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Points of Contact:

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at a Migrant Shelter in Tijuana

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Art
in Latin American Studies

by

Rigoberto Quintana

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Points of Contact:

Agents of Aid and Social Reproduction
at a Migrant Shelter in Tijuana

by

Rigoberto Quintana

Master of Art in Latin American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Cecilia Menjívar, Chair

Drawing on six weeks of ethnographic research in a migrant shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, this thesis focuses on the reproduction of social categories at sites of aid through an analysis of interactions between volunteers and migrants. By looking at the site of the *Lona* shelter as a site that interweaves volunteer motivations, humanitarian principles, and the rescue industry, this study attempts to complicate notions of the “good” to highlight how volunteers’ current deployed strategies reproduce a neoliberal working class that is harmful to migrants. The analysis reveals how volunteers’ approaches motivated by either altruistic and/or self-centered motivations do not create or offer the space for volunteers or migrants to disrupt the harmful social relations solidified at a site of aid.

The thesis of Rigoberto Quintana is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2020

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Intro:

The *Lona* shelter in Tijuana is one of seven religious shelters run by a Catholic sect in Latin America. Recognized around Tijuana as one of the well-established shelters in the area because of its organization, cleanliness, and outreach programs, many media outlets chose to go there when covering the arrival of Central American migrants. When the director of the shelter, and head priest, was asked why the intake of migrants is beneficial to the surrounding community and state, his responses sparked my curiosity. First was his public response, which essentially pointed at the job training offered by the shelter and the number of migrants who have found work based on their workshops or labor office that contracts with outside employers. The second private response came from a conversation between director and workers that I had access to as it took place in an employee-only area behind closed doors. It was said that their ability to be able to point at anyone at the shelter as good because of their willingness to work and “good attitude” was an example of the benefits of having migrants in the community.

Although both responses sparked questions in my mind, the latter response struck me as particularly salient. In the summer of 2019, I was living and working at the *Lona* shelter as an “internal volunteer” and had, at the moment of conversation, been familiar with the intake processes that allowed a person to live and receive aid at the shelter. During my training, it became apparent that volunteers held a significant amount of decision-making power in the workings of the shelter. If a migrant showed what is called “*mala actitud*” [bad attitude] the volunteer would mention it to a worker and the migrant could be excluded or removed from the shelter. The broad definition of “*mala actitud*” allows for a broad range of interpretation and was confirmed by the fact that “*mala actitud*” was the common reason stated on a list of expelled

migrants that hung on the wall directly past the entrance gate, greeting everyone entering the shelter.

The day I heard those responses, I asked myself why the measures of success in both the public and private responses of the director were measured by their ability to produce workers and not the quality of life for the migrant? How did the exclusion of people ascribed as having a “*mala actitud*” benefit the image of the shelter? What does it mean for humanitarian values and approaches to aid when people who have alternative forms of dealing with institutional violence (i.e. drinking and smoking) are not read or ascribed as having a “good attitude”? What role do volunteers and social agents have in reproducing the social processes and categories that are harmful to migrants?

This study focuses on the roles, motivations, and interactions among volunteers and other social agents (Agustín, 2007) within the *Lona* shelter. To better understand how approaches to aid, whether through altruistic or self-centered typologies (Gomez, et al., 2020), function to reproduce social categories harmful to migrants, I look to Social Reproduction Theory (Bhattacharya, 2017) to analyze how public socialized services play a role in sites of aid. I also use the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (OCHA, 2012) four guiding principles to define humanitarian values and frame many of the motivating ideology that inspires action among social agents and the rescue industry.

As per the principles set by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), humanitarian action must adhere to four humanitarian principles: Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, and Independence. Promoting and ensuring compliance to these principles is paramount to “maintain access to affected people...and are essential elements of effective humanitarian coordination” (OCHA, 2012). To better understand the logic behind

each principle adopted, it would be useful to go over each and analyze how it frames and influences on-the-ground strategies.

The Humanity principle seeks to address suffering anywhere it may manifest itself and is set “to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings”; Neutrality is specifically set for social agents by designating that humanitarian actors should not take sides in the social conflicts by engaging in “political, racial, religious, or ideological nature”; Impartiality is designed to offer aid to those that need it most by making no distinctions “on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, or political opinions”; Lastly, Independence directly engages social agents and the rescue industry as this principle set the guideline that humanitarian action “must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regards to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented” (ibid).

These guiding principles set by OCHA are used by various institutions such as the Red Cross and its Code of Conduct has been signed by more than 492 organizations worldwide. As is the case with the law that guide Mexican approaches to migration, the language expressing these principles are broad and palatable yet does not necessarily translate into an efficient deployed strategy that protects vulnerable populations on-the-ground, as we shall see.

Furthermore, as the OCHA principles set values and policies guiding social agents, principles such as Neutrality and Impartiality suggest a type of objectivity that ignores institutional inequalities and fails to engage praxis with positionality. Providing guidelines like “must not take sides” and “making no distinctions” are statements that not only erase the socially created categories like race and gender, but actually participate in boundary-making, as anyone that operates outside of the guiding principles jeopardizes “access to affected people.”

The growing importance of volunteers in administering international aid requires a critical approach that interrogates deployed strategies and incorporates positionality. It is important to maintain a framework that looks past a humanitarian approach that monopolizes the good (Dubal, 2018) in the hands of a few. My focus on social agents, defined broadly to include volunteers, social workers, academics, policy makers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), and religious personnel, is a result from a social agents capability to actively think about how vulnerable people ought to live their lives and the best way to approach that goal (Agustín, 2007). In her book *Sex at the Margins*, Agustín argues the Rescue Industry, defined as a fusion of various social agents that together constructs and ascribes the role of passive victim, limits a person's autonomy by striving to control their bodies. Furthermore, social agents serve as a buffer between the state and marginalized populations by offering services and providing resources to vulnerable populations (Vogt, 2018).

Refusing to frame volunteers as simply passive bodies that do not exert their agency and simply follow orders, I neither aspire nor attempt to focus solely on whether volunteers and their strategies are "good" or "bad." My goal, then, will not be to detail just another example of racism and patriarchy, but rather, to interrogate the dynamic processes and points of contact between volunteer and migrant that create lifeworlds that reflect equity in shared resources and space, yet serve as a site that cannot escape the reproduction of racial and gender hierarchies.

The site of the *Lona* shelter is a dynamic space to observe the interactions among volunteers and migrants and analyze a migrants' context of reception. The shelter exists within a sphere that blurs the lines distinguishing the public and private. A shelter serves as a space that satisfies immediate needs and builds communities by offering a bed to sleep in, a roof over head, and a stable source of food where people break bread together. The shelter also functions as a

source of professional resources as it offers access to legal and psychological services, training to learn a trade, and serves as a contracting service as it connects employers with employees. This reflects what Erving Goffman has called a total institution, defined as social arrangements that are regulated to one plan under one roof (Goffman, 1961).

