THE RISE, ENDURANCE, AND FALL OF MIGRANT CAMPS ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: A SOCIOLOGY OF BORDER VIOLENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The Rise, Endurance, and Fall of Migrant Camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Sociology of Border Violence

Thesis directed by Professor Christina Sue and Professor David Cook-Martín

My dissertation examines how transformations in state-made immigration policies generate violent dynamics at the local and meso levels. Specifically, I delve into the marginal spaces where migrants experience the now-pervasive practices of mass deportation and restriction of asylum in violent contexts on U.S.-Mexico border cities. My research is based on a feminist ethnographic approach analyzing data from 70 in-depth interviews, two years of preliminary research on the U.S. Mexico border from 2016 to 2018, three years of fieldwork in Tamaulipas from 2019 to 2021, and the analysis of over 500 ethnographic photos and monthly drone footage from August 2020 to January 2022.

This dissertation explains how Metering, the Migrant Protection Protocols, and Title 42 have become breeding grounds for the worsening of systematic violence against migrants in transit, and the seedbed of the process of rising, endurance, and fall of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border. In my work, I took a comprehensive look at how the different social dimensions and representations of violent effects are interconnected. To do this, I introduced a framework of analysis that combines the conceptualization of violence as a continuum and the theorization of violence as a web of causal connections between personal, collective, national, and global levels of violence. Based on the intersection of a violent environment, policies designed to deter movement, and an ongoing pandemic, I provide a critical review of how different social structures and actors perpetrate violence and the ways in which immigration policies forced asylum seekers to wait at Mexican border cities, propelling the constitution of "temporal migrant camps" at the doorstep of the United States, turning already complicated journeys into lasting hazardous and deathly experiences.

The thesis is dedicated to the asylum seekers and people working to support migrants in Matamoros and Reynosa.

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INTRODUCTION

Most of us crossed through the river and surrendered to CBP. I was alone with my baby; I didn't pay a coyote. I crossed the river with many people; we were more than 100. Once we reached the river, they detained us and kept us in the freezers, those white tents that you can see from here that are very cold. They mistreated us there. They kept us for eight days. We didn't know if it was day or night. They came and woke us up all the time. They spoke very loudly. One day, an officer came and started asking questions to my kid. I answered for him. The officer was upset and told me that the boy was expected to answer the questions. My son was two years old.

—Jessica, asylum seeker

We didn't know anything. One day they [CBP] called our names. We asked where we were going. Their answer: 'right now, we will stand in line.' No more explanations. Later, they put us on a bus. We looked everywhere and kept asking where they were taking us until the bus stopped, and they lined up us again. Once in the middle of the bridge, they told us we were going to Matamoros. What was Matamoros? All the people in the Plaza talked about how dangerous the city was and how we should not move from there. Honestly, nobody even wanted to try. I was terrified. Other migrants warn us about some white vans waiting outside the Plaza kidnapping people. That freaked me out. I was in a country I didn't know, and I was terrified.

—Miriam, asylum seeker

The U.S.-Mexico border symbolizes a global trend toward violent, hardened, and militarized secure borders where two forces converge: Washington's border enforcement campaign and an ongoing war against the drug cartels' domination in Mexico. These two forces had exacerbated the brutality of the web of racialized, gendered, and class-based violence that people who are waiting or attempting to cross the border to the United States experience. In this context, the U.S.-Mexico border is coming across an important migratory movement comprised of people from southern Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean seeking asylum in the United States, who have been forced to wait in border cities under very precarious

circumstances, propelling the constitution of "temporal migrant camps" at the doorstep of the United States.

The establishment of these migrant camps is part of a global sociopolitical phenomenon intimately linked to a *state of exception* (as defined by Giorgio Agamben[1]) declared by the post-September 11 political leadership —a provisional attempt that has become a permanent practice— where western territorial states have progressively implemented crueler immigration and asylum policies (Papastergiadis 2006; Ek 2006). Asylum seekers who have been forced to inhabit these camps experience what Agamben defines as *bare life*, a concept that describes a life that has been exposed to a state of exception. Bare life refers to a conception of life in which the sheer biological fact of life (*zoe*) is given priority over the way life is lived (*bios*). A condition of radical exposure produced by sovereign power in which the law is suspended, and bodies are surrendered to a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide. The "creation of a space in which bare life and juridical rule enter into a zone of indistinction where the normal order is de facto suspended" (Agamben 1998, 174). Miriam and Jessica's epigraphs are examples of Agamben's bare life and how "exceptional measures" had become a normalizing trend of mistreatment and instrumentalization of asylum seekers and migrants[2].

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[1] The state of exception defines special measures in which the juridical order is suspended due to an emergency or a crisis threatening the state (e.g., September 11). In such a situation, the basic laws and norms can be violated by the state (Agamben 2008).

2 Although I will sometimes use migrants/asylum seekers differently, I will often use the two terms interchanging. My aim is to follow other scholars in the process of moving beyond the migrant/refuge binary (FitzGerald and Arar 2018; Fitzgerald 2019; Castles 2003; Van Hear 2012). I recognize that those labels are useful from a legal perspective however, I argue that the binary obscures the multiplicity of motivations that drive many migrations, for example when violence is not directed by the state, as happens in the case of Central American countries due to armed gangs or drug cartels. Violence directed by non-state actors is harder to identify and to create a legal defense for asylum requests. Another complication of the political/economic excision is that individuals' goals and opportunities often change over the course of time. A third distinction is how refugees have less agency than economic migrants. Within the literature,

Scholars studying the impacts of border enforcement on the U.S-Mexico Border consistently agree that despite the border buildup, the current U.S. immigration control policy is fundamentally flawed and has done little to stop migration (De León 2015; Cornelius and Lewis 2007; Slack et al. 2016; Haslag, Guzman, and Orrenius 2002). Yet, other authors emphasize how, even among the number of migrants who successfully cross the border without proper documentation, there are real and significant effects around prevention throughout deterrence, of which the production of violence and the increasing presence of death are two of the most prominent (W. A. Vogt 2018; Slack et al. 2013; De León 2015; Jones 2016; Bobrow-Strain 2019).

The existing literature on prevention to deterrence discusses how practices of immigration control sealed off urban entry-points to the U.S. funneling people to wilderness routes. According to De León (2015, 33), in the 1994 Strategic Plan, the word *hostile* suggests that this new form of boundary enforcement was planned to be more aggressive and violent than previous programs, increasing the number of fatalities along the border. However, I argue that under post 9/11 immigration enforcement policies, forcing people into hostile terrain is not the only way to deter movement and produce violent and deadly outcomes. Today, the U.S. government strategy also includes an increase in federal funding for immigration enforcement, a significant growth in immigrant removals (including deportations and so-called voluntary departures), turning local police into immigration agents (e.g., secure communities), and a

refugees' mobility is usually described as involuntary, forced, or reactive, while economic migrants can be more strategic on how or when to migrate. However, we may raise questions on what happens with populations forced to move because of climate change, human trafficking, or gang persecution.

volatile number of policy change that threatens the asylum system, leaving migrants stranded in dangerous conditions in Mexico while they wait to have their cases heard in the U.S.

In this context, my research focus on three policies that restrict the asylum process: 1) "Metering Policy" or entry regulations where officials from CBP could only receive a certain number of asylum seekers from Central America and the Caribbean per day to determine if they qualified for asylum. 2) The Migrant Protection Protocols where individuals entering the U.S. at official ports of entry without proper documentation, or who are apprehended between the ports of entry, will be returned to Mexico to wait out their immigration proceeding, and 3) Title 42 Expulsions where asylum seekers are expelled based on the Public Health Service Act of the U.S. Code. I analyze these policies as examples of state-made obstacles to deter movement and minimize the possibility of entering the country with the protection of asylum, turning already complicated journeys into hazardous and deathly experiences.

The deadly effects of the hardening of U.S. immigration security priorities have been previously discussed by scholars such as Cornelius and Lewis and their work on the unintended consequences of new immigration control measures (2007); Wendy Vogt's work about the dangerous journeys of Central American migrants in transit through Mexico in relation to the Southern Border Program and the Mérida Initiative (2018); David Spener's work on professional people-smugglers and how more migrants are hiring them to reduce physical risk and to increase the probability of successful entry (2009); Jeremy Slack's work on deportation and death on the border (2019); Adam Goodman's deportation machine and the human cost of deportation (2020); and the already mentioned work of Jason de Leon about prevention throughout deterrence in the Arizona desert (2015). However, the somewhat recent presence of migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexican border has exposed an important gap in the literature to explore the relationship

between how contemporary immigration policies have forced asylum seekers and migrants into a bare life in temporary migrant camps and how violent and militarized borders intentionally shape the flows and lives of brown and black migrants by pushing them into contexts of increased violence, marginalization, despair, and, in some cases, death.

Therefore, by looking at examples of policies developed as "exceptional" that rapidly became "normalized," we can see the violent negative effects impacting migration and asylum processes. In this dissertation—which is based on a feminist ethnographic approach, analyzing data from 70 in-depth interviews, two years of preliminary research on the U.S. Mexico border from 2016 to 2018, three years of fieldwork in Tamaulipas from 2019 to 2021, and the analysis of over 500 ethnographic photos and monthly drone footage from August 2020 to January 2022— I show how Metering, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), and Title 42 have become breeding grounds for the worsening of systematic violence against migrants in transit, and the seedbed of the process of rising, endurance, and fall of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border.

The significance of this study is that it informs our theoretical understanding of how the different social dimensions and representations of violent effects are interconnected. Additionally, it advances our empirical knowledge of how the normalization of "exceptional" U.S. and Mexican immigration and security practices expose asylum seekers and deportees to deep and broad violent consequences along the U.S.-Mexico border. To do this, I lay out a theoretical overview of how violence is conceptualized in Sociology and how the heterogeneity of violence has resulted in its scattering between disciplines and its fragmentation into specialized sub-fields. Additionally, following some of the most recent reviews on the sociology of violence (Hartmann 2017; Walby 2013; Heitmeyer and Hagan 2003), I synthesized three

important bodies of literature and how they account for violence as a field more central to Sociology, rather than dispersed and fragmented into specialist areas of analysis: first, the conceptualization of violence primarily as a social fact and not as a moral or political problem (Reemtsma 2012; Schinkel 2010; Pearce 2019); second, a micro-sociological approach to the study of violence (R. Collins 2009); and third, a proposition for a methodological linkage between social movement approaches and violence research (Tilly and others 2003; Della Porta 2013, 1995; Malthaner 2017). By condensing these bodies of literature, I reflect on the endeavor of emphasizing theoretically and methodologically the crucial aspects of the intersectionality of the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis in the study of violence. Finally, borrowing from the feminist approximation of violence as a continuum (Cockburn 2017; Krause 2015; Bourgois 2004) and Turpin and Kurtz's (1997) conceptualization of violence as a web, I introduce a framework of analysis that combines the conceptualization of violence as a continuum, or continuity of relations and events, and the theorization of violence as a web of causal connections between personal, collective, national, and global levels of violence.

Based on the intersection of a violent environment, policies designed to deter movement, and an ongoing pandemic, the primary research question in this study is: How are the different social dimensions and representations of violent effects interconnected and in what ways do immigration policies that force asylum seekers to wait at Mexican border cities prompt the creation of "temporal migrant camps" at the gates of the United States? Empirically, I explored the following questions: 1) How does the everyday practice of "provisional" policies of immigration control (restriction of asylum and deportation) exacerbate violent contexts and violent experiences on the U.S.-Mexico border? 2) What are the different factors and social mechanisms asylum seekers use to contravene or mitigate violence in migrant camps? And 3)

What are the implications of the normalization of violence and the continuance of immigration policies that restrict migration and asylum? In my research, I discuss patterns of violence that include social, political, and economic forces revealing the prevalence of a continuum of violence acting as a widening and intricate web.

In the following section, I show the historical marks that paved the way for what would later be the formation of the first migrant camps at the gates of the United States. To do this, I start with a personal memory of how I remember the site where the Matamoros camp existed from 2020 to 2021. I use my childhood remembrance as a metaphor for how border enforcement, security policies, and violence have changed the U.S-Mexico border.

A Orillas del Rio Bravo. The impacts of the war and border enforcement in Matamoros

A orillas del Río Bravo
Hay una linda región
Con un pueblito que llevo
Muy dentro del corazón
—Rigo Tovar, Mexican musician

Rigo Tovar sang about this city. About Matamoros. Rigo sang about the town I knew, the town before the war. The city that lies on the Rio Grande banks where I grew up, flying handmade kites made of sticks my grandpa and I collected from the levee. My grandpa and I always have prepared thread, scissors, paper, and glue. Ready to run along the levee, feeling the rise of the kites in our hands, feeling the sensation of lightness and freedom that gives you the idea of flying. That is how my infant self remembers Matamoros; how I remember "*El Bordo*." As a place of happiness, one of the best places in the world.

Everything changed with the war. Everything changed with the walls—both part of the same violent metaphor, far away from the kites and the lightness of flying. Rigo went

> blind famous; he knew Matamoros. He knew it as my grandpa did before the violence we know now. They knew it before the grenades. They knew it before the walls and before the camps. They knew it before September 11th, when you could cross the border with one nickel and an I-586 border crossing card.

This memory of my childhood shows how life in my home city has changed dramatically in the last 30 years in terms of border enforcement, violence, and security. I am not arguing that Matamoros was "violence-free" when I was a child (see Chapter 2), but I do claim that the exacerbation of violence and border enforcement has been the product of a long-term build-up of immigration and security policies on both sides of the border. In the following section, I will show a summary of the impacts of the war and border enforcement on the Texas-Tamaulipas border. Particularly, I focus on immigration procedures and policies that have changed both sides of the border since a state of exception was placed in practice in the U.S. after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

September 11 and the beginning of a prolonged state of exception

Twenty-three years have passed since my grandpa died, nineteen years since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and since a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer voided my I-586 border crossing card. I emphasize this fact because, for border residents, the revocation of the Nonresident Alien Border Crossing Card, Form I–586 (BCC), was not minor.

The I–586 was a document of identity issued by the Service at land border Ports-of-Entry (POEs) along the United States and the Mexican and Canadian borders to accommodate Mexican or Canadian nationals residing in the border area. A BCC holder entering the United States could

remain within 25 miles of the border for 72 hours or less, requiring no other immigration documentation (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1996) or complex biometric information. As shown in Image 1, for minors, even fingerprints were waived. This BCC card did not have an expiration date until October 1st, 2002 when all I-586 cards were replaced with B-1/B-2 visas with biometrical identifiers. The purpose of the I-586 BCC was to facilitate travel, inspection, and frequent crossings for foreign nationals living in border communities.

The cancellation of I-586 BCC is still a recurrent narrative for border residents regarding the hardening of border enforcement. As Patricia, a 70-year-old woman born in Matamoros, told me: "It was definitely 9/11 what dramatically changed our lives. Before the attacks, crossing the border was part of the routine, you had your BCC that never expired, everything was easy. I used to cross everyday only to buy milk from the HEB. But everything changed. If you're lucky the line will be 45 minutes, but that is if you are really lucky."

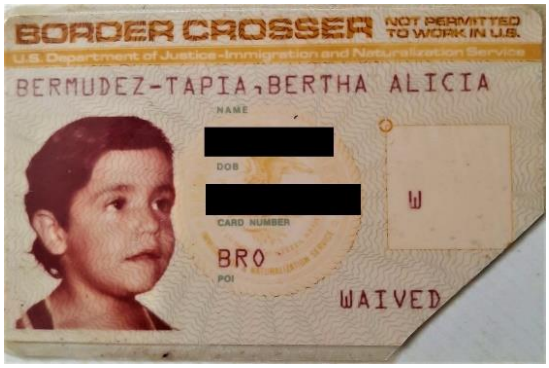

Image 1. I-586 Border Crossing Card. Personal archive.

Yet BCC cards and border wait times have not been the only factors changing on the border. After 9/11, many other aspects of immigration procedures and policies have changed on both sides of the border since a state of exception was placed in practice in U.S. domestic and foreign

policy. These are historical milestones that paved the way for what would later be the formation of the first migrant camps at the gates of the United States.

The following two sections of this chapter recollect some of these changes. I first present an overview of the effects of the Mexican security process and the gradual militarization of border cities, particularly in Tamaulipas. Second, I offer a summary of the most critical restrictive enforcement legislation and operations affecting the Texas-Tamaulipas border from 1965 to 2015, highlighting those enacted after 2001. Finally, I present the immigration policies enacted during the Trump administration, separating them into two groups, restrictive immigration policies from 2017 to 2020 and immigration policies responding to COVID-19.

Neither Rights nor Security. Mexico and "the War on Drugs."

In Mexico, during 2006, former president Felipe Calderón initiated a war to confront drug cartels' forces, generating a spiral of violence, a para-militarization of the cities, and the destabilization of local governments. The war declaration brought extreme consequences for Tamaulipas since cartel organizations surpassed the Mexican state's military power (Astorga 2012). During the Calderón years, an estimated 60,000 people perished in the drug war, and another 20,000 people went missing during that period (Carpenter 2015). However, as Zárate Ruiz and López León (2017) discuss in their recollection of the history of violence in Tamaulipas, it was in the 90s when the beginning of the great militarization of drug trafficking began with the incorporation of Los Zetas to the Gulf Cartel under the leadership of Osiel Cárdenas Guillén. Later, in 2000, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) lost the presidential election, vanishing the state's relative central control over criminal groups by transferring it from the president to the governors. This brought extreme consequences for Tamaulipas since these

powerful criminal organizations operated beyond state borders and surpassed them in military power. Lastly, as an after effect of the war declaration against cartel lords, 2010 marked the highest worsening of violence in northern Mexico due to the cleavage of the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas. During this time, violence in Tamaulipas increased with unprecedented acts of terror, such as the murdering of dozens of migrants and a severe increase in kidnapping, extortion, and migrant smuggling (Correa-Cabrera 2013; Slack 2019). One of the most extreme examples of this is the San Fernando massacre, where the bodies of 72 migrants were found in clandestine graves killed by an organized crime group.

Restrictive immigration policies and the construction of "exceptional invisible walls."

On the United States side, it is precisely the formation of the DHS that dramatically re-shaped border lives and undocumented migrants. The creation of DHS occurred as part of the Homeland Security Act, a U.S. legislation signed into law by President George W. Bush in November 2002, in response to the September 11th terrorist attacks. The ultimate goal was to "make Americans safer" by securing borders and infrastructure (Ginsburg 2010). As a result, Immigration policies post-9/11 became more restrictive and prioritized security over human rights and civil liberties (Goodman 2020, 180). Ultimately, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) shift to the DHS, clarified the bureaucracy's priorities: immigration was declared a matter of "national security" (N. De Genova 2007). Since then, as shown in Table 1, multiple restrictive immigration policies have been enacted by Congress affecting the southern border, such as the 2004 National Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act, the 2005 Real ID Act, the 2006 Secure Fence Act, and the 2010 Border Security Act.

Table 1. Restrictive enforcement legislations and operations affecting the Texas-Tamaulipas border, 1965-2015.

Year	***Legislation / Enforcement Operation***	***Description***
1965	Hart-Cellar Act	Imposed first-ever annual cap of 120,000 visas for immigrants from Western Hemisphere
1976	Amendments to Immigration and Nationality Act	Put Western Hemisphere under preference system and country quotas.
1978	Amendments to Immigration and Nationality Act	Combined separate hemispheric caps into a single worldwide ceiling of 290,000
1980	Refugee Act	Abolished refugee preference and reduced worldwide ceiling to 270,000
1986	Immigration Reform and Control Act	Criminalized undocumented hiring and authorized the expansion of Border Patrol
1990	Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act	Sought to cap visas going to spouse and children of resident aliens
1996	Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act	Authorized expedited removal of noncitizens and deportation of aggravated felons
1996	Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act	Increased resources for border enforcement, narrowed criteria for asylum, increased income threshold required to sponsor immigrants
1996	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act	Declared documented and undocumented migrants ineligible for certain entitlements
1997	Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act	Allowed registered asylum seekers from Central America (mostly Nicaraguans) in the U.S. for at least five years since December 1st, 1995, to obtain legal status; but prohibited legalization and ordered deportation for those who lacked a valid visa or who previously violated U.S. immigration laws (primarily Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans)
1998	Operation Rio Grande	Border Patrol program to restrict the movement of migrants across the Texas and New Mexico border with Mexico
2001	USA Patriot Act	Created Department of Homeland Security, increased funding for surveillance and deportation of foreigners, and authorized the deportation of noncitizens without due process.
2002	Homeland Security Act	The Homeland Security Act created the DHS by consolidating 22 diverse agencies and bureaus. The creation of DHS reflected mounting anxieties about immigration in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11th.
2002	Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act	After the attacks of September 11th, the U.S. government acted to expand the budget, staffing, and powers of the immigration enforcement bureaucracy
2004	National Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act	Funded new equipment, aircraft, Border Patrol agents, immigration investigators, and detention centers for border enforcement
2004	Operation Stonegarden	Federal grant program administered through the State Homeland Security Grant Program to provide funding to state and local agencies to improve immigration enforcement

2005	Secure Borders Initiative	Comprehensive multi-year plan launched by ICE to secure America's borders and reduce illegal migration
2006	Secure Fence Act	Authorized construction of additional fencing, vehicle barriers, checkpoints, lighting, and funding for new cameras, satellites, and unmanned drones for border enforcement
2006	Operation Return to Sender	The sweep of illegal immigrants by ICE to detain those deemed most dangerous, including convicted felons, gang members, and repeat illegal immigrants
2006	Operation Jump Start	Program authorizing the deployment of National Guard troops along the U.S.–Mexico border
2007	Secure Communities Program	ICE program to identify and deport criminal noncitizens arrested by state and local authorities
2007	Operation Rapid REPAT	Program to Remove Eligible Parolees Accepted for Transfer allows selected criminal noncitizens incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails to accept early release in exchange for voluntary deportation.
2008	Operation Scheduled Departure	ICE operation to facilitate the voluntary deportation of 457,000 eligible undocumented migrants from selected cities
2010	Border Security Act	Funded hiring 3,000 more Border Patrol agents and increased Border Patrol budget by $244 million

Source: (Massey and Pren 2012; Kerwin 2010; N. P. De Genova 2002)

Over the years, the hardening of the U.S-Mexico border has resulted in violent outcomes for migrants, including redirecting migrant routes into inhospitable areas where migrants are kidnapped, extorted, or forcibly recruited by organized crime. These damaging outcomes have been exacerbated because of three transformations on the border, which coincide with enhancing the immigration deterrence philosophy after the September 11th attacks (Jones 2016, 31–35), starting the USA Patriot Act and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.

The first transformation is the militarization of security spaces through increased Border Patrol funding, deployment of additional border guards, the use of surveillance technology, and the construction of the very first border walls, after the U.S. Congress passed the Secure Fence Act of 2006 which authorized partially funded the construction of fencing along the Mexican border (King 2006).

The second transformation includes the legal and social processes of immigrant criminalization and a surge in deportations. Before 1986 there were hardly more than 20,000 deportations per year (DHS data from all foreign nationals); by 2000, the number was 188,000 per year, and by 2012, the official report includes approximately 415,700 removals. Regarding the detention of immigrants, the DHS reported that the average daily population detained from all nationalities increased from 5,000 in 1994 to 19,000 in 2001 and over 39,000 in 2017. As shown by different scholars, this mass deportation era has turned migrants into targets of extreme forms of violence (T. Golash-Boza 2012; Goodman 2020; López 2012; Slack 2019; Cornelius and Lewis 2007; Boehm and Terrio 2019).

The third transformation is closely related to the first but has a more technological approach. It is the construction of a substantial border infrastructure that expanded the enforcement area, including predator drones, the use of sensors and cameras to monitor movement and radars to detect underground tunnels; and the most visible change in the border: the 650 miles of 18-foot-high steel fence built-in 2009 as part of the 2006 Secure Fence Act. These transformations align with Jason de Leon's (2015) theorization on the effects of the 1994 Prevention Throughout Deterrence and the use of hyper-security measures around urban ports of entry so "illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing and more suited for enforcement." (2015, 32)

The following section presents the immigration policies enacted during the Trump administration. President Trump made anti-immigration rhetoric the dominant issue of his campaign. While in office, the Trump administration implemented policies on a wide range of immigration issues, affecting everything from asylum refuge and deportation; the diversity visa program; the dismantling of DACA and termination of TPS; the "wealth test: for immigrants

with legal status and their families; creating obstacles for foreign-skilled worker requests; and restricting admissions from African and Muslim majority countries.

To organize the four years of unprecedented (executive action) immigration policy change, I divided the course of the Trump administration's changes on immigration into two groups. Using as the dividing line the year 2020 and the administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as border enforcement; the admission of refugees, asylum seekers; actions involving the Department of Justice and the immigration court system; and changes to screening and visa processes.

Immigration enforcement policies during the Donald Trump Era

> *"It's time to make immigration policy great again."*
> — *Jon Feere, ICE Former Senior Advisor (Twitter)*

Having a clear picture of how the Trump administration changed immigration procedurals and the sudden upsurge of immigration enforcement on the border is pivotal to understand the rise and endurance of the Matamoros Migrant Camp, and the subsequent rising of other camps such as the Reynosa camp, the Chaparral camp in Tijuana, or the Haitian camp in Del Rio Texas. The following table shows the different enforcing policies that occurred from November 2017 to June 2019. A separate table illustrates all COVID-19 related actions impacting Border Security affairs and Asylum procedures.

Table 2. Immigration enforcement policy affecting the Texas-Tamaulipas border during the Trump Administration, 2017-2019.

Date	***Enforcement Policy***	***Description***
Nov-17	Placing All Families into Expedited Removal	CBP instructed Border Patrol agents to process all families for expedited removal, requiring ICE to detain those families who express a fear of persecution in their home countries and are waiting for credible-fear screenings.
Apr-18	National Guard Deployment to Border	Trump ordered the Department of Defense to deploy 4,000 members of the National Guard to the southern border. The deployment was reauthorized several times, the last of which was in June 2020, when the Defense Department authorized a total of 4,000 troops to remain at the border through September 2021. In 2019, the governors of California and New Mexico ordered most of their forces to withdraw, while the governor of Texas sent an additional 1,000 troops.
Apr-18	Zero-Tolerance Policy	The Justice Department instructed federal prosecutors to prioritize the prosecution of immigration crimes. A month later, the DHS would refer all individuals apprehended while illegally crossing the southwest border to the Justice Department for prosecution.
Apr-18	Metering and Asylum Turnbacks	Trump administration ordered ports of entry across the U.S.-Mexico border to meter asylum seekers. According to the new guidance, CBP officials could stand at the border between the United States and Mexico, which physically kept asylum seekers from stepping onto U.S. soil. CBP kept no record of metered individuals because CBP officials refused to inspect the individuals and process them into immigration proceedings.
May-18	Family Separations	DHS began separating thousands of families as parents were referred for prosecution. The practice ended when the president issued an executive order amid a huge public outcry in June.
Oct-18	End of ICE's Coordinated Release Program	ICE stopped its practice of assisting detained families with their post-release plans and travel arrangements, citing the pace of migrant arrivals.
Jan-19	Migrant Protection Protocols	Individuals arriving or entering the United States from Mexico who cross the border illegally or lack proper documentation, including asylum seekers, may be returned to Mexico for the duration of their immigration proceedings.
Mar-19	CBP Starts Direct Releases of Families	At the height of a year that saw Record apprehensions of families' capacity issues caused CBP to begin releasing migrant families on their recognizance rather than transferring them to ICE custody to be detained or released with some form of supervision.

Apr-19	Increased Investigations into Family Units	Amid the arrival of unprecedented numbers of family units at the U.S. southern border, ICE reallocated resources to the border to investigate human smuggling operations and the use of fraudulent documents to create fake families.
Jun-19	U.S.-Mexico Agreement	After Trump threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican imports to the United States, Mexico signed an agreement with the United States. It pledged to increase its immigration enforcement operations.

Since his campaign, Donald Trump loudly proclaimed his desire to restrict immigration. He referred to Mexican immigrants as rapists and drug dealers bringing crime into the U.S. and promised to build a "great" wall on the Southern border. Once Donald Trump was elected, his public rhetoric continued to be centered on the construction of a border wall. However, the executive orders he signed were the real wall his administration built. Those policies targeted undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and temporary workers through increased jailing, prolonged detention, and the use of expedited deportation procedures.

Zero-tolerance, for example, prioritized the prosecution of immigrants. Since its implementation in April 2018, the Justice Department referred to federal prosecutors all arrival migrants, including asylum seekers, for illegal entry. A month later, the DHS would refer all individuals apprehended while illegally crossing the southwest border to the Justice Department for prosecution. Consequently, DHS began separating thousands of families as parents were referred for prosecution. Over 2600 children were separated, with no tracking mechanism in place (Schrag 2020). In addition, Trump ordered the Department of Defense to deploy 4,000 members of the National Guard to the southern border. The deployment was reauthorized several times, the last of which was in June 2020, when the Defense Department authorized a total of 4,000 troops to remain at the border through September 2021 (American Immigration Council 2020). Finally, two other policies enacted by the Trump's administration jeopardized the life and

safety of asylum seekers on the Southern border: The implementation of Metering and Asylum Turnbacks and the Migrant Protection Protocols. Metering physically kept asylum seekers from stepping foot onto U.S. soil (required to legally request asylum); and MPP forced asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while pursuing asylum in the United States.

With COVID-19, immigration procedures became increasingly detrimental for asylum seekers due to implementing a series of border security restrictions in response to the global pandemic. Table 3 shows the most relevant COVID-19 related border security policy changes implemented in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Table 3. COVID-19 Related Border Security and Asylum Processing at the Texas-Tamaulipas Border, 2019-2021.

Date	***Immigration Policy Change***	***Description***
Mar-20	Restrictions on Non-essential Travel across Land Borders	CBP published temporary travel restrictions that limited non-essential travel across land borders. Initially, the conditions were in place until April 20th, but they were renewed monthly.
Mar-20	Expulsion of Unauthorized Arrivals (Title 42)	The CDC and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published an interim final rule creating a procedure under the 1944 Public Health Services Act for the CDC director to suspend the introduction into the United States of persons from designated countries or places in the interest of public health.
	U.S.-Citizen and Central American Children Expelled to Mexico	Many unaccompanied children from Central America and at least 11 U.S.-citizen newborns were expelled to Mexico.
Mar-20	Suspension of Hearings for Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) Participants	
Apr-20	Active-Duty Military Deployment to the Southern Border	The Defense Department deployed 500 active-duty personnel to the U.S.-Mexico border to support CBP to enforce the March order, joining 5,000 troops already there.

Dec-20	Communicable Disease Bar to Asylum Eligibility	DHS and the Justice Department issued the final version of a rule that would bar migrants from eligibility for asylum and withholding of removal if they were coming from a place where a contagious or infectious disease is prevalent by classifying them as a danger to the security of the United States

First, CBP published temporary travel restrictions that limited non-essential travel across land borders. Initially, the conditions were in place until April 20th, but they were renewed until November 2021. Second, Title 42 (or the expulsion of unauthorized arrivals) is a public health and welfare statute enacted in 1944 that gave the authority to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to determine whether the infectious disease in a foreign country poses a severe danger of spreading in the U.S., either by people or property entering the country. Under Title 42, CBP agents could immediately remove anyone entering the country without authorization to prevent the spread of COVID-19 without a formal order of deportation. Finally, the suspension of hearings for MPP participants and the deployment of 500 active-duty personnel (joining 5,000 troops already there) to the border to support CBP to enforce Title 42.

Having a clear image of the U.S. government's systematic efforts to deter and expel migrants in the contemporary history of the U.S. Mexican southern border is a first step to explain the process of rising, endurance, and fall of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border. In addition, it is imperative to reflect on the implications of continuing immigration procedures "temporarily" established in response to COVID-19. For example, Title 42 is still in motion, even after the restrictions on non-essential travel have already been lifted. Hence, policies developed as "exceptional" have rapidly become "normalized" and continue to inflict violent negative effects on migration and asylum processes.

Roadmap

The organization of my dissertation is as follows. Chapter 2 presents a detailed description of the research setting and context. I provide information on the U.S Mexico border, particularly about the Texas-Tamaulipas border's social and political-economic background. Later, I specifically draw into the Matamoros case and how it can be used to interrogate the normalization and acceptance of inhumane (and exceptional) means of security and immigration control. The chapter shows how the hardening of immigration policies, the presence of drug cartel forces, and a global pandemic have worsened systematic acts of violence against asylum seekers. Finally, I present an overview of how policies such as Metering, MPP, and Title 42 laid the foundations for the rising of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border.

Chapter 3 theoretically situates the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico border at the intersection of the sociology of violence and immigration. I also highlight the interconnections between diverse forms of violence that challenge the traditional divisions between interpersonal and inter-state violence. In so doing, the chapter explains how the theorization of violence as a web is an essential navigational tool for building theoretical arguments about how pervasive policies of immigration control have become breeding grounds for the worsening of systematic violence against migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology of the dissertation. This chapter details how I adopted a feminist activist agenda to negotiate access to the site and to engage in ethnographic methods based on human agency, egalitarian research relationships, and empathy.

