**Dangerous Encounters Along the Mexican Migration Route**

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Governance, Policy, and Political Economy**
GPPE

Specialization:

**Public Policy and Management**

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The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2014

## *Disclaimer:*

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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## Dedication:

To all who have helped me grow intellectually this year.  Thank you.

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# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AI | Amnesty International |
| BCIE | Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica (Central American Economic Integration Bank) |
| CDNH | Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (National Human Rights Commission –Mexico) |
| COHA | Council on Hemispheric Affairs |
| DHS | Department of Homeland Security (U.S.) |
| FCCM | Ferrocarriles Chiapas-Mayab |
| FDA | Food and Drug Administration (U.S.) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| IACHR | Inter-American Commission on Human Rights |
| IMDOSOC | Instituto Mexicano de Doctrina Social Cristiana (Mexican Institute of Social Christian Doctrine) |
| INM | Instituto Nacional de Migración (National Migration Institute – Mexico) |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| PBI | Peace Brigades International |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| UNSD | United Nations Statistics Division |

## Abstract

A growing number of Central Americans from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are migrating toward the United States to escape poverty, lack of opportunities, and violence. Migrants pass through Mexico, where the lucrative migration industry and corruption have prevented the implementation of recent laws intended to protect migrants. Along the way, migrants are exposed to a variety of uncivil groups that take advantage of their unprotected position. Humanitarian shelters for migrants work to provide spaces of safety amidst widespread insecurity. Through secondary data analysis, this research explores how and why these different civil and uncivil actors interact with migrants. The study explores the violence from a systems-level analysis and a body politics framework and reveals the strong gendered dimension to personal violence. The strength of uncivil operations creates insecurity for migrants throughout their journeys, and even civil spaces can become implicated in uncivil operations. The lack of a meaningful, humanitarian response from the Mexican state is representative of ongoing cycles of violence and corruption in the country.

## Relevance to Development Studies

Globalization has led to an increased need for people to leave their homelands to find economic opportunities to support themselves. After leaving their countries and families, migrants from Central America encounter suffering in Mexico at the hands of uncivil actors. Understanding how and why this takes place is an important step in putting an end to violent systems against migrants on their journeys. The ideal solution is to eliminate the need for people to migrate for economic or security reasons; however, until that goal is achieved, the migration route itself must not be a place of insecurity.

### Keywords

Central American migrants, transit, migration, Mexico, civil society, uncivil society

**A dream, from a father to his son.**

I left my country, Honduras, leaving my pregnant wife
I ignored what they told me: on the journey they attack, kidnap, and kill.
I did not stop.

I arrived in Veracruz, Tierras Aguas, feared place.
I saw a father with his two sons, we shared the same fate.

I remember, between nine and ten at night a boy stood on the train,
The branches murder, they threw him from the train.

Distressed, I thought of returning, my pregnant wife: my motivation

A beautiful piece of news: my son was born!
I will continue!

The nights were sad, far from my family, with God…

-Juan Ramón Martínez. Honduras.
Written in La Casa del Migrante de Saltillo, Coahuila

# Chapter 1: Beginnings of the Journey

*"We run the risk that they kill us in our villages or we will end dying of hunger. We prefer to die in the intent. We prefer to risk our lives to see if we can succeed in what many of us have heard, that life is better there…"*

-Migrant woman aboard the northbound freight train, Mexico (Ultreras 2014)

In 2014, Cecilia was one of over half a million people to leave their homes in northern Central America (Cave and Robles 2014). She left the town of El Paraíso, Guatemala in late spring, and a month later she arrived in Fort Myers, Florida, USA. In El Paraíso, her family accepted a loan from a smuggler in the amount of seven thousand dollars. In return, as a guarantee they gave him the original deed to their house. Cecilia's aunt has one year to pay off this loan which adds to nearly twice the average annual earnings per person in Guatemala (UNSD 2014). Tens of thousands of other people will begin the same journey this year, and their situations may likely be similar to Cecilia's. Some will reach their destinations in the United States, but many will became caught in a system of heavy debt, lose limbs or their lives, suffer multiple rapes and torture. They will never reach their destinations. In the case of sixteen-year old Cecilia, the cost of her journey was much more than the loan her aunt took. She left the violence which murdered her stepfather and arrived in a city where she may find work, but was a victim of violences and a kidnapping during her journey. The financial costs of the journey still bear on her family through threats from the smuggler they hired, and life in the United States has its own hardships. This year, hundreds of thousands of Central American migrants will live similar experiences as they attempt to find a better life.

## Background Information

Data from migrants, their destination is to arrive in the United States; however, immigration policy in the U.S. allocates each country a specific number of visas per year; however, this number is not sufficient to cater to the number of applied-for visas from the Northern Triangle. Since immigration policies have not changed since 1986, this number has remained constant in each country for nearly twenty years. During these two decades, several significant changes have taken place in Central America which have affected the number of people seeking to migrate. These changes fall under three interrelated categories: economy, transnational connections, and in-country violence (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 2). First, the economies of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have become further integrated into regional and global

systems through free trade agreements. The Central American Free Trade Agreement led to a loss of livelihoods in Central American countries as product dumping of corn and other agriculture from the United States made it impossible for local Central American prices to compete. Next, the inflow of Central Americans seeking refuge in the United States during and after the civil war era strengthened connections with the United States (Zilberg 2011). The first wave of migrants that settled in the United States created incentives for more people to undertake the journey. They sent news home and found opportunities for family and community members in their new towns. In this manner, Central American communities grew in the United States (Zilberg 2013). Political violence from the 1980s was an initial push-factor for outmigration, but US policies in the 1990s led to deportations of gang members and a new wave of violence in the region; this has led to a new phase of northbound migration (Santamaría 2013: 1-2).

The current waiting list for Central Americans with immediate relatives who have petitioned for their visas in the United States is long. For Salvadorans alone, 71,833 people are waiting for high priority level visas, and this number alone is three times the total number of all visas allocated annually to El Salvador (U.S. Department of State 2013: 3). Because it is difficult to obtain a US visa, many northern Central Americans migrate without it as they move through Mexico and into the United States. The extralegal nature of their travel makes an exact figure of unauthorized migrants impossible; however, this number is estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands (AI 2010).

**Differences between the law and reality**

In 2011, Mexico amended its immigration laws and decriminalized migration by unauthorized persons within its territory. The new migration law replaced the General Law of Population from 1974 in which migrants where subjected to harsh penalties, including up to ten years in prison, if they did not have legal authorization to be in Mexico. The severity of these laws encouraged officials to use them to their advantage against migrants. Rather than arrest unauthorized migrants, detain, and likely deport them, law enforcement officers often demanded money from migrants (González-Murphy and Koslowski 2011: 2). The new migration law is---on paper---a strong improvement for migrants. Mexico's new migration policy now dictates that "independent of the migratory situation" of a foreigner, legal treatment and access to certain services are to be made available (INM 2012: 4).

Despite the improvements in the law, testimonies of migrants reveal that the experiences they encounter in Mexico have not changed since the new law came into effect. Rape, extortion, beatings, and other violence against migrants in transit are still a reality for many thousands of migrants in Mexico. Moreover, migrant shelters in Mexico report that eight out of ten women who stay in their shelters has been raped (Flores Noriega et al. 2014). Even though at the current time the new immigration law is just three years old, there has been no noted diminishing of abuses toward migrants. On the contrary, the increase in numbers of migrating Central Americans has only led to more widespread and coordinated abuse at the hands of authorities, organized crime, and other groups.

## Research Objective

The objective of this research is to better understand some causes of forms of manifestation of violence against Central American migrants in Mexico. The majority of the literature around migration towards the United States focuses geographically on the U.S.-Mexico border and nationally on Mexicans crossing to the U.S.. The increasing number of Central Americans traversing Mexico toward the United States also warrants investigation. Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans face multiple threats as they are leaving homelands with much violence and without economic opportunities and passing through hostile terrain where they encounter uncivil groups. My objective in focusing on Central Americans and their journeys through Mexico is to devote attention to a growing demographic of migrants, but it is also to move away from the trend of focusing only on border areas in North American regional studies of migration. Nearly the entire journey for a migrant takes place between the borders, and I feel the literature should reflect this.

Additionally, through this research, I hope to provide new insight into the interactions that take place throughout Mexico between locals and migrants from Central America. Several factors influence the involvement of local actors in a migrants' journey, and by analyzing these factors one could better understand what makes the journey difficult for Central American migrants. The hope is that research in this area can raise awareness which may ultimately lead to positive changes in the experiences of migrants during their journeys.

# Research Questions

The focus of this research is to analyze how and why different civil and uncivil actors within Mexico are interacting with migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras as they travel through the country on their way to the United States.

Three sub-questions will be used to approach this question:

- How does the system of violence operate against northern Central American migrants?
- How is the physical human body implicated into these systems of violence?
- How and why are civil actors, particularly migrant shelters, responding in the ways that they are?

## Research Methodology

This research was written from The Hague using secondary sources. Three works, *El Norte* (1983) and *La Jaula de Oro* (2013), which tell the stories of migrants journeying north from Guatemala were instrumental in mentally carrying me to the migration paths thousands of migrants, and eventually led me to focus on the hardships faced by migrants in my analysis. Sonia Nazario's book *Enrique's Journey* (2006) also played a critical role in guiding me to search for information about particular locations and shelters in Mexico.

