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Captive States: Migration and Expulsion on the Carceral Frontier

by  
Carlos Martinez

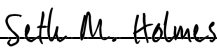
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in  
Medical Anthropology

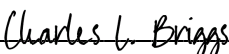
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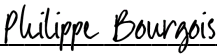
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Approved:

DocuSigned by:  
  
9BEE7146BEDD424... Seth M. Holmes  
Chair

DocuSigned by:  
  
47B... Kelly Knight

DocuSigned by:  
  
4A469... Charles L. Briggs

DocuSigned by:  
  
2FF5BE29CFAA460... Philippe Bourgois

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Committee Members

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by

Carlos Martinez

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my father, Jose Antonio Martinez, who, despite leaving us too soon, showed me the pride and joys of living a life of service and compassion.

## Acknowledgments

This dissertation could not have been completed without the support of a wide community of scholars, personal companions, co-conspirators, colleagues, and institutions. My dissertation committee has provided me with tremendous inspiration, intellectual engagement, generous feedback, and various forms of support along my PhD journey. I have been incredibly fortunate to have Seth M. Holmes as a dissertation chair and advisor, who has consistently gone above and beyond in his capacity as a mentor and colleague. In addition to always being a source of enthusiastic support, Seth provided me with several opportunities to co-publish articles with him throughout my PhD that helped sharpen my thinking and writing. In my last year as a PhD candidate, he continued to draw on his personal networks to provide me with opportunities for publishing my dissertation work, which allowed me to simultaneously develop my project and make my work publicly available. Kelly Ray Knight, Charles L. Briggs, and Philippe Bourgois provided me with incisive feedback and constant inspiration throughout my dissertation research and writing process. I see my project as building on the critical medical anthropology work that my committee members have pursued, and I am indebted to their rigorous thinking and politically engaged ethnographic commitments. Though he was not a member of my committee, I also want to acknowledge James Quesada, who has been a mentor and friend for many years and is the professor who inspired me to pursue studies in medical anthropology.

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Ronica's humor and passion for dessert kept my spirit afloat through some of the most challenging moments of my fieldwork. My time in Tijuana was also enriched by the friendships I developed with other people at RHA, including Mikaela Mizuno, Alex Reep, Hussein Elamin, Ximena Rojas, Psyche Calderon, among several others.

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Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger.

– Gloria Anzaldúa

*Borderlands/La Frontera*

The frontier is no neighborhood storm. It gathers force from afar, entangling multiple local-to-global scales.

– Anna L. Tsing

*Natural Resources and Capitalist Frontiers*

Now is the time for a medical border abolition that treats both the causes and symptoms of a widespread global sickness.

– Sam Dubal, Shamsheer Samra, and Hannah Janeway

*Infrastructural Violence and the Health of Border Abolition*

# **Captive States: Migration and Expulsion on the Carceral Frontier**

Carlos Martinez

## **Abstract**

*Captive States: Migration and Expulsion on the Carceral Frontier* examines how the amalgamation of U.S. immigration policies, the global drug war, and violent bureaucracies have transformed the U.S.-Mexico borderland region into a *zone of captivity* for Central American migrants and Mexican deportees. Based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, this project examines the everyday lives and survival strategies of these communities in Tijuana, Mexico. Moving between migrant and homeless encampments, governmental and private shelters, drug rehabilitation centers, and activist clinics, my dissertation analyzes the lives of those subjected to intersecting forms of confinement and dispossession at the U.S.-Mexico border.

For several years, Tijuana has consistently received the highest portion of deported Mexicans from the United States in the country. Simultaneously, the U.S. government has implemented several policies aimed at stalling the influx of asylum seekers into the country. From the “metering” system initiated under the Obama administration to the Migrant Protection Protocols and Title 42 policies implemented by the Trump administration, these measures have erected an arcane bureaucratic wall against asylum seekers. Though deportees and asylum seekers arrive to the border region through different routes, my project demonstrates how a transnational assemblage that I refer to as the *carceral frontier* seeks to confine the movements of both communities while exploiting their vulnerabilities.

## Table of Contents

<b><i>Introduction: Captive States</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
The Carceral Continuum .....	1
Asylum Confined .....	11
Captive States .....	18
Dissertation Methods and Structure .....	23
<b><i>Chapter One: Homeboys without a Homeland</i></b> .....	<b>26</b>
No Home, No Homeland (And Nowhere to Go) .....	26
Racial Expulsion .....	36
De facto Denationalization .....	47
Carceral Care .....	54
<b><i>Chapter Two: Unruly Waters, Unsanitary Bodies</i></b> .....	<b>69</b>
Infrastructures of Dispossession .....	75
Abject Terrains .....	83
Conclusion .....	91
<b><i>Chapter Three: Dead Time</i></b> .....	<b>94</b>
Slow Borders .....	94
Predatory Bureaucracies .....	103
Necrotemporality .....	108
Conclusion .....	117
<b><i>Chapter Four: Prophylactic Violence</i></b> .....	<b>119</b>
Pandemic Enclosure .....	119
The Unexceptional Exception .....	121
Political and Pandemic Pressures .....	123
Strategic Imperception .....	129
Prophylactic Violence .....	132
Biocommunicable Borders .....	142
<b><i>Conclusion: Beyond the Carceral Frontier</i></b> .....	<b>149</b>
<b><i>References</i></b> .....	<b>159</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Dr. Patty filling out a prescription for a patient in her car	4
Figure 1.2: Luis, “ <i>el psicólogo</i> ,” speaking with migrants at El Chaparral encampment	14
Figure 2.1: Patient receiving wound care at the Refugee Health Alliance clinic	30
Figure 3.1: Makeshift homes inside the Tijuana River Canal	70
Figure 3.2: Border Wound Clinic volunteer providing care to homeless man during a street clinic near La 20	76
Figure 4.1: Wait list manager calling out numbers at El Chaparral point of entry	95
Figure 4.2: El Comedor providing food for patients at the RHA clinic	118
Figure 5.1: El Chaparral migrant encampment in March 2021	124
Figure 5.2: RHA weekend clinic at El Chaparral migrant encampment	125
Figure 5.3: Pro Amore Dei migrant shelter	146
Figure 6.1: Dr. Patty providing wound care to Enrique	151
Figure 6.2: El Chaparral migrant encampment surrounded by chain-linked fence and police units in November 2021	153

## Introduction: Captive States

### The Carceral Continuum

Dr. Patty maneuvered instinctively through Tijuana traffic in the Border Wound Clinic van, barreling towards the southeast part of the city down the Via Rápida expressway while talking the entire time about her two patients who had just tested positive for tuberculosis (TB). We were on our way to find them somewhere around the *20 de noviembre* municipal jail (*La 20*) so she could provide them with their test results. She explained how challenging it is to get outpatient TB treatment for homeless people in Tijuana, recounting a recent incident where she was bounced between Tijuana General Hospital and several governmental offices to try to get care for one man to no avail. Though her patient was Mexican, he had been deported from the United States, so he lacked governmental identification, which should have allowed him to access free public health care. The fact that he was homeless, she argued, didn't help matters either, suggesting that he was discriminated against by the hospital personnel. It was evidently an exhausting and incredibly time-consuming process that she doesn't want to go through again. She considered notifying Tijuana public health officials about the TB cases she encountered among her patients, who live in and around the Tijuana River canal. But she worried that if city officials learn that there are several active TB cases among the homeless community, this might justify a new round of police crackdowns and efforts to cleanse the canal of their presence.

The border receded far out of view by the time we exited the expressway near the jail. Patty wasn't sure where her patients would be, but when she had last seen them a few days prior, she told them to expect her to arrive sometime in the early afternoon. As we meandered through the thin, bumpy streets surrounding the canal searching for them, I asked Patty why some of her homeless patients would decide to live near the jail if they were trying to avoid the police. She explained that a community had formed there because they needed to get high as quickly as possible to recover from their *malilla* [withdrawal symptoms] after being thrown into the nearby jail, usually for 36 hours, and they knew they could score drugs inside the canal. Many of them decided to just stay there, instead of heading back to the Zona Norte neighborhood next to the border where most homeless deportees live.

*“Tijuana es como una gran carcelota,”* (Tijuana is like a giant prison) Patty exclaimed, throwing her left hand off of the steering wheel and gesturing towards the surrounding homes and businesses with many of their doors and windows fortified behind wrought iron bars and concertina wire. That's why she prefers to hold her clinic outdoors in the street, she

explained. Many of her patients already spend so much time in jail and she wants the clinic to feel liberating for them. We finally pulled over into the parking lot of an OXXO mini market where many of the local homeless people go to fill up on water at an outdoor faucet. One of her patients, Enrique, was there waiting. Though Enrique was fairly young, he had clearly been living in the street for some time. His tattered clothes drooped off his emaciated body, revealing much of his blemished skin underneath. He was happy to see Patty, however, showing off his few remaining teeth when he grinned at her arrival.

Patty shared his results, but to her surprise, he told her that he already knew he had TB. Apparently, he had been interned at Las Nubes, a local shelter for poor people living with HIV, which also has a long-term residential TB unit. But he left before finishing his treatment, placing him at even greater peril as his TB could become resistant to further antibiotic medication. She was annoyed that he hadn't told her he was aware he had TB beforehand and lectured him that he needed to get treatment. She phoned her friend, Ramon, who is affiliated with Las Nubes and arranged for him to pick up Enrique the following day to continue his treatment. Patty later related to me that though she appreciates Las Nubes' work, given that they have the only free long-term TB treatment facility in Tijuana, they don't offer opioid substitution therapies. Most of her homeless and deported patients have a heroin addiction, so they often leave Las Nubes to get their fix before their treatment is complete. Nonetheless, she felt like this is the only option left for Enrique, before his TB gets worse.

While Patty was consulting with Enrique, several more of her patients ambled slowly towards the van. Patty asked me to provide them with syringes and they automatically began forming a line. The OXXO parking lot suddenly felt like it had really become a clinic. Within minutes, I hastily supplied at least ten people with packets of syringes. Patty knew most of her patients' names, greeting all of them as they approached and thanked us for the syringes. A man was sitting on the floor next to the OXXO doorway, rocking back and forth in pain while holding firmly onto his ankles. He groaned towards Patty but was largely unintelligible. Patty somehow deciphered that he was asking for pain medication, which she quickly went looking for in the overflowing shelves of a large plastic storage chest in the van and supplied to him. Another man with disheveled grey hair and a beard, Fernando, approached us while Patty was still consulting with Enrique. Fernando revealed large purulent abscesses on his right arm, with hardened bright white puss streaming down it. He was visibly in pain and distressed about the sight of his own arm, clenching his teeth while holding up his arm with his opposite hand so Patty could get a close look. Patty told Fernando that to drain his abscesses of the puss we would need to drive him somewhere else. The OXXO parking lot had

already filled up with Patty's patients and she worried that we might draw excessive attention and possibly a police response.

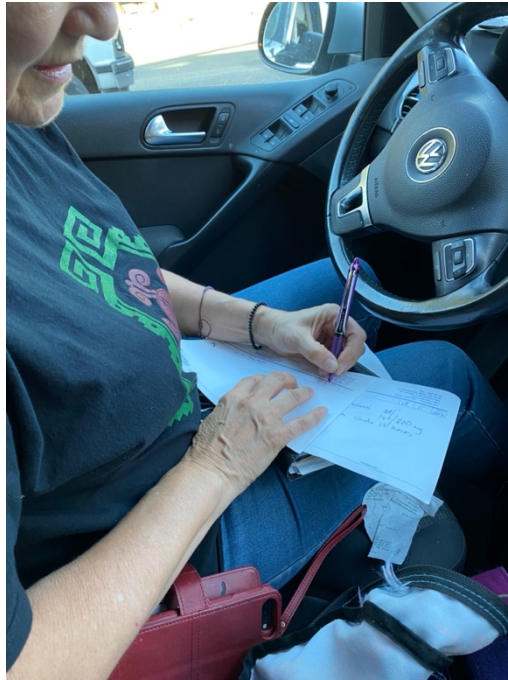
She quickly wrapped his arm with baby blue medical bed pads so that we could take him in the van to another location. We drove around a bit before deciding on a spot that seemed relatively quiet in the surrounding residential area. We were now on a hill and the border came back into view. The green marshes and shrubbery visible on the U.S. side appeared like another world from the hard urban tumult surrounding us. When we arrived, Patty rapidly shifted into street clinic mode again. I helped her pull out a folding table and two chairs from the back of the van where she could drain Fernando's arm. I tried my best to act as an ad hoc medical assistant. She tied a garbage bag onto the van's sliding door handle where she could throw away the medical waste. The street formed somewhat of a wind tunnel, making it a difficult place for Patty to work without everything flying around. She proceeded to place an aspiration needle into Fernando's abscesses and drained the puss from them, little by little. Fernando, who had been talking profusely perhaps to quell his nerves, began to wince and writhe in tremendous pain.

He told us he had lived in Los Angeles, California for several years before being deported for drug possession. Fernando seemed to long for his life there, explaining that he had steady work and housing. How odd it must be, I thought to myself, to miss a place so much that you have been barred from but that remains within eyesight view, just over a double-layered fence that now looked diminutive in comparison to the city's uneven landscape. He told Patty that he had just been picked up by the police a few days prior. When he encountered a doctor at the jail, Fernando asked if he could help him with getting medical care for his abscesses. The doctor told Fernando that he needed to provide a form from the government indicating that he had a drug addiction if they were going to provide him with medical care. I asked what kind of form. He shouted back, "That's what I asked!" He said that he was never told by the doctor how or where he would obtain such a thing.

Patty pulled an incredible amount of puss out of his arm, which even surprised her. "Wow!" she exclaimed. Every time she used the needle, she filled it with the maximum amount of puss it could hold. The wind forced one of the bandages she had placed on his arm to fly in my direction and I unconsciously jumped back to avoid it. Patty noticed my reaction and reassured me that the bandage had no blood on it. I felt embarrassed by how uncomfortable I clearly was by the idea of having a blood-filled bandage fly onto me. I made for a lousy medical assistant, I thought to myself. I was amazed at the way Patty was able to move headlong into action as a street medic, operating with such stoic precision in her windy clinic. Fernando was immediately relieved once all the puss had been

removed, nearly falling asleep in his chair following the deep relaxation that overcame him.

After dropping Fernando back off at the OXXO, Patty continued to think through what could be done about her patients with TB. She was sure that there were many more TB cases in the community that lived near La 20 that weren't being identified. She called Ramon while zipping through Tijuana's frenetic traffic to talk about possible ways Las Nubes could respond. Should they tell their contacts with the public health department so they can conduct more tests? But could their contacts be trusted? Or should they just try to slowly collect urine samples from more patients themselves and send those to a lab to be tested? Maybe they should issue some sort of public statement about it, like a news article or press release, she wondered aloud. She asked me what I thought they should do. But I've only been living in Tijuana full-time for a few weeks and have no real sense of the political dynamics at play. The only thing that is apparent to me is that Patty, as well as her patients, have good reason to be distrustful of public institutions in Tijuana, even those responsible for the public's health. The threat of violence against homeless deportees seems to be omnipresent and it's unclear to me if there is any way out. – Fieldnote, September 19, 2019



**Fig. 1.1** Dr. Patty filling out a prescription for a patient in her car (Carlos Martinez)



Scenes of spectacular brutality at the hands of U.S. immigration officials have proliferated in news media in recent years, particularly under the administration of former President Donald J. Trump. Along with Trump's infamous calls for the construction of a new border wall, his administration's so-called Zero Tolerance policies, which separated thousands of children from their parents, demonstrated a renewed viciousness in the effort to stall migration into the country (Goetze, 2022; Ward, 2021). The images of Central American children held in detention centers huddled in silver mylar "space blankets" inside chain-linked holding cages were particularly horrifying for many and resulted in widespread condemnation (Jiang & Lindsay, 2020). While Trump's Zero Tolerance policies were rightfully rebuked for their cruelty in mainstream news outlets, the daily workings of a broader border security and migrant policing apparatus continued to fall largely out of public view. Beyond the captivity of Central American minors, for example, the Trump administration starkly increased the detention of migrants awaiting their immigration hearing as well as asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their cases, rather than relying on the use of ankle monitors or other mechanisms of enforcement (Watson, 2021). And while rates of deportation decreased relative to the historic highs seen in the early years of Barack Obama's presidency, the Trump administration continued deporting between 200,000 to 300,000 people every year (Kight & Treene, 2019). A significant proportion of these deportations were for drug-related offenses, as in Fernando's case. In 2018 alone, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained 76,585 non-citizens for drug offenses (Tosh, 2021).

I first traveled to Tijuana in 2018 with an interest in researching the aftereffects of what Nathalie Peutz and Nicholas De Genova have referred to as the "deportation regime" (2010). As Tanya Golash-Boza and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) document, deportations from the

United States increased drastically around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century relative to earlier decades. Between 1997 and 2012 alone, the U.S. carried out 4.2 million deportations—over twice the sum total of every documented deportation prior to 1997 (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013). As Peutz and De Genova explain, though this “incipient planetary regime” has emerged as a dominant means by which countries seek to regulate the freedom of movement, the “exceedingly normalized and standardized” nature of this routinized technique of state power has often made it appear unworthy of attention from media outlets and scholars (2010, p. 2-6).

Tijuana, which has become something of a hemispheric capital for deportees, seemed like an ideal location to research the material impacts of the U.S. deportation regime. Mexicans, who constitute the nationality with the greatest number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., accounted for well over half (ranging from 59 to 65 percent) of the individuals deported between 2015 to 2018 (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2019). Among those deported, most are repatriated to Tijuana (Albicker & Velasco, 2016). In total, it’s estimated that between 10 and 15 percent of all deportees from the U.S. are sent to Tijuana (Tolan, 2018). The city’s humanitarian infrastructure of charitable organizations and migrant shelters, more developed than in any other Mexican border city, has been stretched to its limits under this pressure. As a result, many deported Mexicans experience homelessness at some point during their time in Tijuana (Velasco & Coubès, 2013).

Before arriving in Tijuana, I learned about a doctor who conducted street clinics to provide free medical care and harm reduction services, such as the distribution of syringes and naloxone for overdose prevention, to this homeless deportee community. As a medical anthropologist, I was intrigued by the possibility of bearing witness to the embodied impacts of this international project of mass removal and abandonment that inadvertently granted Tijuana

with the dubious honor of becoming the "deportee capital" of Latin America (Nieves, 2017). When I met Dr. Patty for the first time, I wasn't sure what to expect. She invited me to meet her at the Border Wound Clinic's headquarters in downtown Tijuana, which feels more like an activist space than a doctor's office. Posters of the Zapatistas and other indigenous movements are scattered over the headquarters' colorful walls. A banner of Nelson Mandela hangs across one side of the main room. In the corner, a bookshelf is filled with books about the Zapatista movement, medical textbooks, and DIY medicine manuals.

I emphasized to Patty that I was eager to support her clinic in any way that I could. She asked me to write her a letter detailing what my intentions were in volunteering with the clinic. Several months after working closely with Patty, she admitted to me that at first, she was wary about inviting a researcher into her organization—not because the world of research was distant or unfamiliar for her, but because she felt oversaturated by it. For her day job, she was part of a team of public health researchers that had been investigating drug use patterns and experiences among Tijuana's homeless community for several years. During this time, she developed close relationships with many homeless deportees, many of whom would succumb to tragic and premature deaths due to overdose, a lack of medical care, and the inherent precarity of street life in Tijuana. This proximity to so much death was, as she's often said, traumatizing for her. The Border Wound Clinic was her response to this trauma. It served as a vehicle to provide unadulterated free care to those she developed relationships with outside of the confines of a research study. The last thing she wanted was to spoil these relationships by bringing in another "*extrativista*" (extracivist), as she semi-jokingly likes to refer to researchers who have built their careers by extracting data from the community she has come to care for while practically doing very little to improve their conditions.

Patty, of course, is not alone in her concerns about such extractive forms of non-reciprocal research. Anthropology, in particular, as has been pointed out by several scholars, has a long history of extracting information, community knowledge, and artifacts from researched communities while providing little in return (Gaudry, 2011; Lewis, 1973; Price, 1989). Writing in 1973, Diane Lewis described the “attitude of most anthropologists that they have the right to exploit the people they study for their own professional advancement, without having a corresponding sense of commitment to them or their needs” (p. 584). Of course, since that time, the discipline has seen the emergence of a wide arena of activist and advocacy anthropologies aimed at the “deliberate coupling of politics with academic inquiry” (Loperena, 2016, p. 355). Sensing Patty’s guardedness on our first meeting, I assured her in my letter that my “research interests emerge out of my personal and political commitment to advocate for those who have been deported from the United States.”

I did in fact want to work in Tijuana out of a desire to critically demonstrate the real-life stakes of the normalized deportation regime. At the same time, I was concerned about the possibility of simply reproducing simplistic and sensationalized images of “suffering subjects” (Robbins, 2013), while contributing little towards ameliorating their conditions. Working with an organization like Patty’s seemed to offer me a way to develop intimate relationships with deportees, while also engaging in some form of material solidarity with them. However, engaging in research while embedded in Patty’s organization among others was not quite as straightforward a path as I had originally imagined.

For months, I made a concerted effort to downplay my identity as a researcher and demonstrate my commitment to logistically supporting grassroots efforts like the Border Wound Clinic. I kept myself busy helping to plan upcoming street clinics and applying the skills I had

developed in my predoctoral career in non-profits to support with organizational development. I conducted few interviews and instead simply wrote fieldnotes for several months. I often felt unsure of what counted as research and what was organizational work. When I first arrived in Tijuana, I could not have anticipated that I would soon be dodging bandages on blustery streets from the puss-filled arms of deportees. Nor that many of my days would be spent simply putting together hygiene kits for distribution and organizing a filing cabinet full of patient intake forms at another clinic I began working with. My research and the daily chores I took on with the organizations I worked with eventually became inseparable.

In retrospect, I realize this was inevitable. Working with deportees and migrants in Tijuana, I learned, was an “all hands on deck” situation. The urgency of the conditions confronting these communities meant that simply observing and documenting was not an option here. Despite my concerns about producing another volume of what Joel Robbins has critically referred to as “suffering slot anthropology,” (2013) the suffering among my interlocutors was in fact pervasive. The social and political landscape in Tijuana, particularly during the period of my doctoral fieldwork, was constantly shifting, endlessly provoking new uncertainties and challenges for those who sought to provide various forms of care for marginalized communities.

While I was originally called towards Tijuana because of an interest in the impacts of the United States’ juridical system of expulsion, my analysis was quickly forced to pivot towards a wider array of localized violent forces engulfing my interlocutors in the borderland region. I came to see, as Anna L. Tsing, has perceptively noted, that the borderland, or “the frontier,” as she refers to it, “gathers force from afar, entangling multiple local-to-global scales” (2003). The structural violence experienced by many of my interlocutors, I discovered, was intensified by the direct physical violence they experienced at the hands of Tijuana’s carceral regime. I realized

that the deportation regime is just one segment of a transnational “carceral continuum” (Foucault, 1975) of violence impacting deportees. Several scholars of deportation have recently articulated similar insights, seeking to “understand the spatial and temporal continuum of expulsion, where detention, deportation, post-deportation, and the resuming of transit take place as a result of permanent spatial struggles embodied by deportees” (Álvarez Velasco, 2021, p. 5). Such work is providing a new dimension to the notion of a “violence continuum” spanning structural, symbolic, everyday, and intimate violence, as theorized by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2003).

What soon became evident to me is that deportees were not merely abandoned, as I had originally conceived of their condition. They were also being held captive. For them, Tijuana is a “*gran carcelota*,” (a giant prison) as Patty put it. The brutal policing of deportees emerged as a persistent backdrop to most interactions I had with them. At times, it was the first thing they would talk about. In other instances, I would have to probe a bit for them to discuss their experiences with Tijuana police, only to learn that the carceral violence they experienced was such a normalized and quotidian part of their existence that they simply didn’t think to mention it. And yet, in other moments, the way I conducted interviews was directly determined by this reality. On a few occasions, for example, I conducted interviews with interlocutors in my car because it felt like a safer place for us to talk than out in the street where the police could appear at any moment. As described in my opening fieldnote, the policing of deportees also directly impacted how the Border Wound clinic operated. For example, Patty typically preferred to hold the clinic on smaller streets away from the city’s main avenues, to avoid potential police scrutiny. As new strategies of migration enforcement were rolled out under the Trump

administration, just as I began my fieldwork in Tijuana, the condition of captivity in the borderlands quickly widened to include others beyond deportees, albeit in a different fashion.

### Asylum Confined

When I arrived at the encampment at the El Chaparral U.S. border crossing today with Luis—or “*el psicólogo*” (the psychologist)—as everyone at the encampment refers to him, I was caught in the middle of a wave of people that immediately swarmed around him. Luis works with *Psicólogos Sin Fronteras* (Psychologists without Borders) and has been conducting short psychological evaluations of migrants living in the encampment for months to support their asylum cases. If Luis thinks that the interviewee has a story and psychological profile that will indicate to U.S. asylum officials that they are under a clear imminent threat to their life, he schedules an appointment for them to meet with a team of lawyer advocates in Tijuana.

People in the encampment have come to see that meeting with Luis is one of the few keys still available for unlocking access to the U.S. asylum system during the pandemic. He practically appeared like a messianic figure—his tall stature allowed him to tower over the crowd and slowly make his way towards a row of tents while being stopped by someone asking him questions at every step. Luis is one of the few people to visit the encampment who is part of some sort of official organization supporting migrants with seeking asylum. He had to repeatedly explain to people that his organization has a process for conducting the evaluations. He and other members of his team are going to the encampment three days a week, slowly going row by row to conduct evaluations in a way that seems fair. “I can’t skip over any tents, because that would be unjust,” he explained to a woman from Honduras eagerly trying to get his attention. The encampment has grown tremendously in just the last month and only seems to be getting larger by the week, meaning that Luis’ work is interminable.

We meandered through one of the narrow alleys between two rows of tents, stooping below clotheslines and rain tarps the whole way through. It was incredible to think that this plaza, which had now become an entire makeshift community, was empty just a few months prior—typically one would just walk through the plaza before arriving at the pedestrian entryway into the United States. Once we were nearly halfway through the alley, Luis greeted a woman who appeared to be in her 60s, Graciela, and her daughter, Maribel, seated in front of their tent. They had been expecting him to arrive today to conduct their evaluation. Luis tried his best to settle into a comfortable seated position in the cramped space in front of them, plopping himself onto the elevated curb. I also did my best

to contort myself into as comfortable position as possible on the concrete terrain. He spared no time and launched immediately into his evaluation, asking where the two women were from.

They explained that they were from the Mexican state of Michoacán, known for being one of the hot spots in the country's ongoing drug war for several years. Along with Maribel's two young children, they had already spent two months living in the encampment. They explained to Luis that they escaped their hometown to flee from members of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). They were inadvertently caught in the middle of an ongoing territorial rivalry between CJNG and Los Viagras, another cartel. CJNG members forced their way into her house and accused Graciela of supporting Los Viagras, telling her that if her and her family were found in the house the following day they would be killed. They fled early the following morning, leaving everything behind. "I had my job for almost twenty years, working in the municipal palace. I was a member of the union...I had just bought my little house from INFONAVIT (national public mortgage agency)," Graciela cried. They had no time to even collect their documents before leaving, Maribel interjected.

Continuing his questionnaire, Luis asked Graciela to describe how she was feeling emotionally. She replied, "Well, a part of me is happy that it was our turn to talk with you." Luis laughed. Maribel interrupted again, telling Luis that her mother has been suffering from *sustos* (panic attacks) and that she has diabetes and a thyroid disease. "I also have two cysts on my kidney and you can't imagine how much it hurts to sleep on the floor here," Graciela continued. Luis ended his interview by talking Graciela and Maribel through a breathing exercise. He explained, "this is called box breathing. Breathe deeply for four seconds, hold for four seconds, then exhale for four seconds, and then repeat." He counted, "one, two, three, four, hold," as they earnestly followed his instructions. "Now that we've talked and you know we are processing your case, how are you feeling?" he asked. "More relaxed...that there's hope," Graciela replied.

After departing from Luis, I spent more time talking with several people in the encampment. I stopped by a make-shift kitchen covered in tarps with a small window left open in the front where a woman, Inez, sold tortillas and other food. She casually went about her business as we spoke, pouring flour onto her countertop made of large pieces of cardboard when I greeted her. Inez, also from Michoacán, had already been living in Tijuana for over a year. She told me about her journey to Tijuana while she and her daughter continued kneading dough for the tortillas and cooking food. I asked, in a hushed tone, if they were fleeing from cartels. She nodded yes and explained that her family owned a glassware business in Michoacán. One of the cartels began demanding that they pay a "quota," a monthly extortion payment, of 10,000 pesos to keep operating their



business. Soon, however, they raised the quota to 30,000 pesos. They arrived the last Saturday of every month to pick up money and when they were unable to pay one month, they brutally beat her husband. They were forced to sell their pickup truck just to avoid being kidnapped, she explained. But they decided to flee after that.

For three months they stayed in a large migrant shelter nestled deep inside a canyon called El Cañon del Alacran not far from the border. “We came to ask for asylum, but it was all being managed with a number at the beginning. They gave you a number and then when it was your turn, they [Customs and Border Protection officials] would take you,” she told me. “But then COVID came, and they closed everything...everything closed!” she exclaimed while gesturing towards the border with her hand full of flour. The overcrowded shelter forced migrants to move out due to COVID-19 so Inez and her family began renting an apartment in a remote working-class neighborhood. But to their surprise they encountered some of the cartel members who had threatened them in that neighborhood. They fled quickly once again and came to the encampment. But as Inez calmly explained, they were making the most of the situation.

I asked how long she thought they might be at the encampment. She replied in a lowered voice while shaking her head slowly, “I don’t know...If the psychologist meets with us, then we can meet with the lawyers. But he gives preference to the families he already knows. It’s very, very hard to get to him...It’s the only hope that we have.” Inez then asked me, “Do you know where they’re going to relocate us after they open here?” I had no idea what she was talking about so asked for clarification. She explained she had heard that the pedestrian point of entry, which had closed when the pandemic began, would be reopened soon and that the encampment would be forced to move somewhere else after that. I asked if she didn’t like the idea of being moved somewhere else. She replied confidently that if the encampment is moved then they will be more hidden away from the public and there won’t be any pressure on the U.S. or Mexico to reopen the asylum process. – Fieldnote, June 11, 2021



**Fig. 1.2** Luis, “*el psicólogo*,” speaking with migrants at El Chaparral encampment (Carlos Martinez)

In June 2018, as the arrival of migrant caravans travelling from Central America towards the U.S.-Mexico border began to dominate headlines, President Trump clamored in a White House speech, “The United States will not be a migrant camp and it will not be a refugee holding facility...won’t be!” (Gambino & Lartey, 2018). Though unknown by the public at the time, in that same month Kirstjen Nielsen, Trump’s Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, circulated a memorandum among U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) leaders that guided them to turn asylum seekers away at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border to prevent their “operational capacity” from being overwhelmed (Office of Inspector General [OIG], 2020). This practice, which came to be known as “metering,” allowed CBP leaders to set a daily limit on the number of migrants who would be allowed to cross into the U.S. to request asylum protections (Gabbard, 202). Informal waiting lists were created and managed by a number of actors, in some cases by migrants themselves, at ports of entry across the border to manage the backlog produced

by metering. This is what Inez was referring to when she explained that asylum was “being managed with a number” when she arrived in Tijuana. Six months later, in January 2019, the Trump administration inaugurated the “Migrant Protection Protocols” (MPP), a program requiring certain migrants seeking asylum at the U.S. southern border to wait in Mexico for the duration of their immigration proceedings. MPP forced over 70,000 asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while awaiting resolution of their cases (Kocher, 2021).

