

The University of San Francisco

USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

Master's Theses

Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects

Spring 5-21-2022

Violencia en Tránsito: Exploring the multiplicities of violence that shape Central American migrant women's experiences through Mexico and the role of Albergue Abba

Esmeralda Cardona

University of San Francisco, cardonaesmeralda9@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/thes>

Recommended Citation

Cardona, Esmeralda, "Violencia en Tránsito: Exploring the multiplicities of violence that shape Central American migrant women's experiences through Mexico and the role of Albergue Abba" (2022). *Master's Theses*. 1414.

<https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/1414>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

Violencia en Tránsito: Exploring the multiplicities of violence that shape Central American migrant women's experiences transiting through Mexico and the role of Albergue Abba.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER IN MIGRATION STUDIES

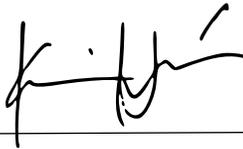
By: **Esmeralda Cardona-Zepeda**

May 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:



Advisor

5-12-2022

Date



Academic Director

5/16/22

Date

Dean of Arts and Sciences

Date

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Chapter 1	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 2	9
Literature Review	9
Multiplicities of Violence.....	9
State actors: Policies criminalizing migrants (the case of Mexico).....	10
Non-state actors: Human trafficking and Exploitation	12
Criminal organizations exploiting migrants: from smuggled to trafficked	15
Role of immigrant organizations in Mexico	20
Violence on migrant-serving organizations	21
REDODEM & Albergue Abba	22
Chapter 3	24
Methodology.....	24
Chapter 4	27
Discussion	27
Unreported Violence.....	27
Exploitation & Vulnerabilities of Albergues	31
Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking Nexus.....	33
Recommendations	35
Conclusion.....	38
References.....	40

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the forms of state and non-state violence that migrant women¹ from the Northern Triangle of Central America experience during their migration into Mexico and the role of Albergue Abba in Celaya, Guanajuato in their transit. As migrant women venture northward, they are vulnerable to being coerced and kidnapped while encountering gender-based violence, including rape, sexual assault, and human trafficking. While migrants suffer a multiplicity of violence in this region, this research will focus on the role of smuggling and human trafficking in order to better understand the vulnerabilities women migrants experience in their transit. Analyzing 2019 current data from Albergue Abba, REDODEM, and testimonials from other migrant shelters, I identify the role of state and non-state actors in contributing to gendered violence and the ways that migrant shelters, such as Albergue Abba, respond to these threats. By looking at Albergue Abba as a case study, my work seeks to address broader questions: how do migrant shelters respond to the multiplicities of violence that target migrant women? Also, how are institutions susceptible to being part of that violence? Findings reveal that the violence embedded in smuggling and trafficking are the most dangerous elements in their transit. Both affect the experiences of Central American migrant women and their journey through Mexico. At the same time, while migrant shelters are spaces where migrants seek refuge and help, these spaces are also vulnerable to infiltration. My aim is two-fold, to contribute to the debate defined by Laurie Cook Heffron on the multiple "interconnecting categories of violence,"² drawing from the migration-violence nexus theory³. As well as analyze the position of community organizations within the landscape of violence and their strategies at responding to inside and outside threats. My work hopes to contribute to the security of all migrants and service workers in the region.

Keywords

gender-based violence, migrants in transit, Albergue Abba, migration-violence nexus

¹ For the purpose of this research, I will focus on cis migrant women however, I acknowledge there are transgender migrant women as well as those who's gender is not defined.

² Laurie Cook Heffron explores "the interconnecting categories of violence as precipitating factors for migration, during border-crossing, and following arrival in the United States." (Cook Heffron. 2019).

³ The migration-violence nexus theory consists of various patterns of violence that tend to happen in the process of migration. (Cook Heffron. 2019).

Chapter 1

This research has flourished throughout my time in MIMS but was very meaningful in my experience at the Arizona-Sonora border. During a trip to learn more about the Kino Border Initiative and their work as a bi-national organization, I met a Central American migrant woman who shared her story. She was in a migrant shelter exclusively for women and shared that her trip to Nogales was very hard. Even though she did not go into detail, she shared that she had decided to stay in Nogales, Sonora, because she wanted to work and save money to continue her trip north. At that time, she had not shared with her family that she had not successfully made it to the U.S. after all; she felt ashamed and embarrassed to return and disappoint her family- therefore, deciding to stay near the border. This particular story has been in my mind during the process of writing this article. The sacrifices and vulnerabilities migrant women endure throughout their migratory journey are part of their processes. However, they find strength and dignity to continue their trip to successfully make it to the U.S.

Even though my personal experience is very different from migrant women (as I am not a migrant myself), I am a daughter of immigrants who also migrated to this country seeking better opportunities for themselves and their children. As a first-generation Mexican American, I am very fortunate to travel in and out of the United States- therefore, I am conscious of the privilege I have. With this being said, although I did not migrate to the U.S; I have experienced migration through my family and their stories. On the other hand, I also understand the privilege that I have as a graduate student who has the opportunity to travel to the Sonora- Arizona border and witness migrant women sharing their stories. While I witnessed migrant women sharing their

stories, my intention was not to retraumatize them or trigger them as it may be another form of pain. Therefore, I did not interview them; I just listened to whatever they wanted to share.

Introduction

The Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) has a long history of violence perpetrated by state and non-state actors. Rooted in the history of colonization and the political and economic interests of the United States, these multiplicities of violence have “negatively impacted and continues to impact the region” (Laurie Cook Heffron pg. 678). An example is the displacement of communities due to legalized state violence, in the form of political and economic policies supported by the United States (U.S), Mexican, and Central American governments. Recent border policies, such as the Merida Initiative and Plan de la Frontera Sur, are examples of how legalized violence is perpetuated by state actors and rooted in a long history of colonization and U.S imperialism in the region. Thus, U.S. intervention has historically added to the effects of policies and legalized forms of violence that Central Americans experience in their home countries. Alongside the policies that have perpetuated by national governments and U.S interventions, it is crucial to consider the local and private forms of violence that Central Americans experience within their country and are also a key factor in the displacement of communities.

While root factors such as escaping poverty, lack of jobs, and the political and economic violence (Diaz Prieto & Gammage, 2016) determine the reasons why Central Americans decide to migrate, women experience high levels of gendered violence ranging from “everyday experiences of domestic violence, marital rape, and sexual assault, to femicide” (Heffron pg.679). The private and public pressures Central American women experience in their home countries forces them to migrate to escape those forms of violence. However, these threats extend to their transit through Mexico and when settling in a new country. In order to better respond and support these migrants, it is essential to understand the intimate forms of violence and how they shape their experiences when in transit. It is also vital to analyze how these multiplicities of violence (state and non-state) are part of the reasons why Central Americans flee their countries. While we’ll review these factors, the focus of this study is focused on how they respond to the potential dangers when in transit, particularly to the threat of smuggling and human trafficking.

