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No Safe Space: Neoliberalism and the Production of Violence in the Lives of Central American Migrants

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Abstract: This paper explores the ways in which neoliberal policies enacted by elites across the Northern Triangle have led to increased violence in Central America, a lived experience that continues as individuals migrate to Mexico and the United States. In this work, I examine how neoliberal polices in the region have created limited economic opportunities and means of subsistence for the poor in Central America, as well as the rise of extra-legal actors and criminal enterprises. Together these conditions leave Central Americans with no choice but to migrate north. This paper then explores the violence migrants experience as they move through Mexico. In this stage of the journey, migrant bodies are objectified and then commodified as cheap labor for the global market as well as local economies of violence. Lastly, I discuss the multiple zones of violence that migrants experience at Mexico's border with the United States. This project relies on in-depth, semi-structured interviews ($n = 99$) with Central American migrants over the course of 4 years (2014–18). Ultimately, I find that for Central American migrants, violence can be a seemingly inescapable reality as neoliberal forces maintain and normalize violence in order to preserve an established social order at the expense of these migrants.

Key words: neoliberalism, migration, violence, Central America.

The recent influx of Central American migrants to the United States and the continued draconian separation of families have once again brought the matter of Central American migration to the fore. Despite the mainstream media's obsession with positioning the migration of Central Americans as an unprecedented crisis, an honest evaluation recognizes that this mass migration north has been a consistent aspect of Central

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American reality.[1,2,3] Yet, this movement of people continues to be framed as voluntary, erasing the historical role that intersecting economic and political forces play in the production of different forms of violence against the poor in Central America. These violences lead to the exclusion, displacement, and ultimately the expulsion of Central Americans especially from the Northern Triangle, i.e., Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.[4] In this paper, I contend that in Central America, U.S. state-sponsored neoliberal policies enacted by elites across different nation-states have led to increases in different forms of violence against the poor in Central America, a lived experience that continues as individuals migrate to Mexico and the United States.

The multidimensional nature of the violences that migrants experience makes it difficult to typify. Although some forms of violence are structural and historically entrenched, experiences of violence are constantly shifting in degree and intensity. Thus, it is more useful to think of these violences as operating on interactive continuums. This study identifies six violences that consistently emerged in my conservations with migrants who participated in this study. These violences, explained in further detail below, are: structural violence, symbolic violence, legal violence, direct, i.e., physical violence, psychological violence, and gendered violence. It is important to note that these forms of violence do not operate independently and are not exhaustive in terms of explaining migrants' experiences with violence. Further, the recognition of the temporal, spatial, and geographic dimensions of violence must also be incorporated into our understanding of the effect of violence on this population.

In this work, I have identified three contexts, rooted in systemic neoliberal restructuring, that have served to promote the violences that have affected the realities of Central Americans. These are, first, the Central American context where neoliberal policies have created limited economic opportunities and means of subsistence for the poor, as well as extreme securitization measures where countries have been turned into violent spaces of state repression focused on protecting the neoliberal enterprise rather than their citizenry. Second is the context of migration itself, i.e., the Central American migrant journey through Mexico where migrants are legally converted into "nobodies," "illegals," and "criminals." (Green 2011). Through this process of dehumanization and criminalization, their bodies can be objectified and then commodified as cheap labor for the global market and/or criminal enterprise. Third is the context of the Mexico/U.S. border where migrants encounter multiple zones of violence—most notable is the hyper-militarized U.S. border.

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Here migrants are, "denied the material conditions of life and recognition of their humanity" (Balibar 2001). These contexts also correspond to the three principal stages of the migrant journey.

I rely on in-depth, semi-structured interviews ($n = 99$) with Central American migrants over the course of 4 years (2014–18). These interviews were carried out in migrant shelters throughout Mexico, specifically Guadalajara, Oaxaca, and Tijuana, as well as in the United States. I sought to interview Central American migrants in varying geographic spaces in order to understand their experience of migration and violence in the entirety of the migration process, i.e., one that does not assume safety upon entering the United States.

Below I provide a brief background on the forms of violence that emerge in the experiences of migrants in this study, their relationship to neoliberalism, and the role these types of violence play in the migration of Central Americans. This is followed by an examination of the three contexts described above, paying particular attention to the neoliberal mechanisms that operate alongside violence to expulse Central Americans from the region into forced migration to Mexico and the United States. I conclude with a discussion on how the violence at the Mexico/U.S. border and beyond functions to continue the systemic suffering among this group.

NEOLIBERALISM AND VIOLENCE

Neoliberalism is understood as, "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within and institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey 2005). Although there has been a tendency to accept neoliberalism as a civilizing force (Barnett 2003; Fukuyama 1992), which is "openly endorsed, or accepted as the sine qua non of human development and the cure all for violence" (Springer 2016), neoliberalism's track record tells a much different story (Farmer 2004; Harvey 2005; Springer 2016, Valencia 2018; Vogt 2013; Zilberg 2011).

Structural Violence

In Central America, the fundamental tenets of neoliberalism: structural adjustment, fiscal austerity, free trade, privatization, and marked reductions in social spending have all led to increases in impoverishment, inequality,

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and violence. The systematized reduction in life chances, via, for example, limited education and employment opportunities, limited access to health care or housing, poverty, or "slow death" as Galtung (1990) refers to it, are all symptoms of a system in which structural violence is prevalent. Structural violence is understood as violence that is built into the structure and function of a system and manifests as unequal power and unequal life chances (Farmer 1996, 2004; Galtung 1969). The root of structural violence is inequality. Thus, the social stratification, which increases inequality, is important for understanding this type of violence. Further, this violence functions to produce vulnerability and social suffering across primarily racialized and gendered groups (Farmer 1996, 2004; Holmes 2013).

Structural violence is often entangled with state violence since state violence can serve to enforce or maintain structural violence. State violence can be used as a tool of governance, which involves social control, oppression, legal erasure, the entrenchment of structural inequalities, political murder, terror, disappearance, torture, genocide (Torres 2018, 383). In Central America, the historical legacies of state violence continue to affect the function of society. In observing the entanglement of structural and state violence within the neoliberal system, Springer (2016) notes that neoliberal policies "provide multiple opportunities for violent conflict" (3) in that their implementation has required the use of force, be it military or local sources of securitization. Here, the neoliberal state has, "exited from the provision of social services [and] invested itself in the social control of its own populations" (Torres 2018, 390). In the case of Central America and Mexico, the conventional military and police have for long acted in the interest of economic elites as neoliberal states have prioritized the protection of the neoliberal enterprise at the expense of the citizenry. As states prioritize neoliberal economic interests, extra-legal entrepreneurs of violence, such as gangs and cartels, capitalize off of the structural, symbolic, and gendered vulnerabilities of the communities in which they operate. These groups also exert their power via physical violence.

Economically speaking, structural violence is also present in the inherent individualism entangled in the neoliberal logic of the marketplace, which emphasizes a "pull yourself by your bootstraps" mentality. According to this logic, individuals are solely responsible for their own success, and by default failure (Harvey 2005); Neoliberalism as a system is exonerated from an individual's ability to "make it." The systematized categorization of people as "winners" and "losers" is then based on an individual's ability to accumulate wealth and power. Further, the fact

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that a possibility, erroneously understood as "opportunity", of "winning" exists, allows for failure, in this framework, to be conceived of as a personal or cultural flaw. As Harvey (2005) notes, "In a Darwinian neoliberal world. . .only the fittest should and do survive" (157).

