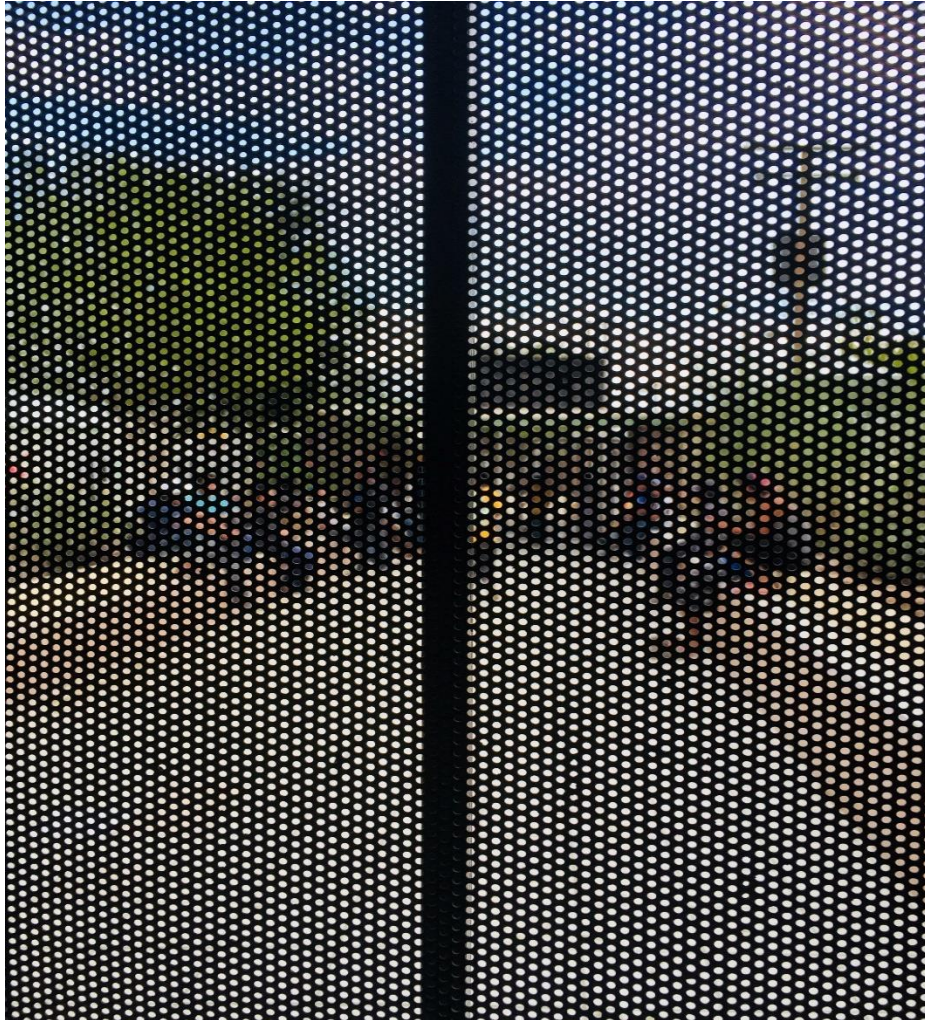


“Sometimes it feels like life is going on without me”:

An ethnographic study of violence, power, and migration
in a Mexican border town.



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Takk

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Maps



Map of Mexico¹.



Map of Mexicali².

¹ (Source: <http://geology.com/world/mexico-satellite-image.shtml>).

² (Source: <https://www.weather-forecast.com/locations/Mexicali>).

Chapter 1

Introduction

The sun was heating the streets as the migrants entered the shelter. Mexicali is located in a valley with the Rumorosa mountains ranging west of the city, blocking the winds coming from the Pacific Ocean, and making the climate unbearable during the summer months. Today it was fried chicken and beans for dinner. The men ate in silence, not saying much to each other. After dinner was over, I sat down with Luis. I remember Luis for his freckled face, and blue eyes. Luis had lived in the United States for 14 years before he got deported. He had crossed the border with his older brother when he was fourteen years old. They had crossed the border from San Luis (Rio Colorado³) and from San Luis they had made their way through the Arizonian landscape until they reached Phoenix where they were going to live with their aunt. When Luis and his brother had crossed the border they had to lie to the immigration officer, saying they were visiting Disneyland. Luis chuckles. "But our plan was not Disneyland, we wanted of course to stay there permanently". Luckily they had the tourist visa, which made the entrance into the United States easy, unlike many other who needs to jump the border fence by themselves at night, or pay a coyote⁴ to take them over the border. Luis tells me he has a wife and three children, all of the children born in the United States. "When they caught me, I just had to leave them behind. It took a month before they deported me. It is the hardest thing I have ever done in my entire life". Back in the U.S. he had two jobs and made sufficient money for himself and his family. The day he got caught by the immigration, he had been in Mexico visiting relatives, and he had made the terrible mistake of standing in the wrong line back to the U.S. The migration officers started asking him the questions about his (false) papers, and they soon figured out he was an illegal immigrant. Now Luis has been back in Mexicali for five years already, and he is waiting for the day he finally gets to go back to his family in the United States. In five years he can apply for tourist visa and then, he adds, he wants to apply for residence. It may take several more years, so he is being patient. Luis says life in Mexicali is not bad, he has a job and family members here as well, but of course he wants to be with his children, watching them grow up and be a part of their everyday life, as he once were. His life is where his children are. I ask him if he ever has considered crossing the border by himself.

³ San Luis Río Colorado - a city located in the state of Sonora, Mexico

⁴ A coyote refers to a human smuggler who brings the migrants over the border unauthorized

He answers yes of course, but he could never do that because that will ban him from the country forever. He wants to do it the right way, and apply for citizenship instead. Luis tells me he has heard of so many others trying to cross the border, but not making it. He doesn't want to be one of them. Now he is just focusing on one day at a time, because nothing good comes out of thinking about the life he once had and what he could have done different to not have been deported. "I once lived the dream, and one day it was suddenly taken away from me".

During my fieldwork in Mexicali I conducted several similar interviews with deported migrants from the United States and migrants coming from countries like Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, and also other parts of Mexico, coming to Mexicali to try crossing the border to the United States. In this thesis I seek to understand how migrants—both migrants from Mexico, Central-American countries and migrants deported from the United States—experience their stay in Mexicali- a city at the border between Mexico and the United States. I will examine how the political, physical and social liminality of being in transit shapes the way migrants become vulnerable to violence and corruption. Many of the migrants I met at the different shelters for migrants, had either just arrived in Mexicali from other Mexican border towns, other parts of Mexico or from Central-America or been deported from the United States. I argue that the migrants I met were on a constant journey, traveling from place to place in Mexicali and other border towns in Mexico, trying to find a way to cross the border back, or waiting for the time to pass until they could legally cross the border back to the United States.

It is estimated that around 400.000 people from countries like El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico try to cross the border to get to the United States every year. Although research on migration and transnationalism has focused on the cultural and material flows between sending and receiving communities (Brettell 2003), there is also a need for understanding the processes that happen while the migrants are in transit. I argue that transit migration are spaces where global processes are being played out at a local level. In this thesis I will focus on the political and social dimensions of transit spaces, and I also seek to understand the physical dimensions of migration. I argue that migration is not only a term to define a flow of movement between countries, but it is also an embodied experience of movement. I argue that ethnographic attention to the areas of inequalities, uncertainty, violence, and the future hopes the migrants have in transit, offer a lens through which to understand the social effects of historical and contemporary processes of structural violence and displacement in Mexico. I will in this thesis show how violence and discrimination against migrants is connected to larger processes that somehow weakens the possibility of people to live in their home communities.

Securitization, militarization, neoliberal governance⁵, and the recent intensity of drug and human smuggling are factors that trigger migration, and creating the conditions for violence to continue to flourish. The recent-day migration between the south and the north can therefore be understood as the current expression of centuries of exploitation of people in Mexico and Central America, where violence is crucial to profitmaking and exploitation. In this thesis I therefore use ethnography as a lens to understand the social effects of historical and present-day processes of economic reestablishment and social displacement as people migrate at the borderlands between Mexico and the United States.

I also seek to understand how the migrants are experienced by locals in Mexicali, how they interact with each other, and how the migrants coming from countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the ones getting deported from the United States, experience their everyday lives in a state of waiting. The United States-Mexico border is one of the most militarized areas in the northern hemisphere while, at the same time, it is one of the most frequently crossed borders in the world. These contradictions allow some people to benefit from economic opportunities and personal options, as they are free to cross the border, while others experience the border as a place of barriers and suffering. For some, the city is a modern city with possibilities, whilst others may perceive it as a buffer city on the way to the United States, consisting of migrants and deported migrants spending their lives waiting to cross the border back to the United States, or seeking other ways to try to cross the border back.

In addition to specifically analyzing how the migrants live their lives in Mexicali, I will analyze the concepts of borders and boundaries through empirical cases from Mexicali, and how the border impacts the lives of the deported migrants and the migrants coming from other parts of Mexico or “The Northern Triangle⁶”. To do so, I have been guided by a series of research questions.

- How are narratives used for inclusion and exclusion articulated and performed?
- What does it mean to be a deported migrant in Mexico, and how do they experience their situation in Mexicali?
- How do they experience violence and the Mexican state?

⁵ Neoliberal governance refers to the Foucauldian notion about how the “art of governing” is being formed by the transformation of liberal governmentality. Neoliberalism opposes as one of the main tenets of liberalism and shows how the political and social powers articulate themselves in order to form the market economy (Foucault, 2007: 120).

⁶ «The Northern Triangle» region in Central America constitutes of the respective countries; Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

- How do the migrants experience the time they spend waiting?

These questions are related to migration, borders and boundaries, and are general questions that might have been answered in any border city, but I will continuously put them in local context. The stories and experiences of migrants also provide a particular view of state policies and the work of state agents. A focus on the everyday lives of deportees and those fearing deportation makes visible the character of state actions. I argue that much of my ethnography demonstrates the potency of state power in everyday lives (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Building on insights from Blom Hansen and Stepputat (2001), I argue that there is a need for a rethinking of the state as a regulator of social life and a locus of territorial sovereignty and cultural legitimacy. “Ethnic mobilization, separatist movements, globalization of capital trade, and intensified movement of people as migrants and refugees all tend to undermine the sovereignty of state power, especially in the postcolonial world” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 2).

Methodological approach

The anthropological fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Mexicali. My main method was participant observation, including informal conversations, and both formal and informal interviews mainly at shelters for migrants in Mexicali. As I lived at the outskirts of the city, it took 20-30 minutes to reach to the different “albergues” (shelters) in Mexicali. At some of the main highways in the city, there were often migrants begging for money, and in this way I often came to speak with the taxi drivers about the migrants coming to, or being deported to Mexicali. I figured out that the taxi-drivers were good conversationalists and it often led to many informal conversations about topics like migration, politics, and the Mexican state. Through some of the taxi drivers I also got to a wider social network in the city as they would introduce me to friends of them.

I spent the first weeks at one shelter called Casa Ayuda⁷, while I was waiting for the other shelters I had been in contact with to answer if I could come and visit. I had read about Casa Ayuda in a Norwegian newspaper and found their contact information through a Mexican website. Casa Ayuda was located in the city center and around seven pm; migrants started to gather outside the shelter, waiting for the doors to open so that they could come inside and get a meal and a place to sleep. Because of its locality many of the migrants that recently had been

⁷ The name of the shelter is a pseudonym. I have chosen to anonymize the shelters in this thesis.

deported often found their way to this shelter, making it a busy house with a lot of people. I did however not spend much time at Casa Ayuda, because at night there were often a lot of crime in this part of town, and I also experienced that some of the men gathering at the shelter were in fact neither migrants nor deported migrants, but homeless or drug addicts, making it a place I chose not to spend much time at. After some weeks in Mexicali I got tired of waiting for replies, got into a taxi and visited some of the other shelters. In total there are five shelters in Mexicali, one of them only for women and children, and two only for men. The other shelters are for both men and women. After some weeks at Casa Ayuda, I spend the rest of my fieldwork at two other different shelters. Casa del Migrante and Albergue de Mexicali.

At the shelter for men; Casa del Migrante, I met Mike, who would become one of my main informants. Mike⁸ had been deported from the United States back to El Salvador twice. Now he was back in Mexico, spending his days working at Casa del Migrante and trying to figure out what he was going to do next. A few of the many other people I met at Casa del Migrante was Oskar and Eduardo. Through them I got insights in the everyday realities of being a migrant in a border town and also how life was at the shelters. At the shelters I also got in touch with different church communities, which invited me to different gatherings at their churches. I soon figured out that religion or a belief in a God was important to most of the migrants I met, and the church communities gave me valuable information about how they build their belief. I also got to know some of the men coming to the shelter trying to hire the migrants to work for them at their construction work places, and I got the chance to conduct interviews with them about how the work situation is, and how the working conditions at the big construction fabrics in Mexicali are.

At the shelter called Albergue de Mexicali, I met Savvas, who also became one of my main informants. Savvas had been deported three years ago and had lived at Albergue de Mexicali for three years. He was going to wait for another seven years until he could cross the border back to the US again. Savvas, a man in his fifties and one of my main informants, had been living and working at the shelter, «Casa Ayuda Para Inmigrantes» for three years. Savvas was also waiting for the years to go by, so he could re-enter back to “el otro lado”. «I have a son living in Seattle, probably the same age as you», he said. It had been three years since the last time he had seen his son, and he was sad that they hadn't been and visited him. Savvas had been caught by the police while he was driving under influence. They had found out that he was an undocumented migrant, and he got deported back to Mexico. Since both Savvas and

⁸ A pseudonym.

Mike were working at the shelters, I got insights in how it is to be at one place, watching the days go by, while waiting for your life to begin again.

My main method at the shelters was informal conversations with the volunteers working at the shelters and with the migrants that stayed there. Before I went to Mexicali I had thought that I would be doing voluntary work at the different shelters, but there wasn't much to do, since most of the shelters had a proper amount of volunteers already. After a while at the different shelters they would eventually ask for help, when they needed. I would for example help with cleaning up after meals, and washing floors, etc. However, I spent most of my days at the shelters talking with the people staying there. I was always welcomed to join dinner, so most of the conversation took place around the dinner table, or outside the shelters, while we were waiting for the dinner to be ready or waiting for the sun to set and thus making the climate bearable again.

In the beginning especially two of the shelters didn't quite understand my purpose for being at the shelters was, and some of the people staying there was rather surprised every time I came to visit. Since there were new men at the shelters every day, I would always get the question why I was there and if didn't get bored just sitting with them and talk every day. They couldn't understand why I would spend my time with them, asking questions, sharing meals and just sitting around watching the busy life outside the shelter. After a while they slowly began to accept my presence there and let me listen to their stories. However, I often had to start over again with building trust, because every week new people and new groups came to stay at the shelters. I tried to talk to as many as possible and most of them were glad to share with me their stories. Life stories can offer insights into both the particular and the more generalized dimensions of the way people make, experience, and express their lives. «The telling of stories, is one of the practices by which people reflect, exercise agency, contest interpretations of things, make meanings, feel sorrow and hope, and live their lives. Storytelling, the narrative presentation of self and culture (...) is a creative social practice». (Lamb 2001:28). Moreover, as the narratives recounted in this thesis show, the migrants interpret their individual life experiences within the context of the material and political conditions shaping their lives, offering valuable insights into how society is experienced, interpreted from those on the bottom rung of global socio-economic hierarchies.

During my fieldwork I visited other institutions, like a rehabilitation center for drug abusers and alcoholics, a workplace that hired deported migrants and a detention center in

Calexico⁹. I also found out that sitting by yourself at a café would make other curios about what you were doing all alone in a Mexican border town, and they would come over for a chat, and in that way it was easy getting a social network.

In Mexicali I stayed with a family which I found through the website; Airbnb. The family consisting of a grandmother, mother and daughter, rented out rooms in their house mainly to students coming from other parts of Mexico, looking for a place to live while studying at the local university; UABC (Universidad Autonoma de Baja California). There were another two Mexican girls staying at the family house during my time in Mexicali. The family and my other roomies, were in the beginning my main resource to get information about Mexicali and the situation with the migrants coming to the city. Through the family I also came in contact with staff/professors at the University working with similar issues, and they introduced me to friends of them which later on became good friends of mine, and which welcomed me into their homes. Through some of the family members and roomies in the casa I stayed at, I got in contact with others than migrants at the different shelters in Mexicali. Through Natalia, my roomie, I got to know Damian, a teacher at the University in Mexicali. Through him I got the chance to have informal conversations and interviews with professors at the University, and also with the consul at the Mexican consulate in Calexico, Unites Stated, as mentioned above.

The field and study participants

I chose to conduct fieldwork in Mexicali because the Mexico-U.S border, being one of the busiest borderlines in the world, has for a long time been a field of interest to me, and I wanted to duck deeper into the region. Mexicali is the municipality in Baja California and a border town about two hours away from Tijuana, located in a valley called Mexicali Valley, which is one of the largest and most fertile valleys in Mexico. The city has a long history of migration to the United States, a pattern of migration that got established with the beginning of the Bracero-program¹⁰. In Mexicali almost every person I met would ask me what I did there and why I would choose Mexicali to conduct my fieldwork. Mexicali is a relatively new city, only dating back to 1910, and it would almost look like someone just placed a city in the middle of Mexico's northern desert. Mexicali is known for its sunny and hot climate, and the city is often referred to as "the city that captured the sun". During the five months I stayed in Mexicali it rained only a couple of times, and the sky was always blue, making it a rather harsh place to

⁹ Calexico is the border town across the border to Mexicali.

¹⁰ The Bracero Program grew out of a series of bi-lateral agreements between Mexico and the United States in 1942, and allowed Mexicans to come work in the United States to on short-term, primarily with agricultural labor (braceroarchive.org).

stay during the summer month, with temperatures over 50 Celsius.

Because of its location close to the United States, Mexicali has been rapidly growing since the city was established, and the city's inhabitants are from all over Mexico. Today the City of Mexicali, together with the metropolitan areas, has a population of 900,000 thousand, and it keeps growing. Before, Mexicali was an important center for cotton production for export, but today the economy in Mexicali relies mostly on in-bond and assembly plants, also called *maquiladoras*¹¹ (Mirowski and Helper 1989).

Over the last 40 years, Mexicali and other border cities have witnessed political and economic shifts as a result of the implementation of both national and international agreements. An increase of migration to Mexicali from other parts of Mexico, and Central American countries, has created a need for housing, health care, and education. Mexicali among other Mexican border towns, have failed to meet these needs, and local residents have seen the need to create for themselves what the state has not managed to provide (Tellez 2008:545).

Because of the increase in migration to northern Mexico, and also an increase in deported migrants, the shelters in Mexicali are run by locals, and they rely on financial support from private actors and church communities. As mentioned earlier, I had had some contact with a shelter, called Casa Ayuda, before I arrived Mexicali. Casa Ayuda is run by the founder; Tomas, a deported migrant himself and was established two years ago, and it is a shelter where they can come for a meal and also stay for the night. After Tomas had been deported he had wanted to help other deportees, and started to collect money to buy a house he could use as a shelter. The house had before been a restaurant, and now it is a shelter where many migrants come to sleep every night. Because the first floor was too small to house all the migrants finding their way to the shelter, they had built a second floor. The second floor of the building was set up by poorly built walls and a roof. Tomas told me that all the things they had used to build it was from materials they had found at landfills or from private persons that had donated it to them. "I know it doesn't look good, but at least it is better than sleeping out in the streets", Tomas said to me. During my first visit to Casa Ayuda, lots of people came by to talk to the owner and also people that had lived there before stopped by to donate rice, bread or just to give Tomas a thank you for the help that he had given them when they needed it.

Albergue de Mexicali (shelter Mexicali), was another shelter I spent a lot of time at and is also located not far from the city center. Albergue de Mexicali is a relatively busy shelter and

¹¹ "Maquiladoras" are Mexican companies operating under a maquila program. The Maquila program grants the company the right to temporarily import materials without paying export tax on the products they produce. These products are manufactured in Mexico. They can be manufactured at much reduced prices and then exported and sold at a much higher price. (Mirowski and Helper 1989).

the people finding their way to Albergue de Mexicali can stay there as long as they want to, as long as they pay some Mexican pesos for each night. Albergue de Mexicali used to be an old sports hall, and the men staying there sleep on what once used to be a tribune. The roof of the building looked as it was going to collapse, and on top of it was also the home of thousands of pigeons; at least it seemed like it. Most men staying at this shelter was either working there as volunteers or had a job which made them afford their staying or food for each day. The shelter was run by two men, who defined themselves as “pastores”¹². In addition to offer accommodation, Albergue de Mexicali offers medical assistance, a job and also offers to pay 50 percent of the bus ticket to the migrant’s place of origin. Albergue de Mexicali also has an “ambulance” they used to drive and help the homeless living in the streets of Zona Centro in Mexicali. Together with the ambulance, they brought soup and medical assistance.