In the process of migration, women experience different dangers while in transit. According to a report from *Doctors without Borders*, in 2015, a survey was given to 467 migrants and refugees in Mexico- the findings included the reasons migrants left their home country and the violence they experienced along their journey. The report states, “nearly one-third of the women surveyed had been sexually abused during their journey [and] perpetrators of violence included members of gangs and other criminal organizations, as well as members of the Mexican security forces responsible for their protection.”⁴ Therefore, migrant women in transit through Mexico are vulnerable to being trafficked or sexually abused in their journey. While

⁴ Forced to Flee Central America's Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis.” *Medecins San Frontieres*, May 2017.

considering all these threats that migrants confront in transit, this research will focus on the role of trafficking and smuggling in the process experienced by Central American migrant women.

In their journey, most migrants have to face threats from both state and non-state actors, while depending on *albergues* (migrant shelters) for support and safety. Non-state actors such as criminal organizations in Mexico have historically worked in conjunction with state actors in profitable underground activities such as drug trafficking. These illicit regimes have infiltrated different government sectors such as law enforcement, the military, and politicians high in office, facilitating criminal activities within Mexico and the U.S-Mexico border. Non-state actors are criminal organizations that include drug trafficking organizations (DTO) and other forms of organized crime. The links between DTO and *coyotes* (human smugglers) have increased and often place migrants as targets for kidnappings, extortions, or death. The relationship between organized crime, human trafficking, and sex work has historically been interrelated- these criminal networks and an array of other elements have constructed powerful sources of an underground economy that have affected internal and international migration. Organized crime uses different forms of illicit sectors such as forced prostitution and sex trafficking⁵ to mobilize and expand their organizations for profit. In this vein, Central American migrants in transit are commodified as goods if they encounter DTO along their journey. As a result, migrant women are trafficked, coerced into drug/ crime organizations, and forced to enter into prostitution.

Even though violence is continuous in the journey of migrants, there are shelters along the migratory trails that offer protection and assistance to migrants. Organizations such as Albergue Abba offer refuge to migrants transiting through Mexico and document the experiences of their journey. Albergue Abba aids populations that include migrants in transit, migrants

⁵ The interrelation between prostitution and sex trafficking will be furthered discussed in the article; section titled "The interrelationship between human trafficking and prostitution."

seeking asylum in Mexico, and migrants who have suffered accidents, such as those who have lost limbs along their journey. Also, specifically for migrant women, this shelter offers extended staying time for pregnant women or those who come with children. Migrant shelters -like Albergue Abba- are a safety net for migrants because these spaces offer humanitarian aid for those seeking opportunities -in a place, it is not their home. Yet, although migrant shelters are safe spaces, they have also been infiltrated by the violence that accompanies migrants in transit.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

It is important to consider the multiplicities of violence to understand how Albergue Abba responds to the threats that target migrant women. Furthermore, it is fundamental to analyze how violence is rooted in the history of this region, and the women's journey. The violence and threats that Central American migrant women experience during their transit, determines their migratory journey and their decisions that respond to life-threatening circumstances.

Multiplicities of Violence

Multiple actors are involved in the violence towards migrants; those include state and non-state actors that work in conjunction with each other. Enrique Desmond and Daniel M. Goldstein expand on the concept of violent pluralism as “multiple violent actors [which] operate within the polity and maintain different and changing connections to state institutions and political leaders, whether those states are officially democratic, authoritarian, or otherwise.” (Arias & Goldstein, 2010). Furthermore, Laurie Cook Heffron delves on the violence-migration nexus concept as multiple interrelated forms of violence throughout the migration process. She delineates that there is a constellation of violence with five categories; those categories include “domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, gang violence, and state violence...” (pg.685). These categories are part of structural oppressions that continue to condone state and non-state actors to violate women's bodily autonomy. Moreover, the violence perpetrated by

these actors exposes Central American women to violence and exploitation before migrating, throughout their migratory trajectory, and when they arrive at their destination.

Arias and Goldstein (2010) assert that the violence that Latin American democracies experience is not only “critical” but serves as a mechanism- a necessary element. They state, “[v]iolence here emerges as a key element of Latin American democracy itself, as the basis on which it was founded and a critical component allowing its maintenance.” Violence is deeply rooted in these countries- even though they are democratic countries with democratic ideologies, it does not necessarily mean that they follow a democratic rhetoric. This is fundamental to grasp because, as Arias and Goldstein (2010) state, “some nations that have been formally democratic...fall far short of the democratic ideal due to, among other things, high levels of state and interpersonal violence” (p.2). Therefore, the perpetrators of violence include both state and non-state actors. State actors may consist of the police, military, government officials, or elected leaders. Non-state actors may include illicit organizations (i.e., gangs), guerrillas, or drug traffickers.

State actors: Policies criminalizing migrants (the case of Mexico)

The legacy of colonization and the political and economic interests of the United States in the NTCA and Mexico continues to impact the region and migrants who traverse its borders. State violence rooted in political and economic policies supported by the U.S., Mexican, and Central American governments are implicated in people's displacement from their homeland. For example, the rise in the securitization of borders that impacts migrants negatively is connected to the indirect violence that targets and negatively impacts migrants in transit.

The United States and Mexico have worked collectively in implementing policies focused on “the security” of both countries. In 2007, the United States funded the Merida Initiative- a binational agreement between Mexico and the United States. The program "...has funneled "security aid" under four directives, or pillars, namely: "(1) disrupting organized criminal groups, (2) institutionalizing the rule of law, (3) creating a 21st century border, and (4) building strong and resilient communities." (Arriola Vega, 2017 as cited in Seelke and Finklea, 2016, i). Although this agreement was initiated mainly to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, some areas involve strengthening and securing Mexico's southern border. Concerns regarding this initiative include the abuse of human rights to vulnerable groups, such as migrants in transit. Mexico has failed to protect migrants by not providing "enough access to humanitarian visas or asylum to migrants who have valid claims to international protection" (Seelke & Finklea, 2017). National security policies such as the Merida Initiative have negatively affected migrants in transit- instead of protecting them, migrants are criminalized.

Thus, the securitization of borders is another example of how state policies target and negatively impact migrants in transit. The Plan Frontera Sur, launched in 2014, was created to enforce security and militarize the Guatemala-Mexico border. The objectives focused on “protect[ing] migrants who enter Mexico, [and] to manage the ports of entry in a way that promotes the security and prosperity of the region” (Christopher Wilson & Pedro Valenzuela, 2014). However, Mexico focused on apprehending and repatriating rather than protecting Central American migrants (Fernanda Martinez Flores, 2020). The increased militarization and implementation of checkpoints along the southern border and throughout Mexico have affected migrants in transit. Therefore, migrant smugglers must find alternative routes to smuggle migrants through Mexico to avoid checkpoints. Such policies and militarization increase

migrant's vulnerability to being exploited and or trafficked (Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera & Jennifer Bryson-Clark, 2016). With that being said, state actors criminalize migrants, increasing the vulnerability and violence towards migrants. Consequently, this places migrants (especially women) in circumstances where they are coerced and trafficked, exacerbating the forms of violence they experience in transit.

