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Las Patronas in the Path of Migrants:

A Counter-Infrastructure of Care

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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The network of Mexican freight trains known as “La Bestia” has been, since the early 1990s, the primary infrastructure used by undocumented Central American migrants to traverse Mexico and reach the United States-Mexico border. These trains constitute the cheapest and fastest way of crossing the country and allow migrants to avoid immigration checkpoints and the payment of high fees to human smugglers. As a response to the hazardous effects of using this infrastructure (such as starvation, assaults, injuries, or death), in 1995 a group of women named “Las Patronas” started providing food and other types of support to migrants traveling on top of the trains. This research examines the group’s role in supporting migrants and challenging border enforcement

and the haunting of migrants through La Bestia. I develop the concept of 'counter-infrastructure of care' to refer to the Patronas' autonomous and participatory provision of safety and security for migrants, which is based on collaboration, conflict resolution, solidarity, attention to emotions and to the embodiment of geopolitical processes and is in direct opposition to the imperial, masculine, and necropolitical logics of La Bestia. This thesis contributes to the literature on feminist geopolitics by stressing the relevance of including geographical analyses of infrastructures in discussions about migration and geopolitics.

The thesis of Irma María Losada Olmos is approved.

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I. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, a network of Mexican freight trains known as "La Bestia" has been the primary infrastructure used by undocumented Central American migrants to traverse Mexico while avoiding immigration checkpoints and the payment of high fees to human smugglers. For thousands of undocumented migrants every year, these cargo trains represent their only hope to reach the U.S.-Mexico border and start a new life in the United States. Yet, the trains that can make a positive difference in their lives are also the source of many of the dangers that undocumented migrants face while transiting through Mexico (starvation, injuries, and death, among others). As a response to the perilous effects of this infrastructure and its increased policing by Mexican immigration authorities, in 1995 a group of women from the southern state of Veracruz decided to start giving food and assistance to migrants traveling on top of the trains. Under the name of "Las Patronas,"[1] these women have provided migrants with food and other types of support on a daily basis. Their goal is to make migrants' journeys less difficult while drawing attention to the pressures exerted against them by both the U.S. and the Mexican authorities.

For understanding La Bestia in its relationship to transnational migration, it is important to situate this infrastructure within the larger historical and geopolitical context of the United States' "imperial effects" in the Americas[2] (Coronil, 2007). Central American migrants in transit through Mexico on top of La Bestia experience different forms of violence that some authors understand as components of a wide-ranging continuum of violence (Vogt, 2018). Understanding the violence of migrants' journey through Mexico as a continuum illuminates "structural forms of violence,

[1] Hereafter, I refer to the group as 'the Patronas.'

[2] For Coronil, focusing on imperial effects is useful for recognizing "systems of domination by their significance for subjected populations rather than solely by their institutional forms or self-definitions" (2007: 243).

including the legacies of civil war, neoliberal securitization, and everyday insecurity" and their relationship with migration to the United States (2018: 25). This shift in perspective encourages us to perceive Central American migration as a survival strategy, in response to the visible and invisible forms of violence and impunity that lead thousands of people to leave their countries every year. It also allows us to better understand historically the relationship between the U.S. and Latin American countries. This relationship has been characterized by different forms of control aiming at protecting U.S. interests in the region since the proclamation, in 1823, of the Monroe Doctrine, by which the U.S. enabled itself to defend the Americas from foreign intervention (Coronil, 2007). And this relationship becomes visible when analyzing migrants' use of the infrastructure of La Bestia and the violence they experience during their journeys.

The extent to which migration functions as a survival strategy becomes particularly visible when looking at the migration of unaccompanied children. This is a phenomenon that is gaining increased attention and has been conceived as children's only opportunity to evade being recruited by transnational gangs like the Mara Salvatrucha (MS) and Barrio 18 (del Moral, 2015). The lack of hope in the future, a characteristic of what some authors have referred to as social death or the feeling of not being fully accepted in society, pushes thousands of children to migrate to the U.S. every year (Wolseth, 2008). As an example, in Honduras, three out of four children live in poverty conditions, and maras (criminal gangs) exploit their precarious situation to recruit them. That is, these children lack at least one of the following: drinking water, proper nutrition, health, housing, education, and access to information (del Moral, 2015: 13). Central American children are constantly balancing the risks between staying home and potentially being recruited by maras, or migrating to another country, whether alone or accompanied (Vogt, 2018: 32). Paulina del Moral, a Mexican anthropologist who followed the journey of a migrant child, writes that: "A child has a

natural instinct for living, and therefore, the question should not be 'why do Central American children migrate?' but rather 'why would they want to stay?'" (2015: 25).

Many Central American migrants see the violence they experience at home as similar or even worse than during the civil war. They perceive current forms of violence as "more nebulous, irrational, and uncertain" (Vogt, 2018: 41), partly because it is for them harder to distinguish between the violence committed by state agents and the violence committed by nonstate actors. For many migrants, their countries are comparable to war zones but not recognized as such[3] (2018: 47). The situation in Central American countries could be understood as what Achille Mbembe called death-worlds, or the "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead" (2019: 92). Similarly to how the Mediterranean has become a death-world due to the necropower that is exercised in this sea (Presti, 2019), Central American countries and Mexico as a transit country have become death-worlds in which necropolitical governance against bodies and mobility is the norm.

Current forms of violence against transit migration on La Bestia need to be connected to U.S. influence in state-sponsored repression during the Central American civil wars through *coups d'état*, the effects of mass deportations of gang members from California to Central America during the 1990s, as well as the results of capitalist economic policies that continue to dramatically alter the lives of Central American populations (Vogt, 2018: 33). During the Cold War, the U.S. used Central America as a terrain for the fight against the threat of communism by providing

[3] Vogt contends that in El Salvador alone, with a population of six million people, there are over sixty thousand active gang members who have taken control of economic markets, small businesses, and individual livelihoods and who continue to threaten the population through deaths, kidnappings, and the recruitment of children who feel like there is no place for them in society (2018: 44). In 2011, the World Bank estimated in 920 the number of active *maras* in Central America (World Bank, 2011).

weapons, financial assistance, and military training to right-wing counterrevolutionary groups such as the Contras in Nicaragua or the Kaibiles in Guatemala (2018: 36)[4]. The ideological control of Central American governments was accompanied by a U.S.-led neoliberal economic agenda aimed at reengineering societies and modes of production according to the needs and requirements of U.S. companies. This was the case of the United Fruit Company, which was the largest landowner in Guatemala during the 1930s and effectively controlled the banana export sector in Central America through various economic, diplomatic, and military guises during the 20th century (Striffler and Moberg, 2003). However, current forms of violence against migrants are also the outcome of the connections between the ruling elites of some Central American countries and drug cartels. For instance, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández has been accused, along with other government officials, of facilitating drug trafficking in exchange for bribes offered by the drug cartel Los Cachiros (García, 2021).

This historical account of U.S. interests in the region is useful for understanding violence against transit migrants on La Bestia as layered and cumulative. Increased U.S. pressure on the Mexican government to police these trains and prevent migrants from using them, which has been done through various mechanisms with more emphasis since 2014, constitutes another form of U.S. influence in the region. Aside from this, framing migration as a survival strategy compels us to rethink the legal divisions between economic migrants and refugees or asylum seekers, divisions

[4] Coronil (2007) explains that the different mechanisms by which the U.S. protected its interests in Latin America were, depending on the circumstances, military interventions, economic and financial pressures, and diplomatic influence. A paradigmatic example of the U.S. role in the continent was the coup against Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz in 1954, which was carried out in coordination with the governments of Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras, as well as the State Department, the CIA, United Fruit Company, and the U.S. Information Agency (2007: 249). Coronil argues that "U.S. policy toward Latin America seems to have been guided by the principle of extending control through domestic forces whenever possible and by external force whenever necessary" (250). Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes described the shared perception of the U.S. among Latin American intellectual elites as follows: "the United States became the Jekyll and Hyde of our wildest continental dreams: a democracy inside, an empire outside" (in Coronil, 2007: 247).

that were not distinguishable during the refugee panic of 2018 and the "zero tolerance" policies and discourses that followed under the Trump administration (Agnew, 2018). As Patricia Erkhamp (2017) argued, the boundaries between these categories are blurred and new terms such as "survival migrants" have emerged to denote situations in which migrants move in and out of categories or share certain characteristics across categories — just as the people fleeing from violence in Central America who are not qualified for asylum or refugee status, or those who are escaping changes in climatic conditions at home.

In this context, the work carried out by the Patronas of Veracruz is crucial for the valorization of migrants' lives and rights. In this thesis, I argue that the Patronas provide a counter-infrastructure of care that challenges U.S. role in Mexican border enforcement through La Bestia, as well as the masculinist, necropolitical, and imperial dimensions of La Bestia. This counter-infrastructure of care, inspired by Christian values, constitutes a response to the vulnerabilities that undocumented migrants face while using this train infrastructure and to the lack of support that they receive while in transit through Mexico. By counter-infrastructure of care I refer to the Patronas' participatory and autonomous provision of safety and security for migrants, which forges a sense of community that contributes to migrants' wellbeing while resisting the securitization of migration.

This thesis shows that the group has established a counter-infrastructure of care based on collaboration, solidarity, conflict resolution, power-sharing, attention to emotions and to migrants' embodiment of geopolitical processes. Over the last 26 years, the Patronas' work has proven to be essential insofar as it allows migrants to continue their journey towards the U.S.-Mexico border. Therefore, I also argue that, by providing migrants with food, shelter, and assistance, the Patronas'

work constitutes an expression of what geographer Sara Koopman (2011) has defined as alter-geopolitics, namely the nonviolent provision of safety for bodies across distance and difference.