The shelter I stayed at most of my time in Mexicali, Casa del Migrante, is located a couple of miles outside the city center, making it a long way to walk for the migrants coming from the detention centers and train station, so they would arrive very tired, hungry and thirsty. Casa del Migrante is a little shelter with paintings on the walls and a garden outside. The rooms where the migrants slept are clean and tidy, with an air condition which was highly appreciated by the men who slept there through the summer months. It also has a living room with a big TV and training equipment’s which they can use. Every Thursday they also offered Anonymous Alcoholics –meetings, and every Sunday they go to church together. Every morning around 4.30AM, people from the different fabrics or maquiladoras arrive to pick up people staying at the shelter to work for them. At this shelter they can stay for a maximum of five nights, and every day, groups from different church communities comes with food and they sit and talk with the men that has made their way to the shelter. I often heard from the men staying there that this was the best shelter in Mexicali, and sometimes they would change their names, or wait long enough to come back, so that the volunteers working there would have forgotten their faces or names, and let them sleep there for another five nights.

When I first arrived in Mexicali, I wanted to focus on the Mexican nationals that had been deported to Mexico, after living for several years in the United States. However, as Peutz notes, “Deportee, like refugee, is a legal category that is applied to individuals in vastly different circumstances and for limited periods of time (Peutz 2006: 219). Indeed, after a while at the different shelters, I figured out that there wasn’t much dividing the deported migrants, and migrants that came to cross the border for the first time. They all had a common goal- to enter

¹² In Mexico I learned that anyone can become a “pastor”. Generally the title refers to someone who is also a priest, but in Mexico you can get the title by being elected as one by the people.

the United States. My informants therefore constitute a diverse group of people, who differ from one another in terms of age, national identity, gender, ethnicity and life stories. Most of my informants were migrants, both deported migrants and migrants that had been travelling through Mexico from Central-American countries, to try to cross the border to the U.S. Nationality-wise they constitute two main groups, Mexican migrants and Central-American migrants, most of them from El Salvador and Honduras. The majority of my informants had been deported from the United States, where they had been living and working without legal authorization or citizenship. Some of them had lived almost their whole life in the United States, and some had only been living there for a few weeks or months. Some had only managed to cross the border before getting caught by the border patrols. A few of them had just arrived to Mexicali to try to cross the border. Some of my informants was also not migrants from a country to another, but had moved from one place to another in Mexico.

Most of my informants had first migrated to the U.S when they were children, teenagers, or in their twenties and thirties. Many of them had lived in “el otro lado”, the other side, for many years, and/or had lived in Mexicali or other Mexican border towns for several years. When getting deported from the United States after staying in the country as an unauthorized migrant, you get banned from entering the country again for ten years. So, most of my informants didn’t have other opportunities than re-entering the country illegally¹³. Back in Mexico they hadn’t had the chance to figure out how to cross the border, or not enough money to pay a coyote, so they spent time in Mexicali waiting for the right time to cross the border back, or wait for ten years until they could cross the border legally again.

Challenges and ethical considerations

Before starting my fieldwork I thought I would have a certain amount of informants which I could use as my referents, but shortly after I arrived figured out that my original plan was a bit difficult to achieve. I thought that the shelters were going to contain people that were staying there for longer times. However, after arriving in Mexicali I figured that most shelters had a certain amount of time the migrants could stay until they had to leave, as mentioned earlier. The shelters were mainly a place where the migrants could get a free meal, a place to sleep and a place where they could rest after being held at detention centers and been deported, or after making their way through Mexico to reach to the north.

¹³ Unauthorized migrants staying in the United States for more than a year after their period of authorized admission, or had entered the country illegally, had to face a ten-year bar. This meaning that they were banned for entering the country for ten years, until they could apply for a green card and re-enter.

Trying to get to know somebody who was supposed to stay for longer times at the different shelters was difficult, since most of them traveled to other border cities or other shelters after their time at one shelter had expired, or tried to cross the border to the United States. Even though some of them got a job while staying at the shelters, they would only work until they had enough money so they could move on to another city, or rent an apartment in Mexicali. I often experienced that people I got to know would leave the shelters, without saying good bye, and in the beginning of my fieldwork I often went online to see if I could find some organizations or work places that hired deported migrants, or organizations that worked with migrants other than the shelters, so that I could spend more time with them. It was however difficult getting a reply at the mails I had sent and I figured out that the idea was a bit difficult to achieve. Therefore I didn't have the time to do in-depth conversations with the migrants that stayed at the shelters for short amount of time, and the men working at the different shelters as volunteers became my main informants. Also some of the men staying there had jobs and therefore afforded to pay a little amount of money for staying at some of the shelters, were also allowed to stay longer than the maximum limit, and in that way I had the possibility to have conversations with them over a long period of time.

I was also sometimes met with confusion at the different shelters in the beginning. Why would a foreign girl be interested in spending her time at shelters mainly for men? After a while at the Casa del Migrante, Mike told me that they often talked about the Norwegian girl doing fieldwork when I wasn't there. New migrants finding their way to the shelter would ask the others if I was from the "migra"¹⁴, or if I was a spy from the United States, and if I was reliable to speak with. I often experienced that it took some time before new migrants would speak to me, and often when I first got to speak with one of them, the other would gather around and join the conversation.

Another problem I had was the language barrier. Before I started my fieldwork I had taken some Spanish courses, both in Mexico and during a semester abroad in Bolivia in 2014, and I thought I could speak decent Spanish. However, the rapid speech left me confused upon arrival, and in the beginning I had a bit of a hard time managing to understand what my informants were saying. Luckily, many of my informants knew how to speak English because they had lived so many years of their lives in the United States. I was in the beginning always hoping that there would be some English-speaking at the shelters I could talk to. However, some of my informants did find it difficult to speak in English, and sometimes there were

¹⁴ «Migra» is a slang word for both the Migration Police in Mexico and the border patrols in the U.S.

confusion and misunderstandings, so I needed to improve my Spanish quickly. In the beginning, I spent a lot of time with my Mexican family, which some of the family members didn't know English and therefore I was forced to speak in Spanish.

In Mexicali I was also met with concerns from both members of the family house I stayed at, taxi drivers, and also from some of men staying at the shelters. They would often say that I had to be more careful when I was outside the house and at the shelters, and who I could talk to. I was however always upfront with what I was doing in Mexicali, even though my Mexican family told me to be careful with speaking to people I didn't know, and I was told to tell people that I was a family member and try not to act like a foreigner. In the beginning of my fieldwork I was a bit worried myself, but figured out after a while that being worried about the migrants in the city was a typical characteristic of the middle-class neighborhood I lived in. Consequently, people were curious about what I was doing there, and being open about what I was doing served as a good conversation starter.

Writing about migrants in a Mexican border town raises a number of methodological and ethical concerns. In this thesis I use a number of ethnic identifiers and therefore clarity about my terminological choices is important. In this thesis I will use the term «Mexican nationals» to describe people from Mexico, and «Central Americans» about people from Central America, in this case people from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras- as most of my informants was from these countries. Same wise I will use the terms «illegal» or «undocumented migrant» about the Central Americans living in Mexico unauthorized, and about those who cross the border unauthorized and/or live in The United states without having some sort of visa. I will use «deported migrants», about those who have gotten deported from the United States to either Mexico or another Central American country. Likewise, the term «migration» will be consistently deployed instead of «immigration», unless referring specifically to immigration law or policy. In this thesis I also use the words «deported» and «deportation», to reflect both formal removals from the United States, and «repatriations» or «voluntary departures» that result from unauthorized migrants signing voluntary departure forms, typically with U.S Border Patrols agents¹⁵.

To talk to people in a vulnerable situation was also a bit challenging during my fieldwork. Sometimes the people who found their way to the shelters had recently been exposed to violence or discrimination, or had just been through a deportation process. Talking to people

¹⁵ The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) repatriations include all removals and returns conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S Costume and Border Protection (CBP) (Homeland Security 2017:2).

that were going through a traumatic experience was hard, and being there as an anthropology student, asking questions made me sometimes feel like I was bothering them with banal questions when they obviously were having a tough time. I also often experienced that some of the migrants, didn't wanted to talk to me because they were too tired to speak, or didn't wanted to talk about their past. Some said it hurt too much talking about their future, and that they were trying to forget it and therefore it was sometimes difficult to have a conversation about their past. Or as one of my informants also said; "I don't like to think too much, because then I just start to miss my family".

Even though I didn't do fieldwork in small community where it is easy to recognize my study participants and the shelters I visited, I have chosen to anonymize them. I have chosen to use pseudonyms when I mention the individuals and the shelters throughout the paper. This because I want to protect the migrants that maybe has managed to cross the border to the United States, without the state's authorization.

Mexican immigration and the United States

To understand the experiences of violence, migration and inequality at the borderlands, a central part of this thesis is the migration history of Mexico and the United States. Early in the twentieth century Japan stopped sending workers to the U. S's mining, agriculture, and railroad industries, and as a result of the labor shortage, Mexican laborers was recruited to work in the United States. During 1920's there were over 650,000 Mexican nationals working legally in the United States. However, after the Great Depression, many Mexicans were expelled from the country. As I mentioned earlier, the Bracero program that was negotiated in 1945, gave Mexican workers access to temporary U.S. visas. Under the Bracero program, the Mexican immigration to the United States rose, and between 1945 until 1963, 50,000 Mexicans were immigrating each year. In 1965, the Bracero Program ended and the U.S government began to limit Mexican immigration, even though the demand for Mexican labor remained (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). In short, as a result of shifts in US immigration policy between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, Mexico went from annual access to around 450,000 guest worker visas and an unlimited number of resident visas in the United States to a new situation in which there were no guest worker visas and only 20,000 resident visas annually. By the late 1950's, a massive circular flow of Mexican migrants had become deeply embedded in employer practices and migrant expectations, sustained by well-developed and widely accessible migrant networks (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). As a result, when spaces for legal entry were suddenly curtailed after 1965, the migratory flows did not disappear but continued without authorization

or documents. Illegal migration rose after 1965 not because there was a sudden surge in Mexican migration, but because the temporary labor program had been terminated and the number of permanent resident visas had been capped, leaving no legal way to accommodate the long-established flows (Massey and Pren 2012:3).

Today more than 98 percent of Mexico's migrants live in the United States. Twenty-five percent of the Mexican adult population has visited or lived in the United States, and 60 percent has a relative living there (Fitzgerald 2008:6). According to the Pew Hispanic Center there were over 35 million Mexican Americans living in the United States in 2014- the biggest immigrant population in the US. Of them, 11.5 million are first generation immigrants, and about half of them (5.8 million) live in the United States without permission (Pew Hispanic Center 2017). These are also the group most directly targeted by the wave of anti-immigrant sentiments that, from 2010, produced a number of state-level laws intended to squeeze "illegals" out. Mexican nationals make up the largest number of individuals identified as "deportable". From 2001 to 2008 deportations of foreign nationals from the U.S was on the rise (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2016).

Irregular migration from Central America and especially from the "Northern Triangle", have been on the rise the last couple of years¹⁶. While migration from Mexico has decreased during the last couple of years, migration from the "Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras), has increased. In fiscal year (FY) 2015, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CPB), apprehended more than 239,000 migrants from the "Northern Triangle" (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2017:5).

However, during the last couple of years there has been a decline in migrants trying to cross the border illegally to the US and in deportations of undocumented migrants. In 2003 there were 88,236 deportations of Mexicans from the US, while in 2015 there were 40,394 deportations (Pew Research Center 2016). Mass emigration from Mexico has continued for more than a century. Such a long emigration has given rise to a wide range of official responses, from putting troops on the border to stop citizens from leaving to negotiate agreements, so that more Mexicans can exit through legal channels into the United States.

¹⁶ The increasing trend in Northern Triangle apprehensions began in 2008 for Guatemala, but the rate of increase averaged less than 15 percent annually through 2011; from 2011 to 2014, apprehensions of unauthorized migrants from Northern Triangle countries increased by 25 to 50 percent per year. After declining in 2015, Northern Triangle apprehensions resumed an upward trend in 2016 (Homeland Security 2017:2).

NAFTA and it's replicas

To understand migration from especially Mexico into the United States, it is important to mention The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA is a comprehensive agreement that sets the rules for international trade and investment between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, and came into effect in 1994 (Office of the United States Trade Representative). However, Mexico had adapted economic reforms to facilitate international trade agreements already since 1986, when the new ruling elite in Mexico, under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, successfully pushed the country into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Soon after the Mexican government made an agreement with the United States about establishing a continent-wide free trade zone, they had signed NAFTA and started the implementation process within two years. The idea was that by reducing restraints on trade, commerce between the three nations would increase (Hing 2010). The agreement was supposed to fix the problems of undocumented Mexican migration into the United States, as it was argued that economic development in Mexico would be enhanced under NAFTA and create jobs in Mexico, encouraging Mexicans to stay home. Hing (2010) claims that NAFTA, as a method of reducing undocumented migration, failed miserably. Rather, NAFTA has not resulted in increased employment opportunities in Mexico for Mexican workers, and U.S. employers continue to recruit workers and rely on low-wage workers from Mexico and Latin-American countries. NAFTA has helped to increase trade between Mexico and the United States, and over the past twenty years, trade between the two nations has increased more than eight times (Hing 2010). Since the agreement was signed in 1994, trade and investment among the three countries has tripled, and by 2011 Mexico had become one of the largest suppliers of goods and services to United States. However the increase in trade, has not led to more jobs for Mexicans at home. It is important to note that NAFTA has resulted in structural changes that encourage more labor migration from Mexico, where most of the low-wage jobs in the United States are being agricultural. Indeed, as this thesis also illustrates, the implementation of NAFTA has led to even more migration to the United States.

As NAFTA requires the relatively unrestricted movement of goods and services across the borders, it also opens its border for transnational criminal activity and drug trafficking, in particular. Managing the free flow of goods, while limiting the free flow of narcotics and criminals, is a central dilemma of the so-called war on drugs in the United States. There is also a need to mention the drug trade and how it impacts the people living in the border areas and rural places in both Mexico, and “Northern Triangle”.

Research on the U.S- Mexican border

The work on border- and citizenships studies is big and spanning areas such as history, law, and political economy and cultural politics. Borders are understood in a limited way as the strict territorial boundaries defining a nation state. Though there is a tendency to understand borders as physical places, border studies borders are also figurative spaces of identity, culture and community (DeChaine 2012). The anthropology of the borders and boundaries was developed as distinct field of research (Fassin 2011:214). Inherited as a tradition from Durkheim and Weber, borders were generally viewed as territorial limits defining national-states and its citizens, whereas boundaries were principally considered to be social constructs establishing symbolic differences between gender, class or ethnicity, and producing identities (Fassin 2011:214).

The border between Mexico and the United States has in anthropology been used as a metonym for the study of inequality, global economics, power and social differences (Heyman 1994). More than any other world boundary, the Mexican-US border has been a subject of rich academic dialogue and social science research (Alvarez 2005: 452). Alvarez (2005:449) argues that the Mexico-US has become the icon and model for research into other borders, as well as for the elaboration and refinement of the boundaries of several salient concepts and referents. Amongst these are culture, community and identity (Alvarez 2005:449). There is also a wide range of anthropology of the Mexican-U.S border which seeks to understand the lives of people living at the border regions between Mexico and the United States. The early ethnography about border regions is considered along with contemporary perspectives on reterritorialized communities and practices illustrated by Mexican migration and trans-border processes. Certain places, like border regions and export zones, are particularly exposed to changes in the global economy, increased regulation and militarization (Sassen 2014). Increased immigration enforcement and technology bound up with maquiladoras along the U.S-Mexico border shows how global economic processes are linked to repressive state apparatuses and violence. I suggest that the migrant journey in the borderlands of Mexico is an example of the way global economic processes, which are trade, labor migration, drug and human smuggling, and state/transnational militarization, intersect and shape specific spaces. The early anthropological work done at the Mexico-US border, perceived the border as a real and natural boundary, and defines the region as a historically and geographically continuous frontier separating the large culture areas of Central America and the southwest (Alvarez 2005:452). The view of the natural boundary encouraged and reinforced later images of bounded communities belonging to either the Mexican or the U.S. side of the border. The people living at the U.S. side of the border with

Mexican descent, were interpreted by US anthropologist as living in Mexican communities that were vestiges of, and in some ways carryovers from the natural frontier that had become officially separated by the political boundary (Alvarez 2005: 453).

There has also been applied work that has led to cross-border and interdisciplinary collaboration with Mexican anthropologists and sociologist, where they have worked on understanding Mexican and US cultures of the border region on problems of social impact on border communities and the problems of environmental contamination and control (Alvarez 2005: 455). There is also a wide range of literature in Spanish on the U.S- Mexico border. During my fieldwork in Mexicali, I was in contact with El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), a college located in Tijuana, which specializes on topics regarding the U.S-Mexican border. Mexican scholars have worked in interdisciplinary team, out of the border-state, and have been particular important in documenting history and life along the border (Alvarez 2005: 456). There is also a wide range of literature on migration to the US from Latin-American countries (Holmes 2013; Alvarez 2005; Boehm 2014, Heyman 1995, Hondagneu- Sotelo 1994, Massey et al.1993; De Genova 2005). From the anthropological study of migration along the border challenged existing views of border life, particularly the notion of separated cultures. Studying Mexican immigration and the undocumented migrants is illustrated in the important volumes focusing on immigration beginning in the 1970's- Anthropologists studied migration from the perspective of the actor and began to describe important social and cultural behavior in local situations (Alvarez 2005: 456).

State, power and migration

This thesis will deal with how it is to be a migrant in a Mexican border town and how the migrants living at the shelters, despite their country of origin, constitute a group of people who are constantly on a journey on their way to safety and a better economy for themselves and their families. I argue how neoliberal market policies and economic trade deals like NAFTA instigate migration from Latin American countries to the United States, making people migrate from their country of origin because of increased criminality, violence, and low wages. To discuss the questions listed above in the introduction it is necessary to clarify my overarching approach to understanding migration, power and state in a Mexican border town.

The concept of the state has been a focus in anthropological studies. In Gramsci's understanding, "state power emerged from the capacities, the will, and the resources of classes, or segments thereof" (Hansen Blom and Stepputat 2001: 3). Gramsci did not see the state as an executive of the bourgeoisie, as had been argued by older Marxist theories, but maintained the

foundational role of class power becoming realized in the form of a state. “Gramsci tried to denaturalize the state by pointing to its essential political, and therefore unstable, partial, and always violent character” (Hansen Blom and Stepputat 2001:3). I will also use Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and class to understand how and why violence against migrants appear as natural and inevitable features of the contemporary world. The Gramscian concept of hegemony must be understood as an ethical and strategic concept that tries to “articulate a coherent and consensual alternative to capitalist rule across the oppressed classes” (Munck 2013:3). Even though violence and discrimination against migrants is done by individuals or criminal groups, it is also a form of state violence, which is tied up to the transnational forces of power and it is also produced by processes of globalization and neoliberalism.

On an analytical level I approach the notions of migration and borders by using Didier Fassin (2011) interpretations of the concept “governmentality”. In his volume; *Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times*” (2011), Fassin reads Foucault’s notion of “governmentality”, into to the field of immigration as “an enrichment of the subtle and complex games involved in the politics of borders and boundaries, detention and deportation” (Fassin 2011:214). Governmentality in the Foucauldian sense includes the institutions, procedures, actions, and reflections that have populations as objects (Foucault 1991). It exceeds the issue of sovereignty and complicates the questions of control (Fassin 2011:214).

The theory of biopolitics, as drawn out by Foucault (1997) theorize techniques and technologies which govern human biological and social processes and is also a critique of the government which have extended political control and power over all processes of life, through a sovereign power into “biopower”. Where sovereign power is exercised through legal apparatuses, Foucault (1997) argues that liberal thought takes over society, and not the state, and this result in liberalism’s necessary ability to take many strategies and forms for self-rationalization. Inspired by Foucault’s concept of “biopower”, I will explore how power is exercised over the migrant bodies during their migrant journey at the borderlands, and through Mexico.

I will also use Agamben’s work on «state of exception», here I argue that the concept of citizenship and sovereignty are key concepts to understand how migrants fail to resist to the power of the state to exclude them. Argued by Agamben in *Homo Sacer and The State of Exception* (1998), the foundational power of the sovereign is the ability to decide if the law applies to a situation. Agamben (1998) uses the term *homo sacer* to describe a condition that he describes as “naked life”. The *homo sacer* is a person who has been taken away his

membership in society and his or her rights and is reduced from being a political being into being a simple biological or a natural body. Agamben claims that the system of nation states differentiates between *zoe* (depoliticized life) and *bios* (a political life), and thus the irregular migrants are left vulnerable to state violence. The migrants embodies the concept of the bare life, purely biological human existence with no political value, and for this reason the protection of this life is removed from the political sphere and becomes a humanitarian concern. The sovereign is the one who has the power to reduce our lives to naked lives beyond the protection of the law (Agamben 1998:13).

