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The Body Migrant:
Border militarization in Mexico and the changing migrant body

By

Levi Vonk

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy

with University of California, San Francisco

in

Medical Anthropology

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Professor Stefania Pandolfo
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Abstract

The Body Migrant

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Levi Vonk

Doctor of Philosophy in Medical Anthropology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Seth M. Holmes, Chair

This text is an ethnographic and anthropological investigation into migrant bodily experience in Mexico, especially Central American migrant experience. It seeks to provide a new way of understanding border militarization and migrant il/legalization and racialization through the instantiation of new techniques of bodily control. I analyze a previously understudied, anti-immigration policy in Mexico known as the Southern Border Program, which has quietly detained and deported millions of (mostly Central American) migrants traveling through the country. Likely tens of thousands of migrants are injured each year as they try to traverse Mexico's new militarized borders, and I seek to document the ethnic, racial, and health disparities that structure migrants' illnesses and injuries, as well as to depict the material and psychic lives of those subjected to intersecting forms of confinement and dispossession. I particularly work with migrants whose bodies tend to be "somatically othered"—such as Afro-Latinx, indigenous, and trans/queer migrants—as they routinely face some of the highest levels of violence on the migrant trail at the hands of state actors. I analyze the "humanitarian reason" that intervenes on these bodies (especially when they are "ill" or "injured") and then track when certain somatic qualities or bodily traumas permit one to also acquire particular documents or state resources. Ultimately, I claim that the Southern Border Program does not simply seek to deport migrants, but to eliminate the bodily ability of migrating as such. Therefore, in *The Body Migrant* I ask the ontological question: Is one still a migrant if they are unable to migrate?

Theoretically, I draw heavily upon the work of André Leroi-Gourhan in order to provide a novel materialist and structuralist conceptualization of what the human and the human body are, and therefore what the migrant body is as well. I make special use of Leroi-Gourhan's conceptualization of "external organs"—that is, aspects of the human body which are externalized from it, such as what are colloquially referred to as "tools"—in order to analyze how one's being is changed when they have access or are denied particular external organs. In doing so, I set out a different means of bodily analysis that departs from biomedical categories such as "biology" and "genetics," and instead focus on the body as a *corpus,* that is, as a body *of* work and a body *that* works. I claim that immigration documents (such as passports or "humanitarian visas") can actually be understood as physically part of one's corpus, actually structuring the notion of one's organic body and individualized identity to which it is attached.

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"The parallel with the zoological world cannot be maintained except by way of paradox, but we cannot completely dismiss the thought that some species change takes place whenever humankind replaces both its tools and its institutions."

- André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*

Introduction

This text is primarily concerned with the body—or, rather, the *corpus*—of the Central American migrant in Mexico. It arose out of one question: If someone can no longer migrate, are they still a migrant?

This is, I believe, one of the most important questions in im/migration studies today, as hundreds of millions of people across the world face increasingly militarized and externalized borders specifically designed to immobilize them. In 2015, I began conducting fieldwork near the Mexico-Guatemala border, the very place that the first contemporary border externalization strategy was born. It is known as the Southern Border Program, which was a plan initially devised in 2014 by the Obama administration in order stop unaccompanied Central American minors from arriving at the US border. Every year since, the US has quietly paid Mexico millions of dollars in order to stop (mostly Central American) migrants from entering the US asylum system. The logic was that, because one must physically be present in a country to ask for asylum, by immobilizing migrants in a third-party country like Mexico, a wealthy country like the United States is essentially able to eliminate the asylum system without dismantling it overtly.

At the time the Program went into full effect, I was living and working in Hermanos en el Camino (Brothers on the Road), a Catholic migrant shelter in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Some of that research would lead to my first book, *Border Hacker* (2022), which is an account of my relationship with one undocumented Guatemalan migrant, Axel Kirschner, as he attempts to traverse an increasingly militarized Mexico. During this research, I noticed that the way that migrants were speaking about their bodies seemed to be changing. Before the Program, traveling the length of Mexico—over one thousand miles—was, though potentially quite dangerous, still a common and manageable feat. Hundreds of thousands of migrants did it every year on the infamous train passage known as the Beast (la Bestia, in Spanish), and though riding the Beast was certainly dangerous, it was much safer than what it has since been replaced by. After the implementation of the Program, migrants were no longer permitted to board the Beast, and suddenly a journey that took only a matter of weeks on the train could easily take months on foot, if not years. It is a gruelingly physical journey in which migrants are not subject only to gang and cartel attacks, but all of the dangers of Mexico's jungles, deserts, and mountains as well. As the Program continued to expand and deportations rose, many migrants expressed to me that they were no longer able to migrate. They were stuck, with no obvious way to make a life in the places in which they just happened to be stranded.

When I entered graduate school, I searched for years for an anthropological way to describe this stuckness. I knew my means of analysis could not be only affective—migrants emphasized that their frustrations stemmed from a literal, material inertness, one that had been specifically designed and enforced by the Program. They were stuck because they had lost the Beast. Without access to the train, they said, their bodies no longer worked in the same way, or worked at all. Most importantly, they spoke about this loss of body also as a loss of being; could one *be* a migrant if they could not migrate? And, if not, what were they instead?

It was only in the spring of 2021 that my friend and fellow PhD student Gustavo Capela put André Leroi-Gourhan's seminal *Gesture and Speech* in my hands. I knew almost immediately that I had finally found the analytical framework my project required. Moreover, I realized that this wasn't just the framework I alone had been looking for, but one that the field of anthropology

seemed have been seeking for at least the last decade as well, as we search for something to resolve, or at least help us think differently about, important questions of being raised by the ontological turn. As I hope to show, we do not need to invent something entirely new, so much as return to a thinker whom we have too long overlooked.

Though a popular and influential biological anthropologist, archaeologist, and structuralist contemporary of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Leroi-Gourhan never reached the same level of acclaim as Lévi-Strauss during his lifetime, and today his work seems to have been mostly left behind by the field of anthropology, especially in the United States. I believe Leroi-Gourhan has been forgotten, or rather repressed, because he saw something fundamental about the human body that goes directly against contemporary assumptions regarding the nature of the human: the human body, he claims (and therefore the notion of the human as such), is structured by the "organs" that lie outside of it, not within it. The human is produced externally, not merely internally through biology or genetics, not because of brain size or enlightened self-reflection. Likely the first external organ, Leroi-Gourhan says, was a "chopper"—a rock held in the hand used to chop, hammer, cut, and grind. From that chopper the rest of humanity burst forth. This text takes Leroi-Gourhanian premise as its foundation and seeks to elaborate an ethnographic account of the migrant trail through the framework of external organs.

While attempting to remain true to the core insights of André Leroi-Gourhan, I have developed a language around his ideas that he himself did not always use, or which he used inconsistently. Six primary terms I employ throughout this text are *body*, *corpus*, (*external) organs*, *gesture*, *figure*, and the *being* of the migrant, all of which I explain and contextualize in extensive depth in Chapter 2. By *body*, I mean one's organic body, the flesh and the bone. By *corpus*, I mean one's *body of work*, and I consider the corpus to be anything that helps this body of work *to do work*, that is, to labor, to continue to reproduce itself. This corpus includes *external organs*. An external organ is that part of the human being which is formed outside the organic body, and which often continues to work for (and on) it even when its possessor is not consciously wielding it. This wielding is called *gesture* by Leroi-Gourhan, which is the way one puts a corpus to work, all the movements and techniques associated with the wielding of both organic and external organs. The organic body, external organs, and gestures make up the corpus. This corpus is primarily material, whereas the *figure* of the migrant is primarily imaginary, or ideal. The figure is what is conjured in one's mind when the word "migrant" is uttered. The interweaving between the migrant's corpus and figure is the *being* of the migrant as such, the total sum of their material existence.

I have split *The Body Migrant* into two parts. Part One lays out the scope of Leroi-Gourhan's conceptualization of the human body, contextualizes this analytical framework within the migrant trail in Mexico, and shows ethnographically how his concept of organ externalization provides new insights into the analysis of migrant ontology. In Chapter 1, I contrast disturbing rumors I began hearing on the migrant trail about organ harvesting with early conquistadors' portrayals of indigenous bodies and their theatrical horror at human sacrifice. I claim that these two stories have something in common: Each provides a language for talking about external organs at a moment when both migrants' and conquistadors' bodies were in flux. I conclude with a reflection on Lévi-Straussian bricolage, and I claim that, through Leroi-Gourhan, anthropology can actually broaden the conceptual framework of bricolage to not only include symbolic or cosmological processes, but also to get at something closer to the original bricolage which so inspired Lévi-Strauss—that is, a material cobbling together of whatever one has available to them in order to form a corpus (which is, at the end of the day, just as much a symbolic process as a material one).

In Chapter 2, I delve further into the Leroi-Gourhanian framework of external organs in order to show how it departs from other contemporary concepts that may initially appear to be similar, such as the notion of a prosthesis or a cyborg. For Leroi-Gourhan, these terms are not sufficient for thinking the human, because, paradoxically, it is precisely what lies outside the organic body—external organs—that structure our notion of the human as such. To speak of cyborgs, Leroi-Gourhan might say, is actually to fetishize the role of the organic body for the human, to place humanness in the organic, rather than to understand that the kernel of humanity actually lies outside any organic body. In this way, Leroi-Gourhan should not be taken as a post-, anti-, or trans-humanist. But his humanism, if we can even call it that, is not traditional either, in that it continuously seeks to identify the borders, margins, and, especially, lacks of the human—which Leroi-Gourhan calls *distances*. The migrant is particularly interesting here, as they are that being who is structured by the literal distances they must traverse, as well as that being who generally lacks access to almost all of the external organs which might help them exist in the contemporary world—such as cell phones, bank accounts, clothing, and, most importantly, functional passports.

In Chapter 3, with the Leroi-Gourhanian framework solidly established, I attempt to push it further, asking what happens when people like migrants are condemned to live without any other external organs that might help them navigate the terrain of nature and culture. The answer, migrants claim themselves, is migrant caravans, to link one's organic body to many other organic bodies, and in this way to form a kind of external organ out of the organic alone. In this chapter, I also contemplate the long religious history behind the formation of migrant caravans, which I claim can be directly traced to the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City in 1531. I conclude that migrant caravans also mark a distinct departure from the idea of border militarization as simply part of a larger disciplinary society or panoptic form of surveillance. In fact, migrants were actually demanding both the gaze of the state and to be disciplined by it, which is in direct contrast to contemporary Foucaultian descriptions of hardening borders.

Part Two of this text is composed of two longer chapters which show how the Leroi-Gourhanian conception of organs adds new complexity to the of analysis gender and sexuality (Chapter 4) and race and ethnicity (Chapter 5) on the migrant trail. A key through line is how conceptions of citizenship and undocumented status relate to each category as well. In Chapter 4, I analyze several particularly illuminative moments of trans migrant experience in Mexico, especially those of trans women. One of the early concerns of this dissertation, before it was a coherent text, was the rising transphobia that I began to witness both on the migrant trail in Mexico and within certain intellectual circles in the Global North, such as with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Rethinking the body and how it is constructed is directly related to this concern. Chapter 4 attempts to understand this transphobia in two otherwise disparate groups as actually connected around the growing anxiety of how all bodies are changing in the 21st century with new technologies, and how these technologies are unsettling previous notions of gender, especially the conception of gender as biologically innate. The concept of the corpus, I claim, allows us to provide a more incisive analysis of the human body in the wake of new technologies that allow for "gender affirming care." If we take seriously the notion that all of us externalize and change our bodies, then exchanging one gendered organ for another is not the abomination—or even the novelty—that some anti-trans thinkers claim it is, but rather part of the very process which makes us human in the first place.

In Chapter 5, I expand my explorations of the tension between the organic body and its external organs by paying attention to the experiences and statements of black and Afro-Latinx migrants. I particularly focus on a new pilot program proposed as a collaboration between the

Mexican state and UNHCR, which prioritizes integrating Haitian migrants into Mexican society due to certain racial, linguistic, and cultural differences identified by state and humanitarian institutions. I analyze the convergence of two distinct notions of blackness—one based on a history of chattel slavery in the US and Haiti, the other based on the concepts of "mestizaje" and "casta" in Latin America—and how migrants must navigate these two distinct understandings of race and racialization while attempting to legalize themselves. I pay particular mind to how the humanitarian orientation toward black migrants in Mexico frames blackness in a certain way as a kind of symptom that it can cure, and how this "cure" overtly claims to be listening to and respecting (racial) otherness, while in practice it often compartmentalizes or dismisses otherness(es) that implicates the humanitarian structure within the history of racial exploitation.

Each chapter is interspersed with ethnographic vignettes that speak to the chapters both preceding and following them. These interludes revolve around one family with whom I worked closely, the Castros, who fled Honduras in 2015 and resettled in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey. By providing glimpses into their lives over the course of eight years—as they navigate family dynamics, sexuality, changing racial politics, and legalizing themselves in a foreign country—I highlight how their corpuses also change in the process. In this way, I am attentive to how they must mold their bodies in new ways in order to pursue a life they desire. The Castros are an interesting group to focus on ethnographically because they are a relatively large family (nine people, not counting the love interests who come in and out of the picture), represent three generations (with the youngest generation actually being born in Mexico), diverse in their racial and sexual identities, and because most of the family intended from the beginning of their migration journey to resettle in Mexico, rather than in the US. Through their resettlement, something is glimpsed of an otherwise mostly unseen process occurring in Mexico—the largest mass migration (and resettlement) event in the country's history, and perhaps the most obviously impactful one since the arrival of the conquistadors half a millennium before.

As Liisa Malkki has written, "The generalized category of refugees is an object of anthropological knowledge that is still in the early stages of construction" (1995). This text hopes to contribute significantly to this anthropological knowledge through the exploration of the material nature of the migrant corpus. In doing so, I also take cues from Paul Farmer's insistence that the framework of *structural violence* must keep "the material in focus" in order to "avoid undue romanticism" in the documentation of suffering (2004). What any reader will quickly see is that my analysis of migration largely focuses on the migrant body and its *abilities*, rather than on a more commonplace form of analysis: (human) rights. I have intentionally tried to depart from the logic and language of rights while describing the migration process, except to, when necessary, demonstrate where the notion of (human) rights naturally surfaces for migrants themselves, when they must confront or be confronted by these things called rights. Instead, I am more interested in migration on its most basic level—when can someone actually move their body, and when can they not?

I do this for three reasons. First, I see the domain of medical anthropology as that of the human body. Understanding what that body is (what it is composed of, what its abilities are, what it is in relation to, where its limits reside, etc.), then, is of upmost importance. Medical anthropology has long critiqued the normative biomedicalization of the human, especially all the ways this Western (or capitalist, or First World, or Global North, or European, or white, or male, or cis) notion of the body is incomplete, or where it leads to particular social inequities and disparities. But it has yet to, so far as I can tell, articulate a competitive alternative for what the human body is instead. As medical anthropologists, we have been forced to continuously fall back

upon particular biomedical conceptualizations even as we critique them. My hope is, through Leroi-Gourhan, to begin providing a new means of analysis that does something different, namely, to offer a way of interpreting the human body that breaks from normative biomedicine, especially from notions of biology and genetics. This alternative way of seeing is by no means a perfect system, and it needs to be intensely refined in the future—but so does contemporary medicine and its understanding of the body.

Second, it is my belief that by starting from the outset with the notion of the "right" to migrate (or the "right" to asylum or the "right" to citizenship), something more fundamental is lost in anthropological investigations of migration, primarily, the *ability* to migrate as such, which I hope to show is not at all the same thing as a right, even if it is related. The literature on Central American migration in Mexico is not vast, and one can quickly see that the majority of ethnographic works often take the notion of (human) rights for granted; many ethnographies therefore tend to be a long form documentation of how migrants are denied rights, an in-depth review of all the ways the state, multination corporations, and humanitarian organizations guarantee rights in theory but in practice fall short of such an ideal. This is an important task, but I have found at times that this kind of literature can become a reaffirmation—or even fall into an overt fetishization—of the international liberal order as such; by pointing out all the ways the state is "hypocritical" in denying migrants rights, the implicit assumption is that rights simply need to be reestablished, and that at a more fundamental level rights are the best or sole means by which we all act and make social claims. But as anthropologist and migration scholar Seth Holmes has pointed out (2013; see also Burawoy 1976), the structure of the US agricultural system is such that it encourages undocumented migration because it can use migrants' undocumented status against them to pay them less than minimum wage and render their labor disposable as needed. Demanding that these agricultural workers' rights be recognized, then, is nonsensical, because the agricultural system is structured in such a way to only hire those who have no rights. At the same time, because the US agricultural system is structured in this way, it nevertheless grants at least some migrants the *ability* to migrate, in that it turns a blind eye to this migration in order to have enough workers to cultivate and pick crops. This is the conundrum that many undocumented migrants face today.

This text considers about the distinction between right and ability in relation to the migrant body—do migrants actually, at this very moment, have the ability to move their bodies through certain spatial and temporal orders, or do they not? And how are migrants attempting to change that? Rights are certainly involved here, but, at its heart, this question forces us to attend to the more primary and material aspects of migrant bodies and journeys.

Finally, in turning to Leroi-Gourhan, I also attempt to depart from a recent strain of anthropological thought regarding the human and its body—even as I have also been inspired by it—which has had an impact on the ways that Latin American migration to the US has previously been analyzed. This strain of thought might be described as the "ontological turn," an umbrella term under which I place Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's project, Latourian new materialism, and explorations of non- or post-human ontology by Anna Tsing, as well as the many other contributors to discussions around post- and trans-humanism. Within migration literature, Jason De León has incorporated some of this turn into his analysis of material culture on the US-Mexico border, especially in his descriptions of the US government policy Prevention Through Deterrence, which De León describes as a *hybrid collectif*—a notion taken directly from Latourian actor-network theory—in that Prevention Through Deterrence employs both human and non-human agents to kill migrants in the desert. For instance, through charting the decomposition of a pig, De León concludes that migrant bodies "disappear" much more quickly in the desert than initial US

government estimates. He shows that, sometimes in as little as twenty-four hours, a migrant's corpse can be eaten nearly in its entirety by various animals in the desert, leaving little to no trace of where and when they went missing (2015, 21-86).

The hybrid collectif, however, only accounts for part of the process of the missing migrant body, and therefore I do not believe it is the most useful framework for thinking about migrant bodies and beings. In contrast to De León, I am trying to think about how migrant bodies, or at least parts of these bodies, disappear while they are still alive. Here, Leroi-Gourhan's conception of external organs provides another means of analysis that lends a much fuller picture of how under the Southern Border Program (and under Prevention Through Deterrence), certain bodies and organs disappear all the time, but in ways that much more often mutilate migrant bodies instead of killing them outright, and therefore receive little of the attention or moral outcry that necroviolence garners. I do not, however, see this text as a direct critique of the ontological turn, and for this reason I do not engage it overtly. Rather, by focusing my analysis on migrants' external organs (as well as their lack of them), I hope to provide an alternative means of analyzing ontology, one that places emphasis on the materiality of the body and the organs that structure it, rather through an emphasis on metaphysical conceptual universes (see Viveiros de Castro 2015). One of my goals is to ultimately to show, through the concept of external organs, that there is no such thing as the individual human body, and in this way it could be said this text is still entangled with the ontological turn's notion of entanglements, at least partially so. Through the secretion of organs, the only body that can truly be spoken of is the human corpus, which is singular in its totality, and of which each of us beings only makes up a tiny and indefinite fragment. External organs structure the body in such a way that it is essentially impossible to determine where my body ends and the other's begins. Here, I follow Alain Badiou's claim (2014) that analyses of human phenomena, and especially the analyses of mass migration—the "vast nomadic proletariat," he calls it (2022)—must start with the notion of the universal in order to begin to understand what difference or otherness is. This is not because I believe the human being is a homogenous entity, but rather because the human is that category which historically is able to subsume others into it. As I will soon show, the notion of the human was originally invoked as *the* great universalizing category between the Old World and the New, the very thing that united two otherwise disparate sets of beings. Spanish colonizers' uncertainty of indigenous humanity in what would come to be known as Mexico came largely *after* the Conquest, in reaction *against* the conquistadors' initial embrace of indigenous peoples as human, which in no way absolves the conquistadors of the great violence they inflicted in the New World. On the contrary, it forces us to think about a violence that is, from the very beginning, bound up in the notion of the human, and in all forms of human relationality and belonging.

PART ONE

Prelude

If there was one thing that Carlos Castro was good at, it was riding the Beast. He'd done it roundtrip, from Honduras to northern Mexico and back, at least thirty times by his count, though it could have easily been forty. Few migrants could say they'd ridden the train even half as many times, and that was usually only because they weren't very good at it, got caught, and had to start over. But not Carlos. Carlos never got caught. Not once in fourteen years, he said.

Carlos claimed to understand the train on an instinctive level. When it was going to leave the station, or when it would stay put for the night. He could tell from the hum of the metal underneath him how loaded the interior of the train cars were, and he always chose the heaviest ones, because they rocked the least. He was familiar with every nook and cranny of the train—where to hide on a traditional shipping container versus an oil tanker—and he knew how to tie himself to the railings that circled the tops of the cars with his belt. So that, as he dozed while the train whipped through the rural wilds of a countryside that he only ever saw while traveling at over one hundred kilometers an hour, he wouldn't fall and slip underneath its churning wheels. He said he'd seen two people cut in half this way, but neither of them was his customer, and that, when he was alone, unimpeded by clients who needed constant chaperoning, he could travel from one end of Mexico to the other in twelve days. This was an endurance sprint of epic proportions, a lumpen marathon of burning diesel and desire across half a continent, and no one was faster than Carlos. That's because the Beast was more than just a train to him, he said. "It's almost like part of me," he said, a monstrous limb that stretched out before him and into the horizon. "When I'm on the Beast, I just know how it feels in my bones. It's like we're moving together."

But now Carlos had a problem. The Beast was dead. Unbeknownst to him, a new border militarization plan known as the Southern Border Program had silently gone into effect, and now no one was able to board the train. If he were alone, he might have risked it. He was fast and familiar enough with the terrain that he thought he could still give immigration the slip. But Carlos was not alone. In tow were his fifty-five-year-old mother, Maria; his two younger brothers, fifteen-year-old Santos and twenty-six-year-old Darin; his five-months pregnant sister Tati and her one-year-old son Rogelio; and his three-year-old niece Sara. There was no way that all of them would be able to outrun immigration.

I met Carlos and the rest of the Castro family in March of 2015 on a migrant caravan known as the "Viacrucis Migrante" (Migrant Stations of the Cross), which I previously wrote about in great detail in my book *Border Hacker* (2022). When we met, the family was living in the jungle outside of a migrant shelter in the city of Tapachula, Mexico, about twenty miles north of the Guatemalan border. At the time, Tapachula was—and continues to be—one of the main nodal points of the Southern Border Program. Within Tapachula is the Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI (the 21st Century Migratory Station), one of the largest detention facilities in the country, with a capacity of 960 inmates, though it routinely detains three to four times that many people. The Siglo XXI also acts as a kind of immigration central command along the Mexico-Guatemala border, where new anti-immigrant strategies are devised and orchestrated. In recent years, one of the main elements of these strategies has been to attempt to trap migrants within the limits of Tapachula itself, thereby turning the small city into something of an open-air detention camp for thousands of migrants at any given moment.

But in 2015, these methods were much less extensive. Immigration's main focus was to install dozens of pop-up checkpoints outside of town, with a focus on stopping buses and other forms of mass transportation (such as "combis"—large vans that act as a kind of communal taxi) which were likely to be carrying migrants north to Arriaga, the city where most migrants previously used to board the Beast. With the Beast's closure and the checkpoints in place, a bottleneck had been created in Tapachula. Thousands of migrants had shown up believing that they would be able to easy pass through the town like before, including Carlos and the rest of the Castro family. But now they were stuck. When the Castros sought shelter at the local migrant shelter, they and many others were turned away because it was already beyond capacity. Instead, Carlos and his family set up camp nearby in the jungle, believing it to be the only way to avoid the attention of roaming immigration patrols while they formulated a more long-term plan.

The Castro family had fled the Honduran coastal city of La Ceiba a month earlier, after Maria's ex-boyfriend had attempted to murder the family. Maria had been dating the man—in what I would later come to understand was not an uncommon arrangement for poor women in Central America—partly out of fear and partly out of economic necessity. The man was from a family with a certain amount power in their locality, mainly through gang ties. When a man from a family like that expresses interest in you, Maria explained to me, her face twisting painfully at the memory, you don't easily turn him down. And so she began to see him sporadically over several months, hoping that at least the relationship would provide a bit more economic stability for her family, who lived on the city outskirts in a two bedroom shack that they had largely build themselves. But in February, the boyfriend—who regularly drank to excess and became violent—returned home inebriated and beat Maria with a wooden stick. It was not the first time, but her son Darin decided it would be the last time. He grabbed a machete from his bedroom and chased the man out of the house, but not before the boyfriend vowed to return and kill the whole family. It was not an idle threat; the man's cousin was known as one of the deadliest assassins in La Ceiba. A few days after the machete incident, Tati on the front porch nursing her son Rogelio when man drove by on a scooter and shot at her with a pistol, exploding the leg of the plastic chair she was sitting in. Somehow, Tati nor anyone else in the family ended up being hit. But Darin called Carlos, telling him that the family was leaving at once, and that very same day Carlos was on a train back to Honduras.

Carlos was the oldest son, a role which came, he said, with certain responsibilities. He was sixteen when he first left his family in search of work in the US. Originally, he'd only planned to ride the train once. He took it north to the Texas border, crossed in the dead of night, and then rustled up some work in the border town of McAllen. For most migrant men, that meant hard labor, construction or landscaping. But Carlos had other ideas. And aesthetic sensibilities. When he arrived in McAllen, he chose to crash in the trailer of a friend from Honduras, because she'd promised to land him shifts at a barber shop down the street. Carlos learned to cut and dye hair. He picked up some English. And then, after going under the pen several times himself, he started inking customers in the illegal tattoo parlor tucked away in the back of the shop. After six months, he had a loyal clientele, a constellation of stars tattooed across his right eyebrow, and no savings. Everything he earned at the shop, tips and all, went to the woman in the trailer, who was not only his landlady and boss, but also the one who'd fronted the money for his coyote. Carlos was supposed to pay her back with interest, and he was behind. To settle the debt, his landlady produced a bag of bubblegum pink pills and instructed him to post up on the corner. After a week, Carlos sold to an undercover cop. He served four years in federal prison, then was deported back to Honduras and banned from the US for life.

That was when he started the riding the train. Hundreds and hundreds of miles all over Mexico, in order to scout out a place that felt something like the US. Eventually, Carlos settled on Monterrey, an industrial city in the desert just three hours south of McAllen. The problem was that he was still undocumented. At the time, there wasn't much immigration enforcement in Mexico, but it was hard to land a job without documents. The city was ringed with sweatshops full of poor Mexicans desperate for work, any work, and the multination corporations had no need to risk a labor infraction hiring migrants. Carlos spent a few lost years squatting in abandoned homes and scrounging up odd jobs. It was still a better life, he claimed, than what he would have had in Honduras. Things in his birth country had taken a turn for the worse. The democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya had been deposed in a right wing, US-backed coup (Pine 2013). Suddenly, people began fleeing the economic and political fallout en masse. But that's when he saw an opportunity, Carlos said. He started escorting whole families from La Ceiba up to the US-Mexico border.

That technically made him a smalltime smuggler, didn't it? I asked.

But Carlos said that he never really thought about it that way, at least in the beginning. He was just keeping people he knew out of danger. And yeah, he made some money, of course, but he accepted less than what most of the other smugglers charged, and he claimed that he always treated his customers better. Because if he didn't, word would get back to his mother. Whenever Carlos was in town for another pick up, he'd often give a significant portion of his earnings to Maria. Her health was fragile, and as her was her eldest son, he saw it as his responsibility to pay for her medications, and as well send whatever money he could back to support the family. It was also his responsibility, he said, to save his family now, and to bring them on the route that he had so often traversed on his own. Carlos estimated that he made six to eight roundtrips on the train every year for five years. Each trip usually lasted about a month, depending on how many people he was escorting and what their stamina was like. But now all of that was over. The Southern Border Program had gone into effect, and Carlos' skill set, grueling acquired over the course of half his life, was now useless.[1]

But he didn't know that yet.

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[1] Loic Wacquant describes a similar relation to body and skill in his essay "Habitus as topic and tool" (2011).

Chapter 1

The Body and the Beast: The human body in conquest

Different bodies, different beings: A preamble

By the time Hernán Cortés and his men arrived at Tenochtitlán, capital of the Mexica empire, they were relatively certain that the beings in front of them were human. The emperor Montezuma, however, was possibly less convinced about the conquistadors. As historian Matthew Restall recounts, Montezuma kept an elaborate zoo—the best documented example in the Americas, and well before an analogous concept existed in Europe—which catalogued the vast inventory of creatures in his empire, including what Western minds would describe as other "human beings." "It is crucial to understand that the zoo, as conceived by the Mexica, included human beings," says Restall. "People too could be collected" (2018, 266).

And they were. Among "a great diversity of serpents and wild animals, which included tigers, bears, lions, wild boar, vipers, rattlesnakes, toads, frogs and many other various snakes and birds," the Mexica king also collected "other people that were monstrous, such as dwarves and hunchbacks, some with one arm and others that were missing a leg, and other monstrous races [naciones[2]] that are born as such" (Restall quoting García Icazbalceta 1858-66). In fact, enough evidence exists within the historical record, claims Restall, to suggest that Montezuma intentionally lured the conquistadors to his kingdom in hopes of adding at least some of them to his zoological collection:

> Thus through his zoo-collection complex, Montezuma could attain universal knowledge, the ultimate acquisition… It was therefore imperative that Montezuma collect the Spanish newcomers in order to know them. Their arrival on the edges of his empire made his universal knowledge incomplete. By acquiring them—not surrendering to them or slaughtering them—he was able to study and understand them, thereby restoring the wholeness and universality of his imperial knowledge. (288)

This explains why, says Restall, Montezuma did not simply kill the conquistadors, though he had many initial opportunities do so.

> "Like a cat toying with a mouse, for months the emperor was watching the conquistadors [as he sent them gifts and invitations to his kingdom], testing them, playing with them, studying them… His goal was neither to destroy nor drive the newcomers away, but to confuse, weaken, and draw them in—so they could be collected. Montezuma was not afraid of the Spaniards; he was hunting them. (300-1)

If this is true, the question at the center of the First Encounter between Cortés and

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[2] For reasons that will become clear in Chapter 5, it is important to note here that the translation of the word "naciones" does not mean "races" in the way that we understand them today—a more literal translation might be something closer to "nationalities" or "peoples," or even "species."

Montezuma was not about what kind of beings the Mexica were, but what kind the conquistadors were. In Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (initially published in 1568), the word "human" (in Spanish "humano/a") is evoked eighteen times. Of those eighteen, eleven are used specifically in relation to the *materiality* of human sacrifice when Cortes orders various indigenous peoples to cease the consumption of "human flesh" ("carne humana")[3] and the spilling of "human blood" ("sangre humana").[4] The other seven instances invoke a more abstract or *ideal* human condition, particularly when Díaz claims that the crucifixion of Christ was a sacrifice for all of "el género humano" (humankind, or the human race),[5] very intentionally including indigenous peoples within its scope.[6]

The accuracy of Díaz's account, of course, has been hotly debated for half a millennium. But the amount of human sacrifice that the conquistador claims to have witnessed, or his exaggerations and falsehoods therein, is not my central concern. Rather, I am interested in when Díaz evokes the notion of the human, and to what end. It is clear from his account that the human generally enters into the equation *only after one has been sacrificed.* When Díaz is speaking of living indigenous peoples, he never once—in over 1,000 pages—refers to them specifically as "humans"; they are almost always "indios" (Indians) or "gentes" (peoples). It is only after someone has been killed in ritual sacrifice that their flesh is referred to as "carne humana."

Here we have a paradox. On the one hand, Díaz claims Christ's sacrifice was for *all* living beings, including the native peoples—thereby conjuring a universal humanity through shared salvation. But, on the other hand, within Díaz's own writing, indigenous peoples do not truly reach their full "human being-ness" until after they have been sacrificed. In the First Encounter, then, the human is summoned by the conquistadors as a universal category with the ability to unite both the beings of the Old World and the New into one. But it is a universal that constitutes itself specifically through victimhood—the sacrificed natives only become fully human after the fact, when they are already dead. For Díaz, the human was the thing that was, theoretically, to be saved at all costs, but which, categorically, could not be saved fully, because its fullness was reached only in death.

Well before the 20th century, then, a kind of "human(itarian)ism" was already present within the conquest of Hernán Cortés, and its goal back then—as it still is now—was to stop a perceived mass sacrifice of human life which, paradoxically, was the very thing that made the human *human*. In other words, this early human(itarian)ism arose most prominently precisely where a being became irrevocably impotent (that is, where it ceased *to be*). The conquistadors' professed humanitarian logic was not to attempt to reverse this impotence (one cannot reverse death), but to stop it from happening again to others. According to Díaz, this was the conquistadors' overt endeavor from the beginning—throughout *The True History,* Cortés is constantly demanding that the caciques (native chieftains) cease all forms of human sacrifice, and he vows to kill them in turn if they continue the practice.

There have been similar critiques of humanitarianism's fetishization of the victim (see

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[3] Díaz, Bernal. *Historia Verdadera De La Conquista De La Nueva España*. Edición Guillermo Serés. Madrid: UNED, 2016. Page numbers 167, 191, 256, 258, 284, 529, 808, & 964.
[4] Ibid. Page numbers 297 & 991.
[5] Ibid. Page 128.
[6] Here Díaz uses "género humano" (128), "hombres humanos" twice (146, 550), and "linaje humano" (279). He also uses the terms "malicia humana" twice (3, 899), and "hazañosos humanos" (970) in less related ways.

Malkki 2010; Maxwell 2017; Ticktin 2014), even if they are not often directly connected to the Conquest of the Americas. But many of these critiques have focused more on the idea of the human as just that—an idea, and how this ideal human(ism) perpetuates itself on the neoliberal or capitalist stage. What interests me, instead, is the materiality of the human body. At times, Díaz describes in great detail the organs and flesh of the sacrificed, the blood and the viscera. These horrifying scenes of a splayed and flayed body—whose most intimate details are displayed for all to see—supposedly morally compel the conquistadors to intervene. But this is generally where Díaz's observations of the body stop. In fact, what we find in the first-hand literature of the Conquest is that the somatic body, if it is mentioned at all, is incredibly secondary. Writers like Díaz and Cortés speak at length of indigenous clothing, weaponry, architecture, and language, but much less about natives' skin color or facial features. (The word "moreno," for instance—the Castilian term to describe darker skin complexion—is only used four times by Díaz in *The True History*, and one of those times is to refer to the dark skin of several conquistadors, who Díaz claims appeared so somatically similar to indigenous peoples that they could dress like the local populations and blend in during covert missions.[7]) Instead, it is the things *outside of natives' somatic bodies*—but which are still in every way perceived as part of those bodies—that are the focus of intense scrutiny and are understood as *major differences* from the conquistadors.

What is interesting about Cortés' initial meeting with Montezuma, for instance, is that, by Díaz's own measure, the conquistadors simply could not make claims of "savagery" or racial superiority against the Mexica and their grand city of Tenochtitlán. The capital was a place of marvels to the Spaniards, which surpassed in scale anything that they had seen in Spain, and which, interestingly, Díaz immediately contrasts with a perceived lack in the number of conquistador bodies like his own:

> Seeing such wonderful things, we did not know what to say or whether what appeared before us was real. On one side, on the land, were great cities, and in the lake many more, and we saw it all filled with canoes, and on the causeway many bridges at intervals, and in front of us was the great city of Mexico; and we, *we did not number even four hundred soldiers*. (Díaz, translation by Burke & Humphrey 2012, 191, emphasis mine)

When Montezuma greets Cortés on one of the causeways leading into the city, there is no mention at all of the Mexica king's somatic body. (In fact, it is not until several chapters later, in Chapter XCI, that Díaz provides a brief, half-sentence physical description of Montezuma almost as an afterthought[8]). But Díaz does recite, in great detail, over and over again, everything about Montezuma's appearance that signals his status as a king:

> Motecusuma, who was slowly approaching us, surrounded by other grandees of the kingdom, seated in a sedan of uncommon splendour… the monarch raised himself in his sedan, and the chief caziques supported him under the arms, and held over his head a canopy of exceedingly great value, decorated with green feathers, gold, silver, chalchihuis stones, and pearls, which hung down from a species of bordering, altogether curious to

[7] Díaz, Bernal. *Historia Verdadera De La Conquista De La Nueva España*. Edición Guillermo Serés. Madrid: UNED, 2016. Page 378.

[8] "… de buena estatura e bien proporcionado e cenceño e pocas carnes, y la color ni muy moreno, sino propia color e matiz de indio, y traía los cabellos no muy largos" (Díaz 2016, 283).

> look at.
>
> Motecusuma himself, according to his custom, was sumptuously attired, had on a species of half boot, richly set with jewels, and whose soles were made of solid gold. The four grandees who supported him were also richly attired, which they must have put on somewhere on the road, in order to wait upon Motecusuma; they were not so sumptuously dressed when they first came out to meet us… and spread cotton cloths on the ground that his feet might not touch the bare earth. (Díaz, translation by Hatchard 1844)

Feathers, gold, half boots, servants, a canopy, and even a sedan—these were the parts of Montezuma's "body" that signaled to everyone around he was Montezuma; they were the things that made his body a king's.

In other words, there seems to be in Díaz's account a conceptualization of the body that is quite distinct from our own today. His attention to the organic or somatic body—to which we pay so much mind—almost exclusively appears in relation to human sacrifice, especially in his gruesome depictions of, and fascination with, the flayed body. The rest of the time, there is a continuous assessment of those things that immediately cling to native bodies—their clothing, jewelry, weaponry, tattoos, face paints, and various bodily piercings—as well as larger native technologies, such as the great pyramids, causeways, and floating gardens (chinampas)of Tenochtitlán.

By homing in on Díaz's inattentiveness to the somatic, I am not trying to dismiss or refute important, contemporary discussions around race and indigeneity. Rather, I am following Silvia Wynter's methodology of "unsettling the coloniality of being," in which she provides a genealogy of when and how "enslaved peoples of Black Africa… were made to reoccupy the matrix slot of Otherness—to be made into the physical referent of the idea of the irrational/subrational Human Other" (2003). For Wynter, the idea of the "human being" arose at a particular moment of Western uncertainty—that unsettling encounter with the New World and all its various beings—in order to create a "new master code of the bourgeoisie and of its ethnoclass conception of the human" in which the "Color Line [was] drawn discursively between whites/nonwhites," with whiteness falling on the side of humanity, and blackness on the side of the inhuman(e). To read Díaz against Díaz, then—to see where his invocations of the human become inconsistent, to pinpoint exactly where his notion of the human lapses—gives us the briefest glimpse into how indigenous bodies were perceived before they were made "indigenous" through the violent, racialized colonial order that Wynter outlines. Doing so reminds us that bodies are not static things, and that today the bodies and beings of the oppressed in Mexico are still very much *made*, not inherent.

One must ask, however, that if the intent of the conquistadors was to conquer—to establish this new colonial order through brutal domination—then why were they so obsessed with human sacrifice? They were no strangers to killing, after all. When reading Díaz, one is struck by how much the viscerality of the ceremonies disturbed the Spaniards, the excoriated skins and still-beating hearts and consumption of raw flesh. No doubt Díaz embellished a great deal of his accounts in order to make the process of human sacrifice appear more grotesque and savage to European audiences, but my point is that this particular kind of ritual killing—for which the Spaniards had no direct equivalent—still wholly captivated their imaginations and fascinations. That Díaz might likely have embellished his accounts only strengthens this claim. The key to the conquistadors' obsession with human sacrifice, I believe, lies in the fact that the ritual largely involved an exploration of the organic body and its organs, especially the opening up of the chest cavity and the stripping of skin. It was not just death that was unsettling to the Spaniards, but this

unabashed excavation of the body, of revealing certain insights as to is design, of having one's composition laid bare for all to see. The conquistadors had reason to fear such a scenario.

Though no first-person accounts exist from the Mexica's perspective of the Conquest, it is clear that they were just as interested in the bodies of the conquistadors as the conquistadors were in theirs, as is indicated by the various legends that still remain regarding Cortés' arrival. The most famous and outrageous of these stories is that the Mexica believed Cortés to be the return of the white god Quetzalcoatl. Another is that—gazing upon horses for the first time—many natives assumed the conquistadors were some kind of centaur-like creature, that they and the horse were one body fused together. As historian Camilla Townsend elaborates in great detail, these legends are almost certainly apocryphal, and likely propagated by Díaz himself, as well as others like him, in an attempt to justify their own violent hand in the Conquest. "The Mexica did not believe that the god Quetzalcoatl walked among them," writes Townsend. "Moctezuma, the king, simply found himself in possession of less military power than the newcomers, and he recognized this" (2019, 10). But though the Mexica understood that the conquistadors held the technological upper hand, it was also far more difficult to pinpoint exactly how this technological advantage played out in real time:

> At no point do the Mexica warriors seem to have been awestruck or paralyzed with fear by the strangers' weapons. Instead they analyzed them in a straightforward way… Unfortunately, when the Mexica secured some of the powerful weapons and tried to use them themselves, they were unable to do so. At one point, they forced captured crossbowmen to try to teach them to shoot metal bows, but the lessons were ineffective, and the arrows went astray. The guns, they soon learned, would not work without the powder the Spanish had. Once, when they captured a cannon, they concluded that they had neither the experience nor the ammunition needed to make it useful. The best they could do was to prevent it from falling back into enemy hands, so they sank it in the lake. (283-4)

Though the Mexica understood that they were at a disadvantage, simply possessing the tools of technology did them little good. In order to fire a crossbow or cannon, they needed to be familiar with the *gesture* of its use—how to wield it in all of its practical applications, and therefore to have some sense of the technology that went into crafting each of its parts, parts that were not so easily identifiable at the outset to the Mexica, parts that were in some way hidden.

> The Mexica knew that they were losing. They had no way to explain the discrepancy between their power and that of their enemies… [But] they did not assume greater merit or superior intelligence on the part of their enemies. Rather, in the descriptions they left, they focused on two elements: the Spaniards' use of metal, and their extraordinary communication apparatus… When the elderly speakers paused in wonder at the events [of the Conquest], it was to ask how the word had gone out so efficiently to so many people across the sea about their marvelous kingdom. The warriors had seen the ships—but not the compasses, the navigation equipment, the technical maps, and the printing presses that made the conquest possible. What is striking is how quickly they realized that these issues were at the heart of the matter. (286-7)

The Mexica understood that ships, horses, and armor were essential to the conquistadors' success—those technologies very visibly enhanced the capabilities of Spanish bodies. But they

had not seen all the other "hidden" technologies that made the more conspicuous ones possible—"the compasses, the navigation equipment, the technical maps, and the printing presses." That is to say, there were aspects of the conquistador body and being that were obscure to Mexica eyes. Its design, in a certain sense, was cloaked. The Spanish fascination and horror with human sacrifice, then, can be interpreted as the worry that these technologies, wrapped up and hidden in their bodies, might be eventually found out. They feared that they too could be laid across the sacrificial slab and examined, their artificial or *external organs* held up to the light.

Missing organs and beastly bodies

In 2015, nearly five hundred years after Cortés started his marched toward Tenochtitlán, I began hearing rumors of organ trafficking in southern Mexico. I was conducting fieldwork in a migrant shelter in southern Oaxaca called Hermanos en el Camino (Brothers on the Path), a place where migrants could find a warm meal and a mat to rest their heads for the night before continuing north. I'd come to Hermanos to study a new, discrete anti-immigration pact between the US and Mexico known as the Southern Border Program, in which Mexico is paid millions of dollars a year to catch and deport as many Central American migrants as possible before they can reach the US. The Program was conceived of by the Obama administration—and endorsed and implemented by then-Mexican president Enrique Peña-Nieto—shortly after over 70,000 unaccompanied Central American minors crossed into the US during the summer of 2014, in what the US media sensationally dubbed the "Border Crisis." This supposed Border Crisis was a serious problem for US politicians on both sides of the aisle. Republicans could not deny the child migrants entry into the country without appearing heartless, and Democrats could not accept them without seeming spineless. Plus, as US asylum law and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly state, all persons who entered the US had a right to seek asylum. But to allow 70,000 unaccompanied minors to file for asylum within an already backlogged system would essentially be to admit culpability for the collapse of the Northern Triangle.[9] To systematically deny all Central Americans their right to petition for asylum, however, would draw international outcry.

The solution was the Southern Border Program, though it did not overtly frame itself as an anti-immigration or border militarization initiative. Instead, the Program was framed both in development and humanitarian terminology—the Obama administration agreed to help Mexico "modernize" its "immigration infrastructure" (Wilson & Valenzuela 2014) and address "humanitarian concerns, especially for migrant children" (Smith 2015). Peña-Nieto echoed this rhetoric, describing the Program as a means to spur economic growth in Mexico's historically economically depressed southern region through two implemented phases: First, to secure its southern border in order to "safeguard migrants' human rights." Second, to increase the economic development of the region through special economic zones made safe for multinational investment through "marshaling international crossings [of people]" (Peña Neito 2014).

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[9] I do not mean an abstract, historical culpability. In 2009, the US State Department, then headed by Hillary Clinton, supported—and possibly helped organize—a military coup against the democratically elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya. Though Zelaya was deposed, the coup quickly devolved into infighting and general government collapse. In the vacuum, Central American gangs, particularly the MS-13, were able to effectively control large swaths of the country (Weisbrot 2014).

The consequences of framing SBP as development initiative are several. First, migrants were transformed from potential subjects into objects impeding the flow of capital. Second, in order to combat these impediments to capital, border enforcement must be tied not only to a traditional, geographic border but also to special economic zones. Under the Program, especially in its early years, special economic zones were designated precisely where traditional migrant routes used to be, and special care was taken to "relieve" these zones of the burden of migration and "smooth" them for multination investment. It was under this rationale—of opening new Mexican markets for investment—that lead to the resulting militarization of Mexico's southern border. In less than a year, dozens of mobile checkpoints ("volantas") were installed throughout the country. Though most of the checkpoints were scattered across the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Tabasco, they also appeared further north in areas known to be well-traversed by migrants, sometimes over a thousand miles into the interior of the country. (Today, it is common for these checkpoints to essentially appear anywhere in the country, at any time, without warning.) As I previously described in my book *Border Hacker* (2022):

> Nearly overnight, a quasi-army of immigration agents, federal police, and soldiers descended upon southern Mexico. They came in fleets of souped-up four-wheel-drive vehicles with machine guns mounted on the roof. Scores of new mobile immigration checkpoints appeared out of thin air, just long enough to detain hundreds of people, then disappeared again, only to materialize elsewhere. In Hermanos, it felt like an overwhelming and mysterious force lurked just outside our walls. It wasn't uncommon to see someone who, in an effort to avoid the new checkpoints, had walked the bottoms of their feet clean off in the jungle, and migrants stumbled into the shelter in various states of shell shock after being beaten and left for dead. (8-9)

During the Program's first year, deportations of Central American migrants rose 78%, and 541% for children ages ten and under, and the number of migrants assaulted, kidnapped, and killed in Mexico increased just as drastically (Vonk 2016). Just as with Díaz's account of swearing to kill the native caciques in order to stop human sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of women and children, so too did the Program make Central American migrants' journeys much more deadly in the name of human rights and child protection. As an immigration officer with Grupos Beta—Mexico's National Institute of Migration's "humanitarian" division, which was greatly expanded under the Program—remarked to me, "We are here to guarantee migrants' human rights. But we can only guarantee those rights when they are in custody. When they are traveling on their own, there is no one who can enforce those rights." Just as a native body never became fully human until it was already sacrificed and therefore too late to save, under the Program, migrants' human rights only seemed to enter into the picture after they have been hunted down and made immobile by immigration forces.

During this sharp uptick in detentions and deportations, I began to hear rumors of migrants being kidnapped and their organs stolen. Migrants stuck in small towns throughout southern Oaxaca especially repeated these rumors, claiming that there were bodies without organs scattered around the jungle in between pueblos. The rumors were mostly concentrated around the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán—all rural states in southern Mexico that migrants must travel through on their way north to the US. Initially, this was very confusing to me. Though migrants often go missing while traveling in isolation through the southern region's various jungles and mountains, they are also far away from the medical facilities and doctors necessary for a successful transplant. That someone might kill a migrant in the jungle, cut out their organs, pack

them safely in ice, and then transport them to a nearby city is incredibly unlikely. And yet these were the rumors I encountered over and over again—that migrants had seen bodies with hollowed out chest cavities in the remotest corners of southern Mexico. I'd especially begun to hear whispers in Chahuites, Oaxaca, a tiny pueblo immediately south of Hermanos. For centuries, Chahuites had been a sleepy, out-of-the-way agricultural hamlet—"Chahuites: Capital of Mangos" proclaims a sign at the town entrance—and migrants essentially had no reason to stop there. But after the Program, tens of thousands of Central Americans began traveling through the pueblo on foot in order to avoid the new immigration checkpoints. By mid-2015, there was already plenty of news coverage that claimed more migrants were kidnapped in the jungles outside of Chahuites than just about anywhere else in all of Mexico (see Chaca 2015; Martínez 2015).