Publications from human rights organizations such as the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico and Amnesty International were used as a starting point to gain an understanding of main abuses faced by migrants on their journeys. I moved beyond the statistics offered by these resources and accessed existing interviews and pieces of conversations with migrants to humanize the topic. Sources on the Internet such as YouTube and the websites of some of the better known migrant shelters carried me closer to my topic and provided me with on-the-ground information about the situation for migrants. As I was unable to go to the field to conduct field work, for some of my arguments I have relied on interviews and conservations that other researchers have had in the field. Interviews, writings from journalists, and data and information released by migrant shelters provided me with much of the information I needed. As the topic of Central American migration through Mexico became headline news in the United States this summer (2014), much new information on the topic has become available in the past two months.

This research has been an on-going process of growth for me both on the research topic and, personally, as a growing researcher. When I initially began work on this topic, I was interpreting the situation for migrants as one of a 'good' civil society working to support migrants against 'bad' uncivil actors. After a time, however, it became clear that strong underlying forces influenced uncivil and civil actors, and that there was more value in understanding the complex situation faced by migrants as one which acknowledged these forces. I chose Galtung's classic systems of violence theory that approaches violence as coming from three dimensions (cultural, structural, and direct). At the same time, studying migration in the Americas from across the globe in Europe felt disconnected from the actual experiences of migrants. For this reason, in an attempt to keep my focus on the individuals affected by the purpose, part of my analysis focuses on the human body in body politics. The movements and ways people adapt their bodies to survive the trip north are a strong reflection of the risks they face and the power they do or do not have to respond to these threats. At the same time, the ways in which different players interact with migrants as 'human bodies' reveals the strength of the business around migration. Violence systems and body politics became the core lenses for my analysis, and I applied them in my analysis of civil society and civic operations in my final analytical chapter.

## Structure

This paper will discuss how and why civil and uncivil actors in Mexico are responding to the flow of transiting migrants from Central America through the use of a conceptual and analytical framework and three sub-research questions. The following chapter will present the key concepts to be used in the paper and the two theories, Galtung's systems of violence and body politics analysis, upon which the analysis will be framed. Chapter Three will then respond to the first sub-question by exploring the system of violence that operates against Central Americans migrating through Mexico. This chapter's analysis will focus on the indirect forms of violence with particular emphasis on structural violence. Next, Chapter Four will explore the ways in which the human body is affected through direct forms of personal violence. It will focus on the transporting of these bodies and the ways in which uncivil actors use migrants as commodities from which to financially benefit. The final analytical chapter, Chapter Five, will discuss the civic actors, in particular migrant shelters run affiliated with the Catholic Church, that work to assistance Central Americans on their journeys north. Civic spaces are a contested space; therefore, the interactions between civil and uncivil actors will be addressed in this

chapter. The conclusion will offer a synthesis of the analyses from Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

# Chapter Two: Conceptual and Analytical Framework

The forms of violence against migrants transiting through Mexico and the responses from civic, humanitarian organizations are not random in nature; rather, they are part of a growing system in which an increasing number of actors is involved. In this research, three primary actors will be explored: civic, Central American migrants transiting through Mexico, and perpetrators of violence (the uncivil society). The analysis of the positions they assume and actions they take will be viewed through a systems of violence framework and the concept of body politicization. These three concepts will be applied to the aforementioned actors in order to explore how and why civic and violent actors respond to the flow of migrants through Mexico.

## Key Concepts:

### Migrants in Transit

Central American migrants who pass through Mexico toward the United States are often referred to in the literature as 'transitory' or 'transit' migrants (Rodriguez Chavez et al. 2011). The phrase 'transitory migration' is used to describe the "situation" between emigration and settlement (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, Aspasia 2008: 4) in which migrants have left their homelands but are not yet at a 'destination'. Though employed widely, the notion of 'transitory migrants' is problematic. First, migrants may not always have a known destination when they leave their homes. Especially in cases where migrants left quickly, their focus may have been centered on leaving rather than on a destination; in this sense, it is difficult to define a location as the 'transit' portion of the journey. Likewise, situations en route may cause plans to change, so 'transit' parts of the journey may become the new destination. Uncertainty often surrounds the movement of people; therefore, it is impossible to pinpoint an exact starting and ending location between which a migrant can be considered as 'transiting'. For this reason, instead of referring to the migrants themselves as 'transitory', this research will refer to them, when needed, as 'transiting' or 'in transit'. In this sense, the migrants themselves are not seen as either inherently in a state of 'transit'. Additionally, it focuses the description on the physical act of transiting, or migrating.

The terms 'transiting migrants' or 'migrants in transit' also removes the connotation that the term 'transitory migrants' carries. Debates on the terminology used to describe 'migrants on their journey' are of political relevance. The concept of 'transitory migrants', and the understanding of migrants in one country as a passing flow into another, affects how--and where-

-the receiving, 'country of settlement' enforces its borders. In several parts of the world, the understanding of a group of people passing through one intermediary territory to reach a separate destination has changed the ways in which borders are enforced. Rather than the final destination country enforcing its border where it actually exists, migration controls and security are extended to the 'transit' country to prevent 'transiting' people from even nearing its country. This can be seen in the cases of sub-Saharan migrants moving north, presumably into Europe, but encountering border security from Europe even before they leave North Africa (Alscher 2005: 2, 11). Düvel refers to the phenomenon of enforcing state borders from outside one's state as 'externalizing' (2012: 416) a border. Especially where the relationship between two countries is unequal, as in the case of the United States and Mexico, the 'destination country' has much power to exert its own interests on border and immigration enforcement practices. By using an alternate term, this phenomenon is not depoliticized; however, it creates separation from the political connotations of 'transitory migrants'.

**Uncivil Society**

In the almost three thousand kilometer journey through Mexico, there is ample opportunity for migrants to be implicated in the "migration industry" which, "capitalize[s] on migrants' desire to move" and the lack of successful regulation by governments of the migration flow (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013: 2). In the case of Mexico, this industry involves an increasing number of actors, ranging from venders and small-scale businesses to large private corporations or organized crime groups. Part of the migration industry includes the multi-billion dollar business surrounding arresting, detaining, and deporting migrants (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2012: 2-3). This formal business sector is a relevant area for research, but the primary focus of this paper will be the informal migration industry, comprised of often highly organized groups who gain profit, or exert their power, at the expense of migrants. While these groups serve a business function through services that they provide to migrants, there is more to their operations than profit gaining. These are the actors who extort, violate, abuse, and threaten migrants; therefore, they set themselves as distinct from formal business operations. Their business-like operations, when viewed together with the violent nature of their operations, places them in a unique space. They are an 'uncivil society': removed from the state and the formal market, yet not embodying the normative, community values which are usually ascribed to civil society.

**Civil Society**

The arena of 'civil society', in which the third set of actors is located, is a category without a settled definition. In the literature there exist several differing views on civil society. Not only are there disagreements about which groups do and do not belong under the umbrella of civil society, but there is also a lack of consensus about the forms that the societal processes related to civil society take (Corry 2010: 12). From the ontological lens, the varying theories comprise differing ideas of whether or not the private sector belongs under the civil society umbrella (Corry 2010: 12). Epistemologically, multiple theories or views of civil society, stress different parts of the varying 'roles' that this sector takes. Outside of these debates, civil society is commonly written about as a 'third sector' (Corry 2010; Wagner 2012) that resides outside of government and the market.

In the context of this research, the term 'civil society' will be used to describe the part of engagement and community interaction in which 'norms of civility' (Sen 2007: 55) are put forward. In Jai Sen's writing, he focuses on civil society as the portion of society in which particular normative values are practiced. Similarly, Michael Edwards terms 'civil society' as "the good life" (Edwards 2004: 45), and the location where the "institutionalization of 'civility'" (2004: 39) takes place by reinforcing social norms, frequently within an organizational structure (2004: 39, 20). The norms advocated for by the work of civil society organizations often support universal human rights, and for this reason there has been an increasing rise in work of so-called transnational or global civil society as human rights have become an issue of universal concern (Edwards 2004: 39; Jordan 2011). In this facet of civil society, the work of voluntary groups and associations operates for the achievement of norms and standards which, by their nature, should exist to all people; therefore, state boundaries do not limit the work.

Similar to global civil society, some voluntary organizations that fall under the label of 'civil society' are of a religious nature. Here, 'religious civil society' will be viewed as organizations operating under a distinctive institutional form of religion rather than driven by "private experiences" or spirituality (Miller 2011: 258). This definition allows distinct boundaries to be drawn between organizations affiliated or not affiliated with a religious institution rather than the work of individual members of an organization driven to engage by their own spirituality and beliefs. These groups operate with the same understanding that drives a global civil society that supports an 'ethical' (with varying meanings of the word depending on the basis of the organization) society not limited by state boundaries. In the case of religious groups, as Miller (2011) explains, operations of the organizations draw on "religious traditions for justification

and ideological support (Miller 2011: 257). In this sense, their goals and understanding of the desired outcome of their work is often unrelated to the politics and legal decisions of their areas. Nevertheless, despite their work often being guided by a higher being or god, religious civil society groups often do play strong positions in political debates for certain issues. Part of their efficacy stems from the social capital of their memberships and their abilities to advocate for policy changes aligned with the philosophies of their religions (Miller 2011: 257). Studies of the efficacy of faith-based organizations have primarily focused on the individual-level effects of these groups (Johnson 2002, for example), such as drug and alcohol abuse levels or the life span of its members (Johnson 2002: 5), however, often these groups also aim to improve the conditions of life overall.

