

CONSEQUENCES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM: THE IMPACTS OF
STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE ON HONDURAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED
STATES

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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An estimated one in five Hondurans live outside of Honduras, and 25% of the Honduran GDP is measured in remittances from migrants living abroad. This means that all Hondurans are implicated in international migration. Utilizing qualitative interviews with Honduran migrants and their families in the context of modern Honduran society, this thesis focuses on the ways in which international immigration structures impact the lives of Hondurans. Over the past two decades, the reasons and mechanisms of migration have changed dramatically and have become increasingly dangerous due to US and Mexican immigration policy. This thesis explores the experience of migrants and their families by focusing on deportees, migrants who are injured in the journey, and those who disappear en route. I conclude that structural violence intersects every aspect of Honduran migration, from the construction of push and pull factors motivating migration to the implications of natural, legal, and structural barriers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2008, the body of Josseline Hernandez was found in a rocky canyon in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. She had died of exposure after falling ill while making the three-to-five day walk from the border to a pickup zone on the highway south of Tucson. Prior to crossing the border, Josseline and her brother had traveled from El Salvador through Guatemala and then across 1,000 miles of Mexico, risking their lives to reach the United States and be reunited with their mother. When she became ill, the group of migrants with whom she had been traveling left her in the canyon to recover, where the coroner estimates she remained for seven to ten days before her death. She was fourteen years old.

The three men who found her body were volunteers with a humanitarian aid organization which works to provide water and medical assistance to migrants in the deserts of southern Arizona. Josseline was one of more than 200 reported migrant deaths in 2008. The Fish and Wildlife Department later cited one of the volunteers who found her body for ‘littering’ by leaving full jugs of clean water in the area where Josseline had died.

Josseline’s story is only one of countless recent stories of victimization and violence in relation to immigration. The recent PBS documentary “Crossing the Line at the Border” documents the death of Anastasio Hernandez-Rojas who was beaten to death by Border Patrol agents in May 2010. During the summer of 2011, dozens of news articles revealed mass graves of Central American migrants which were uncovered in

Mexico, and whose deaths were blamed on Mexican drug cartels (*La Prensa, El Tiempo, La Tribuna*). Workplace raids in the United States regularly result in family separation as undocumented immigrants are deported away from their US citizen children.

Immigration is a fundamental part of the United States, and has been for the entirety of its existence as a country. Now, however, the immigrant experience is framed by an elevated fear of ‘illegal aliens’ and an increasingly virulent set of laws and policies which seek to deter their entrance and punish those who do arrive in this country.

Each year, tens of thousands of undocumented Central American migrants attempt the journey to the United States. They face a route fraught with dangers beginning well before their arrival at the US border. Individual migrants like Josseline Hernandez and Anastasio Hernandez-Rojas have a host of reasons for wanting to migrate to the United States, from escaping poverty and violence in their communities of origin to seeking opportunities or family advancement in the United States. They leave for reasons which are larger than themselves, often resulting from macro-scale structures of globalization, international trade, political power struggles, and natural disasters (Bacon 2008, Brick 2011, Castles and Miller 2009, Nevins 2010, Ogren 2007, Pine 2008, Ruhl 2010, Schmalzbauer 2004, Sladkova 2007). Their decision to migrate is mitigated by structural violence. They are caught up in a system which does not do outright violence to them, but maintains a level of inequality and vulnerability in which people cannot live lives of security and full human dignity. Structural violence is also strongly at play for migrants en route to the United States: their method of travel, vulnerability to crime, indifference or victimization at the hands of state authorities, and fear of detention and

deportation originate in governmental policies and practices seeking to restrict migration, and which play out in individual human suffering.

My thesis examines the experiences of Honduran migrants and their family members in relation to this structural violence within migration systems to the United States. According to the Census Bureau, approximately 625,000 Hondurans live in the United States, over fifty percent of whom are without documented legal status (Dockterman 2009)¹. While this is a much smaller number than the overall population of Central Americans or Mexicans living in the United States, from the Honduran perspective the out-migration flows leaving Honduras have been massive: approximately twenty percent of Hondurans live outside the geographical boundaries of Honduras, and twenty five percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is measured in the remittance money sent back by Honduran migrants (Bonilla 2009). Questions of migration, therefore, are intimately related to the daily experience of all Hondurans, and have a significant impact on the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

My research questions ask 1) how is the experience of Honduran migrants shaped by structural violence? 2) In what way does this violence articulate with the processes of Honduran migration? 3) What is the nature of the tension between the push and pull factors affecting Hondurans and the barriers – natural, legal, and structural – that are erected to prevent their successful entry into the United States?

I argue that the migrant experience is overlaid on every level by structural violence. I utilize qualitative interviews conducted in Honduras to examine the

¹ Census Bureau statistics for undocumented immigrants is inconsistent, as many individuals do not fill out the forms, and are suspicious of stating their legal immigration status (Bacon 2008, Brick 2011, Castles and Miller 2009). Other estimates suggest that the Honduran population in the US is over 1 million, and that a much higher percentage are undocumented (State 2011).

motivations for migration within the context of Honduran life and history, and argue that macro structures have created systems of violence, inequality, and unrest which gravely impact working-class Hondurans and encourage emigration (Pine 2008, Ruhl 2010, Schmalzbauer 2004, Sladkova 2007). To do this, I first examine the experiences of individual migrants who have returned to Honduras after injury or deportation, and discuss how their experiences are mediated by structures designed to discourage their success in order to limit migration flows. Second, I look at the experiences of families and communities of migrants to explore how emigration impacts those who are left behind, an often-neglected dimension in the study of immigration issues. In my final chapter, interviewees were asked to suggest solutions to the problems they describe within the scope of migration, and their responses are structural in nature: changing laws and policies to support the human rights and dignity of Honduran citizens and Honduran migrants, whether en route to the United States or residing there as undocumented workers. I argue that contemporary Honduran migration is constructed in ways that serve the interests of those in power by prioritizing enforcement of immigration policy over human lives and dignity.

Significance

I situate my research in the context of global migration theory and contemporary scholarship on Latin American migration but focus on the particulars of Honduran migration experience on a broad scale of analysis. In April 2010, the Arizona State Legislature adopted a sweeping set of immigration enforcement laws in Senate Bill 1070 (SB 1070) which include measures to force police officials to check the immigration

status of anyone suspected of being in the United States without legal documentation. The ongoing court debate surrounding this law, currently in the United States Supreme Court, indicates the degree to which this country is encoding racism and structural violence into the immigration laws of that state. Structural violence is broadly defined: it is expressed in systems of injustice which enforce vulnerability on certain members of a population, and maintain order through poverty, victimization, and a rhetoric of the 'status quo' which perpetuates itself in everyday life (Farmer 1996). Structural violence is manifest in racism, wage disparities, environmental degradation, law enforcement strategies, educational disparities, and other examples of institutionalized inequalities on both a legal and cultural level. In the case of Central American immigration, it is expressed in the broadest sense by anti-immigrant laws, rhetoric of racial and linguistic purity, discourse surrounding 'illegal aliens,' and the poor treatment in housing, employment, schooling, and access to resources suffered by many undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Bacon 2008, Brotherton and Kretsedemas 2008, Chavez 2001, Coleman 2007, Fernandes 2007, Zolberg 2006). My thesis addresses examples of structural violence within the contemporary setting of increasing violence and discrimination directed at Central American migrants, at a time when human migration is at unprecedented levels in the United States and globally (Castles and Miller 2009, Durand and Massey 2010). Specifically, I focus on the violence of the migrant journey itself as a site of constructed violence whose purpose is to 'deter' illegal immigration (Nevins 2010). In this globalized world, human mobility is ubiquitous, and results in questions of human rights, economic opportunity, and national identity (Castles and Miller 2009). By examining the impact of the structures of immigration as they

interact with individual lives, I am entering a long debate in human rights and immigration research, in which the interests of macro structures are often pitted against individual interests and needs. Where my research diverges from the existing studies is in the specific populations studied and the perspectives gained through interviews with individual Honduran migrants and their communities, who have witnessed immigration structures from the most intimate experiences.

The lens of structural violence is significant because it allows for an examination of the reasons behind stories of suffering (Farmer 1996). The stories examined in this thesis are significant on the smallest scale because of the intensity of experience they represent, and for the lessons that may be drawn from this depth of data and sentiment. However, for the purpose of this research they are relevant because they are part of a spectrum of suffering imposed on human beings as part of a structure limiting human mobility to serve the interests of power. At the scale of the individual Honduran migrant, I explore the motivations, experiences, and impacts of migration. At the community level, I address the impact of family separation and community struggle, as well as the factors leading to such large-scale out-migration. At the national level, I examine questions of structures and policies in Honduras, Mexico, and the United States which cause vulnerabilities and impose oppressive situations. From the largest scale, I address human rights issues and a framework for understanding the conflicts between macro-scale structures and individual experience. The questions raised in this thesis are relevant to contemporary migration theory as well as on a broader scope of policy and human rights debate in the context of international law and contemporary migration scholarship. In contemporary scholarly discourse, human migration is understood to be an intrinsic

part of modern socio-economic global patterns, and the impact of these global patterns will continue to resonate through the literature surrounding human rights, international law, and the political superstructures of the contemporary world.

Methods

The data collection for this thesis primarily comes from semi-structured interviews conducted in Honduras during the summer of 2011 with Honduran migrants (who had returned to Honduras) and the family members of migrants. However, other data sources and activities also contribute to this analysis. Background information of the migrant experience in the US/Mexico border region arises from my volunteer and internship experiences with the humanitarian aid organization No More Deaths, which works in Arizona and Sonora to provide direct aid and gather testimony from migrants on the trails and recent deportees. Experience working with immigrant communities in the United States, primarily in the role of a medical interpreter at Volunteers in Medicine in Eugene, Oregon, provides me some perspective on the lives and experiences of immigrants in the United States.

While conducting fieldwork in Honduras, I lived in both Tegucigalpa and in a rural area outside the small city of El Progreso in Northern Honduras. Field notes taken during this time provide insight from participant-observation and informal conversations addressing the lives and opinions of Hondurans. I read locally available newspapers (*La Prensa*, *El Tiempo*, and *La Tribuna*) and monitored regional news sources for migration-related articles. Additionally, I worked with the local non-profit group FONAMIH (*Foro Nacional de Migracion en Honduras* or National Forum for Migration in Honduras),

which provided me with local contacts and an organizational perspective while I translated documents, attended and assisted in workshops in Honduras and El Salvador, assisted in online searches for missing migrants, and participated in a series of human rights events in Guatemala and Southern Mexico. These experiences living and working with Hondurans are particularly helpful in my analysis by providing an on-the-ground perspective of those issues.

I conducted nineteen semi-structured interviews: nine with returned migrants, seven with family members of migrants, and three with leaders of non-governmental organizations. For the interviews with migrants and their family members, I relied on the organizers of a local branch of FONAMIH in El Progreso to identify interviewees, and to sometimes accompany me on these interviews. This accompaniment was for several reasons, starting with concerns of safety, as my Honduran contacts were extremely concerned with violence and gang activity. The other reason for this participant-selection method was my focus on migrants who had suffered injuries during their journey to the United States, and these men were already part of a local support group. My interviews with organizations took place on-site with local leaders. All interviews were grounded on the participant observation conducted during my fieldwork, with my monitoring of local media as context to individual stories.

My data collection methods follow the semi-structured form of a qualitative interview. Qualitative methodology was applied so as to provide for flexibility in addressing respondents' experiences and opinions in relation to migration. I began each interview by asking for participants' age, level of education, and experiences with migration. I concluded each interview by asking what they imagined for the future of

Honduras and immigration in their community, and what they thought should be done to change the situation as they understood it. Beyond this, the interviews unfolded based on their personal stories and experiences. In analyzing these interviews, I have situated their stories within the broader spectrum of Honduran migration, based on secondary research and local media sources.

Overview

I begin my thesis with a background section including contextual analysis of contemporary migration theory, Honduran history, US immigration policy in relation to Latin America, and a description of the current migration patterns and migrant experiences. At each stage I examine how individual needs and agency interact with larger social structures. In my discussion of global migration theory, I examine push factors which encourage vulnerable individuals to migrate, and relate this to Honduran history to explain causes for contemporary migration flows as a response to macro-structures of instability and injustice. When discussing contemporary immigration policy in the US and Mexico, I focus on those impediments specifically imposed by governments to discourage migration, specifically through constructed dangers of the journey which subject migrants to victimization and risk. Throughout the background chapter, I focus on structures and history as a foundation to the stories shared by Honduran interviewees in relation to migration.

In Chapter III, I utilize interviews with Honduran migrants to address the dangers of the journey and the challenges faced by returnees. This section begins with a

discussion of why migrants choose to make the journey, and their aspirations before migrating. Then I examine at length the experiences of seven men who, in the process of traveling north to the United States, lost limbs to the dangers of riding the trains through Mexico. Death and dismemberment on the trains are startlingly common, and these *migrantes mutilados*, or ‘mutilated migrants,’ provide a sense of the true dangers of the journey, the structures which exacerbate those dangers, and the consequences for these men’s future economic and social stability. Another common result of the dangerous journey is that migrants disappear, leaving family members without knowledge of their wellbeing—wondering if they have died beneath the trains, been kidnapped and killed, fallen into detention centers and prisons, trafficked for labor or sexual slavery, suffered some other form of accident, or have simply severed family ties. In this section, I examine the story of Manuel, a migrant who had disappeared for fifteen years, and had been deported home only two weeks prior to our interview. Returnees suffer physical and cultural displacement, and Manuel describes an intense sense of non-belonging. Another interviewee, Andre, discusses the result of deportation on a ‘successful’ migrant: someone who lived and worked for years in the United States, to the point of being more comfortable in the language and culture of the US. Andre speaks to questions of identity and belonging, and his questioning of the justice in a system which would deport him away from his family in the United States. Finally, I discuss some vulnerabilities particular to women in migration through an interview at a women’s shelter for prostitutes on the Guatemala-Mexico border. The organization’s clientele is primarily migrant women, including a large proportion from Honduras, who were forced into prostitution. Throughout this section, I examine the experiences of individual migrants

within the structures of immigration, and interrogate questions of structural violence in relation to these experiences.

