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**Caminantes in Ecuador
Solidarity and its influence on migrant journeys**

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List of Acronyms

IOM	International Organization for Migration
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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*Caminante, son tus huellas
el camino y nada más;
Caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.
Al andar se hace el camino,
y al volver la vista atrás
se ve la senda que nunca
se ha de volver a pisar.
Caminante, no hay camino
sino estelas en la mar.
-Antonio Machado.*

Abstract

The Venezuelan socio-economic crisis has led to an intensified migration of its citizens. The latter has contributed to the use of non-traditional forms of migration, such as walking. Migrants who start their journey walking are called *caminantes*, and since their journeys are long and complex, several interactions occur in between, such as solidarity initiatives. By using qualitative methods, this study seeks to understand the different interactions that take place in the journey and how the journey develops for *caminantes*. Additionally, as solidarity is one of the interactions that occur during a migratory process, this research aims to understand how those initiatives influence the journey of *caminantes*. To this end, a series of interviews were conducted with *caminantes* and solidarity actors from five cities in Ecuador.

Relevance to Development Studies

During the last decades, the nexus between migration and development has gained relevance. The connections between these two complex issues are influenced by a series of interactions happening in the host and home country. Those interactions are worth to be studied since it offers a broader dimension of understanding the world's migratory dynamics. Therefore, this research centres the discussion on a migration phenomenon occurring in Latin America, whose interest from the international community has been fluctuating; hence, through scholarly research, this study explores the interactions among migrants, the local community, and the migrant community.

Keywords

Caminantes; trajectory approach; solidarity; Venezuelan migration; Ecuador; social networks.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Ecuador is a country with a long migratory history. I grew up listening to stories of those who left. Many of these stories unfolded in distant places like the United States or Spain. However, there was always a story about someone who migrated to Venezuela. Life in Venezuela, as many remember, had a high standard of living. Though, since the socio-political crisis in Venezuela began, those stories were no longer about those who left; but about those who returned.

Thus, we began to see Venezuelan Migrants of Ecuadorian descent returning to the country of their parents and grandparents. But many also came to Ecuador to try their luck and seek a better future. As the crisis worsened, so did the conditions in which migrants arrived. Thus, the *caminantes*, or walkers in English, started to arrive. They leave their country on foot, unable to pay for a plane or bus ticket to seek a better life in another country. As seen in Ecuador, *caminantes* walked through several countries to reach their destination. Since the journey provides diverse and complex interactions, including the development of solidarity initiatives, this research seeks to explore solidarity actions, their actors, and the influences on the journeys.

1.1 Contextual background

1.1.1 Socio-political background

Since 2014, Venezuela has experienced an intensified political and socio-economic crisis. Páez and Vivas (2017, as mentioned in Okumura et al, 2021) categorized recent Venezuelan migration into three waves. From 2000 to 2012, the first wave comprised middle-class citizens with high-level education that migrated to the USA and Europe due to political and economic changes. Between 2012 and 2015, the second wave of Venezuelan migrants was not educationally and economically homogeneous, and their destinations were neighbouring countries such as Colombia, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. By 2015, poverty, food and medicine shortages, violence, and political repression made thousands of Venezuelans from different socioeconomic positions and with limited resources leave the country.

In 2021, 76.6% of the population in Venezuela was considered poor, in addition to experiencing high levels of food insecurity (Acaps, 2021). Moreover, this South American country has been facing high inflation rates during the last decade (Acosta, 2019). The deterioration of living conditions has contributed to the increased level of migration of Venezuelans mostly to other countries in Latin America, although the United States and Spain also became one of the main destinations for the Venezuelan diaspora. The Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2022) recently estimated that there are 7,1 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world.

The economic situation worsens the possibilities of migrants to use traditional transportation. The high costs of bus tickets for low-income families in Venezuela often make walking their only option to leave the country (Acaps, 2021), turning them into so-called *caminantes*. There is no specific data about the amount of *caminantes* in each

country; however, for Ecuador, the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (2021) estimated that during 2021, at least 90,300 *caminantes* walked through this South American country, however, there is no data regarding how many leave or remain in the country.

Venezuelan *caminantes* face a series of threats during their journeys. Some of them are extorted, suffer from sexual and gender discrimination and face corruption in several stages of their journey (Acaps, 2021). *Caminantes* need access to safe and low-cost transportation, jobs and food and water supply (Acaps, 2021). Since response from governmental entities is limited, several initiatives have been promoted by civil actors such as formal Venezuelan associations or local actors in transit towns in Ecuador (El Comercio, 2021).

In addition, Venezuelan travellers have had to face a series of legal loopholes that do not allow them to make their journey in a dignified manner. For example, in 2019, after a series of xenophobic statements by the then Ecuadorian President, Lenin Moreno, a reform to the Human Mobility Law was promoted, which toughened the legal treatment of Venezuelan citizens in Ecuador. One of the most controversial measures was the requirement of a passport and criminal record certificate to access a humanitarian visa to enter the country (El Comercio, 2019). Acquiring a passport is a challenge on its own for Venezuelans due to the delay in the processes, corruption, and lack of supplies in the national entity in charge of this procedure (Alcalde, 2022). During the last weekend before the visa requirement, up to 11,000 people crossed the border. And, due to the cost of the new procedure, many people also crossed through illegal routes also known as *trochas*. The uncertainty over the specific number of migrants arriving to Ecuador, raised a concern among local governments which considered that this situation could lead to a health emergency since the cities were not prepared to cover the needs of the arriving migrants (España and Torrado, 2019).

1.1.2 Walking as a global mobility form

Walking has been used as a mobility form since the beginning of humankind. The first humans were believed to have walked from today's Ethiopia to the tip of South America (Salopek, 2019). However, this trend does not remain in our past. Currently, walking has become a form of migration experienced in diverse situations and on most continents.

During the peak of the Covid19 pandemic, people in India were forced to walk to their localities due to the lack of transportation during the lockdown, having to cover distances such as 800, 1.000, or even 1.500 kilometers (Chakravarty, 2020). In Africa, thousands of Ethiopians and Somalians walk part of their journeys through Djibouti to migrate to Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States in search of a better life (Dolumbia, 2013). On the other hand, governments have used walking as an expelling form of migrants from their territory, as happens in Algeria, where more than 13.000 people have been abandoned in the Sahara Desert and forced to walk to destinations like Niger (Associated Press, 2018). In Europe, this panorama is not distant. According to a report on Migrant Smuggling in Asia and the Pacific published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2018, several routes through the Balkans involve land crossings by foot through different countries with the aim to reach Western Europe (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018).

This investigation focuses on the American context. The migrant caravans from Central America are one of the most relevant and representative forms of migrant agency and organization. For the latter, walking becomes a political performance tool to create

consciousness about migration. Movements such as “Caravana de Madres Centroamericanas” (Caravan of Central American Mothers) since 2004 try to find migrants that have disappeared on the road to the US but also use this tool to denounce human rights violations along the routes (Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano, n.d). These initiatives rely on the work of several Central American organizations such as Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano, Asociación de Migrantes y Familiares, Pastoral de la Movilidad Humana, and Comité de Familiares de Migrantes Desaparecidos de El Progreso. These organizations demand the appearance of their lost sons and daughters or the recovery of their bodies and expose human rights violations in jails and human trafficking along the route (Varela Huerta, 2013). Furthermore, several religious organizations, close to the “Church of the Poor” and the discourses of the theology of liberation, support solidarity initiatives for migrants (Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019).

However, migrant caravans have also shown an agency component of migrants themselves that relies on their capacity to organize their journeys and destinations. For example, in 2018, more than a thousand people started walking from San Pedro Sula in Honduras to reach the United States (Oxfam, 2019). During the journey, mainly organized through social media, people from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua joined the caravan (International Organization for Migration, n.d). In this sense, the migrant caravan confronts the transnational migration policies that prevent migrants from reaching their destinations by using severe security measures (Wurtz, 2020). But it also becomes an efficient traveling form that diminishes the dangers of kidnapping and extortion by walking collectively and choosing routes where there is less presence of criminal groups, and more shelters for migrants (Barona Castañeda & Tejero Rivas, 2021, p. 34).

Although walking is a transportation form involved in migration, one of the most eye-catching, divisive, and largest migratory movements made through walking is the migrant caravans in Central America. And as the migrant caravans became acknowledged in the migration discussion in Latin America, another movement was surging far from media coverage. Since 2018, due to crises in the region, migrants predominantly from Venezuela started to make their journeys on foot. As mentioned earlier, it was uncommon to see migrants walking to reach their destinations, and that this were other countries from the region. While *caminantes* became more visible, the dangers and vulnerabilities that these migrants face also gained the attention of the regional governments. The latter led to a series of regional policies to address this matter. However, migrants from diverse nationalities are currently crossing the Darien Gap by foot to reach the U.S border to request asylum (UNHCR, 2022). This study will focus on the interactions occurring during such journeys focusing on Venezuelan migrants in Ecuador but without excluding participants from other nationalities.