Chapter 5 presents the stories of Manuel, Silvia, and Guadalupe to show how war, political violence, natural disasters, sexual abuse, exploitation, and poverty are some of the causes of trauma and suffering that asylum seekers experience through their migration journeys.

This chapter uses an individual level of analysis to examine how violence is perpetrated by different social actors and structures, such as national governments, international organizations, organized crime, social inequality, racial discrimination, and sexual abuse.

Chapter 6 combines meso and individual levels of analysis to show the different factors and social mechanisms asylum seekers use to mitigate violence in migrant camps. This chapter argues that marginalized asylum seekers draw on a diverse repertoire of strategies to deal with dispossession and violence, particularly the collaboration with local NGOs. To illustrate the collaboration between asylum seekers and local NGOs, the chapter breaks down the following survival strategies: infrastructure development, non-violent protests, moral and spiritual relief, education and recreation, development of economic activities, family well-being, and communication and support.

Chapter 7 built on the two previous chapters to explain how the routinization and invisibilization of violence (at the individual and meso levels) are evidence of how the naturalization of violence works at the macro level. This chapter presents evidence of the process of normalization and worsening of violence and explains the rise-endurance-fall cycle of migrant camps by using the cases of how the rise of the Reynosa camp and the erasure of the Matamoros camp happened simultaneously.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the findings and discussing how the humanitarian crisis at the border is not a problem that can be solved with the end of Title 42 or the new version of MPP. In addition, the chapter explains how the findings of this dissertation are part of a long-time crafted design based on exclusion and white supremacy. I present recommendations for practice and highlight the relevance of my findings to improve the future of refuge, asylum, and migration critically and humanly. Finally, I end the chapter ends discussing

future research directions and highlighting some final remarks about the significance of the research and the study of migrant camps.

CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH SETTING AND CONTEXT

The geographical context: The Texas-Tamaulipas border, the forgotten region

With a few exceptions, borderlands are forgotten places. I have lived in various parts of Mexico, and I always must specify what I mean when I mention Matamoros. That is a sign of oblivion.

Matamoros is a no man's land regarding public policies, welfare, and security. It is a unique and special place to live. Very complex due to its abandonment.

In Matamoros, everyone can do whatever they want with no repercussions.

—Isabel, a resident from Matamoros

The U.S.-Mexican border extends over 1,900 miles from Tijuana to Matamoros and is considered the largest known structure of inequality in the contemporary world. There is no other border with a greater unequal relationship in power, economic development, and social conditions (Scott and David 2003; Velasco Ortiz and Contreras 2014; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Along the U.S.-Mexican border, there are four border environments: Tijuana-San Diego-Los Angeles, the Sonora-Arizona border, Juarez-El Paso, and the Texas-Tamaulipas border (Vila 2000, 6–7). Each one serves as a location of diverse internal and international migration, ethnic composition, and socio-political identities.

Tamaulipas and specifically the city of Matamoros serves as an appealing and unique case because it simultaneously hosted an unprecedented number of asylum seekers and a hyper-violent situation due to the aftermath of the war on drugs. Additionally, until the end of the first version of MPP, Matamoros was the city with the largest migrant camp on the U.S.-Mexico border. Furthermore, this region also has several contextual factors that position it as a relevant case to study, including its geographic localization and closeness to the Central American

migrant transit routes and how it has been widely overlooked by border and immigration scholars (Correa-Cabrera 2014).

Tamaulipas shares 230 miles of border with the U.S. and is the Mexican state with the most international ports of entry, with 18 border crossing points from Nuevo Laredo to Matamoros. Additionally, its most populated border cities (Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros) are the closest destinations for trade —formal and informal— including drug and people trafficking (Correa-Cabrera 2013). The region has been affected by a spectrum of everyday violence, partly due to two influential criminal organizations: The Gulf Cartel and the Los Zetas Cartel. According to the National Registry of Missing Persons (2018), Tamaulipas has the most significant number of reported missing people (5,943 since 2007). Based on the latest report of the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (2017), Tamaulipas ranks 13th nationally for its number of inhabitants, but number one in kidnappings (33.33% of the national total), and number twelve in homicides (30.41% of the national total). In contrast with other Mexican states, Tamaulipas has been unable to combat organized crime due to a gradual loss of the "monopoly" of the legitimate use of violence (Correa-Cabrera 2014), allowing the cartels to operate as a parallel government (Hale 2011).

Despite the extreme violence and the weakening of local state power, U.S. and Mexican immigration scholars have not widely studied the region. Instead, the Tijuana-San Diego border zone has been the primary focus, presented as the archetype of what the U.S.-Mexican border is (Zúñiga González 2011). According to Zúñiga (2011), this can be explained due to its proximity to a world-famous metropolis (Los Angeles) and because it is the Mexican border city that hosts the highest number of academics and research centers. In contrast, Correa-Cabrera calls the

Texas-Tamaulipas region the "forgotten border" since most scholars and political analysts overlook it (2014:388).

Although the Matamoros case may not be directly generalizable to other border areas, looking at the processes through which asylum seekers and migrants construct narratives about their experiences in a migrant camp and their encounters with diverse forms of violence, we can observe parallels with other trends of deterrence of movement and repeal of asylum (De León 2015; Jones 2016; Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017; Winders 2016; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan 2017; Slack 2019); this is important because it interrogates the normalization and acceptance of inhumane (and *exceptional*) means of control on a diverse range of locations and scales.

Region matters. The context of Matamoros

Matamoros is located south of the Rio Grande, directly across Brownsville, Texas. Matamoros is the third-largest city, just behind Tampico and Reynosa. Figure 1 shows a map with the location of Matamoros and the two most populated cities on the Texas-Tamaulipas border, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo.

Figure 1. Geolocalization of the city of Matamoros. Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2 presents a closeup of the border between Brownsville and Matamoros and three strategic places for migrants in transit: The Gateway International Bridge, the local bus station[3], and the location of the oldest local migrant shelter.

[3] The bus station is recognized as strategic because is the site used by deportees to leave Tamaulipas. Mexican deportees will get there even immediately after deportation or be transported there after being in the shelter.

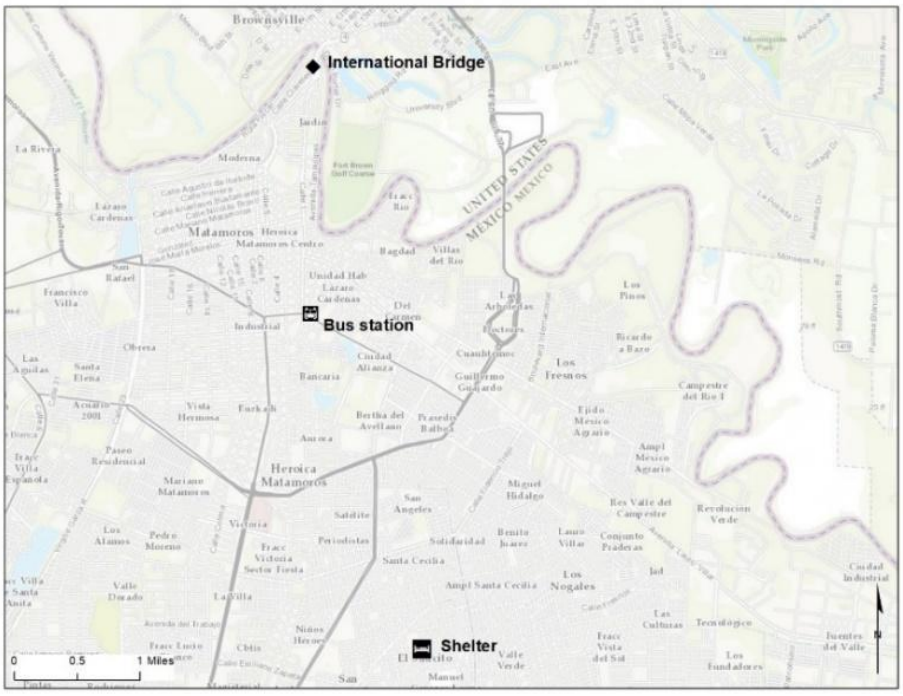

Figure 2. Localization of Matamoros Gateway International Bridge, Bus Station, and Migrant Shelter. Source: Own elaboration.

Matamoros is the 39th largest city in Mexico. The Brownsville-Matamoros area is the second-largest metropolitan area in Tamaulipas and the 4th on the U.S. -Mexico border with a population of 1,387,985. As of the last CENSUS in 2020 (INEGI 2021), Matamoros had a total population of 541,979. However, there are many people in an unstable situations not counted in the official census. Hence, after the last estimate of municipal authorities, the total population could exceed 1 million people and is expected to keep growing if the number of asylum seekers and deportees continues to increase.

I was born in Matamoros. I grew up surrounded by women, except for my grandpa who was in charge of me after school hours. During that time, he taught me how to build kites, and he was always telling me stories of his younger self; he was a natural-born storyteller. I still remember him narrating how he came from Ciudad Mier to Matamoros with his brothers and

sisters on a horse-drawn cart. It was a very divertive story full of action and surprises. I later realized that the most important part of the story that he was telling was how Matamoros became internationally relevant due to the splendor of the cotton industry and the beginning of the Bracero program.

During 1940 and 1960, Matamoros was the land of opportunities due to the golden cotton age, and many families from nearby towns migrated to settle in the big city. According to Quintero (2020), from 1950 to 1960, the Matamoros' population grew by 11%, from 128,347 to 143,043 inhabitants. Quintero also argues how in addition to agricultural workers, young professionals also came to settle to cover the needs of education and health, forming the basis of what would later be the middle class in Matamoros. That is the case of my grandma, who came into the city from Ciudad Victoria as an elementary teacher. Later, my mother and her sisters became teachers at elementary and middle school. For middle class women, teaching was one of the few professions available after the surge of the maquiladoras in 1960, actually between 1970 and 1980, the female population of Matamoros grew by 34.5% (Quintero Ramírez 2020).

After the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the exponential growth of the *maquiladora*s during the 2000s, Matamoros' economy was no longer based on agriculture. Today, the city's economy is based on international trade with the U.S. and the industrial sector, mainly due to the *maquiladoras* of automotive assembly and accessories plants. The maquiladora industry consists primarily in high-turnover, low-pay, and usually part-time or temporary work, with 49% of the employed population, followed by the tertiary sector, made up of commerce and services, representing 45% of the economically active population of the city (Quintero Ramírez 2013). According to the 2020 CENSUS, the average level of schooling in the municipality is 9.7 years, and only forty-eight percent have completed basic education. Sixty-three percent of the

population is between 15 and 64 years old, which brings enormous pressure on the authorities to provide jobs, education, and adequate infrastructure and services. This precarious situation can explain, at a certain point, some adverse reactions observed to the presence of migrants and deportees in the city.

Matamoros is the northern border city of Mexico closer to the center and south of the country and the closest to Central America. Due to this, Matamoros is a strategic place for the crossing operations of undocumented migrants to the U.S., with the consequent network of facilitators that have turned a necessity into a business in which Mexican authorities at different levels participate, including the police and immigration agents (Sánchez Munguía 2021; Spener 2009). Although more recently, these activities have become more violent and controlled by the Mexican cartels.

Extreme violence in the city has been escalating over the years. The destabilization of the territorial control of the Gulf Cartel began when former President Ernesto Zedillo captured Juan García Ábrego in 1996 and his successor Oscar Malherbe in November of 2000. Three years later, in 2003, the government of Vicente Fox captured the new cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, who founded the group of Los Zetas, as a private mercenary army (Zarate Ruiz 2021). However, the city's most violent and repressive military operation occurred in 2010. Under the orders of Felipe Calderón, the Mexican marine forces eliminated Antonio Cárdenas Guillén (Tony Tormenta) in a confrontation that turned the city into a state of war, with a massive display of high-power weapons, bazookas, and grenades. In this regard, Joaquín, a 60-year-old businessman from Matamoros, mentioned: "Osiel was captured at the city's edges and transported to the airport. I remembered shootings, but nothing like what happened with Tony Tormenta. That was huge. They used bazookas downtown! I was trapped in my office for hours.

There was fire everywhere. That was terrifying. I have not seen something similar ever." After 2010, violence in Matamoros keep increasing with unprecedented acts of terror, and a severe increase in kidnapping, extortion, disappearing, and murdering.

I grew up knowing about the narco-culture. It was part of our history. Juan N. Guerra, the "godfather" of the U.S.-Mexican border cartels, controlled the smuggling of alcohol in the 1930s during the prohibition in the U.S. We all knew about him, about the drug trafficking. Even an important avenue in the city was named after his brother Roberto Guerra Cárdenas. The narcotic traffic business was part of the everyday life of Matamoros. But we did not get to see the violence as we do now. I think the big difference was that violence was not committed randomly, only to settle specific scores. That statement is an obvious normalization of violence; however, the core of the argument is that living in Matamoros was not a matter of surviving.

I left Matamoros in 2001 to go to college. I came back to visit family regularly, but it was not until 2012 that I moved back and found a very different city ruled by the terror of Los Zetas and their constant confrontations with the military and the reminiscences of the Gulf Cartel. The American spring breakers that used to come every year when I was a teenager were gone. All of the nightclubs I knew were now closed or belonged to the cartels. Almost all of my friends and their families fled to Brownsville. It was not safe to ride alone at night anymore. People I knew disappeared or were found decapitated on the highway. That Matamoros was not what I remembered. It was not the same place where I flew kites with my grandpa.

I moved out from Matamoros again in 2015, when I enrolled as a Ph.D. student at the University of Colorado to study race, migration, and violence. My last three years in the city triggered me deeply. I wanted to understand the dynamics of the border. I wanted to know why the town I was born in became a nightmare for their residents and migrants in transit.

In 2016, I came back to Matamoros to do research fieldwork, right after deportations had risen steadily (during the Obama administration) and when cartel forces constantly harassed deportees. For two years, I did fieldwork on migrant shelters examining their role in minimizing or reshaping violence against deportees. However, everything changed dramatically in 2018. I remember vividly walking the Gateway International Bridge to cross the border and seeing families sitting in the middle of the pedestrian area of the bridge (as shown in Picture 2). They were waiting for several days on the floor carrying backpacks and sun umbrellas. Later, I knew it was the beginning of metering.

Image 2. The beginning of metering at the Gateway International Bridge. August 2018

In April 2018, under the orders of the Trump Administration, all ports of entry along the southern border of the United States began to implement a protocol known as "metering," or entry regulations. The border crossing at San Ysidro, California, had been enforcing this practice since 2016 but was the only location doing so. Due to metering, officials from the Customs and

Border Protection agency (CBP) could only receive a certain number of asylum seekers from Central America and the Caribbean per day to determine if they qualified for refugee status. In the United States, the definition of asylum is based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its later amendment through the 1968 Protocol. Within this legal framework, a person requests asylum when they are already in U.S. territory or at a port of entry. However, with metering, CBP officers will stand right on the dividing line of both countries. The purpose is to physically prevent people from stepping on U.S. soil and requesting asylum legally. Thus, applicants must sign up for waiting lists for an interview with the U.S. immigration authorities on the Mexican side. Metering did not cause an immediate buildup of migrants but increased clandestine crossings. Coyotes (i.e., smugglers) aided people in reaching the American riverbanks or other areas patrolled by Border Patrol agents. The goal was to circumvent the metering hurdle. If their attempt was successful, they surrendered to Border Patrol officers and began their asylum process. This practice has several repercussions, but one of the most damaging effects is that asylum seekers risk their lives by attempting unauthorized crossing outside formal entry points. However, it was not until August 2019 that the situation really changed after CBP implemented the Migrant Protection Protocols.

Migrant Protection Protocols on the Texas-Tamaulipas Border

Since August 2019, the region has hosted Central American immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S. under the MPP. These protocols are U.S. Government actions concerning non-Mexican nationals who arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border seeking admission to the U.S. without proper documentation. Individuals subjected to this action may return to the U.S. to attend their immigration court proceedings, but they must remain in Mexico until their court dates

(Department of Homeland Security 2019). This policy was initially implemented unilaterally by President Trump's administration without a prior agreement with Mexico. However, in early June 2019, in the context of a series of threats, including possible tariff impositions, the Mexican government accepted the protocols, along with the promise of securing Mexico's southern border to reduce the flow of migration from Central America to the United States (see Table 3 in Chapter 1). Figure 4 shows the sum of MPP expulsions (71,060) distributed by year.

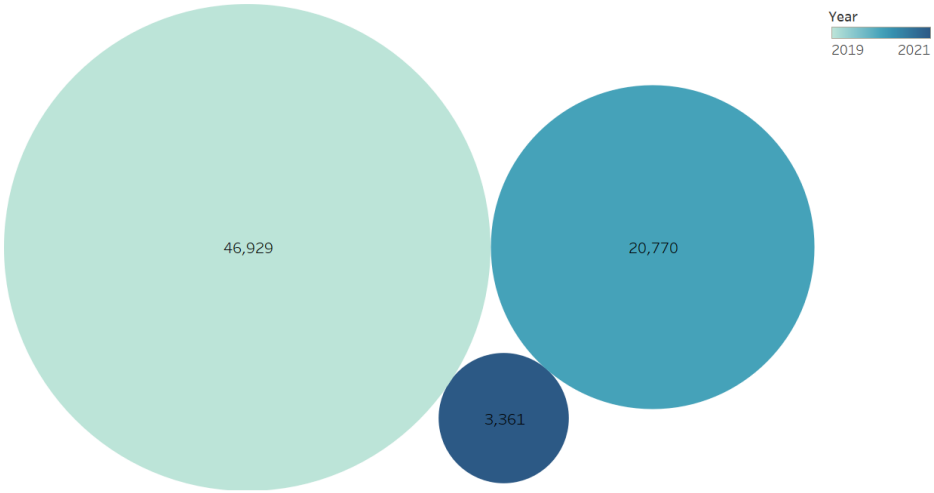

Figure 3. Sum of MPP expulsions by year, 2019-2021.

Source. Author's elaboration based on data from Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) (2020)

Figure 4 shows a significant reduction of expulsions during 2020 and 2021, primarily due to the effects of COVID-19 and the temporary closure of immigration proceedings in the U.S., and the implementation of Title 42. According to the official reporting of CBP for FY21 and FY22 months, in total, the southern border reported the expulsion of 284,658 individuals due to Title 42 in 2021 and 643,630 during the current months of 2022 (October to January). That accounts for a 126% change from 2022 to 2021. In the case of the Rio Grande Valley, CBP reported 69,192 individual encounters in 2021 and 167,425 in 2022, with a percent change of 142%.

Therefore, despite the number of MPP cases significantly shrunken, Title 42 continued expelling people to Mexican border towns more significantly.

The U.S. federal government implemented MPP protocols on seven border towns: San Ysidro, CA, Calexico, CA, Nogales, AZ, El Paso, TX, Eagle Pass, TX, Laredo, TX, and Brownsville, TX[4]. Figure 4 shows the distribution of MPP expulsions, at these border towns, from March 2019 through January 2021. Individuals sent to the Laredo or Brownsville courts, which accounts near 50% of the total deportation proceedings, had to reside or pass-through Nuevo Laredo or Matamoros Tamaulipas, which the State Department classifies as the same level of danger as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (U.S. Department of State 2022). Many asylum seekers and families were kidnapped after having been sent back to Tamaulipas, sometimes within hours of crossing back over the border (American Immigration Council 2022).

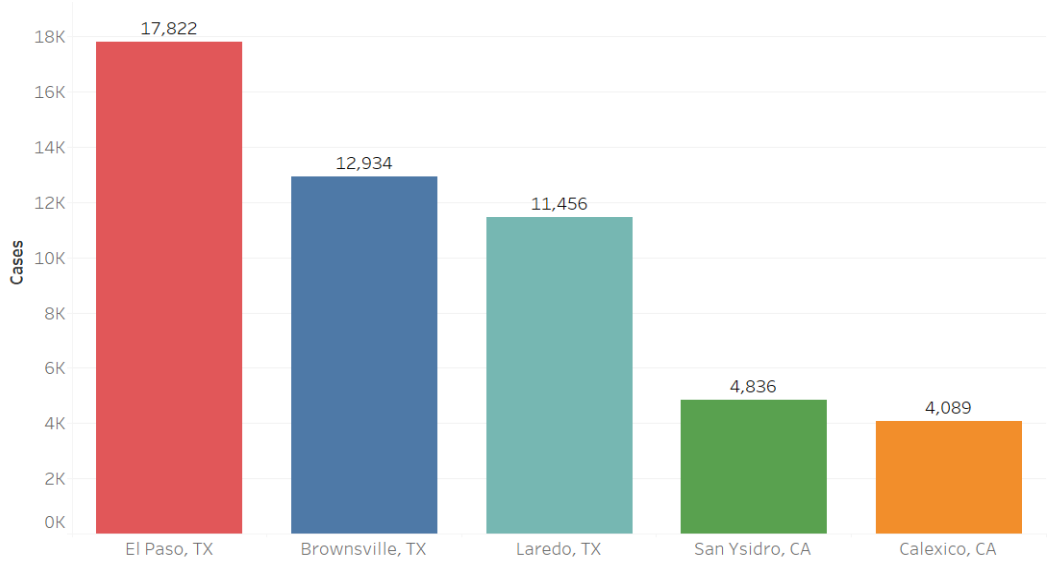

Figure 4. MPP Deportation Proceedings by Court

Source. Author's elaboration based on data from the TRAC (2020)

[4] Individuals sent back to Nogales and Eagle Pass must travel to El Paso and Laredo port of entries for hearings.

Individuals who attended court hearings from Matamoros appeared in "tent courts" provisionally built in Brownsville next to the port of entry. There, asylum seekers presented their cases to immigration judges through video teleconferencing equipment. Figure 5 shows details on MPP asylum proceedings that occurred in the court of Brownsville from 2019 to January 2021.

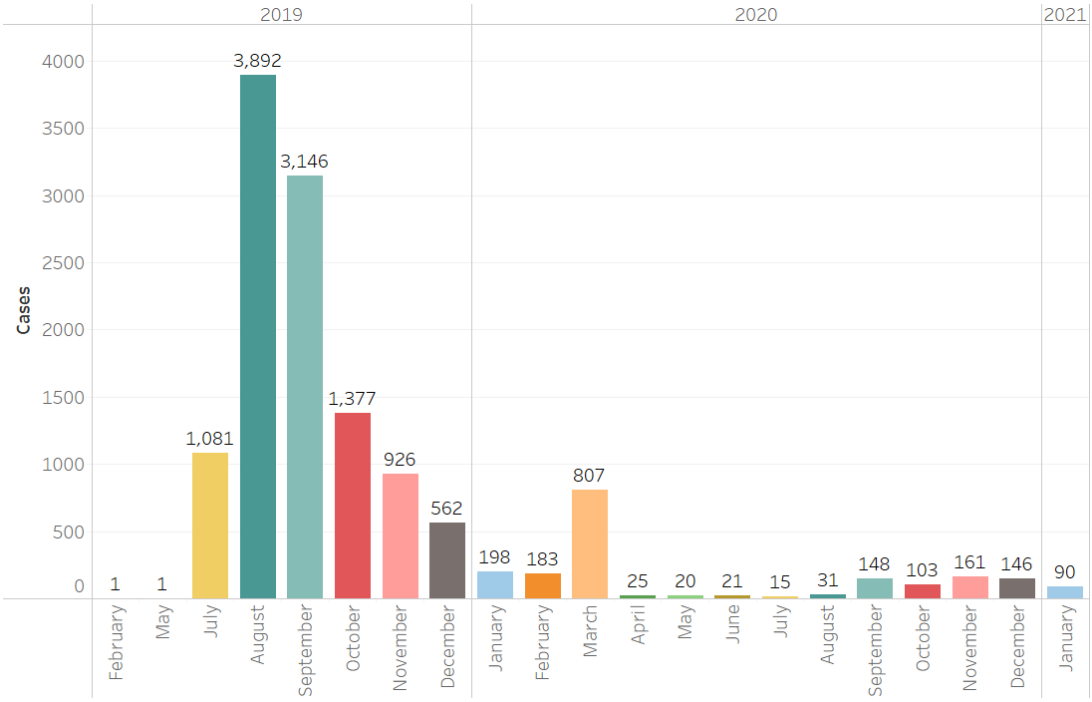

Figure 5. Monthly MPP Deportation Proceedings, Brownsville, TX

Source. Author's elaboration based on data from TRAC (2020)

In total, DHS reported 12,934 expulsions in Brownsville from February 2019 to January 2021, with the highest concentrations of removals during the second half of 2019. In terms of gender distribution, 55% were men, and 45% were women. Overall, minors accounted for 32% of the total expulsions, and 11% minors under five. Figure 6 shows all MPP expulsions to Matamoros distributed by age groups ranging from 0-4 to 60 and more (31).

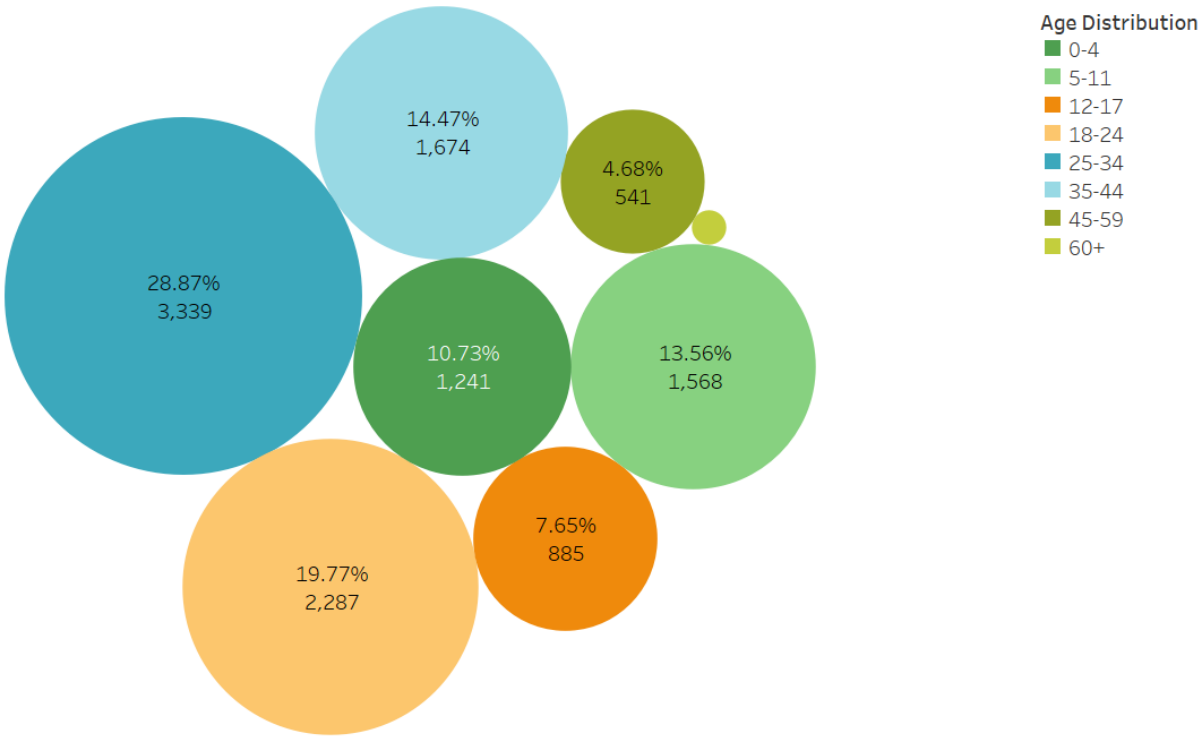

Figure 6. MPP expulsions to Matamoros by Age Groups, 2019-2021

Source. Author's elaboration based on data from TRAC (2020)

Most of the population under MPP came from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti, and southern Mexico. These are people seeking safety in the U.S. as they have fled their homes primarily because of gang violence, political persecution, and humanitarian crises in their home countries. Before the MPP policy, most would have been released to sponsors in the U.S. while their asylum cases were resolved. Instead, according to DHS (2019), they have been sent to Mexico under the promise that Mexico will provide them with "all appropriate humanitarian protections for the duration of their stay." The enforcement of MPP placed asylum seekers at high risk for their lives, leaving them in a very vulnerable situation by expelling them into unfamiliar, hazardous cities with no money, no contacts, and no governmental support.

The rise, endurance, and fall of the Matamoros camp. A quick overview

The Rising: Metering and MPP

The Matamoros camp started growing informally in a small public plaza around March 2019, right on the side of a large white building that reads "Human Repatriation." People who returned under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) spent about a month living in the open. In just a few days after MPP began, the surrounding walkways and the Plaza were full of people, primarily women and children, sleeping on pieces of cardboard. Seeing the growing number of migrants living in homelessness, people from both sides of the border began pooling resources to supply food, tents, clothing, and essential medical services.

Image 3. The beginning of the Matamoros Camp in the Plaza, 2019

Over time, the tent lines continued to expand until the Plaza was entirely covered. The people who first came to provide aid as individuals organized together the first NGOs founded explicitly to support asylum seekers in Tamaulipas. The NGOs brought more tents, but hundreds of people came too, over 2,000 in just a few months. The situation was critical. Right there, in front of the Gateway International Bridge, the architectural landmark known as "*Puerta de México*" was the silent witness of everything that happened in this migrant camp that, for two years, existed between a fence and a border-wall.

COVID-19, the relocation, and endurance

Under MPP, the waiting time in Mexico was supposed to be limited to the duration of the asylum process. However, in 2020, COVID-19 radically changed the Matamoros camp, the asylum procedures, and the humanitarian crisis across the U.S.-Mexico border. Due to the pandemic, all asylum hearings were suspended indefinitely, and migrants started being expelled under a new policy called Title 42, which prevents people from applying for asylum altogether because they would pose a health risk during the pandemic. According to CBP guidelines, expulsions under Title 42 are not based on immigration status and are tracked separately from immigration enforcement actions. Hence, all Title 42 expulsions typically happen without conducting any screenings, legally required to avoid expelling people who need protection or are at risk of severe harm.

What happened with asylum seekers in Matamoros when the U.S. government enacted MPP and Title 42 simultaneously? Given the initial uncertainty around the effects and spread of COVID-19, the rising discontent within the local population, and the lack of experience of

NGOs, the Mexican immigration officials and some NGO leaders decided to relocate people from the Plaza to an immediate area locally known as *El Bordo*.

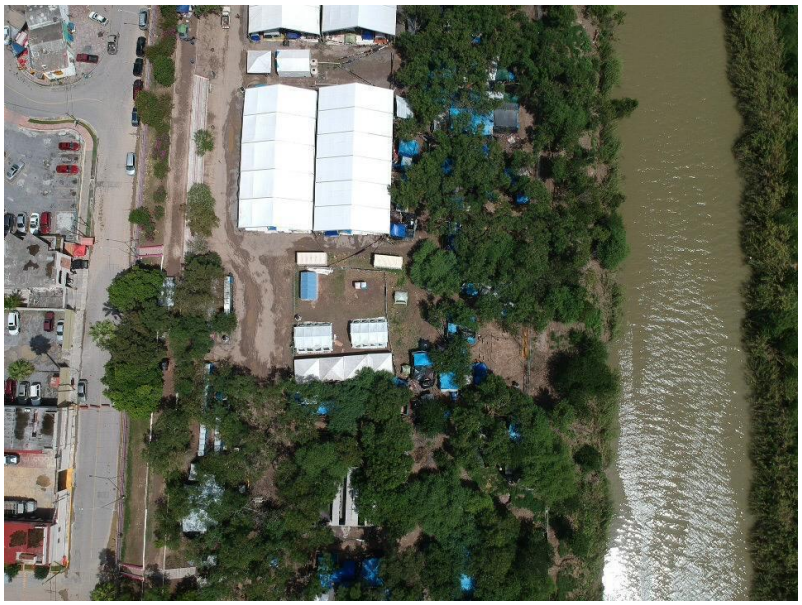

Image 4. The Matamoros Camp in the levee, 2020

Source: Christa Cook, Solidarity Engineering

After the relocation, to enter the Matamoros camp, you needed to walk first on the street in front of where the Mexican Immigration (INAMI) building is located. The building is a two- story white structure with a sign on the top that reads: Human Repatriation. After the INAMI building no cars could transit beyond the building due to a military post nearby. You must walk over two rows of traffic spikes and jersey barriers to reach the entrance of the camp. There is a way around it, but you must pass through a military checkpoint. After the second line of spikes, there is a short, paved hill. I do not remember it being paved when I was a child, but it is now. Once on the top of the hill, you first see an empty white tent with the United Nations logo and two guards standing outside the tent. To the right is the levee I remember as a child and a brand-new bike

path, to the left, a large fence guarded with barbed wire on the top. That was the exact spot where I built kites as a child.

