

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

“Somos Locos Respetuosos”: A Bidirectional Ethnographic Project of Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio*, A Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors in Tijuana (2018-19)

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0zm3486h>

Author

Cruz, Lorena Lissette

Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

“Somos Locos Respetuosos”: A Bidirectional Ethnographic Project of Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio*, A Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors in Tijuana (2018-19)

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Lorena Lissette Cruz

Professor Abigail Andrews, Co-chair
Professor Y en L  Espiritu, Co-chair
Professor Elana Zilberg

2024

Copyright

Lorena Cruz, 2024

All rights reserved.

The Thesis of Lorena Cruz is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2024

Dedication

To the youth who comprise this project, thank you for trusting me with your stories. To all those brave enough to migrate, you are worthy and entitled to the protection of your human rights. To all diasporic communities, we must unify under our segmented histories. As survivors within the diaspora, we have a responsibility to draw out a collective consciousness from our communities and in turn, sustainably empower ourselves and our (his)stories. As a member of the Salvadoran diaspora, I affirm the healing power of redemptive research for my people. El Salvador's transformation is in the hands of an intersubjective reconciliation of a forgotten, multi-generational story of migration.

Table of Contents

Thesis Approval Page	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
Acknowledgments.....	ix
Abstract of the Thesis	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.2 La Junta.....	1
1.3 Context and Background.....	3
1.4 Intervention	6
1.5 Positionality and Methods.....	8
Main Findings	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
2.2 Background on the Rise of Migrant Caravans	13
2.3 Shelter Networks in Mexico	29
2.4 Unaccompanied Minors: Identity & Legality	38
2.5 Caravans as “Border Spectacle” and Evidenced “Crises”	47
2.6 Exploring Childhood and Healing	55
2.7 Spatial and Social Dynamics of Youth Migration	59
2.8 Framing My Ethnography in Latin American Studies.....	64
Interdisciplinary Approach	64
Autoethnography as a Qualitative Research Method.....	68
Relational Positionality	70
Chapter 3: Methodology and Positionality	75
3.2 Balancing Objectivity and Subjectivity in Methods	76
3.3 Data Collection	80
3.4 “La Junta”, The First Meeting at Casa Asilio	82
3.5 Presentation of Results and Data Analysis	87
Map of the Findings	89

3.6 Key Actors and Descriptions	92
Chapter 4: Findings.....	106
4.2 The Cultures of Casa Asilio	106
Guardianship	107
Tragedy and Transformation.....	110
“Locos Respetuosos”	113
4.3 Surrogate Families at Casa Asilio.....	119
Migra the Shelter Kitten.....	120
Support and Safety	122
Parallel Well-being	135
Kindness in Transit	146
4.4 Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio.....	154
Healing Centered Art	160
Last Day at the Shelter	163
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Work.....	164
5.2 Key Findings and Implications	165
5.3 Final Thoughts and Future Work	169
References.....	172

List of Figures

Figure 1 Mural at Casa Asilio includes Migra, the shelter’s pet cat.	79
Figure 2 Youth Tag the Cabinet in the Boys' Dormitory	84
Figure 3 Plaque at the entrance of Casa Asilio.	107
Figure 4 Altar for two migrant youths who were murdered while living at Casa Asilio.....	112
Figure 5 Picture of Migra, the cat adopted by Casa Asilio.	121

List of Tables

Table 1 Chart of key Actors	93
Table 2 Excerpt of Freestyle	115
Table 3 Excerpt of Freestyle	116
Table 4 Excerpt from Interview	123
Table 5 Excerpt from Interview	128
Table 6 Excerpt from Interview	130
Table 7 Excerpt from Interview	131
Table 8 Excerpt from Interview	133
Table 9 Excerpt from Interview	137
Table 10 Excerpt from Interview	139
Table 11 Excerpt from Interview	141
Table 12 Excerpt from Interview	145
Table 13 Excerpt from Interview	147
Table 14 Excerpt from Interview	150
Table 15 Excerpt from Interview	152
Table 16 Excerpt from Interview	155
Table 17 Excerpt from Interview	155
Table 18 Excerpt from Interview	156
Table 19 Excerpt from Interview	156
Table 20 Excerpt from Interview	157
Table 21 Excerpt from Interview	158
Table 22 Excerpt from Interview	158
Table 23 Excerpt from Interview	158
Table 24 Images from Group Therapy Activity with Descriptions and Translations	160

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge that all aspects of this project developed on the land on which I received my education and training, University of California San Diego. UCSD is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation. I thank and pay respect to the indigenous people of the Kumeyaay Nation—past, present, and future—as well as their continuing relationship with their ancestral lands.

Abstract of the Thesis

“Somos Locos Respetosos”: A Bidirectional Ethnographic Project of Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio*, A Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors in Tijuana (2018-19)

By

Lorena Lissette Cruz

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Abigail Andrews, Co-chair

Professor Yen Espiritu, Co-chair

“Somos Locos Respetosos”: A Bidirectional Ethnographic Project of Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio, A Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors in Tijuana (2018-19)* provides a space within Latin American studies to orally illuminate the experiences of unaccompanied minors in transit amid globalized ways of life and massive displacement. I theorize the process by which youth develop kin-ship ties, and by extension—their identities, to humanize themselves within the greater mechanism of the Caravan movement. I reconfigure the massiveness directed at the Caravan movement (and those who comprise it) by the Western media. In this work, I collect stories of survival from unaccompanied minors who travel from Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico,

and Guatemala to the Tijuana-San Diego border as well as the staff at Casa Asilio¹. I freeze-frame the Caravan's unaccompanied youth under the scope of Global political-economic forces that create social conditions in which violence, namely familial disintegration, is rendered natural. Upon their arrival at Casa Asilio, a shelter for unaccompanied minors in transit, I observe the construction of surrogate families, or kinship ties. Through the testimonies of the teens' experiences, I empower their memories of each other as they actively create meaning within undesired circumstances. To safeguard their stories, all identifiable information (such as names of those involved in this study and the geographic setting of the interviews) has been given a pseudonym.

Keywords: Unaccompanied minors, Transit, Central American Caravan, Globalization, Kinship, Violence, Migration, Displacement,

¹ To ensure the safety and privacy of the youth, the name of the shelter and of the interviewees have been changed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The [youth] of this shelter, whose names I have already begun to memorize, are part of a more unique series of events here, in Tijuana. Through an informal collection of demographics, by means of the shelter coordinator, Don Pepe, and the kids themselves, it has been revealed that they are from the migrant Caravan that departed from Central America. This is a unique case because they are asylum seekers hoping to be reunified with family on the ‘other side’ traveling side-by-side from Central America.²

1.2 La Junta

La junta, the meeting, held on my first day of fieldwork at Casa Asilio, was the moment I met individuals who taught me so much about migration, myself, and the Central American Caravan. We met at the site of a long-term shelter for unaccompanied minors in the border city of Tijuana in Baja California, Mexico. In this space, as a field research assistant for the Mexican Migration Fieldwork Research Project (MMFRP), I met youth from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. At the *junta*, I introduced myself as a first-generation Salvadoran American graduate student at UCSD. I told my family’s story as it relates to migration and connected with young people about their journeys and overall survival. We exchanged culture and meaning through our shared meals and related activities. Together, we understood each other and made space for friendship within the space of safety and refuge at the shelter. In our first meeting, they shared their names, proudly told me their countries of origin, and recounted their favorite experiences from their migration journeys. One 17-year-old enthusiastically described his memorable experience riding *La Bestia*, which translates to the beast in English. The beast is the freight train that represents both the dangers and the desperation inherent in the journey of many migrants through Mexico. While it offers a potentially faster and more affordable route to the U.S., it also poses significant risks to the safety and well-being of those who undertake the journey. I

² Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Revisiting Casa Asilio. July 19, 2019.

stood in awe as this 17-year-old told me that he rode the train as far up as it went before he found the Caravan. He ended his presentation by laughing with the boys around him as they agreed and affirmed this memorable experience. Others shared similar stories about compelling moments in their journeys that had brought them to the safety of the shelter in Tijuana. As they recounted experiences that sent shivers down my spine, I understood these children as resilient survivors. I made a conscious effort to mirror their emotions, sharing in their laughter and understanding their struggles. Despite my feelings about the hardships they endured, I recognized that migrants, particularly children, have limited choices. Their hopes for a better life in the U.S. often outweigh the risks they face, an experience that echoes the story of my parents and our family decades ago.

This project aims to give voice to silenced narratives and challenge dominant discourses surrounding children in migration to influence policy. I do this by drawing from feminist epistemologies and autoethnographic approaches in my research methodology. At the *junta*, I told the youth at the shelter that my father also immigrated, at 15 years-old (as an unaccompanied minor) to the Tijuana-San Diego border from his village Chancabrito (found in the San Jorge El Tigre Canton, in the mountains of La Reina, Chalatenango, El Salvador). Separately, my mother crossed the Rio Grande into Texas when she was 19 years-old with her two younger brothers at her hip. My mother's goal was to be reunited with her mother, who was undocumented and working in the U.S. at the time. Despite the differences in their migration experiences, both my parents sought to flee the violence from the Salvadoran Civil War that plagued their lives during in the late 1970s until the Peace Accord of 1991. I used my story to exemplify the generational continuity of our collective experiences with migration. The goal was to emphasize that although the push factors differ, people are always migrating, and migration is, therefore, a fundamental human right that deserves to be protected. Don Pepe, the shelter coordinator, used my story to

advise the youth on the endless possibilities available to them in their futures if they chose to be inspired. As the youth looked up at us, Don Pepe told them that they must learn to be empowered by their own stories of survival. Through my example, Don Pepe informed them that they must also practice articulating their personal histories once a day because it is important both practically and personally. He reminded them that they would be continuously asked about their stories by psychologists, social workers, and lawyers. He reminded them that if they hoped to progress through the U.S. judicial system and gain political asylum, storytelling was an important skill to practice.

1.3 Context and Background

The Central American Migrant Caravan does not solely signify the identities of the people within the Caravan but rather alludes to the route that spans throughout Central and South America. Although many participants were from Central American countries, it was largely comprised of international populations. In fact, smaller Caravans were sought by international migrants in various countries; these small groups went on to join larger groups in bigger cities. Once they found each other, each Caravan joined up to move throughout the continent with more ease and protection. I explain that this mode of transit is neither glorious nor negative for many migrants, specifically, women and children. Traveling with a large group of people is the direct result of increased migration controls in the region. As U.S. immigration policy seeks to externalize the Southwest American border through Mexico's immigration policy, travelers are forced to follow perilous routes to avoid detainment and repatriation. These are routes where they experience police abuse, gang violence, and other environmental hazards. Therefore, the Caravan movement arose to counter these direct risks. Migrants began to organize themselves into larger groups and connected with transnational organizations that supported them with advocacy, legal assistance,

emotional support, and other essential services like healthcare. These efforts of solidarity helped improve migrants' access to basic human rights such as political asylum and education. The Caravan phenomenon has come to define accompaniment in various forms that go beyond providing material assistance.

The act of a mass movement such as the Caravan one involves building relationships based on trust, respect, and solidarity. By walking alongside migrants and advocating for their rights, accompaniment also seeks to address the systemic injustices and make visible the structural barriers that migrants encounter, while also affirming their dignity and agency. This context frames the inherent socio-cultural complexities of unaccompanied minors who often find themselves navigating unfamiliar laws and cultures without the resources to fully understand them. Migration is not merely a response to individual circumstances but also a deeply ingrained cultural tradition shaped by historical and contemporary factors. Within this paradigm, the communal aspect of migration becomes apparent, as young migrants forge bonds and alliances with peers and supportive adults to circumnavigate the challenges they encounter. These positive multi-generational relationships serve as a lifeline and provide youth with crucial support. Through accompaniment from the Caravan and the support of Casa Asilio, the youth are able to see themselves as humans rather than criminals.

The 2018-19 Central American Migrant Caravan was sensationalized as an "invasion" to scare American voters, especially in October and November of the 2018 U.S. Midterm Elections. This rhetoric revealed the complexities of contemporary migration dynamics as misunderstood and fearsome. Although the media narratives focused on horror stories of environmental destruction and violence, the Caravan movement worked to shed light on the humanitarian needs of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable people. Therefore, this project rejects the notion

of an immigration “crisis” at the U.S.-Mexico border; the word crisis oversimplifies the needs of migrants. The stories shared in this paper demonstrate migration as a highly dynamic process deeply intertwined with global systems of power and inequality. I employ an interdisciplinary exploration of Latin American studies to uncover the historical complexities and socioeconomic systems that are fundamental to studying human migration in the region. I challenge conventional discourse by examining the intersections of theory and history to emphasize migrants’ agency and the importance of local contexts in shaping migration patterns. Central to this intersection is the impact of globalization on migration dynamics; while the free movement of goods, capital, and ideas has multiplied, borders remain largely closed to people, particularly those from poorer nations³. Ultimately, my analysis calls for a nuanced understanding of migration that prioritizes human dignity and challenges the prevailing discourse surrounding border security and immigration policies.

In my exploration of the human experiences of migrants, particularly young people fleeing violence, I challenge the problem-oriented approach often seen in studies of immigration and refugees. This focus is crucial given the prevailing discourse in the U.S., where immigrants are often portrayed through a lens of assumed criminality. A stark example of this dehumanization is evident in the derogatory language used by U.S. Border Patrol agents, as revealed in Roque Planas' 2024 article where he writes, “U.S. Border Patrol agents freely used the derogatory slur ‘tonk’ to describe unauthorized migrants...at times while joking about killing or beating them, according to emails and text messages disclosed...under the Freedom of Information Act”⁴. The casual use of

³ Fitzpatrick, Peter, and Patricia Tuitt. *Critical Beings: Law, Nation, and the Global Subject*. Ashgate Publishing, 2004.

⁴ Planas, Roque. “Border Patrol Agents Joked About Killing Migrant Children, Records Show.” *HuffPost*, April 30, 2024. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/border-patrol-agents-joked-about-killing-migrant-children-records-show_n_662bfa3fe4b0ab66ede493de.

derogatory slurs and even discussions about violence against migrants demonstrate a broader narrative that fails to recognize their humanity. This example highlights the power of rhetoric and the profound impact of language on shaping perceptions and attitudes toward migrants and how they see themselves. By framing immigrants as a problem to be solved, this rhetoric perpetuates anti-immigrant racism and contributes to the dehumanization of migrant communities. Instead, I advocate for a shift in perspective that acknowledges the complexity of migration and recognizes the humanity and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their legal status or national origin. This requires moving beyond territorial conceptions of rights and embracing a more inclusive understanding of belonging and justice that transcends borders.

1.4 Intervention

At Casa Asilio, I observe the construction of surrogate families and queer kinship both directly through my active participation in their daily routines and indirectly through observation. Queer kinship draws from the LGBTQ+ community's concepts of family and expands them to examine familial and relational structures within the context of racial and ethnic identities. While it is rooted in LGBTQ+ experiences, queer kinship explores how individuals within racial or ethnic minority groups adapt and create familial and support networks unique to their communities. This includes examining the formation of chosen families, navigating cultural and familial expectations, and developing alternative forms of support and belonging. I see the significance of these relationships through our semi-structured interviews, where I inquire about the youth's experiences leaving home and their encounter(s) with the Caravan. From their responses, I theorize the youth migration process as an age-fluid agency, wherein youth creatively problem-solve to survive, toggling between roles as youth and adult agents as needed. This agency is facilitated by their survival skills, particularly the formation of surrogate families—a term I use to describe the

relationships they form within the context of migration which serve to humanize their migration experience. These ties help them reclaim aspects of their abandoned childhoods. This project aims to spotlight the experiences of unaccompanied minors during the 2018-19 migrant Caravan, illuminating the complex relationships forged by survivors of displacement amid global socio-political-economic forces. This larger schema creates the social conditions in which violence, namely familial disintegration, is rendered natural.

My research challenges conventional economic paradigms by highlighting the multifaceted factors that contribute to successful migration and integration. While traditional economic models often focus solely on individual decision-making and economic incentives, I emphasize the crucial role of rich social networks, and broader structural factors in shaping migration outcomes. By recognizing the significance of social connections, positive support systems, and community networks, we can better understand how migrants navigate the challenges of forced displacement and settlement. Moreover, I argue that migration cannot be understood in isolation from its broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Migration is shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical dynamics, and systemic inequalities that influence both the motivations for migration and the experiences of migrants in destination countries. By situating migration within its larger socio-political and cultural frameworks, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved. Therefore, my research seeks to expand the discourse on migration beyond purely economic considerations, to encompass the intricate interplay of social, cultural, and political factors. By adopting a holistic approach, we can develop more effective policies and interventions that address the diverse needs of migrants and foster inclusive and equitable societies.

I intentionally designed my interviews with the youth as a safe space wherein a conversation could take various forms and directions. The space was conducive to open dialogue and allowed for diverse conversations and expressions. Through reflexive ethnography, I facilitated the sharing of their challenging experiences and indirectly empowered the youth to articulate their stories authentically. The resulting findings contribute to migration studies by offering oral narratives that illuminate the individual experiences of unaccompanied minors in transit, as well as the diverse push factors motivating their migration. While legal definitions frame the identity of the unaccompanied minor, scholarly discussions often overlook their diversity. By examining institutional approaches to supporting different subgroups of unaccompanied minors, I emphasize the vital role of non-governmental shelters in offering alternatives to detention as they provide crucial support for teens in transit. Ethnographic research conducted at shelters like Casa Asilio enriches our understanding of aid for teen migrants, challenging homogenized views of youth migration. In conclusion, by addressing the overlooked diversity within the group of unaccompanied minors in transit and highlighting the vital intervention of non-governmental shelters, my research bridges a critical gap in migration studies by offering a more nuanced understanding of youth migration experiences.

1.5 Positionality and Methods

As an autoethnographic tool, I introduce all chapters with a relevant epigraph quoted from my field notes to frame my positionality and to share insight. These are the smaller, more coherent selections of writing I scratched on scattered pieces of paper in the field that I hoped to later remember and implement when writing this work. I located moments to connect what I observed and experienced at the shelter with what I already knew about migration because of my family. My parents migrated to escape the violence of the Salvadoran Civil War. I heard and connected

parts of my family's story indirectly through observation. I purposefully hid behind doors or stayed quiet under tables to overhear small mentions of my family's story. It was not until I sat down to collect their narratives as part of this thesis project that I began to connect my research methods and analysis with my identity. This narrative is my step toward my familial recovery, where I break away from the intergenerational traumas of silence that are associated with the violence of forced displacement. In this way, my project is autoethnographic as I render stories about my personal experiences within this specific cultural context sensitively. I situate my research in a hermeneutic (interpretive) epistemology⁵ or way of knowing, consistent with autoethnographic representation's interpretive nature.

This is the framework through which I utilize participatory research methods and data that consists of semi-structured individual conversations, autoethnographic reflective writing, and auto-photography. I collected this data by participating in the daily routines of my setting in order to be subject to the youth's moral regulation⁶. My intention was to develop relations with the people at the shelter and observe all the while. I wrote down observations in regular, systematic ways all the learning that I encountered while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others. I accumulated a written record of my observations and experiences; these are field notes that comprise the core of ethnographic research. In these notes, I locate key sites and scenes to highlight my immersion in this world and what I found meaningful. I interact and process the ways that youth make space for positive relationships because of the healing-centered approach from the shelter. This insight was pulled from my ability to participate and see what it takes to become a member of their world. The reason that my analysis is able to approximate members' experiences

⁵ Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2013. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA87153401>.

⁶ Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

is due to my positionality. My position as a child of immigrants from Central America revealed the terms and basis on which teens at the shelter form social ties in the first place. For this reason, I include my field notes to demonstrate that my presence at this shelter allowed me to (also) develop kinship ties; and that would not have been possible through interview and observation alone. I became perceptive to my presence and how I was seen and treated by others; I heightened my sensitivity to social life as a process and concluded on the general experiences of the people at Casa Asilio.

Aspects of this project are intimately autoethnographic, as I build from my upbringing as a member of the diasporic community of Salvadorans from the Greater Boston Area. I was raised to ask questions and be in dialogue about immigration with my diasporic community and other working-class immigrant communities. This positionality grounded my understanding of migration as a fluid experience that is shaped by race and class. This project is the result of the dialogue within my extended family to ask questions of my parents and others about living in the U.S. as undocumented people. I consistently pull on the parallels from upbringing with the stories that the youth share with me in order to ask the right questions or relate at a deeper level. One example is the discussion I had about buses with a teen from Honduras who worked as a fare collector for a bus company after school because he was good at math. In our conversation, I shared that my grandfather also owned his own fleet of buses for a while before he was extorted by the local gang in his neighborhood, so he eventually lost the buses and his only source of income. We then discussed the difficulties of working in countries that are run by street warfare, to which he told me that his reason for migrating was because his boss' bus company was also extorted, so he was forced to find work elsewhere. This kind of interaction happened often—I asked questions and made comments based on what I knew. Therefore, in this project, I connect my methods with

my findings to form an autoethnographic project; *what* I find out is inherently tied to *how* I find it⁷. My choice to engage in a reflexive ethnography impacts the overall development of this project as I center my positionality throughout this study. In all, the project aims to illuminate the migration experiences of my family and the larger immigrant community in the U.S. by focusing on healing and empowerment rather than the traumas of migration. Through the structure of my interviews, I centered the subjects as active participants in their own narratives by empowering them to reclaim their stories and ultimately find meaning within their experiences, despite the challenges they faced.

Main Findings

My journey throughout this project is represented by a mix of autoethnographic and visual participatory methods based on Community-Engaged Research (CEnR)⁸ methods. This data set is made up of interviews, auto-photography, picture elicitation, and reflective field notes. Amid the CEnR³ approach, I reflect on my own racial and cultural positionality, which includes researching the self and researching the self in relation to others. The research participants include twelve unaccompanied minors in transit at Casa Asilio, their pet, and the shelter staff. This project serves to illuminate how minors in transit provide a counter-narrative to the hegemony and dehumanization of migrants; particularly concerning asylum procedures, detention practices, and the care of unaccompanied minors. I also draw on the youth's experiences with the Central American Migrant Caravan movement to contextualize their survival.

⁷ Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

⁸ Key, Kent, Debra Furr-Holden, Emily Lewis, Rebecca Cunningham, Marc A. Zimmerman, Vicki Johnson-Lawrence, and Steve E Selig. "The Continuum of Community Engagement in Research: A Roadmap for Understanding and Assessing Progress." *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 13, no. 4 (January 1, 2019): 427–34. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2019.0064>.

Thus far, there are two groups to be differentiated within the shelter: the internal migration of Mexican youth and international migration of youth from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The happenstances that appear throughout this project are the beautiful life-giving moments that emerge from migration and serve to humanize the experiences of migration. I demonstrate how individuals sustain themselves despite being within a system that does not regard them as human, especially if captured in the United States. In the following interviews, the youth describe the conditions in which they navigate street warfare and familial disintegration within their countries of origin. The last chapter will further draw out the youths' experience within the Caravan movement. The (in)formal knowledge they gained from undergoing this experience, in turn, reveals the myriad survival skills gathered from transit. This knowledge is then disseminated by youth within the shelter dynamics. The familial dynamics and sentiments curated by the youth at the shelter are drawn out from their interviews, art, and music.

The analysis of this work reveals three major themes: first is the culture of respect at Casa Asilio for its inhabitants and the people who work there; second, the development of surrogate families as a means of survival for unaccompanied minors in transit; and lastly, the ways the youth actively reclaim their humanity and by extension, their childhoods through healing-centered approaches. The findings are comprised of happenstances and interviews that prove the successes of alternative care of unaccompanied minors when aligned with the best interest of the child— as a critique to the widely practiced, prison-like, detainment and apprehension of minors under U.S. jurisdiction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A common answer to today's question, 'What are hopes for when you reach the United States?', is that they all hope to go to school, get a job, and learn English. One of the teens at the shelter mentioned a story of a *gringa* (a white American girl)

who came to teach them a couple of words in English once, but then she never came back. I was surprised that he still remembered her. But this comment had me thinking, I never want to be that ‘gringa’. This has almost become our group motto at this point. For this reason, I started to think about creating a donation box where we can collect bilingual books to give to the shelter. At least this way the kids don’t have to rely on people who come in and out of their lives to learn something— I think they live with enough instability. I’m excited about this aspect of the project. This makes me feel like I have more control over breaking that cycle of researchers who take as they can without giving back.⁹

2.2 Background on the Rise of Migrant Caravans

The migrant Caravan is a collective movement that has gained mainstream attention throughout the 2000s and especially in the 2010s. This form of migration arose in direct response to the migration controls imposed by both the U.S. and Mexican governments, specifically, the externalization of the U.S. Southern border. These policies were created to impede the efforts of migrants “through tactics of forced mobility, militarization, and heightened exposure to risk”¹⁰ as stated by Dr. Heather M. Wurtz. Wurtz continues that these tactics went on to create increased checkpoints throughout Mexico (but especially in Southern Mexico) resulting in a “funnel” of migrants into more risky routes where they face police abuse, detainment, gang violence, environmental hazards, and organized crime like kidnapping, extortion, and robbery. Thus, migrants draw on numbers to circumvent newly imposed migrant controls. These collectives were further organized by non-governmental transnational organizations and eventually came to form what is now known as a “Caravan” movement. Through grassroots support, migrants’ mobility was improved, as well as their access to basic human rights like water and shelter. This solidarity, combined with the focus of the international press, helped migrants equipped to access resources

⁹ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note on First Day at Casa Asilio. January 21, 2019.

¹⁰ Wurtz, Heather. “A Movement in Motion: Collective Mobility and Embodied Practice in the Central American Migrant Caravan.” *Mobilities* 15, no. 6 (September 11, 2020): 930–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2020.1806511>.

whilst in transit (such as political asylum)¹¹. This section will focus on public policies that have externalized the U.S. Southwest border by historicizing former executive administration's (beginning with former President Clinton) approaches to migration management. I then discuss the evolution of Caravans as a grassroots movement for survival into an international act of solidarity. I highlight that this act was possible because of many factors like the transnational support in developing the movement based on the Catholic tradition of *Viacrucis*, general civil society activism against policies like "Migrant Protection Protocols", and the increased presence of unaccompanied minors in migration. This comprehensive examination provides a deeper understanding of how these factors have shaped the migrant Caravan phenomenon during my time at Casa Asilio.

Seeking protection at the U.S. border is not illegal, as written in international law, specifically, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which defines the term refugee¹². These policies also establish the principle of "non-refoulement" which prohibits the return of individuals to countries where they face serious threats to their life or freedom¹³. Despite this, regional migration reports demonstrate that U.S. border officials have increasingly violated this principle and individuals' right to seek asylum in the U.S. For example, many unaccompanied children and families present themselves at authorized Ports of Entry to express their fears of harm if returned to their home country. And still, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials engage in problematic practices toward these asylum seekers. These practices include but are not

¹¹ Wurtz, Heather. "A Movement in Motion: Collective Mobility and Embodied Practice in the Central American Migrant Caravan." *Mobilities* 15, no. 6 (September 11, 2020): 930–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2020.1806511>.

¹² UNHCR. "The 1951 Refugee Convention and Key International Conventions - UNHCR Israel," n.d.
<https://www.unhcr.org/il/en/1951-refugee-convention-and-international-conventions#:~:text=The%201951%20Refugee%20Convention%20and%20its%201967%20Protocol%20are%20the%20legal%20obligations%20to%20protect%20them>.

¹³ UNHCR. "Global Appeal 2017 Update," 2017.
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2017/pdf/GA_2017%20Update%20Eng_Book_low-res.pdf.

limited to, ignoring their expressions of fear, intimidating them to abandon their claims, coercing them into signing removal orders without explanation, and even providing inaccurate information about their rights and legal options¹⁴. These acts violate international law and push desperate individuals to find alternative, often perilous, and unauthorized ways to cross into the U.S. There is also no evidence that the threat and use of detention deters migrants from seeking protection. Those who are caught and placed under U.S. custody, transported to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Processing Centers, where conditions are often harsh, particularly for children. Unaccompanied children from non-contiguous countries like Haiti or Venezuela are sent to Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shelters, while those from contiguous countries like Mexico or El Salvador undergo assessment by CBP to determine their potential eligibility for asylum or victimhood of trafficking¹⁵. At first, underage people are housed with adults but later separated from caregivers into short-term holding cells citing the measure of “last resort”¹⁶ (creating de-facto detention disguised as protection). While separated, federal agents conduct interviews where asylum seekers recount their stories on record to determine their admissibility and legal status¹⁷. However, through this process, minors often feel isolated and traumatized from their experiences and are consequently afraid to disclose personal information as they are unable to trust those in uniform¹⁸. Due to this, discrepancies in narratives are common for children who develop Post-

¹⁴ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.01.009>.

¹⁵ Linton, Julie M., Marsha Griffin, and Alan Shapiro. “Detention of Immigrant Children.” *Pediatrics* 139, no. 5 (May 1, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0483>.

¹⁶ Women’s Refugee Commission. “Annual Report 2017,” 2018. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Annual-Report-FY-2017-web.pdf>.

¹⁷ Herlihy, Jane. “Discrepancies in Autobiographical Memories— Implications for the Assessment of Asylum Seekers: Repeated Interviews Study.” *BMJ. British Medical Journal* 324, no. 7333 (February 9, 2002): 324–27. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.324.7333.324>.

¹⁸ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.01.009>.

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Persistent Traumatic Stress Environment (PTSE) while in detention¹⁹. These circumstances are not adequately considered by the system and ultimately impact migrants' legal outcomes. Given the trauma experienced by most unaccompanied children, there are concerns about their ability to provide consistent narratives and effectively respond to questions during these assessments²⁰.

In the realm of the international regulation of child welfare, exists a purported commitment to safeguarding the rights of unaccompanied minors in transit. This policy prioritizes action in the best interests of the child, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and lists detainment as a measure of last resort. This means that every credible alternative to detention has been addressed in the minor's situation wherein the child's best interest was the primary guiding principle for the State's handling²¹. However, the actualization of these principles often falls short due to ill-defined authority from State officials. Criticism brought to light by international groups demonstrate the deficiencies in appropriate facilities and care for unaccompanied children that results in their repatriation to unsafe conditions at home. Non-governmental shelters in Mexico work within this void and play a pivotal role in extending vital aid and protection to migrant youth. They fill some gaps left by governmental initiatives on various fronts by offering a spectrum of support, ranging from humanitarian assistance to legal advocacy. In doing so, they challenge ineffective government policies while also assuming responsibilities typically associated with the State. This research endeavors to investigate the dynamics within

¹⁹ UNICEF. "Alternatives to Immigration Detention of Children." *UNICEF WORKING PAPER*, 2019. [https://www.unicef.org/media/58351/file/Alternatives%20to%20Immigration%20Detention%20of%20Children%20\(ENG\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/58351/file/Alternatives%20to%20Immigration%20Detention%20of%20Children%20(ENG).pdf).

²⁰ Doering-White, John. "The Shifting Boundaries of 'Best Interest': Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico." *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.01.009>.

²¹ Bochenek, Michael Garcia. "Closed Doors." Human Rights Watch, March 28, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/31/closed-doors/mexicos-failure-protect-central-american-refugee-and-migrant>.

these shelters and the unwavering dedication of staff towards supporting migrants despite its risks. These relationships are built on mutual respect and trust that is actively fostered between them.

In the last few decades, U.S. border security has employed a wide array of strategies to manage illicit border crossings in the Southwest region. The Migration Policy Institute's (MPI) 2024 report, "Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border A Challenge Decades in the Making" by Bersin et al., differentiates two "eras" of strategy; the first one ranges from 1980 to 2010 where border security focused on managing the migration of Mexican migrants seeking employment opportunities in the U.S. The second begins in the mid-2010s as the demographics of migrants in transit shifted to Central American families, women, and unaccompanied minors. The MPI report claims this to be the moment of "crisis" where the federal U.S. government struggled to adjust operations to address the challenges posed by new patterns of migration²². While migration studies literature often frames immigration as a "problem to be solved," this chapter section focuses on the evolving public policies aimed at externalizing the U.S. Southwest border by shedding light on the strategies employed by the federal government to manage the perceived crisis. Similarly, this overview does not diminish the importance of discussing policies related to security issues such as drug trafficking, economic policies, or counterterrorism. Instead, it reflects the prevailing public discourse of border security since the 1990s as it focuses on it as an issue of "law-and-order"²³. This work frames federal government response to migration as a response to public perception.

²² Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. "Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making." *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf.

²³ Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. "Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making." *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf

Bersin et al.'s begins their examination with former President Clinton's approach to "migration management". Migration in the 1990s and 2000s saw mostly Mexican nationals, usually adult men who sought seasonal work. This demographic was driven by the demand for inexpensive labor from U.S. employers and lacking authorized temporary worker programs. Within this context, enforcement was seen as relatively straightforward as the Customs and Border Patrol Department (CBP) approach focused on the apprehension of as many undocumented Mexican nationals as possible (who were later repatriated). During the Obama administration, this previous system was complicated by the arrival of asylum seekers in 2014 from contingent countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, who sought humanitarian protections. The demographic shift from adult men to unaccompanied children and single mothers complicated the prevailing system as repatriation was not immediately available. The new group of asylum seekers increased caseloads for the asylum system and exposed fractures within the U.S. political system, as policy was implemented through executive orders and judicial rulings, rather than bipartisan legislation as seen in previous years. This context frames the government's migration management as a direct response to the characteristics of migrants who cross the border at that time.

The U.S. and Mexico collaborated to build approaches that addressed organized crime in the region as a shared, binational issue resulting in policy that externalizes migration beyond the Southwest border. The first shared approach was the signing of the Merida Initiative in 2007 that led to increased law enforcement cooperation between the countries and included the financial backing from the U.S. to support Mexico. Former President Obama emphasized a shared responsibility with "Merida 2.0" as the act reinforced law enforcement regulations and outlined the measures for cooperation between the nations. However, this relationship was challenged with the unprecedented arrival of unaccompanied minors at the U.S-Mexico border in 2014. The minors

sought to be apprehended by border enforcement in order to receive protection from mostly “private violence” such as street gangs or familial abuse²⁴. Bersin et al. state, “DHS and CBP lacked the resources and policies to process, efficiently and effectively, the much more administratively complex claims that asylum seekers presented”²⁵. This is because under U.S. law, unaccompanied minors are to be transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within 72 hours of apprehension. However, due to the breakdown of infrastructure and ill-defined authority, minors were often left in overcrowded CBP adult detention facilities for days, even weeks, alone. In response, the Obama administration sought assistance from Mexico, and as another example of the U.S.’ border externalization, Mexico increased migration enforcement at its southernmost border (with Guatemala) in 2015. Numerically, this approach created less apprehension at the U.S.-Mexico border and helped to alleviate the backlog for the U.S. migration management system until January 2017, when the Trump administration began.

In former President Trump’s first week he committed to his campaign promises and filed an executive order to build a 2,000-mile wall across the entire Southwest border. This decision strained the previously collaborative relationship with Mexico and became a logistical nightmare for the administration. The decision went on to contribute to the loss of the Republican hold in the House of Representatives after the 2018 U.S. Midterm Elections. Despite the reigning xenophobic rhetoric of the executive office at the time, the asylum-seeking approach of migrants continued in

²⁴ Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. “Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making.” *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf

²⁵ Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. “Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making.” *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf

late 2017 and by March 2018, the apprehension of asylum seekers and other migrants was three times higher than it was the year prior. This also demarcated a new change in migration where increased numbers of unaccompanied children and families began to arrive in so-called “Caravans”. This mode of transit intensified the challenges for border officials as public perception shifted to the large arrivals. In response, the Trump administration implemented Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) in January 2019. This policy was comprised of “zero-tolerance” criminal persecution of adults who arrived with the Caravans and the separation of families. This approach in policy did not make exceptions for asylum seekers nor adults who arrived with underage children. Instead, parents were to be separated and criminally processed by the Department of Justice (DOJ) while children were processed through DHHS. The result was adverse harm to migrant families and children as they were forcibly separated. In addition to public outcry against the program, its implementation created problems for the federal agencies in charge of its coordination as they lacked infrastructure and the resources to track separated children which resulted in prolonged familial separation. Overall, the policy failed to deter asylum seekers from Central America and further polarized public policy issues on irregular migration.