Yet, while the Patronas' counter-infrastructure of care is an example of what Koopman calls alter-geopolitics, it is an example that is both geopolitical and infrastructural. On the one hand, the Patronas are engaging in geopolitics from their town (which is next to one of the railway lines of La Bestia) and on their own for the wellbeing of migrants. They do so by providing different types of support and assistance to migrants traveling on La Bestia and by putting their own bodies next to the rails, which is an "unusual place" for them (Koopman, 2011: 280). On the other hand, the Patronas are creating a counter-infrastructure that allows migrants to traverse Mexican territory by making the infrastructure of La Bestia safer for them.

Through this analysis, my thesis is contributing to conversations about border enforcement, feminist geopolitics, and the geopolitics of infrastructure. Specifically, I am arguing for an inclusion of geographical analyses of infrastructures in discussions about border enforcement and feminist geopolitics. While the last 20 years of geographic research have witnessed an increased interest in border enforcement practices within and beyond the territorial boundaries of the state through multiple perspectives (biometric, legal, and governmental changes, migrants' experiences, etc.), little attention has been paid to the role infrastructures play in these processes.

In addition, this thesis aims to provoke more interventions in feminist geopolitics related to infrastructures and the imperial and masculine legacies that infrastructures carry, precisely because infrastructures are key sites where geopolitical processes take place. Infrastructures are also crucial for understanding mobility and the violence of displacement, a focus that remains underdeveloped in feminist geopolitics (Hyndman, 2019). In the same way, critical geographical literature on infrastructure would benefit from reading infrastructures through the analytical

imaginary of feminist geopolitics, which invites us to overcome the public/private and domestic/international divides, to employ "finer and coarser" scales of analysis in lieu of solely focusing on the scale of the nation-state (Hyndman, 2001), and to recognize that bodies are sites where power is both reproduced and challenged (Mountz, 2018).

The first section of the thesis starts by providing an overview of the experience of traveling on top of La Bestia and how migrants' journeys have changed since the implementation of the Southern Border Program by the Mexican government in 2014. It continues with an analysis of the masculine and imperial logics of infrastructures and their relationship to the infrastructure of La Bestia. The following section turns to the literature on critical border studies that addresses U.S. transnational spaces of border enforcement and argues that La Bestia has become an infrastructure of U.S. border enforcement within Mexico through the "haunting" of migrants in transit. The second section of the thesis focuses on the different dimensions of the Patronas' work, which challenge the imperial, necropolitical, and masculine logics of La Bestia and its uses for migration control and the haunting of migrants in transit. This section also examines how, through everyday encounters with migrants, the Patronas have created what I call a counter-infrastructure of care and how the concept is applicable to other groups and organizations, such as the humanitarian organization No More Deaths. The conclusion of the thesis discusses some contributions to feminist geopolitics, specifically by understanding the Patronas' work and counter-infrastructure of care as a powerful example of Koopman's alter-geopolitics. The Patronas are, however, an example that is both geopolitical and infrastructural, and therefore, they add two new dimensions to Koopman's conceptualization of alter-geopolitics: care and infrastructure.

II. Masculine Infrastructure: La Bestia and the Afterlives of U.S. Empire in Mexico

2.1. La Bestia and the necropolitics of transit migration in Mexico

La Bestia, also known as the "train of death," is a system of Mexican cargo trains that carries export products (such as concrete, transportation equipment, gas, corn or fructose) to the U.S. Every year since the early 1990s, as a response to increased immigration controls along highways and bus stations, the train also transports thousands of undocumented migrants to the northern Mexican border, who have to climb on top of the wagons in order to use them. The same infrastructure carries both goods and people to the U.S. and vividly shows how the mobilities of the two are differently treated during their transport as well as differently received at the border. More specifically, migrants' experiences while traveling on La Bestia prove that these trains have become a necropolitical tool for migration governance in Mexico.

La Bestia has three main routes: the Gulf route, the center route, and the Pacific route (Ramos Rojas et al., 2019) and is composed of several different trains without a set schedule, which makes migrants' journeys unpredictable. The shape of each wagon changes depending on the product that it is carrying, and thus also the strategies to climb it. La Bestia's passengers are mostly Central American undocumented migrants whose final objective is to arrive in the U.S. Fleeing the violence and lack of opportunities in their home countries, they traverse Mexico without the required entry permits and are undocumented from the beginning of their journey. Many of them are cyclical migrants aiming to return to the U.S. after failing to enter the country in previous attempts or after being deported from the U.S. (Amnesty International, 2010). Migrants choose these trains because they constitute the fastest and cheapest way to travel across Mexico, insofar as they allow them to avoid the increasingly policed roads, bus stations, and airports, as well as the payment of fees to smugglers and gang groups, which can be as high as $10,000

(Villegas, 2014). Nevertheless, as anthropologist Wendy Vogt contends, although the train is supposedly "free," unofficial forms of payment to corrupt officials or criminal groups enhance one's chances of survival (Vogt, 2018: 69).

As these trains have no passenger railcars, migrants have to ride on top of them, despite the many dangers associated with it. Dehydration and sunstrokes are common, but also kidnappings, extortions, and killings by both drug cartels and the Mexican authorities (Covarrubias, 2015). The lack of food and sleep are another result of traveling on these trains, as well as getting infections or falling ill.[5] But perhaps the most feared risks are the mutilations and deaths that occur when migrants fall off the trains and are sucked below them. The image of migrants dismembered during train accidents has inevitably become associated with the migrant journey through Mexico (Vogt, 2018: 105). It is not surprising, then, that the term used to refer to these trains ("La Bestia" or "The Beast") denotes the monstrous, dangerous, and perverse attributes of this infrastructure[6].

There are no official numbers of migrants who use La Bestia to travel to the U.S. The estimate is around half a million people per year, however, due to the characteristics of this type of mobility, it is difficult to measure how many migrants use these trains as their main mode of transportation through Mexico. Migrants decide to start or finish their journeys on top of La Bestia in different points throughout the train routes, depending on available information about each route

[5] Marianne Marchand (2021) notes that migrants who are traveling on La Bestia are easily recognizable, in comparison to those coming in large migrant caravans. The author cites an interview with a Mexican state official, who describes them as follows: "The migrant who travels on La Bestia is a migrant who has not bathed in at least a month, who has suffered extreme conditions in terms of cold [temperatures], water, food, including violence from the networks that circulate around the railroads and the criminal groups who are also taking advantage of this… They are persons who come very worn out, their appearance and odor are highly perceptible" (p. 153).

[6] Because of this, La Bestia has also become the theme of various novels, films, and songs. One of the most recent songs about it was produced by Mexican hip hop group Kinto Sol (2013), and its lyrics emphasize the dangers of traveling on the trains through the perspective of the lack of agency of migrants: "*Es la bestia la que me atormenta y me ayuda si es que quiere*" ("It's the Beast who tortures me and helps me if she wants").

and ad hoc circumstances, such as train failures, assaults and raids, or lack of space to safely climb onto the wagons (Ramos Rojas et al., 2019; Villegas, 2014).

The dangers of traveling on top of La Bestia are more acute for women and children, many of whom end up trapped in sex trafficking and prostitution networks or being victims of sexual assault (Osorio Ruiz, 2014; Riediger-Röhm, 2013). Because around 80% of women are raped along the way, they start taking contraceptive precautions before they begin their journey north (Díaz, 2020). Taken together, all these factors contribute to the physical and mental exhaustion with which migrants reach the U.S.-Mexico border and constitute an "embodiment of structural, political, and symbolic forms of violence" (Vogt, 2018: 109). As Appel et al. argued in a recent volume, infrastructures have been technologies that modern states use to "differentiate populations and subject some to premature death" (2019: 5). The infrastructure of La Bestia has become a necropolitical tool of migration governance, because it makes migrants an easy target for organized crime and police agents. A report by Amnesty International claimed that most abuses against migrants and kidnappings take place in states where there are train routes (2011: 8).

The vulnerability of migrants in transit increased in 2014, when the government of former Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto established the Southern Border Program (*Programa Frontera Sur*), in order to control the points of entry in southern Mexico as a response to the unaccompanied minors' "crisis" (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2015). According to various scholars and non-governmental organizations, the program was a response to U.S. pressure and effectively militarized the Mexico-Guatemala border, now referred to as "the wall before the wall" (Meyer and Isacson, 2019). Since then, the Mexican government has also expanded its efforts to police migrants throughout the Mexican territory, with a special emphasis in reducing the number of people traveling on top of La Bestia, by increasing the speed of the trains and the amount of border

patrol raids and checkpoints along the train routes, or by building concrete walls next to the railways (Villegas, 2014). From 2014 to 2015 alone, Mexican immigration agents raided the trains more than 20.000 times (Ramos Rojas et al., 2019). Apart from these more obvious ways of preventing migrants from using the trains, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection recently released a song about La Bestia to be played on radio stations across Central America. The purpose of this song is to deter migrants from taking the trains, and its lyrics reiterate that traveling to the U.S. is like heading to a slaughterhouse (CBP, 2014: 1:28).

By preventing migrants from using this kind of motorized transport and pushing them towards other routes and modes of transport, their mobility through Mexico has become slower and their safety within the larger route northward has decreased (Nevins, 2018: 35). Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic has increased the levels of violence towards Central American migrants in transit through Mexico, partly because many shelters had to close in response to restrictions and now migrants need to find other places to sleep, which makes them even more exposed to the violence of gangs and immigration authorities (Arroyo, 2021a; MSF, 2021). Throughout her book, Vogt shows how migrants embody the brutal consequences of deterrence that lead them to take more dangerous routes within Mexico (2019: 112).