In Chapter IV, I examine the impact of migration for Honduran families and community members. I begin with two interviews with families with ‘successful’ migration stories: the migrants have steady jobs in the United States and regularly send remittances, which the families use for economic success in Honduras. By beginning in this way, I examine the structural vulnerabilities even in the case of seemingly successful migration experiences. I continue with migration stories focusing on family separation and the social breakdown which comes with transnational families. I examine the stories of the children of migrant parents and the parents of migrant children. For an additional perspective of the impact migration has on communities, I include interviews with leaders in two non-governmental organizations: an umbrella migration organization in Tegucigalpa and an organization working with street children (many of whom have been abandoned by migrant parents) in northern Honduras. My key argument in this section is that the structural violence and insecurity of migration has severe implications for those who are not themselves migrants, but whose families and lives are tied to and destabilized by migration.

As a final piece of my argument, I discuss the future of migration in Honduras from the perspectives of my interviewees. I asked all interviewees about their understanding of what will happen in Honduras in the future, and about what might be done to address some of the injustices they raised in their interviews. Therefore, this final chapter provides an opportunity to examine some possible structural changes to address migration using both the broad view of a researcher and the grounded perspective

of those who have experienced migration first-hand. Critique falls in two broad categories: that change must be made in Honduras to address structural inequalities, and that policies must be put into place to protect migrants en route to and living in the United States.

Through an examination of interviews grounded in these migration experiences, my thesis addresses questions of structural violence in Honduran migration. My research is situated within contemporary migration theory and with an unfolding saga of violence reported in media regionally and internationally, in which migrants are first forced from their homes through oppressive systems, and then suffer violence from the migration structures. As human mobility continues to drive international conflict and social-economic structures, this articulation of individual experience within broad systems necessitates an understanding of structural violence and the expression of human rights.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF HONDURAN MIGRATION

Note on Terminology

Due to a history of colonialism, political unrest, and identity politics, language referencing individuals living in Central America is particularly complicated. For example, the commonly-used “Hispanic” refers to Central Americans of Spanish heritage, excluding the indigenous population living in the region (Taylor et. al. 2012). For this thesis, I will refer to the population of people living in Central America either as Central American or Latin@s. Latino is the common designation for Central Americans, but due to the Spanish gendering of adjectives, “Latino” is a masculine word inclusive to women but not specifically including individuals of all genders. Contemporary social critics have designated the usage of the “@” sign for such words indicates “Latino/Latina” and is inclusive in terms of gender identity.

In the context of studies of migration and the identity of Central American individuals, terminology referencing the United States is particularly delicate. In the lexicon of most Spanish speakers, “Americano/a” means someone residing in North or South America: thereby indicating the residents of an entire hemisphere. The common usage of “American” to designate someone from the United States therefore signals a false ownership of an identity which spans all peoples living in the Americas. When possible, I will use “United States” rather than “America” and will refer to “US citizens” rather than “Americans.” One key exception to this is in the usage of the phrase “The American Dream,” which is often discussed in Central America, and references a

particular discourse of the United States and a particular vision of the economic and political opportunities available there.

Central American immigrants in the United States are often categorized into three main populations: naturalized US citizens, legal residents (of varying forms and lengths of permitted stay) and undocumented individuals. These broad categories are complicated by citizenship politics for the children of immigrants born in the United States or brought to the United States at a young age. Of the undocumented population, a considerable percentage were at one point legal residents but now have expired papers or are currently living in some form of temporary legal status, and the remainder did not complete formal legal process.

In the course of this thesis, I will be addressing structural violence and critiquing elements of governmental policies and on-the-ground practices of border enforcement as it relates to individual human suffering. In doing so, I offer strong critique of the methods and responsibilities of the US and Mexican governments, and describe the ways in which they are implicated in widespread human suffering and death. Discussion of structural violence does hold those with authority responsible for their actions and inactions in regard to individual experiences in relation to the state. However, I want to be clear that a condemnation of systems does not implicate all individuals within that system. While I am critical of Border Enforcement Agents and offer critique of policies, I recognize here that the majority of these individuals are honest individuals who are doing a difficult job in the best way they can. The abuse of power which sometimes arises in systems of limited oversight and imbalance of resources is something to critique as a structure while maintaining empathy for the individuals within the system.

Migration Theory/Literature Review

Contemporary migration theory recognizes the complex and interrelating factors which influence a migrant's decision to leave their home country (Bacon 2008, Brick 2011, Castles and Miller 2009, Coleman 2007, Durand and Massey 2010, Glick-Schiller et. al. 1992, Nevins 2010, Ogren 2007, Sassen 2000, Sladkova 2007, Zolberg 2006). Some are macro-scale structures, such as national economies, climate change, violence or political unrest, or the abundance of opportunity elsewhere. Decisions are also influenced by micro-scale factors, such as the events of an individual life or family, or the individual goals and aspirations of a potential migrant. This introductory segment provides a brief overview of current migration theory and how this fits with an understanding of the interactions between structures and individuals. At its most general level, the central argument of modern migration theory is that "migration and settlement are closely related to other economic, political, and cultural linkages being formed between different countries in an accelerating process of globalization" (Castles and Miller, 2009, p. 47). Human migration is a key feature of modern political and economic realities, and has enormous impact on both sending and receiving communities worldwide.

Push factors in migration are those conditions in the country of origin which encourage out-migration. These might include economic, political, social, religious, or environmental factors which make the country of origin unstable, dangerous, or otherwise inhospitable (Bacon 2008, Brick 2011, Castles 2009, Durand 2010, Glick-Schiller 1992). Push factors are often of a structural nature: the origins of these problems

are beyond the scope of individual lives or life choices, but rather involve national economies, wars or violent conflict, or oppression of a religious or political nature. For Central American migrants, commonly cited push factors include insufficient employment opportunities, low wages, discriminatory hiring practices, loss of jobs in the global recession, gang violence, natural disasters, and political oppression (Brick 2011, Sladkova 2007). In explaining the decision to migrate across national borders, these push factors in the country of origin (or subsequent residence in the case of multiple migration) are key to understanding individuals' motivations and the complexity of decision-making on an individual or quantitative scale.

Pull factors are those conditions which encourage migration inflows in a country or community. The primary pull factors for immigration are often economic and political in nature. Immigrants leave home to seek stability, and often choose to migrate to locations that are perceived to offer economic advancement, low levels of violence or other oppression, and generally higher levels of opportunity than their place of origin (Bacon 2008, Brick 2011, Castles 2009, Durand and Massey 2010, Glick-Schiller 1992). Pull factors vary with the migrant community, as some immigrants are specifically seeking new permanent homes and citizenship, while others seek short-term economic opportunity before returning to their country of origin. Pull factors are also distinct for those immigrants who are highly skilled and people of relative privilege versus those who are low-skilled and who are particularly motivated by push factors in their countries of origin. Central Americans often migrate to the United States due to the availability of jobs, the relative proximity to their countries of origin (at least when compared to other locations with strong pull factors, such as Europe), and a history of migration flows

which fosters available information and social connections and reinforces these pull factors.

Both push and pull factors are relevant for internal migrants as well as for international migration. This thesis focuses on the impacts of international migration of Central Americans to the United States, but it is important to note that migration theory also applies to the smaller-scale migration within a country, or within a region (Castles 2009, Durand 2010, Glick-Schiller 1992). Internal migration occurs between different areas within a country, often when rural migrants are drawn to the opportunities in larger cities, based on economic and social factors. With the rise of large-scale farming and the industrialization of Central American economies, many individuals and families have moved into cities, and subsequently lost their jobs. In contemporary migration studies, it is common in the developing world to see migration originating first from rural-to-urban migration flows, and subsequent international migration as the different pressures of push and pull factors shift within a country.

Contemporary migration theory focuses increasing attention on the networks which facilitate the international movement of people. These involve social networks and “cross-national communities,” which develop when multiple members of a sending community migrate to the same geographic location, or to the same job sector in the host community (Brick 2011, Pine 2008, Sladkova 2007). Social networking technology and the ease of communication has fostered new degrees of information exchange between migrants and their families and communities in the country of origin, which encourages additional migration and a cultural shift to include the new community as part of the extended identity for potential future migrants. These networks “help immigrants

understand and negotiate the new environment,” including monetary support and physical help, such as housing and job acquisition, as well as ‘soft’ skills such as how to interact with authorities or the cultural factors in employment (Brick 2011).

At each level of decision-making, migrants face a network of individual and structural factors to their mobility and the benefits of migration. Structural violence is often in play, whether in the form of overt violence and instability or in the subtler form of poverty, lack of access to education, or discrimination and oppression. Modern migration theory balances the factors present in an individual’s life with these structures which incentivize international migration. Individual decision-making and self-determination a primary focus for these theories:

On a world scale, the migratory flow caused by displacement is still generally self-initiated. In other words, while people may be driven by forces beyond their control, they move at their own will and discretion, trying to find survival and economic opportunity and to reunite their families and create new communities in the countries they now call home” (Bacon 2008, p. 246).

Individuals react to their environments to improve their situations and to best serve the interests of themselves and their families. These decisions are made within structures of power and privilege which favor some and result in vast inequalities for others. In the following section, I provide an overview of Honduran history and the history of Central American migration to the United States to address the structural roots of contemporary migration.

Honduran Context

Understanding Honduran migration involves an understanding of the context and history of the country and the contemporary Honduran people. In this section, I offer an

overview of the current social-political-economic situation in Honduras by examining several key events which have particular impact on the Honduran diaspora. Specifically, I discuss the massive natural disaster of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the economic impact of the 2005 Central American Free Trade Agreement, and the social/political implications of the 2009 military overthrow of President Manuel Zelaya. This background section examines Honduran history with an eye to instances of structural violence, and the reasons why a Honduran might make the decision to leave Honduras for greater opportunity in the United States. Honduran history and contemporary reality is inherently linked with the international relations between the United States and the rest of Central America: in economy, politics, and culture Honduras is associated with the influence of the United States and with events affecting the Central American region.

Honduras is one of the most impoverished countries in the Western Hemisphere. According to the US State Department, the 2010 per capita GDP was \$4,200, and approximately 65% of the 8.14 million Hondurans were living in poverty, and approximately one third of the Honduran workforce was unemployed or underemployed in 2009 (State, 2011). With more than half of the population living in poverty, 4.5 million of the total 7 million inhabitants cannot cover their basic necessities of food and housing, and “more than 207,000 young people are neither working nor studying” (Sladkova 2007, p. 198). Life in modern Honduras is characterized by visible and widespread poverty alongside efforts to modernize in the image of the United States, with “American-style” shopping malls, US restaurants, and advanced technology. In the context of high economic uncertainty and the political instability resulting from the coup of President Manuel Zelaya, development work exists alongside dysfunctional

transportation systems, widespread health concerns, and a vast Honduran diaspora seeking opportunities elsewhere.

The current economic and political instability in Honduras are part of a history of exploitation and oppression in the country and in the region. Here I briefly outline the key moments of Honduran history, with a focus on the ways in which structural violence is inscribed into the country's food security, vulnerability to natural disasters, political instability, and widespread violence and corruption. These structural elements are fundamental to the decision-making and ultimate experience of Honduran migrants and their families. Understanding migration in the modern context means understanding history and invites a critique of structural violence arising from political advantage and power imbalances in the Western Hemisphere, creating a neocolonial relationship between Central American nations and the United States.

Through the mid-twentieth century, the history of Honduras was parallel to the rest of Central America. Before European contact, Honduras was part of the Mayan empire, and during the early days of Spanish conquest in the 1500's, the indigenous people suffered from wars, slavery, revolts, disease, and the exploitation of natural resources (Pine 2008). In 1821 the majority of Central American declared independence from Spain, and Honduras became a nation in 1838. For the next hundred years, Honduras struggled to create a stable identity through a series of coups, rebellions, power seizures, and various ruling parties through a semi-democratic government. Throughout this early history, the vast majority of Mayan people were subsistence farmers, relying on the surrounding rainforests to augment cultivated food.

The late 1800's saw the arrival of United States corporations as a dominant force in Honduran politics and economy. This began with mining companies and quickly shifted to agricultural productions, particularly fruit cultivation with the emergence of United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit Company. These companies became major employers and politically powerful entities in Honduras and in the rest of Central America, and shifted much of the Honduran economy away from local growth and local ownership in favor of luxury production and export agriculture (Pine 2008). With foreign corporations of this size and power came a destabilization of Honduran food security and a dependence on the United States and the global market. In the latter part of the twentieth century, these economic dynamics were tied to several civil wars in Central America, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Although Honduras did not experience the full-fledged upheaval that characterized other countries in the region, the 1980's and 1990's saw increased instability of the political, military, and social sectors of Honduran society (Pine 2008). The linkage between United States' corporations and the recent history of Central American is critiqued as a neo-colonial relationship, including deliberate political destabilization and military support of oppressive regimes. With corporate interest and investment, Protestant missionaries also became an increasing part of Honduran religious life, leading to a shift away from Catholicism in favor of United States-based churches and organizations (Pine 2008). While Honduras largely escaped the civil wars of this time, the political impact of the United States and international corporations were felt in the threat of power as expressed throughout the region.

This trade reality was solidified in 2004, with the passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) between Central American countries and the United States. This trade agreement mirrored the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Mexico, extending the zone of economic linkage between the US and countries to its south. As explained by the State Department, “CAFTA eliminates tariffs and other barriers to trade in goods, services, agricultural products, and investments. Additionally, CAFTA is expected to solidify democracy, encourage greater regional integration, and provide safeguards for environmental protection and labor rights. The United States is Honduras' chief trading partner and the largest investor in Honduras” (State 2012). In *Working Hard, Drinking Hard*, anthropologist Adrienne Pine describes the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the transformation of the Honduran production systems, linking with the Central American Free Trade Agreement to fundamentally alter the landscape of Honduran labor. She writes, "Today, Honduras's poverty is largely maintained through the state's participation in the neoliberal Washington Consensus model...[forcing] Honduras to reduce its economy (through fair trade agreements) to two tracks: export agriculture and *maquiladora*-style industry" (2008). Not only have these industries blurred the lines between countries and corporations (Pine 2008, Sassen 1988), this has also resulted in massive migration from rural Honduras and subsistence agriculture to a floating population of urban unemployed and unemployables.