I chose to focus on the *Lona* shelter, rather than other social agents and outlets of aid, because of it being a unique site that blurs the public and private and also because of the historically changing demographics that have housed Mexican and Central American migrants, internally displaced Mexicans, and more recently has shifted from deported Mexican men back to Central American migrants and refugees (as well as African political asylum seekers and Caribbean migrants). As the demographics changed, so did policies and approaches for the shelters, thus creating new and important responsibilities for volunteers. Whereas prior to the arrival of Central American migrants at the shelter, tasks for volunteers largely meant receiving donations, cleaning communal spaces, and helping at the entrance doors conduct intake interviews. Duties now also included the tasks of providing childcare and education to children who had completed a traumatic and dangerous journey to Tijuana.

In this study I attempt to offer an alternative perspective of social agents and sites of aid by analyzing how socially reproduced categories that affect migrants' lives interweaves volunteer motivations and humanitarian principles at a site of aid. The *Methods* section explains what and how I use the concepts and theories that frame interactions among both volunteers and migrants I analyze; The *Background* section traces the historical processes of Mexico's approach to migration and how we have arrived to the current social context in Tijuana; *Aid in a Neoliberal Era* analyzes how a state's approach (or willingness) to recognize basic human rights are tied to economic neoliberal policies and approaches; *Points of Contact* focuses on how

socially ascribed identities and characteristics like *mujeres decentes* and *mala actitud* interact with volunteers and migrants as well as humanitarian principles; *Shades of Volunteers* offers an example of highly contrasting strategies between volunteers and analyzes their motivations using typologies of altruistic or self-centered motivations; *Health and Aid* introduces an anti-humanist medical perspective that broadens the definition of aid to include social processes like gentrification and concepts like “homelessness”; The *Conclusion* outlines where this study will go and reiterates the need to focus on the rescue industry and social agents.

As Central American migrants will continue heading north in the foreseeable future (Vogt, 2018; Arce et al. 2019) and come into contact with a diverse range of social agents and sources of aid, analysis of the interactions between volunteers and migrants helps reveal social processes that reproduce social categories harmful to migrants, thereby offering an opportunity to disrupt these structures.

Methods:

During the summer of 2019, I spent six weeks working and living at the *Lona* shelter as an “internal volunteer” (an “external” volunteer works at the shelter but does not live there) conducting personal observations and semi-structured interviews with other volunteers. I gained access to the shelter through a former university student that had conducted ethnographic research at the site and maintained connections to the workers and migrants of the shelter. She reached out to the school I was attending and inquired if there was anyone interested in spending part of the summer volunteering at the shelter. I reached out to the *Lona* shelter and got connected to the shelter’s organizer and after an email correspondence, I applied and was subsequently accepted to be an internal volunteer.

On the first day that I arrived at the shelter I was trained by the employee that I was in communication with prior to being accepted as an internal volunteer. The training consisted of accompanying the employee on a walkthrough of the shelter and learning the tasks and responsibilities of volunteers. After the walkthrough, I was given a series of rules and principles that guide the shelter, a calendar with everyone's shifts, and a manual that described how to use all the amenities offered to migrants such as how the telephone and internet policies work.

The requirements for being an internal volunteer encompass a six-day work week in which a volunteer is designated various shifts at different shift hours. For instance, the first shift for volunteers begins at six in the morning and ends at three in the afternoon; the next shift starts at ten in the morning and ends at six in the evening (again, a flexible end time); Finally, the last shift begins at two in the afternoon and ends at eleven at night. This last shift can be the longest of them all as the INM and Mexican police have the nefarious tendency to release detained people in the middle of the night knowing that the shelters intake hours close at a certain time. On one occasion, I was assigned to the last shift as newly released people arrived at the shelter, after eleven at night, and didn't end the shift until after every intake interview was conducted and bed linens and toiletries were distributed. This particular shift ended near one in the morning, accounting for an eleven-hour workday which was common. The end time is tentative as shifts become longer if something were to come up such as receiving a large donation that needs to be organized and shelved or refrigerated.

The shifts assigned to volunteers were diverse and required the completion of a wide range of tasks which were designed to be done in conjunction with the migrants that make up the shelter. Having accepted the responsibilities of an internal volunteer, I used my shifts as moments to observe the inner workings of the shelters and the relationships and interactions that

took place between migrants and/or volunteers and workers. Furthermore, my participatory approach at the shelter allowed me to communicate and build relationships with the volunteers in a fraternal way as we all were going through similar experiences.

Originally, I had planned to focus on Central American migrants and how they navigate sites of aid. As I began working with other volunteers, many of whom are also students at universities in the United States conducting fieldwork or satisfying program requirements, I wondered how the diverse range of motivations and approaches fit in the particular site of the shelter and what that means for the migrants. Questioning and acknowledging my own positionality led me to focus on volunteers rather than migrants themselves, who are placed in a structurally and legally vulnerable place in Mexico.

My personal penchant for participatory observation and ethnographic research stems from my background as a second-generation U.S.-Central American. Being a son to parents who migrated from Central America through Tijuana in the 1980's informs my desire to focus on these topics and regions. Through my fieldwork, I learned that a sensibility to language and culture is a necessary skill in transcending morally conscious research into a humanizing form of inquiry that recognizes positionality and privilege when taking action.

In this study I attempt to provide a way of thinking of aid that complicates notions of deservingness and the good, as well as ways the latter is performed by volunteers at sites of aid. Along with other authors (Farmer, 2001; París-Pombo, 2016; Castañeda, 2019; Ochoa et al. 2019), I want to approach the subject of structural inequalities to include concepts and frameworks that help analyze the dynamic and nuanced processes created within a neoliberal context.

Situating the rescue industry and social agents within a neoliberal context highlights the limits and boundaries of aid when neoliberal values such as private property, individualism, and competition (Longazel, 2016) must be included in discussions of housing, altruism, and the good. Furthermore, a critical approach challenges neoliberal values and ideology that shift blame from institutional responsibility to personal accountability, as individuals are blamed for their precarious positions and not the economic policies that distribute wealth unequally (París Pombo, 2017).

To focus on the social processes that are created within a neoliberal context, I analyze the context of reception (COR) for Central American migrants in Tijuana, as well as attempt to refocus the concept to include international volunteers arriving at the shelter. The context of reception can be described as the opportunities available to immigrants and how they are treated by members of the host society (Portes & Borocz, 1989; Stepick & Dutton, 2009). The COR can also be described as the opportunity structure, degree of openness versus hostility, and acceptance in the local community (Schwartz et al. 2014).

Although the authors use the concept to look at immigrants arriving in US cities, I believe the concept can yield useful information applied to social agents. Aside from (but not overlooking) the fact that many international volunteers arrive with more protections, social capital and a legal status, some volunteers at the shelter can be described as “Humanitarian Tourist” and “Missionary” (Gomez, et al., 2020) because of their reliance on the same resources as migrants, although social agents can use these resources as a strategy to subsidize uncoerced travel and religious pilgrimages. Most volunteers and workers at the shelter rely just as much from the resources and social capital developed with the surrounding community that applying COR to social agents can be reasonable.

Context of reception has a huge impact on the integration of the immigrant to the host country (Menjívar, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Schwartz et al. 2014). COR influences the access to services and opportunities that can be the difference between life and death and fundamentally affects how immigrants perceive themselves as well as how they construct and understand their sense of belonging (Schwartz et al. 2014). Here too, I believe there is a benefit in applying COR to social agents. For many volunteers that share the characteristics and demographics of the migrants at the shelter they experience similar stigmatization from the surrounding community that cannot differentiate between migrant and volunteer. These experiences impact volunteers' interactions with not only the neighbors outside but the migrants inside as well.

