexico-trafficking-survivor/>.

are undocumented and fear deportation. As a result, it is difficult to know who the victims are and how to stop the perpetrators.

Stories from migrant women shed light on the gravity of danger when migrating through Mexico and the normalization of sexual assault and rape. Rape can be perpetrated by anyone along the migrant trail, including guides and fellow migrants. Sex can also be used as a form of payment when women and girls do not have other resources to pay bribes to government officials and criminals. Traveling clandestinely through Mexico as a woman implies a greater level of vulnerability that women are aware of and attempt to prepare themselves for both physically and emotionally. Before embarking upon their journey, women will take a contraceptive in anticipation of sexual assault.⁶⁷ The normalization of this phenomenon speaks to a larger issue of impunity and active participation in criminal activities by authorities, in addition to organized criminal groups and local-level actors in the area.

Protection of migrants and their rights is hindered by the involvement of multiple agencies in immigration law enforcement—from INM agents to untrained local police officers—and the corrupt detention practices used by INM. As a result, untrained officers are unprepared to handle immigration issues with both documented and undocumented travelers. These untrained officers are also in charge of detaining and deporting undocumented migrants, many times doing so without reason. This aggravates the existing untenable detention situation.

Officials apprehend and detain large groups of migrants that detention centers are unprepared to accommodate. Cassandra Ogren cites in her paper “Migration and Human Rights on the Mexico-Guatemala Border” that in July of 2005 between 450 and 900 migrants were

⁶⁷ Regarding women’s preparation for migration, see Goldberg.

apprehended by local police in and around Tapachula.⁶⁸ Migrants were forced into a crowded detention center where an altercation arose, resulting in the police using tear gas, pepper spray, and indiscriminate beatings to suppress the fight. Due to the untrained nature of immigration officials, migrants face further human rights violations at the hands of law enforcement. An already problematic situation in which migrants are unethically detained is exacerbated when hundreds of migrants are forced into one small space, allowing officials to use excessive violence to quell an uprising. Detention practices used by the INM allow agents to detain those migrants who did not have sufficient funds to free themselves. Additionally, migrants are detained due to ethnic appearance; indigenous Mexicans are frequently detained because INM agents insist they are Guatemalan. This is highly problematic from a human rights perspective, where Mexican authorities utilize racist methods to identify individuals to detain and deport.

Corruption is a pressing concern in terms of counter-trafficking initiatives. Legislation in the Mexican Senate to codify trafficking in persons as a criminal offense has not yet passed. Law enforcement is not trained to identify victims of trafficking. Additionally, there is evidence that suggests that INM agents accept bribes from brothel owners to not raid their facilities. These corrupt agents are also in charge of identifying victims of trafficking, highlighting the Mexican system's inadequate effort in counter-trafficking initiatives. It is unethical for those who have the power to identify the victims of human trafficking to be the same ones who accept bribes that perpetuate the trafficking industry. Even in cases in which victims are identified, few protections exist for them, which is especially important when many victims receive threats from their traffickers. Victims of trafficking require security measures to be put in place after they have identified their trafficker to assure their safety. Government corruption and impunity further

⁶⁸ Regarding overcrowded prisons, see Orgen p. 222.

enhance the insecurity that marks migration through Mexico and the lack of safety outlets accessible for migrants.

Conclusion

“It never stops being horrifying, never.”⁶⁹

New security policies enacted by the Mexican government to stop the flow of migration from Central America are a result of pressure from the United States. Since 2008, the United States has guided nearly US\$2 billion in security aid to Mexico through the Mérida Initiative. The third pillar of this Initiative, “creating a 21st century border,” has transformed into the one receiving the most attention and funding. The goal of this pillar was to secure the borders of Mexico to prevent the flow of illicit goods, initially intending to detect narcotics, weapons, ammunitions, and currency. However, the definition of illicit goods has been reconstructed to encompass undocumented migrants. In 2011, U.S. officials began to regularly declare intentions to increase assistance to Mexico and Guatemala to enhance security measures, providing the funds for patrol boats, night vision equipment, communications equipment, maritime sensors, and training.⁷⁰ Pressure from the United States to heighten border surveillance and decrease immigration rates adversely affected youth migrants and their route through Mexico, exemplified through the consequences of the Programa Frontera Sur for youth emigrating from Central America.

The Programa Frontera Sur was announced on July 7, 2014 as another response to Central American immigration through Mexico. This plan for Mexico’s southern border has a stated objective of bringing order to Mexico’s southern region while protecting the human rights

⁶⁹ This quote is from Martínez p. 59.

⁷⁰ Regarding information concerning U.S. aid in this paragraph, see Isacson.

of migrants who enter and travel through the country.⁷¹ By managing the ports of entry into Mexico through Guatemala, Mexican authorities hoped to stop the flow of Central American migration into Mexico. Additionally, authorities hoped to keep migrants off the trains. To accomplish this, agents from INM guarded train stations and trains speeds increased to make it more difficult for migrants to climb aboard while the trains are in motion. There has also been an increase in operations where INM agents stop the trains and detain anyone they suspect to be an undocumented migrant.⁷² This plan was initiated after significant U.S. pressure due to the high volume and high presence of youth migrants in the news. It was met with applause by the United States on January 6, 2015, where President Obama praised “Mexico’s efforts in addressing the unaccompanied children who we saw spiking during the summer.”⁷³

The resulting increase in immigration law enforcement in Mexico, in conjunction with enhanced border security in Central America and a public relations campaign dissuading Central Americans from immigrating, appears to have decreased the number of youth migrants reaching the United States. Apprehension of undocumented youth by Border Patrol at the southwest border fell from 10,631 in June 2014 to 2,432 in September 2014. Additionally, Border Patrol reported that between October 2014 and February 2015, apprehension of youth decreased 42 percent compared to the same period the previous year.⁷⁴ Both the Mexican and United States governments utilized the drop in apprehensions at the U.S. border as proof of decreased migration and therefor success of the Programa Frontera Sur. Since fewer undocumented youth were apprehended at the border, both governments claimed that there must be less youth

⁷¹ Regarding background on the Programa Frontera Sur, see Boggs.

⁷² Here I am following Sorrentino.

⁷³ Regarding statistics and results of Programa Frontera Sur, see Boggs.

⁷⁴ Regarding these statistics, see "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015."

migration through Mexico. Further, they claimed that the success of this plan has deterred migrants from entering Mexico, consequently ensuring safety at the Mexico-Guatemala border.

In reality, Central Americans continue to enter Mexico, but more are being repatriated to their countries of origin. From 2013 to 2014, deportation of youth migrants increased 117 percent in southern Mexico, from 8,350 to 18,169.⁷⁵ As a result, the same number of migrants entered Mexico, if not more; however they do not arrive at the country's northern border. Those who avoid being deported often find themselves forced to work for organized crime groups. Some remain in Mexico living on the streets while they wait to continue their route. Others disappear or are murdered by organized crime groups. Both countries' governments have manipulated statistics concerning the apprehension of undocumented youth at the U.S.-Mexico border to misrepresent the reality of migration through Mexico.

Programa Frontera Sur has only fueled violence against migrants by both criminal organizations and security forces. The Southern Border Program has increased the vulnerability of migrants, encouraging them to take different, yet still dangerous routes through Mexico to arrive at the United States. Programa Frontera Sur may have succeeded in keeping migrants off of the cargo trains, but it did not succeed in keeping migrants out of Mexico. The Washington Office on Latin America noted how not only are migrants facing more cases of violence, but they are also facing violence from criminal groups with the "collaboration or acquiescence" of Mexican authorities.⁷⁶ The efforts made by the Mexican government to stop migration have further enhanced the human rights violations against migrants while simultaneously allowing officials to operate in complicity with the illicit actions of organized crime groups. Although

⁷⁵ Regarding deportation estimates, see *Boletín Mensual De Estadísticas Migratorias 2013*.

⁷⁶ Regarding government collusion with criminal groups, see Stevens.

claiming to be protecting migrant human rights, the Mexican government has been creating more insecure spaces for migrants who continue to attempt to enter the country.

These heightened security measures target migrants for violence instead of protecting them, pushing them to take more dangerous routes instead of riding *La Bestia*. Migrants are forced to travel clandestinely on more dangerous routes to avoid the surveillance of INM. Migrants' injuries are caused, in part, by state policies for security, the same state that does not offer assistance or medical aid to migrants. As Christine Kovic states, "Central American migrants are the casualties of new security policies implemented by the Mexican government in response to U.S. political pressure."⁷⁷ Whether they continue riding *La Bestia*, ride informal third class buses called "Tijuaneros,"⁷⁸ travel by sea,⁷⁹ or walk, youth from the Northern Triangle will continue migrating north.

High levels of insecurity mark the journey atop *La Bestia* through Mexico, a characteristic of the freight trains that is documented, reported, and recounted by migrants across Central America and Mexico. Physical dangers from riding the cargo trains, risk of assault from gangs, robbery, and government corruption are interactive factors that create insecurity during transit through Mexico. However, youth regard these risks as an acceptable option. The physical dangers of riding these freight trains have not deterred migrants from undocumented emigration. If migrants are aware of the multiple and severe dangers en route, then it is plausible to conclude that their free will is constricted when they make the decision to migrate. With a high likelihood and awareness of experiencing the diverse dangers on and around these freight trains, one must examine why Central American youth nevertheless emigrate and if their choice is truly free.

⁷⁷ This quote is from Kovic and Argüelles p. 89.

⁷⁸ For more information on Tijuaneros, see Siscar.

⁷⁹ For more information regarding migrating by sea, see Orellana.

For many Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran youth, migration is not a choice in the strict sense of the term, because the decision to migrate is forced by external factors that are out of the migrants' control. Even when they remain unaware of the influence, youths' free will is affected by social, economic, and political dynamics—at home and globally—that pressure them to make life-threatening journeys. These dynamics include chronic poverty, gang violence, political violence, domestic violence, and the desire to reunite with a family member. Persisting decisions to emigrate affirm the structural violence and inequality that forces Central Americans out of their homes, believing flight to be the only way to gain liberty. Though the freedom of choice should be an innate right, here it is a privilege. Consequently, riding *La Bestia* through Mexico is idealized by the dynamics that force migrants out of their homes.

Undocumented migrants are not seen as full humans valuable to society, and are therefore denied rights. While they are invisible due to their marginalization, they are also hypervisible as socially excluded outsiders. As a result, migrants are easily targeted for crime and hatred. Organized crime groups, government officials, and Mexican society prey on their vulnerability, robbing, assaulting, raping, and killing them. The insecurity that migrants confront en route is also endemic to the contexts that motivate their decisions to depart, and they operate interactively to force youth out of their homes in search of a better life.