But the rumors of organ harvesting were very hard to confirm. Of the dozens of migrants I spoke with, not one ever professed to have seen a harvested corpse themselves. Instead, it was always that they knew someone who knew someone who'd seen a body in the jungle with its chest cavity hollowed out. There were never any news stories that confirmed the rumors, nor were there any official reports at local police stations. In addition to living in the general area for months, I specifically stayed in Chahuites for several weeks with migrants in order to, among other things, attempt to find someone who had witnessed evidence of organ harvesting themselves, even walking around the jungle outside of town where migrants were said to travel. I never encountered anyone or anything that confirmed the rumors. Though I don't doubt that organ harvesting very well could have been happening around Chahuites or other areas of southern Mexico, I was never able to find any solid evidence of it myself over the course of eight years of research.[10]

I did find it curious, however, that the rumors coincided with the closure of the infamous train passage known as "The Beast" ("La Bestia" in Spanish). As I wrote in *Border Hacker*:

> The Beast was a [freight] train passage that had been a symbol of Central American migration for decades. Tens of thousands of migrants used to ride it to the US each year, braving the elements and gangs atop its rickety cars. The Beast was dangerous, but it was fast. If you rode it hard and pushed your luck, you could make it across Mexico in two weeks. Even better, you could do it for free, without hiring a smuggler. But after the Program, immigration forces swarmed the tracks. Every week there was a new report of agents pulling hundreds of migrants off the speeding train, or even shooting at them as the cars whipped by. Migrants had no choice but to navigate the jungles and deserts of southern Mexico on foot—vast swaths of isolated country where gangs and drug cartels roamed. No one knew exactly how many migrants went missing in those obscure and veiled corners of Mexico. But people kept walking into the unknown because it was still safer than facing the foot soldiers of the Program. (28)

In 2014 and 2015, the Beast seemed to be the primary focus of Mexico's immigration

[10] To clarify, there has been some of the harvesting of migrant organs in the north of Mexico, where mass graves of migrants are periodically uncovered. I have spoken with several people affiliated with city governments in northern Mexico who claimed to be aware of occurrences of organ trafficking around their cities, including incidences of bodies found on the outskirts of town with missing organs. All of these interlocutors requested to remain anonymous, fearing that they would face retaliation from cartels and government officials alike. However, I never came across city officials in southern Mexico, where these rumors were occurring in 2015, who had similar stories.

enforcement. Indeed, Mexico often claimed that clearing the train of migrants was simply what needed to be done to facilitate the special economic zones that the train supposedly ran through, though no maps of such zones were ever released, and there has essentially been no documentation of substantial financial investment—either by the government nor multinational corporations—or factory construction in these areas. The only significant "infrastructural" project undertaken by the Program was the dismantling of the historic La Bestia train passage. Before 2014, the Mexican government actually required train companies to install protective railings on their freight cars, in order to protect migrants from falling. But under SBP, the government reversed its policy and required train companies to saw the railings off again. Anti-immigrant architecture was also erected along The Beast's tracks. Bollards were installed to trip migrants as they ran to catch the train, and concrete arches were built to sweep off anyone sitting atop a train car. An overt part of the Program, then, was to actually create circumstances and terrain in which it was more likely than ever that migrants actually could injure or even lose a body part while traveling through Mexico.

Initially, I conceived of migrants being banned from the Beast as a kind of material loss, which, of course, it was. Migrants and migrant activists alike spoke of it in those terms. They had lost the train. Immigration had taken it from them. During one demonstration I attended against the Southern Border Program in Arriaga, Chiapas, migrants chanted in unison, "Nos robaron el tren, nos robaron el tren" (They stole the train from us, they stole the train from us.) But that wasn't exactly right. The train never belonged to migrants in the first place. The rail infrastructure, such as the train stations and tracks, was owned by the Mexican state, and the trains themselves were either owned by the state as well, or by multinational corporations. And, though the Program made immigration raids on the Beast much more regular, they had still happened occasionally before the Program. It was also well known that gangs like MS-13 and Calle 18 claimed a certain amount of sovereignty in areas that the train passed through, stating that if any migrants wanted to cross "their territory" they would have to pay a fee, most often with money, but sometimes with sex or other favors.

By 2015, Hermanos en el Camino—which had hosted over 400 migrants per night before the Program, the vast majority of whom arrived via the train—no longer filled even 100 beds. Almost none of the migrants arrived by train, and many had to navigate the 300-mile stretch from Mexico's southern border to the town of Ixtepec, where Hermanos is located, almost entirely on foot. What was once a couple day's ride through Mexico now easily took weeks or months of punishing physical activity, which was simply out of the question for many of the people fleeing their homes in Central America. Migrants still crossed into Mexico, but then they would end up stuck. While working in Hermanos, I began to understand that what migrants had lost under the Program was a *means of migration*, one that was relatively systematized and straightforward—before the Program, any migrant could hop on the Beast, and it would take them north. Migrants never owned this means of migration, but for decades they'd had unfettered access to it. Now their ability to ride Beast without mass interference from, and detention by, Mexican immigration forces was gone. And with the loss of this particular means of migration, migrants also lost a means of producing an understanding of, and a narrative around, their migration as such. The trains still ran through Mexico, but everything that made the Beast *the Beast*—the knowledge of how to ride it, the language it provided to describe one's migration, the communities that sprung up around it to cater to the migrants traveling north—was dead.

Carlos Castro and his family were part of the tens of thousands of migrants who ended up stranded in southern Mexico once the Program went into effect. As Carlos explained to me, he

understood riding the Beast as a rite of passage:

> Carlos: I first rode the train when I was sixteen. It's part of growing up and being an adult. When I rode the Beast for the first time, some older guys I knew taught me how to run the right way to catch it, and, like, who you should stay away from so you don't get robbed. There's a lot to learn. And then I taught the same stuff to my younger brothers too.
>
> Levi: Do you think that this kind of knowledge—how to board the train and other things—do you think that this is a knowledge that is passed down between generations?
>
> Carlos: For sure, man. At this point, people's grandparents, and even some of their grandparents' grandparents probably, have ridden the Beast. It's like a kind of test. You want to prove that you can do it.
>
> Levi: What do you think will happen to this knowledge now that you can't ride the Beast anymore?
>
> Carlos: I don't know, man. I hope people can start riding it again soon. Because we don't have any idea about how to get through Mexico now [that the Southern Border Program is in effect]. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go.

Most interestingly, Carlos stated that it didn't even feel like he was migrating anymore, because he and other migrants in Tapachula couldn't actually move.

> Levi: How many migrants are living here [in Tapachula] now like you?
>
> Carlos: I don't know, dude. Probably, like, over a thousand easy. And a lot of people have been here way longer than me and my family. They've been here for forever. I don't even know if you could even call us migrants, to be honest with you. We've been stuck for too long. We can't move anymore.

Carlos' clientele were usually Hondurans from his hometown of La Ceiba, who paid him to guide them through Mexico up to one of the various northern border cities—usually Reynosa or Juarez. With so many years spent on the Beast, Carlos often talked about the train like it was almost part of his own body. "I don't know how to explain it," he said, "but it's almost like me and the Beast are stuck together, like we're the same thing."

After the hitmen had fired bullets into the Castros' home in Honduras, Carlos had rushed back south and met them at the Mexi-Guatemala border. He had planned to ride with his family on the Beast all the way to Monterrey, where he knew of an abandoned housing project that they could squat in. Almost all of the Castro siblings had a different father, none of whom they were in contact with, and it was clear that, as the oldest brother, Carlos saw himself as something of the family patriarch. *He* had rescued his family in Honduras, he said, and now *he* was going to lead them to safety. This notion was reinforced by the fact that, for about five years now, Carlos had been the main breadwinner of the family, as he was able to earn much more money smuggling than his mother or siblings could through menial labor—either as farmhands or maquila workers—in Honduras. But in the few months between leaving Monterrey, collecting his family in La Ceiba, and crossing back into Mexico, the Southern Border Program had silently gone into full effect, and

Carlos had suddenly become a migrant who could not migrate, a smuggler who could not smuggle, and a quasi-father who could not promise his family protection.

Neither Carlos nor either of his brothers, Darin and Santos, knew anything about the geography of Mexico. Without the Beast to guide them, they were totally lost, and they decided it was therefore best to stay put and out of sight in Tapachula for the time being, rather than get caught attempting to walk north to the next pueblo. Because the local migrant shelter was full, they dragged several plywood boards and cardboard boxes they'd found in the trash into the jungle. At the bank of a stream, they cleared a small area of vegetation and laid the scraps over the dirt to build a rudimentary camp. It was clear that such rough living was undermining Carlos's claim to patriarchal authority, especially with his sister Tati , who—five months pregnant and still nursing a toddler who could barely walk—would loudly proclaim that she'd rather take her chances back in Honduras with a roof over her head than sit in the jungle with her "delusional" brother, who would not even allow her to leave to buy an ice cream downtown. Immigration regularly patrolled the downtown area, and Carlos was worried that the family looked "too Honduran" and would be immediately spotted and detained. I came to understand that, in US racial terminology, looking "too Honduran" meant having the somatic appearance of being "Afro-Latinx." As another Honduran migrant—who traveled with the Castro's for part of their journey—remarked, "You can tell they're catrachos [a nickname for Hondurans] because of their skin and hair. They're morenos [dark skinned people]."

The sudden invisiblization of migrants—of forcing them out of public spaces like downtown areas and into the jungle—was very much a calculated tactic of the Program, especially when it came to kicking migrants off the Beast. For decades, the Beast had been *the* symbol of Central American migration. As I previously wrote, part of its prominence in the media was undoubtedly how neatly it appeared to portray the Central American journey:

> It was an image—the huddled masses hurtling north on a monster made of iron—that belonged to a simpler world, one in which real machines carried real people seeking jobs in American factories that really existed. It stirred something deep in the psyche Americana, where the drama of the hardened poor could play out for the benefit of journalists and activists and politicians. But that world was gone now. (2022, 73)

The Beast was, in many senses, a stage. It provided a picturesque scene for reports about migrant hardship and suffering. All an anthropologist, journalist, or policymaker had to do was wait along any of the thousands of miles of rail throughout Mexico, and soon enough they would see—and be able to speak with—migrants traveling on the train. The Beast also provided a very tidy image for the emerging neoliberal era, codified by the passage NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) in Mexico, and its Central American companion CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement): capital was allowed to flow freely, but the migrants who followed it were not. However, this is usually where both journalistic and academic analyses of the Beast stopped. The few popular accounts of what it was like to ride the Beast—such as Sonia Nazario's nonfiction book *Enrique's Journey* (2006), or Cary Joji Fukunaga's feature film *Sin Nombre* (2009)—tended to focus on the dangers of boarding the train, especially the risks of gang violence or of losing one's limbs or life after falling off it. Academic accounts—though more thorough in documenting the various dangers of the Beast and describing them in terms of structural violence (Vogt 2013; 2015), gendered violence (Alvarez 2020), and human rights violations (Sánchez 2020)—have still not provided an in-depth analysis of migrants' relation to, or embodied experience of, the Beast beyond a recitation of the dangers of riding it. Another way to say this is that, up until now,

analyses of the Beast have largely been framed in terms of *risk*, a risk that is frequently framed around the overtly negative bodily consequences associated with using it to travel. This framing, then, could be seen as implicitly incorporating a "modern" conceptualization of risk, in which risks almost inherently call out to be "mitigated," not so unlike how the victim's body calls out to be saved by humanitarianism (Battistelli & Grazia Galantino 2019). But, as Niklas Luhmann has stated, the idea of risk originally emerged in the transition between the medieval and modern ages to describe "the realization that certain advantages are to be gained only if something is at stake" (1993).

The more I spoke with Carlos and other migrants, the more I began asking what had actually been at stake in riding the Beast beyond potentially negative physical risks. Carlos often used anthropomorphic terminology to describe the Beast. It was a fickle creature whose wills and whims had to be intuited—it might "decide to leave the station all of a sudden," or it might "be tired" one night and decide to stay put. It could "get hungry" and "eat" people, but it could also "have energy today" or be in a "tranquil" mood—meaning, that it was either moving fast or providing a relatively smooth ride. Occasionally, migrants would even refer to the churning wheels of the Beast as its "mouth" (la boca). During these conversations, I came to understand the Beast not just as a train or machine, but *as a beast*, as a kind of ambivalent creature that must be engaged with overtly. A certain set of protocols for engagement with this Beast were created and passed down for generations between Central American migrants of the Northern Triangle. The body of the Beast was the material encapsulation of a very specific body of knowledge, one that taught travelers how to migrate across Mexico "correctly" if not legally, and that at times seemed almost ritualistic in its instruction and proscription.

This is how you run alongside the Beast to avoid it sucking you into its mouth. You should never run alongside it without first checking the terrain around the tracks to ensure you won't be unexpectedly tripped up by large rocks or debris.

This is how you grab the ladder of the Beast to avoid losing your grip: First with the hand closest to the train, then with the one furthest away. You should never grab with the furthest hand first, because the Beast will yank your arm closer, twist your body, and suck you into its mouth. For the same reason, once both hands are on the ladder, you must step up onto the lowest rung with the foot closest to the train, then the foot furthest away.

This particular kind of train car is preferable because it has a railing along the ledge, and you can synch your belt to it so that you don't roll off if you fall asleep. You should never ride at night without first securing yourself in some manner.

This is the hole in the back of the train car that you can crawl into to hide from gang members, but you have to be very skinny and less than 5'6" tall. You should know hiding there is a risk, though, because there is no escape if you are discovered.

The loss of access to the Beast, then, was a loss of a kind of *body* of knowledge and a *body* of work—a set of specific physical techniques and practices that, when repeated, also provided a symbolic order that allowed migrants to interpret their journeys (both its hardships and triumphs) through a particular language developed and passed on for decades. Rather than simply being an uncertain risk that migrants had to unfortunately take (as the Beast has often been described in migration literature), it rather provided a material *certainty* for their passage. It guided migrants in a particular direction and at a relatively consistent speed. Migrants more or less understood how their bodies would have to move through the world, and they were able to pass this knowledge between each other. Without the Beast, the migrant journey was not just more grueling physically and less direct geographically, but also symbolically. During the first several years of the Program,

many migrants, especially young men, expressed to me that one of the most frustrating aspects of being stranded in Mexico for so long was that their families—especially older relatives who had successfully made journeys to the US before the Program went into effect—didn't understand what was taking them so long. "My uncle told me that I need to stop partying and chasing girls in Mexico," one seventeen-year-old said. "He doesn't believe that I can't actually get to the [US] border. He keeps asking me what's taking so long. He thinks I'm lazy."

But envisioning the Beast as an actual beast—that is, as a kind of uncanny being or entity unto itself—was not exactly right either. After all, the Beast was not an autonomous creature. Instead, what I came to understand was that—though they have been conflated by migrants, activists, journalists, and academics alike (as well as by me, until now)—*the train and the Beast are not actually the same thing*. It is as if, strangely, there are two organs that exist simultaneously within the same material train. The train infrastructure—the tracks, the stations, the conductors, the freight cars, etc.—is an *organ of capital.* This organ allows for the swift movement of commodities through Mexico. The owners of this organ (again, the train infrastructure), whether state or private, did not name it "the Beast." Migrants invented this name. Nor did the owners of this organ, whether state or private, originally intend for migrants to use it. Migrants invented this form of transportation. The train infrastructure does not need migrants; it can just as easily perform its professed and original function without them as it does with them. Most importantly, the Southern Border Program did not target this organ, and today the train infrastructure continues to transport vast flows of capital as it has for decades.

The Beast, on the other hand, is an *organ of migration*. It cannot exist without migrants. In fact, it only existed because migrants made it so by riding it. Seen in this light, "The Beast" is not simply a train that takes migrants north, but a kind of uncanny, almost phantasmic organ transposed on and into the first (the organ of capitalism), that only exists when a migrant mounts it, and therefore *transforms the migrant body as such*. That is what is beastly: the union of the migrant and the machine. It is precisely this union, and the uneasy relation between the two, that structured the Central American migrant body and its capabilities up until the intervention of the Southern Border Program in 2014. The Beast was a manifestation of an otherwise—something that emerged from an organ of capital that was not intended to emerge, and that worked toward something different (even as it still worked, of course, for capital as well). The Southern Border Program's "killing" of the Beast, then, was a process of amputation. It was about denying Central American migrants the use of an organ that they had acquired due to their inventiveness and that, simultaneously, had also invented them. To think this way is to follow Brian Massumi's claim that "The thing is a pole of the body and vice versa. Body and thing are extensions of each other. They are mutual implications: co-thoughts of two-headed perception. The two headed perception is the world" (2021, 95).

I made this connection while working in Hermanos en el Camino and traveling along the desolate tracks of the Beast. Migrants' concerns over organ harvesting, I realized, were expressed in tandem with the amputation of the main organ of Central American migration. This realization changed my entire outlook on what the Southern Border Program is and how it functions, as well as my understanding of what Central American migrant bodies (and all bodies) actually are. I began to see the Program not only in the ways it is normally described—generally as a campaign of border militarization and externalization, as well as of (panoptic) hyper-surveillance—but also as an institution which seeks to change the Central American migrant body in all senses of the phrase (physically, somatically, psychically, symbolically), especially in regard to its *organs*. The Program is an attempt, as Mexican migration scholar Roxana Rodríguez Ortiz has written, to reach

"migracíon cero" (zero migration) by re-territorializing the space of Mexico in such a way that migrants can no longer migrate (2020). However, it does not do this by simply detaining and deporting as many migrants as possible. Instead, it ultimately endeavors to strip the migrant body of its ability to migrate full-stop, thereby *ending the category of migrant altogether*.

Like the Mexica in the wake of the fall of Tenochtitlán, under the Southern Border Program migrants have found that their bodies no longer possess the same capabilities. In order to destroy the Mexica, Cortés burned all the organs that structured their being—the causeways, pyramids, and markets of Tenochtitlán. Without these organs, the Mexica had no choice but to become something else, the subjects of New Spain. Likewise, after the "killing" of the Beast, migrants' bodies were no longer the same thing. As Carlos said, "We can't move anymore." In the next chapter, I define the (migrant) body, outline the analytic framework I will employ, and demonstrate through ethnographic analysis how the Southern Border Program seeks to end the category of migrant through the intense regulation of these bodies.

Interlude I

One day, Carlos' shirt went missing. Money was tight on the migrant trail—especially for the Castro family, who had to figure out ways to pay for baby formula, diapers, and Maria's medications, extra things many other migrants did not have to deal with—and Carlos did not have money to simply buy a new one. Up until this point, Carlos—at least in front of me—had affected what might be described as unflagging optimism of the will. No matter how bad things got, he seemed to have a faith that he would be able to navigate them accordingly. Even when the Beast was shut down, and his livelihood abruptly taken away from him, Carlos had found the Viacrucis, he said, and therefore another means of accomplishing the goal of relocating his family to Monterrey. He had, according to him, "figured it out."

But while in Hermanos en el Camino, Carlos had stepped into the communal shower of the men's dormitory and left his shirt—which he'd just scrubbed in the outdoor wash basin—draped over a tree branch to dry. While he was in the shower, it had disappeared. The logical explanation was that someone else had stolen it, but, even after hours of questioning, no one claimed to have witnessed the culprit. Without any clues as to who had taken his shirt, Carlos fell into a great despair.

"It's not just that someone stole it," he said. "It's that they aren't even going to wear it."

What did he mean? I asked. Why would someone steal a shirt and then not wear it?

"Because look around," he said, gesturing to the Viacrucis. "If someone puts it on, I'll see. I'll know it was them who robbed me. So they have to hide it until the Viacrucis is over."

The lack of the shirt, though somewhat uncomfortable in itself, was not the point for Carlos. After all, the shelter had a storeroom full of donated clothing, and shelter directors would have immediately provided him with another shirt if he'd asked for one. Nor was the lost shirt special to Carlos in some way—it wasn't a favorite shirt, or even one that he'd particularly cared for one way or the other, he said. Instead, the thing that bothered him most was that, at least in his mind, someone had stolen his shirt knowing good and well that they couldn't even wear it for the time being. That the shirt was just sitting in the thief's bag, unused, while he was condemned to endure the blistering heat of southern Mexico completely exposed, sent Carlos into a deep melancholy. Losing one of the most basic organs of the human body—clothing—perhaps also forced him to acknowledge how bare he felt these days, how naked and impotent the loss of the Beast had rendered his smuggler's corpus. He wandered around shirtless for the rest of the day, which, in a Catholic shelter, was technically against the rules. "I can't do nothing, Levi," he kept repeating in English, his shoulders gradually smoldering to a deep shade of reddish brown, "I don't have nothing."

Eventually, dinner was called. While we were standing in line, the nuns told Carlos that he was not allowed to eat until he put on a shirt. He didn't have one, he spat. It had been stolen.

"Well, that's nothing to worry about," said one of the nuns trying to calm him. "Let's get you a new one."

Carlos dutifully trudged behind her into the storeroom and then emerged some minutes later wearing an over-sized t-shirt that read, "US Open 1998" set against a purple and green tennis racquet. The next day, huge pus-filled blisters had bloomed across his shoulders and back. "I don't understand," he said in Spanish as he picked at them, "I don't usually get sunburned. I'm dark [morenito]." Over the course of the day, the blisters only increased Carlos' anger. Not only were

they painful, but they were a physical reminder of the theft, a physical discomfort that fed into and intermeshed with his psychic one. He sat on the slide of the shelter's playground, which pointed toward the tracks of the Beast. A line of train cars had been sitting there, completely dormant, since yesterday morning, just before his shirt had disappeared. Staring out at the migrant-less train, Carlos began to utter "I can't do nothing" again, along with a new question: "What is my skin doing? What is my skin doing?" Whenever he put his shirt back on, the cloth would stick to the pus and blood, and whenever he took it off, he would have rip the wound open again.

I was not sure how conscious Carlos was of this himself, but the day previous, with his shirt off, it was apparent that he had a stark farmer's tan. Though the skin on his face and forearms was dark, his torso was much paler. With the loss of certain external organs (like his shirt, like the Beast), not even his organic ones (like his epidermis) were working the way they used to or the way he assumed they would. Carlos pulled his new shirt up and asked me to inspect the blisters. They had bubbled up in a remarkably straight line across his shoulders, and, standing behind him, the neat line of pustules ran parallel to the line of train cars that sat empty before us. The disappearance of the Beast was in some sense tangled up with the disappearance of his skin. Though the train remained, it was a painful reminder—like a blister, an open wound—that everything seemed to have changed, even his organic body, and to have changed for the worse.

Chapter 2

The Body Migrant: Reconceptualizing the human body as structured by distance

A return to André Leroi-Gourhan

If the main concern of this text is the migrant body, then at the outset what a body is must be defined, as well as what its organs are in relation to it. When I use the term "body," I do not mean what is colloquially understood by body—that is, the biological body, the zoological body, the somatic or physical or "natural" body (there is no such thing as a natural body). I am not simply speaking of the body as bounded by, and ending in, the flesh. Instead, I mean the body as oeuvre or *corpus*, that is, as a *body of work*.

In order to do this, I turn to the French archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan. Despite his esteem in 20th century structuralist circles, Leroi-Gourhan seems to have been all but forgotten in recent years, especially in the US. But I believe that he saw something about the body that is now essential to conceptualizing the way human bodies are categorized and segregated under 21st century citizenship. Leroi-Gourhan's claim was that what made human beings unique from other animal life was their immense

> capacity to *distance* themselves from their environment, both external and internal […] The whole of our evolution has been oriented toward placing outside ourselves what in the rest of the animal world is achieved inside by species adaptation. The most striking material fact is certainly the "freeing" of tools, but the fundamental fact is really the freeing of the word and our unique ability to transfer our memory to a social organism outside ourselves. (1993, 235, emphasis mine)

It was erect posture, claims Leroi-Gourhan, inherited from other humanoid ancestors, which primarily set the human being on a trajectory different from other animal species, not its larger brain size. There was something unique about the physical *structure* of the human, specifically in its ability to walk upright on two feet, which stripped its body of fangs and claws, resulting in a seemingly feeble creature unable to protect itself. But this same vulnerability also produced the structural means for the hands to be "freed," hands that could then produce the organs externally that the organic body now lacked:

> Our significant genetic trait is precisely physical (and mental) *non*adaptation: a tortoise when we retire beneath a roof, a crab when we hold out a pair of pliers, a horse when we bestride a mount. We are again and again available for new forms of action, our memory transferred to books, our strength multiplied in the ox, our fist improved in the hammer. (246)

It was not that there was some innate and particularly large potential for intelligence stored in the human brain, claims Leroi-Gourhan, that allowed humans to adapt to the world, but rather that human beings were able to "secrete" the organs they lacked, thus pushing the brain and other

organs to function in increasingly complex ways in response. The predominant conceptualization of the brain as master of the body, wielding its organs at will, is inverted; rather, it is the organs that "think" for the brain, structuring the very possibilities of thought itself. By focusing on these now "freed" organs instead of the biological body, Leroi-Gourhan establishes a new methodology for interrogating the human and the human body, the implications of which are vast.

To briefly clarify, Leroi-Gourhan's intention is *not* to recuperate something essential or superior in the notion of the human as compared to the animal. As Donna Haraway has demonstrated in depth in *When Species Meet* (2013), humans and animals are sometimes joined together almost as if they are a single being by bonds of shared purpose and technology. (One is reminded again here of the conquistador and his horse.) And humans are not the only creatures to externalize organs. Birds make nests. Various chimps and apes wield rocks and sticks. But what makes the human *human*, according to Leroi-Gourhan, is its continuous "capacity to distance" itself from both its internal and external environments. This distance is in a sense profoundly material: it is quite literally the empty space between the organic body and its external organs, "the separation between tool and hand" (235). But it is also a metaphysical distance "between word and object, [and also] in the distance society creates between itself and the zoological group." Sartre called something similar "the void," Lacan a "lack." For Leroi-Gourhan, the human is the being that uniquely recognizes this distance and continuously attempts to traverse it. There is no way to successfully complete this traversal; it is an ever-continuous process, an unceasing secretion of external organs that fill in for an ever-growing number of perceived bodily lacks.

In conceiving of the human body as that which traverses a distance through the secretion of external organs, Leroi-Gourhan provides an alternative framework to contemporary literature regarding "prostheses" and "cyborgs," and other literature regarding post/transhumanism or new materialism. For Leroi-Gourhan, rather, an external organ is not something that is a mere extension or artificial implement of the human (body), as some popular conceptions of the prosthesis assume, in which a certain artificial implement/technology outside of the material body either latches onto said body or displaces it entirely. (I am thinking here of Kathleen Woodward's claim that "technology serves fundamentally as a prosthesis of the human body, one that ultimately displaces the material body" [1994, 50]). Nor is the Leroi-Gourhanian corpus a kind of cyborg, a blending or "hybrid of machine and organism" (Haraway 1985). From Leroi-Gourhan's perspective, the organism, whether animal or human, *is already a machine* in that it possesses a specific form that carries out a certain set of repeatable functions. Whether this machine is made of flesh or metal makes no difference: "Taking a general view of the body as a machine, the general mechanism of the human species has not undergone any fundamental change since the time of the first bipeds" (1993, 128). In doing so, he subverts both equations of technological evolution to social progress/superiority, as well as post-humanist conclusions that recent technological developments signal the end of the human. For Leroi-Gourhan, certain external organs emerge at certain historical moments to traverse certain urgent distances, distances that—though urgent—reveal themselves repetitiously no matter the time period or the particular point within a technological trajectory or social milieu:

> We can prove that the way in which material, technical, and economic factors are balanced influences social forms and therefore a society's thinking, but we cannot establish the principle that philosophical or religious thought coincides with a society's material development. Were that to be true, the teachings of Plato or Confucius would seem to us as archaic as a plow of the first millennium before our era. In fact, although we may think

> these teachings inappropriate to present-day social conditions as created by the evolution of material means, they do embody concepts that are still meaningful today… the thinking of an African or a citizen of ancient Gaul is completely equivalent to mine. That is not to say that each of our ways of thinking does not have its peculiarities, but only that once their reference system is known, their values become transparent. (147)

Therefore, Leroi-Gourhan conceptualizes external organs—which are supposedly outside the human, and therefore have been previously understood as *inhuman,* as only supplementary to or displacing the human—as the very things that structure our notion of the human as such; they do not simply blend with the human, they make the human possible, and they therefore *are* the human. Bernard Stiegler, inspired by Leroi-Gourhan's analysis of external organs, echoed something similar when he wrote, "The prosthesis is not a mere extension of the human body; it is the constitution of this body qua 'human'" (1998, 152-153). In this way, external organs are more body than the body, so to speak, structuring our understanding of the organic body as well—without the scalpel to cut the skin, without the microscope to see the cells, without the x-ray machine to scan the organs, it would be impossible to understand the human body as we understand it today. To think with this conception of organs is to understand that our bodies are quite literally the trains we ride, the houses we live in, the clothes we wear, and the passports we travel with. They are not simply implements, they are *us*.

Pushed to its limits, the most revolutionary aspect of Leroi-Gourhan's conceptualization of external organs is that *there is no one standard human being.* After all, the very thing that makes the human *human*—this distance and its traversing—is that it is no longer entirely bound by the biological. "Freed" from these biological restrictions, the human's beings are then structured by the external organs that it flings out over a distance. The re/production and re/organization of these organs holds the potential to create an infinite array of beings, not a definitive one. We are many creatures, many beings. "Human" is merely the category that is evoked as an attempt to universalize these beings, to group them all into a single category and header when necessary, a category that has very little to do with biological homogeneity.

Moreover, Leroi-Gourhan's logic is not even that one individual can be a distinct being from another, but rather that these beings are never solid entities, instead always changing as the external organs of their corpus change. The individual can and will be many different beings depending on which organs they possess and wield at a given moment. Any notion of an inner essence of humanity (whether mystical or biological) is dismissed. The human for Leroi-Gourhan is a creature that continuously transforms itself through its own externalization. It is structured by something exterior to it which also, paradoxically, constitutes its innermost kernel, its essential "humanness." Therefore, the human can only be measured (or sensed, or perceived, or glimpsed) at its borders, at the organs that constantly exceed its limits. The result is not that the concept of the human is merely de-centered—repositioned on some theoretically horizontal relationality with all other beings and/or objects—but rather that Leroi-Gourhan continuously forces us to the physical and conceptual ends of the human as such, the very places where our previous notions of "human" fall apart and become contested. Rather than a reification the human, Leroi-Gourhan's analysis is its most radical destabilization. It is a demand that we interrogate humanity at its limits and lapses rather than at any consistency or essence, an insistence that if anything can be glimpsed of the human, it can only be glimpsed at a border.

It is at the site of borders—that is, physical borders, international borders—where the notion of the human is often most openly contested today. Certain people are permitted to pass through these borders, but many more are not, even when international asylum law theoretically

guarantees their right to do so. In this way, their humanity is contested not just theoretically or abstractly, but legally and materially. It is specifically at places like the US-Mexico border or the Mexico-Guatemala border where the logic of human rights—with all its professions of (biological) equality—openly breaks down.

Finally, the timing of Leroi-Gourhan's thought should be contextualized. He began publishing and rose to prominence shortly after World War II, precisely at the moment that new notions of the human and human rights were being constructed on an international stage, and when terms like "asylum" and "refugee" were formalized as never before, as well as "the legal obligation of States to protect them" as the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) explains on its official webpage for the 1951 Refugee Convention (2022). As Christopher Johnson notes, "Placed in the wider context of postwar French thought, Leroi-Gourhan's work could… be seen as participating in the 'new humanism' that Lévi-Strauss was claiming for anthropology and the human sciences, adding diachronic depth to the synchronic picture of the human mind provided by structuralism. This form of scientific humanism questions the boundaries, or limits, that more traditional variants of humanism have assigned to the human" (2011). In other words, at the very moment that the postwar liberal order was establishing and legitimizing itself through the creation of international human rights law,[11] French structuralists like André Leroi-Gourhan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jacques Lacan were offering quite a different interpretation of the human. It is for this reason that I believe that Leroi-Gourhan has been forgotten, or, rather, repressed. The notion of an *extimate* humanity (see Miller 2008) is ultimately antithetical to the contemporary liberal one, which fixed the notion of "right" to a particular conception of an individualized, biological body; where this isolated body is demarcated, so too do its rights cease to exist. As the famous liberal phrase goes, "Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins."

For Leroi-Gourhan, the human body is not fixed, static, or stationary. It is not restricted by biology, nor is it ruined by technology. It continuously exceeds itself by reaching out into the distance. And so the body *moves.* The body migrates. This migration is material, as one's corpus picks up and sheds new organs. The human corpus is the sum total of all these external organs, all material culture that has been externalized since the first chopper. In reality, each "self" is only a small fragment of this Total Corpus; it is impossible to determine where my corpus ends and the other's begins, and it is therefore impossible to conceive of myself as possessing certain individual rights, because I am always already physically intertwined with the other. The human is that creature with many minds but only one body, one body fragmented between many different kinds of beings.

The Leroi-Gourhanian corpus

By returning to Leroi-Gourhan, I am not simply attempting to critique a (neo)liberal or biomedical notion of the human. Instead, I hope to provide, as John Berger says, a new "way of seeing" (2008). A new way of seeing the human and, specifically, the human body. It is a way of seeing that was first introduced to me by Central American migrants themselves. With Leroi-Gourhan, as with migrants, there is a very present awareness that the body is always in process, continuously in relation to the organs which structure its being in the world. The migrant body is

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[11] This was done particularly through the notion of asylum as established in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which I explore in much greater depth in a later chapter.

a *corpus*, a body of work, whose borders and limits are ever-changing. After all, switching one's Salvadoran passport out for a US one quite literally transforms one's being. Suddenly, the migrant's body is permitted to move through spatial and temporal orders that it could not before. Some beings can walk through walls, others can't.

In order to depict this way of seeing most accurately, I must first clarify some of Leroi-Gourhan's terminology. Throughout *Gesture and Speech*, he tends to use the words "tool" and "organ" interchangeably when speaking of the externalization process, though neither are strictly defined. Likewise, certain binaries such as "natural" and "unnatural" occasionally creep into his language, even though it is clear he is attempting to trouble those very binaries in the first place. For this reason, I will provide more concise definitions here.

Instead of "natural," I use the term *organic* to describe the part of the organic body that does work in order to sustain said body. This is easy enough to understand: the heart is an organic organ, as is the stomach. Their specific functions (to pump blood, to digest food, etc.) generally allow the body to maintain itself. But it is important to emphasize that for Leroi-Gourhan the hand is also considered something of an "organ," as it originally functioned as "no more than a five-fingered claw" (255). When it comes even to organic organs, Leroi-Gourhan does not stick to the strictly scientific categorization, even if his conceptualization of them often draws upon some aspect of the biological. Really for him, an organ is something that has a standardized and repeatable function for the body.

Next, an *external organ* is an organ exterior to the organic body that fills a lack in desired capacities. Glasses, for example, are a fairly straightforward external organ. They see where the eyes are deemed to have failed. Another is when someone without a leg employs a crutch. These—along with other things like hearing aids, wheelchairs, and even toupées—are obvious examples of external organs, because they fill a lack in what is socially understood to be the "normal," "healthy," "adept" human body (again, I do not believe in this kind of terminology, as I soon hope to show).[12] To draw upon an example that Leroi-Gourhan uses himself, a rock becomes an external organ when it is carefully selected by a prehistoric humanoid to smash a nut. The rock is chosen to address a lack in the organic body—its inability to crush the hard shell of a walnut. In this way, the rock is no longer just a rock, but a "chopper" (the archaeological classification for rocks used over and over again for crushing), an external organ. It has a name that belies a present, specific, and repeatable function.

In *Gesture and Speech*, Leroi-Gourhan uses the terms "external organs" and "tools" interchangeably. But I prefer to use "organ" consistently as it better helps to differentiate Leroi-Gourhan's conceptualization of the human body from contemporary literature on prostheses. When one thinks of tools, the image conjured is of something straightforwardly helpful, something invented, something consciously wielded with intention toward a very particular end. An organ is a more slippery thing. External organs are not always invented or wielded with intent, or wielded

[12] In some ways, in his careful tracing of human body-as-machine, Leroi-Gourhan anticipates the eventual creation of crip theory and dis/ability studies, in that he provides a means of materially analyzing how, when the world is built for certain kinds of beings, others excluded from this material being are likely to end up being interpreted as "queer" and/or "disabled." It could be said that Leroi-Gourhan actually provides a materialist and structuralist framework through which crip theory can only strengthen its analysis of a certain "order[s] of things, considering how and why it is constructed and naturalized; how it is embedded in complex economic, social, and cultural relations; and how it might be changed" (McRuer 2006, 2).

at all. I do not have to coax my heart into pumping blood. This is the gesture of the heart: it beats without our asking. Organs outside of the organic body are often quite similar. As Leroi-Gourhan writes:

> We perceive our intelligence as being a single entity and our tools as the noble fruit of our thought, whereas the Australanthropians, by contrast, seem to have possessed their tools in much the same way as an animal has claws. They appear to have acquired them, not through some flash of genius which, one fine day, led them to pick up a sharp-edged pebble and use it as an extension of their fist (an infantile hypothesis well-beloved of many works of popularization), but as if their brains and their bodies had gradually exuded them. (106)

To speak of external organs, then, is to get at something that cannot simply be picked up and put down at our whim—like the common notion of a tool—but something that is inextricably bound to our bodies and beings, a thing that exists in relation to all the other organs of the corpus, and therefore also something that, when plucked out of these relations and dropped into another milieu, no longer operates the same. My Honduran documents might be useful to me in Honduras—likely not so in the United States. In fact, my Honduran passport might be actively *harmful* to me in the US, as it could verify my undocumented status; what was once an organ becomes a tumor.

Finally, there is the *gesture* of the organ. When a carpenter picks up a hammer, they do not contemplate how to wield it. They already know that the hammer is used to repeatedly drive nails into wood, and they do not think consciously about the best way to hammer each individual nail. (Nor does a migrant, when they board the Beast, have to ponder which way is north.) The carpenter has learned over time an unconscious gesture which allows them to drive many nails rapidly and deftly. A gesture, then, is a socially constructed but largely unconscious way of wielding external organs. When one needs to pot a flower or bake a loaf of bread, one does not think of using a hammer. In this way, it is almost as if this thing called a hammer wields the carpenter as much as the carpenter wields it. It is an organ that bafflingly moves itself, irrespective of whichever individual carpenter picks it up. This is the unconscious gesture tied to all organs.

In this way, the rock-turned-chopper-turned-hammer acts as a literal part of the human body. As Leroi-Gourhan writes:

> We [have] arrived at the concept of tools as being a "secretion" of the anthropoid's body and brain. If that is so, then it is logical that the standards of natural organs should be applied to such artificial organs: They must exhibit constantly recurring forms, their nature must be fixed. The same rule in fact applies to all products of human industry in historic times: There exists a stereotype of the knife, the ax, the plough, or the aircraft that is not only the product of a coherent intelligence but is also integrated in a substance and a function. (91)

Here Leroi-Gourhan makes the important point that—though it might appear initially helpful to distinguish between organic and external organs—such a distinction is always in some sense a falsity. Can we really describe a pacemaker as an "external organ," when it is inside the body and keeps the heart beating? And can we really describe the epidermis as merely part of the organic body, when it is bound up in increasingly complex technologies that have commodify (through slavery, for instance) and manipulate it (through beauty practices like scarring, piercing, tattooing, skin bleaching, or plastic surgery).

But it is also precisely here that I depart from Leroi-Gourhan. I am not as certain that "the standards of natural organs should be applied to such artificial organs," nor that it is possible for "their nature [to] be fixed," at least completely. After all, the primary characteristic of external organs is that their uses are constructed in order to address certain socially determined lacks; they are manifestations of desire, and desire wanders. When train tracks were laid across Mexico, no one intended for migrants to board the train as well. By riding it, migrants conjured an otherwise out of an organ of capital—they began using it for something other than what it was originally created for, to chase after a desire that was their own, and therefore in some sense transformed its "nature." From this otherwise of the organ, the Beast was born.

As Lacan said, "Desire is a relation to being to lack. The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It is not the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists" (1991, 223). External organs are the concrete manifestations of the human reaching out toward desire, toward the "objet petit a" in Lacanian terms. Whereas the objet petit a is a "chimerical object of fantasy, the object causing our desire" (Zizek 2008, 69), an external organ is the material manifestation of how we attempt to acquire that unattainable object. It is that part of our corpus that *reaches out* into the impossibility of desire, forever traversing its distance. As Leon Brenner has written:

> Lacan distinguishes between the object cause of desire (also called objet petit a) and the object of desire. The object of desire is the object towards which desire tends. Desire works in such a way that, whenever we get our hands on the object we desire, desire withers for a moment only to re-emerge as a desire for another object. Thus, one should talk of objects of desire in the plural: a chain of objects whose common denominator is subjective. The object a is the algebraic notation of the common denominator of the subject's desirous tendencies. It is what causes desire rather than the object towards which it intends. It sets desire in motion and is said to determine the features that make specific objects desirable for the subject. (2020)

It is possible, then, to conceive of external organs as part of the "chain of objects whose common denominator is subjective."

This was illustrated to me very clearly while speaking with Darin, another brother from the Castro family. Unlike Carlos, who was strapping and muscular, Darin was thin and petite. He was the only member of the family who had attended high school, and afterward he'd found part-time work in La Ceiba as a receptionist in an office, rather than laboring on a farm or in a factory. Timid and quiet, his body moved differently than the rest of the Castro brothers, and he had different goals. Though the rest of his family wanted to resettle in Monterrey, Darin confided in me that he had plans to cross the border and live in the US.

"I have the American Dream," he said in careful English, which he had been teaching himself for the past two years in anticipation of the crossing.

When I asked what the American Dream meant to him, Darin paused. "I want be new me," he said finally.

But what did that mean? I persisted. How does someone become new? How does one say for sure that they have definitively achieved a dream? Especially an American one, since he had never actually been to America yet?

"I want a car, Levi," Darin snapped, switching into Spanish. "I want a car, okay? And a house too. And, I don't know, money. Money to buy nice clothes and good food and tickets to music concerts. And a cell phone, an iPhone. That's how I'll know that I'm new. When I have all those things."

For Darin, “becoming new” meant attaching particular external organs to his corpus. Part of this was, no doubt, tied to particular notions he had surrounding US consumerism. But, as Darin explained, it was also tied to certain notions of ability. Back in Honduras, he had to walk several miles to and from work each day, which he hated because, by the time he’d arrived at work, his clothes—of which he had few and could not easily wash—were already drenched in sweat. And when he returned home at night, he had to share a mattress with his brother Santos and their mother Maria in their two-bedroom shack, while Tati and the small children slept in the other room. The American Dream—that blanket name that so many migrants use to describe their own objet petit a—would likely be much more elusive than Darin anticipated. But, in the meantime, his acquisition of external organs (a car he could drive instead of walking, a house with a bed just for him, a closet overflowing with nice clothes which he could launder at his leisure in his very own washing machine) would certainly restructure his corpus. They were the “chain of objects” whose common denominator would be a new him.

Would that be enough? I asked. Would having all those fancy things mean he’d gotten what he wanted?

Well, no, he replied. What he ultimately wanted was US citizenship. Occasionally, Darin would ask if he could hold my passport, to just feel the weight of the document in his hands, trace its contours, flip through its pages. “If I become a citizen,” he asked, “I’ll be able to travel to other countries like you, right? I’ll have a passport like yours.”

Yes, I said, he’d eventually have a passport like mine. Where would he want to go?

Somewhere he could fly to on an airplane, he said. Japan, Italy, China, England. As long as you could get there on a plane, he wanted to go. For Darin, the American Dream was not simply the wish to consume goods, or even to see another part of the world, but to *possess the ability to traverse distances* that his corpus could not otherwise traverse with a Honduran passport. He wanted the ability to follow where his desire led him.

This is, I believe, a departure from how even Leroi-Gourhan saw external organs, which he understood as secretions that filled an overt lack in the organic body alone. But, when taking the diversity of human material culture into account, there are objects externalized by human beings that do not aid the organic body in any obvious way (to limit external organs to this capacity alone would be to fall back into an inflexible conception of a prosthesis). There is no organic lack, for instance, that a passport fills. It is about as “unnatural” an organ as one can find. However, situating organs neatly within the nature-culture divide proves unwieldy. For example, organic organs might initially be conceived of as falling squarely within the realm of nature, but that is not necessarily the case. For the Mexica, the heart did much more than simply pump blood. In the hands of a skilled priest, it was also an offering for the gods that could summon rain or ensure a bountiful crop of maize (Tiesler & Olivier 2020). And even if one does not believe, as the Mexica did, that the heart actually possesses the means to bring a good harvest, it very much did provide the means for a whole system of sacrifice to be set in motion—the heart was the organ that structured the figure of the Mexica priest. Still pumping in the priest’s hands, the victim’s organ became his organ, it structured his being.

Even seemingly simple external organs like a chopper or a hammer, which are recognitions of a lack in the “natural” body that then crystallizes in the physical world, must do so by means of culture; how a particular club looks and is wielded is at least somewhat dependent on the society it emerges within. Here one is reminded of Lévi-Strauss’ Haida cedar wood club in *Wild Thought*, which is an object of “mythical symbolism as much as… practical function,” something that kills a fish while also providing the story for why the fish must be killed (47, 2021).

But an external organ like a passport has no practical function. It kills no fish, so to speak, cracks no walnuts, and there is no obvious "stereotype" that preceded it (as Leroi-Gourhan claims that a sharp incisor provides a certain obvious form for the knife). Instead, one is tempted to say that the passport lies at the far end of culture—relying almost entirely on mythical symbolism, it could be understood to be an extremely "cultural organ." But that doesn't make it any less important or necessary than a "natural organ." Far from it. Since a passport is essentially the only thing that permits contemporary human bodies to cross international borders, at a militarized checkpoint it can quickly become unclear if a body without a passport is even human anymore; if an undocumented migrant attempts to cross an international border, it is safe to assume they will be treated *inhumanely*. The passport is therefore more body than the body, more human than the human, even though it is entirely "unnatural" in that it does not compensate for any organic function, but rather for the *inorganic disfunction* of the border. And yet today—with the proliferation of biometric technologies like fingerprint, retinal, and facial scanners—the passport is an "external" organ that is continuously re-intermeshing itself with the organic. One's fingertips or retinas or facial structure, because they have been connected to a corresponding passport in a digital bio-datadase, become the organs which allow the body to traverse both natural and cultural terrain (Walters 2008; Lyon & Topak 2013). Even when one's organic body is dead, a mortuary passport is required for the corpse to travel (Marian 2018).

This presents a problem. Is the passport really such an *external* organ if it is so intimately tied to our organic bodies? In the end, is its protuberance really all that different from the human thumb—the emergence of which Leroi-Gourhan so carefully traces over millennia, starting with the structure of the humanoid body acquiring the ability to stand erect on two feet, thereby freeing the hands to grasp and eventually creating a distance in which an opposable thumb might emerge—which dangles at the extremities of the body, nearly external, but not quite? Ultimately, it is important not to distinguish whether a passport (or any organ) is definitively organic or external—here the organic-inorganic and internal-external divides often prove as unwieldy as the nature-culture one—but rather to conceive of all the organs of the body to be in extimate relation to one another, as structuring and working for the same corpus. To see the body in this way is to understand that, increasingly in the 21st century, the passport (and all its subsidiaries, such as visas, driver's licenses, and other identification documents) is one of the organs that looms largest over the human corpus.

The individual body versus the conjoined corpus

To think with external organs is to immediately go beyond any notion of the individual body. When I put a hammer down, for instance, someone else can pick it up. In the US, a nuclear family is a group entity which shares the organs of a house (and often a car, bank account, and the like). A library is that institution which allows for the organs of books to be shared, rather than purchased and owned individually. When I step onto the metro in Mexico City, it is an organ for both myself and all of the other commuters. Attempting to determine exactly where my body stops and theirs begins is impossible. I am forced to confront the fact that I am not an individual, in that much of my corpus is structured by external organs which are others' external organs as well.

Instead, it is more helpful, at least ethnographically speaking, to look for those moments that one attempts to delineate their body—where they draw the line to say "this is uniquely me" versus when they wish to partake in a more communal corpus. The conquistadors' assertion that

the Mexica were human, for instance, is also implicitly a claim to their organs. To understand the other as human is to recognize that not only are our organic bodies largely the same, but that our external organs—which might initially seem so foreign and bizarre—can be shared and attached to our corpuses as well. To see the other as human is to already see our corpuses intertwining, and therefore that we are materially bound together.

This presents a metaphysical conundrum. To recognize the other as human is also to immediately compromise my own body, because our corpuses can quickly intertwine, binding us together both materially and symbolically. (To welcome the stranger means providing a roof over their head and a warm meal, to invite them into my corpus.) It also implies the inverse—if one is in every way resistant to intertwining their external organs with the other, this is in fact an implicit rejection of their humanity. Jim Crow era segregation immediately comes to mind here, and its mantra "Separate but Equal," in which external organs were kept separate as a means of preventing intermingling between white and black populations, and black populations were granted only cheapened versions of the external organs that white populations had. Today, a more recent iteration of this segregatory process is through the notion of the "undocumented immigrant," in which a certain population is deemed unworthy of acquiring most of the organs needed to live in the 21st century US (and, increasingly, Mexico as well) because they lack the organ of a legal immigration document; generally speaking, undocumented migrants in the US cannot take out a mortgage to buy a house, acquire a license to drive a car, or access scholarships or loans to receive a college education. To be undocumented is to struggle with a lack in one's corpus, a lack that was placed there by the state.