Together, metering and MPP fulfilled Trump’s promise to prevent the U.S. from becoming a “refugee holding facility.” This was accomplished by converting Mexican border cities into that very facility. Through these bureaucratic shifts, Mexico’s borderlands became long-term waiting rooms for migrants, like Inez and Graciela, who merely hoped to access the right to request asylum in the United States. Though the two families I described in the above fieldnote were escaping violence from within the interior of Mexico, many migrants suddenly stuck at the border were fleeing from Central America, Haiti, and other countries. Many were affected by both metering and MPP. First, they were forced to wait in Mexico for their turn to simply request asylum at a port of entry, due to metering, and then they were required to return to Mexico to await their court hearing as a result of MPP. Waiting in Mexican border cities, notorious for being embroiled in drug cartel-related violence, proved to be disastrous. Many migrants I met in Tijuana had experienced various forms of violence along the entirety of their journey, from their hometowns to the border and at various points along the way. Like deportees, a spatial continuum of violence impacted these migrants, though differently. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 only compounded these harms.

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. and Mexico closed their shared border to nonessential travel and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an Emergency Interim Final Order

that would allow CBP officials to immediately expel unauthorized migrants attempting to cross into the U.S. without providing them an opportunity to make an asylum claim (Isacson, 2020). The order was issued under Title 42 of the U.S. Code, which authorizes the Surgeon General to suspend introduction of persons or goods into the U.S. on public health grounds. Title 42 also immediately halted all court proceedings for asylum seekers enrolled in MPP (Rachko, 2021; Sherman-Stokes, 2021). Everything closed, as Inez expressed, and everything immediately became considerably more uncertain for migrants. Encampments, such as the one described in the above fieldnote, began to appear near ports of entry all along the border as migrant shelters became overwhelmed by the unprecedented number of migrants that were suddenly stuck in the Mexican borderlands. The path to asylum was closed off for most. Under Title 42, only occasional exceptions were being made for some migrants with the support of groups like Psychologists without Borders and legal advocacy organizations.

From the moment Trump launched his presidential bid, he consistently cast Latin American migrants as criminals and rapists to justify his calls for the creation of a border wall (Lacatus, 2021). Though he did not ever build a wall, the series of bureaucratic procedures implemented beginning in 2018 under his administration, from metering to Title 42, was essentially able to convert the borderlands into a prison for migrants and asylum seekers. Patty's characterization of Tijuana as a giant prison proved more prescient than even she could have predicted at the time. Several activist groups and nongovernmental organizations scrambled in an attempt to respond to this new reality. As in the case of Luis and Psychologists without Borders, these organizations were often overwhelmed. At best, they sought to mitigate the impact of the harms brought about by these policies. Shortly after the border closures were implemented, I began to volunteer with the Refugee Health Alliance (RHA), a grassroots medical humanitarian

organization that provides free primary care to migrants in Tijuana. RHA largely relies on U.S.-based clinicians who travel to Tijuana to volunteer their time. Though I lack any medical skills, they needed all the help they could get. For several months, I worked three days per week at the clinic, mostly helping to conduct intake of patients and supporting with any number of random tasks. Like my work with the Wound Clinic, the urgency of the conditions thrust me into constant activity.

When the pandemic began, RHA had just completed construction on a new clinical space in Tijuana's Zona Norte neighborhood, right across from the border wall and next to the Tijuana River canal. Despite being a tiny and understaffed clinic, RHA became an important resource for both migrants and deportees, particularly given its location. This became even more true when the encampment at the El Chaparral pedestrian port of entry began forming at the beginning of 2021. Now, deportees were not the only long-term homeless community in the area. The deportee encampments became complemented by the seemingly ever-growing migrant encampment, which contained over 2,000 people at its peak (Rouhandeh, 2022). The number of patients arriving to the clinic ballooned over the subsequent months.

Conducting fieldwork in this situation proved challenging for several reasons. Though I was eventually able to develop relationships with many migrants and deportees, the relentless nature of the work at the RHA clinic often prevented me from having long conversations or conducting interviews with patients. Though being geographically stuck in Tijuana, both migrants and deportees were very mobile within the confines of the city, which made it difficult to find people again and easy to lose touch with them. Broadly, the conditions were also in a frequent state of flux. Eight months after I wrote the fieldnote above, for example, the El Chaparral encampment was finally cleared, though several months later than Inez had predicted.

Despite the challenging nature of conducting research in this fraught context I sought to document as best I could the harsh realities impacting both migrants and deportees as well as the hopes, relationships, and forms of solidarity and support that miraculously kept them afloat.

Over time, I developed a large archive of fieldnotes, recordings, and photos of the miniscule details of the life and travel trajectories of my interlocutors. However, after several months of working at both the Wound Clinic and the RHA clinic throughout the pandemic, it was still not clear to me how the experiences of migrants and deportees were bound up in a common set of forces. It wasn't until I stepped away from the day-to-day demands of my field site and reattuned to the original intents and interests that first brought me to Tijuana that I was able to make some sense of it all. Turning towards the anthropology and medical anthropology literatures on migration, borders, structural violence, abandonment, and captivity also helped me to see how the social formations that I had been documenting in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands represented an underlying logic of punitive governance and containment that had transcended into the transnational sphere.

### Captive States

In her classic text *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the Chicana poet and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa famously described the U.S.-Mexico border as a “1,950 mile-long open wound...*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (1987, p. 2-3). In recent years, several scholars have taken up this notion of the border as a wound as well as a wounding agent. Ieva Jusionyte, for example, has examined how the U.S. southern border terrain “acts as a mechanism of injury” (2018, p. 11). Similarly, Jason De León (2015) describes how the Sonoran Desert has been converted by U.S. border enforcement policies into a “killing machine” and a “massive open grave” (2015, p. 3-11). During my fieldwork I witnessed countless open wounds

marking the bodies of homeless deportees, some the result of intravenous injection of heroin and fentanyl and others caused by the brutality of Tijuana's police violence. While these wounds were not directly caused by the border region's physical terrain, when viewed through the lens of what Rob Nixon has referred to as "slow violence" (2013) we can see how they are the latent outcome of brutal immigration policies that have forcibly expelled thousands to Mexico. Similarly, I came to learn of the many psychological wounds carried by asylum seekers, such as the *sustos* experienced by Graciela, from the inception of their journeys and compounded by the harms of migration and migration enforcement. As Chloe Ahmann explains, "Neither spectacular nor instantaneous, and often proceeding at a speed that decouples suffering from its original causes, slow violence can be difficult to represent, even to perceive" (2018, p. 144). The very name of the Border Wound clinic carries a double meaning—it is a wound clinic geographically located at the border that is also aimed at attending to the slowly accumulated wounds of those impacted by the militarized borders fortified in conjunction with the deportation regime.

In a less quoted passage of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa writes, "Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger" (1987, p. 4). Her use of the words "tension" and "grip" conjure up impressions of closure and confinement in juxtaposition to the openness she uses to describe the border as a wound. Anzaldúa's metaphorical comparison of this tension to a virus has proven to be ominously apt amidst the new pressures placed upon borderlands inhabitants, both viral and political, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this project I dwell on the tension that Anzaldúa describes and the ways that it has increasingly gripped both asylum seekers and deportees in the borderlands. While countless scholars have analyzed the harms leveled against unauthorized migrants attempting to cross into the U.S., I pay attention to the violence produced

and exacerbated by the conditions of stagnation and “stuckness” (Jefferson, Turner, & Jensen, 2019) in the border region. Thus, *Captive States: Migration and Expulsion on the Carceral Frontier* examines the U.S.-Mexico borderland region not as a site of migrant transit, but rather of migrant and deportee captivity. I use the term “captive states” in the title of my dissertation in a dual sense: to describe the captive states of my migrant and deportee interlocutors, but also to think through the ways that the concept and constant reinforcement of the nation-state spatially produces the condition of captivity for marginalized subjects.

In recent years, captivity has emerged as a key analytic in anthropology for describing a wide range of contemporary modes of governance and sociality (Burch, 2019; Burton, 2021; Doughty, 2019; O’Neill & Dua, 2018; O’Neill & Dua, 2019). This literature seeks to provide a more robust rendering of the ways that structural violence is produced and mediated outside of the register of abandonment, which has served as a primary and influential analytic for discussing such forces in recent decades (O’Neill & Dua, 2018). Elizabeth Povinelli, for example, has described the logic of “social abandonment” (2011) undergirding late liberal logics and economies, while João Biehl deployed the term “zones of social abandonment” (2005) to describe marginal spaces in neoliberal urban geographies where devalued subjects have been disposed. While the analytic of abandonment has clearly been productive in shaping our understanding of neoliberal governance and socialities, it has proven to be insufficient for making sense of a complementary lineage of carcerality and confinement that has been and continues to be a constitutive force of contemporary societies. As Kevin O’Neill and Jatin Dua write, “If a critical mass of scholars today can say with confidence that politics has become a matter of abandonment, then we must add that it has also become, even if through a parallel and opposed genealogy, a matter of captivity” (2018, p. 5).



As my ethnographic engagements reveal, asylum seekers and deportees on the U.S.-Mexico border are subject to multiple modes of transnational captivity. The U.S.-sponsored drug war, the deportation regime, and the unceasing fortification of the border through militarization, bureaucratization, and medicalization have produced enclosure in the borderlands for years, culminating in a blistering landscape of shelters, encampments, and homelessness from Tijuana to Matamoros. Additionally, deportees and asylum seekers are made vulnerable to further forms of localized captivity in the borderlands, subjected to predation from police forces and drug cartels. In contrast to Biehl's notion of "zones of social abandonment," I suggest that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have become a *zone of captivity*.

Scholars have recently elucidated the ways that bordering practices and systems of migrant surveillance are increasingly being deployed in distant locations from external national borders. This research aims to move beyond understandings of borders as fixed "lines in the sand" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012) to emphasize what Gilberto Rosas has referred to as the spatial diffusion of the "borderlands condition" (2006). For example, scholars working in Europe have examined how geopolitical changes brought about by the 1985 Schengen Area Agreement have resulted in a "spatial reconfiguration of immigration control beyond a neat inside/outside cartography" (Coleman, 2012). Attention has increasingly turned to the ways that U.S. and European borders have traveled internally into the spaces of daily life where racialized immigrants become subject to increasing surveillance, policing, and profiling (Fassin, 2011a; Kline, 2019).

Meanwhile, both the European and U.S. border regimes have extended far beyond their nation-state boundaries. The United States concretized this through the creation of Mexico's Southern Border Plan in 2014, the result of tremendous pressure applied by the U.S. following

the arrival of over 66,000 unaccompanied Central American children that year. The plan has been responsible for the militarization of Mexico's southern border and the deportation of thousands of Central Americans in route to the United States (Vogt, 2018). The externalization of Europe's border control has materialized in "European Neighborhood Policies," which delegate immigration enforcement and surveillance to non-European "transit" states (Fassin, 2011a). Anthropologist Ruben Andersson has examined Europe's complex border policing industry within what he refers to as the emerging Euro-African borderlands (2014a).

As I describe in this dissertation, both the deportation apparatus and asylum deterrence policies, accompanied by an array of local forces, have not only extended a border regime outside of U.S. territory, but have also outstretched a carceral regime into Mexican territory. I refer to this externalized carceral regime, aimed at confining and slowly eliminating disposable migrant subjects, as the *carceral frontier*. I use the term "frontier," instead of "border," to call attention to the geographically expansionist nature of this carceral regime. The frontier has always been a central feature of the U.S. imperial project, associated with the forceful acquisition of new land primarily to expand national territory and gain access to more resources for extractive purposes (Black, 2018; Grandin, 2019). The carceral frontier that has been developing in Mexico's northern border is distinct from this traditional frontier form in that it embeds U.S. political and bureaucratic power onto Mexican soil, without expanding its national territory.

Moreover, the carceral frontier is not driven by an accumulationist drive for more resources, but rather by a "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006) targeting migrant and deported subjects. The carceral frontier does not only keep migrants and deportees outside of and away from the United States, but also keeps them spatially detained in precarious spaces of waiting in Mexico's northern border cities. As I will argue, this logic of containment is undergirded by a

strategy of attrition. This extra-territorial carceral formation is not unique to the Western Hemisphere. Drawing on Stuart Elden's notion of *imperio*, Maillet, Mountz and Williams (2018) describe a similar logic at play in Europe's recent anti-immigrant efforts. They explain that through the "expansion of jurisdiction beyond the edges of sovereign territory," which Elden conceptualizes as *imperio*, or imperial power, "sovereign power moves farther offshore, extending physically and socially outward" (2018, p. 144). This "boundless, limitless and administrative power" traps asylum seekers by keeping them "isolated and excluded as objects of security" (2018, p. 143-144)

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) links the originary violence of colonial conquest and the frontier expansionism of the "*norteamericanos*" with the ongoing racialization, marginalization, and deportation of Latino communities. As I seek to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, while the strategies of anti-immigrant control and expulsion that I describe may be novel, they are undergirded by longstanding colonial logics. Here I am informed by theorists of coloniality who have proposed that the racialized, gendered, and class hierarchies established by colonialism continue to structure contemporary societies (Quijano, 2000). Seen from this perspective, though the carceral frontier is historically distinct in many respects, it should also be understood as the latest iteration of an enduring frontier nationalism grounded in a racializing logic that has been critical to the consolidation and expansion of the fortified United States.

### Dissertation Methods and Structure

This dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2018 to 2021. The bulk of this fieldwork was completed between the fall of 2019 and spring 2021, while I lived in Tijuana. As described, this fieldwork consisted primarily of long-term participant observation conducted at a variety of sites in collaboration with several grassroots organizations in Tijuana

serving the migrant and deportee communities. In addition to conducting participant observation while working with these organizations, I also conducted over 40 recorded interviews, assisted with eight forensic evaluations for migrants seeking asylum in collaboration with the Suzanne Dworak-Peck Keck Human Rights Clinic based at the at the University of Southern California, and conducted research and analysis of the relevant grey literature and news media.

In the four body chapters of the dissertation, I draw on this ethnographic fieldwork as well as a wide range of theoretical sources to describe the various aspects of this carceral frontier that are keeping migrants and deportees in states of captivity in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. In the first two chapters, I analyze the carceral forces impacting deportee communities, while in the following body chapters I turn towards the spatial confinement of asylum seekers. In Chapter 1, I describe the transnational stigmatization and racialization of homeless deportees in Tijuana and how their marginalization is maintained through practices that render them as stateless subjects. I deploy the concept of “carceral care” to examine how intersecting and contradictory logics of elimination and inclusion impinge upon these deportee communities. In Chapter 2, I examine how homeless deportees living in the Tijuana River Canal are targeted by a logic of “rehabilitation” which simultaneously seeks to cleanse the city’s urban landscape while forcing drug-using deportees to “get clean.” I consider how the concurrent disciplining of landscapes and human populations has been a central and evolving feature of the Anthropocene with profound embodied and ecological impacts. In Chapter 3, I explore how a series of bureaucratic changes implemented by the United States have forced asylum seekers to exist in a perilous space of captive waiting, which has made them vulnerable to predation and death. In Chapter 4, I analyze how the racialized medicalization of the U.S.-Mexico border during the COVID-19 pandemic solidified the borderlands as a zone of captivity for asylum seekers and further exposed them to

harm. Lastly, in my concluding chapter I examine the forms of resistance that have emerged to transcend and break open this zone of captivity by reflecting on the political perspectives and challenges experienced by my interlocutors and the organizations that have sought to engage in acts of solidarity with them. I suggest that the carceral frontier will only be successfully dismantled, if such a thing is possible, by paying attention to such efforts, which are articulating and developing what I refer to as *transnational solidarity*.

## Chapter One: Homeboys without a Homeland

### No Home, No Homeland (And Nowhere to Go)

Today I spent the afternoon at the storefront location for Mari's organization, Madres y Familias Deportadas. It's located just a stone's throw from the border and adjacent to the Tijuana River canal in an old commercial plaza with storefronts that are now mostly abandoned. Mari explained to me that it used to be a more bustling commercial center but that changed when a new pedestrian border crossing was opened that diverted the foot traffic of transnational commuters in a different direction away from the plaza. One of the organization's volunteers later told me to make sure I didn't stay in the plaza past sunset, as skirmishes between warring cartels in and around the canal are still common.

While talking with Mari, a man who appeared to be in his mid-20s arrived to the storefront to ask for help with finding shelter and a way to communicate with his family. His name was Arturo. He was originally from Acapulco but had resided in Los Angeles for ten years. He explained that he was just deported yesterday. His family and girlfriend, with whom he has a child, apparently didn't even know he had been deported. The deportation process seemed to have taken place quickly. He explained that he had been drinking and fell asleep on the street next to his workplace. The police picked him up, he was transferred to ICE, and subsequently placed into deportation proceedings. Arturo explained that all his belongings were taken during deportation, including his phone. After being deported to Tijuana he left the Mexican immigration offices to go get food with someone else and ended up wandering around Tijuana for the day. But, because of that they ended up losing their chance to get free shelter that evening, which is provided by local non-profit organizations who go to the immigration office to meet deportees there. So, now he also didn't have a place to stay for the evening. He seemed completely disoriented.

To my surprise, Mari scolded him, exclaiming, "Hijo, pero no puedes andar vestido haci aqui en Tijuana. Te ves como un deportado. La policia te puede agarrar (Son, you can't be walking around dressed like that here in Tijuana. You look like a deportee. The police can detain you)." Arturo was wearing baggy pants, a shirt that looked a few sizes too big for him, and a crucifix necklace. His head was shaven and he had a dark complexion. He definitely looked like a homeboy. But, he responded that these were the clothes provided to him by immigration officials.

Nonetheless, Mari insisted that he prioritize getting new clothes as soon as possible. She made it clear that his outfit put him at risk. Mari tried to

explain directions to a very cheap shelter where he could at least stay for the night and that also had phones to call his family. But, he had no sense of how to get there. I offered to walk Arturo to the shelter. On the walk, I asked him what he planned to do now and if he planned to return to Acapulco. He replied immediately that returning to Acapulco was out of the question. Even though he still has family there, there were no jobs there for him. I got the sense that he felt returning would also make him look like a failure to his family. So, he didn't know what he was going to do yet. Perhaps try to cross into the U.S. again. I wondered how he would survive Tijuana without even knowing how to get around. Arturo was totally lost. – Fieldnote, August 2, 2018

Arturo was one of the first deportees I met early in my fieldwork in Tijuana. As I would come to learn, to “look like a deportado,” as Mari put it, marked one as being available to predation and deserving of punishment by police forces in Tijuana. Mari began her organization to provide basic services to the deportees who arrive by the hundreds every day from the United States. Through her work over the years, Mari has unceasingly borne witness to the disorientation, alienation, and police brutality experienced by deportees. The impact that these experiences have had on her came through in her harsh chiding of Arturo for his physical appearance. On a separate occasion, Mari showed me photos she took on her phone of a deportee who her organization was supporting. His shirtless body was covered in black and blue bruises, the outcome of a brutal police beating. She knows all too well the fate that awaits men who look like Arturo in Tijuana.

The location of Mari's storefront office has made it an immediately visible destination for many deportees who find themselves stranded in Tijuana. Though a network of migrant shelters had been established to provide deportees with short-term housing, many deportees often find themselves in Arturo's situation. Expelled from their homes in the United States and without a home to return to in Mexico, deportees often have nowhere to go. Many find themselves suddenly homeless in a homeland that is no longer theirs—and perhaps never was. A survey

conducted among 400 homeless people living in Tijuana's river canal in 2013 found that over 75% of those who had been deported were living in the U.S. for over five years before their deportation, with 40% having spent 16 years or longer outside of Mexico (Albicker and Velasco, 2016). Many deportees were taken to the United States as young children and speak English as their first language.

Though they are nominally Mexican citizens, deportees are often thoroughly estranged from their country of birth. I frequently asked the deportees I met if they planned to return to their hometowns if they were not from Baja California. They typically respond as Arturo had—with a defiant and immediate “no.” Often, they would respond with some variation of, “There is nothing there for me.” Many no longer have families in their towns of birth. If they do, they tend to have little communication with their family members or don't want to encounter them to avoid their perceived shame of being deported. In addition to their personal reasons for not wanting to return to their hometowns, broader political and economic forces have additionally made this an unviable option. Wages have stagnated for years in Mexico amidst the country's post-NAFTA economic landscape, and this tends to be even more pronounced in rural areas of the country (Bowness, 2018; Weisbrot et al., 2017). This is particularly unattractive for deportees who have become accustomed to relatively higher incomes in the United States. Moreover, drug war violence has devastated many regions of Mexico, both economically and in terms of public safety (Balmori de la Miyar, 2016; Shirk & Wallman, 2015). Indeed, Mexicans continue fleeing many parts of Mexico due to ongoing drug war violence (Rios Contreras, 2014). Though Tijuana is a forbidding city, it becomes a precarious home to deportees for these reasons.

But even here where there are thousands of deportees, many—particularly those who remain unhoused or have intermittent housing—are perceived as and experience themselves as



existing outside of Mexico's national community. Their expulsion from the United States, their condition of homelessness, and the ways they are often associated with drug use and criminality in media reports, governmental accounts, and the public imaginary serve as intersecting axes of alienation. The policing of unhoused deportees is harsh and incessant, making their existence in Tijuana nearly impossible. Tijuana's municipal police—and occasionally members of the state and national security forces—harass, brutalize, and imprison deportees daily with near total impunity (Pinedo et al., 2015b). Due to the constant policing of their movements, deportees' sense of having no home to return to outside of Tijuana is paralleled in their experiences of spatial captivity within Tijuana.

I learned a great deal about these experiences through my relationships with two deportees, Jesus and Israel, who frequently arrived at the RHA clinic to receive medical care or free food. Though, as its name suggests, the RHA clinic was established in response to the arrival of Central American asylum seekers in 2018, its geographic location has made it an important destination for deportees to receive care as well. The clinic was opened in Tijuana's Zona Norte neighborhood, most notoriously known as the city's vice district, officially referred to as a *zona de tolerancia* (tolerance zone), where sex workers and an open-air drug market dominate the landscape (Pitpitan et al., 2020; Werb et al., 2015). Calle Coahuila, home to the district's brothels bustling with American tourists, is within eyeshot of the clinic, which, like Mari's organization Madres y Familias Deportadas, is housed in an old dilapidated and largely abandoned commercial complex. The Tijuana River canal, popularly referred to as El Bordo by deportees (and now many media outlets as well), is located just behind the clinic. A hispanicized play on the word "border," El Bordo runs along the U.S./Mexico border before turning southeast and cutting a long straight line bisecting Tijuana's labyrinthine landscape.



**Fig. 2.1** Patient receiving wound care at the Refugee Health Alliance clinic  
(Carlos Martinez)

Deportees often present to the clinic with several disturbingly visual manifestations of corporeal suffering in the form of injuries, bruises, scabies, and purulent abscesses and ulcers—the outcomes of homelessness, infections resulting from injection drug use, and police violence. Many deportees engage in substance use, particularly methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl, which are widely and cheaply available in Tijuana’s Zona Norte (Pinedo et al., 2018). In some cases their deportation was a result of being apprehended by police with illicit drugs. Others don’t take up heavy drug use until after their deportation to Mexico (Pinedo et al., 2018). The social dislocation and precarity produced by deportation have made drug use a needed outlet for many deportees.

Like many deportees, Jesus and Israel preferred to speak in English, though our conversations would often meander between English and Spanish. Jesus was 47 years old, but he retained a young look and baby-like smile, accentuated by the fact that he only had a few

remaining upper teeth. I learned that most of his teeth had rotted as a result of his methamphetamine addiction. He was tall and lanky, had a shaved head and fading tattoos above his left eyebrow and along his neck. Jesus carried a bucket and squeegee with him that he used to wash cars—his main moneymaking hustle. He always had a book or magazine with him and especially loved reading science fiction. Throughout my fieldwork, he frequently asked me to bring him more sci-fi books written in English when I came back from the United States. In an accident of circumstance, Jesus was born in Culiacan, Sinaloa. His mother had already been born in the U.S., where he was conceived, but she had to return to Mexico to sell off some family property. Jesus was born during her return trip—fateful timing that would dramatically affect his life trajectory. He was deported several times from the U.S., about eight or nine times he told me, but he lost count. He spent four years in Mendota federal prison in Fresno, California before being deported again. He had been living in Salt Lake City, Utah prior to that, where he was imprisoned after being stopped for a traffic violation.

Since being in Tijuana, he has moved in and out of homelessness. At times living in cheap homeless shelters in Zona Norte and at other times living in El Bordo or in the surrounding streets in Zona Norte. When I asked him why he lived in El Bordo, he replied, “‘Cuz that’s the only place that I can live. There’s no shelters. I can’t just live in the middle of the block in a *colonia*, in front of somebody’s house. Police won’t allow it. I mean, I can’t post up in front of a store here in downtown. I can’t just pitch a tent. There’s nowhere for me literally to go. In the U.S you can do that but not here. In the park you can’t. They come patrol it.” To clarify, I asked if the police allow people to stay in El Bordo. “No,” he replied, “not even that cuz they run us out of there which I don’t understand because that means you’re not allowed to

live....anywhere. If you don't have a house, you're a criminal. It's illegal to be homeless. It's criminalized."

Israel was born Jalisco but grew up in La Habra, California and started working in construction when he was 16. Like Jesus, he was bald headed, but didn't have any visible tattoos. He was only in his mid-20s and generally appeared healthy. Both Israel and Jesus had children in the U.S. who they hadn't seen for years. Israel was deported in 2012. He was arrested and charged with a misdemeanor for hitting his partner. After failing to appear for a court hearing, he was issued an order of deportation. Following his forced return to Mexico, he spent a few years moving back and forth between Tijuana and Jalisco, where his mother still lives. He reminisced, "It was great man, living over there. We have land and we have *caña* (sugarcane) and it's beautiful man." But he explained that he hasn't been able to return to Jalisco for two years because he got into a fight with his mother's boyfriend, who called the police to detain Israel. "They wanted to give me three years in a mental institution. Could you believe that?" His godfather paid for a lawyer to help get him out of that sentence. "As soon as I got out of jail, my mom was like, 'Here's your luggage and here's two thousand pesos. You have to leave. You can't be around my boyfriend.' It really sucks." So, he returned to Tijuana because, as he explained, "This was the only place I knew ever since I got deported."

So, Israel is stuck in Tijuana. Trying to cross back into the U.S. would prove challenging because, as he explained, his family is "kinda broke so they don't have enough money to pay for a coyote." But, because Tijuana is a big city, he affirmed, it provides him with "a lot of easy opportunities to make money. I don't have to struggle like I was in other places. Like Jalisco, it wasn't as easy as it is here." He started off making money with small hustles. His sister who lives in Los Angeles would send him packages every month filled with needed items, like clothes

and toiletries. He would then sell the luggage that his sister sent to street vendors to pay for a cheap motel room. But that hustle came to an end when his sister stopped sending him packages. Since then, like many deportees, he began working at a call center. He was recruited by one of their managers, Nacho, at a soup kitchen that serves the homeless community in Zona Norte. Call centers, which are typically contracted by U.S. companies, eagerly hire deportees given their English proficiency (Solis, 2109). Deportees, in turn, are able to find a steady, if relatively low, income and even a sense of community among others like them.

Both Israel and Jesus worked at the same call center. When I first met them as patients at the RHA clinic in August 2020 they recognized each other. Jesus had not been at the call center for a few weeks, so Israel asked him where he had been. Jesus explained that he had been picked up by the police and thrown into Tijuana's municipal jail, La 20. Because of that he missed his work shifts and was laid off by the call center. Another RHA volunteer, Alex, and I were conducting intake of patients in the clinic waiting area. I conducted a brief interview with Jesus and Israel to learn more about their experiences with policing in Tijuana. I began by asking Jesus how many times he had been picked up the police, expecting him to give me a total quantity, rather than a weekly frequency.

Jesus: Aw man, at least a few times a week.

Carlos (C): So, have you been put in La 20 [municipal jail]?

Jesus: Oh yeah. The only reason they don't take me now is because my hand's messed up. Yeah, they pick you up and keep you for a few hours and then transfer you to La 20, leave you there for 36 hours. A lot of people lose their jobs because of that. They take your money, they throw your ID away, whatever they think they can do to fuck with you.

C: So, are they doing that more right now?

Jesus: Yeah, I don't know. They're being really bad right now. They have like a full-scale war right now. They beat people up, take 'em to jail all

beat up. They take 'em to the doctor there cuz their head is cracked open or have their teeth missing. They're abusive man. Yeah, TJ's really bad.

C: Wow

Jesus: It's crazy, huh?

C: Where do you usually stay?

Jesus: I was staying at an *albergue* (shelter) cuz I had a job. But I lost that.

C: So where are you staying right now? On the street?

Jesus: Yeah, I gotta get back to work. You know, the cops pull me over and they throw my backpack away with all my stuff in it. And then I go out and buy another one and they throw that one away. It's an issue with trying to hold onto clothes. Every time they pull you over, they take you in, they throw your backpack in the middle of the street, throw you in there [in paddy wagon] and leave your backpack there.

C: Yeah, it sounds like they're acting extra harsh right now.

Jesus: Yeah, they do *operativos* (crackdown operations) every morning in the whole *centro*.

C: Every morning? What time?

Jesus: Yeah, between 7 and 8:30. Usually I'm at work at that time except I haven't had a job for the last two weeks, so I try to hide during that time. But somehow, they always seem to find you. They'll find you no matter where you're at.

C: Every morning they've been doing that?

Jesus: Yeah, they whoop your ass, take you in, throw you stuff away. It's the same thing every day. Seven days a week.

C: That's awful man. Goddamn.

Jesus: Yeah, they got a full-scale war against people right now. You don't have to watch out for other criminals or anything. You gotta watch out for the cops here. And any money you have on you, they'll take it. It's crazy down here.

C (speaking to Israel): Have you been messed with too, recently?

Israel: From the police? Of course! They take everybody. They give you some crazy beatings right here.

Jesus: Yeah, everybody. They whip your ass good.

Israel: And then, they still take your money.

Alex: Is there anywhere that you guys can go that's like a safe area?

Jesus: Hey man, there ain't no safe area in TJ.

Israel: It's not like we're looking for trouble. Anywhere we're walking, they come and they bring their little vans and they just pick anybody up. And then they ask you, "Does anybody have bail money?" And if you have 200 pesos, you know, they'll let you go for 200 pesos.