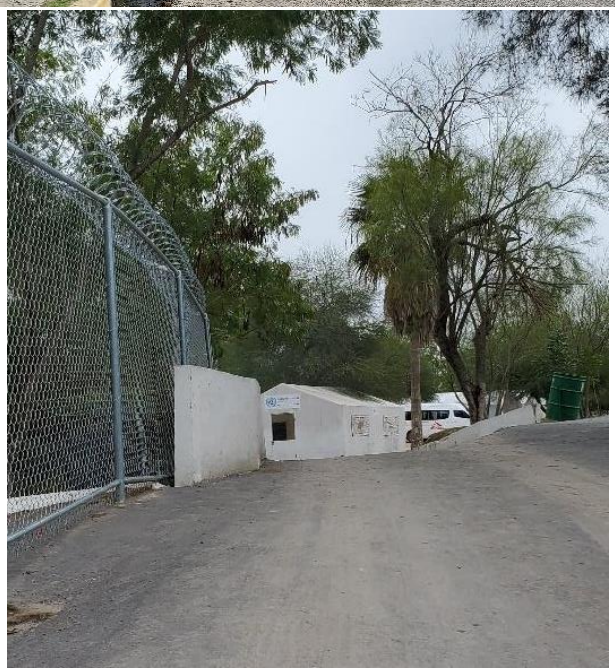

Image 5. Camp entrance after the relocation, 2020

Before COVID, everyone could get into the camp, but immigration officers restricted the entrance after the relocation, and I did not have an I.D. pass. With a few exceptions, only American NGOs who belong to a collective named "Dignity Village" were allowed in. It was not until I was listed as a volunteer with one of the NGOs that I could regain access. A young

American invited me to join her after I enlisted to volunteer with her organization. They wanted to understand the immigration policies and politics behind the camp, so we agreed that I would be training NGO workers and volunteers inside the camp to learn from MPP and Title 42. In return, they would help me obtain access, but they did not have I.D.s available at the time. With no I.D. to my name, I was visibly nervous when I stood at the entrance. She planned to walk inside with enough confidence, like if I had an I.D. "Walk with me," she said. "If you are at my side, they [the guards] will let you in. Keep coming with me until you become a regular; then, they [the guards] will not bother you anymore". That is what I did from that day forward. They never checked for my I.D., and I did not get one until a week before the camp closed, but I was a "regular" who no longer needed it.

Once I walked through the fence, there was a main road with rows of tents on the sides. There was a music classroom made of handmade benches and tarps on the left. A little further, a line of about ten porta-potties on the left and the hand-washing stations on the right. Then the showers. The rows of tents continue. Suddenly, passing a big pavilion, three tents caught my attention, one is a chapel, the other one is a small school with maps and an alphabet hanging from the "walls" made up out of tarps, the third one is a free shop with food and hygiene supplies. Continuing ahead is the NGOs area on the right; it is easy to recognize due to the better shelters, the medical trailer, and the Americans; to the left, there is a barbershop. Two guys on the top of the hill were always there, standing under a tarp with chairs and a radio playing northern music while cutting hair. The rows continue until the end of the field demarcated by a fence that blocks access to the river. The rows do not only follow the entrance road, but they also widen across the entire area. They go deep into the riverbanks, yet the access to that part of the river is also fenced. There is a hidden area near a community kitchen on the edge of the camp

where part of the fence was intentionally cut off. "This is our emergency exit in case something goes wrong," some NGO workers told me while they were holding up part of the wire. "It's a secret exit that can save our lives."

Image 6. The emergency exit, 2020

Who cut the wire? I asked. "We do not know, we found it like that, but we assume the cartels made it to sneak people in at night." After the relocation, Mexican Immigration officers decided to not allow new asylum seekers inside the camp. However, people could sneak into the camp by paying a fee to cartels. Inside the camp, I met several people who were not part of the official population control listing INAMI had. Still, they either paid a fee to the cartels to enter clandestinely or were snuck in by other asylum seekers.

There were many other violent repercussions related to health, hygiene, security, legal protection, and access to justice with the relocation. In terms of health and hygiene, diseases

carried by the infestation of rodents, snakes, and mosquitoes were rampant, in addition to severe cases of dehydration and hypothermia. There was also the risk of intense flooding because *El Bordo* was a floodplain zone designed to be inundated during extreme storms, such as what happened during hurricane Hanna, when people were forced to retreat to higher ground after the level of the Rio Grande rose by 12 feet. Nevertheless, security and physical violence were the most critical issues, especially at night due to organized crime, the absence of public lighting, and isolation from the public eye.

The end of MPP and the dismantling and erasure of the Matamoros Camp

I visited the camp the morning after Joe Biden's election. It was a cold and rainy day; everything was either wet or frozen. It was hard to walk in the mud, but the camp was lively. People jumped in excitement. Immediately upon entering office, the Biden Administration announced the end of MPP. Asylum seekers could cross in an orderly manner to continue their migration process. Many families began packing immediately. There was more hope than ever.

On February 26th, the first families crossed, and by March 8th, the Mexican government began the definitive dismantling of the camp. The processing of people to the U.S was not easy; everything happened under the shadow of pain and dehumanization. People spent hundreds of pesos trying to connect to an online form to submit their cases (in the end, the form was not used to process migrants in the camp), the international organization in charge of the process did not allow anyone to leave their tents and forbade the entrance of all local NGOs and donations to the camp effectively banishing the entire trusted support network asylum seekers had.

The Rise of a new camp, and the continuation of Title 42

The Matamoros camp symbolized the Trump Administrations' political stance toward immigration and, in stark contrast, disappeared when the Biden Administration assumed control. The Matamoros camp shut down, and a symbol was dismantled. However, the reality of restrictive immigration policies violating migrants' human rights is still there, more present than ever in the form of a new camp in Reynosa, only 45 minutes away from Matamoros, located in Plaza la República in front of the Hidalgo International Bridge. The Plaza is 1.6 acres, almost 5 acres less than the size of the Matamoros camp, where, as of February of 2022, more than 2,000 people are living due to the continuation of Title 42, even when the U.S government reopened all the ports along the U.S.-Mexico border for non-essential travel.

In this chapter, I presented how the hardening of immigration policies, the presence of drug cartel forces, and a global pandemic have worsened systematic acts of violence against asylum seekers; And how policies such as Metering, MPP, and Title 42 laid the foundations for the rising of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly the cases of the Matamoros and Reynosa camps. In the following chapter, I will introduce the theoretical framework I use to discuss the complex political and social processes shaping the violent realities of asylum seekers and migrants in transit.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My research on the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico border is theoretically situated at the intersection of the sociology of violence and immigration, specifically related to violent impacts due to practices of mass deportation and restriction of asylum. In my work, I draw interconnections between diverse forms of violence that challenge the traditional divisions between interpersonal and inter-state violence. In so doing, I show how the theorization of violence as a web of causal connections between personal, collective, national, and global levels of violence is an essential navigational tool for building theoretical arguments about how pervasive policies of immigration control have become breeding grounds for the worsening of systematic violence against migrants in transit and the seedbed of the process of rising, endurance, and fall of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border.

Consequently, this chapter proceeds as follows. I first lay out a theoretical overview of the conceptualization of violence, focusing on how violence is a very diverse concept that can be applied to countless phenomena and used to describe multiple sources of events and behaviors. I also show how the heterogeneity of violence has resulted in its scattering between disciplines and its fragmentation into specialized sub-fields. Later, following some of the most recent reviews on the sociology of violence (Hartmann 2017; Walby 2013; Heitmeyer and Hagan 2003), I synthesized three important bodies of literature and how they account for violence as a field more central to Sociology, rather than dispersed and fragmented into specialist areas of analysis: first, the conceptualization of violence primarily as a social fact and not as a moral or political problem; second, a micro-sociological approach to the study of violence; and third, a proposition for a methodological linkage between social movement approaches and violence research. By

condensing these bodies of literature, I reflect on the endeavor of emphasizing theoretically and methodologically the crucial aspects of the intersectionality of the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis in the study of violence. Finally, borrowing from the feminist approximation of violence as a continuum (Cockburn 2017; Krause 2015; Bourgois 2004) and Turpin and Kurtz's (1997) conceptualization of violence as a web, I establish a framework to represent violence in the form of a multidimensional web that can disentangle how the multiple (macro, meso, and micro) linkages in the study of violence operate inside the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The ambiguous definition of violence

Violence is recognized as a complex and slippery phenomenon, part of social life, social structures, and institutions (Kilby and Jay 2013). It is defined as one of the most elusive and challenging concepts in the social sciences, where controversial questions remain unresolved concerning an appropriate definition, substantive differentiation, sociopolitical assessment, and moral evaluation of violence (Imbusch 2003). Violence takes extremely varied forms and may possess many qualities and a substantial range of definitions. Consequently, as Stanko (2005) stated, what violence means is embedded within its context. Thus, violence is understood regarding the interpreter's age, gender, sexual orientation, identities, and personal history. And the outcome of violence, whether physical or non-physical damage, is thus legitimized or condemned, enabling further support or fostering resistance. Therefore, a definition of violence is central to how we measure and understand it. If we are looking, for example, into a "limited" concept focusing exclusively on acts of physical harm or if we are looking for an "expanded" concept drawing on conceptual parallels such as structural (Imbusch 2003; Galtung 1969) or symbolic/cultural violence (Galtung 1990; Bourdieu 1991, 2001) or other forms of non-physical

violence such as racism, exploitation, or social exclusion (Desmond 2016; Sabo, Shaw, Ingram, Teufel-Shone, Carvajal, De Zapien, et al. 2014; Ray, Smith, and Wastell 2005; Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 2015).

Schinkel's (2010) proposition of the liquidation of violence is a very appealing approximation to my understanding and categorizing of violence inside the migrant camps since the violent dynamics that I observed were constantly changing and evolving. Simply put, the liquidation of violence entails the critique of absolute definitions and theories of violence. It is an attempt to make fluid what theories of violence try to solidify, and to thereby harvest and preserve the aspects of violence that many theories do correctly but incorporate in a one-sided manner (Schinkel 2010, 4–5). Following Schinkel, to liquidate a theory is to strip it bare to its most fundamental insights, and to then preserve those insights by storing them in a horizon of aspects that each shed their own distinctive light on a certain phenomenon.

Furthermore, violence remains in a constant dispute and debate about its origins. There are two opposing views, one ascribes violence as part of human nature, which is considered immutable, and the other sees violence as the result of social conditions (Imbusch 2003, 13). In my analysis, I see violence as the result of social processes and not a mere means to an end.

In addition, a precise use of the concept of violence is hampered by connotations that partially overlap with semantically related concepts such as force, aggression, conflict, or power. Those are, however, not identical to violence. In Foucault's (1982) words, although violence may be a part of some power relationships, "in itself the exercise of power is not violence." Foucault based his argument of the difference between power and violence on the possibility of choice. When violence is exercised, the victim has no choice; however, in the exercise of power, both sides have choices and are capable of action. For Walby (2013), violence should be best

considered as a distinctive practice not reducible to other forms of power. When violence is treated as if it were reducible to other forms of power, it often disappears from or is marginalized in social theory.

Finally, violence should be understood beyond the absence of war or conflict. Violence ought to be appreciated as a social fact. We must recognize violence in its most spectacular, explosive, visible moments and its more disguised and routinary forms (Pandey 2006). However, this multifaceted and fluid theorization of violence was not the norm in social sciences. With some important exceptions (Charles Tilly 1977; Michael 1986; Giddens 1986), for several decades after the second world war and the development of the thesis of modernity (Elias 1982; Foucault et al. 1991; Weber 1978), the study of violence in sociology was not a topic of concern and remained studied as a fragmented field, focusing on very specific forms of violence, rather than core to 'theory' (Walby 2013, 97; Hartmann 2017, 1). The Elias (1982) thesis, for example, discusses that the civilizing effects of modernity occur through the increase in self-control, including control over the expression of violent urges. Therefore, for a long time, the primary attention on the question of violence was centered on its everyday physical and visible aspects associated with criminal violence, physical harm, and the margins of society (Jackman 2002). However, the uncovering of new theories about violence questions the classic theses that suggested that violence declines with modernity. In this regard, beyond Elias's theory about the civilizing process, we also have Foucault's change of government from state brutality to discipline and securitization, Weber's monopolization of legitimate violence by a modern state, and the Durkheimian focus on anomie, egoism, social disorganization and social disintegration (Walby 2013; Hartmann 2017). Hence, overcoming the marginalization of violence and reconsidering the relationship between violence and modernity is a result of the pluralizing of the

concept of modernity and the appreciation of the malleable heterogeneity of the phenomenon of violence and the different facets of violence. Recognizing its pluralization and heterogeneity emphasizes the dynamic relations between individual behavior and group-making social processes.

Violence as a re-emerging field of sociology

Recently, a re-emergence of the study of violence as a more central concept in sociology occurred, partly as a consequence of the discussions that emerged from decolonial perspectives and greater inclusion of views from the global south (Maldonado-Torres 2011; Mignolo 2007), women (Vergès and Bohrer 2021), and other minorities (Velez 2019; Anzaldúa 1987), that uncovered a vigorous critical debate to core understandings of the concept of modernity (Walby 2013, 96). Those emerging voices, increased their visibility into the study of interpersonal violence in relation to inequalities of gender, race, and ethnicity, and the study of war and governance as new forms of documented and theorized violence beyond deviance and criminality, challenging the notion that most violence is carried out by those in marginalized positions or as a result of social disorganization.

According to Hartmann (2017), to address the challenge of the ongoing fragmentation within the violence research, it is necessary to strengthen the dialogue between different bodies of literature that pursue to delineate "violence" as the subject of an emerging field of sociology. Currently, three bodies of literature can be distinguished by how they account for the distinctiveness of violence. The first body of literature aims to conceive violence as a social fact rather than as a moral or a political problem. This perspective aims for an 'extended' definition of violence to detach it from state propagated definitions. The most elaborated work in this

approach belongs to Schinkel (2010), Reemtsma (2012), and Pearce (2019). The central argument of this work conceives violence as an ontological concept centred on politics and the state. It disputes the Weberian tradition that defines a modern state as an institution that has a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in a given territory by arguing that violence does not exist in isolation from historical forms of social (and political) organization but it is always embedded in social frameworks (Hartmann 2017, 4). Schinkel, for example, conceives violence as a form of reduction, as a "reduction of being" (2010, 48).

Similarly, as Agamben discusses bare life (1998) and the detachment of the *zoe*, Schinkel explains the reduction of being beyond the total reduction of the body, highlighting how others are reduced in their being in the sense that they are not allowed to exist in light of other aspects of their being. Regarding the social expression of violence, Reemtsma (2012) distinguishes different zones or areas of violence which prohibit, permit, or mandate violence. The argument is based on a process of historical transformation, where social actors in a given society interpret violent interactions as violent and characterize them as prohibited, permitted, or mandated. This framework of violence, anchored on a historical change process, is a useful theoretical tool to investigate violence emerging from immigration policies. For instance, in its first version, MPP was socially categorized as a cruel and despicable policy. However, with the launching of Title 42, a more pervasive and restrictive program, the second version of MPP (with no significant changes from the first version) has been more socially accepted and even encouraged.

A micro-sociological approach compasses the second body of literature. The most important argument of this perspective is presented by Randall Collins (2009), who is particularly concerned about the micro-interactional dynamics of violence. Collins argues that the study of violence must encompass two moves. First, to put the interaction in the center of the

analysis, not the individual, the social background, the culture, or even the motivation; and second, to break down the usual categories of violence and look for the situations within them (Collins 2009, 1). Therefore, a micro-sociological theory of violence should study violent situations, not violent individuals. Collins highly criticizes theoretical approaches that focus on explanations of violence based on background conditions (such as racial discrimination, poverty, abuse, or family disorganization). Such explanations assume that violence is easy once the motivation exists; however, he argues that micro-situational evidence demonstrates that violence is "hard" (2009, 20). Yet, Collins' (2009) micro-sociological perspective based on observing face-to-face interactions does not involve a more comprehensive approach that discusses violence beyond acts of physical assault, and observable violence is only a partial picture of the significance of violence. About the connection between the macro and micro levels of analysis and how to integrate micro-interactional processes into macro patterns of violence, Collins shows that to understand how the micro-macro connection operates, it is necessary to get over the notion that "events" somehow exist in a different realm than "structures" (1988, 244). He also argues that the micro-macro translation shows that everything macro is composed of micro, and conversely, anything micro is part of the macro composition. Therefore, for Collins, micro and macro are not ontologically different; however, the macro level is always composed of micro-events spread out in space and time.

The third body of literature focuses on collective and political violence, examining violent events such as revolutions, riots, or genocides based on a processual approach. Before the work of Charles Tilly, collective violence was treated as a static phenomenon with a strong emphasis on cultural cohesion and irrational actors, where violent behavior appeared because of social disintegration (Hartmann 2017, 6). The work of Charles Tilly (2003; 1978) will

revolutionize the study of collective violence by arguing that collective action arises when groups act to defend or extend their interests from others. Hence, collective action will take a new turn where, instead of being placed as an irrational eruption of violence, it will be studied as a purposeful action that could lead to understanding processes of social change (Sewell 1990, 528). This switch of perspective from a classical collective behavior approach to a political process perspective has been currently developed by Donatella della Porta, who built her own definition of clandestine political violencebased on underlying similarities in the processes of four different types of "terrorist" organizations: left-wing, right-wing, ethnonationalism, and religious fundamentalists[5]. Her work is, therefore, anchored in a key principle: because violence is dynamic, relational, and multifaceted, it should be understood and analyzed as such. Consequently, explanations of violence should include a larger communication among the different levels of analysis, including macro-level systemic causes, meso-level organizational characteristics, and micro-level individual motivations (Della Porta 1995). Other authors, such as Malthaner (2017), use Collins' micro-sociological perspective to strengthen the methodological links between social movement approaches and the study of violence. His work shows how a micro-sociological focus on political violence can be helpful to better understand meso processes, consolidating a dialogue between the second and the third body of literature (Hartmann 2017, 7).

The review of the three bodies of literature above clearly shows that there are enough connections between the different forms of violence – interpersonal, governance, resistance, and new forms of warfare– that they can be analyzed as a single field. The remaining challenge is to

[5] An extreme form of violence perpetrated by political groups active in the underground (Della Porta 2013, 282)

find the interconnections between the diverse forms of violence, contesting the traditional divisions between interpersonal, inter-state, and inter-group forms of violence. For example, interpersonal violence inside the migrant camps, like rape, moves beyond the conventional analysis of crime in the field of criminology since these forms of violence are part of a larger process of structured social inequality and should be addressed by looking into governance or resistance. According to Walby (2013, 105), the strength of a sociological treatment of violence is in the analysis of the ways that different social institutions are interconnected. Therefore, the analysis of violence only as a crime or only concerning states denies the possibility of essential undercover connections and the development of violence as a field of study in contemporary sociology. Therefore, a more comprehensive sociological analysis of violence should at least consider these different approaches to violence where state, collective, and individual violence intersect.

A framework for examining a web of violence

Although neat desegregation of the different sources and forms of violence that are experienced and perpetuated in migrant camps cannot be completely exhausted, in Figure 7, I break down the different forms of how violence is inflicted, perpetuated, negotiated, and reshaped in migrant camps on the US-Mexico border. Based on the analysis of the data collected and the multifaceted character of violence, I disaggregated the most predominant forms of violence I observed in Matamoros and Reynosa Tamaulipas, funneling them into structural, symbolic, political, legal, and everyday violence as frameworks of reference. From there, I discuss other more specific forms of violence, such as racial, gendered, class, or cartel violence. This approach does not look

into which forms of violence are more dangerous but how they are mutually constituted to establish the links among them.

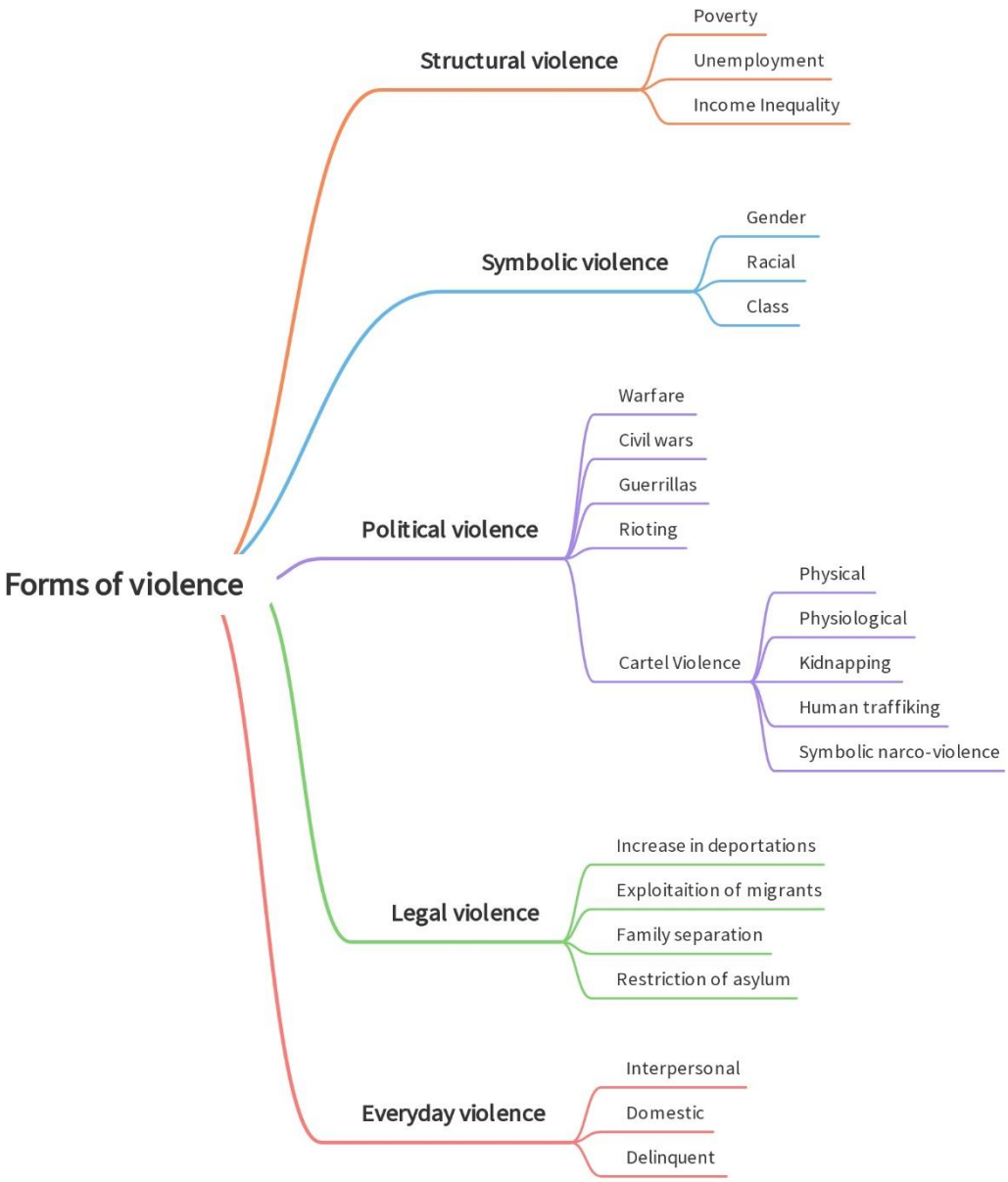

Figure 7. Forms of violence observed in Matamoros and Reynosa Tamaulipas

Source: Own elaboration based on the data obtained in the study

Structural violence

In its more traditional form, violence is usually expressed in terms of direct violence. According to Galtung (1996), direct violence comes from harmful acts by individuals that leave physical scars. However, other types of violence are not observable and remain invisible. Structural violence, for example, refers to systematic ways in which social structures or institutions may cause people to suffer indirectly by preventing them from meeting their basic needs, often through a slow and steady process (Galtung 1969). The problem with structural violence is, as Gilligan (1996) asserts, that when violence is a by-product of our social and economic structure, it usually appears as invisible because "it may appear to have had other (natural or violent) causes" (1996, 192). Structural violence occurs whenever people are disadvantaged by economic, political, legal, or cultural circumstances. A major factor that complicates structural violence is that structural inequities are usually considered commonplace because it endures "how things have always been." Galtung (1969) claimed that structural violence can be any constraint on human potential due to economic or political structures. Often hidden or ignored, structural violence manifests itself in institutions, policies, and practices that are fundamentally unjust but accepted as the societal status quo (Saleem et al. 2020). Therefore, unequal access to resources, political power, education, health care, or legal advice are forms of structural violence and are often legally or institutionally legitimized (Abrego and Menjívar 2011). For example, most Latin American immigrants living in the United States without legal documentation have high rates of poverty and income inequality (Massey and Gentsch 2014; Massey 1987; Saleem et al. 2020; Cornelius and Lewis 2007). In addition, forced migration (through asylum and irregular migration) usually occurs to escape unsustainable living or work conditions that are intimately linked to colonial and postcolonial realities of control and exploitation of people and their lands,

including U.S. policies and interventions in Latin America (Saleem et al. 2020, 172). Another example is portraited in Vogt's work on structural violence and commodification of undocumented Central American migrants (2013), where she describes how the everyday violence that occurs crossing Mexico is produced by local and global economies that profit from human mobility, and hence migration is crucial to capital accumulation, as the movements of Central Americans are circumscribed by demands for labor and drugs in the United States and for weapons, military funding, and remittances in Mexico and Central America (Vogt 2013, 765). In my research, I focus on manifestations of structural violence against migrants arising from institutions and policies, such as the cumulative effects of harsh immigration laws, increased enforcement actions, and the negative stigmatization of immigrants.

Symbolic violence

Johan Galtung (1990) introduces the concept of cultural violence as a follow-up to the conceptualization of structural violence. Cultural violence is defined as any aspect of a culture that can legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Therefore, symbolic violence built into a culture does not constitute murder or harm as direct violence. However, it is used to legitimize either structural or direct violence. Later, Bourdieu (2001) refers to symbolic violence as a non-physical form of violence manifested in the power differential between social groups. It is a process that internalizes humiliations and legitimates inequality and hierarchy across different social domains, such as nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic identity. As Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (2004, 273) define it, "it is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity." Symbolic violence as a theoretical perspective allows us to grasp how multiple inequalities, power structures, and stratified relations become internalized in lasting dispositions known as habitus. Thus, discussing symbolic violence in the form of

unequal and hierarchical class, gendered, and racial power differentials towards immigrants could benefit from examining the production of violence against migrants in transit.

Class, gender, race, and violence

In Figure 7, I specifically arrange class, gender, and race as forms of symbolic violence in the camps since those were the most recurrent forms of symbolic violence that emerged from the data. However, these three components are not exclusive to symbolic violence, and they are present across other predominant forms of violence, such as structural or legal.

Consequently, the conceptualization of class, gendered, and racialized forms of violence is central to analyze the differential power occurring across structural, symbolic, or legal forms of violence. As read in the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), it is crucial to understand the logic of dominance where oppression can occur differently (e.g., black or brown men are not in the same position as whites). Hence, it is impossible to disentangle racial, class, or sexual forms of oppression since they are often experienced simultaneously (1977, 275). Scholars such as Chang (2000) highlight the importance of intersectional analyses, arguing that the advancement of middle-class white women in the workforce has been largely predicated on the exploitation of poor, immigrant women, perpetuating a chain of class/gender oppression.

Class-based violence revolves around the distribution of income, wealth, and status. People who attempt to cross the border to enter the United States are from a broader range of class backgrounds, from the working poor to the middle class. Therefore, a complex relationship between class and violence is related to racial, gender, and national identities. For women with children living in the migrant camps in Matamoros and Reynosa, the obstacles they must confront are particularly challenging. For example, most women with minor children cannot access jobs since there is no safe place to leave their children during working hours. Therefore,

the impossibility of accessing a job limits their opportunities to afford adequate housing, restricting their living options to the camps, cheap hotel rooms, or condemned apartment buildings, and relying exclusively upon humanitarian aid.

Gender violence, on one hand, reflects the idea that violence serves to maintain structural gender inequalities. These inequalities can be directed at women, men, children, gay, transgender, and/or non-binary people. On the other hand, racial violence can be understood as a form of oppression based on a racist system of social control that places certain dominant races above others. This system of racial stratification usually positions whites at the top of the hierarchy (Sabo, Shaw, Ingram, Teufel-Shone, Carvajal, De Zapien, et al., 2014). In terms of how gender and racial violence intersect with immigration within the U.S., Zulema Valdez and Tanya Golash-Boza (2017) look at how ethnic and race relations can be combined to determine the life chances of members of groups that are ethnically and racially defined. For Latin American migrants, life chances are usually determined by processes that relegate migrants to underclass positions. Chavez (2013) explains this process of marginalization, known as "The Latino threat," as the negative experiences and stereotypes used to malign an entire immigrant population who constantly experiences stigma, fear, and violence due to taken-for-granted and often-repeated assumptions about Latin Americans.

Additionally, because of the reinforcement of immigration policies, some of the most crucial problems faced by immigrants living in the U.S. or trying to enter the country is the proliferation of an institutional racial discrimination process against the Latin American community that exacerbates racial prejudice and racial violence. This process of institutional racism has different violent consequences, such as border insecurity, a prevalence of low wages for low-skilled jobs for Latin American immigrants, and an insufficient program of status

regulation (Meissner et al. 2007). Moreover, there is a clear pattern of racial bias around CBP metering practices and the establishment of the MPP, where migrants coming from the Northern Triangle of Central America are particularly targeted.

In terms of gender, we see two different patterns for deportees and asylum seekers. As Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) established, the increase in deportations since 1998 has mainly been among working-class Mexican and Central American men. Golash-Boza's work on deportation (2015) found that removing a father often means losing the family's primary breadwinner, leading to children in poverty. When looking at the demographics in the Matamoros refugee camp, there is an overwhelming number of women and children. Some explanations of this can be drawn based on gendered forms of violence that exacerbate precarious situations in their countries of origin and serve as push factors for Central American women (Menjívar 2011; Wright 2011; Menjívar 2006). The gendered and racial consequences of U.S. deportation policy are severe and part of a long history of immigration restriction and control that operates towards particular ethno-racial groups and will have long-term effects within the U.S. and in the lives of generations of Central American and Mexican immigrants and their families (Goodman 2020; Ngai 2014; Zolberg 2009; Boehm and Terrio 2019).

The brutality of the web of racialized, gendered, and class-based violence that people who are waiting at or attempting to cross the southern border is intimately linked to U.S. immigration security priorities. For example, the enforcement of the 1994 Border Patrol strategy prevention throughout deterrence has been pushing migrants into the most inhospitable terrain for crossing, controlled by cartel forces and smugglers (Spener 2009). Another example is how the Mexican government has significantly militarized the southern Mexican border and migrant routes under the Southern Border Plan. Consequently, women and men experience gendered

forms of violence along the migrant journey, including assault, rape, humiliation, and sexual servitude. Therefore, sex and rape become forms of payment in ordinary encounters along the journey (W. Vogt 2016).

Political Violence

Political violence involves a variety of actions oriented at inflicting physical, psychological, and symbolic damage to individuals and/or property to influence various audiences for affecting or resisting political, social, and/or cultural change (Bosi and Malthaner 2015, 440). Actors across the political spectrum use political violence by performing actions such as attacks on property, bodily assaults, the planting of explosive devices, shooting attacks, kidnappings, hostage-taking, high profile assassinations, public self-immolation, to name only a few (Bosi and Malthaner 2015). Different forms of political violence are interlinked and are part of a continuum of violent tactics rather than discrete and mutually exclusive types. Therefore, forms of political violence must be studied as a process integrated into a multi-level (micro–meso–macro) conceptual framework, which offers stronger explanatory value than single-level analysis (Bosi and Della Porta 2012).

For example, displaced people from Central America and the Caribbean tend to be disproportionately vulnerable. Various elements characterize forced migration in this region: poverty, social inequality, unemployment, hunger, social exclusion, state violence, and criminal groups such as gangs or maras (Morales 2017; Vogt 2013; UNHCR 2020; Angelo 2021; Lakhani 2016). Many Central American migrants lived through or were born soon after the civil wars and state repression of the 70s and 80s in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and, to a lesser degree, Honduras (Vogt 2013). These US-backed civil wars and the rise of Los Angeles transnational gangs in the 1980s are the roots of the ongoing social, political, and economic instability in

Central America (Goodman 2020, 187). Gangs such as MS-13 or 18th Street existed in Central America only after the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) was enacted. This reform contributed significantly to the criminalization of immigrants and increased the number of expulsions with the introduction of various legal mechanisms to migrate. As a result, it is estimated that, between 1998 and 2005, the United States deported around 46,000 gang members to Central American countries (Rodgers and Baird 2015). These gang leaders, upon deportation, organized their own groups and began to commit crimes, particularly in El Salvador; however, slowly, a few years later, the Maras spread across other countries in Central America and southern Mexico (Iñiguez Ramos 2006, 221; Rodgers and Baird 2015).

