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A Central American Limbo State:

The Effects of Racialization in an Imagined Safe Third Country

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Andrea Garfio

Committee in charge:

Professor Abigail Andrews, Chair
Professor David FitzGerald, Co-Chair
Professor Vanesa Ribas

2023

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University of California San Diego

2023

DEDICATION

*Para todes aquelles en búsqueda de un rinconcito en el mundo al que le puedan llamar
suyo. Que pronto lo encuentren.*

For all those in search of a place in this world you can call yours. May you find it soon.

EPIGRAPH

No one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster
than you the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind
the old tin factory is
holding a gun bigger than his body,
you only leave home when home won't let you stay.

no one would leave home unless home
chased you, fire under feet,
hot blood in your belly.

it's not something you ever thought about
doing, and so when you did -
you carried the anthem under your breath,
waiting until the airport toilet
to tear up the passport and swallow,
each mouthful of paper making it clear that
you would not be going back.

Warsan Shire, "Home," excerpt, 2017.

Esa línea en los mapas
es una cicatriz.
Y sangra. Es una trinchera.
Duele si la tocas.
Late como vida debajo de piedra.
Es una declaración de guerra.

Alejandro Ruiz Morillas, "Esa línea en los mapas," 2018.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	African American English
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CDC	Center for Disease Control
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos
COMAR	Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía
INM	Instituto Nacional de Migración
MMFRP	Mexican Migration Field Research Program
MPP	Migrant Protection Protocols
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
REGWG	Race, Ethnicity, and Genetics Working Group
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Central American Limbo State:
The Effects of Waiting in an Imagined Safe Third Country

by

Andrea Garfio

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Abigail Andrews, Chair
Professor David FitzGerald, Co-Chair

This thesis explores the complexities of racialization as applied to Central American asylum seekers who have been forcibly stranded at the border in recent years. These communities are affected by a variety of political, social, and cultural systems that place them at a great disadvantage in achieving a fair quality of life. An examination of the traits on which Central American asylum seekers face discrimination,

which I describe as an effect of racialization, shows that their experiences are unique to their situation in their time and place. Derailing from the common association of racialization by physical traits in Mexico, these communities at the border are more affected by racialization for their nationality, for being a migrant, and for their accent and/or manner of speaking. I identify the perpetrators of mistreatment against Central American asylum seekers and find that while immigration enforcement officials are easily distinguishable, it is much more difficult to determine who indeed forms part of Mexican authorities, the general public, and organized crime groups. Perpetrators can blur the lines between groups: a deceitful tactic in gaining power over these vulnerable populations. I also examine the repercussions of discrimination perpetrated by the actors discussed. Through my analysis, I contend that discrimination not only inflicts significant psychological harm on asylum seekers, but also obstructs their access to essential services, equitable working conditions, and fair housing. I argue that discrimination perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and reinforces existing inequalities, exacerbating the challenges faced by these populations.

CHAPTER 1 · INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND SIGNIFICANCE: EXTRAORDINARY STANDSTILLS

An unprecedented number of people fleeing their home countries have arrived at the United States-Mexico border since the second half of the last decade, many escaping unlivable conditions. People forced to leave their countries fled violence, extortion, threats, poverty, lack of work and education opportunities, and natural disasters that made their homes uninhabitable. For many, the aim was to reach the United States, and for some, the decision ultimately was made through their experiences in other places.

Moving through unknown territories, the migrant caravans were formed in 2018 to traverse Mexico, as a larger group of travelers could offer some protection from kidnappings and other forms of violence, a practice which researchers called an exercise in migrant self-defense (Varela-Huerta and McLean 2019). The caravans carried thousands of Central Americans from the Northern Triangle, namely Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) in Mexico estimated a total of 123,797 Central American migrants with irregular status (such as those traveling with the caravans) in the country by the end of 2019.

Since the increase of newly-arrived migrants through Mexico, the demand for aid persists at a consistently high level in large part due to several immigration laws implemented by the U.S. government which forced migrants seeking asylum to wait for their cases to process in Mexico. Unfortunately, both the governments of the U.S. and Mexico have failed to provide adequate resources to these populations in limbo, which

has kept migrants at a disadvantage in most areas of their lives and extremely vulnerable to discrimination while waiting. Previous studies have found discrimination to be a common experience had by migrants in limbo while in Mexico (Del Monte & McKee 2021; Pérez Díaz 2021; Sedas, Aguerrebere, Martinez Juárez, Zavala-de Alba, Eguiluz, and Bhabha 2020; Valles 2020; Vogt 2018; Wong 2019). Notably, Tom Wong finds that about one third of asylum seekers returned to Mexico dictated by a U.S. immigration policy called the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) reported experiences with discrimination (2019). He finds an unfortunate similarity with the rate of homelessness in these groups.

The practice of waiting in a foreign country makes migrants subject to racialization, that is, the formation and use of the concept of race (Dalal 2010). Michael Omi and Howard Winant interpret racialization as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (2015 p. 111). The process of racialization takes form over a long period of time. For example, they say, racial profiling can be a type of racialization. In the United States it is put into practice when law enforcement officers use a person's skin color to determine the drivers that are more likely to be involved in unlawful activities, so they decide to stop them for small violations like tinted windows or for hanging objects in their rearview mirror. Commonly referred to as "driving while Black or Brown," this leads to a higher number of encounters between law enforcement and people of color than other races.

Also important to discuss is that racialization is not reliant on visual observations alone. Osagie Obasogie claims that once race is conceptualized and understood in a society, racial categories are reinforced through social norms and customs at both the

personal and institutional levels (2013). This can be music tastes, manner of speaking, or employment that is connected to a racial group and is a socially accepted concept.

Nicholas De Genova (2005) explains racialization as the act of attributing racial meaning to something, someone or some event. The process of it takes place over long periods of time, but it is constantly evolving. De Genova also explains that the creation of race depends on the society in question, its social dynamics, and related conflicts (2005). Its current political climate could also influence racialization. These elements affecting racialization make it a regularly shifting experience.

I interpret racialization as the practice of organizing a thing, a person, or an event into a racial category. For this study, racialization will be approached as the process by which Central Americans are categorized specifically as "outsiders" or "others" to be treated accordingly. Informing this process are the U.S. immigration laws that keep the unwanted bodies of asylum seekers from entering the country, and instead force them to wait at its doors an indeterminate amount of time for their immigration court dates. This produces a marginalization of the "outsiders" that affects their everyday lives and perpetuates an unlivable environment.

This thesis poses the following questions: 1) In what ways are Central Americans forced to wait at the northern Mexico border racialized? and 2) How does racial and national origin discrimination affect Central American asylum seekers forced to wait at the northern Mexico border? In order to answer these questions, one must look at the policies that created the practice of waiting.

WHO ARE THEY? DEFINING IMPORTANT TERMS

This section explores the differences between several terms that commonly describe groups of people in transit. It is important to understand the nuances of each because these labels have power in the ways they are used, and because depending on whether a person in transit is considered a migrant, refugee, or asylum seeker, policies will affect them differently.

Common throughout this thesis, interviewees will be referred to as migrants. At its core, the term defines someone in movement from one place and on their way to their next destination. It is a fairly general term, but this is what is used by most interviewees when they reference themselves and others in similar transitory states.

Migrante.

This population can also be categorized as asylum seekers. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Master Glossary of Terms, an asylum seeker is someone that seeks international protection from "persecution or serious danger" in their countries. Moreover, their asylum application has not yet been evaluated (UNHCR 2006).

Once a decision has been established, those who have been granted asylum are considered refugees. Of course, not every asylum seeker becomes a refugee. Definitions of the term vary globally by region (for example, the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees establishes its definition across Central America), but in the United States, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) 101 (a)(42) classifies a refugee as someone fleeing "persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." (1964).

The main similarity between asylum seekers and refugees are the reasons behind the individuals fleeing their countries; the differences start with the way these statuses are obtained. To apply for refugee status in the United States, individuals must be still living in the place they are attempting to flee and wait for a resolution there. This means that a refugee must endure the circumstances driving them to apply for said status until their case reaches a decision warranting their entrance into the country or not, an average of about 18 to 24 months according to the National Immigration Forum (2020). Further, chances of a granted refugee status are extremely low. The Biden administration set the annual resettlement ceiling for refugees at 125,000 in 2022, the highest in almost 30 years, but granted the status to only 25,465 people. The National Immigration Forum claims this is due to the refugee resettlement infrastructure remaining depleted from the previous administration that every year capped admittances lower and lower; in 2020 the limit reached an all-time low of 18,000 (2022). However, upon the need to process displaced Ukrainians after Russian attacks throughout the country, CBP's San Diego Field Office was able to adapt to the demand. They went from processing 2,932 migrants in February 2022 and 6,635 in March, to 23,034 in April (Isacson 2022). This is an increase of 685% in just two months.

An asylum seeker, on the other hand, can only apply for such status at the U.S. border. People fleeing immediate danger typically take action quickly; they do not have the time required to apply for refugee status. This is the situation of the populations stuck at the border in northern Mexico. Traveling from their country of origin takes money and other resources that can be difficult to obtain, and systematically there are a number of barriers that make the journey a more arduous one. Traveling via plane, for

example, requires documentation that some may not have, so it forces people to take more dangerous routes that make them vulnerable to similar fates as those they are fleeing.

Another term worth defining is irregular, which refers to the legality of a person's status or an action. Irregular status is the absence of legal documentation for a migrant in transit to be in the country or countries in which they are traveling. Irregular movement, then, is the "phenomenon of refugees or asylum-seekers moving illegally from a first country of asylum, in order to seek asylum or permanent settlement in another country." (UNHCR 2006).

THE POLICIES THAT HAVE KEPT PEOPLE STRANDED IN MEXICO

Although the main objective of migrants from Central America is to start a life in the prosperous United States, David Fitzgerald (2020) argues that for the majority, the only path for attaining it is to reach its territory and from there claim asylum. Regrettably, only a few will reach U.S. territory and be granted asylum due to the increasing deterrence-focused immigration policies and the practice of "pushing out the border" to prevent unwanted migrant populations from arriving at the physical border (Fitzgerald 2020).

The increasing remote control exerted by the United States has transformed into a solid architecture of repulsion, where "governments reach beyond their territories in extensive, routine collaboration to track and deter millions of individuals and particular groups trying to cross the border," as explained by Fitzgerald (2020). A crucial form of remote control exercised by the United States is the use of its southern neighbor,

Mexico, as a buffer to deter incoming migrants, including asylum-seekers. In turn, Mexico's territory functions as a "vertical frontier" keeping migrants out of the United States by patrolling and arresting unauthorized immigrants along the several routes leading north. As a result, in the last decades, Mexico has apprehended and deported significantly more immigrants from the Northern Triangle than the United States. According to Fitzgerald (2020), this remote-control practice has proven to be more effective in deterring unauthorized immigration than the border wall itself.

Furthermore, in the last couple of years, after intensive pressure from Washington, Mexico has agreed to host Central American and Caribbean asylum seekers along the U.S.-Mexico border while they wait for their claim to advance in U.S. courts. Mexico has also agreed to function as a "safe third country," preventing migrants who pass through its territory from applying for U.S. asylum.

After immigration laws caused people to wait at the border indefinitely and a lack of sufficient resources became evident, spaces like Tijuana's el Chaparral began to take form. Following the strategy of the caravans that provided migrants a sense of self-defense, el Chaparral was unofficially established in January 2021. This was largely in response to the lack of aid given to the populations traveling north attempting to seek U.S. asylum. The makeshift campground became a temporary home to newly-arrived migrants, mostly from Central America and other parts of Mexico, who were forced to wait at the border for their immigration court hearings. El Chaparral was a source of relative safety as a larger group of migrants could be less vulnerable to violence. The site remained a makeshift campground until February 2022, when about one hundred police officers, National Guard, and members of the Mexican army dismantled the site

and evicted stranded men, women, and children, forcing them into three separate shelters (Lebrija 2022).

One of the policies responsible for the need of such campgrounds is called metering. It was created in 2016 by the Obama administration in response to Haitian migration attempting to seek U.S. asylum. Almost immediately this policy caused controversy and it was repealed. The Trump administration reinstated metering in September 2018 (National Immigrant Justice Center 2020). Enforced by Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the policy activated the practice of waiting at the border for many.

A limit was set on the number of asylum seekers to be processed at a given port of entry, including those who expressed credible fear of returning to their country of origin. Those seen after that number was reached were told the ports were full and given instructions to remain in Mexico until the agency could process their requests, creating a long backlog of people (Smith 2022). An effort to manage the chaos this policy provoked at the border, informal waitlists were created. A 2019 metering update by the University of California, San Diego found that in Piedras Negras only fifteen people were processed per day. The list manager stated the wait was 3 to 4 weeks, while waiting asylum seekers said it was more like 2 to 4 months. In Tijuana, the port of entry with the largest number of asylum seekers, only 20 to 40 people were processed per day which created an approximate 4.5 to 5 month wait. Metering continued until March 2020, when a new policy was created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. At this time, Title 42 became an important weapon by which migrants were kept from entering the U.S. Metering was officially overturned by CBP in November 2021 and

operational capacities were increased, but not without the continuous layers of immigration policies barring entry.

The Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) became another major obstruction of asylum seeker entrance into the United States. Also referred to as the "Remain in Mexico" policy, it was created by Trump's administration in January 2019. The policy kept all migrants from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin American countries from entering the United States without documentation, even those trying to legally apply for U.S. asylum, waiting for a resolution in Mexico (Migrant Protection Protocols 2023). Initially, the Trump administration detailed that the delay would be no longer than 45 days, but that rule was not followed for long (DHS 2021). This caused asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for months or even years for their case to be resolved, urging them to reevaluate the idea of making Mexico home, if even a temporary one (DHS 2021). Different from metering, the MPP affects those already inspected and placed in removal proceedings by CBP, where metering was meant for those who had not yet been in contact with them (Smith 2022).

The MPP has been a controversial immigration law since its inception and has also been the source of a number of legal battles. Just a month after the policy was enacted, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies filed a lawsuit against the federal government for the policy, citing unlawful placement of asylum seekers in direct danger as they wait in Mexico. This is a violation of U.S. and international law that provides humanitarian protections (ACLU 2023). The year-long legal battle ended in March 2020; the decision was to keep the MPP active. In terms of the Covid-19 pandemic however,

in that same month, all MPP processes were placed on hold, to resume once the Mexican Government categorized all Mexican border states as medium risk level of infection (US Embassy in MX 2020). In February 2021, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began to process individuals in the MPP and allowed the continuation of asylum applications in the U.S. with the help of both governmental and civil society organizations from the U.S. and Mexico (Migrant Protection Protocols 2022).

Four months later in June 2021, the Biden administration canceled the MPP, but soon after a federal district court found the termination unlawful and ordered the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to resume the policy (Smith 2022). The controversy surrounding the MPP is further evidenced with a statement by U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security that the MPP should be terminated. Alejandro Mayorkas recognized that "MPP likely contributed to reduced migratory flows. But it did so by imposing substantial and unjustifiable human costs on the individuals who were exposed to harm while waiting in Mexico." (Mayorkas 2021).

As of August 8, 2022, the DHS is no longer being required to reimplement the MPP. This means that individuals are no longer being enrolled in the program, and those already in will be unenrolled once they return for their court dates. Asylum seekers will be allowed to wait for their case to resolve in the United States (Migrant Protection Protocols 2022). Still, an additional immigration policy has been largely responsible for keeping asylum seekers outside the U.S. and waiting in Mexico.

Title 42 was implemented in March 2020 following the rise of Covid-19. The Trump administration suspended both policies above and made it nearly impossible for asylum seekers to enter the U.S., using the pandemic as the main reason behind these

decisions. Termed a measure to protect public health, the policy allowed the refusal of people into the U.S. coming from countries with evidenced cases of the disease. The idea around the policy was to limit the spread of Covid-19, though researchers state that these claims are unfounded (Sedas, Aguerrebere, Martinez Juárez, Zavala-de Alba, Eguiluz, and Bhabha 2020). Additionally, according to Juan Antonio Del Monte and Robert Kckee Irwin, the pandemic served as the perfect pretext to violate migrants' political, institutional, social, and human rights on both sides of the border (2021). Travel from Mexico to its northern neighbor was limited to essential travel only, which did not include asylum seekers intending to be at their immigration court hearings. This halted their asylum case proceedings and prolonged their wait in northern Mexican ports of entry (Smith 2022).

The Biden administration continued support of an active Title 42, only granting exceptions to Ukrainian asylum seekers. In November 2021 the government began allowing non-essential travel to the U.S. from Mexico, but still this change was not beneficial to asylum seekers stuck in Mexico. The policy lasted until May 2022 when the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determined the advancements in vaccines and other disease-fighting tools were sufficiently effective in supporting the reintroduction of asylum seekers into the U.S. (CDC 2022).

These three policies have catapulted dangerous situations into the lives of those fleeing their countries and inflated the backlog of U.S. Immigration Court cases. As of January 2023, there are a total of 2,097,244 total cases pending. The largest nationality represented is Honduras (309,683) followed by Guatemala (283,454) and fifth is El

Salvador (164,498) (TRAC 2023). The media has been reporting on the situation, non-governmental organizations and their affiliates have supplied what resources they can contribute, and researchers are investigating the phenomenon, hopefully all with the goal of spreading awareness and bettering conditions for those in limbo at the border.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PAST RESEARCH?

To begin looking at the ways other researchers have dealt with similar questions to what this thesis poses, the first idea to review is that of race and ethnicity as it is tied to the process of racialization that Central American migrants face while in extraordinary standstills.

People are shaped by their experiences and environment to define race and ethnicity. It is widely recognized by scholars that these two concepts are socially constructed but are no less worthy of consideration since the practice of human classification has birthed definitions of physical differences often used as tools of oppression. At its core, anthropologist Peter Wade defines race as a collection of ideas about differences and similarities between humans. From there, the rest is up to interpretation. Race and ethnicity are mutable theories that have changed (and will likely continue to do so) through time and space (Wade 2010).

Wade states that the word "race" began to appear in European languages in the 14th century, but it was understood for its genealogical linkages between a related set of people or animals (2010). Physical appearances were not considered factors; most important was a person's ancestral line. These ideas traveled to the Americas alongside colonization (Wade 2010). Wade recounts that the 18th century was a time when the

idea of race shifted to form "types" such as African, European, Mongol, etc. In a similar study, Odile Hoffmann and Christian Rinaudo examined the shift in race "types." Here began the importance of physical appearance as a determining factor of race, thus establishing scientific racism. European scientists developed these categories and placed European phenotypes at the top (2014).

Entering the 20th century, scientific racism faced rejection and race became recognized by scholars as a social construction (Wade 2010). In its place, cultural racism emerged; this meant that ideas of biological differences were slowly being abandoned and replaced by human differences based on culture. The practice of cultural racism is closely linked to the process of racialization experienced by Central Americans stranded in northern Mexico.

Racial hierarchies engrained in Latin America are seen through a long history of governmental policies. Hoffmann and Rinaudo explore the goal for Mexico to establish national unity and a national identity that came after the War of Independence was won. From this came notions of the 'Mestizo race,' 'Bronze race,' and 'New race,' all signifiers of a recognition and celebration of a mixed population (2014). Some 100 years later, the Mexican Revolution reinforced these national objectives. Ideas of a Cosmic Race and Indigenismo glorified and elevated acts of intermixing in Mexico. Still though, race was deeply ingrained into the fabric of Mexican national pride and unity (Hoffmann & Rinaudo 2014).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the success of multiculturalism, politics of recognition, and a political hand in settling differences opened up space to atone for the poor treatment suffered by marginalized communities. In Mexico, the *indigenista* discourse of

integration provoked debates and programs were created around this theme but caused no legislation changes. People also tried to understand the issue of mestizaje from the view of indigenous populations, beginning with 'dis-Indianization' and subsequently 're-Indianization.' This practice provoked indigenous recognition and a rejection of mestizaje ideology, which was interpreted as the force that prompted a homogenous Mexican culture. At the same time, however, this neglected the importance of other groups not included in the mainstream and indigenous, provoking an invisibility of Afro-descendant populations.

Emiko Saldívar (2014) considers the contemporary interethnic relationship changes that have occurred in Mexico which focus on indigenous and nonindigenous populations. Legal recognition of the multiethnic character of the nation came out of the Zapatista uprising, and for the most part, ended ideas of indigenous assimilation into the mainstream mestizo culture. Education became more inclusive, integrating intercultural and multilingual classes to its curriculum. However, 80% of indigenous people still live in poverty, and the pay gap between a college-educated indigenous and a nonindigenous person is more than 50%. This shows that assimilation, visibility, and recognition of rights is not enough for equality.

For the last hundred or so years, Mexico attempted to attract immigrants to populate its land but was only interested in attracting the "ideal" candidates. David Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martín show that exclusionary immigration laws in Mexico, whether public or private, were created not to protect economic interests of Mexicans as businesspeople and workers, but because of "ideological fears of cultural and genetic

pollution" that would get in the way of the country's promotion of mestizaje and indigenismo (2014, pp. 219).

When analyzing the conditions that migrants confront in Mexico when traveling to the United States, Wendy Vogt (2018) provides various examples of the violence and discrimination that Central American migrants and people from other backgrounds face. The violence that migrants experience while traveling north through Mexico has only worsened in the last decades. Most migrants used to endure theft, however, now the violence has shifted towards a drastic increase in kidnappings (Vogt 2018). The migrant industry of kidnapping perpetuated by organized crime groups has spiked; in the first four months of 2016 there were an average of ten kidnappings per day (Vogt 2018). Vogt (2018) intends for her audience to understand that these kidnappings are not simply due to migrants being caught in the middle of the drug war but that this violence cannot be understood outside of patriarchy, nationalism, and racism. She explains how the conceptualization of migration as an industry is not new, but that it has worsened in the last few years (Vogt 2018).

In terms of the experiences of asylum seekers in the last few years, ample research has been conducted especially inspired by the harsh immigration laws imposed by the Trump administration. For example, researcher Alejandra Díaz de León (2021) investigated the treatment of migrants en route through Mexico and found clear definitions of the "good migrant." Darker skin tone and those with phenotypic differences were markers of one not in the "good migrant" category, even among migrants themselves (de León 2021).

In contrast, Darío Valles (2020) of Brown University found differing results of the treatment of migrants in Tijuana. He compares the struggles of Haitian and Central American migrants who have arrived in the border city in the last several years. He describes the term Haitiano as a blanket term for Black migrants in Tijuana that is used in contrast to the rhetoric of Central American migrants deemed unworthy of aid in Tijuana in terms of the city being a halting point for migrants unable to cross into the United States. Working with *Tijuanenses*, he made a connection between U.S. and European legal exclusion of racialized groups and that which is occurring in Tijuana. Valles (2020) further finds the term a damaging one because in praising Black migrants as the model migrant, Central Americans are demonized and labeled the "unworthy alien," and generalized as criminals.

Del Monte and McKee (2021) explore discrimination faced by migrant groups in Tijuana in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. They find that institutional racism is a key factor affecting quality of life for Central American and Haitians, in particular the access to aid programs like food pantries. With social distance being key to slowing the spread of the virus, many migrant shelters were forced to make the decision to turn away new people to keep their residents safe. Del Monte and McKee (2021) estimated that overall, shelters in Tijuana operated at 40% capacity during the height of the pandemic. Additionally, the pandemic intensified negative perceptions of Haitian and Central American migrants, citing in their research that migrants were blamed for the escalation of infections (Del Monte & McKee, 2021).