I use the Perceived Context of Reception, defined as a migrant's perception of welcomeness, opportunity structure, and availability of social support in the receiving community (Schwartz et al. 2014), as a way to broaden the scope of analysis to include the mental and psychological effects for the COR. Schwartz, et al.'s study analyzed the perceptions of individuals that revealed people within the same group can experience reception differently based on traits such as skin tone. For example, during my fieldwork, there were multiple occasions where recently arrived African political asylum seekers were consciously assigned the menial tasks of the shelter by volunteers as a form of punishment for refusing to wash dishes (they held the belief that work should be designated to women) compared to others whose transition is mitigated by the ability to blend in with the demographics of the shelter and connect and speak with volunteers.

Within this framework, a negative context of reception accounts for internalized emotions and socially ascribed identities that can be connected with depression and its various symptoms.

The shelter provides a space to think about how both social agent and migrant are situated in a site of aid created by structural inequalities and neoliberal policies and to wonder how socially ascribed identities are reproduced by volunteers, leading to health consequences for the migrant. Although these concepts focus on processes that impact the perception and reception into society from the perspective of the migrant, I attempt to refocus the analytical gaze to center the role of volunteers. Refocusing this gaze highlights how volunteers not only provide and mitigate the social services (processes) which are offered at the shelter (context of reception) to migrants, but also emphasizes how they themselves translate and understand their positionality and access to resources within this social context.

To better understand the diverse range of characteristics and motivations volunteers bring with them to the shelter, and to gain a nuanced perspective of social categories like social agents, I turn to what Gomez et al. (2020) describe as typologies of altruistic and self-motivations. This concept helps categorize motivations and explain possible factors that inspire a diverse range of people to volunteer for action. Gomez et al.'s study analyzes the motivations encouraging volunteers in Arizona and Mexican border towns to get involved in modes of resistance, such as providing water jugs to strategic migrant locations on the route from Mexico to the United States.

Emphatic Humanitarianism places the volunteer motivations among a typology of altruistic and self-centered motivations. Under the typology of humanitarian altruism are the categories of “Do Gooder; Good Samaritan; Activist; Missionary” and among the self-centered motivations are the categories of “Humanitarian Tourist; Martyr; Militant; Crusader” (ibid). Although both groups operate within the same axis used by Gomez (moral virtue – deontology

[rules]; secular – faith based) an important distinction between both groups is the ability to include empathy in their motivations, that is, do not center themselves.

The typologies are useful to categorize salient motivations and characteristics among the volunteers in Tijuana at the *Lona* shelter. Differentiating between the empathic and self-centered categories proposed by Gomez, et al., helps frame the interactions among volunteers and migrants to reveal how that relationship is fostered from the foundation.

Finally, to broaden the perspective of analysis to include a focus on both private and public processes and to better understand how volunteers' strategies and motivations result in social reproduction within a neoliberal context, I lean on Social Reproduction Theory (Bhattacharya, 2017). SRT allows for a critical perspective that highlights how “capitalism needs a stable set of social relations to reproduce itself. There has to be certain kinds of work discipline, certain kinds of political formations to allow capitalism to do this” (ibid). Social Reproduction refers to the “activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work- mental, physical, and emotional -aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing population” (Brenner and Laslett, 1991).

Furthermore, SRT allows for the space to ask questions such as how does the shelter, as a site for semi-stable access to resources, create the social relations that allow for the reproduction of the working class? What kind of access do people living at the shelter have in terms of healthcare and education? How do these relations and availability (or lack thereof) of resources create boundaries and limits opportunities for migrants? How does neoliberal economic development benefit by a certain kind of work discipline?

SRT as a method explores the reproduction of labor under capitalism and allows for the analysis of social relations as capital (Bhattacharya, 2017). Its analysis can include how food, clothing, and housing are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm are provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed. For this study, SRT is particularly useful as a methodology because it privileges processes because “developing tendencies of history constitute a higher reality than the empirical ‘facts’” (ibid).

Background:

Immigration and slavery are identified as examples of coercive forms of reproducing social categories such as the working class (ibid). As neoliberal economic policies and processes force people/workers into a nationally bounded site, it is therefore important to identify, understand, and analyze the laws and policies that have created a structurally vulnerable population (Central American migrants). Particularly, as this population relies on the intervention of social agents and the rescue industry in Tijuana for basic survival needs. Although this study centers volunteers and other social agents involved in the rescue industry, it is necessary to provide historical context as to how Mexican and Central American states (with U.S. influence) have approached migration. Furthermore, this allows for a common understanding of the current social context that frames migrants’ opportunities and rights.

According to Abdelmalek Sayad, “migrations are a structural element of colonial power relationships that never ended. The economic and social life of a rural colony was subordinated to another country’s industrialism, peasants became ‘workers’, and immigration was turned into a social problem” (Kim, 2018). It becomes, therefore, difficult to talk about the current situation

unfolding in border towns, particularly in Tijuana with Central American migrants and U.S.-Mexican deportees, without mentioning the historical processes linking Central America and Mexico.

Historically, Mexico's approach to immigrants travelling to the country had remained largely unchanged (Alba, et al. 2012). The focus of Mexican authorities' perspective on migration was on the protection and recognition of its nationals migrating to the U.S. to work in agriculture under agreements such as the Bracero Program (Alba, et al. 2012; Udiarte et al. 2016; Ochoa, 2019). In this social context, the 1974 *Ley General de Población* provided the legislative framework that dictated approaches and provided guidelines for migration policies. Notably, it didn't officially recognize the category of "refugee" (París Pombo, 2017). That changed in 1982 when the Mexican congress modified the law to include the legal recognition of the *Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados* [UN's Commission for Refugees] (ACNUR).

The pressure that modified the law came from civil-society organizations (CSO's), social agents (including social workers, academics, and policy makers), non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and religious sects that stressed the importance of recognizing the basic human rights of Central American migrants fleeing the armed conflicts of the era (Alba et al. 2012). Although Mexico's southern border with Guatemala was seen as an economic integrated area where circular migration between migrants and goods of both countries was common (ibid.), the provisions of the *Ley General de Población* were largely focused on Mexican nationals travelling to the US.

The changes in Mexico's approach to migration became more restrictive due to three changes: The 1986 passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in the U.S.; the

increase of Central American refugees fleeing armed conflicts of the region in the 1980's; and the economic shift toward neoliberalism (Alba et al. 2012). Between 1981 and 1983, an estimated 200,000 Guatemalans sought refuge in Mexico, of which 46,000 were officially recognized as refugees (ibid). They received economic aid from ACNUR through the *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* [Mexican Commission to help Refugees] (Comar) (París Pombo, 2017).

Although migration provisions were present in Mexico's foreign policy during the 1970's and early 1980's, the changes in the region, as well as pressure from CSO's and NGO's that demanded the recognition of the basic human rights of immigrants and refugees, forced Mexican authorities to broaden their periphery of migration. Social agents played an important role in stressing the importance of recognizing the human rights of refugees, further connecting the need to speak about human rights and international migration within a humanitarian framework.