The extreme levels of violence that migrants experience while crossing Mexico have been conceptualized by many scholars as a form of necropolitics (Valencia, 2010; Varela Huerta, 2017). Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, Mbembe defined necropolitics as the ultimate expression of sovereignty, namely the power to dictate who can live and who must die (2019: 66). The deaths and disappearances of migrants in transit through Mexico occur daily with impunity. Two emblematic examples of this form of necropolitics were the massacres of San Fernando (2010) and Cadereyta (2012), when 72 and 49 migrant bodies were found in mass graves and

brought the issue to the fore — albeit temporarily. Yet, it is known that thousands of migrants disappear in Mexico every year (Varela, 2017). More than 20.000 migrant kidnappings happen in Mexico every year, and more than 72.000 migrants have disappeared in the country since 2006. Besides, around 24.000 unidentified migrant bodies have been found in mass graves throughout Mexico from 2006 to 2010 (2017: 135). Because of the lack of response to this situation from the Mexican state, during the last 15 years a group of mothers of disappeared migrants, under the name Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano, have organized caravans to demand justice and support from the Mexican government (Marchand, 2021).

Deterring migrants from using La Bestia constitutes a powerful strategy of necropolitical control. As Mbembe argued, "Nobody even bears the slightest feelings of responsibility or justice toward this sort of life or, rather, death. Necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death, as if life was merely death's medium" (2019: 38). Migrants on the trains and in transit through Mexico constantly risk their lives when they have to escape the police or Mexican immigration authorities. One of the migrants interviewed in the documentary *De Nadie* (2005) described an encounter between the local police and a migrant teenager as follows: "The train was leaving; the police officer came and grabbed the boy by the heel and took him down. The boy fell sideways, his head fell on the line and the train took his head right off. All because of a policeman" (2005: 46:29). Others express feelings of impotence, distrust, and sadness after being beaten up and robbed by the police. "If the situation continues like this," the migrant claimed, "more migrants will continue to die" (50:00).

Any analysis of the violence endured by transit migrants using La Bestia would benefit from identifying the connections between this infrastructure, U.S. empire, and transnational U.S. border enforcement practices in the region. The infrastructure of La Bestia, whose origins can be

traced back to the late nineteenth century, has become a key element for the enforcement of U.S. borders within Mexico, similarly to how the Arizona deserts operates as a tool for border enforcement since the beginning of the Prevention Through Deterrence strategy[7] (Boyce and Chambers, 2021; De León, 2015). In order to identify and situate historically the connections between La Bestia and U.S. empire, the next two sections will explore the masculine and imperial logics behind railroad infrastructure in Mexico and the development of a transnational space of U.S. border enforcement in which the haunting of migrants through La Bestia plays a vital role.

2.2. The masculine and imperial logics of infrastructures

Over the last few years, infrastructures have received increased attention from geographers and anthropologists interested in analyzing the variegated social relations, political forms, and environmental effects that result from them. In his detailed review of the term infrastructure, Ashley Carse (2016) notes that the word took new meanings during the Cold War, moving beyond being a "humble French engineering term" to become the material manifestation of geopolitical struggles around the priorities and values of the Soviet Union and the United States. The purpose of this section is to examine the complex (geo)political lives (and afterlives) of infrastructures and, by doing so, to show that the infrastructure of La Bestia has become a contested geopolitical terrain over border enforcement and migration.

Scholars have pointed to the masculine norms and values behind infrastructure development, provision, and aesthetics. For Siemiatycki et al. (2020), infrastructure development

[7] The Prevention Through Deterrence strategy was implemented by the U.S. government in 1994 to abate the entrance of undocumented migrants by discouraging them to cross the U.S.-Mexico border through cities. This immigration enforcement policy led thousands of people to traverse the border through arid and desolate regions such as the Sonoran Desert in Arizona every year. It is estimated that more than six million people have attempted to cross the border through the Sonoran Desert since 2000 and that more than 3,200 migrants have perished as a result of this policy in Arizona alone (Undocumented Migration Project, n.d.).

and aesthetics follow masculine logics of control based on rationality, objective decision-making, individualism, and hierarchical authority. According to the authors, it is easy to name the "big men" of infrastructure (Georges-Eugène Haussman, John D. Rockefeller, or Robert Moses), despite the undeniable presence of women in the design and engineering of infrastructural projects. This is a similar argument to the one made by Deborah Dixon (2015) regarding the discipline of geopolitics. For Dixon, a focus on the "big men" of the discipline (Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Haushofer, Harold Mackinder, Isaiah Bowman) not only erases women from its history and development, but also reproduces the masculinist dimensions that characterize the discipline's foundations (2015: 21).

Siemiatycki et al. further claim that the masculine bias of the infrastructure sector continues to exist, overlapping with "the colonial/imperial sensibilities associated with 'conquering' foreign lands, 'mastering' nature, and subduing and/or 'civilizing' colonial peoples" that feminist political geographers have long criticized (2020: 302). These logics are certainly to be found in the construction of the Mexican railway system after the Mexican-American war (1846-1848). During the late 1860s and early 1870s, U.S. financial elites deployed all kinds of racial stereotypes against Mexicans to advocate for territorial annexation and economic domination, thus "exporting" the domestic discrimination against Native Americans to the Mexican population:

> Whatever their differences, those who favored closer economic ties and those who favored annexation agreed that Mexico's failure to develop its resources justified American exploitation of those opportunities even if "development" meant merely the extraction of Mexico's valuable natural resources. American businessmen and politicians contrasted the "hard working and independent" virtues of the Anglo–Saxons with the "laziness and docility" of the Mexicans (...) The mental image of "chaos in Mexico" reduced the possibility of a legitimized Mexican state and jurisprudence in the minds of "law abiding Americans." The image of "undeveloped resources" was being used contemporaneously in the struggle between Native Americans and American settlers in the western part of the United States and their backers in the U.S government (Hart, 2002: 42).

Hart writes that, in the late 1860s, a pending resolution in the Mexican Congress was hoping to endorse U.S. investments in the Mexican railroad system and thus, as it was stated in the document, "the full development of Mexico and the true school to educate and prepare them for annexation" (2002: 38). Eventually, the hopes of territorial expansion metamorphosed into the conviction that maintaining economic influence over Mexico would be more fruitful for the U.S. in the long term (235). By the time the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1910, the 24,560 kilometers of U.S.-sponsored railroads provided Mexico's northern neighbor with mineral ores, timber, and agricultural products. In exchange, Mexico received "low-grade corn, finished goods, and high technology for the petroleum, mining, and construction industries" (130). These masculine and imperial logics persist not only in the current economic utility of La Bestia as a cargo infrastructure that transports export products to the U.S., but also in the ways in which these freight trains are increasingly controlled for the purposes of border enforcement.

Infrastructures are associated with narratives of modernization, progress, and nationalism that need to be explored and challenged (see Ferguson, 1999; Starosielski, 2015). As Deborah Cowen (2017) argued, infrastructures always exceed their obvious forms and serve to naturalize the uneven distribution of goods, resources, information, and connections. The construction of the Mexican railroad, which was conceived as a bearer of development and the modernization of Mexican populations, has served to naturalize and maintain uneven trade relationships between the U.S. and Mexico since the late nineteenth century. In a recent book, anthropologists Hannah Appel, Akhil Gupta and Nikhil Anand (2019) underscored the ways in which infrastructures, understood as social, material, aesthetic, and political formations, have promised "modernity, development, progress, and freedom to people all over the world" while repeatedly differentiating experiences of everyday life (3). In a similar way, the Mexican railroad system differentiates who

needs to use these trains to cross Mexico in extremely hazardous conditions and who can afford to travel to the U.S. by other means. It also shows the different conditions in which commodities and people have to traverse the country.

Additionally, infrastructures not only reflect inequalities but can also create them. In her study of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, Cowen (2019) explores how this infrastructure that often falls into nationalist narratives of heroic survival was designed as an essential part of the British colonial-imperial space and is thus deeply intertwined with transatlantic racial slavery and resource extraction. As such, its afterlives are a vivid memory of the histories of land grabbing and dispossession, genocide, and settler colonialism that accompany official discourses of progress and modernization and are normally hidden in these narratives (2019: 473). Cowen argues that "the idea of the transcontinental railroad across the British North America colonial space predates" the idea of Canada as a nation-state and is deeply related to inter-imperial rivalry. The British Empire saw the construction of the Panama Canal and the U.S. transcontinental railroad as a competitive incentive to build a rail that would connect the United Kingdom with Asia (472). The Canadian railway and its underpinning racial logics became the key infrastructure that enabled the establishment of white settler colonial cities and jurisdictions (474).

Others have underlined the vital importance of railroad infrastructures in establishing a political economy of difference. In her analysis of the formation of the Indian national space, Manu Goswami (2004) explains how railroads in British India served to differentiate the Indian population and to maintain the dichotomy between colonizers and colonized, despite the official claim that the railroads would homogenize the Indian population:

> Although official discourse presented railways as the bearers of even development, an abstract space of exchange and circulation, and modern subjects rid of particularistic attachments, colonial practices continually produced the very particularities and forms of

> unevenness they proclaimed to transcend . . . Railways were conceived as a magical agency that would promote and secure the material welfare of the people . . . and enable the production of an industrious and disciplined social body (2004: 105).

Goswami emphasizes the necessity of analyzing railroads not only regarding their economic consequences but also their larger political and social significance (2004: 104). Railroads and other state works in British India, such as irrigation projects and communication networks, served to frame India as a colonial state space, both materially and symbolically (59). The relevance of railroads was such that it was reutilized by the Indian nationalist movement, especially under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership, which framed them as collective national property and a symbol of both national development and iconic Indianness in an economically homogeneous national space (151).

Railways have also been used to ensure the exclusive powers of companies over the development, and underdevelopment, of certain regions. This was the strategy used by oil firms with the production of Middle Eastern oil (Mitchell, 2011). In Persia, Egypt, and Iraq at the beginning of the 20th century, competing oil firms such as Royal Dutch/Shell and the European Petroleum Union (a partnership of Deutsche Bank and the Nobel and Rothschild families) engaged in calculative legal and political arrangements to limit the production of oil so as not to threaten their investments in European markets. Once oil firms got concessions in key sites, they selectively delayed or stalled the construction of railways and pipelines for the production and transportation of oil while retaining their exclusive right to control these areas (2011: 47).