C: So, it's like a personal payment to them?

Israel: It's funny right, but that's how it is.

As Jesus explained, and as was consistently reiterated to me by others, "there ain't no safe area in TJ" for deportees. Though El Bordo might be described as a no-man's land or a non-place (Augé, 1992), it serves several critical functions for deportees who are culturally, politically, and spatially estranged from broader Mexican society. The canal intermittently serves as a refuge for unhoused deportees, where many set up temporary homes and encampments that are periodically destroyed by police. It's also an important point for drug distribution and, as such, a site of ongoing conflict between rival drug cartels. Up until 2015, it was estimated that over 1,000 people lived in El Bordo, an overwhelming portion of whom were deportees and injection drug users (Albicker & Velasco, 2016). Between December 2014 and March 2015, a federally funded policing program, *Programa Mejora*, was deployed in the canal of the Tijuana River canal. Programa Mejora resulted in the expulsion of approximately 800–1,000 people from El Bordo and, according to city officials, 600 of these were involuntarily sent to drug treatment centers (Durán and Caballero, 2015; Guerrero, 2015; Morales et al., 2020). While El Bordo is

now strictly patrolled by police, this non-place continues to be an occasional refuge of last resort for deportees. I often observed the daily cat and mouse scenes of deportees running from police in and around the canal—scenes that have been widely diffused by local press outlets.

For deportees, Tijuana is experienced as a carceral and thoroughly surveilled space—an open-air extension of the punitive immigration apparatus that detained, deported, and dispossessed them of their personal property and social relations. The “full-scale war” on deportees that Jesus described has become an unremarkable and commonsensical part of life and governance in Tijuana. While it might be tempting to think of the carceral violence experienced by deportees as being merely a derivative of Mexico’s notorious police corruption, I suggest that a wider array of social dynamics is at play. Through my ethnographic engagements I have sought to understand why deportees are being treated with such incredible brutality, how this is sustained, and the broader societal implications of this phenomenon. The normalization of deportee punishment, as I will discuss, hinges on their visual stigmatization, *de facto* denationalization, and racial expulsion from the Mexican national community. Deportee punishment is realized through the deployment of what I refer to as *carceral care* by governmental and non-governmental actors, which conjoins corporeal punishment, spatial containment, and spiritual salvation. The policing of deportees, though excluded from dominant accounts and studies of immigration, forms part of a transnational circuit of migrant expulsion and captivity.

### Racial Expulsion

My interlocutors often described to me the sense of being visually targeted and racially stigmatized by police, despite being Mexican and nominally occupying similar racial categories as those persecuting them. One deportee I met named Francisco articulated this confounding



experience in stark terms. Francisco was born in the state of Jalisco and was taken to by his family to live in Oakland, California when he was only two years old. Now 56 years old, Francisco had been homeless for seven years in Tijuana when I met him. He developed a heroin addiction in the United States, which he said was exacerbated after his deportation. Speaking about the police, Francisco explained to me, “Even though we’re their own race, they look at us like parasites. They look at us as people who don’t deserve to be around here. Like this place would be cleaner without them.” In Francisco’s experience, homeless deportees are perceived by security officials and public authorities as contaminating and non-human entities. Similarly, Miguel, a deportee originally from Michoacan who lived in the U.S. for fifteen years and had been deported six years before I met him, lamented, “Somos el vómito de la sociedad. No nos ven como alguien que sinceramente necesita ayuda (We are society’s vomit. They don’t see us as someone who sincerely needs help).”

As Mari had warned Arturo, policing practices in Tijuana are premised on visual markers that serve as a means for police to efficiently identify which individuals are available for abuse. Jaime, a deportee born in Guerrero and who lived in Orange County, California for much of his life matter-of-factly described to me the street-level “visual regime” that optically sorts bodies and structures the vulnerability to carceral punishment experienced by homeless deportees. Discussing the brutality aimed at him and other deportees, he explained, “That’s how they treat people who are badly dressed, who are dirty, people who...well...who they think don’t matter to anyone. They know you don’t have family here, they know they can hit you, mistreat you, and nobody will file a complaint.” The social isolation produced by deportation becomes, as Jaime suggests, visually registered and seen as an opportunity for victimization by police forces.

George, a deportee who often arrived to the RHA clinic for free food and medical care, described this same phenomenon to me shortly after being released from La 20. George grew up in Watts, California. Most of the time, he now lived in homeless shelters in Zona Norte. Aside from having a classic L.A. homeboy look—bald head, tattoos, mustache, and goatee—George appeared relatively clean-cut. He was well groomed and looked healthy. Given that he had access to shelter, he was able to take showers and he was not using injection drugs. I spoke with George about his most recent interaction with police while he waited in RHA’s open air waiting area to be called in to see a doctor. Clearly agitated by his most recent imprisonment, now the eighth time he had been arbitrarily picked up by police and placed in jail, he went on a tirade about the police’s brutality.

We’re easy targets...most of us don’t know how to deal with it. Where do we go? What do we do about it, you know what I mean? Cuz we’re walking in the street, we’re in the street, but what did we do? If you’re not out there stealing, if you’re not out there committing a crime, why are they stopping you and then taking you?

As George elucidated, deportees are marked as always already being criminal. Even when they do not appear to be homeless or engaging in drug use, they are still targeted. Indeed, public health researchers working among Tijuana’s injection drug using community have found that homeless substance users who have been deported experience greater police abuse than those who weren’t deported. Being a deportee, they explain, is, “independently associated with arrests, extortion (i.e., being asked for a bribe), and forceful removal of a place of residence in the past six months” (Pinedo et al., 2017, p. 44).

Jesus also described the “racist” treatment he receives on the behalf of police officers. I asked him to elaborate on what he meant by “racist” since his phenotypic features would not identify him as belonging to one of Mexico’s historically racialized communities, such as

indigenous or Afro-Mexican. He expounded that the police treat deportees more harshly because they are viewed as being Mexicans from the U.S. “They give us a little extra beating,” he elaborated, for being “from the other side.”

Another surprising interaction with a group of deportees who arrived to the RHA clinic to receive a free meal one day revealed the peculiarities of Tijuana’s local racial hierarchies. I joined the group while they were eating their lunches in front of the clinic and asked them about the police presence in Zona Norte in recent weeks. Earlier that day a patient had told me that the police were cracking down hard recently, rounding up dozens of deportees in early morning *operativos* like those that Jesus had described. They all confirmed that the police had in fact been out in full force. One of the men, a man named Marco who was from Guerrero, appeared to be Afro-Mexican. While scarfing down his sandwich, he remarked that the police usually don’t bother him because they think he is a Haitian immigrant. I asked why he thought that cops don’t bother Haitians. He and his friends explained that Haitians are broadly perceived in Tijuana as being hard workers rather than as criminals, so are not bothered by police officers. Though I witnessed and learned about many instances of discrimination against Haitians in Tijuana, particularly in medical settings, the police do not appear to routinely imprison them as they do deportees. As I’ll explain later, in addition to Tijuana’s racial hierarchization in which deportees and the homeless are conspicuously targeted for carceral punishment, Haitians are also likely benefiting from legislation aimed at protecting migrants from police victimization.

What became clear to me from deportees’ testimonies is that in the U.S.-Mexico borderland space they have become targets of multiple intersecting axes of stigmatization, resulting in their racialization as thoroughly foreign, failed, and subhuman subjects. Their stigmatization has been furthered and compounded through an array of violent practices that

keep them spatially marginalized, legally disenfranchised, and socially alienated. This racialization is deployed through a street-level “visual regime” through which deportees are profiled, surveilled, and immediately cast as criminal merely due to their physical appearance. Drawing on Joaquín Barriendos’ “coloniality of seeing” concept, theorist Sayak Valencia suggests that “visual regimes” serve to “instrumentalize bodies and calls into doubt people’s humanity and citizenship and thus their right to access basic rights and non-stereotyped forms of representation” (2019, p. 17). Though Valencia is referring primarily to aesthetic representations of racialized subjects, visual regimes can be enacted through governmental and media representations as well as through everyday bureaucratic practices.

While most Mexican deportees could be described as mestizo, they vary tremendously in their physical features, such as height and skin color. But rather than conceiving of race as merely a biologically-based concept tied to discrete physiognomic traits, racialization describes the protracted processes by which any set of characteristics, whether physical or social, become “essentialized, naturalized, and/or biologized” and seen as inextricably tied to a group of individuals (Silverstein, 2005, p. 364). As Paul A. Silverstein suggests, “racialization thus indexes the historical transformation of fluid categories of difference into fixed species of otherness” (2005, p. 13). Didier Fassin (2011b) similarly argues that while racial ascription has become organically tied to physical features, it is also contingent on social characteristics, such as whether one is poor or incarcerated. Étienne Balibar has theorized racialization as being an “interior supplement” of nationalism—an indispensable dimension of the project of the “nationalization” of society to further the “integrity of the nation, integrity both towards the outside and on the inside” (1991, p. 59). As Balibar elaborates,

For the nation to be itself, it has to be racially or culturally pure. It therefore has to isolate within its bosom, before eliminating or expelling them, the 'false', 'exogenous', 'cross-bred', 'cosmopolitan' elements. This is an obsessional imperative which is directly responsible for the racialization of social groups whose collectivizing features will be set up as stigmata of exteriority and impurity, whether these relate to style of life, beliefs or ethnic origins (1991, p. 60).

Thus, as Balibar suggests, racialization serves a critical function in producing the means by which purity is maintained through the expulsion of foreign and contaminating elements in the effort to fortify and cohere the nation-state.

As Gretel Vera-Rosas and Perla Guerrero (2021) found in their ethnographic work in Mexico City, deportees' Spanish language abilities and visual indicators of working-class status (their skin complexion, style of dress, comportment, etc.) mark them as *pochos*. Though less used today, the term *pocho* circulated more widely in the first half of the twentieth century to describe Americanized Mexicans (Sánchez, 2011). Etymologically, the term *pocho* refers to something "cut" from its source and came to signify, "a loss of 'authenticity' and value, from an imagined linguistic unity and way of being: in other words, 'betrayal' of nation." (Sánchez, 2011, p. 314). *Pochos*, in other words, came to be pejoratively seen as impure Mexicans, sullied and corrupted by their exposure to U.S. society. In his 1930 study on Mexican immigration to the United States, the anthropologist Manuel Gamio described a *pocho* as being "a man without a country" (Herrera, 2010). Deportees, cast as *pochos*, have come to embody racialized and denationalized others. Guilty through their perceived association with U.S. working class and criminal culture, they are held in contempt by the Mexican national community.

The racialization of deportees becomes further sedimented, exploited, and amplified as a result of their ongoing exclusion and persecution in Tijuana. This reinscribing of race further materializes otherness in the bodies and experiences of deportees. Anthropologists have observed

that racialization and race-making are processes that are continually consolidated through state, economic, and cultural practices. As Karen Brodtkin (2000) has articulated, race-making policies such as Jim Crow and residential redlining practices have been critical in sustaining and reinforcing the subjugation of African Americans over time. Jodi Byrd and her colleagues have described racialization as a configuration of daily practices, noting that it entails, “systemic and everyday forms of devaluation, exploitation, and expendability, as well as the violence of racial terror and carceral regimes” (Byrd et al., 2018, p. 1). Anthropologists such as Leith Mullings have identified incarceration and policing as new “brutal sites of racialization” that, in addition to being enabled by preexisting social inequalities, also exacerbate them (2015, p. 310).

Alexander Weheliye emphasizes racialization’s chronicity and constancy as inherent features of its functioning, writing:

Overall, I construe race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west (2014, p. 3).

In a similar vein, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva notes, “our racialized self is constantly being remade (re-branded) through big and small racial acts” (2019, p. 4)

Tanya Golash-Boza and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) have suggested that the U.S. deportation regime is a gendered racial removal project, fueled by the rise of punitive governance, changes in immigration law, and the War on Terror, that disproportionately targets men of color. As deportees in Tijuana attest, deportation acts as a contemporary mode of material and social dispossession that leaves them vulnerable to additional forms of dispossession. Through ongoing acts of marginalization, their geographic expulsion (both from the U.S. and within Mexico) and dispossession results in a form of *racial expulsion*, by which

the outsider status of deportees as non-Mexican, stateless, and subhuman becomes solidified and corporeally “re-branded.” Predicated on racialized profiling, the deportation regime sets in motion a cascade of forces that serve to compound their racialization. In other words, the deportation regime is both a racialized and racializing project.

In describing deportation as a mode of contemporary dispossession, I am joining and engaging with a growing cohort of theorists seeking to provide a more capacious rendering of the multiple historical and ongoing forms of expropriation that have been integral to the production and reproduction of capitalism. Several scholars, including David Harvey, Silvia Federici, Glen Coulthard, Philippe Bourgois, among others, have drawn on and reconceptualized Karl Marx’s concept of “primitive accumulation” to consider contemporary political and economic manifestations of dispossession. Karl Marx (1976) described primitive accumulation as the original methods of violent expropriation, such as colonial conquest and England’s enclosure movements, that created a landless proletariat and provided the conditions for the emergence of capitalist relations. The aforementioned scholars argue that primitive accumulation does not merely represent an early phase of capitalist prehistory. Instead, they suggest it is a permanent modality of extra-economic coercion and violent dispossession, which Harvey (2003) refers to as “accumulation by dispossession,” necessary for the ongoing production of surpluses of capital. This includes a variety of “cannibalistic as well as predatory and fraudulent practices” such as land grabs in the Global South by multinational corporations, the privatization of public assets, biopiracy, the dismantling of social welfare systems, etc. (Harvey, 2003, p. 148).

Scholars have increasingly emphasized the social hierarchizations and dispossessions that have been constitutive of and reproduced by primitive accumulations. Perhaps most prominently, Silvia Federici has theorized that, in addition to economic dispossession, primitive accumulation

also necessarily produced racial and gender hierarchies that “deflect class antagonism” into antagonisms between racialized and gendered subjects (2003, p. 115). She writes, “Primitive accumulation has been above all an accumulation of differences, inequalities, hierarchies, divisions, which have alienated workers from each other and even from themselves” (Federici, 2003, p. 115). Jodi Byrd and her colleagues have offered the concept of “economies of dispossession” to highlight “the constitutive and continuing role of both colonization and racialization for capitalism” (Byrd et al., 2018, p. 2). Their concept aims to overcome analytic renderings of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession that do not center racialization and racial subjugation as inherent conditions of possibility for capitalism’s reproduction. Daniel Nemser (2017) provides the term “primitive racialization” to describe practices of spatial displacement and confinement employed by the Spanish in colonial Mexico to effectively discipline, evangelize, and rule over indigenous people. This “ethnogenetic process,” he contends, led to the development and consolidation of the racial categories “Indian” and “mestizo” (Nemser, 2017).

Dispossession, expulsion, and violent appropriations have served as crucial fulcrums by which new subjectivities and social relations have been and continue to be produced. The social dislocation, economic dispossession, criminalization, and resulting naturalized stigmatization of transnational deportation provides yet another example of how racialization becomes materially produced and attached to particular bodies. The multiple harms produced by the violence linked to deportation and post-deportation life can often be debilitating to deportees’ bodies. While my interlocutors’ purulent abscesses, catastrophic limb amputations, and sullied skin have their proximal causes in homelessness, injection drug use, and inability to access medical care, their deteriorated bodies are, more distally, the product of forced relocation and an international



matrix of punitive forces. Yet, the invisibility of these social forces contrasted with the hypervisibility of their debilitated bodies makes their physical attributes appear self-induced, inherent, and natural.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, Seth Holmes has described how the bodies of indigenous Oaxacan farmworkers, which tend to be shorter in stature relative to mestizo Mexicans, are perceived as being naturally built for engaging in the most difficult and least remunerated agricultural labor—picking berries bent over (2013). As theorized by Bourdieu, symbolic violence is the process by which social hierarchies come to be broadly perceived as natural, often even becoming internalized by those experiencing oppressive circumstances resulting from these inequalities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The racialized agricultural labor hierarchy that Holmes observed produced disproportionate injury and corporeal deterioration among indigenous farmworkers “understood to *deserve*” their social position (2007, p. 59). Because the condition of their bodies appears as a self-inflicted phenomenon and a byproduct of inherent criminality, deportees come to be understood as requiring carceral force for their care.

Thinking with the theorizations of Alexander Weheliye and Hortense Spillers, I suggest that deportees' debilitated bodies are not merely an outcome of racialized hierarchies, but also serve as vehicles for their further racial expulsion from the national and human community. That is, the visibly deteriorated state of deportee bodies is itself a medium of racial re-branding. In her essay, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” Spillers theorizes the concept of the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” by which the inscriptions of violence emanating from the slavery of Black people have been intergenerationally sedimented in the flesh of future “liberated” generations, marking them as non-human and sanctioning ongoing violence against them (1987, p. 67). Weheliye draws on

Spillers's notion of flesh as an archive of historical wounding in deploying the concept of "racializing assemblages" to describe "how race becomes pinioned to human physiology... in order to create the appearance of a naturally expressive relationship between phenotype and sociopolitical status" (2014, p. 12). As Weheliye explains,

Racializing assemblages translate the lacerations left on the captive body by apparatuses of political violence to a domain rooted in the visual truth-value accorded to quasi-biological distinctions between different human groupings....As a result, the flesh epitomizes a central modern assemblage of racialization that highlights how bare life is not only a product of previously established distinctions but also, and more significantly, aids in the perpetuation of hierarchical categorizations along the lines of nationality, gender, religion, race, culture, sexuality, and so on (2014, p. 40).

This process of racial "enfleshment," Weheliye suggests, produces categories of "dysgenic" or "dysselected" groups whose "expulsion from humanity appears to spring from their biological inferiority and appears, therefore, warranted" (2014, p. 69). For Weheliye, the prison-industrial complex provides a primary example of a racializing assemblage "that dysselects black and Latino subjects" (2014, p. 87).

The deportation regime, as I have suggested, also constitutes a racializing assemblage. Through persistent marginalization, deportees' "stigmata of exteriority and impurity" takes fleshy form, contributing to their continued punitive targeting under Tijuana's visual regime (Balibar, 1991, p. 60). Miguel Pinedo and his colleagues have documented how a variety of visual markers predispose deportees to increased police victimization (Pinedo et al., 2015a). Having a disheveled image, track marks from injection drug use, and tattoos, they found, are all associated with recent experiences of police abuse among deportees, making them "easy targets" as George articulated (Pinedo et al., 2015a). Because their physical markings are perceived as being associated with criminal and errant behavior, deportees' bodies draw scrutiny from

governmental authorities. As these corporeal and extra-physiological stigmata become “coded as natural substances,” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 50) deportees’ perceived criminality and politically produced corporeal debility comes to appear as race. Their expulsion from Mexico’s national community becomes visibly naturalized and racialized. This racializing assemblage, in turn, is reinforced by deportees’ consistent expulsion from Tijuana’s juridical order, which solidifies the maintenance of their outsider status.

### De facto Denationalization

In his ethnographic research among Oaxacan farmworkers in the rural Washington state landscape, Seth Holmes found that “the hiddenness of migrant bodies is one factor enabling their continued exploitation” (2007, p. 41). Remaining largely out of sight, migrant farmworkers often toil amidst harsh conditions with little public response or legal recourse. In contrast, in Tijuana I found that homeless and precariously housed deportees often have nowhere to hide from the violent practices of law enforcement agents. Local news reports frequently feature visceral images of debilitated deportees languishing on the streets of Tijuana or running from police. Their hypervisibility, rather than their hiddenness, predisposes them to exploitation and carceral violence. However, this racialized hypervisibility is simultaneously undergirded by deportees’ *legal invisibilization*, in which their legal recognition as citizens is systematically disavowed by the state. Most conspicuously, this is achieved through the police practice of stealing and discarding deportees’ legal documents, most often their INE (Instituto Nacional Electoral / National Electoral Institute)—a government-issued election card. The INE is often the only identification that deportees hold establishing their status as Mexican citizens. It is typically required for employment and for accessing needed social services, such as medical care provided in public hospitals.

Many deportees arrive to Tijuana without an INE. Meanwhile, those who do have an INE or acquire it after their deportation frequently struggle to hold onto their legal documents, along with other personal belongings. As Jesus once explained to me,

Every single time that I've been pulled over they throw away my backpack with all my clothes, all my personal hygiene products, medicine, whatever is in there...gone. Every single time, they throw my stuff away. Every single time! There's not one time that they pull you over that they don't throw everything you have away. Everything except your money. Cellphone, everything....They try to throw my ID a lot and a lot of people's they do throw away. But I've had to fight for my ID...like literally reach for it and they try to slap me and kick me, but I keep reaching and I'll grab it and I'll hold it like a football. Ultimately, they've let me keep it. I've had to fight for it and I haven't lost it yet but it's not for a lack of trying....They do that because it's a setup because they throw your ID away and next time another cop pulls you over and you don't have your ID, they're gonna harass you and take you in. They do it in case they need an excuse. "Oh you don't have an ID, we're taking you in." But they're the ones who threw it away last time.

Similar stories were repeatedly recounted to me. Some deportees explained that their legal documents were taken by police multiple times. George, for example, angrily told to me that his INE was stolen by police officers twice. Often, not having any legal identification is provided as the pretext for police apprehensions of deportees. Thus, stripping deportees of their identifications, as Jesus suggests, provides police with the means to easily perpetuate their victimization. The lack of legal recognition that governed deportees' lives in the United States and led to their expulsion oddly continues to plague them in their country of birth.

Deportees' legal invisibility also extends to their lack of inclusion in humanitarian protections that have been provided to other itinerant populations in Tijuana. Amidst the arrival of the Central American migrant caravans to Tijuana in 2018, reports began to emerge of police officers arbitrarily asking migrants for legal residency documents and subsequently transferring them to Mexico's immigration authorities (Betanzos, 2020). As with the Secure Communities

program and Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees in the United States, Tijuana's police officers were effectively acting as immigration agents (Kline, 2019). In response, migrant rights organizations advocated for the implementation of a municipal judicial order entitled Amparo 1597, which prevents police from unfairly profiling migrants and requesting their legal documents (Betanzos, 2020). Though the arbitrary harassment and imprisonment of migrants by police has certainly not ended, Amparo 1597 has provided them with some protections from the kinds of routinized abuses experienced by homeless deportees. The order was also motivated in response to several anti-immigrant statements made that same year by the city's former mayor, Juan Manuel Gastélum—labeled by his critics as the “Trump of Tijuana” (Fry, 2019). Asked about the migrant caravans by local press, Gastélum shot back, “I dare not classify them as migrants... They are a bunch of lazy people and marijuana smokers” (Camhaji, 2018). While defending an anti-immigrant protest organized by Tijuana residents, he declared, “*Los derechos humanos son para los humanos derechos y nosotros somos humanos derechos*” (Human rights are for [morally] upright humans and we are upright humans) (Camhaji, 2018).

As I found early in my fieldwork, the question of whether deportees should be identified as migrants was similarly contested, but not by the “Trump of Tijuana” or xenophobic protestors. News reports frequently describe homeless deportees, particularly those living in El Bordo, as migrants. However, many of Tijuana's city officials and even migrant rights organizations are often quick to reject this classification. While meeting with the director of a Baja California human rights coalition and migrant shelter during one of my first fieldwork trips, I asked her about the conditions of deportees living in El Bordo. She explained that those living in the canal are not migrants and are not the responsibility of her organization because they have resided in Tijuana for months or in some cases years. I was surprised by her response given that many

people who temporarily reside in her shelter are deportees. But, as I later learned, this is a common refrain imparted by public officials in their statements to media.

Rosario Lozada, the coordinator for the Programa Mejora program that displaced thousands of homeless people from El Bordo and forced many into drug rehabilitation centers in 2015, similarly told reporters that deportees are not considered migrants because they have been in Tijuana for more than six months (Martínez, 2015). Migrant status in this rendering is constituted by a legalistic temporal threshold, by which one ceases to be considered a migrant after six months after returning to Mexico. In describing the program's approach to placing deportees in drug rehabilitation centers, she explained, "The law indicates that you are already a resident, and the issue then is not immigration, but addiction" (Martínez, 2015). By focusing the state's response to deportees on their addiction, the government is advancing a medicalized understanding of their predicament. The condition of El Bordo's deportee communities, it is to be believed, can only be resolved through the provision of punitive care in the form of coerced drug rehabilitation. Jorge Astiazarán Orcí, Tijuana's mayor prior to Gastélum, who conceived of Programa Mejora, similarly sought to ensure that homeless deportees were understood to be mere addicts rather than migrants. As he explained to the media, "Tijuana municipal police know they have to respect the human rights of migrants. However, it is important to differentiate migrants from criminals...there are no migrants living in El Bordo, there are drug addicts living in El Bordo" (Merlo, 2014). According to pronouncements from public officials, residing in El Bordo, being homeless, or engaging in drug use can disqualify individuals from being referred to as migrants and marks them instead as criminals who should be permissibly dealt with using coercive force. However, many of those who were displaced in the 2015 operation did not have

drugs or drug paraphernalia (Rafful et al., 2019). Indeed, some of the displaced may not have been drug users at all (Rafful et al., 2019).

Deportees in Tijuana enjoy neither the privileges of citizenship nor the municipal humanitarian protections, however tenuous and limited, afforded to migrants. The popular phrase “*ni de aquí ni de allá*” (neither from here, nor from there) encapsulates the condition of Tijuana’s homeless deportees in brutal form. Though they are officially referred to as *repatriados*, or repatriated nationals, my interlocutors’ experiences demonstrate that they exist as *apatriados*, or stateless subjects. In her renowned text *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt (1958), an exiled Jewish theorist stripped of her nationality under Nazi-controlled Germany, focused considerable attention on the circumstances that led to the rise of mass statelessness as a quintessentially modern expression of rightlessness. Writing amidst the mid-twentieth century political convulsions and rise of totalitarianism in Europe, Arendt described the *apatride*, the stateless subject, as a paradigmatic figure reflective of the sovereign power of the modern nation-state (1958, p. 278). Arendt argued that the post-World War I denationalizations and forced deportations of “undesirable” groups throughout Europe and the Arab World that produced mass statelessness were the result of “a state structure which, if it was not yet fully totalitarian, at least would not tolerate any opposition and would rather lose its citizens than harbor people with different views” (Arendt, 1958, p. 278).

As Arendt illustrates, this “specifically political form of destitution” (Butler, 2012, p. 150) emerged from the inherent tensions and contradictions at the heart of the international nation-state system in which the legal protection of rights became contingent upon recognition as a national citizen. For Arendt, citizenship is the prerequisite for the acquisition of rights, which she famously described as “the right to have rights” (1958, p. 297). This includes the right to

basic security and freedom from harm by the state as well as the right to participate as a political agent in the public sphere (Gani & Jamal, 2020). States, through their sovereign power to admit or expel individuals from citizenship, therefore determine who can bear human rights. Human rights, in other words, are “protected and enforced only as national rights” (Arendt, 1958, p. 230). The stateless, stripped of national citizenship and expelled from the political community, are individuals who have been deprived of their ability to access rights altogether. As Arendt elaborates,

The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion—formulas which were designed to solve problems within given communities—but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever (1958, p. 295).

Being “ejected from the old trinity of state-people-territory” (Arendt, 1958, p. 282) thus produces a condition of absolute rightlessness by which the stateless become the “citizen’s Other” (Macklin, 2007).

In this context, human rights, “supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable,” becoming instead “the evidence of hopeless idealism or fumbling feeble-minded hypocrisy.” (Arendt, 1958, p. 338, p. 269). Thus, human rights within the nation-state system do not apply for non-members or those cast out of the national community. In announcing that human rights are only for those who are considered morally upright, Mayor Gastélum merely verbalized in quite blunt terms the “tragedy of the nation-state” (Arendt, 1958, p. 230). Arendt contended that while the conditions of the *de jure* stateless, “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law” (UNHCR, 1954), were often discussed at international conferences, a broader group of individuals who could be categorized as *de facto* stateless, such as refugees or individuals threatened with denationalization, often went unrecognized (Hayden,



2008). Denationalization, whether de jure or de facto, was theorized by Arendt not merely as the loss of rights, but as a form of dehumanization that paves the way towards the eliminatory politics of “concentration-camp society” (Arendt, 1958, p. 447). This genocidal structure of “total domination” first required the killing of the “juridical person in man” (Arendt, 1958, p. 447). Arendt viscerally described this brutal historical trajectory.

The insane mass manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses. The impetus and what is more important, the silent consent to such unprecedented conditions are the products of those events which in a period of political disintegration suddenly and unexpectedly made hundreds of thousands of human beings homeless, stateless, outlawed and unwanted, while millions of human beings were made economically superfluous and socially burdensome by unemployment (Arendt, 1958, p. 447).

Denationalization then is a form of juridical dispossession that makes its subjects available for subsequent acts of state violence. As Dana Villa writes, “statelessness is the most radical form of homelessness one can imagine in the modern world” (2007, p. 42).

Through the routine stripping of their legal identifications many deportees are subjected to de facto denationalization, banishing them from Mexico’s political and national community while making them vulnerable to further acts of state violence. Both physically and politically homeless, they become subjected to “total domination” by punitive state and non-state forces, such as coercive drug rehabilitation centers, with near complete impunity. I often asked my interlocutors if they had considered reporting the police abuses they experienced to civil authorities. Most responded as Jesus did. In a frank and serious tone, he replied to my seemingly absurd question immediately, “No, because they would kill me. I’m not joking around. They would literally kill me.” Whether or not it is the case that the police would murder them for filing a public complaint, these responses made it clear that deportees felt sufficiently threatened to

dissuade them from ever attempting to file public denunciations. As de facto stateless subjects they are all too aware that civil mechanisms of accountability do not pertain to them.

While the Mexican state cannot be described as genocidal or totalitarian in the way that Arendt would conceive of it, scholars have recently called attention to the country's move towards "necropolitical governmentalization" (Estévez, 2018, p. 4). Drawing on Achille Mbembe notion of necropolitics (2003), theorist Ariadna Estévez (2018) argues that migrants and the poor living in Mexico's states bordering with the U.S. are living in conditions of managed death. She describes the emergence of "disposability pockets" in Tijuana and other border cities where various intersecting necropolitical forces, from drug cartels to increasingly militarized bordering practices, have forced "those who fail to insert themselves into 'globalization' or who do so marginally...into urban areas that are not conducive to life" (Estévez, 2018, p. 2, 4). Estévez suggests that both the U.S. and Mexican states pursue "public necropolitics," such as the asylum system and governmental human rights commissions, that are designed to bureaucratically appropriate the suffering of displaced populations while converting them into pliable subjects (Estévez, 2018, p. 10). Racially hypervisibilized and marked as deserving of punishment and legally invisibilized, Tijuana's deportees have undoubtedly been rendered disposable. Yet, this disposability does not manifest as a genocidal "mass manufacture of corpses," but rather is deployed through a politics of containment and care.

