NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Knowledge, Place, and Experience in the Migrant Journey: How Central American Migrant Youth Negotiate Violence in Mexico

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Sociology

By

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EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

June 2022

Abstract

This dissertation explores the experience of violence and precarity among Central American youth as they travel through Mexico to the United States. Based on a multi-sited ethnographic study conducted across Mexico from 2015 to 2019, I illustrate how the journey of these youth migrants is, in its basic expression, an experience of movement, violence and precarity. Over the last decade, the number of Central American youth moving through Mexico has grown exponentially. As a result, the U.S. has pressured Mexico to stop migrants from crossing through its territory, and Mexico has responded by more closely surveilling common migration routes and increasing the detention and deportations of Central Americans. This extension of U.S. immigration control beyond the U.S. border has turned Mexico into a space where Central American youth migrants are increasingly persecuted, robbed, harmed, and even murdered for the mere act of migrating. And yet, Central American youth continue to migrate, begging the question: how? I found that youth migrants deal with the violence they encounter along the way through a process of negotiation. During a youth's journey, where experiences of violence are almost inescapable, youth adapt their journeys to attempt to avoid violence and improve the quality of their migration journeys. In the three chapters of this dissertation, I will analyze three elements present in the negotiation of violence and precarity: rumor, time, and space. The chapter on rumor explains how, in the absence of reliable information about the route ahead, youth rely on rumors and the experiences of others to avoid violence and seek opportunities. The chapter on time explores how migrant youths' journeys take longer than many youth expect, which imposes additional hardships, but also leads to unintended consequences, like the gaining of additional knowledge about how to successfully move and the formation of new friendships. Finally, the chapter on space explores the spaces through which migrants move as they migrate, analyzing how they make decisions based

on space and how spaces affect their journeys. This intensive view of the ins and outs of migration contributes to a novel understanding of migrant journeys from the perspective of youth. Sociological studies of migrant journeys have primarily focused on the journey's beginning and end, and the dangers that migrants in Mexico face. These studies typically focus on migrants' vulnerabilities, failing to analyze how migrants experience or respond to those vulnerabilities. My research reveals that youth are not exclusively passive actors: they feel, respond, plan, and adapt as they try to achieve their goals. By exploring how rumor, time, and space interplay in youths' migrant journeys, I reveal how those experiences are lived. Ultimately, this research helps us understand not only youth migrants' journeys, but also how people more broadly face and overcome challenges that seem insurmountable.

Acknowledgments

A fundamental axiom of Sociology is that people's relationships create and shape the way we see our reality. That is why we as sociologists always talk about the social construction of everything—we firmly believe that everything we do is connected with everyone else; nothing escapes our collectivity. This is all to say that this humble thesis is not my own work; it is the product of hundreds, if not thousands of people. It would not exist but for the people I have met, and the institutions and places that I have visited along the way. And though gratitude is not always easy to express in the moment, I want to thank every one of those people and share with them the joy I have in finishing (the beginning) of this work. To each of you, this work is yours as much as it is mine.

Thank you to my parents, for believing in me and supporting me when I told them I wanted to leave Tuxtla Gutierrez and study anthropology, and who let me pursue my dream instead of making me fulfill theirs. To my brother and sister (I love you Weris), and my abuelito Migue, I love you and miss you all the time.

Thank you to my beloved home state of Chiapas, which I also always miss, to all of its people and culture and tacos and pozol de cacao. To the Universidad Veracruzana, my alma mater, and its Department of Anthropology, which changed my life forever by introducing me to academia and its many possibilities (and also to the love of my life). To Luis, Martha, and Angel, people I respect and admire. To my professors, David Cardeña and Diana Mejia, for believing in me even when I was certainly not the brightest student. Thank you to my Aunt Julieta, and my cousins Mauritania and Laura, who hosted me in Xalapa, and who always looked after me while I was there—I miss you too.

Thank you to ProBAR, the organization that introduced me to Central American youth migration ten years ago, and to all the people and youth I met there, and especially to: Edgar (who introduced me to ProBAR), Meredith (for hiring me even though I did not speak English back then), Meghan (thanks for being my friend), Mateo (for taking that one case), Sally (you are amazing), and Lauren (for the feedback and the jokes). Thank you to the Rio Grande Valley, for your borderland culture, lifestyle, Danny, and Q tacos, and to Guillermo, for all the racquetball we played.

Thank you to Chicago, the city that slowly showed me its greatness. Thank you to 535, for having us for seven years as our family grew, and especially to my friends Mike and Joe and Sarge and David. To Northwestern University and to the Sociology department, thank you for taking a chance on me—I have nothing but gratitude. I had no idea what I had signed up for, but I would do it again! Thanks to my professors for taking me under their wings, especially John, Gary (live and learn), Wendy, Beth, Héctor, Galya, and Gerry. And thank you to my fellow graduate students and friends: Philip, Anna, Emily, Erik (for teaching me stats and for always being there to listen), Mariana (por ser una gran amiga), and to all the others I do not have space to name.

Thank you to the activists, shelter workers, and volunteers I met in the field for doing such hard, important work. To el Padre Pantoja, who passed away before I could finish, and who will always be a guiding light and example of selfless service. These people dedicate their lives to loving those that many others see as menaces.

Thank you to all of the youth who gave me their time, even as they experienced such trying circumstances. You are all constantly on my mind. I often think of Orlan, Beto, Maya, Cica, Tachi, Tacho, Kiara, Pier, Adri, Samantha—to you, I hope you made it, I hope you are

safe, I am sorry for not doing enough for you, and I hope that circumstances in which I both met and left you are long gone. You will be with me forever. I hope this work inches the ball toward ending the suffering you all have experienced.

And finally, thank you to my two greatest loves. To my wife Caroline, the person I admire and trust the most, the one who reads everything I write and corrects me before anyone else. Thank you for all the late nights, thank you for caring. I love you mas que sabes, and I am thankful to share this life with you. And finally, to the last person I met on this journey, my daughter Amelia, my joy and happiness, thank you for existing.

To all of you, the most sincere muchas gracias.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

"México Malo: Evil Mexico"

April 17, 2016. It is early morning when Orlan and six other people arrive at the migrant shelter in Tenosique (*ten-oh-SEE-ke*), Tabasco, a small town near the Mexico-Guatemala border (See Map in Appendix). The sun has yet to break over the horizon, but there is already plenty of heat and humidity to make everyone sweaty and sticky. The men are different ages, sizes, and skin colors, but they are all dressed alike—dirty jeans, caps, ripped and stained t-shirts. Some have worn-out backpacks with water bottles dangling from them. They shuffle through the shelter's main entrance, visibly tired, heads hanging, taking heavy steps. They are directed by the staff to a couple of shaded benches near the entry gate where they must wait to be registered.

As they approach the benches, some of the men ask where they can fill their water bottles. Others, like Orlan, lay down on the benches, exhausted. Some of the men take their shoes off. Orlan does not have to; he arrived barefoot.

Orlan stands out from the group. While the other men are mostly Spanish-speaking mestizos, Orlan is Garifuna (black). He is from an Afro-Honduran group typically located along the Honduran coasts. Orlan is taller and more muscular than the other men, but his face reveals that he is younger than them. He is 16 years old.

As Orlan sits on the bench, legs outstretched, the soles of his feet are profusely bleeding (See Figure 1). He also appears to be in pain. In addition to his wounded feet, his legs are cramping, he has abdominal pain, and he mentions having an intense headache and feeling dizzy, likely the product of dehydration. He has just walked almost 30 miles in 95-degree heat and extreme humidity, which is typical of the route.

A member of the shelter staff approaches after a few minutes, and the group waits to be registered so that they can enter. Orlan's feet will also need to be tended to. Shelters like the one in Tenosique rarely have trained medical staff. Occasionally, the area will have a doctor from Doctors Without Borders for a few months at a time, or a nurse or medical residents, but the majority of medical attention is basic, improvised first aid provided by shelter staff or volunteers.

Figure 1. A picture of Orlan showing his feet after they have healed. Consent was acquired.

While he waited to be registered, a staff member dresses Orlan's wounds. I pass him a water bottle and introduce myself. I ask him if he would like to tell me what happened. Orlan eagerly begins telling me his story, which I have heard echoed in other migrants' experiences many times since:

> I was robbed the other night while crossing the river [that divides Guatemala and Mexico]. Another group of Hondurans and I took a raft to cross the river from Guatemala to Mexico, and as soon as we reached the Mexican side, right when the boat left us, two men, one carrying a gun, stood us up and searched our backpacks and took my shoes. They beat us and accused us of hiding money. We gave them all our money, and I gave them my cell phone. I didn't know the other people in this group. We just happened to be robbed together right when we got off the boat, and since we were all wet from the rain, afraid of being robbed again, and without money, we kept walking together. One of the guys mentioned knowing how to get to the migrant shelter, and we decided to follow him. From the river, we have walked across cattle ranches and unpaved roads to get here. I was walking barefoot, so that's when my feet started to bleed.

I ask why the robbers took only Orlan's shoes. He explains that his were brand-name shoes:

> I brought my good sneakers, because they were comfortable. If only I knew they were going to be stolen as soon as I got to Mexico… [The robbers] checked each

> of our shoes and just took mine and returned the rest to the others. They knew they were originals, and one of them put them in his backpack.

Orlan cringes from abdominal pain, then goes on:

> And then, after walking a couple of hours, we were robbed again. It was the middle of nowhere, in the fields, no houses around; another group of people with machetes appeared and started to search us for more stuff to take. I had nothing left, but they didn't believe me and instead punched me a couple of times and asked me to give them any hidden money I had. I told them that we were already assaulted near the river, and they let us leave.

Orlan explains that he does not know what to do now. His original plan—which he learned through his cousins who had made the same trip four years ago—was to move through small towns and cities. His cousins were going to give him instructions on where to go by phone, and he had written down a rough plan on a sheet of paper. Now that his phone was stolen, he has no way to know where to go next or even how to contact his cousins. This town, and this shelter, were never part of the original plan, and, based on what he learned from his cousins, he believes this is not a good situation for him. As he weighs his options, Orlan reflects on what lies ahead of him if he wants to reach the United States:

> It is going to be hard for me to leave this place and move up north. Who knows what's next? I can't believe this happened to me. I didn't think that I would have to walk much; I thought that most of the trip [to the U.S.] would be in cars and on buses. Instead, I am here, where I know no one. *México es malo para uno*. Mexico is an evil place.

After Orlan's feet are bandaged, he is offered a bowl of rice and beans, which he devours while he and the other men in his group are still waiting to be registered and access to the facilities. He and his group chat about how long they should remain in this shelter, how the last night of walking felt eternal, and what they are going to do now that they do not have money to buy food or a cellphone to call their relatives and ask for help.

Feeling a little better, Orlan starts to look around, trying to make sense of this place and his situation. Orlan starts to ask me about taking a train, making phone calls, accessing the internet at the shelter. He wants to know if he can wash his clothes and maybe get a pair of shoes.

As we are talking, a staff member asks Orlan to follow him to the shelter chapel for an orientation talk. There are around 20 migrants seated along the benches of the chapel. They all arrived either last night or this morning. A staff member begins the orientation by describing the shelter's services: the schedule for food, the system for showers, how to ask for medicine. As the staff member talks, the migrants chatter among themselves. However, the noise stops abruptly when the staff member begins to talk about legal options for immigrants. The staff member explains:

> If you are afraid to return to your country, you can receive protection in Mexico. Those afraid to return to their home countries can meet with our lawyer to see if they qualify for asylum or refugee status to remain legally in Mexico. You need to know that the process to obtain refugee status or asylum takes time. I cannot tell you how much time the process might take because it varies case by case. But, waiting has benefits; as a refugee, you cannot be detained and deported by immigration officers or police, and you can work in Mexico as well. Applying for asylum or refugee status is an option for you to think about instead of continuing on without papers, risking your life.

Among the migrants, someone shouts, "We want papers!" And then, another: "No, we want to go to the border." The staff member continues:

> If you really want to keep moving toward the U.S., you must know that it is a dangerous trip. The police and army have checkpoints at the entrances of this town and stop all the buses and private cars to look for migrants. If you take the bus, they will stop you and will ask for your papers. If you don't have any, they will detain you and deport you. Some of you might stay in the detention center for weeks before being deported. In this shelter, you are safe, you can walk around, and nobody will detain you. Outside, in the town, you can be stopped by police and then being handed to immigration, be careful.

Again, another migrant shouts, “To the train, then!” The staff member responds: “Many of you came here to take the train. How many of you have taken the train before?” Two hands go up—not Orlan. He immediately looks at the two men. The staff member goes on:

> You two know that what I am going to say is true. You must know that taking the train is extremely dangerous; you can die, you can get run over trying to jump on the train when it is moving. If you are tired or sick, I recommend you not to try to jump on the train; wait here until you recover. Many of you might hear that you can get on the train while it is parked in the train station; this is not possible anymore. The train rarely stops, and when it is parked, it is watched by guards. You might hear from other migrants that it is easy to jump on the train while it is moving. But, let me tell you, a couple of weeks ago, a person here lost his foot when it got cut off by the train. I can’t stop you from taking the train, but I want to clarify that we do not recommend taking the train. Do not risk your life.

Another shelter staff member interrupts the talk, and the man giving the orientation steps out. Orlan stands up and joins the migrants with whom he arrived this morning. They are talking to the men who already traveled by train. A few minutes later, the staff member returns, and the orientation continues:

> Right now, we know through the migrants that pass through this shelter that the United States border is dangerous. If you don’t have anyone to pay for your crossing [to the U.S.], you are at risk of being caught by drug cartels that will kidnap you and ask your family for [ransom] money. Those who know the border know that I am not lying; it is a dangerous place. My recommendation for you is to stay here and see what the best option is for you. If you qualify for papers, it is better to wait here. Nobody will kick you out. You can stay, and once your case is granted and approved, you can move and work freely throughout Mexico.
>
> There are all kinds of people in this shelter, so be wary of people that just want to take advantage of you. If someone tells you that they will take you to the border for little money, do not believe it; there are always people ready to take advantage of you. Please do not risk your life; it is not worth it. You are still very far from the United States border. The next town where the train stops is at least a full day of walking, a full day from here. That is double what you already did from the Guatemalan border to here, and there are many risks waiting for you outside of this shelter, please, think twice.

After the orientation ends, I lose track of Orlan as he enters the migrant shelter and mixes into the crowd of almost two hundred migrants staying there, the vast majority from Central America.

This shelter—the first that migrants reach in this region after crossing the Guatemala-Mexico border—opened in 2010 and now is a popular stop for migrants, a safe harbor before continuing their journeys north. It, like many shelters throughout Mexico, is sponsored by the Catholic church. Since it opened, the shelter has constantly struggled to serve increasing numbers of both migrants who are simply passing through, and others who become stranded while trying to leave by train or waiting to resolve their refugee or asylum applications. Since 2014, the population of migrants served by the shelter more than doubled and went from being composed mainly of adult males to a mix of adults, families, and minors. On this night in 2016, the shelter does not have enough beds in its dorms to provide everyone a bed. Instead, the basketball court will be filled with mats where most of the men will sleep, although some families that do not find dorm spaces will sleep outside, too.

Later in the day, I meet Orlan again in the dinner line. He is more relaxed; he has taken a shower, been given some slip-on sandals and a new t-shirt. He has not talked to his family yet, but he mentions that he is not really worried about that, because they will not provide much help anyway.

While we are eating, we talk about why he left home. Orlan left his rural town in southern Honduras to escape poverty. He decided to follow his cousins who migrated four years ago and who told him that life in the U.S. is much better. They also told him that minors are not being deported. Orlan is the oldest sibling of six, and he repeatedly mentions that his family is very poor. “We don’t have a house to sell and pay for my trip like my cousins’ family did.” The only family that might be able send him money to help are his cousins in the U.S., who only offered to loan him money to pay to cross the Mexico-U.S. border once he makes it there. So, he needs to get to the U.S. border on his own.

After we finish eating, we stand up, and he complains again about abdominal pain because of the beating he took at the river. We walk to the basketball court, and he tells me what he has learned from other minor migrants at the shelter that day:

> I talked to other youth that are staying here [in the shelter]. They told me that as a minor I would get papers [refugee status] approved in around three to four months, at no cost, that living here is boring, and there is not enough food. They are hungry and bored all the time. The boys said that what the staff member told us is accurate; immigration officers surround the town, and the only way to get out is the train or walking across the fields again until the next town, approximately two days walking. I don't think I will stay here.

Pointing to another dining table, where the people with whom he arrived are seated, he continues:

> The group I came with is leaving tonight. They want to walk through the night to avoid the sun's heat and to avoid being caught by immigration. One person in the group says he knows how to get around the checkpoints. I am not sure if I will go with them or not. They asked me to come with them and keep moving together to protect each other. I might wait and rest and see if I can contact my family to send me money and buy me some shoes, if not I might take the train. I don't want to walk right now with my injured feet, but my cousins told me that this town is unsafe, and I already noticed some people here who don't look very friendly. What I need to do is to reach the U.S. border and then call my family for the crossing. What I was told back in Honduras about this trip makes sense now: "This journey is for suffering."

After we finish eating, we part ways, and Orlan goes to sleep in the dorms—he got a bed inside since he is a minor. The next morning, the night guard tells me that Orlan left with the same group he arrived with, around midnight. As I stand talking to the guard, another group is arriving at the gate, and among them is a teenager wearing nothing but boxers. The young man explains: "I was robbed near the river; they took all my clothes and shoes. I have been walking like this since then."

Central American Migration through Mexico to the U.S.: An Overview

Orlan's story exemplifies the earliest stages of a journey that countless Central American youth have undertaken over the last decade. As scholars have noted, Central American migrants can

move across Mexico in different ways, depending on their economic resources and networks (Sladkova 2016). Some are able to travel from their home countries with a smuggler or guide. Orlan, and thousands of others like him, are what I define as *truly unaccompanied youth*—young people between the age of 0 and 21 who migrate without a smuggler or adult family member, and with minimal resources and networks (Escamilla García 2020). It is up to them to find a way to traverse more than 2,000 miles of Mexico to reach the United States. Throughout this paper, I simply refer to these youth as "youth migrants," and I use the age of 21 as a cutoff because it aligns with certain governmental entities' definition of "minor" (such as New York state), and it also conforms with my observations in the field.

Truly unaccompanied youth are generally extremely impoverished. They leave Central America for a wide range of reasons: to improve their living conditions, to escape the violence in their neighborhoods caused by drug cartels or gangs, to take advantage of a family member or friend's loose promise to pay for their trip and border crossing, to follow compatriots who say that the U.S. does not deport minors and will provide a good work and life.

As a result of their backgrounds, the journeys of these youth migrants across Mexico occur with minimal (or effectively no) economic resources, incomplete or inaccurate knowledge about how to reach the United States, and a fragile promise of economic support in case of an emergency. In many ways, these youth are among the most vulnerable migrants along the route. The journey of truly unaccompanied youth through Mexico is one of the cruelest streams of Central American migration since the end of the civil wars, and this cruelty is embedded within the structural forces that drive contemporary international migration.

The migration of these youth migrants is novel compared to past flows. Since the Bracero program in 1942, Mexican migrants have composed the majority of U.S migration to the U.S. The

demographic composition of Mexican migrants historically has been of adult men (often married) looking for work opportunities. It wasn't until the early twenty-first century when the arrival of other demographic groups, like women, started to be more visible and significant (Donato, Enriquez, and Llewellyn 2017).

Central American migration to the U.S. lagged behind Mexican migration and is embedded in global structures. According to Wallerstein's world-systems theory, since the 19th century, countries' historical development has created the conditions through which states and their subjects interact today (Wallerstein 1974; Wallerstein 2010). Core countries are those with high-skilled jobs and capital-intensive production. In contrast, periphery countries' economies rely on extracting natural resources and low-skilled jobs. Core and periphery countries are connected because the periphery countries provide the raw materials and labor needed to support the core countries. Central American countries—specifically, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—perfectly exemplify the periphery; these countries' economics are based on monoculture production like sugar cane, coffee, and bananas, exported almost exclusively to the United States.

Along with the historical, economic, social and cultural relationship between Central America and the U.S. described by world-systems theory, migration scholars have explained that this unequal relationship between states eventually develops into a migration system (Haas, Castles, and Miller J. 2014; Portes and Rumbaut 2014), which provokes and facilitates the movement of goods and wealth, as well as people, from the periphery to the core, where their labor is needed and they feel can improve their living conditions (Mabogunje 1970). In many ways, the case of Central American migration to the U.S. is a quintessential case. After Central American countries suffered decades of cruel civil wars and economic depressions (in which the U.S. interfered to protect its interests), these countries were left with high levels of poverty and violence,

as well as weak states filled with corruption (Galeano 1983). As a result, Central Americans, and especially Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans have been migrating to the more prosperous and safe countries in the north, especially Mexico, the United States and Canada since the 1980s (Jonas 2014; García 2006). Since then, migration from these countries to the United States has steadily intensified and increased. From the 1980s to 2017, Central American migration from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador has increased by 1,350 percent (O'Connor, Batalova, and Bolte 2019), and violence and poverty have been the main drivers behind this movement (García 2006; Donato and Sisk 2015).

The U.S. has not been consistent in its treatment of these migrants. Historically, employers in the U.S. have participated in the importation of labor from Latin America, benefiting from paying migrant workers low wages and maintaining only loose responsibilities for the wellbeing, or sometimes legal status, of Latin American workers (Rodriguez 2004). At the same time, the U.S. government imposes restrictions and controls over its borders to regulate the flow of migrants from Latin America. This exercise of state sovereignty establishes the U.S. government as a migration state (Brettell and Hollifield 2000). A migration state manages the migratory flow arriving to its borders and decides which migrants are permitted to enter the country (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1994). But this puts employers' needs and government policy at odds, and these two contrasting policies of simultaneous welcoming and excluding create a parallel migrant industry with wide streams of networks, actors, and institutions that facilitate undocumented migration working in parallel with an institutional force dedicated to migration management. (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013). Central American migrants are trapped between both forces: on one hand, labor and living conditions in the U.S. encourage migration from Central America to the U.S.; on the other hand, the U.S. government works to deter this movement.

The Migrant Crisis of 2014 and the Effects of the Southern Border Plan

In the context of Central American migration to the U.S, the migration of minors has garnered attention over the last decade due the circumstances that motivate youth movement, and the constantly rising number of youth arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. Rodriquez and Urrutia-Rojas documented the detention of 1,269 minors were detained in South Texas, almost all from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, in 1989 (Rodriguez and Urrutia-Rojas 1990). Those youths' migration was spurred by violence related to civil war and poverty.

However, the volume of Central American youth migrants over the last decade is quite novel. In 2014, 25 years after Rodriguez and Urrutia-Rojas's study, the U.S. Border Patrol detained nearly 68,541 Central Americans under the age of 18 at the U.S.'s southern border (US-GAO 2015), an increase of 4000 percent in a 25-year period. This spike in numbers shocked the U.S. public. Some news outlets called it a "migration crisis" and published pictures of minors crossing the border and being held at Border Patrol stations. These images caused distress among the public and politicians (Greenblatt 2014), which generated outrage and calls to intervene and stop their movement.

The U.S. government took and immediate action. On July 25, 2014, President Barack Obama met with the presidents of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in Washington D.C. to discuss a single issue: "the rise of unaccompanied children traveling from Central America to the U.S." (The White House 2014). In that meeting, the president emphasized the danger of the journey for Central American migrant children and argued that the United States was doing everything it could ensure the care of those children that had already arrived in the U.S., and that Central America and Mexico had to share the responsibility (Ibid. 2014).

President Obama was right to be concerned about the number of child arrivals in the U.S. By September of 2014, the end of the 2014 fiscal year, the U.S. had detained a then-record high of 68,541 unaccompanied alien children crossing into the U.S. at the U.S.-Mexico border over the previous 12 months (CBP 2015). Nearly all of these children came from the three Central American countries whose presidents met with President Obama on July 25 (See Figure 3).

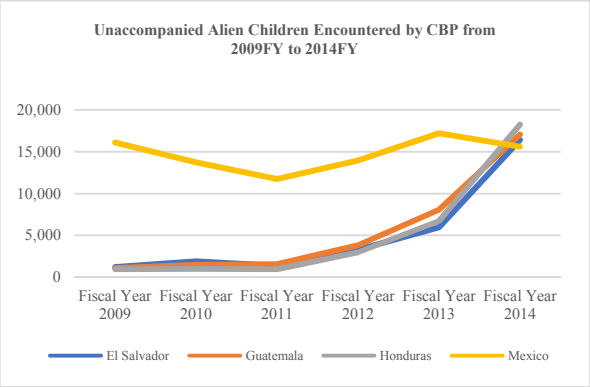

Figure 2. The number of Unaccompanied Minors detained in the United States from 2009 to 2014 (CBP 2015) illustrates the magnitude of the so-called migrant children crisis compared to previous years.

In addition to mentioning the danger of the trip for Central American children, President Obama emphasized the necessity of preventing migrants from taking such risk. From land border to land border, Mexico is around 2,000 miles in length (World Atlas), and any Central American without permission to be in Mexico that wants to reach the U.S. southern border must traverse those 2,000 perilous miles. Scholars, journalists, and international organizations have all documented the high level of violence that undocumented Central Americans migrants face while moving through Mexico (Nazario 2007). For instance, the National Commission on Human Rights of Mexico (CNDH 2009) estimated that 11,333 migrants were kidnapped between April and September in 2014, a considerable increase from previous years. The same study estimated that approximately 20,000 migrants are kidnapped per year in Mexico (CNDH 2009). A journalist writing for The Guardian described Mexico as "[piling] misery onto Central Americans on their way to the United States" (Lakhani 2017).

As dangerous as it was, that danger was not enough to prevent migrants from attempting to reach the U.S. The Obama administration understood what other developed countries have also realized in recent years: a country like Mexico that stands between the core (the U.S.) and the periphery (Guatemala) has a strong influence on migrant arrivals. For example, the E.U. largely relies on Turkey to stop and deport Syrian migrants before they reach Greece, and Morocco and Libya to stop Central African migrants. This is all part of a broader phenomenon called "border externalization" (Zaiotti and Martin 2016). Through border externalization, developed countries use other states, usually their poorer neighbors, to act as shields against migration (Ibid). Developed countries benefit significantly. By subcontracting other countries for migration control, they avoid responsibility for the human and legal rights of migrants. Countries that act as the externalized border (here, Mexico) are incentivized in the form of domestic and international political (and relatedly, monetary) benefits.

Mexico officialized its role as the external border of the U.S. on July 7, 2014, when the Mexican government announced the implementation of Programa Frontera Sur (the Southern Border Plan). The objective of this Plan\was to "bring order to migration in Mexico's southern region while protecting the human rights of migrants who enter and travel through the country." (Boggs 2015). In practice, the Plan increased enforcement along the typical migrant routes that undocumented migrants used to move northward from Central America through Mexico and fomented the implementation of new regulations to protect irregular migrants in Mexico (Arriola Vega 2018). The Plan increased the number of Mexican immigration officials. Checkpoints were set up along many roads in Southern Mexico, and two detention centers, equipped with holding cells and vehicle inspection stations, were created along Mexico's border with Guatemala.

Prior to 2014, being detained and deported in Mexico was not the primary obstacle for Central Americans migrating to the U.S. Rather, the true obstacle was crossing the shared U.S.-Mexico land/river border (Rodriguez and Urrutia-Rojas 1990; Chavez and Menjívar 2010). To pass through Mexico, Central Americans typically took buses or rode atop cargo trains on journeys that were relatively free of immigration enforcement. Immigration enforcement was typically concentrated in the border regions, especially the northern border with the U.S. (Mora Téllez 2017).

Figure 3. Map of the Detention Centers for Migrants in Mexico (INM 2019).

In 2014, as part of the Southern Border Plan, the Mexican Army and federal police joined forces with the National Institute of Immigration (INM) to create a series of checkpoints along the main highways that connect Southern and Northern Mexico (Ureste 2015). From those checkpoints, migrants could be sent to detention centers, concentrated in Southern Mexico (see Figure 3).

After the Southern Border Plan's implementation, Mexico became a major hurdle for migrants to cross. In 2014, Mexico apprehended a then-record 92,889 Central Americans (including adults and minors), again mostly from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (WOLA 2015). This was an increase of 86 percent compared to the previous year and represented the first time that Mexico apprehended more migrants than the U.S. in a year. Especially revealing is the increased number of detentions of Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran immigrants in Mexico correlates with the decrease in detentions (around 56 percent) of the same groups from the U.S. during the same period. This

suggests that Mexico achieved the immediate aim of the Southern Border Plan (Arriola Vega 2018; Ureste 2015; Betancourt Ramos 2021).

Focusing on the effect of the Southern Border Plan on Central American minors specifically, in 2015, Mexico and the U.S. detained nearly the same number of unaccompanied minors for the first and only time in the last decade (see Figure 4). Perhaps most importantly for the U.S., this correlates with a 41 percent reduction of unaccompanied minors detained in the U.S. (roughly 30,000 less). 2014 remained the year with the lowest number of unaccompanied minor detentions in the U.S. until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.[1]

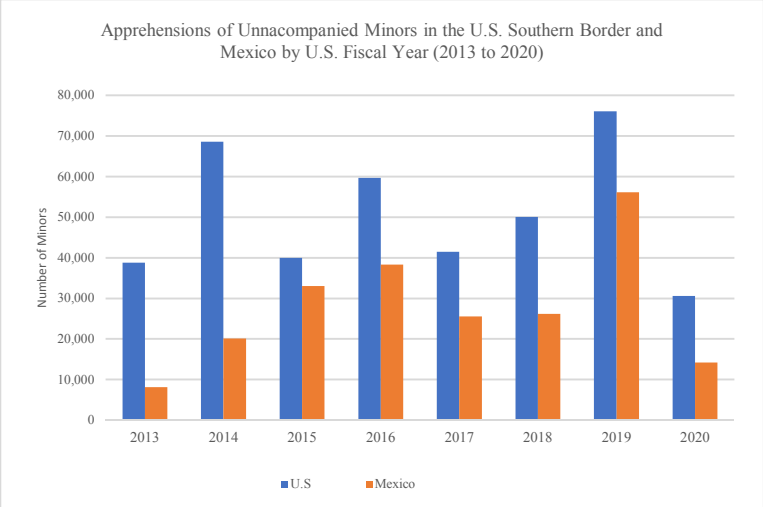

Figure 4. Sources CBP (U.S.), SEGOB (Mexico). The U.S. Fiscal Year runs Oct. 1 through Sept. 30.

Figure 5 demonstrates the Southern Border Plan's impact in Mexico. Mexico's Southern Border States (primarily Chiapas and Tabasco) have been the main areas of apprehension of minor migrants from 2014 to 2020, followed by non-border states, and then by the northern border states, which physically border the U.S. (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas). Notwithstanding passage of time, the proportion of apprehensions among Mexico's regions have maintained their relative proportions. Around half of minors are detained in the

[1] The 2015 fiscal year was the only year in which the U.S. registered a decrease in the number of minors detained while Mexico simultaneously registered an increase; in all prior and subsequent years, the number of minor detentions rose and fell together for both countries. This suggests that the effect of the Southern Border Plan's implementation in 2014 directly contributed to a reduction in the number of Central American youth migrants reaching the U.S. immediately after its implementation, and that its effect was not long-lasting.

Southern border states of Mexico (UPMRIP 2020b). Between 30 and 35 percent are detained in non-border states and between 10 and 15 percent were detained in Northern Border States. The only exception is 2020, when the numbers decreased drastically overall, likely due the COVID-19 pandemic. These numbers demonstrate that the Southern Border Plan did not significantly alter the areas in which minors are detained in Mexico, but instead influenced the overall number of detentions. Further, the data indicates that the Southern Border Plan had a relatively even impact across Mexico, and its effects were not only concentrated in Southern Mexico.

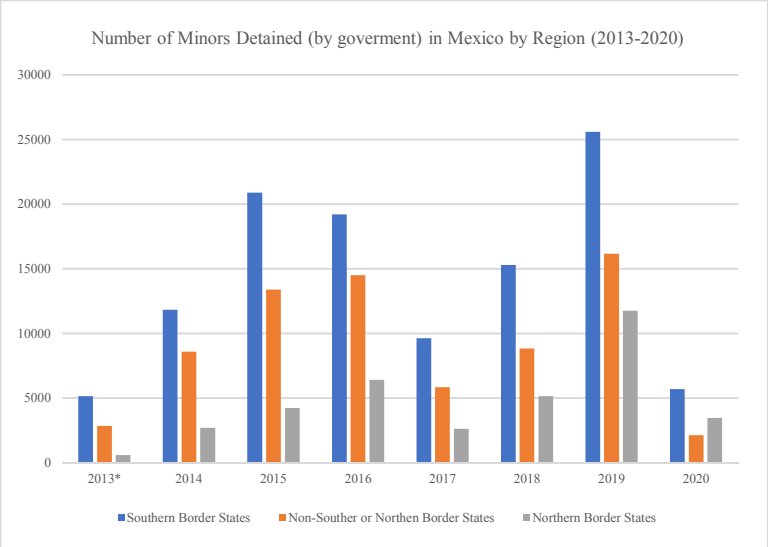

Figure 5. Minors detained in Mexico by Region. Source: (UPMRIP 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020b; CRS 2019) 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020b; CRS 2019).

The Southern Border Plan's temporary reduction in number of minor migrants has created a serious human rights problem. Since 2014, reports by several international organizations and migrant shelters have denounced the excessive use of force by Mexican authorities against Central American migrants. Such force has consisted not only of physical violence surrounding checkpoints and detention centers, but also of reports of officials forcibly removing migrants from freight trains and communities. (París Pombo, Ley Cervantes, and Peña Muñoz 2016). Additionally, there have been increased reports of extortion, kidnapping, and general violence perpetrated during detention and deportation in Mexico since 2014 (MSF 2020; REDODEM 2020;

Gómez Johnson and Espinosa Moreno 2020; Barja Coria 2015). For both Central American adults and minors, Mexico has become an almost two-thousand-mile-long minefield.

Enhanced enforcement resulted in temporary success, stopping the migration flow of Central American youth to the United States border. Specifically looking at the detention of minors at the southern border of the U.S., from the end of the 2013 fiscal year to the end of the 2014 fiscal year, the number of unaccompanied minors apprehended at the U.S. border increased 76.8 percent (68,541). In 2015, following the implementation of the Southern Border Plan, detentions of unaccompanied minors decreased 41.7 percent (39,970). However, numbers quickly rebounded; in 2016, unaccompanied minor detentions increased 49.3 percent (59,692) over the prior year, nearly returning to 2014 numbers (CBP 2019). In 2017, the number of detentions of Central Americans again decreased, except for the number of Guatemalans.[2] The U.S. continues to pressure Mexico to stem migration flows, and these numbers suggest that Mexico has at least some limited capacity to influence Central American migration.

Central American migrant youth who are able to reach the U.S. despite these deterrents receive distinct treatment. American law and Mexican law consider minor migrants (generally under age 18, and in some cases, 21) to be a vulnerable group.[3] This classification provides them with some special rights not available to adults. For example, in both the U.S. and Mexico, minors detained by immigration officials are sent to government-run or government-contracted shelters that are less restrictive than jails or prisons, and where minors are held separately from adults.

[2] Figure 23 in the Appendix shows that the number of Honduran and Guatemalan unaccompanied minors detained by CBP has increased from 2017 to 2018, while Salvadoran unaccompanied minor migration has decreased. Guatemalan migration has increased the most. No publication to date explains the reason for this data, but Salvadoran and Honduran youth explained during my fieldwork that Guatemalan authorities are stopping and deporting minors at Guatemala's border. The detention of Central American minors before reaching Mexico may contribute to a decrease in the number of minors that reach the U.S. border.

[3] U.S. immigration law depends on state-law to define the categories of minors; New York, for example, considers people under the age of 21 to be minors.

Minors detained in the U.S. have the right to appear before an immigration judge prior to deportation. They often have the option to be released from detention centers and reunified with family members in the U.S. while waiting for their immigration court hearings. Mexico also has special considerations for minors that apply for asylum or refugee status in Mexico. For example, an applicant must demonstrate a reasonable fear of returning to his or her home country to win asylum or refugee status in Mexico, but the burden of proof is generally lower for minors than adults. Instead of being dropped off at a border or transport center like adults, minors deported from Mexico are often returned to organizations or agencies that care for minors in their home countries.

Because of the U.S.'s more-lenient policies towards Central American minors than adults, it has increasingly come to rely on Mexico to externalize its border (Zaiotti and Martin 2016). The U.S. hopes to prevent Central American youth from reaching it borders and accessing the set of protections that can eventually lead to their right to remain in the U.S. (FitzGerald 2019). This practice of keeping potential migrants beyond the reach of its border has turned Mexico into a sort of pre-border of the U.S. where Central Americans can be detained and deported,[4] and more importantly, prevented from ever entering the U.S. The migration of Central American youth through Mexico thus is not allowed and happens only clandestinely (Brigden 2018), full of danger and precarity.

The Stratification of Means of Migration

Orlan's first day in Mexico serves to illustrate the post-2014 truly unaccompanied youth migrant experience. He was assaulted and beaten within minutes of entering Mexico, and as a result, his

[4] One example of this policy is the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) created during the Trump administration that allows the U.S. to right to make asylum seeker to wait Mexico for the decision of their cases.

original plan changed dramatically. Violence prompted him to join and travel with a group of strangers. And all of his options were sub-par: waiting in Southern Mexico and applying for asylum would mean hunger, isolation, and a diminishing possibility of reaching the U.S. while still of the age of 18 to avoid immediate deportation. However, continuing to move along a new route with an unknown group of fellow migrants into a highly patrolled area meant risking being robbed, harmed, detained, or deported back to Honduras.

Orlan's story reveals the extreme precarity of youth who move with few resources and weak support from their families or other resource networks. From the outset of my fieldwork, it was clear that the thousands of minors who occupied the front pages of U.S. newspapers in 2014 were not moving by fields, trains, or rivers like Orlan. Those youth were largely moving with smugglers or family. Instead, the precarity of migrant journeys like Orlan's are reserved for the most vulnerable youth like Orlan: unsupported, undocumented, and traveling with (or without) the clothes on their backs.

This has been recognized in the literature. The clandestine movement of Central Americans is stratified, depending on the migrant's economic resources (Sladkova 2016). This stratification means that migrants who have sufficient economic resources can pay for access to smuggling networks that transport them or guide them through alternative routes that avoid potential detention. Back in 2019, the average prices for such trips ranged from four to eight thousand depending on the level of services required of the smuggler. Today the prices can reach the twelve thousand. Smugglers are part of the migration industry, which consists of "a series of actors and infrastructure that facilitates, promotes, and maintains the movement of migrants from point to point" (Hernandez-Leon 2015). Most of the youth that reach the border of the U.S. do it with the help of smugglers. They are moved in cars, busses, or vans from point to point, and they sleep in

houses or hotels, in the hands of smugglers. Their necessities like food, housing, and transport are coordinated by smuggler networks across Mexico, who profit for their movement. And this for-profit business is based on avoiding deportation and detention. Being smuggled is by no means a secure way to migrate. The unscrupulous people that move migrant have total control of the migrant's life. While there is evidence that some smugglers provide careful service to their clients (Slack and Martínez 2018; Achilli 2018), there is also ample evidence of how smugglers can rob, kidnap, or sexually assault migrants with total impunity (Izcara Palacios 2017b, a, c; Doering-White 2018a). Still, for many minors who reach the U.S., their movement is possible because there are migrant networks willing and capable of paying the crossing and a migrant industry dedicated to the international movement.