With its deep-rooted hopes of U.S. territorial expansion, political hegemony, and profit extraction, the development of the Mexican railroad in the late nineteenth century reveals a very similar narrative, although in this case the goal was not to delay the production or extraction of resources (Hart, 2002). The same politicians and railroad investors who were pursuing interests in

the extraction and movement of resources often acquired land along the way, used migrant and indigenous labor for the railway's construction, and kindled political and societal debates on the possibilities of U.S. southward territorial acquisition and later, on the determination to establish economic dominance over Mexico (2002: 110). Much of the development of this infrastructure (11,500 kilometers of railroad by 1896) was financed by a small elite of U.S. bankers and financiers, among which were the founders of J.P. Morgan and the National City Bank, predecessor of the current Citibank. As Hart argues, the geography of infrastructure investment during the late nineteenth century in Mexico reflected the commercial priorities of these elites. The main goal of this group, crystallized in various railroad projects, was to extract minerals and other resources from specific Mexican regions and to connect the Mexican railway system with its American counterpart and with Mexican ports in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as map 1 shows (see Appendix).

2.3. Transnational spaces of border enforcement: the case of Mexico

Border enforcement through the infrastructure of La Bestia is characterized by the masculine and imperial logics of control, rationality, and hierarchical authority discussed above. Additionally, Alison Mountz's concept of "haunting" is particularly productive for understanding border enforcement through La Bestia. First, because haunting reveals how La Bestia, as an imperial-economic infrastructure, is currently being used for the enactment of U.S. sovereign power within Mexico, with the goal of preventing migrants from reaching the U.S. territory. Haunting thus highlights a kind of delocalization of the border. The U.S.-Mexico border haunts migrants every step along the way, showing how border enforcement operates beyond the physical demarcation of the border, and how migrants' journeys are now perforated with raids and immigration

checkpoints throughout Mexico. Secondly, haunting brings to the foreground that these bordering practices have not only a spatial, but also a temporal dimension. Therefore, La Bestia, an infrastructure historically rooted to U.S. economic and political interests in Mexico, is a ghost of the past that lingers, a specter of empire that is felt while riding the train, and a specter of the border that is felt before reaching the physical border that separates the two countries.

While riding on top of the trains that compose La Bestia, migrants face many questions and uncertainties that derive from the current use of these cargo trains as a border enforcement infrastructure. As Salvadoran journalist Óscar Martínez has described, migrants face many challenges and questions:

> "Why are we hanging onto the roof if the cars are empty? Why so fast? Who will protect us when we are assaulted? What horror stories do the rest of the stowaways carry? (…) To avoid an assault, is it better to ride in the middle or the back cars? What sounds signal you to jump on? When do you get off? What happens when you need to sleep? Where is the best place to tie yourself to the roof? How do you know if an ambush is coming?" (Martínez, 2014: 49-50).

Although Mexican authorities have not developed a comprehensive policy that addresses migrants' use of La Bestia, there have been ad hoc responses carried out by federal and state governments and by the private companies that manage the trains (Villegas, 2014). These companies, which were privatized in 1996 by the government of Ernesto Zedillo, are: Ferromex, owned by Germán Larrea, a billionaire businessman and CEO of Grupo México, the largest copper mining company in Mexico and third largest copper producer in the world; Ferrosur; and Kansas City Southern de México, a subsidiary of U.S. company Kansas City Southern (Gallegos, 2016; Milenio, 2014; Univision Noticias, 2014).

Some of these responses have been increasing the number of immigration raids specifically targeting migrants on the trains (raids that have been supported by the federal police and the military), increasing the speed of the trains, and building cement walls along the rails, a measure

implemented by train companies to prevent migrants from boarding the trains (Villegas, 2014). Furthermore, in 2014 the state of Veracruz filed a lawsuit against the train companies that operate within its territory (Ferrosur and Kansas City Southern) for letting undocumented migrants use their trains (ibid.). These ad hoc measures, together with the external pressures coming from the U.S. government, are intended to manage the flow of migrants and reinforce the logics of control and hierarchical authority that characterized the development of the infrastructure of La Bestia.

Since 2014, with the implementation of the Southern Border Program by the Mexican government, La Bestia has become an essential infrastructure for migration control. The goals of the Southern Border Program were to protect migrants who enter Mexico and to manage Mexican ports of entry in the Mexican southern border (Wilson and Valenzuela, 2014). However, the program in practice allowed the U.S. to extend its financial and technical resources to Mexico in ways that have severely deteriorated the experience of crossing the country. For instance, the State Department provided over $10 million to Mexico in mobile checkpoints and kiosks to capture biometric data of the people who live near the southern border and migrants who cross the border (ibid.). In the same vein, by increasing the speed of the trains and the number of border patrol raids, as well as building concrete walls along the railways, Mexico has made it harder for migrants to climb onto the trains (Villegas, 2014). All these measures have increased the risk of having accidents or even dying. Moreover, these measures have made migrants' journeys more unpredictable and fearful, because they lead migrants to distant places away from the shelters established along the railways (Sorrentino, 2015).

Over the last 20 years, geographers have noted a displacement in the enactment of borders beyond the physical boundaries of states, a displacement that is not unique to the United States (Casas-Cortés et al., 2016; Menjívar, 2014). This process has been twofold, manifesting both

internally or "domestically" and externally or "internationally," while having major consequences for migrants in transit and for those who have arrived in their countries of destination but remain "outside" of them. This body of literature has examined spatial transformations that include the expansion of sovereign reach for the purpose of governing mobility (Mountz, 2011), migrants' autonomous and relational contestation of this expansion (Casas-Cortés et al. 2015), the development of jurisdictional "patchworks" with differing and overlapping border enforcement responsibilities within the territorial boundaries of states (Varsanyi et al., 2011; Walker and Leitner, 2011), and the diffuse practices of border work carried out by ordinary people in the spaces of everyday life (Erkhamp and Nagel, 2017; Vaughan-Williams, 2008).

In *Empire of Borders,* Todd Miller (2019) argues that we cannot understand the U.S.-Mexico border as separated from the Mexico-Guatemala border and the Guatemala-Honduras border. In this sense, he proposes that we conceptualize these borders as part of a "border set," to avoid underestimating the immense geographic scope of the enforcement of U.S. borders across the Americas (2019: 35). Moreover, understanding the U.S. southern border as part of a larger "border set" would allow us to overcome the geographical assumptions that accompany the "territorial trap" and that affect the ways in which we perceive borders (Agnew, 1994), as well as the problems and limitations of methodological nationalism (Goswami, 2004).

Some scholars have described the position of Mexican immigration policy and politics vis-à-vis the U.S. as being an expression of a vertical border (Torre-Cantalapiedra & Yee-Quintero, 2018; Varela Huerta, 2018), an arterial border (Vogt, 2018), or an asymmetric border (Agnew, 2018). The idea of the vertical border emerged to denote top-down practices and policies adopted by the Mexican government to assist the U.S. in identifying and deporting individuals before they reach the U.S. territory. Yet, the vertical border does not capture the fact that different Mexican

governments have also used migration controls and the enforcement of Mexico's southern border as a bargaining tool with the U.S.[8] (Marchand, 2021). In this respect, some scholars believe that the idea of an arterial border captures better than the vertical border the non-linear and diffuse nature of U.S. immigration policing throughout the Americas and "presents state power in terms of the more fluid, multidirectional, and contested regimes of mobility that manifest in everyday encounters, discourses, and material infrastructures" (Vogt, 2018: 8).

Conversations around U.S. border externalization in geography have focused on the expansion of U.S. biometric systems around the world (Amoore, 2006; Miller, 2019; Sparke, 2006), the training programs of foreign border agents at the former School of the Americas[9] (Hiemstra, 2019; Miller and Nevins, 2017), and the detention of migrants and asylum seekers in transit countries and on remote islands away from the European Union, the U.S., and Australia (Campos Delgado, 2021; Mountz, 2011). What is clear from all these perspectives is that U.S. border enforcement does not operate exclusively within the territorial borders of the country, but rather that it supports its actions abroad through the "haunting" of migrants, following migrant routes and flows (Casas Cortés et al., 2015). However, little attention has been paid to La Bestia as an essential infrastructure for both transit migration and the enforcement of U.S. borders within

[8] These dynamics have been even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Antonino Caradonna, coordinator of *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) in Mexico, recently said that: "Raids were carried out in Coatzacoalcos on the railway tracks, and around 50 migrants, including families with children, were arbitrarily detained … They were sleeping near the shelter because they are being denied accommodation, allegedly because of the pandemic" (MSF, 2021). Moreover, with the excuse of stopping the spread of COVID-19, the Mexican government has recently announced the closure of its borders with Guatemala and Belize. The announcement follows U.S. demands to stop migrants before they reach the northern border and the offer to provide Mexico with 2.5 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines (Arroyo, 2021b).

[9] In a recent NACLA report, Todd Miller and Joseph Nevins (2017) pointed out that the former School of the Americas (now called the Western Institute for Security Cooperation in Fort Benning, Georgia), where many Latin American dictators and military personnel were trained during the Cold War is currently training a new Guatemalan border patrol force, the Chorti Task Force. This newly established border guard incorporates members who identify themselves as Kaibiles, a special counterinsurgency force that was trained by the U.S. during the 1970s and who was responsible for the Dos Erres massacre in which 200 indigenous people were killed.

Mexico. The concept of "haunting" proves to be particularly useful for understanding the relevance of La Bestia as an infrastructure of externalized U.S. border controls (Mountz, 2011).