### Carceral Care

The forced expulsion of hundreds of deportees from El Bordo by Programa Mejora was presented as a rescue operation by city officials—a necessary use of force to save the lives of the canal's "delinquent" inhabitants (Merlo, 2014). Indeed, in the weeks preceding the operation, heavy rains began flooding the canal and placing the lives of its residents at risk. The operation's

use of mandated drug treatment was also declared an indispensable intervention for resolving the community's high rates of methamphetamine and heroin addiction. Religious drug treatment programs have grown dramatically throughout Latin America in recent years (Garcia and Anderson, 2016). This forms part of a broader trend, both in the United States and Latin America, of rehabilitative and therapeutic social services increasingly being provided both within and adjacent to punitive institutions (Guzman, 2020). These privately operated programs have sought to fill a gap in drug treatment services for low and no-income individuals in an entrepreneurial fashion (Harvey-Vera et al., 2016). Referred to as “mutual aid” societies, they are commonly directed by former drug users and few of them have health or mental health professionals as part of their staff. They typically do not offer opioid substitution therapy, and most do not provide treatment for withdrawal symptoms (Rafful et al., 2019). Mexico's drug rehabilitation centers challenge conceptual distinctions between healing and violence by employing physical and verbal abuse, stringent work commitments, and sleep and food deprivation as therapeutic modalities (Garcia, 2015; Garcia & Anderson, 2016; Rafful et al., 2019). Angela Garcia has described Mexico's informal drug treatment centers, often referred to as *anexos* (though in Tijuana I found that most people would instead simply use the shorthand *centros*), as hybrid institutions combining elements of a “12-step program, mental asylum, prison, and church” (2015, p. 455).

Mayor Jorge Astiazarán, who was trained as an internal medicine doctor, declared that his career background motivated him to seek a therapeutic solution for El Bordo's ills (Guerrero, 2015). Astiazarán frequently affirmed that he sought to address the issue of addiction from a public health perspective by partnering with the drug rehabilitation centers (Uniradio Informa, 2013). Tijuana's approach to managing homeless deportees has united the city's bureaucracy

with these privately run institutions, combining public order with often violent techniques of personal salvation (Garcia, 2015). While anexos were once “condemned as criminal” by public officials in many parts of Mexico, they now form part of Tijuana’s governmental apparatus (Garcia, 2015). Programa Mejora was promoted as a critical operation for saving deportees from both threatening climactic conditions and their own addictions. How do we reconcile this politics of salvation with the daily brutalities of the “full-scale war,” as Jesus described it, experienced by homeless deportees? If deportees are indeed marked as disposable, as I have suggested, then why would the state not merely allow them to drown? Certainly, the Tijuana municipal government wanted to avoid the distasteful spectacle of a mass public death of homeless people. And the provision of rehabilitative care, however harsh and inadequate that care may be, can easily be seen as a cynical public relations maneuver by officials to give the appearance that they care for deportees’ welfare. But what if we took this logic of salvation seriously as an inquiry into contemporary state strategies for the management of those it considers undesirable?

To make sense of a state that exposes its disposable subjects to quotidian violence while expending tremendous resources on preventing their sudden death and rehabilitating them requires a theoretical reconsideration of the relationship between biopolitics and necropolitics. Several scholars have recently sought to rethink the intersection between Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics and Michel Foucault’s concepts of biopower and biopolitics to analyze the conditions facing stateless, migrant, colonized, and other disposable subjects. Foucault theorized the notion of biopolitics to describe new social rationalities and techniques implemented at the level of the population, such as public health measures and statistical metrics of life expectancy, aimed at the promotion, normalization, and regulation of life that emerged in Western societies in the seventeenth-century. Biopower and biopolitics, he argued, developed out of the necessity

for states to complement earlier sovereign techniques of governance, driven primarily by the “right to take life or let live” (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). As Foucault explains,

It is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organizing schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization. So much that far too many things were escaping the old mechanism of the power of sovereignty, both at the top and at the bottom, both at the level of detail and at the mass level. (Foucault, 2003, p. 249).

But the life promoting feature of biopower is not evenly distributed across all groups within modern societies. Rather, biopower is also structured by “state racism,” which as Foucault suggested, acted as a means of “fragmenting the field of the biological” and establishing a “break between what must live and what must die” (2003, p. 288). Like Balibar, Foucault conceptualized racism as a social technology by which biopolitical states wage “war” on those considered to be members of the undesirable “enemy race” as a strategy of “permanent purification.” But, in addition to serving a socially purifying function, for Foucault racism is also aimed at improving and “regenerating” the dominant racial group (2003, p. 1, 257). Though he devotes most attention to the example of the Nazi’s genocidal policies, Foucault emphasizes that such acts of war are also enacted against the “biocriminal,” the mad, and other figures deemed biologically threatening to the population. Nikhil Pal Singh has provided a definition of racism that resonates closely with Foucault’s, writing

We need to recognize the technology of race as something more than skin color or biophysical essence, but precisely as those historic repertoires and cultural, spatial, and signifying systems that stigmatize and depreciate one form of humanity for the purposes of another’s health, development, safety, profit, and pleasure (2005, p. 223).

Racism, as Foucault and Singh suggest, is not primarily constituted by feelings of discrimination against racial others but instead serves as a means for states to defend and maximize society's health by undercutting those it considers abnormal.

In response to Foucault's biopower and biopolitics, Mbembe (2003) has offered the concepts of necropower and necropolitics to describe conditions, such as under colonial occupation and slavery, in which extreme sovereign violence is primarily oriented towards "the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (2003, p. 14). The notion of biopower, Mbembe insists, is insufficient for accounting "for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds" (2003, p. 40). In contrast to the theorizations of Giorgio Agamben, Mbembe identifies the colony and the slave plantation, rather than the Nazi concentration camp, as the primordial and ultimate expressions of modern sovereign violence (2003). He cogently argues that it is in the plantation system that "we see the first syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality (Mbembe, 2003, p. 23). Moreover, he suggests that it is in the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine that we find the most "accomplished form of necropower," which has effectively combined "the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 27). Under necropolitical conditions, he writes, we see the emergence of "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40).

Mbembe's articulation of the heterogenous rationalities underlying late-modern colonial occupations shares a great deal with insights that have emerged from scholars of settler colonialism. Most influentially, Patrick Wolfe (2006) has described the "logic of elimination" as

an ongoing structure of power central to settler colonial societies aimed at systematically replacing indigenous people with settlers. Yet, Wolfe is careful to differentiate this logic of elimination from genocide, noting that settler colonial states do not necessarily need to engage in genocidal practices to replace indigenous peoples. Indeed, he argues, elimination may take on biopolitical and life-promoting forms aimed at assimilating “indigenous peoples, cultures and lands into the body of the settler nation” (Morgensen, 2013). Wolfe writes,

The positive outcomes of the logic of elimination can include officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations (2006, p. 388).

While purification of the national body remains an operative objective in such states, Wolfe describes how this has often been achieved through the assimilationist incorporation of those deemed abnormal rather than through deadly acts of “war” against them, as Foucault suggested. In recent years, numerous scholars have examined how biopolitical modes of elimination are pursued in modern states. Lisa Stevenson has offered the term “welfare colonialism” to describe the Canadian settler colony’s efforts to lay claim to Arctic territory and eradicate the country’s “Eskimo problem” by assimilating, cleansing, and ostensibly healing the Inuit people (2014). Under Canada’s settler biopolitical regime, the Inuit became constituted as little more than biological bodies, serial numbers, and statistics. Stevenson suggests that the biologization of this indigenous community continues to pervade the state’s bureaucratized response to an ongoing suicide epidemic among the Inuit (2014).

Scholars of migrant and refugee governance working across several sites have empirically elucidated the ways that “biopolitics and necropolitics are interrelated rather than antithetical” (Davies, Isakjee, & Dhesi, 2017, p. 1268). Thom Davies and his colleagues, for

example, have examined the biopolitical surveillance and necropolitical inaction experienced by migrants who resided in a refugee encampment in Calais, France, popularly referred to as the “Calais Jungle” between 2015 until its destruction by French authorities in 2016 (Davies, Isakjee, & Dhesi, 2017). By withholding resources and access to asylum procedures, the “violent inaction” of the French authorities produced unsanitary and squalid conditions in the camp, effectively converting it into a “death world.” Referencing Mbembe’s notion that colonized and disposable subjects are “kept alive but in a state of injury,” (2003, p. 21) they suggest that refugees in such conditions are being exposed to what Rob Nixon has referred to as “slow death” (Davies, Isakjee, & Dhesi, 2017). Meanwhile, Jill Williams (2015) has argued that the U.S.-Mexico border is governed by a “bio-necro enforcement regime” in which injured migrants attempting to traverse the region’s brutal landscape are provided with the “minimal amount of care necessary to ensure that death does not occur until after deportation” (2015, p. 17). Life is not so much fostered, Williams suggests, as death is merely averted while assuring that the structures that injure and marginalize migrants remain intact.

These scholars’ insights demonstrate how racialized, disposable, and dispossessed communities can be simultaneously recruited into both biopolitical and necropolitical projects, challenging Foucault’s conceptually stricter delineation that divides populations targeted for life-promoting activities from those marked for death. The politics of elimination and disposal often proceed not only through exclusion and abandonment, but also through practices of inclusion and absorption into disciplinary mechanisms. As Balibar notes, violence “is not situated on the side of exclusion alone. *Inclusion itself can be just as violent*, whether it takes the form of forced (or at least coerced, under pain of “social death”) “conversion” or assimilation” (2015, p. 72).



Likewise, expulsion—often envisaged merely as a spatial casting out or dispersion—can also be complemented with practices of containment.

Containment, as several scholars have recently noted, has emerged as a prevailing logic and practice amidst the ongoing spatial dislocations produced by global capitalism, territorial dispossession, and mass migration. Lorenzo Veracini suggests that the logic of elimination that has historically targeted indigenous communities is increasingly being applied to a wider range of groups considered disposable. This is occurring in response to “a ‘new’ capitalist global dispensation that does not seem to take the reproduction of labor as a priority” (2019, p. 122). This “global settler-colonial present” produced by a “dispossessory regime,” he elaborates, has led to the interminable growth of “surplus populations that are to be warehoused and contained” (Veracini, 2019, p. 127). Containment also figures prominently in Saskia Sassen’s (2014) examination of the global expulsions characterizing the current phase of advanced global capitalism. Per Sassen, the now dominant logic of “radical expulsion,” which increasingly renders the exploitation of workers unnecessary for the pursuit of capitalist profit, has led to a diverse range of superfluous groups subjected to various forms of “warehousing.” Sassen writes,

They include the growing numbers of the abjectly poor, of the displaced in poor countries who are warehoused in formal and informal refugee camps, of the minoritized and persecuted in rich countries who are warehoused in prisons, of workers whose bodies are destroyed on the job and rendered useless at far too young an age, of able-bodied “surplus populations” warehoused in ghettos and slums (2016, p. 89).

For Balibar, our current era of market globalization has produced a condition in which no space exists outside of territorial regimes of power. This global condition of “pure exteriority,” he suggests, has led to the creation of “ubiquitous ‘limbos’ where those who are neither assimilated and integrated nor immediately eliminated, are forced to remain” (Balibar, 2005, p. 31). Thus,

immobilization and spatial segregation have come to operate as dominant modes of an inclusive necropolitics.

As stateless, racialized, and superfluous subjects, deportees have been subjected to what I refer to as *carceral care*, a mode of necropolitical cultivation conjoining containment, punishment, medicalization, and salvation. The notion of carceral care draws on Anand Pandian's concept of "predatory care," which he describes as a "means of grappling with the uneasy intimacy of biopolitical cultivation and sovereign violence" (2001, p. 100). Examining historical instances in which deadly force was directed towards social welfare in India, his intervention sought to challenge scholars of the state who rely too easily on the "commonsensical opposition between predatory rule and the care of the populace" (Pandian, 2001, p. 80). The concept of carceral care is similarly aimed at excavating the imbrication between these seemingly contradictory logics, while also addressing the spatial and juridical nature of an inclusive logic of elimination. More than simply denoting policing and incarceration, carcerality describes the logics of punishment and surveillance undergirding a variety of strategies that states employ to discipline populations and resolve social problems (Fassin, 2017). Loïc Wacquant (2009), for example, posits that "hyperincarceration" has become a mechanism for governing post-industrial poverty and "punishing the poor."

Carceral care has multiple aims, simultaneously seeking to punish, contain, salvage, and assimilate deportees in a segregated fashion. This mode of governance is most obviously expressed in the deployment of forced and often violent drug rehabilitation for deportees. However, the logic of carceral care is also at work in the daily brutalities and routine imprisonment experienced by deportees. While talking with Francisco, the deportee from Oakland, about his feelings concerning the violence he experienced at the hands of police and in

drug rehabilitation centers, he soberly explained to me, “Getting beat up is part of the deal wherever you go. If you ain’t gonna listen with words, the next best thing is *chingazos* (hard blows)...know what I mean? I’m gonna tell you...sometimes it works. Because here they don’t pamper you, that’s one thing. They give it to you straight.”

I learned that deportees often held ambivalent attitudes about the drug rehabilitation centers and in some instances their opinions about them changed over time. During one of the first interviews I conducted with Jesus shortly after meeting him, I asked him what he thought about the drug rehabilitation centers. Although he had never been forced into a center by police, he had voluntarily spent time in two of them in Tijuana. He was regretful about ever going to them and seemed intent on never returning. He shared his assessment of the true objectives driving the rehabilitation centers and more details about their punishing therapeutic methods.

The thing is, it’s not a nice place. They’re not there to help you. They’re just there to get the state to give them money, they’re using you to make money, basically, ‘cuz they make money off of you. The state gives them money to supposedly quote unquote help you and the therapy they give you is they whoop your ass and put you in a barrel of cold freezing water for 24 hours in the dead middle of winter and you almost die or something.

A little over a month after I conducted this interview, I saw Jesus at the RHA clinic. A few weeks earlier, he had begun receiving methadone treatment in the hopes of finally breaking with his heroin addiction. His treatment seemed to be going well and during those weeks he shared how optimistic he was that he would overcome his drug use. But suddenly Jesus’ goals and circumstances seemed to change, as I noted in the following fieldnote.

Jesus showed up to the clinic today and asked for me. He told me he wanted to see a dentist since he had been experiencing tooth pain for the last few days. I recalled that last month he told me most of his teeth had rotted and fallen out because of his meth addiction. Jesus didn’t look well and seemed very tired. I asked how he was doing. He said “bad” and proceeded to tell me that his sister had just died. She was locked away in

federal prison in the U.S. He said she had diabetes but didn't tell me how she died. I was left wondering if it was COVID-19. His mother told him that she would pay for a *pollero* (human smuggler) for him to cross back into the U.S., but that he needed to get clean first. So, she would pay for him to go back into a drug rehab center for three months before crossing. He told me he decided to go to one of the larger rehab centers near the border, Una Nueva Vida. I asked, "no more methadone?" He replied, "No, I just need to get clean from all of that." – Fieldnote, September 22, 2020

Aside from still being harrassed by police several days per week, Jesus was also grappling with physical and emotional pain. At this low point, his mother's offer seemed sufficiently appealing for him. But just a month later, Jesus changed his mind again and he decided not to go back into rehab despite his mother's offer. I asked what changed for him. He simply grumbled, "Their therapy is negativity." He elaborated that in the centers they constantly castigated him and others receiving rehabilitation, making them "feel bad" for their addictions. He just couldn't submit himself to that again he said. These kinds of ambivalent and at times contradictory reactions to drug rehabilitation centers are common among deportees. My interlocutors often became visibly angered while telling me about the brutal treatment they received. But they also described the ways that they were cared for inside the centers. In some cases, I met deportees who felt that the rehabilitation centers truly saved and transformed them. Though many have been forced into drug rehabilitation against their will, particularly during the Programa Mejora operation, some deportees also viewed the centers as providing a space of respite from the dangers of homelessness and police violence. In the context of Tijuana's deadly terrain, the drug rehabilitation centers, though abusive in their practices and often requiring non-remunerated labor as a condition for residency, at least provide food, shelter, and the possibility of personal and spiritual salvation.

But to slightly reframe my earlier question, how did the politics of salvation become reconciled with the "full-scale war" visited upon deportees? Noting that "violence is integral to

everyday life in Mexico,” Angela Garcia has asked: “How could violence be absent from recovery here [in the anexos] if it is present everywhere else?” (2015, p. 468). Indeed, as Francisco so clearly elucidated, violence is just “part of the deal wherever you go.” While the fusion of care and brutality may be attributable, at least in part, to the contemporary ubiquity of violence in Mexico, the confluence of salvation, containment, and war also has a long colonial and religious genealogy in Latin America. In his seminal text *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, Robert Ricard (1966) used the term “spiritual warfare” to describe the various methods deployed by the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian Christian mendicant orders to evangelize indigenous people in colonial Mexico. Daniel Nemser (2017) has described one of these methods, referred to as “congregation” (congregación), in great detail. As Nemser explains, congregation “sought to forcibly resettle ‘dispersed’ indigenous communities into centralized towns under the watchful gaze of the colonial authorities” (2017, p. 26). Implemented as a project of indigenous dispossession and subordination in the first century of Spanish colonial rule in Mexico, congregation was also conceived by its purveyors as a civilizing mission to convert the indigenous from remaining “salvajes” (savages) and as a necessary strategy to prevent their ongoing population decline. Here again we find the logic of elimination appearing not as genocide, but rather as inclusion and containment.

Talal Asad (2015) has suggested that the genealogical underpinnings of modern humanitarian projects deployed by the West have not been inherited from Enlightenment values alone, as is often believed. Often materializing in militaristic forms, he finds that the logic of humanitarianism is also derived from “a complex genealogy that is partly older than the eighteenth century in which compassion and benevolence are intertwined with violence and cruelty, an intertwining that is not merely a coexistence of the two but a mutual dependence of

each on the other” (Asad, 2015, p. 393). In contemporary military and humanitarian interventions, Asad suggests, we can find fragments of Medieval Christian conceptions of violence as a purifying force at play. Similarly, Sacha Darke and Omar Phoenix Khan posit that the contemporary Brazilian legal and criminal justice systems continue to be shaped by colonial logics, which authorized a “just war” against those deemed inferior or “who rejected or impeded the spread of Christianity” (2021, p. 727). This just war continues to manifest, they suggest, in the legitimized use of violence as a tool of disciplinary punishment against criminals and drug users.

Given these historical antecedents, perhaps it should come as no surprise if the pervasive corporeal and carceral violence visited upon deportees, whether in drug rehabilitation centers or while being taken to La 20, is conceived by authorities and, in some cases, even by deportees themselves as an act of caring. I found Jesus’ ambivalent and changing attitudes towards coercive drug rehabilitation reflected in numerous other conversations with deportees. In many conversations, they justified the tactics used by police and rehab centers as harsh, but necessary. One of the first interviews I conducted with Israel was particularly illustrative of this. When I asked him how many times he had been arrested by the cops, he replied, “it feels like hundreds of times.” He went on to describe one of those occasions, when he had some methamphetamine on him. He was harshly attacked by the police officers, which he explained as being a very scary experience for him. But he went on to say that he didn’t regret being arrested by the police and that he “learned something from it.”

Ian Whitmarsh (2014) provokes us to read all institutionality as a form of kinship, with all the ambivalences of love and violence that this entails. Following this, we might understand the therapeutic punishment provided through carceral care as an act of love. In his studies of

colonial expeditions conducted in New Spain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, José Rabasa (2000) found that declarations of love for the subjugated indigenous people were as pervasive as the “hate speech” deployed against them. As he explains,

Hate speech is pervasive, indeed, constitutive of colonial situations, but the implantation of colonial rule and the subordination of colonial subjects cannot be reduced to a modality of hate speech. “Love speech” is as central to colonization as spurting offensive yet injurious stereotypes. The challenge is to understand love speech as a powerful mode of subjection and effective violence (Rabasa, 2000, p. 6).

As Asad similarly reminds us, “love was not incompatible with violence; St. Augustine had, after all, taught that punishment meted out to redeem sinners must always be infused with love” (2015, p. 397). This is not to imply that police officers or public authorities have individual feelings of love for deportees or that they shed tears while deportees suffer and die every day. Rather, I’m suggesting that we should understand carceral care as a contemporary bureaucratized mode of crusading salvation that offers the promise of life (however marginal and subjugated it may be) with an underlying threat of death. For some, the sovereign embrace has always been simultaneously loving and suffocating.

Deportees have been the subjects of multiple projects deployed by both governmental and non-governmental entities aimed at protecting their “bio-welfare” in recent years (Ong, 2011). Some of these have been characterized by violence and punishment, as I’ve discussed, and others have been driven by more solidaristic values. While such projects have pursued a “minimalist biopolitics” aimed at preventing or at least attenuating biological death among this community, they have not attended to the profound “social death” constituting deportee existence (Redfield, 2005). Without confronting the conditions of statelessness and racial expulsion experienced by deportees—that is, until they are socially repatriated as recognized members of Mexico’s national and human community—they will likely continue to be subjected to the violent embrace

of carceral care. In the absence of such an effort, these homeboys without a homeland are unlikely to find a home any time soon.



## Chapter Two: Unruly Waters, Unsanitary Bodies

Today I entered the Tijuana River canal near La 20 with staff from Prevecasa, where they distributed clean needles, naloxone, food, and water bottles to El Bordo's homeless residents. We drove in from one of Tijuana's heavily trafficked thoroughfares running parallel to the canal. After arriving to a large homeless settlement underneath an overpass crossing the canal, Poncho, one of the Prevecasa staff, got out of the car to talk with some of the residents. He wanted to make sure that they were fine with us staying there for a bit to exchange syringes and that everything seemed safe. They replied that we could, so the Prevecasa staff jumped into action. They set up a table outside of the trunk, asked the canal inhabitants to form a line, and provide their names to receive new syringes in exchange for their used ones.

The settlement was like a concentrated make-shift village. It contained the most abundant accumulation of materials used for housing that I had seen inside the canal. There were mattresses, camping tents, plenty of chairs, and what even appeared like an outdoor living room space replete with a sofa and table. A precarious walking bridge built with long pieces of steel railing that usually line the sides of many roads in Tijuana allowed villagers to carefully cross over the dark brown stream of sewage and water running through the middle of the canal. The walls of the overpass that provided cover for the village were filled with majestically sized graffiti featuring the kind of Mexican gangster-style cursive writing that my friends and I, as teenagers, would scrawl all over our junior high notebooks and textbooks. The graffiti letters here were much more sophisticated than our novice sketches mimicking the "cholo" aesthetic that achieved mainstream popularity in the 1990s. Just like many of the canal's inhabitants, this graffiti style has been exported (or rather, deported) from the barrios of Southern California to Tijuana's walls.

Though the village is located in the heart of Tijuana's sprawling metropolitan tumult, sandwiched in between a hard landscape of concrete and asphalt, it has a surprising tranquility, accentuated by the sound of streaming canal water. I was struck by the small glimpses of order, joy, and conviviality I encountered in the encampment amidst the canal's foul stench and the physical deterioration of its inhabitants. One villager was gleefully flying a kite over the feculent stream of sewage and the piles of garbage strewn about, others were cordially passing a pipe around with crystal meth, and another man was sweeping dirt and dust away from the living room area. The only other visible presence in the canal was the legion of large garbage trucks about half a mile down conducting the ongoing *limpieza* (cleaning) of the sediment and waste that has accumulated over the years. Although the mere presence of the trucks

appeared menacing to me at first, knowing full well that *limpiezas* have been used to justify repression against the canal’s inhabitants, the cleaning crews and the canal villagers seemed to be coexisting peacefully—at least at the moment. – Fieldnote, August 21, 2020



**Fig. 3.1:** Makeshift homes inside the Tijuana River Canal (Carlos Martinez)

For decades, the binational Tijuana River basin traversing the militarized border dividing the United States and Mexico has been perceived as an unruly body of water by officials from both countries. Prone to persistent flooding, the portion of the river inside Mexican territory was channelized through a federally-funded development scheme that transformed Tijuana’s urban landscape in the 1970s (Peralta, 2012). A toxic brew of sewage containing industrial pollution from Tijuana’s massive *maquiladora* (tax-exempt assembly plant) industry, agricultural run-off, and residential waste from adjacent informal communities now flows through the canal (Al-

Delaimy et al., 2014; Lemus, 1995; Grineski, Collins, and Romo Aguilar, 2015). Amidst Tijuana's ceaseless growth throughout the 20th century, the riverbed has been inhabited by migrants, laborers, and—most recently—homeless deportees (Albicker and Velasco, 2016). El Bordo is an important site for local drug distribution and consumption. Given this, it is also a front in the perpetual war between rival drug trafficking organizations who seek to dominate the city's *conectas* (drug sale locations) (Mehta et al., 2018).

Cutting through Tijuana like a putrid gash, this fetid waterway has become one of the city's defining features. The canal and its inhabitants are among the first things that travelers see when driving across the border from the U.S. into Tijuana. It is now managed as an ecological and social nuisance requiring constant *limpiezas* (cleaning). Sewage from the canal often overflows into U.S. and Mexican beaches, producing constant backlash from U.S. officials and residents in Southern California (Smith and Fry, 2021). *Limpiezas*, frequently reported on in local news stories, target the sediment, vegetation, and sewage build-up in the canal as well as the homeless communities that have developed there in recent years. These sanitizing practices are aimed at a spatial cleansing of the canal's terrain contaminated by industrial pollutants as well as those treated by authorities as human refuse.

The *limpiezas* targeting homeless deportees take the form of militarized police crackdowns, or *operativos*, in which dozens of the canal's residents are rounded up (Morales et al., 2020). They are typically sent to Tijuana's notorious municipal jail, the *20 de noviembre* jail, for 36 hours. If the individual has multiple prior offenses or is caught with a sufficient quantity of drugs, they are given longer prison sentences. Alternatively, many are sent to one of the city's hundreds of informal drug rehabilitation centers for an indeterminate period (Rafful et al., 2019). Homeless people placed in La 20 or in drug rehabilitation centers are often obliged to serve as

the city's cleaning crews (Camarillo, 2020; Fabela, 2021). The cleaning of the canal thus takes on multiple sanitizing forms. The canal is spatially cleansed of sediment and people, while its inhabitants are forced to get clean from drugs and, in some cases, come to serve as the city's sanitary laborers.

While conducting fieldwork in Tijuana between 2020 and 2021, I participated in a study with a binational team of public health and biogeochemical researchers exploring the health risks associated with the use of and contact with Tijuana River water by homeless deportees living in or accessing the canal. The study sought to provide greater empirical evidence of the health consequences related to contact with Tijuana River water, such as skin rashes and gastrointestinal problems (Al-Delaimy et al., 2014; Smith and Fry, 2021). We collaborated with two local non-profit organizations approaching health from alternate vantage points—PrevenCasa, which advances harm reduction efforts among Tijuana's homeless drug-using community, and Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental A.C. [The Border Environmental Education Project] (PFEA), which has pursued environmental health advocacy related to the Tijuana River's contaminated water since 1991. Collectively, we sought to develop recommendations for the Mexican government that could simultaneously improve the water quality of the Tijuana River and the health of homeless people in direct contact with this water. Our transdisciplinary team conducted interviews, surveys, ethnographic fieldwork, and monthly biological and chemical evaluations of water quality all in an effort to make sense of the entanglements between ecosystem and human health.

Through my ethnographic engagements, I came to see not only the amalgamation of toxic and social burdens associated with living in a polluted urban infrastructure, but also how public rhetorics of cleaning blighted terrains were used to target and ostensibly purify those

experiencing environmental harm. Disposed of and deposited in a hostile terrain by the U.S. deportation regime, homeless deportees are widely presented as criminal and failed subjects in public discourses. Their association with drug use, homelessness, criminality, and living amidst the filth of the Tijuana River canal has rendered deportees as unsympathetic figures in media and governmental narratives. Just as the canal's deposits of sediment and waste requires vigilant removal, so too must these unwelcome human deposits be expelled from the urban landscape, according to city officials. Flood control and human control have been spatially tied in the Tijuana River canal, an eminently technological, ecological, and social structure of the industrial Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene is characterized as an epoch in which humans have become a dominant geological force in the manipulation and destruction of ecologies throughout the planet (Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen, and McNeill, 2011). The disciplining and exploitation of unruly landscapes in the service of capital accumulation has been central to the Anthropocene—or as some prefer to call it, the Capitalocene (Moore, 2017a). This disciplining of ecologies has often taken the form of massive urban infrastructures, such as dams, railways, and canals, which have required the displacement and devastation of both human and non-human communities alike—a phenomenon referred to in development literature as “development-induced displacement and resettlement” (Terminski, 2015). Managing the ecological disruptions emanating from these infrastructures and human-produced waste has become a key feature of the industrial Anthropocene.

At the same time, urban infrastructures existing at the edges of many metropolises, such as sewers, canals, and highway underpasses, have increasingly become homes for the growing numbers of dispossessed and disposable communities in cities throughout the world, from

Prague to Kolkata to Tijuana (Ghosh, 2019; Pospěch, 2020). So integral to the reproduction of capital, these marginal urban spaces have oddly become refuges for those considered superfluous to capitalism. After being depopulated for their development, many urbanized ecologies have ironically been repopulated by those with nowhere else to go. Thus, modern infrastructures, such as the Tijuana River canal, have often served both as agents of expulsion and spaces of temporary respite for the marginalized.

In this chapter I am pursuing what Anna Tsing, Andrew Mathews, and Nils Bubandt (2019) refer to as an anthropology of a “patchy Anthropocene” through examining the concomitant disciplining of landscapes and people in the Tijuana River Watershed. Patches, they posit, are more-than-human landscape structures that have often been shaped amidst the Anthropocene by “modular simplifications” in which “everything but that which is required for the reproduction of the economic product should be eliminated” (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019, S189) This “regimentation of human and nonhuman life,” they explain, has stimulated “feral effects, of nuclear, toxic, viral, bacterial, fungal, or animal kinds” (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019, S189). They provide the plantation as a paradigmatic site of ecological simplification and the disciplining of humans, which—in addition to producing economic capital—also unleashes destructive unintended ecological consequences, such as soil erosion and the proliferation of opportunistic fungi. I consider how materialities and mythologies of orderliness and sanitation have been violently deployed in the disciplining of unruly landscapes and people, producing abjection, shortsighted solutionism, and toxic burdens on humans and non-humans in their wake. I ask how conceptions of the Anthropocene might shift when practices of biopolitical containment are made central to analyses of what we might refer to as *terrapolitical* control. Here I am joining a growing cohort of scholars emphasizing how enduring

histories of human inequality grounded in colonial, racialized, and capitalist relations have been constitutive of and amplified by the Anthropocene (Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Moore, 2017a; Saldanha, 2020; Yussof, 2018). Through ethnographically attending to the intersections of human and territorial captivity, I seek to provide insights into the ways that unruly terrains and unsanitary subjects (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs, 2003) have been coevally constructed as enemies of civilizational progress requiring dispossession, development, rehabilitation.