PART TWO

Introduction

“In El Salvador, there is wrong- it’s being young. You’re stalked by gangs, the authorities beat and follow kids because they don’t trust them; they think they are gang members. There are no jobs for young people because employers don’t trust the kids either...It is better to be old.”⁸⁰

If you ask twelve-year-old Mayeli why she fled from Honduras, she would cite violence and poverty as motivating factors. She recalls witnessing two separate homicides tearfully, stating: “We can’t go back to our countries because they’re very dangerous and very poor.”⁸¹ Salvadoran youth Saúl notes gang related violence as a motivating factor to emigrate. He fled his home at the age of fifteen, recalling one poignant memory, “A few years ago, I saw a man die after being shot many times on my street. One day I was sitting inside my house and I heard gunshots. I saw that on the same block, a man was wounded by bullets and I saw an empty cartridge. There was a lot of blood.” Having outlined the violence and corruption migrants face en route to the United States, it is important to understand the reasons why youth such as Mayeli and Saúl make this life-threatening journey and what factors influence them to flee their homes, despite their knowledge of the dangers.

There are three key structural factors that explain the surge of migration of youth from Central America to the United States, specifically from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras: poverty, violence, and family reunification. Central American youth do not have access to a good education, safe neighborhoods, sufficient nutrition, and domestic security. Consequently, motivations to emigrate generally include a combination of complex economic and security factors, including the desperate need to escape poverty, the hope for an education, the desire to

⁸⁰ This quoted passage is from Carlson and Gallagher p. 135.

⁸¹ Regarding Mayeli and Saúl’s story, see Lee.

reunite with a family member in the United States, and the need to flee from political, domestic, or gang-related violence. These overarching factors interact and force some youth first onto the streets, where migration appears to be the sole solution to their circumstances. The lack of security that has come to define the lives of Central American youth follows them as they migrate to the United States, taking various forms and resulting in life-threatening experiences.

Factors that influence youth to emigrate from their homes are a consequence of the political and economic structural flaws, insecurity, and social exclusion they face in their communities in Central America. The corrupt governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and their collusion with local criminal organizations aggravate these factors. The present Part Two treats each factor to emigrate independently, but these factors operate interactively and force youth to make life-threatening decisions with consequences they do not fully understand. Youth experience diverse combinations of these factors that force them to emigrate, and each experience is distinctive from the other. To exemplify the harsh realities of migration, this section tells the stories of many migrants and their reasons for emigrating, but these stories do not represent the experiences of all youth migrants traveling through Mexico. Although I discuss various motivations to emigrate from Central America, these are not exclusive factors that influence youths' decisions and should not be considered true for every migrant. The testimonies included in this section speak to realities for many youth migrating through Mexico but are not representative of each individual migrant narrative and do not intend to suggest that migrant experiences are identical or homogenous.

In recent years, more youth have been detained at the Mexico-Guatemala border, correlating to the increasingly dangerous circumstances in Central America that have forced them to leave their homes. The number of 'unaccompanied alien children' (UAC) detained at the

U.S.-Mexico border in 2014 rose to almost 68,000. According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the total youth from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras rose from approximately 1,000 per nation in 2009 to between 16,000 and 18,000 per nation in 2014.⁸² In light of these rising figures, I analyze why youth are leaving their countries. Having analyzed the journey and the various sources and forms of danger that await migrants en route, I examine the factors that cause youth to undertake this dangerous journey knowing the risks that they will inevitably face.

Economic Motivation

“How did I decide? It was the American Dream! In Honduras we think that there is so much money in the U.S. that you can just pick it up in the street.”⁸³

Most youth migrants are motivated by the need to escape chronic poverty. In this thesis, poverty refers to limited income, limited resources, and limited accessibility to a productive life and the basic needs conducive to self-fulfillment. For Central Americans who are considering migrating north, poverty is a primary cause that affects other motivations to emigrate. Many people living in poverty do not have access to an education, often because they are unable to buy the clothing and supplies necessary to attend school. Without an education, poverty creates high levels of unemployment and sometimes homelessness. Many youth, particularly those with little family support, resort to crime to attain the basic needs of subsistence in order to survive. As a result, poverty creates an unbreakable cycle in which people are trapped by their economic circumstances, participating in criminal activity to attain basic means of sustenance; however this is not a sustainable method to survive. This cycle is a reality for youth living in the Northern

⁸² Regarding these statistics, see Donato and Sisk p. 59.

⁸³ This quote is from Terrio p. 23.

Triangle who, due to their economic status, are excluded from the resources that would allow them to subsist in their communities.

Contrary to popular belief that most UACs are Mexican, the Office of Refugee Resettlement cites that the most common native countries of UACs are El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁸⁴ These countries are the poorest nations in Latin America. According to the World Bank, in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, 30 percent, 26 percent, and 17 percent of people, respectively, live on less than \$2 a day.⁸⁵ Unemployment rates are extremely high; a study of eighteen countries in Latin America assessed that in nine countries, 20.2 percent of people ages fifteen to twenty-four do not work or study. Guatemala is outstanding with 25.1 percent.⁸⁶ According to Miguel Guitérrez Saxe, a Costa Rican economist who compiles regional data, only 27 percent of Central Americans are enrolled in their national social security system, and the rest work in the informal economy or are among the 11 percent of the total youth who neither work nor study.⁸⁷

Mass poverty in Central America is embedded in the region's social and political institutions, which can be traced back to its colonial and neo-colonial past. Due to the extreme levels of poverty, a vast majority of Central Americans are excluded from participation in decisions pertaining to the environment, the main resource for the rural population's livelihood.⁸⁸ In the Northern Triangle there is a paradox of accumulating wealth side by side with growing poverty and accelerating environmental degradation. By utilizing a large portion of the land for

⁸⁴ Regarding these statistics, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/divisions-unaccompanied-childrens-services>.

⁸⁵ Regarding statistics on daily wages in Central America, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/01/dhs-violence-poverty-is-driving-children-to-flee-central-america-to-u-s/>.

⁸⁶ Regarding these statistics, see <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/20100/20140827/poverty-latin-america-one-third-regions-population-risk-falling-poverty.htm>.

⁸⁷ Here I follow *The Economist's* article "The tormented isthmus."

⁸⁸ In this paragraph I am following Cherrett pgs. 221-3.

agriculture that is inadequate for such use, natural resources are degraded, leaving a country vulnerable to natural disasters, such as Hurricane Mitch in Honduras. Hurricane Mitch left residents across Honduras without power or access to clean water. As Ian Cherrett comments in his work concerning rural poverty in Central America, “Natural resource management requires long-term investment strategies, while the current sociopolitical structure of Central America rests on short-term, rent-seeking strategies of resource exploitation.”⁸⁹ Cherrett proposes that in order to change the existing structure that excludes the poor from making the decisions that affect their neighborhoods, families and communities must invert the existing relationship between themselves and those in power, shifting the current land use practices to introduce systems of production that will enable a small farmer to feed his family and produce a surplus. At this point, effective agrarian reform has not yet been realized and poverty continues to force rural Central Americans to internally migrate out of their villages to urban areas in search of employment.

Consequently many Central Americans engage in the informal economy, working odd jobs for day-to-day economic stability. Informal employment is work that does not comply with the national labor legislation. The International Labor Organization (ILO) explains that informal employment usually includes a low-quality job without worker protections, such as social security or overtime. In Latin America, 46.8 percent of jobs are considered part of the informal economy; Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador hold the highest rates of informal employment, respectively.⁹⁰ The rate of employment in the informal economy in each of these Northern Triangle countries--71 percent in El Salvador, 81 percent in Guatemala, and 84 percent in

⁸⁹ This quote is from Cherrett p. 222.

⁹⁰ Regarding these statistics, see <http://www.as-coa.org/articles/weekly-chart-latin-americas-informal-economy>.

Honduras--surpasses the Central America average of 65.⁹¹ Such jobs provide a limited, unsustainable income on a day-today basis due to their unpredictable nature.

As a result of the low income earned in informal employment, Central Americans feel compelled to search for alternate means to support themselves and their families. In many cases, one or both parents of a family migrate to the U.S. first and send remittances to their families, later intending to fund or facilitate the migration of their children.⁹² However, undocumented parents in the United States confront many obstacles that complicate reunification. Before sending for youth, parents must consider the needs and circumstances of family members in the United States and in their home countries, the expressed desires of the youth themselves, and the parents' views of what is safe, appropriate, possible, or beneficial for youth of different ages and genders.⁹³ After completing the journey themselves, adults are aware of its extreme dangers and are hesitant to send for their children. In addition, parents must save enough money to pay the costly price of a smuggler, who, in many cases, may either abandon or traffic the migrant. In the face of these dangers, Central American parents may still risk their children's lives and safety and arrange for them to come to the United States. Parents who opt for their children to reunite with them in the United States, despite their first-hand knowledge of the dangers, exemplify the larger scale of political and gang violence and insecurity in their communities that compels them to make these decisions.

But a parent does not necessarily need to send for their children in order for youth to migrate. The family structure in Central America typically includes extended relatives; therefore, youth are generally left in the care of a grandparent or another relative when a parent leaves.

⁹¹ Regarding statistics concerning employment in the informal economy, see the *Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map*.

⁹² Here I am following Artico p. 3.

⁹³ Regarding parent's decision to arrange for migration, see Orellana, Thorne, Chee, and Lam.

Although youth often contribute to the household, their presence can still prove to be a financial burden on an extended family member, who may grow to resent the imposition. As a result, youth feeling unloved may flee to the U.S. and reunite with a parent who has left them and to escape neglectful or abusive living situations. This was the case for Alejandro who fled Honduras alone at the age of fourteen.⁹⁴ His mother migrated to the United States when Alejandro was eight months old, leaving him in the care of his grandmother. When he was four years old, Alejandro's uncle began to abuse him. His uncle resented Alejandro's presence in the house, and at one point threatened to kill Alejandro and shot at him. Due to such abuse from a relative who was ostensibly his caregiver, Alejandro, like many children left with abusive relatives, fled in pursuit of an elusive safety that he would unlikely find as a migrant.

By emigrating, youth hope to receive an education in order to find employment and make money to send home to their families. Working in the United States will allow them to support their families in their home countries by sending money home. Remittances sent from the United States to Central America by migrants are critical to the economy of the Northern Triangle. Since the late 1970s, migrant remittances have stimulated national income in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.⁹⁵ A substantial portion of each country's national income consists of migrant remittances; however, these remittances do not stimulate sustainable national productivity that might alleviate the need for migration. Migrant remittances allow families in Central America to attain basic needs such as food, home repairs, school supplies, and the organization of local celebrations. In general, they tend to mitigate instead of eliminate poverty. Due to the chronic

⁹⁴ Regarding Alejandro's story, see <https://supportkind.org/child-abuse-case-kind-supports-appeal-to-highest-immigration-court/>.