Thesis outline:

The aim of this introduction chapter has been to provide the framework by which to understand the following chapters of this thesis. I have outlined my research questions and topic, the methods used in gathering data, the motivation for this research, and the ethical considerations I experienced during my fieldwork. The last section of this chapter has given a brief overview anthropological study on this field and I have also provided a political and historical context in order to better understand migration from Latin-American countries to the United States

In chapter two I try to map the different migrant groups I met in Mexicali and I also seek to understand the underlying factors for their reason to migrate. This chapter brings together political economy and today's condition and policies to understand the forces that propel individuals to migrate.

Chapter three examines illegality in Mexicali and looks at how my informants from especially Central-American countries experience their state of being in Mexico. This requires special attention to constructions of illegality. Through narratives about the lived experiences in Mexico, I would like to focus on how illegality is played out on a local basis. I will also use narratives about border crossings and deportation to understand the effects of deportation when back in Mexico.

In chapter four I examine how migration is ultimately linked to structures of violence in Central America and Mexico, including militarization and securitization at the U.S-Mexico border. An analysis of violence along the Mexico-US border and along the journey through Mexico must begin at a structural level to analyze how neoliberal systems, militarization, and how drug and human smuggling are factors that creates violence to continue to flourish. I will also explore how violence shapes the migrants understanding of the Mexican state and how violence also is a factor why people choose to migrate.

In chapter five I will explore the emotional and physical aspects of waiting. I also seek

to explore how they experience the life in a state of limbo, and the temporality and uncertainty that is a part of it. Chapter five thus seeks to understand ways the deported migrants coped with the new life back in Mexico, after being deported from the United States.

Chapter 2

Transit Migration

Mario had been too tired to have a conversation with me the day before because he had been working with “construction” all day. “Here in Mexicali we work at the maquiladoras from 4am to 4pm, and we get 180 pesos a day, it is nothing compared to the salaries you get in the United States”, Mario said to me. Today he seemed in a much better shape, than yesterday and he finally had the time to chat. Mario had lived 13 years in Los Angeles, and spoke English with a perfect American accent. He had been deported from the United States six years ago, and had been at the shelter for two days. He told me he had tried to cross the border back again from Mexicali, but they had taken him and he was deported back to Honduras again. He tells me he has a son who is 18 years old, and the boy lives with his mother in Los Angeles. His eyes get teary when he talks about his son and he tells me that his son is the main reason why he needs to return to the United States. It has been six years since the last time he saw him. He was deported to Tijuana, or TJ as he calls it. When I ask why he was deported, he looks at me as if he does not want tell the reason for being deported. After a while, he tells me he started with drugs and alcohol. He rubs his eyes and tells me he was in a rather dark phase in his life. It escalated quickly after he was deported to Tijuana. “It makes me sad to think about, so I would rather not talk about it”. After 6 years in TJ, he returned to Honduras. There he has a mother, uncles and aunts. Mario says that Honduras has nothing to offer and that it is dangerous to live and work there. He had often been exposed to violence and theft of gangs, and last time he was home the neighbor’s daughter had been raped and killed by the gangs. He was there for a while before returning to Mexico again, hoping to cross the border back. Now Mario is back in Mexicali, and his plan is to earn enough money to cross the border back again, by working at the maquiladoras in the city. Mario tells me about the journey he had made, where he had taken the train from Chiapas through Mexico. He tells me he saw people who fell off the train and died. The journey was also dangerous because of the gangs operating along the train route, as they were after their belongings. Mario says it is a long ride, but a nice one too. “Mexico is a nice country, with beautiful scenarios along the way. At the same time, I cannot stay in either Honduras or Mexico. There is nothing left here”.

Introduction

The example above is far from exceptional, but points out and demonstrates why some chose to migrate, and/or re-migrate and how it is to be a migrant in Mexicali. I argue that Mexicali is a transit city that consists of both migrants that arrive mainly for the reason to try to cross the border to the United States, and Mexican nationals that get deported back to Mexico from the United States where the majority of them try to cross back to the United States. In this chapter I also argue that it is important to see migration as embedded in social, political, and economic structures. I focus on the legal and political forces that produce migration, as well as labor migration, and I argue that policies which contribute to producing structural inequalities, like NAFTA must be taken into account.

Who are the ones that migrate and why? I argue that there were two main reasons why the migrants I met in Mexicali had chosen to migrate in the first place, both of them embedded in structural inequalities circumscribed by transnational economic and political arrangements. They migrate because of low wages, and the difficulty of finding a job in the country of origin. Some of my informants told me they had migrated so that they could send money back home to their families. Another reason was because they had to flee the country or place of origin because fear of violence and impunity characterized their everyday lives. Even though I did fieldwork at shelters mainly for men, I will also explore reasons why women, children or teenagers migrate. For some of them, migrating was not only because of better economy or to be reunited with their families, but also a curiosity of experiencing how life is at “al otro lado” (the other side, signifying the United States).

In the following chapter I also wish to explore the significance of understanding migration to the United States from Mexico and Central America, as well as understanding the mechanisms by which certain classes of people sees the need to migrate in order to get a better life. I will also explore the hierarchies of race, labor and suffering in both Mexico and Central America, by looking at the historical perspectives from the different countries. I draw on insights provided by Massey and Taylor (2004) to understand the underlying factors that contribute to migration in the first place. Douglas S. Massey and J. Edward Taylor (2004) have approached the study of migration from a global and interdisciplinary perspective. Conclusion reached in their volume is that: “Emigration does not stem from a lack of development, but from development itself, as nations are structurally transformed through their incorporation into global regimes of trade and politics” (Massey and Taylor, 2004:378). I will further discuss the topic of migration in anthropology in the next section.

Migration

In anthropology, the topic of migration has been approached at both micro and macro levels, moving from neoclassical economical rational models to dependency and world system theories (Brettell 2003:2). Anthropologists have tried to link these approaches by looking at both the processes and the people that migrates, through acknowledging the structural and historical contexts in which individuals make choices and act (Brettell 2003:1). However, the anthropology of migration tends to focus on fixed communities of migrants rather than on migrants on a journey, never settling one place or another. The traditional migration models have focused on the motivations for an individual to choose to migrate (Holmes 2003:17). These motivations are often categorized as “push” and “pull” factors. “Push” factors are located in the “sending community” and the “push” factors include poverty or violence in the hometown of the migrant. “Pull” factors finds place in the hometown of the “receiving community” and include aspects as social networks and economic opportunities. Much of traditional migration studies assume a dichotomy between voluntary, economic migration on the one hand, and forced political migration on the other hand. The reason behind this dichotomy is that refugees are afforded political and social rights in the host country because they were forced to migrate for political reasons (Holmes 2013:17). The migrants I met at the border between Mexico and the United States, where however not granted either political nor social rights while being in, or trying to cross to the United States, because they were not seen as refugees fleeing a violent state.

According to world system theory it is «the penetration of capitalist economic relations into peripheral, non-capitalist societies that creates a mobile population that is prone to migrate abroad» (Massey et al. 1993:444). Within the political economy framework, anthropologists call upon labor market theory which argues that «international migration stems from the intrinsic labor demands of modern industrial societies» (Massey et al.1993: 440). Theoretically, anthropologists recognize how global capitalism has supported the often exploitative relationships that exist between developing and labor-supplying countries and developed and labor-receiving countries. According to Massey (1993) these unbalanced relationships are often those forces that create the conditions that lead to migration, in the first place. As mentioned above, the migration studies that recognizes the «push and pull» often assume that labor migration is entirely chosen, voluntary, and economic (Massey et al.1993). Studying migration at a macro level, means that the focus is on the broad population flows and on both the political, and economic constrains and opportunities that influence these flows. Among these flows are the policies of sending or receiving communities that might either restrict or boost migration,

or that might control these in some way to support particular labor market needs (Massey et al. 1993).

There is also criticism to the microeconomic approach to migration. Often there are more subtle reasons why individuals chose to migrate, and the decision-making process is often more far-reaching, shaped and reshaped by particular social and cultural contexts (Brettell 2003: 4). Brettell (2003) argues that in the same way that we see different approaches at why women move in contrast with men, and why they make the decisions that they do once abroad, the same could be said if one looks at other aspects of social location- age, class, regional or ethnic background. She goes on to suggest that one can get some of these subtleties by listening to the voices of migrants themselves- how they tell stories and what meanings they assign to their own actions (Brettell 2003).

Seth Holmes describes in his ethnography how much public health and global health discourse, as in case of border death, the focus remains on individual risk behavior. In much of the mainstream media, migrant workers are seen as deserving their fates, even deaths, because they are understood to have chosen voluntarily to cross the border or their own economic goals (Holmes 2013:21). However, the migrants I met at the different shelters and most people in Mexicali, told me that they were forced to migrate from their homes. The distinction between economic and political migration is often blurry on the context of international policies enforcing neoliberal free markets as well as active military repression of indigenous people who seek collective socioeconomic improvement in southern Mexico.

I argue that it is important to also see the overall macro structures and the people's individual choices, integrating those to better understand why people migrate. Most of my informants told me that their reason for migrating to the United States, was not entirely voluntary, but they were being forced in one way or another, to migrate for a better life for themselves and/or their families. Also, I observed different reasons between nationalities. Relatively few Guatemalan indicated violence as a motive, as opposed to Hondurans, and Salvadorans.

Mike, one of my main informants often told me how dangerous El Salvador was, and that he couldn't return. Neoliberal governance took shape in El Salvador, in the 1980s during the civil war. After the US government began demanding conditions to their policies towards El Salvador in 1985, wanting a more open and liberalized economy, the dollarization of El Salvador's economy in 2001 was a direct result of the US policies towards El Salvador in the post-world war (Moodie 2010). The dollarization in El Salvador has had big effects on the local populations, leading to poverty. Many of whom I spoke to at the shelters said that it was

both because of the economy and the violence that led to their decisions to migrate. Throughout my fieldwork, I often heard “there is nothing left in my country”. Not being able to buy things such as food and clothes, migration was often the only option. Mike, one of my main informants said to me;

The economy in El Salvador is very bad and the prices have increased the last couple of years. As the cost of gas prices rose, everything else in El Salvador also rose. Now it is hard to survive because the salaries remained the same, even though all the prices went up. The workplaces don't pay fair salaries and at some of the places I worked at, they didn't have any labor benefits, they just contract people without giving any benefits. So, these are the reasons why I can't stay there anymore.

A lot of the other stories I heard at the shelters was like Mike's story. Many of my informants said that the difficulty of earning enough money was one of the reasons why they had chosen to migrate. Other migrants I met at the shelters told me about how both economic uncertainty and criminal violence was the reason they had chosen to migrate. One day at Casa Ayuda I interviewed a man in his fifties. Gabriel was from Honduras and the reason he had chosen to leave home was because he could not continue to support his family as a farmer, as the wages were too low. He said that he could have tried to move to a town with a maquila (factory) or to the capital, where he might earn more, but the money he would earn would likely be taken by gangs. He said to me:

In Honduras there is nothing left, so I am migrating for work. In Honduras we work for many hours in construction or in the fields all day, and we get very little money. You can get a job in the maquilas where you can gain more, but there is a lot of extortion by the Mara Salvatrucha, they put a tax on you and you have to pay them monthly. If you don't pay them, they (Maras from 18th Street or “MS” (the Mara Salvatruchas)¹⁷. kill you. If you go to the capital city, you might have to give them half of your salary. If you don't give them your money then they threaten to kill you. Honduras is a dangerous country.

Gabriel's story reveals not only the fear of violence by the gangs, but also how economic markets are attached with violence. The desire to move to the cities and work in the maquiladoras, where wages are higher, are reduced by the state's failure to protect its citizens and instead open new

¹⁷ M13 or Mara Salvatrucha is a criminal gang group located basically in El Salvador.

arenas for especially profit-driven violence to flourish. People who can no longer afford to live in their communities of origin are forced to either move to the cities and live in urban slums, where they will have to share their money with the gangs. These conditions shows how violence, as a social reality are embedded in the migration process, both before and after the journey to the north. Neoliberal economic insecurity tied up with violence at a local level has brought chaos in urban areas and people are therefore migrating not only from poor rural areas, but also urban centers throughout Central America.

Though many of my informants had chosen to migrate when they were in their twenties, during my fieldwork I also met a couple of teenagers doing the trip either by themselves, or in company with others. The next section will explore why children choose to migrate.

Children that migrate

One day at Casa para Inmigrantes a new group of people had just arrived at the shelter. They had arrived with the freight train, “*La Bestia*”¹⁸ and had traveled their way together from Chiapas through Mexico to Mexicali. I quickly noticed three of the men in the group, because they looked a lot younger than the rest of them. They seemed a bit shy and it was difficult to start a conversation with them. They were also laughing, making jokes about the other men at the shelter. As we sat down to eat, I asked them where they were from, and for how long time they had been in Mexico. There was a lot of giggling and every time one of them said something or answered some of my questions, the other two would laugh and make jokes of what the other said. However, the three of them had just arrived in Mexicali to try crossing the border to the United States. I could see that they had just arrived by their clothes. Even though I did see them in the same clothes every day that week, they looked clean and well-dressed. The three of them had met on the way to Mexicali. One of them was from El Salvador and the two others was from Honduras. They had met in Chiapas, where the train starts its journey through Mexico. From there they had traveled together all the way to Mexicali, and now they referred to each other as “*hermanos*” (brothers). They told me that they were going to stay with an uncle who lived in Los Angeles. The uncle had lived in the United States for many years and he was going to help them get a job once they arrived. The Mexican Institute of Migration (Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2016: 43) reported that during 2016 there were 13 737 repatriations of children and adolescents under the age of 18 years old from the United States. Of these 70% were unaccompanied children and adolescents who travel without a family member or other

¹⁸ La Bestia is the train that starts in southern Mexico, in a state called Chiapas, and which most migrants from countries like Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, take to get to the border towns in northern Mexico.

adult person legally responsible for their care and safety. The undocumented and unaccompanied children are “sent back” by U.S. Immigration Services because they failed in their attempt to cross the border and then either gets deported back to their country of origin or gets sheltered by Mexican Governmental agencies at the border towns that they are deported back to. Immigration law defines the “unaccompanied alien child” (UAC) as an individual with no lawful immigration status, under age eighteen, for whom no parents or legal guardians are available in the US to provide care and physical custody. Two policies protect the process rights of UACs in the US asylum system. First, the 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Act established that minors apprehended without parents must be admitted and allowed to petition for asylum through the non-adversarial process at the asylum office. However, this does not apply to Mexican unaccompanied minors, who are usually deported within forty-eight hours of apprehension, without a chance to present their cases (Galli 2017). DACA is a system in the United States, where children that has migrated illegally with their parents, or alone, get citizenship. Every year there are approximately 200 000 persons that apply for a DACA-citizenship. However, not everyone who applies gets granted a DACA citizenship, as some of the sixteen-year olds I met at the border.

During my stay at the different shelters in Mexicali I met a few unaccompanied migrants, especially from Central America, who had made their way to Mexicali in order to try crossing the border into the United States. However, I didn’t meet any female unaccompanied travelers, only male migrants. One of the “honduraños” I mentioned above who traveled with his “hermanos”, told me that he had chosen to migrate because the future in Honduras wasn’t any promising. He had chosen to migrate because the “maras” was after him, and that it was difficult for him to get a job, because he had quit school.

Boehm (2014) argues that the rites of passages in Mexico, through which youth become adults is for males when they migrate to the United States, and for females, when they have their “*quinceañera*” (a quinceañera is a fifteen years old celebration for girls). I argue that the same also can be said about teenagers from Central American countries. Hondaugneu- Sotelo (1994) claims that migration is a “patriarchal rite of passage” (Hondaugneu- Sotelo 1994:83) and links migration to the life cycle. While migration is primary a rite de passage through which boys become men, it is common that the young men experience this ritual together. As with the three teenagers I met at Casa del Inmigrante, they had traveled together, and called themselves “*hermanos*”, and had plans to live together in the United States if they managed to cross the border. Boehm (2014) also claims that teenagers often are expected to migrate to the United States when they are young as was the case with Javier’s experience with his family in El

Salvador.

The motives for migrating to the United States, was for unaccompanied migrants, the same reasons as it was for adult migrators- mixed motives for migrating, including both forced and voluntary reasons. One day I met Javier who stayed at Casa del Immigrante. He was seventeen years old and had just arrived Mexicali from El Salvador.

After my father got sick, I had to support my family as I am the oldest one of my siblings. My youngest sister is only five years old, and we didn't have enough money to buy food. My father's medicine was also quite expensive, and I didn't have any other choice than to migrate to the United States. Some of my friends had already migrated, so I thought; why not try?

Javier had quit school when he was fourteen years old. When his father got sick he had been helping his uncle with working out in the fields, but it wasn't enough money to provide for his family, so he had to migrate. "One day I want to study at the University. I want to become a teacher", he says. Javier story shows how children similar to adult migrants in seeking new social and economic opportunities. These children, sometimes referred to as 'unaccompanied minors', may actively seek migration opportunities as a result of many factors. Many of these children send remittances to their families, combine work with schooling and manage to save money they can send back home.

Gendered migration

Because males are more likely to migrate than females, I didn't meet upon many women during my fieldwork in Mexicali. Partly because I chose to spend most of my time at shelters for men, and most of the times I visited the shelters for women there weren't any there. I did however see them in the city, where they were beg for money with their children wrapped up on their backs, or sell fruits and candy to the people waiting in the check points at the border to the United States.

There is now research on the topic of women and migration, but gender is typically considered in migration theory only when women are in focus. It is useful to ask why gender has been neglected in the immigration literature. Feminist scholarship has shown that gender, that is the social and cultural ideals, practices and displays of masculinity and femininity, organizes, and shapes out opportunities and life changes. The concept of gender as an organizing principle of social life has however encountered resistance and indifferent in immigration scholarship conducted in various disciplines (Hondagneu- Sotelo 1999.106).

It has been estimated that migrating women in transit through Mexico are between 15-17% of the total migratory flow (Servan-Mori et al. 2013). In her book, *Gendered Transitions* (1994), Hondagneu-Sotelo explores some of the reasons why men are the ones that tend to migrate, and not women. She describes “machismo”, a term used to describe masculine and feminine behavior in the Mexican society, and to describe Mexico’s patriarchal family structure. “Machismo” can thus also be said to describe gender roles in other Latin American countries (See Melhus and Stølen 1996). “Machismo” calls for men to be independent, to wield authority over their wives and children, and to be the family’s breadwinner, while women are expected to stay at home and take care of the household (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). However, gendered roles in Latin American countries have changed during the last couple of years. This can be seen partly as a result of women employments in regions of the Mexican market by U.S-bound male migration, where men have migrated to the United States, and therefore women have been taken over their jobs (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). While before it was mainly men that migrated, also women are migrating in the search for a better life for themselves. In general, migration depends on males to facilitate movement, and families with male relatives living in the United States are better positioned to migrate (Boehm 2012: 34). Networks with well-established male migration patterns are likely to have multiple family members living in the United States, while families without such benefits find migration to be much more difficult (Massey et al. 1993).

One day during my fieldwork in Mexicali I visited a shelter called “Albergue para mujeres and jovenes” (shelter for women and youngsters). This shelter was for women and children under the age of 18 years old, and it is located in a relatively nice neighborhood near the city center in Mexicali. At this shelter the migrants could stay for a maximum of three weeks, until the shelter provided them with tickets to their home towns. I did not spend much time at this shelter, because most times I went there to visit the shelter was empty. I do not know whether the shelter was really empty for migrants, or if the people working there just said so, because they didn’t want any visitors. First time I visited this shelter, I had sent them a lot of emails, but unfortunately not received any answers, so one day I grabbed a taxi and knocked on their door. First time I knocked on their door, they shut the door and said they didn’t wanted any journalists there. I had to explain that I wasn’t just there to do interviews, but that I was a student doing fieldwork. After a few more attempts to explain the purpose of my visit, they let me in and that day there was only one woman staying at the shelter. Maria had been deported

from the United States, when she tried to cross with a false green card¹⁹. Even though paying a lot of money to the coyote, she didn't pass through the check point, and she got voluntarily deported back to Mexico. «I could choose between getting a voluntary repatriation, or they would have put me in a detention center», she said.

I was going to the United States to make money and send it to my children who live in Sinaloa. I have three children, a boy and two girls, and also a grandchild. My sister and my brother live in the United States, they have a little kiosk where they sell tamales. I was going there to help them. Before I used to work at my parent's farm, but the economy has been so bad lately that I didn't have any other possibility of making money than to migrate to the United States. Because I have family there, I could easily get a job and earn money. But then they caught me, and now I don't know what to do.