In December 2018, Mexico elected President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (commonly referred to as AMLO) who transitioned the country to a more traditional approach in migration management. Unlike his predecessors, his government sought to shift away from law enforcement and militarized approaches in dealing with organized crime. Consequently, in an overtly political maneuver, former President Trump threatened AMLO with steep tariffs to order cooperation in responding to the arriving Central American Caravan movement. AMLO eventually assisted through increased law enforcement and apprehension. It should be noted that the first official border-to-border Caravan began in 2011 and was made up of 200 to 1,500 migrants. Dr. Amelia

Frank-Vitale’s report for the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) submits that this group was believed have been organized by Pueblos Sin Fronteras. This 2018 report contends that the Caravan that emerged in October 2018, and continued throughout 2019, was an “exodus” of upwards of 7,000 people²⁶. This means that Caravans were once a community-based, symbolic form of protest (back in 2011) and evolved to a continuous, international social movement that attracted thousands by the end of 2018. When reflecting on how the Caravan changed in the eight years between 2010 and 2018, Frank-Vitale’s writes, “The Caravan started as an idea about accompaniment: that when allies literally walk alongside migrants, they keep them safe from kidnappers and assailants that would otherwise prey upon them.” To her, the Caravan’s objective intersects with a form of protest because the movement advocates for the Mexican government to uphold the human rights of all migrants passing through its territory. Thus, the arrival of vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, at the Mexico-U.S. border requires a comprehensive, bipartisan and binational approach that prioritizes the care and protection of minors in transit. The infrastructure of migrant management is wholly outdated and ineffective as it was not designed to accommodate to the evolving dynamics of the border’s social landscape²⁷. This also requires the disassociation of criminality in the asylum process as it is a recognized human right. This paradigm shift begins with the humanization of the Caravan’s participants through recognition and mutual, or bilateral exchange.

This section illustrates the essential evolution of the public’s perception on what the “Caravan” truly encompasses and how these groups have come to exist. Over time, the Caravan evolved into a movement centered on empowerment by asserting the right to dignity and respect

²⁶ NACLA. “From Caravan to Exodus, From Migration to Movement,” November 26, 2018. <https://nacla.org/news/2018/11/26/Caravan-exodus-migration-movement>.

²⁷ NACLA. “From Caravan to Exodus, From Migration to Movement,” November 26, 2018. <https://nacla.org/news/2018/11/26/Caravan-exodus-migration-movement>.

despite lacking proper authorization to exist. The collective represents a deliberate challenge to the prevailing regional framework on immigration, largely shaped by the United States, which often views undocumented migration through a lens of security and criminality also referred to as a problem-oriented approach. Abigail Thornton (2019) writes that accounts from journalists and ethnographers embedded within these journeys indicate the notable transformation of the Caravan movement (over the years). According to Thornton, migrants are increasingly organizing themselves into mass mobilizations, resisting a global order that has failed to protect them. Many Caravan participants, some of whom have been part of previous Caravans, seek safety in numbers during the perilous journey north. Their movement emphasizes solidarity and resistance to the constant threat to their lives. As civil disobedience on an international scale grows in response to the injustices faced by undocumented individuals living in precarious conditions, the role of the U.S. in addressing this regional crisis is pivotal²⁸. Drawing on Wendy Vogt's exploration of "Embodied Mobilities" from *Lives in Transit*, "accidents" such as chance dismemberment—amongst other traumas, are an embodiment of the histories that force migration. Vogt states that traumas "[are] the embodiment of structural, political, and symbolic forms of violence...produced by local and global political-economic forces [and] create social conditions in which such violence is rendered natural"²⁹. Vogt highlights that trauma must be understood within a larger framework that encompasses the role of States in familial disintegration and other forms of violence that compel the migration of youth from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. In summary,

²⁸ Thornton, Abigail. "The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The History of Caravans as a Strategic Response." UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019.

<https://usmex.ucsd.edu/files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf>.

²⁹ Vogt, Wendy A. "Embodied Mobilities." In *University of California Press eBooks*, 105–30, 2018.

<https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520298545.003.0005>.

the goal of this work is the articulation of the humanity in the work of protecting people seeking refuge from State-sanctioned violence.

During my time volunteering at migrant shelters amidst the Caravan movement in late 2018, I met unaccompanied minors who were unaware of the political implications of their actions yet, understood that joining the movement offered their best chance of safety. From their stories I gather that despite the risks involved, they embraced unity with their peers, building relationships and ensuring those around them had their basic needs met during the journey. The city of Tijuana struggled to accommodate the arrival of thousands of migrants at one time, specifically, reaching approximately 144,000 people in May 2019³⁰. Through the shared support between local activists, shelter networks, and other NGOs care was integrated across various intervals. For example, these networks provided housing for those who could not find shelter accommodations and were living in tents at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. Here, the collective power the Caravan held throughout its voyage was challenged due to restrictions of age and gender in the surrounding migrant shelters. The separation of individuals apprehended by the Mexican immigration service also created challenges when the movement reached Tijuana. Furthermore, the individual process of seeking asylum paired with separate housing undermined the overall cohesion of the movement as people navigated next steps. I often heard stories at the shelter from minors about separating from older siblings or family members because they did not meet the age or gender criteria of certain shelters once in Tijuana. This separation was further intensified by former President Trump's MPP policy. Thus, indicating a critical juncture wherein, the strength of the sustained mass movement from Honduras to Tijuana faced compromise and separation. Although the cohesion was not sustained,

³⁰ Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. "Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making." *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf

the cultural impact of the Caravan on the youth at Casa Asilio was stark. They taught me about the humanity of the Caravan movement as it challenged the media portrayal of immigrants as an “invasion”. In all, the overview of divisive policies as resulting from public perception and outcry demonstrates the need to know and understand the organizational work of the movement required, especially at its peak.

To further characterize the motivations behind their migration, this section explores the violence that plagues unaccompanied minors in their communities. Those who identify as women, underage minors, Indigenous, Black, and gender queer often bear disproportionate impacts of sexual and gender-based violence across communities in the Northern Triangle. These countries are El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras wherein high rates of femicide, and domestic abuse exist. This example of identity-based violence serves as one of many forms of hostility that influences migratory push factors³¹. Queer individuals specifically, transgender people, face heightened levels of discrimination, exclusion, and even homicide within their native countries and communities. This reality is compounded by crimes committed against children, like kidnapping, which render young people of marginalized identities particularly vulnerable. For this reason, there has been a notable increase in the presence of unaccompanied minors arriving at the U.S. border since 2011 (primarily from the Northern Triangle). Woven in this transnational dynamic, are broader, structural forms of violence that manifest through extreme poverty and further exacerbates their plight at home. Still, the dangers marginalized people face at home are further intensified throughout their journeys to seek asylum in foreign lands³². Together, these

³¹ Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. “Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making.” *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf

³² Amnesty International. “NO SAFE PLACE.” Report. Amnesty International, November 2017. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/sites/en-us/files/legacy-pdf/5a2ee5a14.pdf>.

circumstances directly drive migration for individuals seeking safety. Therefore, understanding accompaniment as an act of solidarity for vulnerable people in transit is central to this project. To adequately adjust public policy so that it addresses irregular migration to the U.S. (or even deter migrant Caravans altogether) the State must consider its historical and contemporary role in the destabilization of the region through Neoliberal imperialism, that has contributed to pervasive forms of violence.

The direct results of U.S. foreign policy, rooted in neoliberal intervention, has resulted in Central America's political instability, economic displacement, environmental degradation, and social inequality across the region. The agency of marginalized young people plays a crucial role in their response to the push factors created by the economic and political ideology that normalizes familial fragmentation in Northern Triangle communities. In the work, *Mobilities*, Dr. Heather M. Wurtz emphasizes the rudimentary and flexible nature of the role of (Caravan) organizers within migration movements and advocates for autonomy and self-organization amongst the Caravan's participants³³. This concept becomes particularly noteworthy in the context of vulnerability and targeted violence because self-organization allows minors to creatively problem solve through shared experiences to advocate for their rights, collectively. This approach resonates with the conceptions of accompaniment, as defined by Spanish Jesuit Priest, Philosopher, and Theologian, Ignacio Martín-Baró in *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*. Accompaniment, rooted in the Latin notion of breaking bread together, underscores the importance of companionship and support in navigating challenging journeys³⁴. Martín-Baró's description of accompaniment emphasizes patronage and solidarity for vulnerable people who navigate perilous journeys beyond borders and

³³ Wurtz, Heather. "A Movement in Motion: Collective Mobility and Embodied Practice in the Central American Migrant Caravan." *Mobilities* 15, no. 6 (September 11, 2020): 930–44.

³⁴ Martín-Baró, Ignacio. *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*. Harvard University Press, 1996.

those who help them³⁵. Within this understanding, the significance of self-organization of this group means that accompaniment transcends a mere physical presence in transit; rather, it embodies a spiritual approach to the commitment to journey alongside one another, often sharing meals and ultimately fostering crucial support.

In continuation, the Caravan movement is rooted in the philosophy of accompaniment and spiritual symbols that function as a beacon of hope for many. In this project, the concept of accompaniment is integrated into the discussion on vulnerability and violence, creating a cohesive narrative that emphasizes the importance of fostering environments of support. For the past fifteen years, Pueblo Sin Fronteras has been organizing and supporting migrants through Caravans across Mexico. Pueblo Sin Fronteras is a non-profit organization comprised of activists and volunteers principally based in Dallas, TX and was originally formed to focus on workplace rights for day laborers. The group moved to advocacy south of the border after the 2010 massacre of 72 Central American migrants in northern Mexico at the hands of a criminal organization³⁶. In 2011, they drew inspiration from the Catholic tradition of *Viacrucis*, Latin for “Walk of the Cross”, that is observed during Holy Week. The Stations of the Cross is a procession that typically follows a series of stations that represent key moments from Jesus' journey to his final crucifixion. The organization collaborated with other migrant advocates like Solalinde in annual *Viacrucis* during Lent to symbolically draw attention to the challenges, of racial discrimination and social exclusion, suffered by Central American migrants. In 2017, the group planned a Caravan's departure to coincide with the religious event once again that was decisively named *Viacrucis Migrante*.

³⁵ Daria, James. “The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The Northern Triangle of Central America: Violence, Displacement, and Refuge.” UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019. <https://usmex.ucsd.edu/files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf>.

³⁶ Linticum, Kate. “Pueblo Sin Fronteras Uses Caravans to Shine Light on the Plight of Migrants — but Has That Backfired? - Los Angeles Times.” *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-Caravan-leaders-20181206-story.html>.

Together, migrants and their advocates gathered to personify accompaniment in action as they journeyed from the Guatemala-Mexico border and concluded in Mexico City³⁷. Their cause aimed to highlight the grave dangers migrants encountered while journeying North and suggested a collective approach for safety and increased protection from the risks of traveling.

During the initial years, Caravans operated with minimal visibility outside of human rights networks, likely due to their confinement within Mexico and distant conclusion from U.S. entry points. However, this changed in late Spring of 2017 when Pueblo Sin Fronteras escorted a group of 200 asylum seekers to Tijuana, thus marking a pivotal moment of change. This Caravan concluded with 78 migrants presenting themselves for asylum at the San Ysidro Port of Entry at the San Diego-Tijuana border. This event garnered widespread attention through a livestream on Facebook that rapidly went viral. The day was deemed a success by organizers and participants as all 78 individuals were accepted by U.S. immigration officials, marking a subtle yet significant shift in strategy³⁸. In April 2018, another Caravan organized by Pueblo Sin Fronteras arrived in Tijuana, this time with around 400 (mostly Central American) asylum seekers from an initial group of *Caravaneros* in Mexico City. It was also the first instance where these accompaniment Caravans gained international recognition which was largely due to former President Trump's series of negative social media posts. In the lead up to the U.S. Midterm Elections of 2018, immigration officials at the San Ysidro Port of Entry seized the opportunity to deny asylum to the first 50 individuals who arrived with the April group. More reports later emerged that asylum seekers were

³⁷ Thornton, Abigail. "The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The History of Caravans as a Strategic Response." UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019.

<https://usmex.ucsd.edu/files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf>.

³⁸ Thornton, Abigail. "The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The History of Caravans as a Strategic Response." UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019.

<https://usmex.ucsd.edu/files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf>.

unlawfully turned away, signaling a growing trend of official resistance against arrivals³⁹. The increasing international attention proved the import of the Caravan movement within the ongoing discourse on migration, political asylum, and human rights.

In summary, this section illustrates the externalization of the U.S. Southwest border through public policies and law enforcement measures that were implemented through binational collaboration with Mexico. Through a historical overview of U.S. border policies from the past few decades, it highlights agreements and key policies such as the Merida Initiative. The outlined policies exhibit the U.S. government's approach to migration management as a direct response to the public's perception of border politics (an issue of law and order). Through the implementation of a security-based framework, the government increased law enforcement at the border through policies like Merida 2.0. Mexican enforcement of U.S. immigration policies through militarization, increased checkpoints, and deportation practices within the country has been crucial in this strategy. The securitization framework directly impacts migration patterns, forcing people to seek alternative and often dangerous routes. While some may argue that the Caravan phenomenon developed independent of U.S. policies, this section explains that the concept of accompaniment for migrants is rooted in solidarity as a response to defined policy changes. The growing international recognition of Caravans and the responses they have elicited from reactionary government officials, as well as public figures, demonstrates the need for adaptive approach that addresses the evolving needs of new migration demographics. These particularly vulnerable groups deserve direct access to their human right of political asylum.

³⁹ Thornton, Abigail. "The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The History of Caravans as a Strategic Response." UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019. <https://usmex.ucsd.edu/files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf>.

2.3 Shelter Networks in Mexico

The following section will shift to explore migrant shelter networks and contextualize the environment in which this humanitarian sector functions. The shelters, often established without government involvement, serve as critical gateways into Mexican cities and provide essential support to international migrants. Preliminary findings indicate that those working at migrant shelters face significant social risks, as human rights defenders, because the violence is incentivized by border externalization strategies. Although the act of accompaniment itself symbolizes solidarity and protection, the movement becomes hazardous for workers as they expose themselves to various levels of threat and danger. Securitization endangers migrants as well as those dedicated to their protection. To address the broader impacts of violence in migration, urgent action is needed to humanize the process and recognize the individuals involved. Furthermore, powerful geopolitical actors have proven to be disruptive towards transnational advocacy networks—the networks that collaborate to expose federal violations of international obligations that are rooted in the protection of refugees and migrants.

Since 1985, the Scalabrinian Missionaries have been involved in hosting various migrants, deportees, and refugees, with the establishment of the first Casa Migrante in Tijuana, BC and over time, expanded in Nuevo Laredo, Tapachula, Guadalajara, Guatemala, Tecún Umán, and El Salvador. These shelters often offer room and board, spiritual guidance, basic medical care, and advocacy. In December 1999, the Migrant Shelters Network was formally established, marked by the publication of "The Cry of the Undocumented," a document that promoted a collaborative pastoral approach to migration⁴⁰. This paper's research includes insights gathered during my volunteer work at two shelters in Tijuana, Casa del Migrante and Casa Asilio. Although shelter

⁴⁰ Scalabriniani. "Network of Migrant Shelters (Casas Del Migrante) | Scalabriniani." Scalabriniani | Congregazione Dei Missionari Di San Carlo, February 21, 2023. <https://www.scalabriniani.org/en/rete-case-del-migrante/>.

operations often fluctuate (due to funding, demand, violence) they continue to serve as a vital network of shared support and resources for most migrants. According to the 2013, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) report, “Human Rights of Migrants”, Mexico hosts 61 non-governmental migrant shelters operated by the Catholic Church’s Pastoral de la Movilidad Humana. Notably, the Catholic Church institution takes a leading role in accompaniment efforts of migrants mostly due to its transnational nature as it is not tied to any specific nation-state.

The pastoral care efforts of migrants require collaboration with other religious orders, research institutes, NGOs and grassroots organizers. These efforts include initiatives to improve communication across the mobile migrant population. One promising initiative was led by Fr. Juan Luis Carbajal and took place at the Guatemala-Mexico border crossing. His innovative approach utilized technology to track migrants in transit by collecting their demographics and other relevant forms of personal information, as they crossed the border. Their data was then uploaded to a centralized database accessible via app-download by shelter administrators in Mexico. This provided shelters real-time insights on migratory trends, facilitated the allocation of resources along the route, and even supported familial reunification⁴¹. Yet, the invaluable work of those supporting migrants often includes significant social repercussions, rendering them highly vulnerable to violence. Since 2010, the IACHR has advocated for State precautionary measures for workers in five Mexican shelters in declared violent zones (also referred to as, zones of transit) highlighting the urgency to also protect the rights of migrants who pass these areas ⁴². The surge in violence can be attributed to the difficulties in recording violations against those “who work in

⁴¹ Feasley, Ashley, and Todd Scribner. “Accompaniment by the Catholic Church.” *FMR* 56 (October 2017). <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/default/files/FMRdownloads/en/latinamerica-caribbean/feasley-scribner.pdf>.

⁴² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, José De Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Tracy Robinson, Rosa María Ortiz, Felipe González, and Dinah Shelton, Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Álvaro Botero Navarro, and Gloria Gordon. *Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the Context of Human Mobility in Mexico*, 2013. <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/migrants/docs/pdf/report-migrants-mexico-2013.pdf>.

migrant shelter, migrant homes, and migrant human rights centers in Mexico”⁴³. This precarious situation was also supported and revealed in conversations I had with the shelter staff at Casa Asilio. They explained that working at migrant shelters often led to social repercussions in their personal lives such as, relationships.

The IACHR report continues that the precautionary measures to defend human rights defenders “are evidence of just how serious and urgent the need is to protect the human rights of migrants. The violence perpetrated against them threatens to cause irreparable harm to the rights of those who defend migrants in Mexico”⁴⁴. Those working in migration play a vital role in the overall survival of migrants (illuminating a symbiotic relationship between both groups). Therefore, the protection of human rights defenders is crucial because shelter operations depend on the safety of those who run them. Shelters provide essential humanitarian aid, so in their absence, vulnerable situations are created that make migrants more susceptible to exploitation. The IACHR report (2013) specifies that there were 18 reported abuses against human rights defenders between 2004 and 2009, but this number rose to 46 incidents between 2010 and mid-2011 reflecting an increased aggression. The surge in violence was significantly marked by the homicide of Raúl Ángel Mandujano Gutiérrez the Director of Services of the Secretariat for Development of the Southern Border of Chiapas State. On April 2, 2008, Gutiérrez was abducted from his home and later tortured by four armed persons. His case is commonly experienced and demonstrates that absent protections for those in the service of migrants that make them susceptible to targeted abuse

⁴³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, José De Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Tracy Robinson, Rosa María Ortiz, Felipe González, and Dinah Shelton, Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Álvaro Botero Navarro, and Gloria Gordon. *Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the Context of Human Mobility in Mexico*, 2013. <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/migrants/docs/pdf/report-migrants-mexico-2013.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, José De Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Tracy Robinson, Rosa María Ortiz, Felipe González, and Dinah Shelton, Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Álvaro Botero Navarro, and Gloria Gordon. *Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the Context of Human Mobility in Mexico*, 2013. <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/migrants/docs/pdf/report-migrants-mexico-2013.pdf>.

and eventually leads to the closure of shelters. This was the case of Casa Migrante in Palenque, Chiapas, MX. While the shelter was beneficiary to precautionary measures from IACHR, the shelter closed in 2009 due to constant attacks by organized crime and complicit state agents (from all three levels of government). This example demonstrates that although NGOs are advocating for State intervention in the support and protection of human rights workers, the State's involvement often exacerbates the problem or fails to provide sufficient forms of protection. This inadequacy stresses the profound vulnerability inherent in the entire migratory system. The consequences of shelter closures are multifold and strain local communities. Diminished infrastructure for people on the move goes on to intensify the local population's xenophobic attitude towards migrants and creates conflict rooted in racial discrimination. Despite the shelter's critical role, government support remains inadequate and corrupt.

Studies on unaccompanied minors in transit tend to focus on the allocation of humanitarian aid for migrants to maximize their protections in transit. John Doering-White (2018) addresses the discrepancies in protection provided to unaccompanied minors by government agencies and non-governmental organizations alike. He writes that Mexico, “detains an increasing number of unaccompanied minors from Central America” described to be in the “name of protecting young people”⁴⁵ from potential human smuggling. In addition, an MPI report by Rodrigo Dominguez-Villegas (2017) addresses the need to act in best interest of the child principle wherein unaccompanied children are subject to “special protection measures under Mexican law”⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.009>.

⁴⁶ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.009>.

However, Dominguez-Villegas asserts this protection remains inconsistently implemented⁴⁷. The adolescents who are not repatriated once detained in Mexican territory find themselves released into the custody of Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF). Due to this, DIF frequently breaches its capacity for housing so in accordance with Mexican law, DIF is required to transfer underage people to shelters that service their needs. For this reason, unaccompanied minors are connected to non-governmental migrant shelters that utilize its humanitarian network to aid the youth in avoiding detention and repatriation (that they would otherwise face if kept in DIF custody)⁴⁸. Statistics provided by the MPI show that “Less than 1% of the 17,500 unaccompanied children apprehended by Mexican authorities [such as DIF] in 2016 applied for asylum”⁴⁹. During my fieldwork I learned that Casa Asilio saw as many as 256 unaccompanied minors during its peak capacity (with the migrant Caravans) and according to the shelter coordinator, of that group, all 256 minors were granted asylum in the U.S. This showcases the essentiality of such shelters as they circumvent the limited resource allocation and support but still operate to secure the rights of minors. Doering-White discusses the advantages posited by non-governmental shelters he states, “shelters offer an important alternative to detention and a distinct perception of unaccompanied minors in transit”⁵⁰ and my observations concur with this reasoning.

⁴⁷ Dominguez-Villegas, Rodrigo, Rodolfo Córdova Alcaráz, Nelly Montealegre Díaz, Federico Vázquez Calero, Office of the General Directorate for the Protection of Mexicans Abroad, Migration Policy Institute, Central America and Mexico Migration Alliance (CAMMINA). “Strengthening Mexico’s Protection of Central American Unaccompanied Minors in Transit.” Migration Policy Institute, 2017.
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/UACsMexico-FINAL.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.009>.

⁴⁹ Dominguez-Villegas, Rodrigo, Rodolfo Córdova Alcaráz, Nelly Montealegre Díaz, Federico Vázquez Calero, Office of the General Directorate for the Protection of Mexicans Abroad, Migration Policy Institute, Central America and Mexico Migration Alliance (CAMMINA). “Strengthening Mexico’s Protection of Central American Unaccompanied Minors in Transit.” Migration Policy Institute, 2017.
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/UACsMexico-FINAL.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.009>.

Long-term shelters for unaccompanied minors in this geographical region serve as underexamined alternatives to detention. The social dynamics within shelters that support its inhabitants offer a site for insight of migrants' self-determination and survivance. The term survivance, as defined by Gerald Vizenor (1999) combines survival and resistance to further embody the strength, agency, and adaptiveness indigenous communities hold to survive colonialism and its legacies. In this context, survivance refers to unaccompanied minors who navigate the hardships of their day-to-day lives through survivance. It encompasses their ability to not merely survive but to also assert their autonomy and resist the oppressive structures and violence perpetrated by the state⁵¹ Survivance is exhibited through the intimate and everyday interactions within shelters, where migrants actively carve out spaces of support and self-determination. It serves as a form of critique against the violence and injustices imposed by the state, highlighting the inherent strength and resilience of individuals shaping their own futures within the confines of their circumstances. Non-governmental shelters like Casa Asilio, provides long-term shelter for unaccompanied minors who arrive in Tijuana. In January 2019, I began volunteering at Casa Asilio as part of UCSD's Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program (MMFRP)—a community-based research practicum. I observed that the migrants who arrived here were usually between 13 and 17 years-old and typically spend from two days to six months (or more) at the shelter. DIF cannot house the thousands of minors it apprehends so, for the minors transferred to their custody, DIF shelters such as Casa Asilio, take them in. These spaces often bear a resemblance to detention and provide only limited education and psychological

⁵¹ Vizenor, Gerald Robert. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, 1999. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA45555384>.

services⁵². Still, as a community- based alternative, Casa Asilio keeps minors safe from the negative impacts associated with detention such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. They employ a variety of tactics to help young people disconnect from their feelings of being criminals by reminding them that safety is a human right. While previous research has explored aspects of unaccompanied minors' migration experiences, there is a need for further examination of how the rhetoric of protecting unaccompanied minors is translated into practice, especially in the context of transit migration.

This project aims to address the interlinked survival of migrants and those who support them. It does so by advocating for increased support and accountability across institutional and interpersonal levels to address their needs. Despite the dangers they face, actors within transnational advocacy networks are expected to work in the best interest of the migrants they protect⁵³, specifically child migrants which becomes increasingly difficult without proper protection. In addition, human rights concerns are paramount to the study of migration due to the perilous conditions many migrants face. Transnational advocacy networks emerge within this context as international actors united by shared values and discourse put forth by transnational social movement literature. The network includes various entities such as NGOs, religious organizations, and civil society who work to influence policies and behaviors across borders through information exchange, legislative lobbying, and other advocacy efforts⁵⁴. Stoesslé, Díaz, and Martínez (2020) write that traditionally, the San Diego-Tijuana border has historically served

⁵² Dominguez-Villegas, Rodrigo. "Strengthening Mexico's Protection of Central American Unaccompanied." migrationpolicy.org, February 1, 2022. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/strengthening-mexicos-protection-central-american-unaccompanied-minors-transit>.

⁵³ Bochenek, Michael Garcia. "Closed Doors." *Human Rights Watch*, March 28, 2023.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/31/closed-doors/mexicos-failure-protect-central-american-refugee-and-migrant>.

⁵⁴ Stoesslé, Philippe, Valeria Alejandra Patiño Díaz, and Yetzi Rosales Martínez. "Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era." *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (August 14, 2020): 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9080144>.

as a transit point for migrants and is a key site for immigration deterrence programs like Operation Gatekeeper⁵⁵. Despite stricter federal U.S. immigration policies, certain cities across borders such as San Diego (a designated Sanctuary City), and Tijuana, have enacted sanctuary policies to protect migrants. Organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in the U.S. and Espacio Migrante in M.X., work tirelessly to safeguard migrants' rights by providing essential support services. Despite their reach, the organizations continue to encounter challenges from the federal government.

In response to refugee arrivals—particularly from Central America and Haiti, transnational community groups have emerged in San Diego and Tijuana. NGOs in both cities advocate for migrants' rights and request accountability for human rights violations adopting a range of advocacy strategies such as civil and criminal litigation, grassroots organizing, and service provision⁵⁶. Local organizations lack leverage at the federal level, thus relying on informal advocacy networks and local relationships with NGOs to expand protections. The reliance on local connections can create closed structures within communities but also emphasizes the need and value of transnational protest as a tool for amplifying their demands. The effectiveness of transnational mobilization depends on the issue being advocated for, as highlighted by the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium (SDIRC). For example, SDIRC's mission statement claims that they will only collaborate with another coalition on a local issue only if they are willing to

⁵⁵ Stoesslé, Philippe, Valeria Alejandra Patiño Díaz, and Yetzi Rosales Martínez. "Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era." *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (August 14, 2020): 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9080144>.

⁵⁶ Stoesslé, Philippe, Valeria Alejandra Patiño Díaz, and Yetzi Rosales Martínez. "Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era." *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (August 14, 2020): 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9080144>.

publicly expose “the problem”⁵⁷. This illustrates that transnational advocacy networks rely on strategic information dissemination to drive change and continue to evolve.

Moreover, Asylum Access, a practice of legal empowerment for the rights of refugees, demonstrated an adaptive response to the region's evolving needs by opening an office at Casa del Migrante a migrant shelter in Tijuana in 2019. Prior to that, they were expanding their presence from California to Mexico by establishing offices along the country’s Southern and Northern borders. Similarly, the San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRN) adapted its focus from internal immigration enforcement to broader border issues. Collectively, these organizations utilize strategic information dissemination to drive policy change. They highlight the severity of inconsistent immigration procedures on political asylum permissions established by international treaties resulting in increased detention rates and violence. In unison, they depict federal negligence towards humanity as a clear breach of international obligations exposing the absence of governmental and political support⁵⁸. It is crucial to address the systemic challenges in protecting the rights and well-being of migrants and those who advocate for them. In all, a comprehensive understanding of shelters and their many functions ensures the continuation of their transnational advocacy legacies.

In summary, this section’s insightful exploration into the operational context of Casa Asilio and other migrant shelters. Amidst the evolving landscape of immigration policies, the shelter network is collaborative and supportive. The NGOs highlighted above show a commitment to humanitarian aid as an adaptable approach that responds to gaps left by federal governments. Their

⁵⁷ Stoesslé, Philippe, Valeria Alejandra Patiño Díaz, and Yetzi Rosales Martínez. “Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers’ Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era.” *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (August 14, 2020): 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9080144>.

⁵⁸ Stoesslé, Philippe, Valeria Alejandra Patiño Díaz, and Yetzi Rosales Martínez. “Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers’ Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era.” *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (August 14, 2020): 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9080144>.

role emphasizes the need to safeguard individuals working in this sector as they uphold human rights and foster safety. Furthermore, the Catholic Church's Pastoral de La Movilidad and its alliances with local, regional, and international supporters, make up the migrant shelter networks throughout Central America and Mexico. This demonstrates their leading role in the advocacy of migration as human right. Despite the significance of their work, the people operating the networks face continuous threats to their lives and livelihoods. This is mainly due to State-sanctioned violence and societal attitudes against human rights defenders, particularly within migrant shelters. This overview centers the symbiotic relationship between migrants and those advocating for their protection. In order to protect local communities in zones of transit, there is an important need to address these challenges. Still, binational NGOs emerge as transnational support networks advocating for federal intervention. Through information politics, these organizations strive to leverage the protection of migrants and workers by promoting accountability at the Federal level. The following section explores a novel demographic in modern migration: unaccompanied minors seeking asylum at the U.S. border to better understanding the myriad experiences they encounter.

2.4 Unaccompanied Minors: Identity & Legality

My discussion of unaccompanied minors and transnational families centers the need to decriminalize migration altogether. Legality is socially and politically produced through ontological understandings of the border—and subject to change over time. Nevertheless, the label of illegal yields material consequence in the lives of migrants. Ideas of legality are consistently reinforced in public policy, such as the migrant visa process, making it difficult for a migrant to obtain a visa when engaged in unauthorized migration. In further examination of the securitization policies that followed 9/11, immigrants (specifically, non-white immigrants) became synonymous with criminals. To shift this outlook, one must understand unaccompanied minors' intersectional

experiences to fully recognize that their motives for migrating are almost always, to avoid engaging in criminality at home. That is, they are escaping induction into criminal networks. My work argues that the humanization of minors in transit is essential to counteract the damaging, long-term effects of children's self-perceived, and societally reinforced, identification as criminals. In this way, they can survive their adversities and heal in a way that centers love and develops positive self-esteem to live fully realized lives in society. This approach fosters bilateral dialogue and incorporates primary source storytelling with individuals living through these experiences. By doing so, we uncover the broader potential of non-governmental institutions as pivotal sites for humanitarian intervention and emphasize their need for material support to effectively fulfill their mission. This literature review challenges the traditional homogenization of unaccompanied migrants by investigating the role of familial disintegration in their lives and stresses the need for innovative methodologies to better understanding this group.

The gaps, present in both academia and international bodies, provide opportunities to scrutinize how governmental and non-governmental institutions globally approach various subgroups of unaccompanied minors in transit. International research on migration has predominantly focused on specific aspects of youth migration experiences, such as the reasons behind their migration to further delineate the "forced migrant" and "refugee,"⁵⁹. Yarris and Castañeda employ an ethnographic interrogation to respond to "Fassin's (2005) call for migration scholars to 'unveil the ethic of contemporary states' in regards to the political calculations of... the different moral evaluation of migrants' lives"⁶⁰. Their work uses Sarah Willen's article,

⁵⁹ Yarris, Kristin Elizabeth, and Heide Castañeda. "Special Issue Discourses of Displacement and Deservingness: Interrogating Distinctions Between 'Economic' and 'Forced' Migration." *International Migration* 53, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12170>.

⁶⁰ Yarris, Kristin Elizabeth, and Heide Castañeda. "Special Issue Discourses of Displacement and Deservingness: Interrogating Distinctions Between 'Economic' and 'Forced' Migration." *International Migration* 53, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12170>.

"Vernacular Frames and Local Moral Economies: Debating Unauthorized Migration and (Un)deservingness in Israel," to highlight how conventional distinctions between types of migrants hold little relevance in local discussions on migration. Instead, these discussions are shaped by vernacular discursive frames rooted in what Willen characterizes the State's "local moral economy"⁶¹. This awareness enables more nuanced interference in policy debates and fosters a deeper understanding of migration issues on legality. This understanding also facilitates more effective responses that resonate within local and individual contexts. Ultimately, unpacking normalized categorizations in migration bridges the gap between academic discourse and vernacular frames which is essential for promoting inclusive and informed policies that address the diverse realities of migrants and their communities.

Thus far, academic literature and legal instruments establish unaccompanied minors as individuals under the age of 18, who travel without family members or legal guardians. Often, they lack known parent substitutes who would traditionally be responsible for their social and economic well-being⁶². This narrow focus fails to capture the unique challenges and aspirations of these young migrants by overlooking diverse contexts that shape their identities and experiences. However, some scholars endeavor to challenge traditional understandings of unaccompanied minors as a homogeneous group. This is articulated by Chase, et al. in, "Methodological Innovations, Reflections, and Dilemmas: The Hidden Sides of Research with Migrant Young People Classified as Unaccompanied Minors" where they reflect on the challenges faced by

⁶¹ Yarris, Kristin Elizabeth, and Heide Castañeda. "Special Issue Discourses of Displacement and Deservingness: Interrogating Distinctions Between 'Economic' and 'Forced' Migration." *International Migration* 53, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12170>.

⁶² Ricardo Muniz Trejo. "Redefining Best Interests: Understanding the Needs of Unaccompanied Teenage Migrants Through the Lens of Non-governmental Shelters in Northeastern Mexico." UCL Migration Research Unit Working Papers. Vol. No. 2020–2. UCL Migration Research Unit, 2020. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/geography/sites/geography_redesign/files/ricardo_muniz_trejo_ucl_mru_working_paper_no2_2020.pdf.

unaccompanied youth transitioning into adulthood and advocate for innovative methodologies to better understand this group⁶³. The authors emphasize that depicting minors as a monolithic group neglects their social and political differences. Meloni (2020) answers this call by exploring “the evolving migration experiences [of Afghan migrants] in terms of aspirations and responsibilities⁶⁴” to promote Afghan minors’ sense of purpose and responsibility once they arrive in the United Kingdom. This work shows the importance of recognizing youth’s unique sense of agency within a new society with different values and cultures. Similarly, Roth and Hartnett (2018) in, “Creating Reasons to Stay?” examines the push factors that drive Salvadoran youth migration. They conclude that community-based programs are essential in addressing local violence and the poverty Salvadoran youth endure at home⁶⁵. These works are highlighted to articulate the power of incorporating of nuanced perspectives in fully understanding youth in migration. This approach can directly influence the development of effective support systems and policies that addresses their needs and access to political asylum. One of the consequences of restrictive immigration policy in the U.S. is the increased danger of the migration of unaccompanied minors through zones of transit. Here, “zones of transit” is defined as the encounters between migrants and the “material, bureaucratic, and social structures along their journeys”⁶⁶. Zones of transit should also be

⁶³ Chase, Elaine, Laura Otto, Milena Belloni, Annika Lems, and Ulrika Wernesjö. “Methodological Innovations, Reflections and Dilemmas: The Hidden Sides of Research With Migrant Young People Classified as Unaccompanied Minors.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, no. 2 (March 19, 2019): 457–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2019.1584705>.