⁹⁵ Regarding information concerning remittances, see Garni pgs. 322-5.

poverty that exists in Central America, migrant remittances are used for purchasing daily necessities; there is insufficient surplus for savings, investment, or basic economic stability.

Although remittances help Central American families attain basic sustenance, they ultimately have negative impacts on the economy. Remittances are not used for development of infrastructure, betterment of schools, and other government responsibilities. They are received and used on an individual basis. Additionally, due to the influx of remittances in the Northern Triangle, consumer spending and the demand for imported goods has increased.⁹⁶ As a result, the balance of trade is tipped in favor of imports, forcing the government to allocate more foreign currency to foreign imported goods. This creates a consumption “boom” that cannot be sustained through local labor, which results in inflation. This is especially important in the Northern Triangle countries that are based on agro-export economies. Inflation creates an emphasis on imports over agricultural production, making rural workers suffer economically. A cycle is created where, due to the inflation caused by migrant remittances, the local economy deteriorates, which encourages people to migrate to attain economic stability. Central Americans migrate to the United States and send money home to their families, which further destabilizes the economy of the home country and encourages a heavy reliance on migration for economic security. This cycle necessitates large-scale economic change that supports the needs of local producers over foreign goods.

The unsustainable economic conditions that result from this cycle encourage youth out of their homes, onto the streets, and eventually en route towards the United States. Without changing the existing structure that prohibits economically disadvantaged Central American communities from accessing the economic resources necessary for survival, youth and their

⁹⁶ Regarding remittances and consumer spending, see Garni p. 324.

families will continue to emigrate from their homes to the United States in search of economic stability. This migration to the United States further perpetuates the cycle that relies on migrant remittances, destabilizing the economy and encouraging more people to migrate.

Political Violence

“The legacy of violence in Central America may be traced in part to the civil wars fought throughout the region during the 1970s and 1980s- wars that were largely funded by the United States, and that resulted in a heavily armed population.”⁹⁷

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were rated three of the five most dangerous countries in the world in 2013. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime found that Honduras had the world’s highest per-capita homicide rate in 2012, at 90.4 homicides per 100,000 people. El Salvador was fourth with a rate of 41.2 homicides per 100,000 people, and Guatemala was fifth with 39.9 homicides per 100,000 people.⁹⁸ This same study found that violence is the primary motivating factor for youth to flee their homes in Central America to the United States. The UNHCR conducted a survey in October of 2011 and found that out of 404 youth interviewed, 58 percent of them had been “forcibly displaced because they suffered or faced harms that indicated a potential or actual need for international protection.”⁹⁹ Youth flee their homes as a primary result of this regional violence, in addition to other complex and multifaceted reasons. Flight from violence in the 1980s in the Northern Triangle formed the networks that migrants use today when emigrating.

⁹⁷ This quote is from Rosenblum p. 11.

⁹⁸ Regarding statistics concerning violence in the Northern Triangle, see Restrepo and Garcia.

⁹⁹ This quote is from Restrepo and Garcia.

In El Salvador, civil war politically and economically weakened the country from 1980 until 1992. Over 75,000 civilians died due to violence from the governments' military and paramilitary forces during the country's civil war.¹⁰⁰ These twelve years of violence were marked by three major atrocities: the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero that sparked the conflict, the rape and murder of four U.S. churchwomen that caused international outrage, and the 1989 Jesuits Massacre that compelled the international community to intervene. El Salvador's civil war consisted of conflict between the government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a guerrilla army that opposed the government and the right-wing military and paramilitary forces. The United States supported the Salvadoran government during the country's civil war, offering substantial military aid and advisors. Salvadorans were caught in the crossfire of a conflict that ravaged their communities. When a truce was reached in 1992, the United Nations Truth Commission carried out an investigation that resulted in the attribution of a majority of human rights abuses to the Salvadoran armed forces and the paramilitaries. The internationally acknowledged attribution of violence and human rights violations to the Salvadoran armed forces exemplifies the governmental corruption that caused the torture, disappearance, and death of thousands of civilians and created an atmosphere of distrust.

Political violence motivated many youth to emigrate from Guatemala during and after the country's civil war. More than 200,000 people were killed over the course of the thirty-six year long civil war that began in 1960 and ended in 1996.¹⁰¹ As Andrew R. Morrison and Rachel A. May point out in their study on post-revolutionary Guatemala, "the combined effects of political

¹⁰⁰ Regarding information about El Salvador's civil war, see <http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=199>.

¹⁰¹ Regarding this estimate, see Miller.

crisis, war, and the economic crisis aggravated by political conditions have transformed a normal migration flow into massive displacement and exodus.”¹⁰² The political violence in Guatemala was characterized by racial and ethnic conflict, supplemented by a struggling economy. Guatemala has a large population of indigenous communities, such as the Maya, under the control of the government; their land, language, and culture is threatened by political leaders attempting to “Europeanize” the country. The Mayas and the rural poor were attacked and forced from their homes by military and paramilitary forces as the government pursued its view of economic development. As a result, a culture of violence was created in which agricultural workers were displaced and forced to become wage laborers, creating violent conflict marked by insurgency and counterinsurgency.¹⁰³ Due to this atmosphere of violence and war, many Guatemalans fled their countries in the hope of finding safety.

Counterinsurgency campaigns in Guatemala killed and displaced many indigenous communities, similar to the displacement and murder of civilians in rural areas of El Salvador due to the military, paramilitary, and guerrilla warfare.¹⁰⁴ The violent atmosphere in the Northern Triangle countries created an urgent search for safety among its residents. Safety is achieved at the individual level and access to it is unequal. As political violence increases in a country, those who do not have access to the resources that gain safety must decide whether or not to remain in their communities. Those with access to financial resources can attain safety and therefore do not have to emigrate; those who emigrate are the communities that do not have access to these economic resources. Once a critical level of violence is reached, it becomes a necessity to emigrate.

¹⁰² This quote is from Morrison and May.

¹⁰³ This paragraph closely follows the research of Morrison and May pgs. 112-124.

¹⁰⁴ Regarding political violence in Guatemala, see Hamilton and Chinchilla.

Although Honduras did not face the civil wars that its neighbors did in the twentieth century, it did not escape from political violence at the hands of a repressive government. Honduras became a staging ground for the U.S.-supported covert war against what it perceived as Latin American communism.¹⁰⁵ In 1981, the United States offered aid through establishing base camps for the Contras, a right-wing paramilitary force created by the Central Intelligence Agency and military forces to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The United States provided funds for Argentine counterinsurgency experts to train an anti-guerrilla force known as the Battalion 316. More commonly known as the Honduran Death Squad, this Argentine and U.S. trained military intelligence unit carried out a campaign of torture and extrajudicial killing under the pretense of ending the spread of communism. This campaign, notorious for forced disappearances, led state-sponsored terror against Honduran civilians. The United States State Department acknowledged the role of the Honduran military in human rights abuses perpetrated against civilians. Criminal prosecution of military officers did not begin until July of 1995; previous to this, the armed forces were not accountable for their actions. In February of 2000, the Honduran government announced that it would pay \$21 million in reparation to the families of the 19 of the 184 known victims murdered by the 316 Battalion.

The history of civil war and political violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras contributes to the current political instability in the countries that, in turn, motivates migration. These three countries faced high levels of political instability due to civil war and unrest that is essential to understanding the contemporary political climate that encourages youth to emigrate. Civil war in the Northern Triangle created a culture of violence that exists today in the form of political corruption and gang violence. Because of the violence that many faced during the past

¹⁰⁵ The information in this paragraph follows the Center for Justice & Accountability's article <http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=254>.

three decades and the subsequent arrival of democracy that will be discussed later in detail, youth found that emigration is preferable to withstanding the effects of this political atmosphere.

Due to the violence from civil wars in the Northern Triangle and the resulting high rates of emigration, Central Americans who migrated to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s formed gangs like MS-13 that are the main contributors to the violence and elevated homicide rates that make the Northern Triangle the most dangerous region in the world. The gang violence that many youth cite today as a reason to emigrate is a product, in many cases, of the political migration of the late twentieth century and the gangs that formed in response to hostility towards Central Americans in the United States. Civil wars and strife of the 1980s established a pattern of violence that followed migrants to the United States and returned to the Northern Triangle when they were deported in the 2000s, transforming into today's version of violence that youth face in their communities.

In the Northern Triangle, the post-civil war peace era is marked by the arrival of democracy. Post-civil war democracy was motivated by the need for political order. As Leonard Wantchekon describes in his article "The Paradox of "Warlord" Democracy: A Theoretical Investigation," "Citizens adhere to this form of democracy because it generates social order as a by-product and offers protection against large-scale theft and illegal expropriation carried out by predatory warring factions."¹⁰⁶ The concept of post-civil war democracy allows a country to change governments peacefully as a result of the desire to end war and create a sociopolitical order. In theory, the arrival of democracy after civil war includes demilitarization, reconstruction of the state, and the start of the electoral process to institute democracy. Amid the culture of violence in the Northern Triangle countries due to corrupt governments, citizens are motivated to

¹⁰⁶ This quote is from Wantchekon p. 18.

adopt democracy out of security concerns. An opportunity to end an authoritarian and military rule seemed promising to the victims of political violence.

The efficacy of post-war democracies in the Northern Triangle is highly disputed among academics. This is due, in part, to the countries' origins in authoritarian rule and the pre-existing violent and conflictive political culture.¹⁰⁷ Fabrice Lehoucq takes a political economy approach and concludes that limited democracies maintain high levels of inequality, which in turn generate unrest, violence, and immigration.¹⁰⁸ The failure in the Northern Triangle to implement adequate electoral reforms led to ineffective democracies that ignore the citizens' demands for more welfare redistribution. Another point of analysis comes from Jennifer Burrell and Ellen Moodie, who investigated what 'democracy' actually means to Central American citizens in the midst of neoliberal reconstructing.¹⁰⁹ This analysis notes how neoliberal policies created a new type of 'free-market democracy' in the post-Cold War era with considerable foreign support. This historical period was characterized simultaneously by human rights violations, political violence, and a rise in gang violence. The arrival of democracy did little to improve the violence in everyday life. Due to the continuation of such violence, inadequate law enforcement and judicial systems, and poor living conditions, citizens' expectations for fundamental and transformative social change through democracy quickly dissipated and led to a general sense of disillusion and, consequently, emigration.