The current economic recession has exacerbated the negative impact the globalized market has had on Honduras. According to the US State Department:

Because of a strong commercial relationship with the United States, Honduras was hit hard by the international economic downturn, especially in the *maquila* industry, where orders were estimated to have declined about 40%, and where about 30,000 workers lost their jobs in 2008 and 2009 out of a pre-crisis workforce of 145,000. (State 2011)

This evaluation is particularly telling as the State Department has advocated CAFTA as a source of stability and protection for Honduran jobs. Here they acknowledge a direct link between the international trade relationship and the massive loss of jobs due to the economic slowdown of the past three years.

The presidency of Jose Manuel Zelaya (2005-2009) challenged this established order of power and economic ties for Central America. Dissatisfaction with the political process and a widespread sense of economic and physical insecurity played into Zelaya's election. During his second year as president, Zelaya moved to increase transparency, decrease narco-trafficking, and to align the country with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and increasing economic and political distance from the United States (Ruhl 2010). In 2008, Honduras joined Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas alliance, which offered alternative and non-United States trade options and development assistance. His presidency marked a shift in political rhetoric as well: he argued that "the country's existing system of government served only the wealthy few" (Ruhl 2010, p. 100). Zelaya's presidency marked a turn toward a liberal government, with a focus on the protection and participation by the working-class Hondurans who had long felt disenfranchised by a quasi-democratic system which privileged cronyism and had not responded to the concerns of the general public.

In early 2009, President Zelaya proposed a nonbinding referendum to poll Hondurans to determine popular opinion of a constituent assembly to “dismantle legislative and judicial checks on executive power” (Ruhl 2010, p. 100) in a move that was interpreted as a first step to a constitutionally banned second presidential term and a campaign to radically change Honduras in a Chavez-style reform movement. This referendum was hotly contested, and sparked a crisis between Zelaya and the judicial and legislative branches, leading to a split in the military over the president’s legitimacy. Zelaya was overthrown in a military coup d’état on June 28, 2009 and was forcibly deported to Costa Rica, which “exceeded judicial instructions and violated Zelaya’s constitutional rights under Article 102 by exiling him instead of bringing him before a judge as required by law” (Ruhl 2010, p. 102). Zelaya consistently made claim to his democratic election and his identity as the legitimate president of Honduras. His ouster marked the first Central American coup since the end of the Cold War.

The coup was denounced internationally as an unconstitutional removal of a democratically elected president. Economic sanctions were imposed, but the international outcry was limited in scope and did not result in a reinstatement of Zelaya’s presidency, despite the suspension of tens of millions of dollars of economic assistance from the international community, and more than 180,000 Hondurans losing their jobs (Ruhl 2010). An agreement was reached to reinstate Zelaya through a unity government with coup leader Roberto Micheletti, but when the agreement failed and Zelaya was not included in the government, there were no trade sanctions imposed by the international community. When the Honduran Congress voted against Zelaya’s reinstatement, the international community recognized Micheletti’s acting presidency until the November

2009 elections, which were won by wealthy landowner Porfirio Lobo (Ruhl 2010). This understated response from the international community meant that Hondurans now view their democracy as suspect, and that any leader might be overthrown in a similar fashion without serious repercussions from the United Nations or the United States.

In the months following the coup, a litany of human rights abuses were documented against protesters, journalists, humanitarian workers, and Zelaya's supporters. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International documented killings, excessive force in crowd control, arbitrary detentions, and abuse of emergency powers (Human Rights Watch 2010). These abuses targeted opponents of the coup, and extended after the inauguration of President Porfirio Lobo in January 2010: "there have been at least 18 killings of journalists, human rights defenders, and political activists" (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 8). Lobo's government is widely considered to be a return to the pre-Zelaya social and economic order, with a conservative agenda and perceived preference for the traditionally wealthy and powerful classes of Honduran society. In the wake of the coup, Human Rights Watch finds that "The ongoing killings, threats, and attacks have generated a climate of fear and intimidation that has undermined the exercise of basic human rights in Honduras" (2010, p. 61). Put another way, "if the new chief executive simply pays no more than lip service to the need to attack poverty and inequality and to the importance of punishing the corrupt, popular support for democratic politics will likely resume its decline" (Ruhl 2010, p. 106). In short, the aftermath of the 2009 military coup d'état of Manuel Zelaya exacerbated the existing structural problems of democracy, human rights, and the empowerment of working-class Hondurans.

In addition to political and economic vulnerability, Honduras has also suffered from devastating natural disasters. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch destroyed much of Honduras's infrastructure and caused catastrophic damage to agriculture and industry. According to the US State Department, "estimates show that Hurricane Mitch caused \$8.5 billion in damages to homes, hospitals, schools, roads, farms, and businesses throughout Central America, including more than \$3 billion in Honduras alone" (State 2011). For Hondurans, Hurricane Mitch is seen as a breaking point in the potential for national prosperity—that a key piece of momentum was lost in this massive natural disaster (Pine 2008). Hurricane Mitch was also a significant event for Honduran migration patterns, as the United States issued approximately 80,000 Temporary Protected Status (TPS) positions to undocumented Hondurans and temporary workers living in the United States (Brick 2011). This TPS status recognizes that the United States will not deport individuals to a country in the midst of a natural disaster and provides a temporary amnesty and quasi-legal status for the duration of the problems in the sending community. The US State Department explains the renewal of TPS in the following way:

During the past year, DHS and the Department of State reviewed conditions in Honduras. Based on this review, the Secretary has determined that an 18-month extension is warranted because the conditions that prompted the initial TPS designation of Honduras in 1999 following the environmental disaster caused by Hurricane Mitch persist and temporarily prevent Honduras from adequately handling the return of its nationals. (US Citizenship 2012)

This TPS status has been renewed since 1999, so most of the 80,000 Hondurans to receive this status are still living in quasi-legal status in the United States: settled in their receiving communities, but always with the uncertainty that the TPS will be allowed to expire and they will be required to return to Honduras.

Due to the many challenges brought on by natural disasters, political instability, crime, and the fluctuations of the global economy, Hondurans live in a state of insecurity. There is widespread fear, and a sense that a small change could push a family into desperate economic times. Those families who were doing better during the presidency of Manuel Zelaya are now politically (and sometimes economically) disempowered. Those who relied on agriculture before Hurricane Mitch are largely still suffering from the damage to family plots and to corporate farms. For families in gang-controlled areas there is a constant fear that young men will be targeted or otherwise involved in crime and state responses to crime (Pine 2008, Wolseth 2008). The Honduran education system is relatively low quality, the healthcare is inaccessible to many individuals, and general services and resources are not available to much of the Honduran population. Institutionalized inequality and poverty have created widespread vulnerability to natural disasters, and a common sense of near-desperation. Contemporary Honduran migration is a response to this history and context, offering a spectrum of push factors as motivations to seek opportunity elsewhere.

Migration and Honduras

As described by contemporary migration theory, individuals living in adverse situations often make the decision to migrate away from their homes toward areas of greater opportunity. The degree to which this is a true choice, rather than a forced response to extreme vulnerability depends on the individual and the framework for viewing the situation. I argue that migration is a logical response to structural pressures beyond the individual's control, which create a no-win situation in which migration is

understood to be the only viable option. Regardless of the cause, the reality of Honduran immigration is that tens of thousands of Hondurans leave Honduras each year. Statistics of undocumented immigration are extremely difficult to obtain due to the transient nature of the population and the reluctance of people to admit to undocumented status (Castles and Miller 2009). However, the US State department estimates that approximately one million Hondurans live in the United States, “600,000 of whom are believed to be undocumented” (State 2012). In contrast, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that “625,000 Hispanics of Honduran origin resided in the United States in 2009,” twenty percent of whom are US citizens (Dockterman 2011, p. 1). Whatever the statistical accuracy of these figures, it is clear that Honduran migration to the United States is a large demographic and social factor in Honduras.

In addition to a massive movement of the population, emmigration from Honduras has a significant economic impact for the nation and the family members who remain in Honduras. The scale of migration is very much a part of the public discourse in media, politics, humanitarian organizations, and economics. One humanitarian organization speaks frequently of the mass exodus of Hondurans, saying “It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Honduran nationals leave each year, which reduces to 8,333 per month; 1,923 per week; 277 per day; and the equivalent of 12 Hondurans per hour” (FONAMIH, 2009). This framework of the scale of migration communicates an urgency to offer aid and adequate response to the massive outflow of the population. The efforts of Hondurans living abroad contribute significantly to the Honduran economy. The US State Department estimates that “remittance inflows from Hondurans living abroad, mostly in the United States, are the largest source of foreign income and a major

contributor to domestic demand. Remittances totaled \$2.8 billion in 2009, down 11.8% from 2008 levels; that is equivalent to about one-fifth of Honduras' GDP" (2012). Based on this data, Honduran migration and the economic implications this holds for Honduran society means that the decision to emigrate to the United States is part of the narrative of most Honduran families and results in complex decisions for individuals and communities.

As discussed in the migration theory section, a large part of contemporary migration studies focus on the reasons for human migration and the processes migrants engage in order to carry out these decisions. In her article "Expectations and Motivations of Hondurans Migrating to the United States," psychologist Jana Sladkova describes the decision-making process of migrants, and the amount of information they have about the journey before they begin. She describes two national narratives: one of the temptations of international migration, and another of the warnings of the difficulties of the journey. She writes:

The major motivation that emerged from the interviews corresponds to the economic category... [other categories are] politics, self-development, aspirations for children and the pursuit of studies as main motivations for migration. These findings fit within the global context of migration, which blames poverty and unequal distribution of goods and capital for the current mass movements of people. (Sladkova, 2007, p. 195)

These push- and pull factors described here are consistent with larger migration theories, linked here with the lives and contexts of Honduran nationals. Sladkova also discusses the opportunities presented by migration as mediated through the social links formed as more and more Hondurans migrate:

These narratives that prior migrants send back home in the form of letters, phone calls and email messages, or embodied in remittances and other material goods,

get integrated into narratives from local newspapers, TV programs, coyotes and tourists. Individuals, families and entire communities accept some, reject others and combine them into imagined worlds often far away from their situated reality. (Sladkova, 2007, p. 191)

The narrative of migration in Honduras centers on both the dangers and the potential benefits and cultural ties to an “imagined reality” in the United States.

The specifics of the migrant journey will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter, but the essential nature of the route north to the United States is to first cross Guatemala, and then to travel 1,000 miles of Mexico, riding illegally on the tops of freight trains. This journey is fraught with dangers, both physical and psychological, and the threat of apprehension and deportation begins at the southern border of Mexico and continues throughout a migrant’s time living in the United States. Statistics regarding rates of success in migration are difficult to find with accuracy, but are as low as to three or four per 100 migrants (Sladkova 2007). Some make multiple journeys intentionally as “circular migrants,” who work for a short period of time in the United States before voluntarily returning to Honduras with the fruit of their labor. For others, the multiple migrations are due to deportation or other failure to successfully arrive and settle in the United States.

As with many immigrant groups living in the United States, Hondurans are generally poorer, less educated, and have less access to social services than the citizen population. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 61% of Hondurans live in the South, mostly in Florida and Texas (Docterman 2011). This is partially due to geography and partially due to social networks and chain migration: immigrants often form enclaves of individuals from their own country and culture, and use these contacts to feel more

comfortable and to obtain jobs. However, in the sense of empowerment and quality of life, Hondurans living in the United States often are poor and generally have low levels of education. Forty-nine percent of Hondurans 25 years old or older do not have a high school diploma, compared with 39% of all Hispanics in the United States (Dockterman 2011, p. 2). In terms of buying power, Hondurans 16 years or older have a median personal earning of \$17,100, and 27% are living in poverty. These statistics indicate the complexity of the migrant experience from Honduras: even for those who successfully migrate to the United States, economic and social security are often unattainable.

Despite the poverty of many Hondurans living in the United States, remittances sent home are essential to the survival of many thousands of Honduran families. With massive underemployment and poverty, the remittances of a single migrant can support a family in relative comfort, and is a key piece of the overall economy: “approximately twenty-five per cent of the Honduran GDP is measured in remittances sent from Hondurans living abroad” (Bonilla, 2009). According to the Migration Policy Institute, the formal remittance inflow to Honduras was \$2,649,000, with 93% of this money coming from North America, compared to 4% from Hondurans living in other Latin American countries and 3% from Europe (Migration 2011). Thus, migrants are often under considerable pressure to find and retain a job so as to provide stability for their families and communities still in Honduras, and must weigh their decisions against this responsibility.

United States Immigration Policy and Border Enforcement History

The history of the United States is one of successive waves of immigration, with individual needs and changing migration flows interacting with the identity of a country founded by migrants. This history of immigration from Latin America is complex and nuanced, involving the interactions between European powers in the colonizing of the Americas, the interactions between indigenous groups, and the interests of the emerging United States. For the purpose of this thesis, I provide a background to the history of immigration from Latin America to the United States, focusing on Central America but also addressing the longer relationship between Mexican migrants and US immigration policy. Before describing this history, it is important to note that theories of immigration in the United States focus on the interlocking factors of economics, politics, social theory, identity, and globalization. Immigration as a concept is neither a straightforward interaction between law and human mobility, nor an ideological construct of tension between economic realities and American identity.