However, truly unaccompanied youth, and other migrants who cannot afford a smuggler, have to move on their own. They typically cannot access the migration industry in the same way as a migrant who pays a smuggler border to border, or who can afford to purchase fake travel documents. Rather, most of these youths' access to the migrant industry is through migrant shelters. Literature has addressed how shelters pertain to the migrant industry; they do facilitate migrant movement by creating a safe haven—a sort of stepping stone—for migrants as they move. Also migrant shelters can serve as place where smugglers and coyotes "can meet and entices potential clients at these sites" (Hernandez de León 2013, 13).

Instead, they move through Mexico by jumping the cargo trains that move north and south throughout Mexico, walking long stretches from town to town during the 2,000 mile journey, and sleeping in streets, fields, and migrant shelters along the way, all while attempting to make themselves invisible to avoid detention and violence. And their conditions are exacerbated by the precarity that pervades their lives: informational precarity, economic precarity, lack of migrant

capital (migrant networks) to call on for help. Their journeys happen in the most precarious way possible, lasting from a week to several months to years, depending on their path. And in conformity with the findings of Basok and Wiesner, rarely did a Central American migrant youth manage to align their original plans of crossing Mexico with their actual journey, in terms of route, cost, and time (Basok, Bélanger, and Rojas Wiesner 2015). Despite these challenges, truly unaccompanied youth migrants' movement is becoming more common. Smuggler prices continue to increase as a result of increasing enforcement, and this prohibits many migrants from accessing their services. (Jáuregui-Díaz and Ávila-Sánchez 2017).

Data on the Violence Affecting Youth Migrants Moving through Mexico

While the literature generally agrees that the migrant journey is violent, quantitative data on that violence is limited. Generally, the violence that Central Americans experience while moving through Mexico has been documented across disciplines (Bello 2000; Cortes 2018; Lee 2018; Cook Heffron 2019). Sabine Hess has suggested the term *precarious transit zone* to describe this space (Hess 2012). This concept describes how undocumented migrant crossing of Mexico intersects with the violence and uncertainty of this space. Anthropologist Wendy Vogt's study of the Central American migrant journey has shown how violence is the main determinant of migrants' experiences (Vogt 2018). And numerous books, articles, and reports have documented how migrants suffer all types of abuses in Mexico: robbery, extortion, kidnapping, forced recruitment to criminal groups, sexual aggression, and discrimination (UPMRIP 2020a; Brigden 2015; UNICEF 2018; Camargo M 2014). These abuses rise to the level of human rights violations (Massey 2020).

Youths' experiences stand out for their vulnerability, as highlighted by researchers and migrants rights organizations (Coello Gómez 2020; Pavez-Soto 2016; Bello 2000; Galli 2018;

Ruehs 2017; Escamilla García 2020; Camargo M 2014; REDODEM 2017). Minors migrants are subject to the same precarity and violence as adults, but are more defenseless. This experience can generate long-term stress and trauma that can last long after the journeys (Torres Fernández et al. 2017; Glockner Fagetti 2019).

Despite increasing scholarship on violence and precariousness on Central American migration, there is little quantitative analysis of the violence migrants face in Mexico. This lack of research is due to the fact that undocumented migrants who are actively trying to avoid authorities and violence are elusive; they often avoid public areas to prevent detention. They can also be fearful of reporting crimes and dealing with authorities who may detain them and deport them. There are just two main sources of demographic information on violence against Central Americans moving through Mexico: the Mexican government through the government body called UPMRIP, and migrant organizations through REDODEM—the Network of Documentation of Migrant Defense Organizations—which is the overarching body that coordinates among organizations that serves migrants in Mexico, encompassing migrant shelters, dining rooms, and other institutions that serve undocumented migrants on the move. Both UPMRIP and REDODEM provide a wide range of quantitative demographic information about undocumented migrants transiting through Mexico, and also on the violence that these migrants report.

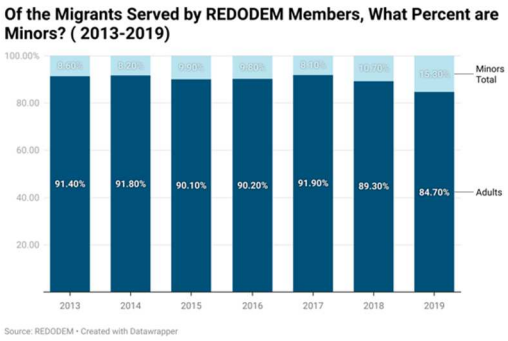

Figure 6. Percentage Of the Minor (0-17 years old) Migrants Served by REDODEM Members.

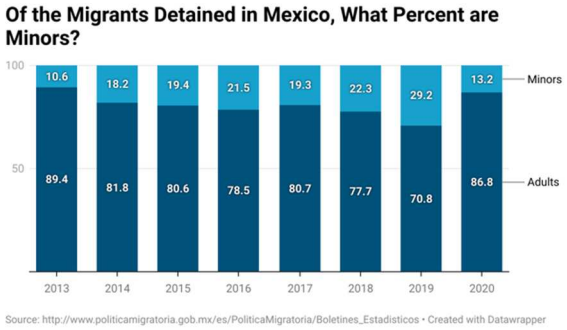

Figure 7. Percentage Of the Minor Migrants (0 to 18 years old) Detained in Mexico.

Both the government and civil organizations provide informative data on the numbers of migrants on the move. The figures above (Figures 6 and 7) show that minors have made up approximately 10-20% of all migrants detained in Mexico since 2013, and 10-15% of all migrants served by REDODEM's member organizations. Both government and civil organizations reported similar ranges of minors. The range of minor migrants is higher in government data, but, in general, the range is that between 8 and 29 percent of all undocumented migrants between 2013 and 2020 have been minors, defined as individuals under the age of 18. Also notable is that the percentage of minors increased over time, especially in 2019 when almost 30 percent of all migrants detained by the Mexican government were minors. This increase might be related to the increasing number of minors coming with families from Central America to the U.S., as this data does not differentiate, as U.S. detention data typically does, between unaccompanied and accompanied minors (Wilkinson 2019; REDODEM 2020).[5]

[5] It is important to note that, in both cases, the number of males surpasses the number of females by a ratio of 4 to 1. In terms of nationality, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans represent more than 90 percent of the entire sample. Data on LGBTQ minors is unavailable in government reporting and is only vaguely reported by civil organizations.

Both government and civil organizations also keep data on crimes against migrants in Mexico, although it the data is somewhat limited and has not been kept until recently. Both sources' data on how many migrants experienced crime in Mexico during 2019 (the earliest

Comparison of Government and Civil Organization Data on Violence Experienced by Minor Migrants (2019)

	Total number of respondents	Number that experienced crime in Mexico	Percent that experienced crime in Mexico	Number of respondents who are minors	Number of minors that experienced crime in Mexico	Percent of minors that experienced crime in Mexico
Government (2019)	182,940	564	0.31%	53,507	141	0.26%
Civil Org. (April-December 2019)	18,519	3,477	18.78%	3,553	211	5.94%

Source: UPMRIP & REDODEM • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8. Comparison of Government and Civil Organization Data on Violence Experienced by Minor Migrants.

available data) is condensed in Figure 8. One striking takeaway from the data is the mismatch between the percent of migrants who reported crime through government data as compared to the civil organizations' data. A possible explanation is that government data, while more voluminous, is collected only from migrants who were apprehended. As this paper will further discuss, migrants who wish to avoid detention and deportation take more dangerous routes through Mexico, and thus likely experience more violence than those who are detained. Secondly, migrants needed to disclose violent events to the authorities, something they may be wont to do with government officials. Migrants also worry that reporting a crime could result in retaliation or prolonged detention.

The organizational data is also likely imperfect. In 2019, civil organizations reported that, from April to December 2019, a total of 18,519 people experienced a total of 3,477, which leads to a rough estimate of 19 percent of migrants experiencing crime. In contrast, the data shows that just 6 percent of minors experienced crime. This number is likely skewed; minors are extremely

vulnerable in qualitative studies (Ruehs 2017; Escamilla García 2020; Nazario 2007). In my fieldwork, I also witnessed how organizations often lack staff to fully interview migrants (especially when they come in mass); sometimes, children are not interviewed due to their age; and sometimes migrants simply do not disclose everything they possibly could. Though the data is imperfect, especially with regard to minors, it is all that exists.

There are additional useful data points in the data. For example, the most common type of crime reported to civil organizations by migrants was robbery at 33.36 percent of all incidents reported, followed by extortion with 18.02 percent of all incidents reported (REDODEM 2020). The government did not collect this type of data. Both government and civil organizations reported that most crimes against migrants were committed in Mexico's southern states that border Guatemala—Chiapas and Tabasco (REDODEM 2020; UPMRIP 2020a).

Overall, the available data provides a general panorama of the magnitude of and type of crime that migrants in Mexico face. From this data, we gather that minor migrants represent between eight to 30 percent of the total number of Central American migrants, and the percentage from this population that suffers crimes in Mexico is likely at least six percent.

However, the data I collected on violent events suffered by my interviewees revealed much higher levels of violence than those reported by either UPMRIP or REDODEM. One of the reasons for this difference is my definition and classification of violence, which is not entirely synonymous with "crime." There is no single standard definition of violence agreed upon across disciplines, that fits all theories of social analysis. Instead, existing definitions are contingent on their aim, level of analysis, and theoretical base (Schinkel 2010; Kilby and Ray 2014; Devault 1996; Eddie 2017; Blume 1996; Steinmetz 1999). In my research, I define an event of violence as "an act carried out with the intention of physically and mentally hurting another person," as reported by

the individual who was the recipient of the violent act. Coming or choosing a definition of violence can be problematic as violence, as intense experience and topic to research can be, exaggerated, trivialized or muted depending on the research's perspective (Heitmeyer and Hagan 2003). My definition is a modified version of definition of violence made by the World Health Organization, widely used in social sciences: the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Rutherford et al. 2007). I add the component of mental injury, to include incidents like verbal abuse and insults related to race and gender considered harmful towards youth (Savin-Williams 1994; Skaine 2015), and that migrant youth reported to be as harmful as physical violence. I also classify government detention and deportation as acts of violence.

In total, the 78 youth I interviewed reported suffering a total of 264 acts of violence during their journeys. This averages to 3.38 violent acts per migrant. In total 60 youth (76 percent of my sample) suffered at least one violent act, a percentage much higher than the figures offered by either the government or organizations. The data on specific types of violence is also revealing. Figure 9 below shows the frequency of violent incidents, as well as the number of youths that suffered such incidents, and the average number of each type of incidents per youth in my data.

Distribution of Total Violent Incidents Reported by Youth Migrants, The number of Youth that Suffered Each Type of Incident, and the Average Number of Each Type of Incident Per Youth (n:78)

Values	Total Incidents	No. Youth that Suffered Violence	Avg. Incident/Youth
Robbery	63	38	1.7
Persecution	40	27	1.5
Detention	41	22	1.9
Physical Attacked	34	22	1.5
Extortion	27	20	1.4
Deportation	15	11	1.4
Rape/Sexual Violence	15	12	1.3
Verbal Abuse	10	8	1.3
Kidnapping	6	6	1.0
Murder (witness)	5	4	1.3
Threaten	5	5	1.0
Torture	2	2	1.0
Defraud	1	1	1.0
Total	264		1.2

Figure 9. Incidents of Violence Committed Against Central American Youth in my sample.

In total, I classified 13 different types of violent incidents. Robbery, government detention, and persecution based on their

undocumented status represent 55 percent of the total number of incidents. The average number of these incidents per youth shows that youth who suffered these three types of incidents were likely to suffer them more than once. In contrast, incidents like kidnapping, torture, and threats (of harm) usually occurred to youth only once.

Specifically, regarding migrant detention, the fact that the rate of detentions (made by the Mexican government) per youth is 1.9 suggests that most youth who were detained were typically detained more than once. But the number of detentions does not match the number of deportations. This is because detentions are often followed by extortion by authorities, so the migrant youth may be released and not deported. Other variables allow similar extrapolation. For example, robbery, for the most part, was committed without physical attack (89 percent of cases), and it was mostly resulted in the loss of material means. In a completely extreme opposite case, the two incidents of torture ended in extreme physical violence: one with the loss of a finger, and the other with contusions and whip-scars on the back and head.

Overall, this data offers insights about the violence that youth migrants suffer during their journey through Mexico. Although each of these types of violence may differ in severity, together they show that the stakes are high for youth migrants, especially compared to the data reported by the government and migrant-serving organizations. Besides the definitional difference in my data set, four other reasons may explain these differences. First, my sample is composed of youth migrants, meaning my sample encompasses youth up until their twenty-first birthday. Second, the youth I met are travelling alone, so this excludes minors that travel with families or smuggler. This difference might indicate higher levels of vulnerability compared to the total represented in other datasets, which include youth who were travelling with or detained with family members. Third, I collected data from migrants across multiple migration attempts—i.e., across their entire journeys.

As youth are deported and try to move again, they experience more violence. This contrasts with the data from both government and civil organizations, which do not aggregate violent events from multiple trips. Finally, I conducted most of my interviews with migrants with whom I had spent time in the shelters, and, as a result, with whom I had a rapport. One vivid example of this is Rita, a 13-year-old from Honduras, who was traveling with a couple of cousins. She disclosed to me an incident of sexual harassment suffered at the hands of other migrants in the shelter. I asked her why she say anything to the staff, and she replied that she thought they would kick her out as a result. But my position as neither a migrant nor staff allowed me to access this type of data that would be otherwise hidden from government and civil organizations.

Overall, my data on violence shows that it is highly likely that a truly unaccompanied youth will experience at least some type of violence during their time in Mexico. This violence serves as a backdrop for the youths' experiences—it ultimately influences where, when, how, and with whom they travel.

The Experience the Precarious Journey: Positioning This Dissertation in the Literature

Positioning this study in the broader literature, unlike many valuable international migration studies, my work focuses on how the migrant *experiences* the migration journey.

For a long period of time, the study of international movement has focused on issues concerned with departure and arrival. The pioneer studies of international migrants like the *Polish Peasant* (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918) or "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups With Particular Reference to the Negro " by Park (Park 1914) were focused on the assimilation (and control) of immigrants into their new societies, and later, one the economic inequalities that triggered migrants' movement (Piore 1979; Lee 1966). During these eras of Sociology, mobility was ignored as an area of study. For example, sociologist Richard Startup's classic work "A

Sociology of Migration" (Startup 1971) describes Sociology's focuses as the causes of migration and its consequences on the receiving area. Startup only briefly describes the migrant journey as a function that facilitates the movement of people and the obstacles they might face, and he notes that "the journey is more often of a short and transitional nature. If this is so, the relevance of the structure of the traveling group to an understanding of the situation after migration is proportionately reduced." (Ibid. :187) Accordingly, throughout much of the 1900's, sociological studies of the journey were secondary or absent.[6]

As international migration flows matured into the currents of core-periphery, or global south to global north, that we have today, migrant journeys began to gain traction in the social sciences and humanities. In 2008, Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula studied the migration journeys of Africans traveling through the Mediterranean region to reach Europe. This work was groundbreaking in the study of international mobility. Her work established a key concept for studying migration journeys—the concept of transit migration. Papadopoulou-Kourkoula characterized transit migration as "the situation between emigration and settlement that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal or illegal, and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural and individual factors" (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008, 5). This concept allows scholars from different disciplines to focus on the phase of migration that corresponds to what happens between a migrant's departure and arrival. Specifically, authors use transit migration to focus on the migration journeys of poorer migrants who travel through a third country on their way to their migration destination.

[6] One justification of the lack of focus on the journey may be that the studies of the era were primarily of cases (mostly from Europe and Asia to United States) in which movement was not as important as in the case of Central America, new studies have shown how these groups from Europe and Asia that migrated during the XIX century had more complicated journeys and mobility than was previously acknowledged (Wieczorek 2018; Jacoby 2016).

Since 2008, transit has been valuable in carving out a conceptual understanding of the migration journeys. Authors have written about "transit states" (Khalaf, AlShehabi, and Hanieh 2015), "migrants in transit" (Iranzo 2021), and "transit countries" (İçduygu and Yükseker 2012). They have also focused on particular groups in transit, like women (Girardi 2010) and minors (Derluyn and Broekaert 2005). Maria Amalia Girardi has studied Central American women in transit through Mexico, focusing on the violence they face at the hands of criminal groups and their condition of being undocumented (Girardi 2010). She finds that these two factors create uncertainty around whether these women will ever reach the United States.

However, the concept is not without criticism. Criticisms of transit migration center on three areas: 1) the concept's lack of detail in explaining what happens during this transit stage of migration; 2) its inability to account for cases of migrants who might turn temporary stopovers in a country into permanent stays; and 3) its lack of analysis of the economic, geographic, social, and political forces that create transit migration. Anthropologist Frank Düvell criticizes transit migration's inability to capture the structural and individual factors that trigger migration. He also notes the difficulty in determining when transit migration begins and ends (Düvell 2012, Basok, Bélanger, and Rojas Wiesner 2015).

Sociologists Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Yukseker have also criticized transit migration for minimizing the role of states in intentionally making regular migration more difficult, thus provoking longer and more arduous undocumented transit journeys (İçduygu and Yükseker 2012). Their work explains that, as countries of the global north like the U.S., Australia, or Italy close their borders to migrants from the global south, the period denominated "transit" becomes too broad and complicated to be useful.

In response to these criticisms, scholars have created modified approaches to transit that recognize the complexity of migration journeys. The concept of “precarious transit zone” discussed above, for example, describes the instability of migrants’ migratory journeys due to efforts by transit states to deter their movement (Hess 2012, İçduygu and Yükseker 2012). Sociologists Michael Collyer and Hein de Haas have created the alternate concept of "fragmented journeys." This idea tries to capture "the state of incertitude in which transit migrants move while migrating” (Collyer and De Haas 2012). For these authors, the idea of fragmented journey involves migrating in multiples stages, with varying motivations, legal statuses, and employment conditions, in a context of violence and potential deportation. These circumstances can all result in a migrant’s failure to advance and might cause them to change their plans.

A few authors have combined the concepts of precarious and fragmented journeys with transit migration to describe and detail the arduousness and unpredictability of transit migration (Alba and Foner 2015). Others have combined these ideas to describe the role of states in stopping migration and necessitating long and dangerous migration journeys through transit countries (Basok, Bélanger, and Rojas Wiesner 2015). These developments in the literature have helped further our understanding of the reality of migration, beyond what traditional concepts like push-and-pull and network theory could offer.

Scholars have also studied migration journeys from a perspective of migrant mobility and migrant trajectories. This body of work centers primarily on revealing the transnational processes that facilitate or inhibit people’s mobility (Blunt 2007; Veale and Dona 2014; Schapendonk et al. 2018; Ong 1999; Elliot, Norum, and Salazar 2017). These scholars see migration as a trajectory, defined by periods of time and space that are, in turn, defined by a migrant’s constantly changing circumstances (Schapendonk et al. 2018, 2). For example, Geographer Joris Schapendonk et al.’s

study of the migration journeys of Saharan Africans recognizes two elements that define migrants' mobility: 1) the spatial dynamics of migration, which include the spaces and areas of transit as well as the migrant networks involved in migration journeys; and 2) and the spatial friction occurring between people and "mobility regimes" (Shamir 2005), which refers to the entire apparatus of laws, enforcement, and crime that shapes spaces of mobility (Schapendonk et al. 2018). Trajectories differ from the concepts of transit migration and fragmented journeys because they recognize migration as a process, heavily influenced by states' migration regimes and the cost of making multiple trips.

Mobility literature is not without criticism (Presskorn-Thygesen 2015, Tapia Ladino 2017, Khosravi 2018). Anthropologist Shahram Khosravi identifies two problems with the work of those studying migrant mobility: their lack of precision about the interactions between migration regimes and migrant journeys, and their failure to consider the constantly-changing trajectories of migrants over the course of their journeys (Khosravi 2018, 2-3) . Khosravi argues that literature on migrant mobility should recognize that scholars are collecting only snapshots of migration journeys rather that entire journeys. They do not capture the full picture of people's mobility. He also recognizes that "methodologies and research techniques have not been adapted to capture the realities of an increasingly mobile, shifting, and interconnected world" of which migrants are a part (Khosravi 2018, 1). Similarly, Michael Collyer and Hein de Haas, who helped coin the term "fragmented journeys," recognize that that concept "can only be used to describe the past events of the migration itself," and not what happens after that (Collyer and De Haas 2012, 479). That is, it does not explore the transformation of migration journeys over time. Similarly, while the idea of transit became a new area for further research, the concept is too broad to be used to describe how migration journeys are experienced by migrants. Finally, the concept of migrant mobility focuses

on immigration policies and enforcement, but it does not address how those policies change the length, destinations, and degree of danger of migrant journeys.

Little literature has focused on how youth migrants experience transit. Two of the principal works that exists are written by journalists. *Enrique's Journey* (Nazario 2007) and *The Far Away Brothers: Two Young Migrants and the Making of an American Life* (Markham 2017) follow the tales of individual Central American youths' journeys through Mexico. Both books address experiences typical to many Central American minors moving through Mexico: they follow migrants along the train routes as they encounter criminals that try to rob or kidnap them, sex traffickers, and natural forces and landscapes like deserts, jungles, and rivers. But they are largely journalistic accounts. Sociologist Emily Rehus (2017) has also studied Mexican minors' conceptualization of their journey to the United States. Rehus finds that migration for Mexican youth can serve as a "male quest story… that allows young men to take economic responsibility for their families and provides the opportunity to escape local forms of violent masculinities." (Ruehs 2017, 223). Migration is a "rite of passage" required for young men to become fully accepted in their communities. However, her work is based on youth who used smugglers, and is based on youths' recounting of their journeys once they are in the United States. Finally, a recent study on North African migrants moving through Libya on their way to Europe has shown how migrants change their decisions, conditions, and vulnerabilities as well as their identities, sense of belonging, and expectations to keep moving to Europe (McMahon and Sigona 2018). This literature leaves ample room for the first explanation of how Central American migrant youth experience migration as they move.

The Negotiation of Violence: A Central Concept

This dissertation's central argument is that Central American migrant youth engage in a process of negotiating violence in Mexico, and that process underlies the macro forces that create their dangerous and precarious journeys. The concept of negotiation of violence illustrates how migrant youth make day-to-day decisions and take actions as they move through their journeys. Specifically, I focus on how youth feel and respond to structural forces like violence and social pressure in an attempt to understand their journeys. By doing so, I intend to contribute youths' perspective to the literature on international mobility and precarious migration.

As will be further set forth in the following chapters, during their migration journeys, youth base their decisions and actions on constant learning and discovery that transforms their conceptions of their possible options for movement. Their decisions are fundamentally aimed at minimizing the risk of violence, while enabling them to achieve other necessary goals, such as providing economic support for families back home, or maintaining certain relationships. These youth know that violence may be unavoidable, and there may be no good choice. Still, they negotiate.

This concept, too, is rooted in the literature. A migrant's journey presents a wide range of interactions and experiences that govern and shape migrants' perceptions, understanding, and movement. At the micro level, their perception of their journey is created independently from macro-structural forces and establishes their movement as "sedimented in structure" (Fine 1991, 165) . This dissertation explores microstructures of the migration journey that can explain how migrants feel, understand, and navigate their migration journeys.

The concept of negotiation of violence during the migration journey relates to what many researchers define as resilience, which is "the multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity" (van Breda and Theron 2018,

237). Better-than-expected outcomes often translate to a sort of "survival" of adverse situations like trauma or violence that otherwise would otherwise devastate groups or individuals. In children's studies, the concept of resilience has been used to describe their capacity to overcome well to traumatic adversities like stress or physical abuse (Luthar 1991). Additionally, scholars of migration in sociology have employed resilience to signal migrant communities' capacity to resist oppression from actors like state or extremist groups (Romero et al. 2014; Bourbeau 2015; Martinez and Ward 2018) and provide support to address community members' trauma.

Like resilience, the negotiation of violence is focused on how individuals respond to adversity, but it focuses on the process and not the outcome. Where resilience requires an understanding of how the individual ultimately coped, negotiation of violence simply asks how an individual or group goes about making decisions or handling adverse situations in the moment. Thus, my research takes one step back from resilience. Additionally, where resilience may focus on a "static" point of success (Rutter 1993, 627), in my research, there often is no "good" outcome. Thus, the concept of resilience was too imprecise to address how migrant youth actually negotiate violence. Instead, I frame the way migrant youth face violence as a negotiation.

Rather than following a chronological sequence of the migratory journey, this dissertation illustrates the negotiation of violence through three ethnographic windows: rumor, time, and space. Each of these windows reflects what I found to be key elements of youths' mobility that shape the way youth feel and think while moving. The study of knowledge transmission, time, and space in international migration is not novel. Numerous studies in Sociology and other disciplines have observed that these themes are key to the study of international migration. (Tefera 2021; Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013). Knowledge, time, and space have often been studied in reference of how violence is enacted by states in the form of immigration laws and surveillance (Jacobsen,

Karlsen, and Khosravi 2021; Martin 2012). And studies have recognized that approaching migrants' life trajectories from the perspectives of time and space opens a window to understanding their experiences (Runde 2012; Sun 2021). This dissertation extends this literature to explore how are each of these elements are experienced by Central American youth migrants.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed examination of my data and methods, and will further highlight how violence is not experienced in a uniform manner by migrant youth, but varies depending on location, social categories, and resources.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 then center on rumor, time, and space in the youth migrant's journey. Chapter 3, *Caravans, Microchips, Organ Trafficking, and Donald Trump: The Role of Rumor in the Migrant Journeys of Central American*, demonstrates how migrants transmit, learn, and reproduce numerous rumors while moving through Mexico as a means of gaining and sharing knowledge. Information about places, violent experiences, and successes or failures of moving is transmitted among migrants through unproven rumors, in an environment where reliable information is otherwise scares or even impossible to acquire. Despite its inaccuracy, migrants use rumors to make decisions on where, when, and how to move.

Chapter 4, *Between Borders: How the Spaces of Mexico Affect the Migration Journeys of Central American Youth*, demonstrates how distinct spaces in Mexico influence the journeys of Central American youth. My multi-site approach allowed me to compare how journeys are experienced by migrant youth in a wide range of different contexts. Migrant youth are aware of how different areas and spaces represent different opportunities and challenges, and they learn to avoid or take advantage of them. Migrant youth can also use staying in a space as a tactic for avoiding violence or gaining economic resources. Overall, this chapter illustrates the diversity of preferences, needs, and options for space among migrant youth.

Finally, Chapter 5, *Time in the Migrant Journey: The Paradoxical Effect of Waiting,* explores how migrant youth experience time, especially the extended time that their migrant journeys often inevitably take due to setbacks, deportations, and timelines controlled by institutional actors and decisionmakers. I describe the hardships that these lengthy journeys impose, and how they affect migrant decision-making, but also highlight certain silver linings of extended journeys, like the acquisition of knowledge and skills that facilitate future migration. These findings reveal the importance of examining how time influences migrant journeys at the micro level, as these micro-level forces can impact macro-level migrant flows.

Ultimately, in a world in which receiving countries are devoting immense resources to making migrant journeys more difficult as a deterrent, I hope this research brings awareness to the ways migrants suffer through these "deterrents," and the impact that these difficulties can have on their lives and the lives of those around them.

Chapter 2: Methodology: Research Design, Data Collected, and Data Analysis

Introduction

The fundamental question posited by this dissertation is how Central American migrant youth experience their migration journeys through Mexico and respond to the violence they face while moving. To answer this question, I conducted an ethnography with Central American youths who were traveling through Mexico between 2016 and 2019. This ethnographic work consisted of systematic observation of Central American migrant youths at various points across Mexico while they were undertaking migratory journeys, supplemented by the collection of interview data. In this chapter, I describe how I designed and executed my ethnographic analysis and how I analyzed the resulting data.

I begin by discussing my methodology and research design, including an explanation of how this project's methodology evolved as the research progressed. I then review the data sources and data collected. I discuss the strengths and potential weaknesses of the data. Finally, I explain my data analysis methods, focusing on the primary method I employed, grounded theory. This chapter concludes by discussing my research's limitations and the extent of my dissertation's claims.

Ultimately, this chapter illustrates my approach to conducting inductive research like ethnography with potentially vulnerable groups, which requires the researcher to maintain a project's integrity while also adapting to new information and challenges in the field.

Initial Methodology and Research Design

In my research, I aimed to see how these youth migrants experience their journeys through Mexico. I chose to approach my fundamental research question through ethnographic and interview

methods. Ethnography, as the act of "being there" (Geertz 2000), is an instrument to comprehend human activity, to use words, images, maps, graphs, or charts to get us as close as possible to seeing how other's see the world.

Today, ethnography is a formal method or research widely used across disciplines in unlimited settings that use self-inquiry to improve our capacity to explain human behavior. Part of what makes ethnographic research a popular method is that it can be used to study practically any human activity or setting. Ethnographers can spend years in communities, fully immersed in the practice of their habitats like classical cultural anthropologists do or can be observers of passersby in a park, like some urban sociologists do. Ethnographers can take different approaches, from those who try to become one member of the community and perform their practices and rituals to those who limit their research to observation of people without any direct interaction.

During my research I approached the migrant journeys of youths from the role of "observant as participant." In Raymond Gold's (1958) classic description of ethnographic methodology, the "observant as participant" approach is when the researcher is immersed in the respondent's world but establishes a clear line between the role of researcher and respondent. This approach is in the middle of the spectrum between those researchers who are fully immersed in the groups they study with the intention of become of them and those researchers that are pure observers with minimum to no interaction with the people they observe. Part of my decision to select the "observant as participant" approach was made following a discussion I had about my positionality in the field that I did prior my research (Holmes 2020). Many aspects of my identity make it impossible and inappropriate for me to attempt to present myself as a true participant or equal. I am a Mexican, American, scholar, and adult male. I do not assume the same level of risk as migrant youths from Central America. I cannot become a minor, or a foreigner, or a woman, or

an undocumented individual in Mexico. Thus, from the outset under Gold's model, I could enter the world in which Central American migrant youths move, but I could not take on these youths' experiences myself. Specifically, I make use of the ethnographic approach that sociologist Mimi Sheller describes "mobile ethnography" (2006) and what Schein (2002) calls "itinerant ethnography." For ethnographers of mobility, the settings and individuals that we observe are not static. Central American migrant youths are not settled in one place, and they do not move in a single direction (or even in a linear fashion, as my research illustrates). The recognition of the mobility in our observation this forces the ethnographer to employ techniques that are flexible and that facilitate the observation and the experience of mobility. Among the ethnographic practices are the actual walking with the groups observed, the creation of maps to illustrate the movement of people and the tracing of how objects or ideas move along with people. I covered different sites in which youths move, staying open to the intermittent and wide range and connection of information, networks, and resources they use during their journeys. By using this approach, I was able to account for the circulation of information youths have while move as well as to pay attention the mobility of knowledge and perceptions that youths have during their journeys.

Fieldnotes are a critical part of the ethnographic process. I chose Van Maanen's (1988) *confessionist* and *impressionist* styles of fieldnotes and focused on experiences from shared interactions with minors. In the confessionist approach, the fieldnotes are written from the point of view the researcher, in the form of rich description. Compared to other fieldnote writing forms that limits the writing to only what is being observed, the confessions and impressionist style also accounts for the thoughts and feelings of the ethnographer as well of their involvement in the field. I also noted detailed descriptions of the places I conducted my participant observations. I wrote my notes primarily in the third person, because I wanted to avoid writing from an *omnipresent*

point of view (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2001, 360), instead focusing on youths and not on my experience. I did write in first person in two instances: when I reflected on my own experience, and when I wanted to note insights from my fieldwork.

I supplemented my fieldnotes with open interviews of the youth that I met. Necessarily, as part of that process, I needed to determine upfront how to responsibly manage the sensitive data I would be collecting: my respondents were undocumented minors, present in Mexico in violation of the immigration laws, and typically lacking any parental supervision. The typical ethical procedure to when conducting research with minors starts by requesting legal consent of the parents or legal guardians of the minors, the institution or setting in which the research with minors will take place (e.g., schools, hospitals, orphanages), and of the minors themselves. In my case, since seventy percent of my sample were minors and were not with legal guardians or parents, and no institution was responsible for them, I could not request parental consent.

Ethnographers that conduct research with similar populations of minors in vulnerable contexts (like soldiers and homeless children) have pointed out the challenges of obtaining consent from this particular population (Nichols 2014; Best 2007; Boyden and Berry 2004). The disparity in power, stressful circumstances, differences in maturity, and the need for supervision can create all kinds of dilemmas for researchers when deciding whether a minor is conscious that he or she is participating research. For my fieldwork, I decided that because the youth were not legally allowed to be in Mexico (as they were undocumented), I needed to protect any identifiable information that could make them a target for immigration officers, police, or human traffickers.

Consent refers to the formal procedure (often in written form) of inform the people that are taking part of a study about the research you are doing as well so they can opt to participate or not or withdraw at any moment. Assent also involve informing the people take part of the study about

their research but is often dedicated to groups like children that generally cannot legally consent their participation, but nevertheless need to know about the research and be provided with the option to not participate. Informed consent and assent from a particularly vulnerable group like migrants and minors and young adults can be complex (Moore and Savage 2002). Minors may not understand the information they are disclosing to the interviewer or how their information will be handled. Also, because of their vulnerable positions, they may feel coerced to participate in the interview.

To avoid these issues, during both the participant observation aspect and the interviews, I introduced myself as a researcher the first time I met any individual, I identified the institutions I was affiliated with, and I shared additional information about my research if requested by the respondents. For interviews, I established a protocol to ask for informed consent and assent at the beginning and end of each interview. Before each interview, I explained to the respondent the reason for my presence and the purpose of the interview, what kind of questions I was going to ask, and that they would be able to withdraw from the interview at any point in time, at which point I would destroy any notes or recording I had of the interview. I provided each respondent with a pamphlet with general information about my research, and if it was not possible to offer written information (sometimes they were walking and did not want to stop, or I did not have a pamphlet available), I shared my email address and name on a piece of paper. I also explained to each interviewee that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. At the end of each interview, I again asked each respondent for their consent and/or assent to be participants in my research. I also asked them if there were any portions of the interview that they did not want to be included in my research.

While interviewing is a method of research by itself, and not all ethnographers interview the people they meet and spend time with, the ethnographic interview is a method that often overlaps with ethnography. Generally, ethnographers do interviews to learn more about the people studied (Allen 2017). These interviews vary in form and style, from casual conversations in public spaces to formal and systematic interviews of communities or groups (Walford 2018). In my case, I decided to incorporate interviews with the youths I met during my fieldwork to have more detailed knowledge of the violence youths suffered prior to my meeting them and their plans to keep moving. While I had the chance to learn about youths' journeys during my informal interactions in the field, I felt that interviews would provide me with a more structured way to document and analyze this information in a way that fieldnotes cannot. For these interviews, I created an interview guide which I will describe in the following paragraphs.

I applied my substantive frame to create an interview guide (Weiss 1994, 45). Interview guides have the intention to aid the research to order their research questions. There is a wide variation on type of interview guides that vary on the need on the interview. I chose to follow a semi-structured style consisting of open-ended questions in order to build narratives about youths' journeys. Where a closed set of questions (like structured interviews) may have rendered more uniform data across each respondent, I anticipated that I may have short windows of time to talk with migrant youths and that depending on the youth's story and circumstances, the interview structure needed to be flexible.

I divided the semi-structured interview script into three broad chronological categories that followed youths' migrant journeys: 1) pre-migration arrangements; 2) the journey up to the point where we met; and 3) the youth's plan for the future from the time we met. I did not follow these categories chronologically for each respondent (See Figure 34). I typically began every interview

by asking youths about the day the respondent decided to leave their countries. The conversation then typically followed one of two directions: either looking back to learn more about the circumstances leading up to their migration or looking forward to the respondent's future plans and desires for continuing their migration. When I was able to record audio of an interview, I did not take written notes, and instead transcribed the interviews as further described below, in order to avoid any distractions during the interview. When I was unable to record interviews, I took written notes during the youth's interview, writing down additional impressions after the interview concluded.

I also designed specific procedures for collecting data during interviews. For example, because I was interested in understanding youths' journeys, every time a youth mentioned a violent incident during an interview, I asked for the exact location where the violent event occurred. I also asked about the locations through which each youth moved and how much time they spent at each site and in transit. And, because I was interested in understanding the process through which youths acquired information on their journeys, when a respondent expressed beliefs, observations, judgments, or uncertainty about places, peoples, institutions, or actions, I often inquired and documented the source of their knowledge as well as the certainty about the information. In asking about sources and the certainty of knowledge, I discovered much of how the rumors influence the journey of youth migrants.

During my fieldwork, the length and type of my interactions with youth migrants varied. I sometimes briefly met with migrant youths while they were on the move, heading for the train or asking for food or work in the streets. In latter case, the act of *moving with migrant youths* broke the tension of my presence as I become (momentarily) another person exploring and moving through a new space. However, most of the youths I interviewed were staying in migrant shelters

or were waiting in the street for their next move. The reality of persecution and violence face by youth migrants during their journeys makes creates suspicion toward establishing relationships or openly talking with strangers. The trust that ethnographers built in longer time periods spend in with those who study are not possible in communities like mine that is disperse, constantly movement and persecuted. I built rapport with those youth, pacing my observation, staying aware of the instances in which they move, they wait and stay but also how they move, stay and wait. In practical terms, my approach implied living alongside them, playing soccer, walking around the block, or helping them with immigration procedures like filling out forms, helping them to create email accounts, or accompanying them to immigration facilities.

Adapting My Initial Research Design to the Realities of the Field

With this research plan in place, the realities of work in the field required flexibility and adaptation. This section discusses the primary challenges I faced in conducting both participant observation and interviews, and how I adapted my methods to address them.