The war on drugs in Mexico altered the routes of drug trafficking and the balances of power between criminal groups in the region, causing, in turn, an increase in confrontations for territorial control, a better organization of these groups, and an increase in the presence and use of more sophisticated and larger caliber weapons (ACAPS 2014). The presence and strengthening of gangs in Central America have resulted in great fear of forced recruitment of children and youth, or potential sexual abuse of women and adolescents and fear of reprisals for non-payment of extortions. Forced migration is part of the humanitarian impact that occurs because of the resurgence of urban violence and violence related to drug trafficking in the region. A part of the population tends to move internally and others (the majority) internationally through asylum and irregular migration. Yet rather than offering humanitarian solutions to a crisis that the United States helped create, the last administrations have slashed refugee admissions, increased detention capacity, expedited deportations, and expanded efforts to stop people from reaching the United States (Goodman 2020, 187).

Cartel violence

Cartel violence, also defined as "narco-violence" by Campbell and Hansen (2014, 159), includes instances of mass killings, decapitation, and other forms of vicious mutilation and dismemberment, systematic and gruesome torture, rape and other forms of sexual abuse, immolation of bodies, car bombing, the placement of cadavers in public places, hanging from bridges and buildings, and countless forms of theatrical and choreographed murders and mutilations (Campbell 2014, 65–66). Therefore, narco-violence in Mexico engages in ultra-violent warfare against each other and the use of material and symbolic violence against the police, the military, and civil society (Astorga 2012). Mexican drug cartels have expanded exponentially since the 1990s because of three main reasons: the downfall of the major Colombian cartels, the increase in trade between the United States and Mexico facilitated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the new neoliberal economic policies in Mexico (Campbell and Hansen 2014; Astorga 2012; Zarate Ruiz and Lopez-Leon 2017).

In addition to controlling the proceeds of the lucrative illegal narcotics trade, cartel violence in Mexico is also a fight for local and regional political control by non-state actors. In Tamaulipas, cartel groups – besides activities such as drug sales, prostitution, or human trafficking, seek to govern, appropriating state and local government functions (Campbell and Hansen 2014; Slack 2019; Correa-Cabrera 2017).

Narco-violence in Mexico is planned and organized, not simply spontaneous or random; it is an act of revenge and a retribution-oriented act of violence that responds to perceived social inequality, trauma, abuse, marginalization, frustration, and humiliation (Campbell and Hansen 2014, 162). It is violence committed primarily by young males, many of whom are poor and socially deprived. It could be further argued that drug war murders, because of the excessive

violence they employ, are always in some form symbolic acts, including decapitation and other forms of bodily mutilation, decoration or strategic placement of bodies, as well as timing of killings to maximize public impact and fear (Campbell and Hansen 2014; Campbell 2014). Inside the Matamoros and Reynosa migrant camps, the everyday occurrence of direct cartel violence and symbolic acts of violence produce fear and control. Those acts of violence became habitual mostly due to the infiltration of cartel members inside the camps, cartel alliances with local governments, and because the Mexican government has been deliberately isolating the camps from the public eye. Consequently, dozens of women have been raped, people constantly disappeared, and several bodies were found in the river as a message to the camp inhabitants of who is in control of the area and the border crossings.

An example is the murder of one of the leaders of the Guatemalan migrants. In an act of desperation, he unsuccessfully tried to cross the border with his family without paying the fee to the cartel. A few days later, his dead body was found in the river, visually beaten. This act of terror is a clear example of how cartel forces use violent symbolic messages to inflict fear and control.

Legal violence

Drawing on structural and symbolic violence, Menjívar and Abrego (2011) use the analytic category "legal violence" to capture the normalized but cumulatively injurious effects of the law on Central American immigrants. Their work brings a grounded analysis of immigrants' experiences and the effects of an increasingly fragmented and arbitrary field of immigration law gradually intertwined with criminal law. The main objective of legal violence scholarship is to analyze how immigrants in tenuous legal statuses experience current immigration laws in qualitatively different and more negative ways than in recent past (2011, 1383). For example, the

definition of a "successful" migration today, compared to 20 years ago, has been reduced to simply surviving the crossing. Notably, this theoretical lens makes visible forms of violence inherent in the gradual intertwining of immigration and criminal law, particularly when these become normalized and accepted. Following this argument, we can analyze current immigration policies such as deportation procedurals, restriction of asylum, or MPP practices as examples of legal violence. These expressions of legal violence have the primary goal to deter movement, at the cost of a cumulative production of violence and the increasing presence of death as two of its most prominent consequences.

Everyday Violence

Nancy Scheper-Hughes first addressed everyday violence to emphasize the production of social indifference to extreme suffering through institutional processes and discourses. The concept was later discussed by Bourgois (2004, 426) as the daily practices of violence on a micro-interactional level, such as interpersonal, domestic, and delinquent. The concept focuses on the individual lived experience that normalizes brutalities and terror at the community level and creates a common sense or ethos of violence (Bourgois 2004, 426). In short, everyday violence may refer to incorporating different forms of violence into daily practices. For example, structural racism can cause a system of inequalities that become embodied as racial/ethnic inequalities invisible to its victims (Sabo, Shaw, Ingram, Teufel-Shone, Carvajal, de Zapien, et al. 2014). As observed in my fieldwork, the enforcement of policies to prevent people from Central America and the Caribbean from requesting asylum places migrants at high risk for their lives. These policies leave asylum seekers in a vulnerable position, with visible manifestations of everyday violence by pushing them into contexts where they become easy targets for criminal groups and organized drug cartels.

A web framework for examining a continuum of violence on the U.S-Mexico border

As mentioned before, my goal is to uncover insights into the scope, forms, and conditions of violence and to present an analysis of how different social structures and actors perpetrate violence. The aim is to achieve a more comprehensive study of violence that accounts for a multi-layered analysis of how immigration policies created the conditions for the rise of migrant camps on the Mexican side of the border.

There is no predetermined order in how all the multiple actors will trigger violence in the continuum. However, I want to purposely arrange them to better understand how they are constituted and their role inside the web. To achieve this, I first present an analytical framework based on acts of individual, collective, clandestine, and state violence.

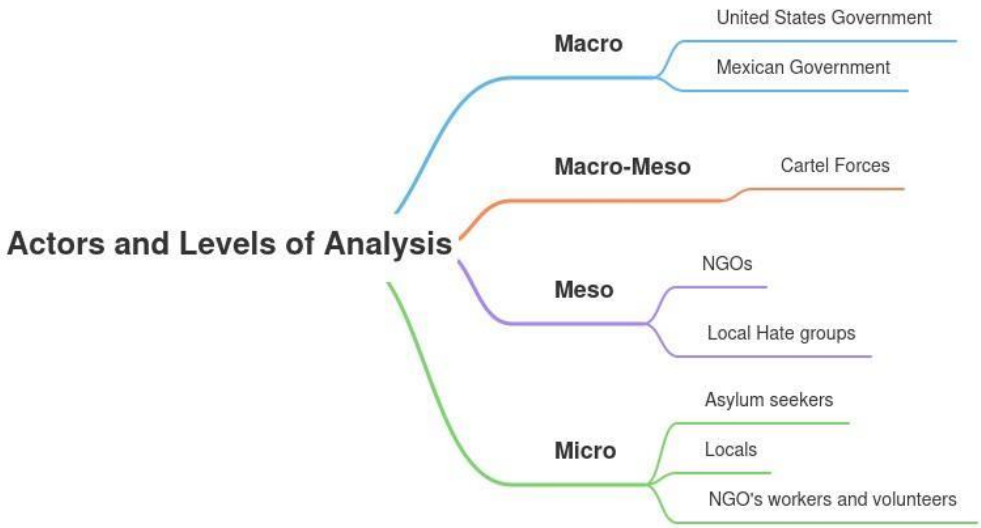

Figure 8. Actors and levels of analysis in Matamoros and Reynosa Tamaulipas

Source: Own elaboration based on the data obtained in the study

At the macro level, I analyze state-generated laws and practices of immigration control, border enforcement, and security policies exercised by the United States and the Mexican governments perpetrating acts of social, legal, and political violence against migrants. At an intermediate level and adopting the definition of Della Porta (2013) of clandestine political violence, I include

cartel forces as collective actors of clandestine violence. Because inside the camps, cartels exercise power and authority beyond and within the state system, their power source is at the same time trans-governmental and confined under state control[6]. As such, I placed them as a macro-meso actor who can operate both at the state and non-governmental levels. At the meso level, I identified two different groups of actors. First, the non-governmental organizations involved in humanitarian work inside the camp and sporadic hate groups that perform acts of racial and xenophobic violence against migrants. Finally, at the individual level, I focus the analysis on NGO's workers and volunteers, locals, and asylum seekers, which I distinguish based on gender, age, and social capital.

A continuum of violence as a widening web in sites of displacement

Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois assert that the definition of violence defies easy categorizations, defining it as a "slippery concept - nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive" (2004, 1). The reason why violence is defined as reproductive is that violence can breed itself, commonly illustrated by the phrase “violence begets violence.” For example, structural violence causes people to suffer indirectly by preventing them from meeting their basic needs (poverty, social exclusion, or humiliation). Hence, the suffering inflicted by poverty and humiliation in a household can inevitably translate into intimate or domestic violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 1). Another example is legal violence, which analyzes how immigrants in tenuous legal statuses experience current immigration laws in qualitatively more negative ways than in the recent past (Abrego and Menjívar 2011, 1383). Particularly when these

[6] The effects of cartel violence can be studied from a collective or an individual perspective. For the purposes of this research (and the limitations I have to access cartel members as individuals) I will use *cartel forces* as a collective actor.

policies become normalized and accepted, like the existence of migrant camps due to the enforcement of immigration policies such as deportation procedures or asylum restrictions, in the forms of MPP practices or Title 42 expulsions. These forms of damaging effects usually carry non-physical injuries that are more enduring and traumatic than those caused by direct violence and produce and reproduce other forms of violence such as human trafficking or sexual violence against migrant women.

A conceptualization of violence in a context of asylum denial, militarized borders, and an ongoing drug war should engage with an intersectional approach. These different contextual aspects embody multiple forms of violence that never occur in isolation but are instead intertwined. To illustrate, observing the reasons to migrate can help identify the everyday economic or political violence most migrants experience in their home countries, experiences that are a core reason for fleeing. It is also possible to observe the physical pain, injury, and death some migrants encounter during their journeys at the hands of drug cartels, smugglers, local police, ICE agents, or border patrol officers. Likewise, other forms of symbolic violence are engendered from the social consequences of public humiliation, stigmatization, and exclusion experienced by migrants living in temporal tent camps. Moreover, deportees also face legal and structural violence when they are separated from their families and lives (París Pombo 2010; Boehm and Terrio 2019) or when they must re-assimilate back into a country that most of them no longer recognize as their home (Cornelius, Fitzgerald, and Borger 2009). In addition to these forms of violence is the underlying presence of everyday physical violence and the constant fear of violence propelled by cartel forces (Slack 2019; Correa-Cabrera 2014).

As a result, the conceptual framework I propose includes recognizing a nonlinear reproductive interpretation of violence defined by different authors as chains, mirrors, spirals,

webs, or a continuum of violence. These different social dimensions and representations of violence are interconnected (Bourgois 2004). For this research, I intersect two of these conceptualizations: violence as a continuum and violence as a web.

The idea of a continuum of violence is anchored on feminist analyses (Ferris 1990; Cockburn 2017; Krause 2015; True 2010) of women living in refugee camps and zones of conflict to illustrate gender power relations and how gender links violence at different points on a scale reaching from the personal to the international (Cockburn, Giles, and Hyndman 2004). The concept emphasizes cultures and, therefore, continuity between relations and events, highlighting the understanding that violence flows through all processes of peace and war, pre-war and postwar. Finally, the continuum of violence runs through the social, the economic, and the political since gender relations are like a linking thread along which violence runs (Cockburn, Giles, and Hyndman 2004, 44). Another example of the use of the continuum of violence is the work of de Bayard de Volo and Hall (2015). They use the continuum of violence to better understand the relationships between the risk factors and gender harassment discussed above and intramilitary sexual assault. However, they emphasize how the continuum can be used to gendered violence in contexts beyond the military; consequently, their framework highlights relationships between forms of violence that are commonly understood as gendered (sexual assault and domestic violence) and those that are not (2015, 884).

Cockburn (2017, 357) acknowledges that the continuum is intersected by where the violence occurs, how violence is inflicted, and how it manifests: direct or indirect, cultural or institutional. Hence, paraphrasing Cockburn, if violence is a continuum, our analysis must observe many places, at many levels, and on many problems simultaneously. Figure 9 illustrates how I use the idea of a continuum of violence emulating the peace, war, pre-war, and post-war

process following three instances of the migration process under MPP and Title 42: pre-migration, waiting time inside the camp, and post-migration:

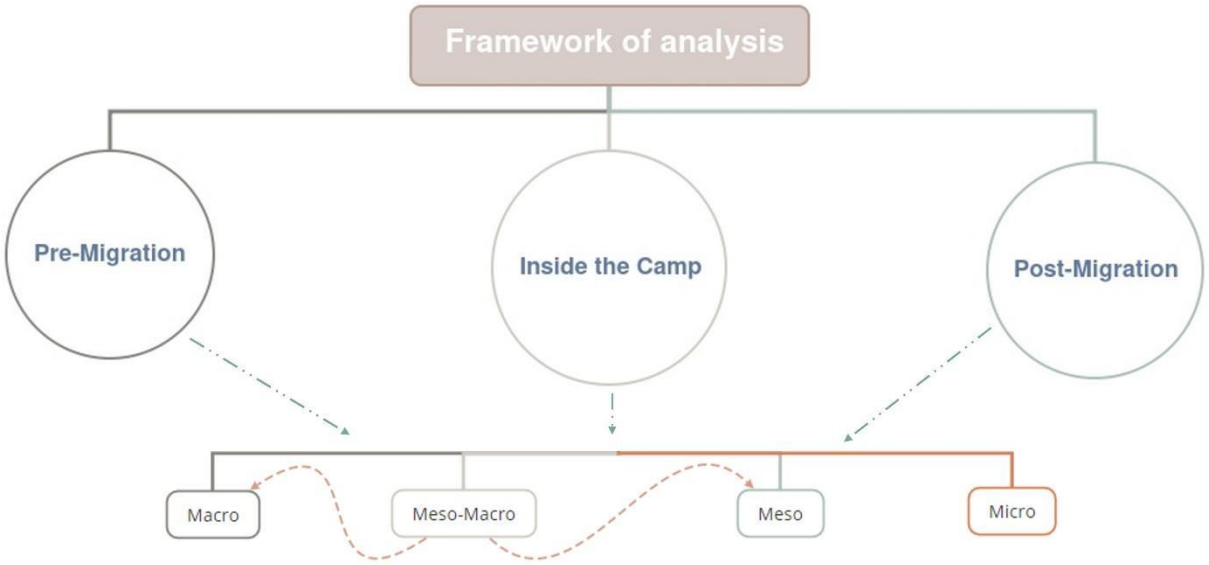

Figure 9. A framework of continuum of violence at the migration journey

Source: Own elaboration

Alternatively, Turpin and Kurtz introduce another interesting framework to analyze violence (1997), theorizing violence as a web and highlighting the interrelationship among personal, collective, national, and global levels of violence, emphasizing the interpersonal to global connections. As with the continuum, this conceptual framework also draws attention to the idea that violence is not limited in spatial and temporal terms and that violent effects occur on a web of causal connections between personal-level and global-level structures, processes, and behaviors (Turpin 208). In my analytical work, I borrow from the feminist approximation of violence as a continuum and Turpin and Kurtz's (1997) idea of violence as a web. As shown in

Figure 10, I establish a practical system to represent the continuum of violence in a cyclic multidimensional web that can disentangle how the multiple (macro, meso, and micro) linkages in the study of violence operate.

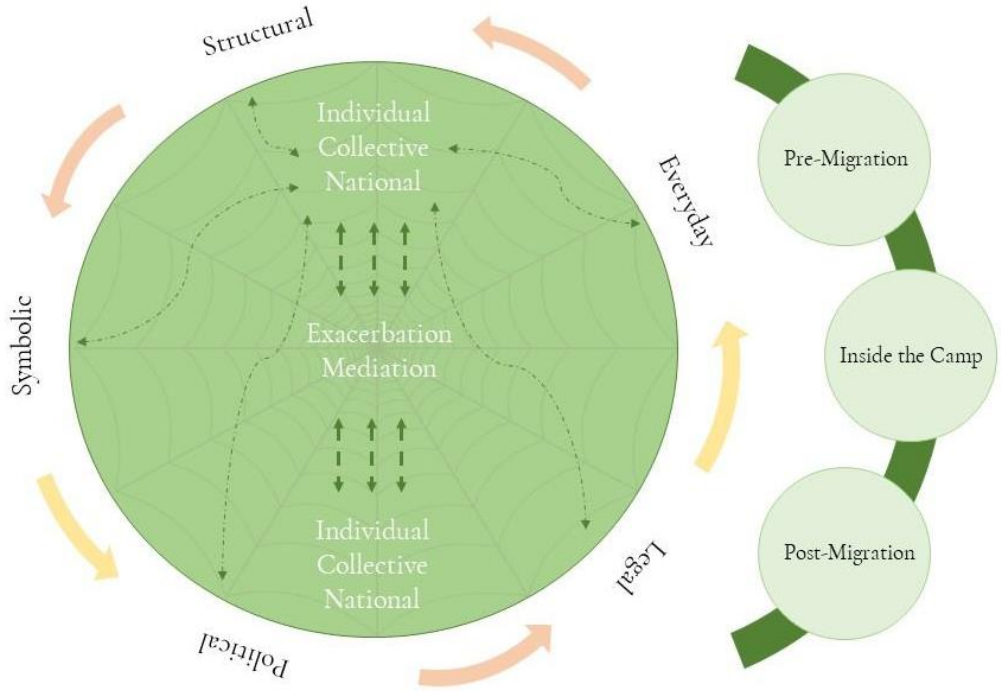

Figure 10. The continuum of violence in a cyclic multidimensional web

Source: Own elaboration

Consequently, my goal is to unearth insights into the scope, forms, and conditions of violence and present an analysis of how violence is perpetrated by different social structures and actors, increasing the understanding of how violence prevails in migrant camps. In my research, I discuss patterns of violence that include social, political, and economic forces that reveal the prevalence of a continuum of violence into a widening web.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An empirical objective of this dissertation is to illustrate how the everyday practice of policies of immigration control exacerbates violent contexts and violent experiences on the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition, I discuss the different factors and social mechanisms asylum seekers use to contravene or mitigate violence in migrant camps. Finally, I show the violent implications of the normalization of violence and the continuance of immigration policies that restrict migration and asylum. This chapter details how I framed my research methodology to meet these empirical objectives and negotiate complex research parameters where borders, violence, and conflict interact. Addressing violence, forced migration, and marginalization necessitates sensitive methodological approaches based on human agency, egalitarian research relationships, and empathy. To achieve this, I decided to advocate for an ethnographic approach that would question power in relation to the production of knowledge. In this spirit, and inspired by feminist scholarship such as Naples (2010), Scheper-Hughes (1995), Davis (2013), and Harrison (2011), I decided to engage in an ethnographic work based on an activist research agenda.

The initial steps

I started preliminary fieldwork on the U.S-Mexico border in 2016 to examine how mass deportation practices produce or perpetuate various forms of violence towards Mexican deportees. During that time, I focused most of my observations on migrant shelters located in the Mexican states of Baja California, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. In Baja California, I visited two shelters in Tijuana since this city is one of the most notorious metropolitan areas of the border; later, I decided to visit a shelter in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon since the region is an important

transit port for Central American migrants. Then, I looked in on different shelters in Tamaulipas to contrast my observations in Tijuana and Monterrey. After a conscious analysis of these observations, I decided to focus my research on Tamaulipas and continue fieldwork there.

Between 2016 and 2018, I observed three migrant shelters in Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas. During that time, I worked as a volunteer and had the opportunity to conduct interviews with Mexican deportees, administrators, and workers at different migrant shelters. However, throughout the summer of 2018, I noticed how Matamoros was experiencing a notable presence of Central American asylum seekers and how by 2019, they were living in improvised camps at the edge of the river. These observations dramatically changed the original goals of my research, which at first explored only the damaging effects of mass deportation in the area. Since then, I decided to focus exclusively on the city of Matamoros and have been observing different migrant shelters and the migrant camp located at the Gateway International Bridge. Still, in March of 2021, after the first version of MPP ended and the Matamoros camp was entirely erased by the Mexican government; people continued being expelled by CBP but instead to Reynosa, where a new migrant camp started growing inside a small Plaza in front of the Hidalgo International Bridge. Therefore, I decided to continue some observations and collaborations with the NGOs providing aid to the Reynosa shelters and the camp during the second half of 2021.

Since 2016, I have continuously reflected on my positionality and how I wanted to approach my ethnographic work. In the beginning, I followed a more standard ethnographic approach following Paul Willis and Mats Trondman's (2000, 5) conception in their manifesto for Ethnography. They define Ethnography as "a methodology that draws on a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, and on richly writing up the encounter,

respecting, recording, representing, at least partly in its terms, the irreducibility of human experience." My goal was to develop a design perusing a methodology that would help me to highlight the importance of theory as an outcome of my ethnographic study. However, something changed as the ethnographic process unfolded, and I became more immersed in the fieldwork. I realized that studying violence, asylum, and migration needed a more profound commitment and a process of continuous reflection on my role as a researcher. During this process, everything began to adjust, and after a course of profound self-reflexivity, I started questioning myself as an ethnographer and the role I should take inside the migrant shelters and camps. Thus, I redirected my research methodology, looking for a process of knowledge production that could help me disentangle issues of power and move toward social justice. To do so, I decided to engage in a methodological design based on a decolonial ethnography, employing a feminist activist research agenda.

According to Jennifer Manning (2022, 39), a decolonial feminist ethnography is an "empowering research methodology that can situate the knowledge, lived experiences and worldviews of 'others' who are often marginalized in management research, thought and practice." Bejarano, López Juárez, Miangos García, and Goldstein (2019) explain decolonizing research as a process of decentering the academic project from what they call the "academic-capitalist machine;" a piece of machinery that remains tied to unrecognized privilege.

The theoretical and epistemological origins of decolonial feminism are based on the work of Latin American theorists such as Escobar (2007, 2010), Mignolo (2009, 2011), and Quijano (2000, 2007). They critique Eurocentric hegemonic patterns of knowledge and claims of universality. For Escobar (2010: 9), "in universalizing itself and treating other groups as different and inferior through knowledge-power relations, the dominant form of Euro-modernity has

denied the ontological difference of the others." Hence, decolonial theory challenges an ontology of modernity by arguing that the universality of Western ontology is based on the displacement of the actions, ideas, and history of 'the Other' (Manning 2018, 312–13). Therefore, decolonial ethnography proposes to detach the production of knowledge from hegemonic patterns coming from the West; engaging with voices, perspectives, and narratives of those who have been marginalized; and looking towards an intellectual liberating practice that requires the recognition of privilege to dismantle the subject/object dichotomy embedded within most of the modern sciences.

The feminist activist ethnographic project, as defined by Dána-Ain Davis (2013, 36), is a process of drawing on methodological strategies that embrace the everyday experiences of people -especially those forced to live on the margins- as epistemologically valid. Davis argues that feminist activist ethnographers should take up the activism project, either through a critique of complex issues or intervening in ways that make sense of particular political moments. Deschener and Dorion (2020) highlight the importance of engaging with feminist standpoint epistemologies and decolonial perspectives to situate the researcher in a dialogue within the field to avoid a replication of colonialist research dynamics to use ethnography in non-exploitative ways.

The pivoting

What precisely triggered my positionality as a feminist activist ethnographer? As mentioned above, since the beginning, I have wanted to conduct my research being attentive to diversity and focusing on those experiencing oppressive circumstances caused by imbalances in power relations. But it was not until I was genuinely immersed in my fieldwork that I understood the

need for something else, a more profound commitment, a social and political commitment. Specifically, two things happened that were definitive to my decision: Valeria and "The book."

Valeria and the book

First, I would like to introduce how I met Valeria and the profound impact she had on me and my research. Everything started when I received an email from a friend who works for a legal immigration office in Colorado. She was looking for a person who was willing to help a Mexican mother who was recently deported without the U.S. birth certificate of her newborn.

The task of retrieving the U.S. birth certificate was not easy. First, the pro bono lawyers in the U.S needed a bilingual person familiar with the area and the organizational procedures on the border to arrange a meeting partway on an international bridge (Brownsville-Matamoros), with a Texas notary to certify the documents required to request the baby's birth certificate remotely. The only way for the process to be valid was for the notary to be standing in Texas territory in front of the mother while she signed the paperwork, but she could not be on U.S. soil because she was already deported. Therefore, the request for me was first to convince the Mexican authorities to let the mother and I walk the international bridge on the Mexican side until we reached the limit of both countries. Then, a notary and the mother needed to sign the paperwork quickly without alerting CBP officers guarding the opposite side of the bridge. I was hesitant initially, as a non-U. S. citizen, I was afraid of how CBP would react, and as a researcher, I was not sure how it would impact my position in the field. I did it anyway, and that is how I met Valeria.

Valeria was one of the multiple pregnant women who tried to cross the border undocumented to request asylum. Her hope was not to be sent back to Mexico on a late

pregnancy or with a newborn. However, when she went into labor, she was taken to a hospital, handcuffed, and guarded by a CBP officer. The rest of her family was deported within hours. Less than 48 hours after giving birth to her baby, they both were dropped off on the Mexican side. She was deported without the baby's birth certificate, unable to obtain medical care due to the lack of documentation from the baby and banned from the camp by Mexican immigration authorities as punishment for attempting an undocumented crossing.

I remember crossing the border around 6 am to figure out all the arrangements with the Mexican authorities and to pick up Valeria from our meeting point. The notary would be in the middle of the bridge at 9 am. I met Valeria around 8 am on the public Plaza in front of the International Bridge. I recognized her immediately. She was a very skinny and short woman in her early 20s carrying a folder full of documents. She was wearing a face mask, a pair of blue jeans, and a warm pink sweater, standing right at the edge of the Plaza. Valeria was shaking. We were ahead of time, so I asked her to breathe in and out a few times. We talked for about a half-hour until she was feeling less stressed. She told me she was terrified of even seeing CBP agents. After telling me everything she experienced at the delivery room and during her deportation process, I can attest she had multiple reasons to feel that way. I took her arm and asked her to walk with me. We walked together over half of the bridge until we found the division line between Mexico and the United States. The notary was there. She was a very kind woman accompanied by her daughter. They explained to Valeria what she needed to sign. While she was signing, a CBP officer started walking our way. Valeria was not the only nervous one; I was also anxious. Fortunately, Valeria and the notary, signed all the paperwork before the CBP officer reached us. Then the four of us walked together into Mexico. Our endeavor succeeded. As

women, we felt so empowered. For me, it felt like a small victory, but two years later, even thinking about it gave me goosebumps.

That afternoon I spent hours writing fieldnotes about what happened. I did not use my usual field notebook because I was unsure if I could record what happened in my research notes. Was this research, or was it something different? After what I experienced with Valeria, I couldn't stop questioning what I wanted to be: a researcher or an activist? Could I be both at the same time? The argument in my head was not taking me anywhere until Valeria called me two days after. She wanted to offer me help with my research.

Since COVID-19 hit the city, the Mexican immigration officials and some American NGO leaders relocated the migrant camp from the Plaza to a nearby levee locally known as "*El Bordo*." Mexican immigration officers fenced off the area and placed guard posts to control all entrances and exits. During that process, I was not allowed inside the encampment. I did not know any American NGOs, and my connections were left out of the camp. So, for a few months, I was left in the dark, trying to find a way to reenter the camp, until Valeria got an idea and called me.

Valeria wanted to introduce me to her friends inside the camp. She called some of them to meet with me in the Plaza right outside the camp to interview them. She brought the camp to me. A few weeks later, I got full access to the camp after volunteering with a women-led NGO that I contacted and wanted to support my research, but that was after Valeria's idea and after I found "The book."

That takes me to the second factor. With all the questions about who I wanted to be and how I wanted to continue working with my research, I remembered the work of Faye Harrison (2011) on decolonized anthropology, solidarity, or the way she frames it as Anthropology of

Liberation. I was digging into her work when I found a book edited by Christa Craven and Dána-Ain Davis named: Feminist Activist Ethnography (2013). After reading this book, things became discernible in my head. I understood how to bring conceptual, theoretical, and ethical perspectives into conversation as part of knowledge production. It also reminded me of Leacock (1987) and Haraway's (1988) reflections of objectivity and politics as domains that are not mutually exclusive (Craven et al. 2013). It was possible to investigate a complex social phenomenon combining scientific rigor with political commitment while prioritizing the oppressed, vulnerable, and marginalized grassroots actions. This is how I decided to redirect my methodology following a decolonial ethnography approach by employing a feminist activist research agenda.

Positionality and the fluidity of the insider/outsider

Following Naples (2013, 49), outsiderness and insiderness are not fixed or static. Instead, community members have ever-shifting and permeable social locations differentially experienced and expressed. This assumption about the fluidity of the insider/outsider distinction was a critical methodological tool that allowed me to acknowledge my fluid position inside the camps. For Naples (2013, 49), there are three methodological aspects embedded in this not-fixed position between the insider/outsider debate: first, as ethnographers, we are never entirely outside or inside the "community"; second, our relationship to the community is never expressed in general terms but is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated, in particular, during everyday interactions; and third, these interactions are themselves enacted in shifting relationships among community residents.

These negotiations were a constant during my time in the field. I needed to re-examine my positionality continuously, prinicpally, due to how fast the circumstances were moving because of public policy and the dramatic changes that occurred in the Matamoros Camp after COVID-19 (e.g., the relocation). People living and working in the camps were constantly fluctuating. The situation and needs inside the camp were constantly changing at a speed that was somedays hard to follow. Even having access to the camp was very challenging at different research moments. Second, even though I was born in Matamoros, it did not help to become an insider. On the contrary, I felt like a "newcomer" inside the Matamoros camp for a long time.

For example, after the relocation, most of those providing aid inside the camp belonged to White American NGOs, and only a few were Spanish speakers. I was one of the few bilingual Mexican people working inside the camp, with most NGOs being white and speaking only English. Being Mexican placed me in an ambivalent position between an outsider and an insider. When I was with NGO staff and asylum seekers, I felt culturally closer to asylum seekers since I constantly felt ethnically different from the NGO workers. We had a good relationship, but it was hard to connect with them culturally. Still, when I was alone with the asylum seekers, the closeness we felt among the Americans was blurred. Most of the asylum seekers I met for the first time spoke English to me. It was not until we directly interacted that they realized I was Mexican. They perceived me as racially ambiguous (i.e., "light-skinned") and a highly educated woman.

Nevertheless, even when there was no language barrier between the asylum seekers and myself, I needed to examine other parts of my identity and bring to balance to have a more egalitarian relationship. For example, the simple fact that after a journey of work, I could come back home safely. And more importantly, what I called home when I was doing my research was

on the U.S side. In addition, I needed to constantly step back and listen, to put aside my education as a sociologist and pay attention to what people needed to say and how they wanted to say it so that I could transmit it.

Hence, a fundamental part of my ethnographic approach was the continuous recognition of the substantial power differentials and the multiplicity of privileges I embody (in terms of race, class, or legal status). I was both an insider and an outsider. That feeling was always inside me because I was born in Matamoros, and I thought I was doing fieldwork in a place that I knew. However, I rapidly realized I knew the physical area where the camp was established and the city's social context where the camp was formed, but I had no previous knowledge of what it means to be in and to do research work on a migrant camp. This is something I genuinely worked with by talking to the NGO volunteers and reading the literature on egalitarian ethnographic approaches and research related to other migrant camps.

For several months, I was a "newcomer" in my hometown. I imagined I would be working as an insider in my hometown, but that was not always the case. The camp was in Matamoros, but it was undoubtedly not Matamoros; another reason I decided to work with an ethnographic approach that advocates for a persistent questioning of privilege and power concerning knowledge production. In this spirit and inspired by feminist scholarship (Naples 2013; Scheper-Hughes 1995; Grazioli 2021; Harrison 2013), I decided to develop an ethnographic work based on an activist research agenda that could help me to represent the participants in the study and their knowledge with fairness and respect.