The Migration Policy Institute characterizes migration patterns from Latin America as having three phases: “limited flows before World War II, primarily Mexican government-sponsored guest worker flows during and after the war, and mainly illegal flows beginning in 1965 and accelerating over the next four decades” (Brick 2011, p. 3). Until the 1970’s, Central American immigration to the United States was very limited. Latin@ immigration was primarily Mexican migrants, generally residing in the US Southwest in the lands that had been Mexican territory before the conclusion of the Mexican-American War in 1848, which disrupted many families, communities, and cultures when the United States acquired nearly half of Mexico. Before World War II,

Mexican immigration to the United States was largely cyclical, consisting of seasonal migrant workers working in US agriculture or railroad construction and returning to Mexico in the winter (Brick 2011). These migrants were almost exclusively male, and therefore this phase did not lead to large numbers of permanent immigrants or to integration into United States society. US companies benefited from the availability of low-wage, part-time workers, and the migrants benefitted economically. This seasonal migration of approximately 60,000 Mexicans per year (Brick 2011) established economic and cultural patterns in the late 19th century which continue to inform migration practices today.

In the 1920's, a cultural backlash against immigrants and toward the protection of American jobs and American identity during the Great Depression meant that visas were less available for seasonal workers from Mexico. Between 1928 and 1929 there was a 75% reduction in Mexican inflow to the United States (Brick 2011, p. 3) and the Great Depression led to mass deportations (including deportation of American citizens of Mexican decent) and a 40% drop in the Mexican population in the United States (Brick 2011, p. 4). While these restrictive policies were successful inasmuch as the Mexican population dropped, this is the first of a series of temporary restrictions to immigration, which did little to deter the overarching paradigm of the United States as a welcoming place for Mexican laborers.

The 1942 Bracero Program changed these dynamics dramatically. This migrant guest worker program encouraged temporary migration of Mexican immigrants to fill factory and agricultural jobs to compensate for the labor shortage due to the US involvement in World War II. Unlike previous guest worker programs, the Bracero

Program actively recruited Mexican workers, and guaranteed certain legal protections and workplace standards (including minimum wage) for the duration of their stay in the United States. The dramatic expansion of seasonal, high-wage work (compared to Mexican standards) resulted in a solidification of migration to the United States as an economic reality for many Mexican communities, and as a social and cultural expectation for poor farmers. When the Bracero Program ended in 1964, 4.8 million Braceros had come to the United States (Brick 2011), including many returning workers. By the program's end, Mexican migrants were involved in a diversifying labor pool and were residing across the United States. It is also important to note that many Braceros overstayed their work visas, settling in the United States on a permanent basis (Staudt 2008). From a structural perspective, the Bracero Program solidified the migration relationship between the United States and Mexico, with the movement of migrants as a central part of both economies, and the lives and cultures of working-class Mexicans.

The end of the Bracero Program coincided with the passage of the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which radically changed US immigration policy and provided the outline of contemporary immigration law (Brick 2011, Staudt 2008). The new law delineated a set number of visas per country, with a preference system favoring family-based migration and limiting the number of worker visas. While this move was framed as protecting American economic interests, it did not account for the established need for Mexican migrant workers. In fact, the new policy included laws against "aiding or harboring" undocumented migrants, beginning the process of defining individual workers as "illegal" and as a dangerous element in American culture (Bacon 2008, Brick 2011).

The 1970's and 1980's saw massive political upheaval in Central America, resulting in the first large-scale wave of migrants arriving from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua (Brick 2011). These years were marked by extreme political violence and civil wars throughout the region, creating large populations of refugees. As discussed in the Honduran history section of this chapter, these wars were often exacerbated by US corporate interest in land-use and economic policies to favor corporate fruit plantations at the expense of peasant farmers or the land-rights uprisings among indigenous people of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. The tightening of US immigration policy coincided with these increasing push factors to encourage Central Americans to flee violence and economic instability, compelling many to seek formal or undocumented asylum in the United States.

Social activism and advocacy efforts surrounding the rights of migrant farmworkers, as well as pressure from American businesses resulted in an amnesty program in 1986 with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). This program involved legalization for long-term unauthorized residents, as well as strengthening anti-immigration rules and increasing border enforcement (Brick 2011). This policy recognized the needs of undocumented individuals who had adopted the United States as their home, but simultaneously responded to growing ideological resistance to “open borders.” This policy trend came to a head after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, when border control first became conflated with National Security. For the next four years, anti-terrorism legislation became linked with border control and immigration enforcement, particularly in relation with the Mexico-US border (Bacon 2008, Brotherton and Kretsedemas 2008, Brick 2011, Fernandes 2007, Nevins 2010, Zolberg 2006).

Rhetoric emerged regarding the threat of waves of “criminal,” “illegal aliens” pouring across the 2,000 mile southern border. In political forums and media coverage, the movement of Latin@s across the border became one of ideological and physical threat, with language surrounding economic migrants and political terrorists used interchangeably to advocate for harsher enforcement policies.

Immigration Enforcement in Mexico

Mexico is a crossroads for Central American migration to the United States. Prior to the 1970’s, most Latin@ immigrants to the United States were from Mexico, so Mexico’s role in international migration was limited to that of a sending country of emigrants to the United States. However, since the 1970’s, Mexico has become a country of transit for thousands Guatemalans, Hondurans, and El Salvadorans en route to the United States, and the US has increasingly put pressure on the government of Mexico to enforce its southern border against Central American migrants (Alba 2010, Alvarez 1995, Castillo 2006, Eschbach 1999, Ogren 2007). Mexico thereby serves as an additional deterrent to undocumented entry of Central Americans to the US, although Mexican officials have not agreed to reduce the movement of Mexican migrants to the United States. Mexico’s geographical location and political/economic ties with the United States makes it a significant impediment to the migration of Central Americans, and over the last three decades has become the most dangerous portion of the migrant journey (Eschbach 1999, Nevins 2010, Ogren 2007). Central Americans must cross approximately 1,000 miles of Mexico, and face physical dangers as well as the threat of crime, immigration detention, and corrupt state officials in order to enter the United

States. In this section, I will briefly discuss the ways in which Mexican immigration policy interacts with Central American migrants, and what these structures imply for a broad understanding of the threat of structural violence in the lives of undocumented migrants.

Mexico requires a passport for all Central Americans entering its territory. Central American countries have an agreement for freedom of movement between Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, which means that citizens of these countries must only show government ID upon entry or departure. While Mexico has not erected physical barriers to the undocumented crossing of its southern border, it has adopted multiple measures of immigration enforcement in the interior of Mexico, detaining and deporting Central Americans without the proper visa documentation (Ogren 2007). Some of these practices are formal government policies, such as vehicle stops on the highways, and in other cases immigration enforcement is a non-standardized exercise in policing Central Americans. As described by the Migration Information Source:

Migratory agents and members of the Federal Preventive Police perform control and verification activities, such as asking to see identification, at specific points but also in any location they choose. They stop buses and other vehicles as well as people walking or staying in certain areas or routes that migrants frequent. A number of agents from other governmental agencies also participate in these checks although the law has not authorized them to do so. (Castillo 2006)

Herein lies a key concern in Mexico's policing of Central American migration: the controls and oversight of detention and deportation are not held under strict scrutiny, but are rather undertaken in a way which leads to increased vulnerability and suffering of migrants (Castillo 2006, de Castro 2009, Ogren 2007). In order to evade Immigration

Enforcement Agents, many migrants ride on the tops of freight trains, risking multiple dangers through exposure and falling from the trains, as well as often needing to board and jumping from the trains while in motion to avoid apprehension by immigration officials at the train terminals (Nazario 2006). Additionally, many migrants are forced to hire guides to help them avoid common detention enforcement sites and to lead them to the border, and these guides are increasingly tied to drug cartels in Mexico, putting the migrants at risk of human trafficking, being held hostage, and forced drug running.

If Central American migrants are detained by immigration enforcement officials, they usually are held in detention centers and then deported to Guatemala, where they may be either left near the northern border of Guatemala or are repatriated to their countries of origin (Ogren 2007). Towns on the Guatemalan-Mexican border are increasingly sites of crime and refugees, and a circular pattern of migration and deportation as migrants make multiple attempts to cross through Mexico. Between 2000 and 2008, Mexico more than doubled its detention facilities, from 22 to 48, including the largest immigration detention center in the world, outside of the city of Tapachula in Southern Mexico (Alba 2010, Diaz 2007). Each year, Mexico deports hundreds of thousands of Central Americans, more than double the deportation numbers for the United States. Despite recent measures to clean up detention facilities, humanitarian groups in the United States, Mexico, and Central America consistently condemn the corruption of the Mexican Immigration Officials, and call for increased oversight and concern for the human rights and safety of migrants in transit (Alba 2010). Questions of enforcement and policing are tied to broader concerns regarding the relationship between the United States and Mexico, and the future of immigration policies for Mexicans: “The

current migration debate in Mexico overwhelmingly revolves around the importance and need to influence the immigration reform in the United States, which is also a concern of its Central American neighbors. Any US immigration reform will affect Central American migration, but US reform will also create a new context for migratory policymaking in Mexico” (Castillo 2006). The loose enforcement structure and nature of the bi-national efforts between Mexico and the United States to prevent Central American immigration result in migrants having few recourses or protection, and instead face extreme physical dangers during their journey through Mexico. These dangers are a result of structures and intention of the governments of the two countries: that immigration law is enforced, in part, by the suffering of migrants on the journey, deterring them from future attempts at undocumented immigration.

Contemporary US Border Enforcement

The increased politicization of the US-Mexico borderlands post- 1990 has resulted in vastly increased border enforcement through a deterrence model which increases the physical dangers of migration. The impacts of these policies on individual migrants and their families is a primary research focus of this thesis. Here I will outline the history and intentions of contemporary border enforcement, both on the US-Mexico border and through the policies Mexico has adopted to combat undocumented Central American migrants from entering Mexico. These changes are part of a long term ideological and identity question in the United States—Who is “American?” Who belongs? When compared with the structured, cyclical migration encouraged by the Bracero Program, modern migration policies deliberately place migrants at risk of

physical and social victimization in the process of migration as a disincentive to attempt undocumented entry to the United States (Bacon 2008, Coleman 2007, Zolberg 2006).

The Immigration Act of 1990 doubled US spending on border enforcement, ushering in a new era of immigration detention and deterrence on the border. Government spending on border enforcement “increased from about \$700 million in 1986 to about \$2.8 billion in 2002 and \$10.1 billion in 2010” (Brick 2011, p. 8). This massive increase in spending represented a growth of Border Patrol Agents from 9,100 in 2001 to over 20,000 in 2010, and the construction of “about 650 miles of border fencing” as well as high-tech and military-grade equipment from cameras to armored vehicles (Brick 2011, p. 8). These measures are an attempt to thwart potential migrants through arrest and deportation across the 2,000 miles of the southern US border through physical interventions against a mass movement of people. However, the border fence also serves as a visual symbol of the government acting to protect the border, and becomes a symbolic investment of resources and manpower to defend the country from the migrant ‘threat.’

A key part of the border enforcement strategy is “enforcement through deterrence.” This strategy is essentially that large-scale and highly visible enforcement of the border in the most highly-used areas of the border will discourage migrants from attempting to enter the United States (Nevins 2010). This specifically means closing the border crossings where migrants could move from a city in Mexico directly to a city in the United States, such as the Tijuana-San Diego area, where migrants could simply cross a highway to enter the US illegally. With increased enforcement in the early 1990’s, this convenient crossing was shut down with high fencing and a Border Patrol initiative

which caught the majority of the migrants attempting to cross into San Diego. With the construction of the border fence, cities which had previously been essentially united across the border (such as El Paso/Juarez, Nogales/Nogales, and San Diego/Tijuana) were divided, which changed the mobility potential of residents, as well as creating a new series of obstacles for migrants attempting to enter the United States.

As intended with this “Operation Gatekeeper” deterrence strategy, migrants shifted their immigration attempts to less enforced areas, which resulted in a “funneling” effect in which migration was pushed away from cities and into the deserted regions outside of metropolitan areas (Nevins 2010). Now, instead of crossing from one city to another, migrants often cross through areas which require a hike of several days through the deserts of the American Southwest in order to reach a city in the United States. By enforcing the boarder in an uneven fashion, Border Patrol uses the terrain and danger of the region against the migrants, seeking to deter further crossings by making each attempt so dangerous that migrants will be unlikely to attempt the journey (Brotherton 2008, Coleman 2007, Eschbach 1999, Fernandes 2007, Nevins 2010). This deterrence model has meant that an increasing number of migrants die in the deserts of California, Arizona, and Texas. Each year, hundreds of bodies of undocumented migrants are recovered from the deserts. Much of the time, the bodies are in such a deteriorated condition that they cannot be identified and are eventually buried in government cemeteries.

As Joseph Nevins describes in *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, these deaths are part of the border enforcement strategy (2010). The policies are crafted to maximize the suffering and deadly risks faced by those migrants who do attempt to cross into the United States. Nevins writes, "US authorities are arguably responsible (at least partially)

for the deaths by knowingly 'forcing' people to take death-defying risks" (Nevins, 2010, p. 174). This argument is key for my examination of the migration experience. As Nevins describes, the deaths of migrants are inherently part of an enforcement strategy that first funnels the migrant journey through deadly areas, and expects the news of the suffering of these individuals to discourage potential future migrants from attempting the trip. This is a deliberate tactic of engineered structural violence, and the success of this strategy demands the deaths and suffering of migrants, and the dissemination of these stories to potential future migrants.

This strategy capitalizes on human suffering to reach a political goal of decreasing undocumented migration. To achieve the goals outlined by the US Immigration Act of 1990, Border Patrol has undertaken a specific mission to induce suffering of migrants and thereby decrease the undocumented entry of Latin@s across the border. As described by Sladkova, however, these dangers are known and understood by migrants, who risk the journey despite the hazards. Nevins describes the policies of closing the border to illegal immigration as essentially futile. He writes, "although it is much more difficult to cross now than in the early 1990s ... and, as a result, some in Mexico stay at home rather than even try, 92-97 percent of Mexican migrants continue to try to cross until they have succeeded" (Nevins 2010, p. 160). Not only has there been only a nominal reduction in the likelihood of repeated attempts, but there has been no true impact on the number of migrants who decide to cross the border. Therefore, the official US policy of "deterrence" of migrants has failed to enforce the border but has ultimately resulted in massive human suffering.