There are nearly two million Salvadorans and their descendants currently in the United States, and an additional 1.2 million Guatemalans, many of them tracing their arrival to the

¹⁰⁷ Here I follow Biekart's analysis of democracy in Latin America.

¹⁰⁸ Regarding Lehoucq's analysis, see Biekart's p. 120.

¹⁰⁹ Regarding Burrell and Moodie's analysis, see Biekart pgs. 121-2.

1980s and 90s at the height of political violence.¹¹⁰ Despite the end of civil war in these countries, emigration continues. The combined effects of violence from civil wars and the resulting economic instability from the arrival of democracy and capitalism in Central America left a legacy of violence and fragile institutions in the Northern Triangle. The arrival of peace and democracy in the 1990s brought capitalism and the free-market economy. In countries where social safety nets such as welfare, unemployment benefits, and social security did not exist, this transition was unsuccessful and consequently limited opportunities to the informal economy. These new economic policies forced people to take part in illicit activities to survive, directly correlating to the high rates of violence mentioned previously. Many emigrated as a result of this economic instability and insecurity in their communities.

Gang Violence

“They shot Tico by mistake. They thought Tico was another guy, that gang member they call El Rey [the King] because he and Tico had their hair the same, they had the same curly hair and both were dark, really dark skinned. And they shot Tico because they thought he was El Rey. It was by mistake that Tico died.”¹¹¹

According to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in 2012 there were roughly 20,000 gang members in El Salvador, 12,000 in Honduras, and 22,000 in Guatemala; El Salvador has the highest concentration with some 323 members for every 100,000 citizens.¹¹² Various factors exacerbate the high rate of gang involvement in Central America. The first factor is poverty and the lack of educational and employment opportunities. Economically

¹¹⁰ Regarding estimates of Central American migrants in the United States, see Vargas-Ramos.

¹¹¹ This quoted passage is from Wolseth p. 113.

¹¹² Regarding statistics in this paragraph, see Ribando Seelke pgs. 5-9.

disadvantaged youth who do not attend school lack the skills to find employment opportunities, which themselves are scarce, creating a ready pool for gang recruitment. The social stigma attached to gangs makes the process of leaving a gang difficult and the process of finding a job after leaving a gang even more difficult. Gang involvement is perpetuated by sensationalist media coverage of the gang phenomenon in Central America, which contributes to a sense of insecurity in the region that enhances the reputation of the gangs portrayed. Finally, anti-gang law enforcement efforts forced gangs to change their behavior to avoid detection, causing them to develop into more sophisticated criminal organizations. As a result of these factors, gangs in Central America have expanded their power and, in turn, their numbers.

The two largest and most dangerous gangs are MS-13, also known as *Mara Salvatrucha*, and 18th street gang, also known as M-18. These rival gangs have an overall number of members marked at 85,000. In 2012, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated a total MS-13 and M-18 membership in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras at a more modest 54,000.¹¹³ These gangs heavily rely on forced recruitment to expand their numbers and power. Youth who reach their teenage years begin to receive threats from gangs and pressure to join, making them primary targets for gang-related violence. According the Washington Office on Latin America, “Honduran boys and men ages 15 to 30 have a one in 300 chance of being murdered—in the most dangerous towns, the odds are 1 in 150,” mainly at the hands of gangs. In El Salvador, the UNHCR found that 72 percent of youth who had been interviewed fled to the U.S. due to severe harm experienced, and 66 percent left specifically to avoid gangs or criminal groups, facing

¹¹³ Regarding the estimates in this paragraph, see Paz.

threats and violence. Additionally, Guatemala has one of the highest femicide rates in the world, along with Honduras and El Salvador, mainly perpetrated by gangs.¹¹⁴

MS-13, a Central American gang that forcibly recruits youth, formed in the United States. After fleeing civil war in El Salvador and migrating to the U.S. in the 70s and 80s, many Salvadorans moved to Los Angeles.¹¹⁵ In Los Angeles, the existing Mexican-American gangs were hostile to Central American newcomers, and in response Salvadorans created their own organization for defense and a sense of community. The Salvadoran community managed to take over the streets and gain an immense amount of power. However, U.S. policies in the 1990s and 2000s resulted in the deportation of undocumented migrants and lawful permanent residents convicted of certain crimes. Consequently, these gangs managed to not only persevere but also to accumulate greater power and to thrive in Central America, where an economically unstable and politically corrupt ambience became the stage for tactics the gang members had learned in the United States. Men deported to the Northern Triangle remained jobless, filling days of boredom with gang-related violence and fostering a new culture of brutality in local gangs. Whether they were a part of a gang in the United States or not, they remained in cities such as San Salvador without prospects. As a result, joining a gang was the only option for what seemed like solidarity and advancement. The Northern Triangle countries became marked by an increase in poverty and violence and a decrease in opportunity once these men were deported from the U.S. Gang members generally do not attend school, do not have job skills, and come from dysfunctional families. This creates a space susceptible to crime and violence.

¹¹⁴ Regarding the statistics in this paragraph, see Carlson and Gallagher.

¹¹⁵ Regarding historical information from this section, see Constable.

Gang violence in El Salvador is marked by the rivalry between the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs.¹¹⁶ After a truce was established between the country's two biggest gangs, the homicide rate decreased in 2011 from 66 per 100,000 people to 41.2 per 100,000. The correlation between the truce between MS-13 and 18th Street gangs and a drop in the homicide rates demonstrates the powerful presence that street gangs have in El Salvador and their ability to control the levels of violence. When the mentioned truce began to break down in 2014, homicide rates increased again by nearly 70 percent in the first half of the year as the gang rivalry resurfaced. This increase in homicide rates after the fall of the truce between MS-13 and M-18 speaks again to their control over crime in Central America and the culture of violence these gangs foster in their communities.

When asked why she sent her fifteen-year-old son Fernando to the United States, Ms. Avila notes, "If I send him, he may die. But if I keep him here, he *will* die."¹¹⁷ Like many other parents in El Salvador, Ms. Avila understands the gravity of danger her son will face en route to the United States, but believes this is incomparable to the danger he faces each day due to the gang presence in their community. She would not consider allowing her son to join a gang, stating, "The gang is three choices- hospital, death, or jail." Fernando faced threats from gang members each day; they drove their car along the path where he walked to class every morning. Fernando later stopped going to school, and his parents arranged for him to leave for the United States. Fernando joined the flood of Salvadoran youth traveling alone, trying to reach the United States and escape the gang recruitment in their communities.

In El Salvador, youth like Fernando are mainly targeted for gang recruitment at their schools, resulting in one of the lowest school attendance rates in Latin America. Gang members

¹¹⁶ Regarding information in this paragraph, see Carlson and Gallagher pgs. 134-5.

¹¹⁷ Regarding Fernando's story, see Nolen.

threatened 17-year-old Salvadoran Mario when he rebuffed their attempts to recruit him.¹¹⁸

Mario explains in an interview, “I left because I had problems with the gangs. They hung out by a field that I had to pass to get to school. They said if I didn’t join them, they would kill me. I have many friends who were killed or disappeared because they refused to join the gang. I told the gang I didn’t want to. Their life is only death and jail, and I didn’t want that for myself. I want a future.” Mario’s fear of gang recruitment and hope for a future highlight how many migrants feel they have no choice but to leave these gang-controlled areas where they are unsafe even walking to school.

Guatemala faces threats not only from MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, but also from Los Zetas.¹¹⁹ Los Zetas established operations in Guatemala for their drug trafficking, money laundering, and contraband networks. The gang controls local police, the military, members of the judiciary, and prosecutors. The police and military forces in Guatemala are so infiltrated that in 2006, the United Nations established a special agency called the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala.¹²⁰ This agency assists the government in investigating and disassembling criminality and corruption in the country. Although this organization has seen many successes, corruption still exists in Guatemala and allows criminal organizations such as Los Zetas to continue to control many areas of the country and recruit youth.

M.C. and D.C., two fifteen and sixteen year-old Guatemalan brothers, were forced to hide in their homes from gang recruiters. Through an interpreter they stated, “We couldn’t go outside anymore. The cartels would get us. They shoot up houses. They shoot people on the streets.”¹²¹ Both brothers stopped attending school. The gang began to infiltrate their family, raping their

¹¹⁸ Regarding Mario’s story, see Taub.

¹¹⁹ Information in this paragraph closely follows Carlson and Gallagher pgs. 135-6.

¹²⁰ Regarding the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, see Taub.

¹²¹ This quote is from Lee.

stepsister and leaving her with a message that if the brothers did not join the gang, the family would be killed. As a result, the family made a decision to flee the country, traveling northward to ride *La Bestia*. In this situation, gang violence permeated an entire family and forced them to flee the country in order to escape violence and death threats. The necessity for this family to flee is explained by not only gang recruitment, but also the general culture of violence gangs create throughout Central America.

In recent years, Honduras has seen a rise in the presence of transnational criminal groups.¹²² Colombian drug traffickers changed their routes and transformed Honduras into the primary point for cocaine transfer to the Mexican cartels. Local gangs grew due to the increasing presence of Colombian and Mexican cartels in Honduras. This growth is facilitated by the corrupt Honduran police force and the country's weak judicial system. The UNHCR found that about 34 percent of Honduran youth flee the country to escape violence perpetuated by gangs and other criminal organizations. This statistic correlates with the experiences of Selvin, a Honduran boy who fled the country when he was sixteen. Selvin noted in an interview, "[t]hose guys, they make you do things that you don't want to do. You're trying to be someone in life, but you can't, unless you join them selling drugs, killing people. And you didn't want to do that. You want to be a better person."¹²³ Selvin managed to escape this gang violence and now lives in Worcester, Massachusetts. For many youth like Selvin, gang presence seems unavoidable except by flight to the United States.

Many times, even adults in youth's lives think going to the United States is the best option. Frances Robles interviewed a mother of two in La Pradera, Honduras, who refused to

¹²² Regarding information about political violence in Honduras, see Carlson and Gallagher pgs. 133-4.