The infrastructure of La Bestia plays a major role in sustaining both transit migration through Mexico and its biopolitical and necropolitical control by Mexican immigration authorities under U.S. pressure. The trains that carry migrants north are a manifestation of what Alison Mountz (2011) calls "haunting." For Mountz, who studies islands used for detaining migrants outside official state borders, these sites of border enforcement reveal not only how the state "haunts" them through the enactment of its sovereign power "offshore" in their territories, but also how the past "haunts" their present through militarized landscapes that result from histories of colonialism and ambiguous or juxtaposed legal systems. The U.S. exerts its power over La Bestia through the actions of external actors (Mexican immigration authorities, police, and the military) who police these trains to prevent migrants from reaching the U.S. territory. By doing so, Mexican authorities are working to enact U.S. sovereign power abroad, determining who can cross its borders, who can live, and who can die. Moreover, the trains themselves, and their spatial layout, are residues of U.S. economic interests in Mexico. As Mountz writes:

> Haunting does geographical work that reveals dimensions of sovereign power enacted offshore, well beyond the mainland territory. Haunting does important analytical work because it captures the mobility of sovereign power as borders are relocated amid the residue of militarized landscapes (...) Haunting thus offers a way of understanding state violence even where the state may appear absent (2011: 119).

While Mountz's analysis focuses on the heritage of military relationships between islands and mainland states, her approach is also helpful for understanding how not only militarized landscapes, but also imperial-economic infrastructures such as La Bestia, are now being used for the enactment of U.S. sovereign power beyond the official borders of the country. The network of trains and railways used by undocumented migrants in Mexico constitute another example of the

ways in which state power, in this case U.S. sovereign power, operates beyond its physical borders to contain the influx of migrants trying to reach its territory. Similarly to the islands examined by Mountz, these railroads are key sites for the transnational enforcement of U.S. borders and the haunting of migrants in transit, who are caught (for weeks, months, and sometimes years) between the subordinate status of Mexican immigration policy to the U.S. and their own undocumented or liminal[10] legal statuses.

What Mountz begins to outline is how the forces of sovereign powers impact even in the absence of the state and thus she hints at a conception of border enforcement that is no longer identical with the physical border. For vertical, arterial or asymmetrical attempts at theorizing recent shifts in border enforcement still remain tied to an ontological conception of the border. Through her vocabulary, Mountz invites us to use Jacques Derrida's term hauntology (a portmanteau of haunting and ontology) to understand how the journey of migrants through Mexico is shaped by the presence of the U.S. border despite its simultaneous absence. As Derrida writes, "to haunt does not mean to be present," which delineates haunting from ontological activities (1994: 161). Hägglund explains the concept as opposed to ontology, which requires self-identical presence. Instead, the specter "cannot be fully present, it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet" (in Fisher, 2019: 19). The concept of hauntology "can be thought of as fundamentally about forces that act at a distance — that which … insists (has causal effects) without (physically) existing" (2019: 20). So, in addition to other conceptualizations of the border,

[10] The term "liminality" was first associated with migrants' legal statuses by sociologist Cecilia Menjívar (2006). Through the concept of "liminal legality," Menjívar wanted to express the ambiguity that characterizes immigrants in the U.S. who are protected or documented only temporarily (i.e., through Temporary Protected Status), and therefore are neither documented nor undocumented. The "betweenness" that transit migrants face while in transit through Mexico is also captured by the term "liminality," not only in terms of their variegated legal statuses while in transit, but also because they are caught in the "spatiotemporal world between 'departure and arrival' and 'sending and receiving.'" (Vogt, 2013: 766).

I argue, it would be helpful to consider a hauntology of the border, and how the effects of the border and border enforcement are inscribed on bodies in transit long before the ontological border becomes present.

Haunting and necropolitics intersect and materialize in the uncertainty and risks that migrants face while crossing Mexico. Not knowing when the trains will arrive, which routes or sections will be safer, who to trust, where to report abuses or find food and shelter, if they will be deported or assaulted, or if they will be successful in their journeys north are some of the many uncertainties that emerge from U.S. border externalization and the haunting of migrants through La Bestia. As Mountz argues, haunting elucidates the biopolitical reconfiguration of borders around the bodies of migrants on the move. In this case, haunting also elucidates the necropolitical uses of La Bestia: by following migrants on behalf of the more powerful state (the United States), Mexican authorities can physically close the borders to migrant bodies, who are targeted through daily raids and controls. While the Mexican state may appear absent to migrants, its sovereign power has clear repercussions on migrants' journeys.

Finally, in contrast with the notion of vertical or arterial borders, haunting emphasizes the temporal dimension of the border. It is not only that U.S. border enforcement has moved into Mexico, but also that the border itself, as a specter or ghost of something yet to come, is felt by migrants long before they reach the U.S.-Mexico border. What migrants on La Bestia experience are fears, anxieties, physical dangers, violence, and memories caused by a border that is not yet present but haunts them. Haunting is a term that always points to the past, because that is where ghosts come from. In this sense, the border haunts migrants in transit while also reflecting imperial histories of U.S. influence in the region, of which La Bestia is a noticeable example.

III. Las Patronas: A Counter-infrastructure of Care

3.1. Las Patronas: 26 years in the path of migrants

The spatial layout of the Mexican railway proved to be essential for trade after the passage of NAFTA in 1994, which transformed Mexico's traditional ways of farming and producing in unprecedented ways (Gálvez, 2018). Ironically, the same infrastructure that has been crucial for U.S. economic influence over Mexico has become, since the early 1990s, the main route through which migrants are seeking to enter the U.S. (Agren, 2016). Because traveling on these trains bears various extreme dangers, in 1995 a group of women from the small town of La Patrona in the southern state of Veracruz started providing food and assistance to migrants riding on top of the trains.

The Patronas are a group of around 12 women from the community of Guadalupe (La Patrona) in the southern state of Veracruz. The group was founded in 1995 by Leonila Vázquez Alvízar and her daughters, when the train known as La Bestia stopped close to where they lived and some migrants who were traveling on top of it asked them for the groceries they had just bought. At the time, these women did not know why people were using these cargo trains, where they were heading to or even where Central America was, as Norma Romero, one of the founders of the group, explained during a public talk (Romero, 2016: 1:13). The group started cooking and giving food to migrants in transit on a daily basis and gradually became aware of the reasons why these people were deciding to leave their countries.

When the Patronas started, they used to cook around 30 meals per day, but this number increased every year due to the larger number of migrants traveling on the trains. In recent years, the group has cooked 20 to 30 kilograms of rice and beans every day, depending on the amount of people passing by on the trains. In 2010, they fed around 800 people daily (2016: 8:26). The

Patronas take turns to cook or pick up groceries during the week and sustain their work mostly through donations (Gayosso, 2012).

Upon hearing the whistle of the trains, the Patronas place all the food they have prepared into carts and run to approach the railway. Geographer Mario Bruzzone portrayed the arrival of the train as follows: “If the train’s whirling movement sounds crisp, almost acidic, the train is going south. If you can barely sense the sound, if it is like the softest and lowest tinnitus imaginable, the train is coming north” (2012: 1). When the train slows down to pass through the village, the group, sometimes with the help of volunteers, starts throwing plastic bags with food and water to the migrants on the moving train. A full day of work is gone in only thirty seconds, sometimes a minute or two (2012: 20). During that brief time, the Patronas need to give out as many bags of food as they can and encourage the migrants to not disembark the train while it is moving because this can result in severe injuries or death.

The women’s representation of their own work reveals changes affecting migration to the United States. For example, Romero has pointed out that in the early 1990s they mostly saw Central American men using the trains and, unlike today, the group did not have to cook large amounts of food. However, during the 2000s, more women started migrating to the U.S. and traveling on top of the trains. And more recently, a higher number of families and unaccompanied children are attempting to reach the U.S.-Mexico border (Romero, 2016: 5:05). The Patronas’ discourse and self-representation depict changes in the pre-migration experiences of Central Americans, such as the deteriorating living conditions, the limited educational and economic opportunities and the increased levels of political and structural violence that have led to the sudden jump of families and unaccompanied children migrating in recent years (Menjívar and Perreira, 2017).

The Patronas' self-representation has also evolved as a result of what their community thinks about them. When they started cooking for migrants, the group was accused of smuggling and helping "criminals" by people from their town. The women were told that people who used the trains were fleeing from justice in their own countries, and this led to the departure of 10 of the original 25 members of the group (Arteaga-Botello, 2020). This encouraged the remaining women to take human rights courses and to seek advice from various organizations in order to better defend themselves. Yet, they also encountered a lack of access to information. As Norma Romero explains:

> When we started, we had to deal with people who had no idea. For instance, the first time I went to the National Institute of Migration I came across a person who was worse [informed] than I was. I wanted to get information about what migration was and what I could do legally to help the migrants. You have to know what you're getting into (Romero, 2016: 49:18).

Additionally, the Patronas had to confront other accusations coming from men in their community. For instance, some of the women feared that their husbands would abandon them if they continued supporting unknown men who would not pay them in exchange for the food provided (2016: 4:04). As Miguel Ángel Orozco (2016) argues, their involvement in feeding migrants in transit created situations of jealousy that even led to family separations. Furthermore, their motivation to continue feeding migrants entailed having to set boundaries with political parties and with the local church. On many occasions, the Patronas had to challenge accusations coming from the local parish. Regardless of their belief that God put them in the path of helping migrants and their constant reiteration of Christian values such as compassion and service, the parish demanded them to have a more active participation in the religious activities of the town and to attend church more regularly (Arteaga-Botello, 2020: 194).

Drawing on the literature on women's participation in social movements, Montes and París hold that the group constitutes a solidarity movement mobilized with the goal of ensuring the survival and dignity of migrants. Consequently, they suggest that this work is based on compassion and empathy, allowing these women to recognize themselves in migrants (Montes and París, 2019: 8). In other words, the Patronas identify with the precariousness that migrants have to endure both in their home countries and while in transit through Mexico. The work of feeding them is understood as an alleviation of migrants' suffering, as well as a moral responsibility (2019: 15). Montes and París cite Bernarda, a woman from the collective, who expresses that she feels seriously worried when they cannot cook or when there is not enough food for migrants. This feeling of personal responsibility is for Montes and París the result of the Patronas' religious identity and their belief that God has placed them in the path of migrants for a reason (16).