In the year from October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010, the bodies of 253 migrants were found in the deserts of Arizona (No More Deaths). Because of the nature of the environment, it is estimated that between one fifth to one tenth of bodies are discovered. As Nevins describes, Border Patrol intended the difficulty of the journey to serve as a deterrent to ongoing migration, and that the deaths of several migrants might persuade the others to remain at home. Instead, a national policy of death by illegal immigration has created a national atmosphere that permits these deaths, and which responds with ever more draconian laws passed against migrants who live in the United States (Bacon 2008, Brotherton 2008, Coleman 2007, Fernandes 2007, No More Deaths 2008, Zolberg 2006). Nevins describes the link between border enforcement and the rhetoric of illegal immigration, as the issue becomes one of combating "lawlessness," rather than critically examining the rationality of migration. Structural forces and political rhetoric have become tied with the enforcement of the impenetrable border zone: "The US-Mexico border region is a crossroads where many forces meet: the global economy, migration patterns, federal, state, and local public policies" (Staudt 2008, p. 295). Thus, deportation and deterrence become the structures in place to satisfy political ends beyond the scope of the lives of those migrants most intimately impacted by the policies.

When Nevins writes that US authorities hold some responsibility for the deaths of migrants, he is referring to an understanding of immigration law as structural violence which creates a deliberate system in which lives are lost for an unsuccessful political goal. Human rights groups working on the Arizona/Mexico border report fluctuations in migration based on broad economic patterns, but largely unaffected by policy initiatives

(No More Deaths). What does emerge from harsh immigration policies is that increased numbers of migrants die in the attempt to journey to the United States. As described earlier, economic pressures on migrants to send remittances to their families result in a high level of motivation for migrants to succeed in crossing the border. The enforcement structures created by the US Border Patrol do not impact the needs of these migrants, nor their motivations for the journey. Therefore, despite a deterrence model and the deaths of hundreds of migrants each year, the decision to migrate continues to primarily depend on questions of opportunity and necessity for migrants and their families.

Gender and Immigration Flows

The implications of large-scale migration for gender relations and the implications this has for sending communities and individual migrants are complex and shifting. Historically, the vast majority of Latin@ immigrants to the United States have been young men seeking temporary employment, while female relatives ran the household, business, and sometimes the communities back home. These gender roles and expectations in migration have shifted over the past thirty years, and an increasing number of women migrants are undertaking the journey to the United States. Here I will briefly discuss gender issues and the implications of this demographic shift for Latin@ migrants, and the implications this has both for the international community and for the experiences of migrants themselves.

Historically, economic migration has been the realm of male breadwinners and young unemployed men. This was particularly the case of migrants from Mexico during the Bracero years, when migration was primarily short-term and circular, with migrants

returning home after a short money-making stay in the United States (Brick 2011). During this time, Central American women made up over half of the population of migrants internal to the region, forming a large proportion of those workers who formed the rural-to-urban migrant population and who would move between Central American countries for family necessity or employment opportunity (Pessar 2005). In the case of Central American migration to the United States, migration was largely inspired by political upheaval and natural disasters, which impact the entire population. Some argue that these in fact have a greater impact on women, who are more vulnerable to resource deprivation and other suffering in times of violence or other instability (Sassen 2000). According to US Census data, in 2000 nearly half (49.4%) of Central American migrants were female (Durand and Massey 2010 p. 35). Economic necessity is a key driver for migrant women, many of whom become the primary breadwinner through the course of migration, although many other factors may also be in play: “For wives, single mothers, daughters and sons, gender and generational inequalities within migrant households and communities may prove to be important factors promoting migration as subordinated household members seek greater freedom over their mobility, productivity, consumption, and social life” (Passar 2005, p. 36). As with all discussions of push-pull factors influencing migration, it is essential to maintain the perspective that women migrants, like male migrants, are individuals existing within social, political, and economic spaces and making decisions based on a complex set of interlocking factors and incomplete information.

Of particular note in this discussion of the experience of female migrants is the increased danger of the migrant journey. In addition to the physical risks shared by all

migrants riding the trains, crossing difficult terrain, and suffering the health and psychological impacts of the deprivations and insecurities of the journey, women are also vulnerable to rape, human trafficking, kidnapping, and an increased likelihood of suffering at the hands of criminals or gangs (Diaz 2007, Nazario 2006, Nevins 2010). Because of the increased dangers, most women migrants choose to travel with a coyote, which increases their chances of arriving in the United States but also places them under the control of that individual. Many women are trafficked to work as prostitutes in Guatemala or Mexico, or arrive in the United States to find themselves and are then trafficked into sex work, forced employment, or a level of debt to their coyote which cannot be feasibly repaid.

In addition to vulnerability at the hands of coyotes, drug cartels, and other criminal victimizations, women also occupy a different position in relation to authorities and official structures. As with all discussions of abuse in detention settings, instances of mistreatment occur within a larger context of a person's location, situation, and the individuals present. However, multiple and widespread instances of abuse by Mexican and US Immigration Enforcement authorities have been cited by human rights groups, and there are consistent calls to improve oversight and the human rights conditions for women in state custody. On the US border, human rights groups have documented violence and abuse of women upon Border Patrol apprehension, as well as the deportation of women at nighttime to insecure and violent areas in Mexican border towns (No More Deaths 2008, 2011). In Mexico, both women and men held in immigration detention facilities have reported inadequate food, hygiene, access to communication with families, notification of their legal rights, and medical care. Additionally, according

to a 2007 study of 90 female detainees in the Mexico City Detention Center “one-fourth of the women interviewed stated they had been treated with violence or aggression by INM [Mexican Migration Institute] personnel since arriving at the detention center” (Diaz 2008). The nature of gender discrimination issues mean that female detainees are often at greater risk of victimization than their male counterparts, resulting in the need for greater oversight while in state custody.

Due to the demographic realities of the Central American migrant population, the majority of this thesis focuses on the migration experiences of male migrants and their families in Honduras. However, it is important to note again that many of the motivations for migrating apply equally to women in Central America, as well as increasing trend toward women migrating to reunite their families in the United States. Women who do migrate often suffer at greater rates, and often find themselves in desperate situations based on questions of gender and power. If current trends continue, the migrant population will even out between men and women, and will continue to feature trans-national families in which women attempt to mother from abroad and to support families through remittances (Schmalzbauer 2004). Structural violence and social inequality are exaggerated in the case of women who attempt to migrate to the United States, and will continue to impact the identity and security of Central American migrants and their families.

Interior Enforcement

Although this thesis focuses primarily on the migrant journey, it is also important to discuss the enforcement of immigration as carried out in interior cities within the

United States, and what this means for our collective understanding of the geographies of immigration and the implications for American identity. In a critical sense, the changes in policing of immigration and the efforts to detain and deport those undocumented individuals living in the interior of the United States blurs the line between internal security and the defense of the country as immigration enforcement is now part of national security, policing, business regulation, and anti-terrorism efforts (Bacon 2008, Chavez 2001, Coleman 2007, Glick-Schiller 1992, Nevins 2010, Zolberg 2006). With the increasing militarization of the border (including the recent development of unmanned drones for border surveillance) the geography of the border and the zones of enforcement have shifted to include the whole of the United States, with broad implications for the discursive ‘Othering’ of the immigrant populations along racial lines (Bacon 2008, Coleman 2003, Nevins 2010). National security has become conflated with keeping out undocumented immigrants, and enforcing US identity through expelling ‘the Other’.

From a structural stance, this enforcement policy impacts questions of criminal justice, policing, business, education, and healthcare. While there is not space to sufficiently explore these controversial topics in this introduction, it is important to note that a great deal of research has gone into the various costs of policing undocumented immigration in the nation’s interior. From a public safety perspective, the fear of deportation leads undocumented immigrants to not trust law enforcement, and to therefore not communicate with the police or report crimes (Bacon 2008, Brotherton 2008, Fernandes 2007, Staudt 2008), and requires that law enforcement officials shift time and energy away from policing and toward immigration enforcement. From a

public health perspective, the lack of access to preventative services results in an overuse of emergency services, at taxpayer cost. Another enormous cost to taxpayers lies in the detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants, often in private detention centers and resulting in many millions of dollars spent. Despite the widespread claims of undocumented immigrants not paying taxes, scholarly research has long shown that immigrants do in fact pay Social Security and other state and federal taxes, and often are excluded from the state assistance funded by these taxes (Staudt 2008, p. 320). It is important to note here that, although the threat of terrorism is often cited as a motivation for increased border enforcement, not one terrorist or suspected terrorist has been apprehended on the southern border of the United States (Fernandes 2007).

From these broader structural critiques of the impact of interior border enforcement, it is also crucial to recognize the implications these policies have on the lives of undocumented immigrants and their families. These micro-scale impacts are the primary focus of my thesis, so here I limit my comments to briefly underlining the impacts of interior enforcement on migrant families. Nevins writes that between 1998 and 2007, "more than 1 million family members in the United States [were separated] from a parent or spouse" (Nevins 2010, p. 186). This references displacement and separation on a massive scale, and speaks to the constant insecurity and uncertainty of families with undocumented members. Depending on their location in the United States, undocumented individuals often live in fear in their workplaces, on the roads, and as members of their communities as church members, students, consumers, and participants in civic life. To be undocumented is to live in uncertainty, from the dramatic consequences of deportation to the 'softer' questions of discrimination and vulnerability,

from questions of wages and housing to unequal access to resources of healthcare and education.

Summary

Latin@ migration to the United States exists in a complex network of historical relationships and current social, political, and economic ties between the countries of Central and North America. The impacts of globalization have created new structures of interdependence and mobility for information, goods, and services worldwide and have also altered the discourse of identity and belonging in relation to human migration. The legal implications of immigration have also changed enormously over the last one hundred years, and the nature of immigration enforcement has taken on new meaning in the context of international security and internal national identity. For Central Americans, the United States has become a destination for economic opportunity, as well as an escape from natural disasters and social insecurity. For Hondurans, the complex ties with the United States begin with the relationship between US business and foreign investment and the existence of a large Honduran diaspora living in the United States and sending remittances home. For an individual Honduran making the decision to travel to the United States, there is a strong and widespread belief in the “American Dream” as a source of hope and dignity: if an individual can only arrive in the United States, then all will be well for them and their family. Despite public discussion of the dangers of the migrant journey and the difficulties of life in the United States, this myth of success is pervasive in Honduran culture, and stands in opposition to the widespread poverty and political disempowerment. For an individual Honduran, therefore, the United States may

be the logical answer to life's struggles, even when coupled with the dangers of the journey and the risks of deportation.

Key to this section and the remainder of my thesis is the idea that individual decisions interact violently with the enforcement of US immigration law. As the political rhetoric has shifted to ideas of national security as tied to immigration enforcement, and as identity politics have increasingly meshed with the racial and linguistic concerns of American citizens, structural violence surrounding migration and the lives of immigrants has increased. The deterrence model of immigration enforcement has created the multi-tiered oppressive system of dangers from violence and vulnerability in Mexico, to geographic and legal barriers crossing the US-Mexico border, and insecurity in the US interior. These structures are deliberately put into place to enforce a version of the United States which does not acknowledge the fundamental connections between immigration, US history, and contemporary reality.

CHAPTER III

MIGRANTES AND THE LOSS OF THE “AMERICAN DREAM”

The suffering of migrants from Hondurans as they move through Mexico to the United States is constructed by international policy, practice, and discourse and shapes widespread human suffering. As discussed in the introduction, human migration is a product of changes in politics, trade agreements, and globalization in which changing economic realities eliminate viable opportunities in sending communities and force individuals into migrating to better opportunities. Tellingly, NAFTA and Operation Gatekeeper both came into being in 1994, suggesting that the government knew that increased mobility of goods would increase the suffering of workers and small farmers in Mexico and Central America (Bacon 2008, Brotherton 2008, Fernandes 2007, Nevins 2010). Political and legal responses to increased immigration have been structured to create situations of vulnerability and oppression, which have not reduced migration but have drastically impacted the lives of migrants and of their families and communities of origin. As migrants have become more numerous and more desperate in response to economic trends, political oppression, and natural disasters, the political climate in the United States has led to an increased politicization of immigration, and a rhetoric of closed borders and the dangers of ‘illegal aliens’ (Bacon 2008, Fernandes 2007, Zolberg 2006).

In this section, I will explore the experiences of Honduran migrants to demonstrate the impact of immigration structures on individual lives. I focus on dramatic cases of human suffering as a result of migration: those who lose limbs en route, or who

have become *desaparecid@s* and then returned to Honduras. I also discuss the implications of deportation or ‘voluntary’ return to Honduras from the United States. To conclude this section, I examine the ways in which female migrants are particularly vulnerable within migration systems. These stories represent the most brutal of the repercussions of the migrant journey as currently shaped by international immigration policy and on-the-ground practice of deterrence. They are iconic in the Honduran media and discourse surrounding migration, and yet are rarely discussed in the United States, where the structural violence originates. One Honduran newspaper reports “It is calculated that for every 100 Hondurans who leave illegally, only 7% arrive in the United States, the rest are deported from Mexico, and at least one per cent remains on the route between Guatemala and Mexican territory” (Bonilla, 2009). In this section, I examine the experience of Honduran migrants who fall under the umbrella of “*migrantes retornados*,” or “returned migrants.” Specifically, I examine stories of migrants who were injured en route, disappeared migrants, the experience of a Honduran migrant who grew up in the United States and was subsequently deported away from his home and culture, and finally the link between female migrants and disappearance through prostitution. I argue that the suffering of these migrants is deliberately constructed to eliminate easy or safe options for migration, and that the migration experience is therefore an egregious case of structural violence, resulting in wide-scale suffering and death for those migrants in pursuit of the American Dream.