Symbolic Violence

Alongside structural violence, there generally exists "symbolic violence," which functions to normalize and legitimize violence. Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) describe this violence as "a range of actions that have injurious consequences to the internalization of social asymmetries and to the legitimation of inequality and hierarchy, ranging from racism to sexism to expressions of class power." It is the internalization of these socially constructed categories, which serve as frames of interaction of daily life, that normalize and perpetuate such conditions. One of the most damaging aspects of symbolic violence occurs when, "The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural. This can lead to a systematic self-depreciation, even self-denigration" (Bourdieu 1998, 35). Neoliberalism as a system has not only penetrated political and economic realities, it has also altered social frames of interaction where, as explained above, those who are most ill affected by this system have internalized their social position within this structure, but further, and perhaps more damaging, society as a whole supports this positionality.

Legal Violence

In the case of migrants, there exists an additional layer of violence, "legal violence"—the harmful effects of the law that exert influence and control over migrant lives (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Legal violence functions to strip individuals of their personhood and/or the rights and protections afforded to citizens of a state. Here individuals are categorized according to frameworks of "illegality" (De Genova and Peutz 2010), i.e., "illegal" versus "legal," wherein such categorizations serve to legitimize violence upon people who are deemed to fall outside of the purview of those who should be protected by "the law." This criminalization promotes exclusion and thus enables multiple forms of violence upon the daily lives of migrants.

Legal violence also serves to illuminate an interesting paradox in the neoliberalization of migration—as neoliberal policies create challenges

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for successful livelihoods in Central America, they simultaneously create a demand for cheap, flexible labor abroad. Yet, in the case of the United States, securitization and militarization along its borders legally (and violently) attempt to limit the flow of such labor into the United States. Thus, "the neoliberal ideology of the global free market has not. . .extended to the labor market" (Varsanyi 2008); states still present challenges in terms of the free (market) movement of people. While material items are privileged with the ability to freely move across borders, migrants operate within a framework of insiders and outsiders, citizens and non-citizens; where the latter becomes the condition they are forced to occupy. It is this "illegality" that serves to transform migrant bodies into commodified subjects throughout the migration process. In the end, the nation-state's "membership requirement" is like most things, exploited to feed neoliberalism's drive for profit.

Direct Violence

The forms of violence that migrants commonly identify are direct, i.e., physical violence and psychological violence. Physical violence is somatic in nature and effects the person directly, psychological violence effects the soul; a principal characteristic of this violence is fear and threat (Galtung 1969). For migrants, direct violence can involve assault, beatings, robbery, detention and sexual violence, and death (Infante et al. 2012). Psychological violence can involve verbal abuse, fear, intimidation, sadness, anxiety, stress, and depression to name a few (Altman et al. 2018; Vega, Kolody and Valle 1987).

Gender and Gendered Violence

Expressions of gender-based violence can be seen in each one of the violences discussed above. *Gender* violence can be understood as inequality that disadvantages women, while *gendered* violence relates to acts of violence against women (Hammar 1999; Menjívar and Walsh 2017). In Latin America, the legacy of centuries of gendered violence has culminated in the widespread phenomenon of *feminicide* against women. *Feminicide*, different from *femicide*, the homicide of women, recognizes the "genocide against women, [which] occurs when the historical conditions generate social practices that allow for violent attempts against the integrity, health, liberties and lives of girls and women" (Lagarde 2010,

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xvi). The term feminicide also conveys the idea that violence against women is a consequence of social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities that intersect with racial inequalities (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). This conceptualization of gendered violence implicates not just individuals, but also the state. Thus, violence against women can be understood as the product of, "structural processes of subordination that are officially or unofficially sanctioned at the local, national and transnational levels" (Hilgers and MacDonald 2017, 24). For migrant women, violence is as Lagarde (2010) explains, "aggravated under permanent or temporary conditions of social exclusion and situations of dependence or of minimal or non-existent citizenship for women" (xx).

An explication of the gendered effects of neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this paper. However, these effects can briefly be summarized in this way: In Central America, one of the effects of the neoliberal restructuring of the system has been the feminization of the workforce. Women are a sought-after labor force due to the patriarchal notion that they are more responsible, gentle, obedient, and most importantly, docile. However, this increase in the number of women in the labor force has occurred alongside a deterioration in working conditions (Standing 1999). Thus, many women end up in poorly paid, flexible, insecure, temporary, and informal work (Robinson 2003, 287). As male employment declines, this creates a tremendous amount of stress on women who are now the primary breadwinners.[5] However, as breadwinners, they bear the brunt of the "increased prices, shrinking incomes and dwindling social services" (Robinson 2003, 288) caused by the neoliberal restructuring of Central American economies. When these conditions are combined with a lack of security (economic, political, and social) from the state, migration becomes one of the only viable options for women. Once in the process of migration, women will be subject to the dehumanization and commodification inherent in this process, albeit for women, there is always the additional threat of sexual violence.

Neoliberal "Moments"

Neoliberalism, as a system and force, functions to exacerbate the above violences. However, neoliberalism should not be understood as an omnipotent force that is neatly imposed all over the world. This global political economy of violence has been developed in coordination with, "the local geographies of existing political economic circumstances and

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institutional frameworks, wherein the vagaries of societal influences and individual agency play a key role in the circulation and (re)production of neoliberalism" (Springer 2016, 9). Thus, it is more helpful to understand neoliberalism in the context of "moments" (Hartsock 2006) that can define particular stages of development. That is to say, in the development of the globalized neoliberal system, there exist moments in particular conditions, political players, social, and political circumstances that play (have played) a role in the reproduction of neoliberalism. Further, "At different moments capitalism creates particular kinds of agents who become capable of certain kinds of violence dependent upon the distinctive geohistorical milieu and their situation within its hierarchy" (Springer 2016, 9). Through these varying local geographies, the larger macro structure of the neoliberal geography of violence that makes up the neoliberal global project in its contemporary moment can be understood (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002).

METHODOLOGY

This project relies on in-depth, semi-structured interviews ($n = 99$) with Central American migrants over the course of 4 years (2014–18). The utilization of qualitative methods in this work was intentional and follows the logic of feminist methodologies, which attempt to address the objectification of research subjects by centering the voices and experiences of marginalized groups in the production of knowledge (Sprague 2016). I interviewed migrants in Mexico and in the United States in order to capture the entirety of the cycle of violence that migrants experience. Beginning in 2014, I visited migrant shelters in Guadalajara, Oaxaca, and Tijuana, Mexico in order to speak, first hand, with Central American migrants traveling through Mexico on their way to the United States or other parts of Mexico.[6] Guadalajara, Ixtepec, Oaxaca, and Tijuana are major transit points for migrants who are attempting to get through Mexico to the United States. I began my investigation in Mexico rather than in Central America because I wanted to interview those who could speak to the "expulsion" out of Central America into the migration journey.