Data Collection

My activist approach to ethnography implies an immersion in the field and the practices that I observe; it is about forging solidarity with resisting others through critical collaboration. (Routledge 2013, 251). Inside the camp, I worked with asylum seekers and multiple NGOs providing services to asylum seekers. I did manual work; procured and distributed donations, including air mattresses for pregnant women, clothes, blankets, and tents. I also volunteered with women asylum seekers cooking and distributing food and collaborating to create safe spaces for migrant women. During meetings, I served as a translator to improve the communication process between American and Mexican NGOs; I developed multiple workshop materials on local politics and migration policies for NGO workers and volunteers. I supported lawyers inside the camp to train asylum seekers on how to register through "Conecta," a service set up by UNHCR to be processed into the United States after MPP was "winding down." I became part of the Welcoming committee in Brownsville, which welcomed asylum seekers under MPP allowed to pursue asylum in the U.S. In addition, I led an interdisciplinary grant in collaboration between the University of Colorado departments of Engineering and Sociology, local NGOs, and asylum seekers to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as site infrastructure, design, and construction in camps and shelters in Matamoros and Reynosa. During this process of ethnographic engagement, I was always committed to building knowledge *from belo*w, that is, in collaboration with those whom the research is being developed (Villalón 2010). I continuously asked questions, listened, learned, and reformulated my initial assumptions.

Alongside this work, I did ethnographic walks, captured landscape and aerial pictures, wrote down fieldnotes, and directly participated in everyday life. Additionally, interviews were a relevant data collection tool that I divided into 'formal' in-depth interviews and unstructured

interactions of a different kind. I directed these formal interviews as conversations following a semi-structured format where I identified themes I wanted to explore deeper. During the entire research process, I constantly revisited those topics and how I conducted our conversations based on the interactions and feedback I received from those who agreed to be part of this research project.

Ethnographic and aerial photography

I engaged with ethnographic photography and drone footage as part of my research methodology. The use of these two techniques was central in my data collection and analysis. I use photography to gather and present ethnographic information and insight. As Harper states in the book Image-Based Research (1998), "Images allow us to make statements which words cannot make, and the world we see is saturated with sociological meaning." Thus, images enlarge our consciousness and the possibilities for our sociology.

I captured monthly landscape and aerial photographs to record how the camps in Matamoros and Reynosa were changing over time. My goal was to register changes in population density, infrastructure, and other more subtle modifications such as a progressive deterioration of tents or the implementation of gardening as examples of lasing-temporariness. I accomplished this combined effort in collaboration with Solidarity Engineering, with which I have worked with since September of 2020. They taught me how to operate drones, work with drone photography, and share their aerial photographic archive of the Matamoros and Reynosa camps. I have 500 ethnographic photos and monthly drone footage from August 2020 to January 2022.

About Ethnographic Photography

The following images exemplify how important photography is in my work. The picture on the left was taken in May 2019, a month after Marina, an asylum seeker, was sent to Mexico under MPP.

Image 7. Evolution of kitchens in the Matamoros Camp

Given the scarcity of food supply, families began to build primitive clay ovens to cook their food, trying to be less dependent on the aid of NGOs. However, clay ovens were the first step in a more complex organizational process. I took the photo on the right in December 2020, after COVID-19 and the process of camp endurance where no one knew how long the waiting time would be prolonged. Therefore, these two images are a methodological tool to demonstrate how asylum seekers develop strategies to improve their living conditions and build dignified places to live. These two images are faithful expressions of the evolution of the space and infrastructure as forms to mitigate violence in migrant camps.

Regarding drone footage, aerial photos allowed me to capture the detailed context of the growing progression of the camps over time. For example, Image 8 portrays the Reynosa camp in August and December of 2021.

Image 8. The Reynosa camp. August and December 2021

Source: Wesley Shugart-Schmidt, Solidarity Engineering

These two photos, at the time of the analysis, allowed me to identify infrastructure changes, the use of different materials to improve housing conditions, and even population density every month, but more importantly, it allowed me to connect these changes to immigration and security policies. This footage graphically shows us the population explosion in the camp related to the expulsion of the Haitian migrant community from their encampment in Del Rio, Texas, that happened in September of 2020, right in between when these two photos were captured.

In terms of how I intersected activist ethnography with the use of drone footage, Image 9 is a good example on how to turn raw data into a useful and collaborative tool to improve living

conditions and organizational protocols among NGOs. In my volunteer work with Christa Cook, founder of Solidarity Engineering, I explored the use of drone footage as a primary data source to address sanitation, water quality, and stormwater management.

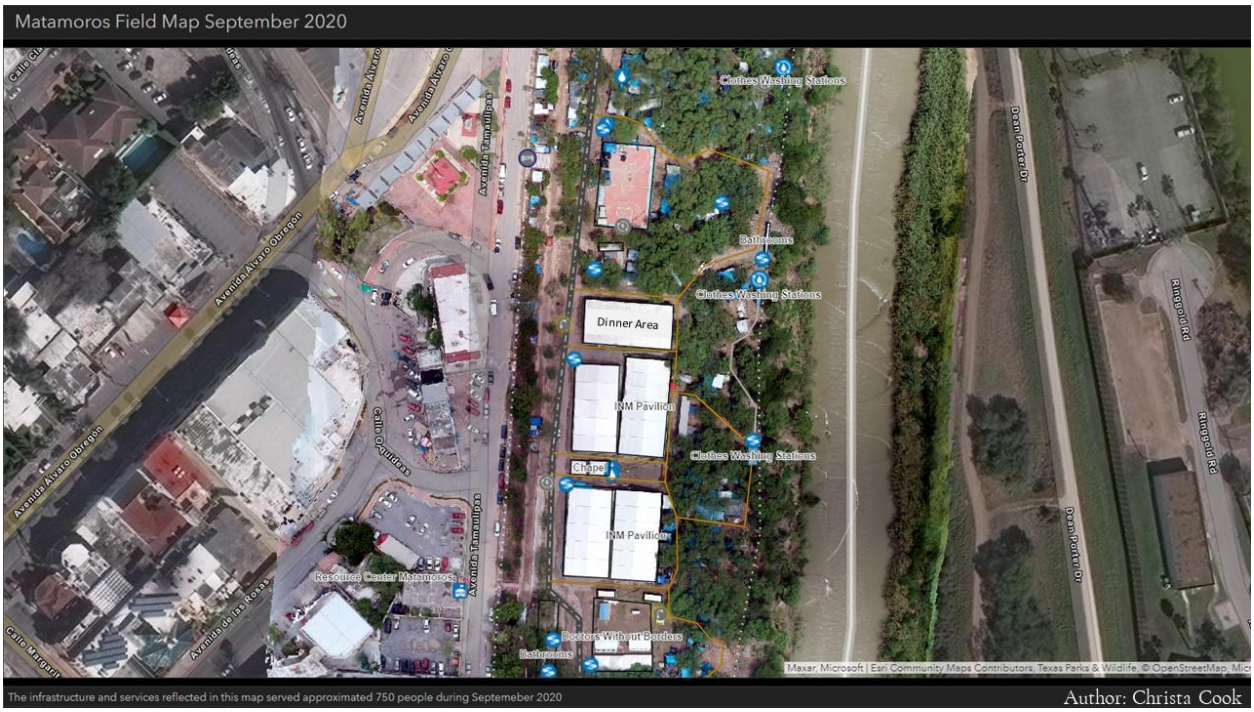

Image 9. Drone footage of the Matamoros camp. September 2020

Source: Christa Cook, Solidarity Engineering

The map above displays the other infrastructure and services available in the camp during September 2020. Working with this kind of mapping was very helpful to organize camp infrastructures such as porta-potties and drainage, as well as coordinating donations, building washing stations, and installing purified water tanks.

The following section presents the different groups of participants in the research project, and how I managed other methodological strategies such as in-depth interviews and site observations.

About the participants

- Personnel and volunteers in migrant organizations and shelters. Adults (age 18+) who have been working in the migrant shelter or migrant camps.
- Deportees and asylum seekers (18+) living in migrant shelters or migrant camps who were recently deported to Mexico.
- People from Matamoros (age 18+) residing in the area, who have lived there all/most of their lives.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the different NGOs working inside the Matamoros Camp that I was able to identify. The organizations marked with one star are the ones I volunteered with at some point in the research; those marked with two stars are the ones I more closely collaborated with.

Table 4. Organizations identified as being part of the Matamoros Camp

Name of the Organization	**Service provided**
*Angry tías and abuelas **	Health, safety, and basic needs
*Team Brownsville **	Food, water, shelter, and basic needs
Practice Mercy	Food, water, shelter, and basic needs
Puentes de Cristo	Food, water, shelter, and basic needs
*Resource Center Matamoros ***	Food, water, shelter, and basic needs
*The Sidewalk School ***	Education, food, water, shelter, and basic needs
Casa Bugambilias	Shelter for women and newborns
*Casa del Migrante San Juan Diego y San Francisco de Asís, A.C. ***	Shelter, and basic necessities
*Catholic Charities **	Legal services, shelter, and basic needs
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)	Legal services
*Texas Civil Rights Project ***	Legal services
*Project Corazon ***	Legal services
Doctors Without Borders	Medical services
*General Resource Management ***	Medical services

Solidarity Engineering **	Site infrastructure, water filtration, sanitation, stormwater management, GIS mapping

Interviews

I conducted three different types of 'formal' in-depth interviews: 1) NGOs leaders, volunteers, workers, and administrators; 2) Mexican deportees and asylum seekers; and 3) Local community members in Matamoros.

Table 5. Description of the participants in the study

Type of participant	**Number of participants**
1. NGOs leaders, volunteers, workers, and administrators	10
2. Mexican deportees and asylum seekers	45
3. Local community	15
	70

I first focused on NGO leaders, volunteers, workers, and administrators at the migrant shelters and migrant camps. I conducted ten formal interviews to capture significant local context and unmediated experiences that helped me understand the struggles and work done directly by grassroots organizations at a ground level to recreate a story of how immigration enforcement policies have shaped violent migratory experiences in Tamaulipas. However, the most powerful exchanges, understandings, and knowledge came from unstructured interactions and active participation with the NGOs during my volunteer work.

Another set of formal interviews involved fifteen Mexican deportees at migrant shelters and thirty asylum seekers at the Matamoros migrant camp from Central America, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, and southern Mexico. Initially, I planned to have an even number of interviews with

deportees and asylum seekers. Still, after Title 42 was enforced, and because asylum seekers overcrowded all shelters, the Mexican immigration authorities changed the repatriation protocols and placed all Mexican deportees on buses to the interior of Mexico. Finally, I interviewed 15 individuals from the local community to understand their feelings and reactions regarding immigration and deportation. Talking to this group allowed me to comprehend how local citizens understand and describe the city and their narratives about migratory movements and migrants living in the Matamoros camp.

The interviews were digitally recorded upon previous consent and ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours. All participants gave me informed consent. I did not collect any information that could help identify the people I interviewed or interacted with. All interviews were conducted either in Spanish or in English and were transcribed verbatim; Only selected quotes from the Spanish interviews were translated to English. All the names of the participants were replaced by pseudonyms, except for those who belonged to an NGO, and I was explicitly requested to use their real names.

The conversations covered themes such as the conditions of how people were either deported or expelled into Mexico, family separation, marginalization and stigmatization discourses and their effects (in Mexico and the U.S.), processes of deportation, decision-making process after deportation, reintegration to Mexico, social and political particularities of border cities, immigration laws, immigration status, and changes in their immigration status. In the case of the interviews with administrators, leaders, volunteers, and workers at the migrant shelters, and the community organizations, I asked questions about their daily work, the history of their organization, the organizations' practices, their experiences as part of these organizations, and about their problems, obstacles, risks, and challenges. For the local community, I asked questions

related to the understanding of what it means to live on the border, how immigration enforcement affects their everyday life, what their impressions are regarding deportation/repatriation procedures, the creation of migrant shelters and migrant camps, and what the community used to be like and how it has changed because of the increasing presence of migrants in the area.

Participant observation

With the implementation of the MPP program and Title 42 process, asylum seekers expelled to Mexico lived either on the streets and public plazas, in migrant shelters, precarious camps, or *quarterias*[7]. Therefore, I divided my observations among these places in the cities of Matamoros and Reynosa from 2018 to 2021.

The observations were organized as follows:

1. Participant observations at migrant shelters: I participated as a volunteer in shelters in Reynosa and Matamoros during working hours. The main goals of these observations were 1) to understand social interactions among personnel and users, personnel organization, and internal organizational procedures. 2) To observe deportees and gather an initial understanding of their experiences regarding their transition and deportation process.
2. Participant observation at migrant camps: Inside the camp, I participated as a volunteer during the working hours (from morning to before sunset). I requested permission from the camp leaders to observe the area and disclosed myself as a researcher with every person I interacted

[7] Cheap hotel rooms or condemned apartment buildings where many people are living together.

with. The main goals of these observations were: 1) to understand social interactions among people living at the camps, leaders' organization, and organizational procedures among people at the camp and volunteers, and 2) to observe deportees and asylees gather together as an initial understanding of their violent experiences regarding their process of deportation and asylum.

Fieldnotes

During the whole time of my ethnographic work, I kept fieldwork journals where I wrote detailed fieldnotes as an essential part of interpreting what was meaningful to people living or working at the shelters and migrant camps (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Due to my own safety and to protect the confidentiality of the study participants, I tried not to write extended descriptions while doing fieldwork. Instead, I used two different sets of notebooks. The one used in the camps and shelters only had bullet points with ideas or words to help me remember what I observed or heard in the camp. Once I was in a safe place, either my house or a trusted person's house, I immediately got out a different notebook or my laptop and started writing more detailed accounts of what happened. These notebooks were always kept in a secure place. If I needed to drive a long distance or the line to cross the border was too long, I would dictate notes to myself. I also wrote fieldnotes based on my own reflexivity.

In terms of site observations, everything I wrote was backed up by my camera. I took photos of almost everything I saw, except for portraits of people or any personal items that could help identify anyone inside the camps or the shelters. In summary, I used three sources of information: interviews, field notes of my observations and interviews, and landscape and drone photographs. I used the fieldnotes, in addition to the content of the interviews and the photographs, to start the process of analysis.

Analysis

As mentioned above, the data for my analysis included interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and photographs. I first coded the interviews using a process of in-vivo coding to identify initial themes. In vivo coding is a first cycle coding method where you derive codes from the data itself. In-vivo codes utilize the language and terminology used by the participants rather than alternative researcher-derived methodologies. I used MAXQDA to code all my interview texts, fieldnotes, and photos. As a first step, I created a word cloud to visualize the participants' most common topics and words in the interviews. I followed the same technique with my reflective fieldnotes, where I recorded thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns. After visualizing the word cloud, I used the exact words to develop my in-vivo coding. I linked each photograph to either the fieldnotes or the interviews in MAXQDA. This procedure was incredibly beneficial in completing the visual analysis of the data. As fieldwork and analysis progressed, I reorganized codes to better structure my analysis and adjust my methodology and interview materials. I also used Google Earth and ArcGIS to connect the photos to a map integrating location data, label infrastructure, and demographic changes with the drone photography. Once I completed most of the coding, I started to create mind maps using the different themes and codes to connect them with policy change and theory. I also started writing analytical memos based on the themes that emerged from the codes. These writings formed the basis of the empirical chapters in the dissertation, which I present in the following three chapters.

CHAPTER 5
A WEB OF VIOLENCE

In this chapter, I answer the following question: How is violence perpetrated by different social structures and actors, and in what ways does this shape how violence prevails in migrant camps on the Texas-Tamaulipas border? Based on the proposed theoretical framework and recognizing violence as a complex and slippery phenomenon (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Kilby and Jay 2013; Stanko 2005), in this chapter, I use an individual level of analysis to examine how violence is perpetrated by different social actors and structures, such as national governments, international organizations, organized crime, social inequality, racial discrimination, and sexual abuse. Drawing from interviews, participant observation, and ethnographic photography, this chapter is organized in the form of three cases: Manuel's, Silvia's, and Guadalupe's. Each of these cases illuminates some aspects of violence. Manuel's case, for example, moves around structural, symbolic, legal, and gender violence. I borrow Manuel's narrative to provide analytical examples of how poverty and illiteracy can trigger other forms of violence, such as gang hostility and displacement. Silvia's case examines various physical and psychological effects, including depression, social stigma, rejection, and isolation. Her story also illustrates how migrant women traveling with minor children are more prone to experience extreme forms of violence. Finally, Guadalupe's case portrays how extreme poverty and organized crime persecution intersects. It is also a narrative about the vulnerability, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of migrant teenagers.

In response to the work of scholars such as Cecilia Menjívar (2011), Leisy Ábrego (2011), Wendy Vogt (2013, 2017), Jeremy Slack (2016; 2019, 2015), and Reece Jones (2016) on immigration and violence, I categorized the most predominant types of violence into structural, symbolic, political, legal, and everyday violence. I discuss other specific forms of violence such as poverty or income inequality, racial and gendered violence, cartel violence, family separation and restriction of asylum, and interpersonal and domestic violence, among others. This approach does not look to uncover which forms of violence are more dangerous but to understand how they are mutually constituted and establish the links among them.

Across the three cases, I follow their pre-migration, waiting time inside the camp, and post-migration stages to unpack how the framework of a continuum of violence as a multidimensional web works to understand how violence gravitates throughout the migratory journey. The aim is to disentangle how the multiple linkages in the study of violence operate from the individual level to the meso and macro levels of analysis.

Because the cases of Manuel, Silvia, and Guadalupe are not linear, I created Table 6 to show how the different forms of violence interact throughout the continuum of violence. Using these three cases, I use a gender perspective to show how violence is produced or exacerbated across the continuum on a web of causal connections, highlighting the interrelationship among personal, collective, national, and global levels of analysis (as shown in Figure 10 introduced in Chapter 3).

Table 6. Analytical chart of the web of violence

Stages of Migration	*Pre-migration*				*Transit*	*Inside the Camp*				*Post-Migration*	
	M A N U E L										
Predominant forms of violence	**Structural**				**Political**			**Legal**	**Structural**	**Legal**	**Symbolic**
Specific forms of violence	Displacement	Poverty	Unemployment	Lack of education	Death threats / Gang extortion	Psychological	Gendered/Sexual	Family separation	Economic deprivation	Family separation	Psychological Racial
Levels of analysis	Macro Global/National				Meso Collective	Macro and Macro-Meso National/Collective	Macro-Meso and Micro Collective/Personal	Macro National	Macro and Macro-Meso National/Collective	Macro National	Macro National
Actors involved	Guatemalan government and international community				Organized Crime	United States/Mexican Governments and Mexican Cartels	Mexican Cartels and partners and neighbors	United States Government	United States/ Mexican Governments and Mexican Cartels	United States Government	United States Government
	S I L V I A										
Predominant forms of violence	**Structural**		**Symbolic**		**Political**	**Symbolic**		**Political**		**Legal**	**Political**
Specific forms of violence	Poverty	Unemployment	Lack of social capital	Isolation	Psychological Physical Narco-symbolic	Racial	Class	Kidnapping	Psychological	Starvation	Sexual/Gendered
Levels of analysis	Macro Global/National		Meso - Micro Collective/Personal		Macro - Meso Collective	Macro - Meso National/Collective	Meso Collective	Macro-Meso Collective		Macro - Meso National/Collective	Macro - Meso Collective
Actors involved	Honduras government and international community		Partner, family, neighbors		Mexican cartels and smuggles	Mexican Government American NGOs	American NGOs	Mexican cartels		United States Government International NGOs	Mexican cartels and Mexican immigration officers
	G U A D A L U P E										
Predominant forms of violence	**Structural**				**Political**	**Symbolic**		**Political**	**Structural**	**Legal**	**Symbolic**
Specific forms of violence	Displacement	Poverty			Death threats / Gang extortion	Psychological		Narco-symbolic	Poverty	Racial	Psychological Racial
Levels of analysis	Macro Global/National				Meso Collective	Macro and Macro-Meso National/Collective		Macro-Meso Collective	Macro and Macro-Meso National/Collective	Macro-Micro National/Individual	Macro and Macro-Meso National/Collective
Actors involved	Honduras government and international community				Organized Crime	United States/Mexican Governments and Mexican Cartels		Mexican cartels	United States/ Mexican Governments and Mexican Cartels	CBP officers	American NGOs and CBP officers

Manuel, family separation and trauma

> *Manuel is an agricultural worker from Guatemala. He never learned how to read or write. He fled his country with his 14-year-old daughter because of gang persecution and extreme poverty.*
>
> *After some months in the camp, Manuel decided to use his savings to pay the cartels to take his child across the border "alone." According to Manuel, that was the only way to save her from being sexually abused in the migrant camp.*
>
> *Later, once he crossed the border due to the end of MPP, he was not allowed to see his daughter for over four months.*

In the case of Manuel we can see how, across the continuum, the different forms of violence show macro to micro linkages, with some examples of meso and macro-meso connections. In his pre-migration process, I highlight structural and political forms of violence as the triggers that propelled migration. Inside the camp, symbolic, legal, and structural violence (expressed as gender, psychological, and economic violence) were the more relevant forms in Manuel's narrative. Finally, as part of his post-migration experience, I identified legal and symbolic violence as the most predominant types of violence.

Pre-migration

Manuel fled Guatemala due to structural and political violence. Although motives may vary by individual, according to the CRS Report on Central American migration (Meyer and Taft-Morales 2019), difficult socioeconomic and security conditions (exacerbated by natural disasters and poor governance) appear to be the most critical drivers of the mixed flow of economic migrants and asylum-seekers. According to UNHCR (2020), by the end of 2019, over 800,000 people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras sought protection to escape interrelated threats, including escalating levels of gang violence and persecution.

In the case of Manuel, structural violence was noted through displacement and poverty in the form of unemployment, lack of education, and economic opportunities. On the other hand, political violence was observed through death threats and gang extortion. Manuel lost his harvest due to extreme weather. After losing his crop, he tried to find a temporary job to support his family and pay his debts. However, he lived in a small agricultural town where jobs were very precarious, and all jobs in the city required at least some primary education and literacy skills. Money pressures kept mounting, and he couldn't find a job, so he decided to borrow money from a loan shark. A few months after, before his harvest was ready to sell, a group of gang members came into his house and threatened him kill the whole family if he didn't pay his debt immediately. The family was in dire straits. In an attempt to hide from the gangs, his wife fled with three of their children to a different town in Guatemala. But that would work only for a short time. Hence, to pay off the debt and reunite the family, Manuel and his older daughter migrated to the U.S. They never imagined being stuck in Matamoros for over two years.

Inside the Camp

Once Manuel arrived at the camp in Matamoros, he encountered psychological, economic, gendered, and legal violence. Regarding psychological violence, he was perturbed about his daughter's safety due to the systematic raping of women, perpetuated either by cartel members or as a form of domestic violence. According to social workers serving rape survivors, an average of 10 women per month were sexually assaulted inside the camp.

After the implementation of Title 42, migrants were forced to wait in limbo inside the Matamoros camp. Hence, they needed to find ways to survive an uncertain amount of time that ended up dragging on for more than two years. Housing and infrastructure improvement was one

of the most important strategies developed in the Matamoros camp (see Chapter 6). Image 10 shows how most housing improvements were made from tarps woven with trash bags and held together with birch branches to protect their tents from environmental exposure. However, the tarps only protected people from the rain or extremely sunny days, but they did not help to prevent trespassing, robbery, or to protect women from raping.

Image 10. Tarps as materials to protect migrants' tents from environmental exposure

Sexual assault also occurred with regularity inside the camp showers. In an interview with Solidarity Engineering, they mentioned how building the shower section was a priority. Before the showers opened, people bathed in the river, contracting different skin and stomach diseases due to water contamination. However, the NGO rapidly noticed how women underutilized the showers. They were afraid of the rape situation and decided to set up spaces near their tents for bathing (more details in Chapter 7). As shown in Image 11, the showers did not have locks to protect the privacy and safety of those using the premises. Similarly, poor lighting made walking

to the showers or toilets dangerous and stressful at night. Consequently, everyday activities such as showering or bathroom usage became hazardous tasks.

Image 11. Renovated camp showers

Regarding legal violence, Manuel experienced the effects of family separation. After Manuel spent five months not sleeping and not leaving his daughter's side at any moment, he realized there was an exception on Title 42 where unaccompanied minors could request asylum. At the same time, in the U.S., he asked his daughter if she would agree to leave the camp without him; according to Manuel, it was a difficult and painful decision, but she agreed to travel alone. After that, Manuel borrowed 500 dollars from a cousin in the U.S. to pay the cartels to cross her. With the Title 42 exception, family separation has been common in the Tamaulipas camps. Between January 20th and April 5th of 2021, Border Patrol agents came across at least 2,000

unaccompanied migrant children who had been previously expelled under Title 42, with high concentrations passing through the Rio Grande Valley (Sganga and Montoya-Galvez 2021).

In terms of economic violence, once his daughter left, he started a small business selling meat, vegetables, and fruits inside the camp. Manuel was still the head of his household and needed to send remittances to Guatemala and his daughter in Chicago. Additionally, because of his lack of literacy, he needed to hire a person to help him follow the accountability and the records of people who asked for credit. Therefore, he couldn't save anything for himself, so the possibility to make enough money to live outside the camp was almost impossible.

Post-migration

Finally, Manuel experienced racial, legal, and psychological violence during his post-migration process. Immediately upon entering office, the Biden Administration announced the end of MPP. With that resolution, asylum seekers could cross in an orderly manner to continue their migration process. Manuel crossed the first days of March 2021. However, he could not see his daughter for over four months after arriving in the U.S. The reason was that the social workers in charge of his daughter's case wanted him to sign papers to give up his parental rights to "smooth his daughters' claim for asylum." However, according to Manuel's lawyer, signing those papers could jeopardize Manuel's process, and his daughter could get lost in the foster system. Therefore, Manuel needed to begin a legal battle for reunification. Yet, this process was extremely difficult for Manuel due to poverty and racial discrimination, adding additional layers of violence to his family reunification process. Manuel did not have the means to pay for private legal counseling. All the information he received was in English, making him feel very anxious about navigating a legal system that is highly complex and in a foreign language. In addition, he

needed to wait several weeks to have news from his case because pro bono attorneys are profoundly overwhelmed with all the pending asylum cases.

Manuel's case demonstrates different forms of violence, moving from structural to symbolic, legal, and gender violence. By looking at the reasons to migrate, his case works as an extrapolation of how poverty and lack of education trigger other forms of violence, such as gang violence and displacement. How violence flows in Manuel's case is an important finding that helps to contest the migrant/refugee binary. Manuel did migrate for economic reasons; however, he needed that money to save his family from the death threats they received. Therefore, by analyzing the web of violence that drove Manuel's migration process, I also undcover the multiplicity of motivations that drive people to migrate, raising questions about what happens when people migrate due to a diverse set of reasons, not only because of political persecution.

In addition, the case of Manuel and his daughter shows how, when analyzing gender, violence, and displacement, the different social identities of the people involved in the narrative need to be introduced in the analytical framework. It is not only the gender of a person that will explain how violence functions. Other relevant factors, such as age, economic status, and education, impact a person or a family unit simultaneously (P. H. Collins and Bilge 2020; Buckley-Zistel and Krause 2017). The case of Manuel is a window to observe how women in migrant camps are objectified and constantly harassed, regardless of age, and how minors are more vulnerable to rape and sexual violence.

Silvia and the politics of fear

> *Silvia is from Honduras; she migrated along with her two-year-old daughter. After the end of MPP, Silvia and three other women with children were part of the last people to cross. The organization in charge of selecting the order of crossing decided to leave the whole tent sector behind until they could find a solution for a woman who was repeatedly raped by a presumed cartel member. In the meantime, all sources of clean water and food donations were shut down, and they needed to scavenge for leftover food from recently abandoned tents.*

In the case of Silvia, we can see macro-meso and meso levels as the frameworks of reference. For this case, I included an additional step in the timeline, transit. In Silvia's pre-migration process, I emphasize structural and symbolic forms of violence, highlining unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and a social/family support network. During her transit to the border, the most important actor triggering violence was organized crime in the form of smugglers and their relationship with cartel violence. During her time in the camp, cartel violence, legal violence, and psychological and racial violence were the most significant. Finally, as part of her post-migration experience, I identified, at the macro-meso level, sexual violence exercised by cartel members And, at the meso level, the decisions made by the NGO processing asylum seekers was the violent denotator for Silvia and her neighbors.

Pre-migration

In Silvia's case, structural violence was noted through lack of food and shelter, unemployment, inadequate local resources, and lack of economic opportunities. Wealth distribution and low income are some of the most pressing problems causing poverty in Honduras, impacting an alarmingly high percentage of the country's population. About 53% of the population lives below the poverty line, including over 66% living in rural areas (National Statistics Institute 2021). In this context, when Silvia was three months pregnant, her partner migrated to the U.S. due to the

lack of employment. A year after her husband left the country, the couple started suffering the difficulties of a long-distance relationship and decided to split. Afterward, Silvia felt isolated and lonely with a newborn, a complicated work schedule, and not having a supportive family network to draw on.

Silvia used to work at a local diner as a waitress; however, once the baby was born, she struggled to make enough time to cover her shifts and find affordable childcare options. She tried to endure; however, when the baby turned two, she lost her job since she couldn't pay for childcare and had no family networks to support her full participation in the workforce. For several months, Silvia tried to find a part-time job, but the economic situation in Honduras made the quest almost impossible.

One of the most important links between economic and social development in employment is the household's primary source of income. However, opportunities for women are limited: in Honduras, only 48.7 percent of women participate in the labor market compared to 74.3 percent of men (National Statistics Institute 2021). The combination of technological change, international trade rules, globalization, neoliberal economic and social policies, and the failure of national poverty eradication strategies have resulted in high unemployment and ever-increasing labor insecurity and instability (Ronderos 2011, 316).

Unable to find a job and with the need to provide for her daughter, Silvia decided to migrate. She contacted a cousin living in Florida to help her with the arrangements. Silvia's case illustrates what the migration literature recognizes as "feminization of migration," which describes a shift in migration patterns. More women are migrating alone, not necessarily to join their husbands in the U.S. but to find their own opportunities (O'Leary 2012; Cerrutti and Massey 2001).

In one of our conversations, I recalled Silvia thinking back on her life in Honduras, "They [the asylum officers] say I won't qualify for asylum, that I choose to move to find a better life. I did not choose this; there is no life left in Honduras." A baseline criterion distinguishing refugees from economic migrants is the idea that refugees migrate due to political rather than economic reasons. However, FitzGerald and Arar (2018) argue that this distinction obscures the diversity of motivations that drive many migrations. For example, when violence is not directed by the state but by armed gangs or drug cartels (as in Manuel's case), it is harder to identify or provide legal defense in asylum requests. Another complication is the question of agency and the idea that economic migrants choose to move and safely return home if they wish. What happens with populations forced to move, like Silvia, due to political corruption, lack of employment, extreme poverty, and in the case of Hondurans, due to the damaging effects of hurricanes, deforestation, and intense tropical storms linked to climate change? Do they have a choice? According to my interviews and interactions with asylum seekers, the answer is a clear no.

Transit

Since the rise of the Los Zetas cartel, violent kidnappings and the murder of migrants across Tamaulipas and the Gulf migrant route have increased considerably (Correa-Cabrera 2017; Slack 2019; Zarate Ruiz and Lopez-Leon 2017). In response to the detrimental effects of violence in the migration route, migrants are responding by finding alternative approaches to gaining entry to the U.S. One of the most common practices is to hire smugglers early in their journeys. However, a recurrent problem I identified in my interviews is that once migrants arrive at the border in Tamaulipas, the smugglers claim that their counterpart in Central America hasn't reimbursed them. In all the interviews I have with migrants who paid for their crossing, the

outcome was the same: they were kept in captivity, tortured, and starved until they paid for the whole trip north again.

That was what happened to Silvia. Initially, she paid 3,000 dollars per person to travel with her daughter from Honduras to the U.S.-Mexican border, following the route of Chiapas to Mexico City on La Bestia (the freight train) and then Reynosa. Because of the caravans, she knew people were applying for asylum, so she paid to be dropped off near CBP to request asylum. However, her smugglers in Tamaulipas interrupted her transit to the U.S. She never anticipated that, at least in Tamaulipas, cartel forces are controlling all smuggling activity (Slack 2019; Correa-Cabrera 2014; Izcara-Palacios 2012).

When Silvia arrived at Reynosa, the *coyota* in charge of the safe house claimed that her smuggler in Honduras never transferred the payment to her organization and that they would remain in the safe-house until Silvia or her family covered the debt. When I asked Silvia what the safe-house looked like, she described it as a dirty and dark, abandoned house with a few mattresses on the floor and windows furrowed with aluminum foil so one could not see the outside.

Silvia and her daughter spent three weeks sleeping on the floor with almost no food or water and experiencing acts of symbolic, psychological, and physical violence. In terms of symbolic and psychological violence, a common practice was constantly hearing screams of people in pain or throwing body parts near them as a reminder of what would happen if she did not pay her debt. Other migrants I interviewed talked about how they were forced to watch videos of people being mutilated several times a day. As for physical violence, Silvia told me how the smuggles put duct tape on the children's mouths every time they cried. They pealed her daughter's skin off after the second time the *coyotes* removed the duct tape from the child's face.

Silvia was desperate. She tried to contact the Honduran smuggler multiple times, but he never responded. In the end, Silvia decided to call her ex-partner and ask him for the money. She ended up paying 12,000 dollars from the original cost of 6,000. The Mexican cartels know Central American migrants have relatives in the U.S., which equals money to them. Ultimately, Tamaulipas's smugglers are profiting from economic deprivation and the rising violence in gang-ridden cities of Central America by torturing and double charging them once they arrive at the border.