While these projects present great data surrounding conditions faced by asylum seekers as they traverse then wait in Mexico, there is considerably less information that

focuses on the process of racialization against the Central American populations in dangerous limbo at the border. There must be more emphasis on researching the ways racialization is experienced in Mexico by these populations, and the ways actions taken based on this affect their quality of life. This is a necessary step to fully understand and take action to heal the communities with diverse nationalities, cultures, and statuses.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodological approach in the study, including details on research design and participant sampling methods, the content and intentions of the mixed-methods data collection, and the demographics of the participants included. Afterward, the approach to analysis of the data is explained followed by an exploration of the limitations of the study.

The design of the study came out of the University of California, San Diego's Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP), a research team composed of graduate and undergraduate students and headed by Dr. Abigail Andrews. The year-long program connects with organizations that provide services to asylum seekers, the goal being to produce reports that ultimately inform ways to better serve these communities. I participated officially in the MMFRP in 2020-2021, and unofficially in 2022. For this thesis I use the data gathered in the latter year because I was interested in the latest information available, especially one that would be less colored by expectations surrounding the end of the Trump and beginning of the Biden administration.

The MMFRP worked with binational organizations Al Otro Lado and Espacio Migrante, both of which work out of Tijuana. Al Otro Lado provides aid to migrants, refugees, and deportees, offering legal and humanitarian aid at no cost in Tijuana and across Southern California. The non-profit works to protect the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers. Espacio Migrante supports migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from communities including those in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, as well as women, men, youth, and children. They focus on areas of Education, Human Rights, Cultural Exchange, Orientation and Social Work, Community Organization, and Advocacy.

Partnering with these organizations, the MMFRP conducted a total of 225 interviews of Central Americans and additional interviews of Mexican and Afro-descendant asylum seekers between January and March 2022. For this thesis, I began by looking at the interviews I conducted and transcribed. I found that even months after these conversations had taken place I was still able to recall interviewees' tone revealing their emotions as they recounted their experiences. To have a more qualified sample size, I sourced additional interviews to end with a total of 57 people's accounts of experiences at the border. The latter were selected blindly to prevent artificial filters in the data.

Contact with participants were all handled via WhatsApp. Interviewers sent messages to potential participants from lists of interested parties provided by Al Otro Lado and Espacio Migrante, set up a time to call, and followed up on the agreed date and time. This method was the most effective at the beginning of 2022 since the status

of the pandemic was wavering. Phone interviews provided accessibility and the ability to connect from any place.

The interviews were separated into two parts and all conducted in Spanish. The qualitative portion of the interview was helpful in gathering participants' general demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, and location. This first part of the interview also was useful in identifying those who felt they had been subject to discrimination while waiting in Mexico's northern border for their asylum cases to be processed. Answers to the following were especially helpful (translated from Spanish by me): "In Mexico, do you consider that you have been discriminated against for any of the following reasons?" (Respondents were read a list of 19 options ranging from skin color to migratory situation and accent or manner of speaking.); "Now I will ask where you have experienced discrimination." (Respondents again were read a list of 11 options ranging from medical services, in the workplace, and in the streets); and "Have you ever had to modify your accent in Mexico to avoid discrimination?" Respondents were also asked to specify if they had experienced discrimination by groups like Mexican authorities, criminal groups, or when searching for employment.

Once concluding the quantitative survey, interviewers used respondents' answers to guide the in-depth interviews. If, for example, a respondent answered they experienced discrimination in their workplace, the interviewer would ask for more detail during the qualitative portion of the interview. There was also a list of sample questions provided for interviewers as reference points, but the main idea was to identify and ask participants to elaborate on any themes that emerged during the first half of their

conversation. Both the qualitative and quantitative interviews usually lasted from about 45 minutes to an hour.

It is important to know who the participants are aside from their status as asylum seekers. Nineteen participants are from El Salvador, 4 from Guatemala, and 34 from Honduras. There is a wide variety of age ranges among participants; from 18 to 62 years old. There are 15 men, 39 women, and two who identify as non-binary. One person opted not to discuss their gender. They identify by the following races: one as Afro-descendant; nine as white; two as indigenous; one as mestizo and indigenous; 23 mestizos; 16 did not know or preferred not to answer; and five selected "other." One person did not elaborate, but the rest did. They identify as *trigueña/o*, a term used to describe someone with Black phenotypes.

As of their interviews, people were waiting for their immigration court hearings in Ciudad Acuña (5), Ciudad Juárez (1), Mexicali (3), San Luis Rio Colorado (2), Piedras Negras (9), and Tijuana (37). Most participants were stranded for anywhere from a few weeks to four years, but there is one person who said they had been at the border for nine years.

With the qualitative interviews transcribed, I analyzed inductively using the process of thematic analysis. I coded the data by first openly searching for themes (not looking for any one thing), ensuring to read the questions posed by interviewers, and noted them in a separate document. Once I coded about twenty interviews in this way, I was able to see a picture of emerging themes. Those themes that I identified throughout different testimonials became stronger as I continued to code, so I began to search for corresponding keywords (i.e. *discriminación, policia, autoridades, trato, acento, mal*). I

decided to finish coding until testimonials were no longer producing new information. I went through the data twice to ensure I had not missed anything the first time.

A phenomenological approach was used for this study. This means that participants' lived experiences and their perspectives were used to analyze the data collected. Dr. Patricia Sanders states that phenomenology is the study of the manner that anything, be it things or experiences (the phenomenon), show themselves (1982). In this study, the phenomenon is the discrimination faced in Mexico's northern border by Central American migrants. A phenomenological approach is well-suited for this study because participants, based on their lived experiences, will have different perspectives on what constitutes discrimination.

A few limitations to the study must be addressed. It is important to acknowledge the interviews were conducted during a period of unprecedented global uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This time was marked by strict social distancing measures and uninhibited in-person contact. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic introduced a level of uncertainty that could have affected participants' responses. Fear, anxiety, stress, and uncertainty associated with the continuously shifting circumstances and fluctuating guidelines surrounding the pandemic might have influenced perspectives and attitudes, potentially altering participants' behaviors and opinions.

In-person interviews can offer richer data through non-verbal cues and body language, but the demand for social distancing and the restrictions of in-person interactions posed logistical challenges for having these conversations. The absence of physical proximity could have limited the depth of understanding and connection between the interviewer and participants. It is possible that certain nuances or

contextual details might have been missed or misinterpreted due to the reliance on remote communication methods.

In some instances, the phone interviews conducted were marked by various challenges that hindered the smooth flow of conversations. One notable issue was the presence of loud background noise that often interfered with the clarity of the interviews. Ambient noise like babies crying, family members talking, or traffic created a distracting environment, making it difficult for interviewer and respondent to maintain a clear and focused conversation. Furthermore, weak phone signals exacerbated the problem, causing occasional disruptions and interruptions during the conversations. The unstable connection would lead to moments in which voices would cut in and out, resulting in incomplete or fragmented sentences. As a result, meaningful exchanges were compromised, making the intended message difficult to decipher upon transcribing the interviews. In a few instances, respondents who did not have their own cell phones borrowed others' devices to be able to participate in the interviews. While this was a good solution to the absence of one's own device, it introduced additional challenges. In some cases, the owners asking to have their phones back resulted in the abrupt end to the in-depth interviews and required alternative arrangements to be made to continue the conversations.

It is also crucial to note that the participant accounts in this study are not representative of experiences by all Central American asylum seekers at the border. Experiences can vary across nationalities, but the sample of participants is not spread evenly throughout ethnic groups. Also, while valuable data was collected from participants waiting in six cities across the border, it is important to recognize the data

distribution is not uniform. This lack of even distribution means that experiences documented may not accurately reflect the diverse range of situations encountered by asylum seekers from each of the three Central American countries represented in this study, and is not representative of the nuances between experiences had at the six different border cities. Given the heterogeneity of Central American populations and varying contexts in which individuals leave their home countries to seek U.S. asylum, it is reasonable to expect variations in experiences. Factors such as nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and personal circumstances can influence an individual's journey and interaction with the asylum process.

Additionally, it should be noted that my involvement in the research process was to be part of a team that collectively conducted all the interviews. I did not conduct the 57 interviews used for this study personally. In an effort to have a comprehensive and unbiased analysis of the stories told by respondents, I made a conscious attempt to avoid placing excessive emphasis on the stories I heard first-hand. By focusing on the collective data, I intended to maintain objectivity and impartiality in my analysis. I recognized the importance of giving equal weight to the experiences shared by all participants regardless of who their interviewer was.

It is also important to note that during the course of the interviews, several participants who initially reported no experiences with discrimination in the quantitative survey later revealed instances of discrimination in the in-depth interviews. This inconsistency can be attributed to various factors like nuances and interpretations in the definition of the term "discrimination" itself, or other variables like the development of rapport and trust as conversations progressed. The qualitative nature of the in-depth

interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' stories that provided them with a safe and comfortable environment to express their thoughts and feelings more openly. And trust between participants and interviewees grew, they may have felt more comfortable sharing sensitive or previously undisclosed incidents of discrimination.

Future research should consider the limitations outlined and aim to address these drawbacks in order to have more well-rounded data sets and findings. The inevitable barriers of conducting distanced field work via phone communication dictated by the Covid-19 pandemic's health restrictions would be addressed with in-person interviews. This mode of conducting field work would provide the ability to have the in-person connections made impossible with phone conversations. Face-to-face conversations would also eliminate limiting factors like connection issues, background noise and its distractions, and borrowed phones cutting conversations short.

Future research would also benefit from more even distribution of respondents from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. By achieving a more balanced distribution of participants from these regions, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and economic factors specific to each country. An even spread of participant nationalities and the cities in which they were waiting at the times of the interviews would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the unique factors influencing each group and can contribute a more informed approach to studying the nuances in challenges faced. A comparative approach would allow further exploration of the differences among nationalities and experiences had by those staying in different cities along the border.

ARGUMENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis posits that discrimination against racialized asylum seekers stranded at the border affects nearly every facet of their existence, severely reducing their quality of life and reproducing the same dangers that they are fleeing. The U.S. government must create a comprehensive plan that provides fair conditions for asylum seekers as they await their immigration court hearings. To prove this need for change, I pose the following questions: 1) In what ways are Central Americans forced to wait at the northern Mexico border racialized? and 2) How does racial and national origin discrimination affect Central American asylum seekers forced to wait at the northern Mexico border?

In Chapter 2, I discuss the traits on which Central American asylum seekers face discrimination. I answer the first research question: In what ways are Central Americans forced to wait at the northern Mexico border racialized? Angela Dixon and Edward Telles (2017) say the process of racialization in Latin America is carried out primarily by phenotype and skin color. While this is evidenced in this study to some degree, people tended to experience racialization by other non-physical traits with more frequency. Findings suggest that the process of racialization is based on nationality, for being a migrant regardless of status, accent and/or manner of speaking, and less so for physical traits.

Chapter 3 identifies the perpetrators of mistreatment aimed at racialized Central American asylum seekers, namely Mexican authorities, the general public, organized crime groups, and immigration enforcement. I highlight the differences in how the mentioned groups oppress those in limbo at the border, namely through extortion,

verbal abuse, and physical assault among others. I find that accurately identifying perpetrators can be difficult due to deceitful tactics in gaining power over these vulnerable populations.

In chapter 4, I show the far-reaching effects of discrimination by the actors identified in the previous chapter, focusing on the answer to the second research question: How does racial and national origin discrimination affect Central American asylum seekers forced to wait at the northern Mexico border? I argue that discrimination has negative psychological consequences for these communities and inhibits access to services like healthcare and education, fair work conditions, and the ability to find fair housing.

CHAPTER 2 · RACIALIZATION AND TRAITS ON WHICH ASYLUM SEEKERS FACE EXCLUSION

Though for some time race has been recognized as a socially constructed idea with weightless authorization to measure and categorize people, it is nonetheless worthy of discussion in order to understand how it navigates through society and continues to affect communities. Racialization is a process by which societies construct the meaning of race and assign racial identities to groups of people. Constructed racial categories and the distinctions that enforce them are built out of the social, cultural, economic, political, religious, and scientific systems already in existence (Omi & Winant 2015). These systems shape how people understand race and can influence interactions with others based on their perceived racial identity. Omi and Winant call these systems the "raw materials of racialization" (2015). Racialization is practiced differently across time and place where some systems bear more weight than others.

The Americas share a history of European colonization and slavery but practice racialization differently throughout. The United States has a history of restrictive race-based policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act, and laws like Jim Crow that kept racial categories sharply defined. Latin America's past is absent of such laws. As a result, much of Latin America including Mexico adopted a mixed-race identity and a wide spectrum of categories as races mixed and blurred the boundaries of such (Dixon & Telles 2017). Edward Telles and Tianna Paschel (2014) posit that Latin America practices racialization by focusing on appearance rather than origin and using intermediate categories (*"No soy negro, soy moreno"*).

In Mexico, racialization has been shaped by 20th century post-revolution efforts to unify the nation. Mestizaje and Vasconcelos' *raza cósmica* theory have promoted ideas of a mixed-race identity, resulting in skin color differences unofficially becoming the standard by which racial hierarchies are organized (Dixon & Telles 2017). This chapter explores the racial markers of Central American asylum seekers that are used as tools of racialization. I argue that while some evidence supports the ideas outlined above, political systems placing them at the border have a much far-reaching impact on their racial classification.

I use the quantitative survey data to inform of patterns found in the traits by which Central American immigrants are racially categorized, and the qualitative interviews to hear them elaborate on their experiences. Findings suggest that Central American migrants waiting for their asylum cases to process are racialized by 1) their nationality, 82%; 2) their position as a migrant, with little regard to status, 75%; 3) their accent and/or manner of speaking, 67%; and 4) their physical traits, 26%.

NATIONALITY AS A RACIAL MARKER

Forty-seven respondents (82%) confirmed that they felt they were discriminated against on the basis of their nationality while stranded in Mexico's northern border. Of these, twenty-seven people are from Honduras, eighteen are from El Salvador, and two are Guatemalan. Those who did not specify nationality as a trait by which they felt discrimination confirmed other descriptors or opted not to answer the question. Nationality-based discrimination was often felt as berating comments, inequitable

treatment, and targeted crimes. Respondents report hiding their national identities to shield themselves from experiencing discrimination.

In November 2018, a video of an interview surfaced of a Honduran asylum seeker stranded in Tijuana. She was filmed complaining about the food served at the shelter where she was staying: namely, the *frijoles*. The interview went viral and caused turmoil and a heavy anti-Honduran sentiment among Tijuanaenses at the time (Rojas 2018). The woman was nicknamed "Lady Frijoles" and though she is no longer in Tijuana, the following testimonials demonstrate that the situation left a scar that people use as a way to "other" certain asylum seekers.

Gaia talks about the term "Lady Frijoles" being used in connection with people of Honduran background. She says:

Em, bueno que, ya como varias veces me ha pasado de que me discriminan por mi nacionalidad. Ya, y he escuchado comentarios donde me han dicho "Lady Frijoles". Es algo que sí me molesta muchísimo. Que, cuando me preguntan, "¿oye de dónde eres?" y yo les digo de donde soy, y me dicen "¿y te gustan los frijoles?" Se me hace como muy feo. Como también eh, siempre están hablando mal de los migrantes, que nosotros somos pandilleros, que, que no somos buenas personas y me molesta mucho eso. Y más que todo por mi nacionalidad. Siempre están creyendo que somos unas personas malas.

Gaia explains that she has been discriminated against for her nationality. She has overheard comments in which she is called "Lady Frijoles" and says it is something that bothers her quite a bit. When *Tijuanaenses* ask where she is from and she explains she is Honduran, the next thing they want to know is whether she likes frijoles. She explains that it is an ugly thing, and goes on to say people are always talking negatively about migrants, calling them gang members and saying they are not good people. This bothers her a lot, Gaia says. More than anything she feels discriminated against for her

nationality. She ends her thought by saying that people in Tijuana make comments labeling those who share her nationality as bad people.

Likewise, Adriel has experienced racialization by his nationality and has been the target of similar pointed remarks:

Discriminación por por mi origen, porque soy de Honduras.
Pues así la gente, los conocidos ahí. Cuando uno conoce a una persona, por ejemplo, cuando va uno a la tienda a comprar y te pregunta que "¿de donde son?" "Que de Honduras". "Ah, a los que no les gustan los frijoles" y así les empiezan a decir cosas a uno.

He describes that he has been discriminated against for his Honduran background. He is treated this way by the locals he has encountered. He explains that when he meets someone, for example if he goes into a store to make a purchase, just like Gaia he is asked where he is from. Upon stating that he is from Honduras, he is met with similar racializing remarks like "Ah, the ones that dislike frijoles." Adriel ends his thought by mentioning the frequency of similar interactions. "*Y así les empiezan a decir cosas a uno*" ("and like that, they begin to tell us things.")

Gaia, Adriel, and another interviewee, Adela, whose experiences were also painted by the 2018 incident that sparked controversy across Mexico, share some key characteristics. Their experiences are linked not only by their Honduran nationality, but also by their similar encounters with discrimination and marginalization specifically taking place in Tijuana. Their stories reflect a larger pattern of embraced social systems that were created to enforce racial categories, particularly against those from Honduras. Notably, none of the interviewees stranded in other parts of Mexico's northern border had experiences connected to the term "Lady Frijoles." This suggests that incidents like

this are specific to the context of Tijuana, highlighting the unique challenges faced by Honduran asylum seekers in this region.

Incidents like the viral interview created an additional system of power that reinforced the racialization of Honduran asylum seekers in Mexico. The term "Lady Frijoles" in practice outlined divisions between nationals and outsiders. It provoked and even "justified" differential treatment or the practice of othering Hondurans awaiting U.S. asylum at the border.

Racialization based on nationality is used as a tool that perpetuates harmful stereotypes among those imposing their power to gain from the affected communities. Ingrid was racialized by extortionists when she first reached Piedras Negras. Her anecdote is difficult to digest because of uncertainties at play; she is unsure if the perpetrators were organized crime groups posing as police officers, or if they were indeed who they claimed to be. She explains:

Si... pues mire. Cuando uno viene de allá abajo para acá arriba, o sea, a uno por todo el camino lo vienen bajando. Ellos dicen que son los, ah no se, unos [inaudible]. A uno lo que le dicen es "Bueno, esta es la frontera más segura, la de Piedras Negras" dicen "porque nosotros somos los que cuidamos aquí. Que no permitimos" dice que "que entre... nadie. Que no los bajen del bus" dice "así que a ustedes les toca pagar" dice. "Y se caen cada uno con mil pesos". Y uno yo le dije "Discúlpeme" le digo "Yo no tengo mil pesos para pagarles por mi y por mi esposo" le digo yo. "Si a nosotros un señor mexicano" le digo "nos regaló doscientos pesos para que le compráramos un juguito a los niños" le digo "Y esos doscientos pesos yo se los puedo dar" le digo. "Ay" dice "es por lo que me caen mal" dice "los hondureños y los guatemaltecos que nunca tienen dinero" dice. "Váyanse a la v" dice.

Ingrid was in a bus full of passengers heading north from Mexico's southern border. A few individuals stopped the bus once they arrived at Piedras Negras, claiming the city remained safe thanks to their hard work: not permitting just anyone to enter

("Que no permitimos que entre... nadie"). The perpetrators proceeded to leverage this to justify their demand of MEX\$1,000 per person. Ingrid explained to the individuals newly aboard the bus that she did not have the money. In fact, she mentioned a Mexican man gave them MEX\$200 to buy juice for their children, and that if they like, she could pay that amount instead. To this, the individual replied that was the reason he dislikes people from Honduras and Guatemala: because they never have money. "Go to hell," he said. "*Vayanse a la v.*"

That moment made clear to the individual in question that Ingrid was an outsider; she was racialized as Honduran or Guatemalan by the person she pleaded to accept a lesser fee than was originally asked. The exchange with Ingrid makes clear that this was not the first time this individual had been in a situation like this with Central Americans. Highlighted here are the issues of extortion and corruption by criminal elements in the country and the ways migrants are racialized and discriminated against for their nationality and perceived economic status.

This kind of racialization as a weapon of oppression perpetuates cycles of marginalization where asylum seekers are forced to navigate a complex and often hostile environment in what is supposed to be a safe third country. Ingrid's experience underscores the need for greater awareness and sensitivity of the experiences of migrants and the importance of addressing the systems of oppression against them in a buffer society.

Other forms of discrimination based on nationality present themselves as inequitable treatment. Respondents recognized times in which they were treated more poorly or even seen as scapegoats in cases involving themselves and

migrants from other backgrounds. Adria explains the way supplies are distributed in a shelter in Mexicali:

Sí, como le digo, cuando algo, algo hacen los niños y ya pues los mexicanos solo saben decir [que fueron] los hondureños, aunque no sea uno. Imagínese cuando van, cuando van a dar ropa, aquí primero les dan a los mexicanos y a veces ni nos dan a nosotros porque somos de otro país. Como es un mexicano el encargado, entonces uno bueno, entiendo, pero uno anda ahí, "¿cuando van a dar algo? Si me dan bueno, si no, también" porque yo sé que hay preferencias, ¿entiende?

Adria feels that her nationality is the main trait by which she receives less commodities than do her Mexican counterparts. She sees that Mexicans who stay at the shelter typically get the first choice of clothing donations and sometimes, there is not enough to distribute to everyone, including herself. She reasons that this is so because "*somos de otro país*" ("we are from another country"). Adria goes on to explain that since the person in charge of the shelter is Mexican, she understands and so if she does receive goods, *bueno*, and if not, it is just as well because she understands there are preferences. Below, she elaborates with other examples of the inequitable distribution of goods and commodities:

Sí, hay preferencia bastante imagínese aquí, a un hondureño no le va a dan una tele, mientras que a un mexicano- aquí todos los cuartos tienen su tele para los mexicanos y cama grande y todo. O sea, están en toda la comodidad, mientras que uno no. Y paga más que ellos, porque a mi cuarto yo pago 800 [pesos al mes] y hay una mexicana que tiene tres niños y su esposo igual que a mí y paga 720, tienen su tele, su refri y su cama adentro.

"There are a great deal of preferences," Adria says. She talks about the differences in comfort between Mexicans living at the shelter and herself: a big bed and a television. She explains that the stark differences do not stop at commodities, the unfairness seeps into the rent due. Her monthly dues are MEX\$800 while rent is

MEX\$720 for another family the same size but with the commodities mentioned above, including a refrigerator. In this portion of the interview, Adria talks about nationality-based discrimination perpetrated by both shelter leaders and migrants of non-Honduran backgrounds:

Sí, porqué imagínese, nosotros estamos en un albergue y en albergues aquí, cuando los encargados reciben a otros, "ah ese es hondureño y esa es hondureña" y entonces uno se siente mal. Pues uno es ser humano, uno siente. Entonces el hecho de que seamos hondureños no es que no sentimos y cualquier cosita. Aunque sean los mexicanos, dicen "fueron los hondureños". O sea, se lavan las manos con nosotros, como quien dice, todo va para los hondureños.

Upon entering the shelter, people are labeled by their nationality with comments from the shelter leaders "*ah ese es hondureño y esa es hondureña*," a practice that Adria says makes one feel bad. She explains that Hondurans are humans, and they have feelings. She says the Mexican migrants staying at the shelter also use nationality to identify select groups. Adria says "*se lavan las manos con nosotros*," ("they wash their hands with us"). Originally an Evangelical phrase, it is used to denote the distancing from a situation one is connected to and rejecting all responsibility for it. Now colloquially, the phrase is used when placing blame on someone or something. In other words, Adria feels Hondurans are perpetual scapegoats for anything going awry in the shelter.

Adria's testimonial shows the ways racialization of Hondurans unfolds in migrant shelters. Her account reveals that nationality is the primary factor by which she is subject to inequitable treatment like being given only a fraction of the commodities granted to Mexican nationals. The unjust distribution of goods and commodities leads to visible differences in living standards and rent dues. Racialization by her shelter leader

categorizes people in situations similar to Adria to determine the hierarchy of those "most deserving," starting with Mexican migrants in the front of every line.