I also interviewed Central American migrants in the United States. The U.S. interviews make up part of a larger project which seeks to understand the entire cycle of the migrant journey in the context of violence—from Central America, through Mexico, to the United States and eventually

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back to Central America. Nevertheless, the same set of questions were used for both migrants making their way to the United States and migrants already in the United States, with the exception being that migrants in the United States provided an understanding of not only their experiences coming from Central America to the United States but also their experiences at the border, crossing the border, the experience of navigating the U.S. space as an undocumented person, and for some, their experience of deportation and return. These were experiences that migrants in Mexico had not yet encountered but are important for understanding the extent of neoliberal violence in the lives of migrants.

Through the use of snowball sampling, I was able to identify suitable subjects for this study. Snowball sampling (Bleich and Pekannen 2013; Handcock 2011) allows subjects to recommend future subjects from among their pool of acquaintances. In order to participate in the study, subjects must have been nationals of one of the seven Central American countries, and over 18 years of age. As previously noted, the interviews used for this study were semi-structured. I chose this methodology in order to provide some guidance in terms of the information that was sought, yet also allow respondents to speak candidly and fully about their experiences and any other topics that they deemed relevant. The interviews were guided by questions on participant's reasons for migrating, their experience migrating through Central America, Mexico, and the United States, and their experience of living and working as an undocumented person in the United States.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish and in person, with the exception of some interviews that required the assistance of a translator who could communicate in Ixil, Q'anjob'al, and K'iche'. The average interview took approximately 1 hour, although on a number of occasions, the interviews went as long as 2.5 hours. All the names that appear in the text are pseudonyms since all subjects were ensured that the confidentiality of their interviews would be respected.

The participants in the study were composed of 55 males and 43 females and one person who identified as a trans woman. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 55 years. Twenty-seven of the participants were Honduran, five were Nicaraguan, 34 were Guatemalan, and 33 participants were from El Salvador. The education level of participants varied, with four who had no formal education, 68 completing some elementary school, 12 completed some middle school, nine completed some high school, and six had some education beyond high school. All were from poor backgrounds and maintained income levels that would

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be considered low income in their countries of origin. All appropriate human subject protocols were followed during the interview process. For the purposes of maintaining the anonymity of migrants in the process of migration, informed verbal consent was obtained for all participants.

EXPULSION: RAMIFICATIONS OF NEOLIBERALISM IN THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE

Contemporary Central American migration to the United States and Mexico can be generally divided into two periods: Migration as a consequence of the brutal civil wars that ravaged the region, primarily El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua (Aguayo and Fagen 1988; Bonner 1984; Coatsworth 1994; Fagen 1984; Fagen and Aguayo 1986; LaFeber 1993; Manz 1988; Montes and García 1988; Peterson 1986) and migration in the post-war period (Coutin 2003; Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991, 2001; Loucky and Moors 2000; O'Dogherty Madrazo 1989; Menjívar 2000). Current migration out of the region is part of the latter (García 2006; Martínez 2016; Sandoval-García 2017). Each period has been accompanied with crises that have pushed people out of the region.

The civil wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala were violent ramifications of decades of marked increases in inequality and loss of land, which led to deepening pauperization, and the consolidation of power in the hands of coercive and brutal oligarchic/military dictatorships. It is no coincidence that these violent social conditions went hand in hand with the region's integration into the world capitalist system.

Robinson (2003) refers to this integration as a series of "rearticulations" that begin in the 16th century with the colonial conquests. The next articulation to capitalism occurred in the latter part of the 19th century through the rapid expansion and extension of capitalist development (classical competitive capitalism) via coffee and other export production. The onset of monopoly capitalism implemented an agro-export model throughout the region, which deepened post WWII and was carried through the inward development policies of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) (Robinson 2003, 64). However, ISI proved to be unsuccessful—these policies led to trade deficits, inflation, and a debt crisis, which exacerbated collapsing economies. By the 1970s, the region had entered a transition into globalization; the move toward neoliberalism had begun.

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In Central America, the neoliberal project was rolled out as part of a concerted effort by the United States and country elites to "impart a measure of fiscal and social discipline to Latin American governments and populations in the wake of severe economic crisis" (Hershberg and Rosen 2006, 7).[7] Debt-ridden countries desperate for solutions had no choice but to accept neoliberal reforms. To the detriment of these countries, this debt relief was accompanied with draconian conditionalities. The first order of business was to implement Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The primary mechanisms through which SAPs transformed Central America toward neoliberalism were privatization, a drastic reduction in social spending, including massive cuts to education and healthcare, the revival of the export-oriented industry, the deregulation of industry, the decimation of labor rights and protections, the elimination of subsidies and trade barriers, and the extreme focus on export production and fiscal austerity (Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Robinson 2003).

The goal of these neoliberal reforms was to create secure investment climates for private investors, which could then drive the recovery and growth of failed Central American economies. The protection of these investments became the priority of elites in the region who benefitted from these economic arrangements. Thus, the expansion of neoliberalism in the region went hand in hand with the restructuring of the state, which was to prioritize the protection of transnational capital above the rights and protection of citizens. In the post war period, neoliberal restructuring and state abandonment were associated with marked disparities in social and economic realms such as education, health, housing, and employment, all of which served to "diminish possibilities for the full democratic participation of all citizens" (O'Neill and Thomas 2011).

Neoliberal restructuring in the region also involved stripping the working poor of economic opportunities, labor protection, and social mobility. The shift from post WWII Keynesian (or Fordist) theories of state intervention to post-Fordist or "bloody Taylorist" models of flexible accumulation divided labor pools between the core and periphery (Jessop 2005; Lipietz 1997; Robinson 2003; Scott and Storper 2005). Under the new transnational model, labor operated within the context of global commodity chains and a global division of labor. Here, instead of countries specializing in an export sector (manufacturing or agriculture), production sites in countries specialized in a constituent part of a production process spread across several countries. The global decentralization and fragmentation of production processes indicate a

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shift from the production of national products to the transnational production of world products (McMichael 2011, 92). In Central America, the traditional agro-export model was replaced by new highly exploitative industries such as the maquiladora (sweatshop) industry, tourism, nontraditional agro exports such as palm oil, and labor and remittances; this process facilitated Central America's position as a site of production in the global division of labor.

Under the conditions of neoliberal restructuring, labor is subject to super exploitation; labor becomes casualized and informalized (Robinson 2003, 260). Further, the deregulation that accompanies neoliberalism creates complete worker insecurity as unionization efforts are violently suppressed and the responsibility of the state to protect labor is nullified and shifts to the protection of the neoliberal enterprise (Bulmer-Thomas 1996; Harvey 1990; 2007; Lipietz 1987). In Central America, those who are unable to locate themselves within new industries become redundant—unemployed and superfluous labor in local economies. The options available for those who fall into this group of "disposable" labor are limited to engaging in informal labor or migrating in hopes of securing gainful employment elsewhere. Those who leave will become part of a denationalized labor pool in the global economy. Here, their literal bodies become commodified as objects of desire that are bought and sold on the market where the demand for them is as constant as their expendability (Harvey 2005; Polayni 1944; Sharp 2000). This neoliberal restructuring has come at a high cost for the social well-being of Central American populations since it has exacerbated rural impoverishment, intensified inequality, led to the informalization, precariousness, and redundancy of labor, and amplified historical structural violence. These factors have served to push mass groups of people out of the region.