Women migrants through Mexico and in the borderlands also suffer human rights violation in a larger scale than male migrants. Many also experience domestic violence serious enough that they are forced to leave home and undertake a dangerous journey where they don't know the outcome. Like male migrants, they also migrate because of gang violence, cartel threats and low wages in their country of origin. At their journey to reach the United States, female migrants may experience violence in the hands of traffickers, criminal gangs, cartels, as well as the military, police, and immigration authorities. Even though I didn't speak with any women who had experienced it myself, I often heard from the men at the shelters that it was more dangerous to be a migrant in Mexico if you were a woman and especially to cross the border by yourself. Mike told me that men could get a "kick in the butt" by the cartels operating in the areas if the migrants were crossing the border at the "wrong" place, and thus drawing attention to the areas where the drug cartels were located. Women on the other hand were in a higher degree being exposed to kidnappings and rape. Therefore, women hardly migrated crossing the border on their own, and were often accompanied by a male.

Borderland families

My first day at Albergue de Mexicali, I met Carrie and her husband Jorge, who were both doing voluntary work at the shelter every Monday. Today the shelter had received a big load of clothes that they had collected to the men and women staying at the shelter. I was helping Carrie sort out

¹⁹ Immigration and Naturalization Service form I-151. A Green Card permits enabling unrestricted access to the United States.

the clothes while she was explaining her family's situation:

We used to live her before, me, my husband and our three children. For three years we lived upstairs at the shelter at the family room. And now every Monday while the children are at school, we stop by the shelter and help out if our help is needed, as a thank you for the help they gave us after my husband got deported. Pastor Lopez ²⁰is a good man.

Carrie and her children were American citizens, all of them born and raised in the United States, but since her husband got deported to Mexico, she didn't have any other choice than to join him to live in Mexico. Carrie also had two other children from another marriage, living in the United States. Once in a while she would cross the border and visit them. And every once in a while she would take her children with her to Calexico to do shopping, while Jorge didn't had any other choice than to stay in Mexico, waiting for them to return. «Even though it was tough in the beginning, moving to Mexico, at least we are together as a family» Carrie tells me. It is not often the whole family chooses to move with the one who gets deported from the United States. Carrie and her family was the only «deported» family I met in Mexicali during my fieldwork, and was as well the only family that continued to stay together even though one had been deported.

In this section I would like to focus on how deportation and migration split families, and how families are split by the border that divides the two countries. Transnational families is referred to in the literature about persons and/or families who are tied up to more than one country, spread across geographical and legal borders keeping long-distance border-crossing connection (Vertovec 2004). Kinship and gender in a transnational perspective show how individuals and families are divided and united. In her book *Intimate Migrations: Gender, Family, and Illegality Among Transnational Mexicans* Boehm (2012) tries to capture the fluidity and disruptions within gendered kin relations. She argues that the notion of family is characterized by fluidity and diversity, and that transnational family dynamic, because migrants, whose lives are characterized by frequent movement, continuously maintain, reassert, reconfigure, and transform family (Boehm 2012).

Family relations are perceived as one of the central constitutive dimensions of home. As family extends across borders, home is characterized by new forms (...) Among transnational Mexicans, expressions of home and configurations of family are made up of parts and totalities,

²⁰ Pastor Lopez (a pseudonym) is the owner of the shelter Albergue de Mexicali.

inconsistencies and continuities, divisions and connections» (Boehm 2012:51).

Most of the people I spoke to at the shelters in Mexicali were not with their families. They had either migrated away from their families or they had been deported away from them. I argue that in addition of suffering from violence while being in transit, they also were suffering from being divided from their families. Savvas, who had a son living in the United States, said that his son was the main reason he wanted to go back to the United States. Because his son hadn't been visiting him after he was deported, he hadn't seen him in over four years. Transnational families, in the sense where the border divides family members, demonstrate how actions of the state reach into family life, and how neoliberal processes and the increased militarization of the border serves as a physical barrier to family reunification.

Parents who live in the United States while their children and families who live in Mexico and Central America, may also experience many of the same struggles as those who get deported from the United States. People often migrate to support family, and/or with financial and social resources from family members, as many of my informants did. Alfonso had lived in Miami for the last 16 years and was from Nicaragua. He had been in Mexicali for seven days and hadn't seen his daughter since she was a toddler:

I came to Mexico to fix something, but tomorrow I am going back. My friend and I (points at his friend sitting in the corner) are going to cross the border by jumping the fence (..) I have a daughter in Nicaragua. She was born when I was only fifteen years old. The mother of my daughter left us when she was only six months old. I couldn't afford raising a child by myself, I was so young, so my mother had to take care of her, and I migrated to the United States so I could send money back to my daughter and family. Now my daughter is sixteen years old, and will soon go to University. I hope she understands now, why I had to leave. That I am in America working for her, so she can get an education. I miss her, I'm thinking about moving back home to Nicaragua. I have been away for such a long time. Maybe I will stay for two years, maybe three. I have to earn enough money before I go back home, so I still can provide for my family.

As mentioned in the introduction some migrate so that they can provide for their families back home. Households may send some family members out into foreign labor markets and keep others at home, thereby diversifying their risk. Further «households send workers abroad not only to improve income in absolute terms but also to increase income relative to other households, and hence, to reduce their relative deprivation compared with some reference

group» (Massey et al. 1993: 438). Remittances are central to both the economy in Mexico and countries like Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, and represent an essential subsistence income for many families. According to the Mexico World Survey in 2014, almost half of the Mexicans interviewed reported having an emigrated relative abroad (Moldanado et al. 2016), and 12 percent reporting receiving remittances. Mexico is the fourth-largest remittance-recipient country in the world in absolute terms. Remittances continue to be among the top three sources of foreign revenue for the country, together with oil revenue and foreign direct investment. Migrants send money home to help those left behind and/or to make investments in their communities of origin, frequently with the expectations of returning.

Economy in a globalized Mexico

Neoliberalism is often referred to as “the free market.” David Harvey argues that “Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2005a:2). Ong (2006) claims that; “neoliberalism has become a code word for America’s overweening power” (Ong 2006: 1). In Latin-America, the U.S. run for open markets and privatization has been coined «savage neoliberalism» (Ong 2006), and American neoliberalism is viewed as a radicalized capitalist imperialism that is increasingly tied to lawlessness and military action (Ong 2006). Ong (2006) argues that neoliberalism (mostly in Asian states), is not a set of policies that diminishes state power. Rather, it is a different form of governmentality, in which states continue to manipulate and shape citizens. Even though Ong’s attention moves between East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the west coast of the United States, I agree with her concern with state practices and how neoliberal exceptions impact notions of citizenship and national belonging, also can be used as lenses to view forces of power in Mexico as well.

Sawyer (2004) argues that the neoliberal policies “seek to make subjects responsible for their own civility or savagery, development or regression, social health or disease” (Sawyer 2004:15). Neoliberalism thus pressures the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of social security health care, and education all by themselves so to reduce the government’s role and responsibility.

Mexico’s economic integration in NAFTA, combined with neoliberal policies, had a negative impact on food self-sufficiency and labor, and the wages for most Mexicans today are lower than when NAFTA took effect (Hartman 2010). The arrival of American agricultural

imports displaced many Mexican rural farmers who were not as automated as and thus less productive than American agro-industry, and U.S. farm subsidies have rendered Mexican farming and millions of farmers lost their livelihoods (Hartman 2010).

Oskar, one of my main informants, said that the main reason he had migrated to the United States, was because the salaries was much better there than in Mexico:

In the U.S you earn eight times more than what you do here in Mexico. I worked as a construction worker in the United States. Here in Mexico you get 120 pesos during a full day at work, which is nothing. In the United States, you get eight times more money and it is safer and they have better working conditions as well. Everything is better in the United States. My wife who lives in the United States makes 100 dollars a day. Here in Mexico I hardly make 150 pesos a day. I think it is unfair that the Americans and the American state makes us Mexicans the bad guys and forbid us to enter the country, and deport us. I don't understand why they want us out of the country. I mean, after all, we are the ones that do all the shitty jobs in the United States.

“It is the international economic policies that form the root of contemporary global labor migration” (Holmes 2013:41). NAFTA began deregulation of all agricultural trade in 2003, and since its initial implementation in 1994, farm subsidies has raised with 300 percent by the United States (Holmes 2013). Throughout the past two decades, the Mexican government has reduced financial supports for corn producers, most of them of indigenous “campesinos” (farmers) from southern Mexico, leading people to migrate in order to survive. Mexican activists are pressing the Mexican government to renegotiate NAFTA so that more farm owners and workers will not be forced by poverty to emigrate for wage labor (Holmes 2013)

NAFTA is a critical framework for the internationalization of capital on regional, national, and global spheres. NAFTA provides a spatial fix (Harvey 2001) for the intensification and centralization of capital at new levels of the world market. The term spatial fix, is a part of the Marxian thinking and it is associated with the work of David Harvey on the historical geography of industrial capitalism. The idea of “the spatial fix” initially came out of attempts to reconstruct Marx’s theory of the geography of capitalist accumulation, and depicts the paradoxical nature of capitalism and shows how capital needs to spread out over space in order to overcome its immanent crises of over accumulation (Harvey 2001). I will use Harvey’s concept of spatial fix to explain NAFTA’s geographical expansion and how its territorial domination affects the livelihoods to rural Mexicans and Central Americans, hence migrating for a better life. Harvey (2001) argues that “globalization is the contemporary version of

capitalism's long-standing and never-ending search for a spatial fix to its crisis tendencies, and were surpluses of capital and shortages of labor (..) can be "fixed" either by the movement of capital to areas of labor surpluses and/or weak labor organization" (Harvey, 2001:24). The North American capital moving into the "maquilas" along the Mexican border and the importation of cheap labor into centers of capitalist development, shows how American capital expands over borders and influencing the lives of those who live there, and also how American capital is securing and deepening a presence in specific locations as a result of investments over time. Harvey's link between capitalist systems and political processes of imperialism and colonialism are important in framing the ways Central American migrants are not only unable to maintain their livelihoods in their home countries, but also why they are migrating to the United States, "as the surpluses of wage labor and shortages of capital often generate strong migratory currents, both legal and illegal" (Harvey 2001: 24).

"Race" and class in Latin America

Talking about discrimination, violence and migration in Mexico and Central American countries like Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador naturally evokes the notions of "race" and class. My informants came from various socio-economical backgrounds from both Mexico and Central America. Some of them also had another mother tongue than Spanish and characterized themselves as indigenous. In all the respective countries where my informants were from, there is a high percentage of indigenous, where the Maya's are the majority indigenous group.

I have put the term "race" with inverted commas, to emphasize that race is a social construction and not a scientific one (Wade 2010:14). However, even though races are social constructions does not mean that they don't exist. As a result of people who behave as races exist, they are therefore not merely "ideas", but as social scientist argues- they are constructions built on phenotypical variation (Wade 2010:14). Wade also (2010) brings into focus the debate about race and class. A central argument in the race and class debate is whether race can be "explained" in terms of class or economics. A classic Marxist approach to the debate argues that "the underlying determinant of capitalist societies is the opposition between the owners of capital (bourgeoisie) and the non-owners (the proletariat)" (Wade 2010:21). Wade argues that this division determines much of what happens at all levels in societies. According to marxist approaches, racial categories must therefore be related to this division, and if racial categories exist it is because of the bourgeoisie who created them in order to better dominate a particular part of the labor, and divide the workers into racial categories and thus rule them more

effectively (Wade 2010: 21).

I argue that most of my informants came from the bottom rung of the hierarchical system in both Mexico and the Northern Triangle. In Latin American countries, concepts of race is often combined with social traits. Economical status, and the racial categories in Latin America are often linked to the colonial times where the Spanish colonistas, developed a complex caste system based on race which was used for social control and which also decided the persons right to society (Acuña 2011). In these arguments, the origins of racism are still located in the class relations of colonialism and the basic functions of racism remain essentially the same over time (Wade 2010:21). Wade (1997) argues that the physical differences are cues for contemporary racial distinction may be seen as social constructions built of phenotypic variations, which correspond to the “geographic encounters of the European in their colonial histories” (Wade 1997:15).

As mentioned above, some of my informants characterized themselves as indigenous, and had an other mother tongue. Kearney (1995) has tried to understand indigenous migration in the respective countries, and has focused on the framework of nation-states because of the effects of nationalist policies on indigenous populations. Kearney (1995) has also connected the indigenous migration with the importance of the state apparatus and its geopolitical borders with the effect of the global economy in diminishing rural life and displacing indigenous peoples as an international source of labor. From Kearney’s point of view, international indigenous migration is part of the functioning of global capitalism (1995:560). The current flow of indigenous migrants from Latin-American countries is characterized by the worsening of the living conditions of the workers, campesinos, and low-income residents in the various countries (Ortiz and Pombo 2014:7).

However, it is not only the poorest and least educated sectors of society that are migrating, but educated and ambitious young people as well. I figured out during my time spent at the different shelters, that people who are able to migrate are often people who have some social networks or resources that can help finance their long journeys and border crossings. So if on a global scale we understand migrants to be among the poorest sectors of society, on a more local level, people who were migrating often had some amount of social and/or economic capital.

Chapter 3

Exclusion and Belonging

“After dinner at Casa del Migrante I helped Mike clean up the dishes and put the tables and chairs at its place. After we had finished, we went to sit at the little bench in the garden. The sun was about to go down and the worst heat was over. The heat had been unbearable earlier today, so the rest of the men staying at the shelter had gone to lay down in the living room. It was soon to be June and the summer months were just around the corner. We started talking about books. Mike told me he wanted to start to read again, so that he had something to fill his days with. The only problem was that he didn’t know how to get a book, as it was too far to the nearest book store. It almost seemed like he thought of the world outside the fences surrounding the shelter as scary and he’d prefer to stay inside. While we were chatting, the founder of the shelter opened his window from his office and shouted that Mike had to come inside. I was sitting by myself, waiting for Mike to come back again. As I was sitting there an older man came by and asked if he could have a glass of water. The shelter always had a can of water standing outside so that people outside the fences could come and have some water in the hot climate of Mexicali. I poured a glass of water and handed it to him, “gracias” he said to me and smiled. Behind me I could hear the door being opened and Mike came out with a nervous look at his face. He rapidly walked to the fence, shouting to the other men in the living room, saying they had to come out quickly. I could hear them talking about “la migra”. They were planning on coming tomorrow to the shelter, I could hear them talking about what they was going to do and what if they were to get caught. Mike turned to me, starting joking that today was maybe the last day I would see him before he most likely was to get deported back to El Salvador by Mexican authorities. “Mexican authorities is getting almost as bad as the American. They are after us. Wanting to kick us out wherever we are”.

Introduction

Although unauthorized border crossing along the US-Mexico border has dropped since its peak in 2000, thousands of people continue to attempt to cross the border without authorization each year (US Costume and Border Protection 2017). In the following chapter, I wish to portray the lives and experiences of some of my informant’s narratives about illegality in order to better understand the social context of illegality and also the consequences deportation has among

migrants in a Mexican border town. I will also focus on how deportation is experienced through narratives of deportees I met at the different shelters in Mexicali. I wish to address the emotional and normative elements inherent to deportation policies and practices and emphasize the connections between deportation, justice and anxiety. These often go hand in hand with public and individual perceptions of justice that shape and influence how deportation is experienced, felt and interpreted.

Irregular migration refers to illegal movement to live or work in a country without authorization. Use of the term irregular migration, refers to people who do not have a residence status in the country where they are residing (Bloch and Chimienti 2011). Since being illegal is a term defined by a nation state in order to exclude, I agree with De Genova (2002) that it is necessary to distinguish between studying undocumented people, on the one hand, and studying “illegality” and deportability, on the other. De Genova (2002) argues that migrant “illegality” is a “preeminently political identity”, and that “illegality” is a “juridical status that entails a social relation to the state” (De Genova 2002: 422) Since there are no sealed communities of undocumented migrants, they engage in social relations with “legal” migrants as well as citizens, and they live in intimate proximity to various categories of “documented” persons, that be: spouses, children neighbors, coworkers and so on (De Genova 2002). In everyday life, their illegality may be irrelevant to most of their activities, and claims that by studying «illegality» can serve «the ends of a distinctly anthropological critique of nation-states and their immigration policies, as well as of the broader politics of nationalism, nativism, and citizenship” (De Genova 2002:422), meaning that there is a need for studying illegality and deportability as sociopolitical conditions generated by law, rather than a group of people.

De Genova (2002) argues in his essay how the conceptual problems embedded in terminology are symptomatic of deeper problems of intellectual and political orientation. He argues that little of the scholarship uses ethnographic methods or other qualitative research techniques to elicit the perspectives and experiences of undocumented migrants. There is a vast social science literature on “illegal aliens and “illegal immigration” (De Genova 2002). Studies have tended to focus on the mechanisms that initiate, facilitate, and sustain immigration (Massey et al. 1993), the ways in which immigrants are incorporated into the receiving societies (Massey et al. 1993), and the way in which the act of migrations transforms sending communities (Reichert 1982), and therefore I wish to contribute fill a gap in the literature on how it is to be an undocumented migrant living in a liminal state, where they cannot participate in the society without fearing the state authorities to catch them.

Citizenship and borders

Every now and then during my fieldwork, I crossed the border to Calexico to shop or do some sightseeing. I did either cross the border by walking by myself or joining my friends in their cars. By car, it could take several hours to cross the border, while walking through the border took less than one hour, if you had a green card or another passport than a Mexican one. One Sunday as we got closer to the border fence and the check point, families on both sides of the fence had gathered to meet up. I could see that they, probably a mother and her son, were holding hands through the border fence that divided them.

Borders symbolize the sovereignty of states, and a nation-state can be imagined (Anderson 1983) through its borders. “The U.S-Mexico border form crucial “problems” in contemporary politics and culture and the concept of the border and its relation to citizenship demands more sustained consideration” (Ciseros, 2014:3). DeChaine (2012) notes that the expression of the border is “variously invoked as a geographical term for delineating territories, a political expression of national sovereignty, a juridical marker of citizenship status, and an ideological trope for defining terms of inclusion and exclusion” (DeChaine 2012:1). In addition to the concept of the border, citizenship is also a fundamentally challenged term. It can be understood as a legal status that defines membership in a nation or a broader contract of rights and responsibilities a citizen has with the state (Ciseros 2014).

However, most of my informants thought of the United States as their home, but had been sent out because they didn’t belong there, even they had been living there for many years and their family and friends were living there. Almost all of my informants continued to live in Mexicali after being deported, so that they were close to the border, and had the opportunity of crossing the border was always there, and many of them continued to live there so that their families could come visit them. However, the national state's control over the population is always present. It is enforced in the form of border controls and border patrols, and helicopters always controlling the border, and a fence. From Casa Mexicali, you could see straight at the border fence, as the shelter was located close to the border. Savvas said to me once; “Look at it. Every day I have to look at it and get reminded about that they (The United States), doesn’t want me to live there”. In the next chapter I will explore how narratives of exclusion and illegality are being articulated and performed. By living in a border town and also by having family and friends at the other side, the deported migrants in Mexicali were in constant contact with «the other side», and constantly reminded of their situation.

The national order of things usually passes as the normal and natural order of things. It is self-evident that “real” nations are fixed in space and marked by their borders (Malkki

1992:26). Malkki argues that naturalizing the border regime leads to a vision of border crossing as pathological (1992:34). Displacement is believed to result in an “uprootedness” mode of being. Border crossings thus break the link between “nativity” and nationality and is perceived as a threat to the nation-state. In this view, violation of the border is also a violation of the ethical and aesthetic norms.

Being a paperless other

“A lot of the migrants from Central-American countries finding their way to Mexicali have gotten all of their belongings and identification papers stolen. That’s why many of them become homeless and starts with drugs, I believe. It’s hard for them to find a job, and earn money. They are paperless. They are nobody”.

Eduardo, local resident

First day at Casa del Migrante, I came to find the shelter empty and surrounded by fences. Since it was midday, the sun had been heating up the streets, making it quite hot to be outside. Across the street sat three men, their looks told me that they were curious about what I did there all alone, in the middle of the day, since nobody goes out during mid-day. When I told them I was looking for the person running the shelter, one of them came over and yelled a man’s name. After a while a man came over, asking me what I wanted. Insecure of my Spanish I asked the man, which introduced himself as Mike, if he spoke English. Mike shook his head, “no”, he replied. So, in Spanish I explained to him that I wanted to spend some time at the shelter for my master thesis and he introduced me for his boss. Later on, I found out that Mike spoke perfectly English, but since he didn’t know me he had first thought I was from the “migra” and been afraid that I was there to trace down illegal migrants living in Mexico. After the little meeting with Mike and his boss, I said good bye and while I was waiting for my taxi to arrive, I went across the street to chat with the three men still sitting there in the heat. They looked tired and dirty, and one of the men was missing half of his leg. The bandage wrapped around his leg was dirty and there were blood stains at it. I asked what had happened, and the man replied that he had fallen of the train and got his leg cut off. They were also waiting for also for the shelter to open, so that they could get something to eat and a place to sleep.