**Incivil society**

While 'civil society' organizations are in positions to operate for the betterment of an overall society, there is a group of excluded people for whom this society (which is being 'civilized' by organized groups) is unreachable. Civil society, in the contexts of faith based or community organizations, operate inside the framework of a larger society. Excluded from this web, however, is an 'incivil society' that has been excluded from this society (Sen 2007: 58-59). According to Jai Sen in his discussion on civility (2007), groups of people who participate in activities that the state (or broader society) labels as "'informal', 'illegal' and 'unauthorized'" (Sen 2007: 58-59) make up this incivil society. These people often operate within an "extra-legal" space (Sen 2007: 59), including living in or navigating through unauthorized areas or working to survive through operations outside of a formal economy. This group is distinct from uncivil society; while incivil also do not embody the norms of a society, they are outside of it, not working against a 'common good'

Sen's use of the term 'incivil' conjures images of a "second-class" (Sen 2007: 58-59) of people who, due to structures within and beyond their societies, are outcast by their societies. Within a society, forced 'incivility' of a group can take be founded in differences in skin color, language, or ethnicity in relation to the dominant group (Sen 2007: 58-59). In higher-level structures from a regional or global view, incivility can be forced upon large groups of people resulting from neoliberal trade policies and structural adjustments which strongly impact certain groups in certain areas, thereby driving large groups into 'incivil' spaces. This view of incivility on the global level is tied to Bauman's theory of 'human waste' (Bauman 2004), in which large amounts of people are pushed into spaces of redundancy as a result of moderniza-

tion and economic progress (2004: 40-41). Beyond inhabiting "extra-legal" (Sen 2012: 59) spaces, incivil people become "surplus" and "human waste" (Bauman 2004: 39) as they are unable to met their survival needs.

## Analytical Framework:

### Systems of Violence Framework

The framework for this paper's analysis is the system of violence theory, as laid out by Johan Galtung in his classic piece "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" (1969). Although now over forty years old, Galtung's concept of violence carved a direction for peace and violence studies which has made his work still. It expanded the focus of violence as not limited to only acts with clear perpetrators, but to all situations in which "human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (Galtung 1969: 168). This concept is critical for discussing much of the suffering experienced throughout the world for two key reasons. First, its focus beyond violence which requires a physical perpetrator builds a lens for structures and practiced aspects of cultural to be seen as violent. This is important in analyzing policies, social practices, and cultural beliefs as forms of violence. Secondly, as this framework depends on context rather than textbook-style definitions of what constitutes violence, circumstances and events are viewed as occurring within a structure which may favor certain groups of people and exclude others. In the 1990s, Paul Farmer wrote on the tremendous suffering taking place in rural Haiti. One of the cases he presented was of a young Haitian woman named Acéphie who died from AIDS (Farmer 1996: 263-267). In telling her story, Farmer speaks of the factors leading to her contraction of the disease; a desire to escape from abject poverty and its related suffering as key reasons that Acéphie became involved with the married soldier who passed on his HIV. Seeing underlying causes, such as the poverty and lack of opportunities in Acéphie's region, removes the mask of normalcy from events and reveals "a deeper and more pervasive violence" (Dilts 2012: 192).

Comprising these differences between the "potential" and "actual" (Galtung 1969: 168) are three forms of violence: structural, cultural, and personal. Structural and cultural violence are referred to as indirect forms since they do not have a clear perpetrator but rather are functions of different parts of culture or society. Personal violence occurs at the hands of someone; therefore, it is direct. Galtung presents this system in the form of a triangle (Fig. 2.1) in which each point represents one of the three kinds of violences. The shape is used to demonstrate that all three forms reinforce each other. The ordering of the points can vary;

however, here they will be presented with 'direct violence' on top to emphasize that direct violence is a manifestation of cultural and structural violence.

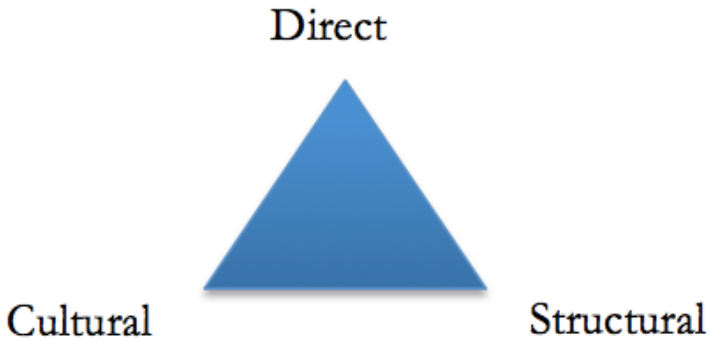


**Figure 2.1: Galtung's Systems of Violence Triangle**

In Galtung's concept, structural and cultural violence are alternatively referred to as invisible violence (and personal violence as visible violence). This paper will not use these terms. Structural and cultural violence are not 'invisible'; they bring pain and suffering that can be clearly seen. Moreover, there is already a tendency to ignore structural and cultural violence compared to personal violence; this is apparent in legal systems that incriminate people for physical assaults while ignoring structures which lead to poverty among only a specific portion of a population. Terminology such as 'invisible' can be perceived as trivializing the violence.

There are additional frameworks through which violence can be theorized. For example, a patriarchal violence framework positions women as primary victims of violence as a result of social patriarchal power structures (Barak 2006: 135; Government Offices of Sweden 2005: 8). This framework addresses different locations for violence, and sees the home and family as the location of most violence for women (whereas for men most violence exists 'outside' the home) (Government Offices of Sweden 2005: 8). Another theory, resource theory of violence, is often used in studying domestic violence (Barak 2006: 135; Hyde-Noland and Juliao 2012: 10); it studies the relationship between wealth and violence. Both of these frameworks, in addition to others (see Barak 2006), highlight specific dimensions of violence. While this may be desirable in some contexts, the focus of this research necessitates a broader framework that does not exclude certain dimensions of violence. Especially critical to this research is a framework that addresses the interconnectedness of different kinds of violence

(Barak 2006: 140). For these reasons, Galtung's framework will provide the most multi-dimensional and unifying view of violence.

**Body Politics**

In addition to Galtung's violence framework, this research will also use ideas from the analytical concept of body politics. This concept highlights the human body as a "site of social experience and political existence" (Harcourt 2009: 17). The body, while a physical and bio-logical entity, is also a site at which forces such as "oppression and power" (Harcourt 2009: 17) are enacted both from and upon the body. Violence, such as personal forms exerted from one person onto another, is experienced at the corporal level of the body, and clearly reveals structures of power or oppression. At the same time, however, the lens of body politics also addresses less abrupt but everyday, lived experiences of different human bodies. For example, the ways in which societies view different gender roles can be examined through the ways the different bodies are treated and the functions that they carry out even in daily experiences (Harcourt 2009: 17). The study of body politics analyzes both the ways the body is treated by others as well as the actions an individual realizes through his or her own body; both these processes reveal information on the ways social experiences affect individuals or particular groups of individuals. Finally, political forces and resistance can be studied through the ways the body is implicated in both of these processes.

Of key importance to the concept of body politics is that society and politics influence and assign meanings to different bodies. This concept is often used from a gender perspective in discussing female bodies as sites of multiple In settings of violence, this implies that bodies on the receiving end of different forms of violence are persecuted and treated in ways that degrade, dehumanize, and harm them. To more completely view violence, especially in its di-rect form, an approach must be used that reaches the basic level upon which violent acts were committed: the human body. It is the biological, corporal body that suffers beatings and rapes, just as it is the body that is withheld from certain spaces or brought into others. By see-ing the body as a "sight of social experience" (Grosz in Harcourt 2009: 17) that is inseparable from politics, then experiences and expressions coming from bodies take on larger meanings.

In this study, body politics will be applied to migration. People who embody the status of 'migrant' are interacted with in different ways by different people. The ways in which dif-ferent individuals or groups interact with migrants reveals various factors. How migrants are viewed by society or treated by certain parts of society can show social values or political

agendas in an area. Likewise, as migration is the study of people making their way from one place to another, the manner in which they, as bodies, travel is also revealing.