### Infrastructures of Dispossession

Today I joined the Border Wound Clinic to distribute syringes, naloxone, and hygiene kits to residents of the canal, near La 20. I spoke with a few patients while they were receiving wound care. One patient, Rigoberto, told me that a large group of governmental officials entered the canal a few days ago to conduct a survey among the people living there. He was clearly bothered by the experience and distrusted the officials' motives. He explained, "That's how they locate us. It's like GPS, but with a pen." He has good reason to be distrustful—he told me he has been arbitrarily picked up by the police and jailed in La 20 countless times. The last time he was detained, the police planted 28 "*globos*" (small plastic wrappers) of crystal meth on him. This provided them with legal justification for taking him to the *ministerio público* (state district attorney), instead of La 20, where he could be charged as a drug dealer and be sent to prison for a longer sentence. They tried forcing Rigoberto to admit to being a drug dealer, but he refused. Ultimately, they let him go but the next time the police caught him, he was promised, he would be sent away to "*la pinta*" (prison). – Fieldnote, November 14, 2020

The Tijuana River canal is a heavily surveilled securityscape (Low and Maguire, 2019), chronically patrolled by Tijuana's metropolitan police as well as state and federal security forces. In addition to periodic *operativos* in which several dozen or even hundreds of the canal's homeless residents are apprehended in one fell swoop, police arbitrarily detain smaller groups of inhabitants daily. The policing of the canal's residents has emerged as a topic of concern among public health scholars in recent years (Pinedo et al., 2015; Pinedo et al., 2017). Researchers, for example, have examined the various ways that policing tactics, such as syringe confiscation,

increase the homeless drug using community’s vulnerability to HIV infection and other infectious diseases by altering their drug consumption practices (Beletsky et al., 2013). The provision of clean syringes and naloxone by harm reduction organizations such as the Border Wound Clinic has been vital in counteracting these forces. The Border Wound Clinic’s slogans, “*Por Una Tijuana Mas Humana*” (For a More Humane Tijuana) and “*Apoye, No Castigue*” (Support, Don’t Punish), emblazoned on many of their materials, banners, and t-shirts, signal their commitment to challenging the punitive logics ravaging the homeless community with free medical care grounded in compassion.



**Fig. 3.2:** Border Wound Clinic volunteer providing care to homeless man during a street clinic near La 20 (Carlos Martinez)

The canal has also been a site of intermittent biopolitical surveillance, in which the lives of those residing in the canal are tabulated and provided with occasional aid by the state—"GPS, but with a pen" as Rigoberto put it. The governmental survey he mentioned was implemented in 2020 as part of a broader governmental effort to “rehabilitate” the canal, which included the



removal of hundreds of tons of solid waste (Sanchez, 2020). Though the provision of free meals and medical care to the canal's inhabitants was prominently emphasized in governmental briefings on the progress of the canal's *limpieza*, the destruction and removal of dozens of makeshift homeless encampments was also central to the rehabilitation project. These removal efforts are aimed at countering the canal's persistent flooding of toxic sewage, particularly during the rainy season, into the Pacific Ocean and across the international boundary into the Tijuana Estuary, the largest coastal wetland in Southern California. Though Tijuana's canal community is undoubtedly targeted for punishment by police and governmental authorities due to their socially stigmatized status, the acts of surveillance and expulsion to which they are subjected are also tied to a broader ecology and history of dispossessive development. Indeed, they are not the first community to experience forced removal from the Tijuana River.

The Tijuana River Valley began to be viewed by officials in Mexico as a coveted territory for urban development by the mid-twentieth century, given the spatial constraints posed by the city's location abutting the international border and its mountainous landscape dominated by steep slopes and flood prone canyons. Prior to the 1930s, Tijuana was little more than a sparsely populated rural outpost isolated from the rest of Mexico (Herzog, 1985). But during the Prohibition Era, when the sale and consumption of alcohol was made illegal in the U.S., Tijuana emerged as a renowned vice outpost engulfed by bars, casinos, and brothels eager to fulfill North Americans' illicit desires (Kun, 2010). This was merely the first act in Tijuana's perpetual effort to transform its landscape in response to U.S. proclivities and policy changes. The 1942 U.S.-Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, also known as the Bracero Program, which permitted millions of Mexican farmworkers to work legally in the United States on short-term labor contracts, produced a dramatic wave of migration to northern Mexico. Initially aimed at addressing a short-

term shortage of agricultural labor during World War II, the Bracero Program continued more than nineteen years after the war and issued 4.65 million labor contracts by the time it ended (García, 2021). Many Braceros took up residency in Mexican border cities, driving steep population growth between 1940 and 1950 (Gordillo, 2009). Amidst an economic downturn and growing unemployment in the 1950s, the U.S. immigration policy pendulum swung again. In 1954, the U.S. government in collaboration with Mexican immigration officials initiated “Operation Wetback,” triggering the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans in an effort to halt growing labor mobility (Lytle Hernández, 2006). Returned Mexicans resettled in northern border cities in droves, further catapulting the region’s population growth (Dear and Leclerc, 1998).

Several squatter settlements developed in the Tijuana River Valley in the wake of these transnational and domestic migrations. Despite periodic flooding, the watershed proved to be the city’s most attractive patch of land for new arrivals to settle. The floodplain’s population continued inflating as laborers who constructed the city’s Puente Mexico built homes along the river’s banks using leftover materials (Dedina, 1995). *Cartolandia* (Cardboardland), the watershed’s largest settlement—built from cardboard boxes, bedsprings, used American cars, and other refuse—was inhabited by 10,000 to 15,000 residents by the 1970s. Though *Cartolandia* developed into a highly organized community, containing an employment center, food cooperative, and clinic, it was derisively viewed as an “urban cancer” by local authorities (Rocha, 2015). Like today’s El Bordo community, *Cartolandia* was immediately visible to travelers entering Tijuana from the United States. The perception of urban chaos in response to growing floodplain settlements along with pressures to find more land for formal residential and commercial development posed political and economic challenges for Mexican authorities.

In this context, the watershed and its settlements became targets for a decades-long campaign of urban, ecological, and social engineering. In 1972, the federal government, with support from the U.S., several bank loans, and the International Monetary Fund, launched *Proyecto Río Tijuana*, a 100 million dollar effort to channelize the river and create a new downtown district (Dedina, 1995; Rocha, 2015). This ambitious project, aimed at converting Tijuana into a modern city and accompanied by the slogan, “*Todo por un Nuevo Tijuana*” (Anything for a New Tijuana), was premised on the removal of the watershed’s squatter communities (Mancillas, 1993). As René Peralta argues, “the Tijuana River Canal proved to be a monological solution to control yearly flooding and informal development along its edge” (2012, p. 139). Buttressed by a utopian and lucrative vision for a “new Tijuana,” government officials called on the military to violently expel thousands of families from Cartolandia and proceeded to bulldoze their homes (Mancillas, 1993). A second phase of canal construction displaced 20,000 families from the watershed in 1978. The removal campaign had a brutal culmination in 1980 when the floodgates of the Rodriguez Dam east of the city were opened during a period of heavy rain without warning, washing away the homes of the remaining 2,500 riverine residents and killing 80 people. Rather than resolving the city’s growing demand for housing, Proyecto Río Tijuana eliminated one of the city’s largest areas of low-income residences while dispersing squatter communities across Tijuana’s precarious hillsides and canyons (Dedina, 1995). The canal now stands as an imposing yet faltering monument to modernity enveloped in a landscape still largely dominated by urban informality and stark poverty.

The infrastructuralization of wild landscapes has been an indispensable feature of colonial and capitalist topographies of the Anthropocene. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, watersheds in Europe were converted into hydraulic catalysts for the rise of industrialization, mass

urbanization, and international commerce. Though watersheds have been manipulated by humans for thousands of years, pre-industrial societies developed innovative means to work with the pulsing ebb and flow of fluvial landscapes, such as “elevating whole terrains and lowering water depths during floods” (Gamble and Hogan, 2019, p. 11). But as watersheds throughout the world became integrated into international commercial networks, they and their inhabitants were fundamentally altered. Europe’s enclosure movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, for example, left peasant communities without grazing rights and drained wetlands to convert them into farmlands owned by large estates (Gamble and Hogan, 2019, p. 11). As rural communities were torn from their lands and began flooding into nascent cities, riverine ecologies became gradually converted into concrete “grey infrastructures” through “hard engineering” practices to consolidate urban developments and nation-states (Dong, Guo, Zeng, 2017; Shannon, 2013). These patterns of ecological dispossession and dispersion were replicated throughout the world with European colonial expansion and continue to reverberate in contemporary development practices (Gamble and Hogan, 2019).

Infrastructures are physical and social technologies that serve to demarcate classed, gendered, and racialized terrains of inclusion and exclusion. As Appel, Anand, and Gupta explain, “Infrastructures have been technologies that modern states use not only to demonstrate development, progress, and modernity, giving these categories their aesthetics, form, and substance...but also to differentiate populations and subject some to premature death.” (2018, p. 5) This insight cuts against normative notions of infrastructural development as being a universally beneficial rising tide that lift all boats. Megadams, in particular, have served as towering symbols of national power in industrializing countries throughout the world. As Rob

Nixon suggests, “to erect a megadam was literally to concretize the postcolonial nation’s modernity, prosperity, and autonomy.” (2018, p. 166).

Yet, in the channelized flows of many urban waterways, some boats may have to sink—as did the Tijuana River canal’s inhabitants—for others to be lifted amidst the rising tide. In this sense, infrastructures are eminently biopolitical instruments—life-enhancing for some while life-diminishing for others (Appel, Anand, and Gupta, 2018). Those living in Mumbai’s informal settlements, for example, are subjected to water quotas, making their ability to ensure they maintain a sufficient water supply significantly more challenging than for those living in the city’s planned developments (Anand, 2015). The biopolitical stakes of infrastructural development are made ominously clear in the proliferation of slum clearance projects in cities throughout the Global South, aimed at cleansing and even “greening” cities (Doshi, 2018). As Sapana Doshi observed, also in Mumbai, such cleansing projects often target the socially marginalized as ecological transgressors of habitats while “lucrative developments are erected in flagrant violation of zoning and environmental laws” (2018, p. 121).

In the “age of capital,” the ability to appropriate habitats and even to destroy them, if necessary, has emerged as a sacrosanct private right (Moore 2017b). Capitalist dispossession is a productive force—a gale of creative ecological and social destruction, to take from Joseph Schumpeter’s phrase (1942). As Jason Moore notes, “an unusual combination of productive and necrotic violence defines capitalism” (2017a, p. 597). In the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the right to pollute the Tijuana River canal for the sake of economic development was enshrined in practice if not in law through a series of border industrialization programs and trade deals—the 1961 *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (PRONAF), the 1965 Border Industrialization Program (BIP) and the 1994 North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Together, these programs

sought to industrialize Mexico's northern frontier through developing material and economic infrastructures that could take advantage of the country's unemployed population and strategic location next to the world's largest consumer economy (Hansen, 2020).

The BIP was established to absorb the masses of Mexican workers expelled from the U.S. economy with the termination of the Bracero program in 1965 (Hansen, 2020). Both the BIP and NAFTA sought to attract foreign capital through establishing a free trade zone in Mexico's border states where companies could import raw materials, equipment, and components of products without paying duties while accessing a pool of cheap labor (Hansen, 2020). The programs proved to be a bonanza, leading to a peak of 20% annual growth in Mexico's *maquiladoras* between 1985-1990 (Ojeda-Revah et al., 2008). Though NAFTA was heralded as a "green" trade deal for its provisions aimed at preventing the creation of "pollution havens," limited enforcement of environmental rules and cuts to the Mexican government's spending on pollution monitoring resulted in a marked increase of ecological degradation of the Tijuana River basin (Grineski and Collins, 2008; Reilly, 1993). As the Tijuana River was cleansed of its inhabitants under *Proyecto Río Tijuana*, it increasingly became converted into a waste dump produced by the contingencies of the global economy.

The downstream effects of this are now being seen in the Tijuana River Estuary across the international border where populations of endangered species have dwindled and an infestation of invasive beetles, which thrive in water with high levels of industrial waste and sewage, have been responsible for the death of native riparian willow trees (Boland and Woodward, 2019). Of course, *maquiladoras* are not the only sources of pollution draining into the river. Raw sewage also flows from local businesses and many of the informal settlements that have appeared along the banks of the river in recent decades (Gersberg, Daft, and Yorkey, 2004).

Many of these communities, however, have formed or grown because of the employment provided by maquiladoras (Kopinak, 2003). Though they provide crucial labor power, most continue to be excluded from “infrastructural citizenship” (Lemanski, 2020).

The infrastructures of dispossession that evacuated, appropriated, and disciplined the Tijuana River basin have been structured by a staggered conglomeration of militaristic and economic actants over time. These prior dispossessions and their outcomes still echo in the contemporary policing and cleansing of the canal’s unruly landscape. Despite these efforts, the watershed and those who intermittingly reside in it reject domestication and, like Rigoberto, refuse detection by state authorities. New encampments and vernacular infrastructures, such as walking bridges made from steel railing, and areas of wild vegetation keep materializing amidst its toxic waters. The canal relentlessly floods and deposits overflowing sewage in defiance of the U.S.-Mexico border. Governmental authorities, nonetheless, continue attempting to contain and sanitize the symptoms of capitalist dispossessions and modular simplifications. To keep this sanitizing and disciplining game of Whack-a-mole going into perpetuity, the polluted river basin and those who seek refuge within it must continue to be targeted by discourses of abjection demanding cleanliness without addressing the systemic causes of these issues. While groups such as the Wound Clinic advocate for an inclusive “humane Tijuana” by providing care for people like Rigoberto, these public discourses of abjection hinge on the promise of creating a “new Tijuana” cleansed of the canal’s human and more-than-human communities.

### Abject Terrains

I had the opportunity to speak with a few canal villagers at length while Prevecasa staff continued distributing needles and harm reduction kits. One man, Alberto, described the last time he was forced to flee the canal when police came to clear their encampment. He and others confirmed that this is a periodic occurrence. When I asked him why he continues to stay there even after all of this, he explained that when police have

encountered him outside of the canal, they yell at him, “*métete tu en el canal!*” (get back into the canal!). Surprisingly, Alberto seemed to have ambivalent and contradictory feelings about his treatment by police officers. On the one hand, he declared that this treatment was discriminatory, referring to the police as “*rateros*” (thieves) that took advantage of people like him. But on the other hand, he justified the police’s actions. Gesturing towards his disheveled clothes, Alberto said he understood why people who looked like him couldn’t be seen out in public. “People who don’t have jobs should be living in the canal,” he explained. The people living there don’t like to work, he continued. I also spoke with another man, Luis, who seemed tentative about speaking with me at first, but agreed to participating in a recorded interview after I assured him it would remain confidential. Almost immediately after beginning, he told me in a hushed tone, “*Ya van haber muchos muertos aqui*” (there will be many dead here soon). When I asked him to explain why he thought that would be the case he became palpably more nervous. He explained that two drug cartels were currently fighting over the section of the canal where the village was located and that many of the villagers will likely be killed amidst this battle. He also expects that there will be another large *operativo* by the police soon, who will force them into drug rehab centers. – Fieldnote, August 21, 2020

Deportees often described the impossible nature of homeless life in Tijuana to me in excruciating detail. As both Alberto and Luis related, deportees are captive to several predatory forces that require them to stay on the move while confining where they can go. As made evident by their frequent crackdowns, Tijuana police maintain the function of cleansing the city’s landscape of deportees wherever they find them. Business owners in Tijuana’s Zone Norte and Zona Centro neighborhoods, where the homeless community is concentrated, are often featured in media reports demanding that the city take strict action to remove these unsightly elements that disturb their customers (AFN, 2015; Sanchez, 2022). In many cases, the canal serves as a site of temporary escape from daily police brutalities. But safety is elusive in the canal and can be harshly interrupted at any moment. As my long-term interlocutor Jesus once explained to me,

When I’ve been homeless, trying to find a place is very hard because they [police] go everywhere. You can’t hide in the park, you can’t lay down in front of a business. If you go into the canal, which is the only place to go, they show up in the middle of the night or else at five or six in the



morning when you're still barely waking up. If you've never been woken up and thrown into the back of a police car, I can tell you, it sucks. You're still half-asleep and they're kicking the shit out of you, throwing you in the back of a police van and you're like, "What the hell?" That's the kinda stuff they do to you.

When the canal becomes overpopulated with large concentrations of deportees, it too requires cleansing. As the President of Tijuana's Tourism and Conventions Committee once stated, the *limpiezas* are crucial for "changing the image of the city before the eyes of tourists and Tijuana residents themselves, since an environment of safety and hygiene is generated" (AFN, 2015). But in a seemingly never-ending circular hunt that merely displaces deportees from one section of Tijuana to another and back, they are also often scolded by police officers to "get back into the canal."

A punitive cycle of interminable expulsion and sanitation mobilizes deportees both into and outside of the canal. It has paradoxically come to signify the only urban space where deportees belong—"the only place to go" as Jesus put it—and as a site in need of ceaseless sanitary intervention requiring their removal. Some deportees, as Alberto articulated, have even come to internalize the notion that the canal is where they should be residing, given their unsanitary appearance and lack of work ethic. Though the canal was meant to signify modernity and a "new Tijuana" when it was inaugurated, its faltering structure and association with homelessness and the ongoing drug war have rendered it a site of developmental backwardness in the public imaginary. As spatiotemporal projects, or chronotopes, infrastructures concretize the future-oriented "desires, hopes, and aspirations of a society" through "emotional and affective investments" (Appel, Anand, and Gupta, 2018, p. 19). But as infrastructures deteriorate or take on new social significations and aberrant functions, so too can these affective investments crumble into pejorative projections of disapproval, fear, and disgust. Managing "the image of the

city,” as Tijuana’s tourist industry official astutely notes, becomes just as important as managing the functionality of infrastructures in these instances.

The Tijuana River canal is now perceived as an abject terrain by both Mexican and U.S. officials. Drawing on Mary Douglas’ (1966) insights into the ways that notions of purity and pollution become culturally constructed, Julia Kristeva (1982) theorized abjection as the sensation of repulsion to phenomenon that transgress one’s sense of corporeal integrity. Abjection has also been conceived as a spatial process in which societies attempt to impose or maintain a state of purity through a geographic expulsion of that which is deemed threatening or repulsive (Campkin, 2013; Popke, 2001). For Michelle Murphy, abjection “designates ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nonetheless densely populated by those who are not enjoying the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (2006, p. 152). In other words, abjection constitutes and consolidates notions of normativity within societies through an expulsion of non-normative elements to “unlivable” zones. Several scholars have described how places deemed unsanitary and the communities associated with them come to experience abjection. Jeffrey Popke examined how a South African shack settlement, Cato Manor, was rendered a racialized site of abjection by city administrators and elites who increasingly came to view it as a pathogenic “threat to the modern urban order” (2001, p. 748). Sarah Moore has explored how waste scavengers and residents of communities adjacent to garbage dumps in Oaxaca, Mexico become construed as “abject others who pose a threat to the more civilized citizens of the central city” through their proximity to the city’s refuse (2008, p. 604).

The abjection of the Tijuana River canal and its inhabitants, I suggest, is a bidirectional phenomenon—while the canal’s image has been tarnished by its inability to contain the city’s

sewage and its association with drugs and homelessness, those residing within it have simultaneously become abjected, in part through their association with the ills, smells, and sins of this vitiated non-place (Augé, 2008). Canal rehabilitation and drug rehabilitation have consolidated into interlinked strategies for managing this symbiotic abjection. In governmental communiques and news articles, the polysemous terms “rehabilitation” and “cleaning” have become equated with development, law and order, cleanliness, and mastery over nature. Throughout 2020, the state government implemented its latest rehabilitation project costing near 5 million dollars in response to growing concerns of overflowing sewage and the reappearance of homeless encampments after several efforts to permanently expel them (Vázquez, 2020). During this time, Tijuana’s mayor hosted city officials to provide periodic televised progress updates. Their public statements meandered seamlessly between discussing the removal of sediment and human expulsion. They reported that the canal’s residents were offered jobs by the city to support the effort to remove waste, shrubs, and trees that were difficult to excavate with machinery (Navarro, 2020). Described as an opportunity for these abjected subjects to reintegrate into society, the residents became human appendages of the cleaning campaign. The cold bureaucratic language describing these seemingly orderly civilizing operations concealed the implicit violence involved with forcibly uprooting the canal’s residents.

The ecosocial remediation of urban and infrastructural dysfunction has become necessary to quell complaints from the business sector concerned primarily with the city’s image and local citizen groups concerned with the regular smell of overflowing sewage in Tijuana’s beach communities. International abjection, at times couched in condescending and nationalist rhetoric, has also been critical in motivating the canal’s rehabilitation. The Tijuana River’s transnational flow of waste into the U.S. coastal region has been a contentious topic of concern and diplomatic

wrangling for decades. But community groups and policymakers in Southern California were especially galvanized in 2017 when a major Tijuana sewer pipe cracked and between 28 to 256 million gallons of raw sewage spilled in U.S. beaches and wetlands (Tevrizian, 2017). The historic spill prompted a coalition of Southern California border cities to file a lawsuit against the binational body that manages waterways between the U.S. and Mexico, charging that their negligence led to “ongoing, severe, and dangerous violations” of the Clean Water Act (Smith, 2018). It’s been estimated that approximately 50 million gallons of sewage-polluted water currently travels from the Tijuana River into U.S. beaches every day (Rivera 2020). Some U.S. officials have now designated this border ecology “the most polluted watershed in our country” (Smith and Fry, 2021).

This ecological transgression has increasingly been rendered by U.S. activist groups and officials as a national security threat, metonymically conjoining Mexico’s unwanted flow of effluent with the flow of unwanted immigrants. This metonymic linking surfaced in disturbingly material form in news stories describing dead and injured migrants found in storm drains traversing the border, which have occasionally been responsible for the sewage overflow (Fry 2019). Narratives of environmental catastrophe merged with concerns over border insecurity amidst reports that Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officers patrolling the Tijuana River valley developed skin rashes, chemical burns, respiratory issues, and other health issues after coming into contact with toxic wastewater (Giaritelli, 2019). In playing up the abnormally hazardous nature of Tijuana’s sewage, Christopher Harris, the director of legislative and political affairs for the CBP officer union, recapitulated pathologizing tropes of developmental backwardness, remarking “this is not American sewage, this is Third World sewage” (Dinan, 2017). Deploying militaristic narratives of foreign aggression, CBP agents described the Tijuana River pollution as

a “biological or chemical attack” that hindered their ability to seize illicit border crossers and drug traffickers (Dinan, 2017). Similarly, a coalition of community groups argued that the the sewage spills constituted “international acts of environmental and biological terrorism” (Partlow et al., 2020). The issue garnered more attention with reports of members of the U.S. Navy SEALs having their health impacted after training at a military installation near the river (Sudman, 2021). Dramatically ascribing malicious intent to the flow of Tijuana’s sewage, the mayor of Imperial Beach clamored, “Mexico is the villain here, and they’ve weaponized the Tijuana River, they’re hurting our Navy SEALs, they’re hurting our border patrol agents, and frankly, I told this to folks in Mexico, you are killing us” (KUSI, 2021).

This “cross-over of biomedical and politico-military languages of defense, immunity, resistance and invasion, of the body, the community and the nation” is of course not new (Bashford, 2004, p. 4). Medicalized nativism has served as a foundational force of international abjection since the colonial era, undergirding imperial hygiene campaigns and the fortification of national borders (Kraut, 1994). As indicated by the above statements, with the rise of global environmental awareness the inability of “Third World” countries like Mexico to control their contamination can be disparagingly read as a sign of their developmental inferiority, weak governance, and affinity for purposefully destructive practices. Such international condemnation coalesces with and reinforces internal “geographies of exclusion” that villainize unhygienic others perceived as sluggish stragglers restraining national progress (Sibley, 1995). In this context, rehabilitation becomes ever more critical as both an internal and external demonstration of commitment to remedying the nation’s social and ecological offenses. While Tijuana’s overflowing sewage problems are clearly the outcome of rapid and haphazard neoliberal urban development in response to U.S. economic imperatives, rehabilitation of the canal has emerged

as a quick technocratic fix. Likewise, though homeless deportees suffer from a continuum of exclusions, expulsions, and stigmatization, coerced drug rehabilitation has been proclaimed as the most befitting corrective for their condition.

Abjection serves as a means of reproducing existing social arrangements through reinforcing the boundaries of normativity and deflecting blame for social ills onto defiled entities. In this case, abjection concomitantly places a spotlight on the canal's failure and its failed subjects to lubricate a system of sanitizing bureaucratic practices necessary for managing Tijuana's crises of urban governance. Because the process of abjection's "purification is always ambiguous and incomplete" (Moore, 2008, p. 603), acts of expulsion and sanitation must be consistently reinaugurated. Amidst Tijuana's urban decay, overflowing sewage, unrelenting drug war violence, and growing populations of unhoused deportees and migrants, rehabilitation and *limpiezas* have become persistent strategies to rejuvenate the "dream worlds of modern technology and an everyday politics of hope in the possibility of securing the 'good life.'" (Schwenkel, 2018, p. 106). Urban development in the colonial and industrial Anthropocene has been a simultaneously technical, political, and ideological project aimed at managing populations and ecologies as well as their inevitable dysfunctions. Indeed, as Angel Rama has elucidated, urbanization was a central feature of the Spanish colonial project's civilizing mission that sought to "dominate and impose certain norms on their savage surroundings" (1996, p. 12-13). In Tijuana's rehabilitation efforts we can see how governments seek to manage the feral effects of the Anthropocene while reinvigorating the ruptured dreams of an orderly modernity. The rehabilitation of the unruly canal and its unsanitary subjects is also a rehabilitation of Anthropocene futurity.

## Conclusion

We live in an era of rapid climate change in which the planet's unruly waters and ecologies are only becoming more unpredictably altered. The specter of an imminent catastrophic sea level rise in the ever-nearing future has crashed mercilessly against the capitalist and developmentalist mythos of a promised ascending economic tide for all. The concept of the Anthropocene has provided us with the ability to conceive of the totality of human impacts on the planet since at least the Industrial Revolution as constituting not merely an intraspecies history, but also an interspecies and geological epoch. Yet this telescopic lens on modern multispecies relations also runs the risk of homogenizing humanity. Kathryn Yusoff (2018) cautions that for the Anthropocene concept to remain useful, it is necessary to excavate the ways that this geological epoch of intraspecies domination has been simultaneously constituted by inter-human domination. She writes, “as the Anthropocene proclaims the language of species life—anthropos—through a universalist geologic commons, it neatly erases histories of racism that were incubated through the regulatory structure of geologic relations” (Yusoff, 2018, p. 2). Rob Nixon suggests that as a political project, the Anthropocene concept provides us with a potentially uniting tool for confronting and adapting to global climate change. But as the impacts of environmental destruction continue to advance, he warns “let's not pretend that we're all in this boat together... We need to speak out against adaptation by the rich for the rich” (Nixon 2014).

As Nixon emphasizes, our contemporary Anthropocene moment is not merely constituted by ecologically damaging practices but also by efforts at human adaptation and environmental remediation. But adaptation, like rehabilitation, is a Janus-faced concept. While it can signify earnest efforts to alter human practices in accordance with ecological equilibrium, adaptation can

also imply the reproduction and restoration of human inequalities in a greener veneer. In examining the implementation of colonial environmentalist projects in Canada, Bruce Erickson found that in the “desire for a green future, the threat of collapse forecloses the future as a site for creatively reimagining the social relations that led to the Anthropocene.” (2020, p. 111). As the rehabilitation of the Tijuana River canal reveals, “the repair of environments in which we live, vast swathes of which are unproductive and/or outright toxic” (Lock, 2018, p. 468) can result in the deployment of punitive policies against marginalized subjects who have come to be associated with abjected terrains. Sarah Moore contends that “the desire for clean and modern environments means that garbage and those associated with it must be erased from the landscape” (2008, p. 605). In this context, the canal’s homeless deportee community has been subjected to both the slow violence (Nixon, 2018) of living at the toxic margins of society and the fast violence of policing and punitive rehabilitation.

As I have sought to demonstrate in this study of one geological patch, the concurrent disciplining of landscapes and human populations has been a central and evolving feature of the Anthropocene with profound embodied and ecological impacts. The minimal recognition afforded to this insight has been buried, according to Yusoff, under a deep epistemic base in service of a dominant “geo-logic that was necessary for colonial theft” (2018, p. 10). She explains, “the epistemological divisions of geology and biology and their respective analytics of geopolitics and biopolitics divide the world between the skein of biopolitical coercion and territorial arrangements of populations” (2018, p. 10). Without attending to this epistemic rift, dominant Anthropocene analyses may fail to recognize the historical implications, contemporary manifestations, and feral proliferations of this “instrumental relation to land, ecology, and people” (Yusoff, 2018, p. 81).



In the Tijuana River watershed, ecological dispossession, infrastructural rehabilitation, and biopolitical discipline have been and continue to be deeply tied phenomenon undergirded by a political and affective economy of disposability, exploitation, and abjection. The history of Tijuana's canal infrastructure is intimately tied to the adjacent international border infrastructure through the U.S. and Mexico's intertwined geographies of migration, deportation, capitalist accumulation, and urban development. As Jaime Cota, a long-time activist who supports the labor organizing efforts of Tijuana's maquiladora workers once stated to me, "Tijuana wouldn't exist if the border didn't exist." And neither would the Tijuana River canal. Obscuring the region's shared geographies and ecologies despite the daily transborder incursions of unwanted human and more-than-human entities is a trick of colonial modernity that reinforces short-sighted solutions and preempts political possibilities exceeding the nation form. Only in repairing the rifts in our epistemological, geographic, and political imaginaries can we hope to escape the confines of what Theodor Adorno referred to as humanity's "spell of progress" (1989, p. 90). Such an effort demands that we discard with sophistic fantasies of order through modular simplification and instead plant our feet firmly in the Anthropocene's shifting grounds to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) of unruly landscapes and uncharted futures.

## Chapter Three: Dead Time

### Slow Borders

This morning I joined several other volunteers working with *Al Otro Lado* (AOL) to observe the management of “*la lista*” (the list) at Tijuana’s El Chaparral pedestrian point of entry into the United States. AOL is asking observers—mostly lawyers—to arrive at the Chaparral plaza early every morning. When I arrived around 7am, the line for asylum seekers to add their names to the list, maintained with traffic control stanchions and yellow caution tape, was short and orderly. Most of the asylum seekers lining up today were Central American and Mexican. The list managers were both Central American asylum seekers themselves. One was a middle-aged man and the other a teenager. They were seated at a table underneath a blue canopy tent. One diligently scribbled the names of each asylum seeker next to a number in a large tattered brown notebook. The other gave every person listed in the notebook a small piece of paper with their number on it. The line grew progressively longer with every passing minute. A group of people surrounding the tent was also slowly expanding and by 8am an enormous throng of migrants was crowded around. Another young Central American man emerged from the tent with the notebook and pen. He began loudly listing off numbers and a group of people began lining up behind him. These were the fortunate individuals and families who had already been waiting in Tijuana for months to be called. The crowd, clearly eager to have their numbers called, quickly dissipated once the young man stopped calling numbers. The lawyers I was with immediately sent out a text message to the AOL group chat with the last number that was called from the notebook and the amount of people summoned. Those whose numbers were called—a diverse group from Mexico, Central America, and Cameroon—then proceeded to line up along a wall of large white concrete pillars where they were met by agents from Mexico’s Grupo Beta. Along with their meager belongings (for some just a backpack), several were also carrying babies and stacks of documents barely being held together in flimsy folders. They appeared neither anxious nor excited. They simply waited, as they had been doing for months, for a Grupo Beta officer to come speak with them so they could be chaperoned across the border to begin their asylum process in the U.S. (Adapted fieldnote, November 28, 2018).