The state's abandonment of its social and economic responsibility toward the populace has created conditions where citizens have no protection from everyday forms of violence (Pinheiro 1996; Robinson 2003). Instead, the state has employed a "security paradigm as a framework for organizing contemporary social life" (Goldstein 2010, 487). This securitization, which functions as state violence, then, "calls on the power of fear to fill the ruptures that the crises and contradictions of neoliberalism have engendered and so functions as a principal tool of state formation and governmentality in the world today" (Goldstein 2010, 487).

The vacuum of law and order that was created by the restructuring of the state under neoliberalism has allowed, "a variety of armed actors and violence brokers... [to] carve out alternative, informal spheres of power

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on the basis of coercion" (Koonings and Krujit 2007, 7). The rise of vigilantism has also created an additional layer of violence as citizens attempt to live and ultimately, "make do in the absence of the state" (Burrell 2010; Godoy 2002). This is what has occurred in the "Northern Triangle," i.e., El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—referred to as one of the deadliest regions in the world.[8] These countries are also places where the process of neoliberal restructuring of the state, based on a strategy of accumulation that favors and protects market-oriented reforms rather than investing in the protection of society at large, has been carried out in full force.

Leaving Central America

The structural forms of violence that persist in the region, that is, the entanglement of economic and social violence, have created conditions which have made Central America unlivable for many. This was apparent in interviews as migrants recalled their motivations for leaving their homes. To begin, there was a deep cynicism related to government in migrant's testimonies. Just as the state had abandoned them, they too had abandoned the idea of government coming to their rescue. Edgar, only 23 years old, was on his way back to Mexico's southern border to meet his brother. He had left Honduras desperate to find a job elsewhere in order to be able to pay for the oxygen tanks his mother needed to be able to survive. Frustrated that he had to leave his country to find a job Edgar commented,

> "I'm a young guy, I should be able to get a job and not have to leave my country. Don't governments want young people to stay and work in the country? But really, they don't care, the entire country is a giant sweatshop, it's not a country it's a factory."

He went on to explain his disdain of government, the sentiment of which was continuously echoed among the migrants:

> "These governments use politics as a way of getting people involved and then they end up fucking you over, and they leave us worse than we were before. They have no interest in helping us. They don't protect us. Look, the only reason I'm interested in politics is because I need to know when they're going to fuck me over, how they're going to take things away from me, where I need to watch out. So, in that sense, I'm interested, but fuck, it's all pure trash! But you know where you will get a job? the

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> biggest need over there [in Honduras] is killing, if you want to kill people you will definitely find a job."

Edgar illuminates the frustration with the lack of economic opportunity and the abandonment of the state. Under these conditions, violence does emerge as a viable economic opportunity for those who are willing.

The killing, the daily violence made possible by defunct states and widespread criminal violence, weighed heavy on the migrants I spoke with. Most of them discussed the insecurity of daily life and the normalization of extreme forms of violence–both symptoms of structural and symbolic violence. Jose, a father of two, left Honduras in search for a job, any job, that would allow him to move his entire family out of Honduras. After losing his job at a *maquila*[9] making car parts he had attempted to secure gainful employment for over a year before he decided to leave. He was desperate to find a way to support his family. Leaving them behind, he feared the long-lasting effects that direct exposure to violence would have on his children. As he teared up, he relayed:

> "I had to leave because I lost my job at the factory and wasn't able to find another permanent job, so I left to look for a job outside of Honduras. But where I live there is daily violence, every second of the day. I have two young children and I don't want them to grow up with that violence. If I don't get them out of there, even if I teach them that violence is wrong, and I send them to school, it won't matter because they will keep living in the violence and they will learn it; they will have to learn it to survive it, or they will become a part of it."

The daily violence experienced by Jose and his family exemplifies a fundamental tenet of symbolic violence—"of all the forms of hidden persuasion, the most impeccable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004). As violence becomes a principal factor in the natural order of life in Honduras, it becomes normalized and accepted, even if such an acceptance is solely based on the need to survive. Jose acknowledged this normalization but expressed his frustration with the way this violence was being upheld and perpetuated by the state and state appendages—he explained:

> "For them, for the government, the news, it's like a sport now, they display everything exactly as it happened. Every morning in the newspapers and on TV they show all the cadavers of dead young men and they show them chopped up and it's like a sport for them to show that. And then we walk

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> outside, and outside of our house there are neatly lined up dead bodies with their heads stacked on top of each other. I saw that, I lived through that. I don't wish that experience on anyone, but that is life in Honduras, its full of violence. I don't know why they always show that, over and over."

As Jose describes it, violence has, in essence, become a spectator sport. As Central American states prioritize the securitization of enterprise, the spectacle of violence can also function as a form of social control as it, "fragment[s] and alienate[s] an active and engaged citizenry, transforming it into a passive audience" (Giroux and Evans 2015, 33). Jose's experience also portrays the subtleties in which lack of economic opportunities, a form of structural violence, forces people to exist in direct, physical, and in Jose's experience, psychological violence; the violences are intertwined. This is why we cannot speak of the out-migration of Central American migrants as an economic migration alone, it is severely entangled with other forms of violence.

Las Maras: Gangs and Direct and Psychological Violence

A significant amount of the violence experienced by Central Americans in the Northern Triangle comes at the hand of extra-legal actors, primarily gangs, cartels, and other criminal enterprises. "La renta," ("the rent" or "war tax", i.e., money paid to gangs for protection within the neighborhoods they control) remains a significant source of profit for gangs who routinely patrol neighborhoods collecting money from residents. Those who are perceived to earn more, this includes those who receive remittances from family abroad, will be taxed heavily. Those who do not pay will face violent consequences. Extortion by gangs and the violence that accompanies it was a factor present in many of the testimonies of migrants who fled the region. At the Hermanos En El Camino shelter in Oaxaca, I spoke with Laura, who left Honduras after being beaten and threatened by gang members for not being able to pay "the rent":

> "I'm a single woman living with my kids; I was selling tortillas to make money. The gangs came and told me that I had to pay the rent but they were forcing me to pay almost all of what I was making. I left because the gang beat me when I couldn't pay the rent, and they wanted to take my daughter because I couldn't pay, and my cousin got involved when he saw that they beat me really bad, and they killed him. I'm just traumatized of seeing all the death; we had to figure out how to leave and never go back because if they see you again, that's it."

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Beyond the issue of the rent, made possible by the disappearance of the state in matters of protection, Laura's experience also exemplifies forms of gendered violence through the complexity of being the breadwinner while existing in the precarity of the informal economy. Her literal space of production, i.e., the street, was void of any type of protection (economic, social, and physical) by the state.

The extortion of Central Americans has been facilitated as more and more people move into urban centers to work in neoliberal industries such as maquiladoras. It is in this transition that, "organized criminals feed off of the market openings fueled by globalization and neoliberal policies that establish trade and move business abroad" (Vogt 2013, 769). However, it is not just those in urban centers who must pay "la renta"—gangs are present and preserve this extractive model throughout the entire region.