1.1.3 Ecuador as a sending and hosting migrants’ country

The migratory history of Ecuador includes various edges, from being a migrant sending country to hosting the most refugees in the region. This section will briefly point out the different migratory flows that have shaped the history of Ecuador. During the late 19th century and early 20th century, Ecuador received different migratory flows, mainly from the Middle East and Europe (Valle Franco, 2017). Subsequently, due to the political and social crises that neighboring countries such as Colombia and Peru were experiencing, Ecuador

became a host country for migrants from both countries (Valle Franco, 2017). According to the UNHCR, Ecuador has granted asylum to 72,000 people, more than 54,000 of whom are Colombians, making it the country with the largest number of refugees in the region (Loaiza, 2022). Likewise, due to the social crisis in Venezuela, Ecuador became one of the countries with the greatest reception for Venezuelan migrants. According to the International Organization for Migration [IOM], as of August 2022, at least 513,000 Venezuelan migrants and refugees live in Ecuador (DW, 2022). The Colombian population lives primarily in provinces near the northern border such as Pichincha, Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos; while the Venezuelan population lives in the largest provinces of the country such as Pichincha, Guayas, and Manabí (Gonzalez, 2021).

Migratory dynamics have not been limited only to Ecuador as a hosting country. Between 1980 and 2000, many Ecuadorian emigrants traveled to Venezuela attracted by the economic and social stability (El Comercio, 2018). It is estimated that approximately 42,000 Ecuadorians migrated, becoming 7% of the foreign population in Venezuela (Hidalgo, 2021). Later, at the end of the 20th century, Ecuador faced one of the greatest economic and social crises in its history. By 1999, poverty levels reached 56% of the population and unemployment reached 15%, which led to thousands of Ecuadorians from different social classes leaving the country (Cardoso Ruiz & Gives Fernandez, 2021). The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Ecuador (INEC) estimated the departure of 860,344 Ecuadorians in that period, with Spain and the United States being the countries that received the largest number of migrants (Cardoso Ruiz & Gives Fernandez, 2021).

In 2008, with the new National Constitution, Ecuador set out new progressive principles of “free mobility, universal citizenship, equal rights for nationals and foreigners, and the adoption of the executive decree that turned it into a visa-free country for visits up to 90 days” (Álvarez Velasco, 2022, p. 57). The latter made it an interesting place for migration attracting people from neighboring countries, however, due to the current social and economic instability, Ecuador is facing a new migratory wave. It is estimated that, as of September 2022, 7,000 Ecuadorians have crossed the Darien Jungle to the United States (EFE, 2022).

As demonstrated, Ecuador's migratory history is very fluid. With periods in which many migrants were received and other periods in which Ecuadorians were the ones who migrated to other countries. Even though Ecuador has welcomed migrants from the region, it is relevant to analyze how these dynamics are managed and addressed in the face of the Venezuelan migration crisis that continues.

1.2 Problem Statement

The economic conditions, the lack of transportation routes and an outdated national identification system, contributed to that many Venezuelans began their migration journey to other countries on foot. Due to the intricacy of this process, there is a lack of data regarding the number of people doing their journeys as *caminantes*. The most reliable information is provided by the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (2021) that estimates that at least 162.000 migrants walked through Colombia, 90.300 through Ecuador, 75.600 past Peru, and 2.900 across Central America and Mexico during 2021. However, difficulties for collecting reliable data depend on different factors, such as the use of illegal roads to enter and leave the country, lack of identification documents and legal changes that affects the proper documentation of migrants in Ecuador (Acaps, 2021).

Journeys are processes where different types of interactions happen, including mobilising diverse sources of support and solidarity (Snel, Bilgili & Staring, 2021). The latter plays a relevant role in their journeys since, in many cases, this type of support networks shape the routes and influences the decisions to settle momentarily or permanently in a place. However, migrants also encounter negative experiences such as threats, such as extortion, sexual and physical violence, labour exploitation, xenophobia, and a lack of supporting networks (Acaps, 2021). Looking attentively to journeys can help us understand how migration evolves and how this influences identities, actors, and places.

Caminantes traverse different cities and countries, hence, there is a need of addressing the experiences, interactions, hostilities, and networks that occur in different stages of these journeys (Schwarz, 2015). Since it is a long, non-linear process that creates engagement with people and places along the way, this research aims to use the “trajectory approach” (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2015), to understand the implications of those interactions during the journey, and in the lives of caminantes.

During the last years, the regional government have strengthened the restrictions for people to enter the country. As requirements increased, new forms of solidarity were emerging. These actions are relevant to analyse since they are developed from a horizontal perspective, and from actors that also faced a migration experience. The latter is an interesting point to analyse since it expands the scope of solidarity beyond ideas of citizenship or hierarchy (García Agustín & Bak Jorgensen, 2021). Therefore, this study is also concerned in identifying how solidarity actions occur, who are the actors behind these actions, and why they develop these initiatives.

Due to the conditions under which this migratory process has taken place and considering that it is relatively new, academic information on caminantes is limited. Therefore, it represents an opportunity to investigate the stories, configurations, and experiences of the actors involved in this increasingly important migratory process. Moreover, by using qualitative research methods, this thesis expects to identify how solidarity actions are consolidated and what motivates the actors behind these initiatives. Finally, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on solidarity in migration, expand discussions on the needs of people in transit and highlight the formal and informal work that different actors do to assist those who face different types of vulnerability due to their type of journey.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

1.3.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to explore the influence of formal and informal solidarity expressions in shaping migratory journeys of caminantes.

1.3.2 Main Question

- How do solidarity initiatives influence the journey and experiences of caminantes and solidarity actors?

1.3.3 Sub-Questions

- What are recent developments in the journeys of caminantes?
- What kind of expressions of solidarity can be identified? Who is involved, and in what ways? How are these initiatives challenged?
- What is the effect of these solidarity initiatives on the journeys and experiences of caminantes?
- What are the effects of these solidarity initiatives on the experiences of the actors who develop them, including former caminantes?

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

This chapter presents the different concepts and approaches used for analysing the data. This section introduces the trajectory approach and how it relates to the journeys of *caminantes* in South America. Next, it analyses how emotions affect the development of solidarity initiatives. Then, it reviews the concepts of emotional solidarity. Finally, it explores the role of social support networks as a result of solidarity.

2.1 The trajectory approach and its influence in journeys

For this study, it is relevant to analyse three key aspects of the journey. First, this section will explore how migration challenges the boundaries of the Westphalian State. Second, it will delve into the migrant's journey to, later, finalize exploring the importance of the trajectory approach in this research.

The “Westphalian” political order that has created territorial division of States, the concept of sovereignty, and the idea of identity and nationality has been destabilized by new migration forms that are not limited to physical territorial borders (Bauder, 2020). Migrants challenge the idea of State especially when using illegal routes or by doing clandestine journeys (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016). Hence, as Mainwaring and Brigden (2016, p. 247) assert, it is relevant to understand the journey as a complex and significant part of the migration process, a social process that shapes migrants and societies. The concept of journey itself is broader than crossing a physical limit, as it also encompasses imagined journeys before migration, the journeys to their destinations or transit countries and deportation journeys (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016, p. 244). Hence, the experiences along the journeys play a central role to understanding migrants' decisions to settle or to continue to a different destination.

Therefore, the trajectory approach becomes central to understanding the migration journey of *caminantes* in Latin America, since this approach investigates migrant's positions through places, implying that journeys are not linear travels from point A to B (Schapendonk et al, 2020). Migrant journeys have ambiguous moments of arrival and settlement (Schapendonk et al, 2020). In this sense, migrant trajectories are useful to also understand the involvement in processes of immobility or settlement since the movements in time and space also influences personal identities, aspirations, and perspectives (Leed, 1991; Benezet & Zetter, 2015; as cited in Schapendonk et al, 2020). Migrant trajectories are not limited to settling, therefore, challenging the idea that life after migrating is sedentary (Moret, 2018; as cited in Schapendonk et al, 2020).

Furthermore, destinations are not always based on migrant's decisions, but it interconnects to different experiences along the journey that contribute to defining settling places. Hence, it is central to understanding that for migrants, such as *caminantes*, migration does not conform solely to a physical movement to a country of destination or a transit country but that it implies a more complex process that requires to visibilize the decision-making process that happens in different places of the journey (Crawley & Jones, 2020). Additionally, migrants encounter different obstacles along the routes, which develop new forms of improvisation, having a direct influence in their destinations and compromising new support practices (Snel, Bilgili & Staring, 2021). Finally, journeys are processes that

create different interactions, like mobilising diverse sources of support and solidarity (Snel, Bilgili & Staring, 2020). Therefore, it is essential for this research to analyse how solidarity is driven, under which ideals, and what are the motivations behind it.

2.2 Emotions emerging from the migratory process

During the journeys, migrants interact with diverse actors and navigate several experiences that can produce or rise from specific emotions. Emotions developed during the migratory process have been mainly discussed from a medical, behavioural, and pathological perspective (Albrecht, 2016). By focusing on the trauma, fears, and mental issues that certainly emerge during a migration process, one tends to forget the migrant's agency (Mahmud, 2021). This process is not only a traumatizing and negative event, but also covers different kinds of opportunities where emotions play a relevant role to mobilise people to express different types of support (Albrecht, 2016). Hence, the role of emotions is relevant to identify the motivations behind the people who develop solidarity actions but also to understand the implications of emotions in the migratory journey.

According to Ahmed “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments” (2004, p. 119; as cited in Wilding & Winarnita, 2022). The migration process involves different transformations that includes “the transmission, reproduction and evolution of emotions in relation to belonging, identity and home” (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 74). Therefore, focusing on migrants' emotions is central to explore their views, identifications, and ways of belonging and how this intersects with the construction of relations within the host communities they interact with (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015).