That form of racialization then reinforces unjust actions by other migrants at the shelter to practice their own form of racialization to gain over these communities. The reduction of identity to only nationality is dangerous in practice for many reasons, but partly for how it positions groups at odds with one another who are facing similar challenges. Utilizing *los hondureños* as scapegoats for anything going awry in the shelter deepens ideas of "them versus us," reinforces racial hierarchies, and maintains a separation of struggles that would otherwise be lessened if these communities worked together rather than attempting to tip the scales of power.

Racialization on the basis of nationality also manifests itself as crimes targeting the "other." Compared to Mexican nationals, newly-arrived migrants stranded in a foreign country typically do not have a support system on which they can rely. This, coupled with a constantly changing immigration status dictated by governmental forces makes migrants vulnerable to experiencing crimes against them. Anais describes an unfortunately common story that migrants face while waiting for their asylum case proceedings in Mexico's northern border:

Pues vinieron unos mexicanos, no sé si eran de Oaxaca o de Chiapas, no sé, pero que sí me discriminan porque dijeron que éramos salvadoreños, que no querían a los salvadoreños en este país. Pues yo no, no dije nada, y pues recibimos insultos. También me robaron, me robaron mi teléfono y me robaron el dinero también.

Anais was a target of discrimination by, as she described, people from the Mexican states of Oaxaca or Chiapas. They said to her that she was Salvadoran, and that they were not welcome in the country. Anais remained quiet while continuing to be insulted.

The individuals then robbed her, leaving her without her cellphone and the bit of money she had. The verbal abuse preceding the robbery is a clear indicator that Anais' national origin was the trait by which she was racialized.

Several interviewees spoke about ways they kept themselves safe from harm. In an attempt to avoid discrimination, respondents report hiding their national identity or getting advice from others not to speak of their nationality. Alexia talks about advice she received to keep herself safe:

Sí, porque las pocas personas con las que he hablado incluso, me dicen que diga que no soy de El Salvador, que yo diga que soy de otro lado, de Tapachula, o de otro lado, pero me dicen "nunca digas que [eres] salvadoreño porque te van a secuestrar".

She explains that the few people she has spoken with advise her not to divulge information about her nationality. These instructions warn her to say she is from a place like Tapachula or elsewhere, but not from El Salvador "*porque te van a secuestrar*" ("because you will be kidnapped"). It is evident here that there exists a connection between being Salvadoran and being considered a target of kidnapping. Alonso has learned tactics that help him avoid mistreatment by only revealing his national identity when he feels safe in Mexicali:

Ah, pues voy solo y pues lo que nunca he dicho [es que] yo que soy de allá, o sea, y siempre así cuando ya tengo confianza les digo pues soy hondureño, pero de ahí no, no digo nada porque no puedes hablar acá si eres de allá.

He explains that he never talks about being from Honduras. He says it is always that way, that he hides his national identity until he feels he can trust. He adds that aside from that, he never says anything because "*no puedes hablar si eres de allá*" ("you

cannot talk here if you are from there"). Alonso shows here that he feels individuals from El Salvador do not have the same liberty to speak and *be* while stranded in Mexico.

RACIAL CONSTRUCTION THROUGH MIGRANT STATUS

Si. Prácticamente a nosotros los migrantes, pues nos detestan, nos odian y no nos quieren ver en ningún lado. Es cosa seria.

Astrid, Honduras. Stranded in Ciudad Acuña.

The data gathered in this study suggests that legal status does not appear to have a significant impact on the way asylum seekers are treated in Mexico's northern border. Forty-three respondents (75%) felt that they were discriminated against for being a migrant, while fourteen did not report experiencing this type of discrimination. Significantly, both groups mentioned had a similar percentage of migrants with legal status. Seventeen (40%) of those who felt discriminated against had legal status, and seven (50%) of those who did not report this type of discrimination had irregular status. These findings suggest that legal status may not protect asylum seekers from inequitable treatment in Mexico's northern border, and points to additional systems of intolerance at play that are utilized as tools to racialize and discriminate against the "other."

During her interview, Adria talks about being othered for being a migrant. She explains:

Si no, cuando uno sale a la calle y lo ven por el hablado y todo eso "eh, allá son migrantes", dicen, y ya lo miran de menos. Y si uno está en la fila "ah, que se va allá atrás si es migrante." Si, si uno está de compras o algo, ya lo quieren hacer de menos.

She talks about being out in public and being seen by her manner of speaking among other traits ("*y todo eso*"), and then hearing the general public pointing her out as a migrant. She explains that in retail spaces, if already in line to pay for example, migrants are singled out and told to go to the end of the line. Adria states that once she is labeled as a migrant, she is immediately placed in a position of inferiority. "*Ya lo quieren hacer de menos*", ("They want to make them as if less-than").

Adria's testimonial shows the harmful impact of societal assumptions and prejudices based on superficial characteristics like manner of speaking. In this example, one trait noticed by people on the streets (in this case, manner of speaking) leads them to make additional suppositions (her migrant status) about how she is unlike them and perhaps "less deserving" of equitable treatment for these differences. Social constructions are strengthened by a layering of racialized traits to justify the outcomes of intolerance and discrimination. Somewhat of a snowball effect, Adria's manner of speaking feeds into ideas of how she is a migrant, which then are used by people on the streets to justify belittlement.

The labeling of individuals by traits which have no weight in deciding a person's contribution to a society is a common practice that often perpetuates harmful stereotypes and biases. Adria's account of being singled out in a retail space and asked to move to the end of the line is a clear example of how this phenomenon plays out in real life. This encounter took place because of a simple perception of her migrant status, but its effects are troubling because they cause a division among individuals often sharing the same space and strengthen these long-existent systems of oppression.

By acting on the differences in migrant status, the perpetrators strengthen their own racial identity, which in their perception is a qualifier for mistreating the "other." This goes in line with ideas of the raza cósmica spread by José Vasconcelos almost 100 years ago (1925). A post-revolution Mexico in search of a way to unite the country embraced the ideas of Vasconcelos that called the Mexican identity the supreme race, but also executed nationalist ideologies. Mexican nationalism promotes racialization which tends to result in the exploitation of those considered "others" by its subscribers. The belief in this social system is dangerous because it often devalues experiences of asylum seekers and perpetrates unjust treatment.

Some participants described discrimination when attempting to report a crime to Mexican authorities. Alonso describes his experience:

Allí donde yo vivía, trabajaba para una empresa. Me llevé- este- una camioneta y se metieron [a la camioneta] a robar y pues yo denuncié todo eso y pues no, nadie me peló y pues no, que eso era [así], que tenía que ser una persona ciudadana y todo eso. Y yo me di cuenta de quiénes eran [los ladrones] y entonces pues no, no me ayudaron hasta que fue mi la mamá de mis hijos, mi ex fue y les dijo. Y ahí fue que hicieron caso, pero pues sí, pues sí me, me ignoraron, no me hicieron caso de nada, porque pues no era, no era ciudadano mexicano, no tenía papeles de acá. Y ella sí, sí. Ella sí es ciudadana. Ella sí. Sí. Mi ex. Sí. Ella era mexicana.

Alonso took home a work truck that was burglarized. He attempted to report the incident to the authorities, but was ignored and told that was the way things worked. He was told that he needed to be a Mexican citizen. He says that when he discovered the identities of the perpetrators, he was still unable to get help until the mother of his children went to report the incident. It was at that point that authorities processed the report. Alonso is convinced that had he been a Mexican citizen, he would have been able to report the crime himself. Although Mexico's Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos

(National Human Rights Commission, CNDH) states that migrants have the same human rights and protections as all other residents (2023), Alonso's story is a clear example of the opposite.

Shelters along Mexico's northern border provide housing for thousands of migrants. Adelaida tells of a frightening incident in a shelter in Tijuana:

Vinieron aquí al albergue en un auto. Unos- una pandilla de muchachos que andan haciendo el mal. Veo, entonces vinieron a golpear aquí al portón y después venían armados hasta con cuchillos. Y uno siente miedo, no entiende.

She explains that members of a gang reached the front gate of the migrant shelter where she was living. She said they were there to do harm, "*muchachos que andan haciendo el mal*". They struck the gate and were armed with knives. She explained that one feels fear and does not understand. This is an overt display of anti-migrant discrimination and violence. At a migrant shelter, the only reason for such an act is to cause harm (whether psychologically, physically, or both) to migrants and those providing them with aid.

ACCENT AND MANNER OF SPEAKING BUILDING RACE

According to the survey data, thirty-eight respondents (67%) confirmed that they experienced discrimination for their accent or manner of speaking while living in Mexico. During the qualitative interviews, participants revealed that there were several identifying differences between speech patterns. There were mentions of Central Americans being racially categorized based on slower speech patterns in comparison to Mexican nationals. Others noted variations in specific words used to describe goods

they might purchase at retail locations, mostly related to food, were markers used to differentiate between a Central American and a Mexican.

General impressions of interviewees were that deciphering accents and manner of speaking served as tools for verifying one's foreignness, which often resulted in various forms of discrimination and differential treatment. The study's findings underline common practices in perpetrating discrimination that play out as ridicule and berating comments. As a result, forty (70%) participants felt the need to modify their speech patterns to blend into their new environment. The following testimonials demonstrate the difficulties of navigating a new environment when speech betrays efforts to go undetected.

Anastasia describes her experience with discrimination based on her accent and manner of speaking, and the strategies she employs to prevent from being recognized as a foreigner:

Sí, se burlan, que hablamos todo chueco, todo incoherente, que no podemos hablar mucho idioma de aquí porque se puede notar de un país a otro. El nombre de las cosas cambian y a veces uno no sabe cómo decirle. Uno los llama por "el" o cómo se llaman en el país de uno y aquí lo que hacen es burlarse. Entonces uno mejor toca "esto, ¿esto que cuesta?" mejor como por señas o señala lo que uno quiere para que las personas no le tomen de burlas si uno les dice a otro nombre las cosas.

She says that she hears everyday people ridiculing her manner of speaking and calling it "*incoherente*" and "*chueco*" (to describe speech, *chueco* can mean wrong or flawed).

She is told that people like her, which I interpret to mean those that share her same Salvadoran identity, cannot speak like the locals because the differences are obvious from one country to another. The names of things change and sometimes, Anastasia says, one is unaware of the specific identifying word for what they are trying to

communicate. People ridicule her for using customary Salvadoran vocabulary in Mexico. As a response, she describes a strategy she has developed to help her avoid being constantly subjected to this treatment. Rather than using terms familiar to her to describe everyday objects she comes across, she tends to either point to objects or use generic terms like "esto" ("that") when making purchases.

Idealizing language use provokes a marginalization of those not subscribed to the regionally dominant manner of speaking. Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa (2015) discuss raciolinguistic ideologies when one language system is determined by a people as the standard by which others are evaluated. They talk about the case of the United States, where though there is no federally recognized official language, a particular type of English is widely accepted as the unofficial standard for communication. This causes the boosting of one version of the language and deems variations of it as inappropriate. They argue that the standardization happens more through the white listening subject than via the speaking subject, highlighting those with the ultimate authority in creating and enforcing language rules.

In the U.S., racialization of language happens often in a multilingual context, where for example, the use of Spanglish can be the tool by which a person is categorized outside of the dominant culture (Flores & Rosa 2015). Within one language however, it is important to discuss concepts of exclusion built around differences in its use. Flores and Rosa talk about the racialization of African American English (AAE). They bring to light the ways it has historically been both legitimized (by former President Barack Obama mixing AAE with "standard" English (Alim & Smitherman 2012)) and demonized (like the public backlash of the Oakland Unified School District's 1990s

"Ebonics" resolution (Baugh 200; Perry & Delpit 1998)) to find the intricacies behind its use as a tool of creating race. They also analyze the differences perceived in speaking the same language, and saying the same words. This provokes a hierarchy among what is considered "accented" versus "accentless", which leads to building models of appropriateness and correctness (Flores & Rosa 2015).

Raciolinguistic ideologies are also built in Mexico's northern border and used to underline differences while establishing modes of correctness. Anastasia and the rest of the participants in this study are fluent Spanish speakers; all mentioned it being their native language. The driving forces of racialization of language present in this study do not stem from language systems colliding with one another, but from the differences within one language. In a monolingual context, social categories based on language use create the "most appropriate" version of one linguistic system. Those whose language practices have subtle differences from the way it is spoken in northern Mexico are racialized, enforcing boundaries between social groups.

This study supports the ideas outlined by Flores and Rosa (2015) that the "idealized" language style is established by the dominant social group of each context. This happens in line with unchecked power imbalances, and the dominant group heightening their own status while oppressing others. When one manner of speaking is idealized, it becomes the standard by which other language practices are critiqued. This creates a situation that sees those who do not speak in the same way seen as inferior. Raciolinguistic ideologies are tools of oppression that work to separate social groups, in this case Central American asylum seekers from the "standard" in northern Mexico.

In Anastasia's encounter, the ridicule of her language style is a response to the raciolinguistic ideologies imposed in the region. Deemed "*todo chueco, todo incoherente*," Anastasia tries to hide her linguistic style to curb racialization and marginalization. Moreover, it is important to highlight that she is told she *cannot* speak the way Spanish is spoken in northern Mexico, an assertion that is more startling than simply being told that her way of speaking is different. This points to perceptions in Central American asylum seekers' linguistic abilities and perhaps even level of intelligence, which further serve to justify marginalization.

It is important to also recognize that Anastasia's experience is not unique to her. Many asylum seekers like Anastasia develop strategies like what she described above to prevent themselves from being recognized as a foreigner. Discrimination based on accent or manner of speaking is an effect of building social differences and subscribing to the idea that they inherently are either worse or better than the other, depending on time and place where this develops.

Other Central American asylum seekers at the border describe their experiences dealing with similar situations. Danilo who has been living in Tijuana since November 2021, describes one particular difference in the Spanish spoken in his native Honduras versus Mexico:

Sí, entonces el acento es diferente, y yo le puedo decir cómo. Una vez fui a comprar también. Nosotros le decimos culantro. "Ponme, deme culantro". Me dijo "que es eso, que es eso". "Monte" le digo yo, "Monte" le digo yo, y ya me traen de monte ya. Y digo yo la gente a veces no pueden entender al inmigrante, a veces.

Danilo sometimes struggles to be understood by Mexican residents when, like Anastasia, he is attempting to purchase groceries. In Mexico, the herb is referred to as

cilantro and in Honduras it is called culantro. Just a one-letter difference causes confusion among migrant customers and salespeople. Danilo goes on to elaborate that he sees no point in arguing with those who discriminate against him:

¿De qué le sirve ponerse uno con una persona que lo discrimina a uno? Porque tal vez habla con el acento. Yo no había pensado, algunas personas me han dicho que como el acento mío es pesado, que yo soy- la bohemia es bien fuerte.

Other testimonials explain more aggressive displays of discrimination. Being subject to berating remarks is a common pattern among respondents waiting in Mexico's northern border. Izan works washing cars for tips. They explain their manner of speaking as a trait on which they face discrimination:

Es así, porque así, así poquito igual en el trabajo, pues cuando habla uno diferente o cualquier problemita ya le dicen a uno "porque no se va para su país". Y le empiezan a decir cosas a uno. Vea que- que "uno, aquí viene", también "a quitarles el trabajo". Pues igual que hay veces que en Estados Unidos, lo mismo piensan que uno les va a quitar el trabajo y no.

There exists an idea of a relation between immigrants in Mexico and competition in the labor force which says that the more immigrants there are in Mexico, the less available jobs there are for Mexican citizens. Researchers Covadonga Meseguer and Gerardo Maldonado explain that this idea is largely unfounded (2015, p. 774). When researching public attitudes towards immigrant populations in Mexico, they found that though the immigrant population was less than one percent at the time of the study, 30 percent of Mexican nationals believed there are too many immigrants in the country (2015, p. 798). The data remains roughly the same with the latest census; about one percent (1,212,252) foreign-born people registered living in Mexico in 2020 (INEGI 2021).

Piedras Negras, Coahuila is also a waiting place for a number of Central American asylum seekers. In February 2022, the Strauss Center (2022) estimated around two hundred people arriving to the city each week even though the metering and asylum waitlists had remained closed since March 2020. The experiences Alana describes while waiting there further make the case for anti-immigrant attitudes on the basis of a person's accent:

Eh, cuando nos conocen, como nos conocen el habla que no, que no son- es igual al de aquí, entonces por eso no nos dejan estar en ningún lado y nos tratan mal. A veces solo, solo pasan así y dicen "quítense de aquí, váyanse". Entonces sí, ya ellos nos conocen por eso. Por eso nos discriminan.

Her Honduran accent is a marker for which people in Piedras racialize her and proceed to treat her as an unwanted outsider. She describes poor treatment and being prohibited from being "*en ningún lado*" ("in any place"). She recalls hearing hurtful remarks such as "*quítense de aquí, váyanse*" ("get out of here, leave").

Amada is part of the thirty-eight people who reported modifying their accent to avoid discrimination:

También hay, no solo yo soy inmigrante, sino también hay como tres personas más también, que no son de acá. También son inmigrantes. O sea, ellas me entienden. Pero a veces cuando he ido a comprar a las tiendas o algo así, cuando yo pido algo, porque yo no digo "realmente no sé cómo se llaman acá", pues te ponen a abrir y todo. Entonces yo aprendo más o menos como pedir las cosas.

She states that she feels more comfortable around other migrants who understand the way she speaks. Like Anastasia and Danilo, she has experienced hostility when making purchases and so she has learned to match her manner of communicating to her environment in Tijuana. Still, Danilo elaborates on the difficulty of speech manner modification:

Pues el hablado de ellos- el acento de ellos es diferente porque uno no puede, uno no puede empezar a hablar igual que ellos de la noche a la mañana tampoco.

The different perspectives in effectively modifying manner of speech between Amada and Danilo could be due to each person's length of time stranded in Tijuana. Amada first arrived in Tijuana in February 2021, while Danilo arrived at the border nine months later in November. Since both interviews were completed in February 2022, this means Danilo had one third the exposure that Amada had to become accustomed to the Tijuanaense manner of speaking. At the point of the interviews, Amada had had much more time to observe the Tijuanaense manner of speaking and learned to code-switch as a tactic to avoid being racialized as a foreigner. Danilo, however, as much as he wanted, still found that he could not "*hablar igual que ellos de la noche a la mañana tampoco*" ("speak like them from night to morning either").

In another example of raciolinguistic ideologies, the concept of systemic racism comes up when analyzing Central American migrants' experience. Below, Ingrid talks about a supposed law against helping migrants:

Si, mire uno dice, "Me puede llevar a tal lugar, por favor?" Y ellos, "Disculpe, de donde eres?" Porque es más que obvio que nuestro acento, o sea, es muy diferente al de ellos. Entonces, "No, no, no, usted no se mete. No, no, no los puedo llevar." Y ya, se arranca. Nos bajan del taxi, así lo hacen. Porque dicen... bueno nosotros le preguntamos al pastor, verdad, con el que nos llevó ahí a la iglesia que por que hacía eso. Y dice que ellos tienen prohibido, todo mundo tiene prohibido ayudarle a los migrantes. Les pusieron una ley donde dice que está prohibido ayudarle a los migrantes, que los van a multar si los andan en el taxi. Son contados los taxis que nos quieran llevar. Luego por la silla [de ruedas] de mi hermana que hay que andar, ay, viera bien complicado la verdad. Bien complicado.

She explains that her accent is flagged immediately upon asking for a taxi. Ingrid describes an encounter with taxi drivers who refuse to take them to their desired destination because of her accent, which leads to the assertion of her status as a migrant. The taxi driver claims they are not permitted to help migrants because of a new law imposing fines on those assisting these communities.

Of all respondents interviewed, Ingrid was the only person to talk about unlawful transport of migrants in Mexico. I unsuccessfully searched for such a law. Whether a valid claim or a rumor, its consequences have real implications on Central American asylum seekers. Ingrid's hardships are many when engaging with the public transportation system in Ciudad Acuña. If indeed a rumor, I am left wondering how this rumor started and by who. Being recognized as a foreigner and thrown out of a taxi is just another example of the manner in which the deciphering of accents and manner of speaking is a tool of racialization.

THE ROLE OF PHENOTYPES IN RACIALIZATION

Fifteen respondents (26%) reported being discriminated against based on the color of their skin. They identified as mestizo/a (8), white, (1), trigueña/o (4), afro-descendant (1), and one person preferred not to answer. In a later portion of the quantitative interview, respondents who confirmed being denied the ability to rent a place to live, medical attention, or education, were asked to name the reason(s) behind this treatment. Four respondents named the color of their skin as a leading factor for denial in these areas.

Interestingly, the latter group of four does not overlap with the former; they did not report being discriminated against based on the color of their skin. Perhaps asking situation-specific questions like "*¿Por qué motivo(s) te negaron rentar una vivienda, si es que sabes?*" ("Why were you denied the rental of a place to live, if known?") was beneficial for people to recall distinct moments of discrimination, even if they did not confirm earlier in the interview when asked the general "*¿En México, consideras que has sido discriminada(o) por alguna de las siguientes razones? -Color de piel*" (In Mexico, do you consider yourself to have been discriminated against for any of the following reasons? -Skin color"). Most respondents that spoke of discrimination based on physical traits specifically mentioned the color of their skin, while one person mentioned facial features.

Aaron identifies as a mestizo. He talks about his experiences with discrimination based on his skin color:

Pues como le quiero decir, es que no hay discriminación en cómo le quieras y en que tal vez lo golpeen a uno o algo así. Pero sí por el color de piel de uno, pues ya le dicen- inventan cualquier tipo de animal y pues ya le dicen a uno de que uno [es] perro negro o hormiga negra, cosas así. Sí, pues muchas, muchas cosas. Pues no solo a mí, también a mi amigo y a casi todos los hondureños. No, le tratan a uno, hasta a la mamá de uno, a tu madre, las que andan en el tren. Y aquí queda solo porque uno viaja en el tren. Pues ya buscan como- como decir las cosas a uno. Oye, muy muy delicada la situación, ¿pero uno qué va a hacer un migrante? Pues nomás de aguantar, se traga las palabras.

Aaron first clarifies that the discrimination has never been physical, but he has suffered verbal abuse in the form of name-calling for the color of his skin. He says while working as a day laborer, people use insulting nicknames by pairing the color black with any animal they think of to berate him. He has been taunted with terms like *perro negro*

(black dog) and *hormiga negra* (black ant). He adds that the situation is a difficult one, but that one as a migrant can do nothing other than swallow their words. He adds:

Bueno, pues mi amigo que anda conmigo- porque está aquí conmigo, pues él también dice que le dicen cosas y pues yo soy más trigueño que él, pero a él también le dicen cosas que tal vez por la nariz ya un poquito grande, ya no, que este- cotorro, que Calamardo, cosas así. Cosa del físico de uno, pues ya lo miran a uno y empiezan a inventar cosas para decirle a él. No sé.

Anthropologist Mark Anderson finds the term *trigueño* in El Salvador is used to describe those with Black phenotypes (2001). Here, Aaron describes the differences between the ways in which he and his friend, who is also Honduran, are dissected by their physical traits and taunted in equally malicious manners in Piedras Negras. He specifies that he is more trigueño than his friend, who for clarity I will call David, but that there is no shortage of berating comments directed at both. David is criticized for the size of his nose and called names like *cotorro* (parrot) and *Calamandro* (the name for Squidward, a cartoon squid from Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants*).