Participation

The degree to which I could be a *participant* observer of migrant youths' journeys varied more than I initially expected. It quickly became clear to me that it would be incredibly dangerous to observe the full migrant journey. As one youth put it, "[Y]ou have to be crazy to do what I do just for fun… How is it that you are here with us when you could be in the U.S.?" As discussed above, my positionality would prohibit me from participating in the migrant process, especially as it relates to the experiencing of violence. Migrant youths' experience with violence is tied to their condition of illegality, age, gender, and economic resources, along with other characteristics I do not share with them. My fieldnotes from Tenosique, Tabasco in June 2016 reflect this realization:

> I was walking with some migrant youths (and migrant adults) across the road in the outskirts [of Tenosique, a small town in Southern Mexico]. The group left the migrant shelter hours before and was about to leave the road and walk through the fields to avoid immigration checkpoints. Suddenly, a truck of Mexican Immigration officials passed the road in the opposite direction and stopped a couple of meters behind us. When we saw the truck stop, all the migrants ran off the road. All but me rushed a barbed wire fence and tried to cross it. In doing so, some of the migrants started to scream as their clothes and skin were being ripped by the metal spikes of the barbed wire. I didn't cross the barbed wire fence, because I didn't feel the fear necessary to risk getting infected wounds that develop into pain, fever, and amputations.
>
> I stayed there, and immigration officers stopped to talk to me. I was Mexican, and I told them I was Mexican. They didn't believe me at first, but, in their own words: "your lack of fear and your accent showed me that you were Mexican." The officers did warn me that I could be accused of smuggling for helping and facilitating the migrants' movement and potentially profiting off them. As the officers pressed me a little more, and threatened to call the police, I mentioned that I was volunteering with the local migrant shelter that give food, shelter, and legal services to the Central Americans migrants that transit through that border, and then they backed down. However, they warned me not to be seen walking with migrants.
>
> On my way back to the migrant shelter, I couldn't help but think how, no matter what I could do to "participate," my life and the lives of migrants will never be the same. I was embarrassed for thinking that I could achieve even a semblance of the same experience as them. We might be walking on the same road, but we have different lifestyles, perceptions, cultures, experiences, and necessities. If I want to know how these youths experience the journey, I will have to do more than pretend to emulate them (Tenosique 2016).

This experience early in my fieldwork was one of many that reminded me not to assume that being in the same place as a migrant would give me a full understanding of their experience. To reduce the human experience to the physical body leaves out social and cultural aspects that are also part of the experience (Farnell 1994, 937). Nor was it worthwhile to try to fool myself. Robbery, kidnapping, severe injuries, and physical violence were rampant along the migrant trail. And to pretend to experience what migrants experience would be disrespectful to these youth, who face danger out of necessity, not by choice.

I did share many experiences with migrant youth. I walked along some areas where migrants typically move, I took two very brief train commutes, and I accompanied them to immigration offices to apply for asylum as part of my volunteer work at shelters. I ate, drank, and slept in the same way they did for month-long stretches. But I was careful to always be conscious of my positionality.

Interviews

Conducting interviews with youth migrants also required adaptation and flexibility. Below, I review some of the challenges I faced in collecting interview data.

Short Time Frame. Writing fieldnotes and conducting interviews came with unexpected challenges. I interviewed under a wide array of circumstances: waiting for admission to a shelter, walking with migrants on their way to the train, right after being persecute, or while in the line waiting for food. In many instances I had only one chance to meet the individual, and my assent and consent protocol was reduced to a short sentence of information: who I was and my interest in speaking with them. And when working in a short space of time, I had to get as much information as possible, quickly.

Chronological Order. My chronological approach to interviews was not always functional. Many youths, particularly the very young ones, did not follow events chronologically and forgot or confused the names of the towns they visited during their journeys. Other youths had been on more than one journey, and there was confusion about the events of their travels. This meant that some youths were unable to provide complete timelines. To tackle this challenge, I kept a handwritten timeline of the events. This method helped me to detect missing episodes of the youths' journeys and helped me collect more accurate data.

Observing Mixed-age Groups. Youth are not isolated from adults during their migrant journeys. Migrant youth share the same spaces, and many parts of their journeys, with adults, and they form all kinds of relations with adults. And adults, not youth, form the majority of migrants who move through Mexico. Thus, in some instances, youth migrants formed friendships with other youths to travel and share resources, and I was able to interact exclusively with youth. But, often, I had to conduct participant observation of groups consisting primarily of adults, with a few youths mixed in.

Discussing Violence. Many of my respondents had suffered extreme instances of trauma, often involving sexual or physical violence. When such instances arose in my interviews, I avoided asking questions that might create stress on the youth, and instead left questions open-ended so the respondent could share only as much as they were comfortable sharing. In some instances, recalling these episodes led to long periods of silence from the respondent, or to the respondent becoming upset. When that was the case, I did not move forward with that topic in the interview unless the minor asked specifically to continue. Instead, I would offer the respondent the opportunity to change topics, or to end the interview completely (at which point, I would again ask if they consented to participation, offering an opportunity to completely withdraw).

There were also instances in which youth disclosed having committed brutal acts like robbery, sexual assault, and murder. In those cases, I was careful to reserve judgment, and I focused on asking questions about those instances only if that information was linked to their migration journeys.

Keeping Interviews on Track. Many minors openly told me they thought I was either an immigration officer, part of the Mexican army, or the U.S. government, and did not trust my interest in their journeys, this happens even after consent and assent was acquired. In some cases,

the youth I met were extremely reserved or not interested in talking about their journeys, even though they consented and assented to participate.

Finally, in some cases, youths wanted to use the interview process as a way of getting information. As a result, during my interaction with some youth, interviews were mixed with topics like my life in the U.S., music, and how to get legal status in Mexico. I understood these patterns as an expression of what youth migrants genuinely wanted to know, which was equally valuable information for my research. Below is an example from my interview with Nico, a 16-year-old Salvadoran boy:

> **Angel**: What do you plan to do when you get to San Luis [Potosi]?
> **Nico**: I don't know, call my relatives so they can send me money?
> **Angel**: In the U.S. or in El Salvador?
> **Nico**: And what will happen to me if I cross?
> **Angel**: Where?
> **Nico**: To the U.S.?
> **Angel**: Ahh well, several things can happen to you. If you want, once we finish the interview, we can talk about that.
> **Nico**: Because they told me that the minors are sent for adoption, and I don't want anyone to adopt me, I have a family.
> **Angel**: And who told you that?
> **Nico**: That's what other migrants told me in Tenosique, that since I don't have a father or a mother [with me], if they [Mexican immigration officials] catch me, they will have to send me to be adopted.
> **Angel**: Well, I do not know of a case like that, I don't recall any case of adoption in Mexico.
> **Nico**: Then what are they going to do to me?
> **Angel**: Well, they stop you first and then it's a whole process.
> **Nico**: And they won't put me in jail, right?
> **Angel**: I don't think so?
> **Nico**: Ahhh, then, I will keep moving! I was already regretting it [leaving my country] because I said, man! someone is going to adopt me! I don't want to be adopted, but if I refuse, then they will put me in jail! I was already thinking about staying here in Guadalajara instead.
> **Angel**: And who told you about being adopted?
> **Nico**: That's what the other minors who were there [in Tenosique] were saying.

Interviews like Nico's were common during my research. While the interview deviated from my planned script, I learned about the transmission of knowledge and rumors about the journey. This

illustrates how, in practice, I had to balance my data collection between following a script and allowing respondents to talk and express what was most interesting to them.

Defining Youth. I initially planned to study the migration of minors, based on the U.S.'s legal definition in the migration context—individuals under the age of 18. However, in the field, I expanded my focus to include *youth*, which I define as individuals age 21 and under. In social science there is a recognition that the is not a universal notion of childhood and also that the transition to childhood doesn't necessary correlates with the legal definition (Norozi and Moen 2016; Collins and Mead 2021). More importantly, in my research I found that focusing just on minors will limit my understanding of on the transition from minor to adults and its intersection with immigration law and the migrant journey. This is because I found how most youths knew that crossing the U.S. before turning 18 would benefit them from not being deported from the U.S. In various cases, I found how 18- or 19-years old youth started their journeys as minors and some were about to turn 18 years old in the following weeks after I met them. These findings were not a surprise to me; you expect migrants to take advantage of any opportunity. It was a surprise to meet 18 years old and older youths who knew about this policy and, even so, for some reason, didn't come before when they were minors. As a result, I decided to include some youths from 18, 19, 20, and some 21 years old in my sample. I decided to extend my research sample's age to compare the group of minor migrants to the older group, observe differences between both groups, and see how immigration law influences the decision to migrate among people when they transition from minors to young adults.

***

Overall, the adjustments I made to my research plan in the field were successful. In all but 10 cases, I was able to collect the timelines of each respondent's migratory journeys, as they

remembered them. My fieldnotes followed the same structure and sequence, and, despite some variation in length, I was able to consistently recollect and document my interactions with migrant youth. The flexibility of my methodology allowed me to capture and incorporate the new themes and findings as I spent time in the field. This, in turn, gave my data depth beyond the scope of my original plan.

Data Collected

In total, I interviewed 86 youths and collected approximately 100 single-spaced typed pages of fieldnotes over the course of 6 months (divided in 4 years). Of the interviews, 55 were voice-recorded, and 31 were handwritten. I took fieldnotes in three different ways: handwritten, typed on a computer, and voice recorded. After leaving the field, I converted all handwritten notes and voice recordings into typed notes. For security purposes, all my data is saved in an encrypted hard drive. My Excel master sheet file and MaxQDA coding file are saved in the in the hard drive and also on my cloud drive account for accessibility purposes.

I also collected maps of migration routes, informational pamphlets, and children's drawings (see Figure 25 in the Appendix). Finally, I took limited pictures during my time in the field. Some pictures were of spaces or geography, and I occasionally took pictures of youths when waiting for the train, preparing to walk or closeup of injuries. For all pictures of people, I obtained the subject's assent prior to taking the photograph.

My interviews can be viewed across four axes: age, gender, and nationality of the respondent, and region of Mexico where the interview was conducted (see Figures 26 to 30 in the Appendix). The distributions of age, gender, and nationality of respondents across my interview set matches the makeup of the population of youths that typically migrate through Mexico according to data registered by the Migrant Defense Organizations' Documentation Network

(REDODEM 2020). Since 2015, this body of Mexican civil organizations compiles data collected from nearly all migrant shelters in Mexico. For example, most youths (78%) I interviewed were men, 8% were gender non-conforming, and 14% were women (see Figure 26 in Appendix); REDODEM data shows a similar distribution for the case of minors (under 18 years old). For regions (see Figure 33) where interviews were conducted, I achieved a roughly homogenous sample between Northern, Central, and Southern Mexico, as those regions are defined by the REDODEM in their annual reports.

I conducted most of my interviews between 2016 and 2019. In total, I conducted 29 interviews in 2016, 16 in 2018, 39 in 2019, and 2 in 2020, (see Appendix Figure 29). During those years, I was in locations with high volume migrant flows, and 2019 particularly saw high migrant flows across Mexico (see the time spend at each region in Appendix Figure 30). I also conducted around 25 different interviews with officials, activists, and academics that work with migrant youth. These interviews help me to understand the context of the places I visited, as well as learn from their experiences in the field. These interviews were used in combination with my fieldnotes to create the narratives in the following chapters.

Method of Analysis: Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory

There are multiple methods of analysis for ethnographic fieldnotes and interviews like content analysis, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis. However, the grounded theory method of analysis has a special appeal for those who analysis of the issue or case exploring happens while doing the research. Grounded theory allows a researcher to create a set of explanations about the issue from the data itself, rather than previous theories (Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis 2019; Bamkin, Maynard, and Goulding 2016; Corbin and Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2006). I analyzed my

data using grounded theory in the classical approach of Glasner and Strauss (1999). This method of qualitative analysis uses qualitative data (often fieldnotes and interviews) to analyze, compare, and build theories about how groups, cultures, institutions, or social settings work (Noble and Mitchell 2016; Charmaz 2006, 2013). These theories are generated by the constant comparison and testing of the concepts against the data to either refute or strengthen the statements and theories in hand. While grounded theory doesn't seek to create universal theories, researchers can apply generalizations as "cases of" a theory that can be observed in other settings (Glaser and Strauss 1999, 104). Thus, the theoretical power of grounded theory is that it helps to explain and predict other cases which ultimately strengths its explanatory capacity. Since its publication in 1975, grounded theory has been one of the primary methods of analysis for ethnographers.

One of the advantages grounded theory gives an ethnographer is inductive orientation that is flexible enough to allow theory to interact and be corrected by the data itself. The theories, or statements generated in grounded theory are not rigid concepts, but instead are in a constant "process" of refinement (1999, 32). This means that theories are written as a theoretical discussion that can tested in other settings and be reinterpreted or augmented with the evidence refutes it (similar to what Blume (1954) describes as "sensitizing concepts"). Grounded theory generates theory in the "middle range" (Atkinson 2017)—the generated theories do not attempt to explain society generally, but instead explain how particular social groups, institutions, or communities operate in their everyday lives.

The creation of theories through grounded theory comes primarily from designing and coding "conceptual categories" in a data set (Hallberg 2009). Conceptual categories are the themes that the researcher pulls out from the data; these themes are typically based on previous literature (theories) and the data itself. These categories inform the categorization and coding of the data

itself, allowing researchers to create coding schemes from which patterns emerge. I will discuss this in the next section.

Code Scheme Progression and Analysis

Applying grounded theory, my research seeks to explain how members of a group (Central American youth migrants) navigate a harsh and violent reality (their migration journeys through Mexico). My research was grounded in the hypothesis that migrant youths are not passive subjects of violence but react to the different obstacles presented in their journeys. From this hypothesis I concentrate my observation (and fieldnotes) on knowing both the different obstacles that youths found during their journeys and how they solved them. Likewise, my interviews aimed to know the about the violence that youths have experienced during their journeys (see Figure 23 at the end of the Appendix). As grounded theory anticipates, my coding scheme, much like my research design, evolved over the course of the project. This subsection describes the evolution and application of my coding scheme.

To analyze my interviews, I used MaxQDA, a software that helps to code, organize, and manage interviews and fieldnotes, as well as create charts, graphs, and maps of the set of codes used during the interviews. In addition, I created a master spreadsheet with all the major categorical variables of my data (gender, age, nationality, etc.).

When I returned from my first summer in the field in 2016, I devised an initial coding scheme for my interviews and fieldnotes. Given my initial research question, this first scheme focused largely on demographic and type-of-violence. I thought these variables would be key to track based on my research design, and on the experiences of and strategies used by youths as part of their journeys. As shown in the tables below, these codes included robbery, injuries, places

through which the youths crossed, and basic demographics (age, gender, and nationality). The second group of codes were unquantifiable, meaning the codes were flags for underlying themes like fear, thoughts, dreams, opinions, and youth violence strategies. I intended to use the quantifiable codes to create maps and run basic statistics that would describe the violence that youth migrants suffer in Mexico. But the unquantifiable codes were the true core of my research and helped me describe and explain the strategies employed by migrant youth.

Scheme for Coding Analysis	
Research Question: How Do Migrant Youth Migrants Experience and Respond to The Violence Suffered During Their Journeys Through Mexico?	
Demographic and Type of Violence Codes	**Unquantifiable Codes**
● Incidents of Violence ○ *Robbery* ○ *Injury* ○ Deportation ○ Detentions ○ Emotional and Physical Harm ● Places Crossed ○ *Amount of Time in Each Place* ○ *Region of Mexico* ● Deportations (if applicable) ● Demographics ○ *Age* ○ *Gender* ○ *Nationality* ○ *Year* ● Type of Transportation ○ *Train* ○ *Walking* ○ *Taxi* ○ *Bus* ○ *Other*	● Strategies and Adaptations ● Knowledge ● Emotions ● Opinions/Thoughts ● Dreams (Expectations) ● Thoughts about Journey ● Plans for Moving ● Experiences with: ○ *Police, Army, Enforcement* ○ *People* ○ *Other Migrants*

By the end of my first summer in the field, I had learned that youth migrants were not simply passive subjects of violence—they reacted to it, or negotiated violence. Finally, the youths' experiences during their migrant journeys generated knowledge and impressions, that in turn influenced the remainder of their journeys.

These realizations, and the resulting additional literature I reviewed, required me to update my coding scheme. After returning from my first round in the field, I added additional codes (in

both types of codes) to account for the relation between geographic regions and violence. I redefined the concept of "knowledge" as "transmission of information," and I included new set of subcodes for rumors, reputations, and legal consciousness. Finally, I added new codes grounded in sociological concepts like migrant networks, emotions, and legal consciousness (Temores-Alcantara et al. 2015; Carling and Collins 2018; Baldassar 2015). The updated code scheme with which I recoded my previously coded interviews and fieldnotes was as follows:

Scheme for Coding Analysis #2	
Research Question: How Do Migrant Youth Migrants Experience and Respond to The Violence Suffered During Their Journeys Through Mexico?	
Demographic and Type of Violence Codes	**Unquantifiable Codes**

● Type of Violence
  ○ *Robbery*
  ○ *Deportation*
  ○ *Detention*
  ○ *Physical Harm*
  ○ *Kidnapping*
  ○ *Extortion*
  ○ *Sexual Harm*
  ○ *Defraud*
● Region of Mexico Crossed
  ○ *Southern*
  ○ *Central*
  ○ *Northern*
● Number of crossings to Mexico (from their home countries)
  ○ *Deportations*
  ○ *Detentions*
  ○ *Imprisonment*
● Demographic
  ○ *Age*
  ○ *Gender*
  ○ *Nationality*
  ○ *Rural/Urban (place of origin)*
● Time in the Mexico
● Reason for Leaving Home Country
  ○ *Violence*
  ○ *Economic*
  ○ *Other*
● Reasons for moving to the US (or Mexico)
  ○ Violence
  ○ Economic
  ○ Family Reunification
● Migrant Networks in the US?
● Interactions
  ○ *General People*
	● Negotiation of Violence
	  ○ Knowledge
	  ○ Time
	  ○ Regional Context
	● Strategies
	  ○ *Change Identity*
	  ○ *Change Plans*
	● Pace
	  ○ Moving
	  ○ Waiting
	  ○ Staying
	● Transmission of Information
	  ○ *Reputation*
	  ○ *Rumors*
	  ○ *Legal Consciousness, Policies*
	  ○ Feelings and Experiences
	  ○ *Emotions*
	  ○ *Desires*
	  ○ *Trauma*
	  ○ *Thoughts*
	● Adaptation of their Journeys
	● Mobility
	  ○ *Deterrence, Facilitators for movement*

○ *Institutions* ○ *Other Migrants*	

With the final code scheme, I constructed the themes that appear in my chapters and created maps and charts to illustrate the general trend on violence among youth migrants. I used demographic concepts to generate charts and maps of the episodes of violence that youths suffered during their journeys in Mexico. Figure 31 (see Appendix), for example, demonstrates how youths of different genders are more likely to suffer different types of violence. Such charts and graphs were crucial to my understanding of the youth migrant's journey. I also located 56 different towns and cities where youth migrants moved and experienced some type of violence. This allowed me to generate maps of cases of violence like robbery, kidnapping, or detention. Figure 32 of the Appendix shows the distribution of incidences of robbery reported by respondents. This reveals that incidences of robbery are concentrated in Mexico's southern region.

My analysis of the unquantifiable codes was different. Instead of creating charts and maps, I analyzed the patterns of the codes I was creating, as well how they related to each other. In grounded theory this process is the creation of "conceptual categories" and "conceptual properties," and the determination of how they relate to each other (Glaser and Strauss 1999, 35). For grounded theory, categories are the core of the theory (like the category of violence) and properties reflect "a conceptual aspect of the category" (1999, 36). This means that properties are researchers' abstractions grounded in the data that show how a category operates or functions in relation to other categories. Together, categories and properties become the basis to explain the large theories of the questions that we are trying to explain.

Following the guidelines of Glaser and Strauss, I began by looking at the properties of the categories coded in my data, and they worked together in combination with the rest of the categories. This process involved a constant back-and-forth, seeing how the properties I coded for my categories worked in the different cases in my fieldnotes and interviews. The recoding process is part what in grounded theory is known as verification of theory. In this process, categories and properties made either using new data or by reconceptualizing the already existing data are compared and verified (Glaser and Strauss 1999, 119). This recoding then allowed me to specifically observe the rumors circulated among youth migrants. To illustrate my analysis of the unquantifiable codes, below is an example of my analysis of the conceptual category of negotiation of violence.

First Coding

I initially had a code called "Knowledge," which I had defined as any substantial and qualitative information that youths have about their journeys in Mexico. During my data analysis, I found that this category was too broad: While much of the knowledge that youths expressed came from their migrant networks and their own research, most of what I categorized as knowledge was uncertain information that circulated among youths and other migrants moving through Mexico. I began to code this type of knowledge as uncertainty. The following excerpt of an interview shows how I coded for knowledge and uncertainty (signaled with an *):

> **Angel**: Why didn't you get on that train?
> **Benja**: Because I did not want to go through that part of the border [Tijuana].
> **Angel**: Why not?
> **Benja**: Because I hear it is very dangerous.
> **Angel**: What have you heard about that?
> **Benja**: So, I heard that the first [migrant] caravan that came from Honduras. That they got all way up to Tijuana, and a lot of them got stuck there and still haven't

> been able to cross the [U.S.] border. There are a lot of people stranded there, so it is more dangerous. Some were sent back [to Central America]. *Knowledge
> **Angel**: How did you find that out?
> **Benja**: I am always listening to people talking, and I remember everything.
> **Angel**: Are you sure that this information is correct?
> **Benja**: I am not positive, but that's what people were talking about when we were walking. *Knowledge
> **Angel**: And if that's not true [about Tijuana], what are you going to do?
> **Benja**: Well, right now that's all I know, that's why I have to be careful as I go.

My fieldnotes similarly reflected how youths used uncertain information to make decisions. The following paragraph is an example of my coded fieldnotes:

> "Migrants listen to everything and everyone to get information about where to move next. What town to move to next, what precautions to take, what cities to avoid. They also recognize that there is not a way to know if this information is true or not, but they do pay attention to it anyway." (Notes, July 2016) *Knowledge

Re-Coding

Notes like this started to be more common during my fieldwork, and I began to specifically ask and look for information considered by youth migrants as neither true nor false but that they still relied on. In reviewing the literature for similar concepts, I found that the concept of rumors, which is a story or a piece of information "that is suspected because of its uncertain and unauthorized origins within a social system" (Fine, Campion-Vincent, and Heath 2005, 1). As a result, I reviewed many of the segments previously coded as "knowledge" and added the subcode "uncertainty." On top of adding the code "uncertainty," I also began coding the properties of the rumors subcode, which included, as shown below, "Deterrent of Movement" and "Potential Deportation." The re-coded segment is now as follows:

> **Angel**: Why didn't you get on the train?
> **Benja**: Because I did not want to go through that part of the border [Tijuana].
> **Angel**: Why not?
> **Benja**: Because I hear it is very dangerous.
> **Angel**: What have you heard about that?

> **Benja**: So, I heard that the first [migrant] caravan that came from Honduras. That they got all way up to Tijuana, and a lot of them got stuck there and still haven't been able to cross the [U.S.] border. There are a lot of people stranded there, so it is more dangerous. Some were sent back [to Central America]. *Knowledge *Rumor
> **Angel**: How did you find that out?
> **Benja**: I am always listening to people talking, and I remember everything.
> **Angel**: Are you sure that this information is correct?
> **Benja**: I am not positive, but that's what people were talking about when we were walking. *Uncertainty *Transmission of Knowledge *Other migrants *Walking
> **Angel:** And if that's not true [about Tijuana], what are you going to do?
> **Benja:** Well, right now that's all I know, that's why I have to be careful as I go.

The process described above allowed me to create more detailed categories to analyze my data and develop a more refined and develop answer to my main research question. Below is a scheme of the evaluation of my findings as my research evolved from my first to my third fieldwork experience.

Primary research question: How do migrant youth migrants experience and respond to the violence suffered during their journeys through Mexico?

> First Fieldwork Iteration
> **Statement:** Central American youth migrants develop strategies to survive violence during their journeys.
>
> **Finding:** Youth did not necessarily know what violence they were facing, and in many cases, they did not have strategies per se to deal with violence. Youth change their plans regularly as they move.
>
> Second Fieldwork Iteration
> **Statement:** Youth migrants adapt their migration journeys as they move through Mexico toward the U.S.
>
> **Finding:** Youths do not necessarily make willing decisions during their journeys in Mexico, and the changes they are willing to make might vary depending on their preferences and interest. The relation between migrant youth and their journeys is more complicated than creating strategies and adapting their journeys—youth migrants experience and negotiate their journeys and its violence differently at different times.
>
> Third Fieldwork Iteration
> **Final Statement:** Youth migrants' journey experiences are a constant adaptation where, while they aim to avoid violence and keep moving to the U.S., the results

> are unpredictable. This situation results in the process of negotiation between youth migrants and the violence of the journey. Rather than seeing youth migrants as being at complete mercy of the violence or fully capable of avoiding violence, the concept of negotiation describes the journey as a process. In this process, migrants deal with an unpredictable violent context by learning/discovering and making sense of what aspects of the journeys can be avoided and transformed and which ones cannot. In exchange for this negotiation, migrants transform their goals and desires, modifying their original plans partially and, in some cases, completely but not necessarily permanently. This case represents humans' capacity to achieve and survive extreme circumstances, not facing it, not winning it, not overcoming it, but negotiating with it. This dissertation will show how this interaction between migrants and the journey that I label as a negotiation comes to happen.

The evolution of my research statement from strategies to negotiation resulted from grounded theory's approach of comparison of data and seeking of concept's properties. The results presented in this dissertation are the results of this comparative process that resulted in an ethnographic narrative.

Limitations of this Study

Despite the extensiveness of my research work, they are limitations about its scope that need to be clarified. First, the sample of my interviews (86) does not have any statistical power. Since 2014, hundreds of thousands of minors have been crossing Mexico, yet my research doesn't attempt to make any statistical attempt to cover the more significant trend. The charts and percentages showed in my dissertation (e.g., six youths reported sexual harassment from another migrant) reference the sample. Second, I conducted my fieldwork in different years and different places. This heterogeneity in time and location might be perceived as affecting the validity of my results and findings. However, I argue that the difference does not necessarily have to be a problem for my research because I am comparing regions, so a different regional sample is part of the consideration of my research.

Regarding the years' variation, although I recognize that from 2014 to 2019, Mexico has changed its treatment toward migrants (increasingly discouraging their movement), during my fieldwork and analysis, I made an effort to take this variation into account. In addition, these changes became part of the research itself. As set forth in the following chapters, this continuous change is part of Mexico's migratory context that makes the journeys of Central American youths uncertain and increases violence. Therefore, differences in years and regions ultimately became more part of my research than a problem.

Finally, although my research is about the journeys of Central American youth, I did not fully experience the journey of each youth I met. It would be impossible to do given each journey's wide variation in length and time. Also, I did not follow up on the progression of the youth's journeys after I left them. This is worth noting as in most cases, it is not possible to observe the final results of their migration journeys. My interest was not to calculate this outcome. My research focuses on the youth's experience of the journey. My research does not presume a linear aspect to the migratory journey but rather reflects a diverse experience and often a serpentine journey.

Conclusion of Methods and Data Section

When I began graduate school, one of my goals was to deepen my knowledge of the empirical aspect of ethnographic research. The way in which we scholars translate our observations and interviews into a consistent, reproducible interpretation of how our society works is important for both the academic community and the general public. By offering a clear description of the research process and its findings, research gives other researchers (and anyone who is interested in the matter) the opportunity to learn the limitations and strengths of a study and to open the conversation to enhancing the understanding of the matter in a coherent way. This section

establishes how I conducted my data collection and analysis in an attempt to further the discussion on ethnographic methods, and to help the reader analyze the strength of the study.

Chapter 3: Caravans, Microchips, Organ Trafficking, and Donald Trump: The Role of Rumor in the Migrant Journeys of Central American Youth

A Free Ticket to the Border?

Saltillo, Coahuila, June 19, 2019.

It is seven in the morning at the migrant shelter near the railroads in Saltillo, Coahuila, a large industrial city in Northern Mexico located 185 miles south of the closest U.S. border (see figure 10). The 100 migrants who spent the night at the shelter are starting to chatter. Something odd happened the night before.

Figure 10. Map showing the location of Saltillo.

Before everyone went to sleep last night, three Salvadoran migrant men who were staying at the shelter gave three first-class bus tickets to three other migrants for free, and then left shelter. The bus was set to depart at noon the next day for the border city of Nuevo Laredo, a 180-mile trip. They gave the tickets to three different migrants, none of whom were traveling together. None of the recipients had met the Salvadorans before arriving at the shelter the day before, and the recipients received the tickets in different areas and times.

Stories about the three ticket donors and why they gave away free tickets had begun to circulate by morning. As word spread, migrants started to gather around the three recipients to discuss whether they should use the tickets or not. One of the migrants who had met the men mentioned that "they said they had found a smuggler that would take them to the border in a private car, so they didn't need to take the bus anymore. They just gave away the tickets so someone else could use them."

But not everyone's readings are so generous—many migrants have learned to be deeply suspicious of any help that could also turn out to be a deadly trap. Some of the migrants commented

that the three Salvadorans were suspiciously well-dressed and clean compared to the rest of them and spent just one afternoon and one night at the shelter. They left in the early hours of the morning, and the shelter guard said that a fancy car came to pick them up. The strangest fact continued to be that they gave away the tickets for free. "Who gives away free bus tickets?"

One of the recipients was Humberto, a 17-year-old boy from Honduras, and a group was gathered around him. One migrant asked him if he noticed anything unusual about the Salvadorans. Humberto recalled that the three men talked to him the night before during dinner, asking him questions about his family back in Honduras and in the U.S. When they heard this, the group gathered around Humberto started to mumble. "There it is!" said one man, as if that fact was the last piece of evidence that solved the puzzle. One of the migrants, an older male, said to Humberto:

> Look, if I were you, I would not use that ticket. I have heard stories about how the cartels go into the shelters looking for migrants to kidnap. Narcos make more money kidnapping people than running drugs and recruit other migrants to use them as bait. They use migrants to bring other migrants to them. When I passed Celaya [a city in Central Mexico], I saw Central Americans with machine guns along the train, working with the narcos.

Another migrant chimed in:

> I have also heard stories about migrants who get recruited and then enter shelters to tell other people they know how to get to the border. And then once people listen and follow them, they get into isolated areas and then call their bosses to come pick them up. Once you're in their hands, terrible things can happen. You are a kid, and these days, children like you are used for organ trafficking. Your eyes or kidneys will be removed. This is my third time making this trip, and I have heard stories like this from the first moment I entered Mexico, be careful. Maybe you are lucky and will get to the border comfortably on the bus, but nobody is at these shelters is giving away *free* bus tickets.

All the men in the group started to nod, approving the comments with their concerned faces. Yet another commenter chimed in:

> From here to the border is when things get 'hot.' We are entering the most dangerous part of the trip, the border. I have heard that ever since I started in

> Guatemala. Narcos have a feast on the border because they know we want to reach the border. They wait for us to come to them, like chickens.

Then a man inspecting the bus ticket interjected:

> I have heard that first-class buses are not being stopped by immigration. But, if these migrants are working for the drug cartels, they know when you are taking the bus and the exact seat you will be in. They might be waiting in the middle of the road and will come right to your seat. If I were you, I would not get on that bus.

After the group disassembles, Humberto confesses to me that he is still considering taking the bus. The opportunity to take a 4-hour bus ride to the border instead of a 12-plus hour trip atop a train is too tempting. At the same time, he knows that the danger of encountering drug cartels between Saltillo and the border is very real, and very serious. Humberto takes his breakfast (see figure 11) and keeps talking to other migrants about what to do. I hear him repeatedly asking, “Should I go or not?”

Figure 11. Picture of the dining room during breakfast.

By 11 am, one of the other two ticket recipients has decided to leave the shelter and go to the bus station. The migrant who is leaving tries to convince Humberto to go, but Humberto says that he doesn’t want to take the risk of being caught by narcos. As he watches the man leave, Humberto laughs nervously and tells me, "If he gets there safely, then I missed an opportunity, but if he gets caught by the narcos, then I made the right decision. I will never know what happens to him, if all these stories are true or not."

That night, I was in the recreation area and heard some of the migrants telling others who had just arrived about the events of the morning. One man told the newcomers: "Last night, we

were sleeping with the enemy, and we didn't know it. The narcos passing as migrants were offering free bus tickets, acting like they were helping us. But it was just a lie. What they really wanted was to take us to an area where they could catch us!" People around the newcomers, including Humberto, nodded in approval, and one said, "it's true!"

Introduction

Humberto's dilemma about whether to use the suspicious bus ticket exemplifies a situation that Central American youth frequently face as they move through Mexico, making crucial decisions based on information they cannot verify but upon which they must rely.

During my research, I found that information and knowledge of the migration journey were crucial to know where, when, and how to move. However, despite the need to know, youth moved with a substantial, if not complete, lack of reliable information along their journeys. This condition allows the circulation (and consideration) of all kinds of stories and claims about issues and opportunities they might encounter during their journeys.

While scholars have shown how information transmitted among migrant networks facilitates international migration flows, there is an increasing consensus that migrants move in precarious conditions like the youth I study. Thus, information is often scarce and unreliable. In the case of youths migrants' journeys, while they can be certain (to some degree) about the places and the general danger they were about to face, they lack information and details about what could happen as they move. This lack of knowledge was especially crucial in the case of violence; youth migrants don't just want to know about the potential dangers of the journey (some lethal) but do want to know how to avoid them.

The lack of access to knowledge creates a context in which youth migrants (and any other precarious migrants) must pay attention to rumors to make sense of the potential dangers ahead.

Just like the case of Humberto, the potential benefits of free bus tickets came with the possibility of ending up kidnapped at the U.S.-Mexico border. With no other sources, Humberto listens and evaluates many rumors about violence to make his final decision.

Broadly speaking, rumors are neither proven nor certified as true or accurate, but they are considered relevant enough or true enough to be circulated. During my research, I found how these types of stories played a significant role in filling the information gaps about the migrant journey that other sources could not. More importantly, they impacted the way youth migrants approached their migrant journeys.

This chapter focuses on the intersection of information, migrant movement, and violence to explore how rumors can shape the way youth experience their journeys through Mexico. Specifically, this chapter describes how rumors fill migrants' knowledge gaps and how migrants use that information to make decisions and set expectations about what is ahead in their migrant journey. A close examination of the role of rumors demonstrates the power of micro-level interactions (transmission of information) in shaping migration flows. The chapter begins by reviewing the role of information and rumors on international migration flows and how the precarity of information and extreme violence that Central American youth face while moving through Mexico triggers rumor use. Next, I provide a descriptive classification of the rumors I collected and discuss how and where youth migrants spread and believe rumors during their journeys. I close by demonstrating the capacity of rumors to transform how youth migrants move across Mexico and the potential negative effects of putting youths' lives at risk of more suffering.

Information Worth Considering: The Importance of Information and Rumors on Migration Studies

The vital role that information plays in the decision of people to migrate has been thoroughly noted and examined by scholars of international migration. Through migrant networks, social media, and smugglers, people learn and transmit information about the experiences other living abroad as well as any resources that can facilitate or imped their migration (Elsner, Narciso, and Thijssen 2018; Schwabe and Weziak□Bialowolska 2021). Information about immigration laws, job opportunities, or living conditions in countries of destination circulates among migrant transnational communities and creates a worldview about migration that determines how migrants decide to move (Uy-Tioco 2007). However, while information is crucial among migrant communities, it is not uniformly transmitted. Instead, the access and type of information that a migrant receives is shaped by factors like their social or cultural capital (Garip 2008; Barglowski 2019). Demographics such as level of education, resources gender, race, or even geographic location can influence the information a migrant receives, and this knowledge ultimately determines access to or denial of additional knowledge and opportunities. However, regardless of the degree of access, information is recognized as a critical component that facilitates, shapes, and maintains migration at different levels in any form or level.

Following the research on the importance of information over migration and its access and limits, scholars have found that for precarious migrants like refugees or displaced people, information and its circulation can have a different process than other types of migrants. The extreme conditions that people escaping war, natural disaster, or persecution experience put migrants in a position in which they do not have reliable access to information about destinations,

laws, or resources. Further, the information they have access to is not trustworthy and can be prejudicial.

Otis and Campbell (2017) have used the term "information precarity" to describe how Syrians living in refugee camps in Jordan have a permanent lack of access to reliable information on immigration laws and politics in both their home Syria and Jordan. This lack of knowledge is substituted by false and misguided information to make sense of their reality and future as refugees. The need and precarity of information that migrants in precarious situations can experience makes them prone to transmitting and believing information about other types of migrants could be discarded. Scholars have found, for example, how refugees can believe fake news about immigration policies or, more recently, about COVID-19, despite this news being refuted by local experts (Parkinson and Behrouzan 2015). Their stubbornness to believe false information is attributed to the lack of access to other sources of information (information precarity) and their cultural mistrust of official sources of information.

One of the forms of communication that information precarity triggers among migrants in precarious conditions is rumors. Sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani in his classic study "Improvised News" (1966), defined rumors as the collective interpretation of situations whose formal explanation is unavailable, ambiguous, or distrusted. In his book, Shibutani argues that rumors arise in "ambiguous situations" (1966, 57), instances in which institutional and formal channels of communication are not enough to resolve confusion or challenges that a group or a community faces in a situation. For Shibutani, rumors are more prone to being seen as credible when the circumstances are dire, like in the case of precarious migrants.

Since Shibutani's seminal analysis of rumors, there has been more intense interest their study. Despite being explicitly questioned as potentially misguiding and dangerous for institutions

and vulnerable groups (Kimmel 2004), scholars have recognized rumors as widely present in different settings and groups worldwide (Campion-Vincent 2007; Donovan 2007). From gold-rush rumors during in the American frontier (Dowd 2015) to rumors about race and violence (Odum 1969; Fine and Turner 2001; Young, Pinkerton, and Dodds 2014; Knopf 1975), or rumors about places like hospitals (Pearson 2003), the stock market (Schmidt 2020), and, more recently, rumors shared through social media (Sunstein 2014; Burrell 2012; Sommariva et al. 2018; De Domenico et al. 2013) are not an exception but a routine among social life.

Much like the examination of rumors across different settings, there has been an expansion on the theory on rumors. Sociologist Gary Fine has moved forward from Shibutani's situational definition and conceptualized rumors as "an expression of a belief of topical relevance that is spread without secure standards of evidence, given norms for beliefs" (Fine 2007, 5). Fine's exploration of rumors goes towards how rumors are collectively discussed and considered as potentially accurate (plausible) and of interest to the group (relevance). For Fine, in the evaluation of rumors, we can find how issues like the reputation of the person spreading rumors and the specific culture of the group discussing the rumors can affect the way rumors are believed and considered as relevant and potentially accurate. In Fine's analysis, rumors are evidence of a society or a group that is invested in discussing and evaluating information out of the control sphere of institutions (Fine 2007), and these rumors are capable of changing how people and groups see and understand their world (Fine 2010).