My first meeting with Mike reveals how Central-American migrants in Mexicali experience their everyday life in Mexico regarding how it is like to live there illegally. They might have gone from living illegally in the United States, to now living illegally in Mexico as

well. They are constantly hiding from the state, from the government. Also, many of the Mexican nationals I met in Mexicali didn't have any papers showing that they were Mexican citizens, which made it difficult finding a job. They had either gotten their papers taken away from them when they got deported, or stolen during the trip through Mexico. Instead of providing protection, Mexican authorities are pushing people to extreme dangerous situations. In 2016, Mexico's National Institute of Migration detained 188, 595 irregular migrants, 81 percent of these from Central America, and returned 147, 370 to their country of origin. Ninety-seven percent of people deported were from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala (Amnesty International 2017). The illegality of transit migrants from Central-Americans through Mexico, and for migrants from both Central-America and Mexico at the border to the United States, creates a dynamic where migrants are both included and excluded by political and economic forces. Coutin (2007) writes about the several erasures that undocumented migration creates and how they relate to violence;

Despite the ways that unauthorized migration has become key to certain economic and political processes, the erasures that illegal migration entails are potentially violent in nature. Human yet a good to be smuggled, illegal yet juridical persons, clandestine yet present, migrants are sometimes literally dismembered, their legs detached from trains their lives separated from those of their relatives, their identity removed from themselves (Coutin, 2007:101).

Coutin (2003) argues that undocumented migrants inhabit a space of non-existence a space of invisibility, exploitation, exclusion and violence. This state of irregularity affects even the smallest aspects of life. All everyday activities are "illegalized" from housing and work to physical mobility (Coutin 2003). Even though most of the migrants I met during my fieldwork were on their way to the United States, they were also worried about getting caught as an illegal in Mexicali as well. Like Mike, some of the migrant I spoke to was sometimes afraid of telling me where they were from in case I was from the "migra", and Mike was also often afraid to go outside the shelter in case he would stumble upon the "migra". Through an understanding of illegality and the transit space where my informants was being a part of, it offers insights into the effects of neoliberalism. Constructions of illegality reproduce the exploitation that they are being exposed of.

Discrimination and racism

As mentioned earlier I had a lot of conversations with the taxi drivers in Mexicali on my way to the different shelters. One day a man called Mario was driving me to the shelter. Mario was terrified to hear that I was being all by myself at the shelters for migrants in Mexicali, being a foreigner and a girl. He said to me that every man from Central-America was dangerous and a criminal, and was only contributing to more crime in Mexicali. When he stopped the car outside the shelter, he pointed out to me the men who he thought was from Central America. “Look at them, coming here and messing up our city. Are you sure you want to stay there with them?” he said.

Like Mexican immigrants in the United States, Central American migrants in Mexico are often feared, and blamed for numbers of social ills. Migrant men, both in Mexico and the United States, are associated with gang-related violence, alcoholism and drug-use. Migrant women are often associated with prostitution. According to the local residents in Mexicali, they had experienced an increase of violence in their city when the number of people being deported from the United States was high, but the last couple of years it had decreased, especially after the private-run shelters had been established. Most of the locals I spoke to had different attitudes and responses to Central American migrants and deported migrants as well, and the associated violence in Mexicali. Some said they felt sorry for the migrants, having nowhere to go, and sleeping in the streets, or as the case with Mario, the taxi driver who was frustrated over the situation with migrants coming to Mexicali.

Juanita, one of my room mates in the casa I stayed at, also told me one day that she had seen two deported migrants outside the neighborhood, at the parking lot. They had asked her if she had any blankets they could borrow, because they didn't have any place to sleep than out in the street. She had gone home to get some blankets to them, because she felt sorry for them. «They seemed like normal people, not like drug addicts or criminals. And then it struck me that the deported migrants are normal people as well».

Central Americans are often often associated with criminality based on the assumptions and fears about ethnicity and race, and often constructed as “others” in the society while being in Mexico. Barker (2009) explains how discourses about “otherness”, allow people to name their fears of people, places, events, and place them within larger social meanings. This social organizing also cause fear for those who are themselves categorized as the threatening “other” (Barker 2009:267). Central Americans are also regularly subject to abuse, rape, kidnappings, and death as they navigate through Mexico, and the discrimination against Central American migrants in Mexico thus reflects the racial and gendered stereotypes of people from Central

America.

Deportation

The deportation of an individual may take only a few days, but the significance of this episode- replicating and engendering as it does histories of suffering and subjection- will continue to reverberate in the lives of the deportees and their kin (Peutz 2006:218).

During Obama's administration (2009-2017) more than two million people got deported from the United States. Baja California, which borders the city of San Diego and the state of Arizona, received one-third of the deportees and it is the state with the largest number of foreign residents. The Obama administration insisted that most people they deported had criminal records, but two-thirds had committed only minor infractions (U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2016). I also got this confirmed by many of my informants, as most of them hadn't made any serious crime, other than driving under influence or staying in the country illegally. There were however some of them who had committed more serious crime, and they often referred to themselves as "bad boys" and didn't wanted to tell me what exactly they had done.

When someone is caught for staying illegally in the United States, they can either choose between being repatriated voluntarily, or they get a minimum of three months sentence in jail. This depends on how long time they have been living illegally in the U.S, how many times they have crossed the border unauthorized, and if they got caught while doing something criminal. After they have sentenced in jail, they have to stand in front of an immigration-judge, who decides if they get granted a citizenship or if they are to be deported. Many of the persons has to sentence in jail also gets involved in criminal groups, even though they didn't were part of a criminal network before. As with many of my informants, those getting expelled from the United States, deportation had a devastating impact in their lives. "Deportation is the removal of "aliens" from the physical, juridical, and social space of the state." (De Genova and Peutz, 2010:1). Whereas deportation should have been considered as a response to "unauthorized" or "irregular" migration, it has come to stand in as the natural way of state powers to deal with this "problem". The current deportation of Mexicans must be understood within a long historical frame of migration between Mexico and the United States (De Genova 2005). As De Genova puts it; "Undocumented migration, and Mexican migration in particular, has been rendered synonymous with the U.S. nation-state's purported "loss of control" of its borders and has supplied the pretext for what has in fact been a continuous intensification of militarized

control on the U.S-Mexico border” (De Genova 2005: 242). Previous “returns” to Mexico have been both voluntary, such as the seasonal migration, and forced. Today’s deportations of Mexicans can be seen as deeply embedded within the removals of Mexicans in the past.

It often came people to the shelters who had newly been deported from the United States. They came to the different shelters either by walking or being brought by the Mexican government. One day, a vehicle stopped outside Casa Ayuda, and out stepped a couple in their thirties. The sun had set, making the shelter a rather cold and harsh place. I noticed the woman crying as she walked into the shelter, the man stroking her back. Pastor Lopez welcomed them and gave them something to drink. They were calm, but I could tell by their looks that they were in shock. Either one of them touched their coffee, but sat quiet and looked out in the room, waiting for Pastor Lopez to come back with clean clothes and toothbrushes, so they could go to bed and wait for the day to pass.

I noticed a big difference in how the migrants faced the deportation, considering how long time they had lived in the United States, or if it was their first time crossing the border and then getting caught. Felipe whom I also met at the shelter Casa Ayuda, tells me about the last time he crossed the border:

It was the third time I tried to cross the border back. I had been living in the United States for 15 years when they deported me. I have been caught every time I have tried to cross the border back again. I just want to be with my wife and children. They live in Houston, and my children ask me every day when I will be back. I miss them. Because I had crossed the border illegally twice before, I got sentenced 6 months in jail for crossing the border illegally the third time I crossed. I cannot stay here in Mexico. There is nothing for me here and I can’t go on living without my family just like that. I think it so unfair that you get punished by crossing a border. It is just a border. I just want to be with my family.

Felipe’s story tells how deportees are people whose life experiences are difficult to account for. They are usually seen as invisible, considered superfluous and dangerous to the nation-state. As Felipe tried for the third time to reach the United States to be with his children, he was considered to be illegal and criminal. Deportation and its impacts on individuals are important to take into account when exploring the ways the nation-state regulates and controls individuals. I will further discuss how the deportation impacts the lives of those who had been deported in chapter five.

The deportation process

The word banish rhymes with vanish. Through banishment or deportation there is the literal threat of invisibility. Not only when the event is concretized, but in the anguish and the uncertainty leading to that. Made invisible. Made meaningless. Superfluous. To other to ourselves.

-Margaret Randall (1987:471)

During my fieldwork I got to visit the Mexican Consulate in Calexico. Through my friend at the university in Mexicali I got to conduct an interview with the consul for the Mexican Consulate in Calexico, who also was working as a teacher in politics at the University. I politely asked him if there was any possibility for me to visit the consulate, and join his colleagues at the different detention centers and jails in Calexico. There was no possibility for me to visit the jails, but I was welcomed to join their trips to the deportation centers. I stood up early that day, thinking I needed a good amount of time crossing the check point at the border, but when I first got there it took only five minutes to cross. Because of my Norwegian passport I was allowed to go first in line. Arriving at the consulate early in the morning I maybe thought that it wasn't going to be that busy, but it was. People were queuing in front of the main door to the consulate building, and waiting for them to open. Most of them were there to fix their working visas. I was showed around at the consulate, meeting people that work with the people that are getting deported, both in prisons and detention centers. The woman showing me around, Ms. Noriega had worked there for over 20 years, and she was responsible for visiting the detention centers, conducting interviews with the people that was getting deported to Mexico, or waiting to be trialed to an immigration judge. Her main task was to ask questions to confirm that they were Mexicans. Ms. Noriega told me that there was a lot of cases were the illegal immigrants would lie and say that they were Mexican, while they originally were from mostly Central-American countries. She would ask questions like how the Mexican national song goes, in which street they live etc.

The detention center was located just outside the city center of Calexico and was heavily secured by the Homeland Security of the US. Outside there were cars, bicycles, motorbikes and trucks ready to be used at the border fence, to catch illegal migrants crossing the border. Inside the detention center we were led to the room were the people that were getting deported were. They were sitting maybe 20-30 persons in each of the small rooms where they would have one

toilet to share in the end of the room. Even though it was 30 degrees outside, the room was cold, and the men were wearing foil blankets. The people were divided in separate rooms depending on if they were getting deported back to Mexico or Central-American countries, if they were under the age of 18, if they were going to be sent to jail or recently had been in jail, or if they were going to be sent to another detention center in Mexico. Men and women had their own rooms as well, and at the end of the room there were a room for families. In this room there were a microwave, diapers and a crib. There were also a room where they had placed political asylum seekers from Africa and Asia. The detention center was crowded, and they were constantly being watched by the Homeland security officers who were sitting in the middle of the room, keeping an eye on them. The officers were listening to rap music and watching YouTube videos.

Ms. Noriega would call out the men she wanted to interview, and today there were two boys and a girl under the age of 18 that was getting deported back to Mexico. Their clothes were dirty and it looked like they had been caught while they were trying to cross the desert. As I understood they had been together while they had been caught by the border patrols, and two of them were cousins. When she would ask them about the contact information to their parents or contact information in the United States, they took off their shoes and showed her the back of the shoe sole, where they had written the phone number. The three of them seemed quite excited over the situation as they were giggling. Ms. Noriega told me later on that it was the fourth time she had interviewed the youngest one that was getting deported once again. He was only sixteen years old.

While Ms. Noriega was finishing her interviews with the rest of the group of Mexicans that was at the detention center, I had a little chat with one of the officers working there. I asked him for how long he had been working there, and if he liked his job. The officer said that he had worked there for over 8 years, since he was 22 years old, and he enjoyed his work. As we were talking we started talking about migrants crossing the border, in search for a better life, and the officer told me that it was a problem for the United States, that so many tried to cross the border illegally, and that the government used a lot of money to keep the border surveillance.

Later on that day, I got to join Ms. Noriega as she followed them to the border to Mexico, and dropped them off at the border fence. We met with Homeland Security, driving the teenagers to the border fence, and we greeted them as they got out of the car. They were looking shy back at us, not saying much. I had imagined that there would be more anger and sadness at the moment of deportation, but to my surprise the teenagers seemed fairly alright, and they were still giggling as they were being driven back at the detention center.

The removal system is based on who is desirable and deserving, and who is not (Bauman 2004:33). Simon (1998) argues that the “immigration imprisonment” is a part of the general prison system, but differs by being a pre-modern prison. He argues that it is a place for punishment and the permanent removal of undocumented migrants (Simon 1998). While prison is associated with “disciplining” (Foucault 1977), detention is associated with taking undesirable non-citizens to abandonment (Khosravi 2010). Alvaro, who had tried to cross the border four times, tells me about how it is like to get caught by the border patrols and put in detention center;

They caught me at the border. I had been walking in the desert for three days, I was so close to make it, until a border patrol car came out of nowhere and they made us lay on the ground with our hands above our heads, while they were pointing at us with their guns. Me and “my hermanos” (brothers) didn’t had any other choice than to go with them, to the detention center. At the detention center they didn’t tell us how long we were to stay there. They treated us like criminals. We were thirty persons in a little room, not being able to lie down and sleep. I yelled at the border patrols, that the treatment they gave us was against basic human rights. They never told us how long they were going to keep us there, neither where we were going. They even took all of our things. While I was there, I spoke up to one of the immigration guards when he was beating up a guy. After that I was held in custody for almost four months.

The conditions in short time detention centers, is cold, and they get a little amount of food, considering the time spent at the detention center once the migrants cross into the United States. At the center for rehabilitation for drug abusers and alcoholics I met Emilio, who was from Mexicali. He had been staying at the center for rehabilitation for a couple of weeks. Before, he had been in jail, arrested for smuggling migrants into the United States. He had crossed the border over to the U.S. fourteen times, and had been caught two of them.

The last time I got caught I was sentenced to three years in jail, because I had been working as a coyote. After jail I got put in a detention center in Calexico. There we were thirty persons in a little room, not being able to lie down and sleep. I yelled at the border patrols, that the treatment they gave us was against basic human rights. They never told us how long they were going to keep us there, neither where we were going. They even took all of our things.

The detention center, I argue are spaces of exceptions where regimes of state institutions, rules

over the rights of rights and justice, and can be seen as the nation state way of excluding those who don't belong to the nation-state.

Crossing patterns

According to some of my informants, migration and return were relatively open from the late 1970's through the early 1990's. It was also easier to cross the border, without being caught. Alfonso, whom I met at one of the shelters, told me he had been crossing the border fence with his parents when he was ten years old. They had found a hole in the fence, which back then was just a regular fence, easy to get through, and they had just climbed through it. He was seven years old when he and his family decided to cross the border and migrate to the United States. He remembers his father first went through the fence, then his mother lifted him and his two siblings over through the hole in the fence and safely over in his father's arms. Today the situation is different:

Today they have infrared cameras, which make it difficult to cross during the night. Also they (the Americans) have helicopters, satellites, border patrols driving both bicycles and cars everywhere. In Sonora, the border town in Nogales, is relatively easy to cross, because of the rough terrain, a lot of people try to cross the border in Sonora. But there is also a big river with strong current. A lot of the people drown trying to cross the river, because they cannot swim.

Surveillance of the border has increased after since September 11, 2001, and in 2006, U.S. President George W. Bush, decided to build a 1,125-kilometer long wall along the border, prohibiting the movement of Mexicans trying to cross the border. Because of the strengthening of border security, migrants have been pushed to find new ways of trying to get in to the country. The changes of the migration patterns based on the "Operation Gatekeeper"²¹ and its replicas in 1995, brought consequences for the migrants in transit that was intended to cross the border, and today they have to find other, often more dangerous ways to cross the border.

Migrants from Central America also have been pushed to take more dangerous routes because of the tightening of Mexico's border. In 1994 Mexico's border with Guatemala became the southern border of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Mexican government, responding to pressure from the United States, has also increased surveillance

²¹ Operation Gatekeeper was a border enforcement initiative that was instituted at the Tijuana-San Diego border sector in 1994 to curtail the flow of illegal crossings. Gatekeeper was part of a United States campaign known as 'Prevention through Deterrence'.

along the Isthmus de Tehuantepec, Mexico's southern border. The Isthmus measures 125 miles, compared with the 2000-mile border between Mexico and the United States. Most recently, the United States-backed Plan Mexico, also known as the Merida Initiative²², provides significant funding to Mexico with the stated intention of security aid to design and carry out counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, and border security measures. Undocumented migrants crossing Mexico are also equated with criminal activity such as drug trafficking and terrorist threats. According to some of my informants it was easier to get involved with the drug cartels operating in the area, and in that way smuggle narcotics over the border. Savvas who worked at as a volunteer at the shelter Casa Mexicali tells me how it is easier to involve with the drug cartels to cross the border;

I guess that there are some deals with the borders patrol, that they can get them over the border. I have a friend that had something to do with the border patrol that had something to do with the cartel. They drove them to the mountains, and said; do this and this. Like the job my friend had, was that he was just bringing stuff for the cartels. He was said to drive a car with immigrants to the borders, and just let them of at the fence in the mountains. Some immigrants get in so much trouble, while others go easily through. It is all business. There are a lot of immigrants that smuggle drugs over the fence. We call the people that takes people over the fence; coyote/pajero (Smuggler). They give you a bag with much stuff in it. Then you have to do the route by yourself. My cousins and uncle crossed the borders I think it was 4000dollars. It is quite expensive. Maybe when you pay this kind of money it is more like a secure crossing.

Felipe also told me how difficult it is to cross the border;

If you don't have enough money to pay a coyote, or get involved with the drug cartels, you have to jump the border fence yourself. Because of height, there is a risk of breaking your legs in the attempt to jump down from the fence. Then you get caught immediately because you cannot move, you know. I think the easiest way to cross the border is by getting involved with the drug cartels with smuggling drugs over. The drug cartels pay for everything, they pay for the coyote or the green card if you pass through the check points. But it is very dangerous. There is always someone after you, either other drug cartels or Americans hiding in the desert, trying to take your bag with

²² Merida Initiative is a cooperation between the United States, Mexico and Central American countries to fight organized crime and associated violence.

drugs so that they can sell it. It is like walking around with a bag full of cash».

According to International Organization for Migration there have been 1250 migrants that have lost their lives at the border, while attempting to cross the border from Mexico to the United States, since 2014 (IOM 2018). Alvaro, one of the migrants I met at Casa del Migrante, had been deported back to Mexico eight times. He was from Nogales, a border town in the Mexican state Sonora, and had been deported back to Mexicali.

Usually, I cross the border back to Arizona from Nogales. I have crossed the border so many times now, that I can cross it by myself, but it is hard. It takes about 3-4 days walking to get to nearest town in the United States, and the climate is hot and sunny. And it is dangerous as well, there are a lot of snakes and scorpions. I often see the skeletons of dead people lying there in the desert.

In order to survive the difficult desert crossing, the migrants carry no more than two-three liters of water, a little amount of food and water compared to the several-day long trip. According to my informants, the coyotes often forbid them from carrying too much because it will slow them down. Crossing the border is harsh. Injuries and hypothermia cause many to stay behind, often near a road where they can meet upon a vehicle and signal for help. Those who manage to cross the border successfully are met by a “raitero” (driver) and transported to the next step of their journey. If they get caught by the border patrols, they get a «voluntary return» and then get sent back to Mexicali within a few days. If less fortunate after getting caught, they are tried in federal court, charged with «illegal entry» or «re-entry», and possibly sent to immigration detention, and then deported to Mexico or country of origin.

Stigma and re-migration

Most of the men I spoke with at the shelters for migrants, had been so long in the United States, that they had lost their ties to Mexico and the Central-American countries. For this reason most of them stayed in Mexicali, to be close to their families in the United States, and to try to cross back again or because they no longer know anyone in their hometowns in Mexico.

Ramirez, who stayed at Casa Betania had recently arrived in Mexicali with the train from Chiapas. He had been deported back to El Salvador after staying in Houston for a month. In the United States, Javier had an aunt who had helped him get a job once he had arrived. After a month, he had been stopped by the police, and they quickly figured out that he was an

undocumented migrant.

I didn't understand a word of what they were saying. I don't know how to speak English. The only word I know is "I'm sorry". So they caught me, and deported me. "Because I had been living in the United States illegally, I had to sentence three months in jail. Life in jail was horrible, but I met a guy there who was a painter and we became good friends. He would sketch the most beautiful drawings. However, I got deported back in an airplane. It was so scary! I have never been on an airplane before. The funniest part is that it took me over a month to reach the United States from El Salvador, and then only two hours to go back again". When I ask him how it was like to be repatriated back to El Salvador, he said he was very shameful. "I had promised my family that it was going to get better after I moved to the United States. I think my family was disappointed in me. Especially my father. My mother, I think, was happy about me being back home again. But I can't stay in El Salvador. There is nothing left there. Poorly paid jobs and the criminal gangs are after to take everyone that goes in their way. Therefore I'm back in Mexicali. I hope to cross the border back, so that I can send money back to my family.