Jasper (1998, p. 397; as cited in Milan, 2018) highlights that “emotions accompany all social action, proving both motivation and goals” and establishes that strong emotions are essential for mobilisation. Additionally, Jasper (2011, p. 287) determines that moral emotions “involve feelings of approval and disapproval based on moral intuitions and principles, as well as the satisfactions we feel when we do the right (or wrong) thing, but also when we feel the right (or wrong) thing, such as compassion for the unfortunate or indignation over injustice”. Other feelings, such as sympathy has been linked to helping behaviour (Knab & Steffens, 2021). Lazarus (1991) and Wispé (1986) state that sympathy is characterised by the awareness of someone's sufferings and the longing to mitigate that feeling. In this sense, emotions such as compassion, sympathy, empathy, and understanding can lead to broader actions such as solidarity initiatives (Kappeller & Wolkenstein, 2013).

In conjunction, as emotions play an important role in mobilizing towards others, resonance is a key concept to understand part of this affective and emotional interactions (Moghaddari, 2021). Resonance is defined by Simone and Pieterse as:

“An affective process of people and things associating with each other, of having something to do with each other, of acting as components in the enactment of operations larger than themselves and their own particular functions and histories. When things resonate with each other there is a connection that proceeds,

not from the impositions of some overarching map or logic, but from a process of things extending themselves to each other” (2017, p. 16; as cited in Wajsberg & Schapendonk, 2021).

Resonance can promote affect and emotion without the requirement of an intimate relation; therefore, it can occur in exceptional experiences but also in the everyday (Moghaddari, 2021). In addition, migrant solidarity can emerge from resonance mutual becoming (Kemp and Kfir, 2016; Moghaddari, 2021; as cited in Moghaddari, 2021). Therefore, certain feelings contribute to the development of solidarity initiatives, hence, we will explore on emotional solidarity for this matter.

2.3 Solidarity within migration

The concept of solidarity has been largely explored to understand the development of humankind. Starting in the 19th century with Emile Durkheim, who differentiated between mechanical and organic solidarity to discuss the division of labour. Nowadays, the concept has gained attention, in the context of the arrival of refugees and migrants (Bauder & Juffs, 2020).

As Bauder and Juffs (2020) assert, solidarity does not have a single definition. Several scholars have defined and categorised sources of solidarity suitable for the realm of this investigation. Yet, in order to understand the development of solidarity initiatives among and for caminantes, this research will consider the contributions of Bauder and Juffs (2020); who developed an analysis of the concept of solidarity in the refugee and migration literature; making a typology that highlight concepts emerging from the Non-Enlightenment and Enlightenment Traditions.

For this study, we are going to follow a concept emerging from the Enlightenment tradition. The concept of Emotional Reflexive Solidarity, influenced by the ideas of David Hume, who highlights that emotions guide reason and decision-making; therefore, becoming a matter of personal motivations and principles of sympathy, compassion, and friendship (Bauder & Juffs, 2020). Solidarity is then expressed as a private matter that derives from personal motivations and moral principles (Bauder & Juffs, 2020).

Authors such as Featherstone (2012) and Agustin and Jorgensen (2019) highlight solidarity as a practice that aims for inclusive change and social justice, but that can also affect the power relations between those offering and receiving support creating hierarchical, paternalistic, and exclusionary structures (della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021, p. 178; Rozakou, 2016; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2020). Since solidarity actions are developed along the way during a migratory process, it is relevant to highlight the multi-dimensional characteristic of this concept (Bauder & Juffs, 2020).

Finally, as illustrated in Bauder and Juffs (2020) literature, there is not a definite use of the concept of solidarity, but rather, it has a multi-dimensional perspective. As mentioned by several scholars, there is an overlapping and linkages among definitions. Therefore, by using

the concept of Emotional Reflexive Solidarity, I aim to explore the results that can emerge from solidarity in the lives of *caminantes*.

2.4 The role of social networks in the migratory process

The role of social networks in migration has been largely studied by authors such as Douglas Massey (1988, p. 396; as cited in Light, Bhachu & Karageorgis, 1989) who defines migration networks as “sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through the bonds of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin.”

Today’s societies interconnect migrants in several forms thanks to the development of information and communication technologies and accessibility of travels (Bilgilli, 2014). These social networks contribute to reducing costs linked to the provision of information and contribute to overcoming cultural barriers (Wissink and Mazzucato 2018; Liu 2013; as cited in Caarls, Bilgilli & Fransen, 2021). Due to the type of migratory journey that *caminantes* engage in, the contacts and networks that they build remain relevant not only in their places of origin and destination but also in the points in between where they transit (Caarls, Bilgilli & Fransen, 2021).

Wheatly and Gomberg-Muñoz (2016) highlight that migrants in transit build specific associations through which they support each other for a short period and separate as their interests change. Due to the changeability of the process, *caminantes* establish fluent relations along the route, even with other migrants. As supported by Díaz de León (2020) in her work on transient communities, these relationships are not based on trust or building strong and lasting ties among them but rather in achieving their main goal. Migrant trajectories are directly affected by the changes in the social networks of migrants, yet there has been little research on how migrant’s social networks are affected over time and its influence in the migration trajectories (Caarls, Bilgilli & Fransen, 2021).

In that sense, social networks are directly linked to social support and the sense of community within migrants. The development of social networks promotes connections with the community and strengthens their sense of community (Vieno et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2016; as cited in Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2019, p. 4). The latter provide opportunities of companionship and social engagement, while participation in migrant and host community activities provide social recognition and feelings of belonging (Djundeva & Ellwardt, 2020, p. 1286). However, local networks based on relationships that are built in a short period of time and non-kin connections are susceptible to disruption (Djundeva & Ellwardt, 2020). Therefore, it central for this investigation to analyse the journey, and the emotions that derive in solidarity and the construction of social networks from actors that develop solidarity initiatives towards *caminantes*.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative methodology because it is suitable to study how people understand concepts and it gives relevance to the context of people's everyday lives (Barbour, 2014). According to Atkinson (2017, p. 65), this type of methodology "help to gain insight into the processes involved in co-constructions of meaning, lived experiences, cultural rituals and oppressive practices". To gather data, I used qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews due to its capacity to make better use of the potential of knowledge production through dialogues and to provide depth to angles that are considered relevant for the participants (Brinkmann, 2020). Secondary data was obtained through literature reviews and online research.

3.1 Data collection

The interviewing process was divided into two sections. First, I developed an interview guide for participants engaging in solidarity actions. Since most of the participants also have a migratory background, this guide touched on topics such as their life stories, their own journey, and the story and organisation of their projects. Another interview guide was developed for caminantes which touched upon their lives, journey, aspirations, and the stories behind this process. I commenced interviewing in early August and finished the process in the first week of September. A total of 18 interviews were conducted; I did eight interviews with solidarity actors, nine with migrants, and an interview with a psychologist from an international organisation. Two interviews with solidarity actors were done through Zoom and one through regular call. In addition, I held several informal conversations during two medical brigades organised by Shelter Amor sin Fronteras.

All the semi-structured interviews and conversations were held in Spanish. Every interview was recorded and transcribed using Sonix, a transcription software. After finalising the research process, the audio recordings will be deleted from all technological devices. For the coding process, I used an Excel document where I analysed the patterns and created categories and subcategories to examine the data. Finally, the names of the participants were changed to protect their identity.

3.2 Participants and locations

The journeys of people in transit are long and uncertain, and interwoven with solidarity actors and activities. After the Covid19 pandemic, many migrants settled in Ecuador, others returned to their countries, and others decided to leave for new destinations. Therefore, I considered two groups of interviewees.

First, I sought to identify different types of solidarity initiatives and their influence on the journeys of migrants in transit and migrants who settled. To answer these questions, I contacted eight solidarity actors in the following cities: Guayaquil, Virgen de Fatima Parish, Juncal, and Cotacachi. I chose these cities for several reasons; first, Guayaquil and Virgen de Fatima Parish are in Guayas, the province where 25% of Venezuelan migrants live (UNHCR, 2022). Second, El Juncal is in the northern province of Imbabura, according to the latest data

from the Ministry of Interior, in 2018, 954.217 Venezuelans entered Ecuador and 792.180 of them passed through this province, becoming a relevant place for their journey (Paucar, 2019). El Juncal is a small rural town that hosts one of the most organized initiatives for caminantes in Ecuador, Casa de Acogida El Juncal (Paucar, 2019). Third, Cotacachi is also located in Imbabura, and it has a large presence of migrants from Colombia, Venezuela, and the United States (Benalcázar, 2021). The selection criteria for solidarity actors focused on informal and formal initiatives that support the journey of caminantes without a nationality distinction. The initial idea was to focus on initiatives developed by Ecuadorian citizens, however, most of these initiatives were no longer running or never received a reply from its leaders. Therefore, it is important to highlight that most of the participants interviewed were former caminantes and migrants. From these initiatives, 3 of them focused exclusively on caminantes, whereas the rest focus on a broader scope to support the migrant community such as legal advice, seed capital, and community integration. Most of the participants in this section are Venezuelans, followed by two Ecuadorians and a Colombian.

Table I
Participant Demography- Solidarity Actors

Participant*	Organization	Location	Nationality
Ana	Fundación Viajeros	Guayaquil	Ecuadorian
Francisco	Fundación Manos Venezolanas	Guayaquil	Venezuelan
Lorena	Vensalud	Guayaquil	Venezuelan
Carola	Communal Leader	Durán	Colombian
Martha	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Virgen de Fatima Parish	Venezuelan/Colombian
Roberto	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Virgen de Fatima Parish	Venezuelan
Juan	Los Caminantes	Cotacachi	Venezuelan
Fatima	Casa de Acogida El Juncal	El Juncal	Ecuadorian

* Pseudonyms

Source: Fieldwork 2022.