Hernán Cortés took a somewhat different approach. He neither openly intertwined his organs with the Mexica, nor did he create a system of segregation, in which the conquistadors maintain keep their corpuses and the indigenous peoples' theirs. Rather, Cortés razed Tenochtitlán (whereas the conquistadors seemingly had no concept of, or worry about, miscegenation, Cortés was still very concerned with what Leroi-Gourhan terms *mélanges*,[13] that is, the intermixture of a somatic body with particular external organs which structure a particular notion of a somatic type as such). In order to dominate the Mexica fully, to turn them into the subjects of New Spain, Cortés destroyed their external organs as well, all of those things that structured the Mexica being in the world—their temples, codexes, clothing, and the like. Moreover, he did not simply stop at destroying the material organs in front of him, but also attempted to destroy the technologies that made the externalization of these organs possible as well. To tear down literally every Mexica building was an attempt to destroy Mexica architecture as such, a knowledge of building practices that was literally concretized into the walls, and which was largely lost after these buildings were torn down; to burn all of the codexes was to destroy Mexica literature and history; and to ban Mexica fashion and beauty practices was to destroy the Mexica's means of self-differentiation and identification. Without these external organs to structure their being, and combined with the swift introduction of Spanish organs in the absence, there were very few materials that might allow the Mexica to continue to exist as the Mexica. All of the organs around them reinforced their new being: colonial subjects of New Spain. He who holds the means of organ externalization, produces being.

Many of these newly introduced Spanish organs—the churches, central squares, hospitals, books, and horses—reinforced a particular notion of communality, of living together in New Spain. The church was supposedly for everyone, a horse could be shared, as could a gun. Of course,

[13] See Chapter 5 for an in-depth account of *mélanges*.

this did not mean that there was not intense segregation within this system—the subjects of New Spain learned quickly that, though the church was theoretically for everyone, in practice it worked for the corpus of the clergy, conquistador, and nobility in a way that it did not for the layperson. But a church still makes a social claim, in that one of its professed intentions is to shepherd the flock, and to provide shelter for the meek.

New organs that are introduced today, in contrast, frequently lack this shareable or communal component *intentionally*. Smartphones, for instance, are linked to a particular individual, and are not organs that are as easily shared. Credit cards and forms of digital payment are increasingly commonplace, replacing actual paper money, tying economic interactions to individualized bank accounts. In Mexico and the US, cars have individualized transportation by through the intentional dismantling of passenger trains and rail infrastructure. And, most of all, a passport cannot be shared. It is an organ invented specifically for this purpose: not sharing, individualizing, isolating the organic body as supposedly the primary aspect of one's identity and being. But in this very way, the passport (and all identity documents to which it is related) actually structures this particular notion of the individual organic body as such. Paradoxically, this thing outside the organic body, which in no way aids its "natural" functioning, is precisely what makes this view of the isolated, individual body possible.

The migrant corpus under the Southern Border Program

Essentially every aspect of the migrant trail under the Southern Border Program works to either deny migrants organs entirely, or to only have access to those organs previously formed in older technological milieus, which are therefore much less effective. For instance: theoretically speaking, one of the most important organs on the migrant trail is a smartphone. In turns, it is a map, a bank account, a flashlight, a list of contacts that one meets while traveling, a direct video line to family and friends, a means of identification (by showing others your social media accounts in order to verify that you are who you say you are), a means of fake identification (by showing others burner social media accounts with false names and/or stories about you that "confirm" you are who you say are), a means of entertainment during agonizingly protracted stretches of down time (perhaps while waiting to be picked up by a pollero), and a sign to other migrants (and potential love interests) that you are financially stable enough to afford such an expensive corpus. But for this very reason, it also makes you a target for theft and robbery. Most migrants simply do not have enough money to purchase a smartphone, and even the ones who do often forgo it while on the migrant trail in order to make their corpus appear humbler than it actually is and avoid drawing attention to oneself.

Smartphones are also incredibly difficult to maintain on the migrant trail. They essentially require daily access to electrical outlets, which almost no migrants have while traveling. They are also easily broken if dropped or subjected to water, dust, and mud, which nearly all migrants must regularly endure while crossing Mexico. Furthermore, if a migrant is detained by immigration, a smartphone potentially opens them up to state scrutiny; if an immigration agent can gain access to the smartphone, there is a chance that they will be able to see exactly how long the migrant has been in the country, as well as where they have traveled and who they have associated with, which might disqualify the migrant from certain legal protections.

Therefore, migrants most frequently travel with a cell phone that is not smart—perhaps something like an old Nokia brick phone, which has no touch screen and literal buttons to dial.

These phones are cheaper, much more durable, and the battery lasts days or even weeks without needing to be recharged. Of course, one sacrifices extensive abilities—like banking, video chatting, posting on social media, etc.—in order to ensure that they will have regular access to the most basic abilities of calling and texting. And brick phones are so cheap that they will almost never be stolen, and they certainly will not signal to others that you have money to spare.

In this way, migrants are often forced on the trail to "cheapen" their corpuses in some sense, to intentionally step out of a contemporary technological milieu and into a more antiquated one. This does not simply affect their technological capacities, however, but quite literally the ways they are able to think. Once, while I was volunteering at a shelter in rural Mexico, several dusty boxes of maps were discovered in the shelter's donation storage room. They were quite detailed maps—the kind designed for drivers navigating Mexico's roads, which unfolded from the size of a pocketbook to approximately one square meter, depicting with sufficient complexity many of the smaller backroads of rural Mexico—and many migrants in the shelter quickly snapped them up. As most of them were traveling with brick phones, they could not navigate their routes digitally, but also by this time paper maps were hard to come by, having been otherwise replaced by smartphone technology. Migrants were thus caught in between two technological milieus—one digital, one analog—with no true access to either. These maps provided a solution. There was a problem, however. The maps were about fifteen to twenty years old, and they were not an accurate depiction of contemporary southern Mexico. Some of Mexico's main thoroughfares, as one Mexican shelter worker pointed out, were not depicted, as they were constructed after the maps' printing, and there was worry that some of the smaller roads portrayed on the map did not exist anymore, having been demolished or rerouted to accommodate the newer highways. The concern, then, was that these older maps might "think" for the migrants, influencing their decisions on where to travel, but then leading them astray. Some migrants decided that the old maps were better than nothing, however, and were willing to risk charting a path on them. It was better, they felt, to have a map that they could carry around in their pocket to be accessed at all times than to only be able to plan their next route when they reached a town or migrant shelter where they could access a computer. The point, they emphasized, was that while their were running through the jungle, they had something that they could reference in moments of uncertainty, even if it was occasionally incorrect, rather than to have nothing at all.

As one migrant remarked to me, "Whenever you think you're lost—which way do I go? This way or that way?—you can just open up the map to help you. When you don't have anything at all, you can get into fights about where you should be heading. But this is something we can look at and find some kind of answer." The map, then, provided a concrete means of dealing with uncertainty, and in this way helped structure this migrant's thought as such. It became an organ—however unperfect—that kept his corpus working, that kept him being a migrant who could migrate.

Another migrant I spoke with, Derik, who was a fellow traveler and friend of the Castro family, saw things differently. Derik believed that, though traveling with a smartphone was a risk, it was also worth it. One of the main reasons, he emphasized, was precisely because it allowed him to think differently on the migrant trail. "If I'm traveling with a paper map," he said, "I can't see the traffic, which is important today." I asked what he meant. Well, he explained, with apps like Google Maps, one is not only given a map, but also an up-to-the-minute account of what the traffic on the road is like. "Now, if I look at the map, and it's all red," he said, which would indicate a traffic stoppage, "[in southern Mexico] that's a good indication that there's an immigration

checkpoint on the road holding everyone up. So even without seeing the checkpoint, I can guess that one is up ahead, and I can figure out how to avoid it. If I'm on a bus, I can get out and walk."

Couldn't it also just be a traffic jam? I asked. Because of a wreck or something?

Sure, said Derik, but he was better safe than sorry. "Plus, even if it is a wreck, that means that police are going to show up, and I don't want to be in a situation where a lot of police are around, even if they aren't technically looking for migrants in that moment."

Derik also emphasized that, because he was the only person among his travel companions with a smartphone, he was able to more directly dictate his own terms of travel. "A smartphone lets you travel at night," he said. "Because you can quickly look at your phone if you need to, but otherwise you can keep the lights off." This was important, he emphasized. Most migrants traveled during the day, as it was easier to navigate such difficult terrain during daylight hours (it would be nearly impossible to read a paper map in the darkness of a jungle night), and so there were often more immigration patrols sent to pursue them during that time. But Derik's smartphone gave him a new ability; it permitted him to become nocturnal. "One guy started saying that he didn't want to travel at night, that he was too scared," said Derik. "I said, 'Okay, well, good luck. You either come with me during the night, or you figure out how to get to the next town on your own.' He decided to stay with me, because he didn't have a smartphone. My phone lets me decide how and when I want to travel."

Derik's phone also with certain limitations, but ones that he also saw as potential benefits. The phone only held a charge for about twelve hours, but would die shortly after that. This meant that, normally, Derik's travel would be limited to twelve hour stints. "Which is good," he said. "I want to take my time and plan everything out. But some guys are crazy. They're pushing you *go go go go* all the time. They want to go as fast as they and don't plan anything out, and that's how you get caught. But when they start saying that, I can say, 'Hey bro, I can't go because my phone is dead. We have to stop in the next town to charge it up.' I get to tell them when we start and stop. Or, really, the phone tells us."

Money is another organ that the Southern Border Program uses to reshape the migrant corpus. Many migrants with whom I worked had never owned bank account or debit card before. But even for the ones who had, traveling with a debit card was a dangerous thing, as one could easily be kidnapped and forced to withdraw the entirety of their savings. Traveling with a large sum cash obviously posed similar risks. Instead, the majority of migrants resorted to having family members periodically wire them money via Western Union or MoneyGram. In order to receive these wire transfers, however, one must have valid identification in Mexico, and under the Southern Border Program, many areas of southern Mexico have declared that official Central American identification, such as passports or national ID cards, are no longer valid. Therefore, their corpus has no ability to access the money that is rightfully theirs. To get around this, migrants will often find someone with valid identification to receive the money in their name. This poses new problems; it is customary for the migrant—who has already had to pay a transfer fee to the corporation wiring their money—to pay the person with a valid ID another cut, frequently somewhere between five to ten percent of the total amount received, and one can never be certain that the receiver will not simply withdraw the money and disappear.

Even migrant clothing is cheapened and antiquated to a certain extent. Traversing large swaths of rural county on foot obviously requires clothes that protect you from the sun during the day and the cold during the night, as well as from dust, mud, insects, and thorns. But wearing clothing that is too nice will again draw attention, especially shoes, which can be easily stolen. Instead, migrants intentionally wear old clothes and shoes because they are cheap and easily

replaceable if ruined or stolen, but this means that they are also likely to cause chaffing and severe foot pain. Dirty and worn clothing also make migrants easily identifiable in the small towns they are traveling through. As Derik told me, "It's easy to spot who's a migrant, because even if they take a shower and buy new clothes, their shoes will still be busted. Shoes are the most expensive things, and they take the longest to replace. You can always tell who's a migrant trying to blend in, because they might look like everyone else at first, but then you see their shoes and they're just falling apart. So immigration patrols [in town] look for people with old shoes. If they see a guy walking around with busted up shoes, they'll stop him." One migrant I knew attempted to get around this scenario by only wearing cheap, mass produced plastic flip flops while on the migrant trail. His rationale was that these flip flops were ubiquitous in Mexico; they were sold in essentially every small town he was traveling through, and many Mexicans wore them as well. He would use each pair of flip flops until a strap broke, or until he walked through the flimsy soles, and then he would immediately buy another pair wherever he was. That way, he said, he could blend in more; the organs of old shoes wouldn't immediately give him away as a migrant. However, this strategy also came with several drawbacks. Hiking through the jungle in cheap flip flops can be dangerous, and it left his feet exposed to mud, snakes, spiders, and the like. The flip flops' plastic straps also sliced into the skin of his feet, especially between his toes, and he often bled while he walked. His solution to this problem had been to buy a role of duct tape at a gas station, and then he would wrap his wounds with it in order to protect them from the plastic straps, a strategy that seemed to only irritate the wounds in the long term and not allow them to heal, as well as make his feet stand out all the more.

The mutilated migrant corpus

During one of my first weeks conducting fieldwork at Hermanos, a group of amputees arrived at the shelter. They called themselves the Caravan of the Mutilated ("la caravana de los mutilados"). It was my first encounter with an instantiation of what would eventually come to be broadly described as "migrant caravans," though, at the time, the phenomenon was fairly marginal. There were about twenty of them in total, all men, all Central American. Each had lost at least one limb, but many were missing two or even three, which had been severed after falling from the Beast and being "bitten" by its mouth. "I was the lucky one," one legless man told me as he palmed himself across the shelter's concrete courtyard. "My friend was cut in half, right across his stomach. I laid next to his torso and screamed for help." Some had lost their limbs years ago, others just months previous. As Ieva Jusionyte has written, migrants fell off the Beast so frequently before the Program that it was not uncommon for emergency responders to regularly encounter "men's fingers and limbs… cut off by the wheels of the freight train" (2018, 7).

A portion of the men used crutches or prosthetic legs to navigate the shelter, but for many such external organs were too expensive or cumbersome on the migrant trail. Standing next to them, I was reminded of the famous San Pablo leper colony, where a young Che Guevara once volunteered while still a medical student (see Guevara 2003, 187). Like lepers, the Mutilated were lumpen, not only in the sense that they were without work, but also in that their being was structured by their *lumps*, the stumps and raw wounds where arms and legs used to be. These lumps doomed them to remain outside a normative relation to labor, their lumpenness cut into their very bodies. This is exactly how the Mutilated described themselves in the various interviews they conducted with reporters at the shelter, as well as with me—as unable to work, as a sudden burden

on their family members in Central America, as stricken with bodily lack.

The goal of the caravan, they said, was to ride the Beast—the same one that had once taken their limbs—across Mexico, and then to travel all the way to Washington, DC, where they hoped to find an audience with Barack Obama. As one man told me, the Mutilated believed that if the US president saw their bodies with his own eyes, he might be moved to create a more compassionate immigration system. It was a daring choice; by that time, the Program had largely shut down the Beast. Anyone caught on board would almost certainly be detained and deported. Or worse. There were many news reports of migrants who, while riding the Beast, were intentionally knocked off or tripped up by immigration officials. For the Mutilated, this journey would be even more dangerous than their last.

The caravan would not end up meeting with Obama, who never acknowledged them, but they did eventually arrive in Washington, DC, where they held several small press conferences to little fanfare. (However, it seems that the caravan received enough media publicity in Mexico that immigration agents allowed them travel without incident. I will explore the tension between in/visibility and migrant caravans in much greater detail in a later chapter.) What no one realized at the time, however, was that the conclusion of their journey marked a transition to a new era within Central American migration. In a certain sense, the Mutilated were the very embodiment of the changing migrant corpus under the Southern Border Program. They were the last migrants to ever ride the Beast publicly—to have their bodies move so swiftly across Mexico for free—while, simultaneously, providing a new discourse that there was something about their bodies that was lacking, that something had been violently taken from their corpus. From then on, the Southern Border Program would seek to disable all migrant corpuses, both their organic and external organs, in an effort to quite literally mutilate as many migrants as possible.

As Susan Schweik has written, from the perspective of US immigration law, the non-citizen body is already always conceptualized as disabled a priori, as lacking some capacity that the citizen body inherently possesses. "Something always seems to be disabling [non-citizen's access to] citizenship," she writes. "Something always seems to be disabling the right to have rights" (2011). One's ability to form a corpus—to create a body *of* work and a body *that* works—is regulated and granted through the institution of citizenship and the immigration bureaucracy it spawns. Whereas most figures are structured by their external organs—the train conductor is structured by the train, the bus driver by the bus, the immigration agent by their badge, weapons, and uniform—the migrant is that contemporary figure structured by the lack of essentially all external organs as such. Generally poor and fleeing for their lives, migrants in Mexico often bring nothing with them. Reduced to their organic bodies, they have little to no corpus.[14]

Another way of saying this is that migrants are structured by distance. Not only distance in the abstract, but in that they are situated within a literal spatial distance that they must traverse as well. Traversing this distance is essential to the being of the migrant—like Carlos rightly alluded to in the previous chapter, it is hard to understand a migrant *as a migrant* if they do not migrate. The true endeavor of the Southern Border Program, then, is not merely to militarize Mexican immigration enforcement, nor to simply externalize the US-Mexico border. Rather, the Program is an attempt to *eliminate the category of migrant as such* by seeking to ban or destroy migrants'

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[14] Here we can see where Leroi-Gourhan and Agamben overlap. What Agamben describes as "bare life" could instead be conceptualized as a reduction to understanding life as that which is bound to the organic body alone. Leroi-Gourhan's notion of external organs then help us think about the actual materiality of *bios.*

abilities to acquire any organs that might aid them in their journeys, that is, any organs that might help them traverse the spatial distance before them and therefore *be migrants*. The Program's real insight was that, if someone can no longer be a migrant, then they also cannot demand asylum. To strip the migrant corpus materially of its organs is to render impotent the legal categories that have provided the bedrock for international asylum and human rights law—and therefore a certain liberal ideology—since the end of the Second World War.

Before the Southern Border Program, the Beast provided migrants not only a collective organ, but also a collective gesture for its use: All migrants had to do was board the train and they would move north. Not much more navigational insight was required, other than the occasional rail change—the Beast did the majority of the navigation for them. And, because this route was standardized, activists and international humanitarian organizations could easily find and attend to migrants as well. Their travel, and suffering, was visible. But today, as illustrated by the Castro family's immobility, that is no longer the case. Traveling by foot in the jungle, it is easy to lose one's way and become turned around, and riding on buses or in taxis requires plotting out complex routes around pop-up immigration checkpoints that one cannot easily anticipate. With the Program, Central American migration was forced underground, into ever-shifting, shadowy margins, which also made it incredibly difficult for activists and humanitarians to provide migrants with the same kinds of basic external organs they previously had—backpacks, water bottles, clothes, and new shoes—or to direct migrants toward centers where they could receive free legal or medical aid. As a director at the Mexico City bureau of the International Committee of the Red Cross told me in 2015, "Before, it was easy to find migrants. We would set up clinics and tents next to places where migrants always boarded the train, like Arriaga [Chiapas] or Lechería [Estado de México]. But now no one rides the train, and we don't know where they're going. And even if we could find them, we can't just set up tents and show immigration where everyone is." Without the Beast, migrants are forced to wander the wilds of Mexico in individual isolation, and most (a significant portion of Central American migrants have only an elementary school education) are simply unable to find these same kinds of resources on their own.

The regulation of migrant organs under the Program goes far beyond the banning of the Beast, however. In southern Mexico migrants can no longer exchange their national currencies (Guatemala quetzales, for instance, or Honduran lempiras) for Mexican pesos. And, frequently, migrants are not even permitted to withdraw money sent to them via wire transfers without first showing legal documentation. Their own passports or birth certificates are no longer good enough—they must produce a valid Mexican visa. US passports, however, are still accepted forms of identification. While working at Hermanos and other shelters, migrants frequently asked me to receive money on their behalf (sent by their friends or family) at the nearest Western Union or MoneyGram location. My corpus had access to resources migrants no longer did under the Program, even resources that rightfully belonged to them.

But the Program has gone further still. In its attempt to circumvent the asylum process, Mexico has been issuing migrants a temporary document called a "humanitarian visa" (visa humanitaria), which was invented to be a kind of cheap organ, a thing made with the intention of disposability, and therefore could justify the disposability of migrant bodies as well. Rather than a traditional asylum document—which, when granted, is an organ that theoretically extends infinitely into the future, granting all its recipients the ability to stay in country forever—a humanitarian visa lasts only one year, and there is normally no option of renewal. The rights that humanitarian visas grant recipients are also amorphous—sometimes they include a CURP number (akin to a social security number in the US), but just as often they do not, meaning migrants still

cannot work or bank legally, nor qualify for various social services with their visa.

As Abdelmalek Sayad has stated, the West often tends to interpret migration through terms of bodily usefulness: "Because the immigrant has no meaning, in either his own eyes or those of others, and because, ultimately, he has no existence except through his work, illness, perhaps even more so than the idleness it brings, is inevitably experienced as the negation of the immigrant." And further: "The importance of what is called the 'language of the body,' or, to put it a different way, the *organic* importance of the body, is, basically, nothing more than the importance of *the body as organ*, or in other words, first as labor power, and only then as a form of self-presentation" (Fassin 2011, 85, quoting Sayad 2018, emphasis mine). But in Mexico, this is not the case with migrants. As nearly 60% of Mexico's economy is informal, there is no need—like in Western countries—to "import" immigrants for the sake of cheap labor; the labor of Mexican citizens is already one of the cheapest in the Americas and in abundant supply (Vonk 2022, 279). Because of this, Central American migrants are rarely understood as workers first, at least for the economy in Mexico. Before the Program, the Central American "body as organ" was always in transit to the US—that is where they would labor, not Mexico—and, because of this, they were able to pass through Mexico quickly with little to no resistance. It was only after the US started "seeing" Central American migrants on its own borders (famously during the 2014 "Border Crisis") that Mexico was forced to see them as well. But, unlike in the US—where there was a preexisting discourse of migrant laborers supposedly stealing jobs and exploiting social programs—in Mexico, Central Americans have long been seen as an excess without obvious utility. They are a growth on the body, not a functioning organ, and so they are immediately understood to be lumpen, bodies that do not have a normative relation to the organs of capital and might even be leeching off the laborious bodies of Mexican citizens. Rather than illness being understood as the negation of the Central American migrant, as Sayad states of those immigrants in the West, illness—in the broadest sense of the term, as disability, as injury, as malfunctioning and malformed body—has long been equated *with* the Central American migrant in Mexico. Granting Central Americans humanitarian visas, then, *visas that do not work* (that is, they provide essentially none of the protections or rights that a visa is supposed to provide), parallels the perception within Mexico that Central American migrants do not work either. It is a warped visa for a supposedly warped body.

Without any means of transportation or work, many migrants I knew, including Carlos, began to "charolear" in an attempt to earn money. "Charolear" is one of the most important words on the migrant trail (as is the diminutive but equivalent phrase "ir a charol"), but it is not easily translatable into English. It ultimately means to beg, but to beg in such a way that one is not openly begging, to somewhat obscure the begging by affecting a certain sense of (impossible) industriousness. The US English word "hustle" is somewhat similar. But whereas hustling implies some imagined chance of eventually entering into the normative working world, when one is charoleando the possibility of eventual legitimacy is essentially foreclosed.

When one goes to charol, they generally have two options. The first is to buy a mass-produced cheap item in bulk—such as a penny candy, or small plastic toys—and then to sell them piecemeal for a slight markup. This might be described as a kind of faux- or petty-entrepreneurialism, the goal of which is to earn money by demonstrating one's willingness to embrace a hard-working bootstrappiness in order to garner the sympathy (and therefore money) of others. As Carlos told me, "I can't just beg. No one will give me money. I'd need a baby or some kind of illness to do that. When you're like me—young, able-bodied ("sano" in Spanish)—people will say, 'Why is that guy begging? Why doesn't he get a job?' So selling candy becomes my job. And I make some money by selling the candy, but I make more when people see me trying to make

a living—then they'll donate to help me."

The second option, which might be described as a more artisanal approach, is to collect trash or scraps—primarily aluminum cans, in my experience—and sculpt "alebrijes" out of them. Alebrijes hold an important space within the Mexican popular art tradition. They are a kind of sculptural reassemblage of animal bodies—especially animals central to Mexican national myth, such as snakes, eagles, and coyotes—to create a new and fantastical creature. The origin story of alebrijes as an art form is also something of a myth in itself. Supposedly, they were first invented in 1936 by Pedro Linares López, a "cartonero" artisan in Mexico City,[15] after he fell ill. While feverish in bed, Linares López says he dreamt of a forest that suddenly began recombining its elements to produce new, fantastic creatures. He saw "a donkey with butterfly wings, a rooster with bull horns, and a lion with an eagle head—and all of them were shouting one word: alebrijes" (Chassen-Lopez 2016). After recovering, Linares began sculpting the creatures he had seen in his dreams out of papier-mâché. The sculptures soon caught the eye of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, among other established artists, and have held a prestigious place within Mexican popular art ever since, with countless other artisans taking up the craft. It is worth noting that alebrijes' primary characteristic—that is, the fusion of multiple real-life animals into one fantastical beast—are not so unlike many of the Mexica gods, such as Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent, and, in my experience, Mexicans today often mistakenly believe that the tradition existed in indigenous societies pre-Conquest.

However, when I asked Central American migrants—many of whom had never spent time outside of their own small towns, let alone outside of their own countries—how they knew about alebrijes, many of them could not answer.

"They're just what we make to charolear," Carlos told me.

"They're fun little animals for kids," said another migrant. "To show we're non-threatening."

Neither Carlos nor any other migrant overtly connected their little aluminum creatures to the nearly century-long established Mexican art form, and none were able to articulate the history of alebrijes in any great detail. Yet here the alebrijes were, emerging from migrants' hands day after day in southern Mexico. Though most alebrijes bore the mark of the same kind of charol sentiment as candy selling (that is, creating alebrijes was usually more a faux-artisanal endeavor than any kind of real craft, a quick and rough-shod fabrication used only as an excuse to beg), a unique few were peculiarly beautiful in their own right, with some special artists even taking the time to give their creatures moving parts—pinwheel tails that spun, fanged mouths that could bite, and clawed arms that reached out into the distance.

What interests me most, of course, is that alebrijes are an artistic reorganization of organs to construct a new being. A single alebrije might possess the mane of a lion, the beak of an eagle, the legs of a kangaroo, and the feathers of a quetzal, but it is none of those things. It is its own being. And migrants were making these new beings at the same moment that they were trying to become new beings of their own through the acquisition of new organs—passports, bank accounts, cell phones, cars, houses. I suggest that we should understand the corpus as both the alebrije and the artist crafting it. We are the beast and the beast that makes the beast. Put in anthropological

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[15] It is important to note that in Spanish "cartonero" can refer both to a papier-mâché artisan or a waste picker/scavenger. Linares López was an artisan, but the connotation is still there. We might think of migrants sculpting alebrijes out of scraps of trash as a kind of synthesis of the two.

terms, we are the bricoleur and his materials, our bodies a constant and ever-morphing bricolage. To think this way is to return to bricolage in the original sense that so inspired Lévi-Strauss, that is, as a literal cobbling together of whatever materials one happens to get one's hands on.

Interlude II

Darin told me he was gay after a week marching together on the Viacrucis Migrante. It was causing problems for his family, he said. Before leaving Honduras, Carlos had forbid him from disclosing this fact to anyone else. Though everyone in the Castro family was generally accepting of Darin's sexuality, they also understood that on the migrant trail it could attract unwanted attention. So Darin, who was twenty-six at the time, told everyone on the caravan that he was seventeen. His hope was that, by pretending to be a minor, people might ascribe his soft voice and feminine gestures to youth, and therefore place him somewhat beyond suspicion. The strategy, however, was not working. No matter what he did, he said, many of the men on the march teased him for the way he walked and talked. Eventually, a man had made a joke about Darin's sexuality in front of Carlos, who immediately yanked Darin off of the side of the road and yelled at him.

He needed to get it together, hissed Carlos, he was becoming a liability. It was already easy enough to see that their family wasn't from around here, and that they had an old woman and children in tow. If the wrong people realized that Darin was gay, they might think that the family was weak and target them for a robbery. I understood this statement not only as a commentary on Darin's sexuality, but also on the family's race. Because most of the siblings were actually half siblings, many were racially distinct from each other. Tati was the most obviously Afro-Latina, as was her baby Rogelio. Maria, Carlos, and Santos also appeared distinctly "Honduran," somewhat identifiable in comparison the population of southern Mexico. Darin, however, was lighter skinned, and it was likely easier for him to blend in with the local population. By now, instead of passing, Darin's sexuality was making the family stand out all the more. Carlos seemed to be implying that Darin's sexual carelessness might not have ramifications for him, but for his darker-skinned family members.

On the side of the road, the anger between the two brothers was palpable. Though Carlos saw himself as the breadwinner, Darin also worked a full-time job in Honduras. While Carlos was away in Mexico smuggling migrants, Darin had stayed behind to be "the man of the house," as he described it, and support the family. He had found a job in the city as a secretary, and, though he did not earn as much as Carlos did, he contributed a significant amount to the household income as well, and he did so legally. It had not been an easy job to land in Honduras, where any kind of professional work is hard to come by for someone born into poverty. Darin was the only one in the family with a high school education, and his commute to work had been over an hour each way on foot. When not in the office, he sacrificed much of his social life in order to care for his ailing mother and the young children, and he did not take kindly to Carlos suddenly swooping in after so many years and ordering him around.

"Don't forget," Darin yelled back at Carlos, "who was there to protect ma when that man was beating the shit out of her. It was me. Not you." After catching his mother's boyfriend beating her, had chased the man out of the house with a machete. Though stick thin and soft-spoken, Darin had learned how to fight at an early age out of necessity; he was not going to back down from Carlos either. "And don't think for a second," he spat, "that I don't know what you're up to all night long. You with all your amigos."

Carlos stared at him, fuming, for a long time, but eventually walked away without another word. At the time, I didn't understand what Darin meant. I assumed that he was referring to the fact that, after the caravan stopped marching for the night, Carlos often stayed up partying with

other men, many of whom also seemed to be smugglers freshly put out of work by the Southern Border Program. Most of them had also smuggled drugs at some point as well, to which they seemed to still have access to in steady supply. I thought initially that this was what Darin was referring to, that he was angry that his brother was chastising him for not passing as straight while Carlos was out partying all night with his friends. But there was something about the way Darin had emphasized the word "amigos." He had said it "amig-*os*," emphasizing the gendered part of the word. "Your *man* friends, your *boy* friends."

Following up with Carlos later, I asked him why he thought Darin being gay was a liability for the family. "Because," he said, bewildered that I would ask what seemed to him like an idiotically obvious answer, "people will think they can take advantage of us."

I said I still didn't understand.

This line of questioning was clearly uncomfortable to Carlos, and he struggled to put it in terms that I could understand. "That kind of behavior is a risk," he kept repeating over and over. "It's risky."

I still wasn't getting it. "Because he could be having unprotected sex?" I mused. Was he worried about Darin's health?

"What? No, Levi. Because people could get the wrong idea."

"The wrong idea about what?"

"That we do that kind of stuff," he said. After a long pause, he clarified, "That we'd do that stuff… for free." Then he waved me away, saying he didn't want to talk about it anymore.

Yet, not long after, I began to hear rumors that Carlos was having sex with men. When I asked him about this, Carlos didn't answer in a straightforward way. Instead, he told me a story about one of the first times he smuggled clients through Mexico on the Beast. They had been stopped by an immigration official outside of Mexico City, at the train stop of Lechería. The migrant trail was difficult, said Carlos. Everyone wanted something from you. When the gangs or cartels or immigration agents stop you, you have to pay a bribe. Most of the time it was monetary, but it might also be sexual. At Lechería, immigration detained Carlos and his clients and through them up against of the immobile train cars and began patting them down. They asked Carlos for identification, and he said that he didn't have any. That's when one of the men went further. "Me agarró el órgano," said Carlos. *He grabbed my organ*, meaning his penis.

Rather than interpreting Carlos' answer as a simple evasion of my question (was he currently having sex with men on the Viacrucis, even as he forbid Darin to do so?), I came to understand his response as illuminative of the blurry lines within the libidinal economy of the migrant trail. Exchanging sex in order to receive what one needed—certain resources in a migrant shelter, to be permitted to pass through a territory by a gang or immigration patrol, and even to procure forged documents—I came to discover occurred with regularity, a regularity that at times also shocked me with its frankness and practicality.

"What?" a single mother named Gabi once asked me during an interview. "You think if me and my daughter are cornered by a disgusting guy [tipo asqueroso], I'm not going to let him fuck me instead of her? Sometimes you just have to pay the fee [pagar la tarifa] to pass." Later Gabi confessed something else to me. "I worry," she said, "that they won't want to rape me. Look at me. I'm getting older. I've given birth to three kids. My daughter is young. These men like that. What if they only want her?"

Like this mother, Carlos' statement "He grabbed my organ" seemed to be his way of communicating that on the migrant trail, he sometimes felt that he had no choice but to have sex with other men. Maybe he desired it, maybe he didn't, but that wasn't the point. The point was that

the presentation of his organ, his penis, was the act which eventually allowed him (and perhaps his clients or his family as well) to pass.

Angélica, a trans woman also traveling on the Viacrucis, again added complexity to the matter when I, echoing Carlos, asked during one of our interviews on navigating the sexual politics of the migrant trail, "Do other men ever want to see your organ?"

She was succinct. "I've jacked off a lot of dicks," she said, "so I don't have to suck them. And other times I show my dick so I don't have to see theirs."

Something interesting emerged in these discussions. The revealing of one's gendered organs—"submitting" them, so to speak, for "inspection"—was described very similarly to how one might present their immigration documents for inspection as well. Months after speaking to Gabi on the Viacrucis, she messaged me to say that she and her daughter had crossed the US-Mexico border, where they were promptly detained by immigration officials. They were now in asylum proceedings in Missouri. When I asked her how it was going, Gabi said it was "disgusting," asqueroso, the same word that she had used to describe the "disgusting guys" she worried might sexually assault her daughter on the migrant trail.

"How so?" I asked.

"In the US, they just look at you," said Gabi. "In the detention facility, in the court, they look you up and down. You can feel their eyes on your body." After I asked her to elaborate, Gabi recounted the moment that she and her daughter had been caught by immigration. Both of them had their Guatemalan passports with them, which the immigration patrolman examined. "He read all our details out loud to us," she said. "'Gabi Ramierz, age 44, female.' I hated the way he said 'female.' He said it in a disgusting way."

This is in no way to reduce the trauma of sexual assault to a normative interaction with immigration agents, but to make the connection that often on the migrant trail in Mexico, the two overlapped. It was not infrequent to hear stories from migrants about being stopped by immigration officials, and, when unable to prove that they were in the country legally, were sexually assaulted, such as with Carlos. And even though Gabi was not sexually assaulted, she felt it was always a possibility, a latent threat. Where the organ of the immigration document was found lacking, a literal gendered organ might be called into substitution.

This kind of substitution is reminiscent of another famous phallic substitution—Evan-Pritchard's documentation of the Nuer exchanging a cucumber for a cow as a sacrificial object. Evans-Pritchard states that the resemblance between a cucumber and an ox is "conceptual not perceptual… a cucumber is an ox, but an ox is not a cucumber" (1956, 128). This is because, he concludes, what appears as dyadic relation is really triadic—God acts as a third, who "accepts [the cucumber] in the place of the ox" (142).[16]

What had gone unspoken between Carlos and Darin's fight alongside the road was actually about substitution. For Darin, being gay felt inescapable, essential. There was no substituting one sexuality for another. Even when he was trying to pass as straight, little gestures and inflections in tone came back to haunt him. "Carlos is so stupid," Darin confided in me. "I am what I am. I can't do anything about that." But for Carlos, sexuality was, at least at certain moments, something different. It was malleable, a thing that you could use to get something else. God demanded a sacrifice of the Nuer in order to receive rain, but he be convinced of accepting the substitution of a cucumber for a cow. The state demanded that aspects of one's corpus be examined in order to receive passage northward; sometimes, when the organ of a visa was missing, a penis could be

[16] Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan. "Nuer religion." (1956).

substituted. But, just as an ox is not a cucumber, it would be absurd to immediately show one's genitals when asked for immigration documents. You don't "do that kind of stuff for free," as Carlos said to me. It is a careful negotiation, at times quite literally an erotic dance, revealing parts of one's corpus at certain moments, substituting one organ for another in order to obtain something else. This was what Carlos felt that Darin didn't understand—his identification with being "gay" was too rigid for Carlos, too inflexible, and therefore giving away something of himself for free when he could get something for it instead. In the end, the brothers' disagreement was about the gestures of each of their respective organs, how one should put their penis to work in the "right" or most productive way.

Later, this disagreement about gestures would set each brother off on wildly different trajectories, which would have drastically different consequences for their respective corpuses.

Chapter 3

Sacrificing Citizenship: Inventing a new form of legalization through violence in Mexico

Humanitarian visas

Up to 700,000 people cross Mexico's southern border each year, the vast majority of whom are migrants fleeing Central America's Northern Triangle (Sánchez Cordero 2019). In 2021, Mexico's national asylum office COMAR received over 130,000 asylum applications, the highest amount in the country's history (Human Rights Watch 2022). Unable to operate at such a capacity, Mexico has recently petitioned UNHCR to provide them with additional resources (UNHCR 2021), but asylum cases remain perpetually backlogged. During my fieldwork, I met over a dozen migrants who had been waiting on an asylum decision for four or more years, and one man who I work with has been waiting over seven.

Since the implementation of the Southern Border Program, another document, known as a "humanitarian visa" (*visa humanitaria*), has been touted as a means of easing an overburdened asylum system. According to the Mexican government, humanitarian visas are reserved for "foreigners who are victims of natural disasters or violence" (INM 2022b). Before the Program, the document was widely unknown, and only issued to a handful of recipients each year. In 2013, for instance, the year before the Southern Border Program went into effect, Mexico only granted approximately 250 humanitarian visas total. But after the implementation of the Program—as the numbers of migrants attacked, kidnapped, and killed in Mexico rose rapidly, and the number of humanitarian visas granted also drastically increased due to this violence. In 2016, 3,632 migrants received humanitarian visas, a more than tenfold upsurge (Vonk 2019). By 2021, that number was nearly 100,000 (INM 2022a).

On the surface, humanitarian visas seem like a reasonable policy. They ostensibly allow victims to temporarily remain in Mexico legally, supposedly granting non-citizens the time necessary to recover physically and regain control of their lives. In other words, the visas were theoretically created to address *anomalous* instances of violence. However, with the enactment of the Program, violence against migrant has become widespread and systematic. In other words, humanitarian visas are now granted en masse because of *structural violence*, that is, a violence created by "social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way" (Farmer *et al.* 2006; see also Farmer 2004; Holmes 2006; as well as Bourdieu 1998's reflections on the "law of the conservation of violence"). Herein lies the bureaucratic esoter(ror)icism of the humanitarian visa: Migrants only qualify for the visa if they suffer physical violence, but this violence is largely a product of the Southern Border Program, and it is most often enacted by immigration and police officers themselves. Essentially, Mexico has created a system in which the only way many migrants can gain legal status is through physical suffering at the hands of state officials. In order to be ushered into Mexican society, they must be beaten. It is worth asking, then, if this process of physical suffering is not some form of ritual initiation or sacrifice.

I first learned of "humanitarian visas" in early 2015, approximately six months after the inception of the Southern Border Program, while conducting fieldwork at Hermanos en el Camino.

At the time, shelter directors were experimenting with humanitarian visa applications as a novel method for migrant legalization, and they saw the visas as a tool to potentially offer new protections to migrants under the rising violence of the Southern Border Program. As one shelter worker told me, "I think the [humanitarian] visa has been around for a few years now, but no one used it before the Program. We only started helping migrants apply for them after [the Program began]. Before, no one really knew this visa existed. But things have gotten so much more dangerous here in Mexico, and we [the shelter directors] heard that the visa is a way for someone who is attacked while traveling to get a document quickly."

In 2015, Hermanos en el Camino was one of the first organizations to regularly petition for humanitarian visas on behalf of migrants, and I quickly met several Central Americans who had received visas with the help of the shelter. Shelter directors and migrants alike described the visa as a way to avoid entering into Mexico's highly convoluted and backlogged asylum system, a process that would have likely taken years with no guaranteed outcome. Humanitarian visas, in contrast, were seen as a faster and more certain bet. At the time, the vast majority of applicants received a visa within approximately three months. Additionally, humanitarian visas were enticing to shelter directors because they were seen as a means of forcing government officials to acknowledge and document the escalating violence against migrants under the Program. As a director of another shelter in the Mexican state of Veracruz told me, she saw each approved visa as a tacit recognition by state officials of the Program's violence against migrants, a violence that they otherwise chose not to acknowledge. "Humanitarian visas document assaults against migrants," she said. "One visa equals one officially documented attack. So local police and politicians have to acknowledge that this violence is happening instead of just ignoring it like they usually do. The visas give us fixed numbers to say, 'Look, this many migrants were attacked in the area and received a visa for it.' The government can't deny their own numbers."

It is worth noting, however, that though some shelters like Hermanos en el Camino had begun to apply for humanitarian visas in 2015, the visa was still largely unknown in most parts of the country. When I inquired as to what rights the visas granted migrants compared to traditional asylum, no one could answer definitively. The only certain thing was that the visas lasted one year, which seemed, at the time, much better than nothing to migrants and activists alike.[17]

The corpus of the caravan

Within this new and uncertain migration landscape—where both novel immigration enforcement techniques and immigration documents were emerging—I was invited by several migrants and shelter directors (some of whom held humanitarian visas themselves) to march on something they called the "Viacrucis Migrante."[18] A *viacrucis* ("Stations of the Cross" in English) is a Catholic

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[17] In practice, as we would later discover, humanitarian visas offer virtually none of the protections awarded to traditional refugees or asylees. They only last one year, often are not eligible for renewal, and frequently do not grant recipients the right to work legally in Mexico or qualify for any of the country's social services. Because of this, several migrants with whom I work have at times referred to humanitarian visas as "asylum-lite," the gist of which is that humanitarian visas carry the pretense of asylum with none of its actual components or benefits.

[18] One can find a much more extensive ethnographic description of the 2015 Viacrucis Migrante

celebration during Holy Week that reenacts the suffering of Christ in his last days as he was imprisoned, sentenced to death, beaten, and crucified. By calling for a Viacrucis Migrante—which would also take place over Holy Week and conclude on Easter Sunday—activists were employing overtly Catholic symbology to describe the Central American migrant journey in Mexico. For instance, the Viacrucis Migrante compared the drastic rise in migrant assaults under the Southern Border Program to the beating of Christ as he carried his cross through Jerusalem, and marchers drew a parallel between the sacrifices migrants made for the potential economic betterment of their families (such as submitting oneself to exploitative labor practices in the US and Mexico in order to send remittances back to Central America) to Christ's sacrifice on the cross for all of humankind (see Huerta & McLean 2019 for more on the language and symbolism of migrant caravans). It is worth noting that other events also calling themselves a "Viacrucis Migrante" had taken place before 2015, but the majority were usually local celebrations that lasted only a day. The 2015 Viacrucis, in contrast, was one of the first large-scale instantiations of what is understood as a "migrant caravan" today—it banded together hundreds of migrants and organized them to charge through immigration checkpoints in southern Mexico. As Amelia Frank-Vitale has written, migrant caravans are

> … at once a literal way of providing safety and security to those unable to access visas, passports or other documents conducive of legal mobility which makes them vulnerable to specific kinds of migration and border enforcement-related violence and, simultaneously, an active form of protest, making demands on the Mexican state to guarantee the human rights of people looking to transit across the country, regardless of their immigration status or country of origin. Understanding the caravans as these twinned elements together is essential… (2023)

In this way, we can understand migrant caravans as a strategy by migrants who have essentially lost access to all organs, and who have been stripped down to nearly their organic bodies alone. Without access to any of the organs that might aid them in their travels and survival, migrants turn to each other to form a new kind of corpus. The lack of organs itself becomes the impetus for a new kind of *organ*ization. By conjoining hundreds or thousands of organic bodies together, migrants were able to produce a new organ that was much larger than themselves, and which could make new claims of the state that they could not individually. This is what a migrant caravan essentially is: the conjoining of hundreds or thousands of organic bodies in order to form a corpus that otherwise could not exist. Once conjoined into the corpus of the migrant caravan, migrants are also more readily able to access other organs that they could not before. They are much more likely to receive clothing and food donations, for instance, as well as offers of shelter. They also obviously tend to attract media attention, and they are therefore able to have access to media networks in order to speak to many more people about their particular kinds of struggles, goals, and demands. Migrants are also able to more easily pool the few external organs that they do have together. While working with caravans, I have found that the few migrants who do have smartphones, rather than hiding them and using them individually, often offer them up to be used in a much more collective fashion, and there will be certain hours designated during the day—perhaps the hour after dinner, for instance—when the smartphones will be placed on a table so that whoever needs to use them to make a call or check their social media may do so. It is not simply that caravans grant people new organs, but also that, through a new kind of communal being, also

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in my book *Border Hacker* (2022).

allow for the gestures associated with certain organs—such as smartphones—to change and be communalized.

Most importantly, migrant caravans are able to access state organs—such as immigration agencies like COMAR and the INM—which previously ignored many of the caravan members individually, or that demanded that they wait many indefinite months before being attended to. For any caravan of considerable size, especially if this caravan is publicly beaten, exceptions are almost immediately made for caravan members within state agencies, and much of the routine bureaucracy and protocols are swept aside. In this way, migrant caravans do not only change the corpus of the migrant, but they also change the gestures of the organs of state agencies, demanding that they act differently and come up with new uses for institutions.

The Viacrucis Migrante

In 2015, however, this kind of large-scale caravan was a very new phenomenon, and it was unclear that conjoining everyone's organic bodies together in this way would prove effective. The goal of the Viacrucis was relatively straightforward: to march over 300 miles on foot from the border town of Tecún Umán, Guatemala, across the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, and to conclude in Ixtepec, Oaxaca for Easter Mass. Along the way, they would march through immigration checkpoints in an attempt to publicly protest their erection under the Southern Border Program. Concluding in Ixtepec was a strategic choice. It is where Hermanos en el Camino is located, and the shelter's founder, Father Alejandro Solalinde, was widely recognized as one of the most powerful pro-migrant activists in the country at the time. The Viacrucis' hope was that his tacit endorsement of the pilgrimage would provide the marchers some amount of protection from being detained by immigration forces.

The name "Viacrucis Migrante" was also strategic. As was outlined explicitly during Viacrucis leadership meetings, by claiming to be "pilgrims" instead of "migrants," organizers hoped the march would appear less threatening to the Mexican federal government, even as they were overtly calling attention to the "human rights abuses being committed under the Southern Border Program." At the time, the progressive Mexico City government had passed an ordinance stating that all pilgrims were welcome to travel within the Mexican capital's limits regardless of immigration status (Gómez Romero 2018). The ordinance was primarily meant for large Catholic holidays, such as Holy Week and the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which attract millions of pilgrims to Mexico City each year in order to attend mass at the Basilica of Guadalupe, one of the largest pilgrimage sights in the world (Fraser 2015). Viacrucis Migrante organizers hoped to push the city-wide policy into new territory. Though they had initially planned to conclude the march in Ixtepec, the idea was continuously floated that—if they gained enough momentum—perhaps the Viacrucis would carry on to Mexico City in order to attend mass at the Basilica of Guadalupe as well. In doing so, Viacrucis leadership insisted that the Mexico City ordinance should apply to them as well, even though they were well outside of the city's jurisdiction.

Organizers readily admitted to me in private that their interpretation was a stretch, but they thought it might be effective for several reasons. The first was that, in 2015, migrant caravans were still a relatively unknown phenomenon. At the time, Mexican immigration officials had never attempted to halt or detain a caravan before, and so Viacrucis organizers were relatively confident that—especially with their famous and well-connected leader, Father Solalinde—they wouldn't be stopped. Another reason was that the government of Mexico City—an incredibly centralized

capital, where the vast majority of Mexican bureaucracy is concentrated, and which is home to roughly one fourth of the country's total population—holds great sway in the country, well beyond that of most city governments. Indeed, the capital's affirmation of the protection of undocumented pilgrims was interpreted as essentially an attempt to turn Mexico City into something of a "sanctuary city," where all undocumented people might be safe from deportation, intentionally thwarting the ability of the federal National Institute of Migration (known by the Spanish acronym INM) to unilaterally carry out the Southern Border Program throughout the country. Top INM officials knew better than to simply disregard the sanctuary city policy. The mayorship of Mexico City frequently catapulted politicians into political stardom, and to be on the mayor's bad side today was to potentially find oneself on the new president's bad side tomorrow.

Finally, it was implicitly understood that the notion of pilgrimage was directly connected to the origin myth of Mexico, and therefore to the origins of Mexican subjecthood as well. The Basilica of Guadalupe is built next to the Hill of Tepeyac, where, in 1531, the Virgin Mary appeared in a series of apparitions to two indigenous Mexica men, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin and Juan Bernardino. As Eric Wolf has described, in order to provide proof of her apparitions, the Virgin "bade Juan Diego pick roses in a sterile spot where normally only desert plants could grow, gathered the roses into the Indian's cloak, and told him to present cloak and roses to the incredulous archbishop. When Juan Diego unfolded his cloak before the bishop, the image of the Virgin was miraculously *stamped* upon it" (1958, emphasis mine.) This stamping, as will become clear later, is imperative to the functioning of humanitarian visas today.