⁶⁴ Ricardo Muniz Trejo. “Redefining Best Interests: Understanding the Needs of Unaccompanied Teenage Migrants Through the Lens of Non-governmental Shelters in Northeastern Mexico.” UCL Migration Research Unit Working Papers. Vol. No. 2020–2. UCL Migration Research Unit, 2020. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/geography/sites/geography_research/files/ricardo_muniz_trejo_ucl_mru_working_paper_no2_2020.pdf.

⁶⁵ Roth, Benjamin, and Caroline Sten Hartnett. “Creating Reasons to Stay? Unaccompanied Youth Migration, Community-based Programs, and the Power of ‘Push’ Factors in El Salvador.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 48–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.026>.

⁶⁶ Yarris, Kristin Elizabeth, and Heide Castañeda. “Special Issue Discourses of Displacement and Deservingness: Interrogating Distinctions Between ‘Economic’ and ‘Forced’ Migration.” *International Migration* 53, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12170>.

considered as sites to further understand migrant experiences as well as those who assist them along their passage.

Contrary to conventional beliefs, the social construction of legality is intricately intertwined with perceptions of racial identity and cultural norms. In his work, Robert Park, a seminal figure in Sociology during the early 20th century, presented a distinctive perspective on race in the 1950 publication, *Race and Culture*. This work focuses on racial identity over the racist social structures of the U.S. While Park's model highlights race as a social construction, it also adopts a liberal and colorblind perspective by omitting the analysis of power. This approach assumes the inevitability of societal improvement and assimilation while overlooking racial disparities and power dynamics within American society⁶⁷. Transitioning from this early approach to migration, contemporary scholar Hana E. Brown's research in *Social Problems* (2011) sheds light on the impact of legal status on immigrants' relationships with the state and broader social interactions. Brown's study examines how refugees strategically leverage their legal status to assert claims for legal and social citizenship by distancing themselves from native-born Black populations. By citing their legal refugee status as evidence of strong relationships with the U.S. government, refugees navigate the American ethno-racial hierarchy to validate their position through the State⁶⁸. Brown's findings underscore the symbolic and interpretive role of refugee status in negotiating the structural realities of the welfare state and race relations. This micro-level analysis highlights the adaptational advantages for refugees, unaccompanied minors, or other migrants who may utilize legal status to assert their belonging within American society. Additionally, this nuanced understanding identifies potential tensions and disparities within

⁶⁷ Park, Robert Ezra. *Race and Culture*, 1964.

⁶⁸ Brown, Hana E. "Refugees, Rights, and Race: How Legal Status Shapes Liberian Immigrants' Relationship With the State." *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 144–63. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2011.58.1.144>.

migrant communities, highlighting that their intersectional differences are indeed important considerations. Park and Brown's scholarship illuminate the complex intersections of legal status, immigration and racial dynamics, by demonstrating migrants' agency in how they navigate legal frameworks. This also displays their understandings of societal structures especially in the ways that they factor and consider race, nationality, and legal status. This further characterizes unaccompanied migrants as a non-homogeneous group by highlighting the multifaceted function of legality within their lives as migrants in transit. In all, their work offers insights into the challenges and opportunities confronting unaccompanied minors as their legal status determines eligibility for different forms of protection and support.

Migration policies that criminalize unaccompanied migrants are a contentious focal point in discussions of familial disintegration. The conversations result in a complex web of socio-political factors driving migration, as outlined in Leisy Abrego's (2014) book, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. In this work, Abrego looks at the experiences of Salvadoran transnational families within the intersections of gender and legal status through ethnographic research. These intersections stratify transnational families and create differential economic opportunities as well as emotional experiences for families striving to maintain connection across borders. Abrego states that 12% of children in El Salvador live without their parents for an average of nine years and that the separation of family units is directly shaped by U.S. immigration policies⁶⁹. Family separation is a common occurrence in the lives of young people migrating, as evidenced by the minors I conversed with at Casa Asilio. They shared that they were raised by grandparents or other extended family members and migrated because they hoped to reunite with their parents or siblings living in the U.S. Their experiences highlight the

⁶⁹ Abrego, Leisy J. *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Stanford University Press, 2014.

emotional and psychological toll of separation for young migrants. Simultaneously, I discovered that although there are some young people who have supportive families at home, they were still forced into exile because they faced immense danger from street gangs. These are criminal organizations in their communities that seek to exploit youth's agency, bodies and connections by pressuring and threatening them to join their cause. In this way, my work aligns with Abrego's intervention as we intend to humanize the life-altering repercussions of familial separation through political structures and address youth's complex lived realities. In conclusion, unaccompanied minors' pursuit of political asylum needs to be supported through systems that understand this option as an undesirable last resort. Asylum offers them a vital means to ensure the safety of their families and to save their own lives.

U.S. immigration policy further unveils its intricate entanglement with both legality and familial development in relation to unaccompanied minors, an increasing demographic in migration. Legal frameworks indirectly explain the role of structural influences and political convolutions in shaping contemporary migration patterns as well as the obscurities of legal landscapes. For example, Abrego (2014) names U.S. policies that linked immigrants with criminality such as, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, or the post-9/11 securitization of immigration policy. These acts produced stringent challenges on obtaining migrant visas which often compelled unauthorized migration through zones of transit. Plus, unauthorized routes produced intensified disadvantages for migrants in transit, such as increased debt, danger, lack of housing, and limited employment options. Strikingly, the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) created a distinct legal shift for immigrants by offering temporary reprieve while requiring continuous residence in the U.S. (which caused extended family separations). Additionally, this legal designation imposed significant financial

burdens on families abroad. Particularly those from the Northern Triangle, lost access to remittances due to the significant renewal costs and expenses associated with TPS⁷⁰. This predicament added to difficulties for migrant families on both sides of the border. Separated families depend on remittances as a crucial source of income because breadwinners are often migrating to find work and safety to support their families. This also contributes to younger family members taking on adult pressures, such as abandoning their studies to find work. Overall, these factors are considerable for the plight of unaccompanied minors and the context in which the choices of migration are made.

In addition, Abrego (2014) attributes U.S. foreign policy to ongoing cycles of displacement as well as unsupported temporary legal statuses, like TPS. For instance, Abrego cites the Reagan administration's backing of Salvadoran military leaders and death squads, during the Salvadoran Civil War, as a major factor in the mass migration of Salvadorans during that time. Despite this reality, those who fled to the U.S. (directly due to the war's violence) were denied TPS as the government did not classify Salvadorans as refugees. This demonstrates policy-induced challenges for specific legal statuses as designations of "refugee" or "forced migrant" are determined by the State itself. For instance, Reagan's support of the Salvadoran civil army exemplifies the impact of U.S. foreign affairs in perpetuating global destabilization in the name of national interests. In this case, the consequences of the U.S.'s proxy war led to mass displacement of the Salvadoran people. Instead of acknowledging its direct influence, the U.S. obscured its role in the resulting migration and denied emergency entry for Salvadoran people. That is, the U.S. further complicated the processes of those seeking refuge at the Southwest border by enacting policy changes to TPS. Such policy changes create profound consequences for families by forming a spatial limbo. Separated

⁷⁰ Abrego, Leisy J. *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Stanford University Press, 2014.

families thus experience “suspended lives” as they wait to be reunited on either side of the border⁷¹. This understanding of structural forces that separate families further contextualize the experiences of youth migrating to reunite with their families. Though contemporary scholars adopt diverse approaches within migration studies to illustrate the U.S.’ role in forced migration, international and national legal bodies treat unaccompanied minors as a nuisance and fault individual parents or guardians for their sufferings. This structural oversight is significant to contest, especially given the crucial role of policy in shaping regulations for youth and their families. Although statistical data of minors in transit is practical for discussions of migratory trends, this section highlights the importance of understanding unaccompanied minors and the conditions wherein they negotiate their identities and legal statuses. The failure to acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of this demographic makes it difficult to provide concrete guidance on how to best address their needs. The evidence outlined above indicates various needs, including familial reunification, access to education, and avenues for skill development. These resources would assist them in living beyond victims of violence so that they can create better futures for themselves⁷². In all, by identifying the role of the State, whether through immigration policies or continuation of proxy wars, in the destruction of families, it can prevent further harm and ensure justice for affected people.

In conclusion, my research fills a crucial gap in the existing discourse on the identity of unaccompanied minors. I focus on humanizing their experiences and advocate for the U.S.’s recognition of migration as an inherent human right. This is important because youth often express a profound sense of shame that is rooted societal and legal framing of irregular migration as a

⁷¹ Abrego, Leisy J. *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Stanford University Press, 2014.

⁷² Ricardo Muniz Trejo. “Redefining Best Interests: Understanding the Needs of Unaccompanied Teenage Migrants Through the Lens of Non-governmental Shelters in Northeastern Mexico.” UCL Migration Research Unit Working Papers. Vol. No. 2020–2. UCL Migration Research Unit, 2020.
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/geography/sites/geography_research/files/ricardo_muniz_trejo_ucl_mru_working_paper_no2_2020.pdf.

criminal act. Addressing and alleviating their shame (of their experiences and choices) is an important, collaborative endeavor as it is structurally reinforced through legal mechanisms and societal attitudes. Therefore, this work seeks to actively engage and honor their choices as illustrations of their will to survive. Moreover, my study at Casa Asilio provides indispensable autoethnographic data to significantly enrich the current literature on aid for teens in transit. I conceptualize the shelter's organizational structure as one that nurtures bilateral, or mutually produced, kinship ties between adolescents and adults. This place provides the “mobile approach to aiding” that is necessary for such travelers⁷³. Hence, shelter employees like Don Pepe and Doña Tita take on parental roles and responsibilities in their administrative work. Through words of encouragement and actions rooted in youth’s best interest, they exemplify the importance of considering flexible modes of support. Their examples stress the need for alternative approaches to young people in transit that are rooted in compassion for teens’ holistic experiences.

2.5 Caravans as “Border Spectacle” and Evidenced “Crises”

In 2018, grabby headlines of a migrant Caravan “invasion” reported by reactionaries, exposed weak understandings about the complexities of modern migration. Mainstream channels reported sensationalized stories depicting environmental destruction, litter, and kidnappings of the October migrant Caravan. While there were reports of isolated violent acts by individuals traveling with or during the same time as the Caravan, focusing solely on these instances dehumanizes the many individuals who saw the Caravan as their only chance for survival. Coupled with the aesthetics of a violent mass approaching from the South, the Caravan and its participants faced fierce xenophobia from local communities and immigration enforcement. In documents obtained

⁷³ Doering-White, John. “The Shifting Boundaries of ‘Best Interest’: Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.009>.

through the Freedom of Information Act, Roque Planas (2024) writes, “U.S. Border Patrol agents freely used the derogatory slur ‘tonk’ to describe unauthorized migrants on government computers, at times while joking about killing or beating them, according to emails and text messages”⁷⁴. This is an example of the broader pattern of heteronormative policies and attitudes positioned by the State to control immigration and select who may legally enter the U.S. Not only does this attitude dehumanize the Caravan and its participants, it also further undermines their dignity and right to seek safety. In actuality, the Caravan lifted a veil on the long-ignored humanitarian need of those arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. As a form of personal and academic advocacy, this project illustrates the positive contributions of the Caravan in an effort to represent the movement as a collective act of survivance. This migratory phenomenon highlights the need for research beyond studies that depict the mass arrival as “crises” as the characterization of crisis omits systemic contributions to migrants’ emergent needs and perpetuates racially biased perceptions.

This paper goes beyond critique of individual acts of xenophobia and rather illustrates the systemic manifestation of heteronormative and exclusionary immigration policies. Previous sections of this literature review demonstrated that immigration policies are shaped by societal perceptions that influence policymakers to act on behalf of the public’s view. That said, the xenophobic attitudes held about immigration incorporates the belief that, immigration is driven by factors like poverty, unemployment, and overpopulation. This portrayal, reinforced by mainstream media, creates the image of an undesirable migrant who comes to the U.S. because their country lacks something. This framework oversimplifies the complex realities driving migration and justifies exclusionary practices at the border. Therefore, employing Eithne Luibheid's *Entry*

⁷⁴ Planas, Roque. “Border Patrol Agents Joked About Killing Migrant Children, Records Show.” *HuffPost*, April 30, 2024. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/border-patrol-agents-joked-about-killing-migrant-children-records-show_n_662bfa3fe4b0ab66ede493de.

Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border analysis, the border is more than just a site of enforcement but as a space where the nation-state is constructed and defined. Drawing on Foucault's concept of power as productive, the border is a site where the state exercises hegemonic power to regulate sexuality in order to maximize its potential to effectively reproduce its authority⁷⁵. Therefore, the border is not a physical barrier but rather a symbol and ideological construct that is ontologically defined. This definition is based on the ideological construction and enforcement of exclusionary nation-state attitudes on citizenship, belonging, and national identity. Luibheid's work goes on to assert that the regulation of female bodies asserts the State's control over reproduction and families by shaping the demographics of the nation. The border, as a site, defines what is considered acceptable within society to reinforce dominant norms and hierarchies like race and class. Hence, the characterization of a "crisis" regarding mass migration to the U.S. Southwest border constructs a narrative of migrants and refugees that frames them as victims and inhibits their agency.

In January 2019, I was conducting research in Tijuana through MMFRP. I was living and volunteering at the migrant shelter, Casa El Migrante, for the week. I spent mornings volunteering at Casa El Migrante serving breakfast, cleaning, and getting to know the migrants who comprised the men's shelter; in the afternoons, I would volunteer at Casa Asilio. On my second day in the field, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) policy, of the Trump administration, was announced and enacted. Within the remainder of my time in Tijuana, I witnessed the progression of already dire living conditions among migrants at the Port of Entry in San Ysidro, as the Caravan continued to arrive. Due to insufficient infrastructure to accommodate thousands, individuals were compelled to camp, often in makeshift tents, while awaiting asylum court hearings. Systemic limitations

⁷⁵ Luibhéid, Eithne. *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*. U of Minnesota Press, 2002.

which included delayed processing, forced individuals to camp in makeshift tents while awaiting their asylum court hearings. To provide a brief overview of the impacts of MPP, it is important to note that according to Section 235(b)(2)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) any non-Mexican nationals entering the U.S. from Mexico were to be returned to Mexico to await their “removal” proceedings. In late January 2019, Secretary Kirstjen Nielson issued a memorandum detailing the implementation of MPP on a larger scale for the arriving Caravan. This practice would continue until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, when DHS and the U.S. Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) suspended MPP hearings. In January 2021, Acting Secretary David Pekoske suspended new enrollments into MPP. More recently, in February 2021, President Biden's administration initiated a review of MPP through Executive Order 14010, which aimed to assess whether to terminate, or modify the program. On June 1, 2021, Secretary of DHS, Alejandro Mayorkas, issued a memorandum that terminated MPP thus signaling the beginning of its dismantling process. However, this decision faced legal challenges by various States so in August 2021, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas (ruled in *Biden v. Texas*) that the June memorandum did not comply with the Administrative Procedure Act. This choice ordered DHS to enforce and implement MPP on a “good faith” basis with no general oversight⁷⁶. The U.S. Supreme Court went on to uphold this decision later that month in 2021.

Based on my observations during my time volunteering in Tijuana, the implementation of MPP policy resulted in what is characterized as a “crisis” or rather, an emergency. Moreover, the use of the term “crisis” is specifically challenged in, “Introduction: At the Crisis-Migration Crossroads: Scope and Limits” by Luis Alfredo Arriola Vega and Enrique Coraza de los Santos

⁷⁶ U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Alejandro Mayorkas, Department of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen, and David Pekoske. “Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) Timeline.” Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) Timeline, December 20, 2018. <https://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MPP-TimelineFinal.pdf>.

(2022). In this chapter, the authors ponder large-scale contemporary migratory phenomena that portray migrants and refugees, as victims of humanitarian “crises”. They contend that crises emerge from myriad structural and systemic constructs; nevertheless, they assert that these processes do lead to situations wherein “humanitarian emergencies can arise”. This analysis acknowledges migrants’ immediate need for aid while also arguing that the emergencies they find themselves in, are the result of “processes that build up, that develop over time”. For example, Santos & Vega also pinpoint this historic moment (MPP) to describe humanitarian emergencies as direct results of the U.S.’ military and political strategy within the migratory phenomenon. They emphasize that humanitarian emergencies emerged directly from blocking border entry. They write, “Border closures, then, are products of politically manufactured crisis— responses to threats to the national community as perceived by dominant political actors” ⁷⁷. This is especially significant considering the series of angry tweets by former President Trump where he described the late 2018 Caravan as an “invasion” and fueled moral panic about the group. He represented them as a threat to national security and societal interests, thus framing them a “crisis” for Americans.

Santos & Vega’s *Crises and Migration* highlights how borders become stages for enacting state power and shaping public perceptions by historicizing the “border spectacle” of Caravans⁷⁸. The chapter spans across various periods of mass migrations in the region that include Caravans from 2014 and 2018-2019. This overview seeks to examine the classification of migration to the US-Mexico border as a “crisis”. They contrast this sample with the treatment of Cuban mass

⁷⁷ Arriola-Vega, Luis Alfredo, and Enrique Coraza De Los Santos, eds. *Crises and Migration*. Latin American Societies, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07059-4>.

⁷⁸ Bayraktar, Nilgun. “Beyond the Spectacle of ‘Refugee Crisis’: Multi-directional Memories of Migration in Contemporary Essay Film.” *Journal of European Studies/Journal of European Studies* 49, no. 3–4 (October 11, 2019): 354–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244119859155>.

migration to the U.S. and Haitian migration to South America, which have not been designated as “crises”. They highlight how framing migration as a crisis often obscures the role of nation-states in creating the problem, particularly in terms of policies that restrict border entry and complicate the asylum process. This approach, exemplified by the policies of the Trump administration, worsen humanitarian emergencies because they trap migrants in conditions of immobility. Additionally, former President Trump's distortion of *Médicina Sin Fronteras* (MSF) figures on the emergency need at the Southwest border to justify the construction of a border wall (which was one of his campaign promises). To Santos and Vega, this further exemplifies the politicization of crisis narratives to advance particular political agendas.⁷⁹ Therefore, emergency measures designed to address the “crisis” overlooks the root issues that cause population build-up at the border. For instance, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in a 2022 blog, that the intentionally reduced workforces in courts led to prolonged delays that worsened conditions for migrants⁸⁰. Through this frame, the measure is seen as a way to indirectly overwhelm migrants to the point where they opt for repatriation.

The crisis narrative as a political tool is used to undermine the rights of migrants who request political asylum. This perspective echoed in a conversation with Casa Asilio’s shelter coordinator, Don Pepe. In this fieldnote, he tells me that he believes the crisis is man-made. Based on his observations the backlog of asylum cases in 2018-2019 resulted in encampments and overcrowded shelters. In a field note summarizing our conversation, I wrote,

[Don Pepe] tells me that he does not believe in a migration ‘crisis’. That, in his opinion, the U.S. and Mexican governments utilize the word ‘crisis’ as a strategy to anger, irritate, and bore migrants to push them to the point where they voluntarily sign for deportation. I agree with him. He states that this strategy is a direct violation

⁷⁹ Arriola-Vega, Luis Alfredo, and Enrique Coraza De Los Santos, eds. *Crises and Migration*. Latin American Societies, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07059-4>.

⁸⁰ U.S. GAO. “U.S. Immigration Courts See A Significant And Growing Backlog,” December 13, 2022. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/u.s.-immigration-courts-see-significant-and-growing-backlog>.

of migrants' human rights. 'Why? Well, because', he continues, 'human rights state that everyone who is born has rights. This means that they have the right to be protected, and cared for, have health care, shelter, a bed to sleep, to study, or to work. If adults have these protections, children deserve it too. In fact, children deserve even more protection'. He says, 'We'll see when the U.S. government understands that. One day, perhaps.'⁸¹

This insight highlights the manipulation of language and narratives by governments and other institutions to justify harsh policies against migrants. His perspective is rooted in the best interest of the child policy (established by OHCHR) as he features the importance of recognizing migrants' rights, particularly the rights of children. He challenges the narrative of a migration crisis and identifies it as a manufactured construct. His insight suggests a need to counter dehumanizing rhetoric to uphold the dignity and rights of migrants, especially vulnerable groups like children. His words also invite reflection on the ethical implications of using language to shape public perceptions and policies toward migrants. This is especially important in his line of work as a shepherd of movement. Ultimately, to Don Pepe, the intended effect of MPP was to reject the humanity of survived people.

This work rejects the notion that Caravans are homogenous in terms of events, movement, and participants. Instead, it examines the Caravan's demographics through varied sites of interest to emphasize the diversity of the group. It is with this methodology that one can paint a holistic picture of the intersecting needs of people in migration to better support and serve them. Scholar Arriola-Vega shares this sentiment in his chapter, "Migration Crisis and Migrant Caravans (October 2018-January 2019) in Mexico: An Analysis from Contemporary Academic Publications" where he writes that the contemporary Caravan movement evolved as part of a "nuanced situation... [where] one is to factor in that the first Caravans achieved their objective,

⁸¹ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Revisiting Casa Asilio. July 19, 2019.

but the subsequent ones did not”⁸². This is significant because it begins to create specifications for each movement and humanizes its participants. This analysis also repositions the so-called crisis as a system breakdown linked to the U.S. export of neoliberalism. Vega's analysis reframes the perceived crisis as a breakdown of systems, which is intricately linked to the global impact of neoliberalism and violence from the neoliberal State. Therefore, within the study of migration, it is essential to not overlook tangible, explicit factors that contribute to a state of crisis. One must also recognize narrative elements that are often manipulated to fabricate migrant crises. Both tangible and narrative aspects should be considered, thus employing multiple analytical approaches that may diverge in this area of interest⁸³.

In conclusion, the border serves as a manufactured construct that is shaped by the interests of the nation-state. By reframing the production of illegality, one sees that the legal statuses of immigrants and their deportability are historically contingent, socially constructed, and a politically orchestrated phenomenon. Additionally, migrant Caravans challenge prevailing notions of "crisis" as politically motivated constructs rather than intrinsic truths. This discussion sheds light on the human toll of racist and xenophobic public policies like MPP, which often precipitate humanitarian emergencies acknowledged by those immersed in this field. The repercussions of such policies on individuals' lives are profound, as they challenge the means of survival for migrants while also fueling a pervasive "moral panic" within nation-states. Shelters function as bastions of advocacy and play a crucial role in navigating turbulent waters for vulnerable people migrating. This project seeks to highlight the societal benefits of their services, thereby easing the

⁸² Vega, Luis Alfredo Arriola. “‘Migration Crisis’ and Migrant Caravans (October 2018–January 2019) in Mexico: An Analysis From Contemporary Academic Publications.” In *Latin American Societies*, 43–61, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07059-4_3.

⁸³ Arriola-Vega, Luis Alfredo, and Enrique Coraza De Los Santos, eds. *Crises and Migration*. *Latin American Societies*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07059-4>.

burdens on workers and enabling them focus on the people under their care. As Gloria Anzaldúa aptly articulates, the border stands as an "open wound," against which one inevitably finds themselves scraping, risking the re-opening of its painful realities⁸⁴. Anzaldúa's poetry tells of the enduring trauma and systemic violence faced by those who occupy the borderland, in this case migrants. Ultimately, the border is not just a physical divide but a site of continuous struggle and suffering.

2.6 Exploring Childhood and Healing

To provide insight into the ongoing immigration at the American-Southwest border, it is essential to understand childhood as a disrupted life experience produced by migration and family separation. This section frames the historical evolution of the Western notions of childhood and the psychological dynamics of relationship building processes for adolescents. Childhood within the traditional perspective is framed as biologically and socially defined. Childhood notions are also influenced by the rapid industrialization of modern times. Subsequently, I draw upon the psychological theory of Socioemotional Development in Childhood (SDC) which states the "socially productive" nature of the relationships that children and adolescents create with adults is, "bidirectional, where both parties actively define a shared culture"⁸⁵. Furthermore, to contextualize the impact of group therapy sessions, observed at Casa Asilo, I employ Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) to support self-esteem production for young people and adults both individually and relationally. This approach, demonstrated by the shelter's social psychologists during their art therapy sessions with the youth, facilitates the development of close, family-like bonds. The Healing Centered Engagement approach, pioneered by Dr. Shawn Ginwright,

⁸⁴ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, 1987.

⁸⁵ Stone, Lynda, Charles Underwood, and Jacqueline S. Hotchkiss. "The Relational Habitus: Intersubjective Processes in Learning Settings." *Human Development* 55, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 65–91. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000337150>.

operationalizes through its five CARMA principles: Culture, Agency, Relationships, Meaning, and Aspiration. By unpacking these principles, it becomes clear that a bidirectional relationship between adults and adolescents fosters active agency on the part of the child, allowing them to organize themselves within the shelter according to their own needs and preferences. Thus, a mutually constructed culture of protection emerges at Casa Asilio as minors learn more about each other. As young people learn to develop reclaimed language to affirm and humanize their conditions, they offer perspectives that reframe trauma and redefine their experiences. As a researcher, this approach allows me to capture their lives more holistically and focus on their resilience rather than the effects of trauma as inherently pathological to migration⁸⁶.

To begin, Philippe Ariès' work, *Centuries of Childhood*, provides a historical perspective on the concept of childhood and emphasizes its relativity. Building on Ariès' work, I argue that youth, particularly those navigating migration, transcend conventional notions of childhood and operate as age-fluid agents. These young people are forced into adult-like roles and decision-making. Through their agency, they challenge traditional perceptions of childhood. I experienced this in my interviews when I asked the youth about their age—they asserted that they were not children. Ariès' work roots contemporary understandings of childhood as encompassed by biological aspects as well as social functions. This view emphasizes the significant role that social structures, norms, and institutions play in shaping one's understanding of childhood and life in general. Ariès' delineation of *un jeune entans* (a young child) starts at age fourteen⁸⁷; this idea resonates with the younger demographics I found at Casa Asilio. Their presence highlights the

⁸⁶Rogers, Kathe. "The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma-Informed Care to Healing-Centered Engagement." Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange - Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, October 19, 2022. <https://youthrex.com/blog/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement/>.

⁸⁷ Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood*, 1996.

pressures faced by this age group, as adolescents are forced to assume adult responsibilities, and ways of being, in their respective households. This study observes how youth exert their agency during their journey and upon reaching the shelter.

Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) is a strength-based approach to holistic healing beyond trauma-informed understandings, founded by Dr. Shawn Ginwright. He states, that although trauma-informed care acknowledges the impact of harm on the development and well-being of young people, it may also inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based perspective that emphasizes pathology. Trauma-informed techniques seek to reduce negative emotions and behaviors of young people; however, it primarily focuses on the reduction of pathology. Ginwright (2020) argues that the technique seeks to merely diminish negative emotions without addressing the underlying experiences of trauma such as, anxiety, anger, fear, sadness, distrust, and triggers. Consequently, this focus alone creates “blind spots” in assessing support and uncovering root causes of collectively experienced difficulties. Therefore, Ginwright asserts that when care is rooted in a healing-centered approach, the environmental context that causes harm is also considered. This recognizes that harm is not experienced in isolation but rather within institutional contexts. Ginwright’s development of HCE is rooted in the South African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humankind through collective engagement and service to others. A key distinction of HCE is that it is explicitly political, not clinical, because well-being is linked to the control and power minors have in their communities. It empowers communities and individuals affected by trauma to actively participate in restoring their own well-being (happiness, imagination, aspiration, and trust)⁸⁸. Through its implementation, HCE’s philosophy prioritizes possibility, collective healing, and cultural empowerment. This framework

⁸⁸ Ginwright, Shawn. “The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement,” n.d. <https://flourishagenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Healing-centered-article.pdf>.

establishes cultural empowerment that values diverse cultural identities, traditions, and values to draw upon young people's strengths.

The philosophy of HCE supports Socioemotional Development in Childhood (SDC) principles wherein individuals mutually influence and develop each other's wellbeing. SDC is a process through which young people learn to manage their emotions, navigate social interactions with others, and cultivate meaningful relationships. My inquiry at Casa Asilo observed how of unaccompanied minors establish love and friendships within the shelter's space, despite the significant hardships and neglect in their own lives. Although this was not the primary focus of my research, I aimed to understand how these connections were possible. The key theories of SDC recognizes the pivotal role of peer relationships in adolescence. The relationships they form offer avenues for social interaction, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution⁸⁹. Therefore, positive peer connections contribute to socioemotional development and enhance overall well-being. The exploration of peer relationships at Casa Asilo, demonstrated how adolescents reclaimed their lost childhoods within the surrogate families they formed with one another. Despite the challenges, these youth found solace and security within the shelter's supportive environment. They navigated the delicate balance of reclaiming their youth while shouldering adult responsibilities. Through their perspectives it became evident that the shelter's focus on collective healing had a transformative impact. Within this environment, adolescents found space to rebuild their sense of personhood and regain a semblance of normalcy. Their resilience and capacity for love accentuated the profound influence of supportive communities in fostering healing and growth.

⁸⁹ Schneider, Barry H., Paul David Hastings, Amanda Guyer, Mara Brendgen, and Eli Cwinn. *Child Psychopathology*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

2.7 Spatial and Social Dynamics of Youth Migration

This section provides an overview of two migration theories commonly used to explain spatial patterns of international migration. That is, I employ critical social theory and social capital theory in this ethnography by incorporating a spatial conceptual analysis. Firstly, international migration is illustrated as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by economic and social structures. Through the exploration of these structural forces in migration, this work confronts the State's legitimization of capitalist labor markets and simultaneous dehumanization of people producing labor and capital. This can be seen through the public conceptions of the mostly working-class individuals who comprise migrant Caravans. However, this work maintains that what migrants may lack in financial resources is compensated by rich social networks. The discussion looks at social networks theory to highlight the role of social capital in influencing migration decisions and processes. This theory establishes migrants' reliance on rich social networks, pre-existing or constructed in transit, to secure resources. This framework further examines how unaccompanied minors utilize technology to creatively navigate age-based obstacles they encounter in transit. I argue that technological literacy enhances their social capital because it produces cross-border communication in real-time. This is an important consideration because it provides a nuanced understanding of unaccompanied minors, an emerging demographic in migration, and the function of technologies to facilitate movement as well as decision making. The theories expanded below highlight key themes of this research: the structural bias in the production of the nation-state, the value of social capital in migrant networks, and the exploration of spatial and cultural dynamics through the youth's use of technology.

To begin, migrants and migration are more than objects of study, they are sites of social critique. Their agency makes visible the role of the nation-state and how its power operates through

globalized forces, such as capital. Immigration policy and debate illuminate the perceptions of the nation-state through its literal and symbolic borders. To integrate the world's dispossessed, Susan Bibler Coutin, Bill Maurer, and Barbara Yngvesson (2002) critically evaluate the policies and practices that produce conditions of global injustice in their work, "In the Mirror: The Legitimation Work of Globalization". Coutin et al. argue that debates about globalization overlook the fractures of the field because it assumes the field is coherent and sound (and, threatened by people). Instead, the scholars emphasize that the illusion of order is maintained through instrumental, ideological efforts. This includes practices that "produce, define, and preclude nation as 'naturalizing' some border crossings and criminalizing others". Therefore, the figure of the "illegal alien" who "lives in violation of the law" is understood as an ideological narrative of citizen-worthiness that shapes our understanding of global phenomena. This work reconfigures the constructs of globalization in terms of jurisdiction, transparency, and sovereignty as they connect to legitimate and illegitimate global processes⁹⁰. The key takeaway, as it relates to this research, is that legality is used to reinforce "globalization" thus reproducing it. They challenge the State's "jurisdictionality" as it pertains to migration-movement, family (in their case, adoption) and flow of capital. For example, the international movement of capital is legitimized as "good business" whereas the migrant "is an object of northern countries' regulatory concern" demonstrating that the State prioritizes and legitimizes capital before people. In this way, the multiplicity of human life is controlled and contested with no margin for error. For instance, the authors argue that families with access to capital enjoy privileges, as elites, to "shop" for citizenship while non-elites are excluded on the

⁹⁰ Coutin, Susan Bibler, Bill Maurer, and Barbara Yngvesson. "In The Mirror: The Legitimation Work of Globalization." *Law & Social Inquiry* 27, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 801–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-4469.2002.tb00982.x>.

basis that citizenship is not a commodity⁹¹. This confrontation questions the legitimacy of the State in creating families through law while funds circulate globally. In continuation, I argue that these inherent inequalities are established through immigration policy thus, prioritizes capital over humanity. Therefore, this work advocates for the reevaluation of immigration policy as it relates to the well-being of individuals so that humanity is upheld above the State's economic interest.

The migrant Caravan movements can further the understanding of collective social networks and how they facilitate cooperation and solidarity for migrants. By drawing on the principles of social capital theory, Garip and Asad (2016) reveal that migration is heavily predicated on pre-existing social ties with friends, family, and community to navigate individual migration processes. These networks importantly facilitate migrants' access to information, resources, and other forms of support that shape their decisions and experiences⁹². This understanding exposes the dynamisms of the migrating process such as the collective mobilization of migrant Caravans to enhance social capital. Within migrant Caravans, spatiality and movement mobility dictate its formation and function. Garip and Asad's articulations of cumulative causation (that develops social capital) is actioned in the collective Caravan as they eat and travel together—towards a common destination. Their collective travel reinforces social ties by building trust and cooperation throughout their journey. In turn, this collective assemblage contributes to a deeper understanding of the temporal dimensions of social capital formation. The Caravan demonstrates social networks as dynamic processes that evolve and strengthen through ongoing interactions in travel. My study further applies the practical implications of social networks in unaccompanied

⁹¹ Coutin, Susan Bibler, Bill Maurer, and Barbara Yngvesson. "In The Mirror: The Legitimation Work of Globalization." *Law & Social Inquiry* 27, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 801–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-4469.2002.tb00982.x>.

⁹² Garip, Filiz, and Asad L. Asad. "Network Effects in Mexico–U.S. Migration." *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 10 (April 19, 2016): 1168–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216643131>.

minors' use of technology whilst in transit and at the shelter. Technology operates as a supplementary tool for young people to circumvent age-based restrictions and immobilities. This concept expands ideas of virtual and physical mobilities in the context of youth migration, and technology's facilitation of resources, information, and communication⁹³. By drawing on the principles of social capital as it contributes to collective mobilization and support, this work explores how collective social mechanisms also facilitate solidarity.

Social mechanisms examine the interconnections of virtual and physical mobilities in the context of youth migration and technological literacy. Digital platforms seemingly shape the experiences of young migrants by facilitating their navigation and contribute to their journey's overall success. Moreover, the culture of collective solidarity that migrants developed mitigate the digital divide between those who have and those who do not. This dynamic was revealed by the youth at Casa Asilio, where I observed the reproduction of the Caravan's culture rooted in solidarity. That is, the way they share equitable access to technology by taking turns with phones and sharing resources like news or videos. My work reveals that migrants who traveled with or around the Caravan brought bonds and ways of relating, forged in their journeys, to the shelter. I observe how social networks continue and facilitate cooperation between the migrants at the shelter setting as they collectively navigate their asylum processes, access services like group therapy, and address their basic needs. By examining how spatiality and movement mobility influence the development of social ties at the shelter, migrants' resourcefulness can be further understood as a reproduction of the Caravan's best qualities.

This framework addresses the understudied role of digital platforms in shaping the experiences of unaccompanied minors in contemporary migration. My data revealed that through

⁹³ Cresswell, Timothy. *On The Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. Routledge, 2012.

the use of smartphones and internet connectivity, young migrants can leverage social media to secure work, watch news, find housing, communicate with family, and more. These digital tools assist as essential lifelines for navigating the challenges their ages may present in the migration journey and overall safety. An important implication of this is that while technology is seemingly ubiquitous, not all migrants have access to their own devices or internet connectivity. Therefore, they rely on the reciprocity of their cultures to share technology. Some observations of technology's various uses and functions include their use of Facebook and Instagram for social networking with the friends or lovers they leave behind, and the live streaming features that gave real-time updates on the Caravan movement. They took turns using WhatsApp to communicate with their networks and families in order to inform and update the logistics of their journeys. They would share screens to watch YouTube videos that provided access to news and information relevant to migration. These examples demonstrate that within migrant communities there is often a culture of resource-sharing where individuals pool what they have (material or knowledge) to support each other's access to information. In all, this section uses a spatial conceptual analysis of virtual and physical mobilities to contribute to network theory by examining how youth in transit utilize technology as a medium and a tool for navigating migration collectively.