Second, this research explores the journeys and experiences of caminantes and migrants, who were former caminantes, that momentarily settled in Ecuador. The criteria for selecting participants focused on people with a migratory background who have walked partial or entire trajectories to their destinations. Participants were contacted through different activities done by Shelter Amor sin Fronteras and at Foundation Manos Venezolanas. Most of the interviewees for this section were Venezuelan citizens, yet I also interacted with Colombians and Haitians during informal gatherings. Since participants did not know me, I first introduced myself, disclosed the purpose and objective of my research, and proceeded to ask whether they wanted to take part in this investigation. Oral consent was asked at the beginning of every interview.

Table II
Participant Demography-Caminantes/Migrants

Participant*	Meeting Location	Intended Destination	Status in Ecuador*
Karla	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Peru	Settled
David	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Colombia	In transit
Camila	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Peru	In transit
Andrés	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Ecuador/Chile	Settled
Melina	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Ecuador	Settled
Abel	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Colombia/Ecuador	Settled
Jaime	Shelter Amor sin Fronteras	Ecuador	Settled
Cristina	Foundation Manos Venezolanas	Ecuador	Settled
Karen	Foundation Manos Venezolanas	Ecuador	Settled

* Pseudonyms

**Status in Ecuador at the moment of the interview; subject to change.

Source: Fieldwork 2022.

Finally, I interviewed a psychologist working for an international organisation to understand the needs and challenges encountered by migrants during their journeys and to note the approaches to mental health for people in transit.

3.3 Research ethics and positionality

This section outlines the ethical considerations observed during the research process. By focusing on a topic that involves the migrant community, which in the past years has been the target of xenophobic attacks in Ecuador and the region, I was aware that this research required a fair representation of this community distancing from the commonly used binaries of documented/undocumented, foreign/national, and criminal/law-abiding. Therefore, the focus of this investigation relied on the experiences, journeys, and organisational capacity of those developing solidarity initiatives and from migrants that are in transit or settled in Ecuador.

Before the interviews, I focused on building trusting and reliable connections with the interviewees. It was crucial that they felt comfortable and safe in telling me their stories and experiences. Initially, it was a challenge to efficiently handle the emotional component that arose during the interviews since I did not want them to revive traumatic experiences or erase their agency to choose in sharing the latter. Participants were informed that they could skip questions that made them uncomfortable and stop the interview at any time. They were asked if they wanted to use pseudonyms, and confidentiality was reassured. Even though they did not require to use pseudonyms, the names of the participants were changed to not overexpose them. Considering that I had several informal conversations, which data has been used in this research, I cared that all people that were having conversations with me, understood the purpose of the research and that the information shared was going to be used for academic matters. All participants in this research gave their oral consent to be considered for this study.

In addition, my positionality played a two-way role. First, being an Ecuadorian citizen studying at a foreign university created an imbalance in the power dynamics; therefore, it was necessary to create a connection through the cultural similarities between Ecuador and countries such as Venezuela and Colombia, where most of my interviewees come from. Additionally, being a young middle-class woman also set some disparities in the interactions during my time at the Shelter, since people expected that I take an active role in the functioning of the places that I visit. On a positive note, people were open to participating and providing relevant information to this study once they knew it was academic research.

Lastly, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras funds the nourishment of migrants. They work on a donation basis and are mainly self-funded. Donations of food and clothes were provided as a form of appreciation and respect for their work and the time and trust they shared.

3.4 Research limitations and challenges

During the data collection, this research faced several challenges and limitations. One of the main limitations was the current criminality rate in Ecuador, which led to reconsidering the locations where this investigation was going to take place. The latter made me extremely alert of the places and people I was contacting, which slow down the path of engaging participants.

Due to the nature of this investigation, access to participants was a challenge. Migrant communities have faced discrimination and criminalization, hence, talking about their migratory situation and their journey remain sensitive. In June 2022, the national government announced that, from September 2022, a regularisation process for Venezuelan citizens will start, considering those migrants who regularly entered the country between 2019 and 2022 (EFE, 2022). In addition, the creation of a temporary humanitarian visa for those citizens was announced. Moreover, from February 2023, the Ecuadorian government expects to start a regularization process of more than 300.000 foreigners that entered the country by irregular paths (Reuters, 2022). It is possible that the latter created mistrust in participants, which inhibited the possibility of interaction. Many of the participants who were contacted during June and July were reluctant to participate in this interview after giving a first approval.

At the beginning of this research, I was hesitant to interview people in transit due to the complexity of handling sensitive topics about their experiences of a journey that they have yet not finished. But, due to reduced access to people who have settled, I considered interviewing people in transit during my presence at Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, where I was able to conduct interviews to participants who were still in transit during medical brigades organized by this organization. Another important limitation was that this shelter is located on a national highway with the presence of trucks and trailers, which are the main support of their journey, therefore, the engagement in the interviews was not as strong as desired since their focus was on finding transport to continue their journey. Finally, the experiences of migrants in transit and migrants who settled had a strong emotional component, which had an important role in the conduction of the interviews, since many topics were left inconclusive due to the emotional weight that it still has on them.

Chapter 4

The Journey

Before starting with the analysis of the findings, I will clarify how the following two chapters are distributed and who are the participants involved in each section. In the beginning of this investigation, I expected to focus on solidarity initiatives developed by host community members. However, after a first approach with participants, I became aware that solidarity actions developed by Ecuadorian citizens lasted less in time and were directed to immediate actions, such as providing clothes, food, and blankets in central stations for the migrants stationed there. Then, I was able to contact two initiatives developed by Ecuadorian citizens. Finally, it is important to highlight that most of the people that participated in this research were former migrants and people in transit that shared the same nationality (Venezuelans and Colombians) and who are living in Ecuador momentarily.

In this chapter, I will analyse the interview findings. The interviews consisted in two sets of questions directed to *caminantes*, be these in transit or settled, and to solidarity actors. With these interviews, I aimed to understand the process of their journey, their decisions around temporarily settling, and the influence that solidarity initiatives had in their migratory process. Whereas with solidarity actors, I sought to understand their own migratory process and the motivations to develop these initiatives. The findings are discussed in two chapters. In Chapter 4, I will delve in the migration journey of solidarity actors, migrants and *caminantes*; while in the following chapter I will analyse the development of solidarity actions and how it influences the journey.

This chapter contains three sections. First, I will delve into the lives of the participants before migrating. Then, I will explore the planning process along with the journey itself. Finally, this study will also explore an interest finding from the gender dynamics that occur during the journey.

4.1 Life before the journey

This section serves as a background to understand the lives of the people that participated in this research, and in the following sections, to explore the journey itself. Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) highlight that migrants tend to understand the journey as embedded in a larger chain of events that determine key elements of how and where they travel. The deterioration of living conditions in Venezuela, made the idea of migration present in the lives of those who remained after the outbreak of the political crisis in the country. It is estimated that 1 out of 5 Venezuelans has fled their country (UNHCR, 2022).

When I asked about their lives before migrating, the older interviewees recalled Venezuela as one of the most attractive countries in the region, since they were able to experience the times of economic stability. These participants, in their mid-30's and early-40's, are also the ones who are now developing solidarity initiatives to support others in their journeys. Even when the economy started to crumble down, these participants had assets and jobs in Venezuela. For example, Francisco had two jobs: one as a journalist for an international well-known channel and as a communications advisor to a public entity. Roberto was a supervisor for an important national company. Juan was a law student working for a tribunal and Lorena

had a family job with her partner. Even in times of socio-economic uncertainty, they experienced some stability. As Francisco, a 34-years-old journalist, recalled:

“I remember that before, when I started working at Venevisión and at the Ombudsman's Office, I used to enjoy certain luxuries such as going to a restaurant to eat and so on. Those things began to diminish with time, and then the crisis began to be quite strong with the shortages” (18th August 2022, Foundation Manos Venezolanas, Guayaquil)

Younger participants are the ones who experienced the times of scarcity in Venezuela, and they mostly made their journey walking. Andrés, 22 years old, shared that he could only afford one bus ticket for his pregnant wife, hence, he decided to make his journey by foot. In 2014, 25.2% of the Venezuelans were living in extreme poverty, by 2021 that figure affects 76,6% of the population (Statista, 2022). As many participants point out, the deteriorating conditions led to migration in all social classes:

“In Venezuela I was studying in high school, I lived with my mother and my father... my mother worked in a hospital, my father worked as a driver in the public buses. As the country fell into a crisis, the work situation became a little more complicated for them. My salary was no longer enough to support them because I also worked as a motorcycle cab driver” (Andrés, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

“My husband was a supervisor for 12 years at Polar, the best company in Venezuela, and apart from that I am a veterinarian. So, we were not bad there, no, we were not bad, it was just that the situation got too tight” (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

As demonstrated in this section, participants of this study had assets and jobs in their home country, yet, that sort of stability did not prevent them from leaving the country in search of a better lifestyle. All the participants were affected by the instability of the country, which moved them to start thinking about a migratory process. In this following section, I will explore the decision-making process behind their journeys and how they chose a place to temporarily settle.

4.2 The planning process and the journey itself

Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) argue that the journey itself can be as complex and significant as other parts of the migratory process. In addition, the increasing securitization of borders and the rising presence of criminal actors make these journeys unsafe and dangerous. All the stages of the journey can have a significant impact in people's lives, hence, it is important to understand how migrants exercise their agency and how they experience the whole process (Kuschminder, 2022). Therefore, how do they plan their journey and destination country?