¹²³ This quote is from Carlson and Gallagher p. 134.

give her name out of fear of gang reprisals. She said in this interview, “The first thing we can think of is to send our children to the United States. That’s the idea, to leave.”¹²⁴ This same article notes the extremity of this situation, describing an incident in 2014 where thirty-two Honduran youth were murdered, bringing the number of youths killed since January of that year to 409. According to the United Nations, San Pedro Sula, a city in northwestern Honduras, has the world’s highest homicide rate. For these youth and their families, the risk of traveling to the United States is preferred to remaining at home. This preference is a result of necessity, not a desire to face the risk of migration. Scott Johnson also conducted an interview with a Honduran youth, Kevin Arita, who notes “The gangs here threaten us... They come and tell us that they’re going to kill us. If I go to the U.S., I may get killed on the way, but if I stay here I’ll also get killed.” He later recalled that he had the urge to move virtually every day: “You walk around with total fear.”¹²⁵ Kevin’s story is just one example of the thousands of youth migrants who face the same problem and search for a means to escape.

Throughout Central America, governments have responded to threats from gangs with a policy introduced in 2003 called “Mano Dura,” or “iron fist.” These anti-gang policies were mainly put in place in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in response to popular demands and media pressure for these governments to act against an escalation in gang-related crime.¹²⁶ These policies enhanced police power to search and arrest suspected gang members and stiffened penalties for convicted gang members. Officials incarcerated large numbers of youth, often those with visible tattoos, for illicit associations based on their appearance or their neighborhood. This increase in arrests congested an already inadequate and small prison system, creating a space of

¹²⁴ This quote is from Robles.

¹²⁵ Regarding Kevin’s story and gang violence, see Johnson.

¹²⁶ Regarding information concerning “Mano Dura,” see Ribando Seelke.

violence between inmates that frequently results in murder. The effectiveness of Mano Dura policies is contested due to the increase in violence in the Northern Triangle and persistent gang presence in these countries.

Mano Dura policies further stigmatized already marginalized communities. The government and media demonized the activities of tattooed youth, setting them apart from their community. With hundreds of gang members forced into one space in prison, group leaders were able to strategize and plan their activities while hidden from their enemies and criminal prosecution behind bars. By operating within prisons, gangs were able to develop into more sophisticated military and business organizations, expanding their criminal territory to extortions and kidnappings and increasing their violence. This evidences corruption and indicates the government's inability to control even incarcerated gang members. Additionally, gangs began to hide or remove their tattoos, change their dress, and avoid the use of hand signals to make it more difficult for police officers to identify and arrest them. As a result of Mano Dura, organized criminal groups enhanced and perfected their recruitment tactics to avoid government detection. This, in turn, motivated youth to emigrate in order to evade recruitment.

Family Reunification

“The children suffer. One goes so that they are well. We think that they are going to be all right, but in reality we are morally destroying them. When parents migrate and leave their children behind, they do not receive the same warmth that parents provide, even if they are left with a grandmother or an aunt. If they need advice or anything else, they feel deserted.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ This quote is from Moran-Taylor p. 89.

Jorge was eight when his father left for the United States. His father fled from the soldiers in El Salvador due to their belief that he was a guerrillero. He knew his life and the lives of his family members were at risk due to the political instability and corruption in El Salvador at the time; people did not have the right to a trial once the militaries believed someone was a guerrillero. His mother joined his father a year and a half later. Jorge believes that if his parents had not fled from El Salvador, neither they nor he would be alive today. Jorge and his siblings were left in the care of a maternal grandmother and experienced a close and nurturing relationship with her. Jorge eventually made the journey to the U.S. and lives here now with his parents. The transition was quite difficult for him, especially in school, because he had missed the equivalent of two academic years due to political unrest in El Salvador before he had left. He also suffered a measure of post-traumatic stress due to the violence he had witnessed before emigrating.

Luis was six when his mother left El Salvador for the United States. She was a mother of six, and her low wages were not sufficient to feed herself and her family. Luis and his five siblings were left in the care of a maternal grandmother; the mother anticipated that in three years she would return or send for her children. This plan never succeeded and Luis was brought to the U.S. by a coyote six years after his mother's departure. Due to this long period separated from his mother, Luis grew close to his grandmother and considers her the one who raised him.¹²⁸ Luis consequently twice suffered the consequences of separation: once from his mother and again from the grandmother who was his primary caretaker for six years.

These accounts from two Salvadoran youth show how poverty and violence are intertwined in “stage” or “chain” migration that incrementally pursues family reunification. This

¹²⁸ Regarding these two case studies, see chapter four of Artico.

type of migration is a common pattern for Mexican and Central American families: an adult migrates first and gradually facilitates the subsequent migration of family members.¹²⁹ Youth are generally the last link the chain. Parents typically flee to the United States for the aforementioned reasons, and once parents are sufficiently economically stable and find a smuggler in whom they feel confident, they arrange for their children's migration. However, in many cases this is not financially possible, or parents who know the dangers are unwilling to risk their children's wellbeing. In this case, many youth attempt to reunite with their parents on their own volition. Some leave their homes without telling a caretaker and depart on the migrant trail. It is common for people to not hear from migrant youth for months until they make it across the border or are caught by immigration authorities along the way.

Olga and Freddy, two nine-year-old Hondurans depicted in the documentary film *Which Way Home*, cite family reunification as their reason for immigration to the United States.¹³⁰ Olga is trying to find her mother and sisters who are living in Minnesota, while Freddy is attempting to reunite with his father, although we are not told where his father lives. Both of these youth witnessed several atrocities while riding *La Bestia*; however they remained faithful that God would bless their journey. The interview with these youth demonstrate the blind faith they have that they will arrive in the United States and find their family members, acting out of pure necessity for survival. They are unaware of the true locations of their parents; however they continue on the migrant trail in hopes of finding them. The filmmaker does not know the whereabouts of Olga and Freddy to this day.

Migrations tend to begin with the father, who establishes himself financially and send remittances to his family, with the hope of eventually reuniting with them. Honduran father

¹²⁹ Regarding "chain" migration, see Orellana, Thorne, Chee, and Lam.

¹³⁰ *Which Way Home* is a film directed and produced by Rebecca Cammisa.

Daniel notes how he always lived in poverty and did not want his children to do the same.¹³¹ He notes in an interview, “I was left with practically nothing. But it doesn’t bother me, because I’m a responsible father, you know? I did it all for my kids.” Daniel emigrated from Honduras to the United States, leaving his children behind to grow up with their family and attend a university. Fathers like Daniel take the risk and migrate to the United States hoping they will find a job and send money back to their families for food and education. In recent years, mothers from Central America have been drawn to the United States as service workers. Reunification of an entire family can take a number of years, and siblings can travel together or stagger their departure across years. Reunification is a complex process and implies two types of separation: the initial separation from the parent, and the second separation from the caretaker.¹³² Both of these separations cause trauma for the child migrant, aside from the physical and psychological consequences of migration.

Parents who send for their children to join them in the United States and youth who travel to the United States to reunite with their parents hope for greater opportunities. What they sacrifice, however, is much greater: their freedom. Once in the United States, families must be careful not to expose that they are living in the country undocumented. As a result, some migrants lose their freedom to walk in public, be involved on local teams, or participate in local clubs. This new, confined life they lead is exposed through interviews with migrants who maintain that it is preferable to the circumstances in their home countries. However, the psychological effects for these youth who suffer through the trauma and transition of being

¹³¹ Regarding Daniel’s story, see <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-migrant-voices-pope-20160214-htmlstory.html>.

¹³² Regarding information in this paragraph, see Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie.

separated from their parents at such a young age are long lasting and detrimental to their transition to life in a new country.

Research carried out by T.H. Gindling and Sara Poggio studies how the trauma, grief, and disruptions have negative psychological effects on youth and their parents. Through focusing on how this transition affects migrant youth in schools in the United States, the authors found that separation, migration, and reunification have profound affects on youth's academic performance. Due to the trauma they faced in their homes and en route to the United States, some youth are unable to succeed in school. Youth's behavior in the class in the U.S. also reflects their poor performance in schools in their home countries, where they are functioning at the same level due to the allurements of migration as a route to success over education.¹³³ Many do not see a purpose to excel in school because they are focused on the potential of escape through migration. Youth in Central America, left alone without knowing when they will see a family member again, focus on migration as a means of economic and social advancement in life, in addition to reuniting with a loved one, but by doing so often abandon their pre-departure academic obligations.

Street Youth

“Look at them closely-their faces show strain and sadness, their clothes are ragged and dirty, others appear hungry suffering from ill-health and malnutrition. There is something mature beyond their years in the haunted expressions. At night, you can see them huddled along street

¹³³ Regarding an analysis of migrant children in the education system, see Gindling and Poggio.

corners, in doorways, or in any dry and secluded corner. They are the representatives of a growing multitude of children who have become known as the 'street children.'”¹³⁴

In many cases, migration does not begin with youth directly leaving their homes for the United States. A common liminal period for migrant youth is time spent living on the street. There are different ways to define street youth based on how much time they spend on the street, if they return home each night, and their activities on the streets. Motivations to live and work on the street vary per person and operate interactively, correlating to the aforementioned reasons to migrate. Despite the differing levels of life on the street, one experience remains the same: youth face various sources of abuse due to vulnerability and this abuse often contributes to a desire to migrate.

The United Nations defines street youth as “boys and girls for whom ‘the street’ (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become their home and/or source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults.”¹³⁵ There are two broad categories: youth in the street and youth of the street. Youth in the street work and socialize there, but return to a home at night. Youth of the street live there, usually with little or no contact with their families. Many live on the streets intermittently, returning home or moving to different cities. The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Relief Fund (UNICEF) has estimated there are about 100 million street youth worldwide, half of them in Latin America.

With two broad categories of street youth outlined, Volpi offers three more specific categories concerning the levels of risk youth face on the street.¹³⁶ Youth in primary risk are

¹³⁴ This quote is from “The Problem of Street Children in Africa: An Ignored Tragedy.”

¹³⁵ Regarding the definition of street youth, see Volpi pgs. 2- 4.

¹³⁶ Regarding these categories from the work of Barker and Fontes, see Volpi’s p. 4.

attached to their family, school, and society, but due to poverty or other factors, their situation could be compromised in the future. Youth in secondary risk have weaker social ties and are already exposed to some form of specific risk, for example school dropout, abuse, and child labor. Finally, youth in tertiary risk are those for whom one or more of the previously mentioned risks are concrete realities, applicable for both youth in the street and of the street. Their ties with society and family are seriously weakened or severed. Youth may fall in one or more of these categories, and each perpetuates their vulnerability and likelihood to migrate.

The factors that cause youth to move to the street vary, but the common sources include low family income, lack of housing, failure in school, family neglect and abuse, armed conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics.¹³⁷ Inadequate access to funding for public schools undermines the education system's capacity to cater to the needs of their population, resulting in increased dropouts. Youth who dropout of school tend to move to cities to find a job and occupy their time, bored at home with their families. Many youth also move to urban areas to work and support their families living in rural settings. Each of these factors affects youth's decision to move to the streets, and later, to emigrate.