The Patronas have rejected attempts coming from the local priest to directly supervise their activities. As a result, these women and their families were denied the Holy Communion, which "left them in a state of spiritual abandonment" (Arteaga-Botello, 2020: 194). Moreover, they have been excluded on many occasions from traditional local ties of protection, solidarity, and spiritual support, which has sometimes made them feel isolated within their own community (193). And yet, as Montes and París (2019) argue, the group's members constantly claim that religion and faith can only be expressed through actions, while emphasizing that their time, efforts, and daily commitment need to be focused on cooking and caring for migrants, and not necessarily attending church every day.

Montes and París (2019) wanted to understand why migrants are so important for these women, as well as the impacts of their emotional labor on each of them. They argue that the Patronas reject their role of passive bystanders and incentivize the valorization of migrants' lives

through collective action for the larger purpose of social transformation (2019: 3). Therefore, the authors claim that their deployment of a feminist ethics of care is what has sustained their work during the last 26 years. Moreover, the Patronas legitimize themselves and their public participation by appealing to their role as mothers (2019: 18). This is also expressed by migrants themselves, who call them "mother" when talking to them (Villaseñor, 2014: 41:33). Montes and París affirm that the Patronas' strategic use of motherhood is both political and based on a feminist ethics of care, similarly to other mother-activist movements in Latin America.

3.2. Building a counter-infrastructure of care through everyday encounters

The concept of counter-infrastructure was developed to explain the autonomous system of water provision created by indigenous Arab communities in the Syrian Golan Heights to resist the hydraulic control of Israel (Dajani and Mason, 2018). Jawlani farmers of the Golan Heights saw a sudden increase in the 1970s of what the authors call "infrastructural violence," namely the restrictions on water use and supply imposed by Israel. As a response to this, farmers engaged in "collective action and the local utilization of labor, machinery and skills" to collectively reclaim water rights and to protect Arab lands and livelihoods (2018: 140). This implied constructing small reservoirs to catch rainwater, pumping up water in the middle of the night, establishing water cooperatives, and building community-funded pipelines (2018: 140-142).

In this case, I use the term counter-infrastructure to define the Patronas' independent provision of care, which takes multiple forms (cooking, assisting with medical care, providing legal counsel, advocating for migrants' rights, etcetera) and relies on collective action. Besides, this counter-infrastructure of care is relational, because it decenters the binary of caregiver and care-receiver, as well as subversive, because it challenges the masculine logics of migration control

along the train infrastructure. Some authors have claimed that care itself can constitute an alternate infrastructure by contesting the effects of infrastructures and creating a genuine concern for the repair of the world (Alam et al., 2020).

The Patronas' counter-infrastructure of care emerges from their daily engagements with migrants. As such, it constitutes an expression of what Fincher et al. (2019) have described as "being together in difference as equals." Although focused on urban encounters with difference, Fincher et al.'s book provides a useful framework for understanding the Patronas' work and their maintenance of a counter-infrastructure of care over the years. Their emotional labor, caring activities, and continuous learning process about migration and human rights enable these women to engage in what the authors call being together in difference as equals, which:

> takes shape through emplaced assertions and enactments of equality that confront the status quo and seek to supplant it with new ways of being together in difference, through the hard work and care of people who draw on a range of organizational resources and structures to sustain their efforts (Fincher et al., 2019: 7).

The Patronas' enactment of equality goes beyond changing their attitudes towards others, and is rather expressed daily through a collective commitment to the wellbeing of migrants, which is one of the characteristics of being together in difference as equals as it is described by Fincher et al. Furthermore, their project requires hard work, determination despite challenges and uncertainties, continuous learning, and ethico-political commitments (2019: 17). By doing all this through different forms of care work, the Patronas are able to politicize the conditions in which migrants cross Mexico and to create a distinct spatiality of care that counters the effects of La Bestia.

The Patronas' most prominent activity is cooking and providing food for migrants. Mario Bruzzone (2016) described this activity as a way of producing a spatially expansive domesticity that disrupts the mutually exclusive public-private divide. By preparing food for migrants who are

traveling on the freight trains, what would otherwise be a 'hidden' form of provisioning becomes a matter of public politics. The Patronas' traditional method of cooking through a *cocina de humo*, an outdoor cooking place that is normally used during important public ceremonial events, constitutes for Bruzzone a form of respatializing the domestic (2016: 249). Moreover, the kitchen is the place that brings together migrants and volunteers from different countries, as well as the place from which the Patronas' public advocacy for migrants emerges. For Arteaga-Botello, the meaning of the Patronas' project also starts in the kitchen, because it is precisely the kitchen what allows them to broaden their horizon of solidarity with migrants (2020: 190). In this context, it is important to point out that food and foodways are an essential component of human relations and cultural meanings, and thus should not simply be dismissed as domestic activities or chores.

Therefore, while members of the Patronas may act within sanctioned gender norms, scholars such as Bruzzone and Arteaga-Botello understand their public domesticity as a way of materializing their activism on behalf of migrants. In this way, the Patronas would be performing public and domestic roles simultaneously while disarticulating the domestic from the private. This disarticulation is achieved by fulfilling 'traditional responsibilities' in new places, such as the railways (Bruzzone, 2016: 259), and by engaging in the political labor of defending migrants' rights. Montes and París (2019) also argue that the group's collective action shows that railroads should be understood as emotional spaces that disarticulate the public and the domestic.

Yet, the Patronas' counter-infrastructure of care has other dimensions. Besides cooking, other activities constitute their counter-infrastructure of care for migrants. Women from the group frequently accompany migrants to receive medical care in local hospitals and clinics (Villaseñor, 2014: 44:33"). Besides, the group helps families to repatriate the bodies of their relatives. In addition, the Patronas recently started collecting data about the migrants who stop at their shelter

to sleep or eat when coming from other routes or after falling from the trains. The main purpose of this community archive is to provide information to families looking for their disappeared relatives who were in transit through Mexico, such as the mothers involved in the caravans of Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano (Sosaita, 2019). The Patronas' relationship with migrants' mothers is solidified by annual encounters held at their shelter in La Patrona.

The Patronas have also established relationships and partnerships with other organizations. For instance, since the cargo trains that compose La Bestia have no set schedule, the group has established a network with migrant shelters along the railway that allows them to know when the train is coming. The migrant shelter in Coatzacoalcos gives them a call to let them know that the train is heading towards La Patrona, as well as the estimated number of migrants riding it. Partnerships with universities such as the Jesuit-Ibero American University have allowed them to receive student volunteers every year, as well as access to training courses and workshops (Arteaga-Botello, 2020: 191). These workshops have prepared them to defend themselves while defending migrants (Di Matteo, 2015).

Moreover, the group's continued willingness to eschew any kind of political or religious cooptation has made them develop different strategies to deal with politicians and local authorities that have effectively sustained, in the long term, their presence in the community. For instance, Norma Romero explains in the documentary *All of Me* (2014) that they have managed to establish a respectful working relationship with local authorities by not interfering in their jobs. As she argues:

> I try to make sure they respect us and that we respect them, we can't fight each other. It's not a pissing contest, you know? Each of us has a job to do, and do it properly, as long as we don't overstep the limits they set up for us. We have our limits as well, they can't go into our kitchen and arrest the migrants. It's about mutual respect (…) As for other departments, when they ask me to give talks to the police, I always accept because it is the

> policemen who often hurt the migrants and they need to know that they cannot do that. It's better that I go there and they hear it from me, because I know that migrants often complain about the police (Norma, in Villaseñor, 2014: 50:10).

The establishment of a relationship of mutual respect with the local police effectively protects migrants from being searched and detained while crossing La Patrona. As I showed earlier in the thesis, the increased police presence along the railway and in adjacent towns and cities makes the migrant journey more difficult and constitutes a form of necropolitical control of migration. In this sense, the Patronas' relationship with the police is an essential element of their counter-infrastructure of care, necessary for the protection of migrants.

Additionally, the Patronas are active agents participating in the media representations about their work, which they conceive as strategies to gain more visibility and recognition (Bruzzone, 2016). Therefore, their involvement in media is also a key element of their counter-infrastructure of care. Although the group was barely known when it started, they have increasingly received media attention. The Patronas began to be acknowledged and celebrated in 2005, when the first documentary about them was released, *De Nadie* by Tin Dirdamal. After this release, the group started receiving donations and volunteers every year. Their public speeches at conferences and award receptions have also given the group notoriety and supported their claims on behalf of migrants. The Patronas' work is not exempt from recognition, both in Mexico and abroad. By virtue of their more civic discourse, a direct result of their interactions with nongovernmental organizations and universities, the Patronas have received multiple awards (Arteaga-Botello, 2020: 191). In 2013, the Patronas were awarded the National Human Rights Prize by the Mexican National Human Rights Commission, the "Sergio Méndez Arceo" Human Rights Award, and the National Award for Solidarity and Volunteer Actions. In 2015, the group was nominated for the Princess of Asturias Award for Concord. More recently, the Patronas were awarded an honorary

doctorate by the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes (2020: 192). Through these public forms of recognition, the Patronas were able to advocate for migrants and put pressure on the Mexican government. All these activities constitute what I call counter-infrastructure of care.

Moreover, the Patronas' counter-infrastructure of care allows them to escape gender-based violence and is a source of personal empowerment. Just as migrants are attempting to escape social death at home, so too are the Patronas, and they do so by countering border enforcement at home and by contesting the authority of local men who have tried to supervise their activities. In the documentary *All of Me* (2014), the members of the group share their dreams, hopes, and life expectations, and how these changed because of the lack of economic opportunities that they had to face and the sexual and gendered violence they had to suffer. As one of them explains:

> I loved to sing and dance, and all that. I used to sing and dance all the time. I used to pray to heaven to let me sing in a band, that's what I used to think. But my mother was always short of money. We started working when we were thirteen. I was the first to go, Clementina followed later, and then Toña went off to find work as well. As soon as we were old enough, they hired us out as maids, and we had to live in the house we worked. I spent a year working in Amatlán, and then I went to Córdoba, which was classier than Amatlán. I spent about three years working for a family there. Then I moved to Santa Leticia for two-and-a-half years, and then I got engaged and all my plans went to hell [laughs] (Villaseñor, 2014: 8:48).