The participants I interviewed come from different socio-economic backgrounds, however, all of them had reached secondary education and some of them had university degrees. All the participants had jobs in their country by the time of migrating. The idea of leaving was building up due to the ravages of the economic and social crisis that the country was experiencing. During several informal conversations with caminantes at Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, on the 26th August 2022, I could gather three points that they had to consider before starting their journey such as the availability of transport, the daily national currency worth, and the tensions at the borders. Hence, with the idea already revolving in their heads,

sometimes their decisions to leave were sudden yet well prepared under the circumstances they were facing at the time.

“No, well, that was suddenly, it was ‘no, let’s go now’, we grabbed some lunch and we left (...) Because the situation there was getting more complicated and that was it. We had already seen other people who had arrived safely and so we took the risk ourselves” (Abel, 26th of August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

“I left in 2019. I left because the situation was very bad. Sometimes I did not have enough to feed my children” (Jaime, 26th of August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

As making a journey by foot presents other sets of vulnerabilities, some participants decide to make their journey accompanied by other migrants. Caminantes travel in groups for many reasons. Some of them, abandoned their countries with friends or relatives, so they embark on this walking journey together. That is the case of Andrés, who left the country with his neighbourhood friends. Traveling together allows them to defy some of the dangers they encounter on the route. For example, Andrés mentions the following:

“We would also help each other on the road, and we would sit in a place, a little park to rest... we would share, if I had and you did not, mine was yours. So, we all helped each other” (Andrés, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

These small groups create alliances to advance on their route. Many times, they travel with strangers who join them along the way, so they do not travel alone. When there is no relationship of kinship or friendship in the group, many are left behind if they do not follow the walking pace of the rest. Also, some people stop to transport small families with children or women with children, so the initial groups become smaller. Walking in groups has been used by various movements, such as the Migrant Caravans of Central America, as tools to defend themselves from harassment by authorities and criminal gangs, as well as to break away from human traffickers and smugglers (Izcara Palacios, 2021).

“Yes, we were quite a lot of migrants, we were about 28 people [walking to Quito]” (Jaime, 26th of August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

“I left with some friends from the neighbourhood, but they did not all have the same destination, each one had their own different destination” (Andrés, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

The motivations to start a migratory process are diverse and can arise from individual aspirations but also from structural forces, including factors of hope and longing of a better life, desire to join family abroad or fear of different forms of violence (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016, p. 246). The reasons and the processes are not linear and the complexity that reflects on legal, social, and economic boundaries, create a constant reshaping of the journey. For them, there are no fixed destinations, but places that adequate to their temporary needs and aspirations.

Out of the 18 participants of this research, 15 of them have a migratory background. From these 15 participants, 9 of them did not consider Ecuador as their final destination. Yet, they settled in the country for several reasons. Francisco, from Foundation Manos Venezolanas, traveled to Ecuador with the idea of trying to establish in this country, however, in case it did not work out, he had a return flight ticket to Venezuela. In the same line, Juan from Initiative Los Caminantes, had time to leave everything in order and then migrate to Ecuador where he had local friends that he met on a tourist visit. The participants who now develop solidarity initiatives could arrive to their destinations by using airplane or buses as their transportation. The exception in this group is Martha and Roberto, from Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, who made their journey on foot accompanied by their three daughters and their dog Tigre.

The participants above, to some extent, could experience a less difficult arrival and settlement. The latter can be largely affected by the assets they had in their home country, which allowed some of them to arrive with some capital to start their lives in a new country. However, the decision-making process to decide where to settle requires them to analyze different factors.

For example, Karla, 19 years old and in transit to Peru, started the journey pregnant. By the time of the interview, she was already in her 33rd week, hence, staying in Virgen de Fatima Parish, where there is a growing Venezuelan community, was a rational decision. But for others, decisions were not clear and shaped along the way.

“Together with my baby's father, I decided to migrate. It was not a decision that was really clear to us. But one day we woke up and said ‘Yes, we are going to go’. We did not know where yet, whether to Brazil or Ecuador. But, well, we decided that we were coming to Ecuador and, well, then we started to gather everything monetarily we could to get here” (Karen, 18th August 2022, Foundation Manos Venezolanas, Guayaquil).

For Martha and Roberto, choosing a destination changed thanks to the support from a stranger and the employment opportunities he provided.

“Yes, we actually passed by, and he was working on a motorbike like my husband now works. He now has a food stall here on 26 [Virgen de Fatima Parish], but before he was working on a motorbike and he asked my husband where we were going, because he saw us with the girls all dirty like that. We told him [where we were going] and he said ‘Hey, don't you want to stay here?’ And I said ‘Yes, if you get us a job, we will stay’. So, he said ‘Yes, I have a motorbike and I give motorbikes to work, if your husband wants, he can work’” (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

As shown above, the stories are different but share a common component: their journeys changed and reshaped along the way. This is largely complemented by the work of Aliaga, Flórez, Díaz and Arias (2022, p. 310) about caminantes in transit through Colombia, in which their participants choose their destinations because they had networks in those cities and because of the economic and social possibilities. Migrants can choose to leave their initially chosen destination if these places do not fulfill their expectations (Moret, 2018; as cited in Schapendonk et al., 2020). Some of the participants have lived in different countries by the time they arrive to Ecuador. David, 40-year old stylist, tried his luck in Chile and Peru, but now is making his way up to Colombia; Jaime, banana factory worker, lived three months in

Colombia but unable to find a job he walked with other Venezuelans to Ecuador; Abel, electrician, walked to Colombia where he lived 4 years, then walked to Venezuela to bring his children, then returned walking to Colombia where stayed until the Covid-19 pandemic was controlled, and then decided to walk again to Ecuador, now with all his family. Karla settled in Ecuador due to her pregnancy but aims to go to Peru, and Camila, from Colombia, is making his way to Peru with all her family.

The factors that make a migrant settle are diverse, but the economic factor is relevant for their decision to stay. Ecuador has the third largest Venezuelan population worldwide and was the major receptor of asylum seekers and refugees in the region during the Colombian conflict (UNHCR, 2022; Pugh, Jimenez & Latuff, 2020). Also, Ecuador has several characteristics that made it a destination country for migrants. First, the cultural ties between Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia have been historically close (Valle Franco, 2017). Second, the use of the U.S dollar as the national currency allows a higher exchange rate which is convenient for sending remittances. And finally, a set of progressive laws that aimed to protect migrants and refugees (Pugh, Jimenez & Latuff, 2020). Nonetheless, the Covid19 pandemic affected the mobility of migrants transiting through countries in South America since the borders between Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile were closed and militarized, which trapped migrants in uncertain and humane conditions (Álvarez Velasco, 2022, p. 60)

The changing dynamics of migration policies have altered temporally and spatially the characteristics of the journeys, involving long periods of settlements combined with short moments of mobility (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016). Despite temporarily settling in countries like Chile, Peru and Ecuador, large numbers of migrants are now leaving their (temporary) host countries to start a journey through the Darien Gap to reach the United States (Turkewitz, 2022; Buschschlutter, 2022). According to David Smolansky, commissioner of the OAS General Secretariat for the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis, from January to June 2022, approximately 28.079 Venezuelans started this journey (Perdomo, 2022). However, due to the impossibility to track mobility of caminantes, and the lack of transparency from the Venezuelan government, there is not a specificity of the countries from which they leave and where they go. In addition, due to the improvement of the economy, some migrants are returning to Venezuela. There are no specific data to the amount of returned migrants, yet the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that since 2018, with the creation of the plan “Return to the Homeland” 30.000 Venezuelans have arrived from more than 20 countries (Paredes, 2022). Added to the latter, Latin American economies are still recuperating from the effects of the Covid19 pandemic, making that not only Venezuelans but also Ecuadorians migrate to new countries.

4.3 Gender interactions in the journey

The journey itself is a process where people are exposed to many vulnerabilities. Women and children are particularly exposed to different forms of violence such as sexual and physical violence, extortion, kidnapping, especially while travelling on their own (Acaps, 2021). According to Herrera (2014, p. 9; as cited in HIAS & UN Women, 2020) 6 out of 10 women in human mobility have suffered sexual violence during their migration journey. While men and boys are at risk of being recruited by criminal gangs (Care, 2020).

In this sense, women and children gain more attention from international organisations and from those who support migrants. However, men are also exposed to dangers on the journeys which, according to shelter's leaders, tend to be forgotten by these organisations. Martha, as a former *caminante*, recalled her experience walking with her husband and daughters and now in her shelter, she tries to support everyone as equal, without any gender differentiation. The latter can be linked to Díaz de León's (2020, p. 2) work on trust within migration, where she stated that the construction of the idea of a 'good migrant' affects how migrants experience the road and their chance to receive help, which also reinforces the conceptions of those who are worthy of assistance and solidarity.

In this sense, I could argue that the stereotypical gender roles also show up during the migratory journey, creating the idea that some migrants are more deserving of support and that others are able to endure harder situations. For example, Roberto, Martha's husband, and key pillar of the shelter's functioning, oversaw the protection of the family and the food gathering, but many nights, he had to sleep at open air because many organizations prioritize women and children, and their lack of resources contribute to leaving men without access to food or shelter. Nonetheless, classifying aid recipients and ignoring that men are also vulnerable to the hazards of the journey erases migrant's agency, reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and contribute to perpetuating patriarchal and paternalistic structures that construct women as weak and men as strong beings that have no rights to be protected or cared for. Therefore, Martha and Fatima are critical to what they sense as an invisibilization of men's vulnerabilities during the journeys.