Wolf claims that the Virgin, by revealing herself to the indigenous Mexica in the wake of the destruction of Tenochtitlán, signaled that both races—those of the fallen Aztec empire and those of the victorious Spanish one—could live together in harmony under a new banner. As Wolf writes:

> The myth of the apparition served as a symbolic testimony that the Indian, as much as the Spaniard, was capable of being saved... This must be understood against the background of the bitter theological and political argument which followed the Conquest and divided churchmen, officials, and conquerors into those who held that the Indian was incapable of conversion, thus *inhuman*, and therefore a fit subject of political and economic exploitation; and those who held that the Indian was *human*, capable of conversion and that this exploitation had to be tempered by the demands of the Catholic faith and of orderly civil processes of government. *The myth of the Guadalupe thus validates the Indian's right to legal defense, orderly government, to citizenship*… (1958, emphasis mine)

One can see, then, why the Viacrucis Migrante would wish to associate itself with the Virgin. By claiming that it was primarily a pilgrimage potentially en route to the site where a united Mexico was born, the marchers were implicitly aligning themselves with those violently conquered by the Spanish empire. Just as with the fallen Mexica, through the Virgin of Guadalupe the migrants' petitions might be heard—not only by heavenly judges, but by the state's as well. Furthermore, Wolf explains that historically the Virgin of Guadalupe found favor particularly with those "disinherited in New Spain as illegitimate offspring" of Spanish fathers and indigenous mothers. "For such people," he writes, "there was for a long time no proper place in the social order," and they were not granted the "full rights of citizenship and legal protection." The migrants of the Viacrucis Migrante saw themselves in a somewhat similar position. They too were stuck at the interstices and margins of an already constituted society—barred from social recognition, racially othered, unable to command the full rights of citizenship and legal protection—and they

too turned to the Virgin as the medium through which they could voice this marginalization.

The Viacrucis was in some sense, then, trying to articulate anew the suffering of the migrant with the religious language of the pilgrim. It was what Veena Das has called a "transaction in the construction of pain" (2006, 38) between the marchers and immigration agents, an attempt to render migrant suffering visible—and therefore legible, even sensible—to the Mexican state, that is, *to make their pain felt by another*. To describe this transaction, Das first quotes Wittgenstein:

> In order to see that it is conceivable that one person should have pain in another person's body, one must examine what sorts of facts we call criteria for a pain being in a certain place... Suppose I feel a pain which on the evidence of the pain alone, e.g. with closed eyes, I should call a pain in my left hand. Someone asks me to touch the painful spot with my right hand. I do so and looking around perceive that I am touching my neighbor's hand. This would be pain *felt* in another's body. (Das citing Wittgenstein 1958)

"Pain, in this rendering," says Das, "is not that inexpressible something that destroys communication or marks an exit from one's existence in language. Instead, it makes a claim asking for acknowledgment, which may be given or denied." This was precisely the task at hand for the Viacrucis: To make a claim asking for acknowledgment of their pain by the Mexican state. But the pain of being undocumented and/or stateless is not easily articulable or locatable—it leaves no obvious mark on the body—especially since the Southern Border Program's goal was to make migrant pain invisible, to push it into the geographic margins of the country, to refuse to document or acknowledge such suffering. But by placing themselves in the role of the sacrificial lamb, the Viacrucis was able to articulate their suffering in a language much more familiar, and therefore much more sensible, to the Mexican state.

By moving away from the migrant (caravan) and toward the pilgrim(age), the Viacrucis: 1) attempted to associate itself with a much better understood figure in Mexico, the pilgrim, which already had a half-millennium history of traversing the country; 2) appealed to the much more overtly religious (and especially Catholic) sentiments of the residents of southern Mexico, many of whom themselves had previously made a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe; while still 3) reaffirming the civil powers of the capital, where secular activists and lawmakers were pushing for sanctuary city protections for migrants; and, finally, 4) harkening back to the founding origin myth of Mexico, in which previously ambiguous figures (those former Mexica, who, defeated, were also a people without a "country") were incorporated into a young national project and made secular subjects through the religious symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the new universal (Christian) humankind she represented.

This claim to pilgrimage proved initially effective. With the Viacrucis framing itself as a procession of "peaceful pilgrims" rather than as a "caravan," immigration forces—though frustrated that their authority was subverted as the Viacrucis flouted their checkpoints—did not detain the pilgrims in the two weeks leading up to Easter Sunday. I traveled with the Viacrucis for the entirety of this initial march, and the arduous nature of the pilgrimage felt very similar to other forms of religious suffering I had witnessed outside the Basilica of Guadalupe, where pilgrims regularly crawl across concrete and cobblestones in a show of penitence and devotion until their knees are bloodied and raw. My own feet, like many on the Viacrucis, became blistered and bled profusely as we trudged along the scorching hot asphalt of the highways of southern Mexico. Our living conditions were ascetic; we often slept outside in town squares or simply on the side of the

road. Meals were irregular, and we were forced to scavenge for food in the orchards we occasionally passed, mostly unripe mangos and avocados. We could not bathe for days at time and relieved ourselves in the jungle. Through it all, the language of pilgrimage provided a means of interpreting and communicating such an arduous and abstemious wandering, as well as the means for local Mexicans to contextualize it. In the small village of Los Corazones, Oaxaca, we were welcomed by the mayor. "You are the testament that God is real," he said to the Viacrucis. "You come from beyond, just like Christ."

On Easter Sunday, we arrived safely in Hermanos en el Camino as planned, where Father Solalinde offered Easter Mass. In total, the Viacrucis had amassed over 450 people—again, one of the largest organized migrant marches in Mexico up to that point. Immigration agents, though they did follow our journey, had stayed largely out of sight. Several days after Easter, Father Solalinde felt confident enough in the momentum of the pilgrimage that he announced he would personally escort the pilgrims to Mexico City in order to attend mass at the Basilica of Guadalupe. But the morning after his announcement, immigration officials and federal police surrounded the shelter. It seemed that perhaps Solalinde and other Viacrucis organizers had not sufficiently considered the temporal limitations of the figure of the pilgrim. After all, pilgrims traveled to the Basilica during Holy Week, and Holy Week was now over. Whereas all pilgrimages come to an end, the figure of the (undocumented) migrant wanders indefinitely. Now, with Easter behind them, the pilgrims had fallen back into migrancy.

INM officials announced that any migrant who exited Hermanos en el Camino would be immediately detained and deported. It was an uneasy standoff. Though immigration agents and federal police were threatening to raid the shelter, they eventually opted to lay siege to it instead, restricting food and water supplies in hopes of forcing a surrender. Shelter volunteers—who were usually Mexican citizens, or Europeans with visas—were stopped each time they left the shelter, and often the provisions they were attempting to bring back were confiscated.[19] Meals had to be rationed, and potable water began to dwindle. With so many people trapped inside, the facility's flimsy plumbing eventually busted from overuse. With no other options, people began defecating in the far corners of the shelter.

After two weeks, with no sign of the police presence subsiding, Solalinde announced that he had hired four coach buses to transport the caravan to the capital. But the police had apprehended the buses in a nearby town and stationed over one hundred militarized officers to hold them at bay; the buses would not be permitted to pick up the Viacrucis. Many migrants told me they thought it was curious that INM officials had not confiscated the buses outright, but had instead chosen to "guard" them with police. Rather than placing the buses completely off limits by locking them inside a warehouse or other facility, the Viacrucis' means of transportation was allowed to idle by the side of the road with the drivers still inside. As one migrant remarked, "Can't the police shut this whole situation down if they want? This feels more like a negotiation. Like,

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[19] I did not leave the shelter myself, as I too feared detention and deportation. Though I was in the country legally, Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution stipulates that "the Executive of the Union has the exclusive power to demand expulsion from national territory, immediately and without a trial, of any foreigner whose presence in Mexico is considered inconvenient and 'Foreigners, can not, in any way be involved in political affairs of the country'" (Calderón 2011). It is, of course, worth stating that the risk of being deported back to the US as an American citizen is in no way equivalent to the risk migrants faced of being deported back to Central America.

'Come and take it.'"

In order to travel to Mexico City, said Solalinde, the Viacrucis would have to march out of the shelter, physically confront the police, and push past them in order to board the buses.[20] As one migrant recounted in detail:

> When we saw the police in the distance, [we] put all the women and children and the old people in the center [of the march], and then… all the men [linked] their arms around them in a big circle. To protect them, right?… Our bodies was their shields… The police was all in those blacked out uniforms with the batons and shit. Solalinde was walking out in front of us with his two bodyguards. He insisted on going out in front, even though the bodyguards said it was a bad idea…
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> Then it was on. The police smashed up against us and I was just tryna hold it tight, to keep my arms locked and not get hit in the face by a freaking baton. Solalinde was caught in the middle and got smashed immediately. The bodyguards dragged him out and he spent the rest of the time on the sidelines holding his head… [Then the police started] beating us with batons and slamming their shields into our bodies and down on our feets. When somebody fell, it was our job to pick them up and make sure the police couldn't bust through the hole they left. This one migrant dude got caught between two police shields and they smashed him right in his neck, and he screamed and went to his knees and moaned, "I can't, I can't."
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> … [I saw someone fall] and there was a hole in the line, so I rushed up. And just as I stuck my hand out to fill the hole, the police brought their shields down, and I saw my arm disappear in between the plexiglass and I heard something snap, and when I finally pulled my hand back, I couldn't move it. You ever been in a situation where it feels like you're looking at yourself from somewhere else? Like what's happening ain't actually happening to you? Like your body ain't your body? That's what it felt like. Like none of this was real. I just kept looking at my busted wrist and asking myself how the fuck I ever ended up here. And eventually I heard the head of immigration yelling that they'd had enough, that they should let us go, that it was over. (Vonk 2022, 94-97)

Today, such a scene is commonplace on a migrant caravan. Many have since been beaten by militarized police and immigration forces in a similar manner, so much so that it is now essentially an expected part of the process. But in 2015, the police attack was both horrifying and confusing. It was the first time, as far as I have been able to find, that Mexican immigration and police officials systematically beat a caravan. Yet, in the end, none of the approximately 450 marchers of the Viacrucis Migrante were detained. After withstanding the attack, all were

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[20] I did not witness the Viacrucis Migrante's confrontation with the police personally. Several days after arriving in Ixtepec with the Viacrucis, I was bitten by a brown recluse spider. Unable to access medical care because of the siege, my conditioned worsened. Approximately ten days into the siege, and nearly unable to walk, I was forced to sneak past the police lines in order to seek emergency medical treatment in Mexico City. I detail the incident in much greater detail in *Border Hacker.* Though I was not there to witness the encounter with the police personally, I spent many hours interviewing migrants about the clash after the fact, including my interlocutor and co-author of *Border Hacker*, Axel Kirschner.

permitted to board the buses to Mexico City.

Two primary questions arise from this encounter. First: Why—after spending two weeks threatening the Viacrucis with immediate deportation—did police and immigration forces not simply detain everyone the moment they left the shelter? They could have easily done so; the federal police had even brought enough equipment and vehicles to arrest the whole march on the spot. And yet they chose not to. The beating itself was also noteworthy in that—though it resulted in several broken hands and feet, concussions, and one fractured spine—the overwhelming majority of migrants did not receive any lasting bodily trauma. Essentially no one received an injury that permanently maimed them. The goal of the beating, then, was thrown into question; inflicting injury for injury's sake did not seem to have been the primary aim. Instead, perhaps there was something about the beating (recall the migrant's account that the head of immigration yelled that the marchers had "had enough, that they should let us go") that changed the relation between the migrants and the state (agents).

Thus, the second question: If the immigration agents' primary goal was not to inflict injury, what were they actually doing when they beat the Viacrucis?

The answer lies in what followed. After arriving in Mexico City and immediately worshipping at the Basilica of Guadalupe, the Viacrucis Migrante drove straight to Mexico's National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH)—a government agency created specifically to oversee human rights abuses in the country—and filed a report against the INM for "violating their human rights." The crux of the claim lay specifically in the physical beating of the Viacrucis by the police. Migrants were called forward to not only testify before the CNDH committee, but to bare their wounds for all to see. As Solalinde later said in a Viacrucis debriefing, it was specifically the graphic nature of the beating, and the physical marks it had left on migrants' bodies, that had "gone too far." There was something in that overt, bodily confrontation—rather than in the more staid but no less violent siege—that somehow granted the Viacrucis Migrante the validity to lodge a formal complaint.

It is worth returning to the expressed logic of the humanitarian visa, which states that one is eligible to receive the document if they have been a "victim of natural disasters or violence." In 2015, what this vague word "violence" meant was still somewhat up for debate in the early stages of the Southern Border Program—did psychic violence count, or only physical violence? Were natural disasters not also capable of inflicting violence? If so, then why differentiate violence from nature? It seems that there is an implicit assumption built within the humanitarian visa that violence lies not on the side of nature, but within culture. Violence is *human* rather than inhuman(e). Thus, the term "*humanitarian* visa" does not refer to the humaneness of accepting others into society, but rather is a recognition that one has suffered violence *at the hands of the human*, and that somehow this violence has now *humanized* the victim. This thesis, I believe, is confirmed by the fact that I have never met a humanitarian visa recipient—and at this point I have easily met over a hundred—who received a visa because they were a "victim of a natural disaster." Functionally, humanitarian visas are not for people displaced or harmed by the injuries of nature. If this is the case, we are at a definition of "human"—and therefore "humanitarianism" as well—that lends further complexity to Didier Fassin's analysis of Western "humanitarian reason."

According to Fassin, "Humanitarian government is… a politics of precarious lives" (2012, 4) which finds its ultimate authority not only by claiming that this precariat must be saved, but by stating that it alone has a "right to intervene" in saving them (Fassin quoting Pandolfi 2003). For instance, he writes, the undocumented migrant in France today—often unemployed as factory work has moved overseas in search of cheaper labor—is "useless to [France's] political economy,

[and so] it now finds its place in a new moral economy that values suffering over labor and compassion more than rights" (87). To demonstrate this, Fassin references the Chevènement Act, a 1990s French policy introduced to provide new protections against deportation for

> "foreigners suffering from a serious health condition" without giving them the right to a residence permit, creating a legal and political imbroglio. Thus, as the logic that combined the introduction of increasingly restrictive immigration laws with the strict application of repressive measures led to a growing number of undocumented individuals being deported… a humanitarian exception was enshrined into law. (87-8)

This humanitarian exception, concludes Fassin, was actually part of a "new moral order that makes the sick [migrant] body a superior criterion for evaluation of the grounds for a request for legalization" (85). We are then at something not so unlike the humanitarian visa in Mexico, in that the Chevènement Act was meant to address a category of ambiguous foreigners who possess some kind of bodily trauma or illness. In reality, however, the logic behind Mexico's humanitarian visa is essentially the inverse to France's humanitarian reason. In France, the sick migrant body is that which is sought out because it beckons to be healed. But Mexico's Southern Border Program specifically targets healthy migrant bodies and then makes them "sick" through state-inflicted violence. Only *then* can the migrant be ushered into the realm of humanitarianism through the humanitarian visa.

Returning to the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe, we might align the migrant body with that of the Mexica peasant Juan Diego, a body which occupied the ambiguous space of non-citizen (the human/inhuman), and was therefore a being beyond the normative order. And, just as the Virgin stamped herself onto Juan Diego, in order to be made the subject of New Spain, migrant bodies quite literally need to be *stamped* by the police to leave an overt mark that attests to their suffering (a mark that statelessness does not leave alone), a physical *document* hammered into the body which then provides the means of being ushered into a new subjectivity and/or status.[21] It is the beating, then, not the healing, that was the first step on the path towards humanity for the Viacrucis Migrante. If the humanitarian reason outlined by Fassin professes that to treat one as human is to be attentive to suffering—and perhaps eventually to even relieve a select few of it—then the Mexican humanitarian visa is the recognition that before one can be relieved of such suffering, one must be made to suffer in the first place.

Every *viacrucis* reenactment in Mexico ends in a simulated sacrifice. The Viacrucis Migrante ended in one as well. The pilgrims, after all, had placed themselves into the sacrificial role of Christ. The police and immigration agents—perhaps wary of the political repercussions of outright deporting a famous priest's march, but also intent on reinforcing their own position of authority—beat the migrants' bodies, and in doing so ritually "killed" them. To think in Das's terms, the beating was an overt transaction in the construction—one might even say *production*—of pain, a process through which a new "perversely human" subject could emerge (2006, 70). By submitting themselves to be beaten, the Viacrucis forced the state to locate their pain (literally in their physical bodies) where it could not be located before (in statelessness). The effectiveness in caravan lay not simply in conjoining migrants' organic bodies alone, but rather in conjoining

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[21] Angela Garcia has written about a not so dissimilar phenomenon in her articles on Mexican anexos—where (often poor) drug addicts are made to submit themselves to extreme forms of physical discipline and suffering in order to prove that they are worthy of sobriety and therefore a kind of salvation within the realm of the social (see Garcia 2015; Garcia & Anderson 2016).

them—however briefly and brutally—with certain organic bodies representing the state as well. The act of literally smashing one's body into another, intermingling limbs, falling onto and into one another, quite literally links migrant organs to the organs of the state. And, instead of simply touching the other's hand, as in Wittgenstein's example, the immigration agents beat it. Though brutal, the beating was nonetheless an action that led to a definitive location of migrant suffering, and an indictment of its cause—the pain could now be proven to the judge, because the judge was also the offender. The beating, standing in for what cannot be spoken (the inarticulability of the anguish of statelessness), then provided the language that became the means of engagement with the state (the legalization process). Only after the beating could the migrants then be resurrected as something new. Just as the violence of the Conquest incorporated the indigenous Mexica into the project of (Christian) humankind, so too did the violence of the police beating finally provide these strange migrant others legal entry into Mexico. This is not mere metaphysical posturing, but actual Mexican law; the only way for the vast majority of migrants on the Viacrucis to legalize themselves was to be beaten by state actors. Without the beating, they literally would not have qualified for legal relief as stipulated by international asylum law. The markings on their physical bodies—the bruises, broken wrists, and fractured necks—like stigmata, attested to their sacrifice and provided irrefutable proof of their new identities: resurrected subjects of Mexico, if only temporary ones.

After the Viacrucis Migrante's testimony at the CNDH, Father Solalinde announced that anyone who wished to stay in Mexico was now eligible for a humanitarian visa. Their claims would be successful, he predicted, because the violence inflicted upon them by state actors had now been well documented. Though many migrants left immediately for the US border, at least several dozen decided to stay, and, as far as I know, all of them eventually received humanitarian visas, and it was the first time a migrant caravan was granted such visas en masse.

From Foucault to Leroi-Gourhan: The Southern Border Program beyond biopower and the panopticon

Since 2015, migrant caravans have grown in size, frequency, and infamy, but the relation between caravans and immigration forces has remained relatively the same. In 2018, for instance—during the largest migrant caravan in history, totaling well over 10,000 people and lasting several months—the Mexican government agreed to issue humanitarian visas to all the caravan's participants, but only *after* they had already beaten them publicly. The visas were not promised beforehand. In 2021, the government again promised something similar to another migrant caravan, granting humanitarian visas only after migrants had endured several clashes with police while marching through the country. Though the vast majority of migrants in both caravans endured violence at hands of state actors, essentially none of them were ever detained, and, to my knowledge, the Mexican government has never offered humanitarian visas to a migrant caravan before state actors have systematically beaten them.

What conclusions, then, can we draw from such beatings?

The 2015 Viacrucis Migrante, and essentially all caravans that have come after it, speak to a different form of (international) governance than that described by Michel Foucault, particularly in relation to his concepts of biopower and the panopticon. General conceptions of modern border enforcement often invoke Foucauldian notions of the panopticon in order to describe a well-oiled surveillance machine with drones, heat sensors, and night vision cameras to track migrants' every

move. Indeed, there is no dearth of literature that analyzes border militarization and immigration enforcement through Foucault's notions of the panopticon, as well as the disciplinary power it makes possible. Terence M. Garrett has recently described "border surveillance as a panopticon" (2018), for instance, whereas Eduardo Mendieta has added further complexity by describing how border militarization as a whole works as a "mobile panopticon" (2017). Sara Riva has charted the disciplinary power that exists in the "hielera" holding facilities on the US-Mexico border (2017). Others have explored the panoptic role of migrant shelters (Newell et al 2017), and how migrants are often locked inside "for their own good" (Balaguera 2018). Didier Bigo has even described the process of border militarization as a kind of "ban-opticon," that is, as a "*dispositif* [that] does not produce a unified strategy but is rather an effect of anonymous multiple struggles, which nevertheless contribute to a globalization of domination" by creating a field of bureaucratic power that migrants cannot penetrate, even if some of them can penetrate physical borders.

With all of this panoptic gaze, one might expect the migrant trail to be rife with paranoia, as people must constantly navigate the Program's increasing use of surveillance technologies. However, extreme paranoia was by no means something that I encountered frequently. Of course, at certain moments in every migrant's journey—especially when they had to travel around an immigration checkpoint—the fear of being surveilled or captured is present. But paranoia—this fear that one is being watched at all times, that the state could see them and would soon apprehend them at any moment—was actually surprisingly rare. Rather, what I heard over and over again was an expression of anguish at *not being seen*. Migrants were mostly concerned by the fact that the Program had pushed them into the shadows. Their routes were increasingly fractured, wandering, nonlinear. In the early years of the Program, many migrants who had previously ridden the Beast expressed great despair about how lonely they were, how few migrants they were now encountering on their journeys, and how, interestingly, it felt like no one was watching them at all.

As one migrant who had ridden the Beast several times before the Southern Border Program went into effect explained to me, "Before, when I rode the Beast, there were thousands of people on the train. It was like an event. And everywhere you stopped, people would be out selling things. You could stop, eat, go to the store. Sometimes it was scary, but a lot of times it was interesting too. I mean, it was still a hard journey, and scary. And you have to sleep in the migrant shelters, which is awful. But it was also interesting. Especially for me, leaving Honduras for the first time, I felt like I could explore some. See new things. Meet new people sometimes. There would even be reporters around sometimes. You'd see people taking photos, journalists interviewing people about their journeys. Now you don't see any of that, because you have to hide."

In *Discipline and Punish* (2012), Michel Foucault describes the panopticism mechanism as that which "arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two" (200). The major effect of the Panopticon, then, is to

> induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are

> themselves the bearers… Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. (201)

The Southern Border Plan, however, is not disciplinary. Under the Program, migrants are quite certain that for much of their journeys they are not being observed. Rather than being trapped within the prison walls, so to speak, or a guard tower looming overhead, migrants have rather been cast outside of the walls entirely. There is no one there to see them suffer, and, even if they manage to find some kind of some supposedly panoptic apparatus, such as the asylum office, or a police department, more often than not their suffering is ignored through indefinite legal postponement or outright rejection. Under the Program, there is no bearer of discipline ready to make migrants into more productive subjects, no one who wishes to reform their morals, and certainly not a soul who desires to preserve their health (see 208).

Nor does one see the "lightness" on the migrant trail that Foucault characterizes as intrinsic to the functioning of panoptic institutions:

> there were no more bars, no more chains, no more heavy locks; all that was needed was that the separations should be clear and the openings well arranged… He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporeal… (202-3)

On the migrant trail, the "physical weight" of the external power is in every way still there. One sees it on the militarized borders and armed immigration checkpoints. It is a power that is absolutely corporeal, absolutely tangible; one is afraid of being caught by real hands which will grab them. At the same time, migrants often articulated a split sensation in relation to their own bodies. On the one hand, their existence felt intensely and horrifically corporeal—they were trapped in these bodies that had been made illegal, and they could not shed them. At the same time, many expressed the sensation of having lost something of their bodies, that they almost didn't feel like they were in a body anymore at all, even though they felt simultaneously trapped in one. After the Viacrucis, Derik—the migrant quoted above whose wrist was broken in the clash with the police—began to hallucinate that he was a ghost. "I can't feel myself," I would say. "I can't touch myself. It's like I'm a ghost just floating."

An oft-overlooked aspect of the panopticon is that it in fact does *not* actually see everything; it only works to provide the illusion that it does. In order for the prison guard to catch an inmate acting out of order, they must first turn their gaze from all the other inmates in order to do so. The panopticon's vision also has quite obvious limitations—those of the exterior prison walls. The guard tower alone cannot see into the neighboring school, for instance; instead, a compatible system of surveillance must also develop in the school, which itself cannot see into the hospital. Of course, as Jacques-Alain Miller has noted, the panopticon is a "general principle of construction" (1987), not simply a literal prison or unilateral surveillance system, and the point is how the "polyvalent apparatus of surveillance" is able to permeate and move between the prison,

school, and hospital simultaneously, in no small part because we as subjects internalize this gaze ourselves, and use to it surveil our own behavior as well as others'. But the point remains that, in actuality, the state does not always see. In fact, it can never witness everything. By focusing its attention here, it must ignore what is going on over there. Within a disciplinary society, then, the panopticon's effectiveness is entirely dependent upon how much it can keep up the illusion that it sees all. And one must ask, therefore, if the state openly admits—or even *insists—*that it does not see something happening within its supposedly sovereign territory, what then?

This is precisely the goal of the Southern Border Program. Rather than being designed as an all-seeing eye, the Program has been constructed to be much more of an *anti-panopticon* than a panopticon—that is, as an institution which intentionally *does not see*, which refuses to see, which turns away at certain critical moments—and, crucially, an institution which teaches other populations to internalize this not-seeing as well. Yes, the Program has heightened surveillance of migrant populations in Mexico, and yes migrants acknowledge and feel the burden of that surveillance, but, also, the Program succeeds largely because it turns its back on migrants.

This "not-seeing like a state" has real advantages for Global South states like Mexico, who often do not have the economic or technological capacity to create the illusion of an all-seeing panopticon in the first place, unlike states like the US or France. And Mexico itself is continuously observed both by its more powerful trade neighbors, especially the US, as well as international human rights organizations like the United Nations. The watchful eye of the liberal international over the Global South, to ensure that it maintains certain supposed human rights standards, puts Mexico in a double bind. On the one hand, if it abides by these international standards, it may not detain and deport migrant en masse without following the proper protocol and asylum procedures that all migrants are entitled to under international asylum law. Mexico claims to not have the resources to do this. But another issue, besides economic resources, is just as pressing—that the US secretly demands that Mexico not follow this protocol, but instead catch and remove migrants as quickly as possible before they get anywhere near to the US. So if Mexico follows international asylum law, they go against US wishes. If they carry out the US's demand to stop hunt down Central American migrants at all costs, they go against the liberal national order, of which the US is supposedly the head. The Southern Border Plan is, in effect, the solution to this problem. It is the unspoken rule. It seeks to make migrants invisible, and therefore the state cannot profess to have ever seen them in the first place. States are much less likely to be held accountable for what they purportedly do not see.

Just as with Cortés and the conquistadors, humanitarianism is compelled to intervene in injustices which it witnesses, and it demands that others to do the same. For a warden to constantly scan prisoners, to create the illusion that they are being watched at all times, is also to bear the social burden of sustaining their life, and therefore having to feed them, treating them when they are sick, granting them refuge when they are stateless, and so on. In the same way, the surveillance state must admit that it is fully aware of the poverty in its midst, of its poor education levels, of the human rights abuses that all within in its gaze suffer. State surveillance becomes a paradox: if a state recognizes that violence is being inflicted upon those in its midst, it must also immediately take responsibility for that violence, because it is the sovereign. Under this logical, global humanitarian institutions compel states in the Global South to address particular instances of poverty and human suffering which it identifies. But there is an important loophole: by humanitarianism's own logic, if states do not see this suffering, they cannot usually be blamed for it. A state is responsible only for the violence which it sees. Therefore, countries like Mexico have learned to "un-see like a state," so to speak, to look away from violences that it has some hand in.

The Southern Border Program is this un-seeing par excellence. A key strategy of the Program has been—through the use immigration checkpoints strategically placed not to actually detain migrants so much as to push them as to divert their migratory patterns through specific geographic locations—to force migrants to travel through territories which are contested by cartels, gangs, and anti-government militias. The Mexican states of Guerrero and Michoacán, for instance, have for approximately a decade been recognized as somewhat autonomous zones, where cartels, local populations, and the federal state regularly clash for military control. The Program has sought to use this violence to its advantage: by pushing migrants into Guerrero and Michoacán—as well as other states known to be at least in part governed by the cartels, such as the more northern states Sinaloa, Sonora, and Nuevo Leon—it can make migrants "disappear" without actually ever physically confronting them. In fact, even before the Program, mass graves of migrants had already been regularly found along the Mexican side of the US-Mexico border, such as with the "Massacre of San Fernando," when seventy-two migrants were executed by Los Zetas cartel and in 2010, and the "Second Massacre of San Fernando," when another mass grave was discovered in 2011, also perpetrated by Los Zetas. Though the death toll officially numbered 193, activists have stated that the government may have conspired to conceal the actual number, which is estimated at over 500 (NOTIMEX 2011). I have also heard from several journalists and researchers that they believe at least some of the people found in these mass graves have had their organs harvested, and that this is the reason they were murdered, though it has been difficult to confirm these suspicions.

When the Southern Border Program went into effect, it essentially used these mass kidnappings and executions to its advantage by diverting migrants into areas where they are more likely to disappear. As Amarela Varela Huerta writes:

> In Mexico migrants in transit face programs and plans of "migration management" like the Southern Border Program, which has converted Mexico into the most violent country in the world for migrants in transit. With more than 20,000 kidnappings of migrants every year, approximately 72,000 to 120,000 immigrants disappeared, and—since the upsurge of the securitization/externalization of borders (2006-2015)—24,000 corpses have been found in anonymous graves in municipal cemeteries, as well as more than 40,000 unidentified bodies in public morgues.[22] (2017, translation mine)

In this way, the Program employs para-state actors—such as cartels, gangs, and militias, which are supposedly framed as acting against the national body, as cancers or parasites within that body—to be central organs of the state as such, as those things which do work that cannot otherwise be seen by the state. This, then, is not merely a hybrid collectif, though non-human actors, such as deserts and jungle, are also employed by the state to make migrants disappear. This is about the transformation of being, that is, the incorporation of various organs into a particular kind of body.

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[22] The original Spanish reads: "… en México los migrantes en tránsito afrontan programas y planes de "gestión de la migración" como el Plan Frontera Sur,[2] que ha convertido a México en el país más violento del mundo para los migrantes en tránsito. Con más de 20 mil secuestros de migrantes por año, un aproximado de entre 72 mil a 120 mil inmigrantes desaparecidos y, desde el recrudecimiento de la securitización/externalización de fronteras (2006-2015), el hallazgo de 24 mil cadáveres en tumbas anónimas en cementerios municipales, más 40 mil cuerpos no identificados en las morgues públicas."

But the Program employment of what are seen from the outside as para-state or anti-state actors is not merely to look away from or excuse itself of the violence inflicted upon migrants. Instead, the state proper—when it is eventually forced to confront this violence through news coverage or humanitarian chastisement, rather than admit any culpability, can frame the violence against migrants (who previously the state in every way rejected as subjects) as a violation of its own sovereignty, which it then uses to ask other countries—such as the US under the Plan Mérida—for more funding for its military campaigns against these para-state actors. In short, the concept of panopticism only works where the notion of sovereignty also works. In a country like Mexico—economically dependent on trade deals with the United States, and politically dependent upon the United Nations to deter its northern neighbor's continuous encroachment—it must first profess a certain amount of impotence within its own borders before it can receive aid, whether from the US or the UN. Only then will it receive the money it needs for this or that program.

Mexico's embrace of the anti-panopticon can also be seen as an explicit rejection of biopower, in that the Southern Border Program resoundingly rejects the biopolitical impetus "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (Foucault 1990, 138). The Program—and its multitude of copycat border externalization initiatives that are being erected around the world today—in no way attempts to ensure or multiply life. Instead, it seeks to profoundly *disorder*, and ultimately dismantle, what could be considered, in Foucaultian terminology, one of the most overtly biopolitical apparatuses ever constructed: international asylum and refugee law. At these increasingly militarized borders, which, make no mistake, are being erected in anticipation of massive climate fallout and the mass migration it will produce (and is already producing), life is not sacred, and its stewardship is no longer sanctimonious. One might even argue that the stewardship of life that Foucault describes has never truly been present in Mexico, nor in greater Latin America, meaning that the universality with which this concept has been applied is often misguided and overzealous. For instance, one only needs to spend several hours in the sprawling migrant shantytowns that exist on the US-Mexico or Mexico-Guatemala borders to conclude that a new global infrastructure is being erected in which life is openly devalued and denied en masse—not just for a small population of others, but currently for hundreds of millions of migrants, who are estimated to possibly grow to over a billion people in the next decades of the climate crisis (Henley 2020). The vast majority of these migrants are legally marginalized not through categories overtly tied to biology (race, gender, etc.) but through their undocumented status, that is, through a lack of an external organ.

In this way, Foucault's notion of anatomo-politics is also not sufficient to precisely describe the profoundly material changes happening to migrant corpuses. As soon as it crosses into Mexico, the undocumented corpus is already beyond organic anatomy and biology, including and especially in the eyes of the state. Leroi-Gourhan provides a means of thinking this beyond. For instance, though the Program is erecting more prisons (immigration detention centers) than ever before, it seems that no one expected these migrants to be disciplined into behaving differently (that is, to be discouraged from crossing). Moreover, it could be said that Foucault's notion of anatomo-politics relies heavily on an isolation of organic body as object of inquiry, to the exclusion of external organs. Foucault provides an analysis of how forces supposedly outside this organic body shape its capacities in one way or another, namely through the individualization of the body as it is educated, punished, and trained, which then also disciplines the subject into reproduce capitalist relations of production. In other words, the body is disciplined through certain social *ideals*, especially in relation to productivity.

But Leroi-Gourhan's conception of external organs provides a more complex framework

to understand exactly how certain organs come to create (and therefore also limit) our particular beings. It is not simply that the ideal of discipline must be hammered into an industrializing population, but that external organs of industrialization actually create the very boundaries by which we can move or maneuver our bodies in the first place, because they are our bodies. The loom demands that a weaver be made, and it sets the boundaries of their being before their existence as weaver. This is the material process behind the "mute compulsion" of which Marx speaks (1990, 899). It is not simply that discipline is a set of relations and obligations that forces us to enact certain values, but that these relations crystallize into material objects—organs—which attach themselves to our corpuses and thereby structure and compel our being in the world.

The Viacrucis Migrante, rather than simply rejecting discipline, reconfigured migrants into a body that demanded it. They insisted that their bodies be disciplined in particular ways in order to become part of society, rather than be excluded from it. The organization of the migrant caravan demands that it be seen—by the state, by international humanitarian organizations, and by the inter/national media—because being gazed upon means a greater likelihood of being incorporated into the state project, even in some marginalized sense, one that now had access to the state organs from which they were previously excluded.

Conclusion: The sacrificing (of) citizenship

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an ethnographic account of the first "migrant caravan" to be beaten by police and immigration forces in Mexico, as well as to show how the humanitarian visa emerged from that encounter to become the most popular form of migrant legalization in Mexico today, both for migrant caravans and individual migrants traveling alone. In the years since the 2015 Viacrucis Migrante, humanitarian visas have skyrocketed in popularity, and nearly 100,000 migrants received humanitarian visas in 2021, drastically outpacing the number of Mexico's asylum approvals for the same year (INM 2022a). Humanitarian visas seem to have become so widespread in the country because they offer a convenient solution to the Mexican state—by issuing migrants humanitarian visas, the government often wins the praise of international media and human rights organizations for supposedly addressing a "mass migration crisis," while simultaneously denying migrants any of the rights of traditional asylum or refugee status (Angulo-Pasel 2022; Boiklund Belliveau & Ferguson 2021).[23]

With this in mind, I hope to have lent further depth into the origins of and logic behind humanitarian visas. Humanitarian visas should not be understood as a straightforward embrace of 20th century humanitarian logic (a mere mirroring of Western humanist thought), nor as *only* a simple legal trick to side-step granting migrants asylum (though they are this as well). Rather, humanitarian visas contain a deeper logic regarding the notion of the human—one that can be traced back to the violence of the Spanish Conquest, a violence that was enacted with the explicit justification of ushering the Mexica people into the realm of (Christian) humankind. Taken up today, this logic implicitly understands violence to be bound up within the realm of human culture, rather than as simply something outside the human that must be intervened upon and cured by culture.

[23] In a future article, I plan to document in detail, through continued ethnographic analysis, the particular trials humanitarian visa recipients face, especially in relation to being unable to work and bank legally.

I conclude, then, with the proposition that the beating of the 2015 Viacrucis Migrante, as well as subsequent beatings of migrant caravans by the Mexican state, must be understood as a kind of *sacrificing (of) citizenship*, by which I mean two things: 1) That Mexico has created an immigration bureaucracy in which the only form of legalization for many migrants is to submit themselves to be physically beaten by state actors. This beating is systematic enough that it can be interpreted as being structured by Christian notions of sacrifice in general and the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in particular, and that the ritual enactment of this sacrifice then allows migrants to be initiated into Mexican society when they otherwise could not be. And yet, at the same time, 2) The invention of the humanitarian visa must be seen as an overt attempt to subvert and dismantle the greater asylum system in Mexico, thereby obstructing the most obvious and beneficial pathway to Mexican citizenship for most migrants.

Further anthropological analysis into this matter might trace the ways in which modern citizenship and legalization processes are materialized through immigration documents like passports or humanitarian visas, and how these documents are related (or even quite literally attached) to the bodies of subjects. As Global North countries continue to externalize their borders around the world, anthropological analysis can be employed to document how this *sacrificing (of) citizenship* is taken up in other "border countries" besides Mexico (such as in Turkey, which has its own version of a humanitarian visa). Additionally, I have lent new insight into anthropological investigations of humanitarianism and its "reason"—and even the conception and enactment of the category of the human itself—especially in terms of how notions of humanitarianism usually attributed to the West or the Global North alone, are taken up, reinterpreted, and wielded in novel ways by countries within the Global South.

Interlude III

I am standing on the roof of the Castros' new home, an abandoned housing unit that they started squatting in just a few weeks prior to my arrival. From the living room below me, Carlos snakes a thin black cord through the window and I grab it, careful not to touch the frayed wire poking out of the black protective plastic. I do not know if it is live or not; whenever I ask him, Carlos has simply shrugged noncommittally, which I take as a sign that I should be cautious. He hops out of the window, drags a makeshift ladder across the yard, and leans it against a nearby electrical pole. Carlos cobbled the ladder together out of scrap wood and nails from the dump. It is flimsy stuff, but it holds his weight as he ascends toward the fuse box. I venture toward the ledge of the roof and swing my end of the wire around my head for momentum, like a lasso, and then let go of the slack, careful to keep the rest of the wire wrapped around my arm. The frayed end sails toward Carlos, and he reaches out and catches it deftly. I feel pleased with myself that I have not fumbled my end of the task, and, for a moment, both Carlos and I are connected by the thin black wire that may or may not have electricity running through it. In the fading evening light, I can't see exactly what Carlos' fingers do in the fuse box of the electrical pole, but eventually he twists our wire among the nest of others and yells down below, "Ma, is it working?"

"It's working," Maria calls back. "It's working."

From the rooftop, the rest of the wire still in my hands, I can hear the drone of a Mexican telecast. Two bodies have been found out in the desert, executed.

"You see that, Levi?" Carlos chuckles. "That's how we get TV in the hood."

After the Viacrucis, the Castro family continued on to Monterrey, an industrial city in northern Mexico, just a few hours from the Texas border. Under the Southern Border Program, Monterrey has become a new international city, where many migrants—mostly Central American, but also African and Asian—have chosen to resettle, rather than braving an increasingly dangerous and unsuccessful journey across the US-Mexico border. It is, in some ways, a city of cold feet, the last place that migrants can decide to try their luck in Mexico instead.

Carlos lived in Monterrey off and on for almost a decade and knew the area well. For many years, while in-between smuggling trips, he would squat in the abandoned factory housing on the outskirts of the city. Monterrey is one of the biggest maquiladora towns in Mexico, and many maquiladoras built excess housing near the factory grounds, in order to accommodate hiring sprees in times of boom. The housing is cheap—basic two-bedroom, one bath units with concrete walls and floors, with option to hook up the electricity and plumbing as needed—and extend in rows of dozens or even hundreds of units. The Castro family's house sat on the end of a string of houses that extended nearly a quarter mile into the distance. The maquilas must not have been experiencing a boom at the moment, because the Castros had their pick of housing on the block, and there were several other squatters within a stone's throw of their house—Central American migrants, internal migrants from rural Mexico, and drug users looking for a stash house. It was the second house the Castros had lived in in as many months. When they moved into their first unit, they hadn't realized that the plumbing wasn't properly hooked up. After about a month, the toilet had "exploded like a bomb of shit" according to Darin, completely destroying their bathroom. The family was now in the process of slowly moving into the unit next door, and Carlos had triple checked that it had adequate plumbing infrastructure.

Carlos liked Monterrey, he says, because organs were cheap to come by there; housing and electricity were essentially free, so long as you paid off the sporadic nosy police officer or city inspector to leave you be. Almost anything you needed for your house—toilets, window, doors, doorknobs, sinks, cabinets, furniture, decorations, and all the other scraps you might require in the process—could usually be found in the dump just down the road. This had been true as long as Carlos had lived in Monterrey, he said, which was a very different situation from Honduras, where such a large quantity of scrap material simply did not exist. "There are too many poor people in Honduras," said Carlos. "No one throws anything away, and if they do it's gone in a second." But Monterrey, with its manufacturing industry and its proximity to the US (which meant a healthy flow of remittances into the city), had an abundance of discarded organs, and the Castros were incredibly ingenious bricoleurs, especially Carlos and Santos. Over the course of a couple weeks, I helped them create a kitchen out of essentially scrap materials. They used a front door as a countertop, sawing a whole in the middle to drop in a cracked sink that they had found in the dumpster of a nearby construction site. With a little concrete and caulk, Carlos made the sink leak-proof in no time. Cabinets and shelves were fashioned out of a chopped up old desk, a table missing two legs, and another door. We fashioned an outdoor sink to scrub laundry in with an old bird bath, PVC piping, and more concrete, which Carlos hinted that he had stolen off the lot of another construction site.

The city itself provided other organs. Monterrey had two metro lines that ran from the city center to the outskirts of town. Though they lived in the desertous periphery of the city, the Castro family could theoretically be in the heart of downtown in just over an hour, and for cheap. That was something they'd never experienced in Honduras, they said. In an attempt to attract tourism, Monterrey had also recently constructed a riverwalk in the fashion of nearby San Antonio, Texas, which Carlos especially liked.

"Monterrey feels a lot like the US," he said to me. "Even if I can't cross back, the river and the buildings and stores here in Monterrey make me feel like I'm almost there."

The other two Castro brothers, however, had a different opinion of the city. "I still can't get a job [with only a humanitarian visa]," Darin complained to me. He had high hopes to find more secretarial work in Monterrey, but no one would hire him without a CURP, and he suspected that being Honduran wasn't helping either. Though Darin was one of the members of the Castro family who did not look Afro-Latino, he did still have a strong Honduran accent; any potential employer would know immediately that he was not Mexican. There was also the problem that, for Darin, the outskirts of Monterrey were incredibly boring, but the city center also confounded and intimidated him. Once, while I was staying with the Castro family, I needed to take the GRE exam as part of my graduate school application. When I showed Darin the address of the building I was supposed to take the exam in, and asked if he knew where in Monterrey it was, he assured me that he did, that it was only about half an hour away from their house, and he offered to escort me there himself on the metro the morning of so that I would not get lost. I was surprised that Darin was so confident; the Castros lived far away from the city center, and Google Maps told me that the building was almost an hour away. "No," said Darin, "that's wrong. Don't worry, I'll show you the way."

However, the morning of the exam, Darin became very turned around. Suddenly, we were running late. I was already very stressed out about the exam; I had not been able to study like I hoped while helping the Castros outfit their home, and I was worried that now I would not arrive on time. Darin sensed my growing worry. He apologized and admitted that the metro system intimidated him, and he had only ridden it once before. In the end, I made it to my exam just in the

nick of time and everything turned out fine. Afterward, however, Darin wanted to talk about the experience more. He confided in me that he was very frustrated with Monterrey. He had yearned to live in a big city ever since he was a child, he said, but resettling in Monterrey was harder than he had expected. He had hoped, for instance, that moving to a big city would mean that he would be able to ore freely explore his sexuality. The glitzy night clubs in Monterrey were alluring, but he had never been to one before and was not sure how they worked. They had nothing like that back in his hometown in Honduras. Those kinds of nightclubs also only admitted men in expensive clothing—often fitted cowboy hats and glossy leather boots—which were organs he did not possess and did not wish to. "Hondurans don't wear stuff like that," he told me. "I'd feel too weird to wear those kinds of things." This sense of inauthenticity extended to the city itself. "Carlos loves the riverwalk," said Darin, "but I've seen pictures of the one in San Antonio, and it's nicer. I've never been to the US, but it just seems like Monterrey is trying to be something that it isn't. It isn't the US. It's Mexico. Everywhere you go, Monterrey is trying to look like the US. But look around. They're failing." In some sense, Darin felt that Carlos had promised him a new life in Monterrey, but he still felt burdened by cheap organs, and he wasn't sure how to even wield the organs that he did theoretically have access to, such as the metro. His humanitarian visa was not nearly as effective as asylum. The few pesos he did earn were not as effective as the dollars that many of his neighbors received from remittances. And not even Monterrey felt like the US in the way that Carlos had promised him.

In Honduras, Darin had especially dreamed of living in a metropolis with world class museums, art venues, and music halls—cultural spaces that he simultaneously believed Monterrey did not possess in sufficient quality or quantity, but also sheepishly admitted that he did not understand how to find or access in the first place. Learning how to exist in the cultural and technological milieus of a city was a skill, and there was no one around to teach Darin how to use his corpus differently. While decorating the house, Darin had dragged a painting out of a dumpster that was an up-close portrait of a zebra's eye. He hung it in the living room over the couch. The only thing visible in the painting was the animal's right eye, and you could tell it was a zebra because it was surrounded by black and white stripes. I asked Darin why he had been so taken with it.

It was a reassuring piece of art, Darin told me. It made him feel seen, like someone was watching over his family. Being seen was an ambivalent desire for Darin. He longed to finally find a boyfriend in Monterrey, and to have a relationship out in the open that was not a secret. But in such a dangerous and remote part of town, the Castro family was also worried about being targeted by their neighbors. All it would take was for one angry neighbor to report them to immigration officials and they could be deported. Carlos had already gotten into several altercations with neighbors in the area, and Darin had been forced to intervene and apologize on the family's behalf, which only enraged Carlos further. Darin was worried that if he was out as gay, that could cause even more problems for the family. So he had continued to try to keep his sexuality a secret even after the end of the Viacrucis.

That was something else that he liked about the painting, he told me, that you could tell it was a zebra immediately, even though only the animal's eye was visible. The stripes gave it away. Darin so often felt like the opposite of that. Trying to pass as straight and Mexican was exhausting—the theoretical possibility that he could pass, that for a moment he might convince others that his corpus was something that it actually was not, was also what continuously haunted him. He dreamed of being in a place where, like the zebra, he could be immediately identified for what he was. That was interesting, I said, because a zebra's stripes are actually camouflage. What

helps a creature blend in one place might be the exact thing that makes them instantly recognizable in another.

For the youngest brother, Santos, things were different still. Carlos overtly embraced hustling and had never held a job in the formal economy. Darin was the only one in the family with a high school education and aspired to a white-collar job. Santos, however, had dropped out of school in the second grade after his mother Maria said that she needed his help cutting sugarcane. Santos was of slight build, but he was lithe and athletic. In Monterrey, he had quickly found work as a mechanic's apprentice, who had agreed to pay Santos under the table if he opened the shop up early every morning to work a double shift, a double shift that came with significantly less pay. He would work at the shop, Santos said, until he was either able to obtain a CURP and find a new job in the maquiladoras, or until he could somehow figure out how to open his own small mechanic's business out of the Castros' house. He could fix cars on the front lawn, but he would first need to acquire the basic organs of the mechanic's corpus—a car jack, a decent toolkit, and, most importantly, an air compressor. Air compressors were relatively basic—they simply shot compressed air through a tube—but they could be very lucrative. Once acquired, they could easily fix flat tires, as well as quickly clean the interior of cars. People always needed their tires fixed and their cars cleaned, so it would bring in a steady stream of money without a lot of overhead. Santos had his eye out for one, though he estimated it would take him at least another year as an apprentice before he could buy a used one himself.

Thus, each brother seemed to represent a different kind of figure within the labor economy of Mexico. Carlos was content to remain a kind of lumpen figure, someone who continuously hustled in Mexico's grey and black markets, and who did not wish to seek formal employment. He very much enjoyed the bricolage of foraging in the dump for whatever he needed at the moment, and when he could not find it at the dump, he confessed, he often figured out how to steal it. Then there was Darin, who strived to be a white-collar worker, seeking a stable life in the professional class, though he had yet to figure out how to do that in Mexico. Finally, Santos very much set his sights on a kind of traditional, proletarianized manual labor, with aspirations toward minor entrepreneurship. He enjoyed the proximity to factories and machines, and he took pleasure in figuring out how these machines worked, what their innards looked like, what made them tick.

Over time, these different aspirations and notions of labor began to make the brothers clash. Though Carlos attempted to continue smuggling people under the Southern Border Program, the smuggling jobs were much more sporadic, dangerous, and usually shorter trips. The pay was low and infrequent, and the other two brothers confided in me that Carlos was increasingly becoming an economic burden, as he tended to spend what little money he did have on drugs and alcohol. The family initially looked to Darin to fill the patriarchal void that Carlos seemed to have created, both because he was the best educated and the next eldest brother. But it was a role that Darin was reluctant to take on—he had other plans, and other notions of family, and he confessed that he felt burdened by the expectation that he become the breadwinner. After over a year in Monterrey, he had still not found an office job, and his humanitarian visa had expired. So the family slowly began to turn to Santos, who was still just a teenager, to provide a steady income. It was a role he was happy to take on. He had only been fifteen when the family fled Honduras, and he was coming of age in Mexico in a way that Darin and Carlos had not. He understood the way things in the neighborhood worked better than they did, he said to me. "They're still too Honduran," he said to me. "They don't get that things work differently here."