In summary, the function of this section is to depict migration as more than just a choice; it is a necessity driven by circumstance. Drawing on the insights from Coutin et al., this research critiques inherent constructions of the border as it constitutes the nation-state; wherein minors in transit are defined as “unpredictable nonpersons whose wants may disrupt the nations, families, and markets in which they are allowed to participate as only marginal players”⁹⁴. This outlook

⁹⁴ Garip, Filiz, and Asad L. Asad. “Network Effects in Mexico–U.S. Migration.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 10 (April 19, 2016): 1168–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216643131>.

demonstrates that the nation-state prioritizes certain identities while marginalizing others, thereby, perpetuating exclusion through legal and spatial mechanisms. This calls for advocacy of the “nonperson” who offers understanding on structural barriers that prevent them from accessing their rights and protections. Subsequently, Garip and Asad describe the cumulative causation that forms rich social networks and is furthered in my project to understand collective mobilization in the form of the Caravan movement. I argue that social networks facilitate solidarity and resilience as migrants organize Caravans, enriching their networks and bettering their circumstances. The youth in this study presented remarkable creativity as they adapted to the intricate interplay of complex socio-political-economic forces that influenced their migration. By integrating spatial and cultural dynamics, alongside technology, Caravan participants produced a shared culture of cooperation to navigate migration controls. Through this culture, the youth learned to forge familial relationships with each other and the staff at the shelter, showcasing skilled relationship-building for protection and survival. This understanding investigates the spatial dimensions of learned culture within the shelter and the surrogate families formed within the space. This is produced by the youth’s (re)construction of supportive spaces. This approach emphasizes the shelter’s design both architecturally and culturally in fostering and sustaining productive, bilateral ways of relating amongst the youth. Casa Asilio was a nucleus for environmentally determinant behavior and exchange by those who participated in the space.

2.8 Framing My Ethnography in Latin American Studies

Interdisciplinary Approach

Through this research, I endeavor to balance the importance of understanding and honoring my past while simultaneously focusing on the present and future survival of my diasporic community. By employing psychosocial, geopolitical-based interviews and transnational feminist

epistemologies, I study the extent of the States' role in an "organized forgetting" as scholar, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian puts forth in, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*⁹⁵. The deliberate erasure of memory functions to actively generate and sustain power structures. This nuanced framework challenges the traditional problem-oriented approach to the study of refugees and immigrants and illuminates the diverse experiences of marginalized groups, specifically unaccompanied minors. This section argues that the every-day is a worthy site of study as it makes visible the spaces of deep intimacy. Drawing from Y en L e Espiritu and Lan Duong (2018), these are places where we, as a collective in the diasporic experience, can exercise power to reassess our private history⁹⁶. Furthermore, I argue that unaccompanied minors in transit experience compounded, or intersectional oppression in their journeys due to their age. This intersectional understanding reveals complex spatial dynamics at play within their experiences. In all, the conceptual approach of this work offers a multifaceted perspective on the experiences of migrant communities to highlight the importance of recognizing intersectional identities and challenging dominant narratives.

This work employs a transnational feminist epistemology articulated by Dr. Y en L e Espiritu and Dr. Lan Duong's "Feminist Refugee Epistemology (FRE)" to discuss "the intersection of private grief and public trauma" of gendered displacement. Within this framework, migration is a site of "social reproduction and innovation". The integration of FRE offers a nuanced perspective that challenges the problem-oriented approach to displacement, which portrays migrant communities as a problem to be solved. The authors argue that traditional approaches to refugee studies often overlook the gendered dimensions of displacement. In continuation, the

⁹⁵ Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316159927>.

⁹⁶ Espiritu, Y en L e, and Lan Duong. "Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art." *Signs* 43, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 587–615. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695300>.

integration of FRE, as a conceptual framework in this work, acknowledges and commemorates individual oppression at the hands of militarized empires⁹⁷. They highlight the importance of recognizing the diverse ways in which gender, race, class, and other intersecting identities shape refugee's experiences. This gendered understanding of displacement is particularly relevant when considering the intersectional experiences of marginalized groups within the larger Caravan movement, such as unaccompanied minors and their many identities. Minors in transit live as an oppressed group whose internal experiences of subjectivity, agency, and well-being are systematically and systemically disregarded. Specifically, in capitalist societies where individual value is fundamentally tied to output and productivity, children are seen as an inconvenience compared to productive adults. To challenge this frame, it is essential to acknowledge children for their distinct abilities and understandings. These are critical differences that merit support and respect as they exist in real-time. Furthermore, spatial understandings reveal the construction of migration systems (physical borders, detention centers, migrant shelters) and the role they play in shaping unaccompanied minors' migratory trajectories. Societal norms and structures can be further reproduced within these systems causing further harm. Therefore, spatial arrangements in migration can contribute to further marginalization and devaluation of unaccompanied minors' experiences. Alternatively, these are sites that can positively reinforce their humanity, as the shelter staff at Casa Asilio does. The term "childism" encapsulates the systematic discrimination of children that exists in society, in this case, migratory regulation systems. This occurs across several means, including but not limited to, inadequate access to resources, restricted mobility, and exposure to harm or abuse. In all, this work confronts internalized childism and the system it perpetuates. This confrontation embarks our path towards a collective liberation, as children serve

⁹⁷ Espiritu, Yên Lê, and Lan Duong. "Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art." *Signs* 43, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 587–615. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695300>.

to mirror adult's deepest flaws and greatest virtues. Ultimately, unaccompanied minors and their stories reflect fundamental truths about our shared humanity.

My approach in Latin American studies goes beyond analyzing physical or economic aspects (infrastructure, wealth, economic systems) of societies as they relate to international migration. Although material systems contribute to the phenomenon, my interest focuses on cultural, social, and ideological dimensions to better understand complex aspects of human life. That is, individuals' cultural practices, social relationships, ideological beliefs, and relational power dynamics. This approach in study provides a deeper understanding of human societies and recognizes that material conditions alone, do not fully explain human experiences and social phenomena. Latin American studies is interdisciplinary in nature as it integrates research and literature from various disciplines, within comparative sciences, into discussion. This explains the role of comparative sciences in critically analyzing established discourses and identifying intentional omissions. Therefore, this project catalyzes a glocalized dialogue, to enrich the understanding of power as it relates to violence (displacement and familial disintegration) in Latin American communities, specifically through forced migration. In this context, glocalized refers to a balanced discussion that incorporates the global interconnectedness of issues while also acknowledging local specificities and cultural differences. Therefore, this research leverages the comparative sciences to employ an interdisciplinary approach as I engage with community voices at Casa Asilio. In order to address issues more holistically, the analytical framework of this project critiques nuanced public policy as it relates to the development of migratory phenomena. As scholar, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2015) describes, political forces are sites of "intimate domestic interaction" where sociality can be found. This is understood through spatial dynamics wherein social relationships and social life are influenced and shaped by public and institutional domains.

They impact personal and domestic spaces, thereby influencing social interactions and relationships within the intimate settings of homes and communities. In this work, Shalhoub-Kevorkian discusses the “feminist labor of continuing life” wherein questions do not aim to debilitate the community it studies. The debilitation Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s work refers to is the focus of research on the dead (their loss or perpetual victimhood). Instead, the author argues that research should orient discussion toward the labor of the living, and what I consider, their survivance. This latter conversation opens different communities to their kin histories⁹⁸. Therefore, my work is autoethnographic in nature as this framework encourages communities of migration to connect with their histories and lineages to foster continuity, identity and resilience.

Autoethnography as a Qualitative Research Method

Within an autoethnographic framework, the exploration of lived experiences is not a solitary endeavor. Rather, it is a collaborative process and effort that invites self-reflection as well as engagement of my participants’ self-analyses. This research utilizes interpretive autoethnographic methods in relation to culture. My work presumes that the full representation of lived experiences requires storytelling. This dynamism is explained by Denzin (2013),

Lives and their experiences, the telling and the told, are represented in stories, which are performances. Stories are like pictures that have been painted over, and, when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible. What is new is what was previously covered up. ... The subject matter of interpretation autoethnography is the life experiences and performances of a person.⁹⁹

Therefore, the study of lived experiences involves interactive and intersubjective processes of interpretation and reinterpretation (as the work progresses). That is, the interactive exchange between my position, as a researcher, and that of the participant—requires mutual collaboration to

⁹⁸ Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316159927>.

⁹⁹ Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2013. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA87153401>.

fully illustrate lived experiences. To do so, I employ interpretive autoethnography as a method to derive meaning of phenomena both relationally and within cultural contexts. This is the frame through which I explore and understand my experiences, as the daughter of immigrants from El Salvador, in context with broader cultural and interpersonal dynamics. This way, the research uncovers layers of meaning that evolve over time; in a way that also transcends my interpretation of my life. As Jamie Nolan (2015) states, “autoethnography is a balancing act between the self and the culture in which we write of the world and ourselves, a process animated by the flux between ‘story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement’. My research thus represents a composite story, mine, and possibly ours”¹⁰⁰. In this way, an autobiographical reflective analysis occurs in collaboration with my participants’ autobiographical self-analyses. It is together that we navigate the complexities of temporality and positionality to reveal the interconnections between us and how we interpret our individual contexts and histories. For instance, my parents’ stories are shared in this work because I shared it with the youth at the shelter on my first day meeting them. Interestingly, prior to this research, I had never viewed my father as an unaccompanied minor when he told me his story (and he did not see himself that way either) however, he crossed the border with the help of a *coyote* and navigated life in the U.S. completely alone. Now, through comparing his experiences with those of the youth, I recognize a profound significance of this identity and the challenges it must have presented him in his journey. Additionally, the difficulties of discussing my parents’ migration with them, throughout my life, is also central to how I conceptualize this research. This realization not only deepened my self-understanding but also provided me with new language to ask my parents, family, community about their migration

¹⁰⁰ Nolan, Jaime. “Uncovering Beauty in a Narrative of Tragedy: Native Students Counter Narratives to Deficit Discourse.” *Unh*, October 9, 2015.
https://www.academia.edu/16607669/Uncovering_Beauty_in_a_Narrative_of_Tragedy_Native_Students_Counter_Narratives_to_Deficit_Discourse.

experiences and potentially uncover new insights. Thus, the collaborative nature of an autoethnographic approach proved that the way we learn to dialogue and ask questions in community, is fundamentally tied to storytelling and the depth in which we understand ourselves. Our collaboration functioned alongside my emotional labor (which encompasses the emotional, psychological, and relational dynamics of displacement) to foster a deeper meaning of our multifaceted experiences with migration. In all, interpretive autoethnography serves as an innovative tool for uncovering nuanced insights within community that reveal how personal and collective identities are sustained within the context of migration.

Relational Positionality

The use of ethnographic data requires reflexivity and subjectivity wherein the researcher critically reflects on their positionality. As Denzin (2013) explains, autoethnographic methods endeavor to construct meaning from “my place in the world” as it relates to a specific time-and-place¹⁰¹. This involves negotiating duality as it exists in my identity as a U.S. citizen born to parents from El Salvador—people, who were forced to endure displacement, migration, and familial separation during their adolescence. Throughout this project and its development, I constantly consider my upbringing within a working-class, diasporic community. I evaluate my liminal position as both oppressor and oppressed in my relationships with the youth at Casa Asilio and beyond. For example, I recognize the privilege afforded to me by my ability to freely navigate across borders, juxtaposed with the oppressive systems that have led to the displacement of those at the shelter and their fixed position within the space. This reflexivity is invaluable as it contextualizes my background and illuminates the lens through which I approach my research inquiry, methods, and interpretation. There are many instances, expressed through the fieldnote

¹⁰¹ Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2013. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA87153401>.

excerpts that begin each chapter, where I consider my position and think about ways that I can use my freedom of mobility to offer the youth a sense of joy or inclusion in my work.

In terms of relational positionality, I draw from my worldview and personal experiences to deeply engage with the youth. As someone who is relatively close to their age, I connected with them by discussing shared interest; we created a bridge beyond my academic scope (a skill I developed through teaching). For instance, discussions with my father usually revolved around El Salvador's new political party, *Nuevas Ideas*, and President Bukele. This taught me that most, if not all, Salvadorans enjoy political participation and discussion. Our dialogue taught me that the 2018 election offered Salvadorans a renewed sense of hope for the future of their country. Therefore, when I met someone from El Salvador I would eagerly discuss politics, recognizing their cultural pride. Even though the youth are not old enough to vote, these conversations often led to profound insights that revealed their worldviews and the aspirations they held for their country's promising new leadership. Additionally, I understood that reggaeton and hip-hop were popular genres in urban areas like Guatemala City, San Pedro Sula or San Salvador. I would often ask youth about what artists they enjoyed and that became another cultural touchstone that fostered connection especially as we exchanged our favorite music. Furthermore, our discussions revealed commonalities within my own life that related to my family's forced migration. Through dialogue I often heard about the violence enacted by street gangs that plagued young migrants' lives. However, what I did not consider prior to this, was the way that street gangs plagued my life as well—that is, my family struggled with gang violence despite living in the U.S. For example, my father had a bus business in El Salvador— this had been his dream for years and he was proud to be a business owner in his home country even if he could no longer live there. He saw this business as his ticket back, his means of retirement, and reconnection with his home. Unfortunately, within

a couple of years, his business was extorted by a local gang and the buses, his investment, was lost. I was reminded of this personal history when I met a teen who had been employed as a fare collector but was forced to migrate because his boss' bus was extorted and he was threatened. His story reminded me that my father had endured something similar which revealed generational experiences with gang violence and extortion. To the teen's surprise, this was an experience that we connected through, and I understood.

Additionally, through other conversations with the youth, I talked about my maternal grandfather, who lived in San Salvador. He had his home overtaken by a street gang because he failed to pay their weekly tax and was left homeless alongside his wife and their children. Thinking relationally, I admitted that at least they were allowed to leave their home with their life, unlike others we hear about. I was also forced to think about the tragic loss of my childhood friends from my parents' neighborhoods who were murdered by MS13. These are some of the instances that further contextualizes the pervasive nature of violence and what it does to our people, our communities. I realized that I did not need to develop a specific conceptual analysis to understand the impacts of street gangs because it was a phenomenon that I was painfully familiar with. However, through mutual storytelling and dialogue, I uncovered this repressed, or rather forgotten, aspect of my life. These experiences, that I understood as "part" of being from El Salvador, were further contextualized with the youth's stories; they made me ponder what would have been of my life if I had been born on the other side of the border. I understood that their departure was never a question of "if" but rather "when". Thus, this research endeavor is beyond an academic exercise for me as it continues to be a deeply personal journey of understanding that shows the interconnections of our lives and the systemic forces that shape them. In all, the introspection of

my positionality connected discrete aspects of my identity and forced me into reconciling its larger connections to people who continue to survive this violence.

The development of this work required personal processing of my experiences and created a deeply emotional impact on my identity. As I wrote and considered my family's history and experiences, I understand migration as a defining narrative within my existence. This is a force that shapes and distorts every aspect of my lived experience, especially as I processed its impact in real-time with the youth at the shelter. Migration serves as a central focal point that challenges my understanding of social, cultural, and political phenomena, and functions as a lens through which I perceive the world. This influence allows me to access and engage with narratives at a deeper level and frames the emotional attachment I had with the stories—a dynamic that made the writing process demanding. In this way, the journey of this project was not static; it was marked by the ongoing complexities of life. In particular, amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I dealt with the complexities of this project in isolation. A profound shift in my life was marked by the devastating loss of my beloved Tío Lito to the virus. The suddenness of his passing and the inability to be with him during his final moments, or attend his funeral, was heart-wrenching and compounded the emotional toll. Especially as I related it to the youth at the shelter and their expressions about leaving their homes from one day to the next—leaving everything they knew and loved, behind. This loss was particularly heartbreaking given my family's working-class background, and my uncle's exposure to the virus was a direct result of his need to work. As I mourned the loss of my uncle, I was devastated to realize that his migration story died with him—and that all I have left are in memories, pictures, and notes. He had a notepad where he wrote down daily occurrences in his life, like changing his daughter's diaper or planning his weekend, as he practiced writing sentences in English for his citizenship test. Throughout these years, the ongoing

nature of my research project became increasingly apparent and forced me to consider the function of temporality for those who migrate. I felt that every event, whether personal or global, added layers of complexity to my understanding of my family and migration. Each time I sat down and relived the stories of the youth I was overcome with emotions as I felt the interviews mirrored the turbulence within my own family. In their stories I see my uncle, my father, my grandmother, myself. In summary, as I continue to navigate the ongoing challenges and complexities of this project, I remain committed to documenting the multifaceted experiences of migration to honor the resilience and survival of migrant communities amidst adversity.

Through the journey of this project, I hope to not only shed light on the untold stories of migration but also to reckon with my own identity and place within the broader narrative of diaspora and belonging. The inclusion of my positionality as it relates to my family's history of migration posed personal challenges that echoed the difficulties of my upbringing. For example, I had forgotten about my early life experiences when we were undocumented, particularly considering I was an infant at the time. Through this introspective process, coupled with the conversations I had with minors about their undocumented families in the U.S., I realized I did not know how to inquire about that time, from my parents, and what life must have been for them. This work has deeply impacted my relationship with my parents, as I contemplate the realization that I never truly knew or understood them. Migration remains, a difficult subject for us to broach but ironically flowed smoothly in my conversations with complete strangers. Namely, the exploration of my narrative was essential for my research but also surfaced unresolved tensions and traumas within my family dynamic and unearthed long-buried memories. These emotional effects impacted aspects of my relationship with my family, as we navigated the delicate balance between confronting painful truths and preserving familial bonds. Still, amidst these challenges,

this project also offered moments of healing and connection where we collectively contented our shared history. In all, the approach to this work involved a reckoning of the generational impacts of migration; this was where I experienced familial recovery and unpacked my parents' shame as immigrants, unwillingly silenced (as well as the beauty of their survival). Through the use of transnational feminist epistemologies, alongside interviews and auto-documentation, this work confronts structural, organized forgetting. Memory is recovered through dialogue and communal exchange where intersectional identities reveal internal contradictions and traumas. Yet, through an autoethnographic approach, this research provides moments of healing and connection to personal and communal experiences with migration. My interdisciplinary approach in Latin American studies honors the resilience of migrant communities while reckoning my identity within the larger narrative of diaspora and belonging. The next chapter discusses the methodology of my research design at Casa Asilio and looks at the function of kinship ties as a mechanism of survivance. I ponder, how do the youth make space for new relationships? What are the implications of their newfound surrogate families? Do these kinds of familial bonds exist beyond the shelter? The answers are uncovered through the means by which we study migration—that is, in their survival, against all odds.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Positionality

In my first interactions with the kids of this shelter, I was taken aback by their eagerness to volunteer and share their story. I admire Don Pepe's set up on this one. He had the children sit, meeting style, and welcome me, and essentially 'break the ice' as we would call it. However, I note that, I would rather use Pepe's words here and say he was setting up *la confianza*¹⁰².

¹⁰² Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of First Day at Casa Asilio. January 20, 2019.

3.2 Balancing Objectivity and Subjectivity in Methods

In this study, I utilize an autoethnographic approach for a nuanced exploration of unaccompanied minors' experiences at the migrant shelter, Casa Asilio. The findings are presented as a thematic narrative that was developed through my interpretation of personal fieldnotes, observations and interviews. In Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I Fretz, and Lina L. Shaw' *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, ethnographies are explained as narrative "tales" as in, stories constructed from fieldnotes to produce a narrative that will interest outside audiences by "weaving specific analyses of discrete pieces of data" into an overall story. In this way, the insights provided in this work are drawn from a collection, as well as a processing, of fieldnotes. Equally important, are the personal observations that portray daily life experiences in the field. Emerson et al. (2011) configure fieldnotes as "building blocks" in storytelling that are analytically themed through an intellectual examination of evidence for a central idea. In accordance with Emerson's approach to ethnography, the central idea of this work was found through the coding process wherein specific excerpts were selected for presentation. The excerpts were selected from my coding process to persuasively reveal the every-day of the youth's lives at the shelter. It was through the process of writing this work that I consistently evaluated insights alongside "indigenous views" to balance between research methods. That is, to maintain the authenticity of the youth's stories and experiences as they were lived, I produced a constant "back and forth", between themes and notes. To Emerson, this represents the negotiated quality of observations made and later interpreted to maintain the overall integrity of the project¹⁰³. As I embarked on documenting reflections, emotions, and insights related to migration and family history using Emerson's framework, I found myself immersed in a project that evolved alongside the unfolding events within my own family.

¹⁰³ Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

I understood migration, a defining narrative of my existence, and its continued influence in how I frame my worldview and engage with the narratives in this study.

To navigate objectivity with subjectivity I engage in reflexive practice to further my research validity. To provide more context about the personal influences of this project's frame I begin with my introduction to transnational ways of relating through difference. From an early age, I was taught the importance of studying and asking questions about my community from within, as survivors of diaspora, who work and die in the U.S. Growing up in Lawrence, MA, I experienced the impacts of poverty and neglect on the city's educational system. To access quality education, I was enrolled at Prospect Hill Academy (PHA) Charter School, situated an hour away. PHA catered to first-generation students by offering a college-prep curriculum tailored to our needs. I attended this school from first grade until I graduated high school. PHA's innovative approach to education included discussions of Haiti's colonial history which resonated with our large Haitian American student population. Through non-traditional study of history like this, we were taught to debate and reflect on our diasporic identities and its structural influences. PHA nurtured my appreciation for transformative education and its role in empowering marginalized people as well as fostering solidarity.

I learned to confront issues, like colorism within the Latinx community, through dialogue that I would later bring up in family conversations and challenge fixed perspectives. Through their approach, PHA taught us what it meant to be part of a diasporic community like Haiti or El Salvador and how to ask questions as it relates to diasporic populations. This background informs my research design as I interpret and make meaning of stories to express and unpack the interconnectedness of our histories. It is through the reflection of this positionality and bias awareness, that I enrich the depth of my fieldwork and the project's authenticity. Despite the

emotional demands of the research process, I found that integrating personal history with academic pursuit became central to my epistemology and conceptual analysis. This fusion enabled me to forge authentic connections with individuals from Latin America who shared similar, and different, lived experiences. This approach enriches both my understanding of their narratives as well as my own identity. Therefore, central to this work, was the negotiation of conflicting emotions and reconciling them the best way I could. As individuals intimately connected to our communities, we possess unique insights and perspectives that hold the potential to liberate and empower marginalized voices. By centering our experiences and amplifying our stories, we can uncover the answers necessary to enact meaningful change and foster collective liberation.

My research interests intersect with the study of my parents' migration stories and the dynamics of contemporary migration. I inquire into the ongoing occurrence of migration, particularly 30-40 years later, when factors like the Civil War in El Salvador, which influenced my parents' migration, are no longer prevalent. What has changed, and what has remained the same? How does this impact the demographics we see in modern-day migration, which includes Caravans or large groups of unaccompanied minors, women with children, or gender queer people? I aim to understand why migration persists for young people in Central America and explore the changes and continuities that drive displacement and familial disintegration. What aspects of their migration journeys do most scholars overlook or fail to consider when studying this population? Additionally, I seek to understand the significance of Caravan participation for young migrants and how their experiences and perceptions of the Caravan influence their journeys. Ultimately, I aim to uncover the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of young migrants as they navigate complex migration processes. Subsequent questions that guided my research include but are not limited to:

1. Why does migration continue for young people in Central America? What's changed and what has remained the same that displaces people from their homelands?
2. Despite the trauma they endure, how do young migrants make space for new relationships and build trust with strangers?
3. What do young people endure in their migration journeys that most people do not know or consider when studying this population?
4. What makes the Caravan participation different for young migrants? What do they feel or believe about the Caravan that impacted their journeys?
5. What do young migrants ultimately want? What are their hopes? What are their dreams once re-connected with their families in the U.S.?



Figure 1 Mural at Casa Asilio includes Migra, the shelter's pet cat.

3.3 Data Collection

The findings published in this paper are pulled from interviews with the adolescents who comprised the shelter. These interviews were conducted in Spanish and later translated into English for presentation and analysis. However, there are some Spanish phrases that I do not translate and intentionally utilize in this project because I could not find an adequate translation of the feelings that certain phrases, or colloquial metaphors, evoked. I attempted to transcribe the collected audio recordings using HelloScribe, an autonomous AI technology that produces transcriptions from audio. However, this technology was ineffective as it failed to capture regional dialects and accents of my participants. Therefore, I wrote out each transcription with summarized observations, including descriptions of the space as well as body language, from the conversations. The data was then organized and analyzed using the Dedoose research platform, where codes such as "reclaimed childhood" and "shelter dynamics" were applied to the transcripts and field notes alike. Recruitment for interviews was done according to a script provided by Dr. Abigail Andrews, the program director of MMFRP at UCSD. The script emphasized the voluntary nature of participation. I then logged the demographic data of my volunteers in a recruitment register to ensure confidentiality. I excluded all identifiable information, such as names. Interviews were recorded with verbal consent using the Voice Notes application on my iPhone, and all photographs included in the project were taken with verbal permission.

Each participant in the study is referred to by a pseudonym to protect their anonymity, accompanied by social categories including gender, age, country of origin, and migration status. Field notes from observations at Casa Migrante and Casa Asillio, where I lived for a week and subsequently visited for six months were also included in the analysis. These notes provided insights into the daily life and interactions at the shelters and contributed to my comprehensive

understanding of the migrant experience for the *Caravaneros* (Caravaners). Throughout this project, I constantly pulled from my field notes because I also included observations of migrants who were not part of the formal interview. Together, the culmination of my methods and personal integration, allowed for observations about daily life at the shelter for young migrants, the culture of migration in Tijuana, and its impact on the communities on the borderlands of the American Southwest.

By the end of the study, I collected twenty audio transcripts from staff and teens at the shelter. The interviews ranged from twenty minutes to ninety minutes. Despite my initial expectations of shorter conversations, the participants often shared detailed accounts of their experiences. Each participant reflected the diverse range of traumas they had endured and their remarkable resilience throughout. From the onset of the interviews, I learned that the youth had their own purposes for disclosing their stories with me, communicating what they deemed important for me to know. Some migrants shared their experiences solely for the “practice”, their shelter coordinator had advised. Others sought to inform me about the miseries they were forced to endure simply because they needed their stories expelled. Nevertheless, I never set a maximum amount of time that the youth could sit with me. I created a space for them to share what they wanted, safely. The observed fragmentation in some stories, especially noticeable with younger interviewees, demonstrated the complexities they face when recounting challenging or traumatic events. This challenge can be understood as the influence of Persistent Traumatic Stress Environment (PTSE), characterized by the perpetuation of trauma through institutional structures such as laws, policies, and practices, embedded within institutions that result in harm to both young people and adults¹⁰⁴. The older demographics of my study (around 16 to 17 years-old)

¹⁰⁴ Flourish Agenda. “Chris Nguon Breaks Down the Foundational Elements of CARMA - Flourish Agenda,” June 8, 2021. <https://flourishagenda.com/podcast/chris-nguon-breaks-down-the-foundational-elements-of-carma/>.

demonstrated a greater ability to sequence specific events more effectively when recounting their journeys. This disparity illustrates the implications of fragmentation and its function as a coping mechanism for surviving deep traumas, particularly among young people—a phenomenon consistent among the participants of my study. Therefore, despite the simplicity of some interviews, whether shorter or less descriptive, often provided deeper insights into the experiences of adolescents, in real-time, due to the gaps and silences in certain parts of their stories.

Reflecting on this, I also confront the silence surrounding my family's migration experiences, particularly considering that both parents migrated at a young age and are the eldest siblings in their families. The inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives enriches my ability to connect to the youth and contributes to a nuanced understanding of a multi-generational migrant experience. Given the significant influence of PTSE on the accounts of unaccompanied minors in transit, it is clear that the stories I gathered are more than just tales of survival—they also reveal the resilience and coping strategies these individuals developed in the face of systemic difficulty. These narratives track the youth's encounters from leaving home to arriving in Tijuana and showcase their perseverance amidst adversity. Their stories offer insights into the survival skills developed by an increasingly new demographic in international migration. Lastly, their relationships and formation of surrogate families in the shelter allows us to understand how bonds cultivate trust and compassion and put them on a path of healing.

3.4 “La Junta”, The First Meeting at Casa Asilio

In reference to the initial recruitment process, the epigraph presented in this chapter is a field note where I demarcate an early and eager engagement with the youth at the shelter. On my first day with them, I felt the beginning of the *confianza* we would share in our time together. This initial mutual exchange facilitated the conversations I had with minors during throughout their

interviews. Almost immediately, the shelter coordinator, Don Pepe, told us that it was important to establish trust and rapport with the adolescents, or as he calls it *la confianza*. I chose to keep this word in Spanish because, to me, *confianza* can mean trust, hope, responsibility, and even reliance. Opening up to the youth and my story inherently forced me to reflect on my positionality as the interlocutor. I related the history of my parents as pioneer migrants¹⁰⁵ of their families to the audience composed of young people who traveled from the same geographical area, Central America. At the time, there were about 30 adolescents at the shelter. They wore red and black Casa Asilio lanyards that displayed their handwritten names: Toni, Chico, Aria, and so on. They individually unfolded metal chairs and organized into audience in front of me. I employed my Salvadoran accent to establish *confianza* and introduced myself. I informed the youth that I am Salvadoran-American. I tell them that both of my parents came to the U.S. by walking from El Salvador. That similar to many of them, my father crossed the El Salvador-Honduras border, then Guatemala-Mexico until he reached the Tijuana-San Diego juncture. I let them know that it meant a lot to me to be there that day. That it was the first time I was in Tijuana, in the same place where, 35 years ago, my father suffered and survived. This was and continues to be a memorable experience especially because I had never encountered minors in transit before. From our first interactions, our relationships were built on mutual respect for our histories with migration. Casa Asilio proved to be a safe space, where I could discuss my parents' lives with migration and connect with the people who not only understood what that meant— but lived it themselves.

¹⁰⁵ Filiz Garip and Asad L. Asad, "Network Effects in Mexico–U.S. Migration," *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 10 (April 19, 2016): 1168–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216643131>.



Figure 2 Youth Tag the Cabinet in the Boys' Dormitory.

To provide more context about the specific story I opened with, I told the youth that back in the late 1970's my escaped the Civil War terror in El Salvador— which to my surprise, many expressed familiarities with. I told them that my father migrated because he was being actively sought after by the civil army of El Salvador. Here is an excerpt of the summarized transcript from an interview of his experience:

[My dad's] family on his mother's side was well connected with the Civil Army. His mother's grandmother was the wife of their village's Mayor. As the Mayor of La Reina, a municipality found in the mountains of Chalatenango, El Salvador (situated at 1,486 ft above sea level). His grandfather sought recruits due to the demands from the Salvadoran Civil Army. His mother feared for [her son's] life— she knew the armies actively recruited child soldiers. So, the eldest of eight travels to cross the border (on his mother's demands) with his mother's brother, an

unreliable alcoholic. After ditching him in Mexico, [my dad] had to find his own way. For several years, his family thought he was dead¹⁰⁶.

Learning about my parents' migration experiences was a personal mission for as long as I can remember. This is because they rarely spoke openly about their past, especially in regard to their migration experiences. My childhood memories are marked by fleeting glimpses into their stories, where I would hide under tables or behind doors to catch snippets of our family history. These moments led to an avoidance of confronting the realities of our family as immigrants, we did not talk about it. Reflecting on this upbringing, I recognize that silence has become a hereditary trait; one that has been passed down and facilitates our intergenerational traumas with forced displacement. Therefore, sharing my father's story was—and continues to be, my step toward familial healing and breaking the cycle of silence of our past.

I then shared my mother's story with the youth. I told my young audience the story of a resilient woman who had a unique opportunity presented to her; plans were made on her behalf to join her mother, my grandmother who was working and living in the U.S. My grandmother had independently immigrated four years prior, leaving behind her children. She had to flee her abusive marriage, in addition faced extortion of her billiards business. My grandmother was given two options, pay the fee or watch her children get killed; so, she left (hoping she could save them later). Eventually, through four jobs as an undocumented woman, she saved enough money to hire a coyote that could get her children to her. Throughout her life, my mother bore the burden of a maternal figure for her younger siblings. She obliged to financial demands that contributed to her family's overall stability in the U.S. and back in El Salvador. She educated herself (both formally and informally). After sharing my parents' migration stories, I wrote the following fieldnote:

¹⁰⁶ Cruz, Lorena, Interview with Jorge A. Cruz about Immigration to America (November 26, 2018), audio recording.

I finished sharing my parents' stories and Don Pepe and the group applauded for me. Don Pepe told the youth that they should feel empowered by my stories. I re-emphasized that I was at the shelter to learn about the youths' experiences and to hear their stories of survival. I talk about this profound meeting moment because it was a powerful moment to hear their names and learn about where they came from in Central America. Don Pepe encouraged everyone was to stand up tall, tell me their name, country of origin, and what their 'favorite' part of their journey was.¹⁰⁷

Reflecting on this moment, I wrote,

Their stories ranged from surviving the freight trains (known as *La Bestia*) to finding new friends, even arriving at Casa Asilio. Don Pepe used our meeting to tell each youth that they must learn to 'stand up' for themselves and proudly share their stories because the world needs to hear them. He inspired the youth by reminding them that they underwent 'supernatural' conditions that, although, they may have debilitated some, ultimately, it did not kill them and because of that, they are stronger now '*aunque te debilite lo que no te mata, te hace mas fuerte*'. Don Pepe reminded the youth that they will all, inevitably, be forced to share their story with lawyers and social workers alike. Therefore, an interview with me should be seen as 'practice'. I watched in awe as Don Pepe effortlessly instilled confidence within the group of minors with his words of encouragement. This meeting was a significant psychosocial moment for the minors who agonize within their traumas in respective, myriad ways. When the *junta* came to an end, everyone picked up their chairs and cleaned up the space without direction. Once they finished, I had my first ten interview participants approach me to inform me that they would like to share their stories with me. I made a tentative plan with my participants to interview them throughout the week and they signed up for time blocks with me.

108

Other interviews were conducted by informally conversing with the youth about their interests.

As I volunteered within their walls, they became familiar with me and built *confianza*. We would talk about the music they listened to, the shows they watched, the subjects they learned from their volunteer teachers, and so on. This led to questions about their countries of origin and what they were waiting for at the shelter (asylum or deportation). This was when I found out that most of the participants who arrived at the shelter were there because going home was not an option— they were mostly, if not all, asylum seekers.

¹⁰⁷ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of First Day at Casa Asilio. January 20, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of First Day at Casa Asilio. January 20, 2019.

3.5 Presentation of Results and Data Analysis

In this project, I engage in autoethnography by utilizing a variety of sensory mediums including field notes, photographs, videos, audio recordings, conversations, and personal experiences for interpretation. These mediums, both direct and indirect forms of data collection, form the core of my exploration. I weave excerpts from my fieldnotes into epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter to encapsulate defining moments and insights from my time at the shelter. These observations were specific moments where I learned something about myself and also the individuals I encountered. While the constraints of a written thesis limit my ability to share certain forms of visual data, I include carefully selected images that evoke the emotional and spiritual depth of my experiences with the youth at Casa Asilio. The pictures in this project are captioned with descriptions and are referenced at various points throughout the text. Furthermore, I employ auto-photography as a storytelling tool to narrate the experiences of the youth I observed. My presence in the field was guided by my commitment to fully engage my senses and cultivate connections with those I encountered. This approach is grounded by the socioemotional development theory (SDC) that emphasizes my dual role as both observer and active participant in supporting the shelter community. Through direct immersion, I gained profound insights. I honor these insights by intentionally presenting their stories with a profound sense of gratitude for the opportunity to learn and contribute.