Israel, who is from Honduras and identifies as indigenous, believes that generally, Mexican nationals have very light skin ("*su color de piel es muy clara, ¿no?*"):

Y pues existimos muchos de nuestros países, como ser- los de Haití y pues de nuestro país existen los garífunas que son de un color moreno, ¿no? Y pues, por eso nos discriminan mucho de que- por el color de piel y pues ya. Pues yo ya, yo no identifico [como parte] de ese color de piel, pero me, me, me encuentro este- de una manera afectado por como tratan a mis paisanos de mi país. Que como ellos son morenos y yo no, ya ahí ellos usan el racismo y pues, ¿si me entiendes a lo que me refiero?

The Minority Rights Group states that the Garifuna people are the third largest minority group in Honduras (2021). Their racial makeup is a mix of indigenous Karawak, Kalinago, and Afro-Caribbean ancestry. In his interview, Israel talks about a number of

people with a darker skin tone like the Honduran Garifunas and Haitians being discriminated against on the basis of the color of their skin in Piedras Negras. He clarifies that he does not identify himself a part of either of these groups, but that he is affected by the way his fellow countrymen and countrywomen are treated. Israel feels sympathy, and perhaps even empathy, for unjust racially-charged actions against people of darker skin tones.

In Tijuana, Gaia, who identifies as mestiza, tells of a frightening instance while with her partner from Haiti:

De hecho, hace poco tuvimos un problema con mi pareja [por] un mexicano que, la verdad a mí sí me dio muchísimo miedo y eso yo lo cuento a todas las personas, más que todo de color para que tengan cuidado porque pues ese señor siempre hace lo mismo. Este hombre nos siguió en un carro gritándole a mi pareja, diciéndole "pinche negro, Te voy a matar". Hasta incluso nos llegó a amenazar con la pistola que nos iba a matar en un semáforo. Fue una experiencia como, muy fea. Y a mí me gritaba "pinche mexicana". O sea, incluso entre las personas de aquí mismo se vive el racismo.

She describes a moment in which a man known for his racially-charged outbursts finds Gaia and her partner while driving. She recalls being terrified throughout, and makes sure to warn people to be careful, especially people of color. The individual followed them, screaming racial slurs and threatening to murder Gaia's partner. He threatened them with a gun at a stoplight and screamed "*pinche mexicana*" ("f*****g Mexican") at Gaia. She ends with her own analysis of the individual's actions: "*O sea, incluso entre las personas de aquí mismo se vive el racismo*" ("In other words, also people from here endure racism").

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the complex process of racialization that Central American asylum seekers are subjected to when waiting for a resolution in Mexico's northern ports of entry. I compared the findings of this study to previous research on racialization in the country and found contrasting results that contribute to my argument that Central American asylum seekers experience a unique form of racialization at the border. Common processes of racialization throughout Mexico informed by skin color and phenotype are evidenced in this group's experiences, but asylum seekers exhibit a much broader range of markers that impact how they are perceived and subsequently treated in this buffer state.

The most common trait used as a tool of racialization is nationality, and it is practiced by performances of berating comments, inequitable treatment, and crimes targeting Central American asylum seekers. As a response, asylees hide their national identities and try blending in as nationals in an effort to protect from the effects of racialization. Waiting at the border while being a migrant was also a common trait by which racial categories were operated. For being a migrant, respondents were subject to berating comments, the violation of their basic legal protections, and serving as targets for crime. Interestingly, having regular status did little to deter from the effects of racialization. While stranded, accent and manner of speaking were also recognized to be signifiers of race. Respondents experienced ridicule and difficulty communicating their needs in public spaces. As with nationality, it was a common attempt to suppress their accents and manner of speaking as a means to avoid being racialized.

Finally, the role of phenotypes and skin color as racial markers were present in the racialization of Central American asylum seekers, though at the smallest scale in comparison to the previous characteristics. This shows that largely, the politics that situate asylum seekers in limbo at the border play a much larger role than what Dixon and Telles (2017) discuss is led by physical appearance in the forming of race in Mexico. This demonstrates the need for further research to explore racialization as it applies to transitory communities. Because their process of racialization is not generalizable across Mexico, it needs to be addressed in a way that will consider their unique experiences. This is crucial for advocates and policymakers on both sides of the border who seek to understand and improve the complex issues surrounding migration. In the following chapter, I describe the four trending perpetrators of racialization and subsequent discrimination against Central American asylum seekers in Mexico's northern border.

CHAPTER 3 - PERPETRATORS OF MALTREATMENT

*No nos toman en cuenta. No nos toman en cuenta. Nos toman como criminales.
Te lo digo generalmente... nos toman criminalmente. En todo lugar... porque
para ellos solo valen las personas que ya están en este país, que aquí nacieron.*

Alfredo, Honduras. Stranded in Tijuana.

For many asylum seekers, Mexico is a buffer zone between their home countries and the chance to begin anew in the United States. However, the buffer zone created by U.S. immigration policies and supported by the Mexican government is not exactly a safe place to wait. Continuous violence, the strength of organized crime groups, and anti-migrant ideals contribute to the normalization of mistreatment against vulnerable communities. The Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal AC, a non-profit organization based in Mexico, found that in 2021 and for the fifth consecutive year, a Mexican city was the most violent in the world. Notably, two main ports of entry in their investigation made the list of the top 50. Ciudad Juárez ranked number six with 95.79 homicides per 100,000, and Tijuana was fourth with 103.19 per 100,000. Both cities' homicide rates far exceed the global average of 6.15 (WHO 2021).

At the border and almost always with no other option but to wait, the journey to safety for the Central American asylum seeker is heavy with insecurity perpetrated by a variety of actors. These communities flee violence and persecution in their home countries only to be stuck amid similar circumstances. Systemic oppression, whether written into law or socially practiced, makes them vulnerable to repeat marginalization. This chapter discusses the most common perpetrators of such treatment, the nuances between each, and the ways Mexican authorities, the general public, organized crime groups, and immigration enforcement officials are guilty of marginalizing Central

American asylum seekers. In particular, I find that between the former three groups is a complex interplay important to address in order to work towards correcting the systems that racialize Central American asylum seekers.

Mexican authorities often fail to protect asylum seekers, instead becoming part of the channels that exploit their vulnerability. Political scientist Stephen Morris (1992) states that corruption in Mexican police departments is only one part of a large network of corruption in the political system throughout the country. One of the most common practices in their abuse of power is the *mordida*, characterized as a "small" payoff for authorities to ignore infractions—both real and oftentimes imagined (1992). Findings in this study support Morris's claims, demonstrating that interactions between Central American asylum seekers and authorities often involved mordidas. Other forms of abuse of power manifested as verbal abuse and physical violence.

Anti-immigrant sentiments in Mexico add to the abuses endured by Central American asylum seekers. The general public tends to have negative associations with asylum seekers, particularly those traveling via migrant caravans. The media is largely responsible for strengthening negative stereotypes (Varela-Huerta, Ruíz Lagier, and Pech Salvador 2021). A 2019 nationwide survey of Mexican residents' opinions on politics and immigration demonstrates the power of the media in establishing yet another system of oppression against asylum seekers. Most participants agreed with the phrase "Migrants are a burden on our country because they take jobs and receive benefits that should belong to Mexicans." (Blanco 2019). Widespread anti-immigrant sentiment throughout Mexico leads to racialization by the general public and an increase of discrimination and marginalization of Central American asylum seekers. The

general public tends to display maltreatment of these communities by perpetrating verbal abuse, threats, and robbery.

Political dealings with corruption in Mexico have strengthened organized crime groups. The dismantlement of centralized corruption upon transitioning to democracy in 2000 shifted to decentralized corruption throughout, creating major groups equipped with their own agendas that delegitimize the government and allow them to act upon their desire for money and power (Palifka 2020). This has reinforced another system by which organized crime groups racialize and exploit those more vulnerable like newly-arrived Central American asylum seekers stuck at the border with inadequate protections from these abuses. This study finds organized crime groups to commit acts of kidnapping, robbery and physical assault.

Border militarization gives power to the enforcers and selects other inadmissible populations who are left vulnerable to injustices. This insider-outsider dynamic creates another system by which Central American asylum seekers are subjected to racialization and exploitation, leading to abusive practices by immigration enforcement officers. Trump-era immigration laws provoked the dehumanization of select asylum seekers by justifying immigration enforcement officers to perpetrate displays of neglect, verbal abuse, and basic human rights violations.

In this chapter I argue that performances under various long-standing political and social systems cause power imbalances and racializes Central American asylum seekers. I come to these conclusions by categorizing the perpetrators using the quantitative data gathered. Then, an analysis of the in-depth interviews allows me to identify the difficulties of accurately identifying each group. While immigration

enforcement officers are more easily distinguishable, blurred lines between Mexican authorities, the general public, and organized crime groups make it challenging to answer the question: Who are the perpetrators of discrimination against racialized Central American migrants at the border?

THE ABUSE OF POWER BY MEXICAN AUTHORITIES

"Proteger y servir a la comunidad" mantra de la policía federal

Mexico's northern border proves to be an unsafe option for Central American migrants to wait for their immigration case proceedings. Encounters with members of the State Police and the National Guard tend to be abusive and violent. Seventeen respondents (30%) confirmed being subjected to various instances of abuse of power by Mexican authorities. Several interviewees expressed multiple negative encounters with authorities. Candy, for example, said that out of the eleven times they suffered verbal abuse by discrimination and belittlement in Tijuana, eight have been perpetrated by Mexican authorities. People commonly reported the abuse by authorities not only in forms of verbal abuse like examples by Candy, but also as extortion and physical violence.

Extortion by Mexican authorities was perpetrated at the border in varying manners. Questioning the validity of immigration paperwork and threats of deportation were used as weapons to pressure migrants in giving officers a payout. To frame the case of Anastasia: she does not have legal documentation to be in Mexico. She has never applied for it being that she does not feel safe, so she finds it a better option to wait in Tijuana for her asylum case to process. She details an encounter she had with

Mexican authorities:

Sí, sí me querían retornar a mi país porque no tenía papeles, sólo traía como un permiso que me hacía constar que había estado en Monterrey. Pero como no traía credencial ni nada, sí decían que me iban a deportar a mi país, pero yo no quería ir. Al final me pidieron dinero. Que si tenía dinero, que cuánto les podía dar y no no traía dinero, [solo] los 600 pesos. Y eso les di.

Anastasia details how authorities wanted to return her to her country for not having legal documentation. She only had a permit verifying she had been in Monterrey. Since she did not have identification with her, officials told her they were going to deport her, but she says she did not want to go. In the end, Anastasia explains, they asked her for money. They asked her if she had money, how much she was able to give them. She only had Mex\$600 with her, and so that is what she gave the officers in exchange for letting her go.

Anastasia's case unfortunately is not unique among respondents of this study. Celestina was coerced into giving Mexican authorities Mex\$500 in exchange for not calling immigration. In Adriel's case, he was forced to give up his wallet with money inside after being threatened by police with a call to immigration if he did not comply. Experiences like these with Mexican authorities abusing their power leave little to no room for people to safely wait for their asylum cases, and at the same time deter them from applying for legal status in Mexico.

Even in cases with Central American migrants that have the protection of legal status in Mexico, reports of extortion are just as common as those against individuals without legal status. A similar situation is found in a U.S. slaughterhouse. Vanesa Ribas (2015) finds a connection between being ethnoracialized as “Hispanic” and the perception of legal documentation. All employees, both regular and irregular Latine

immigrants working in this slaughterhouse were ethnoracially identified as "Hispanic," and found vulnerable to oppressive exploitation. This is echoed in the case of northern Mexico, where there is a systemic practice of ignoring legal status of Central American asylum seekers and grouping them all together to face exclusion. For example, Bernabe has repeatedly experienced extortion by authorities who deny the legitimacy of the legal documents he presents:

Pues bueno, lo único que puedo decir de la autoridad mexicana es que cualquier autoridad Mexicana, sí saben que no eres mexicano, sólo te miran con ojos de dinero y sólo saben decir "mojado." Donde yo voy siempre me bajan mis 200, hasta me he quedado sin dinero porque yo les enseño mi documento y me dicen "no, esto no vale, tú vas de mojado" y se acabó y se acabó, se acabó. Que si no, van a poner droga o si no van a poner algo, ellos son buenos para lo malo.

He states that the only thing he can say about Mexican authorities is that if they know someone is not Mexican, they look at them "*con ojos de dinero*" ("with dollar signs in their eyes") and call them names like "*mojado*" ("wetback"). He says that where he goes, he is always forced to give his Mex\$200 and at times is left without money. He has shown authorities his documentation and when told it is invalid, there is not a thing Bernabe can do to convince them otherwise. He complies because if not, he says officers can easily plant drugs or other illegal paraphernalia on his belongings. He assures "*ellos son buenos para lo malo*" ("they are good at doing bad").

Other respondents detailed similar experiences to that of Bernabe. Delia was stopped on the street and had Mex\$800 on her. When she showed her documents, officers claimed they were fake. Though she assured the documents were from the immigration office, they still demanded all her money. The amount they forced from Delia is more than half of what she earns in a week working in a factory.

The above are examples of people being extorted and forced to comply, but what happens when there is no money to pay off the officers demanding money?

Anunciacion tells of a time she was confronted by the state police:

Este, por ejemplo, están los de la Fuerza Coahuila aquí que nos agarran. Y si nos ven en la calle nos agarran de repente y "¡papeles!" que no sé qué, y no tenemos. Y entonces ya vienen y andan algo de dinero o algo y si no andamos, nos golpean.

She says the *Fuerza Coahuila*, now known as the *Policía Estatal* (State Police), has seen and grabbed her on the street. They demand to see "*¡papeles!*" which Anunciacion does not have, so next comes the demand for money. She says on the occasions she does not have money to give the officers, they physically assault her. Twenty-five respondents (44%) held a job at the time of the interviews. That means that more than half of people in this study lack a steady income and would have been in a predicament similar to Anunciacion.

Through these interviews, one can see that, similar to Chapter 2 that argues legal status has little effect on the outcome of discrimination for being a migrant, legal documentation status is likewise not an effective shield against maltreatment by Mexican authorities. Migrants are still at risk of exploitation by law enforcement at the border.

While waiting at the border, communities form and migrants try to keep each other away from harm. Isaias talks about the hardships navigating the wait in Ciudad Acuña when they are forced to protect themselves from those who are meant to keep them safe:

Es difícil porque lo poco que uno tiene, pues cuesta trabajo, y que no más te lo quiten pues es feo y [más] el no poder hacer nada.

Isaias says their circumstance is difficult because to begin, others in similar situations to

their own have to work very hard for the little they own. It is disheartening when these things are forcibly seized, and worse when one cannot do anything about it. When asked about the number of times they have been robbed in Ciudad Acuña by the police, Isaias responds:

Como unas cinco veces. Me han quitado los teléfonos. Igual que los teléfonos es una distracción que uno tiene. Pues sí, se me han quitado, pues básicamente tres. Y así que a veces que- uno trabaja a veces no-igual, hasta miedo le da salir porque no sabe que va uno a regresar con sus cosas o no. Sí, incluso, pues se pasan, porque ya a uno hasta los zapatos le dicen a uno que se quiten, los revisan a uno.

Isaias has been robbed about five times, three of which included their cellphones being taken. To Isaias, it is a shame because phones serve as distractions. Hardships are compounded when sometimes they have access to jobs and other times they do not, so it is frightening to leave the house because they are never sure if they will return with their belongings. During those times when work is scarce, the difficulty in regaining their stolen property and money is of course, made worse.

Isaias also explains that authorities have demanded they remove their shoes for a fuller inspection. In another part of their interview, they discuss a similar situation in which they were involved in a search by police. Them and a friend who had hidden money in her shirt before heading out into the public were stopped on the street. An officer asked if they had any money on them. The two friends said "no." They were searched, and when the officer came upon the concealed money, he reprimanded her and struck the side of her face. Isaias described the situation as ugly, "*fue bien feo.*"

Even when people are aware of how they are targeted for crime by Mexican authorities and seek safety by trying to conceal their belongings when out in public, Isaias' testimonial shows that some encounters with officers will go beyond extortion by

verbal demands and resort to physical abuse and bodily searches. Repeat abuse like this from authorities provokes deep distrust in them that can be a cause of the vast underreporting of crimes against Central American migrants at the border.

Other forms of violence against Central American migrants waiting in Mexico's northern border in which Mexican authorities are the perpetrators are during instances when perhaps authorities are needed the most. Astrid tells of a terrifying time when she was part of a group of migrants that was kidnapped by an organized crime group. She underwent verbal and physical abuse and suffered from hunger for nine days. When police found the sequestered group, the situation worsened:

Pues no se como llegó la patrulla, la policía y (inaudible), pero por más que les explicamos por qué estábamos ahí, que aun estábamos sufriendo y nos tenían unas personas allí, ellos lo que hicieron más bien fue darnos- bueno, a mí no, me tiraron al suelo y me agarraron del cabello, pero a quién golpearon más fueron a a otras personas que tenían ahí y a mi pareja. Me golpearon, ya de ahí solo nos dijeron váyanse y eso fue todo. Ni siquiera nos preguntaron, ya que nosotros les dijimos que eran personas que dijeron que eran del crimen organizado y que querían que hiciéramos esas cosas. No nos preguntaron ni cómo eran ni nada, sino que no les importó, solo nos dijeron ya después váyanse ya y hasta esto nos golpearon.

The police ignored their ability to aid the group in question. Astrid says the group explained the dire situation they were in, and rather than helping, they grabbed her by her hair and threw her to the ground. The rest of the group was physically assaulted, and police ended the encounter by telling them all to leave. Officers never asked questions, and much less took any reports of the incident.

Similar to Astrid, Ali found herself unable to receive help from police in a desperate moment. She attempted to report an attempted rape that occurred in Tijuana. When she arrived at the station and explained her situation, Ali was told that the bruises on her body could have been made by other means. Marks on her body were

insufficient evidence and so the police turned her away. Situations such as these blur the lines between Mexican authorities and organized crime groups. Measures must be put in place to safeguard the most vulnerable communities at the border from the system which is meant to protect them. Corrupt members of the State Police and National guard must be held responsible for these actions.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S ROLE IN MARGINALIZING ASYLUM SEEKERS

At the border, the general public were common perpetrators of maltreatment against Central American asylum seekers. Twenty-six respondents (46%) confirmed facing unjust treatment by them in forms of verbal abuse (threats and intimidation) and crimes against property (robbery and extortion). Researchers Amarela Varela-Huerta, Verónica Ruíz Lagier, and Cynthia Pech Salvador analyze the discourse surrounding the "*éxodo centroamericano*" ("Central American exodus") in Mexico. They found that institutionally, publicly, and through the media, negative stereotypes surged about Central Americans such as "irresponsable," "ungrateful," and "dangerous" which has caused racism and xenophobia (2021).

During their interview, Candy discusses experiences living with the hostility created by these negative stereotypes. When asked how many times they had endured discrimination by Mexican nationals, they replied:

Uh, yo creo que ya perdí la cuenta; hay tantas veces. Por ejemplo, el otro día estábamos debajo de un puente donde [desde] arriba del puente nos decían, "váyanse basuras, para su país." Donde varias personas racistas ahí, se paraban ahí en el puente y donde los policías no hacían nada, solo se reían.

Candy says they lost count of the times they have felt discrimination by Mexican nationals. They share an example of just a few days prior where, at el Chaparral in Tijuana, individuals atop a nearby bridge screamed towards them, "*Váyanse basuras, para su país*" ("Leave, pieces of trash, back to your country"). El Chaparral, as discussed in the introduction, served as a migrant campground starting in January 2021 and dismantled by Mexican authorities in February 2022. Candy adds that several racist individuals tended to spend time at that bridge and that police stood by without doing anything except laugh.

The constant negative portrayal of Central American migrants in various spheres causes a hostility that, without being able to speed up their asylum process, they are forced to tolerate. Upon receiving comments rooted in malice, Candy explains they feel belittled, like a piece of trash for being in the aggressors' country despite never wanting to be in Mexico, never being violent toward anyone, and never offending others. To Candy, all people are the same, but they feel that in Mexico, the sentiment is vastly different. "*No tienen corazón*" ("They don't have a heart").

Similarly, Gema has lived through constant verbal abuse propelled by negative stereotypes based on nationality. In her case, the perpetrator was a neighbor with whom she and her family (husband and two daughters) came in constant contact:

Sí, porque aquí en Tijuana este, vivía una mujer que era policía y esa mujer no nos podía ver en esa casa donde vivíamos. Era de que se arrojaba todo, no nos podía ver. Decía que éramos delincuentes, que no sé qué. Y nosotros no le hacíamos caso, nosotros siempre la saludábamos, aunque ella hablara así, siempre cuando nos entrábamos porque vivía casi a la par. En los apartamentos habían dos, uno arriba y uno abajo y ella vivía en el de abajo y nosotros vivíamos en la casa a la par de ella y no tenía pared. Entonces era todo. Nos, solo tiraba habladas, pasaba, tiraba cosas así y así vivimos varios díttas así. No, si mira como

sufre, en veces dice la gente, "ay ahí vienen esos criminales" que no es- que no es así. No todos somos criminales.

Gema describes a considerable amount of hostility from her next-door neighbor who labeled her and her family with names like "delinquents" and "criminals." She explains that she and her family tried to ignore the name-calling and remained cordial by greeting the neighbor upon seeing her, but that the relationship never improved. She says the neighbor could not see them without insulting them. The individual "*tiraba habladas*", (to insult, or informally, to tell off). This example further supports the findings of Varela-Huerta, Ruíz Lagier, and Pech Salvador in the negative portrayal of Central American migrants and the constant discrimination they are forced to undergo.

When verbal abuse escalated to threats on their safety, respondents expressed feelings of terror and helplessness. Gaia describes a particularly frightening situation while driving in Tijuana with her Haitian partner (who, for clarity, will be referred to as James):

Este hombre nos siguió en un carro gritándole a mi pareja, diciéndole 'pinche negro, te voy a m***r.' Hasta incluso nos llegó a amenazar con la pistola que nos iba a matar en un semáforo. Fue una experiencia como muy fea. Y a mí me gritaba "p****e mexicana." O sea, incluso entre las personas de aquí mismo se vive el racismo. Sí, entonces es como, es algo, el racismo y la discriminación a las personas, es algo que nunca se va a acabar.

A man followed Gaia and James. He screamed racial slurs and threatened his life, "*te voy a m***r*" ("I am going to k**l you"). He pulled out a gun at a stoplight and repeated his threat. At Gaia, he yelled "*p****e mexicana*," ("f****g Mexican"). Gaia analyzed the event while on the phone with me. She was assumed to be Mexican by the aggressor, which led her to draw the conclusion that even between Mexican nationals, one can experience racism. She goes on to say this is something that will never end.

Gaia and James' experience can be connected with the findings of researchers Luis Ortiz Hernández, Diana Pérez-Salgado, and César Iván Ayala-Guzmán. In their 2018 study, they discovered that racism and white privilege are lived experiences throughout Mexico. I connect this finding to the perpetrator's racially-charged aggression aimed at James. Furthermore, the researchers also found that some experiences with discrimination and racialized violence tended to be more common within white groups than others. They argue that in Mexican society, racialization is experienced among people of all colors and provokes animosity in interpersonal relationships (Ortiz Hernández, Pérez-Salgado, and Ayala-Guzmán 2018). This subargument can be connected to the insult directed to Gaia. The aggressor racialized her perhaps not by the color of her skin (she identifies as mestiza), but for having a relationship with a Haitian.

Some testimonials detail how simple acts of enjoyment such as listening to familiar music can cause individual citizens to racialize and make threats. Izan tells of a story that occurred in Tijuana:

La otra vez aquí, con unos vecinos que- tal vez uno pone una musiquita de su país. Ya ellos están diciendo que le van a meter a la policía que no sé qué, o a la migración y todo eso.