Many of the migrants who are expelled from the country to which they have migrated, will not settle in the country to which they have been returned but will try to re-migrate again (Schuster and Majidi 2014). Based on their explorations of post-deportation outcomes for Afghans, Schuster and Majidi (2014) argue that, in addition to the factors that had caused the original migration, such as poverty, lack of opportunity and fear of persecution, deportation creates at least three additional reasons that make re-migration the most likely outcome. These are debt, family commitments and the shame of failure and or «contamination» leading to stigmatization (Schuster and Majidi 2014). Shuster and Majidi (2014) also claims that in some cases, in particular those deported from the US, whose are forcibly returned are tainted with the stigma of criminality, while in Europe, it seems like the stigma is more likely to be that of failure.

Oskar, a 44 year old man staying at Casa del Migrante told me that I was too young to understand what he meant when he said that it is was embarrassing returning home. Oskar was 44 years old, from a state in Mexico called Guadalajara, had lived in Los Angeles over 20 years. «My story is probably exactly the same as the others you've met», Oskar said.

I got pulled over by the police one night I was driving home from some friends. We had been drinking, so the police stopped me to check if I was drunk, and they found out that I was both drunk and illegal. So, I sentenced three months in jail, for driving and for being an illegal

immigrant. Then, I got deported to Tijuana. The first thing I did was to try to jump the border back again, but got deported again, exactly eight days ago. So now I am here in Mexicali, sweating because of the unbearable heat here. But, I've heard it's easier to cross the border in this border town, so that's why I came.

Oskar has a wife and three children back in the United States. His youngest, only four years old. «*Mi hija chichitita*» (my little girl), he says. Oskar's wife is an American citizen and their children as well, «so next weekend they are coming to visit», he says. «I love my wife very much. She is the love of my life». Oskar tells me about his family in Mexico. He has four sisters and two brothers, and they still live in Guadalajara where they help their parents run a fruit farm. He had also been sending them money ever since he got a job in the United States. He hasn't seen them in 20 years, and Oskar tells me he doesn't want to go visit them or even want to tell them that he is back in Mexico.

As the literature on deportation has expanded, authors have examined the stigmatization of those who are deported. Drotbohm (2014) argues that deportation isn't the end of the stigmatizing process, the point at which the person is expelled from 'normal' society. She claims that in certain circumstances, deportation continues the process of stigmatization and leads to the deported person being treated as tainted by failure as no longer normal (Drotbohm 2014).

Social stigma (Goffman 1963) is an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting' and causes the individual to be classified as different from others, from the norm, undesirable and therefore to be rejected, reducing his/her identity 'from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman 1963:3). Goffman (1963) argues that these stigmatized must constantly confront the image that others reflect back at them and deal with their rejection by others. Haunted by their failure, they suffer a loss of status. Brotherton and Barrios (2009) suggests that the experience of stigma is probably the most difficult social and psychological issue confronting deportees. Many of whom I spoke with, hadn't been visiting their families after they had been deported, because of the shame they felt when they were back in Mexico. Like Oskar, returning back to his parents and siblings in Guadalajara would had been terribly shameful, because he was a grown up man, and had failed to provide for his family in the United States, and also for his family in Mexico. There is a stereotype of the successfully migrant, who sends money back to their families, who managed to cross the border and has a good job in the United States. Fear of rejection by families and communities may lead those deported to avoid rejection by excluding themselves from the labor market and ultimately by excluding themselves from their

home society by re-migrating back again. Also, some of the men at the shelters, didn't have anyone to return to, after being deported back to their country of origin. "I have a mother and a sister back in El Salvador, but nothing more. I have lived so many years abroad now, that there is nothing for me there. I cannot go back", one of the men staying there told me.

Chapter 4

Experiences of Violence

One day at the shelter “Grupo de Ayuda” I met Carlos. It was his first night at the shelter and he seemed nervous. His face was pale and he was being restless, not being able to sit down or relax. He was busy running back and forth, borrowing the phone at shelter, calling to his family in the US. I could hear him crying in the phone, saying he is sorry. Carlos had been deported about a week ago. After spending several months in jail for re-entering illegally, the detention center he had been on, had sent him to Tijuana, the biggest city in Baja California, where they had placed them outside the border fence and from there they were supposed to find their way through the darkness of the city, searching for a place they could spend the night. On his way to a shelter for deported migrants, he had met a guy who called himself a coyote which said he could help him cross the border back to the US again. Carlos, who was so desperate to return back to his children and wife did what he could, and said yes to the deal he had made with the coyote. The deal consisted of Carlos paying him 800 American dollars, so that he could safely bring him back to “el otro lado” did however not turn out that well. Instead of helping him crossing the border back, the coyote kidnapped him and had beaten him up until he would say the name of his family in the United States. After forcing Carlos family to send him more money, and threatened them by saying that if they didn’t pay him money they would never see Carlos again, the coyote had brought him to Mexicali. Carlos didn’t know what to do. This was the second time he had been deported from the US, making it impossible to ever apply for a green card and cross the border legally back again.

Introduction

A lot of the people I met at the shelters had similar stories like Carlos; almost all of my informants had experienced violence or discrimination while being in the border areas between Mexico and the United States. The migrants coming all the way from Central-American countries faced even a bigger threat against violence while they were traveling through Mexico to get to the border areas. Violence and fear of the police, the Mexican government and the drug cartels operating in the area, was one of the main conversation topics amongst the men at the

shelters.

Violence in Mexico has escalated significantly after the federal government initiated the war against organized crime. Violence has especially swollen up in the states where the government has had clashes with the criminal organizations and has gotten worse during the last couple of years. Mexico continues to suffer high levels of violence from criminal gangs associated with narcotics trade, and the Mexican state relies heavily on its armed forces to deal with the criminal gangs. Violence in Mexico remains unevenly distributed with almost 70% of the violence concentrated in the states situated along is the main drug-trafficking routes to the United States. Since 2007, there has been a conflict between the country's powerful drug cartels, which has led to thousands of drug related murders. It is ten years since the start of the "war on drugs", the use of military personnel in public security operations continues and violence remains widespread throughout the country (Amnesty International 2016).

A fundamental problem throughout Central America and Mexico is that criminal violence and state violence often are difficult to separate from one another. That means that gangs and organized criminals do not operate outside the state system, but often together with the state authorities. At my time spent at the different shelters for migrants in Mexicali, migrants regularly discussed their lack of trust in their own government as well as their fear and disgust with the Mexican police and military. What they experienced regarding everyday violence during their journey through Mexico and at the borderlands between Mexico and the United States, illustrates some of the mechanisms through which large-scale social forces becomes embedded into forces of individual suffering. Such suffering is structured by historically given and often economic processes (Farmer 2009).

Phillipe Bourgois (2001) writes in his article about violence and power amongst second-generation Puerto Rican crack dealers in East Harlem, New York City, and revolutionary peasants in rural El Salvador. A 20-year retrospective of analysis of his field notes documents the ways political terror and repression become embedded in daily interaction that becomes normalized brutality in a dynamic of everyday violence (Bourgois 2001). Furthermore Bourgois argues that the structural, symbolic and interpersonal violence that accompanies both revolutionary mobilization and also labor migration to the United States, follow gendered fault lines (Bourgois 2001). Everyday violence in a neo-liberal version of peacetime facilitates the administration of the subordination of the poor who blame themselves for character failings (Bourgois 2001). As Bourgois uses structural violence, a term he has borrowed from Galtung (1969) to refer to the "political-economic organization of society that imposes conditions of physical and emotional distress, from high morbidity and mortality rates to poverty and abusive

working conditions” (Bourgois 2011:7. Structural violence, he claims “is rooted, at the macro-level, in structures such as unequal international terms of trade and is expressed locally in exploitative labor markets” (Bourgois 2001:3). By using Bourgois (2001) notion of structural violence I argue that the violence the migrants faced is produced by historical trajectories of political and criminal violence and by global economies that profit from human mobility.

Most of my informants from especially Honduras and El Salvador told me that they couldn't return to their country of origin, because it was too dangerous for them to return. This suggests that the fear of violence was one of the dominant motivations of migration. One of the teenagers I met at the shelter told me why he had chosen to migrate from El Salvador. He left everything when he fled gang violence in El Salvador. Now he is in Mexicali, trying to cross the border and join his relatives in Texas, and find a job. «I am nervous about that all my effort, all the suffering I have gone through to get to Mexicali, is about to get destroyed by getting caught by a border patrol and get a jail sentence. He had fled the criminal gangs (Mara Salvatrucha, better known as «MS-13» or «Mara») from El Salvador. “I got assaulted, shot and persecuted. They wanted me to join, but I didn't want to. They threatened to kill me if I didn't join, so I had to leave”.

At the shelters I often heard about the “M13”, or the Mara Salvatrucha by my informants, and for many of them, Mara Salvatrucha is considered to be a product of the civil war in El Salvador in the 1980's. In contrast to the cartels, the Mara Salvatrucha is a U.S-phenomenon, where displaced youths migrated to Los Angeles during the crisis. Poor undocumented El Salvadorians who were living in Los Angeles (LA), got recruited into the LA-gangs, and there founded Mara Salvatrucha. After the immigration policy became stricter, after the 9/11, the El Salvadorians who had done minor criminal activity was deported from the United States back to El Salvador. This happened in a time where El Salvador was coming out of a civil war and was therefore a fertile ground for gang members with weapons to continue with gang violence. Mara Salvatrucha has the last couple of years been visible along the El Salvador- U.S. migrant trail where they attack migrants as they hide in concealed train compartments or jump of the train as they approach checkpoints (Hondagneu- Sotelo 2006:103). In this chapter I wish to explore how violence and fear impacts the migrant's lives while they are staying in Mexicali, by using the narratives about their journey through Mexico. By using ethnography I want to address how neoliberal societies contribute to the reproduction of violence and migration.

The war against drugs

The story of the narcotics in Mexico goes back to the opium poppies, introduced by Chinese immigrants, at the end of the nineteenth century. By the 1920's traffickers, who dealt primarily with opium paste, had established clear routes into the US market. Marijuana, a native crop that was cultivated more widely, initially held less interest for smugglers, but the drug-culture boom of the 1960's in the US changed all that and provided them with their first opportunity to get rich. Until the 1980's drug smuggling in Mexico had been mostly a regionally based activity, largely rooted in Sinaloa, because Colombian groups dominated international trade (Muehlmann 2013). In the beginning of the twentieth century the growth of the cartel's power in Mexico grew after the Colombian organization collapsed. Muehlmann (2013) argues that this process was facilitated in part by Mexico's signing of NAFTA in 1994, when Mexico got cheap agribusiness-produced corn, that led to Mexican farmers and rural workers got out of business, and turned to drug cultivation and trade as instead (Muehlmann 2013). Increased legal trade between the United States and Mexico also made illegal trade possible, because the same routes could be used to smuggle narcotics into the United States as well. To understand the present-day systematic violence against migrants, there is a need to understand the larger context of violence and low-intensity conflict that has increased in Mexico since President Calderón declared a "war on drugs." Since 2006, over 50,000 people have been killed in drug-related conflicts and violence in Mexico. Furthermore, the very entities designed to protect the most basic human rights of individuals are responsible for some of the most gross human rights violations. In 2009, Amnesty International issued a report on the human rights abuses committed by the Mexican military, including torture (Amnesty International 2009).

Howard Campbell (2009) uses, in his book about the drug war on the U.S.-Mexico border, the phrase "drug war zone" to refer to the cultural space where drug traffickers and law enforcement agents compete for power and control. These drug war spaces are not unique to Mexico but goes across both North and South America, in terms of the production, transportation, distribution, purchase and consumption of illegal drugs and weapons. The merchandise of illegal drugs must be understood within a context of violence, policies transnational crime, laws and economies.

At Casa del Inmigrante I met Enrique, who was from Honduras. While we sat together, he told me that the reason Honduras has so much violence today is because there is so much drug trafficking there.

We have become the country where all the drugs get smuggled through. The drug dealers are

everywhere and they don't care who they kill or how many they kill. My sister got shot while she was going home after school. Life is worthless for them. So I had to leave.

Enrique was trying to cross the border after being deported two times before. If he were to get caught by the border patrols, he could face up to 20 years in prison. Enrique's little story shows the way present-day migration from Central American countries is embedded in histories of violence, economic insecurity and militarization. Enrique had no support from his government, which he saw as corrupt and responsible for the rise of violence and organized criminals in his community. The US has a critical role in the drug wars: US consumption drives Mexican drug trafficking, and the cartels typically fill their storages across the border.

«Narco cultura»

Traces of drug trade can also be found in folklore music; "*narco corridos*". Mexico's narcocorrido music genre and subculture openly celebrates the most extreme aspects of the country's drug war. The music scene originated in the old cartel citadel of Mexico's western Sinaloa state, and it's an open secret that most of the artists identified with the genre are tied to the local cartel, and the songs are filled with narrations of executions and drugs. During my fieldwork I often heard about the narco corridos, and how the drug cartels often got romanticized by the media.

Brandon: It is a part of our culture. I like it, but not the ones about the narcos. They are romanticizing the narcos. They even made a saint. It is called; Jesus Malverde (the patron saint of narcos). It's their saint. Actually, most people like to listen to this kind of music. At a party for example, someone will always put on some narco corridos. Really? We are fighting this stuff and everyone is listening to it anyways. It is such a contradiction. We talk more about banda-music.

Me: Do they use drugs, the ones who make this kind of music?

Brandon: Yes, they do a lot of cocaine. They sing about the pain and cocaine. The songs are especially popular in Northern-Mexico. For eight years ago, it became more popular in some states here in the north and it spread to the whole country. Have you heard about chollos? Maybe you can identify them by American movies. They are also called gangsters. The chollos were the big thing here in Mexico. There were big gangs- bald, skinny, chains, baggy pants, drugged up. That turned well up, and they became a part of the drug culture- the narcos. It is the same

people, only we call them narcos now. And they listen to this kind of music- the narco corridos. You can easily see who is a narco today by the way they dress. They live in the city, and also in the villages. They live in ranches. They are very proud of their Mexican culture and their heritage. So a lot of them in live in ranches.”

The narco culture is also embedded in the daily languages where they have word like a “narco-saint”. The narco has become a powerful social identity. The narco cultura in Mexico exemplifies how embedded the drug trafficking is in the daily life in Mexico, and especially in the border region.

Views on crime and the Mexican state

The sky could be falling and we wouldn't care». Mexicans are lazy and doesn't care about anything.

Andres, informant

Critique is an important way of expressing marginalization and dissatisfaction and can be found in other aspects of the society. During my fieldwork I met with different people who were not migrants. Brandon worked at a maquiladora, and his job contained of visiting the different shelters where he would try to hire migrants to work at the maquilas. I met with Brandon at a cafe in Zona Centro one afternoon. We sat close to Parque del Mariachi (Mariachi Park), a park where many migrants in the border area came to lay down and find shadow under the trees. I have recorded the following with a recorder.

Have you heard about Donald Trump? He is a crazy American who wants to become the next president in the United States, and I've heard that he wants to build a big wall at the border. If he is to be the next president, I think it will be really bad for Mexicans who lives in the United States or for us who wants to migrate, or just visit to the country. I think that everyone in the United States thinks of us as criminals that come to their country trying to sell drugs, stealing their jobs and live there just to take advantage of the welfare benefits. I think that it is going to be dangerous to live there. I think there will be a lot more racism and discrimination than it already is. And in the United States you can own a gun, and that is crazy if you ask me. I also think that Mexico is on the verge of economic crises, and the government is so corrupt that it's almost impossible to do something about it. Our president, Enrique Peña Nieto, is worse president, I believe. A couple of weeks ago,

the governor of the state Veracruz, had made the staff at a children's hospital give fake chemotherapy to children with cancer. The families paid a whole lot of money to the hospital, thinking their children were getting the right treatment, while the only thing they got was placebo. The money the parents gave went straight to his pocket, of course. When the children didn't get any better, they figured it out, and the governor fled the city and nobody knows where he is. Corruption is manifested so deep in the Mexican state and culture. I think it is impossible to change it, and here in Mexico you cannot trust anyone!

No one likes the president here. He is from the red party, they do whatever they want, they are a very corrupt people and they just like to fill their pockets with money and nothing more. We have the rights now in the power, but they're not any good. Kiosks like Oxxo, you can go and vote there. Often, the politicians buy votes. They go somewhere and ask if they can copy their ID, for food and money, and they go and vote for them. I think that a revolution is going to happen in Mexico soon. There is too much stuff going on here now. I hope for a revolution again. Everything with the drug cartels, the corrupted state, the bad economy, educational loss, works loss. (..) You know, the retirement is longer now, and you pay less, your boss is not responsible if something happens to you at your job. They want to charge for luxury stuff like having a pen and other stuff. You know- In 1968, the year of the student massacre- we held Olympic Games and they had a legal tax for all the country to pay for it. We still have this tax. And for 5 years ago, they made a tax for those who have animals at a farm. Like if you a donkey, you had to pay taxes for it. They just want to screw the people, especially the poor ones. And to get a job you need to know someone, and if you're poor that's not easy. I think it's going to be harder for poor Mexicans in the future. There are a lot of European countries that educate people, take care of, and look after their people, not just like "I want to rise, I want to be better than you- and this is a kind of mindset that is typical here in Mexico. We think that we have to be the best. I guess in some European countries, that people are more generous with people, more kind. Am I right? At the end we are all people, and I think that people, or Mexican people, thinks that the money or status is the value you have. Being a person is not valuable in itself. Being a person with money is valuable. You have to have a good position and/with power to be valuable. And if you are a beggar or something, people just turn around. This is our culture. And it is kind of like this is in our neighbor countries as well. Like in the US, for example. The US makes us believe through movies and social media, that they are the best country in the world, the best people. Americans has a better self-esteem. And I think that Mexicans has borrowed this kind of mentality. Or at least we want to be like them. We have a lot of culture. There is a Colombian author that explains why our society is like it is. We feel robbed because of the Spaniards that came to our country and raped out women, sanctuaries, they killed our people, they put their culture on ours. In his book he reveals that we are a hurt people. That we are broken in two

pieces, sort of. He compares us with a vagina. We feel like we've been raped as a people. It is embedded in our culture. The book is called; "*A hundreds years of solitude*"²³.

"El que no tranza, no avanza"

In Mexico I often heard the expression *«el que no tranza, no avanza»* (The one who doesn't cheat, will get cheated on). This was an expression which some of my informants claimed characterized the Mexican society. Hector whom I met at the rehabilitation center for drug addicts told me that Mexico was a big and wild country:

There are a lot of them in the city center. You see a lot of children with their mothers. I read some place that there is a criminal organization that steel children, drug the down and give them to women, so it easier for them to collect money. There have been cases like this. Money right? All the things money can do to people. All the criminal organizations know each other; they know what everyone is up to. It is really weird you know. You cannot trust anyone. You always have to take care of yourself and your belongings. Not to get scammed. There are many people ready to exploit. You never know what other people can do to you. You know we have a saying here in Mexico that is inherited in our culture; "El que no tranza, no avanza". It is like; if you're not the one that scams another person, you are the one that will get scammed. If you're not the one that scams, blackmail, trick, fool someone, make a fool of someone and take their money for example, doesn't get advantage from it. You have to do it in advance. It is someone everyone says. "el que no tranza, no avanza"- He who doesn't cheat doesn't get ahead. You have kids saying that they know that if they want to succeed, they have to screw someone. You have to steel, or take money or something. For example, it is common when you find a wallet you return it back. But not here, it is like you win the lottery if you find someone's money or cellphone.

The quote "El que no tranza, no avanza", speaks about the mentality amongst the people living in Mexico, and the trust the citizens have to each other. It can be bound up with the general violence and the socio-economical differences in Mexico. When you systematically get excluded from the state, you get tempted to lie, steal and engage with criminal activity to gain the same rights as the upper classes. "El que no tranza, no avanza", can also be understood as a social signifier in Mexico, which allows people to continue to do dishonest actions and underpin the country's corruption.

²³ «A hundreds years of solitude» by the Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Fear as a way of life

“You shouldn’t walk alone in the streets of Mexicali. It’s dangerous here and you cannot trust anybody. Not even the police. They are almost as bad as the drug cartels”.