On the streets, youth subsist in the informal economy, which provides them with limited day-to-day resources. For the most part, migrating street youth beg or survive on the little money they earn picking up garbage, selling small goods, shining shoes, parking cars, and washing windshields.¹³⁸ Apart from the informal economy, many youth take part in illicit activities including selling drugs, petty theft, and prostitution. Odd jobs in the informal economy and illicit activities make youth vulnerable to a greater risk of exploitation and encountering health

¹³⁷ Regarding information concerning factors forcing youth to the street, see Volpi p. vii and 5.

¹³⁸ Regarding this information on street youth, see <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2002/MigrantStreetChildrenontheRiseinCentralAmerica.aspx>.

hazards.¹³⁹ As a result, working on the street proves unsustainable for these youth, further encouraging them to migrate in search for a more permanent and secure lifestyle.

On March 31, 1995, Paul Jeffrey published an article concerning street youth in Guatemala. His article included the following story:

Guatemala City--They call it *El Hoyo*--The Hole. Tucked away in the back streets of Guatemala City, it's a section of town not featured on travel posters. Crammed side by side, the bars and brothels blare Mexican ranchero music while empty-eyed children lounge outside, their hands moving frequently to their mouths so they can inhale from a small jar or plastic bag. The containers hold a rubbery substance whose hallucinogenic fumes help the kids survive life in The Hole.¹⁴⁰

This story illustrates the growing problem amongst Central American street youth of sniffing glue. In this harsh environment, youth are forced to learn how to survive each day, including begging and stealing. To deal with the weather, hunger, and loneliness of living on the street, many sniff glue and other solvents. Once inhaled, these psychologically addictive substances numb the pain of hunger and offer youth an escape or illusion of warmth amid the cold and isolating environment in which they live. Jeffrey goes on to describe how the principal ingredient of the glue is toluene, a sweet-smelling, petroleum-derived neurotoxin. The chemical affects the frontal lobe and the brain areas that control emotions, turning off the brain's connection to reality and neutralizing stress, pain, fear, and memory. Consequently, this drug is ideal for youth for comfort and escape from the harsh realities in which they live, but at a high cost. The drug is highly addictive, and also frequently results in nosebleeds, rashes, headaches, neurological damage, and kidney and liver failure.

Lara, a mother at age sixteen, sniffed glue during her pregnancy while living on the street

¹³⁹ Regarding information on jobs in the informal economy, see Volpi, p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ This quote and the following information is from Jeffrey.

in El Salvador.¹⁴¹ The toluene in the glue left her infant with respiratory problems and frequent night seizures. Even after the birth of her child, Lara could not give up the glue, damaging the infant's health. Lara later abandoned her child and returned to the streets, taking up sex work. The effects of the glue were serious for Lara, in addition to many other migrant street youth who are addicted to the substance. The immediate effects of sniffing glue help youth survive in such dangerous living situations, adding a psychological dimension to the to the substance's physical addictiveness.

Besides the dangerous effects of drug abuse, youth face other forms of violence and insecurity while working and living on the streets. One of the main sources of violence is at the hands of police and vigilante groups as a form of "social cleansing."¹⁴² In February of 2003, the body of a young man in San Pedro Sula, Honduras had the words "limpiano la ciudad" [cleaning up the city] scrawled on his bare shoulder in ballpoint pen. This story correlates with many others in cities across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras where police forces and community members, incited by demonizing media portrayal of street youth, attempt to exterminate children much the same as they would a rodent infestation. One youth living on the street for nine years noted, "The police bother us every single day. They hit us and steal our money, our shoes, our jackets. If you don't give them what they want, they'll beat you up or arrest you...we can't say anything, or they'll hit us harder."¹⁴³ The violence and social exclusion youth face on the street reflects their experiences in their communities and those that they will face en route to the United States if they chose to emigrate. It often seems that for them there is no escape.

¹⁴¹ Regarding Lara's story, see Hayskar.

¹⁴² Regarding social cleansing, see Campbell.

¹⁴³ This quote is from <http://gvnet.com/streetchildren/Guatemala.htm>

Conclusion

“He said he was only looking for a better life, una vida mejor, which is a common saying on the migrant trails. But here in southern Mexico, now that Auner and I are alone, with the train tracks next to us and a cigarette resting between his lips, now that we’re apart from his two younger brothers who are playing cards in the migrant shelter’s common room, he admits that the better word to describe his journey is not migration, but escape.”¹⁴⁴

The word ‘escape’ is commonly cited in many migrant youth’s explanation for why they emigrate from their homes. Youth travel to the United States not due to a choice made by free will, but due to the necessity to escape. The concept of an escape encompasses economic, political, social, and physical threats to one’s life, ranging from the chronic poverty characteristic of Central America to the politically unstable and corrupt governments that target youth and allow gangs to control the streets. Whether they plan to reunite with a family member who has already immigrated or they leave their homes and embark on the journey without connections in the United States, youth consistently emigrate from their homes, confronting a variety of dangers en route. Many of them will not make it to the U.S.-Mexico border; even more will not make it past the Mexico-Guatemala border. Due to the Plan Frontera Sur, more undocumented youth have been detained at the Mexico-Guatemala border and sent back to their homes. This does not deter youth from emigrating; it does, however, change the route they may take to migrate.

In light of these risks and an increase in crackdowns by Mexican immigration authorities, today many migrants are opting for other means of transportation through Mexico. They travel in minibuses, in taxis, or in a “Tijanero” bus. These buses travel from southern Mexico to Tijuana

¹⁴⁴ This quote is from Martínez p. x.

and are run by third-rate companies, lacking the permits required of transport companies.¹⁴⁵

Tijuano buses make various stops along the way to the northern border, where many migrants are forced to pay bribes to continue their journey. Although traveling by bus throughout Mexico is considered safer than riding on top of *La Bestia*, migrants still face physical dangers and corruption at the hands of government officials and immigration officers. For a price of \$100 for Mexicans and \$340 for Central Americans, the ride offers a direct route from the southern to the northern border of Mexico. On this route, migrants are forced to survive for four days, exposed to six different climate zones and limited ventilation from two air vents in the roof, without a functioning bathroom or air conditioning.

Traveling to the United States from El Salvador, Pedro embarked upon his fifth trip to the United States.¹⁴⁶ On Pedro's previous four trips across Mexico he rode *La Bestia*, however on his last journey he was extorted by the Zetas and watched them murder a fellow traveler. Not wanting to expose his brother to a similar situation, Pedro decided to attempt the journey on another mode of transportation: the Tijuano. He paid for private transport to Arriaga to avoid migration police checkpoints and then boarded the Tijuano with his brother. Pedro recounted fifteen police checkpoints along the way, giving nearly 1,000 pesos (about US \$67) in bribes for his brother. Pedro himself had purchased a falsified birth certificate to pass through Mexico that cost him \$1,690 to process in the Mexican consulate in Washington, D.C. where he lives. Across the 3,200 kilometers between Arriaga and Sonora, Pedro paid \$2,700 in bribes, later noting "by the time we've crossed into the United States, [my brother] is going to owe me some \$6,000-

¹⁴⁵ Regarding information about Tijuano's, see Siscar.

¹⁴⁶ Regarding Pedro's story, see Siscar.

\$7,000.”¹⁴⁷ Pedro understands that although the municipal police are not authorized to request migratory documents from foreigners in Mexico, it is safer to comply with officials in order to continue on his route, speaking to the levels of corruption in the country. The municipal police take advantage of undocumented youth’s vulnerability and compliance, knowing that most youth migrants will not question police demands.

In addition to riding the Tijuano through Mexico, many migrants are now traveling by boat across the Mexico-Guatemala border and up the Pacific coast of Guatemala and Mexico. Beginning at the Guatemala border in Puerto Madero, migrants ride on rafts to Salinas Cruz, Oaxaca on the Pacific coast and then continue by hiding in cargo trucks, riding buses, or walking over 100 kilometers on foot.¹⁴⁸ In some cases, migrants board *La Bestia* once they arrive in Salinas Cruz and ride the train to the northern border.

“By the way, where is Los Angeles? Is it near California?” a youth migrant named Rene asked an interviewer.¹⁴⁹ In response to seeing their friends beaten and almost murdered by gang members in their Salvadoran community, Rene, Kelvin, Kevin, and Eliseo fled for the United States on skateboards. They traveled over 400 miles from the capital of El Salvador. Eliseo recalled the violence in an interview, stating, “You can’t even walk in the streets. They’ll rob you on the corner or ask you where you’re from, and if you say the wrong neighborhood they’ll shoot you where you stand.”¹⁵⁰ The boys plan to travel the fifteen hundred miles across Mexico and to attempt the crossing into the United States. This innovative form of migration has proven

¹⁴⁷ This quote is from <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/mexico-migrants-extortion-bus-route>.

¹⁴⁸ Regarding information about travel by boat, see “Migrantes cruzan como balseros el sur de Mexico.”

¹⁴⁹ Regarding the interview with four Salvadoran youth who skateboarded through Mexico to arrive at the U.S. border, see Vonk.

¹⁵⁰ This quote is from Vonk.

to act as a form of camouflage from immigration officials, who search for poor, exhausted migrants and are indifferent to youth skateboarding down the street.

These four migrants exemplify others who flee from Central America and are mentally unprepared for the journey. They expect a dangerous trip, but are unaware of the extent of this danger and lack a realistic plan. When Rene asks if Los Angeles is near California, he embodies the thousands of other Central American youth who name various destinations in the United States without knowing their actual locations. Youth understand that their family members live in North Carolina, New York or various other locations, but these are merely words that have little meaning to them. This phenomenon is illustrated in the documentary *Which Way Home*, in which nine-year-old Olga cites Minnesota as her final destination, because her mother and sisters are there. In reality, Olga has no idea where Minnesota is; she is migrating blindly in the hope that she will be reunited with her family. Stories such as Rene's and Olga's highlight migrant youth's vulnerability en route to the United States and their lack of understanding the true scope and potential consequences of migration without documentation through Mexico.

Given the economic, political, and social conditions of the Northern Triangle, it is no surprise that youth continue to emigrate. As they confront physical danger aggravated by incompetence and corruption, migration seems far preferable to the circumstances that they hope to leave behind. By creating new policies that attempt to deter youth from migrating, the Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran governments have, in reality, forced youth to take other dangerous routes. It is common to research Central American youth emigration through the outsider's lens, focusing on what aspect of the United States draws youth to migrate. By looking through the migrant's lens into the historically corrupt, politically unstable, economically depressed, and violence wrought communities in which they live, however, it is

easier to understand why they flee their homes and risk the dangers of emigration. In order to appropriately confront the horrors of migration, the Northern Triangle governments must address the structural issues in their countries that have historically marginalized the majority of youth and forced them and their families to make the life-threatening decisions to flee.