Izan stated that they were listening to music of their country, El Salvador, in the room they were renting. Neighbors promptly appeared to threaten them with calling the police or immigration. This interaction is a clear indicator of intolerance faced by people not from the country they are forced to reside in while waiting for a resolution of their asylum case. In essence, the perpetrators threaten Izan with deportation.

This feeling is not uncommon throughout Mexico. A 2019 poll of 1,200 adults residing in Mexico conducted by The Washington Post and Mexico's Reforma newspaper found that a majority (55%) of respondents prefer for Central American migrants traveling through Mexico to be deported back to their country of origin. The rest favored granting temporary residency (33%), giving Mexican residency (7%), or did not have an answer (6%) (Blanco 2019). This data suggests that a year after the migrant caravans traveled from Central America to the U.S.-Mexico border, most residents in Mexico were frustrated with immigration.

Maltreatment against respondents by the general public at times was felt in forms of robbery. Anais explains in her testimonial:

Pues, vinieron unos mexicanos. No sé si eran de Oaxaca o de Chiapas, no sé, pero que si me discriminaban porque dijeron que eramos salvadoreños, que no querían a los salvadoreños en este país. Pues yo no, no dije nada. Pues recibimos insultos y también me robaron, me robaron mi teléfono y me robaron el dinero también.

She details that people from either the states of Oaxaca or Chiapas arrived in Tijuana and discriminated against her for being Salvadoran. The people in question said they did not want Salvadorians in their country, and Anais did not reply. She states that along with these anti-immigrant remarks, they robbed her. They took her phone and her money.

This once again shows how immigrant communities, being more vulnerable than nationals, are targeted for crimes. While stranded at the border for their immigration cases to process, people are in a state of limbo that neither allows them to establish roots in the place they are (thus, not permitted to form a support system), nor gives them the ability to wait in a safe environment. Respondents such as Anais are

constantly exposed to maltreatment by the individual citizens, a main driver of this being the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media, in institutions, and by the general public (Varela-Huerta, Ruíz Lagier, and Pech Salvador 2021).

ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS BLUR THE LINES

Conversations with participants in this study suggest that organized crime groups were also among the main perpetrators of maltreatment while waiting in Mexico's northern border. According to the quantitative survey data, seventeen participants (30% of the total) reported mistreatment by organized crime groups. Interestingly, the number of reports regarding the general public as perpetrators was higher than the aforementioned group (46% of the total). Upon looking at these data alone, the findings suggest that although organized crime groups were involved in wrongdoing, their instances of maltreatment were relatively less frequent compared to the general public.

However, conversations with study participants in the qualitative interviews revealed that perpetrators often posed as individuals in positions of authority as an intimidation strategy to coerce Central American asylum seekers to comply with their demands. This tactic allowed them to exert control over these groups. In analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data, this study suggests that the ability of organized crime groups to blend into society or impersonate Mexican authorities may be one reason for the lower number of reported cases of maltreatment attributed to them.

Adelaida's story demonstrates how complicated it can be to correctly distinguish offenders from organized crime groups:

Pues, son hasta ladrones. Ellos se hacen pasar por... por, como le digo, por oficiales. Y pues, será que tal vez ellos andan también en la misma mafia, la verdad.

She explains that thieves she encountered posed as officers. She wonders out loud during the interview if the perpetrators were part of organized crime groups, "*tal vez ellos andan también en la misma mafia.*" Adelaida seems certain that her attackers were not officers though they pretended to be and questioned their involvement with organized crime groups. Without incorporating additional research methods into this study, it is difficult to definitively state that the rate of people targeted by organized crime groups is indeed 30% when interviewees like Adelaida are left wondering about their perpetrators' identities. This also then puts into question the accuracy of numbers relating to the public and Mexican authorities (46% and 30%, respectively) as perpetrators of violence. It is important that future studies put an emphasis on more accurately identifying aggressors of Central American migrants stranded in Mexico's northern border.

Adelaida goes on to detail experiences had by herself and other asylum seekers like her in Tijuana:

Pues sí... ellos me robaron aquí. Pero ni cuando andaba en el camino. Y no solo a mí. Muchos compañeros que viven acá, algunos fueron secuestrados. Los secuestraron para pedirle dinero a sus familiares, supuestamente, y a otros fueron atados en lo que los golpeaban. Bueno, en mi caso- es que- la experiencia de que ellos me robaron y me golpearon porque uno se rehúsa. Fue porque tal vez es lo único que uno tiene, vea, el poquito que uno tiene. Y lastimosamente como uno se encuentra solo, sólo Dios está con uno, y se encuentra entre la espada y la pared.

Adelaida says she has been robbed at the border, and, almost in a surprised tone, said that not even while traveling through Mexico did she suffer from theft. She

goes on to explain that she knows of others living with her at the migrant shelter Templo Embajadores de Jesús who have suffered from equally terrifying experiences. Adelaida recounts stories of others like her who have suffered from kidnappings and physical assault. She explains that in her case, she was beaten and robbed after refusing to give up her belongings. She refused to give up her personal belongings because, she explains, it is the little bit she owns. She recognizes her vulnerable position when she says that unfortunately one is alone, that only God is with her.

Living in a migrant shelter like Adelaida did at the time of her interview is still not enough to protect Central American asylum seekers from harm. In just four months leading up to January 2023, the city of Tijuana experienced a number of attacks orchestrated by organized crime groups targeting migrant shelters (Isacson & Verduzco 2023). The violence perpetrated began with the demand for migrants to stop "attracting" media attention for their precarious situations. By doing so, migrants were inadvertently hindering criminal groups' ability to maintain a low profile while discreetly engaging in illicit activities. The attention brought by media coverage of migrants' difficult circumstances raised public awareness and has kept Tijuana in the headlines. One such example is Adelaida's temporary home at the time that she shared her story. Templo Embajadores de Jesús was the target of armed violence which ended in zero casualties but hundreds of residents being (re)exposed to the very violence they experienced in their countries of origin (El Universal 2023). This activity can also be a tactic by organized crime groups to deter asylum seekers from waiting in the city. If migrants leave Tijuana, media attention will decline.

Stephanie Leutert (2017) states that irregular migrants and organized crime groups in Mexico typically interact in two ways. The first is to be hired as coyotes (migrant guides or smugglers), facilitating their travels through Mexico, and the other is to perpetrate crimes against them such as extortion. Both encounters have highly lucrative outcomes for organized crime groups. Given the financial gains associated with the exploitation of migrants, it becomes challenging to disrupt this complex dynamic, perpetuating its abusive nature indefinitely.

Like Adelaida, participants who shared their stories confirmed they were targeted and endured different forms of mistreatment by organized crime groups. Threats and intimidation (11), physical aggression (9), robbery (8), kidnapping (7), ridicule (7), and insults (7) are among the most common forms of violence endured. This type of treatment is unsustainable since it replicates patterns of abuse Central American asylum seekers fled from in the first place. Here, Adelaida talks about repeat threats she has received:

Porque ya me han amenazado y amenazado. Y ese es el miedo, porque la verdad, pues hemos recibido amenazas. Si aún yo de mi país [me vine] por medio de amenazas. Y acá fue lo mismo, porque como realmente yo me rehusé, porque como era el único teléfono que yo andaba y ahí tenía toda, todos los contactos de todos los familiares, de todas las personas. Entonces, me lo quitaron y me rehusé. Y ahí fue cuando ellos me amenazaron.

She says she has developed a fear from the repeated threats. This fear is familiar to her because she left El Salvador after her husband's life was threatened. "*Y acá fue lo mismo,*" she says, ("and here it is the same"). She explains that she refused to give her cellphone to her attackers because it was the only phone she had, and that phone had

all the contact information of her family members, "of all the people." Even so, they still robbed her of that phone.

The phone in this case is more than a material possession. Stored with their loved ones' contact information, photos, and other digital keepsakes, the device represents a connection to their roots and to people with whom they share memories. These two things are invaluable to an asylum seeker already in a vulnerable state while waiting in Mexico's northern border because of the support system they lack as compared to Mexican nationals. Forcibly taking a cellphone from someone in Adelaida's precarious situation increases the distance between them and their loved ones, and at the same time increases their already vulnerable state.

INHUMANE TREATMENT BY IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Overall, twenty-five respondents confirmed they had been in the United States, including if it was to appear at the border to ask for asylum. Of this group, eight people (32%) reported violence and discrimination by immigration enforcement officers. Candy talks about their encounter with officers upon arriving to the United States, and the way they were treated on their return:

Sí, cuando- cuando yo crucé a Estados Unidos y vino migración y nos agarró, pues la policía fronteriza es muy muy racista, donde ellos no miran ni si los niños están sufriendo o tienen hambre o vienen enfermos. A ellos no les interesa nada.

Eh, cuando llegué a Estados Unidos me dejaron tres horas en el sol donde no iba una camioneta a recogerlo. La niña mía tenía mucha hambre cuando ya nos llevaban creo que para la garita se llama. Solo nos revisaron y no nos hicieron preguntas, dónde nos mandaron dejar con dos policías para acá a México, donde se venían riendo de nosotros.

Candy describes experiencing racism by immigration enforcement officers as they were apprehended in the United States. They say officers did not inquire about the status of even the children they apprehended: whether they are suffering, hungry, or ill. "*A ellos no les interesa nada*" ("They do not care about a thing"). Officers left Candy out in the sun for three hours while an immigration enforcement vehicle arrived. Once in the vehicle and on their way to their deportation destination, they underwent a quick inspection and were asked no questions. Candy notes here that their daughter was very hungry. They were left with two officers, members of the Mexican authorities, who could be seen laughing at Candy and their daughter as they were transferred to their custody.

Candy's testimonial displays a disregard for basic human necessities by immigration enforcement. They crossed into the United States on the Texas/Tamaulipas border with their daughter, and a basic welfare check was not attempted.

Contradictorily, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website states "Preventing the loss of life is core to our mission, and CBP personnel endeavor to rescue those in distress" (2023). It is an incomplete job by immigration enforcement officers to "rescue" Candy and their daughter without checking on their basic needs: food and drink. Worse yet, it is an abusive act to hold migrants like Candy out in the sun for hours while waiting to be deported.

The negative stereotypes that migrants face when discriminated against by the general public are duplicated when encountering immigration enforcement officers. Adela shows another example of the term "Lady Frijoles" (a term which was discussed in chapter 1) being used against Honduran migrants:

Si, lo maltratan a uno. Ojalá que cambie todo. Parece que no hubiera derechos humanos. Si todos, todos [lo merecemos]. No importa de qué

nacionalidad sean, pero es un derecho. Pero si lo maltratan a uno, porque hasta me dijeron "Lady Frijoles" a mí. "¿No eres como la Lady Frijoles?" me dijeron a mí "¿que no le gustan los frijoles?". Me dijo "Lady Frijoles." "Porque me dices así" le digo yo "Si yo mis frijoles, yo me los como," le digo. A mi ahorita frijoles me ponen, yo me los como. Le digo yo "¿No miras que esa es la comida de los hondureños?" "No, porque es que aquí vino una Lady Frijoles, que hablaba mal de los frijoles" dice. Es feo eso, estaba discriminando. Desde que entré, pues el policía.

She says one is treated badly by immigration enforcement officers and hopes it all changes. She states that it seems sometimes as if human rights did not exist, because everyone is deserving of them regardless of nationality. In a ridiculing manner, Adela was compared to "Lady Frijoles" and asked if she also did not like frijoles. She replied by asking not to be called the term, and clarified that she would eat frijoles if they are available. "*¿No miras que esa es la comida de los hondureños?*" ("Don't you see that is Honduran food?"). The immigration officer then told Adela about a woman who spoke badly about frijoles and was labeled with the nickname. She says it is an ugly thing to be discriminated against. Adela says it happened from initial contact with the immigration officer.

Adela describes a situation filled with berating and discriminatory comments that force her to defend herself against negative stereotypes. The term "Lady Frijoles" is used as a tool by this officer to force Adela to demonstrate gratitude for being in Mexico's northern border. Encounters such as this when migrants come into contact with immigration enforcement officers are in no way part of the mission of the department to keep people safe. This exercise of abuse of power imposes distress upon those encountering officers, which is the opposite of what they claim their goal to be.

Respondents also declared feeling less than human when facing immigration enforcement officers. Alfredo tells of his experience by comparing to the treatment of animals:

Muy feo. Horrible. Feo, feo, feo. Te tratan de una forma... ni a un animalito le tratará yo así... Si yo fuera agente de inmigración, yo no trataría a una persona así, ni a un animal.

He repeats the word "ugly." "*Muy feo. Horrible. Feo, feo, feo.*" He says immigration enforcement officers treat one in such a way that he would not think to treat even an animal. He says if he were an immigration agent, he would not treat people the way he was handled. He repeats that not even to an animal would he treat that way.

From his testimonial, one can see Alfredo felt defeated as he was stripped of his humanity during his experience with immigration enforcement officers. Sorrowfully, he compares his treatment to that of an animal, confirming he was treated worse. These experiences can have negative long-standing psychological effects on people who are perpetrated by immigration enforcement officers, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

CONCLUSION

This chapter identified the leading perpetrators of discrimination against Central American asylum seekers in Mexico's northern border. The production of racial categories by long-established systems causes oppression of some communities, and places the power in the hands of the perpetrators. Their vulnerable positions while waiting in Mexico are exploited by a variety of actors, namely Mexican authorities, the general public, organized crime groups, and immigration enforcement. The mantra of

the police department is to "*proteger y servir la comunidad*" ("protect and serve the community"), but respondents' encounters with authorities show they repeatedly were part of the network that exploits asylum seekers' vulnerable positions. They tend to verbally abuse, extort, and sometimes their discrimination turns violent against these communities. The general public have a propensity to exercise verbal abuse, threats, and robberies against this community. By organized crime groups, it is common to hear stories of kidnapping, robbery, and physical assault. Those who encountered immigration enforcement officers experienced neglect, verbal abuse, neglect, and violations of their basic human rights.

This shows that there are a variety of systems, or as Omi and Winant call them, raw materials of racialization (2015), that have long been activated that promote the mistreatment of asylum seekers at the border. Immigration laws imposed by the United States, historically and today, dehumanize these communities and feed a rhetoric of "justifiable" abuses from various groups. Nationalism in Mexico globally propels racialization, its effect often being the exploitation of the "other" by nationals who form part of the list of perpetrators. These political and social systems commonly devalue the lives and experiences of asylum seekers.

While the quantitative data provided information that pointed to the general public being the most common perpetrators, an analysis of the in-depth interviews that follows each section demonstrates the complexity of asserting this claim. It is recommended that future research focuses on addressing this shortcoming. In seeking to identify the complex underlying factors that shape systems of oppression and patterns of discrimination against Central American asylum seekers in Mexico, researchers may be

able to get closer to the truth about the groups who exercise maltreatment. To achieve this may require ethnographic research, a much more immersive approach than what was taken with this study.

CHAPTER 4 · THE EFFECTS OF RACIAL AND NATIONAL ORIGIN DISCRIMINATION AT THE BORDER

The previous chapter described the perpetrators of violence and discrimination against Central American migrants stranded in Mexico's northern cities, namely Mexican authorities, the general public, organized crime groups, and immigration enforcement. In this chapter, I show the ways discrimination by the aforementioned actors impacts the quality of life of migrants at the border, answering the second research question:

How does racial and national origin discrimination affect Central American asylum seekers forced to wait at the northern Mexico border?

To do so, I looked for repeat experiences in respondents' testimonials, and reinforced each concept with data from the qualitative interviews. Based on the findings, I argue that Central American migrants' experiences with discrimination diminish their opportunities for a quality life. Four main areas in the lives of migrants are particularly hindered.

The first describes the psychological consequences of being a migrant stranded in Mexico's northern border. People live in constant distress when they are targets of violence and discrimination, the effects of which can bleed into their community networks. Respondents also fear physical violence, largely informed by an unwelcoming environment and negative past experiences in their countries of origin. These experiences provoke distrust in their environment, which then lead to a practice of isolation as a way to keep themselves hidden from dangerous situations.

The second area affected by discrimination in the lives of these communities is their access to services. Schooling for adults is almost always denied to migrants who inquire about furthering their education, and the reasons for denial are largely rooted in anti-immigrant sentiments. The children of respondents were turned away for similar reasons, though at a lower rate than their parents. Many stories also described extreme difficulty in accessing health care when they most needed it. Often, migrants were unreasonably denied healthcare services and forced to seek other clinics or hospitals that would serve them, at times in emergency situations like giving birth.

Next, I found that people's experiences with discrimination made it an arduous task to work while waiting at the border. It was common among migrants to experience hostile and abusive conditions in the workplace colored by threats to report them to immigration. Also prevalent was the exploitation of migrant labor in exchange for inadequate wages. At times employers refused to pay the already-low salaries agreed upon, ending confrontations with their employees in threats and other forms of verbal abuse. Being aware of their exploitation did not always deter migrants from staying at their jobs—the alternative was to not have any money coming in at all. This speaks of the limited choices that often force migrants to remain in situations of exploitation. On the other side of the struggles in the workplace, was to not be able to secure employment to begin with. People were targets of anti-immigrant sentiments as they were turned away from working.

Finally, discrimination at the border against Central American migrants inhibits their access to fair housing. Often, participants were burdened with unjust utility charges. Fear of repercussions like being reported to immigration enforcement led

tenants to feel no choice but to comply with landlords' demands. It was not unusual for people to stay in unlivable conditions whether it meant constant hostility or a lack of basic needs such as a sewer system in their rentals. Like with access to services or finding employment, however, participants felt they had no choice but to accept the conditions offered at their rental locations because of their previous challenges in finding a place that would be welcoming of migrants.

The four areas affected by discrimination in the lives of Central American migrants are among the basic needs that contribute to a person's quality of life. They are categorized in Abraham Maslow's basic needs theories which are among the most influential despite their age. Since 1943, Maslow shared the hierarchy-of-needs theory that states the five types of human needs are, in order of the recommended sequential acquisition: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-realization (1943, 1954).

Maslow's theories have remained subject to subsequent research, and though findings often contradict the original ideas, they continue to be an important foundation to studies across disciplines. Researchers Mariano Rojas, Alfonso Mendez, and Karen Watkins-Fassler, for example, reject the idea that one must fulfill needs in a sequential manner, and instead find that needs relating to love, belonging, and esteem are equally important to physiological needs (2023). They argue that the most effective way to satisfy human needs is by equally focusing on all basic needs (Rojas, Méndez, & Watkins-Fassler 2023).

I use this approach to inform the organization of Chapter 4. I first elaborate on psychological distress caused by discrimination at the border. I then move on to detail

challenges in access to services. Next, I discuss the difficulties related to working while waiting. I end this chapter with a discussion of housing barriers. All mentioned areas of concern influence one another, so it is important to see them not as a hierarchy in which one is more urgent than the rest. All factors are in conversation with one another whether outcomes are positive or negative.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION: DISTRESS, FEAR OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, AND ISOLATION

The testimonials of people stranded at the border demonstrate grave psychological burdens from discrimination that present themselves as continuous distress, fear of physical violence, and distrust in their environment dictating self-appointed isolation. In certain cases, violence and discrimination can produce far-reaching consequences that emanate outward like ripples, with the perpetrator's target at the core of this phenomenon.

Damaris, for example, describes a terrifying night in which she could have been left without her partner and her three young children without a father. Late one night in el Chaparral, Damaris noticed three unfamiliar men surveilling her husband and a friend as they were entering the restroom. She thought to alert him but felt helpless as she noticed his cellphone still in their tent. Hours passed with no sign of her husband or his friend's return. By this time, it was well into the night, and people at el Chaparral were sleeping. The only person she could see awake was the proclaimed leader of the area, nicknamed El Gato, who told her there was nothing to be done about the situation and that she should get used to the idea that her husband was likely dead. Painfully,

Damaris recalls him saying, ""*acuéstate*", *me dijo*, "*y ahí déjalo*", *me dijo*, "*porque de ese ya no vas a saber nada*"" ("lay down and leave it alone, because you are not going to ever know from him again").

But Damaris was not ready to give up. She went to neighbors asking for any knowledge about her husband's whereabouts, but the more people answered *no*, or *nada*, the more her worry grew. For these actions, El Gato became agitated, stating that she was *escandalizando* (causing a commotion in) the neighborhood. He got two armed men to force her back to the tent with her children and would not allow her to leave. A few hours later a neighbor purposely caused a distraction so Damaris and her children could escape to an agreed location where members of her church were waiting to take her to safety. The rest there was to do was wait.

As the night turned to day, Damaris' husband was finally reunited with the rest of his family with the help of neighbors from el Chaparral. He explained to Damaris that he was forced into a physical altercation in the restroom the previous night. Two of the three individuals had knives, and before they could make clear whether the goal was kidnapping, robbery, or pure violence, the targeted men fought back enough to escape. They ran as fast as their bodies allowed them to get away and had to jump down the Chaparral bridge to increase the distance between them and the perpetrators. They felt fortunate to be able to escape the fate that their perpetrators attempted to create for them.

I connect the events described to discrimination based on national origin. Damaris witnessed the surveillance of her husband and his friend, walking out from el Chaparral which is a known campground for asylum seekers, by unfamiliar individuals.

The perpetrators acted on the knowledge that the two individuals heading into the restroom were outsiders and therefore (unofficially) lacked the state protections granted to Mexican nationals. This is evidenced by a conversation Damaris had with members of her church as they devised a plan to report the incident to authorities. She specified that the leader of her church knew *which* officers to seek out as there seemed to be only a number of them who accepted reports made by non-nationals.

The story told by Damaris shows how dangerously close migrants can be to encountering situations of violence. In this study, nineteen respondents (33%) faced threats and intimidation while waiting at the border. Of those, 63% reported experiencing physical violence. In other words, almost two out of every three people who faced threats or intimidation also encountered acts of violence perpetrated against them. These findings differ slightly from previous research. A 2019 study by the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at University of California, San Diego led by Tom Wong focused on asylum seekers returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) who waited in Tijuana and Mexicali. Researchers concluded that 23.1% of adults were threatened with physical violence in the two border cities. Further, 56.5% of those threats were reported to have turned into actual physical violence such as beatings, robbery, and extortion (Wong 2019). A comparison of this and Wong's study shows that both threats and violence have become a more common practice at the border.

When situations like Damaris' happen, the effects are felt by not only the targets of violence and discrimination but also their community networks. That night near el Chaparral, Damaris' husband and his friend were the perpetrators' aim of violence. The event undoubtedly also affected Damaris. She felt helpless in attempting to alert her

husband of the suspicious activity as he was entering the restroom, and again helpless as she tried to get answers from neighbors while recruiting help. She was confronted with indifference and hostility by El Gato but demonstrated extreme resilience when refusing to abandon the search for her partner.

The situation also rattled neighbors of el Chaparral that night as they too, desperately tried to help with little available resources and area leaders attempting to maintain a false appearance of peace. The church members that were called upon to help Damaris and her children get to safety were also bystanders affected by the incident. In a moment's notice, they met Damaris and her children, providing support in a desperate moment. Though Damaris and her family had only arrived in Tijuana ten days prior to the incident, their story provides insight to how imperative a community network is to migrants at the border. It also demonstrates the ripple effect of violence against one person affecting the targeted individual's surrounding community.