**Fig. 4.1:** Wait list manager calling out numbers at El Chaparral point of entry (Carlos Martinez)

Beginning in early 2016, U.S. immigration officials at ports of entry across the U.S.-Mexico border began implementing a practice that came to be known as “metering,” in which a daily limit was placed on the number of migrants who would be allowed to cross into U.S. territory to request asylum protections (Gabbard, 2020). After this limit was surpassed, arriving asylum seekers were directed to either return another day or go to another port of entry. Placing such a limit and turning away asylum seekers once it was surpassed contravened existing international refugee laws and conventions (Harris, 2021). Metering was first implemented as an informal practice by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers at the Tijuana, Mexicali and Nogales ports of entry when thousands of Haitian migrants began arriving to the U.S.-Mexico border. But in 2018 under the Trump administration, it became an institutionalized administrative practice used across all U.S.-Mexico border ports of entry in response to the arrival of thousands of Central Americans travelling in migrant caravans (Leutert et al., 2018).

Though the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) initially denied the existence of such a practice, an internal memo outlining the use of metering procedures was later revealed following legal challenges from advocacy groups (Rivlin-Nadler, 2020). Metering was publicly justified by officials as a necessary response to an unprecedented rise in asylum requests and as a means of addressing “safety and health hazards that resulted from overcrowding at ports of entry” (Office of Inspector General [OIG], 2018, p. 6).

In the winter of 2018, while conducting preliminary doctoral dissertation ethnographic fieldwork, I began volunteering with *Al Otro Lado* (AOL), a legal advocacy organization supporting the rights of asylum seekers. In addition to providing legal support for asylum cases connected to recent migrant caravans, AOL was also the lead organization that would later file a class action lawsuit against the U.S. government for its use of metering. I observed how an intersecting matrix of new policies and procedures began converting border cities like Tijuana into long-term and precarious spaces of waiting for asylum seekers. While no federal statute or regulation exists permitting CBP officers to limit the number of asylum seekers who may be processed at ports of entry, metering emerged as a one of the United States’ most important strategies of asylum deterrence (Gabbard, 2020). This administrative practice spawned a range of spontaneously created bureaucratic forms in Mexico aimed at instituting order amidst the unpredictability it produced. Waitlists began emerging across Mexican border cities in the wake of metering’s implementation, organized by a shifting ensemble of actors including Mexican National Migration Institute (INM) agents, migrant shelters, municipal government officials, and even by migrants themselves (Leutert, 2019).

Metering quickly led to a massive backlog, forcing migrants to await their turn on these precarious lists for weeks and months in border cities unable or unwilling to accommodate them

and often marred by cartel violence. Despite having no legal foundation, waitlists were managed with a veneer of governmental officialdom involving daily administrative rituals, the establishment of leadership boards, and constant coordination with both Mexican and U.S. immigration officials. In Tijuana, the waitlist came to be managed by a migrant-led “*junta directiva*” (board of directors) with the involvement of Grupo Beta, a branch of the INM touted as a humanitarian service aimed at aiding migrants. The management of the list, susceptible to confusion, manipulation, and malfeasance, was a constant source of tension among all parties involved. As part of their legal effort, AOL had teams of volunteers observe the wait list’s management every morning to document the many irregularities that emerged.

Migrants desperately escaping violent ultimatums, most often from cartels and gangs in Central America and Mexico’s interior, already faced various parasitic and necropolitical forces along their journey before encountering this novel border bureaucracy built with ragged notebooks and small pieces of paper (Saldaña-Portillo, 2019; Vogt, 2018). Implemented at the same time as the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” family separation policy, which garnered significant political and media attention in the United States, metering was relatively ignored and hidden away from widespread public scrutiny (Blue et al., 2021). Nonetheless, this arcane institutional practice produced devastating downstream consequences for asylum seekers held administratively captive in Mexican border cities.

In recent decades, the U.S.-Mexico border has been increasingly militarized with startling increases in funding and personnel for CBP and Border Patrol (Martínez, Heyman, & Slack, 2020; Mittelstadt et al., 2011). This has occurred most markedly since 1994 with the implementation of Prevention Through Deterrence policies outlined in that year’s “Border Patrol Strategic Plan” (De León; 2015). As suggested by anthropologist Jason De León (2015), this

increase of border security measures, purportedly aimed at merely deterring migrants from crossing, has in fact served as a deliberate necropolitical strategy that forces migrants to travel through the Sonoran Desert's punishing landscape—often resulting in their death. The expansion and further militarization of the border wall, vociferously promoted but never completed by President Trump, was complemented by a quieter bureaucratization of the border through the implementation of metering and several other “administrative burdens” on asylum seekers (Moynihan, Gerzina, & Herd, 2022). While migrant deterrence has spatially reshaped cross-border migrant transit routes, these new strategies of asylum deterrence have temporally reshaped the experience of asylum-seeking while keeping many asylum-seekers fixed in place.

A deluge of slight and largely unregistered changes across the asylum and migration administrative apparatus have produced what Donald Moynihan, Julie Gerzina, Pamela Herd refer to as a “Kafkaesque bureaucracy” (2022). Moynihan, Gerzina, and Herd describe 78 administrative actions taken by the Trump presidency as part of its broader strategy of blocking or slowing the influx of migrants from Latin American, African, and Muslim-majority countries. In addition to metering, for example, 750 CBP officers were reassigned from ports of entry to other regions, further slowing the processing of asylum seekers (Moynihan, Gerzina, & Herd, 2022). As one immigration lawyer attested to me, the governmental websites used for processing asylum applications even functioned significantly slower during the Trump years. All together these administrative actions proved successful in achieving the administration's objectives, increasing the backlog for attaining U.S. citizenship by 80 percent since 2014 and increasing the wait times for acquiring some visas from five months to five years (Moynihan, Gerzina, & Herd, 2022; Shear and Kanno-Youngs, 2021). Such administrative policies starkly illuminate how

“violence intimately, and often invisibly, entangles with bureaucratic relations” (Eldridge & Reinke, 2018, p. 95).

Cecilia Menjívar and Leisy J. Abrego have used the term “legal violence” to describe the “normalized but cumulatively injurious effects” of U.S. laws upon migrants with tenuous and undocumented legal statuses (2012, p. 1380). As Menjívar and Abrego argue, legal violence is a particular medium by which immigrant communities in the U.S. come to experience and embody structural violence, or the harms produced by political, economic, and social structures that disadvantage marginalized populations. Legal violence has become particularly pronounced in the United States, they suggest, through the merger of immigration law with criminal law, which has shifted immigration enforcement from a civil issue to a matter calling for increased policing. Though the concept of legal violence provides a critical analytic lens through which to understand how forces of structural violence have come to be embedded in and deployed through public policies, the emerging modes of asylum deterrence pioneered or institutionalized by the Trump administration demand that we expand our view towards the “meso-level of public administration” (Moynihan, Gerzina, & Herd, 2022, p. 23).

A growing literature on “bureaucratic violence” has sought to examine the disparate harms produced through daily encounters with bureaucrats and bureaucracies (Eldridge & Reinke, 2018). The notion of bureaucratic violence critically interrogates normative notions of monolithic state power to reveal how quotidian engagements with a disaggregated array of administrative actors shape social and political subjectivities. Anthropologists have examined how mundane, arbitrary, and seemingly innocuous bureaucratic processes serve as crucial vectors of disciplinary power (Auyero, 2012) and structural violence (Gupta, 2012) that are often concealed from public view or simply taken for granted. Similarly, transgender and legal studies

scholar Dean Spade has recently deployed the term “administrative violence” to draw attention to the disproportionate vulnerabilities that transgender people face “because more aspects of their lives are directly controlled by legal and administrative systems of domination—prisons, welfare programs, foster care, drug treatment centers, homeless shelters, job training centers—that employ rigid gender binaries” (2015, p. xiv). Broadly, this emerging literature calls on scholars studying the often-violent impacts of legal regimes to broaden their view towards the ways that marginalized communities experience, negotiate, and resist administrative burdens and bureaucratic modes of governance.

In the case of metering, the effects of an arbitrary and ostensibly insignificant administrative change rippled across the border, inadvertently producing new forms of disciplinary control and structural violence for migrants merely hoping to exercise the right to request asylum in the United States. Metering was formalized in the summer of 2018 following an internal memorandum issued by then Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen, that guided CBP agents at U.S.-Mexico ports of entry to follow a new “Prioritization-Based Queue Management” (PBQM) system (OIG, 2020). Under PBQM, asylum seekers were administratively placed at the back of the line in a new prioritization hierarchy that rendered them as mere distractions preventing the DHS from accomplishing “its primary mission: to protect the American public from dangerous people and materials while enhancing our economic competitiveness through facilitating legitimate trade and travel” (*Al Otro Lado v. Mayorkas*, 2021, p. 6).

With this new hierarchy, the CBP’s definition of “capacity” for the processing of asylum seekers was shifted from “detention capacity” to “operational capacity” to determine when metering should be employed at ports of entry. Prior to the PBQM system most CBP directors



typically determined their unit's capacity for processing asylum requests by the amount of physical space they had for keeping migrants detained at their port of entry, or their "detention capacity" (OIG, 2020). Now they were given permission to turn migrants away if they deemed that their unit was simply too busy, or beyond their "operational capacity," to respond to other more important priorities. In reality, the PBQM system merely provided a bureaucratic name and official endorsement for a practice that several ports of entry had already been employing. This shift provided all port directors across the U.S.-Mexico border with greater leeway in turning away asylum seekers, given that "operational capacity" is a highly subjective metric not officially defined by CBP in written procedural documents or tracked by the U.S. government. This bureaucratic reconceptualization of "capacity" proved eminently useful in allowing CBP to disguise its eschewing of asylum-processing responsibilities as the mere need to redirect their energies from tasks that draw "resources away from CBP's fundamental responsibilities" (*Al Otro Lado v. Mayorkas*, 2021, p. 6). Indeed, as revealed by an analysis of CBP documents during the court proceedings challenging the metering policy, an overwhelming majority of CBP directors at smaller ports of entry turned back and redirected asylum seekers to larger ports of entry despite having no migrants being held in their detention centers (*Al Otro Lado v. Mayorkas*, 2021).

However, Secretary Nielsen's memorandum did more than legitimize and amplify a practice that some port directors had already been engaging in. By elevating metering to a bureaucratic norm, it also converted the individual actions of port directors into a collective practice. As Matthew Hull suggests, bureaucracies and bureaucratic forms of discourse aim to obscure and remove individual responsibility through generating "corporate authorship and agency" (Hull, 2012, p. 127). As "the epitome of collective social organization" (Hull, 2012, p.

127), bureaucracies appear as “objectivity machines” (Hoag, 2011) that act impersonally, dispassionately, and apolitically. The slowing of asylum processing at the precise moment when more migrants are arriving is conducted not out of individual indifference or malice, but in necessary collective deference to a hierarchy of organizational efficiency. The specter of approaching mayhem and criminality, played up in many of statements and tweets about the migrant caravans by President Trump and his allies, was critical for vindicating the use of metering (Lacatus, 2021). Rather than being an aberration from legal standards, the PBQM system was defended as a “hallmark of rational decision making” (Gupta, 2012, p. 24) amidst the migrant caravans’ “deliberate attempt to undermine our laws and overwhelm our system,” as charged by Attorney General Jeff Sessions (Department of Justice, 2018).

But instead of serving as a bulwark against chaos, metering proved to be a source of constant disorder and confusion at the border. During the period that I conducted legal observation of Tijuana’s waitlist, the number of asylum seekers that port directors allowed to cross into the U.S. for processing fluctuated haphazardly from day to day. Some days, CBP would allow only sixty people to cross, while on other days several hundred asylum seekers would have their numbers called. As a result, on several occasions, asylum seekers who had not expected to be summoned so early did not present at the port of entry and were skipped over. Though the decisions and metrics guiding such fluctuations may have been arbitrary, their outcomes were deeply felt by asylum seekers who experienced tremendous heartache and anger. And while the waitlists that emerged in response to the backlog produced by metering were fictional bureaucracies, they became sources of real vulnerability and danger across the U.S.-Mexico border.

## Predatory Bureaucracies

On my second day of conducting legal observation of the waiting list in Tijuana, one of the list managers, a young Honduran man named Gabriel, suddenly stormed away from the blue canopy in a fit of rage. Moments before, he had erupted into a tumultuous argument with one of the other list managers. It was unclear what they were arguing about, but Gabriel loudly announced before separating himself from the tent that he was quitting his job as a list manager. I approached Gabriel shortly after, who remained in the plaza talking with other migrants, to ask him what was going on. He replied calmly but firmly, “I quit because there were several irregularities that I wasn’t in agreement with.” Though Gabriel was an asylum seeker, he reported these irregularities to me with the authority of a government official. He explained to me matter-of-factly:

One of the members of the *junta directiva* was abusing his authority. He added names to the list of people who are in Argentina. He’s Peruvian, but he lived in Argentina for ten years, with the idea of getting them across. And there’s hard evidence that’s been provided by a young woman who denounced him to news media. He said he would help her cross too in exchange for sexual favors....The people here [migrants] support me, but I quit because I’ve been threatened. He told me that he would kill me if I said anything. So that’s why I preferred to quit.

Accusations, altercations, and rumors of misconduct and manipulation surrounding the waitlists such as those described by Gabriel were commonplace. Conflicts often materialized among members of the *junta directiva*, between the *junta* and INM officials, between the *junta* and asylum seekers on the list, and among migrants on the list or trying to get on it. In this instance, Gabriel was accusing another list manager of engaging in practices that were widely reported to have occurred with waitlists all across the border. Allegations against list managers as well as INM officials of engaging in monetary and sexual bribery to place or move people up higher on lists were particularly prevalent. Gabriel was also accusing the other list manager of

placing the names of his friends who had not yet arrived at the border on the list so they wouldn't have to wait for weeks or months in Mexico. INM officials were also frequently accused of calling a fewer number of people to cross into the U.S. than the amount that was provided to them by CBP port directors and subsequently filling the remaining slots with migrants who would pay them either monetarily or sexually.

The waiting list emerged as an archive and amplifier of the multiple axes of oppression and “differentiation by nationality” (Heyman, 1995) that unevenly burden asylum seekers. In the summer of 2019, thousands of Cameroonian migrants fleeing from civil war violence, arrived in Tijuana, contributing to the further inflation of the waiting list from 4,800 to 10,000 people in the ensuing months (Spagat, 2019). Many Cameroonians found they were being prevented by Grupo Beta officials from crossing to seek asylum even after waiting on the list like others. They also charged that Grupo Beta officials required them to provide more documents than those requested of Mexican and Central American asylum seekers for them to be crossed into the U.S. In addition to being asked for identifying documents from Cameroon they were also in some cases asked to provide Mexican immigration documents as well as additional photocopies. The governmental documents of transgender migrants were also frequently rejected by Grupo Beta officials as illegitimate because the gender identity listed on the document was deemed incorrect. Unaccompanied children and teenage migrants, mostly from Central America, were told they could not add their names to the list unless they were accompanied by a parent—an impossible request. Instead, many were turned over to Mexico's child protective services agency and subsequently deported to their home countries, regardless of the threats they faced there (Flores, 2019; Lind, 2018).

Notwithstanding the deeply contingent nature of the list and the ever-shifting rules that guided its management, migrants were forced to abide by and contend with its “indissoluble, brutal materiality” (Cabot, 2012, p. 23). Though U.S. officials had no hand in establishing waiting lists, they were imposed and largely accepted as official bureaucratic instruments. For some, the list was an expression of self-organized migrant leadership. List managers, despite often being targeted by accusations of corruption, took pride in their positions, and saw themselves as advocates for other asylum seekers. For others, the list became a site of political struggle. In July 2019, over one hundred Cameroonians participated in an act of civil disobedience to protest Grupo Beta’s unfair list rules by blocking Mexican immigration vans from entering a governmental parking lot (Rivlin-Nadler, 2019). After several hours, Cameroonians and Mexican officials arrived at an agreement, allowing the African asylum seekers to view the list every morning to ensure that they were not being skipped over. And after the intervention of legal advocates, transgender migrants were eventually permitted to add their names to the list. Even while the way that the list was managed was contested, questioning its legitimacy as a means for accessing the U.S. asylum system was made impossible. The high stakes efforts and costs associated with accessing and advancing on the list reinforced it as a fetishized artifact (Gordillo, 2006) of migrant governance in the liminal space of bureaucratized limbo created by metering.

In addition to providing migrants with a convoluted means for requesting asylum, the waitlists also constituted economic infrastructures that facilitated the financial and sexual exploitation of asylum seekers. This predatory bureaucracy produced not only pliable clients forced to conform to its rules, but also a marketplace of exploitable subjects and newly empowered "petty sovereigns" seeking to benefit from them (Butler, 2004). As commodified

"technologies of power" (Cohn and Dirks, 1988), the lists were materialized into active agents of bureaucratic dispossession. Precise price scales were reportedly set at various times and locations across the border determining how high an asylum seeker could advance on the list depending on how much they were willing to pay (Green, 2019; Nathan, 2019). Predatory bureaucrats had to persistently conceal the list's "real" rules behind the "official" rules (Tuckett, 2015) of its mundane and seemingly transparent daily organization to prevent situations like Gabriel's sudden outburst from occurring.

Providing the illusion of the list's management as a democratic and incorruptible process was more important in Tijuana, where Grupo Beta officials preferred to portray themselves as mere liaisons between CBP agents and migrants, than in other border cities, such as Matamoros and Piedras Negras, where Mexican immigration and governmental officials were more openly managing the lists. In Tijuana, this illusion was reinforced through multiple shake-ups of the *junta directiva*, aimed at making it more accountable. In one such instance, a Nicaraguan family was charged with managing the list for a period to diminish the possibility of nationalist favoritism. Since most asylum seekers were from Honduras and Mexico, the Nicaraguans were seen as a neutral party. During another period, a group of list managers representing several countries, including Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru, were voted into power to replace an earlier group charged with engaging in bribery (Semple, 2018).

Despite such efforts at establishing democratic oversight, waiting lists proved to be durable and efficient instruments of bureaucratic violence because of the omnipresent backdrop of physical violence saturating migrant journeys. Fleeing threats of violence in their countries of origin and held in administrative captivity under precarious conditions in border cities, asylum seekers were placed in desperate conditions and rendered easy prey. The waitlists also required

the application of brute force to emerge as the only remaining option for most migrants to access the U.S. asylum system. When metering was first applied at several ports of entry it was enforced by physically blocking migrants from stepping onto U.S. soil, which would have given them the right to request asylum. This required CBP agents to use their bodies to intercept migrants at the midpoint of pedestrian crossings between the U.S. and Mexico (Amnesty International, 2018; Armus, 2018). Later, these corporeal barriers were replaced by infrastructural barricades at several ports of entry, such as on the McAllen-Hidalgo International Bridge where a booth staffed by CBP agents now stands (Wiley, 2018).

Asylum deterrence, though later couched in cold bureaucratic language and managed through externalized waitlists, thus required a spatial and martial incursion by agents of U.S. border enforcement into the liminal “thresholds between sovereign and non-sovereign territory” where “asylum-seekers face legal ambiguities” (Mountz, 2011, p. 385). The constitutive violence at the core of metering’s implementation underscores David Graeber’s perceptive insight that, “the bureaucratization of daily life means the imposition of impersonal rules and regulations; impersonal rules and regulations, in turn, can only operate if they are backed up by the threat of force” (Graeber, 2015, p. 32). While many asylum seekers experienced the list as a predatory bureaucracy, it at least provided them with the possibility of safely traversing this militarized landscape. Yet, by forcing asylum seekers to exist in a perilous space of captive waiting, where they could be kidnapped by cartels or deported by Mexican immigration officials at any moment, the U.S. migration enforcement regime inaugurated a new powerful mode of attritional deterrence. Under this paradigm, time itself has become a menacing weapon wielded against migrants.

## Necrotemporality

In January 2019, the Trump Administration implemented another novel tool of asylum deterrence in response to the continued arrival of large groups of migrants, overwhelmingly from Central America, at the U.S.-Mexico border. Dubbed the “Migrant Protection Protocols” (MPP), this new program required certain migrants seeking asylum at the U.S. southern border to return to Mexico for the duration of their immigration proceedings (Kocher, 2021). This differed from normal asylum procedures, in which asylum seekers are allowed to await the conclusion of their cases inside the United States. Upon entering office, the Biden administration briefly suspended and later terminated MPP, before resurrecting the program in December 2021 in response to a court order issued by a Trump-appointed federal judge (Chishti and Bolter, 2021). During MPP’s initial implementation, 71,036 individuals were returned to Mexico (Kocher, 2021). The so-called “Remain in Mexico” policy compounded the impacts of metering, further consolidating Mexican border cities as long-term waiting rooms for asylum seekers. This proved to be catastrophic for migrants’ abilities to adequately make asylum claims by making it more challenging for them to acquire legal representation. Of the total number of individuals who completed cases under MPP (approximately 42,000), only 650 were eventually granted asylum (National Immigration Forum, 2021).

In response to the obstacles created by MPP, advocacy organizations developed new means for providing asylum seekers with legal services at a distance. Several medical school-based asylum clinics supported these efforts by conducting remote forensic medical evaluations using video conferencing. Forensic medical evaluations are conducted by trained clinicians to identify, quantify, and document a client’s markers of physical and psychological trauma to corroborate their claims of torture and abuse in medical-legal affidavits (Gu et al., 2021). After



MPP was implemented, I began assisting an asylum clinic based in Los Angeles with conducting remote forensic medical evaluations with asylum seekers forced to reside in Tijuana. I was asked to meet with asylum seekers in Tijuana and provide logistical, technical, and language interpretation support when needed to conduct the evaluations.

I met Teresa, an asylum seeker who traveled from Honduras with her husband, Sergio, and their daughter, Maria, through my participation in this effort. Teresa was from the Brisas del Valle neighborhood of Tegucigalpa, an area she described as having “gangs on every street.” She and her family fled from their home after they were assaulted several times and her uncle was killed by members of a local MS-13-affiliated gang. Teresa was convinced they were being targeted because her husband was a police officer who had knowledge about the identities of some of the gang members. She explained that they were almost killed twice by gang members—the first time, they were shot at in their car while driving home from dinner a second time, armed men shot at them in front of their house. The gang members dispersed when police officers arrived but threatened that next time the family would not be able to escape.

Teresa and her family traveled by land to Tijuana and requested asylum at the El Chaparral port of entry. Like thousands of others, they were declined by CBP officers and told instead to request asylum in Mexico. Shortly after, they were assaulted and robbed in Tijuana, which propelled them to attempt to cross into the U.S. illegally. They were detained by Border Patrol officers and placed in detention for two days. Maria developed a severe flu—an outcome, Teresa argued, of the frigid temperatures maintained in the detention center, colloquially referred to by migrants as “*la hielera*” (the icebox) (Riva, 2017). Teresa pleaded with officers to be provided with the opportunity to seek asylum in the United States. Despite conveying their fears of being in Mexico, they were enrolled in MPP and returned to Tijuana.

During her forensic evaluation, Teresa spoke at length about the visceral impacts these accumulated experiences of violence had on her. She explained that she had difficulty concentrating and was persistently hypervigilant about her surroundings. She told us that Sergio was depressed and developed a skin infection from the stress he was experiencing. They both had tremendous anxiety and struggled to sleep. I was asked to help her with completing two quantitative questionnaires, the PCL-5 and PHQ-9 surveys, used to diagnose and measure the severity of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. I felt awkward asking her to attempt to quantify the various forms of stress and trauma she was experiencing, but this was considered essential in helping to build her asylum case. When I asked Teresa, for example, to rate how often she has “thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself,” as the survey states, she went into fine-grained detail about her suicide attempts. She replied, “Well, I have some pills for headaches and stomach aches. I took them all at once...that happens sometimes.” Nonetheless, for the purposes of her asylum case, I merely needed her to report how many days per week she experiences such thoughts. Unsurprisingly, she scored highly on both surveys.

Three months later, I was notified by one of the asylum clinic’s members that Teresa’s situation in Tijuana had taken a “significant turn for the worse” and that we needed to conduct a follow-up evaluation. Teresa reported to the legal advocacy group supporting her case that she had been assaulted by a man living in an apartment next door to her family just a few days prior. Her assailant, a member of the Sureños 13 gang, had been harassing her for several weeks before finally entering Teresa’s apartment and attempting to rape her while her husband was away. Teresa was left with several bruises and injuries following the attack. I was once again asked to help quantify the harms that Teresa experienced. I had to meticulously measure the size of her

bruises during the video teleconference, as if this could provide a true assessment of the violence she had endured. Teresa told us that she was now unable to sleep for more than one hour at a time and her anxiety had worsened significantly. Though she filed a police report following the incident, Teresa explained that she felt threatened by the police officers, who acted in an intimidating way towards Sergio and asked them both for their immigration documents when arriving to their apartment.

The assault occurred amidst Teresa and her family's seemingly interminable state of limbo in Tijuana. By the time she was attacked, the date for their asylum hearing had already been pushed back three times by the San Diego Immigration Court. Teresa was just one among hundreds of asylum seekers who experienced a violent incident in Mexico while enrolled in MPP. In addition to making it more difficult for asylum seekers to access legal representation, MPP also dramatically magnified their vulnerability to violence. While Teresa and her family lived in a shared rental apartment with other migrants, a significant portion of asylum seekers in MPP were forced to reside in overcrowded humanitarian shelters and open-air encampments. Such living conditions exposed migrants to victimization and with few protections provided by police agencies, particularly in border cities dominated by cartel organizations. By the time the Biden administration suspended the program in February 2021, there were at least 1,544 publicly reported cases of murder, torture, rape, kidnapping, and other violent attacks against asylum seekers returned to Mexico under MPP (Human Rights First, 2021a). A study by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) found that nearly 80 percent of asylum seekers enrolled in MPP had been the victims of violence while waiting out their asylum hearing in Nuevo Laredo (MSF, 2020). Just as forensic interviews are blunt instruments for capturing the profound imprints of violence, such reports can never fully gauge the degree of brutality experienced by asylum seekers.

Scholars of migration have increasingly drawn attention to the experiences of asylum seekers living in conditions of bureaucratized waiting. As this literature suggests, waiting is not merely an inert or “empty experience” for asylum seekers (Griffiths, 2014). Far from being “paralytic” (Crapanzano, 1985) or consisting of uneventful “dead time,” waiting periods are often suffused with significant movement, activity, and meaning in which asylum seekers must maneuver and strategize in order to survive (Griffiths, 2014; Rotter, 2016; Kohli & Kaukko, 2017). But the imposition of bureaucratic procedures, including “deadlines and time limits which impact on migrants’ lives and geographies,” (Tazzioli, 2018, p. 4) significantly alienate asylum seekers from control over the tempo of their waiting experiences. In this sense, bureaucracies act as powerful disciplinary instruments by requiring patient submission on behalf of its clients and offering a protracted promise of problem-resolution if the required administrative procedures are dutifully followed. As Colin Hoag suggests, bureaucracies derive a “tenuous kind of power” through their ability to “orient people toward the future” (2014, p. 423). Such state-imposed forms of waiting that hinge on an indeterminate yet hopeful futurity, Javier Auyero theorizes, are “temporal processes in and through which political subordination is reproduced” (2012, p. 2). Drawing on the theorizations of Pierre Bourdieu, Auyero demonstrates that subjective experiences of time are often shaped by political and economic actors and that waiting “is one of the privileged ways of experiencing the effects of power” (2012, p. 25).

In addition to the politically structured temporality of asylum seeking, a growing area of research is examining the temporalization of border enforcement practices to slow or block the movement of migrants. This emerging scholarship aims to shift analyses from predominant spatial renderings of migration enforcement towards a recognition of “the role of time in techniques of control and regulation in border regimes” (Drangland, 2020, p. 1130). “Temporal

bordering,” as Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra (2013) refer to it, has become an increasingly important “multifaceted tool and vehicle—even a weapon of sorts” of migrant deterrence (Andersson, 2014b, p. 796). The lens of border temporality reveals how migration enforcement is pursued not only by assuming control *over* time, but also by engaging in modes of control *through* time, or manipulations in the temporal field (Tazzioli, 2018). As Ruben Andersson and others have elucidated, border regimes engage in temporal interventions at a variety of cadences. In some cases, these are “speedy intervention[s],” (Andersson, 2014b, p. 800) as with the deployment of border patrol units to quickly divert, disperse, and deport migrants in the “prefrontier” regions before migrants can step foot onto U.S. or European soil. In other cases, temporal bordering can be enacted through slowing practices that enforce “various forms of stasis and stuckedness in transit zones” (Iliadou, 2021, p. 199), such as placing migrants in outsourced detention centers or abandoning them in refugee camps. Metering provides a trenchant example of a decelerated border practice used to discipline, dissuade, and deter migrants from accessing their right to seek asylum.

Thus, the condition of waiting produced by the slowing of migrant journeys, according to Andersson and others, is not merely a byproduct of border enforcement practices, but instead is a fundamental “management technique” (2014b, p. 796). Waiting is neither a random nor unintentional feature of border regimes. This recognition of the purposeful use of time, a seemingly inert phenomenon, parallels Jason De León’s insight that death is the intended outcome of the Prevention through Deterrence strategy that funnels migrants into the “rugged and desolate terrain” of the Sonoran Desert “to impede the flow of people from the south” (2015, p. 5). As De León explains, “nature has been conscripted by the Border Patrol to act as an enforcer while simultaneously providing this federal agency with plausible deniability regarding

blame for any victims the desert may claim” (2015, p. 29-30) What occurs in the desert as a result of the natural environment, though seemingly random and uncontrolled by border patrol authorities, forms part of an intentional and deadly strategy of migrant deterrence.

I suggest that just as Prevention through Deterrence exposes migrants to deadly forces by altering their movement patterns, MPP deliberately endangers asylum seekers through forcing them into a condition of temporal and spatial confinement in highly precarious environments. While the Prevention through Deterrence strategy relies on what De León refers to as the desert’s “hybrid collectif” (2015) of human and non-human threats, MPP relies largely on intensifying asylee’s exposure to an environment of drug war-related violence and legal impunity that has increasingly embroiled Mexican border cities. As several scholars have articulated, decades of neoliberal economic austerity and the burgeoning political power of transnational drug cartels have together resulted in the “necropolitical governmentalization of the Mexican state or the legal-criminal state” (Estévez, 2018, p. 4). In this context, Mexico is now dominated, Sayak Valencia suggests, by a “gore economy” in which bodies have been commodified through “predatory techniques of extreme violence like kidnapping and contract murder” (2018, p. 20). In the gore economy, migrant bodies have become valuable commodities for cartel and other criminal organizations (Slack, 2015).