What did he mean? I asked.

For instance, he said, neither of his brothers had ever thought about owning a car. But

Santos believed that, if you wanted to get ahead in Mexico, you needed one. “The idea of a car doesn’t even cross their minds,” he said. “Carlos is still thinking about riding the train, which is impossible. And Darin thinks that somehow he can find an office job while he’s still walking everywhere. Have you seen those big office buildings in the city? The people who work in them aren’t walking. Before in Honduras, Darin used to wear a button up and walk to work every day. It wasn’t a big deal, that’s just what everyone did, but we basically lived in a small town compared to Monterrey. People here wear suits and drive to work. They drive cars with air conditioning and work in buildings with air conditioning and go back to homes with air conditioning. They don’t sweat. They look totally different than us. Darin still doesn’t get that.”

In order to get what they wanted, the Castro family would have to drastically change their corpuses. But he was the only one, Santos seemed to be saying, who understood that overtly.

PART TWO

Interlude IV

"Do you know where Darin is?" I had never heard Carlos' voice like this before. It was higher than normal, terrified.

"No," I said. "Is everything okay?"

"He's gone," said Carlos. "We had a fight a few days ago and he left. He just packed a bag and left without even saying goodbye."

"Where do you think he is?" I asked.

"What do you think, Levi?" he snapped. "He fucking crossed, obviously."

We waited for several excruciating weeks and heard nothing. Then I got a call.

"It's me," said Darin. "They caught me."

He crossed to Texas in the middle of the night and had walked right into an immigration patrol. He ran to a bush and and stayed there, completely frozen, for over four hours while trucks and helicopters whizzed by all around him. "I kept my legs crossed and my eyes closed the whole time," he said. "I heard that the cameras can pick up the gleam from your eyes, like a cat. And someone told me that if you scrunch yourself into a ball it's harder for the heat cameras to see your outline." It was these gestures, he said, that had kept immigration from finding him, despite the fact that he was sitting in a small bush right out in the open.

When the sun began to rise, he dashed from the bush and made it to a nearby town. That was where they caught him. "I tried to get on a bus," he said, "to get to Houston. But as soon as the bus pulled out of the station, immigration stopped it and asked everyone to show ID. Can you believe that? It's just like the Southern Border Program, the Program is in the US too." It was hard for him to wrap his head around, he said, that he had crossed the border and done everything right, evading helicopters and immigration patrols, only to be caught on a bus. This is what the Southern Border Program was good at—transforming organs that previously aided migrants into the very things that caught them.

I connected Darin with an immigration nonprofit that specialized in representing LGBTQ migrants' asylum cases, and eventually they were able to secure his release from the detention center. By chance, he detention center was only a few hours drive from where I was living at the time, and he spent one night in my apartment before continuing on. I asked what his strategy for his asylum case was.

"Very simple," he said. "My lawyer says to just keep saying that I'm gay over and over again. And that because of that there's no way I can keep living in Honduras."

Darin might have felt that being gay—unlike Carlos—really was something that he was born with, something that was a part of his essence. But it also became part of his strategy, the labor he would have to understand. It worked. Over a year later, Darin was granted asylum in a large city in the Midwest, the kind that had many museums and art venues and music halls. With only a high school education, he was still not immediately able to find the office job he desired, but he applied to the local community college and was admitted. Within a few years, hopefully, the organ of his degree would finally grant his corpus the ability to walk into an office building and receive more money per hour than the rest of his family could earn combined.

Chapter 4

Corpus Transitus: Trans beings on the migrant trail

"Esa hembra es mala"

The crucifix was life-sized and stretched to the top of the tin roof of the shelter's small pavilion, so that the body of Christ loomed over the audience, his side pierced and bleeding. Beneath this anguished scene was the DJ booth, and in front of the DJ booth were what we called "the shows" (los shows).

I witnessed three shows at this particular shelter. Daniela's was the first of them, and I was shocked. Though this shelter had a reputation of being "progressive," it was still run by the Catholic Church, and many of its internal policies—such as demanding that men and women sleep in different quarters, and that no one bare their midriff in common areas—reflected a certain skepticism of public displays of sexuality. The shows, however, were permitted. The first performer I saw was Daniela, a twenty-four-year-old trans woman from El Salvador. She sang "Esa hembra es mala" by Gloria Trevi, a famous belter of Mexican power ballads. ("That Female is Bad" in English, though the word "hembra" is used to describe the sex of animals more often than people, such as cows or mares, the connotation of which is the femininity depicted in the song contains a kind of animalistic quality). Daniela had not selected "Esa hembra es mala" by chance. As she told me after her performance, the lyrics resonated with her experience as a trans woman:

Yo sé que ella es tan bonita	I know she is so beautiful
Que hasta parece bendita	That she appears to be holy
Pero es un ángel caído	But she is a fallen angel,
Ella es una maldición	She is a curse
Esa hembra es mala	That female is evil
Esa hembra hace daño	That female destroys
Esa hembra no quiere	That female does not love
Esa hembra te miente	That female lies to you
Esa hembra es mala	That female is bad
Trae veneno en los labios	Carries poison in her lips
Su caricia es insulto	Her touch is an insult
Para tú corazon	To your heart
Esa hembra que amas	That female you love
Está jugando contigo	Is toying with you
Esa hembra perfecta	That perfect female
Es puritita traición	Is a perfect little treachery

Daniela made the most of what was at her disposal. Instead of a gown, she began her performance wrapped in a gauche floral bedsheet. Instead of a microphone, she crooned into a hairbrush. As she belted out warnings about the hidden treacheries of femininity and the female

sex, Daniela slowly and seductively let the bedsheet slip off her undulating body. First down one shoulder, then the other. She toyed with the sheet as it fell down her chest, revealing a tiny black-sequined dress. The dress was strapless and, as her audience howled, Daniela played with her cleavage, plumping it between her arms and then letting one of her nipples peak out the top before twirling away and covering herself up once again. As the music began to build toward its final crescendo, Daniela whipped her long hair in a windmill, wrenched the bedsheet away from her body in one graceful swoop, and flung it into the crowd. The hemline of her dress sparkled and just barely covered her crotch. With a final parting guitar riff, she dropped to the ground and attempted a split, her hands provocatively grasping at—but also strategically hiding—her genitals.

The most surprising element of Daniela's performance for me, however, was not the drag show itself. Instead, it was that the performance was a resounding hit. Nearly every migrant in the shelter, close to two hundred people, crowded around to partake in the spectacle, including children and the elderly. Many of these people openly professed to be devout Catholics or evangelicals, and at least some would have likely pronounced, at the very least, a certain amount of skepticism regarding the morality of trans existence. (And some actually did when I spoke with them the morning after.) But during the drag show there was no explicit condemnation. People pushed their small children into the center of the stage and encouraged them to dance with the queens. Straight men—very hardened men—whooped and hollered as Daniela shimmied before them, and several even blew her kisses and reached out to touch her.

I had not anticipated this. Trans migrants, especially trans women, face some of the most extreme forms of violence on the migrant trail (Zecena 2018; Casteñada Romero & Cardona Huerta 2018; Infante *et al.* 2020). Under such dangerous circumstances, I had not expected to see trans women so openly perform their trans-ness on the stage, or for it to be so encouraged in the moment. But, over time, I found that trans experience on the migrant trail, and especially in migrant shelters, was more complicated. For instance, Daniela often vacillated in her descriptions of being a trans migrant. Overall, she said, her journey was dangerous and fearful. In order to avoid several immigration checkpoints, Daniela had hired several smugglers to transport her through southern Mexico. One of these men had requested sexual favors from her—in addition to the money she'd already paid him—and, worried that the man would abandon or harm her, Daniela obliged. But in the day-to-day of the migrant shelter, she said, things were different. Shelters were certainly not trans utopias, where queer migrants might exist without fear or shame, but nor were they always places of straightforward antagonism or castigation, to which the drag shows provided evidence. Nor were trans women the only performers—cis men also performed in drag, and there were performances by cis women as well. But trans women always seemed to be the highlight, the driving energy, and the stars. Daniela was star of the stars. She took her routine seriously, performing between two and four songs throughout the night, each with their own costume changes, which she fashioned from clothing donated to the shelter, bed sheets, fruit (which she stuffed in her bras and then threw to the crowd), and various foliage picked from around the shelter, like palm fronds and flowers.

As Daniela told me later, she saw the shows as a mix of pleasure and practicality; by showing off her feminine sensuality on the stage, it also normalized it to a certain extent. "You have to deal with a lot of gossip," she said. "Many say that being trans is 'against God.' That's what an old lady told me here a few months ago. That I was 'against God.' That's a common thing you hear, that being trans is against God." This refrain—that being trans, or queer in general, was "against God"—was something I encountered somewhat commonly in Mexico, and I have also heard it in the US from both Spanish and English speakers alike. The logic, as it was explained to

me by those migrants in the shelter who voiced the belief trans existence was against God, was that, because trans people were unwilling to "accept the bodies" that "God had given them," then they were going against his wishes. This kind of logic, of course, enters murky territory very quickly. If one must accept the body that God has given them, I asked one migrant, was it also against God to undergo surgery to remove a tumor? Is a Christian allowed to take medicine to compensate for something, like insulin, that their body is not producing "naturally?"

Rather than straightforward debate, Daniela chose a different tack. Drag shows provided a means for her trans-ness to be contextualized and understood—she could communicate with the gesture of her organs, rather than with speech—which Daniela hoped might preemptively halt confrontations before they started. "Guys who might bother me during the day," she said, "sing along with me at night, and then they leave me alone. And if they don't leave me alone, I always tell them, 'That's not what you were saying last night while I was on the stage, sweetie.' Don't try to act tough now." Daniela said that she had even called for a drag show one night after seeing a man enter the shelter who gave her a "bad feeling." "I just felt like he didn't like me," she said. "I thought he might be a problem, that me might insult me, so I decided to sing that night before he said anything to me. And I was right. He saw the show and left me alone." For Daniela, then, performing her trans-ness on the stage protected her, rather than simply attempting to hide or mask it while on the migrant trail. To be trans was to be in a constant process of negotiation, sometimes displaying certain aspects of her body, and other times not. I have found this to be a common occurrence with trans migrants, and not only within migrant shelters or on the migrant trail, but also as they navigate the US and Mexican immigration law as well.

The corpus of trans migrants

Trans bodies add new layers of complexity to the Leroi-Gourhanian corpus. If a trans person desires gender affirming surgery, for instance, are their newly crafted breasts, penis, or vulva now part of their organic body—or are they external organs? Conversely, if a migrant chooses to remove their penis or breasts because that they feel it is contrary to their gender identity, can we really consider these amputated organs as "organic" anymore? In this way, trans existence is perhaps the most apparent embrace of an ever-morphing corpus, an overt recognition that we all acquire and shed organs throughout our lives.

However, as new technologies emerge in the 21st century that allow for gender affirming surgeries to become both more effective and widely available, there has also been an increasingly backlash to trans existence. In recent years, a particularly vocal contingent of anti-trans sentiment has arisen within a strain of Lacanian psychoanalysis, one which claims that all trans people are—supposedly by Lacan's own framework—in the structural position of the psychotic. One of the first Lacanians to make this receive public attention for this claim was Catherine Millot in *Horsexe: Essay on Transexuality* (1990), which deemed all "transsexuals" psychotic in the sense that they "boast a monolithic sexual identity... All male transsexuals have an idea, and even a definition, of womanhood" (15). In other words, Millot ascribes to trans people—in their professed desire to be (and their demand to be recognized as) another gender—a kind of sexual certainty free from the contradictions that plague the neurotic; whereas neurotics incorporate a healthy dose of doubt into their sexual and gender identities, trans people supposedly do not. According to Millot, a rejection of a physical penis is an indication that trans women like Daniela are supposedly *certain* that they are really the other gender, and therefore have renounced the phallus of the Name of the Father

that is the immutable fact of biology. Furthermore, to be trans is to fetishize gender itself for Millot, and therefore to reinforce the very gender stereotypes that psychoanalytic and feminist traditions have long attempted to trouble. Anti-trans feminist scholar Julie Bindel, echoing a similar refrain, claims, "Transsexualism, by its nature, promotes the idea that it is 'natural' for boys to play with guns and girls to play with Barbie dolls" (2009). On the surface, this claim seems initially interesting because it explicitly links gender to particular external organs which help structure it—the boy with the gun, the girl with the doll. Bindel's assertion, then, can be interpreted as a claim that trans people fetishize particular external organs; the trans woman reifies the fetish of Barbie-as-perfect-woman, and the trans man falls back on the violent trope of gun-as-phallus.

While working with Daniela and other trans women, however, I did not find much ethnographic evidence that supported Bindel's or Millot's claims. Another trans woman named Angélica, for instance, had no illusions that she could actually reach some "perfect" version of woman, and she did not seem to fetishize "female" organs—whether breasts or dresses, make up or eye lashes—that help structure the body of a "traditional" woman. In fact, she seemed much less interested in those things than many of the cis women migrants with whom I worked. Though Angélica dressed almost exclusively in pink and purple, she did very little else to her corpus that would indicate a striving toward some kind of Barbie-esque femininity. She cut her hair relatively short and styled in it a fashion that might be described as traditionally masculine; she did not shave her body hair and often let stubble sprout abundantly on her face for days at a time. Though she did occasionally paint her nails, Angélica explained that this was somewhat irregular, and I never saw her wear makeup. "I'm not a girly-girl," she explained to me once. "No soy muy mujer." (Literally: "I'm not much of a woman" or "I'm not very womanly.")

When speaking to trans women on the migrant trail, wearing a dress seemed much less important to them than *the ability* to wear a dress. As Angélica said, "In Honduras, I tried to wear this [an outfit consisting of a matching pink crop top and pink cargo pants], but you can't go out in it. It's impossible. But in Miami, I can."

"Could you ever wear a dress in Honduras?" I asked.

"No," she said. "You can't wear girl's clothes out in public really. Not if you want a normal life."

"But in Miami you can wear girl's clothes?"

"In Miami you can wear whatever you want," she said. "I don't normally like wearing dresses. I'm more of a punk girl [una chica punk]." When I asked if Angélica wanted to return to the US in order to receive gender affirming surgery, she shook her head. "I'm going back because my boyfriend is there," she said. "He likes me the way I am. He knows that I'm a woman."

At the same time, Angélica did not seem to particularly mind being called "he." Many of the migrants with whom we were traveling referred to her interchangeably as "she" and "he," and I never once heard her correct them. When I asked Angélica about this, she said that she did prefer to be called "she," but that she also understood why other migrants—especially those who had never met a trans person before and were unfamiliar with the language conventions around trans identity—might still call her "he."

Really? I asked. This wasn't offensive? She didn't feel like it somehow diminished her femininity or identity?

"No," she said. "Because I'm both."

"What do you mean both?" I asked.

"Well, I *am* a woman," she said. "But I'm also not. Look at my face." She gestured toward her stubble.

"So you don't care when other people call you 'he' at all?" I pressed.

"It would be better if they said 'she,'" she said finally. "I like that you call me 'she.' But I'm also used to being 'he' when I need to be. I move between both."

Did she answer to "he" in Miami as well? I asked. Or in Honduras?

No, she said. In Miami she went by "she" almost exclusively. And in Honduras, most people still called her "he," including many of her family members, even though she told them that she was a woman. But on the migrant trail, her pronouns were migratory as well. Angélica oscillated between "she" and "he," answered to both, and even, on occasion (though only on occasion), used masculine adjectives to describe herself when speaking to others, especially other men ("bonito" instead of "bonita," for instance). When I asked her why this was—why she was more comfortable using both kinds of pronouns on the migrant trail specifically, whereas she was more rigidly defined by one or the other in the US and Honduras—Angélica did not have a straightforward answer. "I say 'bonita,'" she said. "Because bonito doesn't always feel right."[24]

Angélica also said that she felt like a woman because she had certain skill sets that she—and many other Honduran migrants—considered feminine, and therefore within the realm of womanhood. She could cook baleadas, for instance, and knew how to dance the women's steps in salsa and cumbia. In Leroi-Gourhanian terms, Angélica knew the gestures of womanhood within her certain millieu in Honduras; she understood how to wield the external organs of women better than those of men.

Angélica's disinterest in surgery seemed to directly contradict certain thinkers like Millot, who in *Horsexe* assumes that surgery is the always the explicitly material end goal of trans-ness. "The transsexual does not exist," she writes, "without the surgeon or the endocrinologist" (17). But this ignores the fact that, among the vast majority of people on earth today, none of us exist without surgeons and other medical specialists. The field of medicine intervenes materially upon nearly all of our bodies in some way, and our beings are structured by the limits of what this medicine can do. Perhaps the doll or the gun do structure gender in ways considered stereotypical in the West, but this is no different from the overwhelming ethnographic evidence that essentially all societies materially articulate and embody gender through the use of external organs. Within the Guayaki, one cannot be a woman without a basket, and it is the bow that makes the man (Clastres 1969). Similarly, an apron of cedar bark structured the corpus of a Kwakiutl woman in the early 20th century, as well as "large water-tight hats made of basketry," and a Kwakiutl woman of the northern tribes differentiated herself from the women of the southern tribes with a labret (Boas 1895, 319). A Kwakiutl man needed his harpoon and abalone ornaments (406), and his initiation into a secret men's society, such as the seal society, was not complete without the ornamental baton with which he drummed the songs of the society (433). These examples are just a sliver of the ethnographic data collected in relation to gendered external organs.

[24] I once asked Angélica if she had ever heard of the term "genderqueer," but did not know how to directly translate the word into Spanish (in Mexico, the word "queer" is usually lifted directly from English). Angélica said that she was unfamiliar. I attempted to clumsily explain that the notion of "queer" was meant as a kind of overarching term that allowed for someone to begin explaining their gender beyond the binary categories of man and woman. Instead of bonito and bonita, someone who was queer might come to understand themselves as "bonite" or "bonitx," differently gendered suffixes which have been proposed by queer Spanish-speakers to go beyond the normative gendered adjectives.

There is also a rich ethnographic archive of gender complexity from societies all over the world, from the "female husbands" of Igbo society, where successful women entrepreneurs could be "reincarnated" as men, fit to marry the daughters of other men looking to establish long term trade relationships (Amadiume 2015); to the famous fa'afafine of Samoa, whose "transgendered identities were 'traditionally' most often enacted through labour"—that is, through the materially productive capacities of their corpus (Schmidt 2003); to the muxes native to the Isthmus of Oaxaca—where many Central American migrants travel on their way north—who are often referred to as a "third gender" within indigenous Zapotec society, and who have been frequently documented as rejecting Western notions of both "transitioning" from one gender to another and "gender affirming surgery," as they view the combination of the organ of the penis with the organs of the huipil and rabonas (embroidered women's tops and long skirts) to be those things that help structure the material being of the muxe (Stephen 2002; Mirandé 2016).

Unlike Angélica, however, Daniela was much more insistent on appearing and being interpreted as a woman. She only used feminine pronouns to describe herself, and she would immediately correct anyone who did not use them in reference to her as well. She grew her hair long, often styling it in braids with colorful ribbons, and meticulously shaved her face, legs, and arms. Daniela also regularly wore floral perfumes, and she kept her nails immaculately painted, a real feat on the migrant trail. When I asked why she wished to live in the US, Daniela responded bluntly, "Because I want a vag [Porque quiero una concha, literally "Because I want a shell"]." She believed that if she received asylum in the US, she would then be able to receive the gender affirming surgery she desired—mainly, the amputation of her penis, silicone breast implants, and a vaginoplasty.

However, Daniela had a problem. In order to apply for asylum, she needed to first acquire documents attesting to her Salvadoran citizenship, namely a birth certificate. Before migrating, she had attempted to retrieve her birth certificate from her local government in El Salvador, but, because she was wearing a dress and insisted on using the name Daniela when requesting the certificate, instead of the name on her birth certificate, she was denied. "I don't even want to speak that name," she said to me. "I'm from a small town, everyone knows me and the name I used to go by, I don't need to say it. But the attendant was trying to make me say it. And I just said, 'No, no, I'm not going to say it, you already know who I am.'" Rather than continue navigating a bureaucracy that she felt was demeaning and embarrassing, Daniela opted to leave the country several days later. We met in southern Mexico. She had already the nearest Salvadoran consulate, she said (migrants must request their birth certificates from their home countries' embassies or consulates before their immigration applications can move forward in Mexico), in order to legalize herself, but she left after having another interaction with a staff member that she felt was also demeaning—the man kept calling her "he" and "sir," she said.

If Daniela had the money for an immigration attorney, I was fairly certain that this was a resolvable issue, as I had come to know other trans women who were still able to successfully navigate similar bureaucratic circumstances with the assistance of a lawyer or nonprofit aid. But Daniela was very poor and had dropped out of the third grade after she began to "feel more like a girl." Because of her previous negative experiences, she was now highly skeptical of interacting with bureaucratic systems, which at any moment threatened to misgender her, and she was worried that, even if she were able to successfully acquire her birth certificate, because it listed her as "male," any immigration document that she received in the future would similarly misgender her as well. This possibility felt suffocating to Daniela, and she remarked that she was thinking of swearing off engaging with bureaucracy entirely.

"Then how will you get asylum?" I asked. "How will you get a vag?"

"I don't know," she said. "I just can't breathe when I'm in immigration [offices]. Everyone there thinks I'm a man."

Corpus Christi

Strange as it might seem to have a drag show in front of a life-size crucifix, I do not believe it was mere accident. Like the migrant's, Christ's body on the cross is one caught between two worlds. The materialization of his physical body on earth, as well as its material destruction and resurrection, becomes the intermediary between mankind and God, earth and heaven. Before his crucifixion, Christ, like migrants under the Southern Border Program, was stripped of essentially all his external organs. The only organ granted to him was deceptive—a crown that was not a crown, but a crown of thorns—just as migrants are only granted access to a visa that isn't a visa, a humanitarian visa, a visa of thorns.

But perhaps most important of all is Christ's ambiguous gender on the cross. As both man and God, it is not simply that he is beyond gender, but that his masculinity is already troubled from the start, that from the beginning it is undermined by another entity both within and outside of him, something that is simultaneously him and not-him, familiar yet foreign. This is not so dissimilar from how Millot characterizes the neurotic's "healthy" understanding of gender—one is troubled by all its unspoken implications, by the failures to become "truly" a man or woman. But Christ's gender becomes even more complicated when he is crucified and his body (not wholly unlike those sacrificed by the Mexica) is displayed on the cross for all of Judea to see. It is precisely at the moment that Christ dies on the cross—that is, when his being becomes ambiguous, when no one knows for sure if he has transitioned into another realm—that his side is pierced to make certain that he is truly dead. That he does not *move* when his side is pierced is an indication that his body had been fully fixed in place, that he was no longer capable of *transitioning* into a more powerful, heavenly state. His organic body, after all, was quite literally constrained in full, his limbs nailed down, rendering him entirely immobile, unable to secrete any more external organs, to turn water into wine or multiply fish and bread. But it is in this very moment that the soldier pierces Christ's side, that Christ's body is in fact *trans*formed. The piercing itself is the change, introducing a void into the body that was not there before, a cut that is both a lack and a generative space. Through this cut both blood and water flowed, a *fluidity* that sprang from "the interior of Christ's body so that fountains of sacramental grace welled up from it" (Brown 2009, 253). It is at this very point of absolute immobility, then, that Christ's body becomes mobile in a new way. It finds an exit through the cut, it gives birth to new life.

There is a long history of interpreting Christ's wound as a kind of vaginal opening introduced onto the body. As Michelle Sauer has written, by the 18th century, there were Methodist and Lutheran hymns in which "the side wound evokes images of birth and the vagina by mention of protection, emergence, blood, and water, implying rebirth when reemerging from the shelter and nurturing love when sheltered within it" (2022, 199). The author of the medieval text *Stimulus Amoris* declares that he will "enter into Christ's side wound and dwell there… drink[ing] from Christ's side, imbibing blood and fluids, feeling along the edges of the wound, always reaching deeper into Christ's intestines, eventually entering and living inside, awaiting someday the advent of 'childbirth,' when Jesus expels him" (199-200). In the first millennium AD, the Cult of the Side Wound was also an important part of the Christian church, particularly for women devotees, and

in the 14th century, a redaction from Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse* describes Christ's wound as both a "place of protection and as a place of carnal passion" (204), a wound which has lips with a "'scarlet reed hood'[25]… distinctly reminiscent of clitoral imagery" (205).

This has led Leah DeVun to claim that Christ is "the ultimate hermaphrodite, a unity of contrary parts—the human and the divine, the male and the female" (2008). But rather than focusing on Christ as a hermaphrodite or trans icon—that is as a body that holds both poles of the gender spectrum within in it simultaneously—I understood the crucifix in the migrant shelter to be a symbol through which a multiplicity of gender orders might be established. It was not that Christ simply possessed a vagina and a phallus simultaneously, but rather that his corpus represented an ultimate mobility, the *ability* to move, the *work* of movement—between man and woman, between heaven and earth, between life and death—that spoke to not only trans migrants, but all migrants negotiating these categories on the migrant trail.

As Sophie Sexon has written, "There is a certain contemporary immobility in how the body is conceptualized as gendered" (2023, 81), even within scholarship that explores Christ's vaginal wound. Critiquing scholars who interpret the vaginal wound as entirely feminizing Christ, Sexon argues instead that "the vulva-wound is better understood as evidence of the integral fluidity of Christ's gender." I agree, and I believe that attending to the external organs of the Corpus Christi helps us better understand this fluidity, both for Christ's body and trans migrants'. Christ's vaginal wound is just as important as his penis, but so are the other organs that structure, both physically and symbolically, the crucifix as such—without the cross, nails, lion cloth, and crown of thorns, there is no corpus of the crucified Christ. And Christ's body has not been pierced once but five times—once by the spear, but also once in each of his hands and feet, not to mention the puncture wounds caused on his head by the crown of thorns. A piercing at each extremity of his body—the hands, the feet, the head—those organs that most concerned Leroi-Gourhan because they marked the blurred edges of the organic body and the beginning of external organs. Each piercing creates void, a distance in those organs, and filling of that void with a nail. The Corpus Christi is one with many phalluses, and many vaginal voids. (It is also interesting to note that the spear which created the wound is almost always missing in crucifixes—the void in the organic body being mirrored by the absence of the external organ which created it.) In this way, the external organs of the cross are as crucial as Christ's organic body. They throw Christ's anatomy beyond the normative binary poles of gender, even as that binary is, of course, still present.

When Daniela or Angélica danced at the feet of Christ, they too were seeking organs that both structured their gender and simultaneously troubled it. Daniela desired to win asylum in the US in order to receive gender affirming surgery and acquire the organs that she believed would help her feel more like a woman. But in doing so, she would have to first acquire the proper external organs, immigration documents, which all referred to her as "male," and are therefore very much gendered organs—male organs. In her pursuit for the body of a woman, Daniela actually required both male- and female-gendered organs, organs that troubled and complicated each other, even as they also reified one another. And this was exactly the problem: Even though the organ of the immigration document (or the preceding birth certificate) would allow Daniela greater physical mobility and the real possibility of winning asylum in the US, it simultaneously felt too constricting in relation to her gender. Really, she did not simply wish to shed one kind of gendered organ for

[25] See *Aelred of Rievaulx's de Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions*, ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, EETS o.s. 287 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 22. Based on MS Bodley 423.

another, but rather desired the ability to move between them, a mobility and fluidity that would not neatly nail her down, whether in geographic or gendered terms.

Refuge in the corpus

Despite a drastic uptick in anti-trans legislation across the US in recent years, trans migrants also have some of the highest asylum approval rates in the US, even in courts with conservative judges. This is not due to their dangerous journeys through Mexico, however, as asylum is exclusively granted based on the threat of violence and/or persecution one faces in their country of origin alone; the violences that a migrant must endure during transit hold little to no sway over this decision. And yet, to be a trans migrant is to nearly guarantee that one will receive asylum at a time when denial rates have steadily climbed across the country, and across US presidential administrations (TRAC Immigration, 2020). Even in very conservative US immigration courts, trans migrants are much more likely to win asylum than essentially any other migrant. As Shaw *et al.* have noted, between 2007 and 2017, 98.4% of all "credible fear" claims—that is, fear that is both believable to US immigration courts and also theoretically qualifies someone for asylum—involving people who identified as LGBTQ resulted in positive determinations for fear (2021). This is an astronomically high number, considering that by June 2018 only 14.7% of asylum seekers overall were deemed to have a credible fear claim (TRAC Immigration 2018). For trans migrants, then, crossing Mexico holds somewhat different stakes than for most other migrants. The journey is incredibly high risk—risks that will in no way positively affect the outcome of their asylum cases—but, if one actually can make it across the US-Mexico border and ask for asylum, it also comes with incredibly high rewards. [26]

We must ask, then, as the US dismantles its asylum system—both by continuously narrowing who might actually qualify for asylum, as well as implementing border externalization policies like the Southern Border Program and Remain in Mexico, which indefinitely block the vast majority of potential asylum seekers from actually applying for asylum—why are trans migrants', and LGBTQ migrants' in general, ubiquitous asylum approval rates seemingly unaffected?

There are several reasons. First, trans migrants represent a tiny portion of asylum seekers overall, likely less than 1%. Universally approving their claims has very little impact in terms of increasing overall asylum acceptance numbers, with the added benefit that trans cases are very effective at creating a certain narrative about Central America within the US legal system, specifically that the Northern Triangle is a fundamentally anti-LGBTQ place, a region that is universally intolerant towards queer people (see Paur 2018 on "homonationalism"). The US is then

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[26] In my book *Border Hacker*, I noted that the US immigration court's willingness to approve nearly all LGBTQ asylum cases—and its increasing unwillingness to approve essentially all other claims, including and especially those of intense and overt gang persecution—created a kind of "unspoken ranking system of trauma" in the nonprofit immigration law firm where I worked as an paralegal. LGBTQ cases (especially those of trans clients) were overtly sought out by our organization, because they were understood to be "no brainer cases" that essentially every immigration judge would approve, regardless of their political persuasion (2022, 225). In the eighteen months that I worked as an immigration paralegal, I never once heard of a trans client losing their case.

implicitly framed in the opposite light, a tolerant land open to all queer people fleeing persecution. This narrative—which, through the asylum system, now has decades of rigorous legal documentation that may be referred to and cited at will by the US state for purposes well beyond the realm of immigration law—can then be wielded as part of a larger rationale for US-intervention and interference in Central America. US Vice President Kamala Harris, for instance, has stated that violence against LGBTQ people is a "root cause" of mass migration from Guatemala (Lavers 2021), which she has since used to justify the launch of the "US Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration," an initiative that mostly revolves around creating new investment opportunities for US businesses and multinational corporations, with few guarantees regarding how those investments will concretely impact Guatemalans in general (such as concrete promises regarding job creation, salary/wage increases, or improved living standards), let alone how this corporate investment would mitigate in-country violence against LGBTQ Guatemalans specifically (White House 2022). My point is not to deny that trans and queer people face intense rates of trans/homophobia in the Northern Triangle, but rather to observe that US immigration courts use a certain constructed narrative of Central American trans/homophobia to frame these societies as more or less *inherently* trans/homophobic, and therefore in continuous need of paternalistic oversight and intervention.

Second, approving LGBTQ claims while denying the vast majority of other asylum seeker cases is a very effective means of individualizing a process that was originally meant to grant displaced peoples refuge en masse. The legal category of "asylum" was initially codified in 1951 Refugee Convention in order to address migration crises post-World War II (that is, to construct a legal framework that could theoretically directly address and absorb the world's displaced masses during global crises like a world war), has been transformed into the process of individualization and private interiority.[27] For instance, whereas gang persecution used to be considered a violence that qualified a Central American migrant for asylum, since the implementation of the Southern Border Program, immigration judges have steadily dismissed cases based on gang violence alone. As one immigration judge once remarked in court, "If I gave asylum to every person who came in claiming that they were afraid of the gangs, I'd be letting in all of Central America." In other words, because gangs have become such a widespread and ever-present peril in the Northern Triangle, the US immigration system no longer acknowledges gang persecution as an anomalous threat, but as a normative way of life in Central America, thereby again framing the region and its people as violent inherently. To take widespread gang violence seriously, would mean that the court would: 1) be forced to admit millions of people from Central America in the US, and 2) recognize the US's larger role in contributing to this violence.[28] It is worth noting here that, by this

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[27] Chapters 3 and 5 chart this phenomenon, and its implications on wider notions of citizenship, in greater detail.

[28] As I wrote in *Border Hacker*: "In 2009, the US Department of State—then led by Hillary Clinton—backed a coup to overthrow the democratically elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya. His crime was daring to institute a series of progressive policies—including expanding the free public education system, increasing the national minimum wage by 60 percent, and guaranteeing free school meals for poor children—which enraged the Honduran elite and corporations operating in the country, who were worried that such reforms would cut into their profits. The coup was successful, right-wing politician Roberto Micheletti replaced Zelaya as president, and poverty in Honduras—which had continuously decreased under Zelaya's first term—rose again swiftly, as did the numbers of people fleeing the country. US courts were

current logic, it could be speculated that Jews fleeing the Holocaust in Germany might not qualify for asylum in many contemporary US immigration courts, because the violence against them would be so extensive as to be "normative"—even though international asylum law was born out of a desire to ensure that such a Holocaust could never happen again.

Approving LGBTQ asylum applications across the board, then, becomes a means of ignoring a larger structural violence that implicates the United States in favor of individualized instances of persecution that pinpoint the supposedly immutable cultural flaws of Central America as the source of one's desperate need for asylum. Through this kind of individualized asylum, collective demands—such as the demands of migrant caravans—must necessarily be discarded in favor of a single individual petitioning for individual entry. One's singular story, which is held inside one's singular body, becomes the sole criteria for entry.

Finally, as McKenzie *et al.* have written, asylum seekers who claim to have suffered physical violence in their countries of origin often submit their bodies for examination by physicians in order to help substantiate their claims (2019). The physical marks on their bodies—scars, lacerations, and "deformities"—all help "strengthen" the body of the case; the corpus of the migrant is made stronger the weaker their organic body is perceived to be by the state and its medical experts, and this weakness is substantiated by such physical markings. While working as an immigration paralegal, I saw first-hand how a migrant's case was significantly strengthened if they could produce a scar to display publicly for the court. And, frankly, the more gruesome the wound, the better the migrant's case often was. The trans body is interesting in that it submitted as a kind of wound in itself, a full embodiment of the cut, even if a trans asylum seeker has not actually been physically injured in their country of origin. In this way, at least in the eyes of the immigration court, trans people perfectly embody their affliction, in that their current organic body supposedly *is* the affliction itself. This body is understood to be inherently weak not simply because they lack the organs that they desire, but because, again, the US immigration court understands trans bodies to be inherently targeted by an immutable homophobia of Central American societies. In an immigration court that is increasingly loath to acknowledge psychic trauma in favor of "evidence-based" physical trauma, trans bodies become the pinnacle of such materially embodied and substantiated trauma.

In order to acquire asylum, however, trans migrants must perform their trans-ness for the asylum officer or immigration judge. This can present problems, as was made clear to me while I was assisting an immigration attorney with the case of a seventeen-year-old trans youth named Alex. Alex was born female in El Salvador but decided to migrate to the US as a teenager after he began dressing in men's clothing. He feared for his life, he said, because he was trans and had faced discrimination in his hometown because of it. Despite the abundant evidence that trans people face discrimination in El Salvador, and the long legal precedent of nearly all trans asylum claims being approved, Alex's attorney felt that he was not performing his trans-ness enough.

The problem was twofold. On the one hand, an immigration paralegal working closely on Alex's case felt that, at times, Alex was actually too adept at passing as a cisgendered boy. Alex wore very baggy clothes, spiked his short hair with gel, and spoke with a relatively deep tone of voice. This caused a dilemma. Alex's case depended upon convincing the judge that he would not be able live a normal life in El Salvador, that every time he stepped outside to go to school or buy something at the grocery store, his life was under threat specifically because he could be identified

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unwilling to grant Hondurans and other Central Americans asylum, because to do so would be obvious indictments of the failures of American foreign policy" (2022, 223-224).

as trans. "Trans cases are usually really easy," she said, "and, I mean, I still think he'll probably win in the end, but I just think Alex acts too much like an actual boy. Looking at him, it's hard to tell he's trans. And I'm worried that the judge could say the same thing. But I can't tell him to act more like a girl, a little more girly, you know, even though that would really help his case." Later on, the paralegal confessed that she thought about suggesting that Alex wear a slightly tighter top to his immigration case, so that his breasts would be more visible, but eventually decided against it. "He's a minor," she said. "That's a weird scenario, asking him to show his boobs in court."

On the other hand, there were times when Alex didn't "pass" so easily, but in all the wrong ways. While waiting on his immigration decision, Alex had to live with him maternal uncle, who refused to recognize that Alex was trans, demanding that he wear dresses and use "she/her" pronouns. When in the presence of his uncle, Alex would often act "more girly," usually by referring to himself with feminine suffixes. But there was much discussion about this with our legal staff, as this kind of "more girly" did not strengthen his case at all. Alex's legal team professed that they did not want Alex's uncle to accompany him to the courtroom, as they worried that he would start describing himself in feminine ways, thus undermining his claim in front of the judge that he was trans.

For Alex, I suspected that he felt impossibly caught within gender, damned if he did and damned if he didn't. Already frightened by his uncle's threats to "kick him out on the street" if he kept saying he was a boy, it was incredibly difficult for him to grasp how his gender identity needed to be performed in different moments—one way for his uncle, and another way for the immigration judge. This is essentially what trans migrants—and all migrants—must do during their immigration proceedings: submit their organs for scrutiny. With trans migrants, though, this scrutiny is often quite overt; an immigration judge or asylum officer must assess the organic composition of the migrant's body—as well as its gestures—and determine that this body is anomalous, that it is not like the other bodies that walk into the same room asking for asylum. The possibility of asylum for trans migrants, then, is literally held in their corpus. They must flee into their trans-ness—that is, they must flee into the very body that they wish to shed, and to show it off for the judge even though they so often wish to hide it from everyone else—and perform it for the courts in order to win asylum.

One might ask, then, if this is not some kind of a drag show. It is a play between the organs that one has and the organs one desires. During the asylum process, trans migrants must put the organs that they do have to work, to form a corpus—and in this case, not only a body of work, but a body of evidence—and the hope is that in doing so their body will be seen differently after the fact by the immigration court. That they will be permitted to attach new organs to their corpus. It is important to note, that with drag shows, the point is not to pass—to slip seamlessly from one gender to the other—but to perform gender in an outsized and outlandish way, and therefore to draw attention to the fact that one is playing with gender, that the organs one is supposedly presenting to the audience might not be the same organs that will be presented once the curtains are drawn again, so to speak. Just as Daniela performed drag shows to make the combination of traditionally female-gendered organs (her dresses, stuffed bras, painted nails, and high heels) and traditionally male-gender organs (namely, a penis) legible to certain men she worried would otherwise pose her a threat, so too would she have to perform a not dissimilar kind of drag show to the US immigration court if she ever sought asylum, conducting a subtly erotic dance with the immigration court, showing off just enough of her organs to keep the judge interested in her case. Showing the judge a glimpse of her penis, if only in imagined form, would then permit her the immigration documents necessary to acquire a vagina. Rather than taking refuge in the Corpus

Christi, the body of Christ, they find refuge in their own corpus.

In the case of trans migrants, then, being trans seems not to be the fetishization of an idea of gender, or even the fetishization of the external organs that structure a certain gender, but rather the continuous negotiation of the lack of those organs, the traversing of a distance between oneself and the organs that one hopes to eventually acquire to construct a different self. But, within the immigration court, trans migrants must use the organs that they currently have—show them off, perform them, reference them repeatedly—in order to receive another organ also that lends their bodies much more mobility, an immigration document. This is, then, clearly not psychosis. Trans migrants are perfectly capable of recognizing that the immigration judge stands in the place of the Father, and that they are one who will bestow a new name upon them—that of US citizen.

Against God, Against Biology: Rethinking biological and nature

Millot's *Horsexe* is far from the only anti-trans Lacanian voice today. Recently, Élisabeth Roudinesco pronounced that "There is an epidemic of trans children as a consequence of identity drift" (2023a)—which she infers stems from identity politics—and lamented that trans people are "rejecting biology" (2023b). Echoing Millot, she doubled down on her point, stating that "trans people continue to be medicated throughout their lives in endocrinology services. Therefore, they are tributaries of medicine… Can one remain biologically in one gender and declare that they are in another without undergoing complete reassignment surgery? I don't think so, unless we create a third category: gender neutral, which assumes that the characteristics of both sexes are preserved… One day a woman, another man, then both? How many times can you change?" (2023b).

In these anti-trans arguments, the concept of biology replaces that of God. Instead of being "against God," trans people are now "against biology." Biology becomes the thing which reifies a universal humanity, and is negotiated not only on the genetic or cellular level, but at a sexed and gendered level as well. Anyone who rejects the organic body that was "given" to them by "biology" therefore is also implicitly understood to be rejecting something essential to humanity itself. Just as Montezuma once rejected the kingdom of Christ, now trans people reject the kingdom of biology. To be trans, therefore, is to become something of a secular pagan, to turn one's back on the agent responsible for creating them. Whether one's argument is that God created the organic body and therefore we must respect his will, or that biology created the organic body and we must respect its "will," the structure of the argument is the same. Roudinesco's anti-trans claim essentially boils down to "we are made in ~~God's~~ biology's image."

Within the field of anthropology, there is a long history of invoking the universalizing principle of human biology to make the opposite claim. During overtly colonial eras in which the humanity of indigenous and/or colonized peoples was up for debate, anthropologists began turning to notions of biology—often in response to phrenology—to demonstrate that the peoples with whom they worked were indeed human, and therefore deserving of respect and full rights under the (colonial) law, even if they appeared to be vastly different in terms of race or culture. Franz Boas' debates with race scientists regarding the "cultural factor" are a particularly prominent and important example, as they set the tone for how North American anthropology would interpret and define the human, as well as the human body. Though Boas' debate was explicitly framed as a dispute surrounding the objective nature of biology, at its heart was an ethical question regarding the value or worthlessness of certain beings. Boas did not simply embrace any notion of biology,

but rather targeted his criticism toward what he perceived as racist biases within the field of biology itself, and the claims of then "modern biology" that "heredity counts for more than social opportunity… Not only is it impossible for the Ethiopian to change his skin, but he cannot change his outlook, his mode of thinking or behavior, because these too are hereditary. So runs the biological argument" (1946, 6-7). Within this frame, Boas' staunch rejection of biologists "claiming that anatomical type determines behavior" (1905), as well as his refutation of craniometry and the like, must be interpreted as just as much of an ethical stance as a scientific one. The ultimate claim of Boasian "cultural history" is not simply that culture takes precedence over biology within human evolution, but that biological homogeneity universalizes the being of the human; therefore biology cannot be evoked to justify absolute differentiation, let alone the domination, of one group over another. (To be clear, Boas' biological critique is almost exclusively framed in terms of race, not gender. In the following chapter I will explore in greater depth how Boas' thorough and well-intentioned criticism might lead to unintended implications on the migrant trail in relation to racial categories.)

Two things are ultimately important here. First, Boas wields the cultural factor to make the classical anthropological claim of "many cultures, one nature." Biology becomes framed as the natural—and therefore *universal*—grounding of the human being, with the power to unite all peoples across cultural and racial difference. (Note again that this is precisely the role that the conquistadors ask their God to play, though I in no way mean to infer that Boas was some kind of conquistador.) Second, this universalizing biology is implicitly linked to an ethical good. Put simply, to claim that all humans are biologically the *same* is to be *inclusive* and anti-discriminatory. However, framing the equality of human beings in this way (that is, the assertion of equality through biology) leads to an unanticipated problem: If biology is given a privileged place, and, indeed, a *primary* place, in defining and structuring the human, then if one is perceived to be against this universalization, they are also often implicitly assumed to be against an inclusive humanity, and therefore to be acting inhumanely.

Anti-trans thinkers have taken up a similar line of argumentation, in which "woman" becomes substituted for "human" as a universal category based on biology alone; if one is against this supposedly biological certainty, then they are assumed to be against women as such, to be misogynists (this is often Julie Bindel's claim, see Bindel 2021). But it is here that Leroi-Gourhan's notion of the human—a profoundly lacking human, a human that produces only through a prior impotence—provides a concise rebuttal. As he says:

> The adoption of animal traction and of machines activated by water or wind are reported in ancient history… Generally regarded as historical phenomena of technical significance, the invention of the four-wheeled carriage, the plough, the windmill, the sailing ship, must also be viewed as biological ones—as mutations of that external organism which, in the human, substitutes itself for the physiological body. (246)

Rather than understanding culture as the multiple manifestations of a singular biological humanity, Leroi-Gourhan inverts the Boasian formula to say, in some sense, that culture(s) makes the human(s).[29] Leroi-Gourhan's anthropology is not one of "many cultures, one nature," but nor is it

[29] Here we might say that Leroi-Gourhan anticipates the invention of crip studies and its concern with "the ways in which neoliberal capitalism (the dominant economic and cultural system as driven by market priorities) has imagined and [materially] composed sexual and embodied identities" (Bennett 2007).

its inversion, "one culture, many natures" (see Bessire & Bond 2014 for an in depth explanation of this in relation to the ontological turn's inversion of "many natures, one culture"). Instead, it is "many cultures, many natures," in which culture and nature are always collapsing in on, and yet also simultaneously structuring, each other at all times. In other words, it is what is exterior to the human body that structures our understanding of the human as such. The uniquely human capacity to externalize not only organs, but memory and therefore knowledge, means that human intelligence is largely dependent not on biological innateness, nor on a particular cultural rearing, but on the *technicity* that one is born into—that is: 1) the organs which are available to someone, and 2) their desire to wield them (with particular gestures). This technicity not only makes the human, but thinks for it as well, and it does always at the bounds of culture and nature, in that it is always exceeding the forms that nature or culture give it. As Leroi-Gourhan says:

> … the parallel with the zoological world cannot be maintained except by way of paradox, but we cannot completely dismiss the thought that some species change takes place whenever humankind replaces both its tools and its institutions. Although peculiar to humans, the changes that affect the entire structure of our collective organism hang together in much the same way as changes that affect all the individuals in a group of animals. From the moment when the exteriorization of motive force became unlimited, social relations assumed a new character; a nonhuman observer unfamiliar with the explanations to which philosophy and history have accustomed us would separate the eighteenth-century human from the human of the tenth century as we separate the lion from the tiger or the wolf from the dog. (247)

To clarify, Leroi-Gourhan is not claim that certain ethnic groups who possess certain "tools and institutions" should be regarded as superior, nor that particular ethnic groups who do not possess them are inferior. To Leroi-Gourhan, the eighteenth-century human is not more evolved from the tenth-century one, but they are still *distinct beings*—creatures enmeshed in and adapted to two vastly differently technological "ecosystems"—each of whom possess organs uniquely effective to that being. For him, the claim that, simply because we share the same biology, someone alive today is ultimately the same being as someone from ancient Greece is preposterous. And yet, nor does Leroi-Gourhan see this distinctiveness as absolute, immutable, or non-transversable. It is worth repeating, again, his insight that, despite existing in different technological milieus, Plato and Confucius do not "seem to us as archaic as a plow of the first millennium before our era." Rather, they resonate with us across distance and time *not* because they impart some perfect technological assessment or knowledge, but because they identify and attempt to traverse a distance that still remains with us today. What is actually communicated, paradoxically, is lack. Or rather, what is communicated is this lack—this distance that a human being experiences both within and without itself—*as well as the desire* to traverse this lack. Each society not only produces external organs unique to its being, but also identifies—and even produces—particular lacks/distances that it understands as related to its non-being as well. To invent the passport is also to invent, and continuously reproduce, the possibility of the lack of a passport as well. In this way, Leroi-Gourhan's notion of technicity and external organs is not based in a vulgar materialism, so to speak, one that anti-trans rhetoric so often falls into. To say that I am a man simply because I have a penis is just as nonsensical as saying that if Roudinesco dons a suit of armor she has automatically become a knight. Like poor Don Quijote, she equates the assemblage of particular organs with being in itself, all the while completely misidentifying the lacks that are present. Don Quijote charges at windmills because he lacks a mythical giant; Roudinesco charges at trans

women because she lacks a mythical natural woman.

In the 1980s, Donna Haraway was already critiquing what she identified as a problematic tendency within the second-wave feminist movement—of which both Roudinesco and Millot are part of the same generation—to fetishize the concept of the "natural," especially the natural body. As anthropologist Danielle Carr writes:

> Haraway sized up the hippified romanticization of the natural among feminist second-wavers—think Gaia, menstrual cups, and trans exclusion—and concluded that liberation would not ramify out of continued enthrallment to the idea of an unreconstructed nature. Instead, in her 1985 "A Cyborg Manifesto"… Haraway argued that because the construct "woman" is already constitutively artificial, feminist politics shouldn't be afraid of abandoning nature. There is no natural essence of woman to be faithful to in the first place. Since woman is already cyborg, feminists could torque technology toward liberation… (2020)

As Carr makes clear, however, though Haraway prophesized that within the next several decades women would be able to "biohack their way out of oppression," today's technological milieu seems to have only reinforced the gender binary. From phalloplasties to vaginoplasties, breast implants to hair transplants, we are being steered toward a more particular and rigid gender ideal, not toward the infinite fractalline gender prism of the cyborg. This is because the organs that produce these gendered organs—that is, the technological apparatuses that make the reconfiguration of the organic body possible, the "endocrinologists" and all their organs, to quote Millot—do not lie in the hands of everyday women/cyborgs, but ultimately with those of corporations and nation-states. One does simply acquire the means of reproduction, so to speak.