Savvas, main informant

During the recent years, violence and exploitation against migrants have become more systematic and inescapable. A complex network of organized criminals, corrupt authorities and everyday people have gotten successful in developing methodical forms of kidnapping, extortion and violence targeted against migrants. In 2016, the Mexicana National Human Rights Commission issued a report documenting nearly 10.000 kidnapping victims, most of them Central Americans migrants (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos 2016). Alfonso who had arrived Mexicali with the train from Chiapas told me:

Mexico is a big and beautiful country, but it is not secure. It is a little dangerous here. The police are dangerous. Last weekend the police robbed somebody here. They were robbing a person lying in the street. I want to go back to America. I don’t even want to stay one more day in this country. Last week I saw something. I had an experience with the police, and a friend of mine. The police said: “You there, you come with us”, and I said to them; “Don’t worry, he is my friend. He hasn’t done anything”. But they took him for no reason, and made him pay for something he hadn’t done. The police can do whatever they want. I don’t know what we did, but they were rude. Every day the police rob someone, they rape. You should be careful when you take the bus, the taxi. It is better you have a car. When you go outside, never go alone. Someone can hide and wait for you. Ask somebody to come with you, or just stay inside and watch television. This country is for nobody.

After I have interviewed the two men from Eduardo’s workplace, we drive to a local taqueria for some lunch. We talk about the Mexican state and government. “It is madly corrupted”, he says while shaking his head. Eduardo tries to explain the differences between Mexico and the United States. Most Mexican, he claims, wish to have an American life- like the one you see in the movies. They wish their country was free for corruption, violence, a country where there exist welfare benefits. Eduardo tells me:

Mexicans want a peaceful country with well-established laws and regulations, at the same time they don't even hesitate when they break the law themselves. I mean that Mexicans have double standards. If we get stopped by the police, for example, the police may ask for money instead of giving you a fee, and in this way you don't get sanctions and don't get a fee, but instead pay directly to the policeman. Mexicans do a great job with continuing to underpin the corruption in the country, even though they want an end to it. And this is the reason why Mexico still is a third world country.

Eduardo also tells me he would like to live in the United States, but he loves Mexico too much to leave it and go and live in the United States. His meanings about Americans are that they are boring. Mexicans are kinder and "warmer", he claims. He would never have left the Mexican culture and adopted the American. I ask about the happening of 2014, where the 43 students in Ayotzinapa, in the state Guerrero, who were got kidnapped and killed, most likely by the Mexican government. I had been wondering if I could ask about this happening, and their thoughts about it, being afraid that it was a rather sentimental topic. Eduardo didn't look like he was disrupted at all. "It was an awful and terrible act done by state and everyone was shocked, but I think that most Mexicans were just relieved that it didn't have happened to their loved ones. I mean, this is Mexico. Terrible actions like that happen all the time. The only reason why this particular event never is to be forgotten is because it got internationally known".

I have lived different places in Mexico. I have lived in Sonora. I would like to travel, but not here in Mexico. I think it is unsafe to travel here because of the narcos. At some of the checkpoints around in Mexico it can be quite dangerous to pass. They are run by the state, but sometimes the narcos pay the police to look after and stop people they are looking for. So the narcos intervene with the military. The narcos have a lot of money and they are everywhere, you know. They have connections everywhere- with the military, the police, and the politicians. It is corrupted everywhere. We talk about Ayotzinapa. It was very sad. Actually we had this massacre with student in 1968. It is very famous. I don't remember what they were protesting against, but the government thought that they were spies for the CIA. So they gathered around them and killed them. Here in Mexico stuff like that can happen to anybody. Actually Ciudad Juarez was said a couple of years ago to be the most dangerous city in the world. It is a border town not so far from Mexicali.

Central-Americans also flee from violence in their home towns, to meet more violence on their way to the United States. During my fieldwork we often came to talk about the Mexican state,

and how it is producing fear and violence at its inhabitants. The US–Mexico border has been called the “most violent border in the world between two countries not at war with one another” (McGuire & Georges 2003:191). Hondagneu- Sotelo (2006) argues that the image of immigrants as invaders and aliens, and the use of war metaphors to characterize the border, creates ideological victims and enemies that justify war strategies. Using war rhetoric and low intensity conflict methods to enforce border policies she claims; “enforce border policies, increase the social and racial polarization, and encourages violence and abuse against undocumented immigrants” (Hondagneu- Sotelo 2006: 242).

La bestia

The most common way to get to the northern border areas was to take La bestia (the beast), also called “el tren de la muerte” (death train), because of the train’s ability to mutilate and dismember bodies, and also because of its more recent associations with robberies and kidnappings. The train is known to be extremely dangerous thereby the name: “the beast”, reflecting the cruelty of the journey. On the train, migrants are exposed to rain, extreme temperatures, dehydration, and electrocution as they pass under power lines. Many have lost their limbs, or they have seen other people losing their limbs or even their lives as a result of falling from trains onto the tracks below. Most of the migrants taking «La Bestia», primarily from southern Mexico and countries like El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, have crossed Mexico’s southern border as they begin their journey toward the United States. Many walk more than 150 miles from Mexico’s southern border, up the Pacific coast to Chiapas. There they gather to wait for the freight train to begin the journey across Mexico. Having traveled 150 miles from the southern Mexico border and with well over a thousand miles to go, many migrants have already been robbed all the money were carrying. To hide from security forces, they have traveled at night and through isolated areas where they are vulnerable to robbery, rape, and criminal gangs. Migrants are easy targets for thieves in the region, many of whom work with police and other government officials. Many migrants are robbed directly by police, immigration officials or soldiers. The areas near the train where migrants sleep and wait for the train to go are often patrolled by gangs.

Mike, one of my main informants, had taken the train twice from Chiapas up to the border towns.

It’s true when they call it “el tren de la muerte”, it’s truly an awful ride with dangers lurking around every corner. Have you seen the movie “Sin Nombre”? It’s just like that. I remember

seeing in the movie that some guys came and robbed the people and raping the women sitting on top of the train during its stops. Something similar happened when I took the train last time, as well. It is dangerous to fall asleep on the train in case you fall off, or in case there are a tunnel and you'll have to lie down flat, so you don't get smashed"

Pablo, a 61 year old man from El Salvador was staying at «Grupo Ayuda para Inmigrantes». Pablo had lived ten years in the United States, before he got deported back to El Salvador. Now he had just arrived to Mexicali from «la bestia», and his goal is to re-enter the United States again. «It is very dangerous to cross the borders between El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico. There are three borders to cross illegally. I got all of my things taken from me when I crossed the border from Guatemala to Mexico, the Mexican police forced me to leave all of my things, and I was left with nothing». Pablo tells me about the violence he experienced during the trip through Mexico. «Especially one place where the train stopped in Guadalajara, was so dangerous that if you didn't get a place at the shelter during the night, it was a big chance you'll get either robbed, kidnapped or shot». Pablo illustrates how they would pull the gun out of their pockets and shoot.

Even though there were other ways to reach to the border towns, most of the migrants I spoke to had taken the freight train. The ones who had money, could pay a coyote to bring them to the north in a private transport vehicle, or take the bus. The freight train is free, but along the way there are criminal gangs or corrupted authorities after their money. Through the transportation system the migrants use, one can see how the economic choices and conditions exposes them to different types of risk and violence along the migrant route through Mexico, and up to the border towns to the United States.

Coyotes, human trafficking

One Sunday Eduardo and I were driving to Calexico, to shop at Walmart, an American supermarket. As the rest of most people in Mexicali who did their grocery shopping for the whole weekend at Walmart, because it supposedly was cheaper and also had a much broader variety than supermarkets in Mexicali, we were stuck in an endless queue at the check point. Last time we had crossed the border to Calexico we had been waiting for three hours and we were both worried if we were going to reach the supermarket before it closed. At this particular Sunday, people were also rushing to Calexico to buy meat and hamburger bread, as Super Bowl—the American football game was going to be shown at television a few days later. The Super Bowl was a big event in Mexicali, even though it was an American football game. As we sat in

the car, miles from the check point, we came to talk about the coyotes that get paid to smuggle people over the border to the United States. Eduardo told me, with laughter in his voice, that he had read in the newspaper a couple of weeks ago, about a coyote that had tricked a group of migrants from southern Mexico, which he supposedly was going to smuggle into the United States. In a neighborhood not far from where we were, one of the wealthier neighborhoods in Mexicali, he had stopped the truck where the people were hiding back in the trunk. The coyote had said to them that they had made it through the border, and that they were in United States, and that once he stopped the car and opened up the doors, they had to run as fast as they could to hide before the border patrols caught them. “So the poor people had ran as fast as they could, hiding back cars and between houses, for no reason. They were still in Mexico.” Eduardo laughs. I came to think about how many migrants that had paid way too much money to a coyote to smuggle them over the border, but instead been being tricked or getting caught by border patrols.

Paying a coyote was one of the best ways of getting into the United States after being deported or wanting to cross the border in the most “secure way”. You could either pay the coyote and get false papers, which was much more secure than crossing the desert, but it was costlier. I never heard how it went with my informants who crossed the border, if they made it through the border without getting caught.

As with Carlos, whom I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, hiring coyotes to cross you over the border was a risky business. The human smugglers, often referred to as coyotes, are a part of a bigger industry and often organized by the drug cartels in the area. Harsher border controls have increased the price of human smuggling, making it a more lucrative business than what it was before. Today it is one of the most profitable illegal businesses (CNN 2010). According to CNN, the smuggling of humans into the United States generates around 15 to 20 billion dollars a year. Migrants often pay between 150 to 4000 dollars to hire a coyote to enter the United States illegally (CNN 2010).

In recent years, several points along the major migration routes have become important nodes in organized crime operations as drugs, humans and body parts are circulated through and across the country. Networks of smugglers, organized criminals, cartels and corrupt authorities have been extremely successful in developing methodical forms of abuse, kidnapping, extortion and violence targeted against migrants. In these ways we see how undocumented and vulnerable migrants have become sources of big business to drug cartels and gangs, either as commodities to exchange or labor to exploit.

Gloria Anzaldua (1987: 12) refers to the U.S- Mexico border as an “open wound were

the Third world grates against the first and bleed (..) the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture”. An undocumented migrant is in a space outside the protection of the law. The vulnerability of border crossers can be demonstrated by the animalistic features they are being assigned. A border crosser at the U.S-Mexico border is called a “chicken”, while “coyote” for the human smuggler. They are being dehumanized and represented as chickens, seen as less humans, and therefore eligible for violence (Khosravi 2010:27).

The coyotes exemplify instances of everyday violence. Through the migrant’s stories, one can see the ways migrants are de-humanized as goods to be transported, even though they agreed to be smuggled. Their vulnerability stems from their status as unauthorized and the necessity to travel clandestinely. This speaks to larger structural conditions of violence and inequality that underlie undocumented migration at the borderlands.

Chapter 5

Between Here and There

I was shown in to the dining room at the rehabilitation center for drug and alcohol abusers during my visit. The rehabilitation center was located at the outskirts of Mexicali, in a tiny village. There I met Victor, a man in his fifties from Sinaloa in Mexico. He had just finished his meal and while the rest of the men and women were to attend the daily AA-meeting²⁴, Victor did the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen. He had lived in the United States for 23 years and had been deported back to Mexico eight years ago. Victor was going to wait another two years until he hopefully could cross the border legally back to the U.S. «After I got deported I didn't try to cross the border back again. They (the border patrols) said I couldn't come back. They said I had to wait for ten years, or else they were going to put me in jail. Back in Mexico I started with drugs. Ten years is such a long time and I was terribly depressed. I missed and still miss my family so much. In the beginning they often came and visit me, but it has been a while since last time they were here to see me. Luckily, two more years is not that long time. It's going to go fast compared to the eight years I've already spent waiting. I lived in the United States for so many years, all of my children and grandchildren are "en el otro lado (the other side). I haven't even met my two youngest grandchildren yet. Sometimes it feels like life is going on without me».

Introduction

This chapter explores the different aspects of waiting in order to understand the meaning of waiting and the uncertainty about the future of my informants at the different shelters. I analyze the ways in which my study participants narrated their experiences of waiting and uncertainty as a way to understand the characteristics of waiting as a condition, and the aspects of life dictated by deportation, and those finding themselves living in a limbo in Mexicali. I also identify the methods of coping some of the aspects of waiting. These had the effect of improving present circumstances and increasing also the desired future to be realized.

As I have mentioned earlier, many of the migrants I spoke with during my fieldwork had been deported after living in the United States for many years and thus being forced to leave behind family and friends. In fear of getting sentenced to jail or getting banned forever

²⁴ AA- Anonymous Alcoholics.

from the country by trying to cross the border illegally, some of them were waiting for ten years until they could apply for a green card, and legally cross the border back again. Thus, migrants live in a liminal state of transit for days, weeks or years as they try to cross the border back again. Waiting was a permeated fact for all of the migrants which I met at the different shelters in Mexicali. As mentioned earlier, some of the migrants had decided to wait for a period of ten years so they could re-apply for a visa to enter the United States, but waiting was also a fact for the ones that had been deported and didn't know how to re-enter to the United States, or didn't know where to get a job and thus spending their days at shelters or out in the streets in Mexicali.

Liminality, a term borrowed by Van Gennep (1909) and further developed by Turner (1967), refers to the period between two phases where you are in a state of limbo, and which may be used to describe the liminality some of the deported migrants experienced in their state of waiting. Thus, in this thesis I think about liminality in terms of their social status as disconnected from core networks and family, and their physical status of being between home and destination. Bauman (2004) argues how the life of migrants in transit might be experienced as "wasted lives". Most of my informants experienced that their lives were set on hold, where they spend their days waiting for the day where they could get out of the shelters, to either settle down in Mexico, or cross the border, legal or illegally back to the United States. For the Central American migrants, there was also a fear of getting caught by the Mexican migration police, and getting deported back to their country of origin.

In this chapter I will also explore ways the deported migrants coped with the new life back in Mexico, after being deported from Mexico. I experienced that religion was important for them and, that having someone gave them trust while all hope was up, in fact gave them new hope for the future. Many of the migrants that tried to re-migrate often got blessing at the shelters before they were going to cross the border.

Waiting

In Spanish, "esperar" means to wait, to hope and to expect. These meanings points to the concepts of time and especially, the future. As Pascal wrote; "In waiting or impatience, we encounter a situation on which "we anticipate the future as too slow in coming, as if in order to hasten its course" (Pascal cited in Bourdieu 2000:209). However, I would suggest that for some of the migrants at the shelters at Mexicali, especially those who worked there as volunteers, waiting was a state of being. They could either wait for ten years until they could cross the border back to the United States legally, or they could try to cross the border back illegally,

either by getting a job and earning enough money to pay a coyote. Most of the men I spoke to was already banned from the country and could not re-enter legally again, while the others were going to wait for ten years. I experienced that there were a high degree of uncertainty in the process of waiting. After ten years of waiting, they weren't a guarantee that they were to make it the United States legally; they had to go through a long process of getting a green card.

Gasparini (1995) sees waiting time for "interstitial time" and argues that there are three types of waiting; waiting as blockage of action, as an experience filled with substitute meanings, and as a meaningful experience (Gasparini 1995:31). I argue that the migrants in Mexicali that were going to wait for ten years until their ten-year-ban was over, experienced the waiting time as a blockage of action where the time spent waiting was felt like a waste of time, where they were waiting for their old life to begin, and thus living in liminal phase. There was however a difference between the ones who believed in a God, and those who didn't. One day, at the shelter Casa Ayuda, an older Mexican lady came to talk to Pastor Lopez, and while she was waiting for him, she looked at the people working as volunteers there. She stood for a while, observing them and stated «que tipo de vida es eso? (what kind of life is this?). The men replied that they were serving God. I argue that by believing in something that made the waiting time a meaningful experience, functioned as a coping mechanism for some of the migrants that had decided to wait for ten years.

Mike and I were sitting outside the shelter. The rest of the men had gone to relax after dinner was over. Nearly all of the men who had been at the shelter last time I was there, had left and there were all new faces to greet when I arrived earlier that day. A few days earlier I had been traveling to a nearby coast town, named Ensenada, and I was showing the pictures from my trip to him. He had wanted to visit Ensenada, but couldn't go because he couldn't just leave the albergue. «So, they all left and I am still here. Like any other week has been for the last six months», he said. I asked him what his plans were for the summer. Was he still going to be at the shelter? Mike did not know. For all he knew he could be caught by "la migra" and sent back to El Salvador tomorrow. «Maybe I can rent an apartment here in Mexicali and try to make myself a family. I've always wanted children», he said to me. After a while Oskar joined the conversation. Oskar was waiting for the final answer from the "immi-judge" if he was to get an American citizenship. He had been waiting for several weeks, and he was starting to lose hope in ever getting back into the United States. «I might leave for Tijuana next weekend, he said. «It is much easier for my family to come visit me there, as it is closer to Los Angeles, where they live. It doesn't seem like I am going back any time soon, so in that way I can be closer to them».

Jesus also worked as a volunteer at the shelter «Casa Mexicali». Jesus had been trying to cross the border to the United States eight times. First time he tried, he was only fourteen years old, and had been crossing the border fence with his father. His father had managed to cross, while he got caught by the border patrols. Now Jesus is 29 years old, his father still living in the United States, the rest of his family living in Sonora, while he lives in Mexicali. He had been at the shelter for seven months:

I am close to give up at the American dream. It is so hard trying to cross the fence, walking for several days, and then getting caught. I lived in San Francisco for two months, until the migration police caught me last time. Since I had crossed the border illegally several times, and was an undocumented migrant living there, I had to sentence three months in jail before they deported me. Now I am back here in Mexicali, and need a job so that I can afford to cross the border back again.

Considering that most of the migrants did try to cross the border back again, it was always a matter of time before they would earn enough money to pay a coyote or getting a wider network in the shelter or in the city to figure out a new way to cross the border. If they were to get caught by border patrols in their attempt to cross the border, they could face several days in the detention center, or several months in prison for crossing the border illegally. Even though it was dangerous and highly risky crossing the border illegally, the migrants who didn't want to wait for ten years, had a certain amount of control over their own lives, and thus relate to the waiting time differently. Gasparini argues that: «Control can thus be viewed as forecasting or anticipation – and, therefore, as expectation – which is biased and influenced by the actor in question» (Gasparini 1995: 31).

Life at the shelters

The days at the shelter were often the same, except that there were new people coming to stay there, at the same time others were leaving the shelter. As mentioned in the introduction, two of the three shelters I were spending my time at, had a maximum limit of days you could spend at the shelter, while at Casa Ayuda, you could spend at much time you wanted, as long as you paid a little fee each day or whenever you could. The people working as volunteers at the

shelters, were often deported migrants themselves, and a lot of the volunteers whom I met, had been living and working there either just a couple of weeks or several years.

Alejandro was working as a volunteer at Casa Ayuda para inmigrantes in Zona Centro. His job contained of writing down name and age of the men that came by to eat and sleep. Alejandro had lived in the United States for 15 years, but had been caught with several other illegal migrants at his workplace, and been deported. Now he had been in at the albergue for three weeks. «The first thing I did when they sent me back to Mexico was to try to jump the fence back again. You, see I have an American girlfriend in the US. I was missing her badly. Well, trying to cross the border back again didn't turn out that good. There was a dog trying to attack me, so I had to climb the fence quickly and lost my balance at the top. I fell down, cracked two ribs, broke one of my legs, and sprained five fingers. So now the only thing I can do, is sit here».

Tomas, the funder of Casa Ayuda, told me that many of the migrants who came to shelter, was so tired that they slept for many hours. Often they just stayed in their beds for several days, only getting out of the bed to eat. A lot of the people were exhausted after the train ride through Mexico, were they maybe hadn't been able to sleep because of the fear of being robbed or kidnapped. «I also think that some of them is having a hard time excepting that they have been deported. They only wish to stay in bed».

At the shelters there was sometimes an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty and for some, devastation. Some of the people coming to the shelters had just been deported, the ones who have just failed in their journey and who must face reality of what to do next in the difficult and increasingly dangerous landscape of Mexico's northern border.

It was Friday afternoon. It was a busy day at Albergue Casa Ayuda para Inmigrantes. Not that anything had happened in town, but it seemed like several more people this day had made their way to the shelter to find food and a bed for the night. Maybe a group of people recently had been deported and found their way to the shelter together? Already thirty minutes before the food was to be served, the men had been standing outside the kitchen door, waiting for dinner. When the doorbell rang, they queued up and together they prayed a little prayer for the food, before each one got a plate. Today's dinner was chicken and rice, and the men ate up their plates in silence, not saying much to each other. After dinner was over, they said thank you to the chef and to the owner of the shelter for the food. The men who had cash on them, would pay for the dinner and for their stay, whilst the other ones quickly walked out of the house, and out in the dry and busy streets of downtown Mexicali. I asked Savvas what they were doing all day, if they didn't had a job to go to. Savvas told me that it was hard for especially

people from Central-America to get a job in Mexicali, because they didn't have any ID or papers on them, either because they had been robbed when they had been trying to cross the border into the United States, or gotten their belongings taken away from them when they got deported, and also because they were foreigners. Sometimes big companies would come and hire them, but it didn't happen that often. Therefore, their days are spent by sitting in the park close by with several others, or begging for money out in the streets. A lot of them also starts drinking alcohol or use drugs, Savvas explained to me. "It is cheaper to buy drugs than food", he said while shaking his head.