Stranded but not alone: distress affects more than just the targets of violence

Border insecurity is carried out in varying ways, and often it is accompanied by feelings of constant distress. When asked how living at the border has affected them, respondents largely shared feelings of grief for their unsafe situations. Generally they felt unable to freely express themselves and much less defend themselves. Celestina has two underage children attending public school in Tijuana. She explains how she has been affected by discrimination anytime she has made contact with her children's schools:

Mucho la verdad, afecta aunque uno diga que no, pero sí afecta moralmente. Uno siente a veces una cosa aquí en su pecho de- que uno no puede decir nada. Temor a algo, temor a muchas cosas. Uno calla, uno calla las cosas mejor aquí, aunque uno esté correcto. Pero si ellos

dicen este es blanco y si uno dice que es negro es- para ellos es blanco, uno tiene que decir a lo que diga a la gente que no a lo que uno diga, porque uno aquí, uno no vale nada. Aquí a nosotros nos pueden matar y nos pueden ir a tirar y ¿qué me va a decir que yo estaba mal? Es que la verdad, aquí a uno te matan y te tiran a un barranco, o un río y ¿quién va a llegar por ti? Nadie.

She explains that her morale has been immensely affected though she denies it. She states that at times, she can feel something in her chest but unable to voice it. She fears a lot. Celestina tends to keep a lot to herself even when correct because in situations she has encountered is met with hostility if she presents a differing perspective, "*porque uno aquí, uno no vale nada*" ("because here, one is worthless").

Celestina feels that at the border, people like her can be murdered and their bodies thrown out. In a rhetorical manner, she asks the interviewer if she is going to be told she is mistaken. She affirms that the truth is, at the border where she is forced to wait, one is murdered, their bodies are thrown into a ravine or river, and no one will come to search for them.

Celestina's description of the effects of discrimination by her children's school shed light on the continuous distress migrants face while waiting for their asylum cases to process. Celestina's experiences clearly provoked an unrelenting emotional toll, including causing disturbance to her self-confidence and ability to stand up for herself. Her testimonial also highlights the constant fear felt by migrants in an unwelcoming, unsafe third country. When presented by possible disagreements or conflicts, she is pressured to remain silent because speaking up could endanger her life. This implies that the border is not a place open to hearing differing ideas, causing stranded migrants to feel impotent and voiceless.

When Celestina not only mentions the fear of being murdered, but also details that murdered bodies can be easily thrown out into a ravine or river, she recognizes the vulnerable status of migrants at the border, and the lack of security provided to them as they are perpetrated on by the general public, immigration enforcement, Mexican authorities, and organized crime groups. There must be a push for greater protections of migrant communities at the border.

Stranded but not alone: (still) accompanied by fear of physical violence

Under the MPP, Mexico is intended to serve as a safe third country while asylum cases are processed, but government officials fail to provide resources that secure the well-being of migrants stranded in the country's northern border cities. At the border, migrants are at risk of experiencing conditions similar to those that originally led them to flee their countries of origin.

An overwhelming fifty-three respondents (93%) cited violence as a leading cause for fleeing their country of origin. The group also mentioned situations of violence while waiting in Mexico's northern border, though at a lower overall rate of fifteen (26%). While it is undeniable that migrants report less violence in Mexico when compared to their countries of origin, it is still a system that fails its humanitarian duty to thoroughly protect migrant communities waiting in a foreign country. How can Mexico be considered a safe third country if asylum seekers are left without protections from violence?

Ariel is a prime example of what happens when laws are established without consideration for their consequences. He mentioned rarely leaving the room he rents

(now that he has been able to find housing after previously being denied due to his Honduran nationality) because he is afraid. When asked what he fears, Ariel explained:

De que me asalten, de que me griten, de que me burlen y cosas así, de que me hagan daño físicamente. No quiero volver a pasar lo mismo que pasé antes. No lo quiero volver a pasar.

He says he is afraid of being assaulted or being yelled at. He is frightened of being the subject of ridicule and more, he says. He is scared of being physically harmed. He finished the thought by repeating that he does not want to go through what he has endured in the past. "*No lo quiero volver a pasar*".

The conversation with Ariel calls attention to the worries and fears that many migrants face while waiting at the border. Ariel is among those that fled their country due to violence and unfortunately, the system allegedly meant to guide him to safety is facilitating the abuse that pushed him to leave Honduras in the first place. When he describes the types of treatment he fears including situations of physical assault and verbal abuse and adds that he does not want to endure the same fate, he highlights the ongoing battle migrants face in an immigration system that fails to protect them. He purposely avoids being outside the four walls of the room he rents because there, at least he knows he will not need to endure the abuse that many like him face while waiting at the border.

During interviews when asked if they were fearful of returning to their home country, all but five respondents (91%) said yes. While a majority of forty-one people (72%) confirmed their goal to reach the United States when they left their country of origin, it is important to mention the plans of the remaining sixteen. Seven people (12%) aimed to reach Mexico when they left their country of origin, eight (14%) had no destiny

in mind, and one respondent originally meant to settle in a different part of their country. Dire conditions after dire conditions caused participants to edit their plans and try to find safety by applying for asylum in the United States. Unfortunately, the most current immigration laws prove to be ill-suited, dangerous, and promoting of anti-immigrant hostility that causes perpetual fear.

Stranded and alone: distrust in their environment causes isolation

At the border, respondents reported self-appointed isolation as a defense mechanism against maltreatment, a side effect of their experiences since arriving in Mexico. To avoid discrimination whether carried out as physical violence or otherwise, people actively chose to keep themselves in places they felt safe, which usually meant staying in their temporary residence and away from possible situations of danger. A study out of Tulane University found that social isolation is detrimental to mental and physical health. The practice affects sleep patterns, the body's natural defenses, cardiovascular health, cognitive function, anxiety levels, depression, and suicidal thoughts (2022). Moreover, immigrant populations are found to be among the high-risk groups of those affected by isolation. The study cites language barriers, cultural differences, and limited social connections as contributors of isolation (Tulane University 2022). While these three factors could contribute to isolation among Central American migrants waiting in Mexico's northern border, I argue that fear and distrust in their environment are also fundamental in provoking this behavior.

Thirty respondents (53%) confirmed that they preferred to remain secluded from the communities at the border in order to keep themselves safe. When asked to

elaborate, they typically mentioned past experiences with discrimination that altered their behavior into "survival mode."

During her interview, Gema was asked how she feels that her experiences with discrimination have affected her. She answered:

Este, me ha afectado bastante porque casi no tengo confianza con la gente. Hay gente que yo- me la voy conociendo. Por mientras veo cómo se portan conmigo y este, yo lo que hago es cuando una persona es agresiva y todo eso, mejor me voy alejando, me aparto y le digo que hasta aquí. Como, aquí no tenemos amigos nosotros, aquí en la colonia, por no tener problemas con nadie. Son, estamos como aislados, aislados. Yo pues y mi hija, mis hijas también.

Gema has been affected considerably, she says, because she does not trust people. When she starts to meet someone, she is careful to analyze how they treat her. At a sign of aggressiveness, she retreats and communicates to the individual that she is ending the friendship. Gema states that she and the rest of her family (husband and two daughters) do not have friends in the neighborhood because they do not want to have problems with anyone. They are isolated, *aislados*.

The decision to keep themselves detached from the community in which they have been living for three years comes about after fleeing threats, violence, and extortion in El Salvador. Gema and her family left in hopes of finding better living conditions but during our conversation, she described a number of instances in which she was racialized by her manner of speaking, skin color, nationality, and for being a migrant in Tijuana. Once racialized as an "other," Gema became a target for maltreatment based on the previously mentioned traits. Just like the practice of changing her manner of speaking to avoid discrimination and violence, she and her family also isolate themselves to keep a safe distance from the hostility of Mexican

authorities, immigration enforcement, and the general public. Gema and her family cannot change these traits, but they can attempt to limit their exposure to their surrounding community. For them, the reasons for isolation are less about language barriers, cultural differences, and restricted social connections (Tulane University 2022), and more driven by trauma and fear.

DISCRIMINATION'S EFFECT ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE

Another way a migrant's quality of life at the northern Mexico border is affected is through their lack of access to services like health care and education for themselves and their children. In terms of their own education, nine respondents said they tried enrolling in school and eight (88%) were denied admission. The ninth person declined to answer. They listed the following reasons for their rejection: migratory situation, migrant documents, lack of documents from their home countries, appearance, ethnic origin, skin color, nationality, accent, manner of speaking, problems validating transcripts, or their inquiries simply being ignored.

Participants also reported facing hostile opposition as they attempted to enroll their children in school. Thirty-five respondents have school-aged children at the border with them and eleven (31%) stated they were denied access. Like their parents, children were denied school enrollment for varying reasons. They mentioned their nationality, migratory situation, migrant documents, and lack of documents from their home countries among the reasons for being turned away. One respondent was even told their child was not allowed entrance to the school because "migrants are always in

transit." Clearly, these examples of anti-migrant discrimination demonstrate a common practice of keeping them on the margins of society. This proves detrimental to the development of migrant children, and a violation of the commitment made in the "U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration" that states the Mexican government would provide asylum seekers waiting in Mexico with "jobs, healthcare and education" (2019).

It is important to note that the number of parents who attempted to enroll their children in school is unclear. Nineteen parents said they were never denied access to school for their children, but fourteen were not enrolled at the time. This could be for several reasons including limited access to transportation, inability to afford tuition, or not knowing migrant children have the right to attend public school at no cost (UNICEF 2022). For example, fifteen parents were unaware that migrant children have that right in Mexico. One parent mentioned that her two school-aged children are not enrolled in school due to her fear of what may happen to them. She is scared to let them leave the house so she teaches them what she can at home. On the other hand, some parents like Celestina took a different approach. She explained the difficulties she encountered when attempting to enroll her children in a Tijuana school:

Hasta para el estudio de sus hijos, aquí le niegan a uno. Uno porque lucha y le suplica a los maestros, la directora también para que ellos me den una oportunidad con mis hijos. Y aunque eso, yo sé que el estudio no es algo es un derecho. A todos lo- a toda la gente, pues que le dan el estudio, porque yo he escuchado - si - eso no se lo niegan a nadie, se dicen que en los Estados no le niegan el estudio a ningún joven, a ninguno, más bien al contrario dice mi hermano "aquí, si tu no llevas a tu hijo, Celestina, a los dos días te llaman que porque no llevaste a tu hijo, y le tienes que dar una explicación." "Imagínate que bonito", le digo. "Y acá", le dije yo, "a ellos no les interesa si mi hijo no va, luego, si. No, más bien ni falta les hace que aquí no vaya."

She tells the interviewer that even education for children is denied to some. One must fight and beg teachers and principals to give their children the opportunity to enroll. She knows that access to education is a right to all, so she challenged the school administration until her children were allowed to enroll.

Celestina also compares her children's experience with what she knows about the United States, saying that in the U.S. youth are not denied an education. She tells of a time she spoke with her brother living in the United States about the differences in the two countries' education systems. Her brother says that if a child is not in school for a few days, the school calls to investigate, and the guardians must give an explanation. "*Imagínate que bonito*" ("Imagine that, how nice"), Celestina replies, adding that in Mexico, school staff does not care whether her son attends school or not, and that he will not be missed if he is not present.

Of the thirty-five parents who were asked the question, Celestina is among the twenty respondents (57%) who confirmed knowing that migrant children have the right to an education in Mexico. This knowledge could be the reason she refused to be turned away from enrolling her children in school while waiting for their asylum case to be processed, demonstrating how powerful it is for a migrant to know their rights. When asked the reasons for her children being turned away from enrolling in school, Celestina noted anti-immigrant discrimination: nationality, migratory situation, and migrant documents. There must be a greater effort to eliminate the disparity in access to information about migrants' basic rights while waiting at the border.

Further, Celestina's comparison of the education system in Mexico and the United States reinforced her disappointment in the way her children were treated upon

attempting to enroll in school. She knows not only that her children's rights to an education were unlawfully refused, but also believes that in the U.S. she would not face the same challenges. Celestina longs for a place where she will not have to fight for her children to exercise their rights to an education, and she believes that Mexico is not that place for her family. A country where it is a common practice to make access to services like health care and education an arduous task cannot be considered a "safe third country."

Central American migrants' access to health care at the border is another example of the ways racialization and discrimination inhibits their basic human rights. Twenty-four (42%) participants in the study reported living with health conditions related to both physical and mental health while waiting at the border. The physical health conditions affecting participants are the following: bronchitis, chronic pain, high blood pressure, heart conditions, intestinal problems, tuberculosis, epilepsy, gastritis, diabetes, asthma, menopause, and Covid-19. Further, participants also reported suffering from mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and chronic stress. One person attributed their hair loss as a side effect of poor mental health.

Like the restriction of access to enroll in school, a number of participants reported to have been denied medical attention while at the border. Researchers Bob Morris and Edgardo Zunia for the International Rescue Committee find that though an almost impossible task to accurately estimate the number of migrants in Mexico who may need medical attention, 36% of migrants in Mexico encounter difficulty in access to medical assistance (2019). In this study, twelve people (21%) had been denied medical attention at the time of the interviews, while twenty-seven were never denied attention, and

seventeen had not yet sought medical services. Though the probability is lower than in 2019, the unfair treatment of migrants who seek medical care at the border is undeniable.

People reported being denied services by private hospitals, private clinics, and non-profit organizations, but the most common places the refusals took place were in public hospitals and public clinics. Three women spoke of their experiences in seeking medical attention when going into labor. Doctors and nurses refused to help them deliver their children, resulting in the expulsion of patients from these hospitals. They were told they could not be helped, and that they would need to find a private hospital willing to accept them as patients. Cintia, for example, arrived at the hospital nine days before her due date and was immediately turned away. She spoke of her experience during the first contractions:

Y me dijo no, "pues vete a un médico especial que te vaya a atender", me dijo "y te faltan nueve días y [además] usted es extranjera y nosotros no tenemos porque estar ayudándote, tú pagas el dinero porque te atendimos y así."

She said while the doctor refused to allow her into a delivery room, they advised her to go to a specialized doctor who would be willing to help her. The doctor reiterated that she was still nine days away from her due date, and added that since she is a foreigner, that hospital was under no obligation to help her. The interaction ended with the doctor demanding she pay for the time they spent with her before leaving.

Unfortunately, this study finds that this interaction is common among pregnant women and the facilities they attempted to seek help. The anti-immigrant sentiment is clear and the hostility evident, especially as the doctor told Cintia the hospital is not responsible for treating foreigners. Other respondents listed discrimination by their

nationality, lack of migrant documents, and appearance as reasons they were denied medical services. Five people also reported their accent was a trait by which they were discriminated against, resulting in the refusal to offer medical services. Once again, the Mexican government failed to effectively provide the basic needs promised to migrants waiting in Mexico as a result of the MPP outlined in the "U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration" (2019). An elimination of the cruel MPP is necessary in order to justly provide for migrants seeking asylum into the United States.

WORKING WHILE EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION AT THE BORDER: HOSTILITY, UNFAIR WAGES, AND INABILITY TO FIND WORK

After fleeing their country of origin and discovering the MPP changed the asylum process to require applicants to wait in Mexico, finding a job is essential. Working while waiting can provide asylum seekers with a sense of stability and independence, and help them meet their basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter. Being in this position, however, can be a challenge for asylum seekers as they are often left without proper resources and support. The difficulty of the situation can be compounded by cultural barriers, limited opportunities, and discrimination.

Twenty-six respondents in this study participated in a paid activity varying from construction to restaurants and agriculture. When asked about their type of employment, thirteen people (50%) worked by the day, eight (31%) were paid by task, and only five (19%) held steady jobs. The average hours worked per day ranged from three to twenty, but most people worked between eight to ten hours per day.

Unfortunately, the workplace proves to also be a facet of migrant's lives in transit that is impacted by discrimination. Migrants are often vulnerable to mistreatment in the workplace due to their status as outsiders, which can make them targets of discrimination, harassment, and abuse. A hostile work environment can result in increased stress, anxiety, and even health problems.

Twenty-six total respondents (46%) stated they were discriminated against while working. Additionally, six people mentioned the discrimination stemmed from their accent or manner of speaking. Celestina faced a frightening encounter at a job she held for a few months in Tijuana. She tells here about her last day cleaning a particular house:

Me sentí muy humillada porque imaginé que le tiren una taza de café en el pecho a uno por cobrar su dinero. Pues a mí me dolió tanto porque era un dinero que, pues nosotros tenemos la costumbre en Honduras aunque sea sencillamente una ayudadita a sus hijos, pero pues uno está lejos. Y cuando yo cobré mi dinero me dijo ella que quién era yo para que yo le estuviera cobrando dinero, que era una p****e hondureña y que si ella quería me podía acusar hasta de ladrona y me podía entregar a migración. "Si yo quiero ahorita p**a m***e te entrego a migración", me dijo "con tus p****e méndigos, tus hijos". Y entonces yo le dije "no", le digo "no, no hay necesidad de eso, déjelo así, usted tiene razón", le dije "no tengo ni un peso con usted", pues me salí. Yo me tuve que salir de ahí. Si no, llama a la, llama a migración y me llama a mí y me llevan a mí. Tengo que ir a sacar a mis hijos donde yo esté.

Celestina was humiliated because, she tells the interviewer, imagine being thrown a cup of coffee to the chest for asking for wages. She was hurt because though it was not much, she was planning to use that money to buy clothing for her children. When she asked for her money, the owner of the house demanded to know who she thought she was to be billing her, cursing while threatening to accuse her of being a thief and turning her and her children into immigration. Celestina replied that it would not be necessary,

that they could leave the situation as is, and that she was not owed anything after all. She left the house, she says, she had to because if not, the owner of the house would call immigration and take her away. She hurried to her children.

Celestina continues:

Y le doy gracias a Dios de que estaba haciendo frío. Andaba yo dos suéteres pero sí, siempre me he sentido el quemón aquí en el pecho y sólo me andaba una blusita así que era del tiempo de calor. Me hubiera quemado todo pero sí, a pesar de todo sí me ardía a mí el pecho. Estuve como una semana con ardor porque la taza hervía de caliente. Si yo misma se la serví.

Thinking back, she thanks God that day was cold. She was wearing two sweaters and a thin shirt, but still she felt a burning in her chest. She says that she would have otherwise been burned all over, but either way her chest was left with a burning sensation. She felt that discomfort for about a week because the cup of coffee was boiling hot. Celestina had served it herself.

Celestina's testimonial highlights the vulnerable state of migrants at the border, and the propensity for them to face discrimination, abuse, and threats. At any moment, migrants can receive terrible treatment in the workplace and feel helpless to defend themselves because of their legal status or because they are unaware of their rights. In Celestina's story, her client one day refused to pay her, verbally abused her, caused her bodily harm, and threatened her with deportation. The client exploited Celestina's status as a migrant and exercised different forms of abuse in order to escape the responsibility of paying her for the work that was completed. A search for previous studies focusing on labor exploitation of Central American migrants focused only on those with steady jobs. This is an inaccurate representation of the reality of most of the participants in this

study. Future research should focus on bridging the gap for a more thorough understanding of migrants' experiences of working while waiting at the border.

Unfair wages in Mexico can be a major challenge for many individuals and the families they are supporting. Notably, only three people in this study felt their earnings were enough for their basic needs. Ahmed, who reported working twenty hours per day, was not one of them. The extremely low wages (and sometimes, being denied wages as Celestina outlined) cripple migrant communities at the border and place undue stress on an already dire situation. Anti-migrant discrimination in the workplace can affect people's earnings, and because of the difficulty in obtaining a job in the first place, sometimes there is no choice but to accept exploitative wages. Casia makes the connection between discrimination and racism as a pretext to labor exploitation:

¿Aquí en México? Aquí en Mexico, la discriminacion existe tanto por racismo, no sé, como por la forma de hablar, la forma de uno ¿me entiende? Nos quieren ver cómo menos todo el tiempo. Y si nos dan trabajo, no nos pagan como es, sino que tal vez por una semana sacamos tal vez 400, 300 pesos a la semana por toda la semana de trabajo. Trabajando como es algo de 7 de la mañana a 7 de la noche y o sea, no está sonando razonable, ¿no? Porque pues, como quiera también tenemos derecho a trabajar y que nos pagan bien.

She describes that in Mexico, discrimination exists in conjunction with racism as well as for manner of speaking. She says they (presumably, migrants) are constantly seen as less-than. If they are given jobs, they are not paid how they should be. She says in a given week, they may receive a salary of Mex\$400 or even Mex\$300 for all that work. And this would be considering a workday of 7 AM to 7 PM. Casia then states that the amount is unreasonable, because either way, they have the right to work and to be justly compensated.

Casia expresses frustration that she is constantly viewed as inferior and not given fair opportunities in the workplace. The reality of the unfair compensation offered for her work indicates she is being taken advantage of due to her vulnerable position as a migrant waiting at the border. The combination of discrimination based on racism and manner of speaking clearly show anti-migrant biases in Ciudad Acuña that create a cycle of marginalization and inequality that perpetuates the struggles faced by migrants seeking a better life. Casia calls attention to the importance of addressing root causes of labor exploitation, such as discrimination and anti-migrant sentiments to create a more just and equitable community at the border that values the dignity and worth of all people regardless of their nationality or status.

Working conditions are poor for migrants at the border, that is, when they are able to participate in a paid activity. A majority of the participants (thirty-one people, or 54%) in this study did not hold a job, so there was no income for basic needs like food, shelter, or clothing. The most common reasons for their unemployment included those who looked but did not find a job, not having the necessary documents, and fear. When compared to the rest of the country's unemployment rate of 2.9% in February 2022 (INEGI 2023), the unemployment rate among Central American migrants is considerably higher. This could be due to lack of resources available to migrants by the government and discrimination perpetrated by recruiters and others in positions of hiring. It is imperative that these conditions change to serve these communities at the border. All individuals, regardless of status or nationality, have the right to fair working practices and the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families while waiting for their asylum cases to process.

HOUSING CAN MEAN STABILITY, OR MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENCOUNTER DISCRIMINATION: UNJUST CHARGES, UNLIVABLE CONDITIONS, AND DIFFICULTY FINDING HOUSING

Among the first questions migrants ask themselves when they first arrive at the border is "Where will I sleep tonight?" Just as securing a job while stranded in Mexico's northern cities is imperative for migrants to fulfill their basic needs, finding shelter is equally crucial and perhaps a more urgent matter. Many migrants arrive after an arduous journey that has drained them of their funds, and with little or no resources available to help, finding a place to rest can be a difficult task. They are more likely to be exposed to elements like extreme heat or cold, and also more vulnerable to physical violence, robbery, and extortion if found without a secure living situation.

Participants in this study reported various living situations including: twenty-five in a rented room in a house (44%), eleven in a migrant shelter (19%), ten renting an entire home or apartment (18%), and nine living with friends or family (16%). Additionally, two interviewees reported being homeless. Both declared they were previously denied housing. Candy, for example, was living in a tent provided by a shelter in Tijuana with their young daughter. They were previously denied housing due to their nationality, migratory situation, lack of documentation, accent or manner of speaking, gender, and sexual orientation. Housing is a basic need that is often difficult to obtain for almost half of the respondents in this study, as they often face discriminatory language and threats by potential landlords. Though most participants reported having shelter, anti-migrant attitudes severely inhibit the process of finding housing and living without burden at the border as a migrant.

Twenty-eight people (49%) mentioned they were denied renting a place to live in their time at the border for several reasons including: migratory situation (19), lack of documentation (19), nationality (14), and accent or manner of speaking (8). In the case of Alana, all four factors mentioned above contributed to her rejection for housing in Piedras Negras, plus, she says, her appearance and the color of her skin. When asked about her experiences facing discrimination, she explained:

Cuando uno quiere rentar un lugar, entonces la gente ve que, nos ve de donde somos y pues ya inmediatamente nos dicen que no. Nos dicen que no, que no- no hay casa y que no rentan para migrantes. Y nosotros por eso vendemos para sobrevivir, pero no nos dan un lugar.

When a migrant wants to rent a place to live, she says, people are able to identify where they are from and are immediately denied. They are told that there are no houses, and that they do not rent to migrants. She adds that the reason for selling goods on the streets is for survival, yet they are not given a place to live.