On the surface, it might seem that Haraway's conceptualization of the body is very much in line with Leroi-Gourhan's, especially in her attempt to trouble the dichotomy between human and nonhuman, the body and technology, and one hears something of Leroi-Gourhan when she claims, "Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines." But there is one main difference between the two, which I have already briefly alluded to in Chapter Two, and which lies in Haraway's very next sentence: "Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert." Haraway's cyborg is that which is made possible with the "fabricated hybrids of machine and organism," a hybridization that she specifically links to the emergence of relatively recent technologies which weave themselves into our bodies in unseen ways. But in her attempt to reject the category of nature, Haraway unintentionally reincorporates it into her notion of the cyborg by framing its biotic components as *un*natural. For Leroi-Gourhan, again, because organ externalization is a foundational aspect of human existence, the distinction between natural and unnatural organs are not necessary, and therefore there is no such thing as hybridization, nor any need for a Harawayian dualism to reject a supposed problematic dichotomy. Though Haraway claims that new technologies like "biotic components" now place us in a new land of posthumanism beyond that of god or biology, Leroi-Gourhan's rebuttal is that such biotechnologies are nothing more than a new array of external organs, and external organs have existed since the dawn of the human because they structure the human as such. Haraway is not wrong to assert that the cyborg is potentially a new kind of being, but she goes astray when assuming that this new being must necessarily be *outside* the human because it is outside biology.

It is precisely where Haraway claims that the human has died that Leroi-Gourhan says the human is born.

The same could be said for gender as well. One's organic reproductive organs certainly play some part in structuring how they are gendered in the world. But just as for Leroi-Gourhan there are infinite beings within the human, there are also infinite beings within the concept of woman. These differences are so stark ethnographically that one begins to wonder if there has not been an intense mistranslation on the part of Western anthropologists—taking external organs into account, can we really say that the corpus of an early 20th century Kwakiutl woman is anything like the corpus of Roudinesco? Can we actually assert that they are both share a *natural* equivalence? When Roudinesco states that trans people are denying their own biology, her assertion is really that they are placing themselves beyond a certain "natural" configuration of organs out of which a supposedly universal notion of gender arises, one that is reaffirmed by biology—if your organic body grows breasts and a vagina, you're a woman, whether you like it or not. And if you don't, you aren't. In this critique is the second-wave feminist romanticization of nature all over again. For Roudinesco, Daniela's rejection of her organic penis is therefore a rejection of a universal biology and universal maleness, but by focusing on the penis alone, Roudinesco overlooks all the other organs (and lacks) that structure gender within a given society. If plopped into early 20th century Kwakiutl society, Roudinesco's lack of a cedar bark apron might lead many to conclude that she is not much of a woman at all. Nor would she live up to the standards of womanliness that Angélica was eventually able to successfully perform in her poor Tegucigalpa barrio while cooking baleadas for her family. But, like Angélica, Roudinesco can theoretically always still *become* a woman within a given society, specifically through a reorientation of her corpus, of her organs and the body of work that they produce.

In this way, the conception of the natural can just as easily be wielded to obscure the unnatural. As Carr says,

> the feminine cyborg these days seems to use technology only to get a leg up within the game patriarchal capitalism has set up for her… the cyborgification of women's bodies seems to tend toward a virtuosic augmented performance of the natural. The contemporary fashioning of woman is notable not for the embrace of the artificial that marked Haraway's Eighties woman—the camp-artificial silhouette of jutting shoulder pads and the no-holds-barred conspicuous makeup—but for its recommitment to "the natural." We get injections now so we can meet beauty ideals without seeming to wear any makeup at all. Now, we not only have to look hot but to conceal the artificiality of hotness, to veil the labor required to achieve the effect. Under this politics of reenchanted nature, the entire political spectrum agrees that women should not spend a lot of time or money looking hot—or if they must, they should be discreet about it, because making your complicity in your own oppression obvious is in bad taste.

What is most interesting about Carr's observation is how the organs of the femme fetal, which were once more obviously external—shoulder pads and conspicuous makeup—have today been reinvented to essentially disappear into the organic, which leads to a kind of fetish of a "natural" woman's body, but only for an illusion of a natural that could not exist without an abundance of "invisible" external organs which structure and materialize it. This beauty trend is indicative of a larger tendency within technology today, in which an increasing array of organs are hidden behind all different kinds of guises of the natural. Today, fingerprint and facial scans registered to

particular biodata sets begin to replace the need for the physical production of a passport. The passport is still there, but one might say that it has now been knitted into our skin, so to speak. In reality, however, it is our skin that has been knitted into it. This "unnatural" thing, this external organ, inserts itself into us, plumping and primping our corpus. Even citizenship itself is framed as the natural outcome of being tied to the state—either through one's being born there, and so having some kind of "natural" tie to the land itself, or through being born into a particular bloodline and biology, which is itself knitted into the fabric of citizenship. There is astoundingly little literature on how, frankly, bizarre our cultural practice is of attaching a small piece of paper to one's body at all times. But ethnographic parallels do exist. The Aranda's sacred churinga, for instance, which represent "the physical body of a sacred ancestor," and which Lévi-Strauss rightly connects to Western archival documents (2021, 256), can also provide perspective to the relation between citizenship and passports. In order to prove one's citizenship—that is, that one has a particular tie to a particular state (usually) through birth—then one must produce a passport, which acts not only as an identifier for one's own body, but becomes a kind of physical body attesting to one's connection with other ancestors who likely also have a connection to this state. Just as the churinga structures a subject's abilities within Aranda society by materially tying their body to a particular ancestral lineage, so too does a passport structure a subject of a nation-state by tying their body to a particular state lineage. This lineage can be biological, but it does not need to be, just as a woman might be structured by biology, but she does not need to be. These categories—citizen, woman, human—are all ultimately structured and attested to by external organs outside the biological, but which can use the notion of the biological to obscure and naturalize themselves.

Today's hyper focus on the supposed "naturalness" of one's organic body obscures the otherwise obvious larger structures of power that dictate the work and construction of each of our corpuses. The anti-trans movement, at the end of the day, is merely a regurgitation of phrenology, expanding the pseudo examination of lumps and bumps on the cranium to that of the entire organic body. But it is wrong doubly, not only because, as Boas makes clear, there is no scientific evidence that links particular causations to social correlations, but because by focusing on the organic alone, and refusing to move beyond it, there can be no engagement with the external organs that form the corpus of the examiners. At the end of the day, the biological composition of Daniela and Angélica's bodies are often the least of their differences in relation to Millot and Roudinesco. Yes, their organs are different, but so are their lacks; they lack bank accounts (and the money in them), university degrees (and the jobs that come with them), and effective passports, just to name a few. Millot and Roudinesco's underlying assumption that there is something that all women share universally—even if it is nothing more than some kind of biology that structures a gendered organic body—wields biology to obscure all the ways that they are unlike the vast majority of women on earth.

If "woman is the symptom of man," as Lacan famously stated, then we might say that the trans woman is the symptom of woman (or some Lacanian women). Just as for Lacan women only enter the psychic economy of men as a phantasy object, the object cause of their desire, trans women seem to play the same role for Millot and Roudinesco, whose critiques continuously revolve not around what trans women actually are—hence Millot's mistaken declaration that trans women boast a "monolithic sexual identity," which is easily disproven both with ethnographic and psychoanalytic data—but rather what they are not, what they are seen to perpetually lack in relation to "woman." Thinking with Carr and Haraway, we might understand the second wave feminist movement as fundamentally going against Lacan's teaching that "~~La~~ femme" cannot be a universal category, in that it attempted to universalize women's struggle on the basis of the "natural." The

point of "~~La~~ femme," however, is that such Women "do not lend themselves to generalisation, even to phallocentric generalization" (1975). It is a shared lack and only a shared lack, that place Millot, Roudinesco, Daniela, and Angélica in the position of women.

Conclusion: Transversing the death drive

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2015), Freud speculates that the death drive stems from the desire of the organism to return to a state of inorganic matter. To protect itself, the amoeba—exceeding its own biology—erects a hard shell of dead matter, and "acquires the shield in this way: its outermost surface ceases to have the structure proper to living matter." But, in order to evolve into anything beyond the amoeba, it must continuously push through that initial border of dead matter, it must move outside its own being in some sense. This movement toward the outside beyond the shell, dangerous though it may be, is the life drive. The death drive, in contrast, is not simply the creature's flirtation with death as it ventures beyond the original shield. Rather, it is the impulse to remain the same, to rigidify entirely, to freeze all movement. The death drive is the desire for the petrification, whether conscious or unconscious, both for the self and the other.

On the migrant trail, then, migrants confront the death drive not when they risk their lives boarding the Beast or when deciding to place themselves in the hands of a potentially untrustworthy coyote. That is precisely the life drive, risking one's immediate wellbeing for the chance to keep living in the long term. The death drive is articulated in the call—whether in the US or Mexico—for increasingly militarized borders, the pinnacle of which are border walls, great heaps of dead matter erected to encircle amoebic minds, single-celled brains which demand their own petrification and containment. This call is based in an atemporality, a time in the US "before" it was tainted by immigration, a time that in reality only exists as a fantastical, mythic prehistory. To understand this is to realize that it is in fact a demand to return to inorganic matter, a desire for bodies to be eternally frozen in place, unable to migrate, unable to move, and therefore, unable to live. The migrant corpus struggles against this death drive, and it is an acknowledgement that the human body's primary feature is that *it is always in excess of itself*. With humans, says Leroi-Gourhan, this is done primarily through the externalization of organs; with other animals, it is carried out through gene mutation. The life drive is found not in rigid and totalizing adherence to biological repetition, but in anomalies that create new bodies and beings.

When trans migrants like Daniela and Angélica perform in drag in migrant shelters, they are reenacting, in some sense, the very moments that they feared would lead to their deaths back home (and still fear might lead to their murders in Mexico). Many queer Central Americans with whom I worked recounted fragments of a particularly traumatic memories of when they had been "found out" in one way or another—their conservative father walking in on them while they were trying on their mother's dress, their Pentecostal sister spotting them kissing a boy in the church kitchen, or being beaten by a man on the street who was disturbed that they were wearing makeup. The drag shows—which were never advertised as drag shows beforehand, so that few migrants in the audience were prepared for what they were about to see—could therefore be interpreted as a continued repetition of the traumatic event; the trans women were being found out again, but this time on their own terms. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the shows also revolved around a kind of fort-da game—is the penis there or is it not? That Freud's grandson was reenacting the disappearance of his mother does not exclude the possibility that, at the same time, he was also, by casting the wooden reel over the side of his cot, beginning to understand the bounds of his

corpus, throwing a little inorganic piece of himself outside of his protective shield, so to speak, watching his external organ soar out into open space. Is Daniela not doing something similar when she stages a show in order to put her corpus "out there," to fling something of herself out into the audience and then reel it back in? Is she not helping them come to terms with her disappearing and reappearing penis, as well as helping herself do the same?

We might wonder, therefore, if the repetitious urge identified by Freud—primarily, "an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things"—is *always* driving towards death. When one externalizes something of themselves, the new organ that is formed is often inorganic, even if it is still animated. This could be understood as the material side of sublimation, where certain urges or compulsions are displaced and condensed into the productive corpus. This would mean that, rather than placing the inorganic firmly on the side of death, the process of organ externalization puts inorganic matter to work in a dance between Eros and Thanatos. In this way, some part of my corpus—which is already inorganic—might continue to live on long after my organic body returns to that earlier state of things. After all, Freud still speaks to us, not through his mouth, but through the other organs he created during his life—his books, his organizations, his methodologies—which continue to do work for him. If there is an urge toward the inorganic, rather than assuming that it is *always* a primordial desire that one be *restored* to the inorganic, something else might be yearned for instead. One might actually cut off a piece of their organic body, not as an act of mutilation, but at the chance to fuse one's being with something else, to change. This could still be a desire for a kind of death, but the death of a particular kind of subjectivity, and therefore it is the desire for a new birth as well, to leave the being you once were behind and become something else. Rather, it is Millot and Roudinesco, in their insistence on a kind of biological immutability, and a rigid crystallization of gender, who seem to be dangerously flirting with the death drive.

Interlude V

The day that immigration agents detained the Castros, Maria had finally set up the new house just the way she wanted it. They had furniture and two double beds and had taken out a loan at the local pawn shop to buy a secondhand armoire, the one thing they had not been able to find at the dump. The day before, Carlos had come home late at night in a rush with a used TV—it was a mystery how he had come by it—and told his mom that they would wake up in the morning and watch a movie together while eating breakfast.

“I had just made coffee,” said Maria, “when the knock at the door came.”

The neighbors, who’d had several altercations with Carlos over the last few months, often over the loud music he played from a stereo system he had also mysteriously acquired, had called immigration on them.

The agents grabbed everyone in the house—Maria, Carlos, Tati, and the now three young children in the Castro family, as well as a Salvadoran migrant who Carlos had recently smuggled from the city of San Luis Potosí to Monterrey. Santos, who worked six days a week at the mechanic’s shop and had to leave the house every day by 5:00 AM, normally would not have been home when the raid happened. But it just happened to be his day off.

“They threw us into the back of a van,” said Maria. “The coffee was still hot on the stove.”

Carlos and Santos, since they had no ties to Mexico at all, were deported immediately. Tati was initially held and questioned, but when immigration agents learned that she had recently had another child, Leon, in Mexico, she was granted permission to stay in the country and apply for permanent residency, both for herself and her other child, Rogelio. (If one has a child in Mexico, they immediately become eligible for legalization, unlike in the US, where the parent must wait for their child to turn eighteen, and then the child must initiate the legalization proceedings themselves.) It took several days, however, for Mexican immigration to verify that the baby was in fact Mexican. When Leon was born, Tati, wary of government agencies, had not registered the baby within the proper bureaucratic channels, as his biological father was already out of the picture. “I didn’t know that I was supposed to do that,” said Tati. “I got pregnant in Honduras. So I always thought of Leon as Honduran. I didn’t know that they’d consider Leon to be Mexican, or that I could have also gotten documents. Imagine that, for years I could have been legal in Mexico, but no one tells you any of this stuff.”

Immigration also informed Tati that, through her newly gained legal status, she could now petition for her own mother, Maria, to stay in Mexico as well. But Maria and Sara, who had just turned seven, were held for over a month in the immigration detention center. Because Sara’s biological parents were back in Honduras, Mexican immigration said that she wasn’t allowed to stay with Maria unless she had a legal document attesting that her grandmother was her formal custodian, “which of course I didn’t have,” said Maria. Immigration said that they would free Maria at any time as long as she gave her consent for Sara to be deported back to Honduras. “I’d rather die here than let you do that,” she said. “I am this girl’s real mother, even if you don’t think so.” It took over a month for Maria’s daughter (Sara’s biological mother) to acquire the necessary paperwork, have it notarized in Honduras, and send it to Mexico.

Tati, Leon, and Rogelio were let go after several days. When they returned to the house, however, it had been ransacked. “It was the neighbors who had called immigration on us,” said Tati. Almost everything had been stolen from the house—not just the TV and wardrobe (which

they still had to pay back the loans for), but even small things, like underwear and phone chargers. The toilet had been smashed to pieces and the bathroom and kitchen sinks ripped out of the walls. Only Darin's painting of the zebra's eye had been left untouched.

When Maria and Sara were eventually released from detention, they had to live in the empty house for another month—without any money—before Carlos and Santos were able to return and start scouring the dump for new furniture again. "The worst part," said Maria, "was that we still had to live right next to the neighbors. At night we could hear them playing music from the sound system that they stole from us. You could look through their window and see them watching television on our TV, sitting on our couch. It felt so weird to look inside their house and see our house. Our old life. But we couldn't say anything, because we knew if we did that they'd try to have us deported again."

Not long after, Tati moved to a different part of Monterrey to live with a new boyfriend, a Mexican man named Nico, with whom she eventually had another child, Tanya. This time, the child was registered with the state immediately, and all the proper paperwork acquired. Tati had learned her lesson, she remarked to me one evening as we were standing in the front yard of her new house. Any chance to attach a document to her child's corpus, she would take. It was a strange thing, she said, that simply because the children were born in Mexico she could stay as well. As she spoke, she instinctively rubbed her stomach, as if remembering when she was pregnant. I thought about what that meant, that at one point not long ago her body had grown a configuration of organs which eventually exited her and began walking around on their own legs. These organic organs begot external organs that had changed her body as well. She made new beings, and they had remade her. "Because they are here, I am here," she said.

After several long months, Carlos and Santos were able to smuggle themselves back up to Monterrey. After the deportation, Santos said, Carlos was never quite the same. His drug use and unsteady income had already been a point of contention for years, but returning to the house that he had worked so hard to build and seeing it smashed to pieces seemed to break Carlos. Initially, the two brothers promised to rebuild the house together. For months, Maria and Sara had been attempting to keep living in it, even though there were no toilets, sinks, or furniture. But Carlos' drug use became too intrusive, Santos told me, and Carlos' gig as an independent smuggler had completely dried up. These days, the cartels—who were the only ones with the infrastructure, manpower, and land to evade or bribe agents of the Southern Border Program—had monopolized the smuggling routes. Carlos had flirted with trying to work for them, but the family was not happy about this new kind of company, and eventually the family kicked him out.

"Carlos wasn't smuggling anyone at all anymore," said Santos. "There was no money coming in, and I was telling him, 'Look bro, you need to get a job. The smuggling life is over. You can't do it anymore, immigration shut all of that down.' Instead, he just went to the cartels. But when you're working for the cartels, you're still working, and Carlos is not the kind of person who likes someone else telling him what to do. I don't think that in the end he really ever worked for them. He just started using more of their drugs probably, maybe selling a little bit for them, but I don't think he ever really smuggled people. He was too into the drugs to do anything else by that point."

As the sole breadwinner of the family now, Santos tried to find steady work in Monterrey, but it was impossible. One day, he said, he "followed in the exact same route" that Darin used a year earlier and crossed into the US, but he was immediately caught. He was detained in Oklahoma for seven months while in immigration proceedings before deciding that the wait wasn't worth it.

The asylum wait in the US would have been several years at least, during which he would have had to be locked up the entire time.

I wondered what Santos had meant by “following the exact same route” that Darin had used to cross into the US. Was it just the literal geographic route, I asked, or, “Did you ever consider saying that you were gay, like Darin did, while applying for asylum?”

“No,” said Santos, “I couldn’t do that. I’m not gay. Look at me. I don’t move like Darin does, I don’t act like him. It just wouldn’t have worked.”

He chose deportation to Honduras, crossed back into Mexico, and immediately filed for asylum there instead. At the time, Mexico (unlike most of the immigration courts in the US) was still approving asylum for people who fleeing Central America because they had been the victims of targeted gang violence. Santos told the asylum officer about his mother’s boyfriend, and reminded COMAR that he was the primary breadwinner for his family in Monterrey. Eventually, his asylum claim was approved.

Chapter 5

Major Differences: What lies beyond the epidermis of migrants in Mexico

Muy Africa: Blackness on the migrant trail

Do not let anyone else in. That was the last thing Teresa told me before handing over the keys to the shelter. After volunteering at Casa Abrazo for about a month, Teresa, the shelter director, asked me to run the shelter alone while she took the night off. It would be a quiet night, she thought, not much to worry about, hopefully entirely uneventful. But not an hour after Teresa had left—sometime around ten o'clock, as a post-dinner lull settled over the shelter—there was a knock at the door. Obi, a Nigerian migrant who had lived at the casa for several months while his humanitarian visa was in process, barged into the shelter's small office, and, in a rushed mix of Spanish and Portuguese, said, "Levi, tenemos una situação."

There was an African family outside, he said. Come quickly.

I rose from my desk to investigate. Suddenly, the shelter was shot through with energy. Many of the Casa's men were crowded around the shelter's entrance, heads pressed together to peek through the peep hole at the strangers outside. This was somewhat curious. There were already approximately ten African migrants living in Casa Abrazo at the time, so the potential arrival of a few more initially struck me as mundane. But as we strode to the locked front door, Obi explained that no one had been able to communicate with the family. They were from some other part of the continent unknown even to the other Africans.

"Muy Africa," Obi remarked. They were *very* Africa, from *authentic* Africa. No one knew how they had managed to find us.

I opened the door and there she was. A woman in a patterned traditional dress, Nike gym bag perfectly balanced atop her head, standing erect in the dark night. The neighborhood was not a safe one and streetlights were scarce. I peered into the shadows and saw the others with her. Another woman, also in traditional dress, a man in Western clothing, and three children.

"Gringo," came a voice to the left of me. It was the neighbors next door, a cadre of middle-aged sisters who made a living running a small convenience store out of the bottom floor of their house. "Let them in, gringo. They have kids, gringo. You can't just leave them to sleep in the street."

I froze. My one instruction was to refuse entry to anyone who knocked on our door.

The sisters pounced on my hesitation. "Pinche gringo," they yelled at me. "Fucking American, let them in asshole. Look at them, they're African. They're not from around here. They don't speak Spanish." I felt my cheeks burn in shame. My country was unilaterally rejecting migrants, and now I was as well.

"You're right, you're right," I said to the sisters. As I ushered the family inside, I apologetically tried to explain myself—it was my first time working the night shift, I stuttered, and was not familiar with the protocol for events as abnormal as this one—but the sisters steely gazes remained firm. I do not believe I garnered any of their sympathies. We carried the family's bags swiftly into common area and warmed some leftovers for their dinner. In a mix of Spanish,

Portuguese, English, Haitian Creole, and my very elementary French, we were eventually able to discern that the family was from the Congo. Muy Africa. Eventually, Teresa answered one of my frantic phone calls and agreed to let the family spend the night. For such a rare case an exception could be made. We would find them another shelter in the morning, one that was specifically for families.

Casa Abrazo is small by migrant shelter standards, with the capacity to house approximately thirty migrants, all single men, though the shelter is perpetually beyond capacity, usually around forty to fifty men total. I had previously volunteered at Casa Abrazo in 2015 and returned in 2021. I found the shelter was an interesting case study of migrant integration in Mexico for two reasons. The first was that, unlike shelters in many other parts of Mexico, Casa Abrazo is long-term, and was created by Teresa with the explicit goal of helping migrants legalize themselves and integrate into Mexican society, with migrants often staying in the shelter for up to a year while waiting for their immigration documents. There I hoped to work with the same migrants over a much longer period of time, and in a much more intimate setting.

The second reason that was that the majority of the migrants in the shelter were black. Since beginning my ethnographic work in 2015, the racial makeup of the migrant trail had changed significantly. Though the vast majority of migrants in Mexico were still Central American, for the first time in the country's modern history there were also a great number of black migrants, most of whom were Haitians and sub-Saharan Africans. By 2021, Casa Abrazo—which just six years earlier essentially had only Central American residents—was only approximately one third Central American, with approximately another third being Haitian and the remaining third being sub-Saharan African. However, the shelter was much more than two-thirds black. Like the Castro family, a portion of the Central American migrants living in the shelter were visibly Afro-Latinx, though few readily described themselves this way, as openly acknowledging another's (or one's own) blackness in Central America is, in my experience, something of a social faux pas. (I will soon explore this uncomfortable relationship with Afrolatinidad in greater detail.) Casa Abrazo felt like something of a microcosm of the shifting racial dynamics of the contemporary migrant trail, especially in relation to Haitian migration, which had come to dominate both US and Mexican news coverage of migration in Mexico.

I had run into a problem at Casa Abrazo, however. I spoke no French Creole and essentially none of the Haitian residents spoke Spanish. And though there were some African migrants who spoke a bit of English or Spanish, the majority them did not, either speaking French or languages indigenous to their countries. Obi's first language, for instance, was Igbo, and we mostly communicated in a strange mix of Spanish, Portuguese, and English, a challenging and incredibly imprecise process for in-depth interviews. African migrants in Casa Abrazo were more likely than Haitian migrants to speak at least some Spanish or Portuguese, as many of them had first flown to South America—often to Chile or Brazil, where they more frequently were granted tourist visas—but had all had eventually set off northward after being unable to find steady work. This was Obi's story as well. He had first flown to Brazil over three years previous. His initial inclination, he said, was simply to blend into the local population, as there were many other black people who looked like him in Brazil. But after two years, he was still unable to financially support himself, and had received little help from the government or humanitarian organizations. He next moved to Chile, where he could no longer blend into the local population as easily, and where he said that he experienced extensive racism. Within the fair-skinned population of Santiago, he stood out immediately as a migrant, and the Portuguese he'd picked up in Brazil only othered him further in

Spanish-speaking Chile, where black Brazilian migrants are often stigmatized (Valle 2014; Tijoux Merino & Córdova Rivera 2015). Incredibly frustrated and despondent, he'd left after only six months. He spent the next six months traveling to Mexico, often walking large portions of the journey on foot, including through Panama's infamous Darien Gap, a dangerous jungle passage where many migrants die every year while attempting to make their way northward. Eventually, Obi arrived in Mexico, where he was also racially distinct from the local population. It was in Mexico, however, as he explained to me, that he realized humanitarian organizations were more willing to work with him if he emphasized and insisted upon his Africanness (and therefore his blackness as well), rather than immediately trying to integrate into the local community and culture as best as he could.

"One day I got so frustrated that no one was helping me," he said, "and I just started pleading with the [NGO] worker, 'Look at me. I'm African, I don't know what's going on. I don't know where I am. I'm African, I'm African. Help me.' I don't know how much she understood, because I spoke almost no Spanish, but she finally saw me as a person. She remembered me." Eventually, he said, because of her help, he was able to relocate to Mexico City in order to apply for asylum, where he was admitted into Casa Abrazo. At the shelter, he had quickly filed for a humanitarian visa with the help of shelter directors, who were assisting with his asylum case, as well as promised help in obtaining an ever-elusive CURP once the visa arrived. Strategically wielding his African distinctiveness, he concluded, rather than immediately taking the task of integration upon himself, had been very helpful.

I came to interpret Obi's strange utterance about the Congolese family being "muy Africa" as relating directly to this experience. In humanitarian spaces, Obi had learned to frame himself as "muy Africa" as well, and so was trying to plead with me—as I was very much imbricated in the institution of humanitarianism in that moment as well—to accept the family on the same grounds. Even the Mexican sisters next door, I realized later, had essentially made the same argument; they were urging me to admit the family based on their distinct Africanness. In the following months, there were plenty of other times when Central American families knocked on our door and were turned away due to lack of space, but the sisters never once made the same kind of appeal for them. Central Americans, after all, spoke Spanish, and their presence was not any sort of novelty in Mexico, so they were perceived as being more capable of fending for themselves. As a riff on Freud's famous observation that certain rifts occur between others due to the narcissism of minor differences (2015), I describe this kind of humanitarian orientation to equate otherness with deservingness as the *deference to major differences*. I also fell into this logic of deference during my time working at migrant shelters, where scarce resources had to be apportioned to the "most deserving," a deservingness that was qualified by a migrant's supposed otherness in relation to a normative "Mexicanness," and who therefore were deemed less likely to survive on their own due to racial, linguistic, and cultural differences.

After the arrival of the Congolese family, I began paying particular ethnographic attention to when humanitarianism's deference to major differences surfaced. Again, because of the delicate nature of this ethnographic inquiry, I emphasize that I am not necessarily condemning the deference to major differences as such, but rather investigating when it surfaces and what work it does on the migrant corpus. Exploring this incredibly difficult conundrum of deservingness based on the perceived otherness of one's organs—which I do not believe has a clear answer—is the goal of this chapter.

The deference to major differences (and the indifference to minor ones)

Besides providing room, board, and legal aid, Casa Abrazo also attempted to help migrants find work in the local community. Since the shelter was normally only open to single men, most employment opportunities were for hard labor. For instance, shortly before I arrived in 2021, the shelter struck an agreement with a local construction company, which hired migrants whose visas were still in process. The collaboration was explained to me by shelter directors as a mutually beneficial program—approximately a third of the migrants in the shelter were immediately able to obtain relatively steady work even though they did not yet have a work permit, and the construction company had a steady labor pool of workers from which to pull depending on how many laborers they need on any given day or project.

Migrants in the shelter, however, had more complicated feelings. Men hired for the construction gigs often complained to me and other shelter volunteers that they were paid less than minimum wage, sometimes as little as one hundred pesos (approximately five USD at the time) for an entire day, which was often twelve hours' work or more. The payments were also not as regular as the migrants would have liked, and many said that they were owed back pay or had simply not been paid at all for certain days worked. It seemed clear to me that the construction company was using migrants' precarious immigration status against them, and that the shelter—which was happy just to have found any kind of work for the migrants at all, since it was usually so scarce—did not have the wherewithal or power to push back. (I asked several times if I could also work at the construction company in order to conduct participant observation, but my requests were denied each time; I was never able to see migrants laboring on one of the company's job sites.)

There was also an overtly racial aspect to this labor exploitation; the construction company almost exclusively hired Haitian and African migrants. When I asked migrants and shelter directors about this, I was told that the company said that they preferred black migrants, especially Haitians, over Central Americans because they were "more trustworthy," "more dependable," and "hard workers." Central American migrants, of course, took offense to this, and they frequently cited longstanding prejudices against Central Americans—such as that Central Americans are immoral and culturally inferior—that they were forced to navigate in Mexico that newer populations of migrants were not subjected to. Only two Central American men in the shelter were steadily employed by the construction company, opposed to approximately ten Haitians and five Africans, and they were shouldered with additional tasks for which they were not compensated—mainly, ensuring that the other migrants, none of whom spoke Spanish beyond a basic level, could navigate the metropolis and arrive to work on time each day. It was likely that, on top of the stereotype of Haitians being seen as naturally "good workers," the construction company preferred them to Central American migrants specifically because they quite literally could not talk back.

The company's hiring preferences created a great deal of resentment in the shelter, which was especially exacerbated by the language divide. Migrants at Casa Abrazo tended to segregate along linguistic and cultural lines—the Central Americans usually stuck together, as did the Haitians. The Africans, who could not always communicate as easily with each other as the other two groups, since there were several languages spoken between them, were somewhat more splintered and solitary. The Central Americans—with whom I conducted the vast majority of my interviews in the shelter, as I spoke their language—were frequently embittered that they were not given the same visa opportunities, and therefore also work opportunities, as the Haitian and African migrants. Even if the migrants working at the construction company felt that they were being

exploited, most Central American migrants agreed, it was better than nothing; Central Americans essentially had no way to earn money at all.

Ultimately, I felt incredibly sympathetic toward the Haitians migrants with whom I interacted; they were in an impossible position of straddling two extreme—and, at times, competing—conceptions of their presence (and blackness) in Mexico. The first was a kind of "everyday" conception. On a day-to-day basis, Haitians had to navigate a constant minefield of open racism and unapologetic xenophobia in Mexico. In the poor or working-class neighborhoods where they were usually forced to reside, Haitian migrants were not infrequently seen as unwelcome competition by Mexican residents, many of whom were struggling to support themselves as well. Several neighbors who lived around Casa Abrazo, for instance, made it known to the shelter that they were none too pleased that Haitians were living in their community, and the shelter occasionally scheduled outreach meetings with the neighborhood in order to dispel rumors that Haitian migrants were stealing jobs and state resources, or causing increases in petty crime. But it wasn't only Mexican citizens who lashed out. As a journalist once recounted to me, in 2021, hundreds of migrants of various nationalities were threatening to organize another caravan in southern Mexico. The INM then rounded up hundreds of migrants and relocated them to the professional soccer stadium in Tapachula, Chiapas. The agents promised the migrants that they would receive humanitarian visas if they disbanded the caravan and separated themselves by nationality on the stadium field in an orderly manner, in order to begin the humanitarian visa registration process. If the caravan did not immediately comply, the agents threatened, then the deal was off the table. Many of the Latin American migrants began immediately lining up at half field. Several of the African migrants spoke enough Spanish that they also quickly realized what was expected of them and began lining up as well. But many of the Haitian migrants, unable to understand the INM's instructions—and already unsure why they had been locked away in a soccer stadium in the first place—warily grouped together in the bleachers and refused to descend onto the field. Several of the African migrants, furious that the caravan's chances at receiving a visa were now being threatened, clambered into the bleachers and began beating the Haitian migrants into submission, dragging them by their necks onto the field. "It was terrifying," the journalist told me. "One African man almost choked a Haitian guy to death. We had to run into the stands and say, 'Stop, stop, he's blacking out.' It was horrible."

Haitians face many other challenges in Mexico as well. Though there has been a large community of Haitians living in Tijuana for more than a decade, many of the city's landlords have refused to rent to them. Unable to find housing, they began moving into the city dump, quite literally building their homes out of the piles of trash, which eventually came to be known as Little Haiti. Between 2016 and 2018, I spent several days in Little Haiti, which were incredibly poor and isolated from the rest of the city. When it rained in the winter—Tijuana's rainy season is in the winter, and the storms can be quite torrential—the dump was subject to flash floods, which sent rivers of contaminated water and debris hurtling through the settlement. At the Templo Embajadores de Jesús, a Pentecostal church in Little Haiti, a church worker told me that they sometimes temporarily housed Haitian migrants after their homes were destroyed by flash floods. Feral pigs roam the dump and have been said to attack residents. I saw several of them myself while visiting and had to scale a trash heap in order to keep a wide berth from what appeared to be one particularly aggressive boar who would not let me pass. "To be Haitian in Tijuana," said the church worker said, "is to deal with racism every day."

Even within the humanitarian organizations that are theoretically supposed to help them, Haitians often encounter this everyday racism. The same journalist who stopped the Haitian

migrant from being choked in Tapachula's soccer stadium told me another story about hearing a CNDH worker lament his organization's decision to help Haitians integrate into the country because "they breed like rats."

At the same time, there is a second narrative about Haitian migrants within Mexico, which stems directly from the first. This narrative is represented by the humanitarian position at both a national and international level—such as with organizations like CNDH, ACNUR, COMAR, and many more—which reasons that because Haitians are so subjected to this everyday racism in Mexico, they were also in the most urgent need of legal relief as well. In late 2021, Mexico announced a new "Haitian pilot program" in collaboration with the United Nations, in which Haitians, by entering the asylum process in southern Mexico, were to be relocated to central and northern Mexican cities—such as Mexico City and Tijuana—where they would be given "better opportunities for access to the labor market, housing, healthcare, and education" (United Nations 2021). Many Central American migrants, though they often noted how particularly isolated Haitians must have felt in Mexico, still expressed a deep resentment and bitterness at what they saw as an unfair legal privilege.

The special pilot program for Haitians was justified specifically because of Haitian's major differences. Haitians were not only from one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, but they were also racially, culturally, and linguistically other in Mexico. A special program, therefore, was required for such a special population, and Central American migrants, because they were the overwhelming majority of migrants in Mexico, were therefore not seen as in need of the same attention and resource expenditure. Whereas Haitians were approached by humanitarian organizations with the *deference to major differences,* Central Americans experienced an *indifference to minor differences*.

Figuring out how to equitably address all the populations under its roof was very difficult for the Casa Abrazo team. As the shelter director Teresa made clear, she eagerly accepted both Haitian and African migrants because she felt that they were particularly racially othered in Mexico and would therefore have face forms of discrimination that many Central Americans were not directly confronted with. "Haitian migrants are good people," said Teresa. "They work hard and obey the law. But when they arrive in Mexico, they are very naïve. And so many people take advantage of them, because they don't know how things work here. They're so nice, they don't realize that people are going to fuck them."

Ana, a young activist and master's student in sociology who worked as Teresa's second-in-command, agreed with the shelter's new focus on overtly black migration, and Haitian migration specifically. It was her sociological education, said Ana, that pushed her to be more understanding of Haitian migrants. Because Haitians were so different from Mexicans, she said, she believed they deserved special attention and additional resources. "They have no one else here [in Mexico] who understands them, who has any idea what they're going through. They're so isolated, they can't talk to anyone, everyone thinks they're so strange."

However, in the months that I worked in the shelter, there was an increasing amount of friction between Ana and Teresa specifically over the Haitian migrants at Casa Abrazo. Ana confided in me that she felt Teresa frequently discriminated against Haitians migrants, and I often agreed.

"Every migrant who enters those doors," Teresa would espouse, pointing to the entrance of the shelter, "I treat equally. I don't care if you're Central American or Haitian, I treat you equally." But the ultimate measure of Teresa's equality, it seemed, was integration. Her goal was

to ensure that everyone met a particular standard of Mexicanness. Teresa had devised three ways of helping migrants integrate into this Mexicanness. The first way was to teach them to speak Spanish. In order to achieve this, Teresa had begun to partner with several community volunteers to give weekly classes in basic conversational Spanish in the shelter. I also occasionally led these courses. The second was to learn to appreciate certain aspects of "Mexican culture," such as learning how to eat, cook, and enjoy traditionally Mexican food, or to become more acquainted with popular Mexican music. Here a problem arose. Many Haitian and Africa migrants simply did not like Mexican cuisine or music, and they complained loudly and frequently about this. The food was very different from what they were used to eating, and the music, they said—especially the cumbia to which Teresa was partial—was boring. Haitian and African migrants persistently asked to have more control over the shelter's playlist and cart du jour, and, though Teresa did relent a bit, she continually reiterated her frustration to shelter volunteers that "the Haitians" would not give Mexican food and music more of a chance, which she seemed to see as a sign of weakness or haughtiness, as well as an unwillingness to integrate.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly to Teresa, was the assignment of chores to all migrants in the shelter. There was, of course, a practical and necessary element to these chores; there were many people living in the shelter, and the domestic labor needed to be distributed in order to keep the place functional and clean. However, Teresa framed these chores as instilling a work ethic into migrants, and she spent several hours each week devising complex charts to designate particular chores to each migrant in the shelter individually, assigning the deadline of each chore based upon each individual's work and immigration court schedule. Teresa also communicated her expectations regarding these chores in exclusively Mexico City Spanish, which was very heavily accented and slangy. When the Haitians—who quite obviously did not understand the majority of what she was saying—inevitably did not complete their chores on time, Teresa would fly into another rant. "You have to be very strict with them," she said. "Because if you don't, they get big heads. When they arrive, they're so nice, but then they become entitled since the government treats them differently [from the rest of the migrant population]. That's why I think it's important to treat them the same as everyone else in here. I've been too generous in the past, and if you're generous they take advantage of you."

Ana and I attempted several times to push back against these kinds of comments, especially when Teresa began to insist that the Haitians would need to be educated in the ways of Mexican culture if they were to ever "contribute anything to Mexico." But our resistance usually did no good. Many evenings before dinner, Teresa would wander around Casa Abrazo, clucking while she inspected the quality of each migrant's work on their given chore, and then she would inevitably conclude that the Haitians had once again failed in their endeavors.

This routine reached a breaking point one night. This time, Teresa was frustrated that the Haitians hadn't cleaned the bathroom like she had asked them to. Every day, she said, she would wake the Haitians up before they left for work at the construction site and ask them to please scrub that filthy bathroom already, to which they always responded with vigorous nods. And yet, she fumed, every day the baño remained dirty. And yesterday, the Haitians hadn't washed the dishes after dinner, though she had told them to do so three times and even showed them the schedule, which clearly listed their names under dish duty. And the day before that, the Haitians had snuck into the storage room without permission and stolen clothing from the donation bins. Teresa knew because she caught one of them wearing a t-shirt that she had sorted and folded herself. She speculated that he must have seen the clothes being dropped off and asked one of his friends to distract her, then slipped into the storage room while she was otherwise preoccupied.

“These Haitians,” she spat, “are so entitled. They think they should just be able to have whatever they want. They get whatever they want at immigration, so they don’t follow the rules here, they don’t have respect.”

“You’re the one who doesn’t have respect,” snapped Ana, and tears began to well up in her eyes. “I have tried so hard to help you, but you keep saying these horrible things. You say that you treat everyone equally here, but you’re always harassing the Haitians.”

“Harassing them?” cried Teresa. “I’m trying to help them. But they’re taking advantage of me.”

“No, they’re not,” said Ana. “They don’t speak the language. They can’t understand you. But instead of recognizing that, you just scream at them louder. *Do the dishes! Clean the bathroom!* But just because you yell doesn’t mean that they’re going to understand.”

“They understand me,” muttered Teresa. “They just don’t want to do their chores, and they have the perfect excuse.”

“I’m sorry,” said Ana through tears. “But that’s just racist. Nothing else.”

“That is not true,” shouted Teresa. “How can I be racist if I’m the one taking them in? Feeding them? Giving them a roof over their heads? No one else is doing that. It’s not racist to expect them to contribute.”

“I have worked for you for months,” said Ana. “I’ve given everything to this shelter. But I can’t do this anymore. I think I’m done.” Ana whipped off her badge and had handed it to Teresa. “I can’t keep working for you if you’re going to be racist. I quit. I’m leaving.” Then she marched out of the office.

There was an awkward silence. Teresa stared off into the far corner of the office for a long time. Tears began to well up in her eyes. I decided to not speak. Eventually, she looked at me. “Do you want Ana’s position?” she asked. “I can pay you 5,000 pesos a month.”

I politely declined. Within a week, Teresa gave me an ultimatum: Either I commit to working at the shelter fulltime, or I was dismissed. If I wasn’t willing to be all in, she said, then she would prefer that I stay out entirely. The situation with the Haitians was urgent, and she needed people she could trust. I again declined, and Teresa asked that I not come back. I never got to say goodbye to Obi or anyone else.

I came to understand that, despite their disagreement on the surface, at the heart of Ana and Teresa’s spat was actually an unspoken agreement, one that revolved around the deference to major differences. Rather than being radically opposed to one another, both Ana and Teresa sided with ACNUR’s stance that Haitians’ major differences in Mexico compelled a particular kind of urgency and intervention; Haitian migrants needed to be prioritized and addressed specifically because they were so intensely other. Teresa and Ana simply disagreed on how this otherness should be engaged. In the end, each of their views represented two iterations of the same predominant humanitarian logic that currently manages mass migration in Mexico.

On the one had was Teresa, who, at over sixty, was part of an older generation of Mexicans who had grown up during the long reign of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), which had ruled over the country uninterrupted since the end of the Mexican revolution, from 1929 to 2000. Though organized under a revolutionary banner, throughout most of the twentieth century the PRI was in essence an ultra-conservative party. This kind of unapologetic right-wing authoritarianism that nevertheless located its legitimacy and foundation in left-wing revolution prompted the writer Mario Vargas Llosa to famously deem Mexico “the perfect dictatorship” because “it is a dictatorship so camouflaged that it seems that it is not one, but in fact it has, if one

digs, all the characteristics of a dictatorship" (Krauze 2012). The perfect dictatorship had made many older Mexicans, including Teresa, incredibly weary and wary of electoral politics in the country. To complicate matters, it was only after the passage of NAFTA in 1994 that the real possibility emerged for a multi-party electoral system in Mexico, and in 2000 for a party other than the PRI to be elected. As Teresa stated, she saw many of the new parties (such as the PAN, which won the 2000 election, and the PRD, another party of significant size in Mexico), as created to better facilitate and bend to the new economic demands the US made of Mexico under NAFTA, of which increased immigration enforcement placed a crucial part. When I asked Teresa about her own political orientation, she insisted that she rejected all political parties in Mexico. Rather, she believed in "human rights" and saw herself as a "human rights defender," quite consciously embracing the language of humanitarianism as an explicit rejection of traditional electoral politics in Mexico, as well as its revolutionary past. Teresa came from a working-class background in Mexico City, had a high school education—a higher level of education than the national average—and framed her work at Casa Abrazo as labor of love and conviction. She considered herself something of a Christian but was no longer a member of any church, having come to feel alienated both by the Catholic dioses she grew up in, which had long aligned itself with the PRI, as well as by the many Catholic migrant shelters in the country, which have been the subject of several political and sexual scandals in recent years.[30] She intentionally ran the shelter as a secular space, likely spent eighty to one hundred hours every week there, and certainly did not earn a particularly large sum of money for it. Her mission was to give migrants "who don't know about Mexico" a stable place to live in order to begin their integration process. When it came to Haitian migrants, Teresa explained, she felt that this mission was more urgent than ever. "They are so different," she told me. "They have to learn so much about how things work here [in Mexico], otherwise they're going to be taken advantage of by untrustworthy people. That's why I'm so strict. They need to learn." When I brought up migrants' complaints about the construction company, however, and how migrants felt that the shelter's agreement with the company was endorsing their own labor exploitation, Teresa shook her head. "It's not a perfect situation," she said. "But there's no other option for them [to find work immediately]. That's part of learning to live in Mexico too—learning how to work hard and be grateful for what you have."

On the other hand was Ana, who, at about thirty years old, was part of a younger generation of educated activists who are increasingly open and specific about their radical convictions. Ana was a self-described anarcho-feminist who believed in open borders, and she hoped to put concepts that she was learning in her sociology master's degree—such as "cultural relativism" and "decolonizing methodologies"—to practical use in the shelters. Ana was also a supporter of the Zapatista secession in southern Mexico, an indigenous autonomous movement which began in 1994 and was in part an explicit rejection of the Mexican state's entrance into NAFTA. Like Teresa, Ana expressed open distrust of the Mexican government's handling of migration under the Southern Border Program. Though she was more open to the idea of radical politics than Teresa,

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[30] For instance, Father Alejandro Solalinde, once Mexico's most famous migrant activist, has continued to hold unwavering support for the Mexican president AMLO, despite the president's continuation of the mass deportations under the Southern Border Program. In 2023, AMLO announced his intentions to disband the INM and create a new national immigration agency that would be headed by Solalinde. For more information about Father Solalinde's changing stance on immigration enforcement, as well as several sexual scandals within his shelter network, see my book *Border Hacker* (2022).

she saw human rights organizations as a practical alternative to the Mexican state. "The state is always fucking migrants," she told me. "It's good to have oversight from outside organizations."

Ana linked the Program not only to the persecution of migrants, but also to indigenous people in Chiapas (the Zapatistas are located in Chiapas), who were frequently stopped, questioned, and even detained by Mexican immigration because they looked "Guatemalan." (During my research, I found that Mexican immigration agents in southern Mexico sometimes even used the adjectives "Guatemalan" and "indigenous" interchangeably.[31]) Ana's past studies had focused on how indigenous women in Mexico suffered particular kinds of racialized and gendered violence, and this led directly to her interest in Haitian migration. After working at Casa Abrazo for approximately a year, she had simultaneously accepted a similar position at another shelter that housed migrant families and single women. There she had intentionally begun working with Haitian women—though she did not speak any Haitian Creole—because, like Teresa, she felt that they were one of the populations most likely to be taken advantage of in Mexico. "Normally, Mexico is not safe for most women," she said. "Even Mexican women. So it's especially dangerous for Haitian women."

But it was not that Ana felt that Haitian migrants were simply more endangered than other migrants. It was also, she emphasized, that they were also "culturally" other, which led not only to more dangerous situations, but rather fed into a large cycle of marginalization, which then made Haitian migrants seem even more other, which potentially put them in even more danger, which then caused them to further withdraw from greater Mexican society, which made them seem even more other, and so on. "One of the big things we've had to deal with at the other shelter," said Ana, "is different conceptions of hygiene. Haitians don't seem to bathe as much as Mexicans or Central Americans, or use deodorant. And the Haitian women have a habit of peeing in bowls that they keep under their beds. They don't get up in the middle of the night to pee [in the bathroom]. They squat over the bowls and only empty them in the morning, which the other migrant women [in the communal dormitory] complain about. There are open bowls of pee underneath all their beds, and the other women complain about the smell."

"Why do you think Haitian women do that?" I asked.[32]

"I kept asking about it," said Ana, "and finally I learned that it's a cultural thing, maybe about being afraid as a woman to go out alone in the middle of the night. Because it's a family shelter, there are men who sleep there too, and so they say they don't want to be out in the night with grown men around."

Ana clarified that she was in no way criticizing Haitian women's choice to urinate in bowls under their beds. She was simply acknowledging, she said, a particularly stark "cultural difference" she had observed between Haitian women and other women migrants in the shelter, especially Central Americans, and the social antagonism that it had caused. For her, like with Teresa, such cultural differences validated a need to intervene. Except, whereas Teresa believed in teaching Haitians to essentially become more Mexican in order to ease their integration, Ana believed that such difference needed to be understood on its own terms—it was Mexicans who needed to adapt

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[31] There have also been reports of indigenous people in Chiapas who were detained and tortured by Mexican immigration forces in an attempt to force them to admit that they were Guatemalan and agree to be deported (Mariscal 2019).

[32] I had not heard about this phenomenon before, but after speaking with Ana, I was able to confirm with several other migrant shelter workers that Haitian women did seem to frequently urinate in bowls during the middle of the night, which they would then empty in the bathroom in the morning.

to their new Haitian neighbors. She hoped that Central American migrants, as well as Mexicans, would come to appreciate certain aspects of Haitian culture, rather than simply vilifying certain practices that they found strange, such as women urinating in bowls under their beds. But the only way to make that happen, she thought, was for humanitarian organizations like ACNUR to give Haitians documents and social resources. "We shouldn't be yelling at them like Teresa," said Ana. "We should be listening to them. The less Spanish they speak, the more we should listen harder." Both Ana and Teresa, then, agreed that humanitarianism was the practical starting point to address Haitian migration in Mexico. They also agreed that Haitian immigration needed to take priority within humanitarian spaces specifically because of Haitians' racial, cultural, and linguistic otherness. Or, put another way, that Haitians deserved a certain amount of deference because of their major differences.