Gangs also often target young people to incorporate into crime rings; I spoke with a number of young men who after being threatened by gangs fled their towns as a way of avoiding being forcefully drafted into gang life. For many, the threat of gang-related retaliation is enough to cause people to flee (Keller et al. 2017). Juan, a father of four, spoke to me about leaving Guatemala with his 12-year-old son after being threatened by gangs in his village:

> "There is a lot of violence in Guatemala, a lot. Since there are no jobs people do all kinds of things to survive; there are a lot of kidnappers and they kill people just to take your money. My family has dealt with a lot of violence. Some people came at night and they wanted my kids; they were saying they were going to take my son- the gangs want the young kids to sell drugs for them or to help them do terrible things. They said they would kidnap my son and they said that if we didn't give them $20,000 they would kill me and him. So, the only place we thought we could hide was in the U.S. because in Guatemala no place is safe, not even your own home is safe. They started to call my phone and harass me; in the middle of the night I left with my son. My son is 12. The rest of my family is still there, I had to leave my wife with my two daughters and my younger son so that this son could be saved."

Juan's experience represents what it is like for many families who attempt to save their children from being forced into the gang life. Juan's experience also reminds us that the separation of families is a characteristic element of the violence of this neoliberal dislodging; it occurs as a consequence of the pervasive structural and direct violence in the home

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country and is carried through the migration experience. The violent policy of family separation currently being enforced in the United States is but one stage of the process of separation, albeit one that most clearly characterizes the way in which neoliberal mechanisms (in this case the neoliberal detention machine) profit from the violence of family separations.

In Juan's case, the gangs were the driving force behind the separation of his family. In Jose's case above, violence and economic insecurity served to separate his family. The decisions made to leave family behind reveal the desperation people feel in the environments they are forced to exist. Nowhere is this desperation made clearer than in the droves of unaccompanied Central American minors that arrived at the U.S. borders in 2014. In my time at the shelters, I spoke with the parents who had sent their children to the United States alone in hopes of saving their lives. In my interviews in the United States, I spoke with young people, mostly from Guatemala, who entered the United States as unaccompanied minors, almost every one of them fled due to threats from gangs. In the United States, most were waiting for a decision from the courts on whether they would be granted asylum or be sent back to the violence.

In the most tragic circumstances, gang threats materialize into physical death. Oscar had just turned 18 the day before he arrived at the shelter. When I asked him why he had left Honduras he said:

> "They [gangs] killed my dad and I left because I didn't want them to kill me. They had kidnapped him and we couldn't pay what they asked for, so they killed him; they threw his body outside of our house. My mom left to the U.S. when that happened and then she told me to come."

According to the National Human Rights Commission of Honduras (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos—CONADEH) in 2017, over 1,400 Hondurans were internally displaced by threats of violence (death), extortion, and gang recruitment.[10,11] Although, the actual number of people displaced is unknown, but likely much higher. CONADEH had previously reported that from 2004 to 2014, the number of people displaced by violence was 174,000.[12]

In my interviews with migrants, there was a clear gendered dimension to gang threats. While young men expressed a fear of being forcefully recruited to do business for gangs, young women expressed fear of being "taken" or kidnapped by gangs, as well as being sexually assaulted by gangs. Jennifer, who was 18 years old was forced to flee Guatemala

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on her own because of the harassment by gangs. In our conversation, she explained:

> "I left because the gangs were bothering my me and family. One of the gang members wanted me to be his girlfriend but I never talked to him. I always stayed away from them but then they would show up outside my school, and I would run home and they tried to break into my house a lot of times. The last time they broke in the guy tried to take me and he tried to do stuff to me."

I followed up with a question on whether this man had tried to hurt her, to which she answered:

> "My mom tried to get him off of me and he turned around and cut her arm with a knife. I didn't see the guy because it was so dark, but I had to leave after that. Now that I'm not there, my mom will be ok."

In Central America, there is a chronic condition of violence against women (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). The targeting of young women by gangs serves to exacerbate the already high rates of femicide in the region.[13] The persistent gender inequality and historical impunity in relation to crimes against women only contribute to the culture of objectification, commodification, and devaluation of women. In this context, gangs and other criminal groups freely enact violence against women.

IN TRANSIT: NEGOTIATING EXPLOITATION, EVADING DEATH

Once the violence of the home country operates to expulse Central Americans, they are thrust into the process of migration. Leaving their homes is in fact, a last option for most. In my conversations with migrants, many expressed that for them "*no hay de otra*," they had "no other choice" but to leave. Yet, for many Central Americans, their migration is entangled with the process of commodification.

Historically, Central American nations and Mexico hesitated to recognize the mass movement of people out of this region as refugees. The United States has maintained a staunch position on this issue categorizing refugees as economic immigrants. As such this group has been legally stripped of the rights and protections that refugees fleeing violent conflict would normally be entitled to; instead they have been

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made "illegal." Consequently, their departure is positioned within the logic of neoliberalism. This migration occurs via the "disenfranchisement and internal segregation" (Chacón and Davis 2006) in home countries, which displaces entire groups of people who are then commodified into unprotected, deterritorialized labor to be bought and sold on the global market.

While migrants are not objects which are produced in order to be sold, as soon as they leave, their objectification and transformation into an "object of economic desire" (Sharp 2000, 293), to be bought and sold on the market according to the logic of supply and demand, create conditions by which they become trade, like any other (Chacón and Davis 2018; Harvey 2005; Polayni 1944). Here, migrants *are the* industry (Castles and Miller 2003). Further, to use Marx's conceptualization, the "use value" and "exchange value" of migrants in this mobile market is dependent on the local economies, which they traverse (Vogt 2013). In this sense, because the value is always in motion, their tradability is always in flux. As Central Americans move across borders they accrue value as exploitable labor. However, the criminalization that accompanies their movement allows them to be fully exploited by all extractive and predatory economies; in Mexico this includes the narco-economy.

Central Americans as "Good Business"

Although undocumented migration is criminalized, in Mexico, Central Americans make up an, "internationally dispossessed working class… Their migration, segregation, impoverishment and victimization make for good business" (Chacón and Davis 2018, 94). The same occurs with migrants who make it into the United States, their exploitability and expendability make them a sought-after labor force.

For the home countries, migrants have become primary export products; they provide a steady stream of remittances on which Central American economies are dependent (Gammage 2006; Harvey 2003; Orozco 2002; Robinson 2003; Rocha 2011; Sandoval-García 2017). But in Mexico since the "market for migrants" intersects legal and extra-legal spaces, violent exploitation of migrants by gangs, cartels, human smugglers, and other criminal groups is common throughout the migration journey. When the system is set up to maximize profitability, all forces, legal and extra-legal, will attempt to gain a foothold in markets—in this case the market is migrant bodies. Thus, as Vogt (2013) explains,

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"migrants may be valued in various combinations of cargo to smuggle, gendered bodies to sell, labor to exploit, organs to traffic and lives to exchange for cash" (765). Under these circumstances, the movement of migrants through these spaces entails attempts at evading the most violent types of exploitation, as well as negotiating the exploitation they must engage with in order to survive (i.e. being trafficked and labor exploitation).