The data presented in this research blends integrative and excerpt strategies at different places for different reasons. Emerson et al.'s (2010) work explores the ways that researchers navigate their relational connections within the research context to acknowledge the impact of a researcher's personal experiences on the research process itself. For instance, the interviews in the findings are paired with my interpretations in order to create "exemplars" of patterns that emerged

thus producing an integrative strategy. This approach is useful for bringing together observations and occurrences that are scattered in different places and mediums to create a coherent overview of a pattern that I later observed through the coding process. The main reason this strategy is employed is to encourage more flexible and reflective narrative accounts¹⁰⁹. The presentation of this qualitative research is a blend of themes that were identified through coding the interviews. These themes were chosen to illustrate the overarching experiences shared by the young migrants, as I saw them. There are also stories that I present in this paper to set up other themes, or to further demonstrate the cultural environments in which the youth live and interact such as, the story of our first meeting and our last day together. The codes I chose to base this thematic presentation are threefold. For one, they identify the young migrants' Caravan experiences, as well as their dynamics within the shelter. Lastly, I observe the ways that youth reclaim their humanity and by extension, their childhoods (that is, how they heal).

Concurrently, the use of fieldnotes as epigraphs in this work is the integration of an excerpt strategy, as it does not provide my commentary. Instead, "the interpretation is left to the reader and to allow the scenes to speak for themselves". This evokes what Emerson et al. consider "texture" or depth, to the ethnography as the strategy suggests key moments in writing in the ethnographic story. Additionally, by not editing the excerpts, I provide details that allow readers to see for themselves the "grounds" for analytical and interpretive claims. In this way, readers are active participants in constructing meaning as they are invited to assess underpinnings, construction, and authenticity of interpretations¹¹⁰. These approaches are also blended, specifically in the overview of key actors. In this subsection, individual descriptions were taken directly from

¹⁰⁹ Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

¹¹⁰ Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

summarized research memo's that I wrote after conducting interviews¹¹¹. In all, this methodological blend ensures a rigorous examination of the data to capture both overarching themes and fully developed, individual stories.

In the first section of my findings, I explicitly share stories through three artistic mediums: freestyles, interviews, and drawings. All data is systematically presented in a chart format, showcasing the original Spanish language in the left column and its English translation in the adjacent column. To enhance the understanding of the visual data, I supplement it with field notes and excerpts from formal interviews conducted with the youth. Within these excerpts, conversational snippets are included to provide context to the core of their responses alongside my direct questions. To streamline the organization of this data in the findings, I employ charts where respondents are identified with "R" and the interviewer (me) is designated with "I". I categorize the transcripts of my interviews into three overarching themes: the supportive culture at Casa Asilio, the support of surrogate families, and the way the youth find ways to reclaim lost aspects of their childhoods.

Map of the Findings

The findings begin with "The Cultures of Casa Asilio," which looks at the deliberate and collaboratively constructed culture of solidarity within the shelter. Dr. Ali, a psychologist provided by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Dr. Ali introduced Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) activities that ground their approach. HCE is the paradigm through which youth are taught to process and heal their collectively experienced trauma in a way that extends beyond trauma-informed care. The hope is to reclaim their humanity and not be defined by what they endure. In this section, I use field notes and a transcribed video of a youth's

¹¹¹ Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

freestyle during a group therapy session led by Dr. Ali. Each participant was asked to write poems based on HCE principles; these poems illustrate the mutual respect between the youth and shelter staff. This section's implications uncover strategies on how to effectively engage with unaccompanied minors and insights on the impact of collective empowerment on the youth's self-esteem.

The following section, "Surrogate Families at Casa Asilio," looks into the shelter's familial culture by starting with the origin story of their unofficial mascot and pet, *Migra*, the cat who also lives at the shelter. This part utilizes interview excerpts to illustrate the youth's agency in forming their surrogate families. The interviews also reveal that they view the shelter staff as an extension of their families, with Don Pepe, the shelter coordinator, as a father figure and Doña Tita, a staff member, as a maternal figure. They forge sibling-like bonds to protect each other, assert their cultural identities, and foster supportive relationships. Furthermore, this section examines various encounters the youth have with other adults during their journeys, through use of additional interview excerpts. The aim is to showcase how acts of kindness are ingrained cultural traditions. While the focus remains on the shelter's atmosphere and its impact on the youth's experiences, the section acknowledges the context of the Caravan movement. Though not the primary focus, the movement contextualizes the broader environment in which events unfold and affect the youth. Each interview excerpt highlights the diverse ways in which the connections they form provide them support at different junctures. Overall, the findings in this section are focused on the individual agency of the minors to explore their personal power in finding creative solutions and possibilities.

The final section of the findings, titled "Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio," incorporates interview excerpts, auto-photography from an HCE activity in group therapy, and

field notes from my last day with the shelter. It begins with interview excerpts offering insights into the aspirations of the youth residing at the shelter. I share their dreams for the future, to demonstrate their agency in choosing direction of their lives. While their goals vary, the desire to provide for their families and pursue education emerges as a common theme. I include this exchange between us to emphasize that despite their circumstances, they are still children who have been pushed into adulthood prematurely. They opened up their hearts to me when they shared their stories, and this question was my way of providing them with a platform to express the brighter futures they envision for themselves. Dreams and aspirations are essential for children; they serve as beacons of hope, driving motivation and direction in their lives. To authentically depict the lives of the youth, I include pictures to capture how they would like to be perceived by outsiders. During a group therapy session, they were prompted to write words on the tracings of their hands that they wanted people in the U.S. to know about them and their values. These images are presented in a chart format, accompanied by the content written in Spanish and translated into English. This activity was designed to build their awareness of the intersections of personal and political life by pushing youth to understand how their personal struggles have profound political explanations. The section concludes with a narrative recounting my final day with the youth at the shelter. As a scholar in this space, I recognized the importance of not treating them as mere objects of study but as individuals with stories to tell; I was simply there as a channel. Hence, on my final day with the youth, I orchestrated a small gesture—a piñata filled with Mexican candies—as a token of appreciation for their time, openness, and resilience. Despite their initial reluctance, the shared experience brought about a moment of childlike joy. I include this story to remind us all of their inherent humanity.

In its entirety, this project embodies both tangible and intangible elements that have shaped my exploration. While interviews formed a significant part of the research, the focus extended to the art of everyday survival and the intimacy of (dis)continued life through art and creative expression. Art possesses a unique ability to encapsulate and convey the essence of their lived experiences. This allowed me to depict the full spectrum of their humanity. Through various mediums, the youth's expressions reflect a profound commitment to survivance and resistance. By discussing the youth as a collective, I aim to illustrate how communities reclaim agency over their lives despite structural impositions. This effort serves to center marginalized voices in the face of systemic inequality and oppression.

3.6 Key Actors and Descriptions

While I collected twenty stories in the field, I have chosen to include specific excerpts from interviews that directly relate to the focus of this project. The following graph outlines the fourteen key actors presented in this study, identified by pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Each participant's social categories, including age, sex, country of origin, and migration status at the shelter, are also provided. The youth participants include Melo, Río, Felicia, Mani, Chico, Tony, Aria, Santos, Cortez, Beto, and Kali. Additionally, the study includes insights from adults employed by the shelter: Don Pepe, Doña Tita, Don Hugo, and one of the two psychologists provided by UNICEF, Dr. Ali. In addition to human participants, I also include the story of the shelter kitten, Migra, as a symbol of the shelter's environment and its impact on the individuals residing there. Below the graph, I introduce each actor with summaries of their stories to contextualize the excerpts presented in Chapter 4.

Table 1 Chart of key actors presented in this study with pseudonyms and assigned demographic information.

PSEUDONYM	SOCIAL CATEGORY
1. MIGRA	Casa Asilio Cat
2. DON PEPE	Casa Asilio Shelter Coordinator
3. DOÑA TITA	Casa Asilio Shelter Staff
4. DON HUGO	Case Asilio Shelter Staff
5. DR. ALI	UNICEF Social Psychologist
6. MELO	16 y/o, Male, El Salvador, Asylum Seeker
7. RIO	17 y/o, Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker
8. FELICIA	15 y/o, Female, Honduras, Asylum Seeker
9. MANI	17 y/o, Male, Honduras, Deportee & Asylum Seeker
10. CHICO	15 y/o, Male, Mexico, Asylum Seeker
11. TONY	17 y/o, Male, Mexico, Asylum Seeker
12. ARIA	14 y/o, Female, Mexico, Deportee & Asylum Seeker
13. SANTO	17 y/o, Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker
14. CORTES	15 y/o Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker
15. BETO	15 y/o Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker
16. KALI	17 y/o Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

Don Pepe—Casa Asilio Shelter Coordinator

During our initial meeting, Don Pepe warmly expressed, "we are international people here," emphasizing a spirit of inclusivity with the phrase "bienvenido todo el mundo, que todos vengan," meaning "we welcome the entire world, may all come." This welcoming ethos permeated

his demeanor. As I spent more time with Don Pepe, I saw him operate beyond his role, particularly following the influx of migrants during the Caravan's arrival. When I inquired about the shelter's capacity, Don Pepe revealed that they accommodated as many as 178 minors from the Central American Caravan and 78 Mexican unaccompanied minors simultaneously, far exceeding the shelter's official capacity of 30. Despite this challenge, they adapted, filling every available space with beds and implementing new operational systems to manage the increased flow. During quieter periods, such as the "off-season," (mid to late summer) Don Pepe shared that they typically housed around ten migrants. Amidst these logistical challenges, every teen received the necessary attention and support. The adolescents themselves formed a supportive community, finding solace and peace within the shelter's walls. He said that everyone, *gracias a Dios*, (thank God) who arrived at the shelter with the Caravan, has been reunited with their families in the U.S. Only three minors voluntarily returned to Honduras. He said that these cases were supported by Casa Asilio and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). They voluntarily returned to Honduras because they did not have critical cases and were repatriated. He told me that he was proud of the migrants who were granted political asylum and that all the children he worked with are now with their loved ones. He said that there were some cases where those who did not have family in the U.S. formed such close bonds at the shelter, that they successfully applied for asylum with their friends. Don Pepe said he feels fulfilled because he was able to do something, and it worked. He said that he encouraged the youth and that no one lost hope. In the end, they realized their dreams and the impossible became possible for them. He told me that many of the kids did not know about political asylum before they met him. In his view, "they arrived drifting, like a boat without a compass, like an airplane with no signal, walking in circles without knowing where the exit was", unaware of the sanctuary awaiting them at Casa Asilio. I conveyed to Don Pepe that his perspective

and influence diverged greatly from the portrayal of migrant shelters and migrants from the U.S. media. His compassionate approach and the sanctuary he provided stood in stark contrast to the narratives in mainstream depictions.

Doña Tita—Casa Asilio Shelter Staff

This shelter staff member was an integral part of Casa Asilio, alongside Don Pepe and Don Hugo. Among her many duties were meal preparation and feeding the youth. She was deeply admired for her nurturing demeanor. I often observed the youth willingly join her in the kitchen, eager to assist and learn from her. Even without her direct guidance, the teens took the initiative to set up the dining room and arrange tables, chairs, placemats, and dishware for mealtimes. They developed their own systems to serve food, eat, and clean up around the shelter. To me, this demonstrated their deep admiration for her. Doña Tita's support was invaluable, especially for the young women at the shelter facing puberty and gender-related challenges. Unfortunately, she was forced to resign due to her husband's jealousy. Due to this, I was not able to interview Doña Tita before she quit.

Don Hugo—Casa Asilio Shelter Staff

As groundskeeper of the shelter, Don Hugo played a crucial role in supporting Don Pepe. As Don Pepe's right-hand man, he ensured Casa Asilio was maintained. For example, the first day I met him, he was tied to a rope at the top of a palm tree, cutting off grown coconuts with his machete (reminding me of my great-grandfather in El Salvador). He was highly respected for his dedication to maintaining the shelter and safeguarding the youth. His responsibilities included the manual upkeep of the space and he oversaw the shelter at night to ensure the security of the teens while they slept, or in case they needed an adult. He worked tirelessly during the hours when the

other staff members were unavailable or resting. In all, his responsibilities were rooted in the well-being of the residents.

Dr. Ali—Psychologist

At Casa Asilio, a range of services were available to support the young migrants like English classes, social work, medical assistance, legal aid, and psychological support. These services were provided by two non-governmental organizations, Save the Children and UNICEF. At Casa, I observed Dr. Ali, a social psychologist with UNICEF, and her colleague lead group therapy sessions using an approach called Healing Centered Engagement (HCE). HCE is a strengths-based approach focused on holistic healing that emphasizes culture and identity as key elements in personal well-being for young people, their families, and those who support them.

Melo—16 y/o, Male, El Salvador, Asylum Seeker

Through our hour-long conversation, I learned that Melo is from the same *colonia* (neighborhood) as my great-grandmother. Melo, the youngest of 10 siblings, arrived at the shelter with his nephew but was separated from his older brother in Tijuana because of their ages. Melo and his nephew were driven out of their homes because of threats from the street gang MS-13 that controlled his *colonia*. They studied at a school that is in an area controlled by his neighborhood's rival street gang, Mara 18. To go to school, they had to pay a daily \$5 tax to Mara 18. Street tax is common in the daily lives of Salvadorans, he told me. His story showed me that many people find themselves working, commuting, and living in territories claimed by rival street gangs. Gang members disguise their informants as street vendors to spot where people come from and to impose taxes on any "outsiders." One day, MS-13 informants saw Melo paying a fee to the rival gang, so they sent armed, masked men to terrorize his home. Given eight hours to leave the area or face dire consequences, Melo's mother offered her savings to finance his journey to the Mexico-U.S.

border, a step she had taken with his older siblings in the past. His life in jeopardy and aware of MS13's pervasive networks across El Salvador, Melo knew he could not stay. Packing only essentials—two pairs of pants, two shirts, and a pair of shoes—he left behind his grandparents, friends, his secondary education—in all, his life. Melo took a bus to Guatemala but told me that he did not stay long because MS-13 controls most of its territories as well. It was in Ciudad Hidalgo, Michoacán, Mexico that he found other migrants (remnants of the October 2018 Caravan) in transit. Here, he waited for three days to obtain a humanitarian visa, a rare opportunity for most non-Mexican unaccompanied minors. He learned about this visa from the adults he met with the Caravan who encouraged him to wait with them. This permission granted him the authorization to live and traverse Mexico for a maximum of 30 days.

Rio—16 y/o, Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

Rio is a spirited young man who celebrated his 17th birthday while under the care of immigration lawyers in Tijuana. Despite the challenges he faced, his joy remained buoyant as he reflected on reaching Tijuana on his birthday. His story was different in that he avoided the arduous walking part of the journey from Southern Mexico. Through the support of his guardian aunt in Honduras and his infectious zest, he persuaded bus drivers to purchase his tickets throughout Mexico. As he was underage and unable to do so himself, this assistance was crucial for his journey. Throughout his journey, he found kindness from the Mexican community that enabled him to build some savings. He found lodging when awaiting a humanitarian visa in Southern Mexico by connecting with someone he met on Facebook. He charmed strangers with his sincerity and earned their trust and credibility. This aspect is noteworthy as it showcases his steadfast refusal of the temptations and shortcuts presented to him, both in his hometown and on the streets. Motivated by his protective instincts towards his mother and a vision of a dignified life he

embarked on the journey to create a better future for them. This relationship contrasts starkly with that of his father a negligent addict who does not care for him or his family. His story revealed the complex dynamics of impoverished urban families struggling with addiction. Additionally, his account features the harsh realities of extortion, a pervasive evil that infiltrates every aspect of society in Honduras. Essentially, this teen's story illuminates the challenges encountered by young adults in this study who also come from impoverished urban areas. It serves as a powerful reminder that dignity is a fundamental aspiration, rightfully belonging to everyone.

Felicia—15 y/o, Female, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

This is a compelling narrative of a participant whose demeanor exuded warmth and resilience beyond her tender years. Despite her youth, she possesses a maturity that hints at experiences far beyond her age. She spoke with a gentle demeanor and she recounted the harrowing ordeal of sexual violence and harassment inflicted upon her by an older family friend. She revealed the intricate web of fear and danger that permeated her life at home. While her initial plans were to seek refuge in Spain, where extended family awaited her, fate intervened as she embarked on a journey to the U.S., where her parents reside—strangers whom she has never met yet yearns to reunite with. From one day to the next, she packed a modest bag of essentials, only to abandon them upon reaching Mexico's southernmost border. Her journey, fraught with peril and uncertainty, offers glimpses into the pervasive hyper-surveillance that shrouded her in Honduras. Living there was a constant reminder of the gender-based dangers that lurked in her midst. Despite the challenges encountered along the way, she expressed gratitude for the migrant Caravan, as it provided a sense of solidarity and safety in the vast unknown. She bonded with fellow travelers from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador and found friendship within the tumult of the journey. She celebrated her 15th birthday at Casa Asilio and told me that this place was her newfound sense

of security. Casa became a sanctuary where she found refuge from her home life while nurturing hopes for a brighter future.

Mani—17 y/o, Male, Honduras, Deportee & Asylum Seeker

Mani illustrated the desperation shared by many teens who joined the Central American Caravan; all seeking a future beyond despair. Despite facing deportation from Mexico four times, he persistently found his way back. His narrative is one of challenging household economics for single-mother families like his in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Other young mothers, like Mani's, also relied on community support to look after their children while they worked long hours with little pay. He described his home as dangerous and plagued by hunger and hardship. He lived in constant fear of recruitment by street gangs especially by the Zetas. They were infamously known for kidnapping and extortion. He knew staying in Honduras meant risking his life. He told me that, one day, his family lost their home and had to move in with a strict landlord. He expressed an urgent need to find work in the U.S. because of the anguish he felt for his younger siblings living there. His mother's financial struggles forced him to quit school, so he found work locally. He attempted to make his way to the U.S. previous times and then again when his boss extended an invitation to join him in finding the Caravan in October 2018. He told me stories about the migration paths that worked for him and the ones that did not. He revealed that once in Tijuana, he found hope at the shelter. In this space, his hopes were reassured by coordinator Don Pepe, who promised him that he would not be deported this time around. He told me that throughout his journey, he encountered both good and bad people, each differing in their reasons for fleeing. For Mani, the United States offers a chance for salvation, where he hopes to find a well-paying job so that he can buy a home for his family in Honduras and reunite with his grandparents, who raised him. He cried telling me that he hoped to see them again in this life.

Chico—15 y/o, Male, Mexico, Asylum Seeker

During the interview, Chico, a young man from Chiapas, Mexico, shared that he was motivated by a desire for a better life amidst abusive circumstances at home. He had finished the first part of his secondary education but could not finish school because of financial hardships. He was desperate in his circumstances and could not share these feelings with even his closest friends. He felt isolated so he confided in his older brother residing in the U.S. (who worked as an electrical engineer). His brother encouraged him to risk the journey North and revived Chico's dream to one day be a mechanical engineer. Chico left behind his younger siblings and embarked on the trek. He made sure to tell me all the reasons why his journey was not as "horrible" as those of his Central American counterparts at the shelter. He communicated moments of shame as he recalled instances of begging. He only had 1,000 Mexican pesos with him for his journey, equivalent to \$57.69. He traveled alongside his childhood friend who enjoyed photography. This hobby brought them joy during their travels as they often deviated from the Caravan to find picturesque scenery. His reflections taught me that Mexicans often hold xenophobic prejudice against other non-Mexican migrants, both socially and structurally. Once at the shelter, he found brotherhood with his fellow residents. He told me that he learned about the challenges faced by Central Americans in transit that strengthened their bonds at the shelter. He awaited political asylum with the hopes of being reunited with his brother on the other side.

Tony—17 y/o, Male, Mexico, Asylum Seeker

This teen's journey was started because of an intense encounter with a street gang in his village. He was abducted shortly after escorting his sisters to school from their home. When he woke up his hands and feet were tied with a rope, and he had a gun to his head. He said they beat him up and posed him a chilling ultimatum. His choice was to either join them or assassinate a

member of his own family within 15 days (or else become a target himself). After shooting him in his kneecaps, they let him go (he lifted his pant legs to show me his bullet wounds). He reflects on the watch he was gifted for his birthday and believed that to be the reason why he was targeted. He endured persistent threats from the gang members for 10 days after that encounter. This violence was compounded by his difficult relationship with his grandfather who was his sole guardian. On the 10th day after his encounter with the gang, he decided to flee with his younger brother and a friend their age. He knew it was his only chance of survival. He eventually caught up with the migrant Caravan once he entered Mexico but lost his friend somewhere along the journey. At the shelter, he awaits political asylum with his brother who is also staying at the shelter. Together, they hope for a life in the U.S. that will allow them to take care of their family.

Aria—14 y/o, Female, Mexico, Deportee & Asylum Seeker

Key moments of the interview trace back to the initial recruitment of volunteers for this research engagement. Aria was eager to be on my list after our introduction my first day at Casa. This moment is noteworthy because, as evidenced throughout the interview, the respondent struggles to fully articulate some experiences which I now understand as indications of PTSE. Nevertheless, Aria courageously relived her life with me and shared the parts of her story that she wanted known. She was compelled to flee her home due to mistreatment from her guardians, her uncle and grandfather. Traumatized by their experiences, she and her older brother sought refuge with their estranged mother, working in the state of Minnesota (her mother's legal status is unknown). The news of what they were enduring led her mother to financially arrange for Aria and her older brother to travel from their home in Mexico City. The plan was to use falsified documents, procured through some obscure connection in their social network, to cross through border patrol and reunite with her in the U.S. Aria admitted that she was aware of detainment as a

possibility when reflecting on the plan, however she considered it worthy of risk because of the abuse she faced at home. Aria told me that one morning she pretended to go to school, and this was the day she was able to escape her cruel guardians. She cut her secondary studies short and embarked on her journey by plane in late October 2018. Aria and her brother attempted to cross the border on November 1st, but they were detained due to their documents. She told me about the suffering she endured while detained prior to deportation. She was thrown in *La Hielera*, the Ice Box, an infamous holding cell named for its cold temperature. She told me that they left the lights on all day and all night which was a disorienting experience for her as she could not feel or sense the time. She said she was not given the chance to call her mom and inform her about what they were going through until three days later when they were taken to the Mexican consul. The consul gave them the choice to return home or apply for political asylum and await a shelter (Casa Asilio). Once at the shelter, she said she became friends with everyone and learned about their Caravan experiences. Despite enduring intolerable suffering at various points, this 14-year-old and her 16-year-old brother maintained the hope of reuniting with their mother for a secure life.

Santo—17 y/o, Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

This interviewee hails from a particularly turbulent *colonia* overrun by street gangs in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. This was my first interview and marked a significant moment for outlining general themes. He set the tone for what was commonly experienced by underage boys who came from San Pedro Sula, the capital of Honduras. Their urban intersection explained a lot of the youth's music taste and interest which we bonded over. He taught me a lot about popular music for their generation in Honduras. He told me that back home there's a pervasive sense of fear among those working in the transportation industry because of threats and violence. He was good at math, so he found work as a fare collector for a bus owner. Despite never completing primary

education, Santo found himself in a dangerous occupation. He said, many in this line of work are often extorted by gang members who take over bus routes. He told me that the other dangers include coercion to carry out the gang's criminal activities through fear and intimidation. The refusal to comply with their demands resulted in beatings from the gang members. He told me that he heard these stories daily. He also recounted instances of gangs setting buses ablaze with drivers still inside because of their refusal to "cooperate". I shared a personal story of my father's bus business in El Salvador to relate to his experience and share my family's history with extortion in this industry and how it complicated my parents' relationship. He told me that one morning, his boss' bus was threatened so that day he decided to join the Caravan and bring his younger sister with him. He left behind his family; he said his father cried as he accompanied his children to the bus station in San Pedro Sula in the hopes they would reach the Guatemala-Honduras border. They located the whereabouts of the Caravan by using social media and asking people questions. Once he found the collective, Santo and his sister hitchhiked along the route which he revealed was a strong strategy of the Caravan. He felt safer asking for rides when he was with a group. He told me that he enjoyed traveling in the group setting throughout Guatemala and that this was the Caravan's most supportive time. For instance, he tells a story about someone needed new shoes while they were walking in Guatemala and in response, another migrant found a way to acquire it for them. However, he witnessed a shift in attitude once they arrived in Mexico. He said that people were more scattered and individualistic here. This was when he first heard that there were kidnappings in the group. He was also fully cognizant of the contradictions he faced as a victim of the Honduran State's failure to control the gang problem. Santo asserted the belief that the presidential election was fraudulent. According to him, President Nasralla, the popular leftist candidate in 2017, garnered the most votes and deserved to be President. He believes that with the

assistance of the Trump administration, to some extent, that Nasralla was removed and perceived a threat. This was a common sentiment I heard from other Honduran migrants.

Cortes—15 y/o Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

In the interview with Cortes, I witnessed the interviewee grapple and negotiate fragmented memories of his experiences en route to Tijuana. His connections to the people he encountered along his journey stood out throughout his narrative. The adolescent recounted confusing and often contradicting encounters with law enforcement throughout the journey as there were many and he could not decipher between them. He said that law enforcement would dismantle any congregated group that deviated from the "original" Caravan, so they encountered police often. The 15-year-old encountered the same criminal networks that drove his siblings out of their homes in Honduras when he was in Guatemala—a place he mentioned his backup if he was deported. Cortes was subject to constant harassment and recruitment of the street gangs in his neighborhood where they would catch him on his way to school and work. His sister, living in the U.S. told him that she wanted him to have a childhood better than what she had. So, to the advice of his older sister he began to explore the idea of going North. He said that they were raised by their grandparents. They became his guardians after the murder of their father (and that he never knew his mother). His grandparents also encouraged him to seek a life free from the threat of violence despite knowing the difficulty of migration. He envisioned the U.S. as his mecca for financial opportunity, where he could work toward his dream career as an architect to send money back home. The teen broke into tears when he reminisced about the thought of reuniting with his grandparents one day, hoping they don't die. He maintained that, for now, his goal was to make it to his sister's home in North Carolina.

Beto—15 y/r Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

In the last six months, Beto has been at the shelter awaiting political asylum. Beto escaped family problems in Chiapas, MX and sought refuge from their psychological torment. He confided in me that nobody understood the depths of his suffering which only intensified his sense of hopelessness and isolation. He traveled partially with the Caravan accompanied by his friend, his friend's mother, and her infant. They hitched rides in trucks throughout their journey. Despite his challenges, Beto selflessly cared for his group. He shared stories about relinquishing his seat or finding shelter for his friend's mother and the baby as well as shouldering their belongings along the journey. During their travels, Beto managed to communicate with his brother who lived in the U.S. through borrowed phones. Upon learning of Beto's plight, his older brother offered to support his sponsorship to live with him in the U.S. if he sought asylum. He said that although he has extended family that live in Tijuana, he chose to stay at the shelter. Here, Beto has forged meaningful friendships with other residents. These relationships affirmed his choice in staying at the shelter. Together, he and his friends regard the shelter staff as their surrogate family that provide them a sense of belonging and offers the kind of support that Beto and others experiencing neglect, always yearned for.

Kali—17 y/o, Male, Honduras, Asylum Seeker

Kali recounted his journey in our interview as an exciting adventure. He had traveled with his uncle, who guided him through the perilous journey. Along the way, they found and traveled with the Caravan. They stayed at numerous shelters and relied on buses for faster transportation. His storytelling often took on a rhythmic quality, with sentences ending in repeated words like "caminando, caminando, caminando" (walking, walking, walking) and "seguimos, seguimos, seguimos" (we continue, continue, continue). Later, outside the interview, I discovered that he was a rapper by preference and carried a notebook. In this he wrote raps about his journey and

everything he experienced. At various points, I had the opportunity to watch him perform his raps. One he titled "El Rap Caravana," he performed using a microphone and speaker provided by the shelter. He recounted witnessing instances of child abduction and human trafficking while staying at a shelter in Chiapas and shared his experiences traveling with the Honduran Caravan.

Chapter 4: Findings

To begin, there is a shared tenderness among the individuals that make up this space. That may be due to the set-up of the shelter itself. There are a couple of shared spaces; each is cozy and made to be a place of congregation. The simplest being the kitchen/living room space and its bright, warm orange paint. The open partition between the kitchen and living room, along with the clear windows looking into Don Pepe's office provides a 'family' level of connection. The living room seats a comfortable amount of kids between its four couches, while 2-3 people are helping Doña Tita in the kitchen by washing dishes and setting up food plates for dinner. Kids sit on their phones in Don Pepe's office, sharing Facebook videos they come across about other people in the Caravan, some dismemberments and some caught by immigration officers. There are no assigned jobs or roles, so everyone hangs out around each other—the ease of touch amongst them is especially comforting. Tomorrow I hope to dive a bit deeper into what it means to be part of 'Caravan culture'. This sentiment was threaded out of a casual conversation I had with Rio today. He is a 17-year-old kid from Honduras who mentioned the high level of comradery and support within the group itself, especially its extensions of social capital which is how all kinds of information was shared, stored, and maintained while they were in transit¹¹².

4.2 The Cultures of Casa Asilio

This first section of the findings looks at the collaboratively constructed culture of solidarity and respect within the shelter. As culture is bilaterally produced, I begin with establishing Don Pepe's approach to safeguarding the youth at the shelter. The culture he establishes is one of solidarity, and led through his example, teaches its import to the youth. The bonds formed at shelter are underscored by the tragedy of two teens who were murdered while living at the shelter. I share this story because it fundamentally changed everything for those living and working at the shelter. This misfortune attributed to the culture of solidarity because they could

¹¹² Cruz, Lorena. Field Note on First Day at Casa Asilio. January 21, 2019.

not leave the space after this incident, for the own protection. It also taught many of the migrants to be protective of each other and fostered a shared sense of defense. Lastly, through an activity with Dr. Ali, I share a teen’s freestyle that discusses Casa Asilio and the youth’s tremendous respect for the shelter. The lyrics identify this group as, *locos respetuosos*, the “crazy respectful people” that comprises the shelter. His lyrics characterize the supportive nature of the Caravan and how it attributed to his survival.



Figure 3 Plaque at the entrance of Casa Asilio that reads *“Y cualquiera que recibiere á un tal niño en mi nombre, á mí recibe”*.

Guardianship

To begin, there is a black plaque that sits above the entrance of Casa Asilio. Placed on top of a calming blue hue, sits a biblical quote. Engraved on a black stone plaque, in Spanish, reads, “And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me (Matthew, 18:5-18)”. This Christian quote initiates a space built on bilateral respect and offers an atmosphere of humility between those who stay at the shelter and those allowed to leave as they please. This was the context in which I was received, as an outsider, by the youth. This quote reminds me that the shelter’s employees are engaged in the spiritual work that defines the accompaniment of minors

in transit. By protecting the migrant children who enter the shelter, Don Pepe embodies a profound sense of compassion and duty that transcends mere caregiving. His actions demonstrate a deep commitment to their physical and emotional safety (as well as his moral and ethical responsibility).

Once inside the shelter's walls, I am embraced with a deep warm, sunset orange paint that lathers the walls. The physical environment is an open concept between the kitchen and living room. This detail brought about my initial observation of a family-like intimacy amongst the youth at the shelter (shared in the epigraph of this chapter). My observations of their shared tenderness connect to the Biblical verse I read before entering the space. I felt as though I was with my own family; as if my cousins were there with me. This family scene is made possible by the physical architecture of the space as well as culturally, through the youth's interactions. Through conversations with Don pepe, I learned about one policy within the shelter that keeps the youth within the walls of the shelter at all times. The shelter coordinator, Don Pepe, holds the authority to grant permission for minors to leave the premises. He directly instructs and approves the locking of the shelter's outer gates, and through a microphone, set up in his office, he facilitates outside communication and instructs his staff when to open the gate. This rule emphasizes the importance of harmony among the youth, as there are limited alternatives unless they are willing to forfeit the support provided by the shelter—a choice few are willing to make. According to Don Pepe, this rule is implemented for their protection and most of the youth agree to it. To learn more about this rule, during a subsequent visit I asked Don Pepe if the youth are still maintained within the quarters, this conversation is explained in the fieldnote,

[Don Pepe says] the rules that remain, are important. Children are still not allowed to leave the premises, unless they want to buy something at the corner store. Although this is the strategy to protect the migrants, Don Pepe says that he has not told them about the murder of two teenage migrants who had stayed at the shelter. He thinks it's too sensitive of a topic to openly share. He wants the young migrants to feel safe at the shelter and fears that this news would be too much, especially

considering the fact that they had all recently undergone their own traumatic series of events and sufferings. However, Don Pepe makes it an effort to have group excursions. He says that on the weekends he takes them to the Tijuana beaches, soccer fields, even the Parque Morelos (an ecological reserve in Tijuana it has a zoo and an artificial lake). He kindly invites me to join them on Sundays.... While we are talking a youth comes into the office with someone on speaker phone claiming to be his uncle. From what I can overhear, his uncle wants to pick him up at the shelter and is asking Don Pepe about the process. Don Pepe tells him that if he is his uncle, then he has to fill out paperwork with his information. He then follows up by asking which side of the family his uncle is from. This catches me off guard because it seems like he is untrustworthy of the uncle. When the youth exits the office, I quietly ask Don Pepe if he asked questions of the uncle to safeguard the teen. This was my attempt to gauge the processes/procedures of youth leaving with their family members. He replies yes, because the shelter may be put in a risky position or the youth could risk their safety. Oftentimes, he says, youth will claim someone is a family member and it turns out that they were not family. He says, now more than ever, someone (he calls them a ‘pollero’ which is a colloquial term for smugglers) can claim to be the teen’s family and take them to someone who sells drugs and force them to mule across the border where they will risk their lives or they can be kidnapped. Therefore, [the staff] make sure to investigate family members and make sure they are who they say they are by making them show up to the shelter on an appointment basis. He makes sure to never give the family member an idea as to the questions they will be asked so that he can take them by surprise and gauge their responses better. He says he has learned this trick of the trade from the lawyers he has worked with. He says it works perfectly. He has never had a case where it didn’t work for him.¹¹³

Don Pepe’s approach at the shelter is profoundly significant, as it instills a culture rooted in values and norms that prioritize the best interests of the youth. His methods demonstrate a deep commitment to the well-being and safety of the young migrants under his care across various fronts. Firstly, Don Pepe’s decision not to disclose the murder of two teenage migrants who had previously stayed at the shelter proves his sensitivity to the individual emotional and psychological states of the children as they arrive at the shelter. He does not mean to maliciously keep them in the dark about what happened; instead, he shields them from additional distress. Through this effort one can see his dedication to upholding respect for the youth and what they endure. He acknowledges the effects of keeping the youth within the walls at all times, so in an effort to

¹¹³ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Revisiting Casa Asilio. July 19, 2019.

balance the situation, and maintain a sense of normalcy or childhood, he and Don Hugo take the youth on excursions. They show the youth the beauties and joys of the city they live in and enjoy it together. These activities offer recreational fun, and help the youth build communal bonds where they can make memories together (proving further dedication to their well-being). He even invites me to join them next time, reflecting the inclusive atmosphere that extends beyond the shelter's immediate confines. Additionally, his approach to vetting family further proves his dedication to ensuring the youth's safety, whilst maintaining their sense of agency (working a delicate balance between autonomy and security). He does not tell the youth that they cannot see family, rather, he mitigates the youth's risk of trafficking and exploitation through a meticulous, dynamic process. He employs tactics he has developed in his years working at the shelter, learned from the lawyers he works with, proving his proactive and informed stance on safeguarding the migrants.

In conclusion, Don Pepe's actions are a testament to his holistic understanding of care. By considering the emotional, social, and physical needs of the youth, he creates an environment that supports healing. His practices reflect a deep-seated commitment to the youths' best interests, evoking a culture of safety, trust, and communal support at the shelter. This is the context in which youth live and sustain themselves. Don Pepe exhibits the protective qualities of a guardian in charge of a child—which understandably makes him a father figure for many. Just as any parent or guardian who worries for the safety of their child, he keeps the youth as safe as possible. Don Pepe's serious approach to his role likely reassures youths' families and provides them with well-deserved peace of mind.