Alana's testimonial demonstrates the desperation a migrant can experience as they attempt to provide shelter for themselves and their families. Alana is only one example of those who have faced rejection and discrimination while attempting to establish a sense of normalcy and security for themselves and their families. It is evident that the refusal to accept migrant tenants is not based on their character or abilities to pay rent, because Alana explains she makes money selling goods on the streets. Instead, the decision to deny migrant renters is rooted in the very characteristics that come with being a foreigner. Anti-migrant discrimination is dangerous when searching for a safe place to live. The refusal to rent to migrants can put them in more vulnerable positions. They are forced to keep searching for any place that will accept them and at times, can lack basic living standards. After the rejection she faced, for

example, Alana found a room for rent in a house that unfortunately does not have electricity, hot water to shower, a refrigerator, a kitchen, or privacy for her and her son.

When migrants face denial after denial for housing, they can start to look for any place that will accept them with little regard to the place's living standards. Participants report their living conditions as follows: seven people (12%) do not have electricity, fourteen (25%) do not have a sewer system, forty-two (77%) do not have hot water for showering, twenty-four (42%) have no privacy for themselves and their families, thirty-eight (66%) do not have refrigerators, and twenty-five (44%) have no kitchen at all.

Sometimes, the spaces they share with others are cramped due to a limited number of landlords that rent to migrants. Ingrid, for example, rents two rooms in a house. She and her husband along with two daughters stay in one room, while her sister, cousin, and their children sleep in the other. Their rent is Mex\$1,000 per room, and she constantly questions her ability to afford the monthly dues. Ingrid is one of twenty-six respondents (46%) concerned with their capability to pay rent, a burden compounded by the exploitative wages given to migrants in the workplace, and the inability to find work in the first place.

For those who reported paying rent, the amounts due range from Mex\$350–Mex\$6,250, with the average rent at Mex\$2,207.10. To put this into perspective, earnings of interviewees that hold jobs range from Mex\$400–Mex\$9,600 and an average monthly wage of Mex\$4,028.80. Though the ideal rent-to income ratio is no higher than 30%, clearly this is not the case with these communities at the border.

The effects of discrimination at the border also taint the relationship between landlords and tenants, leaving migrants to face constant maltreatment. Participants

reported a number of financial abuses by landlords. Nine people said they were overcharged utilities, five experienced excessive rent increases without notice, and six people said their landlords refused to give back their deposit upon ending their lease. Participants also reported neglect by their landlords; fifteen renters failed to receive a lease agreement, eight people had landlords refuse to make repairs, five said landlords entered their rentals without permission, and three were forced out by unjustified evictions. Additionally, tenants spoke of verbal abuses by their landlords. Ten people recalled inappropriate and aggressive language directed at them, and seven people's landlords threatened to call immigration or the police, essentially threatening deportation.

The effects of discrimination against migrant communities stranded at the border are dangerous. These experiences can lead to a cycle of poverty and marginalization that escalates their vulnerability. Central American migrants face extreme difficulty finding housing while waiting in Mexico's northern border, and when they do, there is a tendency by landlords to exploit their vulnerability. There must be a push for governmental protection of migrants waiting for their asylum cases in Mexico. Otherwise, it is possible they are no safer than when they were in the countries they fled.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated the far-reaching effects of discrimination at the border faced by Central American migrants waiting on the lengthy process of their asylum cases. While stranded, discrimination has psychological consequences that affect many

migrants in an already-vulnerable position. Distress affects the community networks of the targets of discrimination, fear of violence often is faced at the border not unlike experiences in the countries of origin left behind, and distrust in their environment calls for self-appointed isolation as a defense mechanism. Discrimination hinders access to services, namely education and health care. Working while waiting proves challenging, with the effects of discrimination fomenting environments of hostility, unfair wages, and the unfortunate label of "unhirable." Finally, obtaining housing is made difficult due to discrimination that plays out as unjust charges, unlivable conditions, and challenges finding a place to live.

The instances of discrimination relayed through conversations with study participants show that these are not just isolated incidents. A negative encounter with a neighbor, another with a healthcare worker refusing services, and a separate incident with a landlord threatening to call immigration enforcement all contribute to the overall quality of life of the individuals receiving this type of treatment. Discrimination affects just about all facets of the Central American asylum seeker experience at the border.

The violence responsible for their decision to flee their countries tends to be replicated while Central American migrants wait for safety. It is not unreasonable to ask for a safer place than that which they fled. Every person is worthy of security. Additionally, perpetual discrimination against Central American migrants stranded at the border can further push them to the margins of a society in which they are rootless, and already outsiders, already vulnerable.

These factors expose the urgent need for policies that prioritize the protection of vulnerable communities in Mexico. These policies must consider the unique challenges

faced by migrants: their limited resources, lack of access to legal support, and cultural barriers. If policymakers prioritize the safety of migrants and create effective means of access to basic needs (food, shelter, jobs, a sense of community), it may be possible for them to navigate the asylum process safely.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

Race is not real. So why does this matter? It has long been exposed by researchers as an illegitimate human categorization tool, both by scientific (REGWG 2005; Thompson 2005) and sociological standards (Omi & Winant 2015; Smaje 1997). It is weightless in a biological sense, its basis constructed with no validity. So, why debate the concept of race if it is not real?

Race cannot be dismissed as a mere fabrication because its importance in building social categories *is* real. Further, its role in the classification of humans perpetuates hierarchies and inequalities between them. As sociologists William I. Thomas and Dorothy S. Thomas explained, "The subject's view of the situation, how he regards it, may be the most important element for interpretation... If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (1928, p. 572).

This thesis explores the complexities of racialization as applied to Central American asylum seekers who have been forcibly stranded at the border in recent years. These communities are affected by a variety of political and social systems that place them at a great disadvantage in achieving a fair quality of life. Their shared experiences demonstrate the ways racialization affects their ability to establish a life when battling labels like "outsider" or "other." I focus my study around two main questions: 1) In what ways are Central Americans forced to wait at the northern Mexico border racialized? and 2) How does racial and national origin discrimination affect Central American asylum seekers forced to wait at the northern Mexico border?

Chapter 2 examines the traits on which Central American asylum seekers face discrimination, which I describe as an effect of racialization, answering the first thesis

question. I compare with findings from previous studies that focus on racialization in Latin America and find notable differences among our arguments. Dixon and Telles (2017) find that the process of racialization is primarily carried out in Latin America by phenotype and skin color. In this study, these two physical attributes also tend to be traits by which Central American asylum seekers are racialized at the border, but other systems affect processes of racialization at a larger scale. Nationality, being a migrant despite some having regular status, and accent or manner of speaking have a greater impact on the ways Central American asylum seekers are racialized at the border.

In Chapter 3, I identify the groups responsible for carrying out mistreatment of racialized Central American asylum seekers. I find that mistreatment is inflicted on those stranded at the border by a variety of actors, namely Mexican authorities, the general public, organized crime groups, and immigration enforcement officials. These groups exercise abuse of power (whether official or otherwise) that present as extortion, verbal abuse, and physical assault, which I call weapons of oppression. However, I find it difficult to definitively recognize those that are indeed part of Mexican authorities, the general public, or organized crime groups. Perpetrators can blur the lines between groups as a strategy of leveraging unchecked power imbalances to their advantage. It is imperative that we acknowledge limitations like these as we work toward addressing the root causes of mistreatment at the border.

Chapter 4 examines the repercussions of discrimination, an effect of racialization, perpetrated by the actors discussed in the preceding chapter. I concentrate on the second research question concerning the impacts of racial and national origin discrimination against Central American asylum seekers trapped at the northern Mexico

border. Through my analysis, I contend that discrimination not only inflicts significant psychological harm on these communities, but also obstructs their access to essential services like healthcare and education, equitable working conditions, and fair housing. I argue that discrimination perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and reinforces existing inequalities, exacerbating the challenges faced by these already-vulnerable populations. In order to solve these injustices, it is important to recognize the nuances that drive them and the degrees to which they affect other displaced populations.

Racialization of Central Americans in transit comes largely out of the political systems surrounding their migration. Harsh policies that bar some communities, but not others, are responsible for creating a criteria that distinguishes an "ideal migrant," or the accepted one, from the unwanted one. The case of the white Ukrainian migrant seeking U.S. admission in 2022, for example, was treated with urgency. They were immediately classified as refugees which allowed for a (relatively) expedited entry into the United States. On the other hand, Salvadorans and Guatemalans have been fleeing civil war in their countries, and Hondurans have been escaping extreme violence, yet have always been considered economic migrants by the U.S. government and therefore subject to much less protection than those considered refugees (Colbern 2021, p. 62). This classification of the desirable versus the rejected reinforces the "architecture of repulsion" against select groups, as described by David FitzGerald (2019). The concept shapes the experiences of racialized communities in northern Mexico as they wait for a resolution to their immigration cases.

Alongside Central Americans, other groups seeking U.S. asylum during the last several years have been stopped at the border due to preferential immigration laws,

though their experiences during their wait have differed. The case of the Haitian asylum seeker in Mexico, for example, is painted with notions of what it means to be considered a "model migrant." Alejandra Díaz de León (2021) investigated the treatment of migrants in transit through Mexico and found clear definitions of the "good migrant." Similar to findings by Dixon and Telles, Díaz de León concluded that darker skin tone and those with phenotypic differences were markers of those excluded from the "good migrant" category, even among migrants themselves. Díaz de León found that Garifunas, Cubans, and Haitians in transit faced discrimination and were unable to form bonds with other traveling migrants.

However, anthropologist Darío Valles (2020) had conflicting results when analyzing the treatment of migrants in Tijuana. He compared the struggles of Haitian and Central American migrants who arrived in the border city during the last few years. He described the use of the word *Haitiano* as a blanket term for Black migrants in Tijuana. The word came loaded with several implications. First, it was used as a categorization tool to distinguish them from other asylum seekers stuck at the border. Central Americans, seen in a negative light according to Valles, were deemed unworthy of receiving aid in Tijuana. They were considered far from the model migrant. Second, Valles found that *Haitiano* was meant to describe an(y) ideal Black migrant at the border. The term was used also to identify African migrants from Cameroon and other central and western parts of the continent. This exposed Mexico's history of colorism and racist generalization of people (Valles 2020). Valles further finds the term a damaging one because in praising Black migrants as the "model," Central Americans are labeled the "unworthy alien," and stereotyped as criminals.

Along with the difficulties of fleeing one's country to be stopped at the border, asylum seeker experiences were painted by the challenges of a global pandemic. Del Monte and McKee (2021) explored discrimination faced by migrant groups in Tijuana as they related to the Covid-19 virus. They found that institutional racism is a key factor affecting quality of life for Central Americans and Haitians, in particular to the access to aid programs like food pantries. With social distance being key to slowing the spread of the virus, many migrant shelters decided to turn away newcomers to keep their residents safe. Del Monte and McKee estimated that overall, shelters in Tijuana operated at 40% capacity during the height of the pandemic. This became a time that intensified negative perceptions of both Haitian and Central American migrants as they were commonly blamed for the spread of infections (Del Monte and McKee 2021).

U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICIES PUSHING MIGRATION ELSEWHERE

Though the United States has long been considered a destination country for displaced populations, harsh immigration laws implemented during the Trump administration have had a profound impact on migration patterns, pushing many to seek refuge in Canada instead. From 2017 to 2020, almost 60,000 displaced persons were apprehended as they attempted to cross the Canadian border irregularly, avoiding official ports of entry (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2023). This sudden increase in irregular border crossings disrupted what were previously thought as organized migration programs in the country.

According to political scientists Mireille Paquet and Robert Schertzer (2020), this change is in part due to push factors like the restrictive Trump-era immigration policies

of the United States. Canada, with its reputation of welcoming immigrants, has become an attractive alternative for those in search of a new home. However, the sudden rise of irregular border crossings has also been a source of concern, highlighting the need for immigration policy reform in Canada and a look at the geopolitical causes of this change in migration patterns.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study reveals that the experiences of Central Americans in transit are shaped by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and political systems that contribute to their unique form of racialization. Referred to by Omi and Winant (2015) as the raw materials of racialization, state and public attitudes and their subsequent actions (lawmaking, performing discrimination) towards immigration bolster each other and place Central American asylum seekers at a great disadvantage in achieving a fair quality of life while waiting at the border. The findings highlight that this phenomenon observed cannot be generalized to the experiences of racialization across Mexico. These factors also show the need for targeted protections to address this issue effectively. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the specific challenges and discrimination faced by asylum seekers from Central America waiting at the border in Mexico.

Political systems have historically played a significant role in perpetuating racialization through the implementation of exclusionary immigration laws that shape practices of social categorization. This is true not only within imagined borders and boundaries but has had an impact across nations. The most recent immigration laws

enacted by the United States have had particularly severe consequences for the safety and well-being of select populations. By design, U.S. policies have had the power to control the movement of people across borders. They have often used this power to create and enforce laws that prioritize certain racial or ethnic groups while marginalizing and excluding others. Rooted in racial bias and discriminatory practices, these laws have reinforced and perpetuated racialization by defining social categorization practices. It is important to work towards addressing these issues in order to provide safety for communities fleeing their home countries.

By acknowledging the distinct nature of the racialization experienced by Central American asylum seekers, policymakers can develop policies and interventions that address the unique vulnerabilities and barriers they face. Other than the obvious solution to eliminate these exclusionary immigration laws that force asylum seekers to wait at the northern Mexico border to begin with, recommendations involve creating legal frameworks, facilitating connections through the establishment of support systems, and implementing anti-discrimination measures that will make the process a safer experience.

The "U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration" detailed an agreement between the two governments that addressed "the dramatic increase in migrants moving from Central America through Mexico to the United States" (2019, p. 3). It was created upon the implementation of the MPP and detailed the measures each nation was to take in order to work together to address the matter. Some of Mexico's responsibilities included providing "jobs, healthcare, and education" to waiting communities.

It is imperative to ensure the thorough fulfillment of this aspect of the agreement in a more comprehensive manner in order to truly call Mexico a safe third country. This includes addressing the specific needs of these communities such as limited resources, lack of access to legal support, and cultural barriers. A missing component in the "U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration" (2019) is the role of the United States in providing aid to address the issues created by exclusionary immigration laws. It is an injustice to place the obligation solely on the Mexican government; the responsibility to address these issues should be shared. It must be the duty of the U.S. government to acknowledge its role in forcing this demographic change at the border and throughout Mexico. They must provide funds in order to carry out and expand Mexico's current infrastructure and institutional capacity to handle the current shortcomings and provide safety for newly arrived peoples while they wait for their U.S. asylum case proceedings. Once equipped with U.S. funding, it is imperative that Mexican government agencies focus on fulfilling these needs.

The Mexican government could implement know-your-rights campaigns and establish a system that facilitates information about resources available to asylum seekers near ports of entry. This could be a comprehensive online database in which to find information about necessary resources like healthcare providers, hunger relief organizations, continuing education, employment opportunities, and community involvement organizations. To make this database more reachable to its target audience, it is important to advertise the existence of this important resource in migrant shelters and other places commonly visited by newly arrived peoples. Periodically

updated booklets should be distributed to these establishments in order to facilitate ease of access to those without readily available internet connection.

Organizations must also focus on facilitating connections between migrant communities and their basic rights. For example, employment agencies can establish divisions that only work to link migrant communities with jobs. The same must be done with housing. Organizations like the Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR) should expand to have northern chapters at each of the ports of entry that cater to migrant communities along the northern Mexico border, including Central American asylum seekers. Expanding COMAR would mean that these communities are receiving the necessary assistance they require.

Currently, non-profit organizations like Al Otro Lado are providing admirable legal aid to these communities. Due to overwhelming demand however, they are incredibly overloaded, overworked, and unable to reach every client inquiry seeking an update on their case. It is the duty of the government to allocate funding to expand organizations such as these in order to alleviate their backlog, enabling them to provide these essential services to the thousands seeking assistance.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Racialization is a mutable concept across time and place. It has been recognized as such since its inception, and it is a safe assumption that its future is also ever-changing since the systems that support it will also shift. If racialization can be created and recreated, it can also be dissected, weakened, and perhaps even destroyed. In a

constant state of evolution, racialization can shift to create a better, more equitable place.

If societies can learn from Central American asylum seeker experiences now and attempt to lessen the burdens unjustly placed on them, the hope is that the future will have a fair chance at a quality of life. To get there, it is imperative to stop using immigration policies as weapons of exclusion and instead treat them like avenues by which to serve those in need. The United States is at times portrayed as "the land of opportunity" and the place "where all dreams come true." Maybe one day it can be.

Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus." 1883

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Información Básica

¿En dónde estás ahorita?

(Aviso: sólo podemos entrevistar a personas que actualmente se encuentran en México)

- Tijuana
- Tapachula
- Otra parte de Baja California
- Otro lugar en la frontera México/Estados Unidos
- Estados Unidos
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuántos años tienes?

¿Cuál es tu género?

- Hombre
- Mujer
- Trans
- No binario
- Otro
- No contestó / Prefiere no decir

¿Cuál es tu país de origen?

- Honduras
- Guatemala
- El Salvador
- México
- Camerún
- Haití
- Ghana
- Cuba
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

[Si el país de origen es México] ¿Cuál es tu estado de origen?

- Michoacán
- Guerrero
- Jalisco
- Oaxaca

- Chiapas
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿A qué grupo(s) racial(es) consideras que perteneces?
(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Mestizo
- Blanco
- Afrodescendiente/Negro
- Mulato/a
- Indígena
- Asiático
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuál es tu religión?

- Ninguna religión
- Católica
- Protestante
- Pentecostés
- Cristiana
- Evangélica
- Mormón
- Espiritualista
- Musulman / Islam
- Raíces étnicas
- Vudú
- Hindu, Budhista u otra religion de origen oriental
- Otra
- No contestó

¿Cuál es el último nivel de escuela que terminaste?

- Ninguno
- Preescolar
- Primaria
- Secundaria
- Preparatoria
- Escuela técnica
- Estudios superiores/universidad
- No sabe / no contestó

En tu último empleo en tu lugar de origen, ¿en qué área trabajaste?

- Agricultura
- Construcción
- Manufactura / fábrica
- Comercio / tiendas

- Otros servicios (ej. Restaurante, hospedaje, corte de cabello)
- Servicio doméstico incl. jardinería
- Jornalero/trabajo informal
- Profesionista (doctora, abogada, profesora, enfermera, etc)
- Ninguno/desempleado/ama de casa
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuál es tu idioma nativo/materno?

- Español
- Inglés
- Frances
- Kreyol (Creole, Criollo-haitiano)
- Idioma indígena (cuál?)
- Idioma africano (cuál)
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

Hablas algún otro idioma aparte de tu idioma materna?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cual otro idioma o idiomas hablas?

- Español
- Inglés
- Frances
- Creole (Kreyol, Criollo-haitiano)
- Portugués
- Idioma indígena (¿cuál?)
- Idioma africano (¿cuál?)
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué tanto hablas el inglés?

- Mucho/fluido
- Mas o menos
- Poco
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué tanto hablas el español?

- Mucho / Fluido
- Más o menos
- Poco
- Nada
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Has tomado clases de español?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

Familia y Redes sociales

Ahora hablemos de tu familia.

¿Cuál es tu estado civil?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- soltero(a)
- casado(a) por la iglesia / ceremonia religiosa
- casado(a) por lo civil
- unión libre
- separado(a)
- divorciado(a)
- viudo(a)
- No sabe / no contestó

Dónde está tu pareja o ex pareja?

- Aquí conmigo
- Otro lugar en México
- Estados Unidos
- En tu lugar de origen
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuántos hijos tienes en total? (número)

¿Cuántos de tus hijos tienen menos de 18 años? (número)

¿De tus hijos menores de 18 años, cuántos están ... ?

(Número. Entra "0" si ninguno.)

- Aquí contigo
- En los Estados Unidos
- En tu país de origen

Aparte de tu pareja o hijos

- ¿Cuántos parientes tienes aquí contigo?
- ¿Cuántos amigos cercanos?

Migración, refugio, y asilo en México

Ahora te preguntaré de tus experiencias como migrante.

¿En qué mes y año dejaste tu lugar de origen?

¿En términos muy generales, cuáles son las razones más importantes que te llevaron a salir de tu país de origen? Puedo leerte una lista si quieres.

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Pobreza o desempleo
- Falta de oportunidades educativas
- Unirme a la familia
- Violencia, extorsión, o amenazas por parte de pandillas o crimen organizado
- Violencia, extorsión, o amenazas por parte de la policía o el ejército
- Conflicto armado/guerra/guerrilla
- Opresión política
- Persecución religiosa
- Desastres naturales o de clima (terremotos, inundaciones, sequía, etc.)
- Violencia doméstica o de género
- Persecución por orientación o identidad sexual
- Falta de medicamentos / servicios médicos
- Desastre natural (huracán, terremoto, inundación, sequía, etc)
- Otra:
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Quién sufrió esa violencia, extorsión, o amenazas?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Yo
- Un hijo/a
- Un esposo/a o pareja
- Otro pariente/familiar
- Un amigo
- General / en el barrio
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Tienes miedo de volver a tu lugar de origen?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuando saliste por primera vez de tu lugar de origen, cuál era tu destino?

- Otro lugar en el país de origen
- Estados Unidos
- México
- Brasil
- Chile
- Canada
- Otro
- No tenía destino final
- No sabe / no contestó

Entre tu lugar de origen y tu llegada aquí, viviste en algún otro lugar por 3 meses o más?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿En qué país o países?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- México
- Guatemala
- El Salvador
- Brasil
- Chile
- Venezuela
- República Dominicana
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿En qué lugar(es) de México?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Tapachula
- Ciudad de México
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

En tu último empleo en el lugar en que viviste más recientemente (antes de llegar aquí), ¿en qué área trabajaste?

- Agricultura
- Construcción
- Manufactura / fábrica
- Comercio / tiendas
- Otros servicios (ej. Restaurante, hospedaje, corte de cabello)
- Servicio doméstico incl. jardinería
- Jornalero/trabajo informal
- Profesionista (doctora, abogada, profesora, enfermera, etc)
- Ninguno/desempleado/ama de casa
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuántos meses (o años) viviste en otros lugares, en total?

(Si te dicen años, calcula 12 meses x año)

¿En qué mes y año llegaste aquí (al lugar dónde estás)?

Alguna vez has tenido o solicitado algún permiso o estatus legal en México?

- Sí
- No (No tengo documentos/irregular)
- No sabe / no contesta

¿Cuál permiso o estatus legal tienes, tenías o estás solicitando?
(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Refugio (reconocido por COMAR)
- Residencia permanente (INM, vinculo familiar)
- Visa humanitaria
- Permiso de MPP
- Visa de turista (FMM)
- Permiso de trabajo
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Ese permiso lo tienes, lo estás solicitando, o ya venció?

- Lo tengo
- Lo estoy solicitando
- Ya venció
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Quieres solicitar algún permiso o estatus legal en México?

- Sí
- Quizás
- No
- No sabe / no contesta

¿Por qué no quieres solicitar permiso o estatus legal en México?
(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- No me siento seguro/a aquí
- No tengo ingreso estable
- Mi familia está en Estados Unidos
- No me tratan bien aquí
- No me aprobaron el permiso, refugio o visa
- Otra
- No sé
- No contesta

Alguna vez has sido deportado de México?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

Cuántas veces?

¿Alguna vez has estado en los Estados Unidos? (Incluso para pedir asilo)

- Sí
- No
- No sabe/no contestó

¿Tú has solicitado asilo en los Estados Unidos?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Quieres solicitar asilo en los Estados Unidos?

- Sí
- Tal vez
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

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Cuando saliste de tu lugar de origen, ya tenías la intención de solicitar asilo en los Estados Unidos, o tomaste la decisión después?