Coyotes

One of the first ways in which migrants must negotiate their commodification is in their exchange with "coyotes," i.e., human smugglers. The *coyote* serves as the intermediary, the broker, responsible for getting the human cargo to their respective locations. On average, the migrants I spoke with reported paying between $5,000 and $8,000 per person to be moved from Mexico's southern border into the United States. This smuggling operation is not guaranteed and the means by which coyotes will transport migrants is often extremely dangerous and inhumane.

Often migrants are passed through a network of coyotes who move them through different areas within Mexico and the U.S. border. Many times, these coyotes are connected with local criminal rings or Mexican authorities, all of which capitalize on the extortion of migrants.[14] The migrants I spoke with were aware of this corruption, as Alfredo said:

> "It's pure corruption. The coyotes, they are already connected with the police and with the authorities and with the cartels, that's how they get you through. They give them their $500 pesos and they let them pass. Sometimes they will ask for more, you never know. It's not that the coyotes know how to hide, they're all just connected-you pay, and they pass you through."

In these transactions, coyotes may ask for more money or extort migrants by capitalizing on the insecurity of the journey. Several migrants reported that they were told by their coyote that the area they were going to move through was "hot" at the moment, and due to the dangers of moving through, they would have to charge them more. Migrants are then forced to borrow more money, leaving more and more debt as they travel. Those who cannot pay will be left behind, or in the case of women and girls, when money is unavailable, they will be forced to engage in sex or other services to pay their debt.[15]

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It is important to recognize that symbolic violence operates through the normalization of violence, which makes it unexceptional (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004). Structures of power that exert violence are not only normalized but accepted. Therefore, violence can be misrecognized as normal, daily functioning. Payment for passage and the smuggling and transport of migrant bodies, with migrant's consent, is an example of this form of violence. However, we must always be aware of the structural conditions that forced this violence to be normalized to begin with.

Being "Illegal" In Mexico

If the state has abandoned Central Americans in their home countries, migrants will also not find an ally in the Mexican state. Mexico's southern border has for long been a dangerous place for migrants. To begin, Plan Frontera Sur (Southern Plan), part of a larger United States funded strategy to curb and control migrants through apprehension and deportation at Mexico's southern border, has as its main goal to deter Central American migration before migrants have a chance to move north (Ogren 2007). Mexico's southern border is then migrants' first interaction with the neoliberal transnational securitization mechanism. Several multibillion-dollar agreements including the Merida Initiative and the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) between the United States, Central America, and Mexico fund this transnational securitization to police and discipline migrants. The migrants I spoke with were very aware of these policies that control and profit off of their bodies. As Marcos explained,

> "Behind the Mexican government is the U.S. government, and the U.S. government gives Mexico millions of dollars to stop us from coming in through the south, somehow everyone gets money from us, except for us."

In these spaces, migrants are subject to a plethora of abuse on behalf of Mexican authorities. In my discussions with migrants, they mentioned being robbed, bribed, and assaulted by authorities along and around the southern border. By criminalizing migrants, they are treated like any other "illegal" operation and are thus subject to systematized state violence on behalf of the Mexican military, police, and immigration authorities.

While both U.S. and Mexican politicians highlight the abuses of migrants at Mexico's northern border with the United States, little is said of the rampant abuses toward migrants, children included, that

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occur in Mexico. In 2016, Mexico's National Human Rights commission reported on terrible conditions within migrant detention centers in Mexico where 881 complaints of human rights violations were documented.[16,17] As migrants continue to "illegally" cross through the southern border, the Mexican security mechanism threatens them at every step. In fear of being caught and subject to deportation, migrants have been pushed into more dangerous terrain in order to avoid capture.

Oscar, who was 28 and from Honduras, had recently arrived at the shelter in Guadalajara. As I spoke to him about the routes that migrants are forced to take now, he commented:

> "The problem is that everything changes- I had come before on the train but now there is a lot of security around the train, and now there are more laws against us that obligate the migrants to look for new routes and they take us through areas that are very dangerous, there are a lot of delinquents and organized crime where they rob you and assault you and even kill you. The cartels are there too, we never know what will happen to us."

The train Oscar refers to above is widely known as "La Bestia" (The Beast), a system of freight trains that run across Mexico, which have also served as a primary source of transit for migrants crossing Mexico. However, a number of migrants, as well humanitarian workers that I spoke with, stated that La Bestia as a method of transportation was slowly being abandoned since the trains have been heavily targeted by Mexican immigration authorities and other criminal groups. It is no longer considered a "safe" way to migrate. Those who can afford to take other routes, will. This means that those who use the train are some of the most economically vulnerable migrants.

To be clear, La Bestia never was safe. In fact, the train is literally a space of moving violence. The Beast is deadly. The train itself has the ability to enact violence on the migrants and refuges who ride atop the train, exhausted from the journey or by a simple accident, often fall off the train and are dismembered or killed as the train runs them over. Once on top of the train, migrants cannot get off until the train stops, this facilitates criminal group's ability to board the trains and rob large groups of migrants at a time. Several migrants I spoke with reported being robbed on the train; others like Sonia, witnessed extreme physical and gendered violence while riding The Beast:

> "I saw a young girl, she was traveling with her boyfriend and the gangs jumped on the train and they robbed them, then they threw him off the train and they raped her. No one could do anything, we were all so scared."

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I often encountered feelings of fear and helplessness in interviews with migrants. In particular, they were aware that their geographical movement converted them into people who were now considered "illegal" and "disposable." In response to a question on whether or not they believed they had rights as they migrated, many echoed Daniel who stated, "Yes, we have rights, but whether those rights are respected by people and by the law is a different story. It doesn't matter if I think I have rights if society thinks that I don't." It is this sense of vulnerability that exacerbated the already limited ability that migrants feel they have to advocate for themselves and for others in their position. For many, it was as Daniel said, "If something happens who do I tell? The police? They will rob me and then throw me out of the country. We don't matter here." Most of the migrants I spoke with had been victims of violence or witnessed violence against other migrants but did not report it for their own safety. Here it is important to mention that these acts of self-preservation, the trauma of witnessing or experiencing violence, and the fear, stress, and anxiety of traveling in this way are all part of the highly invisibilized psychological violence migrants endure.

Violence Against Migrant Women in Transit

In most spaces on the migrant journey, women continue to be extremely vulnerable. Many of the women I spoke with either traveled with men or met men that "they could trust" and latched onto them for safety. For women traveling alone, the journey is significantly more dangerous. Carmen, a mother traveling with two young children aged 3 and 6, spoke of the violence she endured on the train,

> "I left [Honduras] alone, with my kids because I had no choice. On the train they first robbed me and then when they saw that I didn't have enough money, well, it's something you can't imagine. They will either take your life or they will rape you. They took my kids and made them lie face down next to me and then they came for me, they raped me. My kids didn't see much. I just kept telling them to close their eyes and I tried not to scream because I didn't want to scare my kids."