For the case of international migration, the study of rumors has been relatively scarce until recent years. Many of the approaches on rumors and migration are analyses of rumors about migrants. Rumors on migrants often involve stories of violence and danger that represent a threat to the countries of destination (Fine 2010; Casademont Falguera, Cortada Hortalà, and Prieto-

Flores 2018; Hajimu 2009). Rumors about migrants, while inaccurate, are widely circulated and fueled by anti-immigrant sentiments framework of how groups portray or preconceived certain groups (race or religious minorities) already as threatened or a menace.

While scholars have studied rumors about migrants, less research has been done about how migrants circulate rumors. Historically, there has been evidence that migrants have used rumors to spread information about their potential to move to places. During the great migration, for example, Southern black people circulated rumors about the less-racist and favorable labor conditions in the northern cities of the United States (Lemann 1992). These rumors traveled across the south in different forms and variations and contributed significantly to the decision of many black to migrate to northern cities.

Just like in the past, today's international migrants, like Humberto, are still circulating and discussing rumors. For example, human geographer Michelle Collyer has documented how transit migrants in Northern Africa follow the recommendations of other migrants about cities where they can look for work while waiting for the crossing to the U.S., despite the recommendations' dubious nature (Collyer 2007b). And in her extensive work along the Central American migrant route, political scientist Noelle Bridget has pointed out how rumors on, for example, the closing or reopening of railroads, are circulated among Central American migrants in an attempt to avoid potential obstacles ahead in the journey (Brigden 2018, 72). While rumors do not necessarily influence or substitute the economic and social forces driving international migration, migrants do use them to fill knowledge gaps and and to decide on their movement (Belloni 2019, 47).

But, while scholars have found how rumors can act as facilitators of information among migrants, the nature of rumors as potentially false or misleading information can have a negative effect on migrants. For example, different studies have shown how refugee's lack of access to

official and accurate information about European asylum laws trigger the circulation and belief of negative rumors about policies (Carlson, Jakli, and Linos 2018; Wall, Otis Campbell, and Janbek 2017) and Lebanon (Ozkul and Jarrous 2021). These negative rumors are spread either in-person or through social media, ultimately generating distrust among refugees towards the asylum system, undermining any credibility or approachability. Rumors among migration thus, seem to be a need but also a double-edged source.

Following literature about rumors on migration studies, this chapter examines the circulation of rumors among Central American migrant youth during their journeys in Mexico. In this case, I define rumors as asseverations about the migrant journey to which migrants consider worthy of attention and believe despite knowing that they might not be correct, accurate, or true. During my fieldwork, I could identify almost 87 different types of rumors about violence, laws, migrant routes, and imprisonment in the U.S. and Mexico. I not just collected the rumors, but in many instances, I witnessed how rumors were transmitted and evaluated. Like what literature suggested, the extreme scarcity of information that Central American youth have about the dangers and opportunities during the journey contributes to the proliferation of all sorts of stories, tales, legends, and asseverations about the migrant journey that are explicitly doubted yet considered. But also, as scholars found out and the case of Humberto illustrates, rumors can lead to dangerous situations or increase the already precarious conditions of youth migrants during their journeys.

By putting rumors at the center of analysis, I aim to illustrate migrants' negotiation process. While moving, Central American youth are in critical need of information about the dangers and potential opportunities. However, the dual nature of the rumors—that they can be beneficial or prejudicial—puts youth in a situation where they must decide what to believe. With little room to deliberate, youth migrants often have to negotiate the veracity and plausibility of the information

and make decisions based on it. Below, I start by describing the environment of precarious information that youth migrants experience during their journeys, which triggers their reliance on rumors. Then, I show how rumors are circulated and believed (or not) by youth migrants. Finally, I will discuss the negative effects that rumors have.

Changing and Unexpected Violence, and the Precarity of Information

No matter how well-planned a youth's route was, unexpected situations during their journeys would arise, and they would have to gather information and make decisions in real-time. At the same time, during their journeys in Mexico, youth dealt with a precarity of reliable information about the dangers. This precarity has three features: it is constant, it is hard to avoid, and it can lead to critical consequences. This section expands on these three features of information precarity and how they are linked to the proliferation of rumors among migrant youth during their journeys.

During their journeys, truly unaccompanied youth recognize that they move with significant or total information gaps about dangers awaiting them as they move. For example, during my fieldwork, I observed how youth often realized that they miscalculated the distances and time it would take them to move from place to place and admitted to not being sure that the routes they had taken were safe, even though they were moving based on what they had heard. There was not a single instance in which the migrant youth I met claimed to be sure about the information they had. Quite the contrary: they were almost constantly seeking to corroborate information they had and gain new information.

The lack of information is also not solved through experience. The youth I met who were attempting to migrate through Mexico for second and third times explained that there was no way to know if their previous experiences would be accurate anymore. Part of this is due to the randomness and constant shifting of the violence of the journey. For example, a youth migrants

who had made multiple attempts consistently observed that checkpoints had moved from their previous attempts, and places through which they had previously moved and considered safe were now places they could be robbed, detained, or persecuted. This environment of constant change casts uncertainty over the entire journey.

Similarly, this rendered the experience transmitted from migrant to migrant also insufficient. While eating lunch in a migrant shelter in Queretaro in central Mexico, a group of youth traveling together discussed their next move with another group of migrants, some of whom had already made the journey the youth were contemplating. When discussing the potential presence of robbers near the train rails outside the city along the route, one migrant mentioned that, a few years ago, he was robbed in that location. But another member of the group said he had slept outside one night near that same spot a few weeks ago with no issues. The youth still took the story about potential robbers to be true; they decided that there was a chance of being robbed, so they would limit their time in that area and only when there was daylight. Still, based on this information, there was no way to be sure.

As this group of youth demonstrates, choosing to follow a rumor can be beneficial for youth, but rumors can also lead migrants astray and tremendous implications. a result, youth face an incredible puzzle: they face a constant precarity of information that is almost entirely unsolvable, and they must be careful when they rely on the only information they have that permits them to continue moving.

The information that circulates among migrants includes tales, experiences, stories, and rumors. In this chapter, I focus on rumors, both due to the volume of rumors I heard while I was in the field, and second because youth constantly questioned whether rumors were true or false.

This places rumors at the center of my concept of negotiation of violence because rumors do not ensure evasion violence but considering which rumors to follow is part of youths' process.

An Overview of The Rumors I Collected and How I Collected Them

While I did not start my research collecting rumors, they were immediately salient in my fieldwork, and I began to take note of them very early on. In practice, rumors can come in many forms, such as tales, short sentences, or legends (Fine 2010; Aldrin 2005). Rumors can spread across all kinds of groups, places and can endure over time. We can also find that rumors can evolve as they are circulated among people, and we can find many versions and variations of one specific rumor (Odum 1969; Zires 2005). During my fieldwork, I found rumors in all forms, from short sentences like "I hear that Ciudad Juarez is the easiest place to cross the border" to detailed stories about the torture methods that smugglers use on migrants to force their families to pay ransoms. In total, I documented 114 rumors.

My guidelines for classifying rumors were: 1) their source was either unknown or unreachable, for example, "somebody told me that he heard that…" or "I have heard stories about.."; 2) the stories were always contentious—they were not considered to be or proven to be true or false, but youth found them "persuasive" (Fine 2007:6) or worth considering; and 3) they were circulated by or among youth minors. While I heard far more rumors than those that I have categorized and analyzed, I focused for purposes of my dissertation only on rumors that were circulated by or considered by youth migrants.

As I collected the rumors and my research progressed, I noticed patterns, themes, and repetitions of certain types of rumors. I classified these rumors into four themes: Violence, Mobility, Immigration and Detention, and Opportunities & Challenges in Mexico. Table 1 shows the distribution of the 114 relevant rumors I collected by theme. Because many rumors were

Table 2. Type and Frequency of Rumors			
	Type of Rumors	**Total Rumors**	**Unique Rumors (excluding repeated rumors)**
1	Violence	38	23
2	Mobility	27	10
3	Immigration and Detention	30	12
4	Opportunities & Challenges in Mexico	19	9
	Total	**114**	**54**

repeated more than once, the second column shows the number of unique rumors falling within each of those themes: 54.

Rumors about violence were rumors where the central lesson or point illustrated physical or mental harm youth could suffer during their journeys. One example is the rumor mentioned by Humberto above about organ trafficking by criminal groups. For mobility rumors, focus of the rumor was whether it was possible to move or not, for example, "Reynosa is the easiest place to cross the border." Immigration and detention rumors are primarily stories about detention practices and immigration policies in either the U.S. or Mexico. For example, the only Nicaraguan youth I met during my fieldwork mentioned that part of what motivated him to make the journey was that he had heard the U.S. was not detaining or deporting Nicaraguans that reached the U.S. border. The last category—opportunities and challenges—focuses on rumors about the benefits and downsides of places or people along the journey. The most common rumor in this category was "People keep saying that Monterrey is a place with a lot of work opportunities and good salaries." I heard this rumor circulated seven different times by youth (in addition to many other times by adults).

These four categories correlate with the most pressing issues that youth migrants encounter over the course of their journeys, and the areas about which they had the most uncertainty: violence, detention, and deportation. When I asked migrant youth what they feared the most while

in Mexico, the most common answer was fear of violence and of being deported from Mexico. Youth also frequently asked me what would happen if they got caught by the U.S. Border Patrol and whether I had heard about violence or checkpoints in a particular part of Mexico through which they may travel.

Categorizing the rumors and their frequency helped limit and organize my data and understanding patterns and variations. However, the description and recollection of rumors don't go deep enough to understand how rumors are used. My analysis goes beyond the description and classification and makes a deep analysis of how these rumors are understood and circulated among youth migrants and their consequences in the migrant journeys. In the following sections, I will detail my observations about the circulation and use of rumors and their relation to the migration journeys of migrant youth.

When and With Whom Rumors Are Shared

The sharing or rumors does not occur randomly or casually. Instead, rumors are shared because they are important or relevant for the groups that are discussing them and paying attention to them (Zires 2005). In in my research, rumors were shared in contexts that were relevant to the rumor. For example, when Humberto discloses his predicament about using the bus ticket, the group of migrants that surround him start to circulate rumors with potential explanation and consequence of using it.

Rumors are also shared when they are relatable. Rumors feed a discussion of the issues that concern the group—in this case, violence. Ample literature discusses how violence is perhaps most important issue discussed among migrant during their journey on Mexico (De León 2015; Bello 2000; Escamilla García 2020). Rumors thus work in combination with the already-established knowledge about the violence on the journey to provide alternative or additional information on

this seminal matter. Mullen (1972) has already pointed out that it "is likely that rumors act as reinforcement for already existing legends" (Mullen 1972, 97-98). For example, when I asked Maria, 19, from Guatemala, what she knew about the violence of the journey, she told me that her cousins and friends in the U.S. had told her about the harsh conditions and difficulties of the trip. Despite knowing this, she seemed concerned because she had heard rumors that a criminal group was raping women on the train she was supposed to take. In this case, there was a two-way effect between the rumor and the main story. The rumor strengthened the main story of violence in the journey, and at the same time, the rumor was plausible for Maria because of the existing story of violence and the journey.

Even in such harsh circumstances, migrants do not freely share rumors with everyone in every instance. I found that two factors are important in understanding when migrants share rumors: who the information was being shared with, and how the sharer felt about the information.

Some rumors are only pertinent to certain members of a group, and so are shared with individuals who will be affected by them. For example, 17-year-old Joanna, from Honduras, reported a rumor shared with her in 2017 specifically because she was pregnant. During her interview, I had had just turned off the audio recorder and asked her if she had any other questions or anything to add before leaving the room. She paused for a second, and then she said:

> **Joanna**: Angel, may I ask you an embarrassing question?
> **Me**: Yes, of course!
> **Joanna**: I hear that The United States puts chips in the heads of migrants' children that are born in the U.S. so they can locate them wherever they are. I have been thinking about it, and you are going to laugh, but I can't stop thinking about it. Is that true?
> **Me**: I haven't heard of anything like that, could you tell me more?
> **Joanna**: Well, last week, I heard from a group of ladies that if my baby is born in the U.S., it might get a chip implanted in its head, so they know where the baby will be all the time. You know, maybe it's not true, but I can't stop thinking about it. I am afraid that they will put a chip in my baby's head. If that's the case, I think I won't cross the border until my baby is born here in Mexico. That's why I wanted

> to ask you; because you live in the U.S. I know it sounds crazy, but I can't stop thinking that it might be true, and I don't want to keep moving to the U.S. if it's true.
> **Me**: Joanna, I am almost certain this is not true, but I will look around and do some research to see what I find, but don't worry.
> **Joanna**: I'd appreciate if you could look into it!
> **Me**: But who told you about this?
> **Joanna**: A group of ladies that are staying in this shelter. Some already left, but a couple of them are here.

Joanna directed me to one of the women, and I went to ask her about it. The woman explained that she heard this story from another woman who saw it on Facebook. When I asked her why she told Joanna, she explained: "I told her to keep it from happening to her. I am not lying, I told her what I have heard from other women; maybe it is not true, but who knows! It is better for her to hear it know rather than be surprised later."

After this conversation, I tried to find anything resembling such a practice in the U.S. or elsewhere. While I could not find any specific information about chip implants, I found that the U.S. is currently using ankle bracelets to track migrants with a pending court hearing after being released from immigration detention (Balcazar 2016). This practice, however, is not used on minors.

The next time I saw Joanna, I told her that I did not find any information about the U.S. government implanting chips in migrant children. She was still not convinced that this rumor was baseless. "I am still thinking about it. I've heard more stories about crossing the border; pregnant women are being released with a bracelet on their arms, too. I am still thinking about my baby. Maybe it's not true, but I don't want that to happen to my baby." In this case, Joanna was not necessarily sharing the rumor with me but corroborating it, nevertheless, she hears the rumors about implanting chips on babies due to her pregnancy and from women who had children travelling with them. I found similar cases of rumors that were shared to specific people, for

example were share with minors with tattoos who were explicitly warned with stories of how migrants with tattoos were puts in jail after being detained in the U.S. border. Rumors thus, are generally circulated on places and among people to whom might be relevant.

Separately, the sharer must be comfortable sharing the rumor. Gary Fine's study of rumors has shown that rumors challenge social order because they indicate to society that "information from authoritative sources is either incomplete or inaccurate" (Fine 2007:7). As challenges of social order, rumors may be sanctioned by mainstream social discourse who often control the discourse about a topic. During my fieldwork, I found that youth rarely discussed rumors in front of people they believed would make fun of or look down on them. Instead, they shared rumors with people they might trust or consider equals and will not sanction them. While scholars studying information have shown that certain type of information might flow easy among people or groups that share more feature in common like gender, class, or race (Subaşi 2017), in the case of rumors it was the uncertainty that created the sense among minors that they were going to be judge for sharing a crazy and exaggerated story. This was not an easy phenomenon to observe among migrants in the field since it inherently deals with the withholding of information. However, I saw it in my interactions with youth.

In the case of Joanna, for example, she did not share the rumors about the microchip with me until the recorder was off, and even so, she did it timidly, saying she felt some "shame" for asking. This happened in other interviews as well—youth would feel more comfortable toward the end of the interview, and so they would share more rumors at that point.

On more than one occasion, I saw how youth migrants did not share rumors with lawyers or advocates who, as experts on immigration issues, would be able to confirm if they were true or not. For example, when I asked one young man why he would not ask the immigration lawyer

working at the migrant shelter the same question he had asked me—whether "the Mexican president was going to give all migrants that were in [the southern Mexican city of] Tapachula permission to cross Mexico freely"—he said he felt that the lawyers would probably get mad at him for believing in something that was not true and potentially cancel his asylum application. This suggests that he saw the lawyer as a figure that follows the mainstream discourse, and so the youth was not comfortable asking the lawyer about the rumor he had heard.

Rumors are not individual but social products that exist and are discussed and evaluated in groups (Aldrin 2005). Like in the case of Humberto, during my fieldwork, I often saw the emergence of rumors in groups discussion among migrants trying to explain situations that happen or concern not just one migrant but to the entire group. However, during my research, I found how sometimes youth migrants were reluctant to share rumors if in the group were people that would judge them for believing these stories.

For example, in 2019, while in Saltillo, a professor from a local university came to talk to migrants about the dangers of crossing the desert spanning the U.S. border with the northern Mexican state of Coahuila. During the talk, one migrant raised his hand and asked the professor if it was true that "[U.S.] immigration sends airplanes at night to see if migrants are crossing the border." The professor said that he did not think that was true but that Border Patrol does use thermal cameras when patrolling the area. Right after, another migrant raised his hand and asked if "it is true that some cactuses are poisonous?" A laugh broke out across the group of around 40 people, followed by comments like "don't waste the time of the professor with this question!" and "you are crazy!" The professor still answered the question and explained that, while cactuses are not poisonous, you can get infections in a wound caused by the cactus's spines because of unhygienic conditions. After the professor's response, the migrant defended himself to the group:

"You see, it is better to ask to be sure." After this moment, a woman asked if mothers with minors were being allowed to cross the border (instead of being deported). This time, the professor answered that "he wasn't sure" and that his advice was to stay in Mexico and apply for asylum or avoid the danger of crossing the U.S. border by crossing the river or through the desert.

While none of the migrants disputed the professor's information while he was there, they kept discussing these topics and rumors among themselves in the following hours. Stories about both deportation and successful crossing of mothers with children circulated during in the hours that followed. There were also arguments against the professor's answer: how many migrants saw red lights flashing in the sky while crossing the border, evidence of how flying airplanes surrounded the border.

In this case, the professor was seen as an authority who, while threatening in the beginning, did not stop migrants from sharing rumors, and then the social tension that the presence of the professor disappeared. In addition to that, the professor's responses to the migrants' questions did not fully negate the rumors; quite the opposite, migrants had alternative explanations to the main story. When I asked the professor about rumors, he explained that migrants often choose to believe the rumors they share among themselves rather than his advice.

Thus, as the literature suggests, rumors are not randomly shared but instead arise when groups must explain uncertain events that matter. At the same time, because rumors can be a challenge of the facts shared and maintained by formal channels of communication, they are not shared equally when potential sanctioning figures are nearby. For example, in the case presented here, while the professor answered the questions, rumors on the same issue kept circulating when he left. Ultimately, my research shows that youth do not share rumors unless they are comfortable or feel that they will not be socially sanctioned. This suggests that there are many rumors among

migrants that impact the migrant movement that is never even known to actors that support the mainstream discourse, such as policymakers, media, and even aid organizations.

Collecting Rumors for Later

While the circulation of rumors occurs in specific contexts and among groups with common interests, youth may initially discount a rumor but recall it later when the circumstances change during their journeys. The factors affecting the weight a migrant youth gave to a rumor were the youth's judgment of the person sharing the rumor; the youth's personal circumstances, needs, and doubts about the journey; and how frequently the youth heard the same rumor repeated.

As part of the circulation of knowledge, rumors are evaluated not just by their content but also by who is sharing the information. The reputation of the source of information is considered key to understanding the degree of acceptability of the information (Origgi 2018; Conte and Paolucci 2002). In the case of information like gossip or rumors, the reputations of those who are presenting the information matters in how it is accepted (Fine 2007; Donovan 2007; Paz 2009; Haviland 1977). Youth carefully consider the reputability of the source of the rumor. For example, the youth I met commented on how rumors were discarded when the migrant (or other person) sharing it had features that denounce them as unreliable, such as the use of drugs, alcohol, or gang tattoos. These features in turn, were seen as an indicator of bad habits or bad intentions, which turned the rumors into either a blatant lie or a potential trick.

On the other end of the spectrum, youth may consider a rumor trustworthy not because of the source's reputation but because of how frequently they hear it. For example, nine youth in my sample mentioned hearing, on more than one occasion, stories of how along the U.S. Mexican border, the army and police were cooperating with the local criminal groups to assault migrants. A similar story was mentioned another six times but on the southern Guatemala-Mexico border.

These stories increase youth migrants' fear of interacting with the police or army. In three of these cases, youth mentioned that while they were unsure if this story was true, they were more worried about it and took the stories seriously because they had heard it multiple times from different people and at various parts of their journey. An in one case, the youth mentioned how the first time he heard the story, he thought it was a lie, just to scare him. However, as he heard the same story repeated again and again, he started to accept it as true. In this case, the strength and credibility of the rumors came from their frequency rather than the people's reputation.

The degree to which youth believed rumors also depended on what the youth already knew or thought they knew about their journeys. Because rumors thrive on ambiguous situations, the lack of information makes people react differently to unproven information like rumors (Gadarian and Albertson 2014). For instance, I frequently heard rumors involving whether youth would be deported if detained in the U.S. A common story was that the U.S. was not deporting minors. Under different iterations of the rumor, youth detained while entering the U.S. were said to be given legal status immediately, or the U.S. would pay to fly them directly to their families in the U.S. A version of this rumor was known by 39% of the youth in my sample, and they had no other reliable source of know what would happen to them if detained in the U.S. as a minor. Without such information, they payed intense attention to these types of rumors.

Relatedly, minors with relatives or friends who had already previously crossed the U.S. border as minors were not very interested in or even aware of rumors about the detention in the U.S. They felt they had already learned about the process of detention from their networks. For example, Demetrio, a 17-year-old from Honduras, who I interviewed in northern Mexico in 2019, and whose older brother had already migrated through Mexico to the U.S. as a minor almost two year before him, discusses the specific parts about the rumors he heard:

> I have heard all kinds of stories about what is going to happen to me once I cross the river [the Rio Grande] and get detained by immigration. But I know that sometimes people exaggerate stories about crossing to scare you. My brother told me what would happen; I will be detained and put in the "hielera," a cold room where they put everyone detained that day. Then, the police are going to ask me questions. I have to say that I am a minor, and then I will be sent to a place where they send all the minors, it's like a hotel. My brother was in that place for around two weeks. He said not to be afraid of what people said. I won't be deported.

Except for calling U.S. Border Patrol the "police," Demetrio's description of what would happen to him once detained in the U.S. is quite accurate. He had preexisting knowledge from his brother, so he disregarded other rumors he heard. However, Demetrio continued:

> My problem now is that since I left my country, I have heard that Trump said that minors are not going to be allowed to enter the U.S. and instead are going be deported back to Honduras. It's because of the migrant caravan that tried to enter the U.S. by force. You know that there are rules to follow in the U.S.; they don't like people to come and break the laws. I am worried about that because my brother crossed before the caravan. And my brother can't tell me if the story [about deportation] is true or not. The other day I encountered a minor while we rode on the train, and he was coming back to the U.S. after being deported a couple of months ago. He said that if you lie, laugh, or if you are not serious during the interview, they will deport you immediately. I'm not sure if the border of Tijuana is like that, but I'm worried about it.

The rumor about Trump and deportation in this case, reached beyond what Demetrio already believed he knew, and thus, he took it into account. Youth consider rumors to be a source that can fill their knowledge gaps along the migration route. Having information from other sources made them less likely to believe certain rumors that overlapped with their preexisting knowledge. However, in circumstances outside of those areas of knowledge, youth took rumors into account.

Examining when and to whom rumors about the migrant journey are shared and believed by youth migrants aligns with the literature's theoretical propositions about how rumors appear to make sense of confusing situations that cannot be explained through traditional and official sources. Since the dangerous journey of these youth is a great period of uncertainty, the youth are constantly circulating rumors with the thousands of migrants that are passing going the same

experience. This context explains the large number and variety of rumors I encountered during my fieldwork.

However, as I show in this section, because youth migrants can have different uncertainties, their degree of interest and circulation of rumors varies depending on what aspects of the journey they are trying to explain. Moreover, rumors are also not shared with everyone equally, and migrants may prefer not to share them with people who do not share the same concern and uncertainty, or who could sanction them for believing these stories. These findings, as previously mentioned, suggest that rumors often pass the radar of official and formal institutions that usually try to fight them back and consider them as pernicious. As the precarity information continues, the circulation of rumors on the migrant journey is unlikely to stop, and, as long as youth migrants keep moving, the need for stories that fill gaps of knowledge and offer alternatives to keep migrants out of violence and with options to move will remain.

Rumors in the migrant journey are not just shared and believed, but they also are actively used by youth while migrating. In the next subsection, I will cover the second aspect of rumors—their actual impact on the migrant journeys of youth.

Rumors in Action: The Caravan, Donald Trump, and Facebook Groups

Because rumors offer alternative views or responses to social situations or events, they have the power to change human behavior. I observed rumors impacting youth mobility decisions, and also how migrants interacted with other migrants and with institutions along the migrant route. In other words, rumors can transform the way youth migrants move and act during their journeys.

Below, I show how rumors impact the journeys of youth migrants. I start by showing how rumors have the potential to trigger the movement of migrants by offering answers to sudden episodes of incertitude during the migrant journey. Then I show that rumors do not just condition

the movement, but also the manner through which youth move and interact with people, places, and institutions. Finally, I show how the nature of rumors as informal knowledge of questioned veracity can lead to unintended negative consequences for minors when used. These findings overall shed light on the profound impact that rumors can have on shaping migrant journeys, an often-understudied topic in scholars of international migration.

Rumors as Triggers of Movement

While rumors do not substitute the macro forces that motivate migration like poverty, violence, and family reunification, they offer some explanatory power about the actual movement of migrant youth. Sociologists Milena Belloni and her research of Eritrean migrants and their journeys and movement from Africa to Europe have shown how, despite not changing the strength of the information that migrant networks can have, rumors can change the perceptions that migrants and potential migrants can have over their countries of destination (Belloni 2019). For the case of the youth in my fieldwork, since the information about the migrant journey from migrant networks was minimal and the youth's imaginaries about the journey lacked details, the role that rumors had in transforming youth's journey was important. During my research, I found how rumors can function as *triggers* that by adding a new element of risk or opportunity along the migrant journey, motivating movement.

The most salient case of the triggering effect of rumors during my fieldwork was the migrant caravans. While there had been several prior migrant caravans, in 2018, a group of around five hundred migrants, mainly from Honduras, started to gather in San Pedro Sula (the largest city of Honduras) to walk toward the U.S. While moving, the number of migrants grew to up to five to seven thousand migrants, mainly from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, that joined the group. While during their movement across Guatemala and Honduras, the caravan was tried to be

dismantled and stopped by the police and army at then, and after almost two months, many were able to reach different points of the border between Mexico and the U.S. (BBC 2018). This migrant caravan had a large impact on public opinion in the U.S. and Mexico as images of masses of people, including children and women, walking across highways generated both fears of uncontrolled migration to the U.S. and compassion for the conditions that motivate their migration and their movement (Fabregat, Vinyals-Mirabent, and Meyers 2020).

During my fieldwork in 2019, I had the opportunity to meet several migrants who had participated in that caravan, including three youth: one from El Salvador and two from Honduras. They did not begin with the caravan but instead joined once it was already moving. While all of them mentioned that they had plans to move to the U.S. (one of the for second time) none of them had planned to start the journey when the caravan happened. Each of these youth, none of whom knew each other, had learned about that caravan first via Facebook and WhatsApp groups were migrants and potential migrants share information, and later from TV, where commentators said that the migrants in the caravan would not be detained or stopped in Mexico, and this and motivated them to join the group. While all them recognize that they were going to come to the U.S. at some point, their actual movement was triggered not by the caravan but by the information about the caravan. Two of them recognize that were not sure if the information was true, but the images of people moving and convince them to try it.

Similarly, the strong anti-immigration agenda that Donald Trump had during his presidential campaign generated a lot of confusion and rumors that triggered the migration of some youth during his tenure. Obregon, 17 years old from El Salvador, mentioned how, while he was already planning to migrate to the U.S., his decision to leave his country and start the journey was accelerated after Trump was elected. During The 2016 presidential election of the U.S., Obregon

recalls hot he heard rumors both from the family in the U.S. and social media that Trump would close the border, build a wall, and deport all the immigrants who attempted to cross the border. For him, this rumor was credible because he had heard about Trump's anti-immigrant and pro-wall campaign rhetoric on TV and Facebook. In this case, the risk of a potential closure of the border and a tough journey motivated his rapid departure.

The triggering effect of rumors can happen even when youth are already moving. Everardo, 19, from Guatemala, applied for asylum in July of 2016 in Mexico while staying in a migrant shelter in the south-most Mexican state of Chiapas. He had been at the shelter for six months, waiting for his application to be adjudicated. However, in November of 2016, right before Trump won the presidential election, Everardo abandoned his application and decided to keep moving north without any legal status:

> I was in Chiapas applying for refugee status when we heard on the news that Trump was going to be elected. And I had already talked to my family [in Guatemala] and other migrants here and there [in Mexico], and they commented how that if Trump won [the presidency], he was going to close the border and start to deport migrants that crossed the border. Everything we have heard is that Trump doesn't want more migrants anymore. So, I decided with another group of migrants [that were in the shelter in Chiapas] that it would be better to risk it and keep moving to the U.S. without refugee status before Trump started the deportations.

The cases of Everardo and Obregon were not unique. Activists across Mexico reported that many migrants left shelters in the days following Trump's election and abandoned their asylum applications to reach the border quickly. The situation was so noticeable that it made it to the news

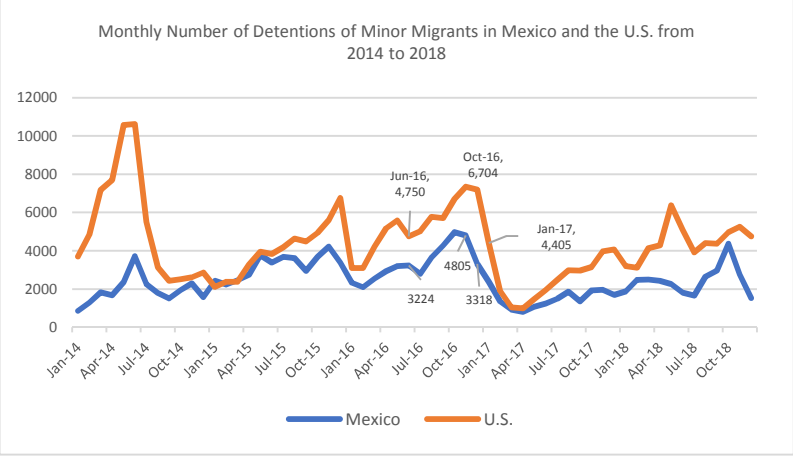

Figure 12 Number of Detention of Minors in Mexico from 2014 to 2018 (Sources: (CBP 2019; UPMRIP 2020a)

on Mexican TV (Noticieros Televisa 2016). This trend is also noticeable if we observe the number of minor migrants' apprehensions from Mexico and the U.S. In Mexico, detentions of minors began to rise dramatically from the start of the Trump Campaign, and they drastically dropped after he was elected in 2016 (see Figure 12 above, and 24 in the Appendix). The same patterns are observable with the number of minors detained by the U.S. on its southern border in the same period. During that time, the number of minors detained reached an all-time high number (October 2016) right before Trump won the election and decreased dramatically in December of the same year (CBP 2017). No other significant event that might have drastically altered the migration flow during this period could have triggered this massive youth movement other than Donald Trump's anti-immigration campaign.

I am not claiming that rumors were the drivers of migration; it is well known that Central American migration to the U.S. has been driven by violence, economic opportunities, and family reunification (Lorenzen 2017). However, rumors that originated from the tension created by the anti-immigration rhetoric of Trump triggered the actual movement of youth in the moment. Here, rumors were the last event that triggered the already confusing, chaotic (and in many ways violent) event that Trump set during his presidential campaign by implying it would close the border.

Rumors and the Migrant Route

Rumors also affected the routes that migrants took through Mexico. Youth frequently considered rumors of mobility at different points of their journeys. If no other information is available, or if the youth did not have a secure crossing plan preestablished with his or her family, the youth might act based on rumors about which border area to cross or which route to take. The relevant rumors dealt most frequently with the presence, or lack thereof, of immigration officials and criminal activity in certain locations.

A typical mobility rumor was that a certain place, town, or border area was the easiest, safest place to cross and avoid potential violence or detention. Many youths chose their route to the border—either to the eastern or western side of the border—following rumors about migrants having had an easy time crossing in that area. On top of choosing the routes based on rumors, youth were also guided about what method to use to move, like taxi, bus, or walking. In one case, a youth mentioned how he was taking the train, but took a bus from Guadalajara to Tepic (western-central Mexico) in 2015 and then continued again by train because he had heard that authorities were not patrolling that particular bus route, and the bus was an easier way to move than the train with its many dangers.

Rumors Affect Youth Migrants' Behaviors and Interactions

Finally, rumors shape youth migrants' behaviors and interactions. Rumors about violence, or about obstacles they might face can shape how youth approach their journey and interact with other migrants and institutions.

By offering information in the form of stories about the journey, rumors provide youth migrants with ideas about what happens if they interact with institutions like migrant shelters, hospitals, or with certain people like lawyers, police, or immigration officers or with places like deserts, rivers, or trains. In the absence of previous experiences dealing with this situation, rumors become sources worth considering instead of risking negative experiences like detention or deportation.

Rumors related to age were especially prevalent among youth. Seven minors (of the 86 in my sample), all under the age of 18, told me that they heard that they would be detained if they entered any migrant shelter or interacted with the police or a hospital. This rumor was taken more

seriously by four of these youth and shaped how they interacted with governmental and civic institutions in Mexico differently. Two of these youth were preferred to sleep in the surrounded areas outside of migrant (like sidewalks) shelters than to risk being detained at a shelter due to their age. One other minor took a different approach. In 2015, I met Pablo in a migrant shelter in Tapachula for weeks before he told me that he was not 18, as he told the shelter, but 17 years old. He lied about his age when entering the migrant shelter because he heard from other migrants that "if you enter a shelter as a minor, you will be detained."

Similarly, Sotero, a 16-year-old I met right outside of a shelter in Guadalajara, told me that he avoids entering migrant shelters and instead goes by their shelter's entrance asking for food and clothes. When I asked him why he said other migrants told him that he would be sent to immigration authorities and detained indefinitely as an orphan. Sleeping outside when a shelter is available may seem extreme, but because Sotero considered the rumor about the detention of minors plausible, it affected how he approached his journey.

By helping youth to previsualize institutions and people that they haven't met but generally are fearful or cautious, rumors predispose youth migrant's interactions in the migrant journey, and in doing so, they can shape their trajectories by shaping imaginaries about the journey.

The Limitations and Dangers of Rumors

As demonstrated above, the youth migrants I study can move across Mexico guided by rumors. However, they sometimes find out that these rumors can turn are untrue or misleading and put minors in situations of risk. The reason for rumors to become dangerous is due the way their own inherent features. I found four factors that limit the ultimate usefulness of rumors during the migrant journeys of youth. Their lack of details, their lack of capacity to account for changes, and their purposive use by others to mislead youth. In this section I will explain each of these factors

and use examples to show how believing rumors led youth into negative experience during their journeys.

First, the content of rumors tends to be brief, anonymous and simple (Renard 2013), and in my research I found due this feature it can provide incomplete information. The case of Tacho, 18, from El Salvador, illustrates this limitation. Tacho, like almost all of the youth I interviewed, could not pay a smuggler at any point along the journey, and was seeking a free way to cross the border. So, he was looking for the area of Mexico where it was easiest to cross the U.S. Border without having to pay a smuggler.

The sources of information on this topic were other migrants' stories about their own crossings, rumors from other migrants about what they had heard about crossing, or social media. Even though youth had no way to verify that any of this information was true, they considered it plausible and would often determine their trajectories based on what they learned. Interestingly, youth at each of the four border areas I visited told me that they were there because they thought it would be the easiest place to cross, and youth in each of the four border areas told me they had not gone to the other border areas because they considered them to be too dangerous.

I met Tacho in Mexico City during his second attempt to reach the United States. He explained that during his first attempt, he heard that crossing the U.S. border was easy during the rainy season because the muddy terrain made it difficult for Border Patrol and narcos to guard the border. So, in 2016, he attempted to cross the river while it was raining, and nobody was patrolling the border. However, because of the rain, Tacho found that the river's current was strong, and it was dragging branches and debris with it. When he was halfway to cross the river, Tacho almost drowned and decided to turn back to Mexico. While he survived that experience, he also saw another youth who was also crossing at the same time drown. In his own words, "If I was told that

the current would be that strong, I probably wouldn't have tried to cross." This is an extreme example of how rumors can be unhelpful and even deadly.

Second, rumors are constructed and transformed from the collective knowledge and experiences of groups and therefore they may be of limited value. Thus, when a youth takes a rumor out of context, the rumor can be of limited, or even negative value. Adalberto, 19, of Honduras, experienced this limitation. When I met him in Guadalajara in 2019, his plan was to cross the U.S. border and turn himself into the Border Patrol. When I asked him why he would do that, he explained: "In the U.S., a person is a minor until they turn 21." And, unlike adults, minors are not immediately deported when detained; instead, they are given the opportunity to appear in immigration court and to be reunited with family while waiting for their appearances.

Adalberto learned about the age of minority being 21 from friends who had previously crossed when they were 19 and "gotten papers" in New York state. However, Adalberto was mistaken. In New York, a person under the age of 21 can apply for legal status under an immigration regulation that provides for "Special Immigrant Juvenile Status," or SIJS. SIJS is dependent in part on state law, and in New York state the underlying state court order required for applying for SIJS can be acquired through the age of 21 (www.nyc.gov). However, that does not apply at the border, and under the applicable immigration law, minority is defined as under the age of 18 (6 U.S.C. § 279(g)(2)). Thus, if he turned himself into Border Patrol, he would be considered an adult.

I explained this to Adalberto, and he started to reconsider. He decided to post a question in a Facebook group for Central American migrants asking is somebody knew if 19 years old people were not being deported in the US border. In just a few hours, he had dozens of responses from people that he assumes are other migrants, containing all kinds of answers, from "minors are 17

and under, immigration will deport you," to "currently, the U.S. is letting everyone cross, go for it and you will make it." Now confused, Adalberto left the next day for the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juarez [on the train]. He said, "I'll make my final decision once I get to the border."

Thus, in this case the rumor that Adalberto follows was taken out of context and that situation was going to put him on potential detention. One of the reasons for which Adalberto believed this rumor could be the physiological and calming effect that rumors have to provide explanation (often through extraordinary stories) to confusion and chaotic situations (Mullen 1972). However, by using the rumor to guide the crossing to the U.S. border, Adalberto put himself in danger of deportation.

Third, rumors are in constant transformation, either over time, or when are adapted in different groups or cultures (Zires 2005) However, in a context like the migrant journey when there is a constant change on the way obstacle and violence are encounter, rumors might not account for the changing scenarios of the migration route, like changes in policies and shifting immigration enforcement. For example, I observed during my research how a change in the context of the migrant route will catch migrants by surprise when following all types of information. For example, Everardo, the same youth mentioned above, was told that the train could be taken from the southern border town of Tenosique, however, when he arrived there, he realized that things have changed and now the train was not crossing there anymore (Voz de América 2014b). The most extreme case of this kin happened to Juan Carlos, a 19-year-old Honduran that followed the idea that Tijuana (border city with San Diego) was the easiest place to cross to the U.S. and asked for asylum without putting his life at risk like crossing the desert or the river. When he got there, he realized that things were much different:

> When I got to Tijuana, I realized that it wasn't how I was told it would be. Everyone had told me that Tijuana was the easiest place to cross for people like me who

> couldn't pay (a smuggler). But when I got to Tijuana, I found that things have change and now you need to pay a coyote if you want to cross to the U.S. border. The only way to cross without paying was to walk far away from the city and then try to cross through the fields. I didn't know that, and I spent time there, beside the border, for weeks. I didn't know what to do. Eventually, I got desperate and walked along the river until I found an empty field and walked into the U.S. Half an hour after crossing, I got caught by the border patrol. I tried to apply for asylum, but my case was denied, and I was deported back to Honduras. This is my second trip. This time I am going in another direction, to cross by Acuña, [a border city in the state of Coahuila], where I heard it's easier to cross. We'll see if I make it this time.