Inside the camp

Once in the encampment, Silvia experienced trauma due to initial homelessness, psychological, and racial violence. When Silvia arrived at Matamoros, everyone was living on the sidewalks of the Plaza. She remembered about 400 people, most of them women with children covering themselves with pieces of cardboard. CBP expelled her to Matamoros, carrying only the clothing she was wearing during her apprehension. "I was fortunate that one of the smugglers at the safe house suggested I wear double clothes for the crossing. He explained to me that if we got deported, CBP would throw away our backpacks, and it happened." Silvia told me how she used the public restroom at the Mexican immigration office to handwash her daughter's clothes and hung them on a tree (as shown in Image 7), so the little girl did not have to stay with the same dirty clothes for too long.

Image 12. People using trees to dry their clothing

"We lived like that for about two months until the first locals came with donations. First, it was food, blankets, and clothes for the kids. Later some people brought tents. My daughter and I got a tent, but the need was too much, and we shared it with two other families. For six months, we lived twelve at a four people tent." Silvia told me that while she wiped up her tears. “You know what they did this to us, *the gringos* and the Mexicans? You know why? Because they do not care about us. Because we are nothing to them [crying], we do not matter.” That statement is about Silvia acknowledging class and racial violence and how the migrant camp in Matamoros was a reflection of a racial process assembled by immigration policies that dictate who can inhabit and belong in a nation-state. As stated by Goldberg (2002, 4) in *The Racial State*:

> “Race marks and orders the modern nation-state, and so state projects, more or less from its point of conceptual and institutional emergence. The apparatuses and technologies

> employed by modern states have served variously to fashion, modify, and reify the terms of racial expression, as well as racist exclusions and subjugation."

Then Silvia continued: "There are good people here in Matamoros, but [pause with a long sigh] sometimes we heard insults, many insults. And in social media, hate groups are harassing us (see Image 13 and 14), calling for people to come and intimidate us. The local news, they and all keep insulting us. They think we are here to be delinquent. I can't say that all of Mexico is the same and that all people are the same, but the majority have discriminated against us, only for being here. They say, why don't you go back to your country? But they don't know. They can't imagine why we are here."

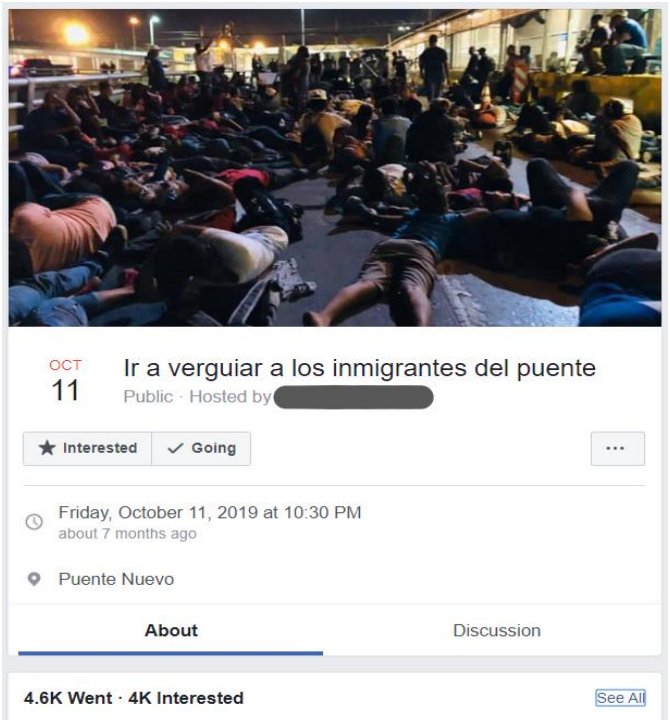

Image 13. Facebook event to lynch migrants living in the Matamoros Camp. October 2019.

Image 14. Ironic cartoon. "Welcome to Matamoros, the great gateway of Mexico."

I retrieved the images from social media in 2019, before the pandemic started. The first image is a Facebook event created to invite people to lynch migrants living in the Plaza. Even though the lynching never happened, 4,600 people said they would attend the event, and another 4,000 showed up as interested. Image 9 is a cartoon published by a local newspaper with the legend: "Welcome to Matamoros, the great gateway of Mexico." The reactions to the cartoon were all adverse, with phrases like "Welcome to Honduras," "I am sending them all to hell," or "They would never cross, and they will stay here forever bleeding Matamoros." Most of these comments align with the narratives I collected as part of my interviews with residents of Matamoros. Not all the people I interviewed were anti-immigrant, but they all mentioned knowing someone upset about the presence of migrants in the city. The main reasons mentioned were related to what Silvia and other migrants told me about the criminalization of immigrants and the negative experiences and stereotypes used to accuse an entire immigrant population who

experienced stigma, fear, and violence. A fascinating parallel is Chavez's (2013) explanations of marginalization of Latin Americans in the U.S. and how Latin American migrants' life chances are usually determined by processes that relegate them to an underclass position.

Regardingpsychological violence, another traumatic event that marked Silvia's life happened when an unidentified man tried to kidnap her daughter at the camp school. Before the camp relocation, a grassroots organization named "Sidewalk School for Asylum Seekers" began to provide basic education to the kids in the Plaza. The Sidewalk School was founded in response to the educational needs of those facing displacement in the Matamoros. Three years after its initial conformation, the NGOs keep growing and supporting asylum seekers in nine cities across Mexico (Matamoros, Juarez, Reynosa, Guadalajara, Tijuana, Playa del Carmen, Tampico, Nogales, and Celaya). However, when they began their work in Matamoros, the situation was very precarious, and they, initially, did not have a physical place to work with the kids. Therefore, they needed to use the sidewalks as their classroom (hence its name).

Image 15. The Sidewalk School, 2019

Source: The Sidewalk School archive

What happened to Silvia's daughter was that she got distracted at some point during the class by an unidentified man who offered her a lollypop. Silvia did not blame the school organization at all. On the contrary, she mentioned how grateful she was that the kids could have some education; however, Silvia became deeply traumatized when she could not find her daughter. Immediately, the teacher from the camp school and other migrants started an organized search around the Plaza. They circulated her daughter's photo using an SOS chat group created by the community in the camp to support emergencies. According to Silvia, the man was heading outside the Plaza holding her daughter. However, a group of migrants was already blocking the access to the Plaza trying to identify the little girl, so he let go of the girl's hand and ran down one of the alleys near the Plaza. The rescue of Silvia's daughter was one of the first examples I captured about building a system of communication and support and creating bonds of trust among migrants in the camp (for more details, see Chapter 5). But for Silvia, this symbolized a very traumatic event. After that, she decided to remove her daughter from the camp school and to remain in almost complete isolation. For nearly two years, she barely slept or got out of her tent. The few times I saw Silvia outside her tent were when volunteers came with winter clothing donations or at the free stores during food pantry collecting days.

Post-migration

As for her post-migration process, Silvia directly experienced legal, psychological, and physical violence, and indirectly she was affected by sexual and cartel violence. In February of 2021, the Homeland Security Department announced the end of Trump’s Migrant Protection Protocols. International organizations, including the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), were in charge of following the process of asylum seekers, giving them an appointment to show up at the

border. They verified their eligibility to enter the country on a CBP mobile app using their negative test for COVID-19. However, this process was far from gentle. First, UNHCR representatives restrained all local NGOs and donations from the camp, effectively banishing the entire trusted support network asylum seekers had. After that, they did not allow anyone to leave their tents and marked the arms of all camp residents with identifier numbers. Some were marked with bracelets, but others had numbers written on their skin using sharpies (see Image 16).

Image 16. Bracelets and markings in people's arms using sharpies

People were told that the numbers would help them identify different tent sections to organize the processing. However, the numbering was not used, leaving people feeling that they were marked in a similar way to prisoners in concentration camps.

Finally, another example of how Mexican immigration authorities and UNHCR dehumanized the process of dismantling the camp is the one I used as part of the opening quote. UNHCR representatives decided to leave Silvia's tent sector behind until they could find a solution for Mariana, her neighbor. A presumed cartel member repeatedly raped and persecuted Mariana for months. However, during the last days of the camp, the situation became more violent. In an interview with Mariana, she told me how she tried to denounce her harasser multiple times, but the Mexican immigration agents never listened to her claims. One night she left me a voice message in the middle of the night; it was about 3 am. She was asking for help desperately. In the audio, it was clear she was running away from someone. “Help me! He wants to kill me. Send help, please. He is going to kill me!”

I did not hear the message until the following day. I tried to get into the camp in the morning to see if she was alive, but the guards did not let me in. Fortunately, one of the guards heard her screaming the night before and called the camp's military post. They did not apprehend Mariana’s attacker, but put her under UNHCR custody. On top of that, there was something wrong with Mariana’s paperwork, so she could not cross immediately, so that is why UNHCR decided to leave the whole tent sector behind. It was not until a week later that Silvia and her neighbors could cross, with the attacker still living in the camp. He was not a migrant and did not have an open case with CBP, so he was never processed. That was the argument for seeking “protection” for Mariana. However, the politics beyond that decision inflicted social suffering and physical and psychological violence on Silvia and her neighbors by depriving them of food and water and denying them the ability to decide whether they wanted to be part of protecting their neighbor or not.

Silvia's case illustrates different forms of violence moving from structural, physical, and psychological forms of violence. It also shows how migrant women traveling with little children are more prone to experience extreme forms of violence since they need to deal not only with threats, coercion, or sexual assault, but also with the pressure to protect and provide for their children. Additionally, Silvia's case examines a range of physical and psychological effects, including depression, social stigma, rejection, and isolation.

Guadalupe and the impossible choice

I remember Guadalupe as a timid woman. Guadalupe fled Honduras with her two sons, Antonio (8) and Jonatan (17). She ran away trying to protect Jonatan after gangs attempted to recruit him. Her husband was killed a year before. With Guadalupe having no education, Jonatan handled all the immigration paperwork. Once in the camp, cartel members tried to seduce Jonatan again. Guadalupe made money washing clothes for others, while Antonio ran errands for the neighbors, and Jonatan worked in a tortilla factory near the camp.

After the end of MPP, they stayed in a local shelter on the U.S. side of the border until a family member helped them with the purchase of plane tickets. Living in the shelter was worse than in the camp. When they finally managed to get enough money to travel to Georgia, CBP at the airport did not accept as valid their damaged and disorganized documents, sending them to a detention center.

The case of Guadalupe is a harrowing story where structural, political, and symbolic violence played a protagonist role. During her pre-migration process, I highlight structural and political forms of violence as the triggers forcing migration. Inside the camp, symbolic, political, and structural violence (expressed as psychological, cartel violence, and economic) were the more important forms in Guadalupe's experience. Finally, as part of her post-migration trauma, I identified legal, psychological, and racial violence as the most predominant.

Pre-migration

Guadalupe and her children fled Honduras due to structural and political violence. Guadalupe never told me exactly what happened, but her husband was killed in Honduras a year before they ran away. Every time she tried to talk about it, she began to tighten her lips, and her voice broke. “I can't,” she told me. What Guadalupe did tell me is what happened next. After her husband passed, she needed to work double shifts cleaning houses. “I was never at home, Jonatan was in charge of taking Antonio to the school and running errands for a mechanical workshop, some days, we did not have enough money to put food on the table, but we were in peace until Jonatan’s 15 birthday” when some gang members he knew from his childhood tried to recruit him. At the beginning there were “friendly” invitations that were easy to turn down; however, things started to get scary when, one night, Jonatan returned home savagely beaten. That was the last straw for Guadalupe. The next day, she sold everything she owned, took her husband's portrait, and got on a bus with her two sons heading north.

In contrast with the more organized model of the Mexican cartels, Central American gangs - or maras - are far smaller, less organized, and highly decentralized, closer to the *unspecialized violence* typology from Della Porta (2013, 7). Therefore, most members make very little money, and the average age for joining is about 15 (Jonatan´s age). They operate on a franchise model that is neighborhood-specific, with criminal activities revolving around low-level drug dealing and extortion of residents and businesses (Paarlberg 2021). However, the 2009 coup that removed President Manuel Zelaya from power exacerbated the instability in the country. Shortly after the coup, Mexican drug cartels increased their presence in Honduras, and Colombian drug traffickers changed their routes and made Honduras the primary point for cocaine transfer (Noriega and Lanza 2013). Since then, teens have been the primary targets of

increasing intergang power, having a one in 300 chance of being murdered (Carlson and Gallagher 2015).

Guadalupe's journey to the U.S. was complicated. She did not have much money for the journey, and her only connection in the U.S. was her husband's sister, whom she barely knew. Once in Mexico, they stayed in Chiapas for two months until they made some money to keep traveling north riding "La Bestia." Migrants like Guadalupe, riding La Bestia, are likely to be some of the poorest and the most improbable to have access to information networks or contacts in the United States (Dominguez Villegas 2014). Since Guadalupe and her children started their journey in Honduras, it took them almost eight months to reach McAllen, TX, only to be immediately expelled into Matamoros because of the Remain in Mexico policy.

Inside the camp

Guadalupe is one of the people I met because of Valeria (see Chapter 4). Our first interview happened in the Plaza, right outside of the camp. We were sitting on a white bench. She was nervous. "Are you sure you want to talk to me; I am not interesting. I did not go to school, and we are just here waiting for an opportunity to cross." That was the first of multiple times I talked to Guadalupe, but it was hard to contact her since she did not have a cell phone. I usually texted or sent voice messages to arrange my interviews with the other migrants. But the logistics with Guadalupe were different. I needed to walk near a playground area and look for Antonio across the fence. Then he ran to get his mom, who was usually washing other people's clothes for pennies. Antonio, Jonatan, and Guadalupe were some of the poorest people I met in the camp. Even their neighbors were always trying to help them with money to buy food or help them get winter clothes or haircuts. Guadalupe's experience inside the camp was surrounded by psychological, economic, and cartel violence. They did not have any cultural, social, or

economic capital. Even inside the migrant camp, social inequality, privileges, and uneven resources and opportunities were part of their everyday life.

I remember visiting tents with “furniture” and TVs. It was not the norm, but they existed. Then one day, I see Guadalupe’s tent. That particular day I was helping with the distribution of air mattresses for pregnant women. Antonio was at my side the whole day until he could not resist anymore and told me: “We need a mattress. Can I have a mattress?” They are for the pregnant women Antonio, I answered. He insisted. “We do not only need a mattress, but we also need a tent. But a mattress could help us to sleep better.” I looked at his eyes and agreed to visit his tent and evaluate if I could get a mattress for his family. Since the relocation, Mexican Immigration officers limited the access to either air mattresses or new tents unless there was a formal petition from an authorized NGO. The reason was to regulate the entry of more families by limiting the number of new tents and air mattresses.

Nevertheless, some grassroots organizations knew how to sneak in some tents and avoid the bureaucratic process. What I saw when I got into their tent broke me from the inside. They lived in a two-person tent entirely gnawed by rats and full of mold due to the humidity generated by the heavy rains during the hurricane season (Image 17). By the next day, I talked to one of the NGOs directors and managed to get them in front of the list of vulnerable families. The next week, Guadalupe and her children received a new tent, tarps to protect it, and two air mattresses (Image 18).

Image 17. Guadalupe's old tent

Image 18. The new tent after Antonio's intervention

Finally, as an example of political violence (at the meso-macro level), Guadalupe's worst nightmare happened. Cartel members infiltrated the camp and tried to recruit Jonatan. They offered him to become a "*Halcon*" (low-paid guards) in charge of small drug distribution and spying on the activities of the authorities or other cartels receiving payments. Cartels also use teens as smugglers (known as "circuit children") since, as minors, they will most likely be sent back to Mexico if caught by the U.S. border patrol, and they can repeat the travel multiple times. Young people of the border region have historically been involved with the smuggling system.

However, their activities have become more visible in recent years in the context of increased border militarization and immigration and crime controls implemented by both the U.S. and Mexican governments (G. Sanchez 2018). In Mexico, human rights groups estimate that at least 30,000 children are currently involved in organized crime conflict (Breckin 2019). Fortunately for Jonatan and Guadalupe, one of the core survival strategies for migrants in the camp was building communication and support practices. Hence, once Guadalupe's neighbors knew about the situation, they asked the leader of a religious congregation in the camp to help Jonatan. The community gave Jonatan advice and counsel and informally hired him to run errands for them. The goal was to keep him busy and surrounded by people. One of the most complicated things about beinga teen in the camp was the lack of social and schooling activities since almost everything was designed to assist young children. With no fixed activities to keep them occupied and psychologically sane, teenagers become easy targets for cartel recruiting.

Post-migration

As for their post-migration process, Guadalupe, Jonatan, and Antonio experienced legal, psychological, and racial violence. Guadalupe and her children crossed into the U.S. during the last week of February 2021. However, their situation got complicated because her aunt, their sponsor in the U.S., lost her job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regrettably, that was the case of multiple families across the border. Many family and economic arrangements changed in two years, and the pandemic worsened the situation for many migrants on both sides of the border. The unemployment rates of migrants increased significantly in more than 75 percent of all members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries in 2020 (OCDE 2011). An analysis of monthly data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that, from May

to July 2021, the drop in the number of employed immigrants was steeper than the number of employed U.S.-born adults compared to the same period in 2019 (Migration Data Portal 2021). In response, different local NGOs were looking for volunteers to sponsor camp families or provide travel arrangements. Unfortunately for Guadalupe, they were sent into an overcrowded local shelter on the Rio Grande Valley with very little organization, limited staff, and no ability to serve all the people arriving from Mexico.

When the first families started crossing the border into the U.S., I started volunteering at a local organization named Rio Grande Valley Welcoming Committee. The committee worked together with the City of Brownsville staff to provide asylum seekers with transportation information, travel arrangements, legal counseling, and shelter for the most vulnerable. After each person's arrival, a group of volunteers helped the families to organize their immigration documents to travel. They needed to have ready their MPP form, a change of address form for future court dates, a printed version of the I-94 form, and proof of COVID-19 negative tests. However, several buses with asylum seekers did not have the opportunity to stop at the Committee service area and were transported directly to local shelters, which did not have enough personnel to provide families with any of those services.

Guadalupe and her children were part of those families arriving directly at one of those local shelters. She described it as a very dark, dirty, and loud place. A few days after, I visited the shelter as part of a group of volunteers organizing immigration packages. The shelter was very close to Guadalupe’s description. It was a very somber multipurpose area, with no windows and no drinking water. The rotten smell was pervasive. I estimate there were approximately 500 people in the shelter that night. Most of them were Haitians recently captured by CBP and about 5 or 7 families from the Matamoros camp. There were several aluminum chairs in the middle of

the place, where people were waiting to register and have some information about their travel or sponsorship situation. On the edges of the shelters, there were piles of very worn blue mats, some families were resting on them, but most of the people were either standing or seated on the aluminum chairs. In front of the chairs, there was a front desk with two volunteers calling names with a microphone. The acoustics were terrible, engulfing the noise, making it numb. That night in the shelter, I found Jonatan hiding near the janitor's room. He was hyperventilating, rocking his body in a fetal position with his hands covering his ears, repeating: "I do not want to be here; I do not want to be here" all over again. He was having an anxiety attack. There was not much we could do to help him or any other families from the camp. People there claimed they had not had any water or food since the day before. It was hard to witness their suffering. They thought they would be safe after crossing, but they moved from one nightmare to the next one. We filed a report on the conditions of the shelter. We sent it to the Welcoming Committee, who later sent more help and economic aid to arrange immediate travel arrangements for the families from the camp. A week later, I learned from Guadalupe that Antonio, her youngest, had borrowed a cell phone and called her aunt in Georgia. He sent pictures from the shelter asking for help. Antonio is a fearless and smart boy. Immediately her aunt borrowed money to pay for their plane tickets and found a sponsor to sign their documents.

Everything was ready for them to travel to Georgia, except that no one at the shelter arranged their immigration documents or printed their I-94. That is when they faced the pervasive consequences of legal and racial violence. A CBP officer asked for their documentation before boarding the plane when they arrived at the airport. In a deliberate act of discrimination and racism, he asked multiple questions using heavy legal jargon. Guadalupe did not know how to answer. She later told me she was shaking while Antonio took her hand crying.

She remembered Jonatan looking with sadness into the carpet flooring; it was his 18th birthday. They were escorted by another officer into a CBP truck and transported into a detention center. According to one of the pro-bono lawyers I interviewed, there was no legal reason for them to be detained that day. The only thing the CBP officer should do is search for their I-94 form. Retrieving that form is an effortless task. You open the CBP 1-94 website, enter the name and alien registration number of the person you are searching for, and that's it. That was the only document they needed to travel, and the CBP officer decided not to look for it or allow them to do it. At the detention center, they did not even leave the truck. When they tried to register them in the system, the officer in charge realized they had been granted parole into the United States through the MPP wind-down program and took them back to the airport. However, their flight had already departed. That is when Guadalupe called the Welcoming Committee, who rapidly found a donor to buy a new set of tickets bound to Georgia.

The story of Guadalupe brings together structural, political, and symbolic violence. Guadalupe and her sons are a portrait of the harrowing intersection of extreme poverty and organized crime persecution. In addition, adolescents' vulnerability increases as their sex and age doubly stigmatize them since they are more exposed to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, becoming easy targets for cartel forces. Guadalupe, like Manuel, needed to adopt more vigilant parenting to protect Jonatan. However, a big difference between Manuel and Guadalupe is the lack of social capital that would help Guadalupe cross her children alone in the U.S., keeping them from the dangerous and challenging life in the camp.

Manuel, Silvia, and Guadalupe's stories detail the circumstances of migrants at the Matamoros camp. Following their journeys, in this chapter, I disentangled how war, political violence, natural disasters, sexual abuse, exploitation, and poverty are just a few of the causes of

trauma and suffering that asylum seekers must experience through their migration journeys. At the individual level, these case studies examine how violence is perpetrated by different social actors and structures, such as national governments, international organizations, organized crime, social inequality, racial discrimination, or sexual abuse. Their stories are also a vivid example of how violence and marginalization repeatedly appear throughout the different moments of their migration process, even when they have already reached the U.S. The majority of the asylum seekers on the U.S.- Mexico border were forced to flee their homes because of violent conflicts or extreme poverty. However, the systematic practice of border enforcement and militarization (now reaching the Southern Mexican border) exacerbates social and economic discrimination and physical assault and sexual violence after displacement, suggesting a continuum of violence, especially for women and male asylum seekers.

CHAPTER 6
VIOLENCE AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

I thought it was a "nice" camp when we came. [Other migrants] told us there was support from the United States. That everything was well organized. But, as soon as we arrived, we saw that it was not like that. They described it all in very rosy terms. They said it was beautiful and that we would be well protected. Nothing close, pure lies.

But now that we are here, we need to survive. I needed some money for my wife and my newborn, so I helped my neighbors to sell mangoes. I work at the school, too, running errands, and they pay me 15 dollars a day. I have done several gigs; things come up.

—Jaime, asylum seeker

The Sidewalk School offers school five days a week, during which children receive a lunch that includes fruit and no processed sugar (the refugee camp lacks dental care, and the teeth of many children are rotting). Currently, we employ eleven teachers who are asylum seekers themselves.

—Felicia, The Sidewalk School

The previous chapter analyzed the violent effects experienced by asylum seekers at the individual level of the continuum. As I have shown, many asylum seekers have suffered the trauma of violence, tragic loss, and family fragmentation. As explained, forced migration presents numerous challenges. For many, displacement had resulted in the loss of livelihood and downward social mobility. Migrants in the camp reported that they had arrived empty-handed either because they were extorted by their smuggles or because CBP confiscated their money and assets. Local NGOs tried their best to assist camp residents with their various needs. Still, the lack of adequate infrastructure, resources, governmental support, and experience to handle the mounting humanitarian emergency tended to be overwhelming.

This chapter devotes particular attention to the meso-level analysis and explains different social mechanisms and factors that propelled asylum seekers to develop survival strategies. I argue that marginalized asylum seekers drew on a diverse repertoire of survival strategies to relieve, or mitigate, dispossession and violence. Further, these strategies placed them as active

participants in the process, rather than only appearing as passive victims of crisis and displacement. To this end, this chapter looks at the interaction between asylum seekers in the Matamoros camp and local NGOs to understand the dynamics of violence production, mitigation and collaboration within the camp. Thus, I first describe NGOs with a more significant presence in the Matamoros camp and present examples of how they built their relationship with asylum seekers. Secondly, I describe how the Matamoros camp was relocated after the U.S. government simultaneously enacted MPP and Title 42. I use this narrative to illustrate how the relocation exacerbated violence related to health, hygiene, security, legal protection, and access to justice. Later, I show how asylum seekers developed dynamics of collaboration with local NGOs based on the different obstacles and violence that emerged after the relocation. To illustrate how this collaboration worked, the chapter breaks down these interactions into seven categories of survival strategies: infrastructure development, non-violent protests, moral and spiritual relief, education and recreation, development of economic activities, family well-being, and communication and support.

Humanitarian aid beyond bare life

Chapter 1 introduced the concept of *bare life* (Agamben 1998) to describe a life that has been exposed to a state of exception. It refers to the effects of a condition of radical exposure produced by sovereign power (United States) in which the law is suspended (lawful asylum procedures), and bodies are surrendered (migrants) to a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide (the camps). Following this logic, Agamben would argue that asylum seekers living in migrant camps are forced to be part of a process in which the sheer biological fact of their life (*zoe*) is given priority over the way their life is lived (*bios*). Drawing from interviews

and field observations, I claim that, in an attempt to alleviate the damaging effects of living a state of *bare life*, asylum seekers in the Matamoros camp did not always act as passive receptors of humanitarian aid but actively worked with the NGO community. Although, this was not always the case given the complexity of interactions in the camp, particularly when cartel forces were involved, the collaboration between asylum seekers and NGOs was critical to confronting violence and dehumanization in the Matamoros camp.

The first approaches between local NGOs and asylum seekers

Because of the lack of a safe shelter, asylum seekers expelled to Mexico under MPP needed to reside in homelessness on the sidewalks of a Plaza nearby the Gateway International Bridge. Consequently, grassroots organizations (run by volunteers) increasingly took on the responsibility of managing the Matamoros camp. This was also the result of the scarcity of support offered by the Mexican or the U.S. governments and the absence of international agencies such as UNHCR, which exacerbated the dreadful conditions that asylum seekers lived in.

At first, most volunteers were from Brownsville and Matamoros areas who helped with different tasks: cooking meals, sorting and distributing donations, building temporary shelters and toilets, organizing recreational and educational activities, and contributing to the general maintenance of the camp. However, after the relocation, the camp received national coverage from popular public media such as the American Way of Life[8], National Public Radio, and The New York Times. After reading or listening about the existence of migrant camps on the

[8] The broadcasting of the episode *The Out Crowd* (2020) had such an impact that the number of volunteers and the presence of foreign NGOs increased significantly after its launching.

southern border, volunteers from all over the U.S. started to arrive as individuals who later constituted their own organizations. After the relocation and fencing of the Matamoros camp, and arrival of American volunteers, almost all the local grassroots organizations from Matamoros were overridden. That is how most of the Mexican volunteers decided to step aside after the relocation, resulting in the separation of forces that organizations from *both sides* could have offered and the symbolic oppression of Mexican organizations and volunteers. According to Lorena, a volunteer from a local Mexican NGO who used to support pregnant women and delivered theater and music classes, the main problem was based on communication — "They came in not speaking Spanish. I do not speak English. They created their own collective and got IDs to access the now fenced camp […] it was too much. I did not have the energy to fight a cruel government and, on top of that, try to fit in with *gringos* who do not even speak my language. I know they mean good, and if they want to do the work, so be it."

To put this in perspective, the Reynosa camp remains not-gated, and American and Mexican local NGOs continue to work together. Thus, in Matamoros, after the camp was gated by the Mexican authorities, the exacerbation of violence was not the only repercussion but also the aggravation of racial and ethnic differences among volunteers and NGOs. Therefore, the different culture, language, and economic dissimilarities ended in an almost total suppression of organizations and volunteers from Matamoros.

Table 7 summarizes the different NGOs I observed in the Matamoros camp after its re-location to *El Bordo*. The table is organized first by the type of humanitarian assistance provided, the organization's name, and the year of foundation. After that, I distinguish between local and

foreign leadership[9], gender of leadership, and if the organization functioned as secular or faith-based.

An interesting finding from this table is that most of the leaders and staff of the different NGOs are women. According to Patel and colleagues (2020), there is very limited evidence and studies on women's leadership in conflict and humanitarian aid. Interestingly, the data available shows that there seem to be more opportunities for women leadership in the local humanitarian sector. However, as larger the organization, the fewer women in leadership positions. In the case of the Matamoros camp, only the religious organizations were directed exclusively by men.

Table 7. Non-Governmental Organizations at the Matamoros Camp

Main Services Provided	Name of the Organization	Year of Foundation	Local/Foreign Leadership	Gender of Leadership	Type of organization
Health, safety, and basic needs	Angry tías and abuelas	2019	Local	Female	Secular
	Practice Mercy	2019	Local	Female	Faith-based
	Puentes de Cristo	2019	Local	Female	Faith-based
Food, water, shelter, and basic needs	Resource Center Matamoros (RCM)	2019	Local	Female	Secular
	Dulce Refugio	2021	Local *	Male	Faith-based
Education, food, water, shelter, and basic needs	Team Brownsville	2018	Local	Women	Secular
	The Sidewalk School	2019	Local	Women	Secular
Shelter and basic needs	Casa del Migrante San Juan Diego y San Francisco de Asís, A.C.	1989	Local *	Male	Faith-based
	Casa Bugambilias	N/A	Local *	Female	Faith-based
Legal services, shelter, and basic needs	Catholic Charities of the RGV	2014	Local	Female	Faith-based
Legal services	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)	1881	Foreign	N/A	Secular
	Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP)	1990	Local	Mixed	Secular
	Project Corazon - Lawyers for Good Government	2020	Foreign	Female	Secular

[9] Organizations marked with a * are based in Matamoros.

	South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project - American Bar Association Commission on Immigration	1989	Local	Female	Secular
Medical services	Doctors Without Borders (MSF)	1968	Foreign	Mixed	Secular
	General Resource Management (GRM)	2017	Foreign	Mixed	Secular
Site infrastructure, WASH, stormwater management, GIS mapping	Solidarity Engineering	2020	Foreign	Female	Secular

The Matamoros camp was not akin to other well-established refugee camps, like the Reynosa one, due to its formation as a temporal space. Suffering was everywhere, standard international norms for refugee protection and camp management (Camp Coordination and Camp Management 2021), such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), were absent. Regular camping tents were used as shelters, there were rats everywhere, and it was common to see people wading through thick mud. Unlike other refugee settlements worldwide, this camp remained unofficial since it never got legal approval from the Mexican government or UNHCR.

When the camp started growing in the Plaza, local NGOs effectively administered aid and established a complex collaboration network with asylum seekers to provide humanitarian assistance. An example of this collaboration is how the Sidewalk School (SWS) was created. In an interview with the SWS directors, they described how their organization was born collectively with asylum seekers. Felicia and Victor (the directors of SWS) were some of the (very) few non-white American volunteers in the camp[10]. Felicia identifies as Black Mexican and Victor as

[10] The SWS directors asked not to use pseudonyms for them. All the other names used in the SWS story are pseudonyms to protect the privacy and identity of the participants.

Mexican American. They met at the Plaza back in 2018, serving dinner to asylum seekers. Separately, Victor was a volunteer with Team Brownsville, and Felicia used to cross the border alone to bring food, medicines, and other donations. After a month, they started to get closer and had conversations about getting better donations or improving the distribution system. That is how, after a while, they decided it was a good idea for them to work together.

Later, because Felicia was crossing more often than Victor and she does not speak Spanish, she needed a translator to help her communicate with asylum seekers. That is how someone in the camp introduced her to Miguel, who volunteered to support her as a translator. For a few weeks, she thought he was an American volunteer, until one day she was serving food and saw him in the line to get food — "I grabbed his arm and asked him, Miguel! What are you doing in line? The food is for asylum seekers. You can't take their food!" And that is how Felicia learned Miguel was an asylum seeker living in a nearby abandoned building close to the camp. Later, the group grew, and they started having lunch together and having conversations about what to do next to support the camp. They decided the camp needed a school since the kids had nothing to do all day — "And we thought it would be a good idea to open a school for the kids and that the project would be better if we only hired asylum seekers as teachers. That is how the Sidewalk School was born, with a conversation on the sidewalk of the Plaza". SWS is not the only organization working with asylum seekers, but it is the only one created in direct coordination with them. Other organizations created while working in the camp, such as Solidarity Engineering, also exclusively hired asylum seekers, and they have also included them as part of their Board of Advisors. GRM is another example of tight collaboration with migrants. In addition to American workers and volunteers, the GRM team includes medical doctors, nurses, social workers, and translators who are asylum seekers expelled under MPP and Title 42.