Lorena, another woman from the collective describes her life as follows:

> Behind this big, strong, formidable woman there used to exist (because I think I am not her anymore) a woman who has been through everything. My dad was an alcoholic, and when I was little, I had to find work, I was eleven or twelve. I started to take charge of my house. And something else happened: I was affected by an illness, I was very ill for about a year, but I pulled through. After my surgery I spent about a year terribly depressed because my family had left me alone. I wasn't doing well. After all that, here I am (2014: 20:50).

Karina, another group member, describes herself as "someone who wants many things," and "dreams of saving the world, but it is not possible," although she is "capable of achieving anything, like many migrants" (2014: 01:51:55). Overall, the women express satisfaction with regards to

working for and on behalf of migrants. This work has given meaning to their lives and changed their self-perception. “It makes me very pleased, it’s very moving. But it also makes me sad. I am sad because they are going away, leaving their families. But I am glad they take a lunch, something for the road,” says another woman from the group (2014: 16:00). The relationality of their care work is expressed through their discourses, which emphasize the relevance and meaning of this work in their lives:

> I want to tell you about Jesús, a boy from Chiapas … He told me he got on the train out of economic necessity … but in a stretch near La Patrona he fell off the train. The train kept going and mutilated him. It took both of his legs. The following day I heard he was in a hospital in Córdoba, alone. Norma asked me to look after him and I said I would, without knowing him … I was nervous. What could I tell to a 23-year-old boy who had lost his legs forever? To someone who had his whole life ahead of him? … I was there the whole day and he told me there was a reason God had sent him here. Even after losing his legs, he said he’d make an effort, he said he’d work if we helped him with his prosthesis. And I was taken aback, I felt bad because sometimes a little problem can make us think as if the world were ending. But this boy who’d never get his legs back was so eager to live… That was the push that I needed (Lorena, in Villaseñor, 2014: 56:33).

3.3. No More Deaths and the Patronas countering border enforcement

The concept of counter-infrastructure of care is appropriate to describe the work carried out by other groups and organizations. For instance, the humanitarian organization No More Deaths (*No Más Muertes*) has established a counter-infrastructure of care that supports undocumented migrants who cross, or have crossed, the U.S.-Mexico border. The aim of this organization is to stop migrant deaths and suffering by providing aid in the deserts of Southwestern Arizona. The group’s projects are leaving supplies such as water, food, socks, or blankets along migrant trails in the desert; providing first aid and phone calls to deportees in Mexico, as well as tools and supplies for those who are going to cross the border; documenting different types of abuse committed by Border Patrol and other government agencies; giving legal counsel through the legal

clinic “Keep Tucson Together”; helping migrants and their families get their belongings back from the U.S. Border Patrol; and searching for disappeared migrants (No More Deaths, n.d.-a).

No More Deaths was established in 2004 as a coalition of community and faith groups but is now an autonomous project. Since 2008, the organization has been an official ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston. Its guiding principles include recognizing that the militarization of the U.S. southern border is an irresponsible policy; addressing the undocumented status of immigrants living in the U.S.; emphasizing family unity and reunification as the key element of U.S. immigration policy; advocating for an employment-based immigration policy that protects workers’ rights, freedoms, and safety; and acknowledging the root causes of migration (No More Deaths, n.d.-b).

In 2018, two Central American migrants, José Sacaria-Goday and Kristian Perez-Villanueva, were arrested by the U.S. Border Patrol together with geographer and No More Deaths’ volunteer Scott Warren. Warren had found the two migrants in a humanitarian station established by No More Deaths in the outskirts of Ajo, in the Arizona desert. Because the two migrants were dehydrated and suffering with persistent cough and chest pain, Warren advised them to rest and recuperate for a couple of days. The prosecution argued that these actions “represented a criminal violation [that] helped to extend the temporal duration of [the migrants’] presence in the United States” (Boyce, 2019: 195). Warren was charged with two counts of felony for harboring migrants and a count of conspiracy to harbor migrants because he had provided “food, water, beds, and clean clothes” to the two migrants for a period of three days (Warren, 2019). The combination of these charges carried a potential penalty of up to twenty years in prison (Boyce, 2019). In 2019, after a second trial, Warren was found not guilty, but migrant advocates and humanitarian workers have emphasized the severe implications of his arrest. Advocates claimed

that the charges against Warren were a governmental strategy to dissuade other people from helping migrants in need (Aguilera, 2019). Moreover, the trial was also part of the Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD) strategy pursued by the U.S. since 1994, and of Trump's policy agenda to dismantle networks of "community, care, and solidarity across difference in the transnational U.S.-Mexico border region" (Boyce, 2019).

Instead of considering the desert as a key element of border enforcement, the desert is portrayed by Border Patrol agents as a dangerous beast for which the U.S. claims to be not responsible (de León, 2015: 43). The U.S. has made smugglers, nature and environmental conditions, and migrants themselves responsible for the deaths that take place in the desert (Boyce and Chambers, 2021). Yet, a network of walls, checkpoints, and surveillance infrastructures work together with the natural attributes of the desert to prevent migrants from moving forward and to funnel them to corridor areas where "spatial isolation, physiological strain, suffering, and corresponding rates of mortality are likely to be the greatest" (Boyce and Chambers, 2021: 2). Some of the many threats to life and safety along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are disorientation, lack of food and potable water, sleep deprivation, exposure to extreme weather and extreme temperature variations, injuries and the exacerbation of previously existing health conditions, animal bites, assaults and kidnappings committed by smugglers or authorities, as well as barriers to accessing emergency medical services (No More Deaths, n.d.-a). In Warren's own words:

> Much has been written about the ways the Border Patrol funnels migrants into rugged, remote, and difficult terrain like these mountains as a strategy of deterrence. This strategy counts on the land itself imposing such hardships on people that they will think twice about entering the United States. I knew that the desert was made into a tool and weapon by the US government. I knew that the death and suffering that occurs in the desert is not the fault of the desert but rather the fault of policy. Even still, as I sat handcuffed and watching through the bars on the window of the bus, those mountains did look sinister (Warren, 2019).

In essence, the work of No More Deaths also constitutes a counter-infrastructure of care. The organization acknowledges the use of deserts as both weapons against border crossers and tools for border enforcement and, therefore, tries to lessen the deadly effects of PTD through direct intervention along migrant trails. No More Deaths effectively supports migrants crossing the desert by engaging in long field trips to leave water, supplies, and "harm reduction kits" next to migrant trails, as well as by conducting search-and-rescue operations and medical interventions (Boyce, 2019: 194). No More Deaths' counter-infrastructure of care works, above all, to save lives, which implies being in direct opposition to the PTD strategy and the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, as the case against Scott Warren demonstrates.

Both the Patronas and No More Deaths acknowledge the uses of train infrastructures and deserts as border enforcement tools, and work to highlight that migrants are not simple commodities that can be mistreated and discarded, but human beings whose rights must be protected. Both groups speak to the inequity that many migration scholars have emphasized during the last 30 years: the different treatment of commodities and human bodies as they cross international borders. As Norma Romero pointed out in an interview: "Si las mercancías y las armas pueden pasar [la frontera], ¿por qué no las personas?" (If commodities and guns can cross [the border], why not people?) (Casas, 2015). Moreover, the organization No More Deaths is another example that contributes to enhancing our understanding of the intersection between counter-infrastructures of care and alter-geopolitics.

IV. Conclusion: Contributions to Feminist Geopolitics

Feminist geopolitics has been particularly attentive to questioning the pre-given or bounded nature of the nation-state as a unit of geopolitical analysis. Therefore, as an analytical perspective, it is useful for overcoming both Agnew's "territorial trap" and Goswami's "methodological nationalism" and for understanding border enforcement processes that take place beyond the U.S. official borders. And it is even more useful for understanding the work of the Patronas.

Over the last two decades, feminist geopolitics has provided major contributions and productive criticisms to both classical and critical geopolitics, by shifting the scale of analysis and by drawing our attention to the embodied experiences of people and to the places and actors that are engaged in geopolitical relations but considered to be outside of the realm of geopolitics. Moreover, feminist scholars in geopolitics have advocated for a shift in our understanding of security that goes beyond its realist conception in classical geopolitics, by asking "security for whom?" and grounding geopolitics in everyday life. Similarly to Coronil's interest in "imperial effects," their focus on human security has addressed the lived realities of those who suffer through geopolitical processes.

Feminist geopolitics has stressed the relevance of studying scales that are often neglected by dominant geopolitical narratives, and not only or exclusively the scale of the nation-state (Mountz, 2018; Hyndman, 2007). More precisely, as a distinct analytical, epistemological, and methodological perspective different from both classical and critical geopolitics, it has aimed to address the lack of attention to the embodied experiences of people, which is identified as one of the major problems of critical geopolitics. Moreover, feminist geopolitics has emphasized that geopolitical relations take place not only in the battlefield, but also in places that remain outside of what is usually perceived as the "geopolitical realm," such as the home, the body, the

neighborhood, the detention center, and in this case, the railways (Christian et al., 2016; Koopman, 2011; Sharp, 2005; Smith, 2012).

Moreover, feminist geopolitics accentuates the need to think of bodies as sites of inscription, reproduction, and contestation of global geopolitical processes (Dowler and Sharp, 2001: 169). The increased importance given to the scale of the body in feminist geopolitics goes beyond merely including women's bodies in geopolitical narratives and examines the absence of certain bodies and the ways in which bodies are both surfaces for the exercise of power and active sites of political resistance (Hyndman, 2007; Mountz, 2018: 761; Koopman, 2011). For instance, Hyndman shows how paying attention to dead and injured bodies is not a neutral exercise, since it speaks to various forms of (geo)political perceptions around who counts as deserving mourning and who should be considered collateral damage (2007: 38). The lens of feminist geopolitics has been helpful when looking at the Patronas' case, who provide care and security through everyday encounters with migrants and are thus engaging in geopolitics themselves.