In transit, it is estimated that approximately eight in 10 migrant women will experience some type of assault and/or rape, making sexual violence against women one of the most serious problems endured by migrants (Dimmitt Gnam 2013).

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Cartels and Gore Capitalism

What makes the journey through Mexico so difficult is the contemporary composition of the Mexican state. Like Central American states, the Mexican state has been subject to the process of neoliberal restructuring where the vacuum left by the restructuring of the state has facilitated the rise of extra-legal groups, in this case cartels, the Narco-State, and the criminal economy that accompanies them (Laurell 2015; Solís González 2013). Further, as Laurell (2015) explains, "formal state institutions are permeated with organized crime to create . . .a *Narco-State* that practices state terrorism" (261). As power between the state and the Narco-State is negotiated, violence becomes a tool of empowerment. Under these conditions, the criminal economy operates according to the logic of "gore capitalism"—"a phenomenon of extreme violence as a tool used against bodies by the global economy- and especially by organized crime as a key component of the economy. . .this situation fits well within the boundaries of gore, since it has retained the grotesque and parodic element of the spilling of blood and guts, which as it is so absurd and unjustified, would appear to be unreal, gimmicky and artificial. . ." (32). As cartels turn their profits, they have also turned entire swaths of Mexico in bloody, gruesome war zones. From 2007 to June 2018, more than 250,000 homicides have been recorded in Mexico, the vast majority of them attributed to cartel violence.[18] It is through this complex, violent geography that migrants travel.

As migrants move through this territory, every piece of them is calculated within the context of profit maximization. Over the years, the kidnapping of Central American migrants has increased as organized crime, namely cartels view migrants as viable sources of profitability (Paley 2014). It is estimated that organized criminal groups kidnap over 20,000 migrants per year (Dimmitt Gnam 2013). Migrants are often forced to pay to pass through cartel-controlled territory, where they are kidnapped, disappeared, assaulted, sexually violated, trafficked, and used to mule drugs. As Mexico's violent drug war continues to claim numerous victims, migrants are an extremely vulnerable group in the country. The danger of kidnapping and disappearance are very real threats. In 2017, Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights documented 312 registered deaths and disappearances of migrants.[19] In 2016, the international organization for migration noted more than 700 migrant deaths in Mexico.[20] Also, in 2016, a shelter in southern Mexico reported eight mass kidnappings of migrants where Mexican officials were directly

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involved.[21] The massacre of migrants such as the 2010, massacre of 72 migrants who were executed in Tamaulipas, Mexico, after failing to pay ransoms and refusing to serve as drug mules for the cartel, or the massacre of 193 migrants in 2011, also killed in Tamaulipas, which also involved Mexican police, has terrorized migrants passing through Mexico.[22]

Again, the most vulnerable group in this violence is migrant women and girls. A 2017 report from the Human Rights Center Fray Matias de Cordova in southern Mexico and Kids in Need of Defense reported that human traffickers will often, "sell migrant and migrant women and girls to human trafficking operations for the purposes of sexual exploitation".[23] Further, smugglers also profit off importing young women from the Northern Triangle to the southern border of Mexico to exploit in prostitution, bars, and nightclubs, many of which are frequented by Mexican authorities. Nathali, a young woman I spoke with relayed that the coyote she traveled with had locked her and 10 others in a shack on the outskirts of a town in Northern Mexico. She had made it a point to stay close to an older woman who was also migrating, "they don't bother the older women as much," she said. As they slept the women organized their bodies against the walls for protection, but as Nathali explained:

> "In the middle of the night someone pulled the girl sleeping next to me away, they grabbed her by her legs and pulled her out of the place where we were, they raped her, she never came back."

For migrants, the journey through Mexico is rife with exploitation, and the constant threat of violence and death, it is truly a "shade below full fatality" (Valencia 2018, 32).

BORDERLANDS: ZONES OF VIOLENCE

A migrant's journey through Mexico ends at Mexico's border with the United States. Yet, the violence and commodification migrants experience are far from over. It is at this border that migrants will engage a space of full hostility, where even the physical geography enacts violence upon those who traverse it. In these spaces of clandestine crossing, the exchange value of migrants increases as human smugglers await to cross them through multiple zones of violence. In borderlands, criminal economies seek to capitalize off the "disposable" bodies of migrants in a number of ways. The migrants I spoke with related their experiences of being held in

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drop houses, their exchange dependent on paying their own ransom. In another instance, I spoke with a young man, Miguel, who had been threatened and then abandoned by his coyote when he refused to mule drugs across the border. On the borders, the criminal economy has no shortage of entrepreneurs: the smugglers, the cartels, the gangs, the thieves, all await their opportunity to capitalize off of the steady stream of migrants. Even non-criminal entrepreneurs have figured out a way to profit from the movement of "illegalized" bodies. Transit towns (towns that exist along national borders) have become bustling economic centers of formal, but mostly informal business (Vogt 2013). In transit towns like Altar, in Sonora, Mexico, one will find everything from currency exchange, to the sale of food and water, to clothing specific to crossing the desert terrain. The same occurs at Mexico's southern border with Guatemala. Here migrants become consumers in local economies that specialize and make their living off the migration market, i.e., off of their own migration.

At the Mexico/U.S. border, migrants must also navigate a space that does not recognize their rights, where they are no longer protected by the law but are instead subject to the violent consequences of the law. As people with "no rights", they can be discriminated, abused, tortured, disappeared, and killed without consequence. At this border, the barbaric practices of the state are laid bare as certain bodies are marked for protection and others are excluded and even exterminated. Here, the state exercises its "necropower" (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003), to define who matters, who is disposable, who lives, and who dies. The proof of this is in the thousands of migrant deaths that have occurred in the desert along the U.S./Mexico border (De León 2015).

As the U.S.' Prevention Through Deterrence policies have pushed more and more migrants into geographically dangerous terrain, the number of documented deaths in the desert stands at approximately 3,244 deaths from October 1999 to April 30, 2018.[24] Two of the migrants I spoke with experienced seeing a fellow migrant dead in the desert. The rest feared that they would become victims of this difficult and dangerous terrain.

Those who the desert does not claim become victims of a geography that was never meant to be transited. In the desert, migrants are subject to heat exhaustion, hypothermia, and hunger as their physical bodies are pushed to the limits while they walk miles and miles, their feet shredded from the journey. All the while, the stress and anxiety of being caught weighs heavy.

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Pushing migrants to traverse this difficult terrain is no accident. In 2000, then INS commissioner Doris Meissner confirmed the policy of deterrence via violent geographies when she stated, "We did believe geography would be an ally to us".[25] Even the natural environment has been weaponized against this migration.

In the desert, migrants must also confront the geography of the hypermilitarized U.S. border. Most notable in this militarization process has been the increase in surveillance including underground sensors, infrared night scopes, encrypted radios, miles of new fencing, massive amounts of new lighting, Blackhawk helicopters, heat sensors, night vision telescopes, electronic vision detection devices, and computerized fingerprinting equipment (Chacón and Davis 2018, 203–5); all technology that seems more equipped for a war zone, than for dealing with migrants populations.