- Sí
- Quizás (lo estaba pensando)
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Alguna vez te ha tocado esperar en la frontera México-Estados Unidos? Por qué programa? Te voy a leer una lista.

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- En la lista de espera (metering)
- En el protocolo de protección al migrante (MPP)
- La frontera estaba cerrada por Covid
- Te regresaron por Title 42
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe/no contestó

¿Alguna vez has sido deportado/a o retornado/a de los Estados Unidos?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

Cuándo te deportaron de Estados Unidos, en dónde te dejaron?

- País de origen
- Guatemala
- Mexico
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

Empleo y Apoyo económico

Ahora te voy a preguntar de tu situación económica.

Actualmente, ¿recibes algún apoyo económico de tus amigos o parientes?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

Actualmente, ¿realizas alguna actividad pagada?

- Sí
- No, ningún ingreso
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué actividad(es) pagadas realizas?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda.)

- ¿Qué tipo de trabajo o ingreso tienes?
- ¿Cómo encontraste ese trabajo?
- Construcción
- Agricultura
- Manufactura / fábrica
- Comercio / tiendas
- Call center
- Jornalero / trabajo informal
- Estacionamiento, autolavado, o gasolinera
- Restaurante, comida, hospedaje
- Servicios de belleza (estética, uñas, trenzas, corte de pelo, maquillaje, etc)
- Otro servicio: limpieza, cuidando a niños, guardia de seguridad
- Venta de ropa o accesorios
- Venta de otros artículos en la vía pública
- Profesionista (enfermera, etc)
- Pido dinero en la vía pública
- Autoempleo
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué tipo de trabajo o ingreso tienes?

- Fijo (empleado/ asalariado)
- Por día (jornalero)
- Por obra, por mi cuenta o de manera ocasional
- Venta de cosas
- Otro:
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cómo encontraste ese trabajo?

- amigos o gente conocida
- un albergue

- una organización de sociedad civil
- una agencia internacional (ACNUR, OIM)
- un programa de gobierno
- en la calle
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

La semana pasada, ¿cuántos

- días trabajaste?
- horas trabajaste por día?

¿La semana pasada, cuánto ganaste aproximadamente en toda la semana?
(Elige pesos o dólares)

¿Cuentas con las siguientes prestaciones de ley?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Pago de tu salario a tiempo
- Horario laboral fijo
- Día(s) de descanso
- Días de asueto (días feriados o no laborales)
- Seguro Social
- Vacaciones
- Prima vacacional
- Aguinaldo
- Ninguno
- No sabe/ no contestó

¿La cantidad de dinero que ganas es suficiente para las necesidades básicas tuyas y de tu familia?

- Sí
- Solo una parte
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

Anteriormente, ¿has estado desempleado aquí (en dónde estás)?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuántos meses has estado sin ingresos?

¿Por qué estás o estuviste desempleado/a?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Busqué, pero no encontré
- Busqué pero me negaron
- No sabía como encontrar

- No tengo los documentos necesarios
- Discriminación/racismo
- Mi acento o manera de hablar español
- Por no hablar español
- Tengo que cuidar a mis hijos u otra persona
- La pandemia de Covid
- Enfermedad o condición de salud, o salud mental
- Miedo o inseguridad.
- Falta de tiempo
- Prefiero no trabajar
- Otra razón
- No sabe / no contestó

En el último mes, ¿has recibido dinero, hospedaje, comida, ropa, u otro apoyo de una organización aquí?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿De cuál organización u organizaciones recibiste esa atención o acompañamiento?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Albergue
- Organización comunitaria / sin fines de lucro (Al Otro Lado, Espacio Migrante, Haitian Bridge Alliance, Centro 32, etc)
- Institución del gobierno Mexicano (DIF, Desarrollo Social, etc)
- Agencia Internacional (ACNUR, OIM, UNICEF, etc)
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

Qué te dieron? (marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Dinero o tarjeta de débito (monedero electrónico)*
- Alojamiento / vivienda
- Comida
- Cosas personales: ropa, de higiene, etc
- Medicamento, servicios de salud
- Cosas de bebe/niño: pañales, leche, etc
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

Vivienda y Alimentación

Ahora te haré algunas preguntas sobre tu vivienda y alimentación.

Actualmente, ¿qué tipo de vivienda tienes?

- Departamento o casa completa, rentada
- Cuarto rentado en una casa

- Cuarto en un hotel u hostal
- Un albergue
- En la casa de familia, amigos o personas conocidas
- En la calle o espacio público
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuántos meses llevas en tu vivienda actual?

En tu vivienda, ¿cuál de estos servicios tienes regularmente?

Te voy a leer una lista. Avísame si aplica.

- Agua caliente para bañarse
- ¿Cuánto pagas cada mes de renta?
- (Elige pesos o dólares. 0 si no paga renta)
- ¿Te preocupa tu capacidad para pagar la renta?
- ¿Alguna vez te han negado rentar una vivienda aquí?
- Agua para beber
- Drenaje
- Luz
- Espacio privado para ti y tu familia
- Una cama para cada persona
- Cocina donde puede cocinar
- Refrigerador donde puede guardar comida
- Internet
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuánto pagas cada mes de renta?

(Elige pesos o dólares. 0 si no paga renta)

¿Te preocupa tu capacidad para pagar la renta?

- No
- A veces
- Sí
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Alguna vez te han negado rentar una vivienda aquí?

- Sí
- No
- No he intentado rentar
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Por qué motivo(s) te negaron rentar una vivienda, si es que sabes?

(Marque toda lo que corresponda)

- Color de piel, apariencia u origen étnico-racial
- Nacionalidad

- Situación migratoria, falta de documentos, etc.
- Género
- Orientación o identidad sexual
- Acento o manera de hablar
- Por no hablar español
- Otro
- No sabe/no contestó

Alguna vez, ¿tu casero aquí ha hecho las siguientes?

Te voy a leer una lista. Avísame si aplica.

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- No te dio un contrato de arrendamiento
- Te desalojó injustificadamente
- Te cobró servicios injustificados (luz, agua, internet)
- Te subió la renta excesivamente o sin avisar
- Te amenazó con llamar a migración/policía
- Entró a tu vivienda sin permiso
- Se negó a hacer reparaciones
- Se negó a regresarte tu depósito
- Hizo comentarios despectivos o inapropiados hacia tí o hacia las personas con quienes compartes vivienda
- Usó lenguaje inapropiado o violencia
- Ninguno (me han tratado bien)
- No sabe / no contestó

Esta semana, ¿tú y tu familia tuvieron comida suficiente?

- Sí, todos en mi familia
- Sí, algunos de mi familia
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

El mes que viene, ¿te preocupes que tú y/o tu familia no recibirán la suficiente comida?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Recibes alguno de tus alimentos de forma gratuita? (en comedores, despensas, tarjetas, etc)

- Sí
- A veces
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Por qué no has recibido comida gratuita?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- No lo conocía
- Es difícil llegar
- Los horarios no me convienen
- Porque me siento mal / estigma
- Discriminación por parte de las organizaciones que brindan la comida
- No me parece adecuado lo que ofrecen (por cultura, religión, o salud)
- No me gusta su comida
- No lo necesito
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

Educación y Guardería

Ahora te haré algunas preguntas sobre la educación

Tus hijas/os han recibido algún tipo de educación aquí (incluyendo tutorías, clases o asistir a la escuela)?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué nivel de educación han recibido?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Preescolar
- Primaria
- Secundaria
- Preparatoria
- Tutoría
- Educación no escolarizada
- Universidad / Estudios Superiores
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué tipo de servicio educativo era?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Presencial
- En línea
- Mixto
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Quién te ofreció estos servicios educativos?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Escuela pública
- Escuela privada
- ONG u otra organización
- Agencia internacional (ACNUR, OIM, UNICEF)

- Familiares, amistades, miembros de la comunidad
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuál es la situación actual de la educación de tus hijos?
(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Están tomando clases presenciales
- Están tomando clases en línea
- Están siendo autodidactas (con materiales de apoyo)
- No están tomando clases
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Alguna vez les han negado a tus hijos acceso a la escuela en México?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe/no contestó

¿Por qué motivo les han negado acceso a la escuela?
(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Apariencia, origen étnico-racial, o color de piel.
- Por su nacionalidad
- Por su situación migratoria, documentos migratorios, etc.
- Falta de documentos del país de origen
- Problemas de validación de estudios
- Falta de cupo en las escuelas
- Por su acento o manera de hablar el español
- Por no hablar bien el español
- Por su género
- Por su orientación o identidad sexual
- Otra
- No sabe/no contestó

¿Has tenido alguna otra dificultad para inscribir a tus hijos en la escuela?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contesta

¿Qué dificultad(es) has tenido?
(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Falta de recursos para gastos
- Falta de internet o computadora
- Los hijos tienen que trabajar o prefieren trabajar
- La escuela está lejos
- Falta de transporte
- Inseguridad, miedo

- No conocer el proceso
- No hablar bien el español
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Alguna vez has intentado inscribirte a ti mismo/a en la escuela en México?

- Sí
- No
- No sé / no contestó

¿Alguna vez te han negado a tí acceso a la escuela en México?

- Sí (me han negado)
- No
- No contestó

¿Por qué te han negado acceso a la escuela?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Problemas de validación de estudios
- Apariencia, origen étnico-racial, o color de piel.
- Por nacionalidad
- Por situación migratoria, documentos migratorios, etc.
- Falta de documentos del país de origen
- Por género
- Por orientación o identidad sexual
- Por acento o manera de hablar el español
- Por no hablar bien el español
- Falta de cupo
- Otra
- No sabe/no contestó

¿Has tenido alguna otra dificultad para inscribirte a ti mismo/a en la escuela?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué dificultad(es) has tenido?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Falta de recursos para gastos de inscripción o colegiatura
- Falta de internet o computadora (en la pandemia)
- I need or prefer to work
- La escuela está ubicada muy lejos
- Falta de transporte
- Inseguridad, miedo
- No conocer el proceso
- No hablar bien el español
- Otra

- No sabe / no contestó

Actualmente, ¿cuentas con apoyo con el cuidado de tus hijos/as?

- Sí
- A veces
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Quién te apoya con el cuidado de tus hijos/as?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Un servicio público (de gobierno) / Guardería pública (IMSS)
- Un servicio privado / guardería privada (con costo)
- Una ONG u otra organización comunitaria
- Una agencia internacional
- Un albergue
- Familiares/parientes, amigo(s) o persona(s) conocida(s)
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

Salud física y salud mental

A continuación preguntaré de tu salud.

Actualmente, ¿tienes alguna condición de salud física o salud mental?

- No / ninguna
- Sí (especifica si quieres)
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cómo te ha afectado económicamente o en tu vida diaria?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- No me afecta
- Movilidad limitada
- Necesito cuidado especial
- Gastos económicos
- No puedo trabajar
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cuántas veces has recibido atención médica aquí?

(0 si ninguna)

¿Dónde has recibido este servicio?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Consulta médica privada
- Servicio público INSABI (Seguro Popular - Hospital General)
- Derechohabiente del IMSS, ISSSTE u otro, o a través de un familiar
- (derechohabiente por vínculo familiar)

- Organizaciones no gubernamentales
- Consultorio de farmacia
- Medicina alternativa (curanderos/as, hierberos/as, brujos/as, parteras etc.)
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Actualmente necesitas algún medicamento?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Puedes conseguir tu(s) medicamento(s) de forma regular?

- Sí
- A veces
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Dónde consigues tu(s) medicamento(s)?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- La farmacia
- Mi médico
- Una ONG u organización no lucrativa
- Una Agencia Internacional (ACNUR, OIM)
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Alguna vez te han negado la atención médica aquí?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe/no contestó

¿En dónde te negaron la atención médica?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Un hospital o una clínica pública
- Un hospital privado, clínica privada
- Una organización de la sociedad civil
- Un consultorio de farmacias
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Por qué razón te negaron la atención médica, si es que sabes?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- No había espacio
- No tenían servicio
- Era un centro Covid
- Nacionalidad

- Apariencia / color de piel
- Falta de documentos migratorios
- No hablar español
- No tener seguro médico
- Otra
- No sabe/no contestó

Ahora te voy a preguntar sobre tu salud mental. Sólo contesta si quieres.

¿Alguna vez tú o alguien de tu familia ha tenido acceso a apoyo psicológico aquí?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿De dónde recibiste apoyo psicológico?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Institución pública
- Institución privada (de paga)
- Organización de la sociedad civil
- Organización internacional (ACNUR etc)
- Otra
- No sabe/ no contestó

¿Cuántas veces has recibido esa terapia?

¿Por qué no has recibido apoyo psicológico aquí?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- No necesito/no quiero
- No sé que servicios hay
- No sé como o dónde buscar apoyo psicológico
- No tengo dinero para pagar la consulta
- No tengo transporte
- El psicólogo no habla mi idioma
- El psicólogo no entiende mi cultura
- El psicólogo no atiende a personas de mi país
- Hay que esperar demasiado tiempo por una cita o consulta
- Otra
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Te interesaría obtener algún tipo de apoyo psicológico si estuviera disponible?

- Sí
- No
- Tal vez
- No sabe / no contestó

Discriminación

Ahora quisiera preguntarte sobre tus experiencias en México.

Al llegar a México, ¿sabías que los migrantes tienen algunos derechos en México?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

Al llegar a México, ¿sabías que los niños migrantes tienen derecho de ir a la escuela?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Cómo te enteraste que tenías derechos en México?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Familiares o amigos
- Redes sociales (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- Las autoridades mexicanas
- ONGs u organizaciones no lucrativas
- Organismos internacionales
- Las noticias
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

En tu opinión, ¿Cuánto se respetan los derechos de los extranjeros en México?

- Mucho
- Algo
- Poco
- Para nada
- No sabe/no contestó

Se dice que una persona es discriminada cuando es tratada de manera desfavorable debido a sus características personales.

¿En México, consideras que has sido discriminada(o) por alguno de las siguientes razones? Te voy a leer una lista y me avisas si aplica.

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Color de piel
- Origen étnico / racial
- País de nacimiento (nacionalidad)
- Lenguaje o por no hablar español
- Forma de hablar (acento)
- Situación migratoria / documentos migratorios
- Peso o altura
- Forma de vestirse o arreglarse (tatuajes)
- Condición económica

- Lugar donde vive
- Creencias religiosas
- Por su sexo o identidad de género
- Edad
- Orientación sexual
- Ideas políticas
- Discapacidad (física o mental)
- Otro
- No considero que he sido discriminado
- No sabe/no contestó

Se puede enfrentar discriminación en diferentes lugares. Te voy a leer una lista y dime si has experimentado discriminación en ese lugar desde llegar a Tijuana. Alguna vez has tenido dificultades o te han negado un servicio aquí (en tu ciudad actual) por tu acento o forma de hablar?

- Tu trabajo
- Tu escuela
- Tu familia
- Los servicios médicos (consultorios, clínicas u hospitales)
- Alguna oficina de gobierno
- Algún organización de la sociedad civil
- Algun negocio, centro comercial, o banco
- La calle o el transporte público
- Las redes sociales
- Otra
- Ninguno

¿Alguna vez has tenido dificultades o ten han negado un servicio aquí (en tu ciudad actual) por tu acento o forma de hablar?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿En cuál institución te negaron servicio?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Servicios de salud
- Educación
- Registro Civil
- Trámites - RFC, CURP, licencia de manejar, otro.
- Trámites migratorios - INM, COMAR.
- Organización no lucrativa / ONG / albergue / etc
- Organización internacional como ACNUR, etc
- En el trabajo
- En una tienda/mercado
- Otro
- No / ninguno

- No sabe/ no contestó

¿Alguna vez has tenido que modificar tu acento en México para evitar la discriminación?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe/no contestó

Seguridad y trato en México

Ahora te preguntaré de otras experiencias en México. No es obligatorio contestar si no quieres.

En el camino desde entrar en México hasta llegar aquí a esta ciudad, ¿encontraste algún maltrato físico, verbal, o económico por parte de los siguientes grupos:

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Autoridades mexicanas
- Grupos criminales
- Gente regular mexicana
- Sí, pero no sé quién
- No quiero contestar
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Por parte de las autoridades Mexicanas cuál de los siguientes te tocó?

- Burlas, desprecios, insultos o gritos
- Discriminación, racismo
- Amenazas o intimidación
- Agresión física o violencia (empujones, golpes, etc)
- Agresión con armas
- Agresión sexual o violación
- Secuestro
- Robo
- Extorsión
- Fraude
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Sabes qué tipo de autoridad te hizo eso en el camino?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Policia
- Guardia nacional
- Autoridades de migración / INM
- Ejército o algo parecido
- Otro
- No sé

- No contestó

Por parte de los grupos criminales en el camino, ¿cuál de los siguientes te tocó?

- Burlas, desprecios, insultos o gritos
- Discriminación, racismo
- Amenaza o intimidación
- Agresión física
- Agresión con armas
- Agresión sexual o violación
- Secuestro
- Robo
- Extorsión
- Fraude
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

Desde que llegaste aquí (a esta ciudad), has encontrado algún maltrato físico, verbal, o económico por parte de los siguientes grupos:

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Autoridades Mexicanas
- Autoridades de los Estados Unidos
- Grupos criminales
- Gente regular mexicana
- Sí, pero no sé quién
- No quiero contestar
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

Por parte de las autoridades Mexicanas en esta ciudad, ¿cuál de los siguientes te tocó?

- Burlas, desprecios, insultos o gritos
- Discriminación, racismo
- Amenazas o intimidación
- Agresión física o violencia (empujones, golpes, etc)
- Agresión con armas
- Agresión sexual o violación
- Secuestro
- Robo
- Extorsión
- Fraude
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Sabes qué tipo de autoridad te hizo eso aquí?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Policía
- Guardia nacional
- Autoridades de migración / INM
- Ejército o algo parecido
- Otro
- No sé
- No contestó

Por parte de los grupos criminales en esta ciudad, ¿cuál de los siguientes te tocó?

- Burlas, desprecios, insultos o gritos
- Discriminación, racismo
- Amenaza o intimidación
- Agresión física
- Agresión con armas
- Agresión sexual o violación
- Secuestro
- Robo
- Extorsión
- Fraude
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

Por parte de las autoridades de los Estados Unidos, cuál de los siguientes te tocó?

- Burlas, desprecios, insultos o gritos
- Discriminación, racismo
- Amenaza o intimidación
- Agresión física
- Agresión con armas
- Agresión sexual o violación
- Secuestro
- Robo
- Extorsión
- Fraude
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Alguna vez te ha detenido la policía municipal aquí?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Por qué fuiste detenido?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Infracción de tránsito
- Delitos en flagrancia (en el momento)
- Manejar alcoholizado(a) o bajo la influencia de droga
- Nacionalidad, apariencia, u otra discriminación
- En un retén/por inspección policiaca rutinaria
- No traer identificación
- Otro motivo
- Ninguna razon
- No sabe
- No contestó

¿Cuál fue el desenlace de esa detención?

(Marque todo lo que corresponda)

- Una multa
- Un soborno/"Mordida"
- Tiempo detenido
- Amenazas de deportación
- Deportación
- Otro
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Durante la detención, fuiste maltratado/a físicamente o psicológicamente?

- Si
- No
- No sé

Orientación legal y planes

Desde que llegaste a esta ciudad, ¿Alguna vez has recibido algún apoyo o asesoría legal para tu caso de asilo en los Estados Unidos o en México?

- Sí
- No
- No sabe / no contestó

¿De quién(es) recibiste/recibías asesoría legal?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Organización de sociedad civil (ONG) como Al Otro Lado, Espacio Migrante, HIAS, AAMX, JFS
- Organismos Internacionales como ACNUR, OIM
- Un/a abogado/a independiente
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Qué tipo de apoyo legal o asesoría recibiste/recibías?

- Información sobre el proceso de asilo en México
- Información sobre el proceso de refugio en México
- Representación legal
- Apoyo en llenar documentos
- Otro
- No sabe / no contestó

¿Desde que te fuiste de tu lugar de origen, de quien(es) has recibido información sobre el asilo en los Estados Unidos y/o refugio en México?

(Marca todo lo que corresponda)

- Familiares
- Amigos y/o conocidos
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Otras redes sociales
- Noticias en televisión o radio
- Noticias en Internet
- Noticias impresas
- Abogados/as
- Autoridades Mexicanas (INM, etc)
- Autoridades Estadounidenses
- ONGs u organizaciones no lucrativas
- Organismos internacionales
- Ninguno
- No sabe / no contestó

Si es que recibes asilo en Estados Unidos, ¿En qué estado quieres vivir?

(Si no sabe, deja sin respuesta)

En caso de que no te otorguen asilo en Estados Unidos, ¿A dónde te piensas ir?

- Ciudad de origen
- País de origen, otra ciudad
- Quedarme aquí
- Otra parte de México
- Brincar / cruzar sin papeles a los Estados Unidos
- Canada
- Otro
- No sé
- No contestó

APPENDIX 2: QUANTITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Nota a la entrevistadora: Elige las preguntas más relevantes a las respuestas anteriores. Elabora sobre lo que ya dijeron, y pideles que te cuenten sus historias en detalle. Por ejemplo, "anteriormente me comentaste que te había parado la policía aquí en Tijuana. Puedes compartir la historia de qué te pasó?" No hay que repetir preguntas y NO hay que seguir el orden aquí.

INFORMACIÓN SOBRE DERECHOS Y ASILO

- ¿Puedes compartir cómo te enteraste del asilo en los Estados Unidos?
- ¿Si prefieres ir a los Estados Unidos que estar en México, ¿puedes compartirme por qué?

TRATAMIENTO DE AUTORIDADES DE EE.UU.

- ¿Si ya has tenido alguna experiencia con las autoridades de los Estados Unidos, ¿Puedes compartirme qué pasó? ¿Cómo te trataron?

TRATAMIENTO DE AUTORIDADES EN MÉXICO

- ¿Puedes compartir alguna experiencia de cómo te han tratado las autoridades mexicanas? (ejemplos: con la policía, agentes de migración, o en una oficina de gobierno)
- ¿Puedes contarme qué pasó? ¿Cómo reaccionaste? ¿Cómo te afectó?
- Si has experimentado un delito en Tijuana, especialmente por parte de las autoridades ¿puedes compartirme de manera general qué fue lo que pasó? No es necesario que profundices.

DISCRIMINACIÓN

- ¿Me comentaste que has sido discriminado/a en Tijuana. (Ejemplo: servicios de salud, educación, vivienda, etc.) ¿Pudieras compartirme un ejemplo de qué te ha pasado?
- ¿Cómo sientes que esto te ha afectado?
- Me comentaste que has experimentado exclusión, rechazo, o negación de ____ servicio en Tijuana. ¿Puedes describirme qué pasó?

CREATIVIDAD Y GOZO

- ¿Puedes contarme de un momento en que te has sentido feliz - o de algo que has gozado/disfrutado aquí en Tijuana? ¿Qué estaba pasando? ¿Cómo te sentiste en ese momento?
- ¿Puedes compartirme qué haces para disfrutar de la vida aquí - sea arte, danza, música, deporte, lo que sea?

- ¿Qué crees que se necesita para disfrutar más?

CÓMO CAMBIAR

- ¿Cuál es tu principal preocupación en México?
- ¿Qué crees que se debe hacer para cambiarlo?
- ¿Qué cambios consideras son necesarios para la población migrante en México?
- ¿Qué puede hacer la comunidad migrante para mejorar su situación en México?

AGRADEZCA Y TERMINA

Muchas gracias por compartir esta información tan valiosa con nosotras/os/es. Con tu participación esperamos encontrar la mejor manera de apoyar a personas solicitantes de asilo y/o refugio en Tijuana.

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