Mexico's approach to Central American migration was not a one-sided approach, however. The 1986 Binational Commission, followed by the 1989 Binational Sub-commission on Migration Issues, was the result of Mexico's efforts to coordinate with the Central American countries, particularly Guatemala, during the 1980s-armed conflicts (Alba et al. 2012). The war-time policies and practices were shaped by the need to address the large number of refugees as well as an attempt to return to the pre-armed conflict conditions in which economic ties between Southern Mexico and Guatemala were strong. The Binational Sub-commission was an attempt to go beyond humanitarian aid and include provisions that gave considerations to temporary agricultural workers (ibid.). International agreements and regional economic integration have continued to tie the interests of Mexico and Central America together to this day.

In 1989, Mexico introduced a number of reforms to restore and facilitate the cross-border flows of its southern region as it was before the armed conflicts in Central America. In 1990, Mexico's first general law on asylum was created, the same year that Mexico led and facilitated the adoption of the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (París Pombo, 2017).

Beginning in the 1990s, as neoliberal economic policies prioritized privatization, deregulation, and cuts to social services continued to expand and be implemented, these policies gave way to new migration flows. Mexican states with historically small migration flows to the US, such as the Mexican state of Chiapas that borders Guatemala (Durand and Massey, 2009), began to swell. The southern regions of Mexico began to send migrants to the US, a different region compared to the central and highland Mexican states that had historically filled that role (Durand, 2000). The shift in regional migration as a result of neoliberal processes proved to be an important change in Mexico's approach to immigration. As Central American migrants fled the post-armed conflict conditions of the region, they were absorbed by Mexico's southern migration flow of nationals heading north to the U.S. (Ochoa et al. 2019).

Although there have been changes and modifications to Mexico's approach to migration since the 1980's, *La Ley de Migración* that passed in 2011 ushered in the next phase in its strategy to mediate migration, particularly from Central America (Alba et al. 2012). The 2011 law, much like the modifications to the *Ley de Población*, was adopted thanks in large part to the civil-society organizations, social agents, and pro-immigrant groups that pressured the state to address the violence Central American migrants were experiencing travelling through Mexico.

An event that played a major role in influencing politicians and swaying popular opinion came from the 2010 Tamaulipas massacre. The massacre was reported as targeted towards

Central American and Mexican migrants by the Zeta cartel with the help of the Instituto Nacional de Migración (París Pombo, 2017; Ochoa et al. 2019; Arce et al. 2019). The images presented by the media sparked sympathy and anger, which culminated in the Mexican congress passing *La Ley de Migración* unanimously, an uncommon occurrence in Mexican politics. At the time, President Felipe Calderon called this effort “the most comprehensive advance in Mexican migration policy in 80 years” (Alba et al. 2012).

The *Ley de Migración* is an important point to analyze because it provides guidelines and frames the rights of migrants yet many of the current deployed strategies by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (INM) and other enforcement agencies, contradict and fail to recognize the rights set by the law. The law focuses on eight principles: unrestricted respect for the human rights of migrants; a welcoming environment for migrants and international solidarity; facilitation of international mobility of persons; complementary in labor markets; equity between Mexicans and foreigners; recognition of immigrants’ rights; Family unity and sociocultural integration; and facilitation of Mexican emigrants’ return and reintegration into society (París Pombo, 2017). Although the language used in the law seems positive and inclusionary a major critique of the law is of its ambiguous and general language and guidelines that leaves a lot of room for local interpretation and implementation (Rafful, 2019).

The eight principles outlined currently frame the interaction between various state institutions and migrants in Tijuana. During the tense interactions between enforcement agencies and migrants, the intervention of social agents can be the difference between occupying a jail or living at a shelter. For instance, there are procedures in place at the *Lona* shelter in the event that any of the five enforcement agencies that have authority to operate in Tijuana (the local,

municipal, and state police; the military; the national guard) violates *La Ley* (personal observation, 2019).

Due to the positionality of the director/priest in the community as well as the reputation of the shelter in Tijuana as a “good one,” there is a seemingly reciprocal relationship between the chief of the local police force and the director/priest. When a migrant is detained and calls for assistance the volunteer should immediately contact the director/priest and he will either call or travel to the police station to speak to the chief. More times than not, that is enough to have a migrant freed on what is largely unlawful apprehensions (personal observation, 2019). Although the *Ley de Migración* outlines that the INM is the only institution responsible for handling and detaining people on migration issues (Alba et al. 2012; París Pombo, 2017), that doesn’t stop local agencies from targeting migrants by waiting outside the shelter to identify them (personal observation, 2019).

In contrast to the *Ley de Migración* that outlines the rights migrants have, the precarious and structurally vulnerable position Central American migrants are received into as they arrive and travel throughout Mexico, is reflective on the drastic consequences that can result from their interactions with enforcement agencies. Given the precarious nature of their status in Mexico, interactions with the police creates the need to rely on social agents to help them navigate the contrasting policies and practices of the everyday, serving as a form of broker between the state and migrant. As there are procedures in place to help a detained migrant be released from jail at the *Lona* shelter, a volunteer’s small gesture of picking up the phone can bring into question humanitarian principles such as Neutrality and Impartiality.

On one occasion there was a moment when a detained migrant called the shelter for help only to be dismissed resulting in their overnight stay at a jail. Coming into contact with the

police creates the threat of being detained indefinitely, something multiple people at the shelter mentioned as a credible threat (personal conversations, 2019). In this case, *Clara*, the volunteer that picked up the phone, had a limited understanding of the Spanish language and essentially hung up on them because they could not make out what was being said (personal observation). *Clara*, a K-12 teacher in the U.S. from Oklahoma, gave two motivators for her desire to get involved in volunteering in Tijuana. First, to gain experience outside the classroom and two, to travel to Mexico, a country she had never visited before (personal conversation, 2019). The tone of the conversations and the end-goals reflected what Gomez et al. categorized as a typology of self-centered motivations labelled a Humanitarian Tourist.

Although on this occasion the detained migrant was able to call back the next day and speak with a fluent Spanish speaker, thereby facilitating his release, it stuck with me that the seemingly mundane action of hanging up the phone can, and has had, drastic negative effects on a migrant's life. This signals that in many cases, social agents have the power to determine, or at the very least drastically affect, the opportunities of a person's life, regardless of intention.

Intent is a motivating factor for many social agents. To contrast the typology of self-centered motivation of *Clara* as a Humanitarian Tourist we can compare *Neil*, a Texan who was pursuing a degree in Religious Studies at a top university in the U.S. *Neil* also had not been to Mexico and was volunteering to satisfy a requirement for his degree. He was another volunteer that received a call from a detained migrant. Although unable to understand the exact message conveyed (he too had a limited knowledge of Spanish), he took it upon himself to get the limited information he understood, such as the name of the precinct the migrant was being detained in and went door to door at the volunteer housing area until he found someone that could help. As is the case with the majority of these arbitrary detentions, the call came through near midnight, a

time when employees of the shelter (such as the lawyer and psychologist) are not present and working. Eventually finding someone to help, a call from the director went to the chief of police and the migrant was released the same night.

In working and conversing with *Neil*, I learned that although he was there to satisfy a degree requirement, his ability to empathize with migrants at the shelter signaled the typology of altruistic motivation based on faith-based moral virtue, the category of Good Samaritan. It was unsurprising that he was one of the more popular volunteers who was able to create solid relationships with migrants in which they were willing to help him carry out tasks that were not assigned to them. A contrast to *Clara's* approach in which her sometimes self-centered decisions would create interactions that provoked animosity among migrants because she displayed a contemptuous attitude when asking for help.