During my fieldwork, I heard the story that Tijuana was an easy crossing place from 12 different minors; some of these youths were not going in that direction, yet they listened to the same story. However, despite its popularity, I couldn't find any evidence proving the rumor. On the contrary, since the Trump administration started, the petition of asylum in the U.S. has become denied at higher rates (AIC 2019), and more migrants' cases are denied right at the border or sent back to Mexico to wait for a response, or like in the case of Juan Carlos, deported. Thus, in such constantly changing policies, enforcement, and violence like the migrant journey, rumors might become false and mislead migrants on their travels.

Fourth, because of rumors' persuasive capacity to influence decisions in situations of uncertainty (Southwell, Thorson, and Sheble 2018; Sunstein 2014; Vosoughi, Mohsenvand, and Roy 2017), actors sometimes spread, utilize, or even create intentionally misleading rumors. During my conversations, activists, immigration lawyers, and migrant shelter staff noted how smugglers often spread false rumors to encourage migrants to pay for their services or choose a certain route. These false rumors were either stories that cause fear in migrants or to make them believe in an easy crossing or policy to motivate them to travel with the smuggler.

During one of my focus groups with youth migrants, we discussed the stories that they had heard about the journey before starting it. Among the answers of the focus group were extraordinary and worrying stories about the migrant journey, primarily from Facebook and

WhatsApp groups, where Central American migrants share information. These comments said things like, “The border is open, the U.S. is letting everyone enter,” or “The border is going to close next month, whoever wants to cross should do it now.” Youth commented how these fantastic stories were attractive and made them think about the danger of crossing and the need to hire a smuggler instead of traveling alone. One youth mentioned how after commenting on one of these Facebook posts saying that the Tapachula border was closed for all migrants, he got a reply from a person of the group offering his services as a smuggler. This situation ultimately alerted him that the rumors were fake. However, since they did not have money to move with the help of a smuggler, they had to go through although paying attention to such rumors.

In my own experience, I witnessed two instances in which migrants shared extraordinary or exaggerated stories in-person. Although these migrants did not come out as smugglers, they did leave migrant shelters in unusual circumstances. One of these instances was a Nicaraguan who I met in Tenosique (southern Mexico) in 2016. This person of a middle age often publicly claimed to have lived in the U.S. for many years and traveled back and forth from Central American to the U.S. by himself. During the week I met him, he exclusively spoke to me in (broken) English (though I am Mexican) and any other English speakers. He often commented how he knew the migrant route well, and he knew how to move without taking the train. He eventually left the shelter, and some youth commented how other adults mentioned that he spent the week secretly (from the migrant shelter staff) a group of migrants to guide, presumably for a fee. While this person was never caught trying to offer his services as a smuggler (something prohibited at migrant shelters), the rumor about him being a smuggler who tried to recruit migrants spread widely among many migrants. Stories like this were common everywhere I go, and many activists and lawyers

will warrant migrants about the bad intentions that anyone who shared these types of fantastic stories can have.

Traffickers' use of rumors to misinform to influence migrants' decisions demonstrates the dangerous and persuasive power of these forms of communication. While these rumors might be of sporadic duration, and youth can find them too incredible to be believable, it is not hard to see how migrants can believe them in desperate or naïve moments. The last negative effect of rumors described here shows one of the darkest sides of rumors in the migration route. In this case, rather than being a collective product crafted in informal ways that seek answers about the migrant journey, rumor becomes traps purposely designed to prey on migrants' precarity and needs to profit or harm them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrate the impact of rumors on the migration journeys of Central American youth in Mexico. The prolonged periods of uncertainty and violence that youth face while in Mexico fuel the wide circulation of rumors that match youths' most prominent concerns: safety, mobility, detention, deportation, and immigration policies.

While they are often viewed in current discourse as false or misleading, rumors cannot be evaluated as either "good" or "bad." Rumors help migrant youth on the move gain confidence to avoid the surveillance and enforcement of Mexican and American officials who seek to prevent the youths' movement. Likewise, rumors can convey information that other actors and institutions, like migrant-serving organizations, lawyers, or scholars, are unable to share due to institutional and even moral limits. For example, it is impossible to imagine any of these groups dispatching information on chip implants. But rumors create the space for the transmission of unproven,

unvetted stories about anything that migrants may view as potentially harmful to themselves and their goals.

This is not to deny that rumors can also have negative consequences for migrants. This is due to rumors' inability to adapt rapidly enough to constantly shifting circumstances in the migrant journey, the same characteristic that often makes the valuable to migrants and smugglers. Since rumors do not come from an official source, they can be intentionally planted to create false expectations of a safe crossing among migrants. In the harsh circumstances of the migrant journey, the truly unaccompanied minors I met put their lives in the hands of rumors, though the consequences of a false rumor can be catastrophic.

Rumors provide a window through which to observe the role that information plays in the migrant journeys of Central American youth, and international migration flows around the world. Unlike the most studied sources of migrant knowledge (like the social and cultural capital provided by migrant networks, policies, and media outlets), rumors exist in a space where information is neither true nor false, but something to be taken into consideration. As shown in this chapter, rumors can have a significant impact on migrant youths' journeys. They often operate at the most micro level of the migrant journey, affecting youth migrants' daily decisions and instantaneous actions, and collectively affecting migrant flows. This perspective fills a gap that macro-level analyses miss. And, so long as youth migrants move through Mexico, there is no reason to believe that rumors will stop playing a major role in their migration journeys.

Chapter 4: Between Borders: How the Spaces of Mexico Affect the Migration Journeys of Central American Youth

Kiara's Dream: Living in Mexico City

In 2019, I met Kiara, a 19-year-old trans woman from Guatemala, in a shelter in Mexico City. She was at the shelter while she waited for her asylum case to be adjudicated. I was at the shelter for a month, and during that month, I heard repeatedly about how thankful she was to be in Mexico City. After her unsuccessful attempts to relocate within Guatemala, where she was nearly killed twice, Kiara decided to try to move to Mexico City, with the possibility of eventually moving on to the U.S.

After she crossed the Guatemala-Mexico border, she arrived at a shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco. There, she applied for asylum, and she stayed at the shelter while she waited for her case to be processed. However, after she suffered a third near-death experience in the shelter, she asked the Mexican Commission of Refugees to transfer her case to Mexico City, and the request was granted. When we met, she was still waiting in Mexico City for her application to be processed.

During one of our walks around the city, I asked Kiara to explain why she seemed so happy to be in Mexico City:

> When I was in elementary school, I dreamed of becoming a professional in the medical field. And when I finished middle school, I went to take nursing courses, but really, I wanted to become a doctor. I was looking for medical schools on Google, and it was there where I found about the UNAM Medical School in Mexico City. It was the best medical school in Mexico. That's how I started to be interested in Mexico City. After that, I started to look at photos and YouTube videos, and I said to myself, 'Wow! what a fantastic city.' And what happiness for those who live in such a beautiful city. Then, I read on the internet about how in Mexico City, gay people have the right to get married and that trans people like me have the right to change their birth certificate to have the names they want on them, and I said, 'Oh, my God! Will I be one of them one day? I'm going get there!' But when I thought those things, I wasn't planning to migrate, I was not thinking about actually living in Mexico City. It was a dream that I thought I might accomplish one day. But after what happened to me in Guatemala City and later in [Southern] Mexico, I decided that I had to live in a place like Mexico City.

Kiara's migration experience was arduous and started years before. When she was still in elementary school, she moved from her rural town in Guatemala to live with one of her sisters in a midsized city in southern Guatemala. During this time, she presented as male and, by her own description, was effeminate. She worked in stores and, at night, as an elderly person's caretaker. One morning, as she returned home from her caretaking job, a group of men surrounded her began to pelt her with rocks, causing her life-threatening injuries. After she recovered, she moved to Guatemala City to live with another sister, where she worked and went to technical school to become a nurse assistant. After a couple of months in Guatemala City, Kiara was poisoned by some of the students in her class, again out of hate. Almost losing her life a second time motivated her to leave Guatemala for good.

Early in 2018, she left Guatemala for Mexico City. During her first attempt at migration, she was detained and deported from Mexico, just after she crossed the border. On her second attempt, she successfully reached the town of Tenosique, Tabasco and decided to stay at the migrant shelter there, called "La 72." This is the same shelter where Orlan had arrived. There, Kiara, just like Orlan, attended a daily orientation, and she learned she could request asylum in Mexico. She decided to apply and stayed at La 72 while she waited for her application to be processed.

Approximately two months into her wait in Tenosique, Kiara was severely physically and sexually assaulted by other migrants in the shelter. After this incident, she requested a transfer from Tenosique to Mexico City from the Mexican Commission of Refugees, which was granted. Though such grants are now more common, this was extremely rare in 2019. She laughs when I ask her how it feels to have your life threatened no matter where you go: "I'm still not used to people wanting to kill me, so I just keep moving."

Now in Mexico City, Kiara compares Mexico City to Guatemala: "I see that Mexico City is like, how can I say this, people are openminded; I walk in the streets, and I don't feel that people see me as strange for being trans. They do not treat us like that here; there is more acceptance, and I feel it because people are no longer disrespectful." This has given her confidence to explore the city that she had previously only seen on YouTube. She has explored plazas, churches, markets, and stores, and she repeats how safe she feels in public.

Though she is happy to be in Mexico City, Kiara has learned that this location also comes with difficulties. Her most pressing problem is money. When she was waiting in the rural town of Tenosique, she worked as a maid in someone's home, earning around 350 pesos (18 USD) per week. While not much, that was enough to pay for hygiene products (shampoo, creams, toilet paper) and extra food to supplement the insufficient diet of La 72. In Mexico City, Kiara had more trouble finding a job:

> I went to look for work in a clothing store, and it was a catastrophe. I was asked for a photocopy of my ID, a sheet listing my work experience, and a reference. I don't have any of those things. This process is very different [from Tenosique], where they didn't ask me for anything. There I worked in a house doing maintenance, cleaning, and cooking, and nobody ever asked me for any papers or if I had documents to work in Mexico.

Additionally, the prices for food and transport in Mexico City are higher than those she had to pay in Tenosique. After doing the math, Kiara realized that all the jobs she looked at would not pay her enough to survive in Mexico City.

Still, when I asked Kiara if she regretted coming to the city, she quickly responded, "not at all." She explained that, until now, the best part of her life had been moving to Guatemala City, and she expands on her plans for Mexico City:

> Cities are great. I had a good time in Guatemala City getting to know places and people. I also had more educational opportunities. Here, I am excited to go back to nursing school or medical school. But… cities are huge; there is so much to get to

> know and people to meet. The only problem I have is not knowing my way around here. But, as time goes by, I will break the ice and find my way around and get to know people, just like I did in Guatemala City.

Kiara continued: "I don't think I could live in a small village. The people in small villages don't understand sexual diversity. They are extremely violent; I lived it firsthand. I want to stay here in Mexico City and, if that's not possible, in any other city where I think I can have a plentiful life."When I left Mexico City, Kiara was still waiting for her asylum application to be processed. I later learned that, shortly after I left, and while her application was still pending in Mexico, Kiara also applied for asylum in Canada. Her application was granted.

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Kiara's journey to reach Mexico exemplifies how the social, cultural, and material conditions of places—i.e., space—can impact the migrant journeys of Central American youth. Any action we perform, either individual or socially, "happens somewhere" (Logan 2012), and that somewhere constitutes space. Space is key to the study of society because every aspect our social life is "located" somewhere. The study of the arrangement, distances, history, and relationships between people within a space give great insight to our reality (Abbott 1997). The study of space and its role in international migration is essential for understanding migrant journeys.

Past scholarship envisioned "transit" as one space, separate from departure and arrival (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008), but scholars have begun to show that migration journeys are a more nuianced (Düvell 2012). Migrants move selectively through space, and some live in places temporarily along the way, while they work toward their desired destinations (Paul 2011). They do not always move in a linear fashion (Collyer 2007a), and some completely alter their final destinations or end goals due immigration restrictions, fear of violence, and changes in the

conditions that led them to migrate (de Haas 2008). During this shift in the literature, scholars have acknowledged that space is a fundamental element of migration journeys, albeit a difficult one to study because, migrants move at varying paces, in varying directions, and may re-visit locations multiple times (Hess 2012). Following the literature on space and migration journey, my research shows that the study of space is fundamental to understanding how migrant journeys in precarious and violent conditions are experienced by youth migrants.

In this chapter, I describe how spaces within Mexico impact the migration journeys of youth migrants. I begin by discussing at a high level the current literature on migration and space, noting the overemphasis on borders in the literature. I then show how the different spaces through which migrant youth move impact and transform their journeys, providing additional discussion of the relevant literature in each sub-section.

What Happens Between Borders? The Literature of Space(s) in the Migrant Journey

There are two main sociological theories of space: dualistic and relativist (Löw 2016, 17). Dualistic concepts consider people and space to be independent forces that interact with each other—space exists independently of human perception and action. Relativists, on the other hand, consider space to be constantly changing, based on the way people interpret and organize it. This chapter does not choose one concept over the other; rather it considers both and discusses space as both a subjective experience of migration (relativist), and as an actual independent physical place through which migrants move and inhabit (dualistic). Central American youth move through a wide range of geographic, social, economic, and cultural regions that exist independent of their presence. Rivers and highways, deserts and certain infrastructure exist with or without migrants. However, these spaces affect migrant movement. Youth take them into consideration and make plans with spaces in mind. Further migrants impact spaces: spaces like migrant shelters exist to serve them, and trains

have simply stopped running to certain parts of Mexico because migrants use them (Voz de América 2014a). Below I provide a brief overview of the sociological literature on space, followed by a description of if literature specific to migrant spaces in Mexico.

The Sociological Literature

Sociologists have long been interested in the relationship between space and society (Simmel 1971; Lefebvre 1991; Löw and Goodwin 2016; Focault 1997), and specific schools of thought within the discipline have studied the relation of space and society, like the Chicago School and its ecological approach to the study of urban areas (Abbott 1997). Today, sociologists still recognize the importance of studying space and how it is intrinsically related to related to social behavior. In the words of Henry Lefebvre, "(Social) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre 1991, 26). Through the study of space and society, sociologists seek to understand how humans shape, define, and use the space they inhabit and also how societies are affected by space.

When specifically studying the relationship between space and international migration movement, scholars have often directed their attention to border studies (Nicol and Townsend Gault 2005) or transnationalism (Faist 2000). This emphasis on borders and transnationalism unsurprising: borders are the physical lines that divide countries politically, economically, and culturally, and turn a migrant into an international migrant (Hiernaux-Nicolas 2007).

Studies of borders either focus on the political division that must be crossed, or on the spaces formed around these political divisions that create unique cultural, economic, and social practices, often called borderlands (Berdahl 1999). Through the study of border and borderland spaces, scholars have recognized the complexity that border and borderland spaces represent for usually monolithic interpretations of national identity (Ramón and Elliott 2010; Michael and

Willem 1997). This approach treats borders not as rigid political lines but as regions around those lines, and demonstrates the incredible connection between actors and the areas. Borderland studies from different disciplines have studied how youth are active makers of borderland life and border culture (Venken 2017).

Transnationalism expresses the constant exchange and interrelation that migrants have at many levels (including space) between their origin communities and their new spaces, regardless of whether these locations are near a border (Conway and Leonard 2014). Transnational spaces are considered migrant-made (and not state-made) spaces that bring both the origin and destination's cultures, economies, and societies together across border. For scholars of transitional space, the emphasis is not in the areas around the borders but how the any space is inhabited by another space's configuration (Gafaiti 2009; Collyer and King 2015).

While border and transnational studies exist at the intersection of space and migration, migrant journeys entail more than just border experiences. Migrant journeys occur in spaces that might not be considered borders, and the time migrants spend in transit *through* territories like Mexico and Northern Africa can last far longer than time in the classic borderlands. For example, Central American migrants must traverse more than 2,000 miles of foreign territory to arrive at the U.S.'s southern border. Similarly, migrants from Countries in Africa that traverse thousands of miles over land and sea to arrive in Southern Europe (Belloni 2019; Berriane and Haas 2012; Triulzi and McKenzie 2013).

For some migrants, a journey represents a period of temporary transit; for other migrants, the transit period becomes a complex mobility that takes weeks, or months, or years, and may lead to temporary or even permanent stays in countries that were not the migrant's target at the outset of their journey (Khalaf, AlShehabi, and Hanieh 2015; Vogt 2018; Schapendonk et al. 2018;

Allerton 2020; Schewel 2019; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). People like backpackers or tourists, for example, are constantly on the move, and yet, their conditions of movement and reasons for moving are very different compared to refugees, homeless individuals, or asylum seekers (Grieco and Urry 2016). While backpackers might see their wandering journeys as an adventure, refugees often do not choose itinerancy and are not necessarily equipped to travel across long and unfamiliar terrain.

Regardless of the duration of a migrant's journey, migrants exist within and interact with the spaces through which they move. Migrant movement may be facilitated and shaped by actors like smugglers or activists, and by infrastructure like trains, taxis, or buses, shaping the spaces through which migrants transit (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013). For example, migrants with more resources can pay for smugglers and move across Mexico in private cars or buses and with few stops along the way, but poorer migrants like truly unaccompanied youth my spend weeks walking across fields and crossing towns that smuggled migrants never see. Likewise, smugglers can facilitate access to certain stopping points that are inaccessible to truly unaccompanied youth, like hotels, security houses and hideouts to avoid immigration.

Literature Specific to the Spaces of Central American Migration

In the literature specific to Central American international migration, scholars have often focused on the border and the migration routes that migrants typically use to cross the border. Several studies examine migrants' planned routes and timelines for crossing the U.S.-Mexico border (De León 2013, 2015; Feldmann and Durand 2008). For the most part, Central Americans have moved through the same routes, following cargo train tracks that move from south to north across ports

and major cities in Mexico (Boggs 2015; Cortes 2018; Villafuerte Solís and García Aguilar 2008; Temores-Alcantara et al. 2015; Flores 2020).

As research has shown, the routes through which migrants move from Central America to the U.S. have been transformed by the increasing enforcement of the Mexico state. Anti-immigration policies and enforcement in southern Mexico have been increasing since the 1980s and putting special emphasis on closing the spaces and meant through which migrants move (Manuel Ángel and Rodolfo Casillas 1988; Del Valle Cabrales 2018; Kleinschmidt 2006). This enforcement has forced migrants to migrate through more isolated spaces and cities' peripheries, and sometimes even the sea, where they aim to escape the detention apparatus of the Mexican state (Vogt 2013; Frank□Vitale 2020; Tapia Ladino 2017; Parrini-Roses and Flores-Pérez 2018; OIM 2021; Anguiano 2015; Casillas 2020). Despite the pressure put on migrants, migrants have not been deterred. The last decade saw record numbers of Central American migrants moving through Mexico and arriving at southern U.S. border despite record numbers of detentions and deportations.

The transformation of spaces through which migrants move has made them more noticeable in certain areas. Authors have shown how migrants are increasingly conglomerating around Mexico's border areas. This is largely a result of the barriers put in place by the U.S. and Mexico like deportation, and programs designed by the U.S. to force Central American migrants wait in Mexico while their asylum applications are processed (known as the Migration Protection Protocols, or MPP), and the violence and tariffs imposed by organized criminals, which make crossing the U.S border a more dangerous and difficult process than largely a result of the increasing difficulties for migrants attempting to cross the U.S. Central American (and more recently Haitian) migrants are settling in Mexico's northern border cities like Tijuana, Mexicali,

and Ciudad Juarez, which are close to the California and Texas borders (Sisk 2007; París Pombo 2018a; Destin 2020). Migrants are also settling in the southern Mexican border city of Tapachula, near the Mexico-Guatemala border (Del Valle Cabrales 2018). This increased number of migrants has led to closer interaction with locals. The residents of border cities on both borders, like Tijuana in the North and Tapachula in the South have protested the arrival of migrants, complaining about the presence of large numbers of migrants stranded in their cities and actively trying to move them out (Maldonado 2022; Gómez 2022).

Not only have migrants begun to settle in Mexico's border areas, as discussed later in this chapter—some migrants have also decided to stay in Mexico. Since 2014, the REDODEM, the organization to which many migrant shelters across Mexico belong, has reported that between 11 and 13% (from 2014 to 2018) of Central American migrants in Mexico report that their end destination is Mexico, a number that has been increasing over time. The same organization reports that more migrants are considering staying in Mexico due to the difficulties of reaching the U.S. and the increased length of the journey through Mexico (REDODEM 2017, 2020). Some migrants settle due to the difficulties of the journey, and communities of settled Central Americans have sprung up in industrial cities in northern and western areas of Mexico, like Monterrey, Saltillo, and Guadalajara.

Literature on the Spaces of Youth Movement

Youth migrants' movement is "embedded in political and institutional architectures" that give shape to the routes through which they move (Farrugia 2018). Undocumented youth migrants are not permitted to be in Mexico, and they are excluded from mainstream spaces used for mobility like bus stations and airports. Yet, migrants (and the migration industry) either create their own

spaces of mobility in the form clandestine routes or try to escape surveillance and pass incognito through the spaces where they are not allowed to be. Youth migrants move, for the most part, in the same spaces as adults, and this overlap makes it difficult to pinpoint differences between youth and adult migrants' relationship with space. In prior publications, for example, I have shown how youth can move further from traditional migrant routes to escape abuse and violence from adult migrants (Escamilla García 2020). And other literature demonstrates how youth migrants face specific challenges in the spaces through which they move.

The perils of the transit migration spaces for minors have been covered by journalists. Specifically, the book *Enrique's Journey* (Nazario 2006) gained popularity for its telling of the story of one Central American minor's journey through Mexico. Focused on the individual narrative, it describes how the move through spaces in Mexico filled with criminals that try to rob or kidnap them, with sex traffickers, and with natural forces and landscapes like deserts, jungles, and rivers.

Other literature has shown that youth migrants who decided to stay in certain places or settle momentarily during their journeys can interact in unique spaces that are set aside specifically for youth, like schools, migrant shelters, and detention centers, while they are excluded other spaces like certain jobs (Moreno-Mena and Avendano-Millan 2015). These spaces with their definitions of what it means to be a minor, shape most of youths' lives while they are in the space (Strasser and Tibet 2020). Because youth migrants are often categorized as non-adults, and are deemed incapable of making their own decisions, can be required to attend school, and have separate migrant detention centers and immigration laws. This treatment shapes what they can do in these spaces that both offer protection but also constrain their mobility.

Another example of youth living a parallel existence to adults in the same space as adults are minors at the U.S.-Mexico border. Authors have shown how Mexican minors can work with smugglers to cross other migrants, knowing that they will not be put in detention centers like adults if they get caught but instead can be sent back to Mexico (Moreno-Mena and Avendano-Millan 2015; Óscar Misael 2020). Though not specific to Central American youth, this example shows how youth and adults can have different experiences in the same space.

And authors have documented how this different treatment of youth, and especially minors, leads youth to make certain decisions. Authors have documented how minors from Northern African and the Middle East migrating to Europe try to cross through certain countries in the E.U. where they believe their asylum cases will be judged more favorably (Buil and Siegel 2014; Laiz Moreira 2011). In the case of Central American youth, minors have been documented to purposely cross the U.S. border at the checkpoint instead of other isolated spaces, knowing that they can request asylum and not be deported (Heidbrink 2014). This differential treatment makes them see border crossing not as an impediment to their movement or as a form of violence, but instead as a potential benefit. Thus, while minors and adults can move in the same spaces, their use of the space can differ.

Finally, youth migrants may see the crossing of space not as a journey per se, but as an adventure or an event that proves their passage to adulthood. Sociologists Emily Rehus (2017) studied Mexican minors' conceptualization of their journey to the United States. Rehus finds that migration for Mexican youth can serve as a "male quest story… that allows young men to take economic responsibility for their families, and provides the opportunity to escape local forms of violent masculinities" (Ruehs 2017, 223). In this case, migration for young men becomes a "rite of passage" required to become fully accepted in their communities. Minor migrants' self-

conceptions of their physical strength, endurance, and fearlessness are common in these articles link and link migration to the process of growth and development of minors.

Notably, these studies show that youths' experience of the spaces of the migrant journey can differ from the experiences of adults. At the same time, many of these studies either explicitly note or subtly illustrate how, despite the vulnerabilities of migrant children, they have some agency and capacity to make decisions and adapt to the different contexts through which they move. In the analysis below, I first discuss youths' interpretations of the physical spaces of the migrant journey, both as they imagined them before migrating, and as they experience them while moving. Then, I discuss how different spaces—border versus non-border areas, and isolated and exposed areas—shape how migrant youth move. Finally, I demonstrate how economic and cultural differences among the journey's different spaces are experienced by youth migrants, and how those spaces and influence their decisions. The overarching aim of this chapter is to describe the impact of Mexico's diverse spaces on an already-complex migrant journey.

Risk and Danger in Sight: Imagining and Undertaking the Journey

> "Este camino no lo conoce uno hasta que le toca hacerlo."
> *You don't understand the journey until you do it.*
> Juan Carlos, 17, Honduras

As youth migrants move through Mexico, they experience and interact with different social, political, economic, and cultural spaces. These experiences affect how the youth approach and understand mobility, and they affect the decisions that youth make as they move.

Migrant youth interact with these spaces in two distinct ways; first, from afar as they plan and envision their migrations, through knowledge transmitted about the journey from other migrants and media. Second, they interact with the space as they move through it. However, these

are not distinct steps; youth envision their movement, and they continue to envision what comes next as they are on the move.

The Imagined Journey

> I already knew what the journey through Mexico was like. Everyone in Guatemala knows how things are… We all see it on TV, on the news, the dead bodies that appear in the desert and the people the narcos kill, the disappeared. Even if you don't have family in the United States who will tell you what this crossing is like, you know what the journey is like. But everyone still does it. Afraid and all, people go. But I will say, you will suffer on this journey, ha! What I've experienced here in these places, I won't forget.
> – Samantha, 18, El Salvador

Before leaving their homes, Central American youth begin imagining the spaces through which they will cross. Scholars have shown that youths' knowledge about the spaces through which they will be migrating comes primarily from the narratives of friends and family members who have previously migrated (Belloni 2019). Parrini-Roses and Flores-Pérez conceptualize other migrants "as the map" on which many Central Americans base their migrations (Parrini-Roses and Flores-Pérez 2018). The rich stories and narratives that migrants share to their families or other migrants are transformed in mental images that illustrate what is to move through the same spaces. These stories are often literally as a map to decide where to go and what to do to avoid violence.

The youth I interviewed suggested that this previsualization typically related to the routes the youth would take through Mexico, and what they would find along the route in terms of aid and danger. They reported that, before they began their migrant journeys, they had more information on potential routes, like where the trains run, extreme weather conditions, and areas where danger is imminent. For example, when I asked Hondurans Carter and Vincent, who I interviewed in Guadalajara, why they chose to move along the route that goes up the western side of Mexico to Tijuana, they explained:

> **Vincent**: We were in Honduras trying to decide if we would move together without paying the smugglers. While we were deciding, we found out that two men from our village had just been kidnapped in Reynosa. The family was trying to collect money to pay for the ransom. That was happening while we were deciding.
> **Carter**: I remember that we looked at a map of Mexico on Google and looked for Reynosa. We looked where it was and decided that we would not go through there, not even close. So, we would go all the way to the other side of Mexico, to a town called… I don't remember how it is called, I think "Tijuana, Mexicali, or Rosarito."

Like Carter and Vincent, most of my respondents' collective imagination of Mexico was constructed based on indirect information from and about other migrants. Most did not have a direct source of information, like a close friend or family member, giving them information. Instead, they relied on informal conversations with acquaintances or people they met in passing; rumors; and second and third-hand information often acquired through Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

Figure 13 Screenshot of a picture shared on Facebook by a Pier. Pier's picture and comment are on the right, showing him and others crossing a bridge in Coatzacoalcos. He posted the picture in response to another migrant's picture of the same bridge.

Youth also envisioned certain landmarks that they have learned about as reference points that can indicate where they are in the journey. For example, five youth I interviewed in different parts and years in Mexico learned from other migrants that they would be half-way to the U.S. border when they passed through a train tunnel in Orizaba, Veracruz. When they reached the

tunnel, they found it helpful to assess their progress. Other youth mentioned landmarks like bridges, train stations, and landscapes (like mountains or desert) as indications that they were headed in the right direction. The youth who I interviewed especially viewed one bridge located near the city of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz as an indication that they were moving in the right direction and shared pictures with their friend both in the U.S. and Central America to show that they crossed it. The sharing of picture of the journey was a common way to make friends on Facebook. On one occasion, Pier (16 years old, from Honduras) showed me a Facebook post with a picture of migrants crossing the Coatzacoalcos bridge (see Figure 13 above), while telling me about how he crossed the same place months ago. He proceeded to comment on the picture with another picture of him crossing the same bridge. The person immediately replied to him in a private message to chat about his experience and his current location. Social media was a common place to share information about space, and pictures of migrants in the spaces were considered a guarantee that the person was trustable.

Kiara provides another example of information indirectly acquired about a potential migration journey. Kiara learned about and envisioned Mexico City as a haven for transgender people, first from an internet news source saying that Mexico City was the first place in Latin America to allow same-sex marriage. This information was almost three years before she left her country and was reinforced by the comments of other trans women she met when she moved to Guatemala City. There, she heard comments about how Mexico City, Tijuana, and California were places with the most rights and resources, and least discrimination, for the LBGTQ community. While this information was not necessarily the main driver of her leaving Guatemala, it was a determinant of where she chose to move to. This information represents what sociologist Héctor Carrillo defines as “a gay social capital” (Carrillo 2018, 107), which is a form of social capital that

is exclusively related to the social networks and communities that are non-heterosexual. Kiara's knowledge thus came through both her interest in this type of information as well as subsequent contact with other trans women. In this case, her gay social capital was instrumental to her imagination of her international migrant journey, and it came as part of her particular interests and social networks as a trans woman.

Sensing of Space in The Actual Journey

While the previsualization and preparedness for the migrant journey certainly can facilitate the movement of youth and helps them to foreseeing the dangers ahead, the actual experience of the journey gives youth firsthand experience with precariousness and violence. Youths' actual movement requires them *to make sense of the space* while moving. Sense of space is a term in the social sciences and humanities used to explain the socially constructed meaning that people give to spaces, and that is manifested in the way individuals and groups interact and behave in the space (Björkvall, Van Meerbergen, and Westberg 2020; Lefebvre 1991; Feld and Basso 1996). The relationship with space is neither static nor unique, as people can prescribe different meanings to the same places and change their relationship with them over time, just like other forces such as politics, cultures and migration (Adams 2013). In the case of youth, various researchers have examined youths' approach to making sense of spaces by exploring how the spaces they inhabit, such as cities and towns, as well as specific spaces like classrooms or neighborhoods, affect their intellectual and emotional development as well as their identities (Matthews 1992; Martz, Powell, and Wee 2020; Lim and Barton 2010; Adams 2013). In the case of migrant youth, similar studies have also analyzed their intersection with local and transnational migrant spaces, especially concerning legal issues and cultural identities (Moberg Stephenson and Källström 2020; Moskal

2015; Cena, Heim, and Trandafoiu 2018). For the migrant youth in Mexico, the sense of space of the journey represents a challenge that cannot be filled with their previsualization, yet it is affected by social forces.

While youth had pre-formed ideas about the spaces of the journey, their actual experience with space sometimes played out differently than they had expected. Kiara, for example, realized that living in Mexico would be more expensive than her previous homes in Guatemala and Tenosique. This was a factor she had not previously accounted for. For other youth, knowing that a place is dangerous allows them to prepare themselves for possible issues, but being in the dangerous space requires real-time solutions and actions that were not necessarily considered.

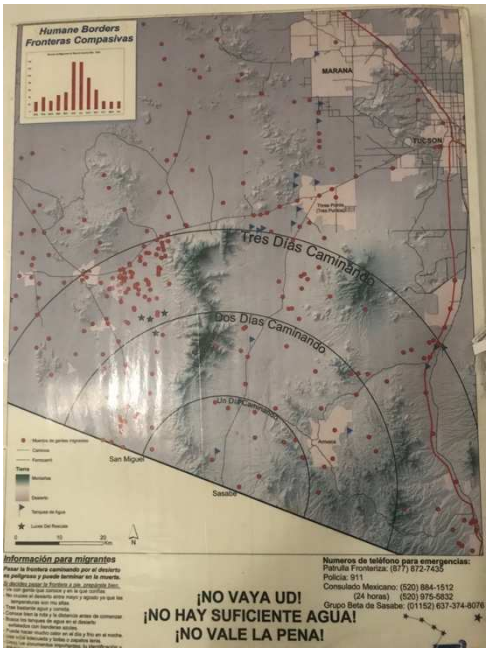

Figure 14. A poster in a migrant shelter in Altar, Sonora, showing the distances, by day, in the Sasabe Desert on the Arizona side of the southwestern U.S. border. Each semicircle represents a "day" walking. The bottom of the poster reads, "Don't go! There is not enough water! It is not worth it!"

While sharing experiences about the journey helps migrants to form images about the spaces will encounter, the level of detail is not enough to capture the full reality of an event. For instance, while in a migrant shelter in Altar, a town located in the Sonora desert, Falcao (a 19-year-old Honduran) and I looked at a map of the desert on the Arizona side of the border hanging on a wall of the shelter (See Figure 14). The map is marked with semi-circular lines to indicate distances (the first semicircle is one day walking, the second is two days, etc.) and with blue and red dots to indicate water sources and deaths, respectively. Falcao's first attempt to migrate through this part of the desert on the U.S.-side of the border failed due injuries and dehydration, and he explained that this map "almost caused his death." Falcao

explained that the semi-circles are really more like two-to three days of walking, because in the desert you cannot walk all day; you can only walk in the afternoon and night after the sun cools. That doubles the time. Also, the walking is not straight, but instead zig zags because migrants need to avoid border patrols or ranchers. In Falcao's experience, this miscalculation led him to run out of water and food rapidly, and, by the second day, he decided to return and look for a border patrol agent instead of facing the risk of dying. He pointed me to the left part of the map where there is a concentration of red dots indicating deaths. He said that this concentration of death in the third ring of the map was due migrants' miscalculation of the space into which they were going and how long it would take them to move through it. After being deported, Falcao was going to try again by the same area, but he commented that this time, he would have "respect for the desert" when he makes plans for his next crossing. Falcao's story is an example of the mismatch that exists between the imagined space and the actual sensing of the space.

The experience of a particular space is also unique to the individual who moves through it—youth migrants bring their own experiences to the space. For example, 12 of the 86 youth from my sample mentioned seeing MS13 and 18 gang members in towns and cities near the Mexico-Guatemala border. This is one of the infamous Central American gangs forcing many youth to leave their countries (Levenson-Estrada 2013). But the reactions of the 12 youth varied. Pietro, a 16-year-old from Honduras living in Tenosique for approximately two months while waiting for his humanitarian visa to be processed, had no problem with gang members around the town. In Honduras, Pietro had lived around many gang members, and he explained why he wasn't afraid of them: "They just approach you when they are in a group, in their territory, but not here where there are just a few of them." For Pietro, a space with gang members did not represent a threat since, in his experience, the gang treats come from groups of migrants, not just a few scattered members.

On the other hand, when I asked Bernardo, a 17-year-old from El Salvador living in Mexico City, about why, after almost two months, he decided to move away from the southern border and drop his refugee case to go to "any other place in Mexico," he explained that while in Tapachula, near the Mexico-Guatemala border, he started to notice that gang members were hiding among migrants. "I saw the tattoos of two guys in the central park (downtown), clowns and the number 13 on their wrists. They were wearing long-sleeved shirts to hide them, but I saw them and identified them as gang members. Then I told myself that I should not be here." Bernardo, who escaped gang persecution in his home country, experienced the space (different than Pietro), as dangerous, somewhere he should not be living. These contrasting examples demonstrate how migrants can move through the same space, but their individual decisions based on that space can differ.

While youth migrants navigate the obstacles and dangers of certain spaces as they move, other spaces can present opportunities. Scholars like Jacqueline Hagan (2015) have pointed out how skills learned in one location can be reused in another, and I witnessed this among youth migrants, too. Youth often reused their skills to find temporary work as they moved through Mexico. While not every skill is transferrable, the wide range of spaces and contexts that youth encounter throughout Mexico presents many opportunities to use varied skills. For example, Tacho, a 16-year-old from El Salvador, explains how his previous work as a fisherman motivated him to stop in the Mexican port of Veracruz to find a job to pay for his journey:

> I was tired of being on the train, afraid that I would fall off, and then in the afternoon, the train slowed down and passed a town. Another migrant that was on the train said, "We are in Veracruz, this a port; we are near the sea." When I heard this, I jumped off the train. I am a fisherman, and I know that not many people know how to fish, drive a boat, clean the engine, and do this type of work. So I went down and started to walk and ask where the port was. I walked to the port, and when I got there, I stayed in a harbor waiting for someone to come in with his boat. When a man with a fishing boat came to the port, I approached him and asked

> if he needed a worker and told him I was looking for work. He gave me one week to test if I really knew about boats. He paid me half of the salary that week. In the end, I stayed with him for three months.

Cases like Tacho's were common; youth can read the spaces through which they move differently based on their skills and shape their journeys accordingly to improve their conditions.

Youths' past experiences also informed their choices about where and how to move. For instance, I met Roque, a 17-year-old Honduran, in the capital city of the state of Chiapas, which is not part of the most common migrant routes. Roque explained that he was trying to only move through urban areas and avoid rural areas or jumping on the train. When I asked him why he was so against going through the rural areas, he said, "I am not from the countryside, I don't know anything about that life. I am better off in cities, where I know how and where to move."

In contrast, Mauricio, a 14 year old from Honduras, was not interested in going to cities. When I met him, he was considering staying in Tenosique, a rural town on Mexico's southern border, because it was rural like his hometown. Mauricio had had to travel through Guatemala City, and reflected that, though moving through a city was bearable, he was not interested in *living* in cities; he wanted to work in the agricultural fields in the U.S. or Mexico, or at least live in a small town.

This section demonstrates that youth migrants make key decisions based on the spaces through which they think they will, and do, move. Their options for northward routes are relatively limited, but the go about their journeys in different ways based on their own understandings of space and what it means for their mobility.