The relocation, the exacerbation of violence, and the development of survival strategies

On March 23, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all pending MPP hearings across the border were suspended indefinitely, and the courts in charge of MPP hearings temporarily shut down. The uncertainty of how long people with pending cases might have to wait before a hearing posed no pressure to the Trump administration on what would happen with people under MPP. This situation worsened the conditions in the camp and at local shelters, mainly because the effects and spread of COVID-19 were unknown and locals' disconcert with the situation. The pressure that Matamoros's residents put on the municipal authorities resulted in the INAMI and other NGO leaders' decision to relocate the camp to a nearby field, locally known as "*El Bordo*."

As mentioned in Chapter 2, *El Bordo* is a levee located next to the Gateway International Bridge on the banks of the Rio Grande. The site was about 7 acres, with limited access to clean water and public healthcare services. With the relocation of the camp, Mexican immigration officers completely fenced off the area, including all access to the river, and placed guard posts to control all entrances and exits. Mexican officers also established a new set of rules, one of them was not allowing new asylum seekers inside the camp. However, because the cartels were immersed inside the camp, people could sneak in by paying a fee. I interviewed several people who were not allowed in by Mexican immigration officials, but who paid their way into the camp via the cartels or were snuck in by other asylum seekers. This is a clear example of how the relocating and fencing of the camp added an extra layer of marginalization in the form of a new smuggling system, not across the river but into the camp. In spite of the dangers and unhealthy conditions inside the camp, asylum seekers needed to be there because it was the only way to access humanitarian aid and. Later I discovered a second reason that they wanted to be in the camp: due to a rumor (eventually proved true) that everyone inside the camp would be able to

cross the border once MPP ended. This rumor overcrowded the camp quickly, going from about 900 hundred inhabitants in November 2020, to almost 2,000 by mid-January 2021.

Image 19. The relocation to "El Bordo."

With the relocation, there were other violent repercussions related to health, hygiene, security, legal protection, and access to justice. In terms of health and hygiene, diseases carried by the infestation of rodents, snakes, and mosquitoes were rampant and severe cases of dehydration and hypothermia were present too. Due to the lack of governmental support, two NGOs decided to get in charge of supplying medical care: Global Response Management (GRM)[11] and Doctors Without Borders (MSF)[12]. These two organizations worked during weekdays until 5 pm; after

[11] GRM is a veteran-led international medical NGO that operated a full-time mobile medical unit inside the camp providing primary and urgent care, women's health, OB care, COVID-19 testing and care, medication distribution, telehealth, local specialty referral pathways, and health consultations pertinent to legal cases.

[12] MSF is an international humanitarian medical non-governmental organization of French origin founded in 1971. In the camp, they supported COVID-19 testing, with mild and moderate cases of flu, but their main intervention was conducting health promotion activities and phycological support.

that time or during weekends, any medical emergency needed to be treated directly at the general hospital in Matamoros or privately.

Image 20. GRM mobile medical unit

Nevertheless, security and physical violence were the most critical issues, especially at night due to organized crime, the absence of public lighting, and isolation from the public eye. As mentioned in Manuel's case (Chapter 5), according to social workers serving rape survivors, an average of 10 women per month were sexually assaulted while the camp was active. In addition, in all my interviews, asylum seekers spoke about how the cartels were infiltrated entirely in the camp. To survive, they needed to stay silent, even if what they saw was brutal or illegal. Esperanza mentioned, "Here we can see any kind of brutality, but the motto is: you hear and see things, but you must not speak of them. And that is how we survive, by remaining silent." This quote from Esperanza is a clear illustration of Agamben's bare life; her life was a in state of exception.

People were constantly disappearing, and several bodies were found in the river. In every interview I had with asylum seekers, they always mentioned how ruthless the murder of one of the leaders of the Guatemalan migrants was. In an act of desperation, he and his family tried to cross without paying the fee to the cartels. Like almost everyone else, they failed and were sent back by CBP. A few days later, the body of the Guatemalan leader was found in the river. The official version of his death was that he drowned after trying to help some pregnant women to cross the river (S. Sanchez 2020). However, all migrants in the camp denied that version, saying that he was trying to cross with his family and was beaten up and intentionally drowned by the cartels. I saw photographs of the body taken by asylum seekers, and it was all full of bruises and visible markings of torture. For migrants in the camp, the death of the Guatemalan leader was a warning of what could happen if someone else tried to cross the river without paying the corresponding fee to the cartels.

Regarding legal protection and access to justice, a pressing problem was how women were sent back to Mexico by CBP officers without their U.S.-born children's birth certificates. Pregnant women and their families waited until their pregnancy was near term to attempt crossing the border to request asylum. They hoped not to be expelled to Mexico with a newborn. That was not the case, and most of them were subject to Title 42. In Chapter 4, I discussed the case of Valeria, who was deported without the U.S.-birth certificate of her newborn. Regrettably, Valeria was not the only one experiencing this type of legal violence. According to the Fuller Project and The Guardian, at least eleven U.S.-newborn citizens were sent to Mexican towns with their mothers without papers. Inside the camp, I also met Maria, a Honduran asylum seeker traveling with two minors (3- and 5-year-old) and her husband, Carlos. When I interviewed María and Carlos, María told me they attempted a border crossing because they did not want

their newborn to suffer the inhumane conditions their other two children had already experienced in the camp. However, once they reached the other side of the border, the whole family was placed in CBP custody. Carlos and the two kids were deported immediately after she was taken to the hospital. Maria gave birth in a hospital room guarded by a CPB officer. Later she was dropped off with her newborn child in Matamoros without a birth certificate. Maria said she never expected to be sent back to the Matamoros camp with a newborn under such freezing conditions (she was expelled in February during the Texas winter storm in 2021).

In the following section, I show how asylum seekers, supported by local NGOs, developed survival strategies to overcome the living conditions in the Matamoros camp.

We will survive

Due to these inhumane conditions, surviving was all that mattered. To stay sane and alive was a constant struggle in the camp. While doing my fieldwork, I learned that violence was present in different forms and shapes; somedays, it was hunger, waking up with frozen feet, or contending with rats, snakes, and lice. But other days, it was about the infiltrated cartel members policing the camp. I remember that vividly. I recall them walking in groups of about ten men dressed in black, wearing cargo pants, radios, and military boots; one could not miss them. The first time I saw them, I was petrified. It happened the day after I interviewed Mauricio, whose wife gave birth to a little girl in the camp with no medical assistance. After the interview, he asked me to take care of Julio, his two-year-old son, while he ran some errands. I was playing with little Julio on the ground when I saw them; people rapidly retreated into their tents. I hid under a tarp near me and took Julio into my shaky arms. I froze. I could only hear Mauricio's neighbor whispering to me: — "Look at the floor, don't look them in the eye; they do not want to be seen. I sleep with a knife in my hand; I have a lock for my tent, but it is a tent; what can a lock do to stop them?"

What I witnessed that day was undoubtedly traumatic; however, I did have a choice to grab my backpack and quickly go home. A choice asylum seekers did not. How did people survive? People lived in fear, in oblivion, and relied almost exclusively on humanitarian aid. Perhaps, because of those conditions, and not in spite of them, these people developed survival strategies that I have organized into seven categories. The first strategy was building infrastructure; the second was participating in non-violent protests. The third was taking part in moral and spiritual relief activities; the fourth focused on education and recreation. Even with no formal education, schooling activities were crucial to support mental and physical health. As part of this strategy, hand by hand, asylum seekers and two NGOs opened two multilevel schools. The fifth strategy was to develop economic activities such as hand wash laundry services and local meat and vegetable shops. The sixth was to provide family well-being. Finally, the seventh strategy was building and maintaining communication and support, a critical approach, particularly for women. A relevant aspect I want to highlight about these strategies is that most of them were developed in collaboration with the NGOs in the camp. Table 8 shows the different strategies and how the NGOs supported these efforts.

Table 8. Survival strategies and NGO support

Strategy	NGO support	NGO
Site Infrastructure	● Construction and maintenance of showers and school buildings. ● Maintaining and cleaning drinking water tanks and washing stations. ● Stormwater management infrastructure such as drainage channels and gravel. ● Delivering tents, tarps, and materials to fix older tents.	● Solidarity Engineering (SE) ● Resource Center Matamoros (RCM) ● Team Brownsville ● General Resource Management (GRM)
Non- violent Protesting	● Co-participating in protesting. ● Counseling about how to prevent possible retaliation.	● Angry tías and abuelas ● Team Brownsville ● Project Corazon

		• South Texas Pro Bono Asylum • Project Corazon
Moral and spiritual relief	• Regular religious services. • Construction of chapels and praying sites. • Celebration of baptisms and marriages, and other religious ceremonies. • Organization of prayer vigils.	• Practice Mercy • Puentes de Cristo • Dulce Refugio • Casa del Migrante San Juan Diego y San Francisco de Asís, A.C. • Catholic Charities of the RGV
Education and Recreation	• Building of two multilevel schools. • Playground construction. • Soccer field Set up.	• Team Brownsville • The Sidewalk School • Solidarity Engineering • Solidarity Engineering
Economic activities		• Led mainly by asylum seekers only
Family well-being	• Sponsoring rentals for families with special needs • Title 42 exemptions for vulnerable immigrants through a lawsuit	• Resource Center Matamoros (RCM) • General Resource Management (GRM) • Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) • Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) • Project Corazon • South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project
Communication and support	• Group chat messaging • Community-based leadership and public held meetings • Women support groups	• Resource Center Matamoros (RCM) • Angry tías and abuelas • Project Corazon • Catholic Charities of the RGV • Team Brownsville • The Sidewalk School

This list is not supposed to be exhaustive. Still, it serves as a roadmap to understanding how asylum seekers developed dynamics of mitigation and by actively engaging with the NGO

community to face violence beyond a "bare survival situation." Next, I describe the different survival strategies that resulted from the extreme difficulties asylum seekers experienced throughout the waiting time in the camp.

Building Infrastructure

The first strategy was based on building infrastructure. To introduce this strategy, I use two different examples, one developed with the support of NGOs and the second generated directly by asylum seekers, particularly by women.

In collaboration with Solidarity Engineering (SE) and Global Response Management, thirty-nine showers were redesigned and fixed, including the cleaning and maintenance of shower drainage and installing curtains, hooks, and other accessories. Additionally, RCM, SE, and Team Brownsville collaborated to install thirteen water Rotoplas tanks on-site and stormwater drainage. In partnership with asylum seekers, RCM created hand-made washbasins distributed in different areas of the camp. The installation of the washbasins (left picture in Image 21) had so much success that they are now used at the Reynosa camp and local shelters, and temporary medical clinics serving migrants in Reynosa and Matamoros.

Image 21. Water distribution and stormwater management

In terms of infrastructure developed by asylum seekers, constructing primitive clay ovens (to stop relying exclusively on NGO aid) was one of the first strategies to establish independence well-being, and the first step in a more complex organizational process. Image 22 shows two of the first clay ovens constructed by Guatemalan and Honduran women. They first started cooking their food by digging holes in the dirt (photo on the left) and later built high clay ovens where they could be standing while cooking instead of having to cook crouched on the soil (right photo).

Image 22. first clay ovens constructed by Guatemalan and Honduran women

Over time, asylum seekers, especially women, developed better and more efficient kitchens. Some of them later decided to turn their kitchens into diners or community kitchens, some to feed volunteers and NGO workers, and as part of economic endeavors to sell cooked food to other asylum seekers.

Image 23. Diners and community kitchens

In addition, after the relocation, asylum seekers did not know how long the waiting time would be prolonged, and some wanted to have a more dignified space to live, so they endeavored in improving their living spaces. Image 24 is an example of this advancement, showing two kitchens that belonged to the same person (Marina) one year apart. — "I have no idea how long I will be here, and my daughters deserve a decent place to eat. They have enough with rats running everywhere. That is why I built this kitchen with my own hands."

Image 24. Transformation of kitchens in the camp. 2019-2021

Non-violent Protests

The second strategy was non-violent protesting. The most important protest happened in October of 2019 when approximately 400 migrants blocked the Gateway International Bridge for over 12 hours. It was not until a direct negotiation between the mayor of Matamoros and asylum seekers' leadership that the bridge was cleared. Image 25 (retrieved from a local newspaper) shows some migrants camping over the bridge in the middle of the night and on the other side of the fence, CBP officers making sure no one crosses the borderline.

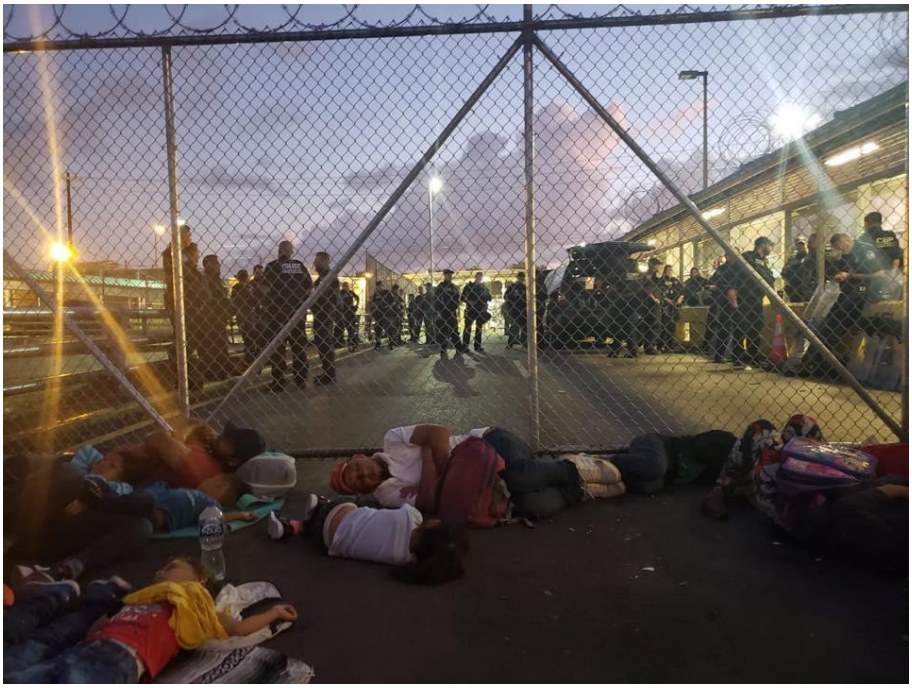

Image 25. Gateway International Bridge blockage. October 2019

The bridge blockage brought a lot of animosity among the local population since people in Matamoros needed to cross daily to attend school, for medical reasons, or work. After this public demonstration, several NGOs with legal training helped migrants switch their strategy to other forms of protesting to avoid jeopardizing their asylum cases or raising more anger among Matamoros's residents. An example of this alternative way of protesting is shown in Image 26, where asylum seekers and NGO activists protested, showing petitions across the camp fence and calling the media's attention to expose their living situation.

Image 26. Other forms of protesting with NGOs

Public protesting shows how asylum seekers were not passive about their marginalized situation. It also demonstrates internal power politics inside the camp and how asylum seekers were constantly publicly demanding that their human rights be respected. Asylum seekers were constantly negotiating with various agencies and authorities, such as INAMI, CBP, and municipal authorities that surrounded them. Often, these endeavors failed, but asylum seekers were not deterred.

Moral and Spiritual Relief

Another strategy for survival was moral and spiritual relief both personal and community-wide. Having faith and feeling close to a Higher Being/God was critical to maintaining asylum seekers' strength. At a personal level, in almost every interview I had with asylum seekers, they mentioned that during times of difficulty, they would pray either to have the strength to continue or to ask for their situation to improve. Don Marcelo, a 50-year-old asylum seeker, told me: — "I ask God every day to give the strength that some days I do not have anymore. I know God is listening, my wife in El Salvador called me yesterday, and she told me how God gave her a

prophecy in her dreams. He told her that I would have many difficulties along the way but that in the end, I would reach the United States. And you see, it looks like Biden will win, and he is going to get us out of here soon." Marcelo's quote talks about how important it is to believe in something greater that can give him good spirits and hope that his situation will eventually improve.

Several religious services existed inside the camp representing diverse religious beliefs and offering a community feel. Some of these services were brought in by faith-based organizations such as the Matamoros dioceses and Catholic Charities of the RGV (shown in Image 27), and others were formed by asylum seekers who identified as Christian Pastors. Another example was a camp-wide prayer vigil on the night of the U.S. presidential election in November.

Image 27. Religious presence in the Matamoros camp

These religious services and personal beliefs exemplify how religion worked as a moral and spiritual relief strategy fundamental to mitigating psychological distress and the traumatic impacts of violence and persecution experienced by many asylum seekers. The role of religion as a coping mechanism is not exclusive to the camps in Tamaulipas. It is part of a larger survival strategy developed by refugees living in migrant camps across the globe. This phenomenon has not been largely studied in sociological studies, but some examples in the psychology literature highlight the various cognitive processes and belief systems that help refugees cope with their difficulties (Khawaja et al. 2008; Brune et al. 2002; Brough et al. 2003).

Education and recreation

A fourth strategy focused on education and recreation. As part of this strategy, asylum seekers and some NGOs opened two multilevel schools together and carried out events for the pleasure of the camp's audience. Even when there was no formal education institutions inside the camp, schooling activities were crucial to minors' mental and physical health. One of them was *Escuelita de la banqueta,*[13] sponsored by Team Brownsville, and the other was "The Sidewalk School" (that I introduced earlier in this chapter). Team Brownsville and SWS supported these two schools financially, but they were entirely organized and run by asylum seekers. Image 28 shows the before and after of *Escuelita de la Banqueta* constructed in collaboration between Team Brownsville, RCM, and SE.

[13] The translation in English is: The Little Sidewalk School.

Image 28. Construction of "Escuelita de la banqueta"

Even though in the Matamoros camp the means of entertainment were minimal, some exceptions supported mental and physical help, such as music lessons, dance clubs, and soccer tournaments organized by asylum seekers who had particular dancing or musical abilities or interests in sports. Image 29 illustrates one of the most vibrant presentations I remember. It was a concert performed by the school of music students to celebrate the unity among the nations represented in the camp. That afternoon, the students played melodies from the different countries they belonged to. They also arranged a collage with the flags of the various countries expelled under MPP and Title 42 and the flag of Israel. When I asked why the Israel flag was part of the mosaic, the teacher told me: — "Because we are like the Hebrew people forced to migrate, persecuted, and without a place to go."

Image 29. Music school performance

Developing economic activities

Another important strategy involved asylum seekers' development of economic activities. The first time I walked through the camp after the relocation, I noticed with surprise how it operated as a small town. The rows of tents were organized following a clear pattern, emulating streets. The main roads had enough space to let large transports pass (garbage trucks and water pipe trucks). There were also cell phone charging stations and free stores distributed along the different camp sections.

Nevertheless, what caught my attention the most was the different business establishments. The first one I saw was a "pizza tent" owned by a family of Cubans. Outside the tent, the owners had a sign with information about the pizzas and how to order them by phone (see the image below).

Image 30. Pizza tent.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, asylum seekers did not want to rely exclusively upon humanitarian aid. Some, like Marina, were looking for a better life in the camp. In the same way as Manuel, others needed to send remittances to their families. Finally, people with fewer resources like Guadalupe were required to find ways to feed their families since the food from the free pantries was not always enough to feed an entire family. In response, people in the camp opened barbershops, diners, hand wash laundry services, and local shops selling vegetables, fruits, chicken, cellphones, and mobile pre-paid cards (Image 31).

Image 31. Local shops inside the camp

Consequently, the development of economic activities is a vivid illustration of how residents from the Matamoros camp did not always act as passive receptors of humanitarian aid but actively worked to create and maintain small businesses. Asylum seekers did this individually and collectively to support others in need and move beyond "bare survival" and economic deprivation.

Procure family well-being

The sixth survival strategy is to procure for family well-being. This strategy includes two activities, 1) to send their children away of the camps and 2) temporary couples. The best example of procure well-being to the family is how parents sent their children away to prevent them from living in the camp (as exemplified in Chapter 5 thought Manuel's case). Those with the resources paid the cartels to smuggle their children across the border "alone" since unaccompanied minors were the only exception to Title 42. The second approach, followed by multiple single women, was finding a temporary partner to prevent harassment, economic

deprivation, and rape to themselves and their children. In the following quote, Ana, an asylum seeker from El Salvador, describes this situation: — "The raping… that forced me to find a partner. A man threatened me. He said that if I refused to have sex with him, he would drown me in the river. So, I met Juan, and we are now together. This relationship is not going to last beyond the camp. I do not think I even really like him, but it is a good arrangement to save my life."

I included temporary couples as a survival strategy because it was a recurrent topic when I asked about gender violence and raping. Women in the camp convinced themselves they needed to give themselves to one man to get protection from violent experiences comprised of sexual violence, including rape and sexual exploitation. Some mentioned, for example, how Mariana (Silvia's neighbor mentioned in Chapter 5) never agreed to have a "boyfriend" since she was married, which caused her to be a victim of multiple raping and violent attacks. This kind of reasoning suggests that rape and gender violence were so pervasive that women developed forms of normalized violence, like having a relationship agreement, as in the case of Ana, to survive. In her work on the migrant route, Wendy Vogt (2016, 379) names this type of social arrangement as "protecting parings." Vogt describes these kinds of relationships as simulated kin relationships, where male migrants exchanged security and protection for the female performance of care work such as procuring food, washing clothes, tending wounds, and, in some cases, sexual intercourse. Both partners perform intimate labors in processes of exchange and reciprocity outside the realm of financial transactions. In this way, such intimate labors, even those involving sex, differ significantly from traditional constructions of sex work. However, abandonment, abuse, and unequal power are still present in these arranged relationships.

I agree with Vogt that these acts differ from traditional constructions of sex work. However, in contrast to Vogt's arguments, I observed that these arrangements still place women in very vulnerable positions at the mercy of their partners since women are the ones in need of protection. Hence, I claim that adopting a partner of convenience is an example of Agamben's theory on the "state of exception" and the bare life. It is precisely women's bodies that remain exposed and at permanent risk. Recent studies on refugee camps criticize the masculine, legalistic and humanitarian image of refugees, calling for a differentiated understanding of women refugees and discussing their process of forced migration, including its gendered dimensions (Buckley-Zistel and Krause 2017, 14) in more detail. Consequently, the study of violence from a gender perspective following successive moments in the flux of peace and war "is not an option but a stark necessity" (Cockburn 2017) to further understand gendered asylum seekers' experiences.

Building and maintaining communication and support

The last strategy is to build and maintain communication and support. A critical approach, particularly for women, was the creation of bonds of trust with those who could leave the camp more freely to run errands for them. For women with children, traveling alone or having access to a job, even inside the camp, was very challenging since they did not have a safe place to leave their children during work time and because cartel members constantly harassed them. The multiple obstacles women encountered when trying to access a job limited their opportunities to afford adequate housing, restricting their living conditions. Therefore, some of them created support groups where women took care of each other's children so they could have access to

employment. Another strategy was to ask people like Manuel, who visited the local market daily, or collectively pay folks such as Jaime to run errands for them either in the camp or in the city.

In addition, they created support groups using messaging apps, where women could communicate about threats, legal counseling, job opportunities, or share information and advice. As mentioned by Adriana, an asylum seeker from Honduras: — "Here in the camp, we have different face-to-face meetings, but also many WhatsApp groups. We have the Honduran group, the Women's group, the Water supply group, the Firewood group, the Free-store group, the Lawyers' group [...]. There are many of them, sometimes overwhelming, but they are also beneficial. At least we know that we are not alone".

Conclusion

Some days, while I was walking outside the camp, I could hear the singing and laughter across the fence coming from inside the tents. People living in the camp used to break piñatas and make wishes before blowing out the candles on birthday cakes. Many celebrations happened in two years, including weddings, baptisms, and holidays such as Christmas, New Year’s Eve, and Easter. However, deep down, the smiles, dancing, and laughter of the good days were threatened by hopelessness, the terror of organized crime, fear of oblivion, and anxiety of not knowing how long the wait would last. This chapter illustrated how asylum seekers collaborated with local NGOs to address the challenges that produced restrictive immigration policies. Recurrently, camp residents devised together strategies to stop being passive recipients of supplied subsistence and turn into active agents looking for ways and means to meet their needs. They used the resources at hand to move forward, [but also supplemented these by developing their own survival strategies] against the different forms of violence they faced during their waiting

time on the border inside a camp. However, in my research, I found that even when violence mitigation was essential to surviving and promoting mental health, it also was a system that sent a false sense of well-being to the U.S. and Mexican governments. This deceptive sense of security and well-being (unwittingly) led international organizations like the UNHR and the United States and Mexican governments to wash their hands off of responsibility.

In Chapter 5, I showed how different social structures and actors perpetrate violence following multiple linkages across the continuum: pre-migration, waiting time inside the camp, and post-migration stages. I did this, paying special attention to how violence impacts migrant women. In this chapter, I focused on the implementation of survival strategies, paying particular attention to the process of collaboration among asylum seekers and NGOs and on how women originate some of these strategies, especially those that ease violence directed at women and children. When I think about these two chapters together, I found that even when at the individual level, violence mitigation became essential to surviving and promoting mental health, at the macro level, it created a false sense of well-being, fueling (unintended but highly consequential) state violence. Consequently, due to the continuation of policies that restrict asylum and the lack of implementation of a program that includes safe shelters with adequate sources of food, medical attention, and education, the Rise, Endurance, and Fall of the Migrant Camps became a cycle.

CHAPTER 7
A PERSISTING CYCLE: THE NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE AND THE RISE OF A NEW CAMP

"Thousands of asylum seekers have formed an informal and makeshift encampment at the Plaza in Reynosa. The conditions at the overcrowded camp are abysmal - the asylum seekers do not have adequate or proper shelter, running water, bathrooms, showers, clothes washing facilities, electricity, education, and more. Without their basic human needs being met, many people are susceptible to preventable water-borne illnesses and Covid, and most suffer from mental and physical health decline."

— *Erin Hughes, Solidarity Engineering*

In the prior two chapters, I showed how violence permeates the continuum of violence in the migration journey (pre-migration, waiting time inside the camp, and post-migration) and how asylum seekers actively worked with the NGO community to mitigate violence. Yet, even when, at the individual level, violence mitigation is essential for surviving and promoting mental health, at the macro level, practices of mitigation can develop a misleading sense of well-being, increasing state and legal violence. Building on this argument, in this chapter, I answer the following question: What are the implications of the normalization of violence and the continuance of immigration policies that restrict migration and asylum? To answer the question, this chapter is organized as follows: First, I present some examples from the Matamoros camp, at the individual level, to discuss the meaning of routinization of violence for asylum seekers. And how this routinization can lead to its invisibilization at the meso and macro levels. My point here is to present evidence on how the naturalization of violence works. After that, I explain, at the macro level, the process of normalization and worsening of violence and how this process explains why the rise, endurance, and fall of migrant camps is a cycle driven by the continuation of "temporary" immigration policies such as MPP or Title 42. Finally, I use the process of how

the Reynosa camp was formed as a case to show how the rapid normalization of "temporary" immigration policies restricting asylum and propelling deportation exacerbates violence.

The routinization of violence

Based on the analysis of the Matamoros camp, I noticed that the production of violence followed a pattern of normalization. In this section, I present three examples. The first one is related to the use of restrooms and the risk of rape; the second example is about severe lice infestations; finally, I use the drowning of Oscar and his two-year-old daughter to illustrate the routinization of death.

Access to sanitation and violence against women

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the use of restrooms and the risk of raping were constant worries, especially for women and girls. According to Schmitt and colleagues (2018), one of the most pervasive yet common forms of gender discrimination experienced daily by girls and women is inadequate access to private, comfortable, and convenient toilet facilities. They also point out that although men and women share the critical need for adequate access to toilets, many social, cultural, and biological realities often impact and differentiate their sanitation experiences. Girls and women living in displacement camps and informal settlements suffer even more from constrained access to an adequate toilet, resulting in experiences of stress, physical discomfort, and gender-based violence.

Inadequate and dangerous access to appropriate toilets was a recurrent theme discussed by multiple women in the camp; I will use one of my conversations with Rosalia, an asylum seeker from Guatemala, to illustrate the problem. Rosalia lived in the camp with her husband and three girls, ages 2,5, and 13 (Ana, Rosa, and Sami). They lived in one of the tents near the

entrance to the camp. I used to visit them regularly because their tent had a malfunctioning zipper I helped them to keep their tent closed. This was a common problem in the camp, but we needed to fix it urgently due to the winter weather. That morning, I brought some tarps I sewed to attach them to the tent's edges and use them as curtains to give some privacy and help repel the cold wind. That day was one of the most physically challenging for me doing fieldwork.

It was a freezing morning, one of the coldest I had spent in the camp. We were in the middle of the 2021 Texas Winter Storm. The temperatures never went up over 25 degrees. It was cloudy and windy, and there was not enough gasoline to turn on the power generators. My whole body was numb because of the cold. I remember my feet went numb while talking to Rosalia. We sat on an improvised bench near her kitchen, close to a fire she lit to heat water. I was on my period, and the blood flow was too heavy because of the copper IUD I used, and I started to feel a leak from my menstrual cup. I was worried about managing the situation of cleaning my cup in one of the portable toilets, so I asked Rosalia about her routine when she got her period. Rosalia immediately engaged with the conversation, but not her own experience; she centered her narrative on her fears about Sami, her older daughter. She told me how she was very afraid of Sami getting her period and having to use the camp porta potties and showers.

> "For the girls, we use toddler training toilets, so they do not have to use the public restrooms. I also adapted a section behind our tent for them to shower. But I am worried about Sami. She is getting to age. We got here when she was eleven. That was not much concern when we arrived, but now I am worried. I know how hard it is to have my period here; I do not want that for her. She can get an infection. I had an infection last month. It is common here to get sick because of the lack of hygiene. But what alternative do we have? The showers? I have heard so many terror stories. I do not want that for Sami; she deserves better."

Fears of assault lead girls and women in displacement camps to create improvised toilets (e.g., the use of outdoor drains or buckets), refrain from consuming liquids, or resort to using plastic

bags for waste excretion ("flying toilets"), which are eventually thrown into the open or general waste streams (Winter and Barchi 2016; Schmitt et al. 2018).

These strategies partially helped families to prevent sexual abuse within the camp. Yet, evidence from studies discussing the lack of access to sanitation and violence against women highlight some of the risks of using improvised restrooms and refraining from consuming liquids. Examples of sanitation-related health consequences include an increased risk of toxic shock syndrome, vaginal infection, and dysmenorrhea resulting from neglectful menstruation practices; infections and hemorrhoids associated with feces and urine retention (Winter and Barchi 2016, 292).

Nevertheless, on top of the extensive health risk factor associated with makeshift toilets and showers, this "partial solution" tended to invisibilize the systemic problem of sexual abuse of women and girls inside public hygiene facilities. Christa Cook from Solidarity Engineering told me how having a sanitation program for the camp was a priority, but solving the problem of insecurity and the risk of rape was a more complex issue, mostly because people preferred to avoid the conversation —"The problem is there, but it is a complicated and uncomfortable conversation." Erin Hughes added: —"I just wish more people were interested in donating for bathroom facilities; it's such a non-glamorous yet essential thing." Christa and Erin's statements talked about how complex was for them to address sexual violence and hygiene in public facilities. First, it is a complicated conversation that people are unwilling to have, and secondly, because of how hard it is to find donations for bathroom facilities. In addition, the temporary solutions implemented by women invisibilized the crisis, silencing the raping problem and exacerbating other health problems such as vaginal infection and dysmenorrhea. This situation

makes it harder for the NGO leaders to find donations or for the public eye to know about the risks of using the porta-potties and the showers. since these strategies

In the end, for the great majority of the camp residents, gender violence and health risks associated with portable toilets and showers became part of the daily routine. They ended up being "just something common that happens," as Rosalia implied when she talked about her infection. Still, improvised toilets diverted the need for adequate private restrooms and showers since women were not using the facilities that often. Consequently, the lack of attention to this crushing issue magnified the precarious and violent circumstances of women and girls in the Matamoros camp.

Lice infestation and the risk of losing everything

Another pressing problem was the high prevalence of lice infestation, particularly among children. Despite the fact that the risks associated with human lice are life-threatening, particularly for the population living in poor-hygiene conditions because of war, social disruption, severe poverty, or gaps in public health management (Badiaga and Brouqui 2012), residents of the Matamoros camp were more worried about the legal effects of having lice.

A recurrent practice used by CBP to discourage asylum seekers from pursuing their claims was the use of medical screenings. Many families were turned away from attending their immigration hearings if CBP believed any family member looked sick or had lice, leading to a postponement of hearings and the denial of their cases in certain circumstances. Like Rodolfo, an asylum seeker from El Salvador said:

"Sometimes, I pretended to be strong because you have to be strong in this life. But they [CBP] treat us like dogs. They did not listen; we missed our last court because my daughter got lice. Look around how we are supposed not to get sick living like this, surrounded by rats and other

animals. This experience leaves scars because we will always remember it even if we overcome it. My kids are never going to forget this place. This camp will follow us forever."