This idea, however, was rejected by many Central American migrants in Casa Abrazo. As one Guatemalan migrant named Andrés pointed out to me, shelter life seemed to revolve around how to help Haitian (and African, to a certain extent) migrants integrate into Mexico, such as with Teresa's emphasis on learning to speak Spanish and cook Mexican food. According to Andrés, Central Americans' concerns—because they already spoke Spanish and were seem as more culturally and racially similar to Mexicans—were not attended to in the same way. Because of Central Americans' perceived minor differences, humanitarian organizations from the small-scale Casa Abrazo to the large-scale ACNUR were more indifferent to their concerns. This was obvious in a certain sense. When I volunteered at Casa Abrazo in 2015, there were approximately thirty-five men living there, all Central American. When I returned in 2021, the shelter was housing about fifty men total, but only around fifteen were Central American. Teresa's choice to attend to Haitian and African migration meant that fewer resources were now available for Central Americans at Casa Abrazo, even though Central American migration had also risen significantly since 2015. Under the logic of major differences, those deemed less different in Casa Abrazo received fewer resources in a very measurable way.

The Haitian pilot program

Not long after I was dismissed from Casa Abrazo, I attempted to interview officials involved in the Haitian pilot program in order to receive specifics regarding what documents and social benefits the program would clearly grant Haitian migrants. But I was never able to land an interview. This was likely for one of two reasons. First, journalists are officially banned from entering immigration detention facilities in Mexico, and in my experience, this ban often extended unofficially into other immigration institutions as well. Even though I explained that I was there to conduct anthropological research, not journalistic investigation, my inquiries were presumably similar enough from an outside perspective to make Mexican officials cagey. Second, I wondered if officials declined to speak with me because they themselves did not quite have the specifics I was looking for. As with many immigration initiatives under the Southern Border Program, the ACNUR announcement of the pilot program had been incredibly general, promising only vague things like "facilitating the emission of documents" to Haitian migrants, without describing what those documents would be, when they would be processed, or how many people would actually receive them. This led to much confusion on the ground. During my time at Casa Abrazo, I knew from my small ethnographic sample size that all of the Haitians in our shelter were quickly granted one-year humanitarian visas with CURPs attached. Central American migrants were likely to be

granted humanitarian visas as well, but occasionally a denial would happen, and only a handful of them ever received CURPs. Central Americans immediately chalked up this discrepancy to the Haitian pilot program, but that was not the case—none of the Haitians at Casa Abrazo, at least at that time, were in the pilot program.

This creates a challenge in accurately describing Mexican government's general strategy to address Haitian migration. In 2021, 62,804 Haitians applied for asylum in Mexico, making Haitians the highest number of asylum applicants from any single country in the Mexican asylum system (IOM 2022). However, Central American migrants were quick to point out that they felt this number was misleading. Yes, Haitians represented the largest number of *official asylum applications*, but that was because it seemed as if the INM had created an unannounced internal protocol in which any Haitian who was detained was pushed to register for asylum. In reality, the numbers of undocumented Central Americans almost certainly numbered in the millions; Haitian migrants were tiny population by comparison. As Andrés told me, "When they catch a Haitian, immigration agents ask them if they want to apply for asylum and tell them how to sign up. I've seen it happen with my own eyes. But if they catch one of us [a Central American], they don't give us that option. They just say, 'You're illegal, you're going back home,' and deport us straight away. No one ever offers Central Americans the chance to apply. And most of us, because we don't know the laws of this land, we don't know that we can ask for asylum."

"Do you think more Central Americans would apply for asylum in Mexico if they were given the assistance to do so?" I asked.

"Absolutely," said Andrés. "But we don't know how to do it. First, you need to show up to an office. But then you show up to and they tell you you're at the wrong place. So you go to the next place, but they tell you that you need to go back to the first place. Then they say that you need to go to your embassy. And then the people in the embassy say you should go back home."

After inquiring about this double standard with shelter workers throughout Mexico, it seems that Andrés was more or less correct in his assessment. Several shelter workers confirmed that it appeared to be much easier for Haitians to apply for asylum than Central Americans; many reported that they knew of Haitians being informed of their asylum rights after being detained, but that few Central Americans ever received the same treatment. As one shelter worker clarified, "I'm sure that there are a lot of Haitians who don't get this treatment, but there are a lot that do. And Central Americans are just told to leave."[33] And while assisting several Central American migrants with their immigration cases in Mexico City, I did frequently observe what seemed to be a distinct system for Haitian migrants outside of various COMAR and INM offices. For instance, in 2019, while waiting outside of COMAR for several hours with a Central American migrant who wished to start the asylum process, one of the employees actually exited the building and stated that, "Anyone who isn't Haitian can go home, we're not taking anyone else today." Only Haitians were allowed to stay and register, something I have never see happen with any other nationality. Although there might have been somewhat of a practical aspect to creating a distinct system for Haitians—essentially all of them require translators—from the outside it could not help but appear that a certain partiality was being granted to Haitian migrants over the rest.

Within Casa Abrazo, there also seemed to be a clear distinction between Haitians'

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[33] To be clear, there is evidence that Haitians are also deported against their will. A 2021 piece in *El Pais* reported that a Haitian migrant supposedly scheduled for "voluntary removal"—that is a removal that he supposedly agreed to himself—jumped from the plane that was supposed to fly him back to Haiti (Maldonado 2021).

immigration cases and everyone else's, especially Central American migrants'. Even before the announcement of the pilot program, a common refrain on the migrant trail was that Haitians were granted humanitarian visas almost instantly, all they had to do was sign up. This was not exactly true—Haitians did not actually receive their visas "instantly," but they did tend to receive them very quickly, often within a few weeks, a stark contrast to the many uncertain months that most Central Americans had to endure. By time the Haitian pilot program was announced in late 2021, there was already an established narrative on the migrant trail that Haitians had it easier than Central Americans when it came to legalizing themselves and receiving state resources. It was a narrative that, from my ethnographic work, I felt was often over-exaggerated but still held a grain of truth. Haitians' visibility in both the US and Mexican media was also very high, which created additional pressure on COMAR to swiftly address their cases. It did not help that the initial announcement of the Haitian pilot program gave no indication of how many Haitians the program would actually aid. Soon, the undefined and over-exaggerated privileges that many migrants assumed all Haitian migrants had become directly conflated with the pilot program. Anytime a new Haitian in the shelter received a humanitarian visa—which, again, already tended to come much faster than the ones for Central Americans—there were comments that this was "because of that special Haitian program."

In March 2022, the first report on the pilot program was finally released, which disclosed that in the program's first year it would accept a grand total of two hundred Haitian families, likely only 1,000 migrants, practically a drop in the bucket to the number of Haitians actually in the country (IOM 2022). The report did claim that the program would be "potentially implemented for a larger number of beneficiaries nationwide starting in 2023," theoretically accepting many more people, but no further reports have been released to date on actual numbers therein, as far as I have been able to find. I spent months inquiring at agencies like COMAR and ACNUR for further information, but in the end, not a single Mexican official agreed to discuss even the most basic facets of the pilot program with me.

Eventually, I was able to line up an interview with Sam, a US-based NGO worker in her early thirties who often consulted on UNHCR projects related to migration on both sides of the US-Mexico border. Sam seemed to be a very bright and well-intentioned person. A white woman, she had decided to learn Spanish in college after taking a class on the labor exploitation of undocumented workers in the US, which eventually led to her career working in immigration law along the US-Mexico border. Sam told me that, though she did not consult on the initial launch of the Haitian pilot program, she was visiting Mexico City at the time for an invite-only UNHCR conference related to migration and asylum in Mexico, where she attended a session related to the pilot program. She hoped to use the connections she had made at the conference to consult on the expansion of the Haitian pilot program in Mexico if more funding became available. When I asked Sam if she knew exactly what kinds of documents Haitian migrants were receiving under the pilot program, she was unclear. She mostly worked on migrant legalization on the US side of the border, she explained, and was less familiar with the Mexican legal process. Switching gears, I explained to Sam that I hoped to learn more about the rationale specifically behind the pilot program, and how Haitian migrants had suddenly come to be so focused on by ACNUR. I thought that this was a relatively straightforward and innocuous way to begin the conversation, but Sam noticeably bristled.

"What?" she said. "You think Haitians don't deserve documents?"

That wasn't the case at all, I tried to clarify. I was in support of Haitians receiving a quick pathway to citizenship. But, after having followed the mass deportations of the Southern Border

Program for the last seven years, it did seem like a somewhat abnormal policy. I was interested in why suddenly Haitians were seen as deserving of documents and not, say, Central American migrants. Rather than reassure her, my response only seemed to further agitate Sam. This was again surprising to me; because she worked along the US-Mexico border, the majority of the migrants whom Sam represented were Central American.

Haitians deserved documents, Sam said, "because they are black." She then began to recount all of the common challenges that Haitian migrants had to navigate in Mexico—their skin made them stand out, they lived in poverty and were often taken advantage of, they could not speak the language, and no one could speak theirs. It was these major differences, both from other migrants and from Mexicans, she said, that should qualify Haitians for a special program.

Because Sam had been in UNHCR rooms in the past, and because she might potentially have some power to influence ACNUR migration policy moving forward, I decided to gently push back, even though our conversation was already uncomfortable. I worried, I said, that setting up a separate system exclusively for Haitians seemed like an unprecedented action that might have unexpected repercussions.

Sam asked what I meant.

Though I agreed with her in principle, I said, wouldn't granting Haitians documents through a special program that no other migrants were eligible for—including other migrants who might also be identified as black in Mexico—actually be in practice used to distract from the fact that the vast majority of undocumented migrants in the country had essentially no pathway to legalization?

Sam said that she found my line of argumentation unconvincing. The partnership between ACNUR and COMAR had now created a pathway to legalization for people who did not have one previously, and that was much better than nothing. The goal, she said, was to expand upon it, not criticize it.

But wasn't the point, I said, specifically to not allow other migrants into the pilot program? Would she, if given the opportunity to work on the program's expansion, push for migrants of other nationalities to be included?

Well, she admitted, probably not. Because the point of the program was that it was specifically for Haitians. UNHCR would almost certainly not approve an expansion to migrants of other nationalities.

And that wasn't a problem? I asked.

It was a problem that there were many undocumented migrants in the country, she replied, but, no, she did not think it was a problem that Haitians were being prioritized, because they needed the documents most. Sam went on to explain that at the conference there was much talk of racism against Haitian migrants in Mexico, especially when it came to being detained my Mexican immigration officials, who could easily pick Haitians out of a crowd and harass them. Haitians, because they were so easily identifiable, and because they had no way to understand or respond to what these immigration agents were saying, were prime targets for bribes and extortion. When speaking of these immigration agents, Sam—echoing other humanitarians with whom I spoke, including Teresa, several other shelter directors, and Red Cross workers—described these immigration agents as "corrupt." They were using their small position of power for personal financial gain, and at the expense of Haitian migrants in particular. It was important, Sam concluded, that Haitians receive some kind of document to help them mitigate this blatant extortion and corruption.

I again agreed with Sam about the unique constellation of violence that Haitians

experienced in Mexico, and expressed hope that granting Haitians documents quickly would minimize at least some of this racism. But, I ventured, did this pilot program not in some way also change Haitian migrants' bodies? If migrants were suddenly granted the bodily ability to travel through Mexico freely, wouldn't that mean that, actually, their bodies were not as different from Mexican bodies, as well as our own white bodies, in a singular but very important way? One of the major differences that Haitians experienced from the Mexican population—undocumented status, and the immobility that came with it—would suddenly be erased. I of course did not think that this was a negative thing at all, but it would mean that Haitians were perhaps not absolute others in the way that she and her colleagues were making them out to be. The moment that a Haitian or any other migrant received a visa, they were in fact included (however imperfectly) into the very community that the humanitarian structure was saying they were excluded from, while other migrants with supposedly more minor differences, such as Central Americans, largely remained on the outside.

Yes, said Sam, but the Haitians are still black. They will still face racial discrimination.

I certainly agreed. But African migrants were black as well. And a good number of Central Americans who were Afro-Latinx faced racial discrimination too. I had conducted research with many who could not find work or housing because of their Afro-Latinidad.

"Yes, but," Sam hesitated. "The Central Americans you work with probably aren't black like the Haitians are black."

What did she mean? I asked.

"I mean." Sam seemed to be choosing her words carefully. "They won't stick out in the way that Haitians stick out. They can blend in better, right?"

What about the African migrants? I asked. Were they black like the Haitians were black?

"Yes," she said. "But they haven't experienced slavery. Black people are in Haiti because of slavery."

This caught me off guard for several reasons, one of which was that certain populations in Africa absolutely continued to grapple with a legacy of slavery, as did Afro-Latinx populations in Latin America. But, while asking Sam to clarify, I began to understand that by "haven't experienced slavery" she meant that she believed that African and Afro-Latinx migrants hadn't experienced slavery in a manner similar to the ways that black enslaved people in the United States had experienced slavery, and that therefore they had not suffered the racializing consequences of a particular kind of blackness therein. For instance, Sam said, had I seen the news story about the US Border Patrol whipping Haitian migrants?

I had. At the time, a group of Haitian migrants had recently attempted to ford the Rio Grande into Texas, and, after crossing the river, they were met by several border patrolmen on horseback, who appeared to brandish whips and lash the migrants with them.[34] Photographs and video footage of the encounter quickly went viral, likely in no small part because they were an image with which US audiences were intimately familiar; desperate black people being chased and whipped by white authorities on horseback immediately drew comparisons to the slave patrols of Antebellum America (Debusmann Jr 2021; Schmidt Camacho 2022).

Sam's office was based not too far from where the whipping had taken place, and she said that the encounter had spurred her to begin exploring how US slavery and the US-Mexico border were connected. She specifically referenced Alice Baumgartner's *South to Freedom*, a historical account of the 3,000 to 5,000 enslaved people who escaped slavery in the US South from 1830 to

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[34] CBP later insisted that they were not whips, but the reins of the horses (Berg 2022).

1865 by crossing into Mexico. Sam cited Mexico's welcoming of these escaped slaves as establishing a kind of historical and legal model that justified Mexico's current prioritization of Haitian migrants—the Mexican state was welcoming people today who had historically endured a slavery that was similar both in form and time period to the one that the US slaves who had escaped to Mexico had endured two hundred years previous.

My interview of Sam, of course, represents only the tiniest of ethnographic data sets, and cannot be said to be representative of the opinions of the people actually in charge of the Haitian pilot program. Over the period of several months, I interviewed several other US and European NGO workers who in some way focused on migration in Mexico, though none of them worked directly on the Haitian pilot program either. However, many echoed the sentiments that Sam had expressed, continuously justifying a special attentiveness to Haitian migrants because of their major differences. Though none of the other conversations became as openly combative as my interview with Sam, each had their own tense moments, which seemed to most often arise when I asked why they believed Haitians should receive a pilot program but not Central American migrants. I emphasize this discomfort and antagonism for an important reason. As I said before, I understood Sam to be not only well-intentioned, but someone who also believed in a continuous intellectual engagement with contemporary dialogues around issues like social justice, race, and immigration. In addition to citing *South to Freedom*, Sam also referenced CLR James' *The Black Jacobins*, as well as drew upon abolitionist literature by Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Angela Davis in order to criticize mass deportations carried out under the Biden administration. And yet, when I said that I worried there was a chance the Haitian pilot program would do more harm to migrants than good—a critique that I understood to be abolitionist in its argumentation (Fannie Lou Hammer's famous statement "Nobody's free until everybody's free"[35] comes to mind)—Sam became quite angry with and wary of me. I understood this to be, as Ian Whitmarsh has described, an instance of "institutional spirit possession" (2019), in which—rather than Sam being a fully coherent individual speaking on behalf of humanitarianism—the institution of humanitarianism was speaking *through her* instead. Though some part of Sam willingly engaged with the theoretical idea of abolitionism, when faced with a deep ethical uncertainty—that is, how to best address and care for millions of suffering migrants simultaneously—suddenly the language of humanitarianism took over. This large-scale uncertainty, as I understood it, was mirrored by another micro one: Why is this white American man criticizing a program designed to aid poor, black migrants? Or, even more personally: Is this stranger implicating *me* in the exploitation of migrants?

In moments of uncertainty—when the reality of the situation becomes a little too Real, to paraphrase Lacan—I have found that many who make their living (or their meaning) through humanitarianism suddenly become possessed by the institution, and it begins to speak out of them. With Sam, this was clear in the structural logic at work in her argumentation, namely the continuous searching for, and citation of, Haitians' major differences from the rest of the migrant population, major differences which, in the logic of humanitarianism, justified their immediate attention and salvation over others.

To be clear, I do not think Sam is really to blame, or at least no more than I was myself when I decided to let the Congolese family into the shelter even though other Central American families had been turned away. What makes the logic of major differences so effective is that, quite often, major differences really do put certain populations at greater visible or statistically

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[35] See: "Nobody's Free Until Everybody's Free,": Speech Delivered at the Founding of the National Women's Political Caucus, Washington, D.C., July 10, 1971

measurable risk than other populations. There is no denying that trans women are some of the migrants most likely to be attacked and killed on the migrant trail. Nor can one deny that Haitian migrants experience truly agonizing isolation within Mexico, an isolation that likely does put them at some greater risk of being attacked or extorted. And yet the trick of this humanitarian logic is twofold: First, it conflates major differences with "major dangers," so to speak, dangers that are understood to be statistically likely and therefore ever present. Second, it wields the equation of major differences and major dangers to make the inverse claim as well—that those who experience so-called minor differences experience minor dangers, leading to the conclusion that these minor differences are less deserving. Therefore, if one questions the urgency that compels humanitarianism to act—"Why only Haitian migrants?" or "What if Haitian migrants are not quite as different as you assume?"—what humanitarianism is likely to hear back is, "Haitian migrants are not deserving of aid," or, put in humanitarian lingo, "These major differences are actually only minor, and therefore not deserving of attention."

The role of the child and the Haitian within humanitarianism

Liisa Malkki's large body of work on humanitarianism (see: 1995; 1996; 2013; 2015) has demonstrated how "children occupy a key place in dominant imaginations of the human and of the 'world community'," in which protecting the lives of children "tends to be identified as apolitical, even suprapolitical; yet the forms in question clearly have political effects" (2010). Here children are perceived as fundamentally different from adults, as beings who are unable to understand and adapt to the world around them, and are therefore particularly susceptible to exploitation and corruption. In this way, we can say that Haitian migrants become *infantilized* by humanitarianism in that they are understood to be inept and innocent, continuously in need of special protection apart from the general (migrant) population. Just as "children come into the world with enormous rational potential" (Malkki 2010), so too are Haitians seen by humanitarians as entering Mexico with a similar potential—they are stereotyped as naturally "law abiding" and "good workers"—and so these traits must be fostered and nurtured apart from the corrupting influences of the migrant trail, especially from "sneaky" Central American migrants who might "take advantage" of them. As a growing body of (usually US produced) literature surrounding black exploitation and the brutal history of trans-Atlantic slavery has come to find its way into the hands of Global North humanitarians like Sam, the response has largely not been to reflect upon humanitarianism's own complicated ties to this exploitation, but rather to infantilize black populations in the same way that children are infantilized. Under colonial regimes, African populations were once openly and unapologetically equated to children in terms of intellect and sophistication (Mills & Lefrançois 2018). Today, it seems this childishness has been reappropriated, in that Haitian migrants are assumed to be currently childlike but possess some potential adult and upstanding citizen within them that simply needs to be fostered and promoted.

As Somers *et al.* have written, there is a long history of children being wielded within humanitarianism, and within asylum and refugee law specifically, in order to then disqualify more supposedly more "resilient" populations—namely, adult men—from receiving similar kinds of services (2010). For instance, the Haitian pilot program has many direct parallels to a legal document in the United States called SIJS (special immigration juvenile status). SIJS is a visa exclusively reserved for child migrants whose parents have abused, abandoned, or otherwise neglected them in their countries of origin. Similar to the Haitian pilot program, SIJS is framed as

faster and easier to win than a traditional asylum case, an expedited legal pathway for a particularly vulnerable and distinct group. As Wendi J. Adelson writes, the logic behind SIJS was that it would be granted to "children without a home to return to in their country of origin... Additionally, such children are vulnerable to all kinds of pernicious influences: traffickers, commercial sexual exploitation, drugs, and gangs, just to name a few" (2008).

The logic behind SIJS, however, was not simply to protect all migrant children from external "pernicious influences," but exclusively children who were deemed to have parents inept at adequately protecting them from such influences, either because these parents engaged in such pernicious behavior themselves, or because they had abandoned the child altogether. We can see, then, how US notions of kindship and the normative nuclear family (two parents and one or more children), frame the bounds of what is understood as appropriate child-rearing in Central America (the majority of SIJS recipients are Central American minors). However, while working as an immigration paralegal for unaccompanied minors, I found that understandings of family and child rearing in the Northern Triangle differed significantly from US norms. In the Northern Triangle, where poverty and migration rates are high, it is relatively common for biological parents who cannot afford to support their child to give them to a relative or close family friend—without the proper documentation and state approval—who raises the child instead, perhaps by an aunt or grandmother, for several or more years. This is what happened in the Castro family, for instance, when one of Maria's daughters gave birth to Sara. The mother immediately handed the baby over to Maria, who willingly accepted Sara, citing a desire to "be her real mother." This "adoption" was never officially registered in Honduras, and Sara's biological mother never gave Maria any money to financially support the child. Under SIJS, this is a relatively straightforward case of child abandonment, but it became clear to me that this was simply part of a kinship system that differed from US notions of what a "normal" family looked like. The children with whom I worked as a paralegal, for instance, were often confused as to why their brother was able to qualify for documents simply because he had been raised by their mother, but they themselves were being denied these same documents because they had been raised by their uncle. Telling the child that it was because their brother had been legally "abandoned" by their mother, and that they had not been, only added to the confusion, and, often, to the pain.

An important unspoken question of SIJS, then, becomes: When does one stop being a child? As soon as a migrant turns eighteen, they are no longer eligible for SIJS, even if they too come from a "broken home" susceptible to "pernicious influences." In this way, SIJS implicitly builds a hard and fast border around childhood in order to exclude adults from being "saved" in the same way. Overnight, children previously understood as innocent and pre-rational are now told that they are resilient subjects who must endure their family history with a stiff upper lip. Any complex understanding of childhood trauma—for instance, that all of us experience it, and that all of us carry it into adulthood—is disavowed by the logic of SIJS.

In this light, Sam's reference to Haitians suffering under the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a marker of their authentic blackness and major difference is better contextualized. First, blackness is equated with having suffered from (a legacy of) slavery. Second, it reinscribes Haitians into humanitarianism's infantilizing structure, in that Haitians come to be implicitly seen as subjects abused and abandoned by their father, the French state. To have suffered under slavery is, in some sense, to have suffered the abuses of an unfit parent and to have been born into a nation that is a perpetually broken home.

It is also important here to return to Ana's statement that "We should be listening to [Haitian migrants]. The less Spanish they speak, the more we should listen harder." I wondered

exactly what Ana had meant by that comment, because, as she readily confessed, the language barrier with Haitian migrants was often so great that she could not have many meaningful conversations with them at all. Though it might initially sound humane, the call to listen to others who you literally cannot understand is in practice nonsensical. To truly listen harder, we would need to extensively study Haitian Creole, or the Haitians in the shelters where we worked would have to learn Spanish, processes that would take years. Even then, I was not convinced that listening harder would allow us to definitively determine a singular and consistent Haitian voice that would sum up collectively the complex experiences and concerns of each Haitian migrant in the country. This was the hard kernel of Haitian otherness in Mexico: I certainly tried to listen to Haitian migrants in Casa Abrazo very hard, but I did not come away with anything that I felt was representative of Haitian migrants' experience other than their great isolation and opacity.

But professing to have listened harder to Haitians is an excellent foray into speaking on their behalf. Just as children are seen as being unable to advocate for themselves, which provides a silence in which humanitarianism might insert itself as guardian and mouthpiece, so too do Haitian migrants make a kind of perfectly mute subject for humanitarianism to speak for. In fact, UNHCR justified its intervention precisely because it could actually "listen harder" to migrants' concerns—especially Haitians' concerns—than the Mexican state could. The Haitian pilot program was proposed after COMAR professed not only to lack the economic resources necessary to address such an uptick in Haitian cases, but also because they could not find enough Haitian Creole interpreters in Mexico to translate Haitian migrants' asylum procedures. I was told that, before ACNUR's intervention, there were only two Haitian Creole-to-Spanish interpreters in all of Mexico City. But UNHCR, with its long history of aid and intervention in Haiti, had the linguistic infrastructure necessary to provide COMAR with many more interpreters, as well as much more funding. They were the ones, and the only ones, who could "listen harder," and therefore speak louder as well.

Central American migrants—as well as the increasing amount of Venezuelan, Cuban, and Belizean migrants that one encounters on the migrant trail today—do not require this kind of harder listening, because they speak a language that is widely spoken. Put another way, they can speak up and speak back. A supposed relatively minor difference (that they might speak Honduran or Guatemalan Spanish instead of Mexican Spanish) therefore actually leads to a lesser recognized but more unsettling otherness—they can assert their difference themselves, that they can disagree and fight and even publicly denounce the Mexican state and humanitarian organizations, which has happened many times. Is this not a more uncomfortable alterity, one that the institution of humanitarianism and the Mexican state wish to rid themselves of?

This is not to assert that, actually, Central Americans are more different than Haitians, and therefore more deserving. Rather, it is to emphasize how otherness *by its very being* cannot be compartmentalized and made legible—nor calculated or quantifiably contrasted—and therefore cannot logically be subjected to a ranking system of deservingness. That Haitian migration was identified as symptomatic on the migrant trail was in no small part because Haitian presence in Mexico was itself an indictment of decades of failed humanitarian projects in Haiti; if humanitarianism was really as effective at listening harder to local populations as it claimed, there would be no need for Haitians to leave their country in the first place. By fixating upon Haitians' supposed major differences in Mexico, humanitarian institutions were not tarrying with this much more damning alterity, but sequestering it into discrete, manageable categories.

Pure blackness and hidden blackness

Just as the infantilization of the child in need then immediately begs the question *When does one stop being a child?* in order to actually ask *When does one stop deserving aid?*, the question that arises out of a new humanitarian attentiveness to black migrants in Mexico is *When does one stop being black?*—as in, exactly how is blackness measured, quantified, and placed at a remove from the rest of the racialized population?

This was an incredibly important question on the migrant trail and was illustrated most vividly to me one evening after the construction crew returned to Casa Abrazo. Teresa had asked a Nicaraguan man named Aldo—whose assigned chore was to be the shelter's cook for the week—to keep dinner warm for the workers. But when they arrived, the majority Haitian crew began to groan at the sight of the food, complaining in broken Spanish that it was too strange and refusing it. "No," they repeated over and over. "Malo, malo, malo, no, no, no." ("Bad, bad, bad.") All of them promptly left the kitchen, choosing to go hungry rather than eat a meal they felt was beneath them. Aldo, who had worked hard to prepare the dinner to Teresa's specifications, became visibly upset. He did not particularly care for Mexican food either but now his cooking was being insulted, despite his best efforts and extra labor. An additional layer to the interaction was that the Haitians, because they were earning money on the construction site, could now afford to purchase food outside the shelter, and within a matter of weeks most of them would receive a humanitarian visa and CURP, allowing them to hunt for a job with even better pay. Aldo, meanwhile, had not been granted a job at the construction site, despite asking for one several times, and so had to labor in the kitchen for free. Meanwhile, the status of his humanitarian visa application—and the question of whether it would come with a CURP—was much more uncertain.

"Fuck those ungrateful bastards," he said to me, looking for a sympathetic ear as the construction crew filed out of the kitchen. "These Haitians think they deserve everything. Look at them. They come here and immediately get a visa. And a job. And everyone tries to help them. It's. So. Fucking. Easy. For. Them." With each word, Aldo angrily scooped a spoonful of rice and cubed ham from the pot and slapped it into plastic Tupperware to store in the communal fridge. "So. Fucking. Easy."

I milled about the kitchen in sympathetic silence, trying to help him clean up as best as I could.

"You know," he said, hanging his head, "I'm black too." ("También soy negro.")

This shocked me. I had almost never heard a Central American migrant openly describe themselves as black, except for a few whom I had known intimately for many years, and only then at my persistent prodding. It was obvious to me, from a US perspective of race, that Aldo was Afro-Latino, but normally in such a situation a migrant would not acknowledge this themselves, nor would other Central American migrants, as it would generally be considered a rude or uncomfortable observation. (I committed this faux pas twice early on in my fieldwork, when I openly referenced—on two different occasions with to different Central American migrants—what I understood to be their obvious blackness. I had done so as a means of attempting to show sympathy for both men, acknowledging that they might have it harder than other lighter-skinned migrants, but I was met not only with anger, but also confusion. It was not simply that both migrants, I realized, thought that being called black was offensive, but that in reality they did not understand themselves to be black in the same way I did. I had brought a different, US-centric conception of blackness into our conversation, and it was not welcome or even understood.)

Aldo continued unprompted, "But my kind of black doesn't matter. Because I'm not black-

black [“no soy negro-negro”]. I’m mulatto [“mulato”]. And the Haitians, they’re black-black. They have pure blood.”

“Pure blood?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he replied. “They have pure blood [“sangre pura”], they are pure black people [“negros puros”]. But Nicaraguans like me? We’re not pure [“no somos puros nosotros”], we have mixed blood [“sangre mezclada”]. My blood is hidden [“mi sangre está escondida”], and so people don’t see me like they see the Haitians. They don’t care about us [Central Americans], they think we’re dirty. But the Haitians, they have pure blood, so they stand out [“llaman la atención”].”

Recounted here, for an English-speaking audience likely unfamiliar with Latin American conceptions of race, Aldo’s comments might appear as intentionally racist, but this is not the way I understood them. Aldo was a favorite in the shelter, someone who was generally agreeable with everyone, and he was one of the first people, along with Obi, to urge me to take in the Congolese family. Rather, I understood Aldo’s sudden exclamation that he was black too—but caught up in a “hidden” kind of blackness—to be speaking to the incredibly complicated way Afro-Latino migrants in Central America and Mexico must navigate their own racial identities, identities in which blackness must not be openly acknowledged but, simultaneously, must always be obliquely referenced. For instance, the nickname “el negro” or “la negra” is common among Central American migrants, but—even though it might initially seem as if this is an open acknowledgment of one’s blackness—things are more complicated. Someone who is readily identifiable as black—such as a Haitian or Nigerian migrant—would not likely acquire the nickname “el negro” on the migrant trail. This makes a certain amount of sense in spaces like Casa Abrazo, where if you referred to someone literally as “el negro,” you could be referring any one of over thirty people. Rather, I found that el negro was reserved normally for Central American migrants who have darker skin possibly due to African heritage, but also possibly due to indigenous heritage—or some mixture of both. Using the contemporary racial terminology that widely exists in the United States, these people would probably refer to themselves and be readily identified as “mixed” or simply “dark skinned.” Giving someone the nickname “el negro,” then, is often more a nod to the fact that someone’s racial heritage is obviously *mixed*, but mixed in such a way that it is not obvious what is involved in this mixing. It is a reference to something lurking behind the epidermis, something hidden.

There are also other nicknames that reference a Central American’s blackness. “Cuba,” for instance, or “el cubano” is an acknowledgment of a Central American’s darker skin. (This is in reference to, as far as I can tell, to the fact that Cuba has a large black population.) Calling someone “el chino” (the curly-haired guy), often connotes the same thing (though not always), as it is a reference to the tight curls typical of Afro hair.[36] Again, to be clear, these are terms that Central Americans call each other, and which would usually not be used to refer to someone like Obi, who would essentially be identified as “black” no matter where he traveled in the Americas. In my experience at Casa Abrazo, overtly black people were either called “los haitianos” or “los

[36] According to García Sáiz, the term “chino” was originally used in the casta system of New Spain—which I will explain in greater detail soon in this chapter—in order to designate a very particular racial category related to African descent (1989, 26). In my fieldwork, however, no Mexicans and Central Americans seemed to know the history behind the term. Note, however, that “el chino” can also be interpreted as “Chinese guy,” an ambiguity that seems to somewhat soften the overt racialization and objectification of the person being called “el chino,” and perhaps therefore accounts for its effectiveness.

africanos." (Normally, I found that Africans were not often referred to by their specific country of origin.)

This US-based racial category of "mixed," however, does not exist in the same way in Mexico or greater Latin America. The word "mestizaje" literally means *mixed*, but in common parlance it essentially refers to someone having a mixture of indigenous and European heritage alone (especially Spanish heritage), not African heritage. I came to understand Aldo's exasperated outburst as a profession of his feeling impossibly caught between two disparate systems of racial interpretation—the first of global humanitarianism, which largely held and imposed a US conception of blackness on the migrant trail, and the second of mestizaje, which historically has conceived of blackness in a distinct way. According to the later, Aldo's dark skin was too black, suspect, a threat always lurking beneath the surface; but these new humanitarian organizations in Mexico City had held his skin up to the light and found it not black enough, and so it had become "hidden," deemed too minor in relation to the major racial differences currently in the country.

Casta, mestizaje, and hidden blackness in relation to the somatic in Latin America

Between 1550 and 1551, a series of exchanges on the nature of the indigenous soul—which came to be known as the "Valladolid debate"—was held between the Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de las Casas, and the humanist scholar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Sepúlveda argued that the indigenous peoples of the Americas were not entirely human but rather "natural slaves" who required Spanish colonization in order to rid them of their barbarism, especially of the practice of human sacrifice and the displays of sacrificial victims' organs, those "horrible banquet[s] of human bodies" (1984, 62). As I noted in Chapter 1, Sepúlveda's argument implicitly recognizes indigenous people as fully human only *after* they have been sacrificed and their organs displayed, but never before. As Brunstetter and Zartner have argued, Sepúlveda's position was explicitly founded on the doctrine of jus ad bellum, whose raison d'être is theoretically "to prevent the use of force except when certain conditions are met," but in reality "drape[s itself] in moral universals and humanitarian imperatives for its expansion" (2010). Sepúlveda advocated for a "just war" in order to educate the indigenous peoples of the Americas out of human sacrifice, but which also therefore implicitly justified the expansion of the "encomienda system" (a system of "communal slavery," in which indigenous peoples were required to labor for a certain number of hours for their conquerors, often in incredibly dangerous conditions, such as in silver mines, and in return they would receive military protection and education (see Gibson 1964). Bartolomé de las Casas, who had worked for years to curtail the power and spread of the encomiendas, for his part argued against the idea of the "natural slave" by claiming that the native peoples with whom he lived and worked were in fact capable of reason, and that therefore they should not be converted through force (Losada 1971). Las Casas especially emphasized that native peoples had a right to arm themselves against the Spanish invaders, and that "even if the Indians were to 'kill two hundred thousand preachers, and even if they were to kill the Apostle Paul and all the other gospel-preaching followers of Christ', war would not be justified against them if they were provoked or waged a war in self-defense" (Brunstetter & Zartner 2010, quoting Las Casas 1999, 172). In other words, whereas Sepúlveda specifically called for the organs of indigenous societies to be banned and replaced with organs that would make them Spanish subjects, las Casas defended the natives' rights to make and wield their own corpuses as they saw fit.

This Valladolid debate is so famous, and so thoroughly explored by scholarly inquiry,

especially las Casa's argumentation, that there is little more I can add in the way of textual analysis. (Sylvia Wynter's critique of Las Casa's plea for the abolition of native slavery, only to immediately suggest that they immediately be replaced by African ones, is particularly compelling and insightful [Wynter 1984a; Wynter 1984b; see also James 1989; Arias & Merediz 2008; del Valle 2010]). However, the debate itself can be further contextualized in relation to the Leroi-Gourhanian corpus. It is no coincidence, for instance, that the debate did not take place until *after* the death Hernán Cortés in 1547, twenty-six years after the fall of Tenochtitlán. This means that the first generation of mestizos were just coming into adulthood, including Hernán Cortés' first son, Martín Cortés. Martín Cortés' mother was Malintzin, better known as La Malinche, who acted as Hernán Cortés' interpreter during the Conquest. Martín was recognized as one of the first people in history to be borne by a European father and an indigenous mother, and therefore earned the nickname El Mestizo. Though born in New Spain in 1522, Martín traveled with his father to Barcelona in 1528, where he received an education, and then worked in, the royal court (Lanyon 2004, 17-18).

In 1530, Hernán Cortés returned to New Spain, leaving his first son behind. There he had another son with his new wife, the Spanish noblewoman Doña Juana de Zúñiga, who he also named Martín. Whereas the first Martín was legally illegitimate (Cortés was never officially married to Malintzin), this second Martín was born a "don," that is, a member of the Spanish nobility, and therefore a legal heir to his father's estate. These two Martíns would go on to represent both the racial and legal stakes of who would inherit the riches of the New World. Martín El Mestizo became a kind of uncanny double of the legitimate Don Martín, a threat not only to his younger brother's future wealth and power, but a symbolic threat to all of those Spanish nobles whose status was suddenly much more in question as conquistadors—who were previously of a minor nobility—suddenly amassed fortunes and provinces that dwarfed the old nobility's riches by comparison. Martín El Mestizo and all the other mestizo children born in the first generation after the Conquest threatened to upend the feudal order of the Old World. Indeed, eventually Hernán Cortés would successfully petition the pope to officially recognize the first Martín as his legitimate son (AEEGH 1985). In adulthood, Martín El Mestizo would go on to sue his younger brother Don Martín for what he believed was his rightful inheritance, including for several silver mines and the enslaved people who worked them (Lanyon 2004, 138-144).

When Hernán Cortés died in 1547, he was no longer around to advocate for his own notion of what the New World would be (one gets the sense that, though certainly brutal, Cortés racialization of the native peoples of New Spain did not correspond exactly to the way that Old Spain's far removed nobility began to racialize them), and his legacy and inheritance were thrown into question. Which son was his rightful heir—the mestizo, who Cortés actually seems to have preferred and took great pains to have legally recognized, or the brother of "pure" European ancestry? The question of race, therefore, as it surfaced for the first time in the Valladolid debate, really had to do with external organs, and how one inherited the corpus of their ancestors. Beneath the question surrounding indigenous peoples' (biological and spiritual) humanity was another one: Will we, the Spanish nobility, allow the illegitimate children of the conquistadors to inherit and wield their fathers' wealth? From the very beginning, children like Martín El Mestizo had already proven that they were just as adept at acquiring and wielding European organs as their Spanish conquistador fathers; in 1537, at only the age of fifteen, Martín was already a skilled enough student that he became a page at the royal court Carlos V (Lanyon 2004, 41-2). It was clear that, if given the chance, he was human enough to fashion a corpus that could threaten the nobility and make a new kind of social claim, just as his father had done before him.

The solution was found in the invention and enforcement of a racial hierarchy, one which remains with us today. Out of the Conquest and the Valladolid debate emerged the "casta system," which created very specific terminology to categorize the racial categories of New Spain, and therefore who was able to receive a noble inheritance, and who was not. The table below is a composite list.[37]

Ethnic Mixture of Castas

1. Español × India = Mestizo (NM)
2. Español × Mestiza = Castiza (NM)
3. Español × Castiza = Torna a Español
4. Español × Negra = Mulato (NM)
5. Español × Mulato = Morisco
6. Morisco × Español = Albino
7. Albino × Español = Tornatrás
8. Mulato × India = Calpamulato
9. Negro × India = Lobo (NM)
10. Lobo × India = Cambija
11. Calpamulato × India = Jivaro
12. Indio × Cambija = Sambahiga
13. Mulato × Mestiza = Cuarteron
14. Cuarteron × Mestiza = Coyote [According to census reports, in New Mexico the term coyote included the mixture of Mestizo × Indio and that of Spanish × Indian.]
15. Coyote × Morisca = Albarazado
16. Albarazado × Saltatras = Tente en el Aire
17. Mestizo × India = Cholo
18. India × Mulato = Chino (NM)
19. Española × China = Cuarteron de China
20. Negro × India = Sambo de Indio
21. Negro × Mulato = Zambio
22. Genízaro – Cambujo × China = Genízaro en Mexico [In New Mexico, the term genízaro had a somewhat different meaning.]

Composite list from Nicolás León, *Las Castas del Mexico Colonial o Nueva España* (Mexico: Talleres Graficos del Museo Nacional de Arqueologia, Historia, y Etnografía, 1924).

The casta system solidified around the mid-sixteenth century and lasted until around the 1820s, when it was eventually dismantled after the first Mexican Revolution. As Magali M. Carrera writes, "casta" was an overarching term meant designate any "person of mixed, impure blood," and the casta system was a means of categorizing the combination of these impurities, with legal documentation, in order to have a record of reference in case someone who was not of pure Spanish blood was attempting to pass. In this way, various castas were recognized by the casta system itself *not* as obviously distinct racial categories, but as categories that were difficult to determine by sight alone; certain somatic bodies might always be able to pass for something else if not carefully recorded, rigorously bordered, and continuously held under inspection.

In order to do this, a series of paintings, often organized in the style of a proto-scientific grid or chart, were produced throughout the eighteenth century in order to depict individual subjects in isolation within the casta system—*this* is what a "china" looks like, *this* is what a "lobo" looks like. As Ilona Katzew writes:

> The series follow a specific taxonomic progression: at the beginning are scenes portraying figures of "pure" race (that is, Spaniards), lavishly attired or engaged in occupations that indicate their higher status. As the family groups become more racially mixed, their social

[37] See: Bustamante, Adrian. "The Matter Was Never Resolved: The Casta System in Colonial New Mexico, 1693-1823." *New Mexico Historical Review* 66, no. 2 (1991): 2.

> status diminishes. In addition to presenting a typology of human races and their occupations, casta paintings also include a rich classificatory system within which objects, food products, flora, and fauna are clearly positioned and labeled. (1996)

What these casta paintings reveal is that one's casta was never defined by their somatic appearance alone, and the epidermis and hair of each subject of a casta painting are only part of the focus. Each subject is surrounded by certain objects—external organs—that are only associated with the corpus of a certain casta figure. And some paintings, as Magali M. Carrera has written about Antonio Pérez de Aguilar's *The Painter's Cupboard*, do not feature any bodies at all (in this case, the painting is simply a cabinet composed of three shelves), only the objects associated with them, which in every way still point to specific racialized subjects in the casta system:

> I recognized that the objects on the cabinet's shelves are commonly found in the eighteenth-century secular paintings of New Spain. The paper, pen, books, and musical instruments… are found exclusively in association with elite individuals. The doll might have been a prop used in another type of elite portrait known as a *monja coronada*, an image of a newly professed nun usually shown wearing her habit, an escudo or chest shield, and a flowered crown, and holding a flowered scepter and a doll-like image of the Christ child. The objects on the second and third shelves—plates, ceramic vases, glass bottles, boxes, and bread—are regularly found in casta images, a genre of painting illustrating mixed-blooded plebeians. (2003, xvi)

The casta system, then, was just as much about the identification, categorization, and regulation of one's external organs as it was one's epidermis or blood. As one quickly sees from even a cursory examination of casta paintings, it would be nearly impossible to accurately categorize the subjects of each casta by their skin color alone. Their configuration of external organs—and the work often being enacted by each corpus—is what truly differentiates them, and what pin them down into "a complete, and nonfunctioning, taxonomy of castas" in New Spain (xvii).

Francisco Clapera, set of sixteen casta paintings. Denver Art Museum.

Las castas. Anonymous, 18th century. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico.

Within eighteenth century Mexico City, there existed two books in which to record births in the territory, the "libro de castas" (the book of castas) and the "libro de españoles" (the book of Spaniards). As Carrera recounts, in 1789, a case was brought before the courts in which one Christobal Ramon Bivian claimed that his wife Doña Margarita had been erroneously entered into the book of castas, rather than into the book of Spaniards, to which she rightly belonged. As Carrera makes clear, without her name in the book of Spaniards—that is, without the book of Spaniards attached to her corpus—Doña Margarita was not legally permitted many of the rights afforded to criollos (people of European heritage born in New Spain). An investigation was thereby called to determine Doña Margarita's race. Eventually, after months of inquiry in which many people from her past were called to vouch for her racial purity, Doña Margarita was legally declared to be from "'españoles limpios de todo mala raza' (Spaniards clean of bad lineage, meaning without stain of Black African, Moorish, or Jewish blood)" (2003, 2), and her name was removed from the book of castas and added to the book of Spaniards.

Two things are striking here. First, the courts readily admitted that Doña Margarita's race could *not* be determined through mere visual assessment alone, which is also an overt admission that casta was not simply based upon a certain somatic aesthetic. Rather, witnesses were called to attest to Doña Margarita's various external organs which validated her organic body as a "pure blooded Spaniard." One priest testified that she attended a church for criollos. Another attested that her father had held an "official certification of purity of Spanish blood, known as a *limpieza de sangre*" (2). Finally, a free black woman named Petra Pozos was brought in to testify that she had cared for Doña Margarita as a baby, in some sense demonstrating that Pozos herself, as a member of a lower casta, had once been an organ for the Doña's corpus. Only through the demonstration of these external organs to the court was Doña Margarita's racial purity established. In this way, these "witnesses"—as well as the recorded testimonies themselves—became in some sense part of the doña's corpus, working to reinforce her being within a certain casta.

The second striking thing is that it was not enough for Doña Margarita's community to attest to her racial purity, nor for the court to merely declare that she was in fact a pure-blooded Spaniard. Rather, Doña Margarita's name had to be inscribed into the book of Spaniards for her to actually become one. It was the document—rather than simply the attestation to her racial purity—that actually made her pure. Without the document, her corpus would have remained forever tainted.

After the revolutions that swept through Latin America in the early nineteenth century, casta as a formal system largely disappeared. In this void, the notion of *mestizaje* became popular to describe a more widespread "new race" of the Americas, one that arose from the intermixture of all the others. In the original casta system, "mestizo" was the term used to specifically describe someone with a Spanish father and indigenous mother, as with Martín El Mestizo. But the term was expanded to create a new myth of racialization in the Americas—all Latin Americans were now "descended" from the union between Hernán Cortés and La Malinche.

In the modern era, the term "mestizaje" was popularized by *La raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*), first published in 1925 by Mexican author and presidential candidate José Vasconcelos. *The Cosmic Race* (1926) advocated for an active mestizaje within the Americas, proposing a future but not-yet-achieved "cosmic race" that incorporated the best aspects of all the others, and of which Mexico—as the site of the Conquest and first mestizo descendants—was at the forefront. Though often celebrated by Chicanx scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa who claimed that *The Cosmic Race* championed racial intermixture and therefore challenged white supremacy, the logic of Vasconcelos' cosmic race, in reality, smuggled eugenicist language into its supposed advocacy of

racial intermixture. After all, what was left unspoken was that the cosmic race would not just spontaneously spring into being, but would replace the indigenous peoples of Mexico, thus elevating them into a higher "cosmic" realm. The point was not to celebrate indigenous heritage, but to dilute it. As Marilyn Grace Miller writes:

> The Mexican educator believed that the Latin American population was a ''chosen people'' with a ''divine mission'' to integrate and consolidate whites, blacks, and Indians. North Americans, who did not have ''in their blood the contradictory instincts of a mixture of dissimilar races,'' had committed the sin of destroying other races, while the Spaniards and American-born Creoles had assimilated them, thus providing ''new rites and hopes for a mission without precedent in history." (2004, 30)

A perfect intermixture, then, was proposed as a new kind of racial purity. But beyond this overt race science, the notion of a cosmic race had another problem: Vasconcelos had no measure to determine exactly when one's racial makeup was sufficiently mixed so as to attain such cosmic status. Indigenous, black, and Asian heritage therefore became something that lurked beneath the surface, always threatening to tip the scales of the new purity of la raza, something to be rooted out and immediately identified so as to be counter-balanced, almost always with greater portion of whiteness. The cosmic race thus became impossible by definition and yet continuously under threat in essence.

Vasconcelos would, only a few years later, become a Nazi sympathizer and largely retract his celebration of the cosmic race, increasingly advocating for the whitening and Europeanization of the Americas (Orestes Aguilar 2007). But that did not stop his schematization of mestizaje from becoming an increasingly popular means of thinking race in Latin America, especially among certain Mexican and Mexican-American intellectuals. This new generation of cosmic race thinkers largely avoided questions of blackness and Asianness, instead reframing the question of la raza cósmica as one between indigeneity and whiteness alone. Chicanx scholars like Anzaldúa also largely minimized Vasconcelos' fascist turn, or failed to acknowledge it at all, because the notion of la raza granted them language to counter what they diagnosed to be their own social, racial, and linguistic marginalization in a country that largely interpreted racial politics and identity through a black-white dichotomy. Whereas within the US and much of Europe whiteness was equated to pureness in itself, the notion of the cosmic race directly undermined this equivalence, instead claiming that each race contained its own purity—the whiteness of Europe was pure, but so too was the blackness of Africa a distinct purity (though, of course, it became quite apparent that Vasconcelos did not think the purity of other races to quite be equivalent to the purity of whiteness). Other races were "pure" in their pre-mixed state, as well as when they were mystically combined in the right proportions to create the perfect and unreachable mestizaje.