Border Spaces and a Precarious Border Crossing

International borders are distinct and contested spaces where countries mark and protect their boundaries. Borders are areas of constant circulation of people, cultures, and producers of hybrid

identities and economies, all tied to their condition of being the physical points of encounter between two countries (Ramón and Elliott 2010; Warren 2014; Michael and Willem 1997). This duality is presented in the daily practices of communities of people that live around these areas.

Youth notice the distinctiveness of border spaces. When I asked youth what they considered to be the landmarks of the migrant journey, they often categorized Mexico's space into broad buckets of distinctive places: borders (both North and South) and the interior. Geographically speaking, borders marked the beginning and end, or segments of the migrants' journey. Mexico's southern border with Guatemala marked the end of Central America and the beginning of the most difficult part of the journey—traversing Mexico. As a youth mentioned in one of my focal groups: "Mexico is the long part, where you are chased, where you have to be on your toes." (Pier, 16, Honduras). The northern border with the U.S., on the other hand, signified being near the end of the journey, and the happiness of achieving the dream of reaching the U.S., but also the heightened risk and of the violence of criminal gangs the high cost of being deported at this stage in the journey. For example, Santi, 15, from Honduras remarked, "If I make it up there to the border and I manage to cross, well that would be nice, but you hear about all kinds of things happening up there."

Youth migrants also perceived Mexico's borders as especially dangerous areas where they undergo intense vigilance. Both the northern and southern borders are high traffic areas where migrants, along with immigration enforcement and organized crime, are concentrated (HRW 2021; Isacson, Maureen, and Smith 2015). Something that seems as simple as crossing a river or a checkpoint is, in the border context, a more delicate matter. On top of not being allowed to cross through official entry points (international bridged), borders are replete with actors that profit from migrant crossing and movement, and who therefore highly control it (Vogt 2018; Spener 2009).

But the youth that I met typically did not have the resources needed pay a smuggler or bribe an official, leaving them to attempt border crossings precariously and at the extreme periphery.

One example form the Guatemala-Mexico border is the case of Sandra, a 17 year old from El Salvador, who I met in 2015 a migrant shelter in the Guatemalan border city of Tecun-Uman. That city lies along the Suchiate River, which divides Tecun-Uman from the Mexican city of Ciudad Hidalgo. Sandra had already recently been deported from Mexico once as she tried to make it to the Mexican city of Tapachula, and she was preparing for her second attempt. But her first attempt used up all of her money, which she needed to cross the river.

I had gone to Tecun-Uman to observe border crossings there. One night around midnight standing near the bridge on the Guatemalan side, a bus from Guatemala City reached the bridge and stopped. The passengers had to get out of the bus and walk across the international bridge to enter Mexico. As soon as the passengers exited the bus, it was rushed with men yelling, marketing "crossings from below the bridge!" and "no passport, no problem!" Some of the people who got off the bus approached these vendors, and after brief chats, disappeared with them into the streets surrounding the bridge. Others who got off the bus had people waiting for them, calling out names, almost like at an airport. The people waiting confirmed the migrants' identities and then left, some walking, and some on motorcycles. Interestingly, all of this happened in front of a police truck (see Figure 15). By the time this frenzy finished, almost two thirds of the people from the bus were gone. The few left were either Mexican citizens like me or people with visas.

Figure 15. Picture of the International Bridge from the Guatemalan Side. The bus is almost empty after people left with smuggler.

What Sandra lacked was money to pay for any of these services. Her previous deportation happened after she crossed the river in a raft like the one in Figures 16 and 17, and then took a taxi that was stopped by Mexican immigraton officials at a checkpoint outside the town. She ended up spending a couple of days in a youth detention center and then was deported back to Guatemala, despite being Salvadoran. When I left the shelter in Tecun-Uman a couple of days later, Sandra was still there.

Figure 16. A picture of people being smuggled from Guatemala into Mexico, just below the international bridge. Certain portions of the width of the river are shallow, while others are not.

Figure 17. A view of the boats that cross people and goods from Guatemala to Mexico in Tecun-Uman, Mexico. In the background you can see the bridge for the official crossings showed above.

Her case shows how the spaces near the border where undocumented people migrate can be inaccessible to truly unaccompanied minors. She would have to either find a way to make money to pay for her crossing, or to move through a remote and more dangerous section of the river, outside of the reach shelters, food, or any of the other infrastructure that exists near border towns like Tecun-Uman and Ciuadad Hidalgo.

After exploring her options, Sandra opted to join a group of other Salvadorans that she met in the shelter who also lacked funds to pay for the crossing. They planned to move away from the international bridge and typical crossings to cross the Suchiate at a remote point, and then walk through fields in Mexico to avoid checkpoints. While talking to her about her about how she felt

about it, she said, “Here you can’t do anything! If you don’t have money, you can’t cross. You have to go further out; you have to take more risk. If you don’t have money, there’s no way to safely cross.” In the case of women, research has shown that women are more prone to moving and crossing border with smugglers because concerns of safety (Durand and Massey 2004). However, almost all of the youth in my sample crossed borders without a smuggler, mainly due to lack of money to pay for the services to smugglers.

Sandra’s expression reflects migrant youths’ feelings about both borders—a nearly impossible place without to navigate without money. The space of the border and its crossing for these youth means the double burden of, first, avoiding the spaces controlled by the state, while also finding a way to cross without access to the migrant industry that facilitates undocumented movement.

Outside of the threat of deportation and detention, most of the violence that youth experience at the borders is committed by non-state actors, like other migrants and criminal groups. Besides facilitating crossing, smugglers also provide a sense of security against any other actor that might try to harm them. This was the case for Sandra, who explained that she was afraid of going into an isolated place with a group of people she did not know well. She said that stories she had heard about raped women found dead in fields in as the main source of her fears, and this is why she had spent her money on a raft and taxi during her first attempt. She had known about the checkpoints like the one where she was previously detained when she made the choice to take a taxi, but she decided to run that risk over the risk of moving through fields. But now, left with no options, Sandra opted for what she considered most risky way to migrate.

The violence and precarity of the “border” is not limited to the physical border. Central American youth have experienced an enlargement of Mexico (and the U.S.’s) borders throughout

the Mexican territory over the last decade. For example, by petition of Mexican Immigration Institute, migrants passing through the city of San Luis Potosí (400 miles south of the U.S./Mexico border) were not allowed by private police to board buses going to cities along Northern border without presenting a valid resident card or a document that permits them move freely (Díaz Prieto 2016). The city, like many others, also had a checkpoint run by police (local or federal) or army on the highway north that that conducted vehicle checks looking for migrants on the way to the U.S. border. In this case, the physical border suffers an enlargement in the form of enforcement and restrictions far from its physical location (Díaz Prieto 2016).

Just as the U.S./Mexico border has expanded south through Mexico, it has expanded into Guatemala too. During my last month in the field in 2019, I heard Honduran and Salvadoran youth I met say for the first time that they were not allowed to buy bus tickets in Guatemala unless they were traveling with adults, something that had already been in Guatemalan immigration law at least since 2010 (IGM 2021). Checkpoints at the borders of Guatemala and Honduras (far from the Mexican border) have become places of extortion and bribery for youth without documents. Three youth mentioned staying for two days at the Guatemala-Honduras border, trying to find a way to keep moving without being extorted or deported from Guatemala. In addition, three youth I met had been deported from Guatemala for not having parents or legal guardians with them. These experiences illustrate how the border experience is extending across the migrant journey.

Prolonged Stays in Mexico

While most of the youth I met considered their time in Mexico to be strictly transitory, approximately one-fifth had explicitly chosen to change their original plans and stay temporarily or indefinitely in Mexico. Even those did not consider stay in Mexico spent weeks or months in places in places and circumstances they never imagined.

The literature in recent years has begun to note this kind of migration—journeys that are not strictly linear, and journeys that change course (Belloni 2019; Crawley and Jones 2021; FitzGerald and Arar 2018; Paul 2017). Some scholars have recognized that there are many voluntary or involuntary pauses during a migrant's journey, and those pauses can have a great impact on migrants' trajectories (Basok, Bélanger, and Rojas Wiesner 2015; Collyer, Düvell, and De Haas 2012). For example, on their study of Central American migrants in Mexico, Basok, Bélanger and Rojas Wiesner (2012) have noted that Central American migrant can purposely stop their journeys in Mexico while waiting while waiting fo money to be sent or simply to rest and recover their strength. Collyer and his work with transit migrant in Morocco (Collyer 2010) has shown how migrants can be "stranded" in legal limbos when they fall outside of the categories of legal protection like asylum, and he has described "fragmented" journeys that are "broken into a number of separate stages, involving varied motivations, legal statuses and living and employment conditions" (Collyer 2010, 275). Anju Mary Paul develops a similar concept called "step wise migration" based on her work with Filipino domestic workers in Italy and the U.S., and describes their long-term, multi-country movement toward their desired final destination. (Paul 2011).

Like the journeys of the migrants studied by these scholars, the youth I met in Mexico were in mixed states of staying in Mexico, while still having the long-term goal of going to the U.S. These migrants had paused for several predominant reasons: applying for asylum or refugee status in Mexico; working to send home remittances; and waiting for or saving funds to pay for border crossing. They also stayed in various locations throughout Mexico, and their settling affected their experiences.

Why Youth Stay in Mexico

Some youth end up staying in Mexico in order to send remittances back to their families. Obregon, a 17-year-old from El Salvador, who I met in Mexico City in 2015, was spending temporary stretches in different cities in Mexico because he needed to send money back to his family, whom he was supporting. Obregon lived in Palenque, a city about 50 miles north of the Guatemalan border, for three months. He was migrating to the U.S., but, like many other youth migrants, he was waiting for a family member in the U.S. to tell him that they had enough money to pay for him to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. He also had a family to feed in El Salvador, and so needed income—Obregon was the primary provider for his mother and four siblings in El Salvador. He liked that Palenque was not "as cold" as Mexico City, but he had no desire to stay there because he needed money:

> My time in Palenque was not bad at all; nothing bad happened there. I stayed there because I needed a quick job to send money back to my family. I worked in different jobs. I started in construction as a mason's helper, then worked loading-trucks, and then worked in a tortilla store. It was hard work, and it didn't pay much. The most I got per week was around 500 pesos [25 USD]. By the time I paid for my food, I only had about 300 pesos per week to send back to my mother. That's nothing. I could earn that money working in El Salvador. So then, I got desperate, and I started to look for other jobs. I heard that there are better jobs and better salaries further north in Mexico. I made a friend [in Palenque] who had a friend working in Mexico in a large factory making $1,800 pesos per week [around 90 USD]. So that's what I am waiting for now [here in Mexico City], for him to call me so I can start working.

In this case, Obregon's decision to stay temporarily in Mexico, first in Palenque, and then in Mexico City, had to do with the need to send remittances.

Other youth were staying in Mexico to wait for or save money to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in the manner that the youth perceive to be least risky. Sometimes, this involved paying a smuggler just for this last stretch of the journey; for others, it involved saving enough money to pay off the quota that criminal groups charge just to be in their territory.

An extended stay along the U.S.-Mexico border may seem ironic, given that youth commonly perceived this border as the most dangerous part of the journey. And the data suggests that they were not wrong: data from my respondents shows that, of the twelve youth with whom I spoke who had personally been kidnapped, eight were kidnapped in northern Mexico. Similarly, six of the ten migrants who had personally witnessed murders witnessed them in northern Mexico. This is at least in part related to the broader situation of violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. In the regions surrounding the border, drug cartels battle for territory in order to move drugs into the U.S. and to control the lucrative business of migrant crossings (Payan 2006). These cartels then enforce their territory, including by not permitting migrants to cross the border unless they pay a quota to the cartel.

As a result, youth like Luis, a 17-year-old from Honduras, had to spend additional time in Mexico. Luis reached the border in Tijuana in 2016, and then found out that his uncle in Los Angeles would not help him to pay for the crossing, as he had previously promised. Without money and support from his family in the U.S., Luis ended up sleeping in the streets of Tijuana and working informally for a local rancher for three months. He was eventually kidnapped by a major drug cartel for several months until his family eventually paid the ransom. His strategy on his second trip, when I was interviewing him in Saltillo, had changed:

> This time, I plan to get to Chihuahua [City] and find a job there. Then I can save money to pay to cross the border. I will not get anywhere near the border for now; it is too risky. I will wait and work in Chihuahua until I have enough money and contacts to pay for the crossing.

Many other youth I spoke with were taking the same tactic: waiting, working, or living temporarily in northern Mexico in cities like Monterrey, Torreón, Chihuahua or Saltillo, but not quite *on* the border.

Despite the danger of the border, youth also perceived it as the finish line. This made any risk of deportation or kidnapping at this point incredibly costly. I met Sergio, a 16-year-old from Honduras in Altar, Sonora, a northern Mexico desert town approximately 70 miles south of the Arizona-Sonora border. He reflected: "I am too close, and too far from the border. If I get deported, or if something bad happens to me, I will have to restart this trip, all for nothing." This feeling led him to be extra cautious. For Sergio, the fear of being detained and deported and having to start over made him use his last savings to rent a small room in Altar while he waited for his family to send money to pay for the crossing. Part of the fear of the northern border was related to extreme violence or lethal violence. Figure 20 (see Appendix) shows the coding of violent events by region of Mexico. We can observe how, while northern Mexico is not the region of Mexico where most of the violent events took place. It is the region of Mexico where kidnapping, torture and murder where the most common type of violence.

However, the most common reason for staying in Mexico among the youth I encountered was the refugee and asylum process. While Mexico had progressively been developing a legal framework for the protection of minor migrants in is territory since before the 2014 unaccompanied minor crisis, the 2014 Southern Border Plan and the drastic increase of minor migrants overwhelmed that system. (Sánchez Gavi 2021; Ruiz Soto 2020).

One of Mexico's responses to the flux of Central American minors was to include increased protections for minors in its immigration laws (Ruiz Soto 2020). In October 2014, for example, Mexico announced a reform to its Ley Sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político (Law on Refugees, Political Asylum, and Other Protection). The reform laid out the requirements for applying for and obtaining refugee status and asylum. It required the provision of special protections to ensure the wellbeing of minors, defining, for example, where they could

be held while being detained. However, this reform has largely failed in practice. Minor migrants struggled to access the process for applying for asylum and refugee status, and government officials struggled to implement the required level of attention and precautions for minors (Rea Granados 2016). Even those that did apply for refugee status faced many of the same institutional issues affecting adults, like lack of knowledge about the process and long wait times in a saturated system that lacks the capacity to handle the volume of applications it receives (REDODEM 2020; Asylumaccess Mexico 2020). In fact, wait times for refugee or asylee status average more than six months, and that deters people from applying for and finishing the process (Asylumaccess Mexico 2020).[7]

If granted asylum or refugee status, migrants receive a residency permitting them to stay, live, and work anywhere in Mexico. However, after obtaining their residency card, many youth move by bus or even plane to the U.S.-Mexico border. In other words, some youth determined that their temporary stay was worth it in order to be able to move more safely to the border.

Where Youth Stay in Mexico

Some youth choose to stay in Mexico near the southern border area due to its physical and cultural proximity to Central American migrants' home countries. Chele, a 16-year-old Guatemalan who left Guatemala escaping domestic violence and family abandonment, had previously attempted to migrate to the U.S. but was deported from Puebla (in Central Mexico). This time, he decided to stay, at least for now, in the Mexican border city of Tapachula. He explains that is similar to his hometown—the weather, the food, and the people. In addition, Chele felt that Tapachula's physical

[7] Mexican law states that vulnerable groups like minors should not be detained and instead should be transferred to proper institutions while waiting for the resolution of their refugee status applications (2021, 31). However, institutions like Human Rights Watch find that minors are primarily placed in detention facilities anyway (HRW 2016).

proximity to Guatemala was preferable for now, because he was not sure if he would stay in Mexico or if he would still attempt to reach the U.S. In Chele's words: "Here, I am closer to my home. I think I might go back one day, and I prefer to stay here near Guatemala than keep moving to the U.S. If my plans change, I can return to Guatemala." Chele, like some other youth I met in southern Mexico, felt that the proximity to his home country was beneficial. Especially given that he had no friends or family in the U.S. that could help facilitate his trip to the U.S., Tapachula was a perfect space for the moment.

Other youth, like Obregon, moved to different spaces based on economic need. That need pushed Obregon to leave southern Mexico for the interior. Several youth with whom I spoke noted the promise of better opportunities in other parts of Mexico can (and do) motivate Central American migrants to move in northern cities. By 2019, one Mexican city had become particularly notorious among migrants for its economic opportunities: Monterrey. This became clear in my research, and it has also been observed by Gabriela Zamora Carmona, who documented how Monterey has increasingly become a destination for Central American migrants (Zamora Carmona 2018). The capital of the richest and most industrialized state in Mexico, Monterrey became the leading destination of migrants I interviewed to either stop and work, or as a launching point for their final move reach the border and enter the U.S. Six youth I interviewed [in 2019] had worked in Monterrey before reaching the U.S. border. In all cases, they went there based on the stories of other Central American migrants. As one migrant told me, "A friend came here (Monterrey) with nothing on his pockets and after a year working hard he saved enough to pay for his crossing…" (Huber, 18 years old, Honduras). At migrant shelters in Monterrey, I observed trucks parked out front, waiting to offer day jobs to migrants who come out, something rarely seeing in other areas.

Migrants also targeted other northern urban and industrial areas like Saltillo, Chihuahua City, and Torreon. During my time in northern Mexico, I observed a great need for labor in all of these cities.

As mentioned earlier, migrants who applied for asylum in Mexico could end up spending extended periods of time in Mexico, ranging from one month up to a year and a half (as I witnessed). Some intended to settle in Mexico permanently if they were granted asylum, like the case of Kiara. Others stayed in migrant shelters while they waited. One common waiting place was Tenosique, but as exemplified by the case of Kiara, waiting there was not always easy, or even possible for Migrants. Another common waiting place was Tapachula. But, as exemplified by Bernardo (discussed above), gang presence may make a migrant leave the place he is required to wait, and even cause him to drop his asylum application. The decision to stay is by no means permanent. Data on refugee applications shows that 11 percent of the applications were abandoned between 2018 and 2019 (Asylum Access 2020), and, in my fieldwork, I met five youth that abandoned their application at different points on their journey. The reasons were mostly desperation and the precarity of their conditions while waiting. The precarity was not necessarily linked to lack of economic resources, but due the adjustments of living for a long period of in a place (normally, a shelter) that was not designed for stays, and due to the youth's mindset of continuing progress toward the U.S.

This state of inhabiting a place instead of moving through it represents a dilemma. They have begun to settle, but they still suffer from certain unchanged conditions like being undocumented and lacking economic resources. In addition, the places in which migrants temporarily settle might not meet the needs presented by other aspects of their lives. For instance, a youth's asylum case might take months to be resolved, and they may be required to wait in a rural area of southern Mexico while the application is processed. At the same time, the migrant's

need for income may be urgent, but they are in an area only with low-paying jobs, and they may need to attend school, which runs on a year-long cycle. Ultimately, these different needs can also create and give different meaning to the spaces they inhabit.

Adjusting to the Stay

Inhabiting a space, instead of transiting through it, changes a migrant's relationship with the space, requiring interaction with different parts of the space than when they were on the move. (Jonas-Simpson 2006; Smaldone, Harris, and Sanyal 2008). Youth deal with these changes by adjusting their lives as they go from moving to staying in a place.

The priorities of youth who had decided to stay in a place shifted from moving to organizing their lives for the temporary settlement. While they all typically planned to continue moving north at some point, they also invested time in other activities like finding work, housing, or going to school. Yonis, a 16 year old Honduran, applied for asylum in Mexico and described the dissonance he felt while waiting for his asylum case to be resolved. While waiting, he attended school in Guadalajara. He felt conflicted about it: he knew he should be trying to get good grades and pay attention. On the other hand, he knew that he would stop attending school as soon as his asylum application was processed because his plan was to move to the border city of Tijuana and look for work. As a result, he confessed to being mischievous at school and lacking interest in doing his homework. In this case, the timing of the school year contrasted with the timing of Yonis' asylum application and his intention to keep moving as soon as he had permission to do so.

Similarly, migrant shelters are not suited for long-term living. There are no private rooms or assigned spaces, and nowhere to safely store belongings. Still, after youth had been at a shelter for several weeks, they would begin to decorate their bunk beds with drawings of cartoons or

pictures of themselves with volunteers of the shelter or with other migrant that had long left the shelter. They would also become more zealous about protecting what they viewed as *their* space, even if these spaces were not explicitly assigned to them. Yonis lived for two months in a migrant shelter in Guadalajara, where he improvised a shoe rack to put behind his bed and claim that as "his space." He would get frustrated when other migrants took his clothes or shoes from his rack, and he lamented the lack of a private space to keep his belongings.

Still, youth that were staying in one place—even in migrant shelters—began to collect belongings when they were settling. Kiara describes acquiring clothes as she began to settle:

> It's different when you have to stay in one place—look at that suitcase I carried with me from Tenosique to Mexico City. [*She pointed to a full-size suitcase.*] It is full of all the clothes I have collected over the last few months. I have collected shirts, pants, and shoes that [Mexican[people and other migrants gave me, and I have bought some shoes that I like, and now I don't want to give them away. I am not sure what I am going to do with all these clothes on the day I move out of this shelter. If I have to up and leave tomorrow, I don't know what I would do. I have so much stuff that I want to take with me.

Situations like this were typical during my fieldwork; though not always clothes, youth who were staying temporarily in a place eventually realized that they had acquired too many belongings to move, if and when they had to move again.

When staying in one place, youths' relationships with people also changed, and their routines become more repetitive. While on the move, youth interacted with a wide variety of people and institutions for short periods of time. Some of those interactions resulted in friendships or alliances (discussed below), but most of these relationships were primarily ephemeral. But settling in a place resulted in more time to meet people, with more extended interactions with people like shelter staff and other migrants. This led youth to be more aware of their appearances. One youth, Santi, 15 years old, who had lived in Tenosique for almost 3 months recalled being

ashamed of wearing the same clothes and shoes every day at schools or migrant shelters where he lived.

Yonis, mentioned above, was similarly aware of his appearance. He was not allowed to accumulate additional clothes because shelter limited clothes to three jeans and four t-shirts, but he paid attention to when that the shelter received new clothes donations and convinced shelter staff to switch out his shirts, jeans, and shoes for different garments when new items came in. When I asked Yonis why he was interested in changing out his good clothes—despite being used, the items he had chosen were high quality and recognized brands—he explained, "It's good to look different, you know. I go to school or to play at the park, and I don't like being seen by girls with the same clothes."

Staying, Documented

Almost all of youths' interactions with space are conditioned by their lack of legal status—they are *in these spaces* due to their lack of status. However, a person who applies for asylum in Mexico is permitted to remain in the state in which they applied while their application is processed; if the application is granted, they can become residents with full rights to move freely throughout the country. As such, the undocumented youths' relationship with space changes drastically as they apply for, and then are potentially granted asylum.

Acquiring legal status drastically transformed youths' vision of what they could do and where they could go in Mexico. For example, Alfonso, a 16-year-old Guatemalan who applied for a refugee status in the small southern town of Ixtepec, Oaxaca, reflected on the period after he got his temporary permit to stay in Mexico. For him, the transition from being undocumented to having

the right to live in Mexico meant being able to explore different spaces that were previously inaccessible to him:

> When the lawyer gave my papers and my credential, he told me that I could be in town without a problem, but I that I couldn't leave the town. It took me a few days to really feel like I had papers. Before applying for refugee status, I mostly stayed in spaces where I felt safe from immigration officials; I was always afraid of being deported. But then, when carrying my papers and knowing what the lawyer told me, I realized I could go anywhere. I went to the park, to some playgrounds, and also went to play video games, and I was also more relaxed, just walking. In the first few days, I will sometimes suddenly felt alarmed because I felt I would still be detained if I got stopped. I was constantly still checking for police. But now, I take the streets I want and don't worry about running into police; I just walk right away. I am also not afraid to talk to people anymore; it feels good.

In walking with other newly documented youth, I noticed how those youth would stop in stores to look clothes or shoes, while similar interactions with undocumented youth involved the youth constantly looking around, focusing on where to go, and constantly on alert.

However, having legal status in Mexico did not guarantee an absence of violence for youth in their new spaces. Half of the youth who decided to stay in Mexico mentioned instances of discrimination for being Central American and being migrants. While moving through isolated areas, youth were quite isolated from locals. However, moving into more public spaces meant interactions with new people who are less accustomed to migrants' presence. For instance, while I accompanied Carmen, a 19-year-old transgender woman from Honduras, to the National Migration Institution (INM) in Mexico City to finish her fingerprints after her asylum application was approved, a person walking by us on the sidewalk yelled, "Fucking immigrants, go back to your own country!" As the person walked away, Carmen told me, "This is every day here in Mexico City, the city that is gay friendly. You know, these papers don't change how people treat us [migrants]; as soon as I get my documents, I'm moving on to the USA."

Another youth, Carlos, a 16-year-old [Honduran] was living in Tapachula while he waited to see if his asylum application would be granted. He recalled one embarrassing episode from his time in the city; he went into a grocery store to buy a soda, and the owner called him a "Honduran rat that came to Mexico just to create problems." After that, Carlos avoided the street where that store was located.

Incidents of discrimination like the one described above happened in all the spaces; rural, urban, border, and non-border. More importantly, they happened to both undocumented youth and youth with legal status in Mexico. And they happened not just at the hands of common citizens, but also police, immigration officers, and army soldiers. And so, even when youth settle temporarily in Mexico, they continue to be exposed to certain levels of violence and discrimination. These negative experiences shape the youths' navigation of space.

Movement through Isolated and Urban Areas

This dissertation largely agrees with research showing that increased immigration enforcement forces migrants to move through more isolated areas to avoid detention or to specific areas where they feel protected like migrant shelters or churches (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016). However, the entire journey is not undertaken in isolation; youth move in and out of isolated areas over the course of the 2000-mile journey. This section first describes youths' experiences in isolated areas, and then describes how and when youth decide to move to less-isolated areas.

Isolated Areas: A Constant State of Precarity

The undocumented journeys of Central American youth generally take them through remote geographic areas like the outskirts of cities, towns, and borders, which conditions their precarity and puts them at the mercy of violence (Schierup 2015). I found that the youth migrants I

interviewed typically moved in the same fashion that other scholars have already documented, like avoiding congested areas, avoiding army, military, or police presence, and trying not to stand out (Escamilla García 2020; Sládková 2010 (Slack et al. 2016)). Around 90% of all the cases of robbery physical and sexual violence collected in my research occurred while the youth was moving through isolated areas: in fields, atop train cars, along bridges, or in the peripheries of cities and towns.

But truly unaccompanied youth often have no other choice but to travel through these isolated areas. Youth migrants who travel undocumented through Mexico are now largely banned by the Mexican movement from accessing mainstream modes of transportation (Díaz Prieto 2016). Their lack of legal documents prohibits them from buying tickets for buses or planes. And immigration checkpoints prohibit them from moving along highways. Therefore, they avoid them.

In addition to the violence, movement in isolated areas means that youth migrants have only intermittent access to shelter, bathrooms, and means of communication like phone signal or access to the internet. Migrant shelters were typically respites in these isolated areas. Shelters aim to help migrants in different ways, providing basic services, like food, shelter, and a place to sleep for a short period of time. Some also offer lodging to migrants who have applied for asylum or refugee status. In addition, many shelters also offer basic legal services, pay phones for local and international calls, clothes, and supplies like backpacks. Some even help migrants receive remittances that families may send to finance migrant travel. These shelters are usually conveniently located, near the train or in cities that are located at central points for migrants moving north to the U.S. Youth usually find out about the location of each shelter by asking at the previous shelter where the next safe stop is, and heading in that direction (Doering-White 2018b).

The time youth migrants spend in a shelter can vary from one day, up to months if they are applying for asylum and living there. I met youth who never touched a migrant shelter due to fear of being detained or because they felt it was a waste of time to rest there. I met others, like Kiara, who spent months in shelters.

In addition, migrant shelters are often refuges in desperation; most of the youth migrants were thankful for the support and care the received in the shelter but anxious about staying in place instead of keep moving. Migrant shelters were conceived as "pitstops" for recovery but did not solve the issue of moving through isolated and precarious spaces.

This precarious space through which migrants move has also restricted access to healthcare. Ron, an 18-year-old youth from Honduras, lost one of his eyes when he was hit with a tree branch riding atop the top the train at night. I met him in Saltillo. In his own words:

> I lost this eye when a tree branch hit me when I was sitting on top of the train on my way to Lecherías [outside of Mexico City]. I lost it because I wasn't able to see a doctor for treatment. I was on the train for four days. I ran out of water, and with the dust, heat, and cold of the night, I got an infection. All I could do was cover my eye with my t-shirt. I wanted to jump off the train and go find a doctor, but the train only stopped in the middle of nowhere and moved through the fields. I was not going to jump out of the train just to get lost. All the time, I felt my eye getting harder, and by the third day, I couldn't move it at all. By the fourth day, I knew *se habia perdido*, it was lost, and I wanted to visit a hospital, but I didn't want to be deported, so I waited until I reached a safe place. I came here to this migrant shelter to get medicine and see if I could get something for the eye infection, but my eye is lost. I know it.

When I met Ron, he still had not seen a doctor for his eye—it had been 10 days. Other migrants' healthcare needs go unattended, too; I saw diabetics going without insulin, and especially among youth, gruesome injuries and infections going untreated. Youths' movement through isolated spaces thus results in an acute state of precarity that can quickly become fatal.

Coming Out of the Shadows

While youth migrants most commonly moved through isolated spaces, their movement was not limited to these areas. Exemplified by Kiara's decision to stay in Tenosique and later Mexico City while she applied for asylum, many youth spent at least some time in urban areas, and all journeys involved at least some interactions with public spaces like parks, stores, restaurants, even schools and cinemas.

Food and money most commonly drew migrants into more populated spaces. I spoke to Ignacio, a 12-year-old from El Salvador, in Saltillo. He rapidly learned that if he wanted to ask for money or food, he would have to come away from the typical migrant trail:

> After two days of walking, I started to get tired and hungry in Tabasco [in Southern Mexico], so I separated from the group I was following. I walked along a road, and a [Mexican] family picked me up and gave me a ride to the city of Villahermosa [the capital of the state]. I spent like ten days there. It was a beautiful city, with gardens and stores. Nobody bothered me there; I walked around the city and slept near the central park, near a parking lot. People didn't know I was not from Mexico. An old lady that owned a restaurant gave me breakfast for two days. Asking around in the central park, I got money, a backpack, and this hat. That's where I learned that it is better to leave the areas where we [migrants] move and go to areas where there are not many migrants around. That's how I have been moving now, going to the parks, the plazas, the markets, wherever I don't see other migrants. People get tired of us Central Americans because some do bad stuff. They judge us all—*por uno pagamos todos*—because of the actions of one, we all pay. When I was in Tapachula at the Mexico-Guatemala border for the first time, people yelled at me and told me to go back to my town. But in the places where they are not accustomed to the presence of migrants, people are nice to me; they give stuff when I tell them I am a migrant. Police do not chase me; there is no immigration.

From Ignacio's point of view, being in a major city was better than being on the migrant trail because he felt that he entered a space where his presence was not surveilled. Four other youth similarly explicitly mentioned similar movement tactics.

Movement through non-isolated spaces in Mexico was not necessarily easy. These urban areas are not exempt from dangers. Ignacio mentioned that while he was not worried about

immigration officials, there were all kinds of other risks. On more than one occasion, he was approached by adults asking him for sexual favors and offering him a place to stay with them in return. And leaving the main (isolated) routes used by Central American migrants means adding length to the trip and leaving behind the protection that other migrants can provide. As Ignacio explained:

> When you are not near other migrants, you also felt unprotected, because if something happens, if someone wants to attack you, you are the only one; there is no other migrant that can help you. You cannot group and protect each other; it is just you. So, sometimes I prefer to be around adult migrants for that reason.

Thus, it was as if Ignacio and the other youth who preferred to move outside of the typical migrant routes were trading extreme anti-immigration hostility and deportation risk for other types of risk. But, they, and many others, have viewed it as a risk worth taking in recent years, as migrants have begun taking a wider variety of routes through new areas of Mexico (París Pombo 2018b).

Purposefully Moving Out in the Open: Migrant Caravans

The ultimate expression of open migrant movement has been migrant caravans. In the shelters, I learned that migrant caravans—large groups of migrants moving openly and defiantly across borders and through Mexico—have occurred on some scale since approximately 2010. The 2018 caravan of Central Americans has become the most notorious, giving rise to many more since then. These caravans represent unique circumstances that permit undocumented migrants to move through open space where they are explicitly not allowed to be; they walk along the highways among traffic, cross heavily protected borders, and pass immigration checkpoints in defiance of authorities.

The 2018 caravan began in the Fall of that year, when a group of Central Americans, mostly from Honduras, walked along highways from the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula, through

Guatemala and Mexico. Scholars and activists have analyzed the structural roots of the 2018 caravan and subsequent caravans and determined that one of their primary causes was the extreme measures of migrant control implemented in Mexico and the U.S. over the last decades (Ernst and Semple 2019; Arroyo et al. 2019). From the perspective of migrant advocates, the caravan also exemplified the desperation of many Central Americans to improve their living conditions and escape violence (Fabregat, Vinyals-Mirabent, and Meyers 2020).

At its largest, the 2018 caravan numbered 4,000 people. It fragmented in several places along the way, most notably in Veracruz, where groups ended up taking two distinct routes toward two majors cities—Puebla and Ciudad de Mexico. Part of the reason for separating the groups was that people wanted to reach different parts of the border—Tijuana in the west, Ciudad Juarez in the center, and Reynosa in the East. Initially, the governor of Veracruz offered buses to transport the caravan out of the state to Mexico City. However, this offer was promptly cancelled, and migrants separated in groups and kept moving, either walking or taking rides. Large groups of migrants ultimately reached the border in late 2018, though in different groups and at different parts of the border (Arroyo et al. 2019).

As it moved, this caravan brought dramatic images of thousands of migrants, including women and children, walking for days and clashing with Guatemalan and Mexican police and armies to cross their borders. In the U.S., the caravan triggered both fear of migrant invasions and compassion for their suffering (House 2018). Both attitudes were extreme, and there was a closing following of the caravan as it moved through Mexico on the way to the U.S. border.

During my fieldwork, I learned about the caravan from many migrants. I met numerous migrants who were part of the 2018 caravan, and others who were part of subsequent caravans in 2019. In particular, I met and interviewed eight youth who either started with the 2018 caravan

from its beginning in San Pedro Sula or joined it at some point along the way. In all cases, the youth learned about the caravan from Facebook or television and viewed it as an opportunity to move without spending money, and with a low likelihood of being deported. The youth that joined the caravan after it was already in motion through Mexico were particularly attracted by the fact that, due to its mass, it had not yet been stopped.

The power of the caravan—and what enabled it to move migrants thousands of miles without detention—was its size. Viewing the caravan from a sociological perspective, large groups' behavior dulls individuality and emotional intensity and favors the stability and actions over their common objectives (like Simmel's study of dyads and triads) (1971). Large groups generally become less emotionally bound and less sensitive to individual disputes and to losing of members than small groups. At the same time, other factors like heterogeneity of the groups and the cost and distribution and resources have shown that size allows the condition to create collective action (Oliver and Marwell 1988). In the case of the caravan, the sheer number of migrants eliminated individual migrants' fears of openly and of visibly moving through certain spaces that they otherwise feared. Siena, a 14-year-old girl from Honduras, describes her experience in the 2018 caravan:

> I wasn't afraid. We were a lot of people, and nobody knew each other, except for people who had joined the caravan together. We were just walking together, but everybody took care of each other. Most people in the caravan traveled with their own groups, or families. I talked to other migrants, mostly just about where we were moving, how far the next town was. But because we were together on the highways, everybody would see police coming. And when someone saw the police coming, they would scream, 'The police are coming! Here comes Immigration,' and then we were all on alert. That's how we helped each other.

As another youth put it, even when the police or immigration came, "What can they do against all of us?" Sienna also felt that the group protected her from other migrants. She said that the number

of families and men with children made her feel that if someone tried to attack or assault her, she would be protected by other group members.

Ironically, moving completely out in the open in a large group was a tactic for mobility. The caravan made it possible for them to move through open spaces in a more-protected way, that would not be attainable moving alone. Thus, in its most elemental form, the precarious mobility of Central Americans is contested through association like grouping.

Navigating Unfamiliar Cultures

Whether isolated areas or urban metropolises, youth migrants in transit navigate space filled with the culture of those who inhabit it. Researchers have shown that, positive or negative experiences with the local culture can impact migrants' journeys and trajectories (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008; Belloni 2019; Düvell 2006). I found that migrants were aware of and influenced by economic and cultural differences in the spaces through which they moved.

Central American youth felt a cultural affinity for Southern Mexico. Historically, the states of Chiapas and Tabasco have been connected with Central America at the cultural, economic, political, and social levels. Even today, Mayan indigenous groups in Southern Mexico and Guatemala have links through language and traditions. As such, migrant youth felt the cultural connection in the South— particular customs and forms of living like food, accents, architecture and even haircuts.—that fades as they move North. The cultural closeness between Central America and Southern Mexico was felt especially strongly among Guatemalan youth.

For instance, two Guatemalan gay youth—a couple—crossed the border from Guatemala to Mexico via a relatively unknown route through the Mexican town of Chicomuselo, a small village located near the Guatemalan border. Both youth recalled how they felt that people in Chicomuselo looked like them, and that even their accents were similar. In addition, the space felt familiar—the city layout, the weather, and even the colors and materials (clay) from which houses were built were similar to their hometown. As we can see in Figures 18 and 19, both towns (separated by a distance of six hours by car) are reasonably similar. However, as they moved towards Mexico City, they recognized that people looked and dressed less like them, and they felt more conspicuous in the streets and when they spoke. Other youth mentioned how quickly they were recognized as Central Americans in more-northern areas of Mexico. They were aware of skin color differences, food, and accents. Overall, this regionalism became a signal for the youth that they were moving away from their countries. As one Honduran youth, Rojas, who I met in Guadalajara, said, "The further north I move, the less I see my country."

Figure 18. A picture of downtown Chicomuselo, Chiapas.

Figure 19 A picture of downtown San Geronimo (Made-up Name), Guatemala.

However, for a handful of youth, being seen as a cultural outsider was not necessarily disadvantageous. Eder, a 17-year-old Senegalese youth, had wandered across Central and Northern Mexico for almost two years after his family in the U.S. did not support his crossing to the U.S. I met him in Mexico City in 2018. He felt that his black skin and distinct factions made him stand out almost everywhere he went in Mexico. He spent four months in Tijuana in 2017 and 2018, and

there he was treated like other undocumented migrants and often confused as a Haitian or Honduran. Then, he moved to Acapulco, a famous tourist beach in Mexico, following a group of African migrants that, like him, were stranded in Mexico. There, he found that his skin color did not make people think he was a migrant. Instead, Eder was treated as either a tourist or a local from the Afro-Mexican villages located on the pacific coast.