In Search of a Better Life: Reasons for Migrating

As discussed in the introduction, there are a wide variety of ‘push’ factors which motivate out-migration, as well as ‘pull’ factors encouraging immigration. The Hondurans I interviewed cited a variety of motivations for migrating. Some had a specific reason, such as a family problem or the loss of a job. But for many, it was the desire to escape the economic hardships and widespread hopelessness in Honduras. Some interviewees told me,

“To work and escape the poverty here” -Manuel

“To be with my mother, who I hadn’t seen in four years.” – Andre

“I went for the reason that everyone goes: to try to find a better life.” -- Roberto

“I always thought about a better life. About a future. That is why someone will leave: to look for a better life. That is why someone will leave their country.” --Francisco

One man, who had been deported after struggling to find work for less than a year in the United States, described the desperation of his working life in a US-owned *maquila* factory in Honduras that pushed him into migrating: “Before I left, I worked from 7:00 am to 10:30 pm six days a week in the Pepsi plant, and made 280 Lempira [approximately \$14] a week. I worked there two years before I decided to go, and my mom had to collect my final paycheck, I left so fast.” He was twenty years old when he left, and cited a hopelessness and desperation arising from this low-pay, low-skilled labor at the Pepsi plant. In this situation, it is possible to see both a classic push factor, and an example of human agency at work shaping the migration process. This interviewee was

trapped in a starvation-wage job, without hope of better opportunities, and thus decided to leave to try his luck in the United States. My interviewees consistently cited a lack of secure or sufficient employment as the primary cause for migration, and most asserted that the key to “fixing” immigration was higher wages, more jobs, and better jobs. For many individuals in Honduras and elsewhere in Central America, the United States represents a kind of escape valve to relieve the pressure which builds over years of hopelessness or disempowerment. This is particularly true of young men who face a life of poverty in spite of long hours of hard work (Pine 2008, Sladkova 2007, Wolseth 2008).

As a result, there is a pervasive sense of hopelessness in Honduras, palpable both in participant-observation and stated in my interviews. One interviewee summed this up quite simply, saying “The majority of people leave [for the United States] because the crisis we have here, that no one has work and if someone works one day they don’t for the rest of the week. With things this way people go to the United States and this will not change. Young people always have in mind ‘I have the option of traveling North².’” This mentality of the United States as the alternative to the current situation of hopelessness is a considerable motivation for people when living in a state of uncertainty and poverty (Wolseth 2008). Honduran youths are surrounded by representations of American culture and life, and neighborhoods are sprinkled with the upscale homes of those Hondurans who have successfully migrated to the United States. Remittances from abroad can raise a family from desperation to comfort, and the history of migration has created a culture of

² I have chosen to capitalize “North” in reference to the migrant path because this is consistent with the grammar utilized in Central American spoken and written migration discussions, in which “el Norte” stands in for “the United States,” and migrants speak of traveling “al Norte,” or “to the North.” When indicating a geographic position not in direct reference to the United States, ‘north’ will not be capitalized.

migration, a network of information, and social capital for those heading North. In this context, migration is seen as the logical response to economic desperation at home.

It is important to note here that migrants have varying ideas of their lives and goals in the United States. Only three of my interviewees originally intended to stay in the United States in the long-term or as permanent residents. Indeed, one man told me, “I sometimes thought about obtaining my papers there to be a legal resident, but not a citizen and not to be stable there because my land is here, and my country is here. I have to return. [...] The culture and the customs here are not the same as there. And suddenly one doesn’t feel well and says ‘I have to return to my country.’” For Francisco, and for many others, the goal of migration was not to become a permanent member of the United States, but rather to be a temporary worker for one or two years to obtain enough money for some measurable goal: to buy a house for the family, to build up savings, to afford medicine, or to help their children finish school. Although some migrants do go to the United States with the intention of becoming permanent residents, many feel a strong obligation or cultural tie with their homes, and seek only a certain security through economic migration.

Al Norte: The Migrant Journey

Honduran migrants make the journey North through various means and with varying degrees of success. The most common means of arriving in the United States in recent years is by traveling overland, first by bus to the Mexican border and then by walking, hitchhiking, or taking buses for the remainder of the journey (Nazario 2006, Sladkova 2007). As discussed in the introduction, the only reliable long-distance

transportation available to most migrants traveling without documents is to illegally ‘hop’ cargo trains and ride on the roofs. This exposes them to the elements and to serious risk of life and limb as they cross the more than 1,000 miles north through Mexico to the US border. As one interviewee stated, “It is terrible, it is sad and terrible to travel the way I did. And so many travel in that horrible cargo train. ‘Train of Death,’ is what I call it.” Indeed, “*Tren de la Muerte*” and “*La Bestia*” (The Beast) are common expressions for the cargo trains carrying migrants through Mexico on top of locked compartments, vulnerable to the elements and to multiple forms of victimization (Eschbach 1999, Nazario 2006, Nevins 2010).

The migrants I interviewed during this research project witnessed a variety of examples of victimization and structural violence on the trains in Mexico. Manuel’s experience provides a clear example of the dangers and resulting emotional trauma of riding the trains:

I went in a group of four friends. We took a bus through Guatemala, then a train through Mexico. I was afraid on the trains, afraid I would fall. When we slept we had to tie ourselves to poles or whatever was available to keep from slipping off and falling. One time a man fell and was hanging by a rope under his armpits and jerking like a doll trying to get back up. I was often afraid.

Paulo described the journey fraught with risks of victimization along with coping with the physical dangers of the trains themselves: “Mexico is the most difficult for us, because people there do a lot to bother us. The police do just like the Zeta [a large Mexican gang] and thieves, everyone. You have to always go in every direction, you always go lost. Always struggling, [...] But in Mexico, the “normal” people are good and they help [migrants].” The migrant experience on the “*Tren de la Muerte*” is,

therefore, a narrative of physical dangers and victimization, in which the migrants live in a state of fear and insecurity.

As described in the first chapter, migration policies have shifted, increasing the structures inhibiting migration and increasing the dangers. Two interviewees, Roberto and Paulo, experienced these structural changes through multiple journeys over the years. Roberto journeyed north four times between 1986 and 2008. He reported, “The first time I went, there were passenger trains in Mexico, just like a passenger bus. But then when I went in 1998 they had already taken out the passenger trains and then they were all cargo trains, and you couldn’t be a passenger anymore.” In those years, migration went from being a relatively “civilized” journey as described by Roberto, to being a situation in which migrants were no longer passengers, but were breaking the law by riding on the roofs of cargo trains. Paulo, who had traveled six times between 2000 and 2008, said “[The journey] has changed a lot. There is a lot of crime. When I first went everything was calm, and then around 2003 it had started. And [indistinct: possibly ‘gangs’] started to prey on migrants, and treat them badly. They rob people, capture them, and kill them.” The changes in the journey were created by the structural change in transportation availability and enforcement on the ground, which increased the likelihood that migrants would be victims of crime. Indeed, another interviewee, Francisco, lost his foot after falling during a scuffle with a large gang who surrounded his migrant group on top of a moving train. The dangers of migration, therefore, have changed because of the violence directed against vulnerable migrants, who cannot go to the police if attacked by gangs. Understanding the changes observed by these Honduran migrants is key to understanding the ways in which state policies have constructed a migrant journey that is dangerous and

dehumanizing, rather than a calm or civilized journey like Roberto and Paulo had experienced fifteen years ago. This illustrates that contemporary dangers are not a necessary, unavoidable part of the experience, but rather are constructed by outside structures of power.

One key component of contemporary immigration law is assuming that the difficulty of the journey will discourage continued migration in the future (Brotherton 2008, Nevins 2010). As described in the Introduction, the 1994 immigration enforcement initiative “Operation Gatekeeper” used ‘prevention through deterrence’ as the framework for border enforcement, naming ‘hostile environment’ and ‘more violence at attempted entries’ (US Border Patrol, 1994, 10) as part of the increased ‘cost’ of migration. This logic states that if potential migrants know of the risks they face, they will choose to remain in their own country. This raises a serious question: does the continued migration stream indicate that information about the dangers is unavailable in Honduras, and therefore people set out North without understanding what they would face? Migrants interviewed for this project, however, indicated that they knew the risks, and that ‘everyone’ knows the risks. They reported that ‘average’ people commonly discuss the route, they travel multiple times, and that the dangers of the trains and the violence against migrants in Mexico is widely disseminated in local and national media. As Paulo said, “everyone knows what happens on the journey because it’s on the television and everyone sees. The people understand all of it.” Roberto agreed: when asked if he knew the risks he said “all of it is on the television.” Paulo summed this up well in discussing his fall from the train: “Of the thousands of people who go, this always happens to some. I am not the first nor the last. Every time this [a major injury] happens to someone.”

Every interviewee who had undertaken the journey reported that ‘everyone knows of the dangers.’ Migrants go despite the dangers, not in ignorance (Sladkova 2007). Most interviewees told me that they went thinking ‘it won’t happen to me’ or ‘the risks are worth it.’ A migration policy founded on deterrence through risks has failed to prevent migration and has resulted in widespread suffering of migrants. Indeed, since the US government set these dangers in the paths of migrants, it can be argued that US policy makers are implicated in the migrants’ suffering.

Mutilados: Truncated Dreams

As previously discussed, “*mutilado*” is an adjective or noun in Spanish and is used to describe an amputee or someone with a disability. In the context of migration, this nearly always refers to migrants who were maimed when they fell under the wheels of the train they were riding, while getting onto or off of the train, falling from the top, or are pushed off. The *mutilados* in El Progreso are part of a loosely formed organization, headed by a local woman named Doña Nelly, who brings the men together for events and for conversation groups. As part of larger migrant rights organizations, she has created this group for the twenty-seven mutilados from near El Progreso.

The narratives shared by the mutilados I spoke with were similar to each other in many ways. Each spoke to their reasons for migrating, and to their knowledge of the dangers. Many expressed fear of the journey, and yet some also expressed a feeling of confidence born of hope they would arrive in the United States. Many also discussed the events surrounding the accident itself, and their medical care directly thereafter. They also were outspoken regarding the difficulties of their lives in El Progreso, from

financial concerns, mobility, social isolation, and fear for their families' futures. Although in some ways similar to the displacement experienced by deportees and returned migrants, the experience of a *migrante mutilado* upon his return is essentially and inextricably linked with his accident on the train, and is a physical manifestation of his failure to reach the United States. For Honduran migrants, mutilation on the *Tren de la Muerte* is both a symbol and a reminder of the possibility of the worst disaster possible on the journey *al Norte*.

Of my six interviews with *migrantes mutilados*, two lost a foot, three lost a leg above the knee, and one lost both an arm and a leg. As quoted earlier, the migrant path has become fraught with perils both of physical geography and of human violence. All the interviewees had made at least one previous attempt to migrate to the United States, and all but one had worked in the United States for at least two years. The dates of their accidents range from 1998 to 2008. One interviewee, Fernando, fell from the train after five days with no water. Roberto fell in the middle of the night during a rainstorm when he was sleeping on top of the train. Paulo fell while trying to get back onto the train. Francisco fell during a scuffle with a gang. All reported hunger, dehydration, fear, and sleeplessness during the journey. As Paulo pointed out, these injured migrants are not the first, nor will they be the last to suffer on the journey to the United States. At the time of the interview, none of the six men were employed in the formal job sector, and all but one expressed a high degree of financial instability and fear of becoming homeless. All but one were married with children and worried about the future of their families.

Of these narratives, Paulo's accident is possibly the most horrific. Not only did Paulo suffer mutilation under the wheels of the train, but his traveling companion did as

well: “he also had an accident. The train killed him.” A metal bar had been installed across the space between the two cars to block migrants from getting on, and Paulo explained that when he and his friend were running to jump back onto the train, they didn’t see the bar. Paulo saw his friend fall under the wheels and die in the moment before Paulo also hit his head and fell. Paulo’s story points to a larger problem of the constructed dangers associated with migration. Train companies take measures to block access to the trains, including stationing police at the train stops to apprehend undocumented migrants. Train companies also allow gangs to patrol the roofs of the trains, either as a deterrent to illegal riders or under threat from the gangs. These groups often demand payment from migrants, sometimes with the threat of throwing any non-cooperators from the moving train (Nazario 2006). Paulo spoke of witnessing gangs robbing people, and having to run away across the rooftops or even jump off the train. He said that the gang members “walk on the train, robbing and throwing people off.” He said that large groups of migrants were more vulnerable, so he always traveled alone or with just one other person. He also said that the trains were particularly dangerous for women, and he had seen women robbed or kidnapped. These gang activities are pervasive, and are permitted by the train companies and by the lack of law enforcement, which allows for continued victimization. This indicates a policy of state tolerance of violence when directed against migrants.

Roberto’s story is also one of stark injustice and human violence. When Roberto fell from the train, a nephew of his got off to help him, and called for help in the nearby town. People came to help, but all they did was call the police, put a tourniquet on his leg, and shine a flashlight on him. They told Roberto that helping him was forbidden

until the police came. When the police arrived, they also refused him medical aid or water, even though he was begging for help. He was told that only the paramedics could help or even offer water. He estimates that he lay there for forty minutes with people standing around, thinking he would die at any moment. He said that during that time he was “thinking of my family, and asking God to help me survive this... I was praying to God and thinking of my family.”

Paulo and Roberto’s experiences illuminate the two key structural injustices in play for migrants on the journey through Mexico. One is an injustice of policy: the actions of police, companies, or immigration enforcement officials which result in injuries or deaths on the trains. These are conscious anti-immigrant practices, which are in direct opposition to the needs and safety of migrants. This results in elevated risks during the migration journey north and thereby causes suffering such as that experienced by these interviewees. The second is an injustice of omission: the lack of enforcement and protection which result in gang activity and the victimization of migrants at the hands of gangs and petty criminals. The tacit permission to take advantage of migrants results in the kinds of practices Paulo described: throwing migrants off the train if they cannot pay a bribe, or the kidnapping and abuse of women. These stories are present in my interviews, and are widely discussed in the media in Honduras, including accusations of corruption, such as migrants being arrested by immigration police and turned over to gangs. Increasingly this information has become deadly: journalists who report on the Zeta and other gangs are being killed (La Prensa 2012). These murders have not been sufficiently investigated, and have resulted in Mexico and Honduras occupying top positions on the list of the most dangerous countries for journalists.