Non-state actors: Human trafficking and Exploitation

Criminalizing migrants due to the implementation of policies is not a sole form of violence- the trafficking of migrants is also a profitable clandestine business that consequently affects migrants in transit. In this vein, human trafficking is a global and social phenomenon that has expanded into a powerful and lucrative underground economy. This section delineates the sectors that work closely with human trafficking, such as criminal organizations, and their interrelation to other networks that endorse human trafficking. Human trafficking, human smuggling, and drug smuggling intersect; therefore, "this conflation creates a vicious circle. When there is no way to disentangle human trafficking from human smuggling, it is impossible to detect it" (Susan Tiano, 2012 pg. 148). That is why it is crucial to understand the line between human trade and smuggling; Susan Tiano (2012) states, "it is easy for human trafficking to disappear behind the smuggling of undocumented workers because the latter is much more pervasive and politically salient."⁶ A person's experience can change from being smuggled to being trafficked. The graph below is a visual representation Tiano uses in her book to explain the different structures that make human trafficking possible; she states:

⁶ Tiano, Susan, et al. *Borderline Slavery: Mexico, United States, and the Human Trade*. Routledge, 2016.

Like any social practice, human trafficking takes place within social networks and organizations that promote it or allow it to occur. These in turn exist within societal and political context that support them or at least fail to prevent them from existing. These social and political processes and structures are embedded in economic contexts that mobilize resources to facilitate or impede their operation, and sustain a population with its own characteristic demographic processes, including births, deaths, and migrations. And all of these processes are physically situated in space and sustained by a physical environment that provides both opportunities and constraints for the populations that dwell there and utilize available environmental resources (pg. 16).

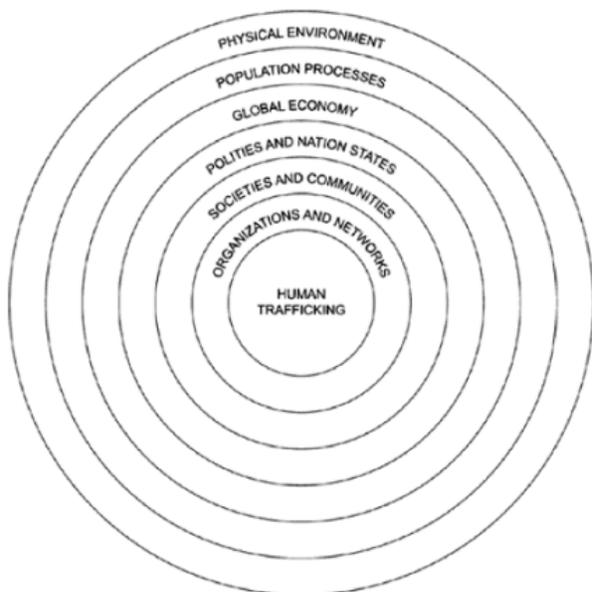


Figure 2.1 Context for Human Trafficking

Source: Susan Tiano 2011

This graph demonstrates the factors that make human trafficking possible, the different components and environments that enable it to thrive. This framework is fundamental to understand the broader picture of human trafficking and the elements that still make it happen. In regard to Central American migrant women -even though they are exposed to different forms of violence- being trafficked is the main form of violence they experience along their journey.

Jeremy Slack and Howard Campbell (2016) expand on the existing interrelationship among human smuggling, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities that have negatively

affected people's mobility. The authors expand on the concept of "illicit regime of narco-governmentality" and how multiple lucrative industries share spaces at the margin of the State. Criminal organizations infiltrated themselves in the State, therefore, creating hierarchies and rules "...which in turn influence how they interact with each other" (Diaz Prieto et.al 2014). The alliance between state and non-state actors exacerbates the experiences of violence Central American migrants experience in transit. Therefore, migrants are commodified as goods since both state and non-state actors work together to exploit and profit from the migration industry.

Women who migrate are aware of the dangers they can experience even before embarking on the trip. Some of the strategies migrant women execute before their trip include hiring their own smuggler, taking different routes instead of the train, or staying in hotels or guesthouses.⁷ Gabriela Díaz Prieto and Gretchen Kuhner (2014) expand on these migration methods and state how Central American migrant women usually take clandestine routes for protection and guarantee their trip to the U.S. successfully. Clandestine routes are seen to be more secure and have fewer encounters with acts of violence. However, it is important to denote that taking clandestine routes does not imply their journey will be free of risks. Migrant women who take clandestine routes and mainly rely on their smugglers risk being trafficked along their journey. Since women entirely confide in their smugglers, they are not aware when smugglers work in conjunction with criminal organizations for profit. Therefore, it increases the risks of migrant women being victims of violence and trafficking. Although criminal organizations and migrant smuggling are different phenomenons, crime organizations have managed to control migrant smuggling. Since criminal organizations control ports of entry on northern Mexico's border and territories along the migrant route, they demand high quotas from migrant facilitators

⁷ Prieto, Gabriela Díaz, and Gretchen Kuhner. *Un Viaje Sin Rastros: Mujeres Migrantes Que Transitan Por México En Situación Irregular*. Consejo Editorial, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, LXII Legislatura, Cámara De Diputados, 2014.

when trying to smuggle migrants. If migrants cannot pay the quotas, they are at risk of suffering violence, such as being robbed, kidnapped, extorted, or even killed by these criminal organizations. Furthermore, Central American women who decide to migrate to the United States are at risk of encountering individuals who will place them in situations where their expectations to migrate to the U.S are not successful.

Criminal organizations exploiting migrants: from smuggled to trafficked

A particular technique criminal organizations have been employing is forcing smugglers to work with them for economic profit and to exploit migrants. Nonetheless, there are coyotes (human smugglers) that work directly with criminal organizations for “their own personal profit and [to] rob or abandon⁸” migrants along their journey to the United States. Simon Pedro Izcara Palacios (2017) conducted a study where he examines the methods used by Mexican criminal organizations to recruit migrant smugglers; this is to take advantage of migrants. Migrant facilitators who essentially smuggle people have shifted their focus from getting migrants safely to the U.S to abusing and exposing migrants to violent situations.

It is essential to understand the complex relationship between smuggling and trafficking and how people can go from being smuggled to trafficked. Smuggling a person involves the “procurement for financial or other material benefit of illegal entry of a person into a State of which that person is not a national or a resident.”⁹ Migrant smuggling is an act that starts voluntarily- one can argue that migrants give consent and have agency at the beginning of the

⁸ Izcara-Palacios, Simón Pedro, “Los Polleros Que Engañan a Los Migrantes: Norma o Exepción. *Convergencia Revista De Ciencias Sociales*, no. 74, 2017.

⁹ “Migrant Smuggling.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2018, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/smuggling-of-migrants.html.

trip since they decide to make and pay for the trip. On the other hand, trafficking victims have no consent at all. The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime states three significant differences between a trafficked and a smuggled person: consent, exploitation, and transnationality. Smuggling is transnational; however, trafficking can occur both within or out of a State.¹⁰ Although there are differences between a smuggled person and a trafficked person, the connection between them is that a smuggled person can be trafficked during their journey. Siddharth Kara delineates the difference between smuggling and trafficking individuals. Individuals who are smuggled (from Mexico to the U.S) decide to migrate, yet individuals who are trafficked are sold to someone who will exploit them- trafficked victims have no sense of ownership. Both are interrelated; as Siddharth Kara (2009) states, “trafficking is thus smuggling with coercion or fraud at the beginning of the process and exploitation at the end” (pg. 189).

In this regard, people in mobility- specifically women in transit- are constantly affected by non-state actors -such as criminal organizations- that control territories along the migrant trail. There are a variety of tactics criminal organizations use to intimidate vulnerable populations. However, when human smugglers come across territories that criminal organizations control, smugglers put migrants in dangerous situations. Simón Pedro Izcara-Palacios (2012) delineates the relationship between migrant smugglers and organized crime. He mentions how after 2007, criminal organizations demanded smugglers’ quotas to cross through their territories. Criminal organizations started using this method to gain economic profit from those crossing through their territories (Izcara- Palacios, 2012). There are different ways criminal organizations demand

¹⁰ “Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2018, www.unodc.org/lpo-brazil/en/trafico-de-pessoas/index.html

financial revenue and extort migrants on their way to the United States. According to Simon Izcara-Palacios (2017):

Mexican drug cartels exploit irregular migration through three mechanisms: a) the kidnapping of migrants (CNDH, 2009, 2011; Izcara, 2016); b) the imposition of increasingly high quotas, which must be paid by migrant smuggling networks to be able to move safely through the areas controlled by the cartels (Izcara, 2012a, p. 359; Slack & Campbell, 2016, p. 1384; Spener, 2009, p. 158) and c) the recruitment of human smuggling facilitators, whom they incorporate into these organizations (Izcara, 2015, p. 330).¹¹

Furthermore, migrants en route to the U.S have been negatively affected by criminal organizations along the Mexican territory. Migrant women are susceptible to being trafficked- since trafficking and prostitution are interconnected, they eventually end up in prostitution.

The interrelationship between human trafficking and prostitution

Women migrating internally and or internationally become vulnerable when they are “forced to accept low wage undervalued [jobs] in the informal sector” and when they are lured into unreal promises (Arun Kumar Acharya, 2010). In retrospect, jobs labeled as informal, such as unregulated prostitution, are found in open street markets and controlled by human trafficking and drug organizations. Women who migrate are smuggled, yet in the process of being

¹¹Izcara, S. P. (2017). *De víctimas de trata a victimarios: Los agentes facilitadores del cruce fronterizo reclutados por los cárteles mexicanos [From victims of trafficking to felons: Migrant smugglers recruited by Mexican cartels]*. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 18(37), 41-60, doi:10.21670/ref.2017.37.a03

smuggled- they are coerced “into exploitative [situations].”¹² The distinction between smuggling and trafficking is blurred by the similar experiences migrants encounter along their journey. As Pia Oberoi states, “an individual can be smuggled one day and trafficked the next” (pg. 34). Consequently, the relation between human trafficking, organized crime, and prostitution are interchangeable, producing high economic profits. Therefore, Susan Tiano’s concept of human trafficking reiterates the different elements that still allow this form of “modern-day slavery” (pg. 16).

Migrant women who migrate without some support system are prone to becoming victims of trafficking. For example, many Central American women migrating north have to stop in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico because they run out of money to continue their journey. Therefore, migrant women have to find some jobs to save money for their trip. Many young Central American migrant women in Chiapas are forced to work as prostitutes in positions obtained once they arrive. However, it is important to denote that not all migrants working in these places are victims of prostitution. There is a blurred line between unregulated prostitution and coerced sexual exploitation. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that women who arrive in these places looking for jobs are forced to take jobs that may purposefully place them in vulnerable circumstances. Therefore, they do not have the option of obtaining other types of jobs that do not include being exposed. Miriam González (qt. in Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera et al.), conducted a study in 2012 and “stated that as many as 58 percent of the prostitutes in Tapachula are Guatemalan migrants and 95 percent of them are between the ages of 15 and 19” (Correa-Cabrera et.al, pg. 65). Although the numbers of this study were from 2012, this demonstrates

¹² “Smuggling and Trafficking: Rights and Intersections.” *Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women*, 2011, www.gaatw.org/publications/Working_Papers_Smuggling/WPonSmuggling_31Mar2012.pdf.

how vulnerable migrant women are as a population and the things they have to encounter during their trip north.

Understanding the interrelation between prostitution and human trafficking is crucial because one can argue that prostitution foments the rise in human trafficking. Unregulated prostitution does indeed exacerbate human trafficking. However, Kamala Kempadoo (2005) argues that “not all victims of trafficking are prostitutes, nor all prostitutes’ victims of trafficking.”¹³ As discussed earlier, victims of trafficking involve individuals who are lured or coerced into different types of exploitation- not only women but also sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, it is crucial to mention the role of unregulated prostitution to understand the ways Central American migrants in transit become victims of trafficking for prostitution.

Although once regulated, prostitution has clandestinely increased disproportionately, evolving into unregulated prostitution. The increase of internal and international women migrating- in this case through Mexico- has generated women to work informal jobs such as prostitution and underground brothels through the Mexican Republic. Arun Kumar Acharya describes how “most of these women are forced to enter to sex market through an organized trafficking network” (pg. 25). Organized crime uses prostitution and sex trafficking to broaden their economic system. Prostitution used to be a form of employment where women were the “breadwinners” and financially supported their families (Kumar Acharya, 2010). Nevertheless, it has gradually shifted to “women trafficked (moved) by pimps to wherever there is a demand for prostitution” (Marisa B. Ugarte, 2003). Human trafficking for commercial sex is only escalating, and migrating women are to a great extent vulnerable to become victims of sexual exploitation. Unregulated prostitutes and trafficked women are highly exposed to physical, verbal, and

¹³ Kempadoo, Kamala, et al. *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights*. Paradigm Publishers, 2005.

psychological abuse. Arun Kumar argues that “the brothel is treated as a market [and] prostitutes are treated as a commodity” (pg. 29). Migrant women are directly and indirectly affected by drug organizations and organized crime through prostitution and sex trafficking.

Nevertheless, human trafficking, organized crime, and prostitution are interrelated, generating high economic profits. Therefore, migrant women in transit are compromised if they are trafficked in the process of being smuggled. It is crucial to indicate that trafficking and migratory routes could be located in the same locations; hence migrants are vulnerable to violence. With that being said, migrant shelters may be located along these trafficking and migratory routes. Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera states, "some migrant shelters might facilitate the operations of migrant smugglers and traffickers" (2017). Even though shelters are spaces where migrants seek safety and help, they are also spaces where migrants are at risk of encountering more violence.

Role of immigrant organizations in Mexico

Shelters are organizations in Mexico, also known as *casas del migrante*, or *albergues de migrantes* and *comedores*, that serve as spaces for migrants to receive health care and legal assistance. Migrant shelters are non-profit and non-governmental organizations operated by volunteers from nearby communities. In Mexico, these shelters are front-line humanitarian organizations that provide services and critical information on the migrant route and the dangers migrants may face along their journey (Tanya Basok et al., 2015). The services migrant shelters offer vary; some may only provide meals, a place to stay for a limited amount of time, and basic health care. On the other hand, other organizations allow migrants to stay for more extended periods and may offer legal and psychological aid for migrants who want to regularize their

status and decide to stay in Mexico. Either way, these humanitarian organizations facilitate passage and transit. These organizations “become nodes of information that may enhance protection...” (Tanya Basok et al., 2015). However, organizations can serve as a double-edged sword. They are humanitarian actors that assist and facilitate migration; they are also targets for crime organizations and delinquents to prey on migrants.

Violence on migrant-serving organizations

Migrant-serving organizations in Mexico also suffer violence from state and non-state actors. John Doering-White (2018) argues how migrant shelters have contradicting frameworks which are human smuggling and humanitarianism. Although migrant shelters are spaces that facilitate human mobility, it is crucial to “not romanticize ethics of solidarity” from organizations and the Mexican community that offer humanitarian aid. Doering- White states, “the residents of areas through which migrants transit are increasingly hesitant to aid migrants for fear of [being] misconstrued as smuggling” (pg. 436). Although some members of the community help migrants, they do so by being cautious. Wendy A. Vogt (2013) argues that members of the community-where the migrant trail crosses- depend on migrants both as “consumers and patrons yet also resent migrants’ presence when their communities experience increases in fear and violence.” Migrants and migrant shelters are seen as both convenient and inconvenient for the Mexican community.

The violence that arises in migrant shelters happens by different actors. As mentioned before, migrant shelters are supposed to be safe spaces for migrants; however, these spaces have become unsafe since they have become infiltrated by organized crime, “smugglers,” and delinquents (Wendy A. Vogt, 2013). Migrant shelters are spaces non-state actors take advantage

of, and criminal organizations “target migrants to kidnap, recruit into Mexico’s sex industry, or coerce into running drugs and weapons in exchange for “safe” passage (Wendy A. Vogt, 2013). Smugglers infiltrate -migrant shelters- as migrants to lure people into continuing their journey with them, which can put migrants in dangerous situations. Furthermore, people who volunteer or work in migrant shelters can also experience violence, such as death threats from criminals and corrupt authorities who feel that their illicit activities are jeopardized. The violence in migrant-serving organizations is something that has negatively affected people in mobility. Migrant shelters are safe spaces -for migrants in transit- and profitable places for organized crime to target migrants.

REDODEM & Albergue Abba

The Documentation Network of the Migrant Defense Organizations (REDODEM) is a network created in 2013 by the Jesuit Migrant Service and other organizations as a collaborative effort to provide humanitarian aid for people in transit. This network consists of 23 migrant shelters across Mexico; part of REDODEM’s vision is to “...generate information about people in displacement and mobility, to influence, dignify and transform their situation, promoting justice and fostering hospitality.” (REDODEM, 2021, Misión y Visión section). One of their main objectives is to document and report human rights violations migrants experience in transit. This documentation is vital for further research and creating strategies to serve, respect, and defend people in mobility.

Albergue Abba (Abba A.C CCIAPM) is part of the REDODEM network, located in Celaya, Guanajuato- in the central part of Mexico. Some of the services they offer consist of

humanitarian aid, psychological services, and legal support. Abba has been operating since 2015; however, Ignacio Martinez- the director- and his family have been doing this work since 2012. When they started, Ignacio's family and community members helped migrants near the railroads with food, clothing, and basic medical care. The Red Cross became aware of the work -that was being done- to help migrants and started sending an ambulance every time community members gathered. Abba's mission statement states, "for the dignity of the migrant." Albergue Abba offers aid to migrants in transit, asylum seekers, amputees, and at-risk migrants. These populations need different services. For example, migrants in transit might only need food, water, and clothing. They can stay in the shelter for up to 72 hours to rest and then continue their journey. They also serve asylum seekers- migrants who decide to stay in Mexico. Albergue Abba provides legal aid for them to navigate the Mexican government and the process for them to stay in Mexico. Abba also serves amputees- migrants who have lost limbs along their journey. They work with the International Committee of the Mexican Red Cross and offer prosthetics so migrants can adapt to their new life. Lastly, they serve at-risk migrants- specifically women- who are pregnant and victims of sexual abuse. At-risk migrants can stay at the shelter longer than 72 hours; however, that is determined on a case-by-case basis. It should be noted that the important work migrant shelters do- such as Albergue Abba- is vital for migrants who are passing by. Nevertheless, these spaces are also at risk since they also attract criminals and where trafficking is prevalent.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method approach to analyze state and non-state actors; contributing to the violence Central American migrant women experience in transit through Mexico. My primary sources were a combination of reports from REDODEM- using Albergue Abba as a case study; migrant women's stories (testimonios documented from the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner); and a semi-structured interview from the psychologist at Albergue Abba. Regarding my positionality, it was vital for me to use and focus on derived/compiled data because I did not want to conduct interviews to migrant women in transit who had suffered forms of violence. I understand that conducting interviews to migrant women who experience violence and forms of trauma can cause re-traumatization. Therefore, as a researcher, I decided not to conduct interviews myself. Part of my research lays out the violence women experience and the perpetrators, so it is essential to understand that interviewing women who suffer violence in their journey was an approach I did not want to take. Also, to interview women, I first needed to create relationships with migrant women, and because of the pandemic, I was limited as a researcher. However, it is also necessary to incorporate narratives of migrant women to include their stories. Therefore, to address this topic, I use existing resources that have data and documentation on the experiences of migrant women in transit. A multiplicity of violence shapes Central American migrant women's experiences- therefore, a mixed-method approach was essential to understand the violence and deliberately offer recommendations on best practices to organizations like Albergue Abba. These reports are vital to understanding violence patterns and the relationship between migration and licit/illicit organizations in Mexico.

The REDODEM reports used are the annual reports from 2019 to current. Since Albergue Abba is part of the REDODEM network, I examine more specifically data from Abba. For the 2019 annual report, some of the topics that the report cover are: people in situations of mobility in the process of settlement in Mexico; internal force displacements- scenarios of violence and transgression of human rights and, risks in mobility and the violence migrants face-assaults, violations and barrier access to human rights. For these reports, I analyze the human rights violations and aggressions that were documented and reported. On the other hand, the testimonios supporting my analysis are from migrant women who were kidnapping victims when in transit through Mexico. Belen Posada del Migrante is a migrant shelter in Saltillo, Coahuila, that documents migrant women's stories to understand the migration phenomenon and the systematic violence people in mobility suffer. Moreover, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the psychologist from Albergue Abba in the summer of 2019. This informal interview was collected to understand how Albergue Abba started and learn more about the services and how they best supported migrant women in transit.

This mixed-methods research study, like any other research, has its own set of strengths and limitations. The strengths include using different sources of data to support and address this topic. Some of the limitations included finding data solely on Albergue Abba. In 2019, Albergue Abba was generating a database that included the types of violence and the number of people who suffered aggressions. Although they are part of the REDODEM network, Albergue Abba did not have a database of the reported violence. As mentioned before, REDODEM generates a report on the data from all the 23 migrant shelters as a whole. With this in mind, it was challenging to find current data specifically on Albergue Abba. Additionally, in regards to the limitations- due to COVID-19 and the global pandemic, it made it challenging to be more in

contact with Albergue Abba and visit the shelter more often. COVID-19 affected my research because traveling was limited; aside from not being able to visit the shelter more frequently, I wasn't much in contact with the shelter because they were also affected by COVID-19. They were busy helping migrants who were migrating during the pandemic. Everyone had to adjust to the pandemic; therefore, I had to also find ways to continue doing my research with the limited material I had gathered. During this time, I had to work with the material that I had; that is, the informal interview I had conducted in 2019.

Chapter 4

Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the forms of state and non-state violence Central American migrant women encounter when transiting through Mexico. The constant state of vulnerability migrant women experience when migrating exposes them to forms of violence such as being kidnapped, sexually assaulted, raped, and trafficked. Laurie Cook Heffron's migration-violence nexus theory supported this research by asserting that the connection between violence and migration negatively affects migrant women in transit. Central American migrant women experience multiple forms of violence when migrating. Migration factors include escaping the violence they endure in their home country, violence experienced when transiting through Mexico, and finally, when they arrive at their destination. In reviewing the data -from the REDODEM reports, migrant women stories, and the semi-structured interview- two main themes arose that helped me understand (the role of) Albergue Abba and other organizations that played in the landscape of violence women have to traverse through the migratory routes.

Unreported Violence

The REDODEM network's main objective is to generate information on people who are displaced and in mobility. They focus on documenting and reporting human rights violations in hopes of it being used for further research. It is crucial to specify their objective because although they document and report, there is also the question of what happens when there is unreported violence? It is vital to address the issue of unreported violence because the data can be misconstrued. The REDODEM report from 2019 reported a low number of victims who

suffered sexual aggressions. The report hypothesized the possible reasons as to why the numbers may be inadequate. Those reasons include those who suffer sexual violence may not have passed through a REDODEM shelter. People might have decided not to tell their experiences due to the stigmatization (especially for male victims of sexual assault). Also, not trusting migrant shelter workers and retaliation of their aggressor being in the vicinity (pg. 187). Moreover, migrant women who become victims of trafficking along their journey to the United States attain a sense of guilt and blame themselves for their experiences. If coerced into prostitution, they become ashamed due to their circumstances and decide rather not to do much to escape the cycle of exploitation. Victims often choose to stay because they do not want to return to their home country and describe their failure and what they experienced along the way. Central American migrants are also afraid to denounce and report assaults to authorities because they cannot differentiate between agents who want to help and aggressors.

It is important to denote the participation of state actors in fomenting violence towards Central American migrants. The 2019 REDODEM report stated that 58% of law enforcement officers, 25% private security personnel, 11% immigration agents, and 6% military officers were the reported aggressors (pg. 172). In this vein, it is difficult for Central American migrants to disclose the forms of violence they experience in transit (because state actors also contribute to the violence)- therefore, a lot of the violence goes unreported. Accordingly, Belen Posada del Migrante- a migrant shelter located in Saltillo, Mexico- has registered testimonies of migrants who have been victims of kidnappings as they traverse Mexico. These testimonies were documented to understand this migration phenomenon and the systematic violence that people in mobility suffer transiting through Mexico. A Central American migrant woman- victim of kidnapping- states:

...ahí en el camino íbamos pasando retenes del Instituto Nacional de Migración y de la Policía Federal, que nos veían cómo íbamos y aún así no hacían nada, sino que sólo recogían un dinero que les daban para que guardaran silencio. (Testimony registered in Belen Posada del Migrante)

The National Institute of Migration (INM) and the federal police- both state actors- work in conjunction with criminal organizations in contributing to the violence migrants endure throughout their journey. As stated in the above testimony, the INM and the federal police both witnessed the conditions of how migrants were being transported. Rather than helping them, they ignored and instead collected money to keep quiet. This testimony sustains why Central American migrants do not trust and report the violence they experience- because they witness how official authorities work together with criminal organizations.

Moreover, the nexus between state and non-state actors operating illicit activities also places migrants in dangerous encounters. In 2010, 72 migrants (58 men and 14 women) were kidnapped and killed in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, Mexico. This massacre is critical to denote because migrants were killed by a criminal organization because they (migrants) refused to work alongside the criminal organization. In a recent statement, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) states, “The tragedy is an emblematic case not only of the violence and dangers that migrants face when journeying through Mexico, but of the Mexican government’s failure to address and prevent those abuses. The case is also indicative of the widespread lack of justice for crimes against migrants....” The involvement of criminal organizations in coercing and exploiting migrants to work with them exposes migrants to situations that can even kill them. Most recently, in January of this year (2021), 19 migrants were killed, many of them being Central American migrants. In this case, several police officers were charged and arrested. This

example also reiterates the relationship between state and non-state actors and how they continue to target migrants with violence.

As stated in the following testimony, two migrant women who were kidnapped were released by their aggressors; however, when they tried to report what had happened to them, they were forced back to their aggressors. Nancy, who recounted her testimony, states:

Después, sucedió que dos de mis compañeras quedaron libres porque pagaron el rescate, así que se fueron a entregar a la migración en Reynosa. Ahí le dijeron a los agentes lo que había pasado y entonces, ellos mismos las vendieron otra vez a los Zetas. Ellas llegaron a la casa y ahí las mataron... (Testimony registered in Belen Posada del Migrante)

Unfortunately, these women tried to report the abuses they had undergone but found themselves recounting their experiences to state officials working in alliance with the criminal organization that had kidnapped them in the first place. In this case, the agents returned them to their aggressors, where they were killed. In many cases, migrants want to report the abuse they experience to state officials and end up disclosing those abuses to people who work in conjunction with non-state actors.

On the other hand, victims normalize the violence they experience in their migratory journey; hence, violence is underreported (Rene Leyva-Flores, 2019). Leyva-Flores states, “this may be a reflection of the fact that the interviewees did not consider the majority of their migratory experiences related to violence (i.e., psychological hostility, physical aggressions, and theft) “serious” enough to report” (2019). Moreover, normalizing the violence is also an issue to consider to address the lack of not reporting the violence migrants experience when in transit. Furthermore, migrant women who are victims of sex trafficking usually end up working as unregistered sex workers. Unregistered sex workers are often migrant women who become

trafficked victims along their migratory journey and forced into prostitution which highly profits drug organizations and their illicit underground economy. Women who are victims of sex trafficking usually end up working as unregistered sex workers. Moreover, migrant women who become victims of trafficking along their journey to the United States attain a sense of culpability and blame themselves for their experiences. If coerced into prostitution, they become ashamed due to their circumstances and decide rather not to do much to escape the cycle of exploitation. Victims often choose to stay because they don't want to return to their home country and describe their failure and what they experienced along the way.

Exploitation & Vulnerabilities of Albergues

Migrant shelters are humanitarian spaces that serve and advocate for migrants. There are countless migrant shelters across Mexico and mainly along the migrant route. Migrant shelters operate differently; some have strict rules of when migrants can go in and out. Wendy A. Vogt states how due to insecurities, “most shelters now implement strict security protocols” (2013). As mentioned before, migrant shelters are vulnerable due to the violence they also experience- therefore, they have to enforce rules to protect themselves and migrants in the shelter. On the other hand, there are migrant shelters that have ‘open-door policies, where migrants can go in and out freely. Alejandro Olayo- Mendez denotes, “[this] shelter has an ‘open door’ policy because it does not want to resemble a detention center or prison” (2017). This is crucial because although migrant shelters are known to be safe spaces, there are people (locals) who take advantage of these spaces and migrants. Furthermore, migrant shelters can be spaces of exploitation and vulnerable to forms of violence that expose migrants.

When I spoke to the psychologist of Albergue Abba back in 2019, she shared that migrants arrive at the shelter so vulnerable and do not feel they have the power to decide for themselves. The experiences shape them negatively, leaving them with no dignity. Therefore, Albergue Abba's mission is to provide migrants with tools and options- such as seeking asylum in Mexico, reporting violations, and informing migrants of their rights even though they are not citizens of Mexico. However, there are migrant shelters that do not share the same values as Albergue Abba or other shelters- across Mexico- that do humanitarian work to aid migrants. Some shelters take advantage of and exploit migrants. The psychologist of Albergue Abba shared that she used to work at another migrant shelter before she started working at Abba. She and other staff who worked in that shelter noticed that documented human rights violations were not being reported. Also, migrants would confide that they had been kidnapped, and their captors were also in the shelter as 'migrants'- no one would take action to protect the victims. The psychologist expressed that they were obligated to open a shelter because they saw that migrant's rights were being violated both when in transit and when they arrived at the shelter. In that regard, this counteracts the purpose of migrant shelters, which are supposed to be safe spaces for migrants to denounce the forms of violence they experience when transiting through Mexico. In this vein, the following text is part of a testimony from a migrant woman that was kidnapped; she states:

Mi nombre es Nancy, soy salvadoreña y estuve secuestrada del trece de abril al veintidós de junio. A mi me agarraron en Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, cuando estaba en el supuesto albergue de una mujer a la que apodan "La Madre", que se hace pasar por religiosa para que nosotros caigamos. Hasta ahí llegaron unas grandes trokas que eran como las que trasladan mudanza y nos agarraron a mi y a otros ochenta y tres compañeros más. (Testimony registered in Belen Posada del Migrante)

Nancy arrived at a presumed shelter of a woman nicknamed “The Mother,” who pretended to be religious to lure migrants into the shelter. While in the shelter, pickup trucks got to the shelter, forced her and 83 other migrants into these trucks, and took them to a safe house. This event is important to highlight because it endorses how migrant shelters can also be sites of exploitation that intensify forms of violence migrants are exposed to when in transit through Mexico.

On the other hand, migrant shelters are vulnerable to violence that target migrants in these spaces. Noelle K. Brigden sets forth how “spies infiltrate safe havens, posing as migrants, to collect information and facilitate these crimes [such as kidnapping]” (2018). Shelters become vulnerable when organized crime and delinquents start infiltrating these spaces where migrants seek refuge. Likewise, according to the psychologist from Albergue Abba, there were moments when a ‘migrant’ would ask for information about someone else because they had lost them along the way. She stated how usually smugglers are the ones asking for details about other migrants. Because Albergue Abba is in the REDODEM network, it has an effective security system and database where they have migrants’ personal information. It is guaranteed that they are not misusing or sharing information easily with other migrants.

Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking Nexus

The complex relationship between the trafficking and smuggling of human beings is crucial because migrants can be trafficked as they are being smuggled. Lara Talsma (2012) states, “it is uncommon that these smuggling agreements evolve into a trafficking situation.” Both trafficking and smuggling have elements of exploitation; however, when migrants become

victims of trafficking, they are exploited leaving migrants with no autonomy. There are different ways trafficked migrants are exploited by criminal organizations. Talsma states:

In situations where migrants cannot pay the ransom (or even if they can), they might be forced to provide services to the gang or cartel, as a way of paying off their 'debt'. This may involve sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and being forced to recruit other migrants to join the organization or gang (pg. 11).

Migrants who are victims of trafficking are exploited in different forms by these criminal organizations. This is important to indicate because it means that trafficked victims are not only exploited through sexual abuse. Sexual exploitation is only one of the many services they are forced to do. In this vein, Maria, a migrant woman, recounted the work she and other migrant women had to do during the time they were kidnapped. She states:

A las mujeres nos mantenían haciendo la limpieza de la casa, también hacíamos la comida y lavábamos su ropa...Cuando querían nos tocaban y abusaban de nosotras, también nos amenazaban pasándonos el machete por los senos, nos decían que si no los obedecíamos nos los cortarían. (Testimony registered in Belen Posada del Migrante)

As Maria states, when they were kidnapped the women were forced to clean the house, cook, and wash their clothes. Their aggressors would abuse and threaten them whenever they wanted. With this being said, smuggling and trafficking are interconnected, and migrant women in transit are constantly affected by these elements that make trafficking happen.

Recommendations

As mentioned previously, migrant shelters are safe spaces for migrants- transiting through Mexico- yet, these shelters are also spaces of profit and insecurity (Wendy A. Vogt, 2018). Humanitarian aid is often criminalized where migrant shelters and migrants are perceived as threats by community locals and authorities. There is a blurred line between humanitarian aid and human trafficking, where migrant rights defenders are often being charged with human trafficking crimes when aiding migrants. However, it is legal for non-governmental organizations to provide human rights services for people in mobility. Wendy A Vogt states the following:

While the relationship between shelters and the state is often antagonistic, many shelters and international bodies continue to call on the state to take a more active role in fulfilling promises of protection and security for migrants in transit and shelter workers. (Lives in Transit Violence and Intimacy on the Migrant Journey, 2018)

With that being said, state governments should guarantee protection and security for migrant shelters and work with these organizations to defend and advocate for migrants' human rights. It should prioritize assisting migrants in transit since they are vulnerable and exposed to different forms of violence along their journey.

The infiltration of organized crime organizations into migrant shelters is also crucial because this has affected the security of shelters and migrants who traverse these spaces. Referring back to the exploitation and vulnerabilities migrant shelters are exposed to, it is essential to emphasize that shelters operate differently. While some may have strict rules of when migrants can go in and out to increase security in these spaces, others have 'open-door policies, where migrants can freely go in and out of the shelter. Considering how migrant

shelters operate differently, it is crucial to focus on the ways shelters can be safer to avert the infiltration of non-state actors into these spaces. With the increase of violence from criminal organizations targeting these safe spaces, there is also an increase in security in the shelters. Enforcing strict rules as migrants checking in and out and having a curfew of when doors of the shelters are closing is essential to keep staff, migrants, and the shelter secure. Although it is hard for staff to identify criminals and delinquents trying to recruit migrants -in the shelter- it is vital to offer workshops for migrants to be aware and not lured into these exchanges with criminals where they are exposed to violence and risk their lives.

Furthermore, when migrants arrive at migrant shelters, they often fill out an intake form where staff document their personal information and register if they (migrants) have experienced forms of violence or human rights violations along their journey. It is crucial to report these violations because it dignifies migrants and brings light to the violence this vulnerable population experiences as they traverse Mexico. Along the way, migrants are deprived of being autonomous because they have to rely on others (e.g., migrant smugglers) to get them from point A to point B. It is harder for migrant women because they are vulnerable to being coerced, sexually assaulted, raped, and trafficked. Therefore, documenting and reporting violations is significant to acknowledge the victims and move forward in denouncing these actions. Bringing light to Central American migrant experiences around violence is also essential to better serve this vulnerable group.

Thus, centering the violence -Central American migrant women's experience in transit- around policy and programming is fundamental to serve this vulnerable group better. It is crucial to insist on regulation by state governments over the abuse and violence against immigrants, especially migrant women. In part, this also connects to the broader fight against gender violence

in Mexico. Recommendations to consider -regarding the underreported violence due to; trust, gender stigmas, normalization of violence, and fear of retribution of state actors- are essential to allude, most importantly, the fear of retribution from state actors. The impunity and corruption that prevails at the government's local, state, and federal authorities affect migrants and their experiences as they travel north.

Conclusion

This study explored the forms of state and non-state violence that migrant women experience during migration from Central America as they transit through Mexico. In their attempt to migrate to the United States, they are exposed to multiple forms of violence- particularly during the process of smuggling and trafficking. Both state and non-state actors contribute to gender violence; even though migrant shelters such as Albergue Abba facilitate passage for people in mobility, they also serve as sites for criminals to prey on migrants.

The findings concluded that violence in the smuggling and trafficking processes is embedded in the experiences Central American migrant women endure in their journey as they traverse Mexico. Even though migrant shelters are spaces where migrants seek refuge, migrants are also encountering high levels of violence in these spaces. The infiltration of criminals posing as migrants -within these spaces- to lure migrants is a phenomenon that continues to flourish. Taking that into consideration, in 2018, I had the opportunity to volunteer a couple of weeks in CAFEMIN, a shelter located in Mexico City. Unexpectedly, the shelter closed its doors a couple of weeks after- for security reasons since there were rumors criminals had infiltrated the shelter. Moreover, this experience asserts the vulnerability and risks migrant shelters are exposed to, and the danger migrants and migrant defenders are susceptible to. Consequently, Central American migrant women are threatened and must navigate experiences of violence as they transit through Mexico.

To conclude, drawing from this research on the multiplicities of violence that affect migrant women and the interrelation between trafficking and state and non-state organizations, one should consider the central points of the discussion. The unreported violence that migrants experience is not disclosed because state actors predominantly contribute to that violence.

Therefore, even though migrant women navigate experiences of violence in transit, they go unreported. On the other hand, the rise in exploitation, violence, and targeting of migrant shelters also exposes the vulnerability they are currently experiencing.

This research can serve as an instrument for further research to look at the work that organizations are doing to support migrant women in Mexico. There are different organizations in Mexico focused on advocating and lifting migrant women. Organizations such as: Instituto para las mujeres en la Migración (IMUMI) and Casa de Acogida Formación y Empoderamiento de la Mujer Migrante y Refugiada (CAFEMIN). IMUMI is a non-profit organization that promotes the rights of migrant women while in Mexico. That may or may not include migrant women who live in Mexico, those in transit, or even those who may reside in Mexico or the U.S. On the other hand, CAFEMIN is a migrant shelter that serves migrant women and their families seeking refuge in Mexico. The work these organizations are doing is vital to continue assisting migrant women. Furthermore, future research could build on the concept of the migration-violence nexus as well as policies and programming around gender violence to better serve migrant women.

References

- Acharya, A.K. (2010). Feminization of Migration and Trafficking of Women in Mexico. *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala*, 30, 19-38
- Correa-Cabrera, Guadalupe, and Jennifer Bryson Clark. "Re-Victimizing Trafficked Migrant Women: The Southern Border Plan and Mexico's Anti-Trafficking Legislation." *Eurasia Border Review*, no. 1, 2016, pp. 55–70
- Izcara, S. P. (2017). *De víctimas de trata a victimarios: Los agentes facilitadores del cruce fronterizo reclutados por los cárteles mexicanos [From victims of trafficking to felons: Migrant smugglers recruited by Mexican cartels]*. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 18(37), 41-60, doi:10.21670/ref.2017.37.a03
- Izcara-Palacios, Simón Pedro. "Coyotaje y Grupo Delictivos En Tamaulipas." *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2012, pp. 41-61.
- Izcara-Palacios, Simón Pedro, "Los Polleros Que Engañan a Los Migrantes: Norma o Exepción." *Convergencia Revista De Ciencias Sociales*, no. 74, 2017.
- Infante, Cesar, et al. "Rape, transactional sex and related factors among migrants in transit through Mexico to the USA." *Culture, health & sexuality* 22.10 (2020): 1145-1160.
- Arias, Enrique Desmond. 2017. *Criminal Enterprises and Governance in Latin American and the Caribbean*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Violent Pluralism: Understanding the New Democracies of Latin America
- Prieto, Gabriela Díaz, and Gretchen Kuhner. *Un Viaje Sin Rastros: Mujeres Migrantes Que Transitan Por México En Situación Irregular*. Consejo Editorial, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, LXII Legislatura, CañMara De Diputados, 2014.
- Kara, Siddharth. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Kempadoo, Kamala, et al. *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights*. Paradigm Publishers, 2005.
- Slack, Jeremy, and Howard Campbell. "On Narco-Coyotaje: Illicit Regimes and Their Impacts on the US-Mexico Border." *Antipode*, vol. 48, no. 5, June 2016, pp. 1380–1399.
- "Smuggling and Trafficking: Rights and Intersections ." *Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women*, 2011,
www.gaatw.org/publications/Working_Papers_Smuggling/WPonSmuggling_31Mar2012.pdf.

Tiano, Susan, et al. *Borderline Slavery: Mexico, United States, and the Human Trade*. Routledge, 2016.

Ugarte, Marisa B, et al. "Prostitution and Trafficking of Women and Children from Mexico to the United States." *Journal of Trauma Practice* , vol. 2, 2003, pp. 147–165. *The Haworth Press*.

Prieto, Gabriela Díaz, and Gretchen Kuhner. *Un Viaje Sin Rastros: Mujeres Migrantes Que Transitan Por México En Situación Irregular*. Consejo Editorial, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, LXII Legislatura, Cámara De Diputados, 2014.

Diaz Prieto, Gabriela, and Sarah Gammage. "Aiding Central America's 'Women on the Run.'" *Puerto Rico: Belonging to, But Not Part Of*, 7 Jan. 2016, nacla.org/news/2016/01/06/aiding-central-america-women-run.

Wilson, Christopher, and Pedro Valenzuela. *Mexico's Southern Border Strategy: Programa Frontera Sur*. Wilson Center Mexico Institute, 2014.
www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Mexico_Southern_Border_Strategy.pdf.