Perhaps more importantly, while working temporary jobs in Mexico, Eder felt that his presence caused primarily fascination. Although he told me it sometimes bothered him to be treated as exotic, it was also beneficial to get along with people. He realized that as someone who looked exotic for Mexicans, he could make a living by selling clothes, sunglasses, and hats in the streets, something he did in Senegal when he initially migrated from his rural hometown to Dakar. He started to make good money and branched out to other tourist areas including Puerto Vallarta, La Paz, and Mexico City, and he was even invited to set up a booth at a local fair. In his words, "I try to move around to places where people think I am a tourist, or where people get curious about me and buy my stuff." In this case, Eder used found an advantage in the way Mexican saw him as an exotic person, and he was able to benefit and make a living in Mexico. Eder's case is relatively unique, shared by just a few other African migrants I met. His experience is an example of the unpredictability of how a space can react to youth's race, gender, or nationality. Still, most Central American migrants report being greeted with relative hostility throughout Mexico.

Space and Association: Migrant Alliances

One of the main mechanisms that migrants confront violence is to form alliances with other migrants to whom youth share the same conditions and to whom they have to move in the same space. Research has shown how groups and alliances are formed among migrants while moving through Mexico (Vogt 2018). These alliances allow youth migrants to work together against the

difficulties that they encounter while moving. But how does space affect their grouping and associations? During my fieldwork, I noticed how youth would use all kinds of group and informal alliances to provide a sense of security and interaction compared to alone traveling. However, the context of the spaces in which they moved did vary the way youth migrants decided to group, with whom, and for what purposes.

The main example of how space mattered in the formation of groups was visible in areas of extreme vulnerability. For example, when youth were in spaces with more stress, pressure, and exposure to violence, like near the train rails or in isolated places, their formation of groups was made less selectively. For example, 18-year-old Anita, a Honduran youth traveling along to Los Angeles in 2019, recalls how, after an attempt of rape while she was waiting for a train in Coatzacoalcos, Mexico, she felt prompted to join a group of men that were waiting for the train along where she was and offer her protection. Once they jumped on the train's wagons, the same group of men that protected her eventually harassed her. When I asked her if she saw that coming when she joined them, she responded said that while she felt insecure, " I had no other option, I preferred to group them that be alone." During the more than eight hours on the train, Anita avoided being physically attacked, and as soon as they left the train, she left the group and walked alone. Situations like this show how spaces, where safeguards are critical, can force vulnerable groups like Anita to group with people that might represent a threat to her just too late in a different space separate from them.

The case of Anita contrasted with the way youth grouped in more relaxed spaces. For instance, at migrant shelters, youth also formed alliances and groups to continue their journey together. However, the more relaxing context allowed them to be more careful when deciding which groups they would form. Issues like nationalities, ages, appearances mattered, but the

opportunity to be in a space where they can meet a person for longer periods and assess their integrity as a person mattered. Thus, more extreme spaces can influence the decision of youth migrants to groups with others forcing them to make improvised alliances that cannot have the desired outcomes.

During my time in the field, meeting all types of informal groups of people migrating together was common. The biggest group I counted was around 21 individuals that were walking together in Palenque in 2019. However, they did it in the peripheries of the train rails.

The grouping of migrants while in the move represented a strategy for their protection and movement in a violent space against youth at various levels. In this case, I posed how increasing the size of the groups, and their characteristics gave migrants the possibility to move through more different spaces and protected them from other types of violence that otherwise will not be achieved is moving alone. While the grouping has its limits and caravan indeed was harassed and partially dismantled along its way to the U.S., it encouraged people and families to move up north faster and relatively safer than if moving alone. Thus, in its most elemental form, the precarious mobility of Central American is contested by primary forms of association like grouping.

The protection people acquire forming groups help them mitigate the violence. I In some instances, their association endures the trip, making it form longer relationships. But in this case, from a perspective of movement and space, it is fair to say that safe is in the numbers. And the space to which youth migrants moved went in relation to the association acquired along the journey works in relation to both the properties that the group can have and the properties that the spaces that the group has. In this case, youth blended in the large groups of migrants to which they shared the same feature, the desired of international mobility; the large grouping allowed them to achieve mobility against the enforcement located in the transit space between Central America and the U.S.

Thus, in this section, I correlated the size of groups with the space through which they move. This perhaps helps to move forward the discussion about the relationship of migrant movement and group formation to understand a situation like the Central American caravans that since 2018 have become more and more common form to reach the U.S.

Conclusion

A closer look at the spaces through which migrant youth travel and choose to travel shows how they experience these spaces and gives nuisance to their migration journeys. Mexico's range of cultural, economic, and social contexts represent a mix of both opportunity and danger for migrants. For Kiara, a trans woman, these opportunities were freedom of expression; for Obregon, who was the sole provider for his family, these opportunities were jobs and higher wages; for Bernardo, it was to escape the violence of Central American gangs. But Mexico also presented dangers to youth like Anita, who survived an attempted rape, and to the twelve youth in my sample, like Luis, who had been kidnapped, and to Kiara, who suffered a violent assault in southern Mexico.

All of these youth had to move through a relatively limited range of spaces. They all had to cross the Mexico-Guatemala border, to traverse the heavily-patrolled narrow isthmus in southern Mexico, and to find their way through central and northern Mexico to the U.S.-Mexico border. At a macro level, the literature has treated these journeys as relatively homogenous or has focused on particular aspects of their journeys, such as border crossing.

This chapter's micro-level analysis gives texture to our understanding of migrant journeys. The youth I met were all seeking the safest space through which they could move, but their assessment of their options varied widely based on their past experiences and their personal goals and preferences. For example, some youth viewed applying for asylum as their "safest" option for

migrating, as it permits open movement throughout Mexico if granted. Others, like Bernardo, felt that the asylum process put them in more danger.

This chapter also emphasizes the themes that run throughout this dissertation. Rumor is at the core of how many migrants determine which space they should choose next—Kiara's goal of getting to Mexico City, Vincent and Carter's goal of avoiding Reynosa, Sandra's long way around to avoid the boats that cross the Suchiate River. Youth migrants' undocumented status, in combination with the potential violence they face, affects the everyday decisions they make as they move. Though these youth are highly vulnerable, they act with agency and make decisions based on what they viewed as their best option.

This chapter also notes the interrelation of space and time. Youths' interaction with space occurs in a framework of time, whether they are transiting through or inhabiting a space. Time plays a large role in how migrants experience their journey, and its precariousness and violence. There is a need to expand research on the relationship between space and time in the migrant journey that considers the journey as a whole and time as a continuum, rather than centering mobility or immobility. This research could help us understand that the decisions youth make about staying or moving are not sudden and impulsive but are product of time in the migrant journey.

Future studies on migrant movement should not disregard the role that these micro-level factors play in shaping migrant journeys. In precarious, multi-step, and sometimes indefinite migrant journeys, such as the journeys undertaken by these youth, specific contexts such as the spaces through which youth move matter.

Chapter 5: Time in The Migrant Journey: The Paradoxical Effect of Waiting

Coming to Terms with the Migrant Journey

Lauro is chewing gum and resting his back against a metal pillar. He looks, expressionlessly, at the central courtyard of the migrant shelter in Saltillo. He's less than 100 miles from the U.S. border. "Have you noticed that I am chewing paper Angel?" Lauro says with a shy smile. "Back in Honduras, I had chewing gum in my mouth all day to have a strong chin, to resist the punches when fighting. But here, I don't have single coin to buy gum, so I am chewing paper just to pass some of the time. I don't know what else to do." Lauro is 18 years old.

It is 12:30pm, and lunch is in half hour. Lauro knows it is better to be close to the dining room to get in line earlier. I sat with Lauro waiting for the cooks to call the line for lunch. Lauro continues:

> This is my third week here, Angel, I could be kicked of this shelter at any moment. And then I'll be sleeping in the street again, near the train tracks. Or maybe I will go to the central park with the group of youth I meet here last week. I need one more week, Angel. I need to know if my uncle is going to help me to cross to the border. The problem is that he is not answering my calls. He told me to get closer to the border and then call him, but now he doesn't answer me. He's trying to save money to pay for my crossing, but I am not sure if he is really going to help me.

As we speak, other migrants slowly start to gather near the dining room. It's gets louder and less private, and Lauro stops talking. Lauro can't stop smiling, laughing in nervous silence. He smiles while he looks to the floor. His hands shred paper, and he puts it in his mouth.

As the number of migrants moving through this border area grows due the increasing number of checkpoints and raids that force migrants to stop and reroute in this direction, some

migrant shelters, including the one in Saltillo, have stopped allowing migrants to stay for two weeks unless they are applying for asylum or refugee status. Lauro has passed the two week mark, but requested an extra week at the shelter while he waits for his uncle to confirm that he has hired someone help him cross the border.

Figure 20. Lauro wearing a donated shirt with the U.S. flag.

During his third week at the shelter, Lauro has been avoiding the staff, hoping he will not get kicked out. He knows that he is going to have to ask for more time again. While we wait, he starts talking again about his journey:

> I have done this two other times, Angel! No, wait, *three* times if you count the time the Guatemalans deported me! I learned and suffered a lot and got so close. Two times, I was sent back to Honduras from Mexico and came back. But that's how it goes. I need to wait and see what else can I do. I'm not going to sleep in the streets—it's rough out there. I tried the streets too many times in the last eight months. I don't want to do it anymore. What I need now is to get to the border. I need to know if my uncle is going to pay for my crossing. I won't go to the border unless I know he can pay. Everyone tells me that you don't go to the border unless you have someone who will pay for your crossing. But I am getting desperate. People come and go from this shelter, and I am stuck here. And I am still a week or two from the border.

As we speak, five men enter the dining room (see Figure 21) and start to get their meals, before the other hundreds of migrants. Lauro says:

> They need to eat first because they are going to work. Outside is a truck, with a boss waiting. I am on the job list for next week, even though I won't be here. I worked two times last week. I used the money to buy some boots. I needed boots to work better. Maybe I can go with one of the bosses outside and work for them. They haven't offered me work, but maybe I could ask them the next time they come. When I was in Puebla, I worked two weeks on a construction site. I did good work

> there, and the boss told me to come back anytime. If I don't make it to the U.S., I probably will go back to Puebla.

Lauro and I sit there in silence as he continues to weigh his options, thinking about what he will do once he gets kicked out of the shelter. Then he says, “Angel, if my uncle doesn't help me, do you think I can get papers here?” I tell him that nothing is impossible, but he needs the talk with one of the staff lawyers that works for this shelter. He laughs again and says,

> I have told the lawyers so many times that I want to submit my case, but they say that I don't qualify. Do you think that’s true? A Honduran man told me that you can apply in [the shelter in] Monterrey, even if they tell you no here. I went there once, but I didn’t apply for anything. The wait for papers is three months, right, Angel?

I told him that seemed to be consistent with what I had heard, but that I could not be sure. I also told him that some people are able to get work permits before their case is decided. He latched onto this: “What I need is to work. Then I will decide what to do next. I don’t think my uncle is going help me now that I am 18.” “Do you think he would do that?” I asked him. “I think I missed my chance, Angel,” he says with a tense smile:

> My uncle told me to come last year when I was a minor. But I didn't want to; I wanted to come with a guide. But he didn't want to pay for a guide. I was afraid because of what people said about crossing Mexico. When I finally decided to come, I was close to turning 18. I made it to Monterrey but was deported. I tried it again, and I was deported again. By the third time, I was already 18. I hear that you can go to Tijuana and work in the fields until you can pay for your trip. Maybe I’ll do that. How far is Tijuana, Angel?

Figure 21 A Photo of the Dining Room at the Shelter in Saltillo 2019

I tell him that Tijuana is far away, probably two days by bus. I have also heard of people taking the train, but I don’t know much about that route.

As we speak, shelter workers finally call the lunch line. Lauro doesn't move; he doesn't want to encounter the shelter staff. He wants to be one of the last in line. After more silence, Lauro says:

> Something will come up, Angel. I have learned that the trick of this journey, is to hang on, to be tough and hold on to the dream. That's how this journey is, to suffer, to have a rough time. There is no other way for me. I need to move out of this shelter. I hope I make it. I might stay here in Mexico, now that I think I know enough to survive. Something I learned in all this time I have been in Mexico and seeing people go North is not to give up and to keep moving.

Introduction: Time and Migration

After multiple deportations, more than a year on the road, and the loss of his opportunity to cross the border as a minor, Lauro watched the support of his family in the U.S fade, too. His story exemplifies the operation of time across many facets of the migrant journey, and his story is like that of many other youth I met. Of the 86 migrants I interviewed, 24 had been deported from Guatemala, Mexico, or the U.S. at least once. For these migrants, a longer migrant journey can mean more money and more suffering. But as Lauro demonstrates, there can also be a silver lining: they learn more about the trip every time they do it. In this final chapter, I explore the aspect of time in youth migrants' journeys.

I approach time through Jiří Subrt's definition of time as "the framework of a certain reference serving people to create landmarks within a continuous stream of change and at the same time allowing the comparison of individual phases of processes" (Subrt 2021, 9). Because the migrant journey is an episode of mobility and constant change, time is a key component. In the case of youth crossing of Mexico, the journey itself corresponds to a temporality, a rite of passage that all migrants have to suffer to reach the U.S., embedded in other temporalities (Brigden 2018).

Using these definitions, this chapter analyzes time and its relation to youths' migrant journeys from three perspectives. The first perspective considers time as the meaning that youth

create to make sense of the changes in their journeys. The changes correspond to the journey itself as an event where youth migrants leave their countries and move in the direction of another one. These changes cause youths' crossing of Mexico to be embedded in structures of the time, calculations, and expectations. They must estimate how much time it will take to move from one point to another, how much time it will take to obtain asylum in Mexico, how long they need to work to earn money. As their journeys extend, their expectations of time, as well as any other expectations they have for their future like their dreams to reach the U.S., must be adjusted.

The second perspective considers time as the measurable prolonged experience of their precarious journeys. This approach considers time to be an external observation of youth's journeys, rather than a created meaning. The changes are observed in the experiences of minors when they spend days weeks, months, or years on the journey.

In addition to these definitions of time in the migrant journey, it is possible to analyze the journey's time in relation to power. From this perspective, the effect of time in undocumented migrant journeys is a form of social control. Sociology has long viewed time as a form of social control and recognized the capacity of institutions and groups to impose a structure of time to shape collective behavior. Sociologists studying time and social control have shown how institutions' and organizations' time structures shape people's livelihoods (Fine 1990; Zerubavel 1979; Cottrell 1939). Specifically relating to migration, sociologists have shown how immigration laws, enforcement, detention, and deportation are forms of social control that receiving countries use to manage migrants considered inadmissible (Sun and Wu 2018; Nessel 2017; Armenta 2016; Welch 1996). In essence, these mechanisms are mechanisms of time—they affect how long it takes a migrant to achieve a desired goal.

As I demonstrate below, the structures of power that attempt to deter Central American youth migration impose timelines and alter youths' time expectations. Restrictive immigration policies and enforcement accomplish the altering of time in two ways. First, youth are limited by their lack of legal status in Mexico. Thus, their journeys can be elongated to an almost indefinite point as they seek to avoid deportation and violence. Second, most youths' only option to move in a documented manner is to first acquire asylum or refugee status in Mexico. But if they apply, they become subject to the institutional timelines imposed by the immigration process, over which they have no control. They must wait for the necessary government bodies to hear and decide their cases.

The timelines of these institutions are not aligned with youths' desires or needs, and they often overlap or contradict youths' goals (Masoumi 2021). The impact of the timeline of an undocumented youth's journey fundamentally affects their journeys. Sociologist Inka Stock has shown how Moroccan migrants' increasing period of immobility on their way to Europe negatively affects migrants' perception of the future, the past, and the present. Issues like lack of migrant network support, failure to the send remittances to their families in their home countries, and precarious living situations while in transit causes migrants to feel "stuck" in transit. This period erodes their expectations of reaching their desired destination and dreams of leaving their communities of origin (Stock 2019). Similarly, Shanthi Robertson's study of Asian migrants in Australia demonstrated how migrants must reconcile their personal timelines with the institutionally imposed temporalities and waiting periods controlling their international migration (Robertson 2019). As demonstrated in the chapters of this dissertation on rumor and space, a lack of legal status has a similar capacity to impose elongated and unpredictable timelines on migrant youths' journeys.

The timelines imposed upon Central American youths' migrant journeys creates indefiniteness. The indefiniteness of migrant journeys in contexts outside of Central America, like North Africa and the Mediterranean, has generally been conceptualized by scholars as a "paradox of (im)mobility" (Schewel 2019; Veale and Dona 2014; Iranzo 2021; Wieczorek 2018). These scholars consider the periods of immobility in a journey—the many episodes of in which migrants are deprived of movement—as violence in themselves, because longer periods of immobility within the transit period reduces migrants' possibilities to achieve their desired final destinations.

The relation of time and migrant trajectories has garnered increasing attention from social scientists. For example, ethnographic work by Ken Chih-Yan Sun has shown how Taiwanese elderly migrants in the U.S. change their perceptions of the past, present, and future of their lives as they reflect on the ups and downs of their migrant experiences over time (Sun 2021). For Sun, time crosses borders and identities in the experience of international migrants. Likewise, scholarship on forced migration has studied the effects of living in refugee camps on the future aspirations and current living conditions of displaced people. Similar work considers the living conditions and violence asylum-seekers face while waiting along the Mexican-U.S. border due the Remain in Mexico Policy (HRW 2021; Mercado et al. 2021).

In this chapter, I argue that the effects of time and indefiniteness have a dual and paradoxical effect. An elongated journey extends youths' exposure to the violence and precarity of the journey, all while they feel that they are not achieving the progress they desire. However, increased time spent on the journey expands youths' migrant networks and youth learn new skills that facilitate their future movement. By focusing on these dual effects of time, I show how policies of migration control can have unintended consequences. Understanding these consequences can help explain current and future phenomena in Central American migration, such as the formation

of permanent Central American communities in Mexico, fluctuations in the number of minor arrivals in the U.S., and the growth of migrant networks that facilitate migration to the U.S.

I separate this chapter into two overarching themes. The first demonstrates how violence, immigration enforcement, and the legal system influence youths' perceptions of time throughout their journey, with particular emphasis on how and why migrants may extend their journeys through waiting. The second section explores the unexpected and tangential consequences that result from extended migrant journeys and how these consequences transform youths' journeys.

Timelines for Reaching the U.S.-Mexico Border

Virtually all youth I spoke with had a loose schedule in mind before they left their countries. They estimated in days, weeks or months how long they expected their trip to the U.S.-Mexico border to take. The shortest time frame I heard was around five days; the longest was "a month or two." The general average was around two weeks. The shorter the timeline, the more confidence the youth had that their journey was going to be smooth and fast, moving on buses and trains. On the contrary, longer estimations of time were backed with pessimism and uncertainty, as well as some degree of resignation that they will have to wait in some places to escape violence or deportation.

Creating this kind of timeframe enabled them to prepare for the amount of time they thought they would be in a precarious state. The timeframe extended to other plans and preparations that needed to be made and accounted for. For example, youth often used time to estimate how much money they would need to pay for food or transportation during their journeys, and then saving or borrowing that amount, if possible. While 11 minors left their countries without money in their pockets, most left with more than zero less than 100 dollars, which was spent on small buses, bribes, and food. Their calculation of time helped to calculate for food, phone calls, and small rides with taxis or buses. While they all wished to have more resources when leaving,

they felt that for the time they were going to spent in the journey, that money saved would be useful in case of extreme emergency.

Estimating time also helped youth estimate the effect of the journey on their relationships. Chiva, a 17-year-old from Honduras, thought that it would take him two to three weeks to reach the U.S. He knew that during that time he would have a hard time communicating with his high school girlfriend. As a result, he told her not to try to contact him, to avoid any issues of extortion in case his cellphone was stolen. Chiva prepared mentally for the separation: "I told myself that during these weeks I would be strong and I would not be scared. This is a time when I need to be strong."

Despite their preparation efforts, all mentioned that their time estimations were incorrect. Manuel, an 18-year-old Honduran who had been traveling northward almost a month when I met him in 2018 said, "I thought it was going to be easier… like eight or 10 days max. I am about to spend a month on the journey." In most cases, the difference between the original estimation and actual reality was significant. This mismatch can in part be explained by how youths' conception of time for the migrant journey was created.

Migrants tend to calculate how much time it will take them to cross Mexico with information from three sources: what other migrants have told them, the internet, and smugglers. For example, 17-year-old Salvadoran, Miguel, thought it would take him three to four weeks to reach the U.S.-Mexico border. He got that number based on what he heard a local Salvadoran smuggler telling two other future migrants. "I heard the *coyote* (smuggler) say that it takes him around two weeks to get to the border. I did the numbers and also asked on Facebook [groups]. Someone in the group told me if it would take a person who knows the route two weeks, that it would take me double the time." However, when I met Miguel in 2016, he had already been on the move for almost six

months. Migrants who estimated the time they would take to reach the border based on the movement of other migrants miscalculated for a similar reason: migrants all move in different ways—moving with a smuggler is much faster than without one—and some migrants make it to the border without ever getting caught and deported, making their time calculations wildly different. Because almost all of the youths' calculations were far too short, most ended up without the money to keep moving, or to pay for transportation or food.

This miscalculation also had the effect of creating false hope about a difficult and violent journey. Even though most migrants recognized that, since the beginning, they were not certain about their time estimates—after all, they were very aware of the uncertainty of the migrant journey—they had convinced themselves that the journey was feasible. Tacho, an 18-year-old from Guatemala who I met in northern Mexico after he had been deported twice (and had spent 11 months traveling), reflected on how his original plans encouraged him to make the trip:

> I made my plans to come to the U.S. and thought that it would take me around ten days to get to the U.S. I did know that this was kind of a gamble, that it might not be true, and that probably I would take longer. But you get ideas and dreams and want to believe. If I told myself that it would take me a year to get to the border and that I would suffer everything that I have suffered now, I wouldn't dare to make the trip. You hear stories about how difficult the trip is, and how much suffering, but I also heard stories about the other migrants who made it to Houston in a week. When you really want to go to the U.S., which story are you going to believe?

David Spener has observed a similar effect among smugglers at the U.S.-Mexico border, where smugglers sell false timelines for the border crossing to convince people to buy their services and make the trip (Spener 2009). But in this case, youth themselves framed timelines that encouraged their movement.

Youth migrants also revised their timelines while they were on the move. They would hear how long it took other migrants to cover another route and use this information to update their own timelines. When Mariano, a 16-year-old from Guatemala who I met in Mexico City, heard from

other migrants that it took around two weeks to get from Mexico City to the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juarez, he recalculated: “If I got to [Mexico City] in three weeks, then I think I can stand two more weeks.” He previously thought that it would take him around four more weeks to get to the border, something that scared him. Two weeks felt shorter and more feasible, and it helped him set what he felt like were attainable goals.

Underscoring how timelines helped encourage migrants to keep moving is the counterpoint: when youth felt like the trip could be endless, they lost hope. At midnight in a migrant shelter in Tenosique, I was called to assist Ariadna, a 17-year-old Honduran who was trying to commit suicide by cutting her wrist with a razorblade. After talking to her about her life and depression, she mentioned that she was also pregnant. She repeatedly mentioned feeling lost and not knowing if and when she would reach the U.S.-Mexico border. She repeated, “I don't see the end of this.” After almost two months, Ariadna was already feeling that her mother in the U.S. was not going to pay for a smuggler to move her north. Now that she was pregnant with another migrant in the shelter, she was certain her mother would be no help.

This sense of timelessness was echoed by many youth in moments of panic or disappointment. These cases strengthened my understanding of how timelines worked as an intrinsic part of the journey. But, these moments of desperation often ended in youth re-making their timelines. I talked to Ariadna a few days later, and she told me that while her mother was angry and sad about her pregnancy, she still kept her promise to send a smuggler to take her to the border. She said it might be a couple of weeks until the smuggler picked her up from the shelter to start her journey again.

Finally, around 36 percent of the youth I interviewed had made more than one journey, either because they had been deported from Mexico or Guatemala (26 percent), or because they

had abandoned their earlier migration attempt and moved back to their home countries for a period (10 percent). However, having learned first-hand how hard and uncertain the trip is, these youth viewed the journey as a flexible period, where reaching the border depends on various factors yet still feels achievable. Lauro, for example, has no set estimation of when he would reach the border this time. Instead he knew that the time it would take him to get to the border would depend on many factors, including his economic resources and both border enforcement and security near the border. He explained, "The journey will take whatever time is needed."

Time plays an essential role in Central American youths' understanding of the migrant journey. The organizational capacity of time to frame our reality is used by youth to see the migrant journey as a transitory period with an end. The power of time in framing and reframing events happens even after deadlines are broken and children must remake their schedules and timelines. Here, time seems to be essential to make the journey possible. However, as we will see in the next section, the migrant journey conveys youths' interaction with many other institutional and social forces with their schedules. These forces play a significant role in transforming the timelines of youth during their journeys.

Immigration Law as Institutional Control of Time

While migrants often created their initial timelines themselves, external factors and institutions largely controlled the timing of their journeys. One of the main external forces affecting migrants' timelines was U.S. immigration law and its treatment of unaccompanied alien children (UACs). A UAC is a minor detained in the U.S. under the age of 18 with no parent or legal guardian to care for them (LII 2020). Those migrants receive special treatment under U.S. law: they are required to see an immigration judge and be given an opportunity to express any fear of return to their home country before being deported. And, while they wait to see an immigration judge (which can take

years), UACs can live with a family member, and sometimes even friends, in any part of the U.S. (Gutiérrez 2014; Schrag 2020). They have permission to live in the U.S. for a period (until their cases are resolved), even though they entered the U.S. without legal status. And though they may still need to pay criminal gangs to cross the border, they do not need to worry about being detained and immediately deported by border patrol.

Treatment of migrants detained in the U.S. age 18 and older is drastically different. They have no automatic right to see an immigration judge unless they can convince a border patrol or immigration and customs official that they have a reasonable asylum claim. They are also required to stay in detention facilities unless they can pay thousands of dollars in bail, and bail is often not permitted in any case.

Thus, many youth were explicit about their goal of moving to the U.S. *before* turning 18 years old; 63 percent of interviewees explicitly mentioned trying to arrive in the U.S. before they turned 18 as a major factor in their decision to migrate. What exactly they thought would happen if they arrive before they turned 18 varied from youth to youth. The most common conception was that by crossing as minors, they would be "allowed be to pass," not be deported, and to continue moving beyond the border. This is roughly accurate. UACs detained by border patrol are required to be transferred to the custody of the Office of Refugee and Resettlement (ORR) within no more than five days of detention. They are sent to detention centers (run by private companies) specifically designated for minors. There, youth wait until they can be reunified with a friend or family member in the U.S. This process is relatively quick (one week), and only occasionally do youth spend extended time in these shelters (when they have no one with whom to be reunified). Youths' other conceptions of what would happen once they entered the U.S. varied. The most optimistic version I heard was that "minors are getting papers to live and work in the U.S." The

least optimistic was, “as minor, you can pass, but you have to wear a monitor around your feet.” Regardless of their conception, most of the youth I met were attempting to cross the border before they turned 18 years old.

This deadline was so important that, in many cases, youth who were only a few months from turning 18 started their journeys, even if that had not been their original plan. For instance, Sebastian, almost 18, explains how his decision to move to the U.S. was conditioned by his age and his fear of making the journey:

> Because my mother died, I did not want to go to the U.S., I wanted to stay and see what would happen to my little sisters. But I also knew I had to move faster if I wanted to cross as a kid. Two months ago, I made the decision. I felt that if I didn't do it now, later it would be harder, even though I didn't want to go.

This situation was common among the youth I met. Not surprisingly, the most common age in my sample was 17 (comprising almost 30 percent of the total). Two of these 17 year olds were turning 18 in less than two weeks when I met them. In both cases, their belief that they could cross before they turned 18 was quickly diminishing. Like Lauro, issues like deportation, health problems, or fear to move through a dangerous areas increased their time in the migrant journey, changed their already tight schedule, and lowered\ their expectations of reaching the U.S. on time.

As Lauro’s case shows, some youth do not make it to the border before they turn 18, and not because they did not try, but because deportation or the violence of their journeys interrupted their timelines. Then their plans must change. Lauro, for example, had originally planned to cross the border and surrender himself to the Border Patrol. When he turned 18, his plan changed to waiting for his uncle to pay the desert crossing to completely avoid detention in the U.S. As he confessed to me, his uncle was angry that the crossing was going to be more expensive because he was no longer a minor.

Migrant youths' journey timelines can thus be conditioned by the law. But it is hard to say whether these youths' decision to attempt to cross as UAC's is ultimately beneficial to them. Many of the migrants seeking ot enter as UACs rushed their journeys, and were often uncertain or fearful of what they were doing. Perhaps taking the journey at an older age, with more money saved, or more knowledge, or more confidence, would help them avoid certain dangers they faced. Many were moving because they felt they had to. Many were moving because they felt they had to. This is an area ripe for future research—understanding how youth organize their trips around this legal cutoff in the U.S., how support networks like parents and family conceive of the hard deadline it imposes, and what its overall effect is on migrants and migration.

Detentions, Deportations, and Waiting: Elongated Journeys

Increased Deportations

The main factor that increased the length of Lauro's journey was his two deportations from Mexico and one from Guatemala, all of which occurred within a span of less than a year. In total, his original plan of two weeks turned eight months and counting. Of all the youth I met during my fieldwork, around a quarter were deported from Mexico or Guatemala at least once. Each deportation extended the length of their journeys, which in turn increased their exposure violence and their need for resources. In this section, I discuss how extending the time spent in precarious conditions through detentions and deportations elongates their journeys.

As discussed in Chapter 1, in 2014, Mexico significantly escalated its attempts to detain and deport Central American migrants through the Southern Border Plan. That Plan converted Mexico into a major obstacle for Central American migrants and has resulted in the deportation of tens of thousands of migrants from Mexico over the last seven years. The impact of the Southern Border Plan was apparent as I carried out my ethnographic research. Over my 4 years in the field,

stories of deportation became more common among the youth I interviewed. Between 2016 to 2019, the average number of deportations (from Mexico, Guatemala and the U.S.) trips in my sample grew from 1.5 to two. For those youth who were deported from Mexico, the increasing length of the journey represented a higher mental and economic burden.

The Experience of Deportation

Unsurprisingly, regardless of the location in Mexico from which youth were deported, their experiences were remembered bitterly. Studies of detention and deportation of Central American youth in the U.S and Mexico have found that the psychological trauma of deportation, the inhumane conditions youth face while detained, and the deception youth face as a result of having to start the journey over again can equal the conditions of violence and extreme poverty that motivated the migration of many Central American youth (CRS 2010; Fernández de la Reguera Ahedo 2021).

One of the main frustrations expressed by youth who had been deported was the feeling that they had wasted their time because they had to start all over again. They also feared having to live through the same dangers and suffering again. I met Mario, 16 from Honduras, in Mexico City. Mario had been deported from Mexico city three weeks before, and I met him as he was undertaking his second journey. He explained, “I remember that when I was on the [Mexican Immigration] bus on my way to Honduras, I started to cry because I realized that I had to do the same trip again. To know I would have to make the same trip again and go through cold and heat and hunger again, all of it again. I was tired already.” Other youth reflected similar sentiments. Youth who had never been deported feared deportation, mainly because they did not want to repeat

the same experience. Notably, deportation did not deter them from coming, but it did transform the conception of time in the migrant journey.

The extension of their journeys meant adjusting their plans and budgets, as well as their relationship with their migrant networks. Despite traveling with few resources, the youth try to acquire as many resources as they can by working, saving, selling their belongings, and borrowing from relatives and friends. When deported, youth migrants must acquire the same resources again. Like Lauro, whose uncle in the U.S. was not responding to his phone calls to pay for the crossing of the border, migrants' deportation can increase tension with families who may refuse to send money for the journey, especially if they have already paid once and then the youth got deported.

Deportation also erodes the already-limited human and material resources youth require to migrate. Youth often requested between 100 to the 500 dollars from their family members in the U.S. to support their journeys, which is miniscule compared to the thousands of dollars that a smuggler would charge for the crossing. In 2020, the rate for a smuggler to transport a migrant form Honduras to the U.S.-Mexico border was around $10,000. Even if youth request relatively low amounts of money from their families, the amounts can constitute a significant financial burden. For example, about his third deportation from Mexico, Hugo, a 16-year-old from Honduras, recalls being sent to a detention center for minor migrants in Mexico and then deported. His parents had to be present at his release in San Pedro Sula. But they lived in a rural community hours from the city and did not arrive for his release, despite the efforts of a social worker to contact them. After a week in detention, Hugo eventually contacted them by phone, and they told him how they did not have the money to make the trip anymore. He had to find a way to move by himself. After that phone call, he escaped from the detention center and started his migration

journey again. He never went back to his village. This exemplifies how multiple deportations can put tension on the already-delicate support networks that youth have.

Ultimately, deportation did not make youth migrants stay in Central America. My sample is self-selected for youth who *did* decide to try again. The is currently no accurate data on how many migrants reenter Mexico after being deported. However, my findings provide evidence that reentries do happen, and the experience of deportation, while brutal, doesn't prevent this. Instead, deportation simply made their journeys longer and more strained. It interrupted their dreams of reaching the U.S. and increased their time moving in precarious conditions. Therefore, deportation was one of the most undesirable events for migrants.

The Decision to Wait

One way youth migrants avoided deportation and violence was to wait and stay in a relatively safe place like a migrant shelter. However, such waiting necessarily extended their journeys. This section discusses the implications of waiting in migrant shelters or cities along the migrant journey.

Scholars have noted remaining in a specific place along a journey as a strategy or survival tactic for migrants (Jacobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2021). While waiting, migrants can identify dangers ahead make decisions about routes to take and next steps. In addition, migrants can purposely stagger their movement, meaning they stay in different places along the route to acquire work or money (Belloni 2019; Collyer 2007a). However, scholars have also found that waiting can create a sense of forced immobility that can aggravate the pain, depression, and precariousness that migrants experience (Dwyer 2009).

On more than one occasion, I met Central American youth waiting in shelters or cities. They were waiting for their families to send money, or a smuggler, or taking time to figure out

their next steps, or for an injury to heal. Youth also spent considerable time waiting for asylum or refugee applications to be decided, which could greatly facilitate their movement.

Waiting in the migrant journey had a paradoxical effect, and it required youth to make a delicate calculation. If waiting allowed them to take steps that reduced their risk of deportation—getting healthier, waiting for money, making decisions based on more information—then waiting helped reduce the potential length of their trip. However, if waiting became indefinite, then it could increase their conditions of precarity; it extended the period of time during which they (and often therefore their families) were without income, and if often led to anxiety and restlessness.

Often, despite the benefits of waiting, youth deemed the costs to be too high. I met multiple youth with open wounds on their feet or hands who decided to keep moving instead of waiting to recover, in order to avoid spending more time in Mexico. For example, Orlan (mentioned in the Introduction) kept moving despite his wounds and symptoms of dehydration. Likewise, I saw youth with broken hands, extremely infected wounds, fever, and diarrhea jumping in trains or leaving migrant shelter in an act of desperation. Sadly, stories of how migrants in these conditions eventually died in remote areas were common.

Other youth would apply for asylum, but after a couple weeks of waiting in a shelter, abandon their applications because they felt it was not worth it to keep waiting. Still others felt external pressure to keep moving. Juan, a 17-year-old from Guatemala, was making his second attempt. He talked about how during his first journey, he abandoned his application for refugee status due to pressure from his brother:

> When I told my brother [in the U.S.] that I applied for refugee status in Mexico, he told me that he was not going to keep saving the money he was going to loan me to pay my crossing because he had another expense to pay. I got nervous, and I stayed in the migrant shelter for just one more week after he told me that. After that, I decided to keep moving.

Juan was ultimately detained and deported from San Luis Potosí during that first attempt. When I met him in Saltillo, during his second attempt, he had no plans to apply for asylum or refugee status.

Unlike Juan, some youth decided to wait for months for their asylum or refugee applications to be resolved. Thousands of Hondurans and Salvadorans have applied for asylum and refugee status. Studies of the process have shown that Central American migrants (and applicants of other nationalities) largely use the status acquired through this process to move freely through Mexico to reach the U.S. border (Candiz and Bélanger 2018; París Pombo 2018b). My research supports this finding. It was common knowledge among youth migrants that asylum and refugee was a way to get a residency card. During my fieldwork the idea of a residency card was often associated with mobility. Youth could also work legally if needed to raise money for crossing, and if they were deported, they could re-enter Mexico again.

But the wait for that residency can be grueling. Waiting can be tedious and boring. It can gave youth time to overthink their worries, and to grow anxious about their personal issues or what is next to the journey. It can even lead to anxiety and depression. I conducted a focal group with eight youth staying temporarily in a migrant shelter in Southern Mexico while they waited for their applications to be processed. One of their primary complaints was that they were bored of wandering all day around the shelter and the small town. Comments like, “My head hurts, I just can't stop thinking about the girlfriend I left,” or “I need to find something to do here,” or “I am going to go crazy” were common. I spent one month with that group in the shelter. Three of them left the shelter without notice and did not complete the refugee application process. When I asked the remaining youth why the three would abandon their applications after they had already been waiting for months, they told me that one left because he was tired of being there and felt that the

immigration lawyer was just lying to him. The second left because he felt pressure to reach the U.S. and provide money for his ill mother. The third migrant (who I later found drunk in the street) left because he was an addict and had an urgency to find substances (using drugs or alcohol is prohibited in the shelter). The other five remained in the shelter when I left.

During my month in that shelter, I saw two minors obtain refugee status after waiting two and four months. Both immediately left the shelter for other parts of Mexico where family members were waiting for them. One of them had the firm intention of reaching the U.S. as soon as possible; the other wanted to work in northern Mexico and decide later if crossing was a good idea.

By delaying their journeys through waiting, youth take a gamble between potential reward and suffocating immobility. There is no right choice—both options have upsides and downsides, and youth ultimately make personal decisions based on their own calculations and pressures. In the next section, I explain how extended journeys alter migrants' goals and expectations, opening new doors to navigate the violence and precariousness they encounter.

Unintended Consequences and Silver Linings: The Cumulative and Indirect Effects of an Extended Journey

Most Central American youth migrants aim to move through Mexico as quickly as possible, with the goal of arriving in U.S. While extended journeys can mean youth spend additional time in a precarious position, they can also create new and unintended opportunities for social interaction. Youth migrants encounter new people, get to know new places, and hear stories, information, and experiences from others. The more time they spend in Mexico, the more migrants and their journeys are shaped by this social world.