Although it may be appealing to frame these events and interactions to cultural difference, bad luck, or messages lost in translation, I offer an alternative perspective. Regardless of intent and how each call was handled, the Humanitarian Tourist and the Good Samaritan performing good challenged humanitarian principles yet could not escape participating in the process that reproduces social categories harmful to migrants.

Aid in a Neoliberal Era:

After making the 4,700-kilometer trek north, the context of reception at border towns for Central American migrant will vary (Arce et al. 2019). In 2018, when the Central American Caravan arrived in Tijuana, the reception was mixed. Although many CSO's, NGO's, and social agents like *Pueblos Sin Fronteras*, religious shelters, and active residents offered aid and support, the institutional response was in a negative context. The mayor of Tijuana at the time

was Juan Manuel Gastélum, a conservative politician who called the Central American Caravan a “tsunami” and referred to migrants as undesirables, violent, and drug addicts that threaten the security and tranquility of Tijuana (ibid).

When the Caravan arrived in late 2018, the location chosen by the mayor to create a temporary shelter for the thousands of men, women, and children, was nefariously placed in a region known for its anti-immigrant sentiments in the *Zona Norte* of Tijuana. The *Benito Juarez Albergue’s* (open-roof shelter) location caused tensions between migrants and the surrounding conservative community to rise. The situation eventually erupted into a display of state power and subjugation with the INM and Mexico’s military intimidating and attacking the encampment that was housing 5,446 migrants, of which 3,475 were men, 1,010 were women, and 965 children (Arce et al. 2019).

This was similar to the incident in Playas de Tijuana of November of that year, where drunken civilians attacked immigrants and, with the help of the INM and military, succeeded in intimidating a vulnerable population (ibid). These episodes reflect the boundary-making process in which certain areas are marked as hostile. The context of reception is important as lived experiences for migrants can differ due to location and the placement of shelters. It also shows the importance of the surrounding community in providing a positive context of reception through solidarity which can be fragile.

Through the media, much like the case with the Tijuana mayor in 2018, many conservative residents spewed anti-immigrant sentiments by comparing Central American immigrants to animals and criminals (Arce et al. 2019). When Trump reduced the entry lanes at the border and crossing-times became longer, Tijuana residents that supported migrants began to shift their opinions as many *Tijuaneros* have children that go to school in San Diego or they

themselves work in the US (ibid). The extended wait-time tested their solidarity as many residents blamed migrants for their hardship.

This fragile form of solidarity that can shift attitudes also allows for the adoption of harmful economic policies that are enforced with impunity. A point of interest that arises when analyzing the rescue industry in a neoliberal era is that it reveals how a state's approach (or willingness) to recognize basic human rights are tied to economic neoliberal policies and approaches. For example, macroeconomic policies like 1994's North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which stratified border towns as a source of cheap labor with Free-Trade Zones, maintains dangerous and informal work in border towns like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez (Ochoa et al. 2019; Arce et al. 2019). The low-earning potential of informal work makes aid offered by shelters, such as providing a free savings account, grow in importance.

Shelters and the rescue industry are an important source (many times the only source) of job-training and placements, setting the conditions in which migrants must rely on social agents and the rescue industry to survive. These entities facilitate access to work, largely in exploitative and low-wage conditions (Anderson, 2015; Rafful, 2019). At the shelter in Tijuana, one of the pillars of "integrating" the migrant into society is providing opportunities for training in a specific job such as being an electrician. The labor office at the shelter has connections with various employers where jobs range from working in a call center for US and Mexican companies (for those who speak English [Anderson, 2015]) to working in the *jicama* fields where overseers have the notorious reputation of abusing and exploiting their employees (personal observations/conversations, 2019).

Although the material gains earned through exploitative work is important for the survival of immigrants, it is also important to highlight that "integration" in this context

translates to becoming a productive member of society, that is laborer, regardless of job. This structure benefits the United States and Mexican government as the nation-state continues to have access to a large pool of cheap labor, thereby reproducing the class hierarchy in which economic mobility for vulnerable migrants is stratified.

It can be argued that the job trainings provided in shelters also helps reproduce the social categories that the rescue industry is meant to eradicate (Agustín, 2007), as they help solidify the job opportunities afforded to migrants by maintaining access to mostly labor-intensive and/or exploitative work with no alternative. There were cases at *Lona* in which even the employers that have had a background check and have contracted with the shelter in the past still participate in acts such as wage-theft and exploitation. Functioning within a neoliberal social context, the Labor office of *Lona* has no structural process in which to reclaim that money for the migrant (personal observation/ conversation with Labor Office representative, 2019).

Mexican policies impact and shape the legal categories in which immigrants can participate in the labor market. For example, the 2011 *Ley de Migración* eliminated the distinction between immigrant and non-immigrant and instilled four categories of foreigners (Visitors, Temporary Resident, Temporary Resident Student, and Permanent Resident) to provide better access to labor markets (Alba et al. 2012). Yet these provisions have done little to change the structural and institutional barriers on employment which creates a need to seek employment in the informal sector.

These structural and institutional barriers set the conditions in which many migrants (or failed migrants) (Vogt, 2018), find semi-economic stability as *polleros*, guides, or smugglers (Tavira et al. 2019). Here too, the rescue industry and social agents play an important economic role as *polleros* do not have to seek out potential clients as the shelter serves as a wholesale

entity that provides a continuous source of clients in need of a guide (Vogt, 2018), and volunteers are tasked with the responsibility of policing these groups by remaining vigilant for people with “*mala actitud*”.

The strategy of *polleros* to infiltrate shelters to gain a client base at *Lona* is something volunteers are told to be on the lookout for when we begin “training”. To achieve this, it is necessary for volunteers to have a relationship with migrants in which they feel comfortable saying something when they are approached by a *pollero*. This happened only once while I was working at the *Lona* shelter. In that particular moment a recently deported US-Mexican man had arrived at the shelter and began prodding for interest among migrants as to how many people want to go to the US. It was only after multiple migrants came up to a specific volunteer that this issue became clear.

Here too, the importance of how volunteers approach interactions with migrants reflects that even within a positive and trustworthy relationship, the results benefit the social categories that excludes people who do not conform to the measures of success set by the shelter (the *pollero* in this situation was removed from the shelter and given information to the next available shelter that was overcrowded and notorious for nickel and diming migrants that stay there).

Using another example in a local context allows for the focus on the limits and barriers facing Central American migrants in Tijuana that highly restrict their earning power and forces migrants to join the ranks of the informal sector (Udiarte et al. 2016; Vogt, 2018). Tijuana is known as a city of cheap labor (Udiarte et al. 2016) but cheap labor is not restricted to industrial work. Organized crime, sex work (quasi-legal work), street vending, and any other informal ways of making a living can be found in Tijuana (ibid; Bautista, 2019). The social stigma that is connected with these types of informal work results in the criminalization of populations which

leads to a variety of approaches that includes forced rehabilitation of people who inject drugs (PWID) and sex-workers (Rafful, 2019).