Miguel came over and joined our conversation. He wondered what day it was today, and asked if I had any plans, since it was Friday. Was I going to the movies, maybe? "Every day is exactly the same here. You never know if it is Monday or Saturday. Tomorrow will be just the same day as yesterday was".

At casa Betania, we often sat and shared conversations after dinner. This was my favorite time during the day. During the afternoons the sun was setting, the heat was starting to get bearable again, and the sky was often colored by the sunset. One afternoon I was talking to Mike, Oskar and a man named Cesar. The topic was food, as it often was. Mexican food. We spoke about tamales, tortas and soon the rest of the other men would engage in our conversation. They were enthusiastically speaking about their mom's tamales and their grandmothers homemade corn tortillas. Even the most tired of them would smile and shout out a compliment about how much they missed their mom's dishes. Even though they didn't stay for a long time at the shelters, having others to talk to that was in the same situation, often led to conversations about how they experienced the deportations, the journey they had been at through Mexico, and Mexican food. Families, was however not a topic they discussed with others staying at the shelters. One of the men staying at the shelter told me that it wasn't good to talk with others about their families, especially their families living in the United States because you never knew what intentions others had.

Casa Betania opens its doors at four o'clock in the afternoon. The men finding their way to the shelter and the ones that are being brought back to the shelter from the construction jobs they have been hired in to, will queue outside the shelter until they open. Once they are inside, Mike informs them about the house rules, which is that they cannot drink or take drugs while staying at the shelter. Then they are given a broom each, and they have to sweep the street outside the shelter. After they are done sweeping, they are offered a shower and they get ordered to meet in the dining hall where the food is being served. A lot of men coming the shelter Casa Betania, told me that this shelter was the best one in Mexicali. The beds were clean and tidy,

and there is also a living room where they can relax.

«This is a good place. They even let you stay here for a bit longer if you want to. You can go to the church, and the food here is pretty good. Every day we get dessert. The people working here is very good people as well».

Home as a place

Heidy Sarabia (2017), argue that deported Mexicans migrants living in Mexicali, feel dislocated and uprooted, and that deported migrants —legally banned from returning to the U.S.— engage in what she calls transnational citizenship. The term is defined by their restricted mobility even while they retain personal, social and economic ties with the U.S. (Sarabia 2017), and which is based on their personal, social, and economic connections to the U.S. I often came to talk about home with the migrants at the different shelters. Some of them saw their country of origin as their home, while others saw the United States as their home after living there for so many years, and thus having family and friends there. Home is often associated with a geographic space, as for example: the place where you grew up, the country in which you were born. Malkki (1992) has argued that «people are often thought of, and think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness» (Malkki 1992:27).

Juan, whom I met at Casa Ayuda, had lived in the Unites States for 17 years. When he was six years old, his family decided to cross the border in search for a better life for Juan and his eight brothers.

It was not so hard to cross the border back then, and we just jumped through a hole in the fence. At the other side there was a car waiting for us, the car drove us to the nearest hotel and we stayed the night there. The next day my uncle came and we drove to Los Angeles, and as time passed Los Angeles became our new home.

When Juan is twelve years old, his father decides to take his family back to Mexico, so that they can get to know the Mexican culture and so that his father can take care of his old and sick grandmother. After two years in Mexico they decide to cross the border back again by paying a coyote, but the coyote had just taken their money and ran away, so in the middle of the night they are forced to cross the border illegally by themselves. Back in the United States, he needs to start school again and he his two years behind the rest of his friends. Juan tells me he gets friends with bad influence, and gets into a criminal gang. One day he gets caught by the police and they discover that he is not an American citizen, and then Juan gets deported to Mexico,

where he has been living for the last couple of years. Juan has blonde hair and blue eyes. He agrees with me when I comment that he doesn't look so Mexican. Because of his looks and because of his poorly spoken Spanish, he often gets question where he is from. Juan tells me he never knows what to answer.

It feels like I am both Mexican and American. American because I have lived almost my whole life in the US, and Mexican because Mexico is where I live now. Back in the United States I was always afraid of getting caught by the police and I was being afraid that someone would say to the police that I was an undocumented migrant living there. Here in Mexico I feel free and can do whatever I want without being afraid of getting deported.

Transnational Mexicans migrants use spatial terms to describe their movement and place in the world- territory as well as symbolic spaces of membership and exclusion (Boehm 2010:6). Migrants often understand themselves as belonging to, divided between, or outside of two-nation states; here and there. Immigrants are, *mitad alla, mitad aqui* (half here, half there (Boehm 2010:6). The narratives of transnational Mexicans capture the contradictions of migration and separation- going and staying, connections and divisions, movement and its obstacles, and are powerful descriptions of the experiences of transnational Mexicans as they go and do not go between Mexico and the United States (Boehm 2010).

Drugs and alcohol consumption

One day at Casa del Migrante, we were sitting outside in the garden and talking. Three of the men who had left the shelter a week ago were back at the shelter. We were glad to see them again, but at the same time sad on their behalf because that meant that they hadn't managed to cross the border. While we sit and chat about the failed border crossing, a car stopped outside the shelter and a man with a younger boy comes out. The boy, who is maybe 15 years old is skinny and it looks like he's trembling even though it's 40 grades Celsius outside. The boy is clearly drugged up. Mike goes out to greet them and some minutes later, after what looks like a persuasion, the boy is allowed to stay at the shelter, even though he is drugged up and the shelter doesn't allow people who have been taking narcotics to stay there. I can hear Mike promising the man that he will take good care of the boy. The boy is struggling to walk and can barely sit still on the chair. It seems like it is a normal procedure, and none of the other men is giving the boy any attention. Later on, Mike tells me that the boy had been found in the road, sleeping. The man had picked him up and brought him to Casa del Migrante. Mike takes the

boy with him so that he can shower, and after at the dinner table, the boy eats twice as much as the rest of the men, while he's stroking his own skin and smelling the clean clothes he's wearing.

Studies conducted among deported migrants in the US–Mexico border region suggest that deportees display an elevated prevalence of depressive symptoms and mental health problems as compared to the general population and migrants without a history of deportation (Bojorquez et al. 2014). Deportation from the United States may carry unintended health consequences for deported migrants, including for their mental health status. Deportation from the US can be a traumatic experience and deported migrants experience social, emotional and economic stressors that impact their physical and mental health. Post-deportation, migrants experience multiple social, emotional, and economic stressors that impact their physical and mental health (Pinedo et al. 2014). As I often got confirmed by the locals living in Mexicali, there could hardly see the difference between a drug addict and a deported migrant. According to Savvas,

Faith and religion

«El hijo de Dios es Jesus, y el sabe cuando voy a cruzar la frontera»

(Jesus is the son of God, and he knows when I am going to cross the border)

Llovi, informant

Since there are no state run shelters in Mexicali, the shelters were run by locals and got funded by private persons and church communities. At the rehabilitation center for drug abusers and alcoholics in Mexicali, Andres and I talked about the economic support the shelters in Mexicali gets from the state. “Before we got economic support from the state, but they have stopped it now. It is like the state said; “What of instead giving three pesos to the poor, we give them nothing at all. In that way we can save money”. “It feels like the state takes the money from the poor and gives it to the rich”. Andres tells me that the state doesn't want to support migration to the United States, and therefore they don't support shelters that take care of homeless migrants or deported migrants.

Most of the funders of the shelters was religious and saw it as their duty to help the migrants in Mexicali, as they majority of the ones that were homeless or poor in Mexicali, was deported migrants. Therefore, there were often daily prayers, and sometimes there were held ceremonies for those who were leaving the shelters to cross the border. The owner, Lopez, which referred to himself as a «pastor», often held blessings/ceremonies of the men staying at the casa Ayuda para Inmigrantes. One day they held a blessing for a man who had been at the albergue (shelter) for only a couple of days. Savvas, Pastor Lopez, and several other men gathered together and started to pray. The owner and the other men held their hands on top of the man's head and shoulders, and while the speech got louder and more rapid, the man burst out in tears and Pastor Lopez gave him a big hug. This they stood like this for a while, until the man was done crying.

After the prayer at the albergue «Ayuda para inmigrantes», I helped Luciano with serving coffee and cookies to the owner and his wife. Luciano tells me about his family and about the life he lived in the United States. He had been working as a chef in LA, where his family also were living at the moment, «they are waiting for me to come back», he said. Luciano was in a good mood this day, because the night before he had been having a dream about God telling him that tomorrow was the day he would manage to cross the border, and go back to his family. He was so sure in his case that he had been planning all day, and he was also taking a couple of the other men at the shelter with him. He saw it as his duty to also bring the others with him. Since Luciano had been deported a couple of times already, he knew how to get back in, and the roads that would lead them away from the border patrols, he proudly said. Through dreams some of them got messages from God that they could move on by trying to jump the fence again. Maybe it was a way of justifying the situation they had got themselves into. This was especially typical at Casa Ayuda. Many of the men living there told me over and over again that they had God to thank that they were living at this shelter, and it was his greatness that had saved them from the miserable life they had lived, when they were homeless, drug addicts or alcoholics, both in Mexico after deportation and in the United States.

Andres, the person working at the rehabilitation center for drug abusers and alcoholics also told me the importance of believing in something bigger than you. «My girlfriend, who used to stay at this center, started using drugs as soon as she was out of here. She didn't believe in God, and that's why she isn't doing any good at the moment». Andres tells me that believing in a God, gives sense to the situation by staying at the shelter alone without your family. «I think by believing in something, even though it's just a rectangular, there is a need for believing in a superior power, something bigger than yourself. You don't have to go to church, or pray.

Only believe, in order to get past the bad stuff that has happened in your life”.

The religion and faith in a God as a protector and as a guide was significantly important for most of my informants. To have someone or something that gives meaning to the situation they were in, and someone who is the decider of what will happen to them in the future, I experienced, was giving them a sense of meaning and support. Hondagneu- Sotelo (2006) claims that the psychological benefits of the blessing the migrants get before they decide to cross the border “are so powerful that in the mind of a migrant it may in fact exceed the value of a visa or a passport issued by the state” (Hondagneu- Sotelo 2006:103). Religion thus plays as a protecting and guiding force in the wandering trajectories.

I argue that some of the men who had been deported and was now working at the shelters as volunteers, were spending all of their time, their days at the shelter, away from their families and relatives for a reason; to serve God. I believe that they were trying to make up for themselves that they were not wasting their time, and that this whole situation was a part of Gods plan.

Thoughts and dreams about the future

«Vamos a buscar el sueño del Americano».

Mike, main informant

They would migrate without papers, crossing a dangerous and highly militarized international border. If they successfully cross, they will live in the United States as an unauthorized migrant, marginalized and vulnerable, joining millions of other undocumented migrants who live with the fear of getting caught and deported.

Deborah Boehm (2014:10)

After the church on Sundays, I sit with Mike. We talk about movies. Mike tells me that he had only been at the cinema when he was in the United States, in Chicago. «We could buy these big popcorn boxes and there were also many types of flavors you could put on. It was so nice! ». Mike tells me about the times he and his friend would gather up and go to the movies or go out to eat. “But, as I told you, this is only memories now. It feels like it was all just a dream. A good one as well, the American dream.”

For most of my informants, the United States represented freedom, security and better economic opportunities. And for many of the migrants, beyond the fences that divides Mexico and the United States, their families was there waiting for them. There was a certain agreement amongst my informants about the unfairness of being deported, or the unfairness of having to risk your life to get into the United States. Even though some of them might have had criminal records and had sentenced in jail, they also paid taxes, worked hard and had the “shitty jobs”, back in the United States, as Andres of said.

These are the conditions in which we come, wanting the American dream, yes, that is what we are looking for. We are here not because we want to be here, but we need to look towards the future, to do something in our lives, so that later our children can go to University, and have food at the table.

Andres, informant

The migrants staying at the shelters in Mexicali had various dreams about the future, and sometimes it seemed like their plans for the future changed every day. The only thing that most of them had in common though, was that they were all planning a way that they could get back into the United States, so that they could be with their families again, and/or earn enough money to send back home.

Mike told me once that he was planning on going back home to El Salvador, once he told me that he wanted to get a real job and rent an apartment in Mexicali and make a life there. Another time he told me he wanted to go back to El Salvador so that he could get a passport and buy a flight ticket to Spain. He had heard that he didn't need any visa to enter, and they spoke Spanish there as well. Another time, he told me he wanted to cross the border back to Chicago, but if he crossed and got caught, he would likely get a longer sentence and have to sentence in jail for several months.

Uncertainty defines people's lives before, throughout, and after their migration journeys. Uncertainty is a motive for migrating, the uncertainty of making enough money to buy the necessities that your family needs. Perhaps the most painful form of uncertainty is the uncertainty of not knowing when and if they will ever see their children, wives, husbands, parents or sibling again.

Cesar is from Guadalajara in Mexico. Juan had lived almost ten years in the United States and had been deported after the migration police had done a searching at his working place. Together with 13 of his colleagues, he had been deported back to Mexico.

It feels hopeless to think about the future. I cannot wait for ten years until I get to see my wife and children again. I am worried about them. My wife cannot provide for our children by herself, and with the low wages here in Mexico, it's difficult to earn enough money here so I can send back home.

The volunteers at the shelters often gave me a little update on where the men who had been staying there had gone after they had been there for the five days they were allowed to be there. Almost every person I met at the shelters told me how dangerous Mexicali was, and also how harsh it was for migrants to navigate through the city in the hot climate that often occurred in Mexicali. A lot of them therefore traveled to other close-by border cities, or to other parts of Mexico to get jobs. Pablo, the 61-year old from El Salvador said that he wants to get a job, so he could pay a coyote to cross the border. «When I get to the United States, I want to learn how to write and read. All of my life I have been working, I never got the change to finish school. And even though I am beginning to be old, I have prayed to God to send me a wife. God is great and by believing in God, you get faith in life itself and faith in yourself as well».

During my fieldwork I came to understand the many facets of hope along the migrant's journey to safety, better economy, and reunification. While fear and violence characterized much of the experience of the journey, it was hope that often fueled their decision to migrate. People expressed their hope in education for their children, the hope of seeing a loved one, the hope of living in safety and with dignity. On their journey, it was this hope that motivated them to keep going even when they faced risks. I experienced that hope often was expressed through spirituality and religion. Many migrants used their faith in God and rely on God's plan to communicate their hopes for crossing with safety and reaching their destinations. So, on the other side of their uncertainty, there was also hope.

Conclusive Remarks

Drawing on scholarship across disciplines, I have engaged theories of transnationality and borderlands, state power and the construction of illegality, gender relations, family and transnational intimacies. The ethnographic study of transnational migration reveals much about the structuring of intimate lives and state power, and especially how state controls and manifest in the everyday experiences of transnational migrants from Mexico and Central-American, in this case “The Northern Triangle”- Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

As Ernest Gellner describes a map; “neat flat surfaces are clearly separated from each other, it is generally plain where one begins and another ends, and there is little if any ambiguity or overlap” (Gellner 1983:139–40). There is no intermission between borders and they appear unbreakable as if they have always been there. The border between Mexico and the United States naturalizes the border as it was primordial and as a part of nature. However, through analyzing the reasons for why people try to migrate, and the structural conditions engendering, regulating and shaping migrations patterns, we realize that borders and migration flows are not “natural”, but rather inherently man-made and deeply political.

This thesis opened with a story from one of my informants, where Luis had been deported and was going to wait until the day he could cross the border back again. Throughout this thesis I have focused on the narratives about the everyday life of migrants in Mexicali. I have done so in order to elicit the nature of the migrant journey and the everyday realms of being in a state of limbo. For some of the migrants, the journey through Mexico did not have a clear end, whether that means a successful crossing to the United States or deportation back to their countries of origin. Rather, the migrants I met in Mexicali comprise a group of people that lives more or less along the migrant journeys in the borderlands. Many of these people spend their lives in the migratory processes, or simply do not have other options available to them and must circulate between and among shelters in Mexicali. I have used Fassin (2011) notion of governmentality, and argued that recent-day migration is related to the construction of border, sovereignty, economy and identity (Fassin 2011:221).

In chapter two I use both a micro and a macro lens to explore the reasons why my informants chose to migrate from their country of origin. Chapter two brings together political economy and today’s condition to understand the forces that makes individuals to migrate. It is important to acknowledge why the migrants chooses to migrate in the first place. They migrate because of low wages and the extreme violence in the country of origin. Migration policies

have during the last couple of years become much more restrictive, and the globalization of capital and labor markets pose strong challenges to the concept of the nation state and sovereignty, requiring people to move beyond borders in search for a better life.

Chapter three focused on the illegality the Central American migrants are faced with while making their way through Mexico and while being at the U.S- Mexico borderlands. To further develop Foucault notion of biopower (1997), where the state controls the body, Agamben claims how the migrants are being rejected as political bodies that makes the migrants resemble *homo sacer*, taken away their membership in society and rights. The *homo sacer* is reduced from a complete political being to a simple biological body, without rights, and is a completely depoliticized body different from the politicized forms of life embodied in the citizens (Agamben 1998). *Homo sacer*, migrants are left vulnerable not only to state violence, but also to the violence of ordinary citizens, in this case the drug cartels operating in the borderlands and at the migrant journey through Mexico. Here we see how present day's power relationships operates not just between states but also between individual subjects and classes, dating back to long historical developments (Gramsci 1990). In chapter three I also focused on the deportation and the deportees as people whose life experiences are difficult to account for. Deported migrants are usually considered superfluous and dangerous to the nation-state. Deportation and its impacts on individuals are important to take into account when exploring the way the nation-state regulates and controls individuals

The attention on violence in chapter four, is my effort to acknowledge the illegal markets that move bodies and drugs, and where Mexico almost has become a "free trade" zone where migrants are transformed into commodities to be bought, sold, exchanged and disposed of. To understand the violence and commodification that individuals experience while being in transit or on their journey through Mexico, one must consider how violence operates on multiple levels. That is, new forms of present-day violence that are produced by historical conditions and their social consequences. With measures to strengthen border security, whose main focus is the restriction of the movement of persons by land, and the securitization of land, the discretionary application of the law by the US authorities has increased and so has the violations of human rights of migrants.

In chapter five I explored the everyday lives of the migrants that were mainly living at the shelters in Mexicali, and I focus on the time they spend waiting for their lives to start again. The everyday experience among the migrants living in transit in Mexicali, was characterized by uncertainty, the feeling of living in a limbo, and a longing after the life they had lived in the United States. Many of the men I met at the shelters had lived in the United States and consider

it home, despite the lack of documents that confirms they belong there and therefore had been deported back to their country of origin. I argue that the time they spent waiting to either cross the border back illegally or wait for ten years and then cross it legally, was characterized by a feeling of uncertainty and of “wasting your life” away.

As xenophobia and nationalistic movements calls to build walls continue to intensify, as signaled by the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump’s «war on immigration» agenda, rigorous scholarship that demonstrates the real impacts of these approaches will be of the utmost importance in the years to come. What about the situation in Europe? Is it ok to build fences to keep the “others” out? The border fence between Mexico and the United States is a paradox- while the American state still are in need of foreign labor force, they deport and increase the border security so that it makes it difficult to make it into the country.

US immigration policy often has had little to do with trends and patterns of immigration. Even when policies respond explicitly to shifts in immigration, they are rarely grounded in any real understanding of the forces that govern international migration. Instead, over time the relative openness or restrictiveness of US policies is more strongly shaped by prevailing economic circumstances and political ideologies (Massey and Pren 2012). I believe the case of Mexico/U.S- border has significance beyond its national borders. Most of us live in a world where it is increasingly difficult to believe that individual persons have the power to influence the direction in which we are heading. This world is one of large transnational and international corporations and alliances, and global capitalism, where political and social structures appear unbreakable.

The aim of my thesis has been to present a more nuanced dimension of migration that shows the complexity of transit migration. The border has been constructed in academic and scholarly ways that need challenges and interpretive designs. Violence in these countries is driving the mass migration and the violence still continuing. As I have shown in this thesis, not all are fleeing violence, some are coming for economic reasons or to reunite with their families. Violence, economic development, and networks are however not only independent causes of migration but also deeply intertwined. I argue that ethnographic attention to the areas of inequalities, uncertainty and violence offer a lens through which to understand the social effects of historical and contemporary processes of structural violence and displacement in Mexico. Since there are no signs of a more liberal border politics between Mexico and the United States, it is important to continue to study migrants who live in the spaces in between.

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