The idea of exposition to the conditions of violence and precarity of the migrant journey is by no means new. Sociologist Ken Chih-Yan Sun, mentioned above, has explored time in international migration and its transformative power to complicate issues like assimilation, transnational identities, and political views. (2021). Likewise, sociologist Bandana Purkayastha argues that, during their lifespans, migrants face all types "of social structures and belief systems at each life stage [that] have cumulative effects on their experiences as older adults." (Purkayastha 2012, 10). Ultimately this exposure to precarity and violence for a prolonged time transforms the migrant's journey.

The Capital of Precarious Movement: Detention and Deportation as a Learning Experiences

Because of the difficulties of crossing the U.S border, all kinds of migrants can cross multiple times for many different reasons and purposes. Migrants can be deported multiple times and try again. They can turn to living on the border and crossing continuously for work, school or living. They can become smugglers specialized who cross other migrants (García Vázquez, Gaxiola Baqueiro, and Guajardo Díaz 2007; Moreno-Mena and Avendano-Millan 2015; Roberts, Menjívar, and Rodriguez 2017). Scholars have studied how migrants convert international migration experience into beneficial skills. One of the most salient cases of learning through repeated migration are smugglers' continuous border crossings (Maijidi 2018, Achilli 2018, Slack 2018). Through repeated crossings, smugglers learn new routes and the best ways to avoid detection as well as to connect with other smugglers to expand their operations. Scholars have also noted that migrants' learned ability to avoid detention and to migrate internationally is a skill and commodity from which migrants can earn a profit. Specific to youth, scholars have coined the term "circuit children" to refer to the youth that live in Mexican border cities and use their experience

crossing the border undocumented to help other migrants cross (Moreno-Mena and Avendano-Millan 2015; Hernández-Hernández 2020).

When discussing the facilitation of movement, researchers use the concept of social capital, which is often a proxy for the strength of migrants' social networks (migrant, ethnic, and transnational) (Louise Ryan, Umut Ere, Alessio D'Angelo 2015). These networks provide knowledge and resources that can facilitate the international movement of people. Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu 1986, 21).

In the field, I found that deportations had the indirect effect of increasing migrants' social capital. In line with Bourdieu's theory, I found that, while the migrant journey is for some a one-time experience of departing and arriving, for deported youth, the precarious journey is also transformed into social capital. I define the capital of precarious movement as the incidental accumulation of knowledge resulting from the elongated migrant journey that facilitates future movement and helps migrants avoid future violence. In other words, many deported youth learned from their prior migration experience, and instead of being discouraged by deportation, felt that they had additional experience (social and migrant capital) to employ on their second (or third, or fourth) journey.

The primary way youth transformed their previous deportations into social capital (skills) was to reflect on their already-lived experiences when migrating again. Fabio, a 17-year-old Honduran who I met in Coatzacoalcos Veracruz, had already been deported twice. This was his

third attempt. He told me how, on this attempt, he was able to avoid border checkpoints without paying anyone, take local buses, and avoid police and robbers in the southern part of Mexico, all based on what he learned in his previous attempts. Fabio mentioned reaching the place where he was previously detained (Villahermosa, Tabasco) twice as fast as he did in his first attempt. This made him feel like this migration was going better.

Like Fabio, other youth mentioned learning from past attempts the places where immigration officials were patrolling, where shelters were located, and how long their journeys would take. This allowed youth to learn how to negotiate with their circumstances. Fabio, for example, mentioned how, for his upcoming stop in the central Mexican city of Puebla, he would need to find a sweater to endure the cold of the train that moves through the mountainous region, and many plastic bags to protect his clothes belongings from the mountain rain. This information prepared him to move faster and more safely. Interestingly, Fabio had never made it to Puebla in his previous attempts. But the social capital he gained from other migrants in those attempts had prepared him for this next step.

The experience of deportation also provides youth information about which routes are more-heavily patrolled by immigration officials. Many varied their routes on their subsequent attempts, but that also led them to places and situations they did not initially migrate through.

Finally, the knowledge acquired on prior unsuccessful journeys also served as a resource for other migrants, even potential migrants who had not yet made any migration attempts. For example, Lena, 19 years old, from Guatemala, was deported three times from different of Mexico near the U.S.-Mexico border before I met her near Mexico's southern border on her fourth attempt. This time, she was traveling with a group of women from her community who were on their way to the U.S. for their first time. As Lena ran out of money after her deportations, two women from

her community offered to pay her for her transportation and food in exchange for guiding them. Even though she had never been successful, these women saw her as a resource.

In each of these cases, deportation was a major setback in youths' journeys, extending the time it took them to achieve their goal of reaching the U.S., and depleting their resources. However, deportation had a silver lining. It gave them confidence, and in some cases, a knowledge that became valuable not just to them, but to other migrants too. This confidence is an expression of the capital of precarious movement that is achieved solely through the experience of deportation. It is primarily (if not solely) helpful to move undocumented and under precarious conditions. Youth recognized this paradox: on the one hand, they were tired of the journey, but on the other hand, they felt more familiar with and knowledgeable about how to avoid danger and detention while moving.

Waiting as an Interim Step

While waiting in Mexico constitutes additional time, not all youth felt the pressure to move quickly to the U.S. Many found Mexico to be safer and better economically compared to their home countries. Mexico thus became for many of these youth a second-best option, a step in the migration process (Paul 2017). Like stepwise migration, some youth see the social and economic conditions of Mexico as an option that will bring them closer to their final destination, the U.S. However, stepwise migration does not fully account for these youths' waiting periods. The youth I met were also not waiting by choice, but forced to wait while undocumented. And while some were staying for the improved labor conditions, other youth stayed for their safety: Mexico is considered a less dangerous place than Central America.

Waiting was also an active choice for many youth—a strategy to facilitate mobility, challenging the narrative that Central Americans are stranded in Mexico (Collyer 2010; Lancet 2017; Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010). And, while waiting created problems, as recounted above in this chapter, it was also a way to keep viable the dream of reaching the U.S.

The youth I met mentioned several considerations outside of the asylum context when deciding to wait in Mexico. Two of those considerations predominated. The first was that Mexico was a viable place to wait and live while undocumented. Youth mentioned determining that there were the higher wages and safer conditions than in their home countries. After being deported twice from Mexico and losing communication with his cousins in the U.S. who were supposed to send him money, Ismael, a 15-year-old orphan from Honduras, decided that he would stay in Tapachula, Mexico, right across the Guatemala-Mexico border, during his third attempt until his economic situation improved. When I met him living in a migrant shelter that specialized in migrants minors, located in Tapachula, he was searching for family members who could pay for his crossing and with whom he could be reunified in the U.S.. He would cross as a UAC. Simultaneously, his aunt in Honduras was pressuring him to send money back to pay for his younger sister's food.

Sitting in Tapachula's Central Park, I asked Ismael if he was feeling an urgency to move on. He explained that, after being deported around three weeks ago from Tapachula back to Honduras, he currently had no money, and nothing secure in the U.S. He still intended to go to the U.S., but, as he explained, "the United States is not going anywhere, it will always be there." Rather than returning to Honduras, he decided to, in his own words, "wait" in Tapachula. He hoped to save money working in a bakery or a kitchen, a job he previously did in Guatemala, where he

worked for a while before deciding to migrate to the U.S. Because he could make more money in Tapachula than he could in Guatemala or Honduras, being in Tapachula made sense for him.

Second, other youth, also like Ismael, hoped that their circumstances would change while they waited in Mexico—they hoped they would find a network, like a family friend or a friend in the U.S., that could help them cross. In other words, they looked for institutional or structural advantages that would facilitate their movement and ease the precarity of their journeys. This is distinct from the stepwise migration concept that focuses on labor niches and is facilitated mostly by family or international working networks.

Maria, a 19-year-old Honduran, decided to wait in Guadalajara (central Mexico) when she found out that her uncle and cousin, who were ahead of her on the journey, were close to reaching the U.S. Maria decided to wait because they had promised her that as soon as they crossed the U.S. border, they would find a way to pay a smuggler to bring her from Guadalajara to the border. She recognized that this plan could fall through, and her family might actually be able to help her, but she still preferred wait and see if it would happen rather than risking the journey north.

She was halfway to the U.S., and closer than if she were waiting in Honduras. She had already crossed one of the two of the three borders she needed to cross—both the Guatemala-Honduras, and Guatemala-Mexico borders. And though not as daunting as the U.S.-Mexico border, crossing the Guatemala-Mexico border was no small feat. In Tapachula, two youth waiting in a migrant shelter for their families to send them money told me that they were waiting on the Mexican side of the border because the border was heavily patrolled, and so they crossed when they saw a window of opportunity. While not easy, waiting for them was still a step forward in their journey.

Waiting for some youth thus kept alive their hopes of reaching the U.S. If they did not wait in Mexico, they would have to return to their home countries, and be that much further from their ultimate goals.

Socialization in the Migrant Journey: Forming Relationships over Time

Studies on the immobility of Central America migrants have noted that while migrants wait, they can learn from locals and form groups with other migrants to survive the violence of the journey (Vogt 2018; Brigden 2018). The last section of this dissertation discusses this process among youth who wait and move through Mexico for long periods of time, focusing on how time in the migrant journey has the capacity to extend migrants' alliances, transforming them into long-term relationships, and how time can redefine how youth migrants conceptualize Mexico.

In classical sociological theory, socialization occurs when individuals learn values, morals, or language that dictate the social norms and customs of social life (Giddings 1897, 2; Simmel 1971, 23). The socialization of minor migrants specifically is often viewed as a life course process, either in the form of acculturation or assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Handlin 1966; Slobin 1982). In my research. I observe how the time spent on the journey increased youths' contact with people, institutions, and culture that lead minors to learn and adopt some of the norms and cultures of Mexico and other migrants as well. In other words, the migrant journey can also be a process of socialization for youth migrants.

As shown throughout this dissertation, youth migrants met people and shared information in a broad spectrum of spaces and with a wide range of people. Both sharing knowledge and interaction in space have a time component. As the length of a migrant's journey increased, so did the volume of these interaction—so did their socialization.

Socialization was a salient element of the migration experience of youth who spent considerable time in Mexico. The most common example of time in socialization that I observed was the formation of alliances between youth migrants and other youth migrants or adults. By moving together, migrants of all ages, nationalities, genders, and economic and social conditions start learning from each other, internalizing other's views of the migrant journey, and strengthening their relationships and alliances. Youth who spent time together for longer periods while moving or waiting for an refugee status application to be processed began to form alliances. They grew used to each other and shared the same touchstones of their journeys. These shared experiences led them to form groups in a dangerous context when one of the untold rules is to not trust anyone.

For instance, when I met Oliver, a 17-year-old from Guatemala, in Central Mexico, he had traveled with eight other men (none of whom were youth) for almost two months. The familiarity with which Oliver and the group initially interacted led me to think that they were old friends moving together. They shared the food they brought and took care of each other's belongings. They also had nicknames for each other, and Oliver's nickname was "El Baby," as he was by the youngest in the group. His slender build made him look even younger. I was surprised to learn that this group was formed while moving through Mexico.

The group formed during Oliver's first attempt to reach the U.S., when, at the Guatemala-Mexico border, he met four other men who were traveling together and asked them if he could join them and walk together. Jokingly, Oliver said, "*Nos gustamos*"—"We like each other." When I asked him what he meant, he explained that, during their first attempt, the five of them spent around ten days moving together, walking, sleeping, and eating in the fields and shelters. During that time, they become friends. Oliver remembers:

> As weeks passed, we moved together, and began to help each other more and more. The ones with money would buy food for everyone. One of them shared his cellphone to contact our families, and so on. I didn't have much to offer, but later, when we were moving in the towns, I asked for money in the streets, and I shared what I got with them.

The group was eventually deported from the city of Veracruz, near central Mexico. When they decided to attempt the trip together again, the group added four more men who were relatives of one of the original group.

Learning that Oliver was making his second attempt to reach the U.S. with a group of people who were not his relatives nor from his home community caught me by surprise. This was a unique case that I had heard of from other youth migrants but never witnessed in person. I asked more about their group. Oliver explained that after they were deported, they all contacted each other and regrouped in Guatemala City three weeks later to continue their journeys as a group. Before they left for their second attempt, Oliver's mother met the four men at the Guatemala City bus station and made them promise that they would look after each other.

From Oliver's perspective, the time they had spent sharing and getting to know each other helped them to become a group, a situation that he viewed as an advantage to travel. Oliver reflected on how the group's time moving together affected his relationship with the other men:

> There are instances when you meet a person in the train or walking, but you rapidly lose them, or you simply don't like the person and you go in different directions. But in this case, I was able to get to know them along the journey, for weeks. And that is what allowed us to form a group. I saw them calling their wives and children and telling me they were afraid to move, just like I am.

Like Oliver, the journey that was elongated by the group's deportation had the indirect effect of strengthening his new friendships. And these friendships ended up shaping the group's journey. I was able to observe how Oliver and his group made decisions together at the shelter. The group

discussed the conditions of violence at the different portions of the U.S.-Mexico border and the times and routes to get to each. All the group took part in the conversations, including Oliver.

Oliver's case was not wholly unique; four other minors commented on similar situations in which the length of the journey allowed them to get to know a group of new friends with whom they traveled. The violence and precarity that youth migrants have over their journeys is, for the most part, an impediment to forming any durable relationship—as Oliver mentions, most meetings are ephemeral. However, time spend on the journey can play a crucial role in forming groups of migrants that end up impacting youths' journeys.

Elongated journeys can also lead to finding love in Mexico, which can in turn interrupt or even end a migrant journey, and lead to further socialization in Mexico. In Queretaro, a city located around 130 miles northwest of Mexico City, I met Timo, a 20-year-old Honduran working in a hair salon as a stylist. He ended up in Queretaro when he was 17 years old migrating to the U.S. After falling from the train there, he had a severe concussion that left him hospitalized for a month. Afraid of continuing his journey, but also afraid of his hometown's drug cartel recruitment and harassment, he decided to stay in Queretaro and work as a mason on a construction site. While he was working there, he met his now-partner, a Mexican woman with whom he has a one-year-old baby.

I met Timo outside of his salon, and when talking to him, I could tell that his Honduran accent was fading. He had started to use the Mexican words "*wey*" and "*cabrones*" instead of "*maje*" or "*cerote*," which are used heavily among young Hondurans. For Timo, his decision to stay in Mexico was greatly influenced by his partner: "I was just passing through, and now it's been three years since I left my home. I liked Mexico, and now with my baby, I feel this is my country as well."

Timo is now a Mexican resident. Since he left his country, he hasn't gone back to Honduras, primarily due to fear. Instead, he occasionally sends remittances to his parents, who relocated within the country and who he is trying to convince to come to Mexico as well.

While happy in Mexico, when I asked Timo about his original plans to go to the U.S., he responded, “For now, that plan is over.” His wife has relatives in the U.S., and they both have been toying with the idea of migrating as a couple to the U.S. But his plans depend on what happens in his life. “It will depend on what happens in the next few years,” he says. “Right now, I am not worried. This city is safe, and there is plenty of work for me. But if the situation gets worse, or maybe when my child grows and starts to have more needs, we might need to move to the U.S. The U.S. is always an option for us Central Americans, Mexico is better than Honduras, but it is not better than the U.S. That is the ultimate stop for us, but if I go, I will not go alone. I want my family to go with me.”

Timo's story is an extreme example of how the length of a migrant’s journey can transform the journey and increase the socialization of migrants in Mexico. But it was a common among the youth migrants who had spent a considerable amount of time in Mexico that they grew familiar with the names of the towns and cities, the institutions, the tastes of the food, the words and accents, and the behaviors of Mexican people.

Still, familiarity with Mexico does not change the socioeconomic structures of Mexico. As Timo explained, Mexico is an “in-between” between Central America and the U.S. Therefore, while he was comfortable staying in Mexico, he recognized that migrating to the U.S. was not out of the question.

The socialization process youth migrants experienced over time was not restricted to interactions with people and culture but also institutions. Most of the youth who stayed in Mexico

for more extended periods did so to apply for asylum or refugee status in Mexico. As discussed above, the waiting period can be long and burdensome. But it also allowed (or required) youth to interact with a wide range of Mexican institutions—hospitals, schools, and Mexican immigration authorities—and to gain experience and learn from other migrants who were already going through the process. Youth reported feeling more comfortable by seeing how other migrants deal with school or handle their asylum cases. In these instances, youth's mistrust over institutions was surpassed by seeing how others pass through the same process.

The familiarity with Mexican culture and institutions provided by extended time in Mexico gave migrant youth more confidence in their short futures in Mexico. I spoke with Wilmer, a 19-year-old Honduran who had been working in Guadalajara for two years. When we spoke, he was currently hosting two of his youth cousins who were on their way to the U.S.. Wilmer explained that he was not interested in moving on to the U.S. He had decent work in construction and rented a small house in the outskirts of Guadalajara. While eating with him and his cousins in a restaurant in Guadalajara, I asked him about his plans to live in Mexico:

> I do like Mexico now. For the first year, I suffered applying for asylum, and all I wanted to do was reach the border. But now I think Mexico is not that bad of a place. I could see myself living here. I have been to the capital, the beaches. Mexico is a beautiful place. I have had good friends here, and I have visited beautiful places. I am not sure if I will stay here, but for now, Mexico is my home.

Wilmer exemplifies how the length of the journeys can shape Central American youths' migrations. His long wait for legal status resulted in making his journeys longer, and indirectly led to him learning about Mexico and viewing it as a potential permanent home. More migrants are now looking to Mexico as a final destination, or at least a place to stay for extended periods due to the incredible difficulty of reaching the border (Haas Paciuc and Sánchez-Montijano 2020;

Vázquez Ruiz 2015). These future Central American communities in Mexico are an ample field for future study.

Conclusion

While the dream of most migrant youth I met was to reach the U.S. as soon as possible, they all learned early in their journeys that unpredictable circumstances could cause their journeys to last months, even years. Their journeys ran long due to injuries, economic need, strategic stops, and endless waiting for their asylum or refugee cases to be resolved. This chapter explores how youth live these extended periods, how they conceptualize the time spent on their journeys, and the effect of these periods on their journeys overall.

Some of the effects of extended stays are hardships: youth run out of money; they are unable to support their family members who depend on them; the time strains their mental health and their relationships with their loved ones; and they are exposed to additional risk and violence along the migrant route, especially when they must take multiple trips due to deportations. However, these extended stays in Mexico can also create certain opportunities and novel experiences. Youth meet new friends, gain helpful knowledge that they can use to travel more safely, and they can even gain profitable skills and find new homes. These challenge characterizations of migrant journeys that depict Central American migrants as stranded in Mexico, or that fail to attribute any agency to youth migrants. In fact, this chapter helps explain how migrants both lose and gain capital that they use to further negotiate their journeys.

As I write, migrant journeys continue to grow in length. The U.S. continues rigid immigration enforcement along its southern border; Mexico continues to aggressively detain and deport migrants; the situations of violence in both Mexico and Central America persist; and the numbers of youth migrants from Central America are rebounding after dropping during the initial

phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this environment, it is imperative that we further explore the effect of elongated migrant journeys on both migrants, at a micro level, and migration patterns, and a macro level.

Further analysis of the role of burgeoning Central American communities across Mexico will also be crucial in understanding future Central American migration patterns to both Mexico and the U.S. Because youth require specific services, like schools, healthcare, professional training, and recreation, understanding how they are both affected by and affect Mexican society will be key for policy makers and social workers. Moreover, as demonstrated by this chapter, not all youth who aim to migrate to the U.S. end up there. But they do not all completely abandon the dream, either. Long-term studies of their ultimate trajectories will help us understand how migration patterns from Central America develop over time.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

"There are Thousands More Behind Me": The Increasingly Violent and Precarious Migrant Journey, and How Knowledge, Time, and Space Contribute to Our Understanding of It

As an ethnographer, it is difficult to close the study of an event that is ongoing. But when I asked the youth I met whether they thought Central American youth migration through Mexico would slow, the emphatic answer was no. Almost all of the youth felt that neither violence nor poverty in Central America had any end. As one youth put it as he walked toward the train: "There are thousands behind me who will come." Mexico's role in this migration process has been cemented over the last decade. To keep its neighbor to the north happy, it must attempt to deter migration at almost any human cost. This dissertation falls at the intersection of these two contradictory positions and attempts to explain how the most vulnerable Central American youth navigate this seemingly impossible situation.

I conducted my fieldwork in the shadow of the Donald Trump campaign and presidency. Trump called the migration of Central Americans an "invasion" (Zimmer 2019), and, specifically referring to the additional protections UACs are afforded in the U.S., said, "They look so innocent. They're not innocent" (Kim 2018). Trump-era policies reflected these same attitudes. In 2017, the administration put in place family separation policies, where families who crossed the border together were separated. Adults were detained separately from children and criminally prosecuted for reentry, and children were then typically processed as UACs and placed in the infamous "cages" that appeared in the media. Previously, family units apprehended together were permitted to remain in detention together.

The Trump administration also devised and carried out Migrant Protection Protocols ("MPP"), which send non-Mexicans who enter the U.S. through the U.S.-Mexico border without

authorization back to Mexico “while their U.S. removal proceedings are pending” (DHS 2022a). In practice, this means that Central Americans who cross the U.S.-Mexico border and ask for asylum are sent to Mexico to live in squalid conditions along the border while they wait months for their asylum applications in the U.S.to be processed (Abi-Habib 2021). Though the MPP did not apply to UACs, it did apply to apprehended family units (DHS 2022b). Trump’s comments and policies were followed closely by the Central American youth migrants I met.

In December 2018, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador took office in Mexico. After his campaign based on anti-corruption and populism—promising a government that would "represent all Mexicans, rich and poor” (Noack 2018)—migrant advocates and scholars also hoped for changes in Mexico’ migration policy and a reversal of the South Border Plan. However, Lopez Obrador has taken no action on the Southern Border Program and has permitted the MPP to continue. In fact, in conjunction with the Trump administration, Lopez Obrador launched an initiative called “Quédate en México” (“Stay in Mexico”), which promised to offer asylum applicants waiting in Mexico jobs like highway construction, and certain education and training (Nájar 2018). Advocates and scholars had similar hopes for the Biden administration, and in January 2021, Biden ended the MPP. However, the suspension lasted less than a year. The MPP was reinstated in December 2021, and the Quédate en Mexico program was expanded (Los Angeles Times 2022).

Mexico’s Southern border has also increasingly become a bottleneck for migrants since I left the field. As highlighted in this dissertation, Tapachula and Tenosique were already areas of Mexico filled with checkpoints and intense immigration surveillance. Since then, the situation there has only intensified. In 2021, Mexico received 123,187 applications for asylum or refugee status, a 300 percent increase from 2019. The majority of these people are waiting near Mexico’s

Southern Border for their applications to be processed. These areas are overwhelmed with migrants—they fill parks, plazas, and areas around Mexican immigration offices while they wait for a resolution of their cases so that they can move toward the U.S. more safely (Salinas Maldonado 2021).

Migrants from other countries have also increasingly begun to flow through Mexico. Between 2016 and 2019, I interviewed just one Senegalese and two Nicaraguan migrants, and this was consistent with the broader sample of migrants I observed. While there were some migrants from other countries, the vast majority were Honduran, Guatemalan and Salvadoran. However, according to the shelter employees with whom I maintain contact, migrants from Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, and Venezuela are increasingly common. With this increase in migrants, Mexican society has become increasingly hostile to their presence. Migrants waiting in Mexico are accused of being thieves, health hazards, invaders, and cultural outsiders. There are protests to the government to stop the flux and eradicate their presence (Camhaji 2018; Krauze 2021).

In 2020, both Mexico and the U.S. saw a drop in migrant arrivals that aligned with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been the only event that has been linked to a massive decrease in arrivals of youth migrants and Central American migrants since year one of the Southern Border Plan (See Figure 22). This drastic drop in numbers in

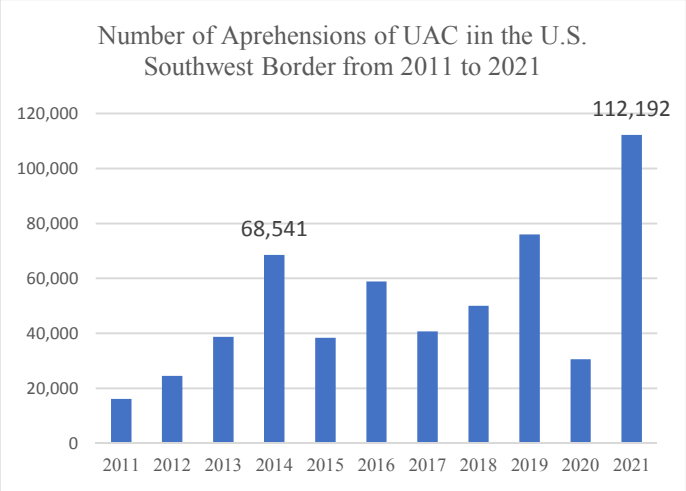

Figure 22. Apprehensions of Unaccompanied Minors in the U.S. from 2011 to 2021 (CRS 2021)

combination with the risks of the pandemic meant that migrant shelters had to close their doors, offering just meals and blankets to migrants. It is not clear why, exactly, arrivals decreased during the pandemic, and this is an area for further research.

However, by 2021, arrivals at the U.S.-Mexico border had rebounded to the highest levels ever (CRS 2020). Migrant caravans are still happening; in 2021 another caravan even bigger than 2018 caravan departed from Honduras and was labeled as "the mother of all caravans" (García 2019). Similar to the 2018 caravan, the group disintegrated as it moved North, but it successfully helped thousands of migrants cross the Guatemala-Mexico border. Today, according to both shelter workers and migrant-oriented Facebook and WhatsApp groups that I follow, smaller (but still sizeable) caravans are continually departing from Central America and southern Mexico. The frequency is such that they are no longer covered by mainstream media. Central American migrants are still looking for and utilizing protection in numbers.

With all the events above described, the 2014 child migrant “crisis” seems long forgotten, just the tip of an iceberg. By 2019, the number of UACs apprehended in the U.S. surpassed the numbers of 2014 by almost 7,500, and during the first 10 months of 2021. As the initial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic faded, the U.S. stopped 112,192 UACs, sixty percent more than in 2014 (CRS 2020). But neither media nor politicians have raised the issue to a national level. Instead, the “cumulative causation” process is established, where the social and economic forces driven by migrants produce and attract more migration (Haas, Castles, and Miller J. 2014, 69). In other words, the process has become self-perpetuating.

However, what *is* a crisis—and without end in sight—is the incredible suffering and violence that Central American migrants must endure in order to reach the U.S.-Mexico border (Massey 2020). Exemplified by the Biden administration’s reinstatement of the MPP, we can

expect the U.S. to continue to use Mexico as an externalized border. With more pressure, enforcement, and migrant demand, an increase in smugglers' prices is inevitable. This will make smugglers' services prohibitive for more migrants, which will likely increase the number of migrants moving in the precarious manner described in this dissertation. This dissertation can serve as template for studying this type of migration, as well as a guideline for anyone interested in understanding how other groups of vulnerable migrants experience the migrant journey.

The framework of knowledge, space, and time provide a comprehensive micro-level picture of youths' negotiation of violence in international migration and how they experience border externalization. Violence imposed by externalization of the U.S. border is inescapable and marks the entire migration experience of these vulnerable migrants. At the same time, these youth are not passive subjects of violence. Undeterred, they dream of escaping the violence of their home communities, living a better life, providing for their families back home, and reunifying with their families in the U.S. The process they use to attempt to achieve those dreams is negotiation. They actively utilize the information they can access—often in the form of rumors—to navigate space and time in Mexico, in an attempt to avoid as much violence as they can on their way to achieve their migration goals.

These findings beg future research in several areas. The precarity of information shaped youth migrants' journeys, and the sharing of informal knowledge was key to their movement. If the conditions of the migrant journey persist or worsen, we should continue to see this type of information being key to understanding broader migrant flows through Mexico. Researchers should seek to understand how information spreads among migrants, how migrants determine when to deep information credible, and what role information plays in determining when and how migrants move. This research should also be connected to the broader discourse on rumor, fake

news and precarity of information. While rumors are often viewed as problematic sources of misinformation, this dissertation presents a counternarrative.

This dissertation also shows how migrants move through and utilize new and different spaces in an effort to avoid violence. Future work should expand the study of migrant journeys to more cities and towns outside the typical migrant routes to understand how those spaces form part of the migrant journey. Instead of conceptualizing migrant journeys as happening upon fixed routes, Mexico itself should be treated as a transit space. Similarly, migrants are increasingly remaining in Mexico for extended periods. Some are grouped around the southern and northern borders, awaiting legal processes in Mexico or the U.S., or waiting for family members to send money to facilitate safer journeys and crossings. Other migrants have settled in the interior of Mexico, and Central American communities are cropping up in cities across Mexico. These extended stays result in migrants' interactions with spaces in Mexico on deeper level. This is especially true for youth, who are entering a phase in their lives where they are looking for jobs, finding partners, gaining independence, and starting families. Thus, many questions remain about what will come of these youth who are spending extended time in Mexico? Will the asylum process in Mexico continue to be used mainly as a means of safe passage? Will more youth stay in Mexico, either temporarily or permanently, especially given their weak migrant networks in the U.S.? The youth I met from 2016 to 2019 may be the future of a major diaspora, and the roots of what I conceptualize as tri-national migrant networks.

Finally, we cannot forget that these youth are fleeing the conditions they face in their home communities. Those communities are losing thousands of young people, but many of these young people are leaving behind younger siblings or other family members. Future studies should ask what happens next in these communities? Will they benefit from the migration flows? Will

governments eventually control the violence and economic conditions that are currently spawning migration? Similar studies have been conducted on classical migration flows like Mexican migration to the U.S., and this new context can adds to that literature.

Finally, this dissertation has important policy implications. My finding that youth migration is shaped by policy could not be clearer—youth were motivated to migrate by youth-friendly migration policies, and simultaneously negatively affected by policies that seek to discourage migration. This creates many policy questions, perhaps the most important being how to end the humanitarian crisis that current policies have provoked.

While this dissertation focuses on youth who had survived the journey at the time I met them, thousands of youth never make it to the U.S.; some stay in Mexico, some give up and return to their home countries, and many others die in complete anonymity. It is impossible to calculate how many youth fall into each bucket. But it is possible to say that this palpable threat of death does not deter migrants from attempting the journey.

Ultimately, I hope that this dissertation captures how the experience of violence in the migration journey is more complex than just suffering. Despite the cruel and inhumane conditions I observed during my field work, I have attempted to show that violence does not have a stranglehold on youth. Much of their effort in the migrant journey is devoted to avoiding any violence, but they also meet people, learn new skills, gain experience, advocate for themselves, and even find love along the migrant journey. The violence towards them cannot be understood without explaining how they respond to it. This is precisely the role of the concept of negotiation of violence—explaining the process through which they move. This concept can be used to study other settings, too. Many studies of violence against vulnerable groups, like minors in war, homelessness, and subjects of natural disasters, are often reduced to suffering and resilience. But

understanding the process behind resilience is key. Even in situations of extreme precarity and violence, people find space for negotiation and survival, and as scholars, recognizing these instances is to recognize the strength of humanity.

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APPENDIX

Figure 23 Map of Cities and Towns Referenced in Dissertation

Southwest Border Unaccompanied Children Encounters by Country

Numbers below reflect Fiscal Years 2015 - YTD2021.

Unaccompanied Children Encounters by Country							
Country	**FY15**	**FY16**	**FY17**	**FY18**	**FY19**	**FY20**	**FY21 TD MAR**
El Salvador	9,389	17,512	9,143	4,949	12,021	2,189	3,755
Guatemala	13,589	18,913	14,827	22,327	30,329	8,390	18,372
Honduras	5,409	10,468	7,784	10,913	20,398	4,454	11,949
Mexico	11,012	11,926	8,877	10,136	10,487	14,359	11,785

[1] Beginning in March FY20, USBP Encounters statistics include both Title 8 Apprehensions and Title 42 Expulsions. To learn more, visit: Title-8-and-Title-42-Statistics

Figure 24. Unaccompanied alien children detained by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) from 2014 to through March 2021, broken down by nationality. https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions.

Figure 25. The map some youths used to mark the different places crossed during their journeys.

%Distribution of Gender (N:86)		
Gender	**#**	**%**
Men	67	78%
Women	12	14%
Gender non-conforming	7	8%
Total	*86*	*100%*

Figure 26. % Distribution of Gender (N:86).

%Distribution of Nationality		
Nationality	**#**	**%**
Honduras	49	57%
Guatemala	24	28%
El Salvador	9	10.5%
Other	4	4.5%
Total	*86*	*100%*

Figure 27. % Distribution of Nationality.

%Distribution of Age		
Age	**#**	**%**
10-14	5	6%
15-17	51	60%
21-18	29	33%
Total	*86*	*100%*

Figure 28. % Distribution of Age.

%Distribution of Year When Interview was conducted		
Year	**#**	**%**
2016	29	33.7%
2018	16	45.3%
2019	39	18.6%
2020	2	2.3%
Total	*86*	*100%*

Figure 29. Distribution of Year When Interview was Conducted.

Region of Mexico	Cities/Towns Where I Have Conducted Research	Characteristics of the Region	Time Spent in the Field
Southern (includes Guatemala)	• Tapachula, Chiapas • Palenque, Chiapas • Tenosique, Tabasco • Ixtepec, Oaxaca • Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas • Tecun Uman, Guatemala • El Petén, Guatemala • Agua Caliente, Guatemala • Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz	Near Central America and the beginning of the migrant's journey through Mexico. Lower economic development relative to the rest of the country, coupled with intensive immigration enforcement. Central American gang presence. Extreme humidity, and heat and long rainy season.	2 months and 2 weeks
Central	• Mexico City • Guadalajara, Jalisco • Lecherías, Estado de Mexico • Queretaro City, Queretaro • Bojay, Hidalgo	Concentration of institutional services. Highly urbanized, with some economic opportunities or migrants. Cold weather and considerable altitude.	2 months and 1 weeks
Northern	• Saltillo, Coahuila • Monterrey, Nuevo Leon • Tijuana, Baja California • Nogales, Sonora • Altar Sonora	Industrial. The most economically developed region of Mexico. Near the U.S. border, but Mexican criminal groups have a strong presence. Desert landscape	2 months and 1 week

	• Piedras Negras, Coahuila • Acuña, Coahuila	with lack of water and extreme changes in temperature.	

Figure 30. The regions of Mexico, the cities or towns in each region where I have conducted research, and the distinguishing characteristics of each region.

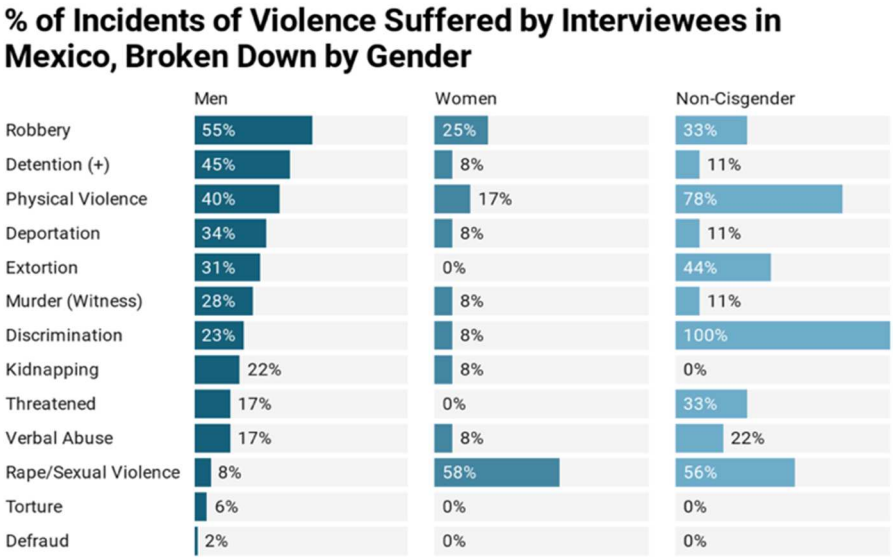

Figure 31. Visual Chart of the percentage of youth that suffered violence, by gender, in my Sample (n=86).

Figure 32. Robbery Incidents Among Sample.

Figure 33. Distribution of Interviews by Region of Mexico.

Figure 34. Youth Interview Script

I'm going to ask you some questions because I want to understand the way you and other children cross Guatemala and Mexico on your way to the United States. I also want to understand the risks you face and how other people, like this organization, can help you.

I want to make sure you know that your name will not be noted here, and you won't be able to be identified based on this audio recording or my notes. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or want to stop the interview, please let me know. Also, if you don't want to answer any question, we can skip that question.

Child's Background

1. How old are you?
2. What country and province are you from?
3. Are you from a rural or an urban area?
4. Where are your parents?
5. Who was taking care of you back home?
6. What grade of school are you in, or how far did you get in school?
7. Were you working in your home country? Doing what?

Child's Country Context

1. When did you leave your home country?
2. Why are you leaving for the United States right now?
3. Did you travel by yourself of with other people?
4. Do you know other children who have left for the United States?
5. Do your parents/family know that you left your country?

The Journey

1. Could you explain your trip?
2. Could you explain to me the route you took? Why did you go this way and not another way?
3. Who did you travel with?
4. How did you know where to go?
5. How long did it take you to get here? How many days?
6. Who is paying for your trip?
7. What are you most afraid of in Guatemala/Mexico?
8. Have you been detained and/or deported from Mexico or the United States?
9. Is this your first time trying to get to the United States?
10. How do you take care of yourself when you are traveling?
11. How did you arrive to this organization?
12. Have you stopped at other organizations prior to this one?
13. Do you plan on stopping at other organizations in the future?
14. What's was the worst part of your trip?
15. Where are you going when you leave here?
16. If you are unable to make it to the United States this time, will you try again?

The Border

1. What do you know about the border? How do you imagine it?
2. What will happen before you cross?
3. What will happen once you cross?
4. Has anyone you've known already crossed? Did they describe it to you?

United States

1. What part of the United States are you going to?
2. What will you do when you get there? Work, study, etc.
3. Who will you go to live with?
4. Do you think you will stay there forever, or do you plan to go back to your home country?

Distribution of Violent Incidents (%) Among Central American Youth by Region of Mexico			
Values	Southern	Central	Northern
Defraud	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Deportation	47.8%	26.1%	26.1%
Detention (+)	55.3%	17.0%	27.7%
Extortion	92.9%	3.6%	3.6%
Kidnapping	25.0%	16.7%	58.3%
Murder (Witness)	30.0%	10.0%	60.0%
Persecution	65.9%	24.4%	9.8%
Physical Violence	46.3%	26.8%	26.8%
Rape/Sexual Violence	81.8%	4.5%	13.6%
Robbery	68.7%	19.4%	11.9%
Threaten	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%
Torture	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Discrimination	65.7%	25.7%	8.6%
Verbal Abuse	38.5%	38.5%	23.1%
N: 78	113	35	33
*Number of Youth:78 Total Number of Incidents registered: 181			

Figure 35. Chart with the percentage of incidents of violence by Region of Mexico.