Social stigmas ascribed to bodies also translates into the need for moments of “rescuing” which validates and reinforces the need for social surveillance and policing. In Agustin’s book *Sex at the Margins*, her study highlights the relationship between “victim” and “rescuer” as one in which the latter recognizes the former by racializing and gendering work and populations. At the *Lona* shelter, as the demographic shifted to include women, moments of social surveillance and policing manifested themselves as volunteer and migrant interactions set the limits on what is acceptable behavior for women.

Points of Contact:

For migrants arriving in Tijuana, the changing economic and cultural setting, as well as the shifting gender roles, has led to an attempt at placing limitations and ascribing roles on women’s bodies. Through patriarchal constraints and surveillance, women’s bodies become a site of oppression and resistance. The combined oppressive factors of economic availability, cultural pressures, and the mapping and re-mapping of women’s bodies has resulted in placing transnational migrant women in a political economy of sexual risk (Castañeda and Zavella, 2003).

Xóchitl Castañeda et al. (2003) showed in their study that Mexican migrant women face many pressures to adhere to accepted gender roles. Although this study focused on Mexican migrant women in Central California who work in agriculture, similar structural vulnerabilities that result from precarious legal status within a patriarchal society is reflected in the social standings of Central American migrant women in Tijuana. For migrant families, the private

home life serves as a site for the transmission of social and gender roles that serve to control women's bodies.

The subservient role ascribed to women in a patriarchal system creates the pressure for women to live up to the idea of being recognized as “*mujeres decentes*” (Castañeda, 2003). “*Mujeres decentes*” are the women that remain silent about sexuality, are virgins before marrying, will sacrifice themselves for their children, and are adherent to the patriarch of the family. Falling outside the contours of a “*mujeres decentes*” places women migrant workers in a vulnerable position that results in a higher risk of sexual assault.

The oppressive result of pushing migrant women to adhere to being *mujeres decentes* is something that continued to arise at the *Lona* shelter. As the demographics of the shelter shifted from recently deported Mexican men to women and children, largely from Central America but also Cuba, Ghana, and Senegal, I observed migrants conversing amongst each other trying to decipher if a recently arrived woman was living up to those standards.

On one occasion, there was a conversation in which people were questioning a migrant woman's morals because, although she was migrating with her daughter to the US to reunite with her husband, the fact that she was speaking to men in the shelter alone created doubts in observers minds of her ability to be a “good mother” (personal observation). This translated to her being ostracized from certain social groups, which can have drastic impacts in using social capital to access job opportunities, as word-of-mouth in the shelter proved to be a valuable currency.

This type of social pressure and policing is not the only form of control that is exerted within groups. Women must also contend with the mapping of their bodies at home, which results in the policing of their actions by their families. “Patriarchal Constraints,” which limits

the freedom of women's movements and actions, sees the body as a map (ibid). On this "map," people, especially mothers and *mujeres decentes*, can "read" cultural transgressions on a woman's body, "when they lose their virginity, women walk different- with their legs separated- and in their faces and their eyes you can tell that they saben más, that han tenido uso de hombre" (ibid). This constant pressure on women to guard their reputation against gossip creates a restriction of movements and actions, as there is always someone watching/policing in society for cultural transgressions. As the pressure of reproducing cultural beliefs falls on women to live up to an idealized form, surveillance is needed and in the case of the shelter, the responsibility of social surveillance was undertaken by volunteers.

To further compound the vulnerability and policing of bodies, social surveillance plays an important role in maintaining patriarchal structures. At the migrant shelter, the task of policing women's bodies was undertaken by the volunteers, priests, and the migrants themselves. Volunteers participated in this surveillance by adhering to patriarchal rhetoric such as "we have to protect women from the men of the shelter"; Priests played the part by overseeing the volunteers to make sure such policing was being carried out; Migrants participated such in the case as the example mentioned above. In this way, "gossip and interactions with others serve to police woman into fulfilling their expected roles as self-sacrificing providers, regardless of the scarcity around them. The geographic context of immigrant's women's lives may intensify or diminish the presence and impacts of social surveillance (Menjívar, et al, 2001).

The entry process of migrants at *Lona* offers an example to social surveillance and social agents. The systematic approach of the shelter to the reception of migrants is efficient and organized. From the moment a person arrives at the gated doors of the shelter, they must follow a set of steps before they are offered support. The entry interview, conducted by shelter workers

and volunteers, seeks to find information on the person while also trying to find any discrepancies in their stories. For a sense of security, the shelter only allows recently arrived people into the shelter, meaning that the person has to arrive at the doors within five days of their arrival to Tijuana. If they arrive after that time window or if there are discrepancies to their stories, such as recently deported men from the United States saying they just arrived in Tijuana, yet their official deportation document shows they arrived weeks before, social agents offer information for other shelters and deny them entry (personal observation, 2019).

After the interview and with the approval of those working the front doors, they are required to meet with the on-site psychologist, labor office, and legal services. After completing the necessary steps and speaking with various social agents, they are assigned a bed and given toiletries so they can take a shower and clean up. They are also given an ID card that gives the information as to whether the person can arrive late to the shelter (working overnight or early in the morning), has access to meals, is allowed on the premises to only take advantage of a service (savings account, wiring money, make domestic or international calls), the end-date of their stay at the shelter, and how many times they have received clothes, towels, and bedsheets (allowed to change them once a week).

Any of these services or dates can change depending on circumstance, for instance a person can lose their card if they are deemed to have a “*mala actitud*” [bad attitude] or if they are allowed to stay longer by a shelter worker. The category of “*mala actitud*” is broad and can include refusal to do tasks, arriving late, or missing mass, among other actions. Multiple infractions will result in being denied entry or access to services. At the entrance door there is a wall filled with pictures of people removed from the shelter. Under their picture are captions explaining the reason why people were removed. Labels such as “drunk,” “aggressive,” and the

commonly used “*mala actitud*” serve as a reminder to both the person waiting at the gate to be let in as well as for the volunteer that there are rules and real-life material consequences for not performing a “good attitude”.

Although these processes seem to apply equally to everyone who arrive at the shelter, reflecting the Humanity principle, many of the divergent experiences results from a migrant’s relationship with the worker and/or volunteer. For instance, the rules guiding the distribution of clothes limits access to donations to once a day and when someone receives clothes, they have to wait three days before gaining access to the closet again. These guidelines are firm according to the shelter but become flexible when enforced by volunteers. Depending on the volunteer, their motivations for being there, and their ability to empathize with the migrant, the malleability of the rules can translate into a material benefit for migrants, for example many volunteers gave extra clothes to people they have had interactions with because in building a relationship with them they understood that the migrants’ labor-intensive job requires him to change clothes frequently.

Shades of Volunteers

During entry interviews for recently arrived African asylum seekers there was a clear distinction between the interactions of volunteers and interviewees. For example, there was the approaches among *Alberto*, a seasoned volunteer from Southern Mexico, and *Alejandra*, an experienced volunteer and former Mexican police cadet, and the relationships fostered with the African asylum seekers they spoke to. In a moment between interviews, *Alberto* remarked that it was difficult to pronounce their names and suggested we call them “*ladrones*” (being recent arrivals, there was no reason for him to suggest this label) and he repeated it as the next asylum

seeker walked in. Given my proximity serving as translator between volunteer and asylum seeker I witnessed the reaction of the interviewee that set the tone for the rest of the interview. Particularly given that the asylum seeker had a beginner's knowledge of Spanish and clearly understood what *Alberto* had called him.