In the midst of this critique of the Mexican institutions and the dangers of the gangs, it is also important to note that my interviewees speak highly of the nature of the citizens or “normal people” in Mexico. Paulo in particular spoke highly of Mexicans who go to great lengths to help migrants en route on the trains. Paulo opened our interview by saying “Mexico is the hardest for us [migrants], because they do a lot to bother us. The police and the Zeta alike, and thieves, everything. You always have to look in all directions, you always go around lost. You are always struggling. But in Mexico, the normal people are good and they help you.” He described towns where the poor residents would come running to the trains, throwing bottles of clean water and bundles of food to the migrants as the train sped by. Paulo also thanked a “normal Mexican person” for his life: when he fell from the train he lost consciousness. He woke several days later in the hospital, and heard that some person had brought him to the hospital in a “personal car.” Paulo said, “I don’t know his name. I never thanked him.” It is important to note that, in the midst of the critique of structural violence and harm done by the official Mexican institutions, some individual Mexican citizens go to enormous lengths to offer support and comfort to Central American migrants.

This theme continues through the recovery process. The men I interviewed all received medical treatment in Mexico, paying nothing for surgeries and medicines while they recovered. Each started out in a government hospital, and after being released most spent an extended recovery time with nuns in health clinics, receiving physical therapy, medical attention, and sometimes equipment to deal with their disabilities. Several still use the wheel chairs or prosthetics they received from the nuns years ago. All speak with great affection for their care and treatment, and many describe better healthcare in

Mexico than that which they receive in Honduras (where they do not receive support for their health needs or disabilities services unless through charitable organizations).

Mutilados re-entering their communities

As with the non-disabled returnees, the group of *mutilados* that I interviewed had a very difficult time settling back into life in Honduras. They spoke of displacement and the pain of not offering their families the support that had been the original motivation for their trip *al Norte*. They also spoke of being a burden on their families, but in this case with increased pain and diminished hope that the future might hold something better. Roberto explained this, saying “you have to always continue forward with hopes of living, and of working. It is not easy, everything is very difficult.” Paulo said, “You have to continue on one day at a time. When you don’t have a job you have to fight day by day to continue.” This theme of finding steady work and employment, and maintaining one’s faith that things will improve, was consistent in the interviews. Returnees spoke of maintaining the attitude that they would find some kind of job, although many also wished that there were some support from the government or an organization that could aid their efforts at finding work as people with disabilities. Francisco described this in conjunction with the discrimination faced by the *migrantes mutilados*: “[What we need is] A place or a support or an organization or institution that could give us some little kind of work so we can go there to get the basic necessities. Because here they look at us as though we won’t serve for anything. And the truth is that many of us have the intellectual or physical capacity to [indistinct] many things.” What

Francisco is describing here is a basic lack of the resources and accommodations necessary for someone who has recently become disabled to live a healthy, productive life. Consistently, those interviewees in wheelchairs reported that there was no work and no hope of work. Although many interviewees mentioned that they wanted or needed help from service providers, or money to help support their children, the vast majority of these theoretical requests was in the form of help securing employment and a life in which people wouldn't look at them as if they were useless. Francisco put this in the most succinct way: "*Quiero ser útil*," ("I want to be useful"). Francisco, like the others I interviewed, wants to hold a meaningful and productive role in his family life and in his community.

Those who were working were generally in unstable, day-by-day jobs. Francisco explained his situation in El Progreso:

My worry is for my children. Sometimes because I don't have a foot, I don't work and I don't have money to give them from my earnings. I have a wife, I have my woman and sometimes she is sick and she can't have stable work. And there is... I leave to go out and find small jobs and [indistinct] I repair small electronics. I often have at the house people that look for me to repair their bicycles and I fix them. And I do what I can to help the neighbors as I can to get what I can to feed my children.

Francisco and others have to rely on the support of their wives or family members as the primary breadwinners, and do what they can to fill in their days with odd jobs. Even Roberto, who was proud to report that he had "adapted" to life without his foot, was surviving only because his family had the resources to support him, mostly through his wife's work. Roberto works selling fruit to the neighbors, but also told me that this work was enough to provide some support for his family, but not enough to fill the expected male role as the primary breadwinner and the head of household. In the context of a

machista culture in which gender roles are strictly proscribed, this lack of economic power is particularly debilitating and emasculating for these men who have already suffered enormous physical and psychological loss.

In addition to employment, transportation and mobility were consistently cited as challenges for the *mutilados*. Paulo described discrimination in the buses, which is the main transportation for people living in the El Progreso area: “Here there is a law that when the buses pass they have to stop for people, but for me they do not stop. There is a fine but they don’t stop. Sometimes five pass and none stop for me. I have to wait for a good person to say ‘hey man, do you want up?’ There are some who are quick to help, but most do not.” Transportation discrimination was commonly cited as a huge limitation for a dignified life as a person with a disability. Consistently, my interviewees complained that there were no basic accommodations for those in wheelchairs, who had particular difficulties moving around the city. For those with prostheses or crutches, most found it easier to manage their own mobility, but still faced challenges in getting onto busses or into businesses. These challenges were consistently accompanied with a desire for self-sufficiency among the group of *mutilados*. Two interviewees who had lost a foot rode bicycles, one with his prosthetic foot and one without. Both were proud to show me how well they got around, and both were quick to tease me when I confessed that I was afraid to ride a bike with my two feet.

Despite the optimism demonstrated by Roberto and Francisco, the challenges of life as a *mutilado* were described repeatedly in each interview. This led several interviewees to experience depression or other emotional problems in response to their injuries. Francisco asked me to stop my recording for a time when he broke down in

response to my inquiry about his children. He described his youngest daughter, age seven, as a sweetheart and a “little doll,” and then described the shame he felt the first time she saw him without his foot. He cried, and said that the only time he loses his hope that God will help him survive are the days when his children don’t have three meals, and the times when he feels shame in front of his little girl. Pablo reported his own extreme response to his accident and return to Honduras: “I spent one year without going out. One year that I thought in taking my own life. I was only sitting in the house. For one year until I met the group with Doña Nelly.” He spoke repeatedly of Doña Nelly’s support and the importance of the group of *mutilados* for his coming back to life, and his conviction to continue on. He also spoke to one of the other group members, who had lost an arm, a leg, and most of his other hand. That this other man was so badly injured and yet managed to continue his life with optimism was a saving grace for Pablo, as was the group aspect of sharing the challenges and limitations of life with a disability.

The group of *mutilados* I interviewed expressed the emotional pain of losing their chance at living and working in the United States, and now adjusting to life with a disability. They consistently spoke of the hardships of life and their concerns about employment and their families’ futures. Their losses on the *Tren de la Muerte* were a double loss: the physical impact of losing a limb and the emotional/psychological loss of their identities as whole and healthy individuals, with mobility to choose to migrate to help their families. Narratives of hope often had to do with their families or the community of *mutilados* in El Progreso, as well as the gratitude felt for still being alive after their accidents. Despite this hope, the realistic outlook for these men and their families is one of economic and social instability. They are the unlucky but inevitable

few for whom the structural impediments of migration have done drastic and lasting damage to their bodies and their futures. Significantly, these injuries are on display for the community to witness the dangers of migration, although the discourse of successful migration continues to be the dominant narrative despite these dangers. For these men in El Progreso and their families, the consequences of migration will be viscerally present and painful for the remainder of their lives.

Desaparecidos³: *Those Lost on the Journey*

The experience of a *desaparecido* is one of loss of contact, rather than of physical loss. The word “*desaparecido*” is interesting in this context, as its literal meaning is “someone who has disappeared,” but its most common use has been in the context of oppressive governments and civil wars, in which “*desaparecidos*” were individuals who had been forcibly “disappeared” by the government or other violent means. Therefore, the widespread use of *migrante desaparecido* suggests that there is an element of violence and victimhood in that loss, and that there might be someone specifically to blame. The common practice of making the verb of “he disappeared” into a pronoun is a powerful act of labeling, and indicates the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in Honduran communities and on the psyche of those who disappear.

Due to the constructed vulnerabilities of the migrant journey, disappearances happen in a variety of ways, and with varying implications for the migrant. Some disappear due to death on the journey: death under the wheels of the train or at the hands of a criminal, or through sickness, exposure, accidental drowning, car accidents, and any

³ In the context of this section, all those referred to as “*desaparecido*” are male, and therefore the masculine adjective will be used, rather than the gender neutral *desaparecid@*.

of the myriad of dangers all humans face in the course of their lives (Nazario 2006, Sladkova 2007). The difference in the case of migrants is that these dangers are exacerbated by the vulnerabilities caused by the migrant experience: there are few safe spaces for migrants along their journey. They are victimized on all sides, or must be cautious of victimization. The same holds true for other causes of disappearances: kidnapping, human trafficking, and prostitution (forced or otherwise). While these tragedies might befall any unlucky member of society, migrants are without the resources of community, sympathetic law enforcement, and access to services to help protect them. Since police often coordinate with immigration officials both in the United States and in Mexico, the stakes are too high to trust a police officer, even in the event of a common crime. Finally, as has increasingly been reported, many Mexican law enforcement officers are corrupt, with crimes from bribery to participating in migrant kidnapping, torture, and killings in connection to gang activity.

I focus on *desaparecid@s* as well as mutilados because they represent another possible outcome of the structural violence faced by Honduran migrants. For the purposes of this research, the impact of disappearances will be discussed at length in the “Family and Community” section, since it is impossible to conduct interviews with migrants who are currently *desaparecidos*. In this section I focus on two aspects of disappearance: a man’s story of being a *desaparecido* for over fifteen years as a result of his incarceration in a California prison, and second a look at the structural risks of female migrants and their risks of human trafficking and prostitution. I interviewed leaders in a women’s shelter which works with former prostitutes, many of whom were migrants and were considered to be *desaparecidas* by their families back home. First I analyze

Manuel's story of disappearance through incarceration. His story is not unique: over the course of my internship in Honduras I searched through prison rosters in the United States and found four men who had been considered "*desaparecidos*," and was able to inform their family members of their whereabouts⁴. Individuals who are incarcerated in the United States might lose touch with their families due to shame and unwillingness to report a crime to their family, or because they have lost the family's contact information. Because of geographic distance, individuals might disappear through incarceration without the news ever reaching the family at home. Manuel's story is of particular note as I spoke with him only fifteen days after he was returned to Honduras and reunited with his family.

*Manuel*⁵

Manuel left for the United States in 1995, leaving a job in the Pepsi plant in which he worked from 7:00 am to 10:30 pm six days a week for very low wages. He was twenty years old when he made the journey. He entered Texas on his second attempt, after having run out of money in Mexico the first time. He received money from a family friend in Los Angeles, but when he arrived he could not find work. He slept under bridges and ate from garbage cans, and said that he only bathed every 15 to 20 days. He

⁴ I received long lists of names during my volunteer work with FONAMIH, and found records of four out of over a hundred names. In the case of those four, I provided the families with addresses and phone numbers of the prisons, as well as explaining procedures for getting in touch. I do not know if they were successful in re-establishing contact. I also do not know the whereabouts of the other individuals on those lists.

⁵ This interview was not recorded at the interviewee's request. Notes were taken during the interview, and a detailed recounting and description was written immediately afterward. Therefore, most of the story is paraphrased, but any statement in quotation marks was recorded word-for-word during the interview. The interviewee's mother and a community member were present during the interview, at his request.

described the culture in America as very different: that in Honduras someone would have invited him to at least wash his face or take a bath, but in the US no one would help him.

During this time he was in contact with his mother. Then, in October of 1996 he committed a crime (unspecified) and was sent to prison. When asked if he felt that the system was just, he said yes. He also stated clearly that his lack of contact with his family was not the fault of the prison system, but was due to a change in the area code for Honduran phones, and because his mother's company changed locations. He sent many letters and tried to call, but with no results.

He said he never thought about being returned to Honduras. He thought about dying, and thought about his family, but he never thought about coming back. He reported being afraid of how everything had changed. Even now, he said he is afraid of going out. He said he is not comfortable here now, that "old friends no longer exist." His neighbors do not trust him, wonder why he was in prison, and think badly of him. He has found temporary work for a neighbor, working full days for 100 Lempira⁶ per day. He explained that it would be impossible to find a 'real job' in the formal economy, as he was too old. He said that Honduran companies do not hire over thirty, and he is thirty-five. He said it is like being retired, but retired with no money. He asked "What is one to do?"

He spoke at length about his family and his emotional state now, two weeks after returning home. He described his deportation by air, and of being returned to the airport in San Pedro Sula, the major airport for Northern Honduras. He said, "If I had returned and not found anyone, I would have gone North again: better to be killed by gangs en

⁶ \$5.24 on February 18, 2012

route than to die of hunger here.” His isolation was so complete that he had no idea if he would find his family upon his return to the neighborhood, and his mother had no idea that he was coming. That anxiety of not knowing was still clear during our interview, and projecting into the future. He said, “What will happen if I lose my mother? Who else will help me? Where would I find work? I wouldn’t have anything. Here there is no work.” This anxiety over the future also was expressed in terms of his current situation. He said, “I can’t just stay here, asking my mother for money. *Me da vergüenza comer. Prefiero morir que venir y ser carga,*” translated as ‘It shames me to eat. I prefer to die than come here and be a burden.’ Shame and fear as a consistent aspect of Manuel’s experience: during and after his return home, he was filled with anxiety surrounding his identity and family connections.

This description of Manuel’s experience as a *desaparecido* and *retornado* (‘returnee’) is key in the narrative of migration and belonging in Honduras. Manuel expresses a simultaneous fear that he will lose his family through his mother’s death, and an urgent desire to remove himself from this unfamiliar home, and from the status of a returned *desaparecido* with no prospects and nothing to offer his family for the years he was gone. Although the circumstances of his disappearance are particularly fraught due to his time in prison, he is expressing a common sense of loss and desperation: the guilt of the failed migrant, and the fear of continued economic burden and dependence. Indeed, Manuel’s sense of guilt and fear of being ‘a burden’ to his family and community is reminiscent of Francisco’s stated desire ‘to be useful’ and the fears expressed by the *mutilados* who are now cut off from economic power and their masculine role within their families.