"Something very important that I always want to emphasise. Men should also be helped here. It should also be declared that men have the right to rest in a bed, to rest under a roof, that they should not be told in the shelters that you go outside, and the women go inside. Because if women are seen as weak women, as weak children, then what is the man? Because the man is the one who comes carrying the suitcases. The man is the one who comes with the responsibility of looking to feed his children. So, I believe that as a human being we should not rate or classify, we should give the appropriate right to all human beings as men, women, children, old people, whatever. And in a shelter, you must treat them all as human beings, not to say this one yes, then this one no" (Fatima, 8th September 2022, regular call, Casa de Acogida Juncal).

"I used to think that men alone almost do not need anything. And in reality, as I have told several organisations, they are the ones who need the most. Because I have had men who come, older people, they come looking for a future, because they left their family in Venezuela, because they could not afford to bring them all here, because they did not want to risk their family out on the street. We did it, but perhaps many men do not decide to do it, they do not want to. So yes, it is necessary to help them all" (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

This is deeply connected to the lack of resources to cover the needs of this population from an organizational and governmental view. A report conducted by Care Ecuador (2021) identified that shelters and refuges are operating at a lower capacity since the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic, and they present insufficient resources and structure to articulate in the benefit of the migrant community. Therefore, it is relevant that resources from governmental and non-governmental institutions are directed to cover the current needs of the migrant community.

In this section, I do not aim to ignore the vulnerabilities women and children face during their migratory process but to highlight that men also have needs and vulnerabilities that have to be covered, especially by formal entities that have the resources and structures to do so. Undoubtedly, it is important to understand these matters from a gender perspective to have an adequate response to the needs of these populations, yet it remains central to include all people in this process. However, as highlighted by the UNHCR, the lack of investigations and data about migrants in transit is an important loophole and a serious obstacle to formulate adequate and effective policies (2018, p.23; as cited in Aliaga, Flórez, Díaz & Arias, 2022). This is also expressed in the budget requirement that estimates that \$1.79 billion are needed to support the migrant and refugee Venezuelan community in their host countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN News, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary that regional governments and international organizations destined sufficient resources to support caminantes, since due to the shortcomings, many migrants are being left behind. In the following chapter, we will explore the different solidarity initiatives that emerge during the journey.

Chapter 5 Solidarity

This chapter contains four sections. First, I will explore the solidarity initiatives. Then, I will focus on the unexpected forms of solidarity that I encountered during fieldwork. After this, I will discuss about the support networks that emerge from and during the journey. Finally, this study will also look at how these initiatives influence the journey.

5.1 Solidarity initiatives

The journeys are intertwined with practices of care and solidarity, which as stated by Álvarez Velasco (2022, p. 68) is materialized by sharing, protecting, and caring; contrasting with the inability of States to protect migrants in transit. In this section, we will focus on this solidarity actions that emerge during the journey, however, we will give prominence to the solidarity initiatives carried out by Martha and her family, and Fatima, since their shelters focus mainly on caminantes. Later, I will delve into Francisco, Juan, Ana, Carola, and Lorena's initiatives since their focus is broadly directed to the immigrant community.

These types of initiatives, based on migrants' solidarity and self-organization, present many possibilities for collective action (Kallius, 2019, p. 249). Therefore, I will first introduce the Foundation Amor sin Fronteras. The latter was born one day when Martha and Roberto realized that for many migrants in transit Virgen de Fatima Parish is an important place in the journey. This Parish is traversed by a national road that goes to the northern and southern part of the country; hence, it has a large presence of heavy vehicles, which are a fundamental ally for migrants to continue their journey.

"It took us two months to walk from Venezuela. When we arrived here in Ecuador, we arrived at kilometer 26 because this is the road that goes to Huaquillas, to Peru, Chile and on the way back goes to Colombia, Venezuela. So, we were looking to go to Peru, but we arrived here in Ecuador and at the 26th, then a guy offered us a job." (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

"From Colombia, the journey was by car, in gandolas [trailers] as we say, we advanced for at least three or four hours in the car, the car would leave us somewhere and we would stay there for the night, and we had to sleep under a small roof. Then we advanced in other cars that gave us the ride...and then to wherever they left us." (Roberto, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

This area offers plenty opportunities for informal work and commerce. Migrants usually take daily jobs to save money for their journey, and to some extent, to settle temporarily in the town.

"I was working in a shrimp farm, I rented a little house, and well, little by little I am getting my things, what I really should have, what I dream of, for my future, for my child" (Andrés, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Interestingly, these initiatives have arisen despite the needs that these Venezuelan migrants have and that still face the problems of informal work, limited access to health and education, and the lack of a legal status that would allow them to access formal employment.

For Francisco, journalist and leader from Foundation Manos Venezolanas, the development of his initiative took place during the pandemic, when an action to help him allowed him to support other people in the same condition:

"And as that day I had that gesture from that person, from that Ecuadorian friend who sent me food and I said 'well, I have to give this back to the people, to the same God who is helping me and to humanity'. So that's when I started to get all those people who had contacted me for food, because for all these negative things that were happening, I put them in a WhatsApp group and I said I was going to start looking for them. I told them that I was going to start looking for humanitarian assistance in different international, national, and international organizations to help me with food." (Francisco, 18th August 2022, Foundation Manos Venezolanas, Guayaquil)

And Juan shares a similar story:

"The initiative is born from the pandemic because many people had migrated before or were migrating just when the pandemic happened and had to return to Venezuela. Others came back from Argentina, Bolivia, or Peru, back to Ecuador or back to Colombia or back to Venezuela. I think that the approach is born from there, because the pandemic itself left many people without work, left them homeless." (Juan, 25th of August 2022, Zoom call, Cotacachi).

On the other hand, there are also initiatives such as Lorena's, which are a great relief for the migrant community and the community in transit. Vensalud was born from a group of Venezuelan migrants that started a private health center that provides low-cost health services for migrants of different nationalities. Lorena supports the medical brigades organized by Shelter Amor sin Fronteras where migrants in transit receive free care and the settled migrants receive low-cost services.

Solidarity actors aligned their commitment to support other migrants from different perspectives. Fatima, from Casa de Acogida El Juncal, aligns this commitment as a way to express her religious belief and as a form in which she can also grow with this experience. Fatima claims that: "for me it is a great satisfaction to have been able to learn to look at people in need, to look at God in poor people, to look at God in migrants".

Roberto, former caminante and leader from Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, states that:

"It moves me a lot because I put myself in their position, because I went through the same thing. I walked a lot. They blamed me a lot. The doors were closed to me. I know how it feels to be an emigrant because it is not easy to live that life. To live a life where you do not have a fixed course to be nor a point of arrival. And that is a strong experience. It really is" (Roberto, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Just like Roberto, other participants such as Francisco and Lorena recalled their personal migration experiences, and the support they received from the local and migrant community as drivers from them to mobilized and support others. For example, Francisco shares that "since the day I received that gesture from that person, from that Ecuadorian friend who sent me the food, I said 'well, I have to give this back to the people who are helping me and to the humanity'". This connects with Martha's reason to support migrants, as she claims, "many of them do not go to a place like us, we did not have anywhere to go, we said where they offered us work, that is where we stay". This connects to their experiences and struggles during the road, as expressed in Montes and Paris Pombo (2019, p. 564), it derives from "sharing common emotional experiences, intimacy and

interconnections”. This is one of the reasons why Karen and Cristina, mother and daughter who volunteer at Foundation Manos Venezolanas, now support Francisco in his initiative, as a form to give back the support they have received through the foundation.

5.2 Solidarity in the unexpected

This section provides an overview of different types of solidarity that does not rely on tangible goods. By exposing these forms of solidarity, this essay attempts to show the different levels of agency, and interpersonal relations that develop during the migratory journey.

5.2.1 Social Media as an organising tool

When I first started looking at solidarity initiatives, I expected to find major organised activities. As I searched for these initiatives, I could also find solidarity in unexpected actions. A notable example of solidarity is present on Facebook groups of the Venezuelan migrant community, where is common to find the following type of messages:



Source: Facebook Group.

Many possibilities for collective action are driven by migrant’s self-organisation and solidarity narratives (Kallius, 2019). Messages like the ones above reflect migrant’s organization and agency, they may not be explicit solidarity initiatives, but it does bring possibilities of joint actions that can later derive in support networks and solidarity for the journeys or the settlement. Through these Facebook groups, it was common to find recommendations, support in finding the better routes and locations, blessings and encouragement for their journeys.

Facebook groups serve as a connection point among those who are already settled and those who want to start their journey. As well, this migration networks provide updated information about legalization processes, availability of jobs, accommodation, and illegal crossing paths in the borders. This updated availability of information affects the journeys since it allows a sense of immediacy to migration due to the fast access to information and connection among peoples with the same destination (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). Thus, social media strengthens and feeds people’s desire and ability to migrate (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014).

The use of social media is not a distant tool for migrant organization. The Mesoamerican Migrant caravans illustrates this point clearly since they organize themselves through Facebook and Whatsapp groups where they point out the places they pass through, waiting for other people to join them on the way. As Şanlıer Yüksel (2022, p. 1842) states, “digital media and social networking sites also provide capacities to mobilise fragmented groups, such as migrants and refugees, and enhance political mobilisation across borders”. However, to the same extent, social media contains information that is difficult to verify, which can expose migrants to false information, to smugglers and to different types of scams (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014).