## **Chapter Three:** Systems of Violence

*"Every time that I have come, they've told me, "Hey, don't get up on this train, because further ahead they are killing people. They just killed one. Just now the train passed on top of two"*

-Interview, Salvadoran migrant (L.I.S. 2013)

One of the more common images associated with Central American migration is that of hundreds of adults and children riding on the top and sides of La Bestia (the Beast), the infamous northbound freight train and most common mode of transport from Arriaga, Chiapas to Mexico City. This train received its reputation from the high levels of serious accidents and fatalities associated with riding it (Vogt 2012: 150). In the words of one Honduran man, "the train is more dangerous, but it is free" (Angeles Mariscal 2007). Although the train does not require a ticket to ride it, the costs of riding it can be high. When climbing aboard, one loose grip or misplaced foot can cause a person to slip and lose an arm, leg, or his or her life. If they succeed in making it onto the train, they will face different dangers. The train itself is not a safe mode of transit; in three months in 2014, there were twelve reported train derailments (Manzo 2014). Furthermore, La Bestia is reported to be routinely stopped by authorities or organized crime groups who extort migrants for money, physically assault them, rape, or kidnap them. During their trip north on La Bestia, migrants are continuously at risk of dying or being seriously injured at the hands of uncivil actors or even the train itself. This violence takes different forms; however, stories from migrants at humanitarian shelters and from human rights investigations (AI 2010) show that it is a predictable occurrence. The following chapter discusses the different forms of violence which confront Central American migrants during their journeys through Mexico.

This chapter will this system of violence will be explored primarily through the lens of Galtung's system of violence triangle in order to show the systemic and organized nature of the struggles migrating peoples face. First, the violence system within Mexico for Central Americans will be put into context by viewing the realities in which Central Americans live prior to migrating. Next, the different forms of violence migrants encounter will be presented and discussed in relation to the three categories of structural, cultural, and direct violence. The following section will then explore the ways in which these violences are generated and sustained against Central Americans in Mexico. This analysis, based on Galtung's approach, will be deepened by looking at local, national, and international level factors that build and rein-

force the initial categories of violence; furthermore, a gendered lens will be applied to view the ways in which the system of violence has been feminized.

The system of violence engulfs migrants within Mexico; however, the structure of this violence starts long before migrants enter Mexico. It is the current situation within their home countries that pushes northern Central Americans to seek new situations north despite the well-documented risks. New reports and word of mouth serve to spread knowledge of the violence faced by migrants in Central America, and considering the large population of missing Central Americans in Mexico (estimated at between seventy to one-hundred and twenty thousand), it is likely that most in northern Central America either directly or indirectly know someone who has experienced abuse and violence while migrating through Mexico.

Despite the insecurities, the growing rate of migration out of the Northern Triangle reveals the difficult circumstances faced by many northern Central Americans in their home countries. Ríos Zamudio outlines three primary driving forces for northbound migration (2014: 2). These three causes form a structure of violence which pushes large numbers of people out of their home countries and into situations with high levels of danger (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 2). The first of these causes is poverty. Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador all suffer from dramatically high levels of poverty. In Honduras, 42.8 percent of the population lives in an extreme poverty where they are unable to meet their basic needs (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 3); extreme poverty, and in Guatemala and El Salvador this figure is 29.1 and 16.7 percent respectively (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 3). Overall poverty rates in these countries range from 46.6 in El Salvador to 67.4 percent in Honduras (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 3). The second push factor is the perceived potential for money sent back based upon remittances people see friends and neighbors receive (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 3). All three Northern Triangle countries are in the top twenty-five countries for percentage of personal remittances in GDP (World Bank 2014).

The final push factor is violence (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 3). Organized crime in the form of drug smuggling operations and gang violence (Vogt 2013: 81) have radicalized the Northern Triangle into locations for new types of violence. All three countries have histories of violence, especially focused in the 1970s and 1980s. The previous generation of violence was rooted in politics, but the current homocides and insecurities stem from gang violence and drug trafficking (Vogt 2013: 81-82). Naya, a female Salvadoran migrant described the current violence as "between the people" (Vogt 2013: 82); whereas during the Civil War the violence was "between governments, between political parties" (Vogt 2013: 82). Naya referred to this

current violence and the gangs as "something that has come from nothing" (Vogt 2012: 82). A Guatemalan migrant described the violence in his country in a similar tone: "In Guatemala they kill women like they are dead chickens hanging in the market" (Vogt 2013: 81). Unsurprisingly, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ranks Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala as the countries with the first, fourth, and fifth numbers of homocides in the entire globe (UNODC 2012: 126).

It is these deep levels of poverty and high violence that drives northern Central Americans out of their countries at the rate of up to half a million per year (Dominguez Villegas 2014). The expectation of leaving is that they will leave behind the violence and poverty of their home countries and build better futures for themselves and for their families through working in the United States and sending home remittances (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 3). Being driven out of their homelands is the first structure of violence experienced in their migration journey; however, it is only a small portion of the structured violence they will encounter during their transits through Mexico.

**Structural violence**

The most notable structure that marginalizes migrants in Mexico is a lack of successful and uncorrupt implementation of the 2011 Migration Law. This legislation was a reform of the General Law of Population from 1974 which strictly limited entry into Mexico and carried heavy punishments for foreigners who were within Mexico without official approval (González-Murphy and Koslowski 2011: 11-12). The migration reforms of 2011 gave legal rights to all foreigners regardless of authorization status (INM 2012: 2) and made the claim that irregular migration in and of itself is not a crime (INM 2012: 2). At the writing of this paper, these laws, now over three years old, have not reduced levels of violence against unauthorized migrants. Central American migrants in Mexico without authorization still navigate as, to use Jai Sen's terminology (2012: 58-59), incivil actors. While they are recognized by the law as being entitled to rights and legal recourses, migrants without authorization are also subject to arrest and deportation under the new (and also old) law (INM 2013: 31). Jai Sen speaks about incivil society as being 'on the fringes' and socially excluded. Central American migrants who travel without authorization are pushed into spaces of incivility since they travel along terrain where they are less likely to encounter an official from the National Migration Institute (INM). Although their more remote modes of travel help them avoid deportation, they are simultaneously 'funneled' into areas where uncivil actors are more easily able to rob, extort, and commit

other acts against them and the realities of hunger and exposure to the elements can harm them (Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006).

The distinction between authorized and unauthorized migrants, even with the new migration law, still maintains that the government accepts people with authorization while stigmatizing those without it. By legally reinforcing this differentiation, migrants are seen as lawbreakers rather than excluded people looking to support themselves, their families, or live free from violence. In addition, this stigma creates a contradiction in the arena of 'civil' society with effects which reach the local level. Sen outlines civil society as "a society or community that is ruled by norms of 'civility'; a section of society that has become –in its own terms, and by its own definition- civilized" (2012: 54). While the term 'civilized' can be understood in multiple ways, abiding by the law is generally understood as behavior in which the 'civilized' engage. In this sense, migrants traveling clandestinely, as lawbreakers, should not be supported by a 'civil society' which behaves in a 'civilized' manner. On the other hand, 'civilized' can be interpreted in a vein more akin to a furthering a just and fair society. In this sense, migrants pushed into incivil positions should especially be supported by a 'civil society'. The discrepancy between interpretations has less to do with multiple understandings of the term 'civilized' as it does with revealing the structural effects of a law that marginalizes people. Migrants are harmed through policies that stigmatize them, even if the law guarantees them their rights. These structures, together with the situations in their home countries and difficulties of obtaining a visa to travel with authorization amount to strong levels of structural violence against Central American migrants from the national level in Mexico.

Structural violence also has a regional foundation above the local and national levels. The majority of migration and the highest number of border crossings take place northbound into the United States. Given that Central Americans make up the largest growing demographic of immigrants into the United States, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has increased its efforts to prevent unauthorized crossings from Mexico into its country. The U.S. has militarized its border, and built a border fence running 3,200 kilometers across the U.S.-Mexico divide (Sarabia 2012). In spite of these efforts and expenditures at the border, the U.S. focuses its own border 'defense' strategy increasingly further south. This is apparent in the changes taking place in Mexico's border defenses and checkpoints, but also in the direct discourse used by the DHS. In 2012, its chief diplomatic officer Alan Bersin pronounced that "the Guatemalan border with Chiapas, Mexico is now [the U.S.'s] southern border" (Miller 2014: 200). The border strategy of the United States for 2012-2016 is a "layered approach" (Mike Fisher in Miller 2014b) whose initial layer begins in the south of Mexico. Starting in

2000, the U.S. has supported Mexico's Plan Sur (Miller 2014b) which has deported staggering numbers of people. Between January and September of 2013, 63,843 people, the vast majority from Central America, were deported by the INM (INM 2013: 31[1]). This pressure has continued into 2014 with 112 million US dollars being allocated to "modernize and make more efficient Mexico's border policing and militarization" (Miller 2014b). Numerous testimonies from the town of Arriaga, Chiapas, where *La Bestia* begins its route, reveal that striking changes have taken place in the twenty-five thousand person town since increased enforcement of the border began. Miller conducted interviews with locals, shelter workers, and migrants and all attributed declined presence of Central Americans to increased militarization pressure by the U.S. government (Miller 2014b). One local claimed it was normal to see large groups of migrants throughout the city and in the train yards waiting; however, now they must hide in wooded areas to avoid the raids conducted by government officials (Miller 2014b).