Through their work of feeding migrants in transit, the Patronas implicitly recognize railroads as key geopolitical sites and compel us to pay attention to this infrastructure and what it does to migrants' lives and bodies. Therefore, feminist geopolitics is a useful methodological and analytical perspective to understand the work of the Patronas because of the following reasons: the relevance the Patronas give to migrants' bodies as "bodies that count," according to Hyndman's terminology; the Patronas' implicit recognition of railroads as key geopolitical sites deserving attention and their provision of a nonviolent security for migrants on the trains; the group's dismantling of the public/private divide through what geographer Mario Bruzzone called "spatially expansive domesticity;" and the Patronas' perception of their work as a source of self-empowerment, as it is expressed in their own words.

Sara Koopman's (2011) contribution to feminist geopolitics (through the term alter-geopolitics) is particularly relevant for understanding the Patronas' work. The concept of alter-geopolitics constitutes a valuable approach that focuses on the geopolitics done collectively by non-state actors "on the ground." Koopman studied how grassroots organizations that remain outside of the formal geopolitical realm engage in geopolitical activities such as the provision of security and safety. Specifically, Koopman's research addresses the security provided by international accompaniers in Colombia, individuals who live in communities that are under threat and who provide security by putting their bodies next to the bodies that are at risk to prevent them from being killed or attacked (2011: 278). Although the group that she studies would not refer to its work as geopolitical, she wants us to consider it as a form of feminist geopolitics at work because it challenges dominant geopolitical relations through a spatialization of peace that places privileged bodies next to less privileged bodies (279).

For Koopman, alter-geopolitics "is geopolitics being done differently (...) by putting bodies together, putting bodies in unusual places, putting bodies on the line (...) in ways that challenge both material domination and dominant representations" (2011: 280). Hence, I have argued that the Patronas, through their provision of a counter-infrastructure of care, are engaging in a form of alter-geopolitics from the ground. However, the Patronas' counter-infrastructure of care is an example of alter-geopolitics that is both geopolitical and infrastructural. While the Patronas would not define their actions as geopolitical, the group has successfully created an alternative infrastructure for migrants traveling on top of La Bestia that allows them to continue their journeys north. By leaving their homes, putting their own bodies next to the railways and providing food for migrants, the Patronas have created their own alternative security (and infrastructure) while challenging the discourses and representations of migrants as undesirable people. Therefore, their

counter-infrastructure of care contributes to enriching our understanding of alter-geopolitics by bringing care and infrastructure to the fore.

Specifically, I have claimed that the Patronas' work constitutes an example of alter-geopolitics in four ways: first, by building a nonviolent security next to the railroads and countering border enforcement in La Bestia through the provision of food and other types of support to migrants; second, by overcoming the public/private divide through their spatially expansive domesticity, which consists in performing "traditional" responsibilities next to the railroads; third, by paying attention to migrant bodies and advocating for migrant rights through their actions and discourse; and finally, by contesting the authority of local men who have tried to control their activities and finding in their work a source of self-empowerment.

Moreover, the Patronas' collective, grassroots provision of safety being done not only to push back against hegemonic policies of (in)security, but also, and especially, to create alternative forms of nonviolent security by focusing on the safety of bodies. The Patronas' example is distinctive because it foregrounds the relevance of care and infrastructure in alter-geopolitical processes, and thus adds two other dimensions to Koopman's description of alter-geopolitics. The Patronas, through their daily encounters with migrants, operate in direct opposition to the haunting of migrants across Mexican territory and effectively support transit migration through Mexico by "countering" U.S. border enforcement and the necropolitical uses of La Bestia.

By focusing on the work of the Patronas and their creation of what I have called a counter-infrastructure of care (a form of alter-geopolitics that is both geopolitical *and* infrastructural), this thesis has examined the perils of traveling on La Bestia and its uses for the externalization of U.S. border enforcement, which results from a masculinist logic of protection of the "nation" (Slack et al., 2016; Young, 2003). I have conceptualized the Patronas' different activities as a counter-

infrastructure of care that supports transit migration through their town while advocating for migrants at the state level and providing a collective form of security for them. Furthermore, this thesis has attempted to show that their counter-infrastructure of care takes multiple forms, among which, cooking, providing shelter, healthcare, access to information, and spiritual guidance to migrants; establishing networks, partnerships, and relationships with NGOs, authorities, and members of the local community; and engaging in advocacy through a wide range of mechanisms (social media, public speeches, and participation in various documentaries).

All these activities are essential for supporting migrants to continue their journey towards the northern border and to survive the "death-worlds" of transit migration in Mexico, despite the dangers associated with traveling on top of La Bestia. Crossing Mexico on top of the cargo trains of La Bestia remains the fastest and cheapest way to reach the U.S.-Mexico border for thousands of undocumented migrants who are escaping from violence and lack of opportunities in their home countries every year. Yet, this thesis has shown how the migrant journey on top of these trains is characterized by uncertainty and many dangers that constitute a form of necropolitical governance of transit migration. Drawing on feminist geopolitics as an analytical perspective, I have revealed and interrogated the masculine, imperial, and necropolitical dimensions of infrastructures and, particularly, the infrastructure of La Bestia. I have also emphasized how these trains are a vital part of U.S. border enforcement within Mexico since the implementation of the Southern Border Program in 2014, when the Mexican government initiated a series of measures to prevent migrants from climbing onto them.

This thesis has also shown that the Patronas' counter-infrastructure of care is based on collaboration, solidarity, conflict resolution, power-sharing, and being attentive to migrants' embodiment of geopolitical processes. It is also relational, because it decenters the binary of

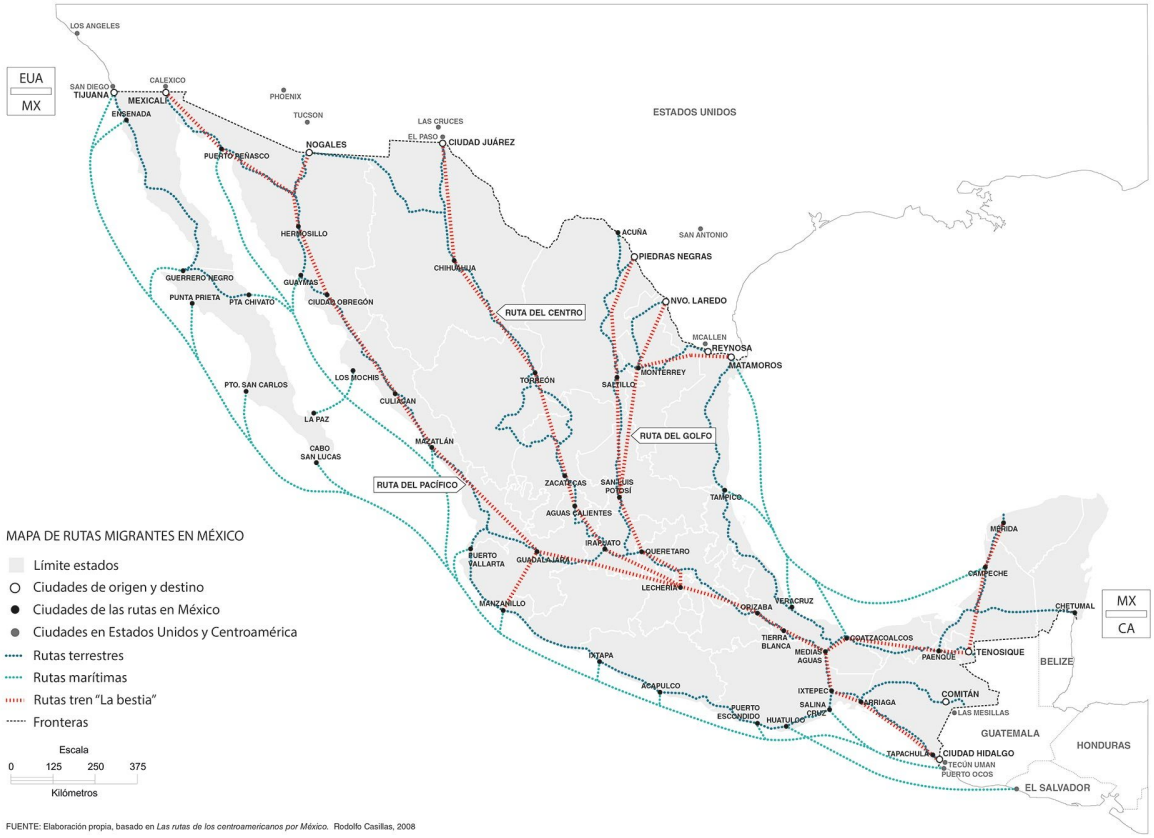
caregiver and care-receiver, as well as subversive, because it challenges the masculine logics of border enforcement along the train infrastructure. Hence, the Patronas' work is challenging, on a daily basis, the logics of control, rationality, individualism, and hierarchical authority that characterize the infrastructure of La Bestia and its policing by Mexican authorities. I have also described how the concept of counter-infrastructure of care is applicable to other groups of people who exercise care in a way that is no longer restricted to the private realm with the aim of creating alternative securities for migrants, such as the Arizona organization No More Deaths. Yet, the Patronas' case is distinctive inasmuch as their work constitutes a source of personal empowerment that allows them to escape gender-based violence in their communities and to give meaning to their lives.

V. Appendix

Figure 1: Map of Mexican railways

Source: *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War*, by J. Hart (2002).

Figure 2: Map of *La Bestia* routes



Source: *Arquitectos con la gente* (2008).

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