However, migrants in transit cannot isolate; they are required to engage and cooperate with others to gather updated information, resources and a sense of solidarity and belonging (Díaz de León, 2021). Social media then becomes a tool to spread solidarity expressed by delivering information to caminantes and settled migrants. And it also becomes a support network from strangers who share the same nationality to those that are experiencing migrating in a harder way. This availability of updated information regarding the routes and journeys reinforces migrant’s agency by preventing them to use smugglers to reach their destinations and by allowing them to choose where and how to go.

5.2.2 Emotional care, a form of solidarity.

Migrants and people in mobility experience different forms of solidarity. As mentioned before, there are high levels of organization among people in transit that can be shown in how they organize their routes, their settlement and how they support other migrants. But there are also unexpected situations that create bonds among them. Martha and Roberto, as former caminantes and leaders of Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, and Fatima, from Casa de Acogida Juncal, engage in activities that involve values of empathy, responsiveness, attentiveness, and compassion (Montes & Paris-Pombo, 2019). Their activities do not rely solely in providing shelter and food to people in transit, but also involve a sense of caring for the emotional well-being of migrants.

Leaders of solidarity initiatives not only look after the physical well-being of caminantes, but also take responsibility for the emotional and psychological well-being of many who pass through their shelters. This care is expressed in actions that are reflected from the time where they also had those needs. For example, caminantes usually walk without contacting their families for weeks or months, so for the leaders of Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, a phone call becomes an urgent need for them to bring calmness to their families back at home.

“Sometimes we think that with the help we give them, for them it is almost nothing. A plate of food is a lot because I experienced it with my daughter, with my three daughters, and a phone call is too much because you are calming them down [the family]. Look what happened with that boy [who died on the road]. It was the last time he got to talk to his mom, that she saw him. So that is a help for them, to communicate.” (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Equally, other forms of emotional care such as hugs becomes important for them to drain the emotions of their journeys.

“A lot of people will say ‘no, why would they need a hug? no.’ I have had 15, 16 years old kids that I have hugged them, and they start crying for their mom. They miss their mom, they miss their grandmother who raised them, they miss so many people and a hug (...) they cry what they have to cry, they wipe their tears and ‘come on, there is still a long way to go’... so even in that.” (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

From feeding migrants to supporting and relieving the emotional charge of these journeys stem from a sense of identity and self-reflection. Martha and Roberto were former *caminantes*, therefore, they can see their own journeys in the people that arrive to their shelter and just like for Fatima, who also migrated from a rural town to a bigger city in northern Ecuador, helping migrants became a moral duty that is also aligned to their religious values. The link between secular and sacred, and the moral with the political, is what Hondagneu-Sotelo et al. (2004) define as politicized spirituality, which it is illustrated when Fatima was asked about solidarity, and she related its meaning with the parable of the Good Samaritan and the story of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Other participants mentioned that this closeness, that goes beyond physical and material things, alleviate their suffering while living abroad, especially when they confront situations in their home country.

“My father had died electrocuted because he worked in a power plant, and it was very difficult for me. And I told the people who accommodated me in their house, and they were my encouragement. They told me ‘mija, calm down, things happen for a reason’. The lady, who is a Christian, also gave me a lot of advice and it is nice to have people who accept you, who love you as if you were from their country” (Melina, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Another form of solidarity that was displayed during my presence at Shelter Amor sin Fronteras was the desire to visibilize the oblivion of migrants’ death. Martha and Roberto experienced the death of one migrant that was looking for shelter at their refuge.

“I have the story of a girl who came to my refuge. Since the road is so dangerous, we told her to wait on the other side, that we were going to look for her and cross her to this side. The girl said that she was very tired, in an oversight that we were bringing other migrants she crossed, did not look, and was killed by a truck in front of us. That was a terrible story for me, to tell you that people thought she was my family because of the way I reacted, because the girl died in my arms. I did not know her. I did not know who she was. But it did break my heart to see my sister, a Venezuelan sister, die in my arms and in the situation she died. We did our best to bury her. I started making pots to ask for money at the traffic lights and we managed to bury her here, because it was the pandemic and nobody wanted to bury her, it was (...) Well, we talked to the parish council, and they gave her a grave and we were able to bury her. I managed to contact the family in Venezuela, but they told me that she had a six-year-old girl and that her brother was in Colombia, that it was impossible to travel because of the pandemic, that they wanted to come and pick her up, but they did not have any money. The transfer to Venezuela was a lot of money. I buried her here. Every Sunday we go to her grave, we bring her flowers, and we keep an eye on her” (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Therefore, they seek to remember those who have died on the road, as Roberto highlighted, “looking for a better life”. Martha and Roberto are very critical to the lack of attention from regional governments and organizations to address the conditions in which *caminantes* travel. And by telling her story and by taking care of her grave, they aim to visibilize her journey and to highlight everything she endured to achieve a better life for

herself and her daughter. Nowadays, thousands of migrants' deaths remain invisible and unnamed; hence there are several initiatives that are trying to generate empathy or assign political responsibility to these deaths (Délano Alonso & Nienass, 2016). That is the aim of Martha and Roberto, that journeys and the stories of the people who die and who passed their Shelter do not fall into oblivion, but that others recognize the value and the courage of what they did.

5.2.3 Support networks as a result of solidarity

During their journeys, caminantes experienced different types of support along the route. Some of them may receive information and monetary support from family and friends, from other migrants they meet in the journey or from different institutions (Snel, Bilgili & Staring, 2021). In Ecuador, several international organisations such as The Red Cross, UNHCR and IOM provide food and hygiene kits for migrants in points in the Northern and Southern border. These kits become an important incentive, but it also allows people to share what they have left.

As mentioned earlier, most of the people I interviewed are Venezuelans, Colombians or Ecuadorians who are now developing initiatives to shelter caminantes and migrants trying to settle in Ecuador. Schwiertz and Schwenken (2020) assert that local actors and communities have reacted in solidarity as a response to the inability of nation-states to address the issues that migrants encounter along the routes. Indeed, the Ecuadorian government has used the migrant community as scapegoats for their mismanagement of the security and employment rates (Cantos, 2022). The latter unleashed a series of attacks towards the immigrant community in Ecuador. Therefore, many initiatives surged to challenge these narratives and to support migrants stationed in the country. Some initiatives were sporadic and served as an immediate support, like offering food and blankets at Central Stations, but other lasted longer in time and were mostly legally organized. While approaching these initiatives, I realized that the latter are mostly driven by migrants, whereas the former by Ecuadorian citizens. Nonetheless, these actions are run on a spontaneous basis, depending on self-work and donations of its own leaders. In addition, migrants encounter solidarity on spontaneous acts on the road, such as in receiving money, food, or rides.

“They helped us more because of the children, but most of the people who came with us came alone. So, they didn't help them much. So, we, with the same help they gave us, also collaborated with them”. (Abel, 26th of August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

As asserted by Díaz de León (2020, p. 4), social networks become crucial within international and clandestine migration, since they are essential for accessing resources. Despite participants had limited access to resources, other caminantes became a good support network during the road. This is reinforced by Karla's experience on the road, where she states that: *“The people who travelled, who had something, helped us. At least [with] the food, at least [with] water. If they brought goodies for the children, [with] those things”* (17th August 2022, Medical Brigade, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras).

Among them, solidarity is expressed as a form of a tangible sharing, protecting, and supporting each other during their journey. Díaz de León (2020, p. 4) highlight that for migrants in transit cooperation and engagement among them is key to develop a sense of

solidarity and belonging. Some of them meet on the road and develop a sense of camaraderie that last during their journey.

“We would also help each other on the road, and we would sit in a place, a little park to rest... we would share, if I had and you did not, mine was yours. So, we all helped each other” (Andrés, 22nd August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

“In fact, I was very supportive of a girl who was six months pregnant, with a five-year-old girl that she was bringing with her. She came alone” (Jaime, 26th of August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

“I met the boy and the family that I told you. The man came in a wheelchair. He came with his wife and his child. In fact, my husband was a light for them. And they were a light for us. We became a family. To this day” (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Relationships during the journey emerge as a form of protection, care, and endurance, yet the connections made in the way do not last long. Some participants do not have contact with the people they met on the journey.

“Everyone already took their course, and we did not know more. We did last chatting for a little while like ‘how are you doing? how it went? and such’. But from there everyone goes by their side” (Abel, 26th of August 2022, Medical Brigade, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

Whereas the relationships that emerge between migrants and solidarity actors are also attached to the immediacy of the journey, but they keep weak contact through social media.

“Yes, yes, I have contacts (...) Not with many because I recognize that sometimes I get attached to people and then I suffer a lot. So, I have put that aside. There are many people who do have my contact, but there are some people who we have become friends, yes, we still talk to each other, and they always call me” (Fatima, 8th September 2022, regular call, Casa de Acogida Juncal).

“We give them our phone number. The social networks (...) So we communicate with them. There are many of them with whom we do not [have contact], because they come travelling without telephones, they do not have a way. However, we give them a little piece of paper where they have our social networks. They can look us up if they would like to send a message, talk to us or if they want to ask for some kind of help”. (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

As demonstrated by the experiences of the caminantes, solidarity can happen in all the stages of the journey, and it is not limited to formal forms of solidarity with a structured initiative. Indeed, hierarchical types of solidarity exist, but in the realm of this investigation, we could see that solidarity happens from people in the same conditions, from caminantes to solidarity actors who do have limited economic means and that are also struggling with the difficulties of their migratory process. Solidarity rises from the supporting each other, by sharing, protecting, and caring for their group as long as the journey lasts.