Beyond being driven into remote areas and deported at the rate of ten people per hour (INM 2013:31), migrants are also victims of violence due to the modes of transit they take. The cheapest and most efficient method of travel is on the northbound freight trains; however, these trains offer little security. First, as the journey north can take well over a month, traveling atop the train forces extended exposure to elements and a high risk of a hazardous incident (AI 2010: 6). Injuries can take place either through attacks on the train by organized crime groups, individual accidents from insecure footing or exhaustion, or train accidents as a result of heavy rains and hazardous train tracks. Accidents such as a derailing or tipping of the train are common occurrences that result from a number of causes including unmaintained train tracks and heavy rains (*Cuarto Poder* 2014). In August 2014, the news in Oaxaca reported that *La Bestia* had derailed for the ninth time in two months (*Cuarto Poder* 2014). In these train accidents, there were no reported injuries; however, fatal accidents have occurred from train accidents. In August 2013, tens of people were injured and six died from a train accident (*BBC News* 2013). Because the train's route runs through remote territory, there is often no cell phone service or way to reach the train tracks, except by airplane or boat, as in the case of the train accident in August 2013 (*BBC News* 2013). While the train is the mode of travel for many migrants, riding it north puts their safety in the hands of old and unmaintained railroad infrastructure.

[1] For a chart on deportation rates by country and year, see Appendix B.

Train accidents are one form of indirect violence that, compounded with the targeting faced by deportation policies and increased border militarization, form a structure that targets migrants traveling north. In summer 2014, however, newspapers around Mexico reported that Ferrocarriles Chiapas-Mayab (FCCM), the company which operates *La Bestia*, has announced that one hundred fifteen million USD will be invested into the trains to triple its velocity over the course of five years (Ugarte 2014). If this plan is enacted, the structural violence resulting from unsafe train travel would become closer to direct violence. Despite heightened risks, migrants in need will continue to try using the train for travel, and the train will become a more of a weapon than a mode of transportation.

The structures of violence working against Central American migrants range from train derailments and personal accidents on the train to national-level laws and regional-level policies aimed at restricting the movement of irregular migrants throughout Mexico. Tightened patrolling and increased militarization on the border and farther north has pushed migrants farther into remote areas. Deportation numbers have increased, but conditions in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have not improved. In these countries, migration is still one of the most employed options to improve living conditions for oneself and family; for this reason, the three push factors presented by Ríos Zamudio (2014: 2) of poverty, high levels of violence, and the expectation that migrating will result in significant remittances home serves as a foundational layer of structural violence for these migrants. In this sense, structural violence pushes northern Central Americans into remote areas in Mexico; at this same time, they are simultaneously targeted them for deportation and dismembered or seriously injured by train accidents.

**Cultural violence**

According to Galtung (1990), in a system of violence, cultural violence complements structural violence. In the case of violence against Central American migrants, Galtung's argument would point to cultural factors which make violence against migrants feel more acceptable to large groups of people (1990: 291). In his words, cultural violence is when an aspect of a culture "preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural" (1990: 295). This section will explore three factors that have, in different contexts, been attributed to cultural violence against migrants. The first factor to be explored is the power of the rule of law. Spener (2008) explored this factor in his analysis of culture violence at the U.S.-Mexico border. Next, the ideas of nationalistic sentiment and

xenophobia will be explored as potential cultural factors that contribute to violence against Central American migrants in transit through Mexico.

In 2011, the new Migration Law in Mexico decriminalized irregular migration by guaranteeing (on paper) legal rights to people regardless of their migratory status (INM 2012: 2). Prior to this change migrants were legally viewed as criminals (González-Murphy and Koslowski 2011: 11-12) so acts committed against them would have been framed as a crime against a criminal; this interpretation would support the claim of a high value on the rule of law within society, and uncivil acts were responses to this law. This line of argument has been used by Spener (2008: 125) to explain cultural violence against migrants; however, in the case of migrants in transit in Mexico this explanation is insufficient for two reasons. First, the decriminalization of unauthorized migration in 2011 would have led to a decrease in violence against migrants. Figures for the amount of beatings and rapes committed against Central American migrants have even increased over the past half-decade. A priest at a migrant shelter in Chiapas reported in 2011 that six out of ten women in the shelter had been raped (AI 2010: 16), and in 2014 the coordinator of a shelter in neighboring Oaxaca reported an even higher figure of eight out of ten women (Flores Noriega et al. 2014). Furthermore, migrant testimonies overwhelming point to organized crime groups, such as the Zetas, as the perpetrators of their attacks; since these cartels operate with disregard for the law, the rule of law cannot be a cultural factor for these attacks. Moreover, in a CNDH report, 191 of 238 interviewed victims and witnesses of kidnapping reported that public officials were either "directly responsible for" (AI 2010: 12) or "colluded with" (AI 2010: 12) their kidnappers. The reported depth of involvement of officers with uncivil acts suggests that the causes of violence are unrelated to legal views on migration.

Anti-migrant sentiment is another cultural element that can reinforce a system of violence. Zamora-Kapoor (2013) outlines six factors that can lead to feelings against immigrants. Immigrants and migrants in transit have different characteristics in that immigrants have settled in a new location whereas migrants in transit are still moving; at the same time, these two groups share the key characteristics of being foreigners entering the space of an established population. For this reason, aspects of Zamora-Kapoor's analysis for immigration can be applied to migrants as well. The six characteristics referenced are economic competition, human capital, cultural affinity, social capital, political values, and institutional environment (2013: 15).

A view of several of these factors does not add much evidence to notions of cultural violence as playing a necessarily strong role in oppressing Central American transiting migrants. For example, the category 'political values' is similar to the above discussion of the effects of the rule of law; it does not seem to be a strong indicator in this case. Similarly, as the majority of Central American migrants do not plan to settle in Mexico (Albergue Decanal Guadalupano 2013), they are not an economic competition to the local population. The two factors of 'political values' and 'economic competition' would not impact the relations between Mexicans and migrating Central Americans.

An additional factor to analyze, according to Zamora-Kapoor (2013: 15) is 'cultural affinity', or the idea that a group's perception of migrants will "depend on their individual similarities" with the "out-group" (Zamora-Kapoor 2013: 18) or migrants, such as language or ethnicity. This category presents more evidence that cultural violence exists than the other categories; however it does not offer significant evidence. Differences in cultures between migrants and Mexicans would exist most strongly if the migrants were indigenous and the locals were not. Of the three countries in the Northern Triangle, Guatemala has the largest indigenous population (40.3 percent) (BCIE 2010: 2). It is not possible to know exact current migration figures of indigenous peoples migrating out of Central America; however, according to a survey completed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) over six hundred thousand Mayans received remittances (Davis 2007: 334). Considering one of the potential forces that drives migration is the expectation of remittances based on those received by family members (Ríos Zamudio 2014: 2), migration of Mayans should be expected to be in the thousands as well. Nevertheless, drawing from demographic statistics from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, the majority of migrating peoples from these countries is not indigenous and shares a language and many aspects of a cultural history with Mexico.

**Conclusion**

Migrants seeking to pass through Mexico on their way further north become implicated into aggressive systems of violence. This 'system' of violence was explored using Johan Galtung's theoretical approach (1969, 1990) where violence is categorized into three self-reinforcing groups. This chapter focused on the two categories of structural and cultural violence. Structural violence against Central Americans in transit through Mexico was analyzed through a national and regional perspective. Policies surrounding irregular migration lead

many migrants to travel through more remote areas to avoid public officials and deportation. In addition, fear of violent and extortionary actors, including corrupt officials, increase incentives to travel clandestinely. Other dimensions to structural violence stem from the mode of transportation many take. Because it is free, hundreds of migrants can be found riding the northbound freight train from Chiapas. The conditions of this train lead to many fatal accidents and serious injuries.

# Chapter Four: 'Human Bodies' on the Migration Route

*"I think almost all of the women are abused on the way north. These migrants know the price to pay for getting to the United States. The price is being sexually violated."*

-Elvira Gordillo, victims of trafficking assistance specialist (Siegal McIntyre 2014)

This chapter will discuss the various ways in which anti-migrant direct violence is realized and responded to along the migration route at the level of the individual. It will explore the ways in which both uncivil actors and migrants use the physical human body as an instrument. Furthermore, the gendered nature of this violence will be discussed with particular attention to the specific forms of violence that are used against men and women. Departing from the system-level view from Chapter Three, Chapter Four will analyze person violence and migrant responses from an on-the-ground level.

Much of the brutality against migrants is committed by organized groups as an integral part of a migrant-driven industry that uses Central American migrants as a way to earn profit. The extent and nature of the ways that the human body is used as a profit-gaining commodity (Vogt 2013: 765) will be discussed. Galtung defines violence as "the cause of the difference" (1969: 168) between potential and actual levels of realization for an individual or group. While assaults and rapes are clearly violent acts, following Galtung's definition kidnapping, robbery, and extortion are also forms of personal violence since they can substantially lower actual levels of realization by these migrants.

The migration industry in Mexico provides motives for uncivil actors to behave violently against transiting Central Americans. Both men and women are victims because they both can be extorted; however, there is a particular gendered pattern to the violence. Both men and women suffer beatings and physical assaults; however, the most common abuses against women are sexual assaults. These occur at epidemic rates. A Mexican human rights organization reported that eight out of every ten Central American women is raped at least once on her journey through Mexico (Vasquez and Garcia in Green 2011: 372). While all migrants are implicated into the migration industry and the physical violence which comes with it, the face of the violence varies by gender.