Tragedy and Transformation

Prior to late 2018 and early 2019, unaccompanied minors at Casa Asilio had the freedom to move in and out of the shelter as they wished. However, this changed one day by a devastating

event: two 17-year-old migrant boys were kidnapped, brutally tortured, and then murdered outside the shelter's walls by a criminal network. This harrowing incident profoundly affected Don Pepe, and his staff, leaving them emotionally shattered. Before this tragedy, the shelter operated with relatively unrestricted movement for its residents that was similar to other shelters in the area. However, in the wake of the boys' deaths, Don Pepe made the difficult decision to implement a new rule: no minor could leave the shelter premises without explicit permission and supervision. This rule was instituted to ensure the safety and protection of the youth under their care. Don Pepe shared with me the immense impact of the tragedy on both the staff and the youth. Despite their grief, they persevered in their roles, driven by a resilient spirit and a commitment to their duties. Don Pepe's leadership became a source of strength for the shelter community, fostering an environment of bravery and compassion among the youth. The loss of the two boys was keenly felt by all, as they were regarded as "brothers" by many within the shelter.

In light of these events, Don Pepe was vigilant about security measures at the shelter. As explained in the previous section, he carefully screens and verifies the identity of any individual claiming to be a relative before granting them permission. Unlike other shelters in the city that allow for more fluid movement and visitations, Don Pepe prioritizes the safety and well-being of the youth above convenience. The following field note describes more about the tragic event and its lasting impact on the shelter's staff. My field notes say,

In a conversation with Don Pepe, we briefly detailed the tragic story of the minors who had been staying at the shelter but were killed in the streets of Tijuana. We imagine how difficult it must have been for the families of those children. He [Don Pepe] tells me that this situation hit Doña Tita hard. As the shelter leader, or 'capitán' as he put it, Don Pepe says it was a difficult and sad situation for him as well. However, Don Pepe had to put on a different *cara* (face) than what he felt. He said he needed to maintain his emotions, no matter how difficult it was for him to keep supporting the adolescents and *seguir adelante* (push forward) in order to maintain order and respect. He wanted to show them how to live a better path and forget (as much as they can) any bad influences. To teach them he says, 'you have

to be strong but in reality, the heart feels everything'. He says that the beautiful thing about the human heart is that it is 'simple and soft, but we must keep the face strong, even when the heart splits and breaks, *fijate*'. He continues that although he was 'strong' his emotions were 'tender'. In the end, he says they have all lived through a lot at the shelter, but *nunca volteamos la bandera y seguimos* (we never turn back we continue ahead)¹¹⁴.



Figure 4 Altar for two migrant youths who were murdered while living at Casa Asilio.

Following this incident, the teens, and staff both felt it was necessary to remain within the protection of the property at all times. Together, the youth set up an altar for their lost brothers; Figure #4 shows the altar as I saw it on my first day. The altar holds flowers and is decorated with the only pictures they could find on social media of the teens who passed away and a few of their personal items brought with them to the shelter. However, the altar was washed away during a heavy rainfall in late January 2019. Despite its fleeting existence, this act of collective

¹¹⁴ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note on First Day at Casa Asilio. January 21, 2019.

commemoration embodies the enduring bond between the youth and transcends the temporal and physical constraints of their environment.

“Locos Respetuosos”

To further support the teens, social psychologists from UNICEF were invited to the shelter to provide group counseling. Although the efforts of non-governmental organizations like Casa Asilio are commendable, many of these institutions lack the resources for individualized psychological counseling. As a result, group counseling sessions were held to facilitate the collective processing of their shared experiences—also proving the power of collective healing. One day while I was volunteering at the shelter, I was invited to participate in several group psychology activities with the youth (along with the psychologists' permission). One memorable experience was the Story of Me activity because it allowed me to know the group at a deeper level. The psychologists divided the youth into three groups. This ignited their competitive spirit even though they were unsure of the activity's nature. We quickly learned that the game was not about winning or losing but a reflexive activity. Here is a field note about the experience:

The goal was for each group to write a song about 1. Quienes somos (who are we?) 2. De dónde venimos (where do we come from?) and 3. El futuro (the future). It was incredible seeing how good they all are at writing raps and this is because, as they told me, they have been writing throughout their entire journey and it's how I have seen them relating to each other—through music. This was a beautiful process to watch unfold because they had so much to say. It felt incredible just to sit back and empower their rhyme schemes and see how good it felt to them to receive that validation. The kids then set everything up; they brought out their speakers and a microphone, and luckily there was a little platform with stairs that served as our stage. Every group got on stage to perform their art. Each group touched me in incredible ways, and I was so happy to be able to capture some of it on film.¹¹⁵

I had the privilege of working closely with group two, who addressed: where do we come from?

Their eyes filled with excitement as they told me about where they were from and as we worked

¹¹⁵ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note on First Week at Casa Asilio. January 24, 2019.

through their ideas for the project. I had one teen, Kali, tell me that this task was easy for him because he often wrote down his freestyles and had written at every chance along his journey North from San Pedro Sula, Honduras. He asked me to record him when he performed because he aspired to be a famous freestyler one day. I specify that they were encouraged to create any art they wanted, but they all chose to write lyrics to a trap beat they found on YouTube. The genre is important to the stories they are telling about survival and came about organically. Storytelling is integral to hip-hop and by extension— people who survive oppressive systems. They are culturally taught to rap in this way, especially the flow of the lyrics. Flow is the rhythmic and melodic aspects of a rap performance; flow is always regional and specific. As someone who picks up regional accents of Honduras (as it is similar to Salvadoran accents), I understood the passion of his performed flow. For someone who may not speak Spanish, it is the impact of the flow itself that unveils the passion. This idea demonstrates that the research of migration is a regional project. It is a glocalised conversation, specific to the lived experiences of people from specific places. Therefore, the study of migration should include multifaceted migration narratives. This way, research can uncover unique, regional-specific lived experiences. Other important considerations are, where do people come from? Where do they want to go? What are their hopes? What do they need? Engaging with the youth through rap and hip-hop provided insights into their perceptions of self and family. By connecting with them through similar cultural expressions, I gained a deeper understanding of the significance of family within their lives, as reflected in their lyrics.

After a set time, the groups were asked to present. As the field note above states, they set up a microphone station with speakers on top of a platform that served as our stage. Each group went up together further demonstrating how they physically show up to support each other. When the YouTube instrumental beat played, the microphone was passed from person to person to share

their lyrics. There were some more shy and quiet than others, there were some who chose not to participate but maintained respect and stood in the audience hyping each other up. The title of this section is a lyric pulled directly from one of the rap performances by a 17-year-old from Honduras. A snippet of this rap is provided in Spanish and English below:

Table 2 Excerpt of Freestyle

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Kali	<p>“Somos los migrantes, somos los que no somos maleantes... a Casa [Asilio] tenemos que respetar es una cosa de migrantes...no somos maleantes...respetamos a las reglas de Casa [Asilio] Pepe lo respetamos desde que llegamos porque él es él que echado la mano, [respetamos] a Doña [Tita] Ella muy elegante y muy bonita... Respetamos a Don Hugo que nos ayudado a otra manera...Respetamos a los abogados los contamos toda la historia de todo lo que hemos pasado, Ósea es que somos locos respetuosos”</p>	<p>“We are the migrants, we are the ones who are not thugs... at Casa [Asilio] we have to respect it’s a migrant thing...we are not thugs...we respect the rules of Casa [Asilio] Don Pepe we respect him since we arrived because he is the one who lent us a hand, We respect Doña [Tita] She is very elegant and very pretty... We respect Don Hugo who helped us differently... We respect the lawyers, we tell them the whole story of everything we have been through. I mean we are crazy respectful people ”.</p>

I include these lyrics because they demonstrate the culture of the shelter and its inhabitants. The staff and migrants built a shared culture of respect, “it’s a migrant thing” as Kali says. This teen is discussing who he is and where he comes from by rapping about the person he is at the shelter. From the first day of their arrival, he says that they collectively respect Don Pepe for lending them his support as one often does for a father figure. He was in the audience during their display and was touched by the sentiments of the group. Don Pepe even jumped on the microphone

at the end of the verse to say that he respects them all too. The rap also mentions their respect for Doña Tita because she provides a motherly figure that also supports them. They call on her beauty as a definitive marker of how they see her. They show their respect for Don Hugo, who is not an administrative worker but rather, the handyman of the shelter who fixes and upkeep the space. Kali also expresses his respect for the lawyers that the shelter has provided them. He reminisces on the heaviness of their stories and what it means to them to have people in positions of power, like lawyers or administrative staff, to support them during a difficult time. He feels their respect and gives it back to them. He poetically ends this verse by powerfully describing who makes up the shelter and by extension, who he is, “crazy respectful people”. This is not to say that he sees himself as crazy but rather the respect itself is crazy because it runs deep for all of them, and especially for this young man.

In addition to the homage the young migrants paid to the adults at the shelter who supported them, they also shouted out their experiences with the migrant Caravan. Clearly, the migrant Caravan impacted his identity and experiences as he talks about what they endured together. The rap below shows me that they learned the skill of survival and relationship-building from the Caravan itself. That is not to say this was not a skill they had prior to migrating, but rather, was reinforced through their migratory experience. When rapping about “where are you from?” Kali wrote about the people he met with the Caravan and described them:

Table 3 Excerpt of Freestyle

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Kali	R: “[tuvieron] buenas intenciones, nos ayudaron, nos alimentaron, siempre los llevo conmigo en mi mente y en mi corazón, nunca los olvido. También	R: “[they had] good intentions, they helped us, they fed us, I always carry them with me in my mind and in my heart, I never forget them. Also

Table 3 continued...

	<p>aguantando sufrimiento, pero como dicen, antes de una victoria hay que aguantar un proceso. Muchos aguantando frío, abrazándose para darse abrigo entre Guatemala y Mexico. Unos locos peleando, otros pidiéndole al señor, entre esos estuve yo. Muchos enviaron unos buses dispuestos a ayudarnos, muchos decían que era para regresarnos. Pero los que se quedaron fueron los que más feo la pasaron.”</p>	<p>enduring suffering, but as they say, before a victory you have to endure a process. Many enduring the cold, hugging each other for shelter between Guatemala and Mexico. Some crazy people fighting, others praying to the Lord, among them was me. They sent buses allegedly to help us, but many said it was to return us. But those who stayed were the ones who had the hardest time.”</p>
--	--	---

Through his lyrics, we get a glimpse of the shared humanity that characterized his journey. He shared that there was a spirit of camaraderie and mutual aid that prevailed among the Caravan participants. He states that many had good intentions and assisted each other by providing necessities like food, as well as warmth. He acknowledges the presence of troublemakers and occasional conflicts in the group, but at the same time, he emphasizes that these instances were not indicative of the overall atmosphere within the Caravan. Instead, he mentions the individuals praying amidst “endless suffering”. In a way, his own prayer was knowing that this suffering was leading him to his “victory”. This choice in his lyrics highlights the resilience and determination that permeated the journey. He explains the distrust between the migrants and the larger immigration system. At some point, he says, buses were sent to aid the migrants walking in the Caravan but skeptical of the institution’s motives, they questioned whether the buses were there to help, or intended to send them back home. Despite the physical challenges of endless walking (he repeats walking, walking, walking), enduring cold (continuing, continuing, continuing) and hunger. The repetition of walking and continuing offers us a rhythmic impact on the unending

nature of his journey to drive the message that, together, the migrants had a clear purpose and resolve to reach their destination. The repetition also serves to contrast the physical suffering of the journey with the deeper emotional and existential suffering of those left behind. He ends by saying that despite the difficulties, he recognizes that the true suffering and hopelessness is faced by those back in his homeland. Kali's flow serves as a narrative of survival. The Caravan's continuous effort is the heart of their movement. His experience offers a counternarrative that deepens our understanding of the collective nature of their journey.

After each group presented, the activity became a dance party and rap battle. The teens who enjoyed freestyling took the moment to share other lyrics they wrote, and they took turns showing each other new beats and dancing to hype each other up. The unanticipated events that followed the activity were spontaneous and gave me further insight into how the teens regard each other in this space. The collective reflections of the participating teens encapsulate the multifaceted nature of the migrant experience. This experience is made up of moments of unity, solidarity, even tension, and uncertainty. Through their poetry and lyrics, they highlight the importance of fostering an environment of creativity and mutual respect within the shelter setting. It is through such an environment that migrants can find solace, build connections, and embark on a journey towards a better future. The shelter culture itself is built on bilateral respect between the staff and the youth and it runs deep. Together, they created a supportive environment that allows for honesty which is not a common story in migration but should be. This reciprocal respect forms the bedrock of a safe space where young migrants can forge meaningful connections, nurturing their well-being and develop a sense of belonging.

In all, the staff's dedication plays a considerable role in exemplifying respect amongst those at Casa Asilio as revealed in group therapy. Don Pepe's words and actions nurture and

promote a supportive ecosystem. He creates a space where young people could not only survive but also thrive. By embodying the principles of the "best interest of the child" policy, this environment prioritizes youths' holistic growth and considers the welfare of each individual. As such, it is imperative to recognize and safeguard people who engage in this important work; it is fundamentally human work that has a direct and profound impact on the lives of unaccompanied migrants. The shelter stands as a beacon of hope and resilience for its young inhabitants. Within its walls, they find refuge and a sense of community amidst their journey. By cultivating a culture of respect, the shelter epitomizes the transformative power of human connection and empathy in the face of adversity. Moreover, the teen's touching characterization of themselves as "somos locos respetuosos [crazy respectful people]" reflects the profound esteem and gratitude they harbor for those who offer them support in this space. This is how they want to be seen. This eloquent portrayal encapsulates the enduring impact of mutual respect within the shelter and showcases the transformative potential of positive relationships for vulnerable people.

4.3 Surrogate Families at Casa Asilio

This part of the findings is divided into four sections that represent the formation of surrogate families and its diverse functions. Each part begins with a presentation of the actors involved and their quoted excerpts, followed by an exploration of their experiences. The first subheading tells the story of the shelter's pet, Migra and the hope she represents. Subsequently, the next section focuses on the protection and support that bilateral friendships and family-like bonds provide the youth. The chosen excerpts highlight the agency exerted by young people to navigate their survival strategies. This process is rooted in a learned protectiveness and influenced by the dangers they witnessed both at the shelter and during the Caravan journey. The next subheading is focused on parallel well-being between adults at the shelter and the minors. The implications

suggest that, for young people to thrive, it is crucial that adults also prioritize their own well-being. This concept is known as a parallel process of well-being, where adults actively engage in their own healing journey alongside the young person. The development of surrogate families is further developed in group therapy where migrants share aspects of their stories. Through dialogue, they find ways to relate to each other's experiences and learn more about their interconnectedness. I include the impact of those who fail to positively integrate themselves at the shelter and its consequences. The last theme examines kindness in transit. The relationships they forge during their travels help them creatively problem-solve migration controls and other difficulties. The adults they encounter represent parental figures within their surrogate families.

Migra the Shelter Kitten

I begin with the story of the kitten adopted by a teen at Casa Asilio. She was adopted as *Migra* meaning, immigration, and is often synonymous with border protection patrols or immigration officers. However, for young migrants, migra (as in, immigration enforcement) is often discussed light-heartedly and this name is clearly one of jest. Her name also symbolizes the youths' acknowledgment of their migration status. Don Pepe told me that Migra was found by him and Rio who heard her cries on their way to court one morning. Don Pepe was accompanying Rio to the first hearing of his political asylum case. Although he had family in the U.S., he was forced to wait in Mexico due to the Migrant Protection Protocols policy established in early 2019. Together, they followed her cries and found her barely a couple of days old, struggling for her life, inside a dumpster outside the courthouse. Rio pleaded with Don Pepe to let him take her home to the shelter with him. Don Pepe was hesitant to burden the already limited staff at Casa Asilio with the responsibility of looking after the kitten during an already busy migration season. Don Pepe told Rio to focus, and that if the kitten remained in the same spot when they came out of the

courthouse, he would consider taking her home. He wanted Rio to direct his energy toward the day ahead of them. Once they finished what they had to do in the courthouse, they came outside to find the kitten in the same place. So, keeping his promise, Don Pepe brought the kitten back to the shelter. The kitten brought much joy to the kids at the shelter, everyone was excited to play with her as she was freshly born. They all helped revive her back to a healthy state. She lived there from the moment they found her, in October 2018 until I got there in January 2019. She was still there when I visited six months later and to my amazement, she had been memorialized in the new mural on the exterior walls of the shelter (Figure #1). Over time, she regained her health and had the upmost playful energy. She was the perfect fit for the shelter. Migra became part of everyone's daily routine, even mine, as we took turns taking care of her. Being the independent spirit that she is, once she was fully healthy, she went about the shelter independently looking for her own food, finding people to give her extra cuddles, and sought for places to rest. She was one of them after all. This story, amongst others, details the happenstances that comprise this ethnography.



Figure 5 Picture of Migra, the cat adopted by Casa Asilio.

Happenstances are part of a larger pattern of survival, as it is the coincidental nature of events that shape one's experiences or circumstances. The kitten represents a hope that is intertwined with the youth at the shelter. The youth hope to end their migration in a happy way,

which is to be in the U.S. and reunited with their families. In the same way, Migra hopes to stay alive and eat. The bond that the youth form with this lost cat is emblematic of their own resilience. Migra exemplifies the value of compassion and care from people invested in your survival. In the intricate tapestry of happenstances, Rio journeyed over 2,000 miles, from Honduras, to Tijuana, to confront chance and destiny to save a life. Amidst the tumult of migration, the youth find purpose in this unexpected encounter— one where their aspirations intersect. These are the beautiful life-giving moments that come out of migration stories. Migra further represents and humanizes the individuals who comprise the shelter in an effort to show the world, how they care. Furthermore, this story symbolizes the shelter's innate desire to nurture and protect vulnerable beings. The youth and staff at Casa Asilio chose to provide a home for Migra. She mirrors their need for safety and belonging; her story parallels the young migrants' quest for a better life.

I begin this section of surrogate families with Migra to demonstrate how the youth actively cultivate familial bonds and connections within the shelter environment. Additionally, Migra represents a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of caring for one another. Her inclusion in the shelter's mural (Figure #1) further immortalizes her role in the community and reinforces the familial, communal bonds among its members. Overall, Migra's story embodies the concept of survivance by showcasing how the youth reclaim agency and resilience by reclaiming their childhoods and forging meaningful relationships within the shelter.

Support and Safety

The profound sense of camaraderie among the youth at Casa Asilio immediately captured my attention. Initially, I sought to explore how they transition from walking with the Caravan to a structured environment like detention or shelter. However, what became evident through my interactions with them was that their strong bond was not solely a result of their shared experiences

at Casa Asilio but also profoundly influenced by the loss of the two young boys at the shelter whom they consider their fellow brothers. There are four interviews shared in this section and ends with a fieldnote.

At the shelter, some of the communal culture they fostered was learned from their experiences in the Caravan. For instance, in an interview with Chico, a 15-year-old Mexican teen from Chiapas, MX, he discusses his migration as a choice for a better life due to abuse at home. While we spoke, he made sure to include all the reasons why his journey was not as “horrible” as the experiences of his Central American companions. He is awaiting political asylum so he can live in the United States with his older brother who migrated years earlier. In our interview, he reflected on his preconceived notions regarding Central American migrants. He said his viewpoints were challenged when he was forced to endure the journey himself. He expressed moments of shame when he thinks back to the times in which he had nothing and found himself begging on the streets—he says he left for the trip with 1000 Mexican Pesos. In the excerpt below I ask Chico about his feelings about living at Casa Asilio. He says that he feels differently because he is Mexican. His response sheds light on the youth’s collective sense of solidarity and protection:

Table 4 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Chico	<p>I: “¿Y qué piensas de aquí [en Casa Asilio]?”</p> <p>R: “pues muy bien, pues siendo mexicano pues te tratan bien pero así como mis compañeros cuando vienen... bueno yo vine escuchando a la gente de que ‘¿por qué vienen?’, hasta yo mismo me sentía así porque yo cómo no se sus problemas que tienen allá y con la noticia expresaban</p>	<p>I: “And what do you think about here [in Casa Asilio]?”</p> <p>R: “Well, very good, well, being Mexican, they treat you well, unlike my compañeros [companions] when they come... Well, I came here listening to people saying, 'why do they come?' so even I felt that way because, well, since I don't know</p>

Table 4 continued...

<p>que pues vienen haciendo desastre... pues, ¿por qué vienen? ya estando aquí me involucre con todos ellos, Pues no es... no es diferente porque cuando uno convive no sabe cómo es la persona, como dice el dicho que 'por uno pagan todos'.</p> <p>Entonces ya aquí conozco a todos y yo me siento a gusto y conforme estar con mis amigos porque digamos que no son como yo pensaba. Son diferentes, te tratan bien. Pues si como miraba yo lo que venía pensando, ya estando aquí ya me siento diferente porque no es lo mismo de lo que yo pensaba es diferente las personas.</p> <p>I: “¿Entonces cómo es la persona que pensabas?”</p> <p>R: “Como la noticia decía que venían haciendo, que golpeaban cosas o que dejaban su ropa tirada o basura así y así pues decía uno pues ¿a qué vienen o por qué? Empezaba a decir [yo] de cosas. Y ya pues viéndolo y convivir con ellos es diferente.</p> <p>I: “¿Ustedes han hablado sobre las diferentes circunstancias que te han llevado para acá o es algo que ustedes no hablan?”</p> <p>R: “Sí, hemos platicado y a veces también hemos tomado ese tema con ellos. Hablamos de ese tema con los psicólogos. De que digamos, cómo empezó, qué pasó,</p>	<p>about the problems they have over there [in their homeland] and with the news expressing that they are making a mess...Well, I asked, “why are they coming?” Being here though, I got involved with all of them. And well, it's not... It's not different because when you live together you don't know what the person is like, as the saying goes 'everyone pays for one'. So now being here I know everyone, and I feel comfortable and happy being with my friends because, let's just say, they are not what I thought. They are different, they treat you well. Well, as I looked at what I was thinking, now that I am here, I feel different because it is not the same as what I thought, the people are different.</p> <p>I: “So what did you think the people were like?”</p> <p>R: “As the news said what they were doing, that they ruined things or that they left their clothes thrown away or left garbage like that and so on, one said, well, for what are they coming for or why are they doing this? I started saying those things. And well, now living it and</p>
---	--

Table 4 continued...

	<p>cómo se sentían siendo mexicanos? Cómo nos sentimos a gusto... Pues como aquí mataron a dos muchachos que estaban aquí. Los mataron, los torturaron y todo. Con eso empezó el tema y que si se siente mal uno. Pues no se siente con confianza al salir.</p> <p>I: “¿Hasta ti también te sientes así?”</p> <p>R: “Sí, porque digamos que siendo mexicano pues... estando aquí— te toman como uno de ellos. No es de que porque soy mexicano y así puedo salir, no. Estando, digamos que se siente el albergue, se siente uno como ellos y al maltratar a uno— digamos, que si pegan a uno pues yo también me metería porque es mi amigo”</p> <p>I: “Y cómo te sentís en Tijuana ser mexicano y convivir con hondureños y otro centroamericanos?”</p> <p>R: “Pues yo me siento feliz contento por estar aquí, gracias a dios pues no me llevo mal, no me metí un vicio me metí en un lugar donde estoy bien.”</p>	<p>cohabitating with them it’s all different.</p> <p>I: “Have you all talked about the different circumstances that have brought you here or is it something that you don't talk about?”</p> <p>R: “Yes, we have talked and sometimes we have also taken up that topic with them. We talked about this topic with psychologists. They say, how did it start, what happened, how did you feel being Mexican? How comfortable we feel... Well, they killed two boys who were here. They killed them, tortured them, and everything. With that, the topic began, and if one feels bad. Well, one does not feel the confianza [trust, self-confidence, faith] to leave.</p> <p>I: “Do you feel that way too?”</p> <p>R: “Yes, because let's say that being Mexican, well... being here— they take you as one of them. It's not because I'm Mexican that well I can leave, no. Being here, let's say being at the shelter, you start to feel like them and when they mistreat any one person— let's just say, if they hit a person here, then I would get</p>
--	---	--

Table 4 continued...

		<p>involved too because they are my friend."</p> <p>I: "And how do you feel in Tijuana being Mexican and living with Hondurans and other Central Americans?"</p> <p>R: "Well, I feel happy to be here, and thank God because I don't get along bad with anyone, I didn't get into a bad habit, I got into a place where I'm okay."</p>
--	--	--

From this excerpt, we see that Chico initially expressed sentiments that were influenced by media portrayals of migrant Caravans and social xenophobia in Mexico. He mentions that the media perpetuated negative narratives of migrants that he initially shared but later challenged when he was forced to migrate. By asking him what he initially thought people were like, I drew from my parents' migration experiences, where they experienced racism as Central Americans. His answer contextualizes his experiences at Casa Asilio where he cohabitates with Central Americans, "now it's different" indicating that he changed his mind. He says, "for one, everyone pays" highlighting the multifaceted nature of the Caravan and that the negative illustrations of the movement were largely due to the bad actors but reminds us that those people are not indicative of everyone. This is significant because it shows how the function of power and racism unfairly paints the entire movement as "bad", thus perpetuates harmful stereotypes that the migrants internalize. However, now that he is at the shelter is happy and safe with his friends. The transformation of his viewpoints highlights the power of firsthand experience in dispelling prejudice for migrants themselves.

Chico also notes that experiencing the loss of two fellow migrants resulted in a shared trauma that made him sympathize further with the difficulties Central Americans endure in

Mexico. This demonstrates that the tragic event deepened Chico's bond with his fellow residents in a way that transcended their race or nationality. That, even though he is Mexican it does not matter because within the shelter the others see him as "one of them". In addition, the psychologists play a powerful role in mediating the relationships between the youth and further their empathy. In this way, mutual understanding emerges through their shared experiences. By way of personal discussions and group therapy, they collectively heal from the tragedies and agree that no one feels safe enough to leave the shelter. He says that, even though he is Mexican, he does not feel safe to leave the shelter either (further demonstrating that Don Pepe's security of entry points and restricted access contributes to a sense of safety). He states that as he continues to live there, he has friendships that he will protect because he knows that it is a difficult environment for his Central American peers. He described feeling a sense of camaraderie and solidarity with the others at the shelter. He emphasized that they were now his friends and even equated them to family. I gather this from his willingness to defend his new friends from any mistreatment. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they rally together to ensure each other's safety. This collective defense mechanism is particularly significant given the dangers they have faced individually and collectively, both in their home countries and during their journey. His example demonstrates the strength of his newfound connections and the community that emerged within the shelter. An aspect of Socioemotional development theory tells us that there must be a process of built empathy for the formation of a positive bilateral, peer relationship. He did not say he would defend one or two people, he said "anyone". Chico ends by offering his gratitude for the shelter because it kept him safe from addictions and bad habits, and that he is happy to be living with his Central American friends.

Next is the story of Felicia to contextualize what safety means to her and many others at Casa Asilio. One must recognize that for many, the violence in the Tijuana region is not understood as different from the violence they experience in their countries of origin. For example, Felicia is a 15-year-old female from Honduras who survived sexual assault and stalking from a close family friend. She was traveled with the Caravan and, like others at the shelter, she arrived in November 2018. Felicia walked with her older sister and cousin but due to their ages, were separated into different shelters. In Felicia's story, she illustrates how the shelter provides her with a sense of safety and security that she did not experience elsewhere, even at home. This is significant because in her interview, she told me a story about a child abduction that she witnessed which understandably, scared her. Her story shows the relativity of safety and what it may mean for those who find it. Her story is further impacted because she never felt safe, even with her own family:

Table 5 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Felicia	<p>I: “¿En cuáles espacios te has sentido segura y bienvenido?”</p> <p>R: “Sólo aquí [en Casa Asilio]”</p> <p>I: “¿Y cómo te sientes aquí en la Casa Asilio?”</p> <p>R: “Pues bien.”</p> <p>I: Si? ¿Tienes amigos aquí?</p> <p>R: Todos. Todos somos amigos.</p> <p>I: “Son amables?”</p> <p>R: “Si.”</p> <p>I: “Si, se ven como una familia”</p> <p>R: “Sí somos como hermanitas”</p>	<p>I: “In what spaces have you felt the most safe and welcomed?”</p> <p>R: Only here (Casa Asilio)”</p> <p>I: “And how do you feel at Casa Asilio”</p> <p>R: “Well, good.”</p> <p>I: “Yes? Do you have friends here?”</p> <p>R: “Everyone. We are all friends”</p> <p>I: “Are they kind?”</p> <p>R: “Yes”</p> <p>I: “Yes I see you all like a family”</p> <p>R: “Yes, we are like sisters”</p>

Felicia's testimony illustrates how Casa Asilio provides her a sense of safety and security that she did not experience elsewhere, “only here”. Despite the loss of two minors to violence, she expressed that she feels safer at the shelter than in her home country, where she lived in constant fear. She illustrates the kind, supportive atmosphere where she feels like she has “sisters” through her friendships (indicating the power of forming surrogate families). Her story reflects the experiences of many of the young girls seeking asylum due to gender-based forms of violence. Therefore, the shelter is more than physical place of refuge, it is a space that manifests meaningful connections that contribute to the youth’s overall well-being. Overall, this is a space where Felicia, and girls like her, can begin to heal and regain aspects of their childhoods. Casa Asilio serves as a microcosm of what a safe and supportive community can look like for these young people.

The shelter’s facilitation of family-like connection is furthered by Aria’s testimony below. Aria was forced to flee her home due to abuse from her guardian uncle and grandfather. The trauma endured by her and her older brother drove them to reconnect with their estranged mother living and working in Minnesota. Aria’s mother paid for her children to be smuggled into the U.S. from their home state, Mexico City. They planned to use falsified documents to cross the border. These materials were bought through the mother’s connections. So, she paid for Aria and her brother to flee their abusive guardians by pretending to go to school one day but instead, they took a plane to Tijuana. Cutting her secondary studies short, Aria left home at the end of October 2018. She attempted to cross on November 1st, 2018 but was unfortunately detained at the border and sentenced to deportation on November 2nd, 2018. I highlight this because, throughout our conversation, it became evident that she struggled to articulate her experiences fully. Instead, it was through her body language and the pauses in her narrative that I gained insights into the harsh conditions of her life in Mexico City and the impact that detention had on her.

Aria, along with her 16-year-old brother, endured significant suffering but maintained hope for reunification with their mother. At times, I found myself probing awkwardly phrased questions in an attempt to elicit further details from her. However, I also learned to trust my instincts and pivot to different lines of inquiry when I broached subjects she did not want to discuss or could not understand. This experience showed the fundamental difference between interviewing adults and children, particularly in their capacity to articulate their experiences fully as they continue to endure them. Children, especially those lacking adequate medical support to process their trauma, may not fully grasp the extent of their hardships. Aria’s interview taught me to pay close attention to subtle cues, such as body language or gaze to uncover deeper meaning:

Table 6 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Aria	<p>I: ¿Cómo llegaste aquí? ¿tu mamá te dijo sobre este sitio?</p> <p>R: Bueno, mi mamá pagó para que nos cruzáramos ilegalmente y nos detuvo migración y estuvimos un día en la famosa hielera. Es un lugar donde... Bueno, cuando te agarra migración, te tienen allí encerrado, pues dependiendo de cada caso te tienen ahí y dependiendo de cada caso es el tiempo que te quedas ahí. Y ahí es donde te agarran, te repatrian y te deportan a tu lugar de origen y a nosotros allí es donde nos llevaron. Estuvimos ahí, en las oficinas de la garita. Cuatro horas de ahí nos</p>	<p>I: “How did you get here? Did your mom tell you about this place?”</p> <p>A: “Well, my mother paid for us to cross illegally, and we were detained by immigration and we spent a day in the infamous ice box. It's a place where... Well, when immigration catches you, they keep you locked up there, and depending on each case that's how long you stay there. And that's where they catch you, repatriate you, and deport you to your place of origin and that's where they took us. We were there, in the border patrol offices. We were moved to the ice box four hours away and we stayed there</p>

Table 6 continued...

	<p>trasladamos a la hielera y ahí estuvimos el resto del día y la noche ya la mañana siguiente. Nos llevaron al cónsul mexicano y nos trasladaron al DIF. El DIF nos platicaron muchas cosas sobre este lugar (Casa Asilio) y nos enviaron por acá. El señor nos explicó todo sobre el proceso de asilo político y que vamos a estar seguros y todo eso. Entonces decidimos quedarnos aquí.”</p>	<p>for the rest of the day and night and the next morning. They took us to the Mexican consul and transferred us to the DIF. The DIF told us many things about this place (Casa Asilio) and they sent us here. The man explained to us everything about the political asylum process and that we were going to be safe and all that. So we decided to stay here.”</p>
--	--	---

When describing her detainment, she recounted being confined in the notorious *Hielera* (the ice box) at the Garita Kilómetro 26, a federal inspection station operated by the Mexican government, 26 km south of Nuevo Laredo, MX. She explained that this detention cell is notorious for its frigid temperatures. She spent three days in the ice box without being able to contact her mother to inform her of her situation which intensified her sense of fear and isolation. She shares that she endured hunger, sleep deprivation, and could not access basic hygiene. She said that she feels much better now that she is at Casa Asilio:

Table 7 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Aria	<p>I : “¿Cómo te han tratado aquí digamos en Tijuana?” R: “Bien.” I: “¿Y en el albergue?” R: “Bien y eso no ha cambiado desde que llegué.”</p>	<p>I: “How have you been treated while in Tijuana?” R: “Good” I: “How about at the shelter?” R: “Good. And that hasn’t changed since I arrived.”</p>

Table 7 continued...

	<p>I: “Dijiste que viniste contigo tu hermano. ¿Han hecho amigos juntos aquí o en el proceso de llegar acá? R: “Sí pues bueno todos nuestros amigos nos conocimos aquí en la Casa. Somos amigos con todos quienes han llegado y de la Caravana.”</p>	<p>I: “You said that you came with your brother. Have you both been able to make friends here together, or make friends along the way here?” R: “Yes, well, all of our friends we met here at Casa (Asilio). We are friends with everyone who has arrived here and who has arrived with the Caravan.</p>
--	---	---

In contrast to her distressing experience in the infamous *Hielera*, where she endured extreme conditions, her time at Casa Asilio stands out as a sanctuary of safety and support. This example shows the vital role of the shelter in providing a psychological sense of security for the youth. This is significant because Aria and Felicia show us that the shelter can be seen as a haven from the traumas, they experienced prior to their arrivals which reinforces my understanding of the space a symbol of safety that reinforces its role as a place of refuge. Her testimony also highlights the inclusive environment fostered at the shelter, where she has formed friendships with “everyone”, including those who arrived with the Caravan. This inclusivity is particularly important considering the preconceived notions and prejudices that some internally migrating Mexicans (such as Chico and Aria) may hold towards other migrants. As demonstrated earlier by Chico's experience, residing in the shelter as a Mexican person challenged these biases through cohabitation and as they undergo shared experiences. In Aria's interview, when asked about her experiences in Tijuana and at the shelter, she consistently affirmed feeling treated “good” by the shelter and its people. Her story emphasizes the positive and enduring nature of her interactions and relationships within the shelter community and how it is sustained as new people arrive.

In this next interview, Mani articulates a deep sense of gratitude towards the shelter and highlights its provision of comprehensive support in every aspect of his life. His positive

experiences emphasize the overarching theme of protection and support within the shelter environment:

Table 8 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Mani	<p>I: “¿Entonces como te trataron cuando llegaste aquí y como te tratan ahora acá?”</p> <p>R: “Desde que llegué pues ya tengo como dos meses y medio si me han tratado bien o sea le digo yo que acá estoy mejor que allá porque aquí tengo alimento de todo que no tenía alla porque alla es dificil. Si uno come una vez no come otra vez. antes me iba a vender así cositas porque es dificil.”</p>	<p>I: “How have you been treated since you arrived and how are you treated now?”</p> <p>R: “Since I arrived, well, I have been here about two and a half months, and they have treated me well. That is, I’ll tell you, that I am much better being here than back there [home] because here I have all the sustenance, I need in every way that I didn’t have back there. After all, it was difficult [at home] if I eat once then I don’t eat again. In the past, I would try to sell things because it really is hard.”</p>

By contrasting his current situation with his life at home, Mani highlights the multifaceted nature of safety. The other interviews illustrate safety as a form of emotional security, Mani’s narrative reveals a broader significance for those enduring poverty. In addition to the emotional support the shelter provides, access to necessities like nutritious food and stable living conditions are material forms of safety for unaccompanied minors. His reference to past struggles with hunger at home, “I eat once, I don’t eat again” is profound because residents do not have to worry about where their next meal will come from. The shelter provides them three meals a day (which I can attest, are always delicious) and they do not restrict access to snacks. The teen's description of the shelter's provision of sustenance serves as a source of psychological comfort and stability because they do

not need to worry about where their next meal will come from. This sense of security allows them to focus on other aspects of their well-being without worry or anxiety related to hunger. Therefore, for Mani and others in similar situations, the shelter encompasses a holistic sense of safety.