Contrasting interactions with those of *Alejandra* are revealing. She approached the interviews in an organized manner meaning that there was a rhythm and pattern to them. Although she moved quicker in the intake of information and completed more interviews than *Alberto*, she interacts with the asylum seekers with empathic and respectful tones and always made eye contact with them, small details that *Alberto* did not do.

For *Alberto*, whom had spent years working at various shelters throughout Mexico until eventually arriving in Tijuana, the journey of being a volunteer started when his fiancé had an affair and became pregnant. He stated that this inspired him to leave his hometown and an opportunity arose as a volunteer at a shelter in Southern Mexico. From there he moved from shelter to shelter as a volunteer until eventually arriving at Tijuana, where he had been for almost a year when I arrived at *Lona*. In describing the day his former fiancé confessed as if it were yesterday it was clear that the moment still played a part in his refusal to return home. He finished our conversation by saying that it all worked out because now “*estoy aqui ayudando las personas*” (personal conversation, 2019).

The motivating factors and framing of a negative moment for *Alberto* has turned into what can be described by Gomez et al., as a symmetry between a Good Samaritan (typology of altruistic motivation) and Martyr (typology of self-centered motivations). His faith-based moral virtue aligns with the former and his guilt-based penance aligns with the latter. Based on my observations and conversations it can be said that he leans more towards the Martyr category,

centering himself and framing the good around that experience. Recognizing these motivations helps explain his interactions with the African asylum seeker as empathy was not a significant aspect of his motivation leading to him commonly interacting with migrants in a contemptuous way.

For *Alejandra*, an indigenous woman from Southern Mexico, her volunteer journey began after she moved to college in Monterrey. Once graduated, she volunteered throughout shelters in Mexico to get personal experience with the populations she hoped to work for as she then had plans to go to law school. Through her journey of volunteering at various shelters leading to her arrival at Tijuana, she had completed training at a police academy and worked at what was described to me from various experienced volunteers as the most dangerous shelter in Mexico, that of Nuevo Laredo. Explaining to me that during that time, seeing the extreme fear on migrants faces as they prepared to cross the border had a profound impact on her desire to continue this work. She was well aware that the fear migrants felt came at the knowledge of knowing that the most dangerous and difficult obstacle facing them on their way to the U.S. was the area controlled by the Zetas, that is, all of Nuevo Laredo. The area was so dangerous that volunteers at the shelter lived at another location in the center of town, miles from the shelter, a rule that differentiates that shelter with the others.

This salient experience for *Alejandra* solidified her empathic approach to the migrants arriving at the shelters. While working at the *Lona* shelter, she was interested in getting involved in the law office, which is how she got assigned to conduct entry interviews for the shelter, because she was motivated to explain migrants' rights to them (personal observation and conversation, 2019). The social justice and secular moral virtue motivations inspiring *Alejandra* can be categorized as an overlap between Do Gooder and Activist. The ability to recognize and

link her motivations to a typology of altruistic humanitarianism helps explain how the relationships she created among migrants and asylum seekers were built from an empathic approach that create a reciprocal relationship in which migrants were comfortable in coming to her to express themselves. A stark contrast from the migrants' unwillingness to approach Alberto because of the reputations he had acquired in which he was described as the "manager" of the shelter because he always gave work.

Health and Aid:

When approaching the subject of health, I chose to look in depth at the common factors presented by the World Health Organization of causing ill health such as "the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age," (WHO, 2019) and look at definitions and concepts that incorporate the institutional impact on well-being. I analyzed works that included an emphasis on the social determinants of health and how poverty is correlated with negative health factors (Ferraiolo et al. 2016; Vogt, 2018; Castañeda, 2019; Tavira et al. 2019; Rafful, 2019) and found the concept of anti-humanist medicine (Dubal, 2018) to be of particular use.

The concept approaches health with a perspective towards recognizing that the social diseases that manifest themselves in individuals are reflective of the institutional nature of health inequalities, which express themselves in the body or as Louis Althusser called people being "carriers of structures" (ibid). By applying this concept to the *Lona* shelter in Tijuana, the impact of inequality becomes nuanced by incorporating otherwise overlooked health consequences such as negative mental and emotional effects caused by structural barriers and restrictions to economic and housing access. Furthermore, this concept helps challenge the humanitarian

approach that many NGO's operate under and allows for the recognition of processes like gentrification as symptoms of structural disadvantages in health.

Within an anti-humanist medicine perspective, the health context of Tijuana is made the more dynamic considering the interplay of national policies, local ordinances, and state enforcement in displacing unwanted populations through the process of gentrification. Tijuana has historically been recognized as a city of immigrants, “point zero” (Udiarte et al. 2016) of a mix of cultures, vices, and entertainment. This reputation has continued hitherto and as a result, local ordinances and policies such as *Tijuana Mejora* in 2014-2015, were created to reclaim the canal of Tijuana River by removing houseless people and PWID in the name of “revitalization” (Ferraiolo et al. 2016; Ochoa et al. 2019).

As the value of land rises, so too does the need to remove unwanted populations. In this case, the rescue industry plays an integral role. The forced rehabilitation of PWID (Rafful, 2019), violent removal of sex workers (Ferraiolo et al. 2016), and the arbitrary detaining of immigrants (personal observation, 2019) that leads to their removal and deportation (París Pombo, 2017) are done under the name of “progress,” “revitalization,” and “creating jobs.”

In a neoliberal context, it becomes acceptable to dispose of vulnerable populations for the good of the economy as displacement is veiled under a “progressive” guise. Although this approach is not new to border towns, in 1998 Ciudad Juarez passed *Plan Parcial de la Zona Centro*, the first institutional attempt at recuperating the historic zone through revitalizing the economy and updating the urban landscape (Ochoa et al. 2019), the size and rate of current policies that directly target vulnerable populations differentiates itself from other moments. For example, Ciudad Juarez built off of the 1998 plan to expand the approach to include areas where sex workers occupied in 2004, and in 2006 the *Plan de Regeneración Urbana del Centro*

Histórico was officially presented as the next phase of “revitalization” that attempts to remove all the unwanted from the region (ibid). Immigrants, and their structurally created vulnerability, are further marginalized and disposed of through restricted access to housing, again, stressing the importance of access to aid such as shelters.

Many of the approaches to humanitarian medicine center Western concepts and have resulted in the concentration of decision-making power over what is good to be held in a few hands (Farmer, 2001). Humanitarian medicine, which relies on the politics of compassion and claiming to be neutral and impartial (Dubal, 2018), sees vulnerable populations as “victims” that need to be rescued (Ferraiolo et al. 2016). Going beyond focusing only on biological factors and determinants, we can approach the issue of health in a holistic way while maintaining a critical view on how reproduction of social structures make people sick. Furthermore, we can move away from the moral approaches to health and “rescue,” which excludes and marginalizes populations through prejudice and discrimination (ibid), while reproducing the racial and ethnic hierarchies it attempts to remove.