By keeping asylum seekers bureaucratically stuck amidst Mexico’s gore economy, MPP is actively engaged in a strategy of attrition, in which the number of asylum seekers at the border is slowly decreased over time through the indirect recruitment and deployment of nonlinear threats. In the warfare context, the strategy of attrition is “designed to erode both an enemy’s material capacity as well as their will to continue the struggle over time” (Kiras, 2012). Attrition is not a novel strategy deployed by the U.S. migration enforcement apparatus. Indeed, the notion

of “attrition through enforcement” was converted into official public policy in Arizona with the enactment of the state’s Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (SB 1070) in 2010 (Plascencia, 2013). This strategy seeks to encourage undocumented migrants to self-deport and deter the influx of prospective migrants by creating a number of legal and administrative obstacles that make it more difficult for these communities to access jobs, driver’s licenses, healthcare, and other social services (Low, 2017). This approach is considered an indispensable and “rational” alternative in situations where a mass deportation campaign would prove too costly and logistically challenging (Plascencia, 2013). Rather than relying on direct coercive force, the strategy of attrition seeks to gradually wear migrants down by dispersing daily threats to their existence.

Forcing asylum seekers to exist in a perilous space of captive waiting, where they could be kidnapped by cartels, deported by Mexican immigration officials with little legal recourse, succumb to an illness while living in an open-air encampment or overcrowded shelter with minimal access to medical care, or even seek to take their own lives, as Teresa did, has come to serve as a powerful new mode of attritional deterrence. Metering and MPP have produced deadly conditions for asylum seekers by bureaucratically calibrating time and space in such a way that increases their exposure to a variety of dangerous elements, giving new meaning to the term “dead time.” I refer to the weaponization of time employed by such strategies as *necrotemporality*. The notion of “slow violence,” as theorized by Rob Nixon, has sought to draw attention to “a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence” that is “incremental and accretive...playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2013, p. 2) Similarly, Lauren Berlant’s concept of “slow death” aims to develop a framework for considering the accumulation of forces that lead to the “physical wearing out of a

population,” particularly those living under “global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality” (2007, p. 754). While these concepts are helpful for conceptualizing the cumulative and latent impacts of a diffuse array of insults produced by forces of structural violence, they are insufficient for making sense of strategies in which time is intentionally manipulated to produce and exacerbate harm.

Necrotemporality offers a way to conceive of temporal impositions that are employed as forms of targeted attrition to slowly wear out and eliminate those who are deemed to be members of enemy populations. Slow violence, to be sure, forms a part of such targeted attrition. But necrotemporality emphasizes the strategic use of time to maximally increase exposure to threatening forces that, while outside of the direct control of those who wield this power, are not “random nor senseless” (De León, 2015). Necrotemporality forms a core part of what Ariadna Estévez has referred to as “public necropolicies,” such as the regulations undergirding the U.S. asylum system, which engages in the “bureaucratization of social suffering” (2018, p. 9). The asylum system, Estévez argues, is not so much a biopolitical instrument of life promotion for asylum seekers, but instead acts as a necropolitical tool aimed at “managing the death of those who fail to insert themselves into ‘globalization’” while giving them “the illusion that they are moving towards justice” (2018, p. 4-9).

For asylum seekers surviving amidst metering and MPP, life promotion and death making are barely discernible logics. Teresa’s bruises and her high PCL-5 survey trauma score, the outcome of being forced to wait out her family’s asylum hearing in a space with disproportionate threats, were nonetheless ultimately useful for her lawyers to submit a humanitarian parole request on her behalf. Such parole grants, though extremely rare, have become one of the only strategies left at the disposal of lawyers to get their clients into the U.S.



Teresa's bruised body was forced to survive between Mexico's gore economy and the U.S. asylum economy. In this context, her "suffering body" emerged, paradoxically, as her only currency available to secure her "bodily integrity" (Ticktin, 2006). Thus, the suffering exacerbated by the necrotemporalization of the U.S. asylum system has also increasingly become a requirement for accessing it.

## Conclusion

One might think that asylum seekers would lose all sense of hope and collectivity in such convoluted conditions of bureaucratized violence. As I have discussed, predatory bureaucracies and necrotemporal strategies seek to discipline and deter asylum seekers. In this context, divisions and opportunities for exploitation undoubtedly developed. However, I also witnessed the emergence of several quotidian counterstrategies among migrants and those acting in solidarity with them to withstand the contingencies of the U.S. asylum system. For example, in several instances, when list managers learned that someone on the waiting list had a medical vulnerability, they would communicate this to Grupo Beta officials to have that individual move up on the list so they could cross more quickly. But daily practices of care became crucial even for those who could not avoid having to wait for long periods in Tijuana.

When I began to work at the Refugee Health Alliance clinic in 2020, I noticed that migrants were also forced to wait there, often for several hours, before receiving care. While RHA clinicians do their best to treat as many patients as quickly as possible, they are simply too understaffed. As a non-clinician, my role in the clinic was to add people to the waitlist, conduct a diagnostic check of their vital signs, and fill out an intake form for them. Many of my days were filled simply trying to organize the clinic's file cabinet, bursting with forms and manila folders. While the work was fast paced, many of my days felt long and slow. Working in a small-scale

bureaucracy beset by a lack of resources often felt frustrating. Our patients would also at times become visibly frustrated by the “dead time” produced by the clinic’s slowness.



**Fig. 4.2:** El Comedor providing food for patients at the RHA clinic  
(Carlos Martinez)

Most patients, however, would wait until their name was called. This was only made somewhat bearable because of the mutual aid (Spade, 2020) provided to them by El Comedor. A cooperatively managed kitchen, El Comedor, was founded in 2019 by a group of young Central Americans who arrived with the migrant caravans that year. While many of El Comedor’s members are asylum seekers themselves, held in captive waiting in Tijuana, they have taken it upon themselves to provide their community with the most basic of needs. The arrival of El Comedor to distribute food while blaring music out of mobile speakers mounted on their bicycles was often a highlight of everyone’s day—patient and clinician alike. El Comedor, I believe, is in the business not only of distributing food and musical joy to its community. It also serves as a visceral demonstration that no amount of imposed waiting can ever fully discipline the movements, actions, solidarities, and hopes of migrants in transit.

## Chapter Four: Prophylactic Violence

### Pandemic Enclosure

I was only five months into conducting my dissertation fieldwork when COVID-19 cases began to be detected in the U.S.-Mexico border region in March 2020 (Fry, 2020). Everything was uncertain in these early days of the pandemic. Restrictions on cross-border travel were being anticipated and discussed by people in Tijuana but it was unclear what would be enacted. While I was unaware of it at the time, the border enforcement landscape and experiences of asylum seekers in Tijuana awaiting their trials to be processed in the U.S. would be dramatically altered in the coming weeks. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. and Mexico closed their shared border to nonessential travel and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an Emergency Interim Final Order that would allow Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials to immediately expel unauthorized migrants attempting to cross into the U.S. without providing them an opportunity to make an asylum claim (Isacson, 2020). The order was issued under Title 42 of the U.S. Code, which authorizes the Surgeon General to suspend introduction of persons or goods into the U.S. on public health grounds. Title 42 also immediately halted all court proceedings for asylum seekers enrolled in the Migrant Protection Protocols program (Rachko, 2021; Sherman-Stokes, 2021). Such policies were not unique at the time, as travel restrictions and border closures began to be enacted by governments across the world. Broad political and public health consensus existed for enacting Title 42, with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), declaring, "There's fundamental public health reason" for closing the northern and southern borders (Hansen, 2020).

Ostensibly put into place to protect CBP agents and the U.S. population from COVID-19, Title 42 proved to be the Trump administration's most potent weapon for border enforcement.

Though many predicted that President Biden would rescind Title 42 upon entering office, his administration surprised many by repeatedly fighting in the courts to maintain it. As of September 2021, Title 42 has been used over 1.2 million times to expel migrants (American Immigration Council, 2021). This staggering feat has coincided with a historic increase in displacement and migration from Central America. The number of migrants from Central America increased by 318 percent between 2015 and 2020, with most hailing from the region's Northern Triangle countries— Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala (UNHCR, 2021).

Title 42 has heralded an extraordinary expansion of the powers available to and employed by the U.S. border security apparatus. While the mobilization of anti-immigrant politics has resulted in incessant securitization of the U.S.-Mexico border over the last two decades, the COVID-19 pandemic provided the United States with an unprecedented opportunity to counter migration and asylum under the rubric of national biosecurity. Indeed, biosecurity provided the U.S. with a pretext not only for slowing down the asylum process, as the Trump administration had already been doing, but with effectively preventing migrants from making asylum claims at all. As a public health order emerging from the CDC implemented with the support of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Title 42 has merged the prerogatives of each agency and ushered in the development of what I refer to as the Homeland Biosecurity State. Drawing from analyses of the Homeland Security State and insights from asylum seekers expelled under Title 42, I suggest that this new iteration of the migrant policing paradigm has required new modes of asylum deterrence and transnational collaboration while conducting important ideological work in order to advance.

## The Unexceptional Exception

Many theorists and commentators have argued that the lockdowns, border closures, and executive overreach characterizing the global response to COVID-19 represent a new “state of exception,” including Giorgio Agamben—the theorist most responsible for developing this concept and bringing it into popular use (2021). Engaging with the theorizations of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, Agamben has sought to challenge standard conceptions of liberal governance and the relationship between law and violence. For Agamben, the state of exception is the “constitutive paradigm of the juridical order” in modern states, which have routinely suspended the rule of law to preserve the rule of law (2005, p. 7). As a result, he argues that modern society has entered a perpetual arrangement where the exceptional suspension of the rule of law—the state of exception—has become the rule. From this vantage, the COVID-19 restrictions merely represent the latest in a long series of governmental extensions of executive power.

But, as several scholars have remarked, Agamben’s notion of a generalized state of exception fails to account for “why and how exceptional conditions apply only to specific bodies and places” (Valdez, Coleman, & Akbar, 2020, p. 902; Makalani, 2017). Indeed, Agamben’s thoroughly Eurocentric and disembodied analysis only lightly references racism, slavery, and colonialism in passing. Agamben’s theorizations leave us ill equipped for understanding how the state of exception within modern Western societies has always hinged upon an “already operative exception” reserved for those inhabiting the constitutive outside of the imperial imaginary (Makalani, 2017). While the state of exception ushered in by Title 42 is novel in form, it follows in the footsteps of and builds upon earlier genealogies of colonial and racial “inclusion through exclusion” targeting immigrants and Latin Americans (De Genova, 2008).

Drawing on Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power framework, Roberto D. Hernández suggests that the "the nominally 'anti-immigrant' sentiment that plays out on the border is a long-historical incarnation of a racial/colonial objection to the Mexican not as immigrant but as coloniality's all-too-familiar subject: the Indigenous other who appears at once savage, uncivilized, and now illegal" (2018, p. 16). Similarly, Jeffrey S. Kahn (2019) and Nicholas De Genova (2002) describe migrant "illegality" as a fundamentally racial category and "migrant policing" as a racial project couched in a colonial and eugenicist heritage. Thus, immigration policies over the last 140 years, since at least the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, have aimed to preserve the U.S.' white majoritarianism and existing racial hierarchies (Aranda & Vaquera, 2015; Haney-López 2006).

Though the authority and capacity of the Homeland Biosecurity State is groundbreaking, the conditions of possibility for its emergence hinge on longstanding notions of immigrant pathogenicity (Molina 2011), the historical construction of Latin Americans as existential enemies (Saldaña Portillo, 2019), a progressive increase in border enforcement capacities, and a bipartisan ambition to undermine asylum law (Harris, 2021; Martínez, Heyman, & Slack, 2020). Likewise, Title 42 relies on both old and new silences, obfuscations, and concealments for its emergence and perpetuation. The Homeland Biosecurity State thus represents both a point of rupture and continuity with earlier forms of racialized anti-immigrant violence, surveillance, and captivity. Contrary to Agamben's generalized state of exception, Title 42 starkly illuminates how pandemic policies have been differentially deployed to double down on the state of exception in which racialized communities are already enmeshed. As scholars of coloniality and Black Studies remind us, it is imperative that we stay attuned to the ways that an "emergency was a prior, long-standing reality" amidst new states of exception (Makalani, 2017, p. 535). This

requires that we attend to the resonances with earlier modes of racialized states of exception that have been with us for centuries as well as the ways they are being rearticulated in contemporary form. As Malcolm X once perceptively remarked, “racism is like a Cadillac, they bring out a new model every year” (Lipsitz, 1998).

### Political and Pandemic Pressures

By the early months of 2021, it felt as if a sea change had occurred in Tijuana, though policy wise much continued to stay the same. Despite the diffusion of COVID vaccines and declining rates of transmission in both the U.S. and Mexico, Title 42 remained in effect. After six months in office, the Biden administration terminated the MPP program, only to have a federal judge order that it be reinstated weeks later. Nonetheless, the end of the Trump presidency augured a new reality across the U.S.-Mexico border. New hopes and expectations had been sparked among those seeking to flee their homes throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. With the support of *polleros* (human smugglers) and Whatsapp messaging, rumors began trafficking through transnational networks across the region that the Biden presidency would reopen the asylum process and that his administration would be more compassionate. The era of harsh immigration policy and cruel treatment of migrants and asylum seekers seemed to be coming to end.

In the late months of 2020 and early months of 2021, a new migrant encampment began forming in Tijuana, directly in front of the San Ysidro pedestrian point of entry adjacent to the Zona Norte neighborhood. Hundreds of migrants, mostly from Central America and Haiti, established a small tent village that would continue to grow in size and complexity in the months ahead. This was just one among several such encampments that began to populate the Northern Mexican borderlands in the aftermath of the implementation of MPP and Title 42. Some of the

encampment's inhabitants had just arrived in Tijuana, while others had already been settled in the city for months (Lebrija, 2021). The conditions at the camp were highly precarious. Vulnerability to violence and disease, whether gastrointestinal or infectious, was a constant. Several migrants spoke to me in whispered tones about some of the inhabitants who had mysteriously disappeared and about trucks full of men with large guns that would drive by the camp in the middle of the night.



**Fig. 5.1:** El Chaparral migrant encampment in March 2021 (Ben Fanjoy)

Despite their dire circumstances, the camp's inhabitants, most who were escaping incredibly threatening situations, were making the most of it. They used dozens of extension cords to bring electricity into the camp, allowing them to create a charging station where people



plugged in their cellphones amidst a jumble of cables. A pool table, chess game area, and laundry stations were created and a few industrious families established food vending and hair salon enterprises. Many thought of the encampment as a political tool—a means of making themselves visible to both the Mexican and U.S. governments and to apply pressure on the Biden administration to reopen the asylum process. They insisted that staying at the camp rather than hidden away in a shelter, no matter how threatening, was critical for bolstering their cause.



**Fig. 5.2:** RHA weekend clinic at El Chaparral migrant encampment (Carlos Martinez)

The Refugee Health Alliance began conducting weekend clinics at the encampment, attempting to treat an astounding number of medical issues with limited resources. Amidst the health crisis brought about by the pandemic, Tijuana’s General Hospital began treating only patients with COVID-19 and turning others away (Fry, 2020). For migrants, seeking out medical care amidst Mexico healthcare system, impacted by three decades of neoliberal austerity, can already be a nightmarish scenario. The pandemic made RHA’s free services all the more valuable for these communities, whose needs often overwhelmed the organization’s capacities.

In March 2021, the on-the-ground RHA team received notice from Dr. Carvajal, a *Tijuana* physician who works with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), that CBP had begun flying 100 migrants expelled under Title 42 from Texas to San Diego and then transferring them to Tijuana every day. Most were caught attempting to cross near the Mexican border city of Reynosa. A new Mexican federal law implemented in January 2021 required that migrant minors detained by immigration officials be held in child-welfare shelters instead of detention centers, as had been the usual practice. While the new law was praised by the United Nations and international advocacy organizations, Mexico did not have a shelter infrastructure needed to accommodate the growing flow of migrant children (Amnesty International, 2021). In response to the new legal framework, Mexico's border state of Tamaulipas—one of the busiest crossing locations for migrants—began refusing expulsions of families with small children from the U.S., declaring that the state's shelters were already at maximum capacity. At first the U.S. stopped expelling families and began placing them in Texas shelters. But as soon as the shelters in Texas reached capacity they pivoted to a new strategy: transporting families to other Mexican border states, primarily Chihuahua and Baja California (Rosenberg and Daniel, 2021).

In a fuming text sent to the RHA team's group chat, Dr. Carvajal explained, "there's no medical screening or food organized nor housing planned for all these people....my boss was the only one who could find food for them after 24 hours without eating anything." She argued that Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador was cooperating with this effort "because of the 'donation' of COVID vaccines." Indeed, President Joe Biden and Lopez Obrador had recently held talks concerning a U.S. donation of COVID-19 vaccines to Mexico as well as binational efforts to curb migration from Latin America. Both administrations denied, however, that the vaccine donation was being used to pressure Mexico into supporting the U.S. with

enforcing its stepped-up border restrictions. In response to reporters' questions on the matter, Lopez Obrador responded indignantly, "We do not accept supervisory visits. We are not a colony, a protectorate. Mexico is a free, independent, and sovereign country" (Garduño and Martínez, 2021).

The sudden flow of migrants to Tijuana quickly overwhelmed the city's public health bureaucracy, migrant shelters, and humanitarian organizations. The IOM, which had opened an emergency shelter out of an old hotel during the pandemic, only provided temporary housing to expelled migrants for a few days before transferring them to longer-term accommodations, typically provided by charitable religious organizations. After expelled migrants began arriving, the IOM staff conducted COVID-19 screenings of the new arrivals and several tested positive. Dr. Carvajal was unnerved, knowing that many more would likely test positive in the coming days. Most shelters in Tijuana, many already at or beyond capacity, refused to accept migrants who tested positive for COVID-19. Meanwhile, the DIF (the Mexican System for Integral Family Development), which is charged with providing housing to most migrant children in Mexico, was operating a temporary shelter in Tijuana's municipal sports auditorium. However, they too had already reached capacity. In desperation, Dr. Carvajal asked if RHA could help coordinate housing for positive COVID-19 patients. "This feels like 2018 all over again, but with COVID," she exclaimed, referencing the arrival of thousands of Central American migrants to Tijuana less than two years prior. Incredibly, RHA, a small medical NGO, albeit one with funding sources from the U.S., was being asked to intervene while governmental and intergovernmental organizations found themselves incapable of managing this crisis.

Dr. Carvajal allowed me to interview some of the recent arrivals before they were moved to another location. Upon arriving to the shelter, I was directed by Julio, a member of the IOM

staff, to the third floor of the hotel where some of the recent arrivals were staying. Julio was careful about directing me to the rooms without walking too closely to them, clearly mindful that some of the migrants had tested positive for COVID-19. I had just been vaccinated so felt slightly less apprehensive than Julio when nearing the rooms. As I walked along the second-floor hallway overlooking the barren hotel grounds, I wondered whether it was one of the countless casualties of the Tijuana tourist sector, which has struggled for decades amidst post-9/11 border securitization efforts, drug war violence, and, most recently, COVID-19 border restrictions. I knocked on one of the doors where I was greeted by Claudia and her daughter. They had both just tested positive for COVID-19 but, fortunately, neither of them was experiencing severe symptoms.

Claudia was wearing a gray sweater and sweatpants—provided to her by CBP officials after she was detained under a bridge near Reynosa while attempting to cross into the U.S. with a group of about 300 other Central Americans and had all her personal belongings taken. Most of the people she traveled with were immediately returned to Mexico after CBP officers took their photos and scanned their fingerprints. Claudia and her daughter were taken into custody and confined in a detention center in Texas with hundreds of other people. Migrants colloquially refer to U.S. detention centers as *la hielera*, or icebox, given the extremely cold temperatures that the CBP maintains in them.

Claudia told me that she was from Libertad, El Salvador. I responded that my family was from the Salvadoran province of Santa Ana in a perhaps facile attempt at quickly establishing a personal connection with her, even as I maintained my physical distance. I asked why she left her home, which she spoke about longingly. She explained that she had been physically abused and threatened with murder by her ex-partner, who was affiliated with a local mara. She had scars

from her ex-partner's abuse that she hoped to present to CBP agents as evidence that she had a legitimate case for receiving asylum protection. She also had several text messages on her phone containing death threats from her ex-partner. Claudia began to struggle with her words, pushing past her tears while explaining that she was told by officers that she would be interviewed for her asylum case. But every time she tried to speak with one of them about her situation she was ignored. After four days in detention, she was boarded onto a plane without knowing where she was being taken. Rather than ever having her asylum case heard as she was promised, Claudia was expelled to Tijuana.

### Strategic Imperception

Claudia's story represents a prototypical experience that many migrants attempting to receive asylum have endured under Title 42. As with thousands of others, Claudia's attempts to speak with someone about her asylum claim fell on deaf ears. Another woman from Honduras expelled under Title 42 recounted to me that when she repeatedly sought to speak with CBP agents about her asylum claim, they simply replied, "[I] no speak Spanish." She knew they were lying, remarking that the agents were "Chicanos." Border Patrol officers are in fact required to have Spanish language proficiency to work in the agency.

These acts of feigned deafness and non-understanding by CBP agents are no accident. A leaked internal CBP memo entitled Operation Capio that was circulated following the implementation of Title 42 instructed agents that people caught trying to enter the U.S. should be immediately expelled in nearly all cases without being provided with the opportunity to explain their fears. Migrants should only be provided with an asylum screening if they "spontaneously" express fear of torture in their home countries, but only if the CBP agent finds their claim "reasonably believable" and receives approval from a senior official (Lind, 2020). Under Title

42, CBP agents were required to collect only biometric data and photos of migrants prior to expelling them (Castillo & Garcia, 2021).

While the Operation Capiro memo did not explicitly instruct CBP agents to ignore statements made voluntarily by migrants, it provided them with extraordinary legal discretion to decide what was “believable” and worthy of their attention. By engaging with the theorizations of Walter Benjamin, we can conceptualize how CBP agents, like police officers, act as both a lawmaking and law-preserving force whereby they are endowed with the sovereign power to institute new laws through decree. According to Benjamin, law-preserving violence provides police with the right to act to pursue legal ends, while lawmaking violence grants them with “the simultaneous authority to decide these ends within wide limits” (1986, p. 286). As Benjamin’s insights suggest, CBP agents are not merely following the law, but rather play a central role in interpreting and inaugurating law.

I refer to CBP’s practice of selective surveillance under Title 42 as *strategic imperception*. The practice of strategic imperception arises as a vernacular lawmaking act of violence—a means of applying the “force of law without law,” as Agamben would have it, that provides the state with the means to efficiently dispose of migrants (2005, p. 39). Rendering marginalized communities inaudible and unintelligible—whether they be migrants, proletarians, the homeless, etc.—is, according to theorist Jacques Rancière, a key locus by which political inequalities are structured in society (2010). For Rancière, political and social orders are aesthetic in a broad sense in that they are constituted by what he refers to as “distribution of the sensible,” a system of categorization determining which bodies and voices are visible, sayable, and audible and conversely which are invisible, unsayable, and inaudible. As Rancière writes, “If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them

as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths” (2010, p. 38). Rancière uses the term “police order” to describe the rules and conventions that reinforce this inegalitarian perceptual “order of visibility and sayability” (2004). The function of the police within the reigning perceptual order can be summarized in the phrase, “Move along! There is nothing to see here!” In other words, the police order ensures that certain activities become legible as speech and others merely as noise that must remain muted (Rancière, 2010, p. 37).

Under the contemporary police order of visibility and sayability, the words of asylum seekers are not only made intentionally inaudible or misunderstood, but the accounts they provide also disintegrate into incoherence. The full spectrum of the state's sensorium is partially auto-disabled to ensure that only the data that preserves its interests become perceptible and legible. Biometrics count, claims to asylum do not. By enacting this “partition of the sensible,” as Rancière (2010) would describe it, through the force of lawmaking violence, CBP officers have been empowered with the facility to circumvent international human rights standards of asylum without consequence. But, the strategy of imperception deployed by CBP is only successful because of migrants’ prior placement into a racialized state of exception. As Rancière emphasizes, claims that circulate in a discursive space are not categorized or judged by the quality and nature of these speech acts alone. Rather, they are claims that are inherently tied to particular bodies that are marked by race, class, gender, and other signifiers of inequality, which are in turn, “constitutively contaminated by the meaning of these bodies within a ‘policed’ economy of mattering” (Feola, 2014).

The police order of visibility and sayability that already reduces claims by racialized migrants to mere “groans or cries...but not actual speech” worthy of political attention has been

further reinforced by the actual figure of the border police (Rancière, 2010, p. 38). While Title 42 has made strategic imperception much easier to deploy, it was already becoming a routinized practice by CBP agents prior to the pandemic. Under the Trump administration, the DHS implemented new asylum screening programs in which migrants were forced to undergo credible fear interviews while being held in CBP detention facilities often without access to legal counsel, rather than in ports of entry as was previously done. This resulted in a significantly higher rate of asylum seekers being denied credible fear claims (Human Rights First, 2020). Moreover, most African and indigenous migrants are not provided with translators during these interviews, further marginalizing them as unintelligible subjects (Human Rights First, 2021b). As the CBP made very transparently clear in an U.S. Government Accountability Office report, Title 42 has made the jobs of CBP officers much easier. They can now be “on the front lines rather than spending time completing paperwork or otherwise processing apprehended individuals...which in turn increases the chances of interdicting anyone crossing the border illegally” (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021). Move along. There is nothing to see here, indeed.

### Prophylactic Violence

In palimpsestic fashion, Title 42 condenses, consolidates, and refashions the various discourses regarding migrants and Latin Americans promulgated by U.S. officials over several time periods. Traces of earlier rhetoric can be found in the public pronouncements and justifications for the policy’s implementation. In particular, enduring notions of innate immigrant pathogenicity have merged with a conceptualization of migrants as criminal threats that cohered in the post-9/11 era and was further bolstered by the Trump administration. The immigrant as a source of contagion and the border as a contamination zone requiring medical sanitation have been longstanding tropes in U.S. national discourse. The medicalization of borders links



nationalist sentiments of racial purity and biosecurity with the policing of territory. Jeffrey S. Kahn (2019), for example, has examined how conceptions of pathologized Haitian migrants arriving from a putatively disease-ridden environment became a primary idiom through which many Americans experienced an erosion of their national sovereignty amidst the rise of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Similarly, in their exploration of a deadly cholera epidemic in Venezuela that killed several hundred—mostly indigenous—people in the early 1990s, Charles Briggs and Clara Mantini-Briggs (2003) describe how governmental and media discourses portrayed Venezuela as a human body waiting to be invaded by a foreign disease spread by immigrants from surrounding countries.

As documented by several historians of medicine, screening migrants for disease ostensibly in the name of national protection became a central feature of U.S. enforcement of the southern border in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Border enforcement centered on the exclusion and racialization of Mexican bodies as a medical and social threat. Indeed, the U.S. Public Health Service began conducting intrusive medical screenings of Mexicans nearly a decade prior to the creation of the Border Patrol (Molina 2011). In the 1910s and 1920s, Mexican immigrants were perceived as so threatening that the U.S. Public Health Service deloused those crossing the border by bathing them in kerosene. With the expansion of the Public Health Service and epidemiological surveillance, U.S. border cities began to enforce quarantines, usually for yellow fever and smallpox, against migrants entering from Mexico. Informed by developments in germ theory and bacteriology, public health officials used the medical examination room at border entry points as a means to identify and construct nationally salient notions of Mexicans as diseased foreigners (Stern, 2015; Molina, 2006).

As Natalia Molina suggests, biologically-based negative representations of Mexicans persisted far beyond the ambit of the biopolitical border regimes that constituted them (2006). Such representations, born out of the regime of border medicalization in the early twentieth century, only intensified during the late 1920s and into the Great Depression era. The portrayal of Mexicans as diseased served as a key justification for their deportation during the Mexican Repatriation campaign of this period. As Howard Markel and Alexandra Minna Stern write (2002), the widespread use of shifting pathologizing categories by U.S. authorities throughout the twentieth century “contributed to durable biological metaphors that explained, usually in catastrophic terms, the potential risks of unrestricted immigration to the nation's social health” (p. 758). Such histories implore us to attend to the ways that race becomes reproduced globally through biopolitical practice over time (Smith and Vasudevan, 2017). Like craniology, medicalized borders emerged as a technique of “race science” by which racial diagnostics and imperial imaginaries of biologically inferior others became affixed to each other (Harding, 1993).

In the context of COVID-19, we are witnessing a reemergent emphasis on immigrant pathogenicity and dramatic re-medicalization of the southern border. Rhetorically, President Trump used the COVID-19 pandemic to further justify his immigration policies by drawing on a deep well of pathologizing discourse. In claiming, for example, that “Tijuana is the most heavily infected place anywhere in the world, as far as the plague is concerned,” (Rieder, 2020) Trump rehashed narratives describing the border city as a “moral sink hole” and a “constant source of disease and disgrace” (St. John, 2011). Upon implementing border closures at the beginning of the pandemic, Trump described migrants’ professed disability and infectivity in catastrophic terms, claiming that, “In normal times, these massive flows place a vast burden on our health

care system, but during a global pandemic they threaten to create a perfect storm that would spread the infection to our border agents, migrants and to the public at large” (Hansen, 2020).

But, in contrast to earlier techniques of border medicalization, Title 42 does not require its targets to undergo diagnostic screening or sanitizing treatment. Rather, it enables CBP agents to merely expel migrants, whether they have COVID-19 or not, as quickly as possible. The identification of actual disease is unnecessary under Title 42, which effectively engages in a preemptive diagnosis of all encountered migrants as vectors of disease. Such a totalizing view flows naturally from a durable perception of those occupying the constitutive outside of the imperial imaginary (in this case, predominantly Latin Americans and Caribbeans) as always already being threatening and pathogenic.

Drawing from the concept of “preemptive and preventive action” put forth in President George W. Bush’s national security strategy following 9/11, anthropologist Lynn Stephen (2017) has used the term “preemptive suspects” to describe categories of people who are “identified, detained, harmed, and even killed because of their categorization as dangerous and/or disposable” (p. 8). Stephen explains how the categorization of Central Americans as communists and subversives during the Reagan administration indelibly marked migrants from those countries as worthy of suspicion. Similarly, María Josefina Saldaña Portillo (2019) draws on the theorizations of Carl Schmitt to argue that the U.S.’ relationship to Latin Americans, but primarily Mexicans and Central Americans, has been undergirded by what Schmitt referred to as the “friend-enemy distinction.” Latin Americans, in this schema, are construed as existential enemies so “different and alien” that the U.S. must engage in a myriad of interventionist and securitization practices in order to protect its populace from them. Under the Trump

administration, we witnessed a stark resurgence of the conflation between migrants and criminality, and in particular, the casting of aspersions on the veracity of asylum seekers' claims.