The importance of food and meal-sharing in fostering support and safety is further illustrated in a field note I wrote after having my first dinner with the youth. There are no rigid rules around food at the shelter as youth are allowed to seek their own snacks between meals or even cook something themselves if they are hungry outside the designated mealtimes. This culture not only maintains migrants' agency it also supports their autonomy, or rather control over their daily lives. For instance,

We helped set up the kitchen for dinner. The kids were making spaghetti and sausage. They ate it in a way I had never seen before, with tostadas and spicy green salsa. Yum! They invited me to eat with them and I did¹¹⁶.

The communal dining experience is a testament to the supportive environment provided by the shelter and its staff. Communal cooking and eating are ways for residents to come together, share stories, and build memories (as well as develop their culinary skill). In my field note, I note the enjoyable atmosphere during mealtimes, where everyone gathered to eat together furthering the family-like culture. Their creativity and resourcefulness in using a green salsa added another layer of excitement to our dining experience. Although they are making the best of their donated provisions, the green salsa shows their resourcefulness and adaptability. Although spaghetti is traditionally made with red tomatoes, the youth taught me that it can also be made with green tomatoes. In addition, the consistency of delicious meals and the inclusion of the youth in making them, cultivates their sense of joy, inclusivity, and purpose. This approach helps the youth feel cared for and valued. I remember feeling privileged to be invited to eat with everyone; especially

¹¹⁶ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Next Visit at Casa Asilio. February 15, 2019.

as they showed me an innovative way to enjoy a traditional meal. I also met someone new during dinner and they offered to participate in an interview with me. I include this because it further exemplifies the way that communal meals develop connections and trust within community.

Overall, the testimonies shared in this section demonstrate the vital role that the shelter plays in providing holistic support for their inhabitants. By addressing both the emotional and material dimensions of safety, the shelter offers a lifeline to those facing adversity. Through the facilitation of group therapy, migrants uncover the interconnected nature of their shared experiences. This empowers them to rebuild and heal, as a collective. In this way, the relationships they form are founded on mutual support and protection. Thus, proving that the shelter's culture of solidarity is bilaterally produced through the youth, the staff, and the shelter's resources. In this way, minors strengthen their sense of belonging and create friends for life—forming siblings in their surrogate families.

Parallel Well-being

The following section looks at how the youth perceive the adults, who support them at the shelter, as integral parts of their surrogate family. This is revealed through three interview excerpts, an observational story, and two field notes. The relationships that youth form with adults in this space are facilitated by the shelter's organizational structure. The adults serve as parental figures within the youths' constructions of their surrogate families, a survival mechanism they developed in transit. Notably, these are gendered dynamics where the maternal figure cares for minors by cooking food or providing emotional labor. Paternal figures support youths' psychological well-being by promoting non-violence and order. Through their interviews, the youth reveal the vital role that adults at the shelter. Through care, words of affirmation, and stability they facilitate support in various forms. These relationships are formed through a parallel process that prove the

interconnectedness of well-being between the youth. This reciprocal process reinforces the magnitude of collective care when working in children's best interest. In all, this section argues the importance of shelter staff as they remain socially and systemically unprotected and unsupported within this sector.

Rio, a 17-year-old from Honduras, exemplifies the resilience fostered by such connections. Despite facing barriers as an underage traveler, Rio's upbeat demeanor and resourcefulness enable him to creatively navigate challenges. During his journey, Rio persuaded bus drivers to purchase tickets on his behalf because those under the age of eighteen are not allowed to travel alone (one example of age-based migrant controls). He also leveraged social media to find temporary housing while in Mexico. His determination to forge a better life with his mother, whom he admires and protects, contrasts sharply with the adversities he faced with his paternal guardian and on the streets. I interviewed him on his second night at the shelter, it was the day after his 17th birthday. As it was his second day, he had not yet established friendships. He said this was because he spent his entire first day with lawyers, that the shelter provided, working on his asylum case. He said he spent his birthday in their offices. In his journey, he meets a woman on Facebook in Chiapas who helps him find work. As he worked, she also helped him acquire a humanitarian visa that gave him permission to live and work in Mexico as a migrant. In the excerpt below Rio sheds light on the harsh realities of urban poverty and extortion he faced at home in Honduras. His account highlights the pervasive impact of these societal ills on familial dynamics. He reflects on his biological father's vices and the destruction of his family. Nevertheless, Don Pepe stands out to him as a positive father figure because he affirms Rio's desire to live vice-less. This story also underscores the resilience and dignity with which young adults like Rio confront their challenges. Each one strives for a life of meaning and worth. When reflecting on the most notable part of his journey,

Rio says that his most vivid memory was when his bus was stopped by immigration officers in Mexico and all the passengers were forced to disembark and present identification materials which he luckily had due to the kindness from the woman in Chiapas:

Table 9 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Rio	<p>I: “Te quería preguntar si dirías que hubo una situación notable de todo el viaje hasta este punto qué dirías?”</p> <p>R: “Cuando me bajaron los de migración. El miedo. Porque dos me dijeron que me iba a quedar con ellos ‘sólo me dices dónde vives y los vamos a llevar allá’ cuando le decía que era menor de edad...y me dijeron que podía viajar. Porque ellos echan de ver que yo no por ejemplo no les daba problemas ni nada. Me dice [Pepe] me dice, ‘na como te miro y no tienes ningún vicio vas a vivir bien allí. Por ejemplo, tu sos humilde’ dice ‘lo noto’ que por ejemplo no me gusta buscar problemas...yo también me salí de la casa porque mi papá quería que yo por ejemplo aprendiera de los vicios de él. Yo le digo, mira le digo y le decía que yo no voy a ser así cómo usted [su padre] que, por ejemplo, por andar en vicios le digo— no tiene familia ni se acuerda que tiene familia, le digo. Eso no es</p>	<p>I: “I want to ask if there was a memorable situation during your journey up to this point?”</p> <p>R: “When the immigration officers took me down. The fear. Because two of them told me that I was going to stay with them they said ‘just tell me where you live and we will take you all there and when I told them that I was a minor...they told me that I could travel because they see that I, for example, don’t give them problems or anything. [Don Pepe] tells me, ‘I look at you and you don’t have any vices, you’re going to live well here’. For example, he says ‘you are humble’, he says ‘I notice it’, and that for example, I don’t like looking for problems...I also left the house because my dad wanted me, for example, to learn from his vices. I tell him, look, I tell him that I’m not going to be like you [his father], who, for example, because he’s addicted, I</p>

Table 9 continued...

	<p>para pasar la vida le decía yo, tal vez por eso tiene problemas con la familia y no viven bien.”</p>	<p>tell him— he doesn't have a family nor does he remember that he has a family, I tell him that is not enough to get through life, I told him, maybe that's why he has problems with his family and they don't live well.”</p>
--	---	---

In Rio's interview, he contrasts the supportive relationship he has with Don Pepe with the neglect and addiction in his relationship with his biological father. Don Pepe's positive influence is highlighted as he told Rio that he sees him as a young man without vices, “you are humble” and instilled in him a profound sense of validation. He felt seen by Don Pepe and this provided Rio with the encouragement he needed to navigate his situation. To me, this connects to Chico’s freestyle when he recounts Don Pepe as someone who lends them a hand—creating a positive role model for the young men. Despite the hardships he endured at home from his father's addiction and neglect, Rio's experience at the shelter is transformed by the supportive relationship he forms with Don Pepe on his first day. This relationship empowered Rio to believe in himself, work towards his goals, and ultimately seek a better life for himself and his family. The affirmation from Don Pepe is significant to the youth as they look to him for validation of their humanity.

Many of the adolescents have sacrificed and forgone safety to journey North. They say that they see themselves as criminals in the larger frame of migration because they know it is unauthorized. This notion is exemplified in Mani’s narrative because he is a repeat deportee. Deportation has created his criminal record which he said, complicates his asylum case. In our interview, he told me about Don Pepe’s promise about his safety:

Table 10 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Mani	<p>I: “¿Y cómo te sentís de otra vez en este sitio?”</p> <p>R: “No se pues antes ya había garrado un temorcito, pero ahora, aquí como dice Don Pepe, no nos puede tocar nadie. Allá, está difícil la delincuencia, extorsiones y todo. A mí y a mi hermano nos hacen mucho los extorsionaron. Le dijeron que pagara un dinero de donde el alquiler y le quitaron todo su dinero. Y asaltan y asaltan y asaltan cada rato. Es tan difícil que la gente ya por último se pone a asaltar o hacer cosas allá. Hay mucha gente que de los basureros hayan donde vivir. Yo en Tegucigalpa no era así pero ahora hay gente que caminan los basureros buscando comida porque no hay. esta difícil y esta caro todo.”</p>	<p>I: “And how do you feel in this place again?”</p> <p>A: “I don't know because before I had some fears but now, as Don Pepe says, no one can touch us here. Honduras is difficult; the delinquency, the extortion, and everything. They extorted me and my brother a lot. They told him to pay money from where he rents, and they took all of his money. And they assault and assault and assault all the time. It is so difficult that all people end up assaulting or doing things like that there. There are many people who have to live off of garbage dumps. It wasn't like that in Tegucigalpa for me, but now there are people who look through garbage dumps looking for food because they don't have any. The situation is difficult, and everything is expensive.”</p>

The pervasive presence of gangs, extortion, and poverty creates a climate of fear and uncertainty for youth in Honduras, “they assault and assault and assault.” This repetition of assault emphasizes the relentless nature of violence Mani endured. The violence is an ongoing cycle of trauma and fear as he says, “it is so difficult that all people end up assaulting or doing things like that.” This sense of helplessness is further exemplified when he says that people “live off of garbage dumps.”

His narrative demonstrates that this upbringing is not an isolated situation; many in Tegucigalpa do not have access to fundamental necessities, such as food and shelter and contributed to his constant fear. Therefore, the statement made by Don Pepe that “no one can touch you here” carries significant psychological and emotional implications for him and others who endure pervasive violence. His words convey a sense of safety and security wherein the teens can focus on healing and reclaim their agency. Don Pepe’s assurances and positive affirmations alleviate youth’s anxieties and signifies hope for new beginnings. This then offers them a sanctuary where they can begin to heal from the psychological wounds inflicted by their experiences. In this space, Don Pepe helps them reclaim a sense of agency over their lives. This story demonstrates the power of a positive role model for young men who have been surrounded by violence. As a paternal figure, Don Pepe models integrity and compassion by reassuring the youth that they are capable of overcoming their challenges.

Don Pepe is regarded as a father figure because he establishes guidelines for the boys and maintains a watchful eye over them. This provides a sense of assurance and stability for those who may have lacked it and need it. However, I maintain that this relationship is bilaterally produced therefore, it requires flexibility and patience from the youth (as healing and asylum are not overnight processes). Take, for example, a 13-year-old boy that we referred to as, *chiquitín*, a term of endearment that translates to “the little one”. Although I initially observed his boisterous demeanor as welcoming, he was not interested in being interviewed or interacting in our activities. As I observed his interactions with the other youth, he often exhibited attention-seeking behavior that others later confirmed as problematic and added that he was prone to conflict. I never saw *chiquitín* again after our initial encounter, so I inquired with Don Pepe about his whereabouts. He revealed that the boy's time at the shelter was short-lived. *Chiquitín*, managed to slip past the

shelter's gates under the guise of a trip to the corner store. Instead, he “made a run for it,” as Don Pepe told me. The adolescent took it upon himself to attempt to cross into the U.S. without permission but was detained by immigration authorities and later deported to his country of origin after refusing to return to the shelter. This story sheds light on the consequences of those who fail to cultivate intimate familial bonds at the shelter and cause problems for others. His impulsivity led to a risky decision wherein he faced legal consequences that will later impact his ability to apply for visas thus enabling him to seek irregular migration. This story is shared to demonstrate the importance of youth fostering bonds with their peers while residing in the shelter, as they live there for an unknown amount of time. By cultivating patience and adhering to the shelter’s rules, they develop a sense of community through mutual cooperation which enhances the overall experience of everyone involved.

Instances of disruptive behavior go on to disrupt the social fabric of the shelter and poses additional challenges for its inhabitants. This is demonstrated in a conversation with Rio where he tells me about chiquitín’s problematic behavior while at the shelter. He mentioned feeling apprehensive about the people at the shelter because of the disorderly behavior of the younger boy. Since Rio had only been at the shelter for two days, he thought this was indicative of everyone’s behavior which he later learned was not the case:

Table 11 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Rio	I: “¿Cómo te sentiste en tu primer noche?” R: “bien.”	I: “How did you feel on your first night?” R: “Good.”

Table 11 continued...

<p>I: “¿Te sientes comfortable con los otros chicos? ¿Han hablado sobre tu situación?”</p> <p>R: “No. Es que no haya confianza tal vez. Yo por ejemplo, para no buscar problemas [no digo nada] porque se ven que son de problemas con todos que están ahí. Entonces mejor no les hablo para no tener problemas arriba [el dormitorio].”</p> <p>I: “¿porque dices?”</p> <p>R: “Con nada se enojan. Solo buscan las peleas. Don Pepe nos dice ‘no andes peleando porque así’ me dice ‘vas a tener problemas’ porque el chico y un chamaquito han tendido problemas. Ese con cualquiera anda. Le gusta problemas y puede ser con mayor, lo que sea. Anoche estuvo ahí peleando a las 10 de la noche con uno mayor. Por ejemplo lo está calentando para que él otro llegara y lo sonará.”</p> <p>I: “Entonces hay muchos dinámicos aquí”</p> <p>R: “Mhm porque estuvo en la otra migración y de allá lo mandaron por acá mejor porque daba muchos problemas.”</p>	<p>I: “Do you feel comfortable with the other kids? Have you talked to them about your situation?”</p> <p>R: No. Maybe there is no trust yet. Me, for example, in order not to look for problems I don't say anything because I can see people look for problems with anyone who is there. So it's better not to talk to them so I don't have problems upstairs [the dormitories].”</p> <p>I: “What makes you say that?”</p> <p>R: “They get angry with anything. They only look for fights. Don Pepe tells us, 'Don't go around fighting because like that', he tells me, 'you're going to have problems'. Because one little boy has caused problems. That kid goes with anyone. He likes problems and it can be with someone older, whoever. Last night he was there fighting at 10 at night with an older kid. For example, he's getting the older one riled up so that he can get the older one to go up to him and hit him.”</p> <p>I: “So there are many dynamics here?”</p> <p>R: “Mhm, because he was in another migration place, and from there they sent him here thinking it would be better because he caused a lot of problems.”</p>
--	--

Despite the support provided by the shelter, teens choose their routes. The troubled behavior of the 13-year-old, who sought to cause problems for others, illustrates the importance of building positive peer and adult relationships in this space. It demonstrates that adults and youth intentionally sustain the shelter's supportive culture together. Therefore, negative consequences arise when minors fail to create such relationships. This is seen in the disruptive behavior, and eventual departure, of chiquitín from the shelter, as “they sent him here thinking it would be better because he caused a lot of problems.” His deportation can be attributed to his lack of respect for Don Pepe and his unwillingness to participate with other migrants in the space. This is why Don Pepe makes sure to teach the youth that while they cannot control the behaviors of others, they can empower themselves by being in control of their own responses—promoting agency over their actions. This philosophy promotes everyone's well-being as they learn to develop self-discipline and collective responsibility. His rules “don't go around fighting” encourages the boys to maintain inner peace and ignore instigators; he reminds them that these behaviors contribute to the success of their political asylum cases. Additionally, they learn to resolve conflict without resorting to violence which is a framework that many are not used to. This life lesson instills the value of empathy and respect for others. Thus, this example highlights the fundamental role of supportive adult figures in shaping the behaviors and decisions of young migrants. Through order and stability within communal spaces, the youth engage in reciprocal well-being by way of accountability and constructive engagement.

Don Pepe's role as a father figure extends beyond metaphorical support for minors in transit as he also integrates his own family into his work at Casa Asilio. This fusion allows him to manage the shelter space more effectively while imparting the value of his work to his children. In the following field note, I wrote,

He [Don Pepe] then introduces me to Marito. We joke about him having the same name as another staff member. Marito proudly tells us that he finished cleaning the bathroom. To this, Don Pepe laughs patting him on the head, and says ‘*okay mi hijo, mi retoñito*’ (my son, my little sprout). He tells me that he is 13 years old. I clarify if Marito is his biological son to which he replies, yes. You see, Don Pepe is actually working on his day off in order to give Don Hugo, the other staff

member, a break. He said he likes to bring his kids to the shelter so that they can also observe the work Casa Asilio does. There used to be three employees at the shelter, but Don Pepe sadly tells me that Doña Tita had to leave the shelter due to a jealous husband who did not want her working.¹¹⁷

The inclusion of his family in his work, in addition to its logistical advantages, demonstrates Don Pepe's personal commitment to the shelter. He fuses his professional work with his family which furthers the sense of familial support at the shelter. This inclusion further imparts values of social responsibility, humility, and compassion to his kids. As Don Pepe steps up to support rest for his staff, he does not have to compromise time with his family because they receive hands-on experience and witness their father's dedication to civic duty as a human rights defender.

In addition to Don Pepe's paternal presence, Doña Tita embodies a maternal figure at the shelter. She offered crucial support and guidance to the four young ladies who resided there during my fieldwork. Doña Tita's situation highlights the complex realities faced by women in the workplace, especially in societies with entrenched sexism. In addition to her vital role in managing the emotional labor inherent in her responsibilities (like providing care and support) she must also navigate personal challenges. She had to resign to appease her husband's jealousy. This is a common difficulty for many women in similar roles, who must balance their professional commitments with societal expectations. Her responsibilities extended beyond cooking to include the distribution of medications, organization of chores, and forms of gender-based support. Here is a field note of this observation,

After she cooks, Doña Tita is also in charge of making sure that anyone who needs it, receives their medications alongside their meals. I was impressed by her memory and organization of the meds by pill color for specific kids and the specific amounts of each. She reminded each one to take it down with some food.¹¹⁸

Despite facing personal challenges, including the aftermath of the tragic murders of two young migrants, Doña Tita remained a steadfast maternal figure at Casa Asilio. Her work contributed to

¹¹⁷ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Revisiting Casa Asilio. July 19, 2019.

¹¹⁸ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Next Visit at Casa Asilio. February 15, 2019.

the nurturing environment essential for the best interest of its residents. As Beto attests, she is undeniably considered part of their shelter family and provided nurturing support:

Table 12 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Beto	<p>I: “¿Que es algo de la experiencia que nunca vas a olvidar?”</p> <p>R: “Convivir con la familia”</p> <p>I: “¿Esta familia? ¿Así lo consideras?”</p> <p>R: “Si”</p> <p>I: “Entonces Doña Tita sería la mamá? ¿Y Don Pepe el papá y ustedes todos los hijos?”</p> <p>R: (Riendo) “Si, si”</p>	<p>I: “What is something from the journey that you will never forget?”</p> <p>R: “Living with the family”</p> <p>I: “This family?” (I point to the shelter) “Is that how you consider it?”</p> <p>R: “Yes”</p> <p>I: “So then Doña Tita would be the mom? And Don Pepe is the dad and all of you are the kids?”</p> <p>R: (Laughing) “Yes”</p>

This comment by Beto directly reflects the familial atmosphere of Casa Asilio. He claimed that the most unforgettable moment in his journey was living in this space, “living with the family”. This sentiment resonates deeply with the role that shelter staff play in providing care and emotional support to the youth. This example serves to demonstrate the power of working in the best interest of children and creating a nurturing environment akin to a familial unit. This moment serves as a testament to the invaluable contributions of people in humanitarian work like Doña Tita, who navigate the complexities of their roles with resilience and dedication. They create a sense of stability for the youth who navigate a challenging environment. This positive leadership ultimately shapes the memories of those they care for at the shelter.

To conclude, it is essential to recognize that these adults can only offer their support to the extent allowed by societal norms and traditions. This stresses the importance of caring for the individuals who do this work to ensure that their own needs are met so that they can adequately

support others. Gendered roles also extend beyond the shelter space and impact Doña Tita's relationship with her husband. His insecurities affected the shelter's overall dynamic and eventually prompted Don Pepe to bring in his children to help support the shelter while they worked on hiring someone new. This situation serves as a reminder of the demands of personal lives and the importance of attending to them. Moreover, research in healing-centered engagement demonstrates that fostering a sense of agency in young people contributes to their overall well-being. This process, known as a parallel process of well-being, involves adults engaging in their own healing alongside young people. It requires questioning biases, examining privileges, and uncovering perceptions that hinder genuine human connection.

Kindness in Transit

Unaccompanied minors in transit often travel with the support of family back home or in the U.S. but the path itself is often filled with challenges that they navigate alone. In the following interview excerpts with Melo, Rio Beto, and Cortes they informed me about some challenges they faced in their journeys and how kind adults around them helped them through it. It was in Ciudad Hidalgo, Michoacán, MX that Melo found other migrants (remnants of the October-November 2018 Caravan) in transit. He waited three days in Ciudad Hidalgo for a humanitarian visa (a rarity for most non-Mexican unaccompanied minors). This visa enabled him to be in the country and traverse legally, for a maximum of 30 days. While in transit, Melo found that it was generally easy to make friends and said he often relied on the kindness of strangers. He says that with the Caravan, when anyone could, they would share their food. Melo fondly recalled a group of Honduran men offering him some chicken to eat while he and his nephew awaited their visa in the beating sun. He told me that it was important for everyone who was with the Caravan to help each other out; there was almost a system to it. He said he always felt safe because everyone

would unite to fight kidnappers or abusers in the group (an uncommon depiction of the Caravan’s supportive nature). Despite the large number of migrants, he claimed that no fights ever broke out in the group he was with.

From these accounts, we see that the kindness of the adults during the youth’s migration is integral to the culture of the Caravan itself. In the following excerpt from my interview with Rio, he tells me that he had to stay in Chiapas, MX for over a month to make money for his journey. Fortunately, he was able to find housing with someone he found on Facebook:

Table 13 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Rio	<p>R: “Ya me quedé allí en Chiapas. Allí agarre en autobús que venía para Tehuacán. Allí en Tehuacán estuve un mes.”</p> <p>I: “¿Por qué?”</p> <p>R: “Porque me quedé allí? Pues porque mi tía me dijo que no hallaba con quien mandarme el dinero para transportar [en Tehuacán] entonces conocí a una chava allí y ella me dijo que me podía quedar con ella”</p> <p>I: “¿Cómo la conociste?”</p> <p>R: “Por Facebook”</p> <p>I: “¿Sí?”</p> <p>R: “La añadí y allí empezó a comunicarse conmigo y preguntó de dónde era y dónde estaba y que ahí me podía quedar con ella. De</p>	<p>R: “There I stayed in Chiapas. From there I got a bus that went to Tehuacán. There in Tehuacán, I stayed for a month.”</p> <p>I: “Why?”</p> <p>R: “Why did I stay there? Well because my aunt told me that she couldn’t locate a person with whom she could send me money for transport [in Tehuacan] so I met a chava [girl] there and she told me that I could stay with her.”</p> <p>I: “How did you meet her?”</p> <p>R: “On Facebook. I added her and she started communicating with me and asked where I was from and where I was and that I could stay with her. From there I would get up in the morning and I would go to work.”</p> <p>I: “Work where?”</p>

Table 13 continued...

	<p>ahí me levantaba en la mañana y me iba a trabajar.”</p> <p>I: “¿Trabajar donde?”</p> <p>R: “Ahí mismo, el rollo es que ella me consiguió el trabajo supuestamente para que me quedara viviendo ahí. Era una chica mayor de 24 y ella era soltera.”</p> <p>I: “¿Y cómo fue, cómo te consiguió el trabajo?”</p> <p>R: “Tenía una prima que trabajaba en una empresa de eso de poner lonas y todo eso. Entonces ya ella llegó y me habló y me dijo que si quería trabajar y le dije que sí y ya empecé a trabajar. Ajuste algo [de dinero] ya con eso llegué hasta aquí con lo que ajuste. Ella no quería que me viniera, ‘tengo que irme’ le dije, ‘ya no puedo vivir aquí’ le digo.</p> <p>I: “¿Porque piensas que quiera que vivieras con ella?”</p> <p>R: “No sé, sólo me dijo que no me viniera y ‘no’ le digo, ‘tengo que irme’. Y de allí llegué a la Ciudad de Mexico. Ya allí le hablé a mi tío [en los EEUU]. Entonces un conductor de un autobús me hizo</p>	<p>R: “There in Tehuacán. The difficulty was that she got me the job supposing I was going to stay there with her. She was older, 24, and single.”</p> <p>I: “How was that? How did she get you the job?”</p> <p>R: “She had a cousin who worked in a tarp company. So then she came to me and talked to me, she asked if I wanted to work and I said yes so I started working. I started saving up [some money] and with that, I got up to here with the money I saved. She did not want me to come, ‘I have to go’ I told her, ‘I can’t live here anymore’ I told her.”</p> <p>I: “Why do you think she wanted you to live with her?”</p> <p>R: “I don’t know, she just told me not to come, ‘no’ I told her ‘I have to go’. From there I arrived in Mexico City and I spoke to my uncle (in the U.S.). Here, a bus driver did me the favor of withdrawing the money, the 2,000 Mexican pesos to take the bus and it takes two days to get here.”</p> <p>I: “I see”</p> <p>R: “And they couldn't sell me the bus ticket either because I was underage and they told me that as a rule, they couldn't</p>
--	---	--

Table 13 continued...

	<p>el favor de retirar el dinero, los 2,000 pesos, para tomar el bus y son dos días para llegar hasta aquí.”</p> <p>I: “Sí”</p> <p>R: “Y tampoco no me podían venderme el boleto porque era menor de edad y me dijeron que por regla no me podían vender el boleto. Entonces un conductor del autobús me lo fue a comprar.”</p>	<p>sell me the ticket. So then a bus driver went to buy it for me.”</p>
--	---	---

Rio’s case exemplifies the difficulties of traveling as a young person alone, especially through irregular paths. Although he had the financial support of his aunt, who was willing to send him money to assist him in his journey, they could find a way to get the money to him. It is unclear why he could not access money from his aunt, but demonstrates unexpected challenges arise in transit. The role of social media as a spatial tool is significant in Rio’s case because Facebook was a tool he could use to connect with local support; which he found in Tehuacán, a critical space for migrants heading north from Central America. In addition to offering shelter, his newfound connection found work for Rio through her cousin. This job offered him financial empowerment where he was able to save money and support himself for the rest of his journey. Tehuacán, as a transit point, provided a temporary yet vital space where Rio could rest, work, and plan his next steps. This network-based interaction exemplifies the importance of social spaces in the digital age and the extensions of social capital that exist in contemporary migration. Youth like Rio, who grew up in the digital age, depend on their technological literacy to find solutions. Through technology and virtual spaces, they can leverage complex migration landscapes. Later in his journey, Rio could not purchase a bus ticket which can be understood as a migratory control to prevent underage

people from traversing the territory. Through the kindness of a bus driver he was able to obtain a ticket that allowed him to continue his journey. In all, these interactions provide immediate relief through the acts of profound humanity towards migrants and demonstrate the essential role of community and compassion in migration; without it, unaccompanied minors could not survive. The adults’ willingness to help Rio navigate legal restrictions and financial obstacles proves the significance of bilateral friendships for survival. Their support empowered him to continue with dignity and hope.

In a similar sense, Beto’s narrative provides a compelling glimpse into the dynamics of the Caravan and the impact of relationships he forged during the journey. As I learned more about the experiences of unaccompanied minors like Beto, it became evident that the Caravan fostered a culture of camaraderie among its participants. Despite the diverse backgrounds and individual circumstances of the Caravan participants, Beto highlights being treated with kindness and respect by fellow travelers:

Table 14 Excerpt from Interview

Pseudonym	Spanish	English
Beto	<p>I: “¿Cómo te trataron las personas con quien tú venías para acá?”</p> <p>R: “Pues cuando yo venía con ellos [la Caravana] pues yo me sentía a gusto porque nunca fue de que...de que, este—digamos que te tratan mal. No te tratan mal. ¡Hasta los en el camión en que venía yo los vi un par de veces de repente, los he visto en la calle aquí! Y me saludan.</p>	<p>I: “How did the people you came with treat you on your way here?”</p> <p>R: “Well, when I came with them [the Caravan] well, I felt comfortable because it was never that... that, um... that, as they say—they treat you badly. They don't treat you badly. Even the people I came with on the truck, I saw a couple of times out of the blue, I've seen them on the street here! And they greet me. I met some single mothers with</p>

Table 14 continued...

	<p>Encontré unas mamás solteras con hijos y pues yo soy que da cuando tengo y pues a un niño nunca se le niega nada. Yo no soy de esas personas que cuando tengo lo niego. Y cuando no tengo pues, así no se que dar. Y cuando venía pues, ya ves, yo venía pidiendo (se pone triste) ayudando con cualquier cosa. Y si no, daba mi lugar para que se sentaran o para que durmieran allí.”</p>	<p>children and well, you never deny a child. I am the kind of person that when I have something to give I don't deny it. And when I don't have anything, well I don't know what to give. And when I was coming here, well, you see, I came begging (he gets sad saying this) helping with whatever came up. And if not, I would give them my place so they could sit down or so they could sleep there.”</p>
--	--	---

Beto’s narrative vividly illustrates the warmth and support he received from travelers he met with the Caravan as he recalls the kindness of others in his story, “they don’t treat you badly”. He experienced kindness and respect from fellow Caravan members which is a significant contrast to how they are illustrated and perceived by outsiders. Beto even encountered some of his fellow travelers unexpectedly in Tijuana, where they warmly greeted him, remembering him. This interaction shows that the relationships they formed during their journey transcend transit—they endure in real life. Thus, enabling both younger and older migrants to reaffirm their humanity and offers emotional and support within new environments. Moreover, Beto’s support of single mothers and their children, demonstrates a spiritual reclaiming of his identity—someone who helps others no matter his personal situation. Through Beto’s acts of kindness towards others that he believes need more help than him, he intentionally reinforces his self-worth while proving the intrinsic value of all human beings. In all, Beto’s narrative serves as a touching reminder of the transformative power of human connection in the pursuit of refuge and survival.

Kindness is vividly portrayed in Cortes's narrative below. In his story he said that his friend's mother, Yesenia, emerges as a crucial figure in his survival, his “mama Yesenia”. Cortes recounts how Yesenia's unwavering kindness left a lasting mark on him and describes her as the most unforgettable aspect of his journey.

Table 15 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Cortes	<p>I: “¿Pues hay algo más que quieres decir sobre tu historia o algo memorable del viaje que nunca te vas a olvidar?”</p> <p>R: “Cuando venia con la mamá de mi amigo. El momento más memorable para fue cuando ayudaba con el bebé dy cargaba sus cosas. Esto me hace pensar en todo lo que había perdido hasta ese momento. Cuando la inmigración me agarró por primera vez, perdí un par de cosas, pero la segunda vez, cuando la inmigración me despertó, huí sin mi bolso. Cuando volví más tarde a buscarlo, me detuvieron y arrestaron. Me dijeron que recibiría mis cosas en el centro de detención cuando llegara, pero de repente nos dejaron ir sin devolver mis cosas. Afortunadamente, mantuvo mi billetera en el bolsillo que tenía todos sus documentos importantes. Cada vez que Yesenia comía, nunca se olvidaba de mí. Ella era como mi segunda madre. Mi mamá Yesenia.”</p>	<p>I: “Well is there anything else you want to share about your story or share a memorable that you will never forget?”</p> <p>R: “The most memorable moment for me was when I helped with Yesenia's infant and held their bags. This made me think about everything I had lost by that point. When I was first grabbed by immigration, I lost a couple of things but the second time when I was woken up by immigration, I made a run for it without my bag. When I returned later to look for it, I was detained and arrested. I was told I would receive my stuff at the detention center but then I was suddenly released but they did not give back my belongings. Luckily, I hid my wallet that had all of his important documents in my pocket. Any time Yesenia she ate, she never forgot about me. She was like my second mother. Mi mama Yesenia.</p>

Cortes fondly recalls the moments he spent helping Yesenia with her infant by carrying her bags aiding her with psychological support for her physical burdens during their migration. In return, Cortes sought ways to reciprocate her kindness; his actions were driven by a desire to alleviate any discomfort experienced by his "second mother," Mama Yesenia. This showcases that in times of vulnerability and adversity, acts of kindness sustain individuals and foster a sense of belonging. Despite losing his effects and being detained by immigration authorities, Cortes found solace and support in his evolving relationship with Yesenia as she made sure that he ate when she ate. Her maternal care embodies the spirit of community and highlights the reciprocity in their relationship that forms a mutual support system. This narrative showcases how physical spaces intersect with the emotional and social spaces created by interpersonal relationships. The transformation between Cortes and Yesenia's relationship can be observed as a micro-community, or safe space, within the larger, often hostile environment of migration. These spaces are crucial for both physical survival and emotional well-being. Therefore, this narrative beautifully exemplifies that these relationships, forged in the shared physical space of migration, transcend the immediate journey and positively influences migrants' experiences in subsequent stages of their transit

In conclusion, the stories shared by the youth in this section, exemplify various forms of kindness allow them to overcome the challenges they face. While they navigate the path alone as an "unaccompanied" minor, youth find and rely on support from adults and fellow migrants. The resulting sense of unity, solidarity, and mutual support becomes a tool for survivance as it promotes communal well-being. These actions create cycles of care that sustains the entire community and offer both immediate and long-term benefits. Kindness, as a manifestation of care and empathy, challenges dominant narratives that perpetuate cruelty and misunderstanding. In the context of migration, the interplay between virtual and physical mobilities is critical. Digital spaces provide

platforms for connection and support that transcend geographical boundaries. Digital spaces create new opportunities for survival that are important for vulnerable populations confronting migrant controls and other challenges. Therefore, this section demonstrates that positive encounters within spaces, such as shelters and the shared routes of the Caravan, offer tangible support and a sense of safety. Acts of kindness from adults and fellow migrants are more than acts of charity but essential elements of survival that youth learn and adapt to subsequent parts of their journey. By practicing kindness, individuals engage in active resistance against oppressive systems, contributing to the creation of more equitable and compassionate societies. In the context of migration, kindness is essential for building social networks that help individuals navigate complex and hostile environments. It acknowledges the inherent humanity and dignity of migrants and emphasizes the interconnectedness of the human experience.