In typical neoliberal fashion, the militarization of the border has actually made unlikely allies of the profiteers of migrant commodification. Coyotes have capitalized on moving migrants through militarized spaces and alternative routes charging migrants more money to move them through more dangerous terrain. Similarly, if clandestine bodies are not moving across the border then there is no market for the lucrative business of neoliberal securitization. In times when there is a shortage of wars abroad, borderlands become beacons of hope for military contractors seeking to secure billion-dollar contracts by militarizing the borders.[26] This has turned the borders into zones of profit. Via the technology of persistent surveillance, migrants—men, women, children, entire families—are treated as enemy invaders.

Those refuges and migrants that are apprehended along the borders will then become sources of profit for the neoliberal detention machine. In these zones of confinement, migrants suffer severe human rights abuses including excessive overcrowding, inhumane isolation, withholding of medical treatment, slavery, and sexual abuse.[27] The Trump administration, as well as the Obama administration, has funneled thousands of undocumented immigrants, including children, into detention facilities. Trump's zero tolerance immigration policies are set to serve the prison industrial complex handsomely as more migrants are stuck in detention and deportation proceedings.[28] Those who make it into the United States will be integrated into the exploitative machine of low wage disposable labor, subject to constant insecurity and fear. Once in the United States, the journey is not over, it just enters a new violent iteration.

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CONCLUSION

For Central American migrants, violence can be a seemingly inescapable reality as systemic forces, which create, maintain, and normalize violence in order to preserve an established social order, are persistent in their lives. This mass dislodging of people from Central America that we are currently witnessing is just the latest articulation of a process of expulsion of people from this region. In this work, I do not seek to reproduce yet another layer of violence against migrants by simply gazing upon and consuming their suffering. Instead, the goal here has been to lay bare the neoliberal power structures that rely on violence to maintain an economic system of exploitation. It is this neoliberal economic system, bolstered by its political and social counterparts, that have served to not only create the expulsion of Central Americans from the region, but have also served to form a nexus of suffering among migrants. A principal goal of this paper has been to expose these neoliberal structures, which are commonly represented as "normal" and are thus accepted, upheld, and reproduced within the society.

NOTES

1. For a discussion on the framing of migratory movements as "crises" and/or "national emergencies," see Tazzioli, Garelli and De Genova (2018), and De Genova (2018).

2. Although the most significant amount of Central American migration is to the north, there are sizeable Central American populations that have migrated within the region itself. Historically, export economies led to the displacement of entire communities who would then be forced to squat on unused lands or migrate to other regions. Export economies also forced laborers into seasonal migration as a means of survival (Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla 1991), a practice that continues to this day. In more recent times, internal migration has included Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica, migration of Salvadorans to both Honduras and Belize, and Central American migration to Mexico, to name a few (Garcia 2006; Meza 2005; Sandoval 2007; Vega 2012). Rural to urban migration has also been a significant aspect of neoliberal expansion in the region.

3. A complete examination of the historical trajectory of Central American migration both internal and external is beyond the scope of this paper. For an excellent foundational review, see Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla (1991).

4. Reguillo (2011) has described violence as "violences" in the plural. In this way, she captures the multidimensionality of violence, which can present itself in singular or combined forms.

5. Although the focus here is women, neoliberal economic restructuring has led to the unemployment of men. This has led to the widespread migration of men out of Central America. See Standing (1999) and Robinson (2003).

6. These interviews took place at migrant shelters and food kitchens run by three separate humanitarian groups: FM4 Paso Libre in Guadalajara, Jalisco; Hermanos En El Camino in Ixtepec, Oaxaca; and Casa Del Migrante in Tijuana, Baja California. At these food kitchens and shelters, migrants can eat, shower, sleep, make a phone call to their family members, and can receive supplies, such as shoes, clothes, water as well as medical attention.

7. In terms of the United States rolling out neoliberal system in Central America, I follow the logical of Robinson who argues that a more useful interpretation of the United States' role in the region is that of a leadership role on behalf of a transnational hegemony rather than advancing

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solely U.S. interests. In other words, in Central America, the United States has played a key role in the neoliberalization of the region; however, this role is more properly understood as "US sponsorship of the region's restructuring and integration into global capitalism on behalf of a transnational project, not of a project of US hegemony in rivalry with other core powers for influence in the Isthmus" (Robinson 2003, 49).

8. The severity of the crisis of violence in these countries is clear in the numbers. To provide context, the global average homicide rate is around 6.2 per 100,000. In North America, homicide rate is approximately 5.3 per 100,000; Canada is about 1.6 per 100,000. In comparison, homicide rates in el Salvador averaged at 82.8 per 100,000, in Honduras the rate averaged at 56.5, and 27.6 in Guatemala. It should be noted that homicide rates above 10 per 100,000 are considered to be an epidemic. Following this logic, Cantor (2016) has argued that the violence in the Northern Triangle, "Is as deadly as an armed conflict [and] shows how the epidemic of organized criminal violence is producing high levels of displacement in (and from) some Northern Triangle countries" (79). It is these structural conditions—the historical legacy of violence, high unemployment, staggering inequality, and poverty and the lack of state intervention in citizen security—that have created a situation where the violence in this region comes second only to countries involved in brutal armed conflicts; and where the victims of this violence are mostly children, youth, and women and girls (Cantor 2016).

9. Sweatshop.

10. Note that the actual number of people displaced by this violence is unknown, but likely much higher. There is a real fear related to reporting this violence to authorities for fear of retaliation. The numbers presented in this report were those cases that were reported to authorities.

11. http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1189743-410/desplazados-honduras-violencia-pandilla-extorsiones-asesinato-.

12. ibid.

13. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-63.pdf.

14. https://www.wola.org/files/WOLA_Increased_Enforcement_at_Mexico's_Southern_Border_Nov2015.pdf.

15. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) and Human Rights Center Fray Matías de Córdova, Childhood Cut Short: Sexual and Gender-based Violence Against Central American Migrant and Refugee Children, June 2017, page 29.

16. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Comunicados/2016/Com_2016_263.pdf.

17. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/Informe_NNACMNA.pdf.

18. https://fronteralist.org.

19. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/InformeEspecial_20170406.pdf.

20. http://www.informador.com.mx/internacional/2016/678642/6/crecen-las-cifras-de-migrantes-muertos-en-el-primer-semestre-de-2016.htm.

21. https://www.wola.org/analysis/migrants-transit-face-crimes-human-rights-abuses-mexican-government-prioritizes-detention-deportation-protection/.

22. There have been a number of kidnappings, disappearances, and murders of migrants in Mexico. Although a number of cases go unreported, the following report provides a summary of the most well-known events: http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/HRF-Mexico-Asylum-System-rep.pdf.

23. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) and Human Rights Center Fray Matías de Córdova, Childhood Cut Short: Sexual and Gender-based Violence Against Central American Migrant and Refugee Children, June 2017, page 29.

24. https://humaneborders.org/wp-content/uploads/deathposter_cumulative_letter_2018_04_30.pdf.

25. https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Border-crackdown-linked-to-rise-in-migrant-deaths-2000747.php.

26. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/07/us/us-military-firms-eye-border-security-contracts.html.

27. Ibid.

28. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-28/prison-operators-gain-as-u-s-immigration-detentions-surge.

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