To highlight the impact the rescue industry and social agents have on immigrant health, I turned to the work of Luis Eduardo Perez Murcia, who analyzed the concept of Home as being neither static nor fixed, and how for displaced people, the concept of home becomes an existential crisis (Perez Murcia, 2019). Although his study focused on internally displaced people in Colombia, many of the social context and experiences that led to his conclusions can be applicable to the Central American migrant case in Tijuana. For instance, the Colombians of the study had been living and navigating through a violent society that caused people to flee and find refuge outside “home,” while many were not legally recognized as being displaced (ibid).

The liminality that many dealt with in Colombia, is reflected in the liminal status many Central American migrants in Tijuana are experiencing (París Pombo, 2017). Furthermore, focusing on the deployed strategies used by shelters that function outside of an anti-humanism approach, further highlights the structural and legal violence (Farmer, 2001; Menjívar & Ábrego, 2012) that many immigrants have to navigate through to survive, highlighting the negative context of reception.

The feeling of “homelessness” (Perez Murcia, 2019) experienced by displaced people can mean both a material longing and/or a metaphorical expression of disenfranchisement from the living (ibid). The feeling of isolation and exclusion is made the more nuanced when these depressive emotions are perceived in the context of reception (Schwartz et al. 2014). With discriminatory rhetoric flowing from the media and anti-immigrant groups that support suppressive policies in a national and local context, many Central American immigrants reflect the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) V’s description of symptoms of depression. Symptoms include guilt, feeling tense, isolation, and anxiety, so it is not a far-reach to expect that many immigrants that are journeying through the violent terrain of Mexico, suffer from one or all of the clinically recognized symptoms of depression (Tolentino and Schmidt, 2018). The abstract emotion of “homelessness” contributes to the criminalization of migrants as the displacement is internalized and regardless of where a migrant is physically, he or she may always feel as an Other and outsider regardless of geographical location.

Uncertainty plays a major factor in the health of immigrants (Menjívar and Ábrego, 2012; Vogt, 2018; Castañeda, 2019). Life in a shelter in Tijuana can translate into waiting. Immigrants wait for asylum (Arce et al. 2019) and many will work to wait (Udiarte et al. 2016). In Bridget M. Haas study, she synthesizes concepts of waiting to show that the structural vulnerabilities of

liminality impact the way immigrants experience waiting and how that experience varies based on the person's position within structures of power (Haas, 2017). In such a precarious position where worrying about the present outweighs the hope for the future it is of no surprise that many immigrants' structurally disadvantaged position reflects in their health.

Given the trauma, violence, and negative contexts of reception, it would not be a far reach to say that many immigrants are suffering from depression and other emotional and psychological ailments. In the Mexican national legal context, access to healthcare is offered to everyone in Mexico regardless of legal status (Alba, et al. 2012). The on the ground reality, however, is drastically different, particularly in a shelter.

Conclusion:

Given Tijuana's appealing location of neighboring California, and the continual arrival of Central American migrants to the border town, it remains a rich site to analyze the role of the rescue industry in reproducing racial and gendered hierarchies. This is further emphasized by our current era of U.S.-Mexican border relations in which Trump's border policies forces Central American migrants to stay in Tijuana as the process of seeking asylum is now done on Mexican soil as opposed the historical (and constitutional mandated) standard of allowing people to claim asylum on U.S. ground. In this study I attempted to offer an alternative perspective to aid and challenge notions of humanitarian principles that motivate social agents into action. My goal is to move beyond a dichotomy of "good" and "bad" when discussing aid for vulnerable populations and to challenge social agents to remain critical of their own motivations and approaches.

A salient and impactful aspect of reproducing social categories is, as we have seen with examples with Good Samaritans, Humanitarian Tourists, Activists, and Missionaries, regardless of motivation, that social agents performing good within a humanitarian framework does little to confront and challenge structural inequalities. Whether by arguing that a shelter is good because it has good people in it, speaking on the phone, or policing for *polleros* and people with a *mala actitud*, aid in this context will not alleviate the underlying processes that creates the need for social agents to get involved. Ultimately that is the general goal for people getting involved in humanitarian issues, erasing inequality and bettering the lives of vulnerable people thereby facilitating the elimination of the need for social agents and the rescue industry.

Focusing on social agents and shelters in border towns offers a unique and dynamic site to challenge preconceived notions of good. Furthermore, the shelter reflects a total institution (Goffman, 1961) because the site serves as a living space where people share similar social situations and access to resources that distances them from the wider society, and serves as an example of a “formally administered round of life” that encompasses daily activities such as recreation, eating, working, and resting (Goodman, 2017).

My experience living and working at the *Lona* shelter allowed me to conceptualize ideas and processes that go beyond striving to satisfy only immediate needs. By analyzing the context of reception and perceived COR of migrants and social agents in Tijuana, as well as refocusing the academic gaze to center the social reproduction caused by humanitarian principles, I attempt to complicate on-the-ground deployed strategies.

Studying the rescue industry, particularly in border towns, will be a necessary undertaking as the (coerced) movement of people will continue to come up against national borders. The importance of analyzing social agents will only increase because neoliberal

economic policies are continuing to be implemented in the Global South causing a forced migration. Furthermore, the issue of providing humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations will be tested as large migrations will continue to happen due to the increase of natural disaster such droughts, rising tides, and the extraction of natural resources as a result of Climate Disruption.

In today's COVID-19 social context, the *Lona* shelter has been forced to limit its intake of people (Srikrishnan, 2020) as is the case with other shelters around the world. National borders have been essentially shut down. Under the guise of "public safety" and combating the virus, we already can see a conscious effort from public and private actors at their attempt to exclude migrants from seeking resources by reproducing tired stereotypes and social categories using biological racism (Rivera, 2020). This social moment further nuances questions about detention and deservedness as men, women, and children are left in detentions centers with no preventative measures to protect from COVID-19.

Although I am critical of many approaches and structures to the rescue industry and social agents, I acknowledge that the majority of volunteers participate in these spaces with nothing but good intentions in their hearts. I do not believe that volunteers are waking up every day eager to reproduce social categories harmful to migrants or are satisfied simply by providing donated clothes to those in need (although there are social agents that fit these categories). I hope to provide an example of how limiting one's own understanding and definitions of good and aid reinforces the processes and hierarchies many social agents get involved to eliminate.

Furthermore, I would remiss if I did not acknowledge that even though migrants are structurally vulnerable and face daunting challenges to survive, my experience living and working at a migrant shelter in Tijuana allowed me to witness a different aspect of migrant life that is not commonly portrayed in the media or academia. Everyday immigrants displayed the

joy, happiness, and agency that also shape their lives. We celebrated birthdays together, people helped each other connect to the Wi-Fi to be able to use Facetime, and the community building at the shelter was reflected in the fact that many at the shelter willingly looked after the children arriving in Tijuana. People spoke about their aspirations and hopes, all the while navigating the structural disadvantages that restricts their access to various forms of mobility.

Finally, with the changing and uncertain times we currently occupy and with the challenges still ahead in the fight for equity, I hope this study and its use of SRT can help sharpen resistance strategies. SRT as a method teaches us that the moments where capitalism forges social relations are also an opportunity to rupture these social relations (Bhattacharya, 2017). Therefore, the deployed strategies used on the ground to resist gentrification, access to healthcare, and challenge legal status are filled with potential and opportunities to shape and sow seeds of dissent and anti-systemic struggles. SRT allows for the fusion of scholarship and street organizing which will be a useful tool in organizing.

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