References

- Aguirre, Ivan Pierre. "Mexican Police Helped Cartel Massacre 193 Migrants, Documents Show." *NPR*. NPR, 22 Dec. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.npr.org/2014/12/22/372579429/mexican-police-helped-cartel-massacre-193-migrants-documents-show>>.
- Aridjis, Homero. "Migrants Ride a 'Train of Death' to Get to America & We're Ignoring the Root of the Problem." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 7 Aug. 2014. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/homero-aridjis/migrants-train-of-death-america-_b_5568288.html>.
- Artico, Ceres I. *Latino Families Broken by Immigration: The Adolescent's Perceptions*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publ., 2003. Print.
- Batalova, Jeanne, and Jie Zong. "Central American Immigrants in the United States." Migration Policy Institute, 2 Sept. 2015. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>>.
- Biekart, Kees. "Assessing the 'arrival of Democracy' in Central America". *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 96 (2014): 117–126. Web. 30 Jan. 2016.
- Boggs, Clay. "Mexico's Southern Border Plan: More Deportations and Widespread Human Rights Violations." *Mexico's Southern Border Plan: More Deportations and Widespread Human Rights Violations*. WOLA, 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <http://www.wola.org/commentary/update_on_mexico_s_southern_border_plan_new_routes_more_deportations_and_widespread_human>.
- Burnett, John. "Mexico's Ferocious Zetas Cartel Reigns Through Fear." *NPR*. NPR, 2 Oct. 2009. Web. 06 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113388071>>.
- Campbell, Duncan. "Murdered with Impunity, the Street Children Who Live and Die like Vermin." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 29 May 2003. Web. 15 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/may/29/duncancampbell>>.
- "Caravan of Mothers Disappeared in Mexico." N.p., 10 Dec. 2015. Web. 5 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/17946>>.
- Carlson, Elizabeth, and Anna Marie Gallagher. "Humanitarian Protection for Children Fleeing Gang-Based Violence in the Americas." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3.2 (2015): 129-58. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.
- "Central American Migrants in Mexico: Lost in a Black Hole of Violence." *COHA*. N.p., 07 Sept. 2011. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.coha.org/central-american-migrants-in-mexico-lost-in-a-black-hole-of-violence-2/>>.
- Cherrett, Ian. "Decentralization, Rural Poverty, and Degradation of Uplands in Central America". *Mountain Research and Development* 21.3 (2001): 221–225. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.
- Constable, Pamela. "Could Deporting Children to Central America Accelerate Gang Violence?" *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 25 July 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/gang-member-deportations-in-90s-factor-in-border-crisis-some-contend/2014/07/25/10c5adda-0d1d-11e4-8341-b8072b1e7348_story.html>.

- Cottrell, Jesse Alejandro. "Way Station." *The California Sunday Magazine*. N.p., 29 Oct. 2015. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<https://story.californiasunday.com/migrant-shelter-mexico-guatemala>>.
- Cuevas, Jose Luis. "The Problems Mexican Migrants Face and the Officers Struggling to Help | VICE | United States." *Vice*, 24 Mar. 2016. Web. 06 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.vice.com/read/migrant-mission-v23n1>>.
- Davila, Ana. "Drug Cartels: Where Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling Meet Today." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 16 June 2015. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ana-davila/drug-cartels-where-human-trafficking-and-human-smuggling-meet-today_b_7588408.html>.
- "Divisions - Unaccompanied Children's Services." *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. Administration for Children and Families, 3 Oct. 2012. Web. 04 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/divisions-unaccompanied-childrens-services>>.
- Donato, Katharine M., and Blake Sisk. "Children's Migration to the United States from Mexico and Central America: Evidence from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3.1 (2015): 58-79. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.
- "El Salvador." *CJA : Background on El Salvador*. The Center for Justice and Accountability, n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2016. <http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=199>.
- Frank-Vitale, Amelia. "Central American Migrants in Mexico: Implications for U.S. Security and Immigration Policy." *CLALS Working Paper Series* 2 (2013): 1-12. Web. 17 Apr. 2016. <http://www.american.edu/clals/upload/CLALS-Working-Paper_CA-Migrants-in-Mexico.pdf>.
- Garni, Alisa. "Mechanisms of Migration: Poverty and Social Instability in the Postwar Expansion of Central American Migration to the United States." *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 8.3 (2010): 322-25. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- Gerber, Marisa, and Laura Tillman. ""Migrant Voices: On Journey to North, 'you Can't Smile Because There Is No Reason To'" *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Feb. 2016. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-migrant-voices-pope-20160214-htmstory.html>>.
- Gindling, T.H., and Sara Poggio. "Family Separation And Reunification As A Factor In The Educational Success Of Immigrant Children." *Journal Of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 38.7 (2012): 1155-1173. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.
- Goldberg, Eleanor. "80% Of Central American Women, Girls Are Raped Crossing Into The U.S." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 12 Sept. 2014. Web. 28 Apr. 2016. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/12/central-america-migrants-rape_n_5806972.html>.
- Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana, Jens Manuel Krogstad, and Mark Hugo Lopez. "DHS: Violence, Poverty, Is Driving Children to Flee Central America to U.S." *Fact Tank*. Pew Research Center, 01 July 2014. Web. 04 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/01/dhs-violence-poverty-is-driving-children-to-flee-central-america-to-u-s/>>.
- Gonzalez, Elizabeth. "Weekly Chart: Latin America's Informal Economy." *Weekly Chart: Latin America's Informal Economy*. Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 2 Apr. 2015.

- Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.as-coa.org/articles/weekly-chart-latin-americas-informal-economy>>.
- Grant, Will. "Las Patronas: The Mexican Women Helping Migrants - BBC News." *BBC News*. N.p., 31 July 2014. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-28193230>>.
- Grillo, Ioan. "The Mexican Drug Cartels' Other Business: Sex Trafficking | TIME.com." *World The Mexican Drug Cartels Other Business Sex Trafficking Comments*. N.p., 31 July 2013. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://world.time.com/2013/07/31/the-mexican-drug-cartels-other-business-sex-trafficking/>>.
- Hamilton, Nora, and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis". *Latin American Research Review* 26.1 (1991): 75–110. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.
- Hayskar, Bonnie. "Sticking with Addiction in Latin America." *Street Children: Latin America and the Caribbean*. PANGAEA, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. <http://pangaea.org/street_children/latin/monitor.htm>.
- Imison, Paul. "The Right Train That Runs to the Heart of Mexico's 'Drug War': Riding 'La Bestia' to Freedom or Death." *The Independent*. Independent Digital News and Media, 3 Feb. 2013. Web. 15 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/the-freight-train-that-runs-to-the-heart-of-mexicos-drugs-war-riding-la-bestia-to-freedom-or-death-8478906.html>>.
- Isacson, Adam. *Mexico's Other Border: Security, Migration, and the Humanitarian Crisis at the Line with Central America*. Rep. N.p., June 2014. Web. 5 Jan. 2016. <http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/WOLA_The%20Other%20Border%20Publication.pdf>.
- Jacobs, Harrison. "What It's like to Ride the 'Train of Death' from Mexico to the US." *Business Insider*. Business Insider, Inc, 05 Nov. 2015. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/what-its-like-to-ride-the-train-of-death-from-mexico-to-the-us-2015-11>>.
- Jeffrey, Paul. "Missing in Mexico." *Christian Century* 2 Apr. 2014: 26-29. Web.
- Jeffrey, Paul. "Toxic Glue in Central America." *Toxic Glue in Central America*. National Catholic Reporter, 31 Mar. 1995. Web. 04 Mar. 2016. <http://pangaea.org/street_children/latin/ncr.htm>.
- Johnson, Jennifer. "Perilous Journey: Kidnapping and Violence against Migrants in Transit through Mexico." *Latin America Working Group Education Fund* (2013): 1-28. Web. <https://utexas-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2152/26546/LAWG2-13_Migrant_Report-v5.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>.
- Johnson, Scott. "American-Born Gangs Helping Drive Immigrant Crisis at U.S. Border." *National Geographic*. National Geographic Society, 25 July 2014. Web. 4 Feb. 2016. <<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/07/140723-immigration-minors-honduras-gang-violence-central-america/>>.
- Kopoka, Peter A. "The problem of street children in Africa: An ignored tragedy." *International Conference on Street Children and Street Children's Health in East Africa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*. 2000. Web. 19 Jan. 2016.
- Kovic, Christine, and Francisco Argüelles. "The Violence of Security: Central American Migrants Crossing Mexico's Southern Border". *Anthropology Now* 2.1 (2010): 87–97. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.
- Lee, Esther Yu-Hsi. "These Three Central American Kids Who Fled Violence Are Asking Congress to Help Others Like Them." *Think Progress*. N.p., 30 July 2014. Web. 24 Apr.