Title 42 enacts what I refer to as *prophylactic violence* through preemptively marking irregular migrants as both criminal and infectious biological agents whose asylum claims must be categorically ignored in order to facilitate their swift removal. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a mechanism for converting those already cast as preemptive suspects into preemptive biothreats. A particularly outrageous but illustrative example of this was the allegation made by a Fox News anchor that the Haitian migrants amassed in Del Rio, Texas in September 2021 were intentionally assembled by an amorphous foreign enemy to act as a “virus bomb” that would detonate coronavirus infections across the U.S. (Media Matters, 2021). Amidst the pandemic, the alleged criminal plot to invade the U.S. has been thickened to now include a biological motive. The congealing of discourses on Latin American migrants as both criminal and biological threats has provided a basis for the commonsensical acceptance of a policy as drastic as Title 42 and for the development of a Homeland Biosecurity State.

### **Building the Homeland Biosecurity State**

While Title 42 integrates multiple narratives constructing migrants as threats, it also signals the emergence of a distinct mode of migration governance linking several shifts in national security logics that have evolved over recent decades. The establishment of what I refer to as the Homeland Biosecurity State represents the culmination and consolidation of various trends that have transformed the way that threats to national security are perceived and confronted. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the growth of caravans as a strategy for migrant mobility in recent years have provided an external impetus for U.S. agencies to put Title 42 and other emerging strategies into practice. The implementation of these strategies is only possible

because of prior investments in the creation of a robust border and migrant enforcement apparatus. Several scholars have theorized the notion of the Homeland Security State to describe this structure, which I draw from in developing the concept of the Homeland Biosecurity State.

Scholars and critics of the Homeland Security State have drawn attention to the colossal growth in funding and prioritization of immigration enforcement in the aftermath of 9/11 associated with the signing of the Homeland Security Act by President George W. Bush in 2002, which established the DHS (De Genova, 2007; Gonzalez, 2016). Subsequent presidents continued to increase funding for the DHS in the following years, leading to the proliferation of detention centers across the U.S.-Mexico border and a massive growth in personnel (Gonzalez, 2016). This was accompanied by bureaucratic changes in migration enforcement, including the transfer of the government's immigration enforcement functions from the Department of Justice (DOJ) to the DHS. This seemingly innocuous bureaucratic modification gestured towards a more profound ideological shift by which "national security concerns regarding threats from external terrorist enemies got mixed in with domestic concerns about immigrant 'invaders'" (Lovato, 2008).

More broadly, these transformations in migration enforcement were reinforced by a post-Cold War and post-9/11 governmental sensibility of "radical insecurity" (Kaplan, 2003) in which the homeland is conceived as existing in a "continual state of emergency" in the face of permanent threats posed by "elusive transnational networks of non-state enemies" (De Genova, 2007). Roberto Lovato has argued that conjuring immigrants as part of this diffuse specter provided a "way of normalizing and advancing militarization within the borders of the United States" (208). The establishment of the Homeland Security State was accompanied by what Melinda Cooper has referred to as a "biological turn" in U.S. defense policy that "conflates

public health, biomedicine and war under the sign of the emerging threat” (2006). Though it had earlier antecedents, this biosecurity paradigm was also ushered into the political mainstream under the George W. Bush administration following the 9/11 and subsequent anthrax attacks in the same year (Lakoff, 2008). Under the Bush administration, the U.S. government established a national defense strategy against biological threats and Congress approved Project Bioshield, a \$5.6 billion package for research and preparedness against bioterrorism (Cooper, 2006).

The adoption of a biosecurity framework by national security officials was preceded by a growing emphasis among public health officials and researchers on the distinctive threat posed by emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. As Nicholas King (2002) explains, this line of research was shaped by rising anxieties about living in a globalizing world in which international borders were increasingly being transgressed by migrants, commerce, tourism, and viruses. This “emerging diseases worldview” recapitulated colonial and tropical medicine’s obsessions with eradicating and containing diseases perceived as being endemic to peripheral territories and deemed threatening to those in the imperial center (Ahuja, 2016; King, 2002). However, under this new paradigm, full eradication and sanitary segregation were no longer seen as plausible in an unpredictable globalized world. Rather, the establishment of a “global surveillance network to detect, track and intervene against outbreaks of disease around the world” increasingly became seen as necessary (King, 2002, p. 774).

By the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, the emerging diseases paradigm was widely adopted by U.S. foreign policy and national security experts, who were already expanding the scope of security concerns beyond mere military threats (Cooper, 2006). Increasingly, they understood emerging and re-emerging diseases as constituting a “nontraditional threat” to U.S. security (King, 2002). Indeed, a CIA report published in the year

2000 described “global infectious disease” as a nontraditional threat comparable to the emerging risk posed by non-state terrorist networks (Cooper, 2006). The incorporation of infectious diseases into the security criterion contributed to a transformation in the rationales guiding governmental response to unexpected threats. As Andrew Lakoff (2008) and Melinda Cooper (2006) have articulated, the logics of “preparedness” and “preemption” against the emergence of inherently uncertain events came to dominate national security discourses by the 1990s. Preparedness, as Neel Ahuja (2016) writes, “stages catastrophic risk as an everyday phenomenon,” presuming and planning for the worst-case scenarios to occur (p. 138). The logic of preemption, as Cooper (2006) explains, represents a “future-invocative,” rather than predictive, mode of anticipation that “endow our suspicions, fears and panics with an active force of law” (p. 125). Preemptive action, whether against a foreign military enemy or an infectious disease, acts as a mobilizing force that seeks to survive emergent uncertainties through actively engaging in the production of the future.

Thus, by the early twenty-first century, both immigrants and infectious diseases came to be understood as imminent and permanent threats to the homeland and incorporated into national security and military planning. It should perhaps be no surprise then that we are witnessing a pronounced integration between the objectives of the DHS with those of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The ideological foundation and practices undergirding the implementation of Title 42 would have been unthinkable without these prior developments in the biosecurity and migrant enforcement paradigms. The administration of Title 42 required the establishment of a well-equipped border patrol entity that only came into existence in the post-9/11 era. It is also contingent upon a rationale of preemption so central to the militarized biosecurity framework.

The current response to migrants in the form of Title 42 has resulted in a further integration between the branches of government responsible for biological and territorial security. The Department of Health and Human Services has delegated its authority to the DHS infrastructure while providing the agency with a medical justification for its actions. A common defense provided by both the Trump and Biden administrations in response to criticisms is that Title 42 does not constitute an immigration policy, but rather is a necessary public health order from the CDC that is simply being implemented with the assistance of the DHS. Indeed, Alejandro Mayorkas, the Homeland Security Secretary under the Biden administration stated that he would not support Title 42 if it was an immigration policy (Aguilera, 2021). Though DHS officials claim their department is merely serving as a handmaiden to the CDC, they have in fact, greatly determined how Title 42 is being operationalized on the ground, as already discussed. Indeed, as several advocacy organizations have emphasized in their legal arguments, the Title 42 order makes no mention of the CDC having the right to expel anyone who has come into the country. Rather, the statute only describes the CDC's power to order a quarantine for individuals (Guttentag, 2020). Nonetheless, Mayorkas has insisted, "This is what is necessary as a matter of public health imperative as ordered by the Centers for Disease Control" (Montoya-Galvez, 2021).

Given the growing pressures being placed on the Biden administration from several advocacy groups, policymakers, and public health officials, it seems likely that Title 42 will be rescinded at some point during his administration when the COVID-19 pandemic is considered under control. However, Title 42 is merely one expression, among other worrying tendencies, of a developing Homeland Biosecurity apparatus aiming to further merge migration enforcement with a logic of preemption. A stark example of this can be found with an expansive new rule



proposed by the DHS and the Executive Office for Immigration Review, a sub-agency within the Department of Justice, in July 2020 that would significantly magnify the authority of both agencies to classify asylum seekers who travel from or transit through a country where a contagious disease is prevalent as potential threats to national security (Security Bars and Processing, 2020). This new rule would endow both agencies with remarkable new preemptive powers to make migrants ineligible for asylum based on their alleged contact with an infectious disease simply based on their travel history (CLINIC, 2020). The rule change aims to both concretize and amplify Title 42, converting it from a temporary emergency order specific to COVID-19 into a durable bureaucratic regulation applicable to a wide range of communicable diseases that are not subject to U.S. quarantine laws and do not present a viable risk of widespread public transmission, such as syphilis, tuberculosis, and Hansen’s disease.

As critics have argued, this rule would result in a further blurring in authority and responsibility for managing infectious diseases between the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services (Iacono, 2020). Moreover, it would dramatically enhance CBP’s ability to enact prophylactic violence by delegating tremendous discretionary power to them, providing agents with the authority to make determinations regarding an asylum seekers’ health status despite having no medical or public health training (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021). In March 2021, the DHS and DOJ delayed the rule’s effective date to December 31, 2021. Whether or not the rule is implemented, its mere proposal illustrates how migration, infectious disease, and national security have become conflated in the imaginary of the Homeland Biosecurity State. The proposal’s authors paint an apocalyptic vision couched in the emerging diseases worldview to argue for the necessity of the rule change, explaining that “pandemics such as COVID–19 can inflict catastrophic damage to America’s, and the world’s,

economy and thus, to the security of the United States” (Security Bars and Processing, 2020, p. 41209). Ostensibly, such catastrophic damage can only be averted by broadly casting migrants as preemptive biothreats.

Predictably, the logic of preemption and global surveillance is now being transferred from the realm of infectious disease prevention towards the prevention of migration altogether. In October 2021, the DHS announced plans to launch a new intelligence unit aimed at better tracking and predicting the movement of migrant groups traveling to the U.S. southern border (Ainsley, 2021). Established largely in response to the surprise arrival of thousands of Haitian migrants to Texas the previous month, the program mirrors existing global health efforts to develop a global viral surveillance network to forecast future threats and enable early detection of viral transmissions (Carroll et al., 2021). The program promises to conduct aerial surveillance of truck traffic along known migration routes and to develop algorithms that will be used to monitor social media chatter on platforms popularly used by migrants, such as Whatsapp and Facebook (Ainsley, 2021). Through coordination and sharing of intelligence with other countries, the DHS hopes to better deter migrating caravans from ever arriving to the U.S. southern border. Anticipatory containment, long a bedrock of the biosecurity framework, has emerged as a guiding logic for the preemptive management of migration viewed through the prism of impending catastrophe.

### Biocommunicable Borders

Ideologically, the emerging Homeland Biosecurity State reifies the nation state as a natural and real sanitary unit in the public imaginary. Amidst the real threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Title 42 has produced a popularly accepted “biocommunicable model,” as Charles Briggs (2011) would refer to it, that “shapes biosecurity through its powerful reliance on

several sets of assumptions that are not explicitly defined or questioned but are projected as facts about the world, seemingly known and accepted by interlocutors” (p. 17). Indeed, support for border restrictions became widespread among Americans during the pandemic, regardless of political affiliation (Rose, 2020). The impregnability of the border through the defense of the national body from infectious migrants became seen as intimately entwined with the defense of Americans’ biological bodies. Despite epidemiological ambivalence about the efficacy of border restrictions for containing COVID-19 and the growing criticisms of Title 42 by public health officials and organizations, the shuttering of the border has appeared as a commonsensical corollary to the wider lockdown policies implemented across the world during the pandemic (Grépin et al, 2021; Linka et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2020). This popular support was achieved through the circulation of discourses on the pandemic and migration through a range of governmental, mass media, and social media circuits.

In her book *Savage Frontier*, Ieva Jusionyte (2015) draws on Briggs’ concept of communicability to describe how the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay became discursively produced as a racialized security threat through the ongoing intervention of journalists and national policymakers. This racialized construction was enacted through a process of entextualization, in which decontextualized stories of violence are extracted from the border’s local context, expunged of the relationship between this violence and broader structures of power, and repackaged for national audiences (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). In this way, the “savage frontier” became essentialized as an innately criminal space in juxtaposition to the civilized center of that nation. Yet, as Jusionyte argues, such news narratives ignore that the realities within border zones are fundamentally the outcome of national politics, economics, and cultures. In similar fashion, sensationalized media accounts about a cataclysmic surge of

migrants have failed to acknowledge how restrictive border and anti-asylum policies bear a great deal of responsibility in determining recent patterns. The Trump administration's MPP program and "metering" policy, in which CBP agents place severe limits on who is allowed to approach ports of entry and ask for asylum, forced hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers to wait in Mexico, for years in some cases, for their cases to be heard (Blue et al., 2021). This produced a severe backlog in the processing of asylum cases, which forced many migrants to attempt to cross into the U.S. in large groups or with the help of smugglers out of sheer desperation (Human Rights First, 2021c).

Perhaps more perniciously, the inordinate emphasis placed on irregular migrants serves to obscure a more fundamental fact of which anti-border activists and scholars often remind us: borders are inherently inegalitarian structures governed by "global mobility regimes" that are hardened against some while softened for others (Sheller, 2018). Despite claims that depict borders as obdurate instruments against external forces, they are in many respects quite porous. Particular manifestations of border porosity have been historically silenced, while others are disproportionately magnified. Several scholars and activists have reiterated the point that we live in a time in which borders are increasingly being crossed by capital, while simultaneously being militarized against migrants (Sheller, 2018). But, it is not only capital that crosses borders with ease. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2019) argues, it is precisely through the transgression of Latin American borders through military interventionism that the U.S. shored up its territorial control and its own security from "even a geographically remote threat" (p. 7).

In the Cold War era, this threat was commonly characterized as the encroaching spread of communism. In more recent years, the perceived threat of drugs and gang-affiliated migrants has led to the further penetration of Latin American borders with the inauguration of the U.S.-funded

drug war and the deportation regime—two political projects that have led to further destabilization of the region (Rios, 2014; Saldaña-Portillo, 2019; Zilberg, 2011). Indeed, the dramatic increase in the cross-border flow of U.S.-manufactured guns and military funding through agreements such as the Merida Initiative have coincided with the historic rise in drug war associated violence in Mexico (DeLay, 2013; Puyana et. al, 2017). Meanwhile, the deportation of young Central American gang members to their countries of birth throughout the 1990s and 2000s, despite them often having left there as children, laid the foundation for the establishment of a transnational gang network that is in large part responsible for the current exodus from the region (Zilberg, 2011). In order to keep our attention on the transgressions of irregular migrants, however, these transborder imperial mobilities must be rendered invisible. Likewise, the narratives of those impacted by these flows must remain inaudible in order to prevent their passage. And yet, these threads of violence and the “death worlds” (Mbembe, 2003) they produce in Latin America infused the testimonies of many of the migrants I met in Tijuana.

In April 2021, I visited Pro Amore Dei, a privately operated religious shelter, to meet with a group of migrants who had just been expelled under Title 42. Located deep inside one of Tijuana’s hilly working class neighborhoods, Pro Amore Dei is just one of the dozens of migrant shelters dotting the border city’s sprawling landscape. The shelter was buzzing with energy in anticipation of their upcoming Easter Sunday celebration—the incessant sound of children playing, babies crying, dozens of conversations, and food being prepared for the shelter’s approximately one hundred inhabitants echoed all the way down the block. The shelter was orderly, and everyone seemed to have their clearly delineated responsibilities and routines, but it appeared to be bursting at the seams. Leticia, the shelter director, explained that the government wanted to send her more migrants expelled under Title 42. But she only had capacity to take

forty more people. Many migrants living in Pro Amore Dei had already been living there for several months, placed in an indeterminate holding pattern first because of MPP and then COVID-19.



**Fig 5.3:** Pro Amore Dei migrant shelter (Ben Fanjoy)

I met Sandra there, a young Salvadoran woman, who had been traveling with her two-year old daughter. Just like Claudia, she was apprehended while attempting to cross into the U.S. near Reynosa and was subsequently expelled to Tijuana. Sandra was from Apopa, a neighborhood in El Salvador’s capital city with notoriously high murder rates associated with an ongoing territorial rivalry between five gangs. She fled after being told that she would be killed and her child would be kidnapped if she didn’t pay a “war tax”—the price levied by gangs to have your life spared while living in a zone in territorial dispute. Even after fleeing, she continues to receive text messages demanding that she send money to gang members, who have

now threatened to kill her family members who stayed behind. She was told that if she doesn't pay, they will kill one family member at a time. She shook her cellphone at me while recounting this, seemingly adamant to have her story heard and believed. "*Pa'tras no puedo ir*" (I can't go backwards), she told me, while rocking her two-year-old daughter in her lap. Sandra could not return to El Salvador, because not only her life, but her entire families' life depended on it.

For Jacques Rancière, politics and political agency are those acts that disturb the existing perceptual order of visibility and sayability. Rancière (1995a) writes that politics, "makes visible what had no business being seen...it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise" (p. 30). The task of political agents, for Rancière, is to establish an "obligation to hear" what was previously perceived only as noise (1995b, p. 86). But as theorist Michael Feola (2014) argues, Rancière leaves undertheorized the necessity for a concomitant cultivation of receptivity, or a resensibilization of perception attuned to hearing de-authorized subjects. As Feola (2014) explains, "counter-hegemonic practices of listening"—or perhaps we can call it oppositional perception—can also act as a "core practice for negotiating, disrupting, or expanding democratic space" (p. 515-516). Migrant solidarity, I suggest, cannot simply entail undoing the strategic imperception being applied by CBP agents under Title 42—though this is a critical task. It also requires cultivating an oppositional perception to hear and understand the realities shared by migrants such as Claudia and Sandra that discursive and material bordering practices seek to conceal. A politics of oppositional perception requires us to say what has become unsayable and to hear that which is rendered inaudible in the context of prevailing border discourses. This calls on us to say emphatically that, contrary to the views espoused through the biocommunicable models that have come to dominate during the pandemic, borders are not pillars of security. At

best, borders are mere spectacles that distract from the imperial violence that overwhelms them, and at worst they serve as magnifiers of the insecurities they seek to hide.



## Conclusion: Beyond the Carceral Frontier

In November 2021, I briefly returned to Tijuana after completing my dissertation fieldwork year six months earlier. Unsurprisingly, the conditions for migrants and deportees there continued to shift, though the forces of captivity that gripped them were ever-present. As usual, I joined Dr. Patty to help her conduct a follow-up visit with some patients near La 20. While driving to our destination, she told me that the most recent wave of police crackdowns on the homeless community had largely been successful in “cleansing” the canal of their presence. Though deportees and the broader homeless community continued to enter the canal to purchase and consume drugs, most were now finding places to sleep in locations in the surrounding streets in an attempt to avoid being captured by the police. Many members of the community near La 20 took up residence in a vacant lot strewn with piles of garbage adjacent to the canal. Patty explained that her patients were now much more difficult to find and, in general, there were far fewer of them. She had been told by one patient that several people living around the canal had died within a span of a few months. Patty suspected that this spate of deaths was likely the result of SARS-CoV-2 ripping through the community. Combined with the fact that many were already struggling with other conditions, including HIV and TB, and public medical care remained acutely scarce amidst the ongoing pandemic, it was just a matter of time before COVID-19 caught up with the homeless deportee community.

Fernando, the patient whose abscesses she had drained back in 2019 when I first started working with the Border Wound Clinic, was among those who had recently died. I was sad to hear of Fernando’s passing, since we had developed a closeness with each other over the past two years. The last time we encountered each other in early 2021 he unexpectedly gave me a big hug, which startled me at first. He then proceeded to tell me that the police had once again

arrested him and several others inside the canal just a few days prior. But this time he seemed even more unsettled by the experience than usual. He angrily told me that they had forced his group to get on their knees while brandishing their guns before arresting them. This was clearly a humiliating and scary experience for him. Fernando had recently been hired to sweep the area in front of the Tijuana civil courthouse from Tuesday to Friday every week he told me. But getting arrested repeatedly interfered with his ability to maintain this job. Ironically, Fernando, like other homeless deportees, was consistently treated by law enforcement as a blemish on Tijuana's landscape but was in the meanwhile being paid to clean outside of one of the city's legal buildings. Despite his efforts to make a steady living, Fernando was unable to escape the forces of attrition that wore him down over time.

One of the patients Patty planned to meet with was Enrique, whom she had tested for TB over two years prior. As in past follow-up visits, we went to look for him at the parking lot of the OXXO market, which had just been permanently shuttered. The corner store lot now felt more barren and dismal, without the hustle and bustle of customers coming and going. Enrique somehow appeared even thinner than the last time I had seen him. He never completed his TB treatment at Las Nubes, despite Patty's best effort. He had recently developed deep abscesses on his left arm, the outcome of being infected by persistently using non-sterilized syringes to inject himself with heroin. Just as she had done with Fernando and countless other patients, Patty drained Enrique's abscesses. And I again, played the simple role of collecting any medical waste before it flew into the busy street in front of us. She took great care to clean up the blood and puss dripping down his arm and ensuring his abscesses were disinfected before gently wrapping his arm with bandages. She told me that she would return in a few days to check on the wound and wrap his arm yet again.



**Fig. 6.1:** Dr. Patty providing wound care to Enrique (Carlos Martinez)

Once we were back in Patty’s car, I asked her if she ever got tired of doing this work of constantly patching and repatching up the wounds that interminably appeared on her patients’ bodies. She replied, “*Esto no me cansa. Lo que me cansa es la política*” (This doesn’t make me tired. What makes me tired is politics.). When Patty used the word “politics” she was referring to electoral politics. Patty often emphasizes her distaste for electoral politics and bureaucracies in Mexico, declaring that all politicians, even those who have populist messaging, are inherently corrupt and anti-poor. But Patty, of course, is a deeply political person. Her convictions and the Border Wound Clinic’s work are greatly influenced by the political vision of Mexico’s Zapatista indigenous movement, which emphasizes autonomy and a “bottom-up” form of political and community organizing (Mora, 2017). Nonetheless, Patty often submits that for all of the clinic’s

efforts, it is insufficient for responding to the profound needs of those whom she has chosen to serve. Death continues to be “no stranger” for these borderland inhabitants, as Gloria Anzaldúa described (1987).

The following day I went to visit the El Chaparral migrant encampment to see how the conditions there had evolved since I had left Tijuana. Title 42 remained in place and continued to prevent all but a very small quantity of migrants from seeking asylum in the United States. A few weeks prior, the encampment was surrounded with a chain-linked fence by Tijuana city officials in a surprise operation conducted in the evening (Molina Aguilar, 2021). This was purportedly done to protect migrants from criminal organizations and to ensure the safety of children living in the camp. However, this action also displaced hundreds of migrants, some of whom had their tents and belongings destroyed when the fences were suddenly installed. The carceral frontier gripping migrants in the borderland that I have sought to describe throughout this dissertation now appeared in an ominously material form with the gated El Chaparral encampment.

I hoped to speak with a few of the remaining migrants to get a sense of how they felt about their new situation. However, I was careful about not wandering too closely to the encampment, given the around-the-clock presence of police officers maintaining a watchful eye over all who entered and exited. Those living in the encampment were provided with identification cards, featuring their photo, country of origin, and date of birth. Most migrants wore them using lanyards, as if they were employees of a company. They were required to show their identification cards to a police officer before entering the encampment. As Beatriz, a Guatemalan woman living in the encampment explained to me, aside from being a requirement for entering the encampment, the identification could not be used by migrants to access any social services or employment. “*No sirve para nada!*” (it’s useless), she exclaimed.



**Fig. 6.2:** El Chaparral migrant encampment surrounded by chain-linked fence and police units in November 2021 (Carlos Martinez)

This rigid new bureaucratic order imposed upon residents seem to be an odd fit with the encampment's otherwise precarious conditions. After the fence was installed, police officers stopped allowing charitable, legal, and medical organizations from entering the encampment and providing donations. The communal kitchen that was once filled with donated food was now running low in stock, forcing residents to purchase food at nearby markets with whatever meager money they had. The encampment fence had now also cut off access to the nearby pedestrian bridge crossing over the Tijuana River Canal that allowed migrants to easily access the RHA clinic in Zona Norte. RHA clinicians were also prevented from organizing their weekend clinic at the encampment, which they had been doing for several months up until that point. I asked Beatriz if *el psicólogo* with Psychologists without Borders was still arriving. "No! Not them, no clinics, we aren't receiving anything right now," she lamented.

Many of the migrants I spoke with expressed ambivalence about the chain-linked fence. Beatriz, for example, told me she felt more protected from the threat of cartel organizations, but also didn't like the feeling of being constantly monitored by police. Several suspected that the new controls over the encampment were ultimately a means to slowly diminish its population. The encampment was finally cleared by Mexican National Guards and immigration officials using bulldozers three months after the fence was installed, and the remaining migrants were dispersed across Tijuana (Mendoza & Morrissey, 2022). Some moved into migrant shelters while others continue to live in smaller outdoor encampments, but further away from the border. In many cases, migrants began renting apartments in neighborhoods in the outskirts of Tijuana, further distancing them from being able to access social services or employment (Morrissey, 2022). One migrant rights advocate suggested that the underlying intention behind this brutal eviction was to, "disappear them into the general populace of Tijuana and make them susceptible to unknown greater dangers because no one knows what is happening to them now" (Solis & Bowler, 2022). The strategy of attrition directed at migrants in Tijuana has continued to shape their movements and experiences of time, consistently producing "ambivalence and unrest" (Anzaldúa, 1987) for them.

As I have explored throughout this dissertation, an assemblage of punitive and necropolitical forces has increasingly turned Mexican border cities into zones of migrant and deportee captivity. Though the border may be a socially and politically constructed "line in the sand" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012), it is perpetually reinforced not only through defensive strategies of barrier construction and militarization, but also through proactive policies of targeted attrition. While this form of slow border violence may be punctuated by spectacular displays of brutality, such as police crackdowns and evictions of migrant encampments, its

quotidian ramifications often remain hidden from view. These forms of border violence, often conducted away from the threshold of the physical border itself, are echoes of U.S. immigration enforcement policies that reverberate outwards into Mexican territory. The conversion of Mexican border cities into “disposability pockets” (Estévez, 2018) for migrants and deportees has been accomplished through the transnationalization of carceral forces, which I have referred to as the carceral frontier. In my fieldwork, I sought to attune to both the fast and slow temporalities of this transnational assemblage by participating in the incessant small acts of care and solidarity purveyed by activist medical groups seeking to mitigate its impacts. These activities are clearly no match for the overwhelming force of the border and carceral regimes impacting the communities they serve. And yet, through participating in them, I began to see the inklings of a countervailing transnational force, however small and incommensurate it may be in comparison to the carceral frontier.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, clinicians in the United States were largely prohibited by their employers from travelling internationally to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. Despite this, several of RHA’s volunteer clinicians continued to travel from the United States to Tijuana to provide care for migrants impacted by Title 42. The biocommunicable models (Briggs, 2011) that reinforced the U.S.-Mexico border as a sanitary barrier against purportedly pathogenic immigrants were unconvincing for them. This was no accident. Many of RHA’s clinicians perceive of their transnational work as being a form of what Sam Dubal, Shamsheer Samra, and Hannah Janeway (a co-founder of RHA) refer to as “medical border abolition” (2021). For them, the border is a harmful fiction that can never serve as a protective barrier. The border, out of necessity, must be crossed by clinicians and even more so when the U.S. government has refortified it using a logic of preventative health. Moreover,

questioning and politically challenging the very idea of the border, they suggest, must become a necessary component of a medical practice grounded in migrant justice.

Continuing to cross the border during this critical period is not only an outcome of their abolitionist perspective. It also emerges from their recognition of the US government's role in producing many of the conditions that have resulted in mass migrations from Mexico and Central America, such as the promotion of neoliberal policies, covert and overt militaristic interventions, financial support for repressive regimes, and ongoing funding for the global drug war. And as they have witnessed in their clinics, the United States' increasingly aggressive anti-immigrant policies have only exacerbated the physical and psychological harms experienced by migrants. Thus, for RHA's clinicians, working at the border with patients who have been impacted by harmful U.S. foreign and border policies is a direct means of challenging the carceral frontier. Just as the harms brought upon migrants are transnational in nature, they understand that their practices of solidarity must also inherently be transnational. Dr. Patty and the Border Wound Clinic are also driven by such a "transnational imaginary" (Saldívar, 2006), fully cognizant that many of their patients' wounds are the outcome of punitive policing in both the United States and Mexico.

Both organizations are driven by what I refer to as *transnational solidarity*, undergirded by an understanding of these shared global histories that have produced recent transnational migrations and reinforced border militarization (Martinez et al., 2022). Such practices of solidarity differ from acts of charity in their recognition of the histories and social structures that have brought disproportionate harm against their patients. The organizations I have collaborated with throughout my fieldwork provide just two examples of how transnational solidarity is pursued to support migrant communities. I have sought to highlight their work not to construct a



heroic image of them. Indeed, as I hope to have illustrated, while their efforts are certainly valiant, they are often faced with the challenges of having to work within broader structures of violence that seek to constrict and wear down migrants. Moreover, their work is generally incapable of fundamentally transforming the conditions facing migrant communities. For that to occur, a broader political movement that confronts our dominant “border fictions” and directly challenges the emergent carceral frontier will be necessary.

Dubal, Samra, & Janeway argue that “Rather than acquiesce to the idea of borders as fixed and thus focus interventions on mitigating their harms, we must think about the medical necessity for abolition” (2021, p. 5). They call on clinicians to recognize political efforts aimed at defunding ICE and closing detention centers as “new medical remedies for diseases born of borders” (2021, p. 5). While I wholeheartedly agree with this call, my fieldwork has led me to see that the daily work of mitigating the harms produced by borders must go hand-in-hand with a broader medical border abolitionist effort. Crossing borders and engaging in practices of transnational solidarity to mitigate the harms of attritional violence targeting migrants will continue to be imperative in a context of carceral expansionism, in which new iterations of necrotemporality and prophylactic violence will likely be employed and augmented in the years ahead.

At the time of writing this conclusion, the Biden Administration has announced that he will at last terminate Title 42 (Alvarez, 2022). And yet, in response, Republican and some Democratic congressional representatives have introduced the Public Health and Border Security Act of 2022, aimed at preventing Biden from ending the program (Treene, 2022). Even if Title 42 is permanently terminated, the Migrant and Protection Procols program has already been relaunched and expanded (Chishti & Bolter, 2021). Meanwhile, cities like San Francisco have

become ground zero for new “deportation pipeline” programs, like the Federal Initiative for the Tenderloin launched in 2019, in which police officers cooperated with ICE to arrest and deport several Central American immigrants for drug-related offenses (Gartrell, 2020). And although the Biden administration has sought to narrow the targets of deportations from the interior of the country to those considered “national security threats,” several states are seeking to block his rule changes in federal courts (Miroff & Sacchetti, 2022; Montoya-Galvez, 2021). Just as techniques of migrant expulsion and containment continue to shift and evolve, so must the ways in which we politically analyze and resist them. It is my hope that this analysis of the carceral frontier as experienced by my interlocutors in Tijuana has contributed to this ongoing effort.

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