**Manifestations of direct, personal violence**

The National Human Rights Commission, AI, and migrant shelters all have reported on the high levels of assaults against migrants committed by officials, members of organized crime groups, and other uncivil actors (CDNH 2011; AI 2012). According to testimonies from migrants these attacks are frequently committed in the context of a robbery or in an attempt to extort migrants (CNDH 2011). Testimonies from kidnapped migrants (CNDH 2011) reveal horrifying details of torture and assault with the primary purpose of extorting money from family members of these migrants. Several of the reports cite that the attacks were 'punishment' for not revealing phone numbers of family members for the uncivil actors to extort (CNDH 2011: 18, 22, and 29). Physical assaults also take place en route, with a great number of these occurring, logically, where many migrants can be found such as in train yards and aboard *La Bestia* (AI 2010: 5). Tightly networked organized crime groups systematically extort migrants along their journey by stopping forms of transportation, including *La Bestia*, and demanding a toll.

The high number of assaults reveals the depth of structural violence against migrants. The clandestine nature of their travel and their lack of true access to meaningful legal recourse for crimes against them (AI 2010: 27) holds Central Americans in positions where they cannot reach justice for acts committed against them during their migration. One migrant shelter coordinator in Chiapas said that it is common for officials to not register complaints or take no further action on registered complaints from migrants (AI 2010: 27). In this sense, structural violence stemming from policies and treatment from government officials opens spaces for physical abuse. In addition, reports of public officials being widely involved in the abuse of migrants (CNDH 2009; AI 2010: 21-27) undermines any legal system for migrants; thereby increasing strength of uncivil actors. While legal structures exist in the law to protect migrants and provide a path for attaining justice in the event of an abuse (INM 2012), this is not enforced due to widespread involvement of public officials in uncivil activities.

**Gendered Nature of Violence**

As mentioned, men and women are both abused along the journey, but they are abused differently. While men are threatened into joining organized crime groups or forced to participate in drug-smuggling activities (IACHR 2013: 43), the majority of migrating women passing through Mexico are raped (AI 2010: 15) or trafficked through kidnapping operations into local sex industries (AI 2010: 5). Both sides of gendered violence (as it is experienced by men and

women) involve uses of their bodies. The violence taken against women involves the use of their bodies for domination and control. In the case of men, migrant bodies are used for economic gain by furthering organized crime operations. Since these operations extend into northern Central American countries, migrant men are of a particular value to crime groups. Often under threats by the same *pollero* they paid to be smuggled through Mexico (IACHR 2013: 43), migrants are forced to work as smugglers between Mexico and their home countries (COHA 2011). These violences against migrant men degrade them to a "reserve army" (COHA 2011) for dangerous gang operations and the interests of uncivil groups. To this end, male migrant bodies have value to organized crime groups because of knowledge of their home countries and ability to physically work for these groups; however, this value is superficial and is realized through strong threats. The heavily reported San Fernando massacres in 2010 and 2011 in Tamaulipas reveal how migrant men are at once valuable but at the same time of no worth to uncivil groups: the seventy-three migrant bodies found in the first San Fernando Massacre in Tamaulipas are widely believed to have belonged to migrants that refused to join the gang activities of Los Zetas (Iliff 2013). Had they joined, perhaps they would have lived. The second San Fernando massacre revealed the harrowing reality that migrants are disposable for uncivil actors: reports cite that male victims in this massacre were forced to participate in "gladiator-style fights" to the death (Hernández 2013).

At the same time that men experience different value to their bodies, women are also used to uncivil actors. The endemic rape used against women is both a weapon and a cost they are forced to bear on their journey. With rates as high as six to eight out of every ten migrant women being raped at least once on their journeys north (AI 2010: 15), rape is used as if it were a weapon of war; the widespread rates of rape lead to a "systematic degradation" (Falcón 2007: 203) of these Central American women. In addition to rape along their journeys, women are frequently both 'tricked' or directly forced into working in the sex industry, especially near the Mexico-Guatemala border (Siegal McIntyre and D. Borello 2014; IACHR 2013: 63). This process takes several forms; one Honduran woman explains that she was offered temporary work as a waitress in a restaurant near the border, but that she was also expected to "fichar" (have a drink and spend time with the male guests) (Siegal McIntyre and D. Borello 2014). In addition, one lawyer for trafficked victims explains that women are frequently brought to places to pursue temporary employment along the journey but later come to find that the only available work is in the sex industry (Siegal McIntyre and D. Borello 2014). Along the journey, as women become victimized into particularly gendered forms of violence, it is their biological body which serves as valuable to the perpetrators. When women are

forced to work in local sex industries, it is their biological female body and sexual organs that gives them value to their violators in this forced work.

Rape and forced sexual exploitation through work is viewed as "the price [migrant women] have to pay" (Falcón 2007: 206) when crossing Mexico. If they cannot pay extortion fees, migrant women are put into positions where they have no option but to suffer rape. It is widely understood that most Central American women will be raped on their migration trip, and for this reason Central American women pre-emptively take the anti-contraceptive Depo-Provera, an injection that ceases ovulation for a period of three months (IACHR 2013: 90). With the injection, the risk of becoming pregnant from a rape is lessened. At the same time, however, since it is an injection, women remain unprotected against sexual diseases (Little-crow-Russel 2000). The degree to which this violence takes place despite widespread knowledge of this assault shows the individual negotiations female migrants make with their bodies.

**Commodification and unique consumerism**

While structures in their home countries push northern Central Americans into difficult journeys toward the United States, they know what they will face on the way. As mentioned, the media in Central America publishes information on dangers facing migrants. Campaigns such as "Don't put their lives at risk" by the Salvadoran government make parents aware of the perils their children may face if they migrant north (IOM 2014). This campaign, of course, ignores the violence faced by children at home in El Salvador.

At the same time that many are leaving their homes for the economic survival of their families, their own survival on their journey depends on the purchase of goods and services which are particular to their transit through Mexico. The necessities of food and replacement clothing along the journey are made available to migrants by informal vendors set up outside migrant shelters or near train tracks (Vogt 2013: 774-775). The prices venders charge along route for migrants for food, beverages, and other necessities are higher than local townspeople are charged (*Caras de la Migración* 2012). Beyond food and clothing, the migration system also forces migrants to protect themselves through purchases of goods and services. Researcher Wendy Vogt spent months in Mexico conducting research on Central American migrants and their journeys. Her writings include significant ethnographic descriptions and interview notes; therefore, the. She notes that alongside the carts of tortillas and other food being sold to migrants were carts of banknotes (2013: 774). Because the uncivil actors who rob and demand

tolls from migrants along their path expect to be paid in Mexican pesos, Central Americans must be prepared with money to offer them (Vogt 2013: 774). Offering these currency exchanges provides an economic opportunity for informal workers in the same way that the sale of food or water around train yards provides a definite market for those vendors.

Economic benefit at the expense of migrants does not only occur at the local level. Western Union, the international money transfer company, brought in nearly one billion dollars of revenue in 2007 (Dearte 2007) not only from the sending of migrant remittances, but also from providing the service of wiring money to kidnapped migrants who need to pay their own ransoms to their kidnappers in exchange to continue on the migration. While the Western Union CEO boasted that global migration was "how [they]'ve grown" (Dearte 2007), Mexican activists denounced both Western Union and Money Gram as complicit in the "plague" (Ballinas and Becerril 2011) of extortion and kidnapping. One migrant testimony confirms reports of the extortion and role of large money-sending corporations:

> "I also feel that Western Union, like the federal authorities and Migration (INM), Western Union is also working there. Because they carried a list of people and the keys, and they would say: "Look, this is the key of so-and-so, this is the key of so-and-so", like that."
>
> -Migrant Testimony (CNDH 2009: 18)

Just as informal venders at the local level benefit from others' extortion of migrants (and therefore themselves extort migrants), Western Union also reaps large financial benefits from the uncivil, violent work of others. Turning migrants into consumers with the unique need of paying one's own ransom or for one's safety along the journey ensures that many opportunistic actors can benefit off their suffering.

The second way in which migrants are commodified is through the ways they are smuggled. Despite the extremely high prices Central Americans pay to be smuggled through Mexico, their smugglers treat them not as costumers but instead as a product to be transported. This commodification, unlike in the first category, does not address the humanity of the migrants, but instead it focuses solely on the transportation of their bodies as a 'good' to be transferred. According to migrant stories, usually half of the 'service charge' required to be smuggled through Mexico is paid at the start of the trip; therefore, coyotes have already made some profit before the journey begins. Other stories from migrants reveal that migrants are often left if they are slow, or sick, or old which reveals that for these coyotes migrants are not viewed as a human life. Similarly, discoveries of migrants in suffocating conditions into the

backs of trucks or locked into train cars. In July 2013, ninety-four unauthorized migrants were discovered in the back of a truck passing through Chiapas; they all showed signs of suffocation (Latino Daily News 2013). Far from being viewed as customers paying for a service, in the smuggling business migrants paying to go north are instead treated as cargo.