Because of the prevalence of head lice infestation, several families decided not to send their children to the school, arguing that clustering children in a classroom could increase the probability of getting head lice. Even the remote possibility of missing a court date was a massive concern for asylum seekers. Amalia, from Honduras, told me:

"My son does not go to school. I know it is important for him to have an education, but he will have the opportunity to go to school when we get to Atlanta. Right now, I need to be sure that we won't miss our court dates. My neighbor got her court delayed because her kid had lice. I am not risking it. I do not let Juan near other children, and I always keep his hair short. We cannot jeopardize our only chance. I want us to cross legally. I do not want to be running away my whole life, we are doing this right, and if that means Juan needs to miss school, then that is what we must do."

The psychological distress caused by the fear of missing a court date and the possibility of having their case denied placed asylum seekers in a position where their health and the education of their children were not even a remote priority. The goal of the people living in the Matamoros camp was to get their asylum granted, and they would pay any price to reach it, including living in complete isolation. This sacrifice clearly illustrates how legal violence, in the form of CBP medical screenings, normalized other kinds of violence such as mental and physical health or a sustained lack of education.

Oscar and his daughter and the routinization of death

The case of Oscar and his daughter, whose bodies were found drowned on the backs of the Rio Grande (Chappel 2019), is another harrowing example of how violence became normalized inside the Matamoros camp. When Oscar was 25, and his daughter was nearly 2, a journalist

photographed their bodies lying facedown in the river. "At first, we put crosses to remember the dead, but we have seen so much death and suffering that you get to it. Now we prefer to think that missing people are safe, that they went back to their countries. The alternative is too painful." Those were the words of Marina, an asylum seeker from El Salvador, when she was walking me to the edge of the river, pointing at a group of crosses with the names of those who drowned in the river, some because of the dangerous currents of the Rio Grande, and others, like the Guatemalan leader, at the hands of the cartels.

Image 32. Memorial to the death at the Matamoros Camp

Then Marina continued: — "Look at everybody there, having fun. We found Oscar and his daughter only a month ago, and here we are, in front of their names, trying to find a little joy because death does not scare us anymore." For Marina, death became routine, and she seemed to be at peace with that. However, the routinization of violence can have dire consequences, not

only in the display of spectacular acts of aggression but because it has become an ordinary practice in history and in politics (Pandey 2006, 14), such as the continuation of Title 42, even when public health experts have argued that while international borders remain largely open to other travelers, there is no need to turn away refugees (American Immigration Council 2021). Consequently, when violence becomes an ordinary practice, it raises considerable tolerance among camp residents.

> The routine, ordinary practice of violence—for instance, the beating, rape, and indeed burning of women, in homes, in village squares and barely secluded parking lots, and their general humiliation on the streets, in public buses, in films, and so on—gives rise to a considerable tolerance of violence (Pandey 2006, 11).

Just like Marina explained it, death became part of the routine in the camp. Like the raping of women and vaginal infections: "Something that happens." Violence was so pervasive in the Matamoros camp that it became tolerable. Residents of the camp continuously developed mitigation practices; however, violence never really disappeared. It only changed forms or became part of the normalized routine, breeding a cycle of violence. Consequently, violence became silenced until it turned invisible to the public's eyes or to those who were not immersed in the dynamics of the encampment. A recurrent topic in my interviews with Matamoros residents was the idea that migrants in the camps were there only to make money out of humanitarian aid and were there by choice. People were unaware of how violent and unsafe the camp was for asylum seekers. Violence was invisible outside the camp, first because of general hatred and xenophobia and second because it was not named and hidden behind the fences surrounding the camp.

The cycle of violence. From Matamoros to Reynosa

Violence at the Matamoros migrant camp became routine, symbolically and physically tolerated, not only by those experiencing it firsthand but by the general public and policymakers. As illustrated in Figure 11, this process of routinization (inside the camp) and invisibilization (outside the camp) turned the process of the rising, endurance, and fall of the Matamoros camp into a cycle due to the silencing of suffering and the continuance of policies that restrict asylum.

Figure 11. The cycle of normalization and exacerbation of violence

The figure above shows how the pattern of normalization works. First, violence is triggered, then people develop survival strategies to mitigate the effects of violence. However, due to prolonged exposure to dehumanizing conditions, the important role that violence mitigation and violence reduction measures can play is damaged by the normalization of violence and a gradual process of exacerbating violent effects. I will use the launching of the Migrant Protection Protocols as an example.

The Remain in Mexico program started in March 2019, after (coercive) negotiations between the U.S. and Mexican governments. Nevertheless, the government of López Obrador

agreed to implement the program even when the Mexican government repeatedly claimed to have solid "humanitarian concerns" and did not have the resources or a good plan to provide a decent and safe stay to the people expelled by the MPP program. As expressed by one of the lawyers working at the Matamoros Camp:

> "The irresponsible expansion of MPP to Tamaulipas, agreed upon at the meeting between Secretary Marcelo Ebrard and Vice President Michael Pence, has aggravated the situation in Mexican border cities and exposed thousands of people to serious risks. Particularly those returned to the border cities in Tamaulipas." —Rachel, pro bono lawyer

In addition, the agreement included the enforcement of the Southern Mexican border. President Lopez Obrador (who based his campaign advocating for the poor and the oppressed) ordered the deployment of 6,000 members of the National Guard to patrol the border with Guatemala. According to INAMI (2019), the number of deported people from Central America has almost tripled, from 5,717 in December 2018 to 14,970 in April 2019.

Regardless of the multiple criticisms received by humanitarian organizations, the Mexican and the U.S. not only continued MPP for over two years but after Biden's administration announced the end of MPP in 2021, expulsions to Mexico continued under Title 42. Therefore, at the macro level, after a lapse of "joy" because of the closure of the Matamoros camp, a new camp was established, 45 minutes away from Matamoros and with worse conditions than the extinct camp. As Chloe from Solidarity Engineering attested: "The new encampment in Reynosa is like Matamoros on steroids." I quote Chloe's words to demonstrate how the continuation of policies restricting asylum not only continues a violent process on the U.S.-Mexico border, but the effects of the continuation of Title 42 are more damaging and dangerous than the original introduction of MPP. For example, in the Reynosa camp, neither men nor

women use portable toilets during the nights out of fear of being kidnapped. One of the most shocking memories I have from my first visit to the Reynosa camp was of a filthy and foul-smelling camp. I could not stop thinking about the advancements in health and sanitation infrastructure, like sanitary drainage and stormwater management, that NGOs spent months investing at Matamoros and were about to be demolished.

In the following section, as an example of how the continuation of "temporary" immigration policies such as MPP or Title 42 not only endure but exacerbate violence, I explain how the Reynosa camp was formed as a more dangerous site for asylum seekers to wait in Mexico almost at the same time the Matamoros camp was demolished.

Matamoros. The dismantling and erasure

I visited the Matamoros camp the morning after Joe Biden's election. It was a rainy and cold day; everything was wet or frozen. It was hard to walk in the icy mud, but the camp was lively. People jumped in excitement; there was hope for everyone. Immediately upon entering office, the Biden Administration announced the end of MPP. Many families began packing immediately. Asylum seekers could cross in an orderly manner to continue their migration process. I could hear the words of joy and singing coming out from the tents. I also saw people celebrating outside their tents despite the freezing temperatures and the heavy rain. I still remember Manuel, completely soaked, with a huge smile and his hands up, celebrating that the end had come.

On February 26th, the first families crossed to the U.S, and by March 8th, the Mexican government began the definitive dismantling of the camp. The images below show how the Matamoros camp looked during the dismantling process, which lasted no longer than two weeks.

Image 33. The Matamoros camp after its closure (2 days and 1 week after closure)

Regrettably, violence against asylum seekers went beyond March 8th. The Matamoros camp symbolized the Trump Administration's political stance toward immigration and, in stark contrast, disappeared when the Biden Administration assumed control. However, families from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America continue to be expelled based on Title 42. Over 600,000 people have been expelled from the United States under Title 42, including the brutal deportation of 15,000 Haitians camping under a bridge in Del Rio, Texas. Therefore, even

though MPP officially ended, Title 42 is still in motion, disregarding the protections and procedures mandated by international humanitarian laws for immigrants seeking asylum.

The rise of a new camp

> *"Children have tried ending their lives at the encampment in Reynosa. How can you fix something that serious if you don't have anything? You can't."*
>
> — *Felicia Rangel, The Sidewalk School.*

Image 34. The Reynosa Camp in Plaza de la Republica

When the Matamoros camp shut down, a symbol was dismantled. However, the reality of restrictive immigration policies violating migrants' human rights is still there, more present than ever in the form of a new camp. The Reynosa camp is only 45 minutes away from Matamoros. As of March 2022, more than 2,500 people live in Plaza de la República, right in front of the Hidalgo International Bridge, without running water, bathrooms, showers, electricity, education,

and any security or protection from organized crime. Migrants were told, by other migrants they had known, that they were better off staying at the Plaza, a short walk from the international bridge. Otherwise, they would face the risk of deportation from Mexico. According to lawyers working in Reynosa, that was not the case, but migrants were hesitant to believe in anyone they did not trust, so they decided to stay in the Plaza. In addition, there were only two shelters available in Reynosa: Casa del Migrante de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, which can host up to 250 people; and Senda de Vida, with approximately the same occupancy[14].

Image 35 was taken the same week the Matamoros camp closed. The image shows the gazebo at Plaza de la República, where people 150 people were already living due to Title 42 expulsions.

Image 35. The Gazebo at Plaza de la Republica, March 2022

14 Until they decided to use all their common areas for people to live in tents to relocate people from the Plaza, increasing their capacity to almost 2,000 people. However, this was not enough, and the Plaza remained full.

Plaza de la República is 1.6 acres in size, almost 5 acres less than the size of the Matamoros camp. As of March of 2022, asylum seekers live in the Plaza, exposed to violent conditions such as recurrent shootings, kidnappings, or raids organized by the Mexican National Guard to confiscate gas tanks, clean water containers, and electrical extensions[15]. Image 36 shows how the Reynosa camp grew from March 2021 (see image 35) to August of the same year. In this image, we can observe how not only is the gazebo already covered by tents and tarps, but most of the Plaza is already populated. Unfortunately, security and sanitizing services did not arrive at the same speed, and only one handwashing tank and a few drinking water containers were available. As claimed by the NGOs providing medical services, severe dehydration, and water-borne illness were very common during the summer months in the camp.

Image 36. The Reynosa Camp. August 2021.

Source: Wesley Shugart-Schmidt

15 The rationale for confiscating these items was to prevent a major accident due to a short circuit. However, those were the only resources asylum seekers had to have drinking water, cooked food, and access to electricity.

After seeing how fast the Reynosa camp was growing, most nonprofit groups working in Matamoros saw the demolition of the Matamoros camp as devastating since they now needed to rebuild everything from scratch and commute every day to Reynosa or relocate their headquarters. As Loren, a volunteer from Team Brownsville, mentioned: — "Why destroy everything? Why cannot we use what was already built?" What Loren's questioning emphasize is not only the exacerbation of violence that the complete erasure of the Matamoros camp brought to asylum seekers expelled under Title 42, but also the lack of planning and care given to the work and investment of the organized civil society and nonprofits working to ameliorate the damaging effects of MPP and Title 42.

The camp's growth in Reynosa has been exponential since the first families began to inhabit the gazebo until the last patch of the Plaza had been covered over with a disorganized maze of tents and tarps. However, the maximum population growth happened between September and December of 2021 due to the arrival of hundreds of families from Haiti after all 15,000 migrants were deported from an encampment in Del Rio, Texas. Haitian families are fleeing their country due to the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in 2010 and the political instability after President Jovenel Moïse's assassination in July 2021. Several families returned to Mexico after the U.S. left their country years ago to live in Chile or Brazil. However, they left those countries because of discrimination and the COVID-19-related economic slowdown.

After the raids at Del Rio, TX, as stated by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, about 2,000 migrants were deported to Haiti, and another 8,000 were returned "voluntary" to Mexico. According to local NGOs, Haitians moved into Reynosa after hearing that the Border Patrol was not turning back families with children after crossing the Rio Grande. However, most Haitian families were either deported to Haiti or returned to Mexico, only

exacerbating the confusion and worsening their living conditions. Even though, in May 2021, DHS re-designated Haiti for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), TPS only applies to Haitians already in the country at the time of the designation; hence all the families waiting in Mexico due to Title 42 are not permitted to request asylum or to be screened for fear of return in violation of U.S. law and treaty obligations. Image 37 shows what the Reynosa camp looked like in December of 2021, after the arrival of hundreds of families from Haiti.

Image 37. The Reynosa Camp. December 2021

In addition to the violence that families from Central America and Southern Mexico experience inside the camps, Haitian families struggle with additional layers of discrimination due to racial bigotry, cultural bias, poverty, and a substantial language barrier. Some NGOs are working on finding ways to get translators and have signs made to inform Haitians better, but local nonprofits are small, and their resources are very limited.

Title 42 continuation and the exacerbation of violence

In Reynosa, like in Matamoros, people are living in the open with no place to go and without a timeline or any legal path to the U.S. In Tamaulipas, over 10,000 asylum seekers are living in public plazas, shelters, cheap motel rooms, or condemned overcrowded apartment buildings, exposed to very hazardous conditions, limited access to clean water, diseases carried by animal infestations, and increased risks of kidnapping, extortion, and sexual violence.

Image 38. The rain season in the Reynosa Camp

Source: Solidarity Engineering

Image 38 illustrates the conditions of the Reynosa camp after the rainy season in September of 2021. The rain turned most of the camp into mud, flooded tents, and forced some migrants to evacuate the Plaza. Keeping the mud out of the tents was almost impossible. Because of that, cooking utensils and food were impossible to keep clean, making all food unsafe for human

consumption. Moreover, people could not wash or dry their clothes, making it particularly difficult for families with babies and little children to have their basic needs met, including access to clothing, medicine, and food.

To walk through the Reynosa camp is to be confronted with the concourse of cruel policies of immigration control and asylum restriction, along with a failure at a regional scale from Washington, D.C., Mexico City, and the different capital cities across the Caribbean and Central and South America. Federal governments in the Americas have failed to solve the structural causes driving unprecedented levels of people to move. Mexican and American immigration policies failed to address a humanitarian response to the thousands of people forced to move. And local governments in border cities languished to address crime, insecurity, and xenophobia. At the camp, migrants believe that cartel groups are running everything and are everywhere. No one feels safe, and since the conditions in their home countries are only worsening, going back home is not an option.

MPP 2.0, the continued calamity and the persistence of the cycle of violence

In April 2021, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt challenged the end of the Migrant Protection Protocols, arguing that the Biden administration failed to justify the termination under federal regulations and that the Biden administration's move to suspend the policy was an "arbitrary and capricious decision." In August, Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Texas judge, ordered the federal administration to reinstate the policy. Biden's administration appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the appeal was declined. The Supreme Court stated that DHS must work "in good faith" to reinstate MPP until the department expands the government's capacity to detain migrants in the United States lawfully. Consequently, in December of 2021, the U.S. government relaunched MPP.

Ironically, because Title 42 authorizes rapid expulsions of migrants at the border (based upon a presumed risk of disease) and does not offer access to asylum petitions, the relaunching of MPP has been seen as beneficial for asylum seekers; however, according to several layers working at the Matamoros and the Reynosa camps, MPP was designed for migrants to fail their asylum cases due to a long-delayed process. Additionally, its re-establishment will not improve the conditions of asylum seekers on the U.S-Mexico border.

Nevertheless, even if Title 42 is revoked[16], people will continue to be expelled to Mexico under the new MPP. In response, local NGOs and the local government are working together to build two new migrant shelters to relocate people living in the Plaza. However, the resources are minimal, and only women and families with children will be allowed at the new shelters. Furthermore, these shelters are designed to work as "NGO owned" tent cities. This means that even when people may be more protected from violence from organized crime, they would continue to live in temporary tent accommodations inside overcrowded facilities, just like how the shelter Senda de Vida has been operating since the beginning of Title 42 in Reynosa. Because of the unsafe conditions and the increasing number of migrants living in the Plaza, Hector Silva, the shelter of Senda de Vida, decided to allow people to camp in his shelter. Currently, almost 2000 people live there, waiting for the end of Title 42 or for their paroles to be processed (see image 39).

16 Twenty-one states have signed a federal lawsuit seeking to Block the end of Title 42, therefore it is still unsure if Title 42 will end on May 23rd as announced by the federal government.

Image 39. Senda de Vida in Reynosa become a tent shelter after Title 42.

In Reynosa (and in other Mexican border cities), the number of expelled immigrants continues to exceed the cases that lawyers can move forward. As stated by the director of Senda de Vida, Hector Silva — "If the U.S. government keeps expelling people like this, no matter how many additions or shelters we build, there will always be an encampment."

To indefinitely live in temporary tents is not a humanitarian solution. It exacerbates violence by normalizing inhumane living conditions and continuing a state of exception where asylum seekers are forced to live a bare life where their bodies and their self are reduced to a harsh existence. Even when migrants continue to actively work with the NGO community, exploring dynamics of violence mitigation, if restrictive immigration policies continue, the situation will not improve, and the cycle of violence will continue to grow indefinitely.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

This dissertation explains how Metering, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), and Title 42 have become breeding grounds for the worsening of systematic violence against migrants in transit, and the seedbed of the process of rising, endurance, and fall of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border. In the preceding chapters, I took a comprehensive look at how the different social dimensions and representations of violent effects are interconnected. To do this, I introduced a framework of analysis that combines the conceptualization of violence as a continuum and the theorization of violence as a web of causal connections between personal, collective, national, and global levels of violence. Based on the intersection of a violent environment, policies designed to deter movement, and an ongoing pandemic, I provide a critical review of how different social structures and actors perpetrate violence and the ways in which immigration policies forced asylum seekers to wait at Mexican border cities, propelling the constitution of "temporal migrant camps" at the doorstep of the United States.

In chapter 1, I presented an overview of the effects of the Mexican security process and the gradual militarization of border cities, particularly in Tamaulipas. I also summarized the most critical restrictive enforcement legislation and operations affecting the Texas-Tamaulipas border from 1965 to 2015, highlighting those enacted after 2001. Finally, I presented the immigration policies enacted during the Trump administration, separating them into two groups: restrictive immigration policies from 2017 to 2020 and immigration policies responding to COVID-19.

Chapter 2 introduced the research setting and context. I provided information on the U.S Mexico border, particularly about the Texas-Tamaulipas border's social and political-economic background. Later, I discussed the Matamoros case and how it can be used to interrogate the

normalization and acceptance of inhumane (and exceptional) means of security and immigration control. The chapter showed how the hardening of immigration policies, the presence of drug cartel forces, and a global pandemic have worsened systematic acts of violence against asylum seekers. Finally, at the end of the chapter, I discussed how policies such as Metering, MPP, and Title 42 laid the foundations for the rising of the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico Border.

Chapter 3 theoretically situated the migrant camps on the U.S.-Mexico border at the intersection of the sociology of violence and immigration. I also highlighted the interconnections between diverse forms of violence that challenge the traditional divisions between interpersonal and inter-state violence. In so doing, I showed how the theorization of violence as a web of causal connections between personal, collective, national, and global levels of violence is an essential navigational tool for building theoretical arguments about how pervasive policies of immigration control have become breeding grounds for the worsening of systematic violence against migrants in transit on the U.S.-Mexico Border. Chapter 4 described the research methodology. In this chapter, I showed how I negotiate access to the site and engage with ethnographic methods based on human agency, egalitarian research relationships, and empathy.

Chapter 5 presented the stories of Manuel, Silvia, and Guadalupe. In doing so, I showed how war, political violence, natural disasters, sexual abuse, exploitation, and poverty are some of the causes of trauma and suffering that asylum seekers must experience through their migration journeys. In this chapter, I focused the analysis at the individual level to examine how violence is perpetrated by different social actors and structures, such as national governments, international organizations, organized crime, social inequality, racial discrimination, and sexual abuse.

Chapter 6 combined meso and individual levels of analysis to show the different factors and social mechanisms asylum seekers use to contravene or mitigate violence in migrant camps.

In this chapter, I argued that marginalized asylum seekers are not passive victims of crisis or displacement but draw on a diverse repertoire of strategies to deal with dispossession and violence. Finally, in Chapter 7, I built on the two previous chapters to explain, at the individual level, the meaning of the routinization of violence. And how this routinization can lead to its invisibilization at the meso and macro levels. Following Agamben (1998) in his description of camps as spaces that are opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule, in this chapter, I presented evidence of the process of normalization and worsening of violence and how this process explains the rise-endurance-fall cycle of migrant camps by using the case of how the rise of the Reynosa camp began on the same day as the erasure of the Matamoros camp started.

Practical Recommendations and Policy Relevance

On April 1, 2022, the breaking news is that the Biden administration announced an end to Title 42 on May 23. However, the announcement has been followed by pushback from local congressional representatives. Nevertheless, the humanitarian crisis at the border is not a problem that can be solved with the end of Title 42 or the new version of MPP. The crisis I witnessed in my dissertation is part of a long-time crafted design based on exclusion and white supremacy. To unpack this historical exacerbation of racial state violence, we should look at policies such as the 1790 act that limited access to U.S. citizenship to "free white person(s) ... of good character." Black people were not considered qualified to receive citizenship at birth. Since then, race has had everything to do with who has its place in the United States. Later, the Immigration Act of 1917 was the first of a series of restrictive statutes imposing literacy tests on immigrants, creating new categories of inadmissible persons, and barring immigration from the

Asia-Pacific zone. To further limit immigration, the 1924 Immigration Act established extended "national origins" quotas, a highly restrictive and quantitatively discriminatory system.

Additionally, the 1920s was a period of intense nativism that resulted in creating a substantial amount of border control mechanisms. One of the most important is the formation of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924, which was created to systematically protect the physical borderline and to enforce for the very first time a direct deportation campaign (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). In 1965, the Hart-Celler Act abolished the earlier quota system based on national origin and established a new immigration policy to reunite immigrant families and attract skilled labor. Later, the aftermath of the Bracero program and the restricted and inhumane procedures resulted in the process of undocumented migrant recruitment. The increment in the number of "illegal" crossings developed an important "fight back" directed by the INS, known as Operation Wetback in 1954 (Calavita 2010). Operation Wetback, the nativism ideology, and the established idea of Mexicans taking Americans' jobs are the roots of the contemporary discourse of illegality and a process of stigmatization that continue to this day.

Even though the Bracero program was supposed to provide temporary jobs, during the 20 years it lasted, the system allowed migrants to become familiar with the U.S. labor force, creating an important cultural capital that encouraged more migration. Another mechanism developed during the bracero years was the establishment of a network of human resources that reduced the costs and risks of migration (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; T. M. Golash-Boza 2015; Calavita 2010). The growth of these mechanisms, combined with an economic decline in Mexico and the increment of the restrictions to obtain a work visa for Mexicans, was the perfect recipe for an explosion of undocumented immigration.

As a result of the economic changes in both nations, the lack of success of border enforcement to prevent undocumented immigration, and intense political pressures, in 1986, the U.S. Congress passed one of the most life-changing immigration reforms. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) is a double-edged sword. One edge complicated the possibility of hiring or recruiting migrants, made it illegal to hire undocumented migrants, and required employers to attest to their employees' immigration status. On the other edge, legalized undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. before 1982 and had resided there continuously (T. Golash-Boza 2012; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002).

In 1994, the U.S. Border Patrol implemented a strategy called Prevention Through Deterrence, a plan that relies on the use of hyper-security measures around urban ports of entry so "illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing and more suited for enforcement." (De León 2015, 32). Two years later, in 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). IIRIRA was presented as a platform that included two sets of immigration bills, one focused on illegal migration and another covered legal migration. The legal immigration bill drastically reduced the number of family and employment immigrants permitted into the U.S., while the illegal immigration portion covered deportation and border enforcement. IIRIRA is recognized as the principal legislation that facilitates the removal of immigrants. Additionally, as part of the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. treated migration as a matter of Homeland Security. The constitution of migration as a subject of national security was consolidated in 2002 by the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which established a new institutional apparatus that not only expanded the causes on which non-citizens can be deported

but also expedited the process of deportation and intensified the discourses of illegality and criminality around undocumented immigration.

In terms of refuge and asylum, the U.S. has long romanticized its welcoming of the refugee, even when the tensions between welcoming and nativist fears of foreigners have been a constant since the U.S foundation. However, 2016 is undoubtedly a watershed in the history of the U.S asylum and refugee policy. Donald's Trump anti-immigrant stance and his harsh racial and xenophobic rhetoric jeopardized the system of protecting refugees and asylees, established in 1980 by blocking the entry of refugees and asylees and criminalizing foreign nationals who attempt to seek asylum in the U.S. Trump's narrative asserted that terrorists are coming to the U.S. as refugees (Muslims ban), and claimed that migrants from Mexico and Central America are all rapists and gang members, despite research showing that most Central Americans are fleeing gang violence when they seek asylum.

An example of how racially biased has become the U.S. asylum system is what is happening with the Ukrainian population on the U.S-Mexico border. Because of Russia's assault on their nation, Ukrainians have fled their country, and some are seeking asylum in the United States at Mexican border cities. Contrary to what has happened with African, Central American, and Caribbean migrants fleeing violence and persecution, Ukrainians have been singled out for special treatment. In a memorandum signed on March 11 by Matthew Davies, head of CBP, he authorized “case-by-case” exemptions of Ukrainian refugees, while 21 states are signing a federal lawsuit to block the end of Title 42 for Latin American or Caribbean countries. In addition, the Mexican government launched a series of measures to protect Ukrainian citizens in Tijuana, including the opening of a safe shelter exclusive for them, while the rest of the asylum seekers have been homeless for over two years. My argument is not that Ukrainians should not

be protected but that everyone deserves the same treatment regardless of their nationality or the color of their skin.

Simply put, Washington's D.C. response to migration and refuge has been built over the years as a restrictive apparatus targeting racial minorities and migrants. This has been a long process of racial discrimination based on the power of delimitation through exclusion and empowerment through inclusion (Goldberg 2002). As stated by Goldberg, the power of delimitation through exclusion and empowerment through inclusion, interactively definitive of the modern state and its degree of self-determination, offers the artifice of internal homogeneity to a state's population. After the 1924 national origins quotas slashed immigration to the United States, immigration laws are a central but often an obscure part of the envision of the United States as a white country. First, it was the Chinese Exclusion Act. Later, national quotas and what we now know as the Border Patrol, the hostile terrain, the surveillance, the militarization of the border, the metering, and the walls (even the invisible ones).

Undoubtedly, the U.S needs a comprehensive immigration policy. Still, at the same time, the country keeps struggling with strong political arguments that prevent the possibility of acting in a more efficient way. As a result, immigration policies have been disengaged from the country's actual social, economic, and humanitarian needs. The U.S. is facing a crude reality of family separation (Romero, Schueths, and Lawston 2015; L. Abrego 2014; L. J. Abrego and Menjívar 2011; Hagan, Eschbach, and Rodriguez 2008), border enforcement without successful results (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Cornelius and Lewis 2007), and inefficient employment procedures unable to reduce undocumented migration (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Massey and Gentsch 2014; Meissner et al. 2007).

The current U.S. challenges on immigration are intimately tied to family reunification, regularization of unauthorized immigrants, employment programs, and the need for a real and humanitarian asylum and refugee program. Currently, as Fitzgerald (2019) explains, governments from the Global North guard their discretion to select refugees from camps abroad and admit mostly symbolic numbers through legal channels. They also kept asylum seekers from their borders using techniques of remote control or the implementation of turnback and metering protocols (as in the case of the United States). The case of how Mexico has been under pressure to deter and filter asylum seekers is another example of remote control damaging Central American and Caribbean migrants fleeing civil war, political persecution, extreme poverty, and gang extortion. Since immigration is a product of social, political, and economic processes in origin and destination countries, a successful immigration reform must understand the interests of people in sending and receiving societies. A good public policy must recognize the existence of divided political interests and be grounded in a broadly defensible morality (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002).

Finally, considering the living conditions of asylum seekers on the U.S.-Mexico border due to restrictive immigration policies and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, future research on migration, asylum, and refuge should continue critically studying border areas as sites of racial exclusion and questioning how the past and current policies of border enforcement and deportation function to intentionally shape the flows and lives of brown and black migrants by pushing them into contexts of increased violence, marginalization, despair and, in some cases, death.

Future research directions

My dissertation points to several avenues for future research. After over two years of fieldwork, this project uncovered many rich data, but I did not systematically explore all themes that emerged during the data analysis. For instance, I was not able to completely explore all the unique ways in which migrant camps and violence can talk about racial or class disparities. Limited data also provides evidence that most leaders of local NGOs are women. For these reasons, future research on migrant camps and humanitarian aid could add to scholarship on gendered discourses about violence and migration, how migrant advocates address them, and how unique and intersectional identities and experiences shape the strategies of NGO leaders. Other future directions of my work include expanding on Agamben's 'space of exception' by exploring the concept of lasting temporariness, adding to other scholars questioning of common representations of refugee camps as transitory infrastructures (Minca 2015; Ramadan 2013), by discussing migrant camps from a framework of permanent temporariness (Hilal and Petti 2018). For example, one of the most recent strategies developed by NGOs in Reynosa and Matamoros is to open private migrant camps or shelters based on tents (similar to Senda de Vida -Chapter 7-). Therefore, I wonder first how these new shelters speak of a more permanent situation in terms of restriction of asylum and deportation, and secondly, I want to look at how efficient they will be in preventing violence and dehumanization. Additionally, I anticipate expanding on the use of use drone imagery to map changing conditions in refugee camps. This is a technique that has been used by NGOs to improve safety and logistical issues but has not yet been explored to produce social knowledge.

Final remarks

It is impressive how memory works. The first lines of my dissertation are about memories from my childhood that dramatically contrast with how life in my home city looks today. My memory of *El Bordo* today is no longer about kites and fun. Every time I stand in front of the original camp, I see death, suffering, and violence. The smell I remember from my infant memories has also changed. The smell is no longer close to my grandpa's cologne. Now my memories are of wood burning at the hand-made stoves and the putrid smell coming from the drain channels running through the lines of tents. I am sure I will remember the laughing, hope, and kiddos running from afar to hug me. But the tragic stories I heard and witnessed will prevail.

I am sitting on the edge of *El Bordo* writing these lines. Everything is gone now. Only a few pieces of tarps can be seen in some segments of the fence. The playground area is the only structure that remains standing. However, the emptiness of the levee is only an illusion. The violence remains. The memory of the dead is still here. I can still feel the pain in the air. It is as if someone tried to hide an elephant behind a narrow pole. It is only a matter of listening carefully, looking around, and seeing how the violence did not go anywhere. The erasure of the Matamoros camp is a reflection of the multiple efforts that have been enacted to convince us to accept as normal and humane those policies and procedures of immigration control that should be considered exceptional and properly inhumane or, as I believe, never considered at all.

Though the Biden administration formally ended the "metering" policy at ports of entry, CBP officers are still standing at the dividing line between the U.S. and Mexico. Hence, asylum seekers are still being turned away in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act (which states that any foreign national "who arrives in the United States" may apply for asylum). In addition, while I am writing these lines, Title 42 is still in motion, and MPP has been reinstated.

Reynosa still has 3,000 people living in Plaza de la República, and local NGOs are now rushing to complete the construction of two tent shelters in the city. Other border cities such as Laredo, Acuña, Juarez, Nogales, and Tijuana are still struggling to overcome the effects of Metering, Title 42, and MPP.

The circumstances of asylum seekers expelled under Title 42 are precarious on different levels. It is not limited to violence from cartel forces. It is not a migration crisis either, but a humanitarian crisis expressed in the deterrence of movement and the production of violence generated by U.S. and Mexican immigration policies. Suppose orderly and dignified processing of asylum petitions cannot be resumed fast enough (even if Title 42 ends on May 23). In that case, the U.S. and Mexican governments must establish safe shelters with adequate sources of food, hygiene, medical care, and education, as they proved possible with the Ukrainian refugees.

Consequently, the relevance of discussing the rise, dismantling, and erasure of the Matamoros camp and the rebirth of a camp in Reynosa, is to highlight the conditions under which immigration control might best be challenged and how the study of violence is critical to the transformative thinking and action required to improve the future of refuge, asylum, and migration. Therefore, as I have shown, the significance of this research is to establish a practical theory to disentangle how multiple linkages in the study of violence operate, to highlight the conditions under which immigration control might best be challenged, and to uncover how the study of violence can persuade transformative thinking and action regarding the future of migration policymaking.

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APPENDIX A
LIST OF ACRONYMS

DHS	Department of Homeland Security
GRM	General Resource Management
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party
INAMI	Instituto Nacional de Migración
MPP	Migrant Protection Protocols
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
BCC	Nonresident Alien Border Crossing Card
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
POEs	Ports-of-Entry
SE	Solidarity Engineering
SWS	The Sidewalk School
TRAC	Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees