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Being of Transit

Central American and Mexican Migrants' Experiences of (Dis)Possession

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Abstract

The thesis is based on the ethnographic fieldwork done during February 2015 in a place where aspects of transitory life are configured in an effort to (re)humanize those migrants that have been exposed to harm and (dis)possession, and thus entangled within an undesirable physical reality. Empirical attention is dedicated to the ways and means in which a particular migrant shelter located on the border region of Mexico-US operates and fulfills its purpose. The theoretical framework relates to *being of transit* as the composition of the migrants' emergent state of uncertainty and instability within their continuous transitory experience. This is juxtaposed with Karen Barad's (2007) *posthumanist performativity* analysis of how discourse and the material markers that make up transitory Mexico-US are a composition of assembled actions of (dis)possession processes of social, political, and historical power relations constantly becoming in practice. Additionally, the focus expands on how more-than-human elements and material possessions are intra-acting with the migrants that became part of the study. Therefore, through the politics of mobility and violence the thesis explores how the people, places and things that assemble transitory Mexico-US evidence such undesirable physical reality. That is to say, a ceaseless diffracting ebb and flow of co-constituted intra-acting humans and non-humans in constant momentum and positionality conceptualizing the phenomenon of *being a migrant, thing, or place of transit*.

Keywords: transit, dispossession, materiality, posthumanist performativity, mobility, violence

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List of Abbreviations

CAFTA Central American Free Trade Agreement

HRW Human Rights Watch

ICE Immigration and Custom Enforcement

INM Instituto Nacional de Migración (Mexico's National Migration Institute)

LM2011 Ley de Migración 2011 (Immigration Law 2011)

MBCS Migrant Border Crossing Study

NAFTA North American Free Trade Agreement

PTD Prevention through Deterrence

UNHCR United Nations Human Rights Council

US United States

USBP US Border Patrol

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1. Introduction

Being a *migrant of transit*, laid bare to precarious paths during any stage of mobility, including detention and deportation, is an important subject to follow because of the numerous human rights violations that are conceivable. In the past decades the Sonora desert—located between the today states of Sonora in Mexico and the south of Arizona/southeast of California in the United States (US)—has become the prime geographical area under investigation that illustrate the crude reality of this phenomenon (see sections 6, 10 and 11). As Mexican novelist and essayist Luis Alberto Urrea (2005) states in his non-fictional novel about one of the largest group border deaths in the Sonora desert; "In the desert, we are all "illegal aliens" (Urrea, 2005:120). Referring both to the derogatory term enacted against undocumented immigrants within the US and to an area that is harsh and brutal; where the unprotected human body is unfamiliar to the composition of the desert and thus yields to suffering or even death. However, this region is only part of an extended body of migratory places and spaces across Mexico and the US composed of injury and uncertainty. Therefore the thesis pertains to the materiality of these trying paths and to the migrants that are subjected to illegal conditions that should be alien to everyone.

At its forty-second meeting on the twenty-ninth session, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted resolution A/HhRC/29/L.3 on the protection of human rights for migrants with a main focus on their transit experience (United Nations)[1]. The resolution advocates for the share collaboration between countries of origin, transit, and destination in the prevention of human rights violations against migrants during their journeys. Mexico, considered to be a country of origin, transit, and destination has led this proposal as a contingency against the loss of integrity, identity, and humanity of the migrants that have either temporarily or permanently relinquished the lands that saw them grow. However, the usage of terms such as transit migration in resolution A/HhRC/29/L.3 continue to be surrounded with ambiguity (Duvell, 2008; 2012), and its usage begs for more questions. Instead, the sheer idea for the international community to revisit the subject—which comes as a reaction to the current affairs that continue to arise around the so-called transit areas between the so-called developed world and its periphery—should become a precursor in the struggle for utterances of performativity that lead to human(e) action instead of mere empty discourse.

[1] http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G15/135/64/PDF/G1513564.pdf?OpenElement

Research suggests that all irregular migrants of transit Mexico are subjected to constant state-sponsored violence (see e.g., Coutin, 2005; Green, 2011; Chávez et al., 2011; Amnesty International, 2010 on *Central Americans on their move through Mexico*). There is a continuous threat for migrants to have their material possessions taken by the collaboration of organized crime, gangs, human smugglers (*coyotes)*, police officers, border enforcement agents, and even the common opportunists[2] (see, e.g., Amnesty International 2010; Danielson, 2013). Not to mention the exposure to the possibility of enduring physical violence like rape, kidnapping, extortions, the possibility to be forced into trafficking illegal substances through the US-Mexico border (see, e.g., Nazario, 2007; Martinez, 2010; González, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Vogt, 2013) or even to be trafficked to the US to work in licit and illicit industries (Finckenauer & Schrock, 2000) . Migrants are exposed to acts of dispossession by being forced to pay *mordidas* (bribes) to police officers (local, state, and federal) and border enforcement agents, or to be subjected to pay *cuotas* (fees) to gangs and organized crime in order for them to continue onwards (González, 2013; 182). Furthermore, the path north consists of altering geographical areas were migrants need to adapt to the changing temperatures and other unfamiliar settings. They must venture the funneled and isolated paths of the Mexico-US borderlands (Lawrence & Wildgen, 2012) under dangerous climatic conditions, an exceptionally guarded region with high technologies, patriotic militias such as the *minutemen*[3], United States Border Patrol Border (USBP), and Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) agents. As a consequence of the growth of border control and anti-immigration groups, an increase of migrant deaths along the US-Mexico border has increased (Cornelius, 2001; Martínez et al., 2014).

Similar to other studies that focus on the treatment of irregular immigration, the advocacy group No More Deaths published a report—No More Deaths • No Más Muertes*: How Deportation Robs Migrants of Their Money and Belongings*—stating that the Obama administration had deported an estimated 1.9 million people in 2013 (Hafter et al., 2014:5). However, the main objective of the report is to give a detail account about the mistreatment of migrants by USBP and ICE officials who either lose, dispose of, or make it difficult for migrants to recollect their material belongings before or after being deported. The same report similarly gives voice to the

[2] Collaboration between police, border patrol, and organize crime has been reported to be linked by Amnesty International (2010).

[3] 'The Minutemen Organization' is an activist group patrolling the Sonora Desert for border crossers. They consider themselves vigilantes that generally operate in small cells. In some cases are known to be a radical militia group. (see i.e. Doty, 2009; Ward, 2014 on the rise of anti-immigration grassroots movements in the Sonora Desert)

surveyed migrants that revealed the theft or disposal of money[4] and other items during their procedural detention process is a common occurrence (Ibid).

Similar to No More Deaths, The University of Arizona and its Center for Latin American Studies together with the Immigration Policy Center, conducted research project between 2009-2012 over the mistreatment of migrants by USBP and ICE. The two part report titled *Migrant Border Crossing Study* (MBCS) (Martinez & Slack, 2013: 2) demonstrated, among other things, that over one-third of the recently deported migrants interviewed were not able to retrieve their belongings or had difficulty to do so due to the restrictive procedures of repossession. For example, items like clothes, backpacks, identification documents, mobile phones, and money were ranked as the highest percentage of none retrievals (Ibid: 6). Moreover, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that one of the reasons for the separation of important documents and other things is in part due their multiple facility transfers (Human Rights Watch, 2009: 69). Therefore, the thesis intents to analyze and elaborate on *things of transit* and on the significance of the above mentioned procedures.

Nevertheless, within all this despair and violence—and as part of the human condition—altruistic forces exist. Humanitarian organizations, through tangible solutions try to "(re)humanize" those that have been stripped of their possessions while entangled within an undesirable physical reality. This does not imply a direct dichotomy against the violence outside of these places, but as places where aspects or daily transitory life are configured in a different manner.

With the intention of capturing at least a glimpse of what it constitutes to be a migrant of an uncertain position such as those under the conditions of transit Mexico-US, I found it fitting to visit a migrant shelter located alongside the Mexican border. By making *Casa del Migrante* (The Migrant House) at the border city of Juárez (further referred to as *Casa del Migrante* or simply the shelter), as my access and biding point, I was able to become part of one of the many junctures of transitory Mexico-US. The purpose was to do a single-site ethnographic study of an important location—such as a migrant center—and junction of transit-Mexico were a two way transit of *coming* and *going* is occurring. In this case *coming* refers to those migrants being recently deported after a long or short detention periods in the US, and *going*, refers to those trying to cross the northern border into the US.

[4] Participants stated that most money thrown to the trash bins was mostly Mexican currency but would sometimes include the stealing of US dollars.

Thus, the thesis focuses on analyzing—making "cuts" within—the physical markers that structure the so-called ''human waste," or that is, ''the rising quantities of human beings bereaved of their heretofore adequate ways and means of survival in both the biological and social-cultural sense of that notion" (Bauman, 2004:7). And as a consequence, focus on what the phenomenon of transit migration within transitory Mexico-US is comprised of.

2. Aim and Research Questions

The main objective of the thesis is to critically approach transit migration through discourse and its materiality, and thus, on the basis of empirical research, analyze and define *being(s) of transit*.

The thesis seeks to explore the perceived reality of Central American and Mexican asylum seekers', irregular and forced migrants' experiences of mobility through Mexico and the US by focusing on (dis)possession within the politics of mobility and violence supported by a more-than-human theoretical approach. Or, to re-conceptualize people, places, and things all entangled within the phenomenon of *being of transit* through discourse and its materiality.

The thesis is thus guided by the following research questions:

- *What has been the composition of transit for migrants before arriving to Casa del Migrante, with a special focus on their physical condition and the things that matter to them?*
- *What role does Casa del Migrante play in the processes that constitute being of transit?*
- *How does focusing on the mutuality between people, places, and things explained through Karen Barad's posthumanist performativity approach enhances our understanding of transitory Mexico-US?*

2.1 Limitations

The thesis dedicates part of its attention to the ways and means in which a particular migrant shelter located in the border region operates. Implying that the empirical data provided is limited to the experiences of those migrants arriving to *Casa del Migrante*. Nevertheless, the intention of this work is to listen to the tales that are told by the migrants while being housed within the walls of *Casa del Migrante* and to analyze the markers that the current conditions experienced by transitory Mexico-US create. Attention is placed on the importance of the migrants' material possessions and their physical condition with the intention to later present a wider spectrum through a more-than-human perspective. During my stay at the shelter, there was a considerably lower number of women compared to men. Therefore, mostly men and only a small number of women in transit were interviewed. Despite the fact that women experience violent acts in an alarming rate during transitory Mexico (Wiesner, 2007; Johnson, 2013; Sandra, 2014), the degree in which violence is perpetuated against women is—without dismissing its severity—not contemplated here. Instead, narratives of violence and dispossession are gathered in general terms to shed light on the reality perceived by migrants of transit Mexico-US. Additionally, unaccompanied minors are part of the overall analysis of

transit migration, yet no empirical work on minors was done in this work due to time and legal constraints. However, I did have contact with children by playing games and having random conversations during my fieldwork, yet, no critical notes, observations, or interviews were collected on minors.

Other limitations pertain to the scope the thesis intends to cover. Since multiple issues will arise some information will be reduced and simplified due to the margins in writing space. Most examples are given to emphasize the complexity of the topic in hand with the intention to give a clear understanding of the perspectives covered.

3. Clarifying the Use of the Notion of Transit

The state of being in transit should not be confused with the assumptions put forth by the field of transit migration (Suter, 2012:21). Despite the fact that the thesis focuses on migrants on their way to the US or their deportation from it, the classification concerning migrants in transit—for example asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented migrants, forced migrants and economic migrants—as having a defined destination is, in this case, dismissed (Ibid:21). Instead the focus here is on defining *being of* transit as the migrants' emergent state of uncertainty and instability during their continuous mobility. Moreover, the field of transit migration and its ambiguous description must only be understood here for its two key elements; First, for the intentionality of the migrants to move onward (space), and secondly, for the momentary nature of the migrants' stay (time) at a particular place (Düvell, 2006; 2008b; Içduygu, 2003; 2005). Likewise, the term is commonly associated to countries on the periphery to the European Union (İçduygu, 2003; 2005), but in this case, it generalizes the concept to the US-Mexico transit area. Therefore to be *of transit* applies both to the journey(s) taken by migrants through Mexico towards the US and to their detention and deportation processes (as will be clarified in more detail in Section 5).

4. Contextual Background

As introductory background information the thesis will elaborate on the meanings that have been given to irregular migrants and asylum seekers entangled in the phenomenon of *being of transit* within the territories of Mexico and the US.

4.1 Discourse of reifying the "Illegal Alien"

The 1990s saw a surge in public discourse of the securitization of the US border against any foreign threat. This as a result of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 proposed by the Regan Administration and later passed and enacted by congress, that gave a path to residence status to over two million undocumented migrants that meet the requirements suggested (Singer & Massey 1998). Through a conservative-led rhetoric of the protection from "illegals," politicians rallied for a fortified southwest. Despite the fact that large scale anti-immigration sentiments had been part of discourse in states like California and Texas since the 18th century, the increment of the word "illegal (alien)" in this given context increased rapidly during the last half of the century (Nevine, 2010: 12). For instance, judicial documents databases of the state of California found no trace whatsoever of the word "illegal" prior to the 1950s (Neuman, 1993: 1899).

The term "illegal alien" has become the sediment term that effectively criminalizes unwanted migrants for residing in a country even if no sanction is committed at the national level, whilst it re-enforces the standpoint of some regions of the Unites States' ethno-racial hatred (see e.g. Neuman, 1995; van Dijk, 1996; Huspek, 1997). Leo Ralph Chavez (2005) proposes that this arose as a result of 1986s IRCA further visible racialization of the US. This re-enforced a conservative discourse of *the unwanted* that became a crucial tool for the construction of boundaries within territories where the *others* were *talking over* (Paasi, 1995). For instance, 1990s Operation Gatekeeper in the state of California (Nevine, 2010: 5) arose as a measure towards further securitization. Proposition 187 was its key inciter, calling for the denial of any public social, education, and health services (apart from emergency situations) to an undocumented immigrant (Ibid). USBP Operation Gatekeeper later assembled a national strategy plan whose discourse reads for the importance for, "restoring our nation's confidence in the integrity of the border… [while] a well-managed border will enhance national security and safeguard our immigration heritage" (USBP, 1994:1-2). This subsequently saw a huge rise in the USBP's budget that included new technologies, infrastructure, and an increment in the number of agents. This also resulted in an increase from less than 5,000 in 1994 to 9,000 in 2000, and by 2009 a total of 20,000 were part of the USBP team. The fiscal years of 1993 also

saw a $400 million dollar budget, yet 1997 saw $800 million. By 2010, a total of 7.6 billion dollar budget for the USBP agency with an extra 779.5 million in technology and infrastructure was given (Nevine, 2010: 6).

The same spur of security measure in the southern border of the US extended with the strategy known as Prevention through Deterrence (PTD). Based on its discursive elements, the strategy sought to *reduce* the number of migrants seeking the US as a destination by making it more difficult and *less appealing*. The main objective was to intensify security in urban areas in order to shift the possible crossing of migrants into desolated areas such as the Sonora Desert (see e.g. Cornelius, 2001; Andrea, 2009). Today, reports suggest that PTD has been a failure in deterring migration flows (e.g. Cornelius & Salehyan, 2007).

That same year saw the implementation of the region's economic integration, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This trilateral agreement between Canada, United States, and Mexico saw the gradual elimination of tariffs in goods produced by NAFTA partners (Naftanow.org, 2012). Thus, trade between the US and Mexico more than tripled from $895 billion to $27.3 billion between 1993 and 2004 (Nevine, 2010: 9). An extension to this treaty is The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and by 2005 the agreement was signed with a late incorporation of the Dominican Republic (renamed CAFTA-DR). The intensification of traffic in the major terrestrial ports of entry between the United States, Mexico, and the Gulf of Mexico implies the increase regulation of the borders while increasing deregulating of markets (Andreas, 2001). According to Singer & Massey (1994), the increase number of neoliberal economic policies—like NAFTA and CAFTA-DR—has also increased migration. This is important to mention because it further elaborates on the unbalanced interdependence that is created between Mexico-Central America and the US.

4.2 Transit-Mexico

After the mutual composition of transnational agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA-DR, programs to intensified border security, and the modification of discourse towards irregular migrants in the US, also saw a modification in the migration measures implemented in transit Mexico. Measures like the Southern Plan 2001 (*Plan Sur 2001*) established the topic of migration as a security threat by intensifying border security between Guatemala-Mexico and by increasing the number of checkpoints in the southern states of Mexico (Pickard, 2005). Within others, the Merida Incentive of 2007 increased funding to detect and combat transnational organized crime, money laundering, and drug trafficking in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. The measures consisted of strengthening the Mexico-US border

through the usage of more technology and simultaneously intensify vigilance in Central America and the Caribbean, to guarantee control in the southern border of Mexico (Seelke & Finklea, 2010). Additionally, the Merida Initiative received even more funding from US Congress in the fiscal years of 2010 and 2011 "with an emphasis on training and equipping Mexican military and police forces engaged in counterdrug efforts" (Ibid.; 1).

Paradoxically—based on the discourse and resources of the implanted laws and multilateral agreements—the intention to regulate transit migration and intensify drug enforcement measure in Mexico has failed, and instead, has created the perfect situation for the development of various criminal organizations (Herrera-Lasso & Artola, 2011:11). As a result numerous means of violence against migrants arose. For example, the Southern Plan 2007 heightened migrant exposure to smugglers and organized crime due to the new construction of isolated routes to avoid the immigration and military spot checks (Brison, 2010). In other words, the vulnerability associated to the created notion of irregularity as a priority, makes the migrants in this conditions even more susceptive to the criminal activities that are constructed by such securitization measures (Herrera-Lasso & Artola, 2011:11).

Moreover, the Migration Law of 2011 (LM2011, also known as the New Migration Law or *La Ley Migración 2011*) made significant progress in matters of migration and human rights in comparison to previous implementations in Mexico (Gonzalez-Murphy & Koslowski, 2011; Morales Vega, 2012). Additionally, LM20011 also brought an increase in protection to undocumented migrants. The law stipulates that being undocumented in Mexico changed from being a criminal act, to an administrative one, while also ensuring the full protection from being apprehended and deported while being housed in any humanitarian organization or shelter (*La Ley Migración 2011*:1).Unfortunately the law excludes those migrants with a low socioeconomic profile by creating procedures that hinder their possibility of obtaining proper visit and transit permits. The embassy of Mexico in Guatemala, for example, requires transit or transnational migrants to provide passport (or first page), together with either a proof of economic solvency, bank statements, or clear place of destination (Rivera)[5]. Article 61 of LM2011 states that the applicant must provide economic statements as proof of economic solvency to cover transit costs (Dof.gob.mx, 2012)[6]. These items can be costly, time consuming to acquire, or even impossible to obtain by those of lower economic status or no economic solvency. Consequently such documents are usually in danger of being lost or disposed during

[5] http://embamex.sre.gob.mx/guatemala/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=419&Itemid=65
[6] http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5270615&fecha=28/09/2012

times of uncertainty like the ones explained here. Needless to say, those that have the resources experience another reality because LM2011 does provide the accessibility for the protection of migrants' rights. Nonetheless visible actions and material markets hinder the possibilities for such regulations to be properly implemented to most Central American and other transit migrants. The policies of the LM2011 stay within the logic of human rights but through securitization. The primary measure was to give more power to the National Migration Institute (INM - Spanish initials for the *Instituto Nacional de Migración*) and grant a monopoly on matters pertaining migrants of transit Mexico[7]. The law opens the doors for granting selective visa permits—for those with the resources and knowledge of it—or impunity against possible state run violence similar to the policies of detention and deportation in the US.

The Southern Border Program (2014) (*Programa Frontera Sur*) is another example of how Mexico has intensified its security in the southern border region. WOLA advocacy group and its report titled *Increased Enforcement at Mexico's Southern Border: An Update of Security, Migration, and U.S. Assistance* (2015) claims that today there is more: (1) aggressive enforcement measures along the cargo trains (most common mode of transportation), (2) an increase of INM enforcement agents and mobile checkpoints (apart from stationary checkpoints),(3) and the increase of apprehension and deportations with lack of proper screening or concern over the protection of forced migrants (Isacson et al., 2015:2). Such measures only means that migrants are using isolated alternative routes to cross Mexico. Most importantly this program leads to the reduction of migrants registering into migrant shelters because most of them are located along the commonly used train routes (Ibid: 19). Similarly, other measures show how deportations by Mexican authorities has increased 47% from 2013 to 2014, and that until 2010, transit routes were along the train tracks and its corridors (Martinez et al., 2015). Today migrants are even resorting to ocean routes along the coast of the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca (bordering states), hiding in vehicles, and taking uncommon train routes (Isacson et al., 2015:19).

[7] The INM can ask for assistance from federal, state and local police.

4.3 Detention Centers

There are multiple contentious issues surrounding detention centers, starting with the action of imprisoning migrants as a way of imposing power over the "illegal" (Kimberly, 2013). Detention in the context of this work implies a notion of violence because of the way it's constructed. One of its most controversial practices is the continuous transfer of migrants from detention centers to prisons or jails in the US. For example, there has been an increase of transfers of migrants being detained from 46,914 in 1999 to 405,544 in 2009, with a total number of 2 million transfers occurring between 1998 and 2010 (No More Deaths • No Más Muertes, 2014: 18). Yet, the number of detainees has not increased in proportion to the amount of transfers done (Ibid: 19). Relocations are said to be important to avoid overcrowding of the detention centers or prisons that are closer to high concentration areas of irregular migrant apprehension. However the motives are still unclear about the main reason for so many rotations. This due to a lack of oversight and monitoring of the operations done by detention centers in the US (Hamilton, 2011).

But why is this important? For instance, HRW (2011) released a report titled, *A Costly Move: Far and Frequent Transfers Impede Hearings for Immigrants in the Unites States*, which found that migrants that underwent transfers were overall detained three times longer than those never transferred (Ibid: 18). In total 46% of all migrants detained were moved at least once; with around 3,400 people transferred 10 times or more in 2009 (Ibid.). Those transferred are said to be separated from evidence necessary to present in court, hence, cases are more likely to be rejected due to lack of evidence (Ibid: 1). Additionally, personal belongings are harder to keep track of, are commonly misplaced, and eventually disposed. Advocacy group No More Deaths brought the issue to USBP and ICE demanding a reason for why such procedures are a common occurrence. As a response, the agencies' basically acknowledged that they were not responsible for returning the migrants' belongings by adding that "migrants are not directly entitled to getting their belonging back" (No More Deaths • No Más Muertes 2014: 8).

5. Literature Review

5.1 The Materiality of the Sonora Desert

Although there is research done over humanitarian work and political representations across the Sonora Desert and of the reifying of fear and violence to construct the "other" (see Boyce & Launius, 2011), Vicky Squire (2014; 2015) goes further to expand into the realm of discourse and materiality to assesses how both human and non-human entities are used to politicize migrants crossing this isolated borderland. The material-discursive phenomenon of crossing the Sonora Desert consists on the one side of those that reify the migrants by assessing the objects left behind in the desert as "trash," or as marker for the arrival of less civilized people polluting the environment. On one side, there are those that have the belief for necessary intervention to sustain the "illegal alien" from entering the US by using the desert as a "moral alibi" (Doty, 2011). The other side consists of those that see the "deserted" artifacts as the embodiment of all the people that have struggled while in such conditions (Sundberg, 2008; 2011; see also Sundberg & Kaserman, 2007; Loyd 2012). These artifacts work as markers to illustrate dehumanization through, what Squire (2014; 2015) describes as, the material-discursive intra-actions of being of a certain economic class and socio-cultural position with the desire to migrate by informal mean through the isolated transit areas of the Sonora Desert (also see Pickett et al., 2011 on the production of a stigmatized zone of racial exclusion and economic marginality in South Phoenix). Therefore by looking at the things that are left behind, the author scrutinizes just how the struggle over "the human" is transformed through the recollection and re-interpretation of these artifacts. The result is how people, places, and things constitute a more complex, more-than-human reality that resembles the ambiguous nature of post-humanitarian politics through Barad's posthumanistic approach (see Sections 7, 10, 11 for further elaboration).

Within the same lines, ethnographic research on the material and corporal connection between people, places, and things has increased on studies of secularization and existential security theory[8] (see Norris, 2004), on clothing garments, gender, and culture in India (Banerjee and Miller, 2003) or the Kuna in Panama (Margiotti, 2013), subjective motives for humanitarian action enrollment through site ontologies (Johnson, 2015), and lastly, through the unique materiality that has been shaped as a result of the border enforcement and mobility of migrants within the Sonora Desert (De Leon 2012; 2013. De Leon et al., 2015; Squire, 2014; 2015). The co-evolution and symbolic mutuality of time and space between militarization and conversation

[8] The view that religion arises where people lack economic security.

of national wildlife (Meierotto, 2014), extends with the accusation exchange between the environmental degradation from the modifications done by militarization and migrants involvement that create social, racial, and political tensions between Mexico and the US (Meierotto, 2012). Yet, other findings suggest that whilst it is simple to come to the conclusion that the landscape has been altered by human intervention, it seems rather uncritical to position the migrants' disposed artifacts as pure "garbage" (Sundberg 2008: 882-883). A critical analysis of the settings presented in the Sonora Desert can conclude that such markers demonstrate themes of racism, social, and economic inequality that can be constituted and imposed as state-crafted violence (see Chavez, 1998; Holmes, 2007; Nevins, 2002).

Through archaeological procedures that study the modifications that are made by the migrants' artifacts left in the area, evidence of struggle and suffering can be perceived (De Leon, 2013). Things that may seem to hold no importance, and that can be seen as trash, are used as markers that help understand the dreadful conditions that are part of crossing modern borders created in areas like the Sonora Desert. Through the archeological technique known as use wear—or the measuring of the modification of a garment of clothing, shoes, or any object that has been utilized for a particular purpose—Jason De Leon (2012) has illustrated how disposed objects have stories of their own. The author adds that pain is perceivable both on the materialized marks left in the process, and on the specific methods migrants use to cross the desert. For example, these techniques are used to embody violence endured by the migrants through the blood stains left in garments from the cuts done by the desert's landscape and on the completely destroyed and worn up shoes.

Additionally, De Leon's (2012) research expands to the Mexican side of the border where he investigates the material culture that has arisen as a result of the dangers that are to come, and the measures that need to be taken to survive. Things like high-salt-content canned foods, water bottles, and black or camouflaged clothes to avoid detection, become part of the characterizations of the migrant traveling by foot through the desert (De Leon, 2012: 482). Notwithstanding the material goods that are accessible to the migrants' economic standards, tend to instead become counterproductive by creating more harm than good (De Leon, 2012: 492)[9]. For most of the travelers, it's "better to be hot than get caught" (Ibid) and make it through the Sonora Desert. David Spencer (2009:227) adds that the poor conditions have become a

[9] De Leon explains that items that are said to be necessary to avoid detection, for example clear bottle water create a glare from the sunlight, and therefore black bottle water are sold. Unfortunately they make the water undrinkable after hours of exposure to the heat.

common and accepted reality. Contained by the concept of bare life and characteristics of precariousness as part of a 'natural' migrant-defined habitus, a ritual for achieving success is constructed by intricate material and social strategies (De Leon et al. 2015). Moreover, Seth Holmes (2013) on his book titled *Fresh Fruits, Broken Bodies*, uncovers how anti-immigration sentiments, racism, and market forces weaken the health of farmworkers in Mexico. Holmes gives a thick description of how socially structured suffering comes to be perceived as normal in migrants and thus gives a more-than-human insight into the subjects of food production and migration.

5.2 Contributions

Foremost I want to acknowledge that this thesis is parallel to Vicky Squire's (2014; 2015) work on humanitarian work in the Sonora/Arizona desert through a more-than-human perspective, the politics of mobility, and by using Karen Barad's posthumanist performativity. In this case I use *Casa del Migrante* in the border city of Juárez to empirically extend the research done previously by Squire. To my knowledge, Jason De Leon's anthropological studies today also extend to the border between Guatemala-Mexico. Otherwise this text only encompasses De Leon's work around the borderland of the Sonora Desert. Moreover, I borrow from Susan Bibler Coutin's work titled *Being En Route* (2005) on Salvadorians emigrating to the US and her concept of "clandestinity." On the other side, I attempt to theoretically contribute to the application of a posthumanist performativity interpretation to transit migration.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Posthumanist Performativity

Performativity has its roots in the area of linguistics from philosopher John Langshaw Austin. The author (1979:6-7) argues that "performatives are *contractual* ('I bet,' 'I do!') or *declaratory* ('I declare war') utterances." This suggests that performative utterances convey action, i.e. where one utterance is not just *saying* something but *doing* something, as opposed to a statements from the positivist standpoint where its usage is just a verifiable way to describe the world (Austin 1979). Derrida (1988) then elaborates further on Austin's emphasis on the performativity of language to consummate an action, but also adds, that performative utterances are subjective and effective after their "iterability" or repetition. This means that performativity produces linguistic categories that generate certain realities into being, that is, into effect.

Furthermore, gender performativity as developed by Judith Butler (1990)—subsequent to the defined concept of performativity of Austin and then of Derrida—conveys the subjectivity in the embodiment of gender. Butler in this case conceptualizes gender formation to be the repetitive performances of established discourse and normative patterns of how the body—binary, female or male—should *be* and *act*. Instead, she proposes that gender is not a fixed or determined thing but a kind of *becoming* or doing (Butler, 1990:112). This implies the performative construction or formation of identity through the image of the body, and thus, questions any depiction that does not conform to normative cultural practices. To exemplify this, Kelly Fritsch (2015:50) draws on Shelley Tremain's work to argument how a disabled body has always been perceived as *being* impaired through its relation between its materiality, historical practices, and discourse. Fritsch adds that Tremain's argument builds from Butler's (1990) performative embodiment (i.e. from the concept of gender performativity) and Foucault's apparatuses of disciplinary power/knowledge to illustrate how "the impaired disabled body appears through historically-specific practices that naturalize impairment as an already existing interior biological identity upon which culture acts" (Fritsch 2015:51). This logic therefore implies that to view the human body fixed solely on social and political representations of power can be and is problematic.

It is here that the performativity approach further elaborated by Karen Barad (2007: 47) departs from Butler's Foucauldian approach against representationalism. Butler's gender performativity, or the continuous practices of social factors on the body, is criticized by Barad for being an anthropocentric view of poststructuralism. Instead the author subscribes to a posthumanist account. Barad (2003:802) states:

> A *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.

Barad positions that language lacks in consideration to the materiality of the world and is instead aspired with too much meaning. Humans are not just outside in relation to the world with their ideas, understanding, personification, and subjectivities, but instead, emerge through it and as part of it (Fritsch 2015; 54). For that matter, I intent to illustrate how the performative embodiment of the migrant in the context of this thesis is fixed on the iterative discourse of illegality and deviance through postcolonial accounts of dependency, whilst simultaneously materialized through human and more-than-human assemblage of violence, (dis)possession and (im)mobility.

In the following subsection, I will further elaborate on Barad's (2003) agential realism ontology of posthumanist performativity through its most important terminology. Similarly I will elaborate on a more-than-human approach in order to expand on the intentionality of the thesis.

6.2 Central Concepts

6.2.1 Intra-acting and agency

The neologism "intra-acting"—intra-(within) acting opposed to inter-(between) acting—is coined by Barad (2003) to reconstruct how material and discursive elements are entangled within one another. Intra-action can be described as the mutual performance of humans materializing through actions as part of the world and the ability to act emerges from within the relationships with other non-humans—that is material objects. Human "existence is not an individual affair…individuals emerge through and part of their entangled intra-relations" (Barad 2007: ix). In other words, it is the mutual constitutions of human and non-human relationships with one other and how the world *is* "made" or "becomes" in "its differential mattering" (Barad 2003:817). As a result, the world has the ability to change, transform, or emerge simultaneously within time and space (Barad 2007: ix). For that matter agency is an act, an assembly of people, places and things, or "a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone has or an attribute whatsoever. Agency is "doing" or "being" in its intra-activity" (Barad 2003:178).

6.2.2 Phenomena

Barad (2007) relies on her interpretation of Danish physicist Neils Bohr's understanding of the apparatuses of observation in his philosophy of quantum physics as "the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (2007:148). If this logic is extended to the social sciences, phenomena are understood as the "ontological inseparability of agential intra-acting components" (Barad, 2003: 815). Phenomena does not exist *a priori* to the representation of agency in the world but within their mutual inseparability. This implies that everything is becoming in association with time and space. Bodies are not simply "in the worl", but rather are engaged and *becoming* as they materialize in relation to the configuration of mutually-constituting objects within the world.

6.2.3 More-than-Human

Moreover, Sarah Whatmore (2002) explains a "more-than-human" approach of critical human geography as that which re-conceptualizes the world away from an anthropocentric interpretation. She implies that history, culture, and politics have been solely focused on human beings—as central part to everything surrounding them in the world (Whatmore, 2002). As if "we insist[ed] on defining humanity as a mode of being hermetically sealed-off from and standing above other forms of life and existence" (Haraway, 2008: 305). This does not imply in this case that non-humans should have exactly the same kind of importance as humans, but to consider the "insight that humans and non-humans are always-already irrevocably intertwined" (Metzger, 2013: 13). By "expanding the corpus of "beings that count" (Whatmore, 2002: 155) "and whose fate and faring we are sensitized to" (Metzger, 2013: 14), this thesis considers the *being of transit* as those materialized entanglements of precarious and unfamiliar geographical areas, locations and existence of migrant shelters, and of objects during their journey.

6.3 Politics of Violence

Dysfunctional government structures operating under corruption and deception, organized crime, and the politics of a "war on drugs" in Mexico and Central America contribute in hindering while also producing the mobility of forced and irregular migrants. Violence is materialized in the bodies of the migrants of transit-Mexico (Danielson, 2015; Infante et al., 2012). It is also necessary to acknowledge the possibility of detention and the uncertainty that occurs once becoming an "illegal" immigrant of the US. The creation of such stigmatization, as the migrant becomes a dangerous outsider, reinforces the idea of securitization as a priority. These acts of dispossession subsequently generate a cycle of dehumanization to commodify a

certain social class during mobility or immobility (Vogt, 2013), and thus becomes,"legal violence" (Menjivar & Abrego, 2012).

Close attention in this thesis is put forth on the dispossession and infliction of an uncomfortable physical reality as the politics of violence. If analyzed from a historical perspective, causality of violence against the global south derives from a legacy of colonialism and imperialism—i.e. as evident in violence against irregular migrants today (Gilroy 2005). Violence was materialized and normalized by mundane practices of corruption and subjugation of the population through structures of control, politics, power, and racial hegemony which overtime has shaped Latin Americas reality today (Moraña et al., 2008: 2). Through a Marxist scope, it can be stated that the emergence of its normalization is a part of the hegemony of certain factions of society against another. Violence has become culturally tolerable and strictly speaking a key ingredient for cultural hegemony as once explained by Antonio Gramsci. Subsequently the violence that was perpetrated over the peripheral of the US post WWII was in part over Cold War uncertainties and for the region to secure neoliberalism as the dominating system of rule (Brands, 2010). Similar to other regions of the world once colonized by Europeans since the end of the 15th century, a 20th century historical retrospect of Central America and Mexico gives evidence to the postcolonial legacy that is continually materialized through coercion and looting. Based on a history of foreign dependency (Donghi & Chasteen 1993), reckless rule by oligarchs, harmful economic agreements[10], transnational security treaties,[11] and civil, fragmented, and guerilla wars in Mexico and Central America (see Ayres 1998; Robert 1998; Londoño, &Guerrero 2000; Kay, 2001; Krug et al., 2002; Morrison et al. 2003; Coutin, 2005) has led to a geographical area of weaken states.

Along these lines I also rely on the yearly analysis done by the Fragile State Index as a resource. This yearly report published by an independent, non-partisan research and educational organization called The Fund for Peace[12] works to measure the levels of instability around the world. Unsurprisingly Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua are commonly positions as weak states with a high fragility level. The evaluation is based on indicators that include: uneven economic development, violence, corruption permeated in many if not all level of government, population displacement, sociopolitical dysfunctionality, and external intervention just to name a few (Messner et al., 2015: 16-17). Consequently ethnologist

[10] The negative aspects of NAFTA and CAFTA-DR (See Section 5)
[11] For example the Merida Initiative (See section 5)
[12] http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/

Wendy Vogt (2014: 767) adds that "the violence people experience along the migrant journey echoes both the violence and the struggles for dignity that have shaped their entire lives." Suggesting that deteriorated physical spaces function as materialized path of violence that serves as an element in the politics of mobility.

6.4 Politics of Mobility

Cultural geographer Tim Cresswell (2010) brings forth the idea of the politics of mobility governed by motives of force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction. Whereas the common well-off individual frequently travels with little or no questioning, with comfort, speed, and a predetermined destination, those traveling out of force or necessity are regulated, exposed to dangerous and slow routes, detention, deportation, and confronted with the hierarchical reality of the politics of mobility (Ibid.: 21-26). Cresswell thus refutes the glorification of mobility and instead places the representations of freedom and modernity aside deviance and suspiciousness (Ibid: 2).

Furthermore, human mobility created from free market enterprise, globalization, and trade agreement does not benefit everyone (Creswell, 1999; 2006; 2010; Hannam et al., 2006). Time-space compression associated to the liberal assumption of mobility does not apply to different strata of societies (Singer & Massey, 1994). There is a clear tendency that shoes how the lower social strata has been left exposed to violence, dispossession, and a lack of opportunities to have a reasonably comfortable life, let alone the opportunity to progress. Adding to the disparity of mobility within the different social strata, Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 86) states that those on the lower end "happen time and again to be thrown out from the site they would rather stay in". As for those in the high end, happen to choose to travel due to consumer society in the quest to eradicate boredom (Bauman, 2005: 39).

As Squire (2011) adds, 'processes of externalization have been implemented through neighborhood policies, sea and land patrols, and foreign policy initiatives' (Squire, 2001:2). Hence, scarce economic support to stay in the country of origin with a lack of employment options, wages under the poverty line, and a lack of support by local and national governments of all essential necessities like health and social protection are a reality for those deemed as the "other" or "threat". Arranged with the materiality of violence just explained, the politics of mobility framed as 'security' becomes a "necessity" and consequence of the politics of violence.

7. Methods and Methodologies

7.1 Philosophical Considerations

In the pursuance of outmost clarity, it is necessary to express the philosophical stance in which I decided to undertake the research task presented in this thesis. Whereas I undoubtedly came to the following conclusion based on my subjective context and believes (6 & Bellamy, 2012: 56), it is through that same introspection that I realize that to focus solely on individual representation of the world can become problematic. This suggests that the stance on which this thesis is based on, not only depends on the construction of my thoughts, but also on my intra-action with the people, objects, time, and space I analyze. Therefore to say that this work can be refuted because it is relatively constructed on the basis of *my* interpretation would deem to acknowledge all the components—people, place, and things—of *Casa del Migrante* as inconsequential. This of course is further away from positing an objective truth, but instead to acknowledge that the emergence of my thoughts shifted as I intra-acted within all the elements described above. Thus, through the concepts of performative posthumanism I seek to make a distinction over the constructive nature of my analysis, whilst also taking into consideration the position of a more-than-human approach to the phenomenon in question. This thesis thus employ methods and methodology through a new materialist perspective. Fox & Alldred (2014) summarize an ontology on what Deleuze & Guattari (1984) coined an "empirical focus on process and interaction" (Fox & Alldred, 2014: 401).

7.2 Research Design

7.2.1 Ethnography

> "Movement between fields is only part of the flexibility of the ethnographic method--the paradox is that flexibility of a kind lies also in the very state of immersement, in the totalizing as well as the partial nature of commitment"
>
> (Starthem, 1999:6)

In order to examine one of the junctions of transit Mexico the thesis employs an ethnographic study to evaluate what things and places do in relation to the migrants during mobility. As stated above by Marilyn Strathern (1999: 6), no preparation in advance can be enough before becoming part of the field, and the researcher writes about things that one has not being able to forget. Strathern follows that ethnography is important by stating that the data collected does not become immediately obvious but until the researcher produces it into meaningful information (Strathern. 1999:6-7). Therefore one becomes the methods employed. As one of the strategies suggested by John W. Creswell (2007; 2009:13), ethnography is the inquiry of research that collects interviews, notes, and employs observation over a cultural group in a

setting over an extended period of time. Furthermore, Karen O'Reilly (2009:3) defines ethnography as an "itereative-inductive" research apparatus composed by a set of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents. Within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), O'Reilly (2005: 27) clarifies that "iterative" suggests a non-linear—both spiral and straight—procedure, and "inductive," as data collection to be done with the least preconceptions possible, that is with an open mind, and "allowing data to speak for themselves."

Critical ethnography—the "doing" and "performing" of critical theory (Madison, 2005:15) — emphasizes that the positionality of the ethnographer during fieldwork is essential. For instance, when to acknowledge their power, privilege, and biases as a researcher, while also questioning the power structures that are being enacted upon the agent—in this case the migrants (Ibid: 7). Here, the critical ethnographers' task is to further elaborate by interpreting the voice of the agents and to take a clear position by uncovering the material effects of the topic receiving attention (Habermas, 1971; Fine, 1994).

7.2.2 Single-Site Ethnography

Through a single-sited ethnographic research of *Casa del Migrante*, I seek to contribute to the intra-connectivity concerning migrants of transit and the agency of (dis)possession through a material-discursive analysis (for examples of single-sited ethnography see Gielis, 2011; Davies, 2009; Walsh 2005). George Marcus (1995) as a forger of multi-sited ethnography, proposes that ethnographers ought to track the movement of people and things through space, and study the stories around various places meticulously. However, Marcus makes an emphasis on the importance for ethnographers to also consider the possibility of strategically situating oneself in a single site to encompass an array of movement that still emulates phenomena in a multi-sited context (Ibid: 110). Through a single-sited ethnography of *Casa del Migrate,* I believe to have benefitted from the application of such methodology in researching the position of people within today's transitory spaces of Mexico-US. Ethnographic methods such as participant observation, note taking, and daily conversations with the migrants became part of my performative involvement with the migrants and things during their transitory situation.

7.2.3 Material

7.2.3.1 Access

Having been born and raised in the border region of Juárez-El Paso gave me an advantage over what was possible to do, who I could contact, and to have previous knowledge about migrant shelters such as *Casa del Migrante*. I am familiar with the city and can relate in multiple away with the people that live around the area. I was also fortunate that the staff from *Casa del*

Migrante was extremely helpful when I contacted them. Additionally, I had previous knowledge that *Casa del Migrante* is one of many shelters around the border areas of Mexico and Guatemala that operate under *Los Misioneros de San Carlos Scalabrinos* (The Missionaries of San Carlos Scalabrino) as the *Red de Casas del Migrante* (Network of Migrant Homes). Therefore, I accessed their website[13] but was surprised to see that no information from the shelter in Juárez was provided. I was able to find the shelter's Facebook site and realized that constant actualizations where being made via this medium. Before sending any detailed information, I sent a brief description to the message section of their Facebook account. I got a quick reply from one of the staff members that then provide me with the information of the person in charge of the shelter. In this case Father Javier Calvillo (see Section 9 for further information) kindly worked as my gatekeeper to give me access to the facilities—the term gatekeepers is given to those in charge of an organization and that give access to the researcher to do research (Taylor, 2015). This process happened two months before my arrival and after sending Father Calvillo a detailed explanation of my intentions and background information. The process was fast, friendly, and with no restrictions. Upon my arrival in February the staff's welcoming was warm and provided all the accommodations and guidelines that were needed to be followed.

I was housed at *Casa del Migrante* for a total of 18 days in the timespan of a month (February 2015). Since migrants were not allowed to leave the premises (further elaboration in Section 9 and 10), I decided to stay during the weekdays (with some exceptions due to personal reasons) and leave for the weekends. I followed every process that a migrant would undergo during their stay. However, I was not permitted to sleep amongst the migrants and instead was given a room in the main building close to reception area—a room that is reserved for guests, volunteers or researchers. Although I felt as I should sleep in the same dormitories, the administrators asked of me to occupy the room that was given to me for safety reasons.

7.2.3.2 Sample

Those migrants that I had met within minutes before our interview, consisted of moslty men that had been recently deported to *Casa del Migrante*. I was waiting for them in the reception area and introduce myself as they were getting registered. I also planned to keep my attire as relaxed as possible in order to seem approachable. The migrants *coming*, comprised mostly of Mexican nationals that were taken from the USBP drop-off point along the divisionary border line between Mexico and the US (see Appendix 1 for map), and were thereafter, gathered and

[13] http://www.migrante.com.mx/

driven to the shelter by the INM assistance team called *Grupo Beta*. The arrivals would regularly happen during the night time between 10 p.m. and midnight, with an unexpected number of migrants every day[14]. If no migrants were seen at the drop-off points that particular day, *Grupo Beta* would notify *Casa del Migrante* that no recently deported migrants were to be driven to the shelter.

During their registry process I would explain my presence. If the migrants agreed to have a conversation with me, they were first asked about how they got apprehended and to describe their experience while being detained. The question were open-ended and casual to maintain fluidity. Meanwhile the questions were also directed towards the whereabouts of their material possessions and of the detention centers' materiality—i.e. their treatment by USBP and ICE, the food, clothes and relation with other inmates. The recently repatriated group would most likely only stay for the night, have a late dinner, sleep, and leave in the morning after breakfast. I would help cook and serve dinner in order to maintain common conversations and would maintain participant observation by overhearing their comments while they ate. In most occasions the conversations continued in the same direction to what was mentioned during the recorded interviews.

Those which I had more time to converse with previously, consisted mostly of Central Americans. Most Mexican nationals that were to attempt crossing to the US, were either seeking asylum, or were waiting for their case to get appealed. They were asked about their journey north and to describe some of the experiences that first came to mind. They were also asked about what items they decided to take in the journey apart from the essentials. I also found it interesting to hear about random conversations, e.g., regional rivalries amongst migrants of different nationalities, how they were perceived by Mexican authorities, or anything else they needed to express.

7.3 Methods

7.3.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is considered by Barbara B. Kawulich (2005:4-10) to be essential to the opening stage of ethnographic studies. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002: 92) add that apart from its limitations, participant observation as a method of research develops a comprehensive and accurate idea of the phenomena under investigation. Yet, these authors stress the importance for the researcher to be prepared to utilize skills such as; good listening skills, active seeing, to

[14] The shelter would some nights receive recently deported migrants. If it was the case, around 8 to 12 people would arrive at once.

resist any impulses and any attachment to a particular group or people in order to minimize bias opinions, and most importantly patience (Ibid: 17). If done correctly, the researcher can take advantage of a first-hand performative aspect of a specific phenomenon—people, places, and things—allowing for rich descriptions of unscheduled events, situations, and behaviors (deMunch and Sobo 1998: 43).

During my first week at the shelter, I dedicated all of my time to establish rapport and become familiar (Howell, 1972:10; Bernard, 1994) with the migrants, employees, volunteers, and with the shelter itself. I recorder no conversations and mostly became acquainted with the migrants that had been staying there for a longer period of time. The goal was to maintain conversations about the things that were kept close, the things that were considered important, and worth protecting. The remaining time consisted of keeping common conversation, asking to help out with the cooking, chores, and overall activities in order to seem approachable and keep my participation active (DeWalt & Waynd 1998). As mentioned by Atkinson & Hammersley (1994:249) the participation varies depending on who knows of the researcher's position, his or her intentions, and what orientates the researcher to act as an insider or outsider in activities that he or she is engaged with. Moreover, participant observation is not considered to be a specific research mechanism but a "mode of being-in-the-world of researchers" (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994:249) because one has to be part of the world in order to be able to study it (Hammersley & Atkinson1983; Atkinson & Hammersley 1994:249).

7.3.2 Unstructured Interviews

During my stay at *Casa del Migrante* a total of 30 unstructured interviews were recorded, yet, not all recorded material was transcribed. The interviews where all held in Spanish (the native language I shared with the research participants) and I personally did all translations into English (the language of my 15 yearlong education in the US).

An ongoing assemblage of participant observation and unstructured interviews work as methods to maintain a fluent interaction between researcher and informant in a spontaneous manner (Patton 2002). As it may be expected, neither the categories of the questions nor answers are prearranged (Minichiello et al. 1990). This does not suppose that the general purpose of the study and the issues in hand where without preparation (Fife, 2005). Instead the interviews were focus-intensive on the reasons to emigrate and the trajectory period. They had a fluidity of common conversation but were material- and object-orientated—yielding descriptions of places of rest and detention, of paths and transport used in the migratory journey, and things carried, given, and taken away. As an interviewer I avoided leading questions that

may lead to certain conclusions. Additionally, I attempted to be neutral with my comments while simultaneously intended to be an empathetic listener (Saldaña, 2011:40) by always acknowledging my attention and gratitude for their participation. I also maintained focused on creating a sense of pleasantness by speaking shortly about myself and by sharing anecdotes that had nothing to do with the interviews.

Nevertheless there are multiple challenges associated with conducting and analyzing unstructured interviews (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009). First, gathering data from this method becomes time consuming and challenging. Due to the personalized natured of the interviews, the length of the sessions where either very long or very short. Second, the researcher must maintain control over the interview as the discussion might tend to deviate from the topics that want to be discussed. Finally, analyzing the data (as explained below) can become difficult (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009: 5-6).

Since I am not experienced in the field, I became associated with every single one of the above mentioned challenges. For example, the interviews that were conducted with repatriated Mexicans—or those *coming* from the US—were relatively short in duration (the shortest being 5 minutes to 20 the longest). Since the interviewees were mostly tired from their apprehension, long transfer, and processing period, rapport, trust and access was difficult. Although our association was really short, the information given was helpful and insightful. Most of the material was over what had happened to their possessions, the treatment they received during apprehension and detention, the duration and living condition at the detention centers, and their number of transfers. Moreover, the interviews conducted with those migrants wanting to cross—or *going* to the US—tended to be around an hour long with conversations mostly concerning conditions of their trajectories before and after mobility. To the contrary, I had longer time to speak and socialize with Central American migrants, as a result, trust and rapport became stronger.

7.4 Material

My material also consists of transcripts from audio recorder interviews, and handmade notes documenting the conversations that were not recorded. Furthermore, the material includes fieldnotes and photos (see Appendix 2). Fieldnotes describe an experience or observation of events that I was involved with (Emerson, 2011). The notes taken were subjective interpretations of my active involvement and were never taken as facts (Ibid). To keep consistency I notated the date and time of all events and conversation that I could recall (Chiseri-Strate & Sunstein, 1997).

Most of the notations were taken after breakfast when most migrants left the shelter, or at night before finishing my day. During the mornings I would sit at a same location—in the courtyard between the main building and the recreation room—because it was a good position were staff and migrants would occasionally pass through, thus giving me accessibility and visibility. This also gave me a chance to be approached and would continue talking with staff or migrants over my observations. Because I was particularly interested in describing the shelter, I spent the first days taking pictures and notating everything possible (See Appendix 2). I took photos of the premises only when no one was visible to keep anonymity and respect for staff and migrants. I was also provided an office next to reception in order to conduct the interviews.

7.4.1 Coding

A code in qualitative studies is known as the phrase or word association that signifies the assigning of "a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009: 3). From the recorded interviews selected, transcribed, and translated I looked for patterns that had a sequence, similarities, and relevance to my goal to later create filters to keep my language consistent, to thereafter, categorize (Ibid).

I resorted mostly on Johnny Saldaña's (2009), *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research*, as my handbook to the data analysis procedures. I also resorted to HyperTRANSCRIBE^{tm} as my computer assisting software to analyze and interpret the patterns that emerged from the data gathered. This suggests that HyperTRANSCRIBE^{tm} does not have the capability to analyze information. Instead, this program worked as a tool to locate the topics that arose from my coding and facilitated the process of categorizing the recorded interviews collected during fieldwork (Charmaz, 2006: 3, 46).

7.5 Ethical Considerations

Due to my position as a researcher, sensitive topics and difficult situations were discussed in the interviews. I had to contemplate and consider the ethical issues that arose during and after fieldwork. The last decades have brought a growing concern and more ethical awareness in qualitative research (Christian, 2005; Flick 2007). As a result, Creswell (2009:87) cites Israel & Hay (2006) on the following consideration to expect with research participants: A need to protect participants in issues of personal disclosure, personal privacy, develop trust, protect the integrity of the study, and be prepared to manage new and difficult situations.

During my fieldwork I was concise and forward over my intentions despite the fact that the final product was not exactly as explained. As time progressed I noticed that people were less interested in talking about material possessions and instead were more interested in talking

about their current situation. My objective and preparation before my arrival modified as I became part of the study and did not maintain exactly the initial goals. I was also clear when identifying myself, the institution to which I am affiliated as a student, any confidentiality measures, and assurance that involvement with the study was optional (Creswell, 2009: 89). Anonymity of the participants was guaranteed and informed consent was given to each research participant (Plummer, 2001:217; Christian, 2005: 144-146; Flick, 2007:68). I did not encounter anyone that was concerned with participating. All participants are not mentioned by name, and if they are, they have been changed to keep anonymity.

These considerations are important in order to maintain the five ethical principles mentioned by Plummer (2001:228): (1) to promote respect, (2) promote care (ethics of care), (3) fairness and justice, (4) to enlarge autonomy, freedom and choice, and (5) minimize harm. Moreover, this work is in agreement with an entangled notion of ethics, knowing, and being, or what Barad (2007:258) defines as an "ethico-onto-epistem-ology" where "ethics cannot be about responding to the other as if the other is the radical outside to the self."

7.6 My Participatory Role

Coutin (2005) references Strathern (1991:1995:1999) to describe ethnographic work as the "immersion" of oneself with the "field." Ethnographers must adopts natives' point of view and produce fresh accounts of a social order to produce knowledge (Strathern, 2005: 202). During my fieldwork I tried my best to seem approachable and communicative in order to minimize any gap between me and those that I invited to become part of this research. Coutin (2005) also adds that fielwork does not end in the "field" but continuous on the "desk" (1999:1). "Field immersement" is repeated in the subsequent study away from the field. Ethnographers set themselves the task not just of comprehending the effect that certain practices and artefacts have in people's lives, but of re-creating some of those effects in the context of writing about them" (1999:5). In some regards, standard accounts of ethnography has its similarities with irregular migration. For example, as migrants in a sense, moved territory, they practiced a form of practical nostalgia that made the past present. In most respects I was not questioned about my position but only asked about my association with the shelter and general background information on myself. As part of these guidelines, I was told by the staff to provide my final work after publication in order to contribute to the accumulation of news reports or research that has been done on *Casa del Migrante de Juárez A.C*. (see, Trápaga 2009). The topic has always been relevant in the region and many independent researchers and universities have produce work on the shelter.

7.7 Credibility, Dependability, and Transferability

With the highest intention of maintain the work provided here to be as transparent as possible, in this subsection, I present the procedures done to preserve credibility. A practical engagement to document the data, decisions, and methods are outlined here to provide an eloquent interpretation of my doings, and thus, obtain trustworthiness and consistency (6 & Bellamy, 2012:261-262; Seale 1999:45-46). The purpose is to provide the necessary tools to analyze how I came to understand the material markers and discussions that arrange the reality of migrants arriving to *Casa del Migrante*, and also, how the shelter works as a "buffering zone" to the migrants' situation.

Nonetheless, to create a ground for possible applicability to other relevant domains, transferability was in mind by providing a detailed description of where I was located, what procedures I followed, and what where my intentions (6 & Bellamy, 2012:261-262; Seale 1999:45-46). Despite the fact that detailed descriptions are given in this thesis, an exact replication of this work is not possible due to the (intra)subjectivity of the encounters on which the research is based. This does not diminish its credibility but instead gives transparency to the work done.

8. Findings

8.1 The Migrant's House

Casa del Migrante is located in the southwestern part of Juárez, approximately 5 kilometers away from the Zaragoza port of entry to El Paso, Texas. The shelter first opened its doors in 1989 as part of a web of migrant shelters built by multiple faith-based organizations around Latin America and other parts of the world (Rigoni, 2010). [15] In the case of the city of Juárez, the diocese was granted a land mass of 3,500 square meters. Today the center is surrounded by a church, an event hall, and a school that was previously a convent.[16] The shelter has capacity to house 300 men, women, and children at once, but the shelter has had to house more than 300 at a time in various occasions. For security purposes administration was not able to provide any data regarding for example, the amount of people arriving, their nationality, and time of stay—I was only given a total of 5,882 migrants housed (registered) in 2014. Today the shelter is maintained by the donations of the local population. Cash donations, clothes, canned foods, and blankets, are received daily, while businesses donate building, cleaning, and maintenance supplies or leftover food from their cafeterias. Additionally, bread from bakeries is sent every week. Milk, fruit, and produce is donated by local supermarkets, leftover food from restaurants, and meat from local butchers. Other residents give their time and volunteer, i.e. a physical therapist goes to the shelter every Wednesday to give foot massages and a hairdresser every Tuesdays to give haircuts for free.

Central American irregular migrants are allowed to stay for up to 12 days. This to ensure that they have enough time to rest, contact their family members, receive any medical or legal attention, and, to give money transfers the necessary time to be collected and received. The recently deported are mostly Mexican nationals that need to rest after their detention period. These men and women are permitted to stay for 3 days, however, most spend the night or stay for a few hours to eat, rest, and contact family members. Most of the repatriations to the Valle de Juárez region, consist of those individuals that have been registered to be originated from states close to the border (see Appendix 1 for map), with some rare exceptions[17]. The municipality of Juárez and the INM provides a voucher of 1000 pesos (around 60 American dollars) valid exclusively for bus fare. This in order to ensure that the recently deported go to

[15] Casa del Migrante is part of an organization of shelters founded by Bishop Juan Bautista Scalabrini, an Italian immigrant to the Americas at the end of the 19th century.
http://www.migrante.com.mx/uploads/4/6/9/5/46959225/libro-flor-maria.pdf
[16] The nuns worked at the migrant center during the previous administration but changed in 2010 after its re-opening and instead with donations, employed personal to help the migrants.
[17] Other states of origin, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Michoacán, Guerrero.

their home towns and don't stay in the border region. Mexican nationals *coming* south are those that have been forcefully removed or those who decided to leave their point of origin due to violence or uncertain situations. Additionally, longer residency exceptions are made for those Central American migrants considered by the director to be in a dangerous position, or for those awaiting any legal procedure.

The current director of the center, Father Francisco Javier Calvillo, is the key person responsible for running and promoting the center to maintain its doors open. A well-liked figure in Juárez, Father Calvillo's personality and negotiations skills have managed the center to be adequate and functional. Known as *Casa del Migrante Cinco Estrellas* (The Five-star migrant center) among the *migrants of transit*, those residing have the opportunity to ask for an extra serving during the daily meals, to pick up an extra piece of bread or fruit, get an extra blanket and pillow, and to have a comfortable mattress to sleep in. Compared to other cities around the country, the number of migrants arriving to the center is considerably lower[18]. Because of the volume of donations and the uncertain number of arrivals, the center is well-known to have plenty provisions. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the work and dedication put forth by all the administrators of the shelter.

The main areas of the *Casas del Migrante* consists of four white standard buildings with red brick edges (see Appendix 2). As the premises are spacious, the center has an extensive open area separating the buildings. Between the buildings, there is a basketball court with benches on the side, a grassy area with trees and flowers particular to the region, and a shrine of the Virgin Mary in the middle grassy area. It gives it a hacienda feel to it where chickens, roasters, and dogs (held in a particular area not to kill the chickens) are running around an extensive space surrounded by a gated wire fence. The main building has a reception area, infirmary, human rights and employees' offices, laundry room, storage rooms—with clothes, sheets, pillows, shoes and other garments—, storage room for cleaning supplies, dispensary of non-perishable goods, and a second floor with rooms to house guest during large events programmed by the diocese (i.e. religious retreats and religious holiday events). The biggest building has a recreation room with a television, books, pool table, board games, tables, chairs and six long comfortable sofas. The dormitories comprise of six bunk beds per room, bathrooms, and a big kitchen with 6 long tables with hundreds of plastic chairs folded in a corner. A smaller building

[18] This is due to the funneling of migrants to the outside areas of the main border cities. The most common drop-off zone has become Mexicali (see map in Appendix 1) due to the violence that has been registered at the western part of the borderlands between the state of Texas, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila.

next to it has a separate residence area for women and children. Most walls are filled with informational posters with religious messages, phrases of encouragement, preventive measures to consider if any sort of abuse is or was experienced, health facts, and newspaper reports about current migration related issues.

The reception hosts a plethora of religious paraphernalia—such as statues, posters, and inspirational phrases—, it has a huge variety of informational pamphlets, and newspaper clips with news on the current events and statistics. This room has two statues of Jesus holding check stubs from multiple detention centers addressed to those once detained. The most common items hanging from the statues are Rosaries, identification wrist bands from various detention centers, letters of good fortune, and scraps of paper with repetitive phrases that read, "*I need a working permit*" (for more photos of the shelter see Bureau, 2014).

Nevertheless the center has really strict rules in order to maintain its status. The most restrictive rule has to do with access to communication and mobility. Once registered in the center, the migrants cannot leave the premises of *Casa del Migrante*[19]. The shelter maintains similar rules to those seen in prisons or jails; e.g. the meals are called *platon* (slang word for meal in prison-detention centers) and given at specific hours, the male dormitory areas are closed from 9a.m. to 10p.m., cellphones are taken away, and calls can only be done upon request with limited number of minutes. Additionally, any form of aggression—verbal or physical-–is penalized with expulsion (loss of access) from the shelter. The limited access to the city made most of the participants feel uncomfortable.

8.2 Things of Transit

8.2.1 Things Essential for Survival

Things that are bought and sold in the market during the migratory trajectory. Their flow and mobility is constant. A culture of selling certain goods becomes part of transit. These mass produced items construct a transit market culture that is fomented and enacted by transit social networks. This includes things such as bottled water, food, clothes, blankets, shoes, and required medication that is given in migration shelters or sold around the transitory routes of transit Mexico. They further include, for example, salted foods like beef jerky for water retention, backpacks, and dark clothing (to avoid detection).

[19] The exemption was of some of the asylum seekers that had been helped with obtaining a job at the informal level but had a proper working visa.

8.2.2 Legal Documents

Government-issued IDs, driver's license, any document of identification, and other credentials. In the case of asylum seekers any object that can be used as proof of prosecution (documents, pictures, newspapers, etc.).

8.2.3 Communication Devices

Mobile phones, GPS, and access to internet (as a new venue of time-space). Or as Tim Cresswell (2001: 2006) refers to as the "metaphysics" of mobility.

8.2.4 Memorabilia and Amulets

Items of sentimental value such as letters or pictures. Amulets such as religious objects, blessed items, or random good luck charms.

8.3 People of Transit

In this section below I have chosen to include only a selected number of the recorded interview from the ones I found fitting to transcribe and analyze. Evidently the selection was done based on the duration, relevance, and fluidity of the narratives. Ultimately, four detailed accounts and numerous short descriptions of experiences of transit were selected. Detailed accounts were randomly selected from the recorded interviews examined.

8.3.1 Detailed Narratives

8.3.1.1 Agustin

25 year old Honduran man whose ongoing migration experience has lasted two years. This includes being detained at multiple facilities in the US, deportations to Honduras and the borderlands of Mexico. During one of our conversations he mentioned to have tried to cross from east to west, being deported around seven times, with his detentions lasting from fifteen days to six months. The reason he was able to go continuously without receiving harsher sentences was because he had tried to enter through different geographical areas, mostly through California and Texas[20]. Notwithstanding, he was clear to say that he is terrified of crossing the Sonora Desert and would never try it, yet while I interviewed him the topic came up again. He paused and pondered about it, looking down as if thinking that he had no other alternative, but he instead looked up at me and said, *"No, something will come up, one of these days an opportunity will arise."*

He lived in New Orleans for five years and worked with the reconstruction of the city in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Agustin said to have only been 17 years old during his first attempt to reach the US. He said to have been kidnapped during that first trip, but was fortunate

[20] Counties and states have different jurisdictions and sentencing depends on many factors left uncertain.

to be released after his family paid for his ransom. However, he said to have been recently kidnapped a second time. Agustin was tortured for seven day in the northeast part of the Mexican borderlands, but escaped from his abductors three months from our encounter. Because of it, he cannot go back south:

> *I will get killed the minute they [established gang in the southeast-northeast region of Mexico] see me in the east or south of Mexico… even in Honduras. They are really well organized, they got a picture of me with their cellphones when I was kidnapped…they know my face.*

Agustin was given permission by Father Calvillo to take refuge in the center and was given an informal job by remodeling a congregation hall the Dioses of Juárez has next door to the shelter. I could not imagine his condition after arriving to the center.[21] Agustin had nowhere else to go; if he was to be arrested by USBP one more time, he would have to do more than one year of detention. If he went south, he would risk getting killed. He seemed to be "stuck within transit."[22]

Agustin was friendly but difficult to approach at first, he seemed to question my presence in the beginning. One day while I was writing some fieldnotes, Agustin jokingly ask if I was questioning everything around me—as if to lay emphasis on my position against his. He even questioned why I slept in the guest room instead of sleeping in the dormitories with everyone else: *"You are afraid to get a disease or lice,"* he said with a teasing nature. My reaction was to laugh and explain that I was not allowed by administration. Most of our longer conversations happened during meal times and before going to bed. He was the last person I formally interviewed, knowing that his life story was one filled with extreme turmoil and violence. His stories of transit and loss kept me in total shock. He lost all possession gathered from the years of living in the US. His cars and furniture where sold by his cousins still residing in New Orleans. To this day, he said to have not seen a single cent from the earnings. Since one of my main focuses was on material possessions, I would—amongst all the stealing, murders, and rape he stated to have witnessed during his trajectories—try to squeeze a question regarding the topic. When the situation arose I asked about his actual possessions, he proceeded to laugh and say:

[21] It was however described to me by administrative staff at the center, apparently—and with no surprise—it was disheartening.

[22] Suter (2012) exemplifies this on her dissertation titled *Tales of transit: Sub-Saharan African migrants' experiences in Istanbul* how this is topic of its own. One of her informants was stuck in Istanbul for 20 years after being stuck in the bureaucracy of the international asylum system, thus the urgency for the refining of the notion of transit.

> *A really torn Bible and a belt that I stored in those lockers (points outside)… I got the bible when I was locked up in California*[23]*, I always have it with me. It is all torn because with that bible they (kidnappers) were hitting me in the head* (laughs) *while they had my belt placed around my neck. After all that, I still got the belt and bible back… it's the remembrances from my kidnapping! It has been some time since I last read the bible. Almost since I got here, it's because I have put it away [in the locker]. But while I am on my way* [transit] *I read it all the time… and I'm not even religious. My family is Catholic, but not me… I believe in God, but religion* [expression of disapproval]*...I don't mind going to any church; evangelical, catholic… wherever I am invited. I'm neutral…by the time I got here (shelter), I had not even one cent with me. Inside the bible I had six thousand Mexican pesos… "they wouldn't open the bible if I get mugged" I though… but I trusted this guy* [the person that led him to his kidnapping] *so I told him to exchange them for dollars… that is why they were hitting me more, they thought I had more money.*

Agustin was kidnapped together with another person. A *coyote* they had met in the city of Monterrey lured them after Augustin was told of a plan with certain precision. They were apprehended by a group of men in their arrival to the border. They were asked for a total of ten thousand dollars or five thousand each as ransom. Only four thousand dollars were collected. For that matter, Agustin and his companion were told that they had to pay their way out by working for the kidnappers. It was then that Agustin received his bible back and was able to escape from the same person that had lured them. "*He (coyote) fell asleep while we were in a train back to Torreón, we could've taken revenge by throwing him under the train… we decided to leave it up to God,"* said Agustin. I then asked about his wounds, he responded by saying that he still gets nightmares, has constant headaches, and has occasional pains around his stomach and rib section from being kicked.

8.3.1.2 Pedro

A charismatic even somewhat eccentric man from Honduran in his second month of transit. He had lived in Atlanta for 18 years—from 1996 to 2013—working as a construction worker before getting detained for 30 days and subsequently deported to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. While in detention, a friend of his got a luggage with some of his belonging; things he said he wanted to take back to Honduras. He was transferred to another detention center but his things did not follow him. Pedro then continued, *"The paper slip I was given said that I had 90 days to recollect my items otherwise they throw them away. But when you call from Honduras no one answers."* After one year working in Honduras, Pedro was forcefully expelled from his home town after he witnessed the murder of a girl. He told me with great concern, *"Everyone in my block saw, but then they (gang members) started to "take-out" the people that supposedly saw,*

[23] He was in detention for six months in California

luckily I was warn… when one leaves, one comes over quietly with the truth." Because Pedro had no problems expressing himself, I proceeded to ask about what he decided to take from Honduras:

> *From Honduras the only thing that I still have is this from my mom, a bracelet that I took from her the last day we were together. I told her, "give me that." That's all, from Honduras just the bracelet. My clothes, sneakers, and all that… I was robbed in Medias Aguas… They took my cellphone, my Honduras ID, everything! The robbers took 300 pesos that had just been wire-transferred to me. That is what happened to me… this bracelet is the only thing that I have left…it's about to break, but if it does, I will fix it. I will get needle and thread, because I told my mom, "this I will come back and give it back with my own hands."*

With his animated gestures he continued to speak of the multiple opportunists who ask for unreasonable amounts of money only for using a phone, or for getting money transferred under their names.[24] He also said to have had to jump out from a 40 km/hr train moving. Preferring to get hurt instead of getting mugged again. He finalized by adding:

> *I want to make it clear in this recording. The treatment you get at Caritas* [migrant shelter] *both in Torreón and San Luis Potosí is great! They have rules in there like here, but if you follow them… just great! The clothes I have on* [beany (seamed cap), jacket, and shoes] *are from there, they are in so good condition I don't want to throw them away. From Honduras the bracelet… and the memory of my mom with it.*

8.3.1.3 Edgar

46 year old Salvadorian national whose body language gave indications of fatigue and melancholy. His gestures were slow and timid, his answers short and to the point. He told me that he had lived in the US for twenty years working first as a mechanic to later become the owner of an auto repair shop. He said never to have worked in El Salvador because he met his wife in Mexico, so he was constantly moving around from Mexico and the US when he was a teenager. Later in the conversation I asked if he had obtained Mexican nationality, but he stated that he was never interested in the legality of it all. In the US he had managed to obtain a fake social security number and driver's license that gave him access to rent a house and build up credit. Yet, he made it clear not to care much for material possessions, *"Everything is under my ex-wife's name and my children… they are American."*

[24] Money transfers can only be withdrawn with valid Mexican IDs. For manners of security, migrants do not carry their entire savings and instead have family members wire-transfer the money to them once they are in their trajectory. This was mentioned more than once by the participants to be the main reason why kidnappings had become more common.

When I proceeded to ask about his deportations, Edgar mentioned that the last time he was deported was four or five years ago after getting caught trying to rent an apartment with his fake social security number[25]. He say that everything had changed in 2007 when he sold his business and together with the family moved back to Mexico. Unfortunately, his family moved back because his four children were not able to adapt to life in Mexico. Edgar stayed behind because he was not successful at crossing over the border. Like everyone else who had tried the journey many years ago, Edgar was surprised to know that the trajectory had become so much more restrictive. Edgar had been working again as a mechanic in the Mexican state of Tabasco for eight months after he had resided in Morelos but eventually got divorced. Missing his family, he decided to head north again. He said to have got really sick this time around and required treatment and rest in Caritas, Torreón (migrant shelter). *"In my 46 years I had never gotten this sick; I felt like I was going to die."* Whilst I asked over his possessions in Tabasco, he again emphasized his lack of care for material things and mentioned how everything he had on him was from his stay in the migrant shelters in Irapuato and Torreón. He instead said to have only brought his cellphone and added:

> *This time it's not the same* (as his trajectory five years ago), *then, I was with my wife, my children where in school and needed me, now they are all grown up and can take care of themselves. I don't like asking them for favors, I don't want to be a burden… but this time I am in need of, I don't know… a hug... let's just say that money brings happiness, entertainment, but now I wish to be with one of my grandchildren and hug them… that, money can't buy. I hope to God all goes right this time because I think this is my last try, because the journey… every day I'm getting older, everything gets more difficult.*

His children know that this is their father's last migratory journey and he asked one of them to pick him up in Tucson. He prefers to move alone, because that is how *"you avoid problems,"* he said. Finally I asked if he was told about the consequences if he got caught again:

> *Sometimes I say to myself, I wouldn't mind to be detained, but I don't know. Because the rooms are really cold and only get a sandwich here and there, but maybe I would accept it because my children could have the opportunity to visit me. But that is not the point, it is not the same as being free, feel useful, be able to fix a car, or, I don't know, help a neighbor with his electricity and give them a hand.*

Lastly, I asked about getting his things back from USBP or ICE agents after his detention and deportation. He was clear to say that it was a common occurrence to not get things back. He

[25] He knew the number by memory and repeated it rapidly as he told this part of his situation.

added that people he had met in detention said to have lost many things because of the constant transfers from prison to detention center.

8.3.1.4 Angel

A 25 year old divorced man from Oaxaca with a daughter from a previous marriage. It was his first time being deported but not his first unauthorized crossing. Angel was driven to emigrate because he was looking forwards to reuniting with his girlfriend living in California. By listening to his life story it became evident that he had no economic reasons to emigrate. Based on the content of a letter—which he passionately was holding in his hand while we spoke—the connection was evident to the item that he was holding and to a girl he was looking to reunite with. Our conversations were mostly about his previous interaction with this girl and what he had done a years since he had last seen her. Angel acknowledged that his mobile phone was really important to him because he would call his girlfriend every day. The mobile, together with his girlfriend's love letter—that will get him into tears every time he would speak of its content—were for him, the most important items he possessed.

8.3.2 Other Testimonies

Apprehension by border patrol agents, based on the interviews and conversations, mostly happens in the first couple day or within hours of crossing the border. As supported by the US Homeland Security yearbook of immigration statistics of 2013, over 90% of the apprehensions from 2004-2013 are done in the southwest sectors of the US (or borderland area) by USBP (www.dhs.gov, 2014). In many occasions people said to have been tricked, robbed, or abandoned by the *coyotes* (smuggler) within minutes of crossing. Others would mention having to wander the desert for days before being detained—for what they would generally describe as avoidable mistakes. After being apprehended, some would describe the agents as aggressive but not offensive. Others would mention verbal abuse or even mild physical abuse and the dumping of their possessions into the ground during the routine arrest procedure. It should be clear that most of the people I spoke with would not particularly stigmatize the border patrol agents in general, instead for particular individuals enjoying their power and position. Generally the interviewees would acknowledge that most of the abused committed (if any) happened during the identification or registration procedures. They said to have witness the purposeful disposal of money and certain goods together with the use of more physical and verbal force.

Also important to mention is the diversity of the testimonies given by the Mexican repatriates that reside along the borderlands. Some said to have been deported once or a couple of times after having successfully crossed in several attempts. In general, these attempts were done

because they declared to be associated with the transportation of elicit substances. In numerous occasions I had to elaborate further on my confidentiality clause. In general, these testimonies were in regards to the techniques that are employed to avoid detention and of the ingenuity that is created based on the constant modifications or technologies of detection. Most also acknowledged that detention has become easier due to the usage of USBP drones. Moreover, the testimonies regarding the transportation of illicit substances also lead to stories about corrupt USBP and ICE agents, and of their techniques employed to hide evidence.

Migrants of transit Mexico gave an array of difficult situations experienced during their journey. Most accounts are supported by previous research done over the precariousness of transit Mexico (see Coutin, 2005; Green, 2011; Knippen et al., 2015). As mentioned above these included abuse by criminal organizations, gangs, police officers, immigration enforcement agents, and common opportunist in transit cities. Trains were in most, if not all of the cases, the mode of transportation with testimonies that included the numerous dangers that exist when boarding and while travelling parallel to the train tracks. Consequently narratives were also directed towards their experience in other shelters.

At *Casa del Migrante* I met with people with different experiences of transit, different personalities, different life experiences and different ways to confront the everyday. I also experienced those that became sensitive as I spoke about the materiality of transit. For example, a particular interview that was held with two men—one on his late teens—from El Salvador, gave me an understanding of how carrying certain items can also bring negative reactions. The older man briefly stated that he refused to take any pictures or any item that reminded him of his daughters, "*I preferred not to bring anything, just thinking of them makes me sad."* Yet, while I asked about their physical health, they both acknowledged to be in complete pain due to their shoes inadequate to sustain such a long journey. I proceeded to take them to the boxes of donated shoes; their facial expressions changed as they both found fitting and more comfortable ones. Later that week they also received a foot massage from one of the therapeutic volunteers and followed by telling me that they felt rested and appreciated all the help.

9. Analysis

9.1 Being(s) of Transit

Following the logic of Barad's posthumanist performativity that "focuses on humans *of* the world, rather than *in* the world" (Fritsch, 2015: 54), I focus on being(s) *of* transit rather than being(s) *in* transit. *Being of transit* thus implies that anyone that has become part of the materializations of transit Mexico-US is positioned within trying conditions. Through the reification of irregular migrants as a commodity, their presence becomes part of historical and socio-political material-discursive enactments of oppression, domination, and discrimination. So, for example, Agustin is "stuck within transit" because of the always becoming enactments of power and punishment. He appears as not being able to conceive any other reality than choosing alternative routes or locations to once again earn a decent living and send remittances to his family.

Leo Chavez (2012) adds that transit is the positional threshold of simultaneously *being* absent yet occupying space. Within this positionality the migrants cannot—though the entanglement of material-discourse violence and (dis)possession—*become* equal to those that are privileged or "legal." However, *being* part of transit at the same time implies the process of *becoming* or re-enforcing "illegality." I therefore argue that *being of transit* is also the *becoming of transi*t. Migrant are enacted as a violent and unreasonable alien recognized by their undesirability. The unwonted actions of migrants of transit US are presented as their own wrongdoings. As being of fault for the violent environment in which they entangled and as a consequence will contaminate the "civilized" world within their arrival. However, transit is materialized as the time and space where migrants are most certainly bereaved of adequate protection by the state in which they are located, and therefore, are defenseless against mistreatment, crime, injury, and death (Coutin 2005:196). The understanding of transit in this thesis goes beyond looking separately at migrants and extends to the matter and meaning that demonstrates the absence of rights whilst molding and constructing all irregular migrant as "illegal aliens" who are thus *becoming beings of transit*.

The performativity of immigration and border patrol strategies have the power to pattern *beings of transit* to what is intended. As mentioned above, PTD (Prevention through Deterrence) has been efficient at molding a set of transitory border routes into dangerous paths of violence where a unique composition of material culture has been shaped and technologies have taken a particular role (De León, 2012; 2013; 2015). Its language from the beginning implies the punishment of border crossing by using the composition of the Sonora desert as an available

resource. Instead of preventing migrants from entering the territory, deterrence is the usage of capitalist power to further criminalize the migrants and politicize the topic of migration while further creating a sense of emergency to invest on more advance systems of securitization or facilities for detention. Power and punishment is typified through a momentum where human action and more-than-human elements are *becoming*. This is visible throughout

However, *beings of transit* are fixed in the framework of transit migration; they are clustered and reified as "illegal" or "trash." This signifies a plethora of capitalistic material-discursive entanglements that hold a system that has *beings of transit* as commodities. Barad (2007:63) exemplifies, in some respects, on Foucault's claims in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) of how "specific material configuration of the prison supports and enacts particular discursive practices of punishment." Emphasizing how the body's materiality develops a new form of politics and economy defined by organized discipline. Yet Barad goes further in elaborating how the human body is not only central to the apparatuses of punishment but as part of an entanglement of material configuration of the people, places, and thing of the world.

Consequently, the blisters that were found on some of the participants of this study are the embodiment of violence intertwined within the constructive paths of transit Mexico-US. This signifies the *possession*—as implied in the use of (dis)possession in this thesis—and embodiment of subjugation. Similarly the torn up shoes that I came to see in the shelter's trash cans and donation boxes (see Appendix 2), just like those analyzed by Jason De Leon (2012; 2013), are the materialization of capitalism enacting its intra-dependency on those in the lower strata to mobilize and sustain its continuous action. As explained above, my analysis does not imply the body to be the center but instead entangled within the world's materialization; the scars, blisters, bruises together with the shoes, deserted bottled water, and clothes with blood and sweat are the topography (De Leon 2012; 2013) that co-constitutes *being of transit*.

This thesis also intended to elaborate further over the dispossession of things that matter as presented by reports such as No More Deaths • No Más Muertes (2014)[26], Martinez & Slack (2013), and Human Rights Watch (2011)[27] (as explained in Section 1). All the reports agree that the dispossession of things establishes a direct act of violence against the integrity and sanctity of the migrants' exposed vulnerable position. Things that can become important pieces of evidence in the process of asylum seeking are normally in danger of being attained,

[26] Shakedown
[27] *A Costly Move: Far and Frequent Transfers Impede Hearings for Immigrants in the Unites States,*

maintained, or retained (Hamilton 2011). The majority of the recently deported interviewees acknowledged this situation. It was only if a family member was close and able to pick up the items before the 90 day period that had a different luck. More than one third of the participants in this study also stated to have been dispossess of legal documents or identification card. All of them acknowledged to have had inconveniences due to the loss of these items. Some become errors due to detention center transfers, one of the interviewees—A Mexican asylum seeker from the state of Michoacán—had his case in the process of appeal because his documents got 'lost' in the process, and as a result, had his asylum claim rejected. He comes from a generation of farmers that was expelled from his family's lands by a vigilantly group *Los Autodefensas*.

The narratives of the participants of this study gave the assumption that objects had a central role on their wellbeing. Things like letters, pictures, bracelets, amulets while the essentials like food, medication, and clothing gave further meaning to their struggle. Moreover, it is an inevitable for any person during their journey, not only to be able to identify themselves. If individual protection is uncertain and vulnerability is a reality, migrants should be able to have access to communication devices and keep contact number in order to stay visible while being absent. Nonetheless this is a contested issue since mobile phones facilitate the actions done by human smugglers and other criminal organizations. Based on the participants of *Casa del Migrante*, a mobile phone was seen as a justification for detainment and dispossession in the grounds of suspicion. That is to say, things are always seen and interpreted in a way that may go against the person that is being subjugated. In the contrary and in the case of those in detention, items that are created and the services that are produced as exchange value (e.g. tattoo equipment, art, drawings, things created from recycled material) illustrate the importance on the objects that are entangled with a person that is in need to be keep a material culture, and in some regard, feel human.

9.2 The Role of Casa del Migrante

Iban Trápaga (2009) analyzed the problematic that exists between the discourses of charity, love, and hope to maintain faith-based migrant shelters like *Casa del Migrante*. Trápaga warns about the possible glorification of charity as discourse that in part victimizes the migrant. As further described by the author, *Casa del Migrate* is constructed as a *panopticon* (Foucault, 1977). The zero tolerance methods of securitization implemented can be seen as the usage of the migrant as an object of philanthropic work where the provider makes its power relations evident. Similarly, Squire (2014) also warns about the re-interpretation of things collected in the Sonora Desert as artwork that could position the migrant solely as a victim.

With regard to these critical standpoints, I neither intend to glorify nor stigmatize *Casa del Migrante*. Instead I reaffirm the shelter not as a place dichotomous to the injuries of transit but as a places of transit where actions are reconfigured in a different manner. I argue that shelters are more of a "buffer zone" or an oasis in the middle of a desolated desert. It is assembled with a notion of helping the migrant with providing care. Most of the participants spoke of shelters along the way of transit Mexico to have saved their lives, given them proper clothing to survive the changing conditions of the rest of their journey, the medication needed, and food to withstand the long travel. Furthermore, the shelter was also important in providing haircuts—a gesture for the migrants to insure a more hygienic travel. Most importantly foot massages and medical attention helped to relief the pain that had materialized in the body of the migrant. Yet, the shelter is not a solution to the problem but a grey area that foments hope and aspirations to continue. Participants in the courtyard of *Casa del Migrante* would mention how peaceful it felt to be part of those grounds, but only to later recall that the feeling was temporary.

Notwithstanding the shelter does maintain a regimen similar to a jail or detention center where access to the dormitories is restricted to certain hours, mobile phones are confiscated, and access to work or association to others in the city is regulated. The staff notified every newcomer of these regulations to ensure that the shelter kept its service to the migrants. The confiscation of mobile phones was said to be done to avoid human smugglers from posing as deportees and recruiter those that are in the attempt to cross[28]. I also found that food played a big role on the migrants' mood. The preparation of more flavorful food and better ingredients created a positive reaction by all of the newcomers, especially the recently deported. I was amazed at the way repatriates would relate to me and other staff members once they receive their meal. There was a sense of relief by the newcomers and automatically became more open to speak once they had received such rapport. Apart from *being* a necessity for survival, the agency of food *becomes* an important piece of human and a more-than-human embodiment of humane action. The association of the proper ingredients and the quality of the food that is being ingested enacts the respect for the migrant.

9.3 Mobility and Violence

In the theoretical chapter I postulated that the politics of violence and mobility are the forces that materialize upon asylum seekers, irregular and forced migrants during mobility and immobility of transitory Mexico-US. Disposed of all possessions, exposed to emotional and

[28] I witnessed an incident of two smugglers intending to recruit migrants in my last week at the shelter.

physical pain, migrants of transit Mexico-US are vulnerable to those forces sustaining world-systems of governance (Creswell, 2012). The analysis of my material suggests that becoming of transit through restrictive mobility and violence creates an uncertainty that turns everyone against each other. No one is to be trusted because the market of goods and services of transit imposes desperate measures of survival to anyone in this situation. This is added to the issues the participants told me about: the inconvenience of the changing landscapes and temperatures, other animal species that also cause harm, boarding dangerous vehicles like moving trains, and the difficult to walk terrains with minimal rest. The Sonora Desert, the trains that transport migrants from south to north Mexico, the jungle of Chiapas, large and small transit cities, and the borderlands all play a role with the notion of mobility and violence.

Furthermore, the analysis of my material also suggest that the constant transferring of migrants during detention while in the US, is done for the mere purpose of maintaining the migrants in constant hardship and uncertainty. Detention is position as immobility, but, the punishment imposed by constant transferring from one detention facilities to another without mayor justification, implies ulterior motives.

Additionally the materiality of the detention centers is, as explained by those I spoke to, in conditions were the individual is always uncomfortable. Every recent deportee mentioned how the temperature of the detention cells was too cold and the bathing water was too hot without a way to modify the temperature, causing many to get sick. Not to mention that all participants complained about the food. It was said to be old and tasteless with the mere purpose to provide the necessary nutritional standards for a person to survive. Being detained either in a jail, prison, or detention centers is random. If a federal prison was the destination of one migrant, his or her situation would also depend on what block or area they were placed. According to my interviewees, the importance of race and identity is magnified during incarceration. Migrants are not only randomly placed with other migrants, but with violent and nonviolent offenders that base their wellbeing due to the association to their racial or identity/cultural group. This would follow with long periods with a lack of information about their next transfer or release dates. Certainly these actions not only keep the migrant in an ambiguous position but they also place them far away from their belongings—i.e. important documents—and their families. This is a direct act of human rights violations that can hinder the proper procedure to be followed (Hamilton, 2011). Actions of unreasonable treatment to the migrants' material possessions and the lack of proper deportation measures make the migrant be part of transit, or in other words, *a being of transit*.

10. Conclusion

In order to achieve the main objective of the thesis, namely to define and analyze *being of transit*, ethnographic research has been conducted. I explored the perceived reality of Central American and Mexican asylum seekers', irregular and forced migrants' experiences of mobility through Mexico and the US, and made observations in a migrant shelter in Mexico.

The empirical results were analyzed against the backdrop of a posthuman (more-than-human) understanding of transit migration, presented in the theoretical chapter. As related to Foucault's criticism of "the human" (1977)—the building of power is done through social marginalization. The notion of *being of transit* is employed in this thesis as a critique of human-centered accounts of transit migration and the issues of (lack of) power are central to the analysis. The thesis provided a critical analysis of transit migration through acts of (dis)possession against irregular migrants and asylum seekers within the politics of mobility and violence. It showed that the more-than-human theoretical approach of Karen Barad's posthumanist performativity enhances our understanding of migration since it enables us to focus on the mutuality between people, places, and things. Consequently, the migrants I talked to, and the place and things they talked about, were re-conceptualized as entangled within the phenomenon of *being of transit* through discourse and its materiality.

The composition of transit is restrictive and violent for all repatriates, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers before their arrival to *Casa del Migrante*. They risk their lives in an attempt for a better life by experiencing physical pain due to fatigue and exposure to violence from people, places, and things. Bare to physical, psychological, and social violence, migrants pay the price for the socioeconomic costs of violence. The narratives presented here give evidence to the complexity of the established systems of power that hinder mobility. Furthermore, *Casa del Migrante* works as a buffering zone for those that risk their lives. The laughs, tears, conversations, food, and situations entangled in a buffer zone to contemplate what the situation was. Staff and volunteers also said to sometimes feel powerless and a sense of impotence for not being able to further help. A feeling of privilege was also mentioned every time one crossed the international bridge to the US. I remember a family from Irapuato, Guanajuato that had forcefully migrated because their house crossed a big oil pipe.[29] They asked for asylum by presenting themselves to one international bridge. Only the mother and child got accepted, the father was placed in detention. After his release he went to *Casa del Migrante*. The couple

[29] Cartels and criminal groups steal oil and sell it in the black-market. This is extremely dangerous and entire towns have gone into flames

mentioned that they preferred to stay together only to be looked with perplexity by all the other migrants. Finally, I was also asked to write down some important phrases in case they needed help once they crossed. A women in her late 50s, gave me a list of phrases in preparation on what to say to USBP.

By questioning what it constitutes to be a transit migrant while intra-acting with the people, places, and things within a shelter such as *Casa del Migrante*, detention centers, and other routes of transit Mexico-US, the essence of transit migration lies particularly as an entanglement of political, cultural, and historical materializations. Not to mention the rhetoric of the "illegal alien" and its political representations of citizenship within immigration policy ratifying between "us" and "them" or the "fully human" and the "nonhuman" (Barad 2007:59).

As a result the thesis criticized transit migration because agency is an enactment of "being", *being of transit* implies to the agency of the migrants and to the intra-action of all that composes its materialization. In this context, the agency of the migrant is enacted through the multiple material-discursive factors that constitutes its realization. The migrants' phenotype, physical abilities, gender, socio-economic status, life-experiences, thoughts (i.e., reasons for migration). All these factors assemble to construct agents (irregular migrants or asylum seekers) of intra-acting phenomenon (transit migration). Similar to Judith Butler's gender performativity, *being of transit* is the continuous narrative that is ascribe to the migrants' composition as mentioned above—comparable to gender as the narrative that is ascribed by autonomy. In other words, migrants of transit are ratified based on the categorization of their characteristics stipulated by a capitalist human centered (privileged male) world.

The thesis explained the phenomenon of *being* of transit Mexico-US as the intra-action of human and non-human (more-than-human) actors—in this case Central American and Mexican migrants—and the (1) discourse on transit migration; (2) the discourse of the other as subhuman; (3) border formation materialized with technologies and its actors; (4) and the socio-cultural, economic and historical (capitalist and nationalist) conditions of discourse and matter that constitute the way *migrants of transit* are ratified (see Holmes, 2013). It showed that, consequently, different human and more-than-human matter and meaning produce different phenomena. The position of the research participants in *Casa del Migrante* are therefore presented through the continuous entrapment of human and nonhuman materialization of power and punishment.

To conclude, the usage of a more-than-human approach looks at the places and things as the entangled physical and material markers that exist as agent of intra-acting transit between Mexico and US. The thesis sheds light about the *reality of transit* by considering the paths that are taken and the things that are carried as the apparatuses of analysis. Therefore I emphasize the importance of the conditions in which the migrants are intertwined. Not to mention the environment that they are presented with, and how it is materialized in their body and mind—i.e. PTSD or blisters in their feet. This means that a more-than-human approach proved to be indispensable for the analysis of the entanglement of objects and geographical conditions that is central to the *becoming of migrants of transit*.

10.1 Last Remarks

Lastly I also use the importance of non-human elements to not forget the importance of the (post)human. Instead there is a need to depart from evidencing power exclusively through "the human", and thus, stabilize the analysis of transit Mexico-US through the entanglement of omitted non-human elements. Considering the idea to be a particular set of migrants excluded in harsh and deteriorated places puts forth a stronger meaning to the evaluation not only of this phenomenon but to the evolution of society. With all the implemented security measures along transit Mexico-US, new routes are created, new paths are taken, new methods are associated as means of civil protection, yet, new methods of isolation are composed and less protection for the migrants, material possessions, and its settings is created. Things are always changing in time and space. Their meaning is obtained by emergent values based on identity, experience, and the position of vulnerability. For example, Agustin's participation in this thesis illustrates how a belt and Bible have a disturbing yet moving sense of endurance in relation to the enactment of *beings of transit*. Angel's love letter and the need for his mobile phone to call his girlfriend gave meaning to his entire experience. Pedro's bracelet gives continuity to his aspiration to return for his mother with the implication for the circularity of movement. Interpretation of the position of all beings materialized as part of transit can tell many stories about how a postmodern society is *becoming*. That is to say, a ceaseless diffracting ebb and flow of co-constituted intra-acting humans and non-humans in constant momentum and positionality conceptualizing the phenomenon of *being a migrant, thing, or place of transit*.

11. Appendix

11.1 Drop-off Points of the US-Mexico Borderlands

The United States has deported record numbers of immigrants in recent years, and roughly two-thirds are Mexican nationals. Some are new arrivals, but others have spent years living in the United States and are determined to sneak back in. U.S. officials often transfer them laterally along the border, far from the place they were arrested, as an additonal deterrent.

Numbers indicate deportees received, January-November 2013:

Source: *Miroff* (2016)

11.2 Casa del Migrante de Juárez A.C.

All Photos by Ricardo A. Ortega February 2015

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

1. 5 boxes of donated shoes.
2. Main building
3. Main entrance
4. Dormitories
5. Clock with no batteries in TV room
6. Next to this wall was the entrance to dormitories and cafeteria, above it read, “For the migrant, the country is the land that gives the bread.” - John Baptist Scalabrini

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