The two roles of commodity and consumer that migrants are given in their transit through Mexico unite under the control of the growing network of extortionary actors. Migrants being moved as cargo simultaneously must continue to pay for their 'unique' consumer needs of security through paying 'tolls' to pass through territory controlled by different uncivil groups. As connections between uncivil actors grow in Mexico, the possibility of not paying into this exploitation has diminished; avoiding the web of uncivility is nearly impossible. An anonymous Honduran *pollero* stated in an interview "if you don't have a connection, and you go with the "American Dream", with your backpack, working hard and arriving on your own accord, you are very mistaken. You will never make it." (Huffington Post 2014). *Polleros*, the Zetas, train conductors, and Mexican officials can easily enter into the business network against migrants because they are all in a position to threaten the security of the migrant.

The number of actors involved in the exploitation of migrants as transportable commodities from whom to earn profit is large. Testimonial evidence reveals the extent of the web of actors: in December 2010, a government-owned train carrying 250 migrants was stopped by "Mexican immigration officers, police, and military personnel" (Vogt 2012: 192). The migrants who were not detained by the authorities were forced to pay a toll to the conductor of the train; however, not long after this payment, the train was stopped and forty of these migrants were "robbed, beat, and kidnapped" (Vogt 2012: 192). Public officials, kidnapping operations from large organized crime groups, and *polleros* all take advantage of theThe "paperless, anonymous, moving bodies" (Vogt 2012: 219) in Mexico.

# Chapter Five: Civil Responses

Up until now, this analysis has focused on the harm that accompanies Central American migrants during their trip. This focus is reflective of the degree to which uncivil actors affect migrants in Mexico through kidnappings, assaults, and other kinds of violence. Nevertheless, throughout Mexico there are independent and religious civic groups working to assist and support Central American migrants on their journeys north. While there are several different kinds of humanitarian operations, the focus will in particular be on migrant shelters. This chapter will examine how these groups operate and the position they play in relation to other actors. Taking into consideration the violence system, civil operations are not immune from uncivil involvement. The civil space from which migrants benefit is also at risk for becoming a space of negotiation for smugglers (some of whom may be seeking to extort migrants) and uncivil actors. This chapter will discuss the existing dynamics and will further the previous chapters' analysis by discussing how migrant shelters respond to these uncivil actors and the threats they bring. This analysis will first explore the operations of civil groups, particularly migrant shelters, and will explore how in many ways uncivil behavior toward migrant shelters is an extension of the uncivility encountered that individual migrants experience.

Civic operations to benefit migrants are located primarily along the most heavily traversed migratory routes in Mexico (Vogt 2012: 137). There are around fifty shelters in total in the country and the majority of them are affiliated with, but not funded by, the Catholic Church (Vogt 2012: 137-138). Funding from the shelters must be obtained independently (Vogt 2012: 138), and many of the shelters solicit for both donations and volunteers. Finally, the extent of the operations of each shelter varies by location. For example, one shelter, the Decanal Guadalupano in Veracruz offers a health clinic, showers, and three meals a day for migrants (Albergue Decanal Guadalupano n/d). The number of migrants helped by these shelters also vary by season and location. The shelter in Veracruz, in the less crowded month of September (of 2014), provided meals for around six-hundred people and hosted 224 overnight stays (around seven per night) according to September 2013 statistics (Albergue Decanal Guadalupano 2013). Other times of the year bring in more people, leading to a 2013 average of seventeen overnight stays per night (Albergue Decanal Gudalupano 2013). These numbers suggest that the shelter is one of the smaller ones; others, such as the Brothers in the Road shelter hosts between thirty and fifty migrants a night (Hermanos en el Camino).

The services shelters provide go beyond providing for physical needs. In addition, many shelters provide their support by preparing travelers for the weeks ahead in their journey. This

is done through distributing counsel and information about places and groups further north that will support them medically, with shelter, and with human rights assistance or support for legal help (Albergue Decanal Guadelupano n/d). The vast majority of these organizations are in various ways affiliated with the Catholic Church and its local community.

Shelters such as Decanal Guadelupano and Brothers in the Road both assist migrants in fulfilling their journeys. The website of Brothers in the Road provides information for travelling migrants. This information involves warnings related to particular locations:

> - "In Apizaco, Tlaxcala, there are checkpoints at the end of the longest tunnel, called El Mexicano, (it's a plain where there is no hiding space); get off in Huamantla." (Hermanos en el Camino n/d).

Other types of advice relates to the physical conditions faced along the journey. For example, the website provides counsel such as the following:

> - "In the tunnel or on very cold days, protect your hands with gloves or a cloth: the steel of the train freezes" (Hermanos en el Camino n/d).

The type of advice offered on this website is not only aimed at providing humanitarian assistance to keep migrants safe along the journey; it also seeks to assist Central Americans at successfully avoiding altercations with officials. In this sense, the Brothers in the Path shelters not only steps in to provide shelter and a hopefully safe space, but some of the advice also serves to help migrants, as incivil, 'extra-legal' people, navigate successfully through heavily monitored terrain.

**Position of the Catholic Church**

Most shelters in Mexico, like Decanal Guadalupano and Brothers in the Road, are affiliated with the Catholic Church. In Mexico, the Catholic Church has taken on a position as a strong supporter of migrants. Throughout the country, it is the Catholic Church that has advocated most strongly for the rights of migrants and reform for migration policies. In 2003, Catholic bishops from Mexico published a letter in collaboration with counterparts from the U.S. in support of binational immigration reforms (Vogt 2012: 137-138). In the letter, the bishops write "We stand in solidarity with you, our migrant brothers and sisters, and we will continue to advocate on your behalf for just and fair migration policies" (Vogt 2012: 137).

While the Church offers humanitarian support, it has also taken concrete steps in advocating for changes in policies and migrant defense.

Despite the high levels of deportations by public officials (almost two hundred fifty per day) (INM 2013: 31), the Catholic Church has managed to operate shelters and provide food, medical care, and guidance and support for migrants throughout the country. The Catholic Church encourages community members to engage in civil work in the community in an effort to "build the common good" (Ferrari 2012: 31) Regardless of legal status or social views of migrants, Catholic liberation theology focuses on assistance and advocacy for the poor (Vogt 2012: 136); therefore, the work of these religious-based humanitarian organizations is guided by "non-negotiable principles that, being rooted in divine revelation, transcend social consensus and political expediency" (Ferrari 2012: 32). Since the work of Catholic advocates for migrants has its roots in beliefs outside of the state and accepted social views, it has a strong drive to continue regardless of politics and in spite of threats.

The unique position of the Catholic Church in Mexico has allowed it to advocate for the rights of migrants from a respected position. The Catholic Church continues to have strong power in Mexico. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (2012: 1), in 2012, 82.7% of the country classified themselves as Catholics. Even more revealing of the Church's power, the Mexican Institute of Social Christian Doctrine (IMDOSOC) interviewed over 4,300 people throughout the country and reported that the Catholic Church was rated as the third most respected institution in the country (behind only the navy and the army) (IMDOSOC 2013: 2). It is likely that the high levels of support throughout the country for the Catholic Church have allowed the humanitarian work and activism for migrants' rights to exist to the extent that they have. The work of the Catholic Church is not significant enough to noticeably cut down on the violence against Central American migrants; nevertheless, some speculate that the name of the Church has protected some of the civil, humanitarian operations. For example, in 2010 a Central American man was accused of raping a young girl in Ixtepec, Oaxaca (Vogt 2012: 301). The details of the story vary, but according to Father Solalinde, the director of the local migrants' shelter, the man accused of the rape had not been staying the shelter (Martínez 2009). In addition, details around the crime and whether it had occurred were contradictory. Nevertheless, community members organized themselves in protest and arrived at the shelter threatening to burn it down (Vogt 2012: 300). According to Solalinde, he spoke to those men and referred to the migrants inside the shelter as brothers and that "Christ was [there]" in the shelter (Martínez 2009). Although he and the migrants were threatened that night, after Solalinde spoke he began walking away from the shelter. In

the end, neither the shelter nor Solalinde were harmed. It is impossible to know the reason uncivil actors chose not to burn down the shelter; nevertheless, the fact that Father Solalinde was able to stand outside in their presence without being harmed could reveal the power of the Catholic Church (and a Catholic priest) as an institution in Mexico.

**Personification of Migrant Shelters**

The previous event also reveals the ways in which uncivil actors personify the migrant shelter. By threatening to burn it down, their intention was not only to terminate its operations, but also to remove it physically from existence. Field researchers Wendy Vogt and Todd Miller hboth mentioned the extensive presence of Central Americans in southern Mexican migrant towns (Vogt 2012; Miller 2014). however, in this event the uncivil actors threatened not simply migrants but the shelter itself. This signifies that for these community members the shelter symbolically represented 'social ills' that certain community members felt accompanied migrants. At this time, students at the local university conducted research and found that while ninety percent of participants supported helping migrants fifty-eight percent of the their surveyed respondents felt "no threat from the presence of the shelter or of their local opportunities in light of the flow of migrants" (Vogt 2012: 300). Threats to the shelter were an expression of community sentiment toward the shelter.