5.3. The influence of solidarity actions on the journeys.

The journeys of migrants do not follow a path from point A to point B. During the journey, different interactions arise between local people and those they meet along the way. For example, in the case of Martha and Roberto, their destination was Peru as they had friends in that country. However, on the way, they decided to stay in Ecuador without planning it,

because of an opportunity offered by another Venezuelan migrant already settled in Virgen de Fatima Parish.

The area of Virgen de Fátima Parish offers several types of informal work, but it also has a growing Venezuelan community, which serves as a support group among the migrants living in this area.

"I have a group of 103 Venezuelans established here in 26 [Virgen de Fatima Parish]. We, in the group, publish that we sell arepas, and as we help, they also help us, they buy arepas from us and with that we raise funds to be able to feed this number of people" (Martha, 17th August 2022, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, Virgen de Fatima Parish).

"We arrived here [Virgen de Fatima Parish] but we are going to continue, we decided to rest for a while so we decided to stay here" (Karla, (17th August 2022, Medical Brigade, Shelter Amor sin Fronteras).

In addition, the support networks that start to develop during the migratory process, also become a network for the solidarity actors. Volunteering is a form of help from those who migrated and settled in Ecuador, who after receiving some type of assistance, also join more structured initiatives because they see it as a way of gratitude for what they have received. For example, Cristina, 50 years old, and Karen, 26 years old, are mother and daughter, and both, despite their economic limitations, volunteer in the organization led by Francisco.

"The Foundation gives us a lot, a lot. And seeing the receptivity that they have had with us, in our free time, when we have time, we also help them to help other people who are more in need than us." (Cristina, 18th August 2022, Foundation Manos Venezolanas, Guayaquil).

In other words, in some of the cases of the participants interviewed, the type of support they received was an important factor in their decision to settle in Ecuador. With the support of initiatives such as Shelter Amor sin Fronteras, that have contacts and knowledge about the access to international organization's aid, *caminantes* especially those traveling as a family group, have easier access to resources such as help to pay the rent, food cards or seed capital to start their businesses. These factors are not determinant, but they are relevant to alleviate the situation in which migrants arrive.

The dangerous and difficult conditions in which *caminantes* must do their journey, contribute to mobilise people to support them. It was common to see people offering them food, shelter, money, and clothes. However, *caminantes* leave their country in search for economic and social stability. Hence, their focus remains in having access to economic resources to be able to stablish in a new country but also to send money back to their families. I could see that the interactions among solidarity actors, especially with those who share the same nationality, had a bigger influence in their lives. First, because solidarity actors experienced the same, some from a more privileged perspective, but at the end, as a participant told me in an informal talk *"the journey is different, but the pain is the same"*. There is a sense of identification between them since they all miss their home country and share a common disbelief about Venezuela's crisis. Second, despite the economic and legal uncertainty that many of the solidarity actors still experience, they have built a network of international organizations, host communities and other migrants that are willing to support their initiatives.

Finally, as demonstrated throughout these chapters, the journeys of caminantes are connected to different solidarity actions which derives from feelings of empathy, resonance, and compassion. Solidarity is not exclusive to host communities or to wealthy communities, as we can see, important initiatives are being developed in small rural towns, yet the capacity to influence someone's live is immense. As expressed by Martha and Fatima, a plate of food but also a hug, have determining effects in caminantes, as it alleviates their pain and helps them move forward.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and recommendations

The journey as such became a central part of the investigation because the attention to this topic has been fluctuating from moments of great movement to moments of settlement. Likewise, the investments of regional governments and international organizations to deal with this issue have also oscillated. For this reason, this study focused on understanding the journey as a process beyond departure and arrival to a country, and on making visible the "in-betweens" where many determining processes occur in the lives of *caminantes*.

The second focus of this research was the solidarity initiatives that arise along the way, their actors, and the influence these actions have on their journey. A relevant result of this research was to understand the participation of migrants, and even former *caminantes*, in structuring initiatives that help other migrants in transit and settling. The latter became important given that participants face economic and legal limitations; however, with their few resources, they have established legal and structured organizations that support other migrants. In addition, their actions contribute to making *caminantes* visible, whose presence on the roads has become common but that go unnoticed.

The start of these initiatives stems from empathy, resonance, and identification since most of these participants have also been migrants. The latter played an important role since it demonstrated that the initiatives ran by migrants were highly organized and lasted longer in time as they addressed immediate problems that *caminantes* were facing. While Ecuadorian initiatives were the initial focus of this research, the engagement with Ecuadorian actors was weak since their initiatives were mostly sporadic and short-lived compared to the ones organized by migrants. However, there was no further research on local actors; therefore, a comparative study between solidarity initiatives coming from migrants and from the local community would complement this study.

Despite solidarity initiatives being highly organized, due to the realities of its actors who face economic instability and lack of access to formal jobs, covering the necessities of *caminantes* was limited to donations and self-funding, which limited the scope of action. Therefore, solidarity actors have also become aware of the importance of caring for the psychological well-being of *caminantes* and making visible the oblivion, death, and adversities that migrants go through when making these journeys.

Although this research cannot conclude that solidarity initiatives are the sole factor for *caminantes* to settle in Ecuador, it is fair to point out that solidarity initiatives influence the journey not only in the decision to settle but also in alleviating the journey and pushing them to continue. Indeed, the networks *Caminantes* are making on the roads forge their new lives. It was clear to me that initiatives such as Shelter Amor sin Fronteras and Casa de Acogida Juncal, rely on a shared identity as migrants, God's Children, or Venezuelans. Their actions are valuable for people that regional governments and authorities have been using as scapegoats for their mismanagements and who have been an instrument to political discourses that do not address the realities that *caminantes* live in their journeys.

The construction of support networks between migrants and solidarity actors contributed to supporting *caminantes* in defining their temporary settlements in places where they already have built contacts. However, as shown above, it is not possible to speak of permanent settlements since there are factors that mobilize migration, such as economic instability, lack of employment, and the lack of regular status in the country. For this reason, I cannot

conclude that solidarity initiatives exclusively define the settlement or the journey. Rather, they help build spaces where the participants try to start their lives, which changes if the country and the environment cannot reply to their needs and aspirations. Therefore, further research on the impact of caminantes in the locations they transit would be beneficial to understand the interactions that emerge from non-traditional places of arrival, as it remains relevant to identify how these places transform with the presence of migrants and with their interactions with the local community.

During this research, I realized that the discourse in favour of the Venezuelan migrant community is still present as a regional political tool yet even fewer resources and attention are being destined to address the needs of caminantes. By the end of this research, new migration laws were approved affecting migrants trying to reach the United States, which leaves migrants in uncertain places to settle while finding a form to reach their destination. I hope this research can contribute to keeping in the discussion that caminantes are still making their journeys in inadequate and dangerous conditions. Finally, due to the inability of many states to act, people can become change agents and support those who are now trying to achieve a better life. I aim to visibilize these solidarity actors, who, with their initiatives, are also challenging the discourse and stigma of 'bad migrants' that, for the last years, have been present in Ecuadorian society.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Interview Questionnaire for former Caminantes

1. Can you tell me a about yourself?
2. Can you tell me about your life in Venezuela before traveling?
3. When did you choose to leave your country? Was there any specific situation that motivated you to leave?
4. Were you employed by the time you left?
5. How long did it take you to decide to leave your country?
6. Where did you decide to move?
7. Did you have relatives or friends in the country you planned to move?
8. Did you travel on your own or with family? Was there resistance from your family?
9. How was the planning of your journey? How did your journey change according to your initial plans?
10. If it is possible, can you tell me a little bit about your journey to reach to Ecuador (or any neighbouring country)?
11. During the journey, were you able to meet other people?
12. Who assisted you during your journey and how did they help you?
13. At any time of your journey, did you feel threatened by other people? When and how did you feel threatened?
14. Who helped you the most during this process? What kind of support did you receive? Monetary, emotional, etc.
15. How did you support other caminantes or the location where you walked through?
16. What do you think could have helped you during your journey?
17. What would you do differently if you have to do this journey again?
18. Now that you have reach a destination, what are your plans?
19. Can you tell me what describes a caminante or a Venezuelan?

Appendix 2
Interview Guide

Interview Questionnaire for people developing solidarity initiatives.

1. Can you tell me a about yourself? How was your life in your home country?
2. How and when did you arrive to Ecuador?
3. What are the activities you do in a daily basis?
4. When did you start seeing Caminantes in your town?
5. Was there anything that caught your attention when you saw them?
6. What motivated you to create this initiative?
7. How did you organize yourself to develop it? Has this initiative interfered with your normal activities?
8. Who has assisted you developing this initiative? How did they assist you? Do you receive volunteers?
9. Which kind of support do you receive and by who?
10. What was the most challenging part of having this initiative? Who or What has challenged you during the development of this initiative?
11. What kind of backlash did you receive for developing the initiative? Which actors opposed to your initiative? Did you receive threats for it?
12. What is the most valuable thing you can say about this experience?
13. How long do you plan to keep your initiative running?
14. Is there any story that you have heard that stayed with you?
15. Do you still have contact with some of the caminantes?
16. How do you think the locality has reacted to seeing caminantes?
17. What is your opinion about caminantes?

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