4.4 Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio

The youth's time at Casa Asilio provided them with the space and attention to heal from their journeys. To various degrees, they all endured difficulties while maintaining the hope of safety. In my interviews, I made an effort to end every interview by asking the adolescents why they wanted to live in the U.S. by asking about their hopes after Casa Asilio. For those whose childhoods have been disrupted by violence, personal aspirations represent hope. To me, aspirations serve as a reminder of the possibilities that transcend limitations. This is a means of reclaiming agency over their lives to envision a future where they can pursue their dreams. Aspirations offer a sense of purpose and direction and motivate us to strive for a better tomorrow. In essence, aspirations can be a source of resilience and empowerment for children and fuel their determination to overcome and build a brighter future for themselves. I include their answers to my question in the chart below to generalize what this demographic ultimately desires from life:

Table 16 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Rio	<p>I: “¿Por qué quieres vivir en los Estados Unidos con tu tío y no en otro país?”</p> <p>R: “Por las cosas que digo y tal vez si voy [a otro país] no voy a ganar lo mismo, pero, aunque sea poco voy a trabajar. Yo voy a salir adelante con mi tío por que él dice que si me apoya”</p>	<p>I: “Why do you want to live in the U.S. with your uncle instead of a different country?”</p> <p>R: “Well for the reasons I mention and maybe if I go [to another country] I’m not going to make the same amount of money but even if I make a small amount, I’m going to work. I am going to come out ahead with my uncle because he says that yes, he supports me”</p>

Table 17 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Felicia	<p>I: “¿Por qué quieres ir a los Estados Unidos?”</p> <p>R: “Pues, estar en Honduras yo corro peligro. Corre peligro con mi familia y creo que estando allá nunca vamos a salir adelante. Y creo que estando al otro lado ya los podría ayudar”</p> <p>I: “¿Y cómo quieres ayudarlos a tu familia?:”</p> <p>R: “No sé, cómo darle lo que ellos necesitan.”</p> <p>I: “Entonces cómo darle dinero o cosas así?”</p> <p>R: “Si.”</p>	<p>I: “Why do you want to go to the U.S.?”</p> <p>R: “Well, being in Honduras I am in danger. My family is in danger and I think that being there we will never get ahead. And I think that being on the other side I could help them.”</p> <p>I: “How do you want to help your family?”</p> <p>R: “I don’t know, I want to give them what they may need.”</p> <p>I: “So like giving them money and things like that?”</p> <p>R: “Yes.”</p>

Table 18 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Chico	<p>I: ¿Cuáles son las esperanzas que tienes para ti mismo y para tu familia cuando llegas a los Estados Unidos?”</p> <p>R: “Pues de seguir adelante y pues si...seguir adelante en el estudio. Me gustaría llegar a ser, este, ingeniero mecánico.”</p> <p>I: “¿Es algo como un sueño?”</p> <p>R: “Digamos que tengo un amigo que es dueño del taller, es mi vecino. Y pues, él con mi hermano estudiaron eso y dicen que son hermanos ingenieros y mi hermano salió cómo y ingeniero de eléctrico. Entonces él lo está empeñando ya en los Estados Unidos y como yo sé bien de mecánica, pues a mí me da muchos motores y me gusta quedar en un motor, es lo que a mí me encanta, mi hermano siguió allá que él me apoyaba en pagar cursos de mecánica.”</p>	<p>I: “What are the hopes you have for yourself and your family when you get to the United States?”</p> <p>R: “Well, to move forward and well yes... carry on with school. I would like to be, a uh, mechanical engineer.”</p> <p>I: Is that a dream of yours?</p> <p>R: “Let's just say that I have a friend who owns a garage, he is my neighbor. And well, he and my brother studied that and they call themselves engineering brothers and my brother is now an electrical engineer. So he is saying that he [my brother] pledges that once I'm in the United States and since I'm a good mechanic, well he gives me a lot of motors and I enjoy working on the motors, it's what I love, my brother continued that he will support me in paying for mechanic courses.”</p>

Table 19 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Mani	<p>I: “Pues te quería preguntar también sobre tus esperanzas para ti mismo, ¿o tu familia si quieres hablar sobre eso?”</p> <p>R: “Sueño de llegar a los Estados Unidos para ver a mi familia y hacer lo que sea</p>	<p>I: “Well I wanted to also ask you about your hopes for yourself or your family if you want to talk about that?”</p> <p>R: “I dream of getting to the United States to see my family and to do what I</p>

Table 19 continued...

	<p>para comprarle una casa a mi mamá y a mis abuelos porque ellos no tienen dónde vivir.”</p> <p>I: “Tienes unas expectativas de los Estados Unidos que piensas que vas a ver o experimentar?”</p> <p>R: “No. Pues yo quisiera si Dios me diera la oportunidad de trabajar. Trabajar y así puedo estudiar y pues estudiar porque me gusta el estudio, pero ni modo no pude salir adelante [en Honduras]. Ya mi mamá pues yo le yo le agradezco porque, aunque sea la primera saque, pero si no pudo no se pudo no se pudo.”</p>	<p>can to buy my mother and my grandparents a house because they don’t have a place to live.”</p> <p>I: “Do you have expectations of the United States that you think you will see or experience?”</p> <p>R: “No. Well, I would like if God gave me the opportunity to work. Work so I can study. And well, learning, because I enjoy learning but [in Honduras] there was no way I could get ahead. And my mom, well, I am grateful to her because I finished primary [school] but if she couldn’t [provide] so I couldn’t continue.”</p>
--	---	--

Table 20 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Cortes	<p>R: “Yo quisiera regresar siempre a mi casa. Quisiera regresar a ver a mi familia. [lorando]. Si llegara pasar, y sacaré papeles quisiera regresar a ver a mi familia.”</p> <p>I: “¿Qué quieres hacer desde este punto al futuro?”</p> <p>R: “Pues yo quiero ser arquitecto y construir edificios. Eso es mi sueño pero no creo que lo logré.”</p> <p>I: “Por qué los Estados Unidos?”</p>	<p>R: “I would like to return to my home, always. I would like to return to see my family [crying]. If the time ever comes, I would like to have documentation so that I can return to see my family.”</p> <p>I: “What do you want to do from this point for your future?”</p> <p>R: “Well, I want to be an architect and create buildings. That is my dream, but I don’t think I will accomplish it.”</p> <p>I: “Why [choose] the United States?”</p>

Table 20 continued...

<p>R: “Aquí [en Tijuana] no tengo familia, pero en los Estados Unidos, sí.”</p> <p>I: “¿Quién?”</p> <p>R: “Mi hermana está en Carolina del Norte, creo. Es hija de mi abuela. Ella dice que me va a ayudar.”</p>	<p>R: “Here [in Tijuana] I don’t have family, but I do in the United States.”</p> <p>I: “Who?”</p> <p>R: “My sister is in North Carolina, I think. She’s my grandmother’s daughter. She says that she is going to help me.”</p>	
--	---	--

Table 21 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Tony	<p>I: “¿Cuál es el sueño?”</p> <p>R: “Llegar allá [los EEUU] y llegar con mi familia. En Honduras de la escuela me salí del segundo grado y no sé leer.”</p>	<p>I: “What is the dream?”</p> <p>R: “Getting there [the U.S] and getting there with my family. In Honduras, I left school in the second grade and I don’t know how to read.”</p>

Table 22 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Aria	<p>I: “¿Me puedes contar sobre tus metas o sueños?”</p> <p>R: “Estar con mi mamá [en Minnesota] y tener una buena vida y seguir estudiando.”</p> <p>I: “¿Y para tu hermano también?”</p> <p>R: “Sí.”</p>	<p>I: “Can you tell me about your goals or dreams?”</p> <p>R: “To be with my mother [in Minnesota] and to have a good life and to keep going to school.”</p> <p>I: “And for your brother as well?”</p> <p>R: “Yes.”</p>

Table 23 Excerpt from Interview

Name	Spanish	English
Santo	<p>I: “¿Cuáles son tus deseos después de Tijuana?”</p>	<p>I: “What are your desires after you leave Tijuana?”</p>

Table 23 continued...

<p>R: “Estudiar algo, lo que sea.”</p> <p>I: “Para usted que es tu sueño?”</p> <p>R: “Viajar a todos los países. Quiero ver a mi mamá otra vez.”</p>	<p>R: “To study something, anything.”</p> <p>I: “What is your dream?”</p> <p>R: “To travel to other countries. I want to see my mother again.”</p>
--	--

In reflecting on the experiences of the youth at Casa Asilio, it becomes evident that the shelter provided them with a vital space for healing and growth after their arduous journeys. Despite facing hardships, their ultimate aspirations are to reunite with their families and pursue education. The way all children deserve to learn. I ended each interview by asking about their hopes for the future to reveal their desire for education, career advancement, and family reunification. Their dreams stand as a testament to their enduring optimism about what lies ahead, despite the adversity they have faced. The focus on aspirations allows them to see themselves beyond their oppression and trauma. Rooted in Healing-Centered Engagement, I ask this question to encourage youth to explore possibilities for their lives so that they may towards their personal and collective advancement.¹¹⁹ My hope, as an adult in their lives, is to use my time with them to help them acknowledge and communicate the ways that life continues for them. In addition, this work serves to illustrate them the ways that they want to be seen and remembered. I share these stories because they are essential to recognizing the systemic factors that have shaped their experiences. The contemporary landscape of migration reflects a complex interplay of economic disparity, political instability, and social upheaval, all of which have contributed to the fragmentation of families and communities throughout the world; but especially in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The normalization of familial disintegration is fueled by

¹¹⁹ Flourish Agenda. “Chris Nguon Breaks Down the Foundational Elements of CARMA - Flourish Agenda,” June 8, 2021. <https://flourishagenda.com/podcast/chris-nguon-breaks-down-the-foundational-elements-of-carma/>.

U.S. imperialism and the West's neoliberal structures. These forms of state-sanctioned violence accentuate the urgency of amplifying their stories and advocating for systemic change.

Healing Centered Art

In this next section of the findings, I share a series of photographs I captured after a group therapy session. During this activity, Dr. Ali, the UNICEF psychologist, instructed the youth to trace the outlines of their left and right hands. After tracing, they were asked to consider: "If someone from the U.S. could know something about you or something that you value, from your hands, what would your hands say?" They drew and wrote these profound messages:

Table 24 Images from Group Therapy Activity with Descriptions and Translations


Image	Text
	<p><u>Mano izquierda:</u> hermandad, confianza, respeto</p> <p><u>Mano derecha:</u> Respeto, confianza, hermandad ---</p> <p><u>Left hand:</u> brotherhood, trust, respect</p> <p><u>Right hand:</u> Respect, trust, and brotherhood</p>

Table 24 continued...

	<p><u>Mano izquierda:</u> saber expresarte hacia los demás</p> <p><u>Mano derecha:</u> confianza</p> <p>---</p> <p><u>Left hand:</u> knowing how to express oneself towards others</p> <p><u>Right hand:</u> trust</p>
	<p><u>Mano izquierda:</u> comunicación buena</p> <p><u>Mano derecha:</u> respeto, felicidad y amor</p> <p>---</p> <p><u>Left hand:</u> good communication</p> <p><u>Right hand:</u> respect, happiness, and love</p>

Table 24 continued...

	<p><u>Manos izquierdas:</u> ánimos, respetar, confianza, respeto, tolerancia, no es así, afectación, respeto y confianza, respeto</p> <p><u>Manos derechas:</u> gratitud, dar amor a los demás, amor, confianza, lealtad, amistad, confianza</p> <p>---</p> <p><u>Left hands:</u> encouragement, respect, trust, respect, tolerance, it's not how it appears, affection, respect and trust, respect</p> <p><u>Right hands:</u> gratitude, loving others, love, trust, loyalty, friendship, trust</p>
--	--

The activity of tracing their hands and reflecting on what they convey provides invaluable insight into the values and aspirations of the youth, especially given the prevailing negative attitudes towards immigrants from Latin America. In 2022, the Pew Research Center published that “the Latin America and Caribbean region has the fastest-growing international migrant population. Since 2005, the region’s international migrant population has roughly doubled” proving that this

study's participants represent a lasting presence in contemporary migration. The drawings, adorned with words like "brotherhood," "trust," "respect," "encouragement," "tolerance," and "love," serve as touching testaments to the inner world of these young people. The heartfelt illustrations provide a challenge to stereotypes of migrants and emphasize their profound desire for positive connections, understanding, and supportive relationship.

Last Day at the Shelter

Through weeks of engaging in dialogue and mutual learning with the youth at the shelter, I came to deeply appreciate the importance of recognizing their humanity and childhood. It became clear to me that they deserve to be treated as more than research subjects. My goal was to bring joy and compassion into their lives.

I traveled to the Centro Mercado today to find a piñata and some candy. I set my sights on a colorful llama and filled it with all kinds of Mexican candies even spicy ones. I attempted to sneak the piñata into the shelter but got caught by the kids. As a special thank you for welcoming me so warmly and sharing their stories, I decided to spend the personal finances that I had thought I would need for the trip. Instead, I put the money toward a donkey-like piñata filled with a couple of pounds of Mexican candy. I also brought my friends to join in on the fun and meet the kids. We arrived earlier than usual, at around 11 am. The teens were still waking up, getting brushed for the day, and preparing their breakfast which was a delicious egg soup. They were surprised to see us in the morning as they greeted us very excitedly upon arrival. We had intended for the piñata to serve as a surprise (I had this idea because in the interview the day before, a teen told me that he had spent his 17th Birthday in an office interviewed by immigration lawyers and case workers). News about the piñata quickly spread and everyone got involved to help us find a string to pull it up and a stick to break it. Once the tools were compiled and everyone had their breakfast, the teens ran out to the back and set up. They began to set up the microphone again; it was clear they were excited. I decided to wear my El Salvador soccer jersey today. It served as a reminder to them, that I was passionate about my work with them (I say this because I may have mentioned that exact line to three or four of them). It was a powerful moment to share with all of them because of the elements of youth, music, and cheer that surrounded us. To me, it was an opportunity to offer them remembrances of their youth (also to get some energy out and beat something up never hurts). It was interesting seeing the kids who were involved with this process alongside those who could not care less about it. Ultimately, the candy brought on a lot more participants to engage with me. I spent the rest of my time, chatting with the teens and taking Snapchat together. They used this as an opportunity to get my contact information which I gladly provided.

My experiences with the youth at the shelter, combined with my cultural background, allowed me to end my stay with an act of kindness at the shelter. As an auto-ethnographer, I drew on my understanding of Salvadoran culture to contribute joy to their lives. The story of sharing a piñata filled with candy, alongside the teens' enthusiastic participation and communal spirit, illustrates the importance of actively reciprocating relationships to build community. This story serves as a reflection on the transformative power of healing-centered approaches. Therefore, effective policies rooted in humanity and the best interest of a child require action at multiple levels: individual, interpersonal, and institutional. In this space, I prioritized healing at the individual level to foster empathy and enjoyment. To me, this was a definitive moment of the youth's reclaimed childhoods. It reminded them of the innocence and joy that should be inherent in their lives. In all, my data in this section offers a counter-narrative to the prevailing discourse on migrants. I chose to showcase the resilience, aspirations, and contributions of individuals whose motives are often misunderstood. This synthesis of personal reflection and cultural insight shows the universal themes of resilience and the intrinsic capacity for compassion in the migrant experience.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Work

Don Pepe explains to me how they set the bedrooms up when the shelter was packed with the Caravan. He says that he struggled to learn their names but now he struggles to forget them. In the corner, we see some wall art left behind by those who knew this place as their home. We recount the names and faces we remember from that time. It was funny to see that those who came from Honduras made sure to write an 'H' next to their names. There was a shocking note written on the wall saying '*somos muertos en vida*' (Figure 2) which translates to 'we are dead in life'. Don Pepe quietly says to himself, it's true, that's how they arrive. He tells me, they are survivors. He tells me to imagine the number of those who managed to not die during the trajectory of their travels and how powerful that is... This reminds me why I record stories of this place; its very function is to give hope. It offers a wholly unseen narrative. I write this to inspire compassion and optimism. Don Pepe tells me that we can never lose our hope until we die. Never lose faith in what we seek and that every time we fall, we learn to walk better and to walk longer, if not, life

would have no meaning. You have to fail to learn, '*cada cabeza es un mundo*' meaning every head is its own world.¹²⁰

5.2 Key Findings and Implications

In conclusion, this research project provides a comprehensive examination of the multi-faceted support systems and cultural dynamics within Casa Asilio, a shelter for unaccompanied minors. The findings are organized into three key sections: "The Cultures of Casa Asilio," "Surrogate Families at Casa Asilio," and "Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio." Each section provides insights into how the shelter operates as a sanctuary for youth by fostering a culture of solidarity and empowerment that is bilaterally produced by the youth and adults in the space. The Cultures of Casa Asilio highlights the intentional construction of a supportive and healing environment within the shelter, facilitated by Dr. Ali through Healing Centered Engagement (HCE). HCE activities enable the youth to process their trauma collectively and reclaim their shared humanity by forming sibling-like relationships. The freestyle and poems created by the youth during group therapy serve as powerful illustrations of mutual respect and the impact of collective empowerment on self-esteem. In Surrogate Families at Casa Asilio, the focus shifts to investigate the parental bonds formed within the shelter. The youth's agency in forming surrogate families and viewing the shelter staff as parental figures, are emphasized through interview excerpts and the story of Migra, the shelter's adopted mascot. Acts of kindness from adults and fellow migrants are shown to be more than charity; they are essential mechanisms of survival that the youth adapt to throughout their journey. These connections provide crucial support and reinforce the culture of solidarity that encompasses migration and specifically, the migrant Caravan. Reclaimed Childhoods at Casa Asilio is the final section that uplifts the aspirations and dreams of the youth, emphasizing their resilience and agency in envisioning brighter futures. The

¹²⁰ Cruz, Lorena. Field Note of Revisiting Casa Asilio. July 19, 2019.

concluding narrative of my final day with the shelter serves as a touching reminder of their childhood and the profound impact of simple, humane gestures by researchers working in this field. Throughout the research, the intersection of virtual and physical spaces plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of the youth. This work intervenes ongoing research by investigating the function of digital spaces, such as social media, in facilitating the creative problem-solving and resourcefulness of youth as they emerge in contemporary migration.

Simultaneously, the physical spaces of migration—such as the Caravan and shelters like Casa Asilio—serve as important environments where bonds are formed, and survival strategies are developed. The collective journey and shared experiences within these spaces allow people to overcome the dehumanizing challenges of migration. Casa Asilio can be indicative of a larger reality and may share some characteristics with other shelters for unaccompanied minors, but it is also highly unique as implied by the murder of the young men at the shelter and its consequences on the formation of surrogate families that are rooted in protection. Therefore, this work is fundamentally site-specific as it looks at the dynamics and cultures within a specific place-and-time. Due to this, similar approaches and challenges exist in other shelters throughout Mexico and Central America. One common goal of many shelters is the commitment to providing a safe and supportive space for migrants navigating complex laws, policies, and personal circumstances. The extent of this support varies based on resources, staff, and even populations they serve. Further research and ethnographic studies at other shelters could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how widespread and effective these supportive practices are.

In this project, the findings highlight the transformative power of solidarity, resilience, and compassion to center the voices of the migrant Caravan experience and those who migrated during that time. This research functions as a written way of "watering the flowers," a metaphor for the

significance of nurturing and caring for children. In the same ways that flowers need water, sunlight, and attention to flourish, children require love, support, and guidance to grow and thrive. Children reveal the most human parts of ourselves; they show us the emotional, physical, and intellectual nourishment, we deserve to realize our full potential. Through intentional care rooted in their best interest, youth grow into healthy, well-rounded individuals despite all odds. The narratives shared by the youth illustrate how acts of kindness from adults provide immediate support and contribute to the broader interconnection of well-being. By caring for the youth, adults inadvertently care for themselves, creating cycles of care that sustain our shared humanity; in this way, we build toward an equitable and compassionate world. Additionally, it is important to facilitate and support youth's own kin-making and the creation of spaces where they can experience both childhood and adulthood—defining these concepts as they see fit. This approach helps them navigate their dual roles and develop a sense stability wherein their healing takes center stage. Local communities also have a role to play in supporting migrant youth, especially if rooted in healing-centered engagement. By understanding the diverse experiences of unaccompanied minors and their healing, communities can work towards creating more inclusive and supportive environments for migrant youth.

The implications of the findings from this research are multifaceted and extend to various stakeholders, including policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. For policymakers, the research shows the importance of upholding international law regarding the right to seek asylum and addressing reported violations by U.S. border officials. Specifically, policymakers need to ensure that Customs and Border Protection Processing Centers provide humane conditions, particularly for children, to support their ability to respond effectively during their assessments. NGOs involved in supporting unaccompanied minors in transit play an essential

role in providing alternatives to detention and necessary support. Despite resource challenges, these NGOs rely on their networks to offer vital assistance to vulnerable populations. Shelters like Casa Asilio, provide a model of support that fosters familial interactions between staff and adolescents that contribute to their well-being. Generally, this project emphasizes the importance of ensuring the protection and well-being of unaccompanied minors in transit, as well as the need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to address the complex challenges they face. Further ethnographic research at shelters like Casa Asilio can enrich our understanding of aid for teens in transit and inform future actions and decisions aimed at supporting migrant youth.

A common misconception about migrant youth places them as a burden on society or pose a threat to local communities. Through this research, I showcase the survival, aspirations, and contributions of these young individuals to highlight their agency and the positive impact they can have when given the opportunity. Another misconception is that all migrants seek economic opportunities rather than fleeing violence or persecution—which in itself should not be seen as an issue. However, by sharing stories and experiences from my research participants I hope to show a more nuanced understanding that illustrates the diverse reasons why people migrate and the challenges they face along the way. By humanizing their experiences, the research challenges oversimplified narratives that are often portrayed in media and public discourse. Lastly, this research offers insights into the structural barriers and systemic injustices that shape the experiences of migrants and refugees alike by providing context to their struggles. This work is intended to foster empathy and understanding of the complexities that they endure at various points in their young lives.

This work connects to the significance of supporting the adults working in the migrant shelter industry. These individuals play a pivotal role in providing care and support to vulnerable

populations, yet they often face precarious social repercussions and threats due to their advocacy. The lack of governmental and political support for migrant shelters exacerbates detention rates and perpetuates widespread human rights violations. Therefore, policymakers and practitioners must prioritize initiatives that not only empower migrant youth but also safeguard the well-being of those working with them. Humanitarian workers can only support as much as their respective societal norms and traditions allow them to. By addressing systemic challenges there needs to be an adequate support to shelter staff who are working to create environments that prioritize holistic care. Therefore, they must also be sustained in order to work in this field. That is, adults must also have their needs met (first) so that they can provide high levels of support to others. Through the example of staff at Casa Asilio, we see that gendered roles extend beyond the shelter space and impact their personal lives directly. This integrated approach recognizes the interconnectedness of individual experiences and the need for broader systemic change to uphold the rights and well-being of all involved in the migratory industry.

5.3 Final Thoughts and Future Work

In closing, my work seeks to urge people to confront stereotypes and advocate for inclusive policies in the asylum-seeking process (and other similar legal statuses that effect refugees) that humanize difficult experiences. As survivors of diaspora with multi-generational ties to migration, it is upon us to amplify our voices and champion the dignity and rights of all migrants. This site offers itself as a space for critique on U.S. interventions in Central America that undermine its social, political, and economic institutions. Neoliberal intervention in the region perpetuates a legacy that has transformed all facets of society, beginning with the abandonment of childhood. The survival of unaccompanied minors in transit is contingent on the acts of kindness they receive from the relationships they build by forming surrogate families within the shelter and extending to

the staff who comprise it. These relationships are an extension of Caravan culture and provide a sense of safety as well as respect amidst their difficulties. Through the process of negotiating my personal history and community identity, I give voice to those silenced by trauma or death and share stories of resilience for migrants and their children.

Future work includes expanding this research to other shelters for unaccompanied minors throughout zones of transit to better understand sites of intervention that can support youth in healing and recovering from the violence that plague their lives. These could be locations that also use HCE based activities that offer therapeutic interventions that aid youth in processing what they confront in their journeys. This would include a comparative study of unaccompanied migrants detained in the U.S. to identify best practices and the effectiveness of different approaches to support youth. In this way, there could be a policy analysis to assess the impact of current immigration and asylum practices at various border processing centers. This approach could uncover the U.S. and Mexico's alignments within international human rights standards established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, the exploration of digital and physical mobilities are significant considerations for the new generation of migrants as they are continuously developing and hold significance for migrants' all-around survival. By integrating this into future research, unaccompanied minors can receive adequate care and protection they need in order to fulfil their dreams.

As scholars continue to study the migration of unaccompanied minors, it is vital to centralize the construction of their identities and the conditions that lead them to abandon their childhoods in varying ways. This study provides a space within Latin American studies to illuminate the experiences of globalization and in/security to challenge the discourse on transnational gang networks and historicizing familial disintegration. By reconfiguring the current

narrative surrounding migration, I hope to empower the memories and voices of those navigating the challenges of displacement. This work serves as a call to action to disrupt cycles of violence and amplify the resilience and strength of migrant communities through storytelling. Our stories shed light on the intergenerational transmission of trauma and violence. By sharing these narratives, we advocate for policies that uphold the dignity and rights of all migrants. In closing, this research journey has illuminated the profound impact of migration on individuals and communities. The presented research urges us to confront stereotypes and advocate for inclusive policies. As survivors of diaspora, with multi-generational ties to migration, we recognize migration as movement and survival which are fundamental human rights. Migration exists beyond statistics; each person's dreams and experiences demand acknowledgment to heighten our shared humanity. Through this work, I endeavor to disrupt cycles of violence to celebrate the strength and beauty of migrant communities in the face of adversity.

References

- Abrego, Leisy J. *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Amnesty International. “NO SAFE PLACE.” Report. *Amnesty International*, November 2017. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/sites/en-us/files/legacy-pdf/5a2ee5a14.pdf>.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, 1987.
- Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood*, 1996.
- Arriola-Vega, Luis Alfredo, and Enrique Coraza De Los Santos, eds. *Crises and Migration. Latin American Societies*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07059-4>.
- Bayraktar, Nilgun. “Beyond the Spectacle of ‘Refugee Crisis’: Multi-directional Memories of Migration in Contemporary Essay Film.” *Journal of European Studies/Journal of European Studies* 49, no. 3–4 (October 11, 2019): 354–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244119859155>.
- Bersin, Alan, Nate Bruggeman, Ben Rohrbaugh, and Migration Policy Institute. “Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making.” *Migration at the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Challenge Decades in the Making*, January 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-border-history-report-2024_final.pdf.
- Bochenek, Michael Garcia. “Closed Doors.” *Human Rights Watch*, March 28, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/31/closed-doors/mexicos-failure-protect-central-american-refugee-and-migrant>.
- Brown, Hana E. “Refugees, Rights, and Race: How Legal Status Shapes Liberian Immigrants’ Relationship With the State.” *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 144–63. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2011.58.1.144>.
- Chase, Elaine, Laura Otto, Milena Belloni, Annika Lems, and Ulrika Wernesjö. “Methodological Innovations, Reflections and Dilemmas: The Hidden Sides of Research With Migrant Young People Classified as Unaccompanied Minors.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, no. 2 (March 19, 2019): 457–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2019.1584705>.
- Chavda, Janakee. “Key Facts About Recent Trends in Global Migration.” *Pew Research Center*, April 14, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/16/key-facts-about-recent-trends-in-global-migration/>.

- Coutin, Susan Bibler, Bill Maurer, and Barbara Yngvesson. "In The Mirror: The Legitimation Work of Globalization." *Law & Social Inquiry* 27, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 801–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-4469.2002.tb00982.x>.
- Cresswell, Timothy. *On The Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. Routledge, 2012.
- Daria, James. "The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The Northern Triangle of Central America: Violence, Displacement, and Refuge." UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019. https://usmex.ucsd.edu/_files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2013. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA87153401>.
- Doering-White, John. "The Shifting Boundaries of 'Best Interest': Sheltering Unaccompanied Central American Minors in Transit Through Mexico." *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.009>.
- Dominguez-Villegas, Rodrigo, Rodolfo Córdova Alcaráz, Nelly Montealegre Díaz, Federico Vázquez Calero, Office of the General Directorate for the Protection of Mexicans Abroad, Migration Policy Institute, Central America and Mexico Migration Alliance (CAMMINA), "Strengthening Mexico's Protection of Central American Unaccompanied Minors in Transit." Migration Policy Institute, 2017. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/UACsMexico-FINAL.pdf>.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Espiritu, Yên Lê, and Lan Duong. "Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art." *Signs* 43, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 587–615. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695300>.
- Feasley, Ashley, and Todd Scribner. "Accompaniment by the Catholic Church." *FMR* 56 (October 2017). <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/default/files/FMRdownloads/en/latinamerica-caribbean/feasley-scribner.pdf>.
- Fitzpatrick, Peter, and Patricia Tuitt. *Critical Beings: Law, Nation, and the Global Subject*. Ashgate Publishing, 2004.
- Flourish Agenda. "Chris Nguon Breaks Down the Foundational Elements of CARMA - Flourish Agenda," June 8, 2021. <https://flourishagenda.com/podcast/chris-nguon-breaks-down-the-foundational-elements-of-carma/>.

- NACLA. "From Caravan to Exodus, From Migration to Movement," November 26, 2018. <https://nacla.org/news/2018/11/26/caravan-exodus-migration-movement>.
- Garip, Filiz, and Asad L. Asad. "Network Effects in Mexico–U.S. Migration." *American Behavioral Scientist* 60, no. 10 (April 19, 2016): 1168–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216643131>.
- Ginwright, Shawn. "The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement," n.d. <https://flourishagenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Healing-centered-article.pdf>.
- Herlihy, Jane. "Discrepancies in Autobiographical Memories--- Implications for the Assessment of Asylum Seekers: Repeated Interviews Study." *BMJ. British Medical Journal* 324, no. 7333 (February 9, 2002): 324–27. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.324.7333.324>.
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, José De Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Tracy Robinson, Rosa María Ortiz, Felipe González, and Dinah Shelton, Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Álvaro Botero Navarro, and Gloria Gordon. *Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the Context of Human Mobility in Mexico*, 2013. <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/migrants/docs/pdf/report-migrants-mexico-2013.pdf>.
- Key, Kent, Debra Furr-Holden, Emily Lewis, Rebecca Cunningham, Marc A. Zimmerman, Vicki Johnson-Lawrence, and Steve E Selig. "The Continuum of Community Engagement in Research: A Roadmap for Understanding and Assessing Progress." *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 13, no. 4 (January 1, 2019): 427–34. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2019.0064>.
- Linthicum, Kate. "Pueblo Sin Fronteras Uses Caravans to Shine Light on the Plight of Migrants — but Has That Backfired? - Los Angeles Times." *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-caravan-leaders-20181206-story.html>.
- Linton, Julie M., Marsha Griffin, and Alan Shapiro. "Detention of Immigrant Children." *Pediatrics* 139, no. 5 (May 1, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0483>.
- Luibhéid, Eithne. *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*. U of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Martín-Baró, Ignacio. *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*. Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Karen A. Pren. "Border Enforcement and Return Migration by Documented and Undocumented Mexicans." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 7 (December 11, 2014): 1015–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2014.986079>.

- Nolan, Jaime. “Uncovering Beauty in a Narrative of Tragedy: Native Students Counter Narratives to Deficit Discourse.” *Unh*, October 9, 2015. https://www.academia.edu/16607669/Uncovering_Beauty_in_a_Narrative_of_Tragedy_Native_Students_Counter_Narratives_to_Deficit_Discourse.
- Park, Robert Ezra. *Race and Culture*, 1964.
- Pindado, Encarni. “Migrant Caravan in Pictures: A River of People Moving North.” *BBC*, October 24, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45944166>.
- Planas, Roque. “Border Patrol Agents Joked About Killing Migrant Children, Records Show.” *HuffPost*, April 30, 2024. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/border-patrol-agents-joked-about-killing-migrant-children-records-show_n_662bfa3fe4b0ab66ede493de.
- Ricardo Muniz Trejo. “Redefining Best Interests: Understanding the Needs of Unaccompanied Teenage Migrants Through the Lens of Non-governmental Shelters in Northeastern Mexico.” *UCL Migration Research Unit Working Papers*. Vol. No. 2020–2. UCL Migration Research Unit, 2020. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/geography/sites/geography_redesign/files/ricardo_muniz_trejo_ucl_mru_working_paper_no2_2020.pdf.
- Rogers, Kathe, Kathe Rogers, and Kathe Rogers. “The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma-Informed Care to Healing-Centered Engagement.” Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange - Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, October 19, 2022. <https://youthrex.com/blog/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement/>.
- Roth, Benjamin, and Caroline Sten Hartnett. “Creating Reasons to Stay? Unaccompanied Youth Migration, Community-based Programs, and the Power of ‘Push’ Factors in El Salvador.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 92 (September 1, 2018): 48–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.01.026>.
- Rowe, John Howland. “The Incas Under Spanish Colonial Institutions.” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (May 1, 1957): 155–99. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-37.2.155>.
- Scalabriniani. “Network of Migrant Shelters (Casas Del Migrante) | Scalabriniani.” Scalabriniani | Congregazione Dei Missionari Di San Carlo, February 21, 2023. <https://www.scalabriniani.org/en/rete-case-del-migrante/>.
- Schneider, Barry H., Paul David Hastings, Amanda Guyer, Mara Brendgen, and Eli Cwinn. *Child Psychopathology*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316159927>.

- Stein, Stanley. "The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective, by Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein." *Political Science Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (June 1, 1972): 318–19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2147857>.
- Stoesslé, Philippe, Valeria Alejandra Patiño Díaz, and Yetzi Rosales Martínez. "Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era." *Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (August 14, 2020): 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9080144>.
- Stone, Lynda, Charles Underwood, and Jacqueline S. Hotchkiss. "The Relational Habitus: Intersubjective Processes in Learning Settings." *Human Development* 55, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 65–91. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000337150>.
- UNHCR. "The 1951 Refugee Convention and Key International Conventions - UNHCR Israel," n.d. <https://www.unhcr.org/il/en/1951-refugee-convention-and-international-conventions#:~:text=The%201951%20Refugee%20Convention%20and%20its%201967%20Protocol%20are%20the,legal%20obligations%20to%20protect%20them>.
- Thornton, Abigail. "The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana an Analysis by the Center of U.S.-Mexico Studies Fellows (2018-19): The History of Caravans as a Strategic Response." UC San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies UC San Diego School of Global Policy & Strategy, 2019. https://usmex.ucsd.edu/_files/TheMigrantCaravan-FromHondurastoTijuana-August2019.pdf.
- UNHCR. "Global Appeal 2017 Update," 2017. https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2017/pdf/GA_2017%20Update%20Eng_Book_low-res.pdf.
- UNHCR US. "No Safe Place: Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans Seeking Asylum in Mexico Based on Their Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity | UNHCR US." UNHCR US, n.d. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/media/no-safe-place-salvadorans-guatemalans-and-hondurans-seeking-asylum-mexico-based-their-sexual>.
- UNICEF. "Alternatives to Immigration Detention of Children." *UNICEF WORKING PAPER*, 2019. [https://www.unicef.org/media/58351/file/Alternatives%20to%20Immigration%20Detention%20of%20Children%20\(ENG\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/58351/file/Alternatives%20to%20Immigration%20Detention%20of%20Children%20(ENG).pdf).
- U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Alejandro Mayorkas, Department of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen, and David Pekoske. "Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) Timeline." *Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) Timeline*, December 20, 2018. <https://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MPP-TimelineFinal.pdf>.
- U.S. GAO. "U.S. Immigration Courts See A Significant And Growing Backlog," December 13, 2022. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/u.s.-immigration-courts-see-significant-and-growing-backlog>.

- Vega, Luis Alfredo Arriola. “‘Migration Crisis’ and Migrant Caravans (October 2018–January 2019) in Mexico: An Analysis From Contemporary Academic Publications.” In *Latin American Societies*, 43–61, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07059-4_3.
- Velasco, Soledad Álvarez, and Nicholas De Genova. “‘A Mass Exodus in Rebellion’ – the Migrant Caravans: A View From the Eyes of Honduran Journalist Inner Gerardo Chévez.” *Studies in Social Justice* 17, no. 1 (March 26, 2023): 28–47. <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v17i1.4157>.
- Vizenor, Gerald Robert. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, 1999. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA45555384>.
- Vogt, Wendy A. “Embodied Mobilities.” In *University of California Press eBooks*, 105–30, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520298545.003.0005>.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. “The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century, by Immanuel Wallerstein.” *Political Science Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (January 1, 1975): 182–83. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2148733>.
- Women’s Refugee Commission. “Annual Report 2017,” 2018. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Annual-Report-FY-2017-web.pdf>.
- Wurtz, Heather. “A Movement in Motion: Collective Mobility and Embodied Practice in the Central American Migrant Caravan.” *Mobilities* 15, no. 6 (September 11, 2020): 930–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2020.1806511>.
- Yarris, Kristin Elizabeth, and Heide Castañeda. “Special Issue Discourses of Displacement and Deservingness: Interrogating Distinctions Between ‘Economic’ and ‘Forced’ Migration.” *International Migration* 53, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12170>.