Shortly after the threats, Father Solalinde called upon the several organizations including the army and the Oaxacan state police for protection and has since received two full-time body guards (PBI 2010). In addition, "barbed wire, security cameras" and "prison-style bright lights" surround the shelter and Father Solalinde day and night (Ceceña 2014). Just as migrants adopt forms of protection against violence, the Brothers in the Road shelter installed security features to guard against intrusion from uncivil actors. These security 'defenses' are are reactions to uncivil actions but do not sufficiently prevent violence. The Brothers in the Path shelter is unique because its founder is a well-known human rights activist whom the international community has supported (AI 2012; PBI 2010). Nevertheless, other shelters in Mexico have experienced insecurities and threats. A shelter in the State of Mexico stopped its operations for over a year in 2012 due to threats from gangs (Gómez Mena 2012; *Somos Migrantes* 2013).

### Insecurity in and around Civil Spaces

Threats against migrant shelters undermine the safety of the shelter. When these threats are direct, such as in the previous example, it is more likely that they can be faced. For example, if resources are attainable, security can be increased. Admittedly, this is not always a possibility. For this reason some shelters have had to close their doors (Gómez Mena 2012).

Threats from actors looking to take advantage of migrants fundamentally undermine the security that the civil spaces seek to provide. These threats take several forms; however, they are all related to business operations surrounding migration. For example, Casillas R. reports that human smugglers wait in and around the shelter in search of Central Americans looking to pay a coyote to smuggle them the rest of the journey (2008: 166). Other economic operations that take place in and around humanitarian spaces include recruitment to join local sex industries and organized crime operations (Vogt 2012: 280). In addition, the density of migrants in the vicinity of the shelter makes it a space where crime groups organize operations and communicate with other uncivil actors further along the route (Casillas R 2008: 166). The extent to which these actions threaten the security of shelters is apparent in the comments of one priest, Father José, who explained that "at least once every day" he and other workers have to ask suspected smugglers to leave the premises (Vogt 2012: 280-281).

The extent to which uncivil groups 'infiltrate' the neutral space of humanitarian shelters to "prey upon people in transit" (Vogt 2012: 288) reveals the difference in strength between civil and uncivil actors. The civil space is intended to ensure safety and dignity to passing migrants. While in most instances migrant shelters are able to provide security for people, the permeation of these uncivil, economic-driven pursuits into the civil space reveals the extent to which this threat is present along the entirety of the transit journey. Even in locations explicitly established to serve migrants, there is no guarantee that the forces that commodify and use migrants will not find their way.

## Conclusion

In light of the unhumanitarian actions and structures of violence surrounding migrants throughout their journeys, various groups have established civic operations to provide a space of dignity and security for migrants. The Catholic Church is responsible for many of the fifty migrant shelters located around Mexico. The strength of and respect for the Church in Mexico has, to an extent, allowed priests and local churches to carry out their humanitarian operations. Nevertheless, uncivil actors still do interact with these humanitarian operations. While

migrants are physically threatened in their journeys and incorporate certain tactics to protect themselves, shelters also experience threats and take certain security measures to fend off uncivil actors. As a neutral space, Central Americans can be found in and near shelters, and uncivil actors 'infiltrate' the space of the shelter in search of expanding their business. in search of economically profiting off Central American migrants.

# Chapter Six: Conclusions

This research sought to understand how and why civil and uncivil actors are interacting with migrants in transit from northern Central America. The initial focus was on the different actors, ranging from organized crime groups, *polleros* who extort or mistreat, and local level entrepreneurs to migrant shelter workers and human rights defenders. From these actors, I anticipated uncovering a story surrounding these actors and the ways in which they interact. Uncivil actors are intimately involved in the fate of migrants as they undertake this dangerous journey, whereas civil actors, guided by the Catholic Church, strive to provide spaces of security and dignity for migrants.

This research has revealed that boundaries between these spaces of 'civility' and 'uncivility' are not solid on the migration route in Mexico. Actors that are 'uncivil', such as some *polleros* who mistreat migrants, may assist them by bringing through parts of Mexico. At the same time, the work of civil actors in migrant shelters provides rare but valuable support for migrants; however, these spaces are continuously at risk of infiltration from individuals looking to extort or harm Central American migrants. The primary operations of many of these shelters are providing food, shelter, medical assistance, and counsel to migrants. Many thousands of migrants benefit from these shelters each year, but it is worth noting that these humanitarian shelters would not exist without strong 'unhumanitarian' efforts. To this end, migrant shelters provide a reactive service that does not address the root of the problem.

Insofar as boundaries between civil and uncivil actors' work have ambiguities, the initial research question 'how and why are various civil and uncivil actors responding to migrants in transit' is insufficient. The question does not address the complexities and various, often conflicting forces. Chapter three's analysis revealed the extent to which political and social structures place migrants in positions to be violated; Chapter Four followed by examining the ways migrants physically suffered while uncivil actors benefitted from their position. These analyses revealed uncivil actors benefit from the economic benefits that come through extorting, kidnapping, and threatening migrants. Migrants' vulnerable positions and lack of realizable protection does not make it possible to defend against well-connected and coordinated uncivil actors.

The ways in which migrants are victims of violence are primarily determined by the sex of the migrant. There is a strong gendered dimension to the violence, and personal violence manifestations are dependent upon whether the migrant is male or female. Women are likely to suffer at least one rape along her journey and are frequently forced into local sex industries

by gang members or other uncivil actors. Migrant men are more likely to be threatened into roles as drug smugglers and integrated into gang operations with reaches as far as the migrants' home countries. These typically gendered violences against both men and women involve their bodies. For men this involves being used for the transport of drugs and work of organized criminal groups; in the case of women, sexual assault is the most frequently used violence. Rapes against women are intrinsically connected to their bodies and sex organs just as the ways in which women respond also involve their bodies.

Both direct, gendered violence as well as structural violence create a system for migrants in Mexico in which they live in a constant state of insecurity. Even within the 'civil spaces' of migrant shelters, safety is not a guarantee as uncivil actors (organized crime members and traffickers, among others) can infiltrate the space. Not only has the Mexican state not taken meaningful action in ending these abuses, testimonies from migrants reveal that public officials are frequently involved in the violence against them.

Central American migrants, as foreigners thrown into a system of violence, are the most susceptible to uncivil actions against them. However, the recent 'disappearances' of forty-three Mexican students in Iguala, Guerrero reveals that the complicity of the state in violence against migrants is not limited only to Central Americans. Given the local government's involvement with gang members in these 'disappeances', this event highlights a deeper story of corrupt state support for violence. While the voices of Central American migrants have been muffled, the 'disappearance' of forty-three students within Mexico has sparked civil society throughout the country to rise and say "¡Ya me cansé! I have had enough". It is to be seen what will come of the current protests in Mexico; however, a proactive civil society has turned global attention to Mexico over these 'disappearances'. Humantiarian shelters provide nourishment for migrants, but they do not provide a voice for the thousands of violated and tortured migrants since they themselves are under threat. Proactive civil society together with more global awareness and support for Central American migrants are what is needed to stop a corrupt and vicious system of violence.

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## Appendix A:

## Intentional Homocide Count and Rate per 100,000 population by country (2006-2012)

| Country/territory | Indicator | Year | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| El Salvador | Rate | 64.4 | 57.1 | 51.7 | 70.9 | 64.1 | 69.9 | 41.2 |
| | Count | 3,928 | 3,497 | 3,179 | 4,382 | 3,987 | 4,371 | 2,594 |
| Guatemala | Rate | 45.3 | 43.4 | 46.1 | 46.5 | 41.6 | 38.6 | 39.9 |
| | Count | 5,885 | 5,781 | 6,292 | 6,498 | 5,960 | 5,681 | 6,025 |
| Honduras | Rate | 44.3 | 50.0 | 60.8 | 70.7 | 81.8 | 91.4 | 90.4 |
| | Count | 3,118 | 3,588 | 4,455 | 5,280 | 6,236 | 7,104 | 7,172 |
| Mexico | Rate | 9.3 | 7.8 | 12.2 | 17.0 | 21.8 | 22.8 | 21.5 |
| | Count | 10,452 | 8,867 | 14,006 | 19,803 | 25,757 | 27,213 | 26,037 |

Source: UNODC (2013)

## Appendix B

## Central American migrants by country deported from Mexico, 2005-2010

| NATIONALITY | YEAR | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
| Deported from Mexico | 226,539 | 179,609 | 113,442 | 88,679 | 65,057 | 64,469 |
| Guatemala | 100,948 | 86,709 | 56,222 | 42,689 | 29,604 | 29,154 |
| Honduras | 78,326 | 60,679 | 38,584 | 30,696 | 24,040 | 23,788 |
| El Salvador | 42,674 | 28,080 | 17,201 | 13,576 | 10,355 | 10,573 |
| Other Central American countries | 4,591 | 4,141 | 1,435 | 1,718 | 1,058 | 954 |

Source: Center for Immigration Studies based INM, information recorded by migrant centers, local and regional offices. 2005-2010

Website: http://www.colef.mx/emif/boletines.php

**Appendix C:**

**Map of Principal Train Routes Used by Migrants through Mexico**


Source: (Dominguez Villegas 2014)

**Appendix D:**

**Map of Well-Known Migrant Shelters in Mexico**


Source: (Vogt 2012: 52)