2016. <<http://thinkprogress.org/immigration/2014/07/30/3465488/these-three-central-american-kids-are-asking-congress-to-help-migrant-children/>>.
- Lee, Esther Yu-Hsi. "Two Guatemalan Teens Explain Why They Traveled 2500 Miles, Without Their Parents, to America." *Think Progress*. N.p., 3 Dec. 2014. Web. 29 Apr. 2016. <<http://thinkprogress.org/immigration/2014/12/03/3585213/san-diego-feature-2/>>.
- Martínez, Óscar. *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail*. New York: Verso, 2014. Print.
- McPhail, Fiona. "Extortion, Torture, Death: Price of Migration to US: Fiona Mcphail Reports from the Preliminary Hearing of the International Permanent People's Tribunal in Mexico City". *Socialist Lawyer* 65 (2013): 28–29. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.
- Miller, Talea. "Timeline: Guatemala's Brutal Civil War." *PBS*. PBS, 7 Mar. 2011. Web. 28 Apr. 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/latin_america-jan-june11-timeline_03-07/>.
- Moran-Taylor, Michelle J.. "When Mothers and Fathers Migrate North: Caretakers, Children, and Child Rearing in Guatemala". *Latin American Perspectives* 35.4 (2008): 79–95. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- Morrison, Andrew R., and Rachel A. May. "Escape from Terror: Violence and Migration in Post-revolutionary Guatemala". *Latin American Research Review* 29.2 (1994): 111–132. Web. 15 Dec. 2015.
- Nolen, Stephanie. "Menaced by Gangs, El Salvador's Children Are Running for Their Lives." *The Globe and Mail*. N.p., 29 Aug. 2015. Web. 29 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/menaced-by-gangs-el-salvadors-children-are-running-for-their-lives/article26151568/>>.
- Oleaga, Michael. "Poverty in Latin America: One-Third of Region's Population At Risk of Falling Into Poverty." *Latin Post*, 27 Aug. 2014. Web. 15 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.latinpost.com/articles/20100/20140827/poverty-latin-america-one-third-regions-population-risk-falling-poverty.htm>>.
- Orellana, Marjorie Faulstich, Barrie Thorne, Anna Chee, and Wan Shun Eva Lam. "Transnational Childhoods: The participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration," *Social Problems*, Vol.48, No. 4 Nov. 2001. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.
- Orellana, Xiomara. "Migrantes Cruzan Como Balseros El Sur De Mexico." *La Prensa*. N.p., 2 Feb. 2015. Web. 5 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/790984-410/migrantes-cruzan-como-balseros-el-sur-de-mexico>>.
- Orgen, Cassandra. "Migration and Human Rights on the Mexico-Guatemala Border." *International Migration* 45.4 (2007): 203-43. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.
- Paz, Frank. "Children seek refuge from gang-forced recruitment: how asylum law can protect the defenseless." *Fordham Urban Law Journal* May 2015: 1063+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 4 Apr. 2016. https://login.peach.comncoll.edu/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com/ps/I.do?id=GALE%7CA429278475&v=2.1&u=connc_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=ddf0d7ce3a3f26621c8b7c620b5a44c1.
- Penhaul, Karl. "Scarred but Alive after Riding the Train of Death." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 30 July 2010. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/07/30/wus.la.bestia.penhaul/>>.
- Perez, Eduardo. "Rising Child Migration to the United States." *Migrationpolicy.org*. Migration Policy Institute, 21 July 2014. Web. 04 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/prgrams/us-immigration-policy-program/rising-child-migration-united-states>>.

- Petrich, Blanche. "Mexico Voices: Migration Through Mexico: Central American Mothers Conclude 11th Annual Caravan." *Mexico Voices: Migration Through Mexico: Central American Mothers Conclude 11th Annual Caravan*. N.p., 21 Dec. 2015. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://mexicovoices.blogspot.com/2015/12/migration-through-mexico-central.html>>.
- "Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map." N.p., Sept. 2014. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=39224238>.
- "Prevalence, Abuse, and Exploitation of Street Children." *Street Children - Guatemala*. BBC News, 13 Apr. 2002. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. <<http://gynet.com/streetchildren/Guatemala.htm>>.
- Restrepo, Dan, and Ann Garcia. "The Surge of Unaccompanied Children from Central America." *The Surge of Unaccompanied Children from Central America: Root Causes and Policy Solutions*. Center for American Progress, 24 July 2014. Web. 04 Jan. 2016. <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/report/2014/07/24/94396/the-surge-of-unaccompanied-children-from-central-america-root-causes-and-policy-solutions/>>.
- Robles, Frances. "Fleeing Gangs, Children Head to U.S. Border." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 09 July 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/world/americas/fleeing-gangs-children-head-to-us-border.html>>.
- Romo, Rafael. "Human Trafficking Survivor: I Was Raped 43,200 times." *CNN*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2015. Web. 06 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/10/americas/freedom-project-mexico-trafficking-survivor/>>.
- Rosenblum, Marc R. *Unaccompanied Child Migration to the United States: The Tension between Protection and Prevention*. Rep. Migration Policy Institute, Apr. 2015. Web. 3 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/unaccompanied-child-migration-united-states-tension-between-protection-and-prevention>>.
- Rueda, Manuel. "Why a Train Carrying Hundreds of Migrants Derailed in Mexico." *ABC News*. ABC News Network, 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/train-carrying-hundreds-migrants-derailed-mexico/story?id=20071646>.
- Salt, John, and Jeremy Stein. "Migration as a Business: The Case of Trafficking." *International Migration* 35.4 (1997): 467-94. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.
- Sanchez, Linda E. "In Search of the American Dream: Undocumented Youth and the Journey North." Thesis. San Diego State University, 2013. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. <https://sdsu-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.10/6087/Sanchez_sdsu_0220N_10076.pdf?sequence=1>.
- Sanchez, Mayela. "Tensions Between Migrants and Mexican Community Force Shelter Closings." *Global Press Journal*. N.p., 09 Dec. 2012. Web. 5 Feb. 2016. <<http://globalpressjournal.com/americas/mexico/tensions-between-migrants-and-mexican-community-force-shelter-closings/>>.
- Seelke, Clare Ribando. "GANGS IN CENTRAL AMERICA." *Current Politics and Economics of South and Central America* 4.1 (2011): 67-96. ProQuest. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.
- Shoichet, Catherine E. "In Mexico, Central American Immigrants under Fire." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 14 July 2012. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/14/world/americas/mexico-immigrant-shelter/>>.

- Siscar, Majo. "Las Carreteras De La Extorsión; Cómo Sobrevivir En Un Tijuano." *Las Carreteras De La Extorsión; Cómo Sobrevivir En Un Tijuano*. En El Camino, 5 Dec. 2014. Web. 15 Feb. 2016. <<http://enelcamino.periodistasdeapie.org.mx/ruta/las-carreteras-de-la-extorsion-como-sobrevivir-en-un-tijuano/>>.
- Siscar, Majo. "The Buses (and Bribes) of a Migrant's Journey Through Mexico." *Insight Crime*. N.p., 31 Dec. 2014. Web. 4 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/mexico-migrants-extortion-bus-route>>.
- Sládková, Jana. *New Americans : Recent Immigration and American Society : Journeys of Undocumented Honduran Migrants to the United States*. El Paso, TX, USA: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2010. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 29 February 2016.
- Sorrentino, Joseph. "A Long Walk Through Mexico." *Commonwealth* 142.18 (2015): 10-12. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.
- "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015." *Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015*. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, n.d. Web. 20 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2015>>.
- Staudt, Kathleen A., Tony Payan, and Z. Anthony. Kruszewski. *Human Rights along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gendered Violence and Insecurity*. Tucson: U of Arizona, 2009. Print.
- Stevens, Elijah. "Mexico's Southern Border Plan Fuels Violence." *Mexico's Southern Border Plan Fuels Violence*. Insight Crime, 10 Nov. 2015. Web. 5 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/mexico-southern-border-plan-fuels-violence>>.
- Suárez-Orozco, Carola, Irina L.G. Todorova, and Josephine Louie. "Making Up For Lost Time: The Experience Of Separation And Reunification Among Immigrant Families." *Family Process* 41.4 (2002): 625. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.
- Taylor, Alan. "An Immigrant's Journey." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 13 Aug. 2013. Web. 01 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2013/08/an-immigrants-journey/100573/>>.
- Taub, Amanda. "The Awful Reason Tens of Thousands of Children Are Seeking Refuge in the United States." *Vox*. N.p., 30 June 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/30/5842054/violence-in-central-america-and-the-child-refugee-crisis>>.
- Terrio, Susan J. *Whose Child Am I?: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Children in U.S. Immigration Custody*. N.p.: U of California, 2015. Print.
- "The Tormented Isthmus." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 16 Apr. 2011. Web. 10 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.economist.com/node/18558254>>.
- Toller, Cheryl A. "Gangs in Central America." *Central America's Gang Violence and the Rise of Unaccompanied Children in the U.S.* N.p.: Nova Science Incorporated, 2014. N. pag. Print.
- "Trafficking in Persons Report 2014." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 2014. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2014/index.htm>>.
- Unidad De Politica Migratoria. *Boletín Mensual De Estadísticas Migratorias 2013*. Rep. Secretaria De Gobernacion, n.d. Web. <http://www.wola.org/files/2013_inm_stats.pdf>.
- Valencia, Nick. "72 Bodies Found in Mexico Were Immigrants, Officials Say." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 25 Aug. 2010. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2010/CRIME/08/25/mexico.dead.bodies/>>.

- Vargas-Ramos, Carlos. "The Central American Child Emigration Crisis: Facts, Figures, and Root Causes." *The Central American Child Emigration Crisis: Facts, Figures, and Root Causes*. Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 23 Sept. 2014. Web. 04 Feb. 2016. <http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0097>.
- "Victims' Stories." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 2013. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013/210546.htm>>.
- Villegas, Rodrigo Dominguez. "Central American Migrants and "La Bestia": The Route, Dangers, and Government Responses." *Migrationpolicy.org*. Migration Policy Institute, 10 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-migrants-and-la-bestia-route-dangers-and-government-responses>>.
- Vogt, Wendy A. "Crossing Mexico" Structural violence and the commodification of undocumented Central American migrants" *Journal of the American Ethnological Society* Vol. 40 No. 4. Nov 2013. Web. 06 Jan. 2016. Pp. 764-780. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/am.et.12053/full>
- Volpi, Elena. *Street Children: Promising Practices and Approaches*. Rep. Washington, D.C.: International Bank for Reconstruction, 2002. Print.
- Vonk, Levi. "How Four Dudes Skated from El Salvador to the U.S. to Flee Gang Violence." *Rolling Stone*. N.p., 17 July 2015. Web. 18 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/four-dudes-from-el-salvador-are-skating-to-america-20150717?page=2>>.
- Wantchekon, Leonard. "The Paradox of "warlord" Democracy: A Theoretical Investigation". *The American Political Science Review* 98.1 (2004): 17–33. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.
- "What It's Like to Fall Off La Bestia." *NPR*. NPR, 18 Dec. 2015. Web. 06 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.npr.org/2015/12/18/460300307/what-it-s-like-to-fall-off-la-bestia>>.
- Which Way Home*. Dir. Rebecca Cammisa. White Buffalo Entertainment, 2009. DVD.
- Working with UAC Survivors of Human Trafficking*. Rep. Tahirih Justice Center, n.d. Web. 5 Feb. 2016. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Identifying%20and%20Working%20with%20Human%20Trafficking%20Survivors_3.pdf>.
- Wolseth, Jon. "Everyday Violence and the Persistence of Grief: Wandering and Loss Among Honduran Youths." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 13.2 (2008): 311-35. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.
- Yarris, Kristin, and Heide Castañeda. "Encounters of Violence and Care: Central American Transit Migration through Mexico." *Somatosphere Encounters of Violence and Care Central American Transit Migration through Mexico Comments*. N.p., 2 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <<http://somatosphere.net/2014/09/encounters-of-violence-and-care-central-american-transit-migration-through-mexico.html>>.