Within Chicanx literature and activism, mestizaje was used not only as racial descriptor, but as a means to attempt a distinct claim regarding nationality; Chicanos were not simply scorned Americans, but those descended from the land of Aztlán—the mythical home of Mexica people before they migrated south and founded Tenochtitlán, a kind of cosmic land to which the cosmic race belonged, if only on the mythic plane (Delgado 1995). Mexicans, however, unlike Chicanos, did theoretically have a country all their own, and so mestizaje became a different kind of mythical bedrock. As Mexican anthropologist Federico Navarrete writes,

> Every Mexican has been hearing and reading about this myth ever since they were a child… we are all mestizos because we are all descended from a Spanish conquistador father, no

> more and no less than the implacable and fearful Hernán Cortés, and a conquered, Indigenous mother, our very own La Malinche, Cortés's beautiful but traitorous local interpreter… The myth goes on to claim that from this difficult union were born the mestizos, a new class of human beings who would combine the best attributes of the two races that constituted them. (2020)

Here, in a certain sense, the myth of mestizaje explains and justifies the existence of an actual country, not an imagined one, as with the Chicano movement. But, as Navarrete is quick to point out, mestizaje becomes the means of imagining Mexico in a particular racialized way, an imagining which justifies certain eugenicist practices:

> In the name of the mestizo nation's racial integrity, proclaimed by the myth of mestizaje, Mexican governments of the 20th century designed ambitious policies to "integrate" those who refused to become part of the nation's racial majority. The study of Indigenism was conceived in order to convince Indigenous peoples to evolve and voluntarily transform themselves into mestizos, promising them a better life as part of the homeland's "majority." Modern educational policy was directed toward the "criollos" who refused to integrate into the racially unified nation and recalcitrant Catholics still cleaving to their "superstitions," "ignorance," and "backwardness." *Both initiatives were backed up by a combination of incentives, such as the offer of health care or support for local businesses.* [Emphasis mine.]
>
> At the same time, our governments were also looking for ways of excluding those immigrants they considered to be inferior and not sufficiently open to integrating into the mestizo nation, such as Asians, Africans, and Jewish people — which is to say, almost all non-European immigrants. "Europeans," of course, were able to make a positive contribution to the betterment of the mestizo race…
>
> The same legend [of mestizaje], however, stipulated that, in order for mestizos to fulfil so exalted a mission, constant vigilance was necessary. The risk was that the racial mixing would begin to head in the wrong direction, and instead of selecting the best qualities of each race — principally the white race — it would fall prey to their defects and vices — especially those inherited from Indigenous peoples. For that reason, mestizaje must be led by modern science and eugenics… In the most brutal terms, the task of scientists and of government was to whiten the "Indians," but never, under any circumstance, to "Indianize" or darken the white people.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that Teresa's particularly attentiveness to Haitian migrants stemmed both from a humanitarian impulse and a legacy of state-sponsored mestizaje program. Historically in Mexico, to aid a population deemed "other" was to help them integrate into the state project through mestizaje. As one lightens one's organic organ of the epidermis, and sheds all the external organs which structure their belonging to a particular indigenous community, one is also now theoretically able to attach new organs to this fairer skin, hence Navarrete's citation of the programs being "backed by a combination of incentives, such as the offer of health care or the support of local businesses." However, following the logic of Leroi-Gourhan, we cannot say that these were mere incentives. Rather they were the very material means by which the state could

actually reshape the indigenous corpus into the mestizo corpus—a corpus that was attached to the organs of modern medicine and capital. In this way, mestizaje was much more than simply the combination of genetics. This leads Navarrete to declare, "Mestizaje was not a biological process." Rather, he says, it was a process of modernization and nation building, one intent on incentivizing a certain kind of "modern," industrialized life over other forms of life, especially those that granted indigenous Mexicans the autonomy to continue their own traditions and rituals apart from a capitalist mode of production.

Perhaps no other anthropologists have written as thoroughly or explicitly about the tension between the native body and the biological—or the relationship between race and nationality—as Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber, especially in their debates with (neo-)Lamarckians and other race scientists. In his essay "Race and Progress" (1905), Boas begins by stating "it is necessary to separate clearly the biological and the psychological aspects from the social and economic implications" of the supposed "problems due to the intermingling of racial types." From the beginning, then, biology is framed as something apart, a thing that lies outside of culture. Boas then continues by interrogating a racial schema that may seem somewhat antiquated, or even entirely unfamiliar, to us today—that of the "so called races of Europe":

> We are accustomed to speak of a Scandinavian as tall, blonde and blue-eyed, of a South Italian as short, swarthy and dark-eyed; of a Bohemian as middle-sized, with brown or gray eyes and wide face and straight hair. We are apt to construct ideal local types which are based on our everyday experience, abstracted from a combination of forms are most frequently seen in a given locality, and we forget that there are numerous individuals for whom this description does not hold true. It would be a rash undertaking to determine the locality in which a person is born solely from his bodily characteristics. In many cases we may be helped in such a determination by manners of wearing the hair, peculiar mannerisms of motion, and by dress, but these are not to be mistaken for essential hereditary traits.

This is a very interesting passage for several reasons. The first is that what Boas calls "ideal type," we might instead call a *figure.* When one thinks of the figure of a Guatemalan migrant, a certain image comes to mind. Mexican immigration agents, as previously stated, seems to see this figure as a dark-skinned indigenous person. The second is that, as Boas rightly points out, whereas the notion of a figure is ideal in the sense that it is always imaginary, this imagined figure is still deeply intertwined with the external organs of people from a particular social group and geographic region, as well as the gestures they use to wield these external organs: "manners of wearing the hair, peculiar mannerisms of motion, and by dress." It is these external organs and the gestures associated with them that frequently reinforce the notion of a racial type.

Finally, we are reminded that not so long ago, the idea of race and nationality were often condensed into the single term "race." There was the "Scandinavian race" and the "German race" and the "Spanish race." The notion that "white equals European, and European equals white" is largely an invention of the twentieth century. Before then, in Mexico, "white" was not a commonly recognized racial category, but rather "Spanish." The intense intermixture of peoples in the Americas due to conquest and colonization—as well as the rise of former colonies like Mexico to become economic players in their own right—troubled these terms. None of the newly emancipated Mexicans of the nineteenth no longer considered themselves Spanish, even if some of them were still of the "Spanish race." The embrace of mestizaje in Mexico after the revolution

of 1810 as an attempt by a newly independent country to create a singular “Mexican race” where there was none before, an attempt that was reinvigorated after the revolution of 1910 and schematized by Vasconcelos. But this conscious effort only further laid bare the rules of the game; race and nationality, which previously had been conflated, where being pulled apart in the modern era, especially in the Americas. Craniometry and other modern race sciences emerged in the cracks between race and nationality. Boas saw part of anthropology’s task as showing that these two things were always at a distance, even if they had been commonly conflated in the past—race did not spring from a civilization, nor civilization from a race.

This stance was then picked up by Boas’ disciple Alfred Kroeber, who went somewhat farther in systematizing the claims of the cultural factor through the concepts of the “organic” versus the “superorganic.” As Degler (1989) writes:

> Kroeber was moving toward a recognition that there were two kinds of evolution—not just one, as so many biologists and social scientists, influenced by Darwin's evolutionary scheme, assumed. Biological evolution, he said again and again, had nothing to do with social evolution. In fact, he wrote, "social evolution is without antecedents in the beginnings of organic evolution” […] Social evolution, Kroeber pointed out, was truly Lamarckian, in that "use modification"—a basic Lamarckian principle—"is permanent." Kroeber observed, however, that this is not the case in biological evolution. In this "non-organic process of evolution," which he called "civilization or human accomplishment... transmittal of the acquired exists," thanks to language.

And further along:

> The superorganic, or culture, in Kroeber's view, was not only distinct and untouched by biology it was also separate from individual human beings as well: As members of a group or social system, individuals had certainly created the superorganic, but as individuals they did not exert influence over it nor was an individual as an individual affected by it.

The problem is that Kroeber’s superorganic is absolutely affected by biology, even if he does not acknowledge it. But it is not affected by what biology *dictates* (that is, culture is not affected by biological superiority or inferiority), but by what human biology is determined to *lack* by a given society. What the organic body is born without, the superorganic, so to speak, fills in. But neither Boas nor Kroeber conceive of the cultural or the superorganic in terms of lack—for them, the debate around race science was rather about demonstrating what biology was equally capable of *producing* across all social groups, and their ultimate assertion was that all humanity had an equally productive capacity. The misrecognition of both the Lamarckians (perhaps due to some avowed belief of white/European supremacy) and the Boasians (perhaps due to some avowed belief in fighting that claim to supremacy) is that, actually, fundamental ethnic traits *can* be passed from parent to offspring, not simply through the schema of biological heredity, but through external organs. This is obvious when considering birthright citizenship in the United States. A parent in the US quite literally passes on the organ of a US passport to their children, and this organ is determined not by biology but wholly by the environment in which the parent resides (the US), even if the parent themselves does not possess a US passport. When seen in this light, it becomes clear that the debate between the Boasians and the Lamarckians was not only about race or biology, but about a third thing that neither side could quite pinpoint—organs. Even Boas himself, when

contemplating the systematic destruction of native organs under US colonization, seems to sense this when he says, “The buffalo hunter was an entirely different personality from the poor Indian who has to rely on government help, or who lives on the proceeds of land rented by his White neighbors” (1905).

Leroi-Gourhan saw his theory of external organs as intervening on a similar debate in France between Marcel Mauss—who advocated for an anthropological humanism not dissimilar from Boas’ that challenged what he saw as intensified forms of racism and individuality consolidated by modern national identification—and George Montandon, a race scientist and eventual Nazi collaborator during the German Occupation of France. As Alice Conklin writes, Leroi-Gourhan believed that

> Mauss and Montandon… had each gotten the question of human origins and evolution (physical and cultural) wrong: Montandon because of his flawed premises [of scientific racism], Mauss because of his failure to recognize that the material world or “milieu” imposed constraints on human groups in their quest for survival. Perhaps, Leroi-Gourhan ventured, human groups were formed by both their drive to seek the best possible solution to every material and social challenge *and* the limits of the milieu. This combination of forces produced a movement toward “the formation of a type (and not a racial type)”… a new type that is never perfectly realized. “Race then is perpetually virtual, there is no race but a tendency toward race,” because humans are always choosing among any number of possible combinations of “man, milieu, *mélanges*.” (2013, 340)

These “mélanges” (“mixtures” in French), should be understood not as only racial mixtures—which would be the normative understanding of mestizaje—but mixtures of both somatic bodies and external organs. The casta paintings of New Spain seemed to intuitively grasp this concept of mélanges. However, casta paintings were an over attempt to fix these mélanges in place, to rigidify them into a single racialized being, whereas Leroi-Gourhan’s point was that such a fixing is impossible—external organs will always push the corpus into new territory and new beings. Here, mélanges could be understood as a material supplement to Lévi-Straussian bricolage. Bricolage creates a particular cosmology and in doing so orients a subject within said cosmology; mélange does the same, but with the corpus. This is why Leroi-Gourhan understands race to be “perpetually virtual,” which is in no way meant to dismiss the lived experience and trials of race. Rather, it is to recognize that the notion of race is constructed not only through the organic body, but through the corpus, and that when one’s external organs change, the notion of what their supposedly biological race is often changes as well. Race, then, is never only somatic for Leroi-Gourhan, even as the somatic body is integral to race.

In recent decades, medical anthropology has been particularly attentive to the somatic body. As Scheper-Hughes and Lock write in their essay “The Mindful Body” (1987), the subfield inherited a biomedical conception of the individual body based on the Cartesian divide, *as well as* a readymade critique of this divide, the somatic.

> The Cartesian legacy to clinical medicine and to the natural and social sciences is a rather mechanistic conception of the body and its functions, and a failure to conceptualize a "mindful" causation of somatic states. It would take a struggling psychoanalytic psychiatry and the gradual development of psychosomatic medicine in the early 20th century to begin the task of reuniting mind and body in clinical theory and practice. Yet, even in

> psychoanalytically informed psychiatry and in psychosomatic medicine there is a tendency to categorize and treat human afflictions as if they were either wholly organic or wholly psychological in origin: "it" is in the body, or "it" is in the mind.

And further:

> As both medical anthropologists and clinicians struggle to view humans and the experience of illness and suffering from an integrated perspective, they often find themselves trapped by the Cartesian legacy. We lack a precise vocabulary with which to deal with mind-body-society interactions and so are left suspended in hyphens, testifying to the disconnectedness of our thoughts. We are forced to resort to such fragmented concepts as the bio-social, the psycho-somatic, the somato-social as altogether feeble ways of expressing the myriad ways in which the mind speaks through the body, and the ways in which society is inscribed on the expectant canvas of human flesh.

What Scheper-Hughes and Lock seem to sense here, already in the early days of medical anthropology, is that the notion of the somatic—though framed as a kind of critique of the divide wrought by Descartes—in reality proposes reunification of mind and body by quietly creates another rift: that between the organic body and external organs of the corpus. The fixation on the somatic becomes, perhaps unintentionally, a means of analytically isolating the organic body from its external organs, hence why, when conducting anthropological analysis, we must immediately begin conjoining the somatic with so many other qualifiers—“psycho-somatic,” “somato-social,” and the like. It also somewhat counterintuitively reinforces yet another divide by turning the analysis of the body away from the material—which too quickly relegating the materialism of the body to the field of the biological—and instead frequently opts to show how this somatic body operates *symbolically*. Two classic anthropological examples of this are Arthur Kleinmann’s work on the somatization of depression in the aches and pains of Chinese patients (1980), and Scheper-Hughes’ accounts of poor Brazilian mothers who cannot help but see the otherwise normal breast milk that they produce for their children as sour, bittered, and rotten (1984, 541-544). Scheper-Hughes and Locke trace this somatic-symbolic linkage in medical anthropology to Lévi-Strauss’ famous article “The Effecacy of Symbols” (1967) in which Lévi-Strauss proposes that shamanic practices might intervene on an ill person’s material body through a reorientation of their cosmology at the level of the symbolic. This efficacy of symbols—which is, they claim, described by modern medicine as “nocebo and placebo effects”—is “integral to all sickness and healing, for they are concepts that refer in an incomplete and oblique way to the interactions between mind and body.”

I do not disagree. However, what is sometimes missed in Lévi-Strauss’ analysis of the effectiveness of symbols is that simply because a treatment is *effective*, that does not mean it is *true*. Quite the opposite in fact. In “The Sorcerer and His Magic”—the essay which immediately proceeds “The Effectiveness of Symbols” in *Structural Anthropology Volume 1*, and should therefore be understood as in direct dialogue with it—Lévi-Strauss concludes of shamanistic (and psychoanalytic) practices that:

> The study of the mentally sick individual has shown us that all persons are more or less oriented toward contradictory systems and suffer from the resulting conflict; *but the fact that a certain form of integration is possible and effective practically is not enough to make*

> *it true, or to make us certain that the adaptation thus achieved does not constitute an absolute regression in relation to the previous conflict situation…*
>
> A body of elementary hypotheses can have a certain instrumental value for the practitioner without necessarily being recognized, in theoretical analysis, as the final image of reality and without necessarily linking the patient and the therapist in a kind of mystical communion which does not have the same meaning for both parties and which only ends by reducing the treatment to a fabulation. (1967, emphasis mine)

This clarification is essential in the analysis of the Haitian Symptom (that is, humanitarianism's identification of Haitian-ness as a distinct problem in Mexico that needed to be addressed and resolved) and the pilot program framed as its cure. Though we might initially see humanitarianism's goal as far removed from Sepúlveda's, much of its argumentation and justification for intervention on the Haitian population echoes that of jus ad bellum. Whereas Sepúlveda argued for a just war in order to reeducate the barbarous indigenous populations of the Americas, humanitarian organizations like UNHCR call for a "just intervention" on the Haitian migrant population, not because of an explicitly recognized barbarity, but nonetheless because of a supposedly impenetrable alterity. Like the indigenous peoples of New Spain, whose organic bodies cried out for salvation during sacrificial rituals, Haitian migrants' organic/somatic bodies also call out to humanitarianism to be saved. And, like the indigenous peoples of New Spain, Haitians supposedly require the proper stewardship in order to become upstanding citizens free from pernicious influences, full humans under the law. This rationale is *effective* in that it is able to adequately justify the intervention upon, and reintegration of, the Haitian migrant's body into humanitarian and state projects. Nevertheless, this does not make the humanitarian diagnosis any more accurate than Sepúlveda's, which was also effective in its own time at eventually incorporating conquered native peoples into the socioeconomic projects of New Spain. Certain Haitian bodies might be "cured" by the pilot program, but they are only made so because the structure that now saving them once deemed them "ill." As Lévi-Strauss says, the adaptation thus achieved by the pilot program in reality constitutes an "absolute regression in relation to the previous conflict situation," in which many other migrants will be subjected to the same forms of "illness" that the Haitian migrants were previously subjected to, but this time without any promise of a cure.

External organs and social death

Mestizaje was just one of the racial schemas that Aldo felt hopelessly caught between. The other was a humanitarian conception of race, which has been heavily influenced by US notions of blackness, which—rather than understanding blackness as a potentially hidden thing, as with mestizaje—often framed it as that thing right out in the open, an obviously identifiable and undeniable aspect of one's being. I found this point of view to be held by many of the US and other international humanitarian workers with whom I came into contact, such as with Sam. These humanitarian workers' sense of an "obvious blackness" also strongly correlated with a sense of "obvious oppression." As Sam remarked in our interview, "It's structural racism, isn't it? Haitians live in an anti-black world." Another way of framing this is to say that these humanitarians understood blackness to be intertwined with social death. In contrast to medical anthropology—

which historically turned to the somatic as a means of describing socially constructed illnesses, those ailments that seemed to have no obvious biological or organic cause—critical race theory has framed race/racialization as a kind of somatic illness in itself, if not *the* somatic illness par excellence, especially blackness. Orlando Patterson's foundational *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) was one of the first texts to directly link the concept of the somatic to that of "social death." As Patterson shows, this social death—in which an enslaved person is understood to be a sub- or non-human being, and therefore "dead" in the realm of the social—has been justified in particular historical moments by the enslaved's somatic bodies, primarily their skin color and hair texture. This inescapability of somatic blackness—a kind of entrapment or "petrification" of the body, as Franz Fanon might say (2004)—potentially dooms one to the realm of the socially dead before they are even born.

This is initially seems to be obviously be the case when reflecting upon the Trans-Atlantic slave trade at large, and especially for chattel slavery in Haiti and the US South. However, as Patterson himself clarifies, even at the level of the seemingly obvious somatic divide, things were not always so straightforward.

> Color, despite its initially dramatic impact, is in fact a rather weak basis of ranked differences in interracial societies. There are several reasons. For one thing, the range of color differences among whites and among blacks is greater than is normally thought. Dark Europeans, especially Latins, are not far removed from many Africans who come from areas other than the classic West African "jet-black" zone. The differences diminish even more when we take into account the permanent suntan acquired by most whites working in the tropics. Furthermore, the color differences are quickly blurred by miscegenation, which diminishes the significance of color much faster than is usually imagined. Very soon, therefore, in all slave societies of the Americas, there were numbers of slaves who were in fact lighter than many European masters: the probability that the mulatto slave offspring of an African mother and a very blond Cornish or Irish father was lighter than the average dark Welsh overseer was significantly above zero. Within a couple of generations the symbolic role of color as a distinctive badge of slavery had been greatly muted-though, of course, not eliminated. (61)

Here Patterson emphasizes that the millieu of the slave society—the material world and the constraints it imposes upon bodies, according to Leroi-Gourhan—is often overlooked when thinking about the somatic. Moreover, when one closely examines historical records on manumission in the Americas, things become more complicated still. Rebutting what he deems the "somatic theory of manumissions," which proposed that if an enslaved person had a lighter skin tone then they were more likely to eventually be freed by their master, Patterson writes:

> When the more important variables such as skill, origin, and means of acquisition are controlled, the differences in the incidence of manumission between black and mulatto slaves were considerably reduced. Thus Johnson found in his study of Buenos Aires that mulattoes who were purchased were no more likely to be favorably treated than blacks; further, that it was because mulattoes were more likely to be Creole rather than foreign, urban rather than rural, brought up in the household rather than elsewhere, and "more aware of opportunities for manumission," that they had a better chance to acquire skills and to purchase their freedom. Black slaves with these characteristics were almost—though not

> completely, for color did count for something—as likely to be freed. (268)

And further:

> In Jamaica the somatic theory also receives only qualified support. It was certainly the case that "the chances of manumissions increased as the slaves approached whiteness," nonetheless Barry Higman found several puzzling correlations once he went beyond this strong zero-order relationship. He found it necessary to postulate two patterns of manumission—one rural, the other urban. The somatic factor held up strongly in the rural areas, but principally because the masters tended to recruit skilled slaves on the plantations mainly from the mixed-blood slaves. In the urban areas the same bias existed, but the range of skills was greater and the bias of whites in determining access to skills not so strong; the result was that the number of blacks manumitted in Kingston far exceeded those of mixed parentage. (269)

What we find here, then, is that the granting of manumission is much more frequently based upon one's corpus—in which one's organic organs, like the epidermis, very much still play a part—rather than on the somatic body alone, and that being born into a particular kind of somatic body is not always an immediate social death sentence. If one's corpus is understood to be particularly skilled or sophisticated, it is these organs and abilities which make all the difference. Of course, having lighter skin might lead to being seen as more inherently sophisticated. But such lightness or darkness is not simply somatically inherent either. When one is allowed to work all day in a house, rather than sweat unprotected under the hot sun, it will have a drastic effect on one's appearance after a number of years. The organic body of an enslaved person used only as a kind of enlivened "plow" in the field will not look the same as another enslaved person's whose work is primarily to attend to the master's family indoors.

Perhaps the most important point of Patterson's observations, however, is the distinction between the urban and rural. Quoting Frederick P. Bowser, he concludes that "'manumission, in an age when few questioned the morality of slavery, was largely an urban phenomenon'… The same high correlation exists between urban residence of the slave population and the manumission rate in ancient Greece and Rome and, of course, would be expected in the essentially urban-industrial slave systems of Han China and the Islamic lands other than sub-Saharan Africa" (269). In other words, within cities enslaved peoples tended to have much more access to various external organs—and especially organs that are overtly productive and profitable—to which they might incorporate into their corpuses in some useful way. But in the greater isolation of rural areas, this was often not the case; one's milieu was much starker, and the mélange of the enslaved person was therefore able to be much more tightly regulated, both for one's organic and external organs. Certainly, one's darker skin—equated with a lack of *moral* civilization—was a curse to an enslaved person, but another curse was the lack of external organs available to them, a lack due quite literally to an isolation from *material* civilization.

My connection of manumissions to black migrants is not arbitrary. In the US South today, for instance, a significant portion of undocumented migrants end up working in the very same fields where enslaved peoples once labored, and not infrequently their working and living conditions are so abysmal that they meet the legal definition of slavery (see Chan 2023; Silva & McClausland 2021; Stevens 2018; Caballero 2011). Another reason is that a freed person required legal proof of their manumission. This proof came in the form of documents that attested to one's

status as a freeman. These documents were officially called “Certificates of Freedom,” though they were frequently referred to as “freedom papers” (Gronningsater 2018). In many places in Antebellum America, if a freed black person did not have freedom papers connected to their corpus, they risked being detained by slave catchers, taken down south against their will, and sold (back) into slavery. Without the organ of the freedom paper, every black body was suspect and stripped of the ability to travel. There were several ways that one came to possess freedom papers. The most common was to be born into a state where slavery had already been outlawed. In this way, a black person in the North did not so much “acquire” freedom papers but was born with them attached to their corpus, just as a US citizen is theoretically born with a US passport attached to theirs. Rarer cases of freedom paper acquisition included enslaved people purchasing their freedom themselves, if they were freed by a slave owner, or by having someone else purchase their freedom for them. Like passports, most freedom papers also included physical descriptions of the possessor of the papers in question (Gronningsater 2018). Free black people were essentially required to carry these papers on their person at all times, or risk being “deported” south into slavery. Through the organ of the freedom paper—like with undocumented people today—a lack was quietly placed into every black body within the US, a lack which was then framed as a prior lack. Freedom papers, by granting the ability to travel to a select few, actually petrified the vast majority. (It is also important to note that, whereas the freeman was required to carry the external organ of freedom papers on his corpus, the enslaved person’s organic body was often brutally subjected to certain forms of mutilation—throughout the Americas slaves were regularly branded well into the mid-eighteenth century as a form of “identification” that signaled that they were owned by a particular master, and in the US the practice continued into the mid-nineteenth century. Certain mutilations also signified that a slave had previously attempted to escape or broken some other law; the state of South Carolina systematically “mutilated slave felons by cropping their ears” well into the nineteenth century [Patterson 1982, 59]. In Virginia, it was decreed that “any Negro guilty of perjury in court should ‘be ordered by the said Court to have one ear nailed to the pillory… and then the said ear to be cut off’… This law, slightly modified continued until after the Civil War” [Wilson 1965, 37]. We therefore see an inverse relation between the freedman’s corpus and the enslaved person’s corpus. The freedman’s identity—and therefore freedom—is always in question, which then requires the external organ of freedom papers which attest to the freedman’s identity and freedom. In contrast, the slave’s “identity document” is branded into their organic body, which in fact does not serve to actually identify them, but the rather the person who owns them. And whereas the freedman must continuous deal with an immaterial lack inserted into their corpus—that never-ending uncertainty regarding their legality and individual personhood, to which the freedom papers must attest if questioned by the law—the enslaved person is *certainly* a non-person, and further mutilation and manipulation of their organic organs, such as the severing of ears, attests to this uncertainty by creating a lack in the organic body.)

In the Old South, Patterson writes, the incidence of manumissions by slave owners was incredibly low (3). Indeed, many of the enslaved people who were eventually granted manumission had their freedom bought or negotiated from them in some way by abolitionists, often Quakers. One such abolitionist organization was the North Carolina Manumission Society, which, as Patrick Sowle writes, had initial success at liberating slaves in the state starting around 1775. State legislators, however, “feared the Quakers’ schemes of emancipation, and in 1777 the General Assembly provided that a slave could not be liberated ‘except for meritous services to be adjudged of and allowed by the county court…’” (1965). Thus a precedent was set that in order for a noncitizen slave to earn their freedom papers, their moral character would have to be assessed and

found exceptional by the courts. Other southern states, such as Virginia, had already passed similar laws by 1723, which stated that an enslaved person's manumission could not be bought "upon any pretence [sic] whatsoever, except for some meritorious services to be adjudged and allowed by the governor and council" (Wilson 1965, 15).

Manumissions' striking similarities to the modern practice of asylum are not simply by chance. On top of the old system of manumission—though almost a century had passed—the new system of asylum was instituted. I am not claiming that this was a conscious decision. Instead, the notion of *civil salvation* in the United States—in which one is transformed from noncitizen into citizen specifically because some entity has deemed them in need of saving—was first understood and practiced under slavery. Even after the abolition of legal slavery in 1865, this idea of civil salvation seems to have quietly continued to persist within the US symbolic order until the passage of the Refugee Convention of 1951, at which time it was actively picked back up again and put to new work with the asylum system. When one looks closely, the structural similarities are quite extraordinary: The tendency of those from somewhere in the south to be saved by those in the north; the tendency for those who are saved to be black or brown, and those that supposedly do the saving to be white; the fact that the only way for an enslaved person to win their freedom papers, or a migrant to win their green card, is for the court to sufficiently establish that they are a person of exceptional moral character; that both emancipation and asylum ultimately advocate for a "peaceful" resistance to oppression through the existing legal framework, which alone is able to determine one's freedom; that any slave or a migrant deemed a threat to this peaceful process will not be saved, but rather detained by the state and sent back south; that a person who has been successfully saved is required to carry particular legal documents attesting to this new freedom on their person, and through the presentation of these documents their corpus acquires new abilities; and that, perhaps most importantly, the idea of manumission or asylum creates what is essentially a false notion of a freedom that can always theoretically be acquired, but in practice is out of reach for the overwhelming majority of noncitizens (though there is an obvious difference between contemporary asylum seekers and enslaved black people in the Antebellum US. Whereas a migrant without documents is deported to "their own country"—a phrase not to be used without a healthy dose of irony—an enslaved person obviously had no other country to be deported to, as they or their ancestors had been violently kidnapped and ripped out of their own mélanges in Africa).

It seemed to me that Sam and other predominantly American humanitarian workers brought this concept of civil salvation (and its particular relation to a particular kind of blackness) with them to Mexico. In doing so, a language and means of analysis created by critical race theory to critique the ever-present effects of a brutal legacy of slavery was appropriated by humanitarianism in Mexico in a way that actually further harmed black migrants, all the while professing to still be attending to this very legacy of brutality. When Sam said that she believed deference should be shown to Haitian migrants because of their major differences, of which a legacy of slavery was a crucial one, I believe that she had the best of intentions, and I'm sure many of her co-workers did as well. But the well-intended hyper-focus on the Haitian corpus actually made the larger scope of the Southern Border Program's mass deportations less visible, and actually justified the detention and removal of other migrants through the implicit assumption that major differences must be attended to first in relation to minor differences, rather than, say, an alternative outlook that more explicitly questions why such differences are being asserted in the first place and by whom.

Conclusion: Social death and the new strategic essentialism

This leads to a phenomenon that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as "strategic essentialism," in which a particular group of people might make a political claim by strategically portraying themselves in reductionist or essentializing ways in order to appear more transparent to the power they are appealing to. "In terms of the hegemonic historical narrative," Spivak says, "certain peoples have always been asked to cathect the margins so others can be defined as central," and therefore they may have to intentionally portray themselves as "marginal in the eyes of others" (Chakraborty 2010 quoting Hutnyk, McQuire, & Papastergiadis 1990, 40–41).

I cannot speak to whether Haitian migrants strategically essentialized themselves or not, as I could not communicate with them. However, when contemplating Obi's insistence that I admit the family into the shelter because they were "muy Africa" can be interpreted as an instance of strategic essentialism, as well as his own experience with the NGO worker when he first entered Mexico (when, in order to receive attention and aid, he insisted over and over again that, "I'm African, I don't know what's going on. I don't know where I am. I'm African, I'm African"). As Obi himself told me, there was also a tendency in Mexico to lump both Haitian and African migrants together, presumably because both populations were black. I found that both journalistic and NGO reports of migration in Mexico tended to do this frequently. One report, for instance, stated that, in the first half of 2019, "7,000 African and Haitian migrants opened immigration cases in [the southern Mexican state of] Chiapas" (Aristegui 2019). There is essentially no reason, as far as I can tell, to lump these two disparate groups together other than that both are understood as obviously black and therefore exceptionally somatically other in Mexico. The conflation did not just happen in the media, however. In Casa Abrazo, Central American migrants would frequently assume that African migrants were Haitian, and "haitiano" essentially became a synonym for "black" in the shelter. This greatly annoyed Obi, who felt that he had to constantly remind other migrants that he was from Nigeria. But, as he told me, he also felt that it occasionally worked in his favor. "Everyone knows that they [Haitians] are fleeing poverty," he said. "Poverty and earthquakes,[38] which people here [in Mexico City] are very sympathetic to. And so sometimes when people [working in humanitarian institutions] assume I'm Haitian, I don't correct them. Because I get their sympathy." When I asked him if this conflation of blackness with Haitianness had helped his immigration case, Obi said that he did not know, but that he thought it definitely had not hurt.

In recent years, Spivak has distanced herself from strategic essentialism, frustrated that it had been taken up incorrectly by activists and academics in order to fetishize an authenticity of the subject that she herself did not believe in. But the humanitarian embrace of Haitian migrants due to their major differences provides a new iteration of strategic essentialism, one that Spivak herself seemed to be striving to articulate with the term.

Even if they had never read Spivak before, many humanitarians with whom I worked often professed to have cultivated a reflexivity around the history of certain marginalized peoples becoming essentialized by the state or previous generations of humanitarians. This was, after all,

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[38] Since 2010, Haiti has had a series of earthquakes that have decimated large parts of the country's urban centers, such as Port Au Prince. Mexico City also has a history of being hit very hard by earthquakes, which occur nearly every year in the city, but especially in the years of 1985 and 2017, which killed hundreds of people each.

one of the reasons that Sam and Ana were so intent on accepting Haitians' major differences *as differences*—both where preoccupied that other actors (such as Ana's frustrations with Teresa claiming to treat all migrants "equally," or Sam's critique of Mexican immigration forces racially profiling Haitians) were too quickly essentializing Haitian migrants. However, it is exactly this professed self-reflexivity that allows humanitarianism to insert itself as a new actor where the state has failed, claiming that it is more adept at recognizing, validating, and attending to particular populations' major differences, instead of essentializing them. But, in doing so, this merely becomes a new means of essentialization; rather than essentializing supposed commonalities within a given social group, the group's differences are essentialized as *utter distinctiveness* in relation to the larger population. It is their supposed ontological difference, their marginalization—always calling to be intervened upon humanely and "re-centered"—which becomes understood as their essential quality.

According to humanitarian workers, the most "obvious" aspect of Haitians' essential difference is their somatic distinctiveness—they are "obviously" black, and this blackness continuously calls attention to itself, sticks out, demands to be recognized. It is a blackness that harkens not only to slavery in Haiti, but to slavery in the US as well, and in this way provides further opportunities to spur renewed discussions around the history of slavery in Mexico that have long been brushed aside or repressed. Blackness, then, is understood as a symptom by the humanitarian institution in Mexico, something plaguing the black body, and the Haitian body in particular. As Min Yang has written:

> Žižek perceives symptom both as a pathological and a philosophical sign that we can easily catch by sight but cannot grasp. Symptom interposes ambivalently both the Real and the Symbolic. On the one hand, it mediates the gap between these two realms. We can see symptom directly, and this seeing may alert us to something unknown. On the other hand, it indicates the permanent discrepancy between reality (i.e., that which for Žižek is constructed by the Symbolic) and the Real. Thus, paradoxically, the symptom is always both the visible and the invisible, both the directness and the distance. It passes a message that we can perceive by our seeing and listening, but what is repressed is always beyond the curtains. (2016)

The pure or "obvious" blackness of the Haitian migrant and the hidden blackness of the Central American migrant work as the two realms of the symptom, the reality and the Real, hypothesized by Žižek. For the humanitarians of Mexico, blackness is a symptom in that it "passes a message" that must be listened (harder) to. But humanitarianism's willingness to only address what they understand as obvious reveals its intent to only engage with the reality of the symptom. It portrays Haitians' obvious blackness as the pressing *reality* of the humanitarian crisis on the migrant trail, as the thing that is *really* happening and the thing that is *really* important. To humanitarians, this kind of obvious blackness indicates that they are dealing with an authentic kind of (racial) otherness, a notion which is reinforced by all of Haitians' other major differences—such as speaking a unique language, urinating in bowls, and the fact that they have a direct and easily traceable history of being enslaved. But in this very way, humanitarianism manages to largely compartmentalize Haitians' otherness in the realm of the Symbolic, sidestepping the Real of blackness, something that is unmanageable and opaque (see Glissant 1997, 189-94).

In contrast, the hidden blackness of Afro-Latinx Central American migrants represents the invisible aspect of the symptom, that which continues to be repressed by humanitarianism. Hidden

blackness roughs up an otherwise smooth narrative about black migrants in Mexico; it too quickly recalls the horrors of slavery, casta, and mestizaje in Mexico and Central America, horrors that are still not readily acknowledged within Latin America, and ones that are seen by the US dominated ideology of humanitarianism as less immediately understandable than the chattel slavery of the US South and the Caribbean. Central Americans' supposedly minor differences mask this underlying and much more uncomfortable otherness. It must be said that Haitian migrants also possess this hidden blackness, they too are bearers of a blackness that could potentially problematize humanitarian intervention; it is simply that, for the time being, humanitarian has created a narrative which more or less successfully smooths over such otherness. It does this by linking Haitian trauma to a slavery long past, enacted by a bad parent, France, who is no longer a major player in the region, as well as natural phenomena like earthquakes. These acts of God in the present and acts of a (now impotent) father in the far way past essentially leave no one to blame for the "Haitian crisis." The trick of this humanitarian framing is that its rationale pretends to be historical in form, but under scrutiny its content continuously empties this history of any consequence in the present. It is a history without history. The hyper-fixation on and fetishization of Haitians' epidermis and other somatic qualities becomes the means of obscuring a more damning history. By claiming that Haitians are so immutably other, humanitarian rhetoric obscures all the ways that much of this otherness is created—and addressed—through access to external organs like humanitarian visas, CURPs, and permanent residency visas.

The history of contemporary Central American mass migration, in contrast, is all too present, from the Carter and Reagan administrations' ruthless military interventions to suppress socialist movements in the region are part of living memory, to CAFTA's continual domination of labor in the Northern Triangle, to the deposition of Honduras' Manuel Zelaya in 2009. Focusing on Central Americans' minor differences is an attempt to overlook these traumas which threaten to suddenly become all too present. Central American migration immediately implicates humanitarianism's own complicity with US foreign policy, and the mass migration spurred by the US neo-colonization of Central America is a reminder that the Mexican state is not an autonomous actor either, that it carries out the Southern Border Program at the northern empire's bidding.

Today, Central American migrants' somatic bodies are not the only place where the symptom manifests itself. In conjunction with their epidermis, another part of their corpus that continuously aggrieves and tortures them—that horrible thing that claws itself onto them and cannot be shed—is their passport. This is the organ that, like the deadened legs of Fräulien Elisabeth von R.,[39] freezes them in place and immobilizes them. And, not unlike Elisabeth and her father, this petrifying organ is passed on from one generation to another.

This is the work of the Southern Border Program: It renders all visible migrant bodies deportable, which then places the most visible or distinct migrants at the most risk, such as black and trans migrants. Then the Mexican state, as it carries out the Program in all its ruthlessness, calls upon humanitarian organizations to urgently rescue these particularly precarious migrant populations. The state claims that it has no money to integrate these migrants into society (after all, it already spent it on the Program). In this way, Mexico is able to "double dip," so to speak, receiving money

[39] Fräulien Elisabeth von R. was a patient of Freud in 1892, who complained of continuous pains and immobilization in her legs. A full description of her case can be found in *Studies in Hysteria* (2004).

from the US to kill migrants, while pocketing more from the UN to save them.[40] If we take Leroi-Gourhan's claim seriously that organs structure one's being in the world, then migrants whose organs "call attention to themselves" are the most targeted because their corpuses lay bare the stakes of the game—namely, that one can change one's being through the acquisition of particular organs, as well as that one feels most doomed or petrified when they cannot change their organs, as well as that the state is doing everything possible to lock migrants into a barren ontology, deprived of all organs that might be useful to them.

Trans migrants and black migrants in some sense represent two poles of the migrant corpus in Mexico. At one end are trans migrants who openly embrace the reconfiguration of their corpuses and even acute medical intervention at the level of their organic body, openly hoping for the day that they can cut off some organs and stitch new ones in. On the other end are black migrants. Whereas trans migrants tended to place some hope or sense of self in the act of transitioning, many of the black and Afro-Latinx migrants with whom I worked sometimes described feeling "stuck" or "trapped" in their skin, with no way to escape it. Unlike with trans migrants, there is of course no standardized medical procedure available to change their epidermis (though the high rates of plastic surgery and skin bleaching in Latin America and the Caribbean seem to suggest that there is a desire for it[41]). To be trapped inside an epidermis that immediately condemns one to a degree of marginalization, then, could certainly be understood as being stitched into a shroud of social death.

But the question becomes, then, is social death found in the organic alone? Thinking with Patterson, social death occurs when one is "is violently uprooted from his milieu" and introduced "into the community of his master, but it involves the paradox of introducing him as a nonbeing" (1982, 38). (Patterson is quick to clarify that this "uprooting" should not be understood as always occurring literally—not all slaves are kidnapped, of course—but rather as an act in which one is ripped from whatever social fabric is available to full citizenry. One can be an internal other, uprooted from a milieu before they are even born.) This nonbeing, then, is structured and continuously reinforced back the fact that the socially dead person no longer possesses the ability to acquire or create the organs necessary to be considered a full member of society. In Leroi-Gourhanian terms, it is when one is not only denied a corpus, but denied a mélange—that is, denied the ability to intermix both with the racialized organic bodies that dominate them (one may not commit miscegenation), as well as the external organs that structure these conceptions of race or ethnicity (one cannot own one's own house, land, business, or means of reproduction as such). Therefore, social death is that condition in which one, trapped in segregation, also becomes trapped inside their own organic body to such an extent that, paradoxically, they feel as if they are becoming inorganic. Even more paradoxically, they feel that they are becoming inorganic precisely because they are barred from the very same realm of the inorganic—from all the external organs which might make their corpuses and beings new. If one is able to obtain new organs which allow their corpus to function within the society (or other societies) in new ways—such as, say, powerful passports or visas—the socially dead being they were previously does actually "die" in a certain sense, in that they have now left that inert being behind and become something else. What is most interesting here is that, with today's supposedly "educated" and "self-reflective" humanitarianism, if a migrant is found to be aligned with social death—whether because they have been ritually "killed" during a migrant caravan, or because their organic bodies have been

[40] See McGuirk and Pine 2020.
[41] See Glenn 2008; Hunter 2007.

identified as majorly different—they might then become more eligible to be saved by humanitarianism for their bodies to be resurrected. As with Cortés in the New World before them, humanitarians march through Mexico, looking for those nonbeings they can make human, and find them everywhere.

Epilogue

The last time I stayed with the Castro family, in 2022, Carlos was not there. "We hardly see him anymore," said Maria. "He's lost in the drugs. I don't want you to see him. He's just bones, he doesn't have any meat [carnita] on him. There's nothing. It's like he almost doesn't have a body."

Without the Beast, Carlos had lost his corpus, and with it his standing within the Castro family. Unable to work, unable to move his body as he once did, he no longer held the familial role as patriarch. The oldest brother had been reduced to a body of bones and inability, to bare life, to social death. Santos had taken his place. The youngest brother, who was only half Carlos' age when they had arrived in Monterrey, had never really known the Mexico that Carlos once knew. The only Mexico that Santos was familiar with was one that had been fractured under the Southern Border Program, one of walking to taxis to buses to walking again. The memory of the Beast—of ripping through an entire country in one go, of feeling your own body hurtle through space and time in a completely different way—did not haunt him the way it continued to haunt Carlos.

"I had to tell Carlos that he's not allowed to come over here anymore," Santos said to me. "Or at least until he pulls himself together. He's always asking for money. One of the last times we talked, he said that he was thinking about selling one of his kidneys. 'A kidney?' I said to him. 'Look at yourself, bro. No one is going to want a kidney from you.'"

After receiving asylum and a CURP, Santos was hired at a wooden pallet manufacturer in Monterrey, and his family moved into official factory housing. It was essentially the same exact housing that they had been squatting in for years, but this time it came with documents from the maquiladora that officially stated the Castros were renters. After two years, Santos had nearly earned enough credits at the factory to qualify for a mortgage, and he planned to buy a three-bedroom house just down the block, where he, his mother, and his two younger cousins would live. In his spare time, he opened a "garage" in the front yard, just as he had planned years ago, where he fixed cars. He had finally bought that air compressor he'd talked, which was purchased in good condition from another worker at the factory in need of quick money. Santos kept the air compressor in his bedroom, next to his bed, so that no one could rob it in the middle of the night. Most Tuesdays—his one day off during the week—he would snake the hose of the air compressor through the house and into the street. It could fill tires, clean cars, and also operate nail guns and other pneumatic tools.

Tanya, the youngest daughter of Tati, was turning four in a few days, and Santos had promised to make several large tables for the event, so that the family could invite all the neighbors for dinner. We built the tables in the front yard out of discarded pallets that Santos had snuck out of the maquiladora. At the factory, he said, he had access to infinite scrap wood, so he no longer had to dig around in the dump like he once did with Carlos. "And look," he said, firing a nail into the tabletop to secure it to one of the legs, "The nail immediately sinks in. Remember that one time that we made that table out of a door with Carlos? It used to take us forever to make this stuff. Not anymore."

Santos had traded his older brother's hammer for a nail gun. And whereas the train was once part of Carlos' corpus, cars were part of Santos'. With the steady income from his job, he was able to purchase a used car of his own, the first that anyone in the family had ever owned. What Carlos had previously promised his family when they first fled Honduras—that he could help them move safely through Mexico, a promise he had not been able to keep—Santos had made

good on. After the tables were built, we all loaded up into Santos' four door Volkswagen and drove toward the airport. Just off the runways was a highway overpass, and right there, on the shoulder of the road, we parked the car and watched the planes fly overhead, close enough to hear the jet engines roar overhead. No one in the family had ever been on a plane before. Marcos asked how long it would take me to fly back to Mexico City.

"An hour and a half," I said.

"An hour and a half," he repeated, mulling over the words. "Just imagine."

I had promised to buy pizza and soda for Tanya's birthday party. As we rolled through the Little Caesar's drive through, I pulled out my debit card to pay. No one had ever had a debit card before, and they asked me how it worked. The card, I said, was linked to my bank account. None of them had bank accounts—they all paid in cash all the time. "And so you go to your bank later to pay the money back?" asked Santos. No, I said, the card was digitally linked to my account. The payment happened automatically; I did not have to do anything physically. "So where is your bank?" asked Santos.

"There isn't a physical location," I said, waving my hands. "It's just on the internet, out there."

"Do you think someone like me could get one?" asked Santos.

I often had the sense that the family thought of me as a different kind of creature, some strange something with abilities that they simply did not, and likely would never, possess. That little bit of plastic signaled that I was a very different kind of being in the world than the Castro family. They understood that with one of these cards I could also pay for things online, which they obviously couldn't do. And they had even heard of stores in Monterrey that were so fancy that you were not permitted to pay in cash, even if you had the money—they only accepted card.

"Imagine turning down good money," said Maria.

Nico, Tati's partner and Tanya's father, asked to stop by the supermarket on the drive back. He still needed to pick up a few things for Tanya's party that night, including meat for the discada, a traditional dish from Monterrey in which various chopped meats are cooked together in a wide, shallow vat.

"The supermarket?" asked Maria, impressed. "Well, aren't we fancy."

The quality of the produce at the supermarket was undeniably worse and more expensive than what could have been purchased at the corner store down the street from Nico's house; all of the supermarket's tomatoes and avocados were imported from California. But that was the point. We were in the supermarket because that's where real working-class people shopped for special occasions like this, maybe even middle-class people whose bodies could move across borders, or at least who could buy produce that had. The supermarket represented a solidly proletarian family, one with a good paying job. We were leaving the world of the lumpen behind, at least for the moment. This voyeurism was an expense that Nico could barely afford, and a shopping trip that should have lasted ten minutes took nearly an hour because he kept running around, picking something up and putting in the cart, only to take it out again, return it to the shelf, and hunt for a cheaper option. In the checkout line he twice sprinted away to fiddle with and mull over some potentially cheaper product. I offered to pay, but he waved me away. By the time we returned to the car, the pizzas were cold.

Tati had decorated the paved front yard of her house with streamers and a piñata. She needed to comb Tanya's hair for the party, she said, and in the meantime could I please use Santos'

air compressor to blow up balloons to hang around the yard? I got to work. When I returned, bushelfuls of balloons in tow, Tanya and some of the other children were having their faces painted. Tanya wanted to be a mermaid. Leon wanted to be Spiderman. Rogelio was a cat. Suddenly there were a dozen little creatures running around the yard, different beings, all showing off what they had become.

In the backyard, away from the women and children, the men were drinking and huddled around the discada. I asked Nico what kind of meat he ended up buying at the supermarket. "A little beef," he said, "and tripa." Organs. A much cheaper cut of meat than steak. We drank and stirred the organs until Tati yelled that it was time for the piñata. She asked Santos to please climb onto the roof and yank the string while the children took swipes at it. Before clambering up the ladder he took off his good shirt—one of the few he kept clean for life outside the factory—and handed it me. As the children rained down blows on another body in order to expose what was inside, I caught several of the young women sneaking peaks at Santos' naked torso. He was very beautiful, I thought. Years of hard labor in the maquiladora had left him with muscled shoulders and six-pack abs, and now that body was on display for the neighborhood. Santos was one of the only bachelors in the area with a job, a car, and, soon, a house. He even had enough money to pay for braces—straightening your teeth was a luxury that almost no one in this part of town could afford. Santos' corpus moved in many ways that most men's bodies in Monterrey did not, and everyone took notice.

The only thing that the Castros had brought from their old house to the new one was Darin's painting of the zebra eye. With age the canvas had begun to crack and peel away from the wood, and the painting had now split into three pieces. A fragment of a body splintering into more fragments. Next to the front door, Maria had hung another painting that she'd found leaning against a dumpster in their new neighborhood. It was a portrait of Christ's face.[42] But within this first Christ another had been painted, this time Christ's whole body nailed to the cross, which also formed the left side of the larger face of the first Christ. The torso of the crucified Christ formed the other Christ's nose. His side wound was also the nostril. The fallen head of the dead Christ became the left eye, his loincloth a mustache, his feet the point of his beard, his outstretched arm his right eyebrow. Above Christ's head, speared in his crown of thorns, glittered seven eyes, and from his beard sprouted a multitude of other crucifixes.

These two paintings hung directly opposite one another. One, the zebra eye, was a portrait of a body not fully a body, a sliver of a body, an organ decaying. On the other was a body that was too much a body, a swirling mass of organs intermixing and undulating, multiplying, passing through one another, turning over and into one another again and again in continuum. We sat somewhere between them and chatted about what else in the house needed fixing.

[42] Later, I would learn the portrait was a reproduction of Octavio Ocampo's "Cavalry." Ocampo became renowned in Mexico for painting portraits of which were composed by a particular configuration of organs—in other paintings, a bouquet of calla lilies is also a woman's cheek, a windmill spins the wilds of Don Quixote's hair, and a young mariachi singer serenading a woman doubles as the profile of an old man's face.

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