Manuel also had a few very specific comments on the impact of his loss. He repeated several times “*Yo perdí mi vida,*” or “I lost my life.” He told me this both in the context of incarceration and in reference to those fifteen years gone from his family, his career, and the opportunity to make something for himself in the world. Of his prison experience he told me, “*Salí lo peor como entré. Como puedo recuperar los años?*” translated as, “I left worse than I went in. How can I get back [or ‘recover from’] those years?” His experience of disappearing into a California prison and losing all touch with his family was the experience of losing his life. Now he is coping not only with the loss of those years, but with the ongoing shame and fear, both economic and from the judgment of his community based on his incarceration. He not only feels he has lost his life, but also that he would prefer to die than to continue living as he is currently. As a conclusion to his narrative, Manuel told me “*Así se pierde el Sueño Americano*” or “this is how one loses the American Dream.”

Manuel was not mutilated by the train, nor was he one of the bodies found in mass graves, the victim of a gang. But his story as a *desaparecido* represents a different kind of death and loss, through the missing portion of his life and his desperation in looking toward the future. The narrative Manuel presents is not of a lost son returning home, or the triumphant migrant bringing wealth to a family, or of the hope at a second life. His story is one of failure and loss: failure to help his family and instead becoming a burden; an attempt to migrate and work as a young man and now living as an unemployable “old man”; and as a living, hopeful person inspired by the American Dream who now feels lost, desperate, and on the edge of death.

“Migration is a pathway to prostitution”

Female migrants face additional risks on the migrant trail, which can lead to disappearance or damage in a different way than suffered by men. My interview with three leaders of a Guatemalan women’s shelter, Adelante, illuminated some of the unique risks and results of women’s migration. The house serves approximately 200 women, all of whom are prostitutes or who are trying to transition out of prostitution and back into ‘normal’ life in the community. This small town is on the Guatemala/Mexico border, and approximately 150 of the clients are migrants who resorted to prostitution en route to the United States and were subsequently deported to Guatemala. They are mostly from Honduras and El Salvador, although some are also Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans, Panamanians, Guatemalans, and Mexicans. In their work, the women who run this shelter help rehabilitate former prostitutes: to provide healthcare and job skills, and to encourage them to find a safe way back into their communities. Because of a cultural prejudice against prostitutes and women who choose that livelihood, many of these women are ostracized. Many have been trafficked into prostitution, either through kidnapping or through the offer of a front employment and transportation to the United States. The interview with directors of the Adelante provided the perspective of why many women disappear in the process of migration, and what the consequences of this trafficking and prostitution are for women and their communities.

Juana, the head spokesperson, described the trajectory of the clients of the Adelante. She said that “most come from poor families or broken homes. Some are drug users, but most were not before becoming prostitutes. Some are trafficked, but more are tricked.” She explained that she knew of only 40 or 50 cases of ‘real’ trafficking,

including several minors as young as fifteen. She draws a distinction between those who were violently kidnapped for trafficking and those many others who were tricked into thinking they would be employed as house cleaners or restaurant employees. She explained that “many of those same coyotes already have contracts and leave women [with the traffickers/prostitution rings]. It is a closed business, and a circular one. A woman is left without money and without any resources.” As is often the case with victims of human trafficking, the women Juana encountered at the Adelante were already vulnerable members of the population: those living in extreme poverty, often with limited formal education, and uprooted from their families and support networks by the decision to migrate. These women were then trapped in a form of a Catch-22 of migration: that the journey is too dangerous to undertake without a guide, but that the guide himself might be in the employment of a trafficking ring or large gang. It was at this point in our interview that Juana stated “*Migracion es un camino hasta la prostitucion.*” Or “migration is a pathway to prostitution.”

When asked about the structures in place to support women and combat human trafficking, Juana was clear that the laws are ineffective and that no real progress has been made to protect female migrants. She described women’s vulnerability as a result of structural vulnerability: that a lack of jobs and equality are key to women’s decision to migrate, and result in a routine victimization of female migrants en route. She said “The principle cause of migration is work and inequality: that just a few families have all the money in these countries.” Here she describes prostitution and migration as a symptom of the structures of inequality in Central America: that wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few, leaving the majority vulnerable to desperate situations. Juana believes that the

key to rehabilitation for these women is “work, empowerment, and resources. They need employment and education.” By naming these solutions (which will be discussed at greater length in a subsequent chapter), Juana names the root problems leading to women’s vulnerability: a lack of work, education, and equal access to resources.

The structural critique goes deeper than these overarching concerns of resources and equality. When Juana discussed the link between coyotes and prostitution, she was addressing structural factors which place women migrants uniquely at the mercy of these guides, who often take advantage of the women through rape as well as through trafficking. The rise of the largest gangs in Central America is a function of international policy which has incentivized these groups, and which has not managed to combat the corruption which allows for their continued existence. Thus, the gangs control both coyotes and prostitution, and women suffer particularly from this system. When asked about laws to bring perpetrators to justice, Juana said “In theory, human trafficking laws are good. The problem is that, unfortunately, the authority figures are involved themselves. Sometimes this ends very badly. Narco-trafficking and prostitution are interlinked. You have to know who is trustworthy and be strategic.” The corruption and abuse of the system enable enormous suffering for individual women and their families and communities back home. Prostitution is one common way in which women can become *desaparecidas*, and lost to their families. What Juana addresses here is the relationship between criminal organizations, migration, and the government. Corruption creates a system in which none can be trusted and female migrants are left with few resources, if any (Ogren 2007). The vulnerability they suffer from being female and impoverished in their home communities is exacerbated by these factors on the journey,

and results in their resorting to a life of prostitution. Juana explains how lack of resources and the desperation of a migrant on the journey forces many women into making that decision for themselves: a kind of structured no-win scenario in which they ‘choose’ a life which removes them further from family and community.

One of the key functions of Adelante is to rehabilitate these former prostitutes to become part of the community again so they can eventually return home. They combat the health problems many of the women suffer, including the drug addictions often encouraged by pimps, and also work to undo the emotional damage done by living in the brothels. Juana described the need to “get close” with the women, and that many have been in “emotional prison” during their time as prostitutes. She said that many of the women have children, often both in their home communities and sometimes during their time in the brothels. Sometimes those children are forcibly removed from their mothers, or used to control their behavior and movements. The leaders of Adelante believe strongly in empowerment for the women, teaching literacy classes, building community, offering exercise programs, and sharing stories. The house is a religious institution, and therefore avoids questions of politics or legal reform, despite the implications these have for the lives of the women they serve. Instead they work with one woman at a time, and try to empower them to return to their countries or at least contact their families. Juana repeated again that these women are at very high risk because of their circumstances. She said that the work of the Casa is to serve these individual women and heal the community, and that the way to effect these changes is “the fight for equality” between classes and genders in Central American societies. By this interpretation, the safety and

rehabilitation of these women is a key question of structural violence and is the responsibility of the community at large to offer a response.

Men and women are both subject to human trafficking in the United States as well as in countries of transit. Migrants have reportedly been kept in hostage situations with their documents controlled by a trafficking ring, or gangs have created a kind of indentured servitude by demanding exorbitant rates for guiding people across the border, resulting in a permanent indebtedness to the cartel (Alba 2010, Castillo 2006, Sladkova 2007). However, these threats are exacerbated in the case of female migrants, who disproportionately suffer assault at the hands of coyotes and gangs, as well as being vulnerable to victimization in towns and on the trails en route (Diaz 2007, Pessar 2005).

As Juana recognizes, these problems are founded on a system of gender and class inequality, and are exacerbated by corruption and structures which do not protect or empower the most vulnerable elements of the migrant population. Those structures which make all migrants vulnerable to crime, injury, and death on the migrant trail are exacerbated when that migrant is a woman, largely due to pervasive sexism and the widespread threat of trafficking into the sex trade. Cultural pressures mean that such work labels the woman as “damaged,” even if she was a victim of trafficking. As migrant demographics continue to shift to include more families and women pursuing the “American Dream,” the structural vulnerabilities have only increased as well, pulling more and more women into dangerous and deadly situations. When Juana describes the relationship between organized crime and the trafficking circles, she is pointing to a fundamental human rights concern in the face of structural violence: that women’s vulnerability is tolerated in pursuit of profit. Juana calls for justice, equity, and

opportunity for women and for all individuals in their hometowns, that they not need to risk the dangers of the migrant journey. Addressing the structural vulnerabilities is key to improving conditions for female migrants who are heading north in pursuit of a life with dignity.

Retornados: Returned but Not Home

Contemporary immigration structures in the United States and Mexico result in constant waves of deportees returning to Honduras. The massive deportations occur both for migrants en route through Mexico and on the US border, as well as occurring in the US interior, with more-established immigrants. In the cases when a long-term migrant is returned “home,” there are issues of cultural adaptation and the psychological trauma of being jerked back into one’s original community. Manuel described this both in terms of culture shock upon leaving the prison and in returning to a community after such a long time away. For those who do not have stories of disappearance and incarceration, deportation still marks a dramatic break between life in the United States and an involuntary and sudden return to Honduras. Many deportees attempt to migrate North again as soon as possible, continue the process of circular migration. Others attempt to re-settle into their communities, and to connect again with their families and communities. For those who choose to stay in Honduras, this often represents a shift from being the remittance-sending economic support of the family to being a dependent, which can have severe emotional and social ramifications and a certain loss of power and identity that can come with economic independence. Conflict between returnees and

their family members is commonplace, and often revolves around the loss of remittances and resulting lack of stability which was hard-earned in the United States.

Psychological disconnect and economic hardship often occur even for those migrants who were not *mutilados* or *desaparecidos* during their migration experiences. Increasingly, long-term, non-legal migrants to the United States have faced deportation away from a life which is more a part of their identity than their nationality (Castles 2009, Nazario 2006, Sladkova 2007). This is a particular concern for families in the United States with US citizen children, or with some children who are undocumented and others who are citizens. The deportation of undocumented immigrants away from family members has been widely criticized as inhumane and against fundamental understandings of human rights and the well-being of children. The concerns of “Americanized” children, who arrived in the US at a young age and are culturally American if not legally citizens have been addressed recently through the failed DREAM Act (2009), which would have provided a pathway toward citizenship for undocumented migrants who arrived in the United States as children, and ongoing debate over whether these individuals should have options to challenge deportation. Overall, the status of immigrant families with mixed documentation status is of extreme concern, as is the situation of those individuals who were brought to the United States as children, and who therefore transcend the traditional migrant with a “sending country,” and rather grow up as non-citizen, undocumented residents of the US, facing the ongoing threat of deportation and the other vulnerabilities imposed by US policies for those without legal status.

My interview with Andre addresses some of these issues of belonging and identity with long-term non-legal residence in the United States. Andre first went to the United States in 1995, when he was eleven years old. He was accompanied by his aunt, and went to rejoin his mother, who he had not seen in four years. Andre went to school in the United States from fourth grade until graduating from high school. He lived in the US for more than 13 years before being deported in 2008. We conducted our interview in English, and he told me he was much more comfortable speaking English than Spanish. For Andre, and for many other migrants who arrive in the United States as children, the language and culture of their “host country” is far more relatable and familiar than that of their country of origin. Indeed, when asked “do you feel more American⁷ or Honduran, he said “American, absolutely.”

Deportation policy in the United States has been in a state of flux over the past several decades. With changes in policing laws, such as the notorious SB1070 bill in Arizona, which, among other policies, empowers police to make immigration-related stops of individuals, racism and prejudice are often part of the enforcement of immigration rules. In January 2012, the Obama administration announced a shift in policy to stop the deportation of undocumented immigrants who did not have criminal backgrounds, and to allow those non-legal residents who were attempting to gain legal status to remain in the country during that bureaucratic process. These policies are still in flux, and will likely remain so with a continuance of workplace raids, changing police policies, and an on-the-ground practice of deportation policy which sometimes pits

⁷ I noted the tensions surrounding the use of “American” to describe people residing in the United States, but as this interview took place in English and Andre talked about ‘America’ rather than ‘the United States,’ I use his terminology in discussing his interview.

residents of communities against the police, making neighborhoods less safe for everyone.

Andre arrived in the country with falsified documents, but had since gone with his mother to court as a minor, and was somewhat protected under his mother's temporary worker's permit. He experienced first-hand the complexities and structural impediments to remaining in the United States when he attempted to establish legal residency. When he went to continue the process, he was told that he had not properly notified the court of his presence, and there were documents which should have been filled out when he turned eighteen.

“I went to the court date in March, somewhere around there, and the judge told me, ‘well you didn’t bring no lawyer, and you brought me your school records and all your income tax papers and your police record and everything’s clean, you know, but you haven’t given me a good reason why you should stay here.’ And I was like ‘well maybe because I’ve been here you know, half my life,’ and at that point is was more than have my life, ‘and I have my daughter here too, you know? And my mother and I need to take care of her,’ but he still said ‘You haven’t given me a good enough reason for you to stay...’ So they gave me what they call a voluntary departure.”

This testimony points to the confusion and marginal space occupied by undocumented or semi-undocumented migrants. Andre had thought his papers were in order, and went to court with the expectation that his long-term residency in the United States would mean he could maintain a worker's permit or temporary resident's card. And instead he was told that he had no ‘reason to stay.’ His confusion at this assertion is clear: with his mother and daughter both living in Miami, he was still deported away from his family and back to a country where he felt little connection. Andre's daughter is still lives in Miami with Andre's ex-wife, who is an American citizen. His mother is working on her

legal resident status, and although she wants to come see Andre and possibly move back to Honduras, Andre told her to stay in the United States, and to save money since there is no way of knowing if she would be able to find a job, or return safely to the US if needed.

Also relevant in Andre's return story is that the culture he adopted in the United States has damaged his opportunities in Honduras. Despite having the benefits of speaking fluent English and having graduated from high school (generally benefits for the Honduran job market), he is virtually unemployable due to the tattoos he got in Miami. He has three small tattoos on his arms, which in America might not even be noticed except in certain job sectors. In Honduras, tattoos signal gang membership and criminal activities (Pine 2008), and his tattoos have meant that Andre cannot find work outside of unpaid odd jobs for family members:

I can't really get no job, you know? Because of the tats. It's caused me a lot of trouble. Because here they figure you're either a gang member or a thief or whatever, so they judge you for it. And they don't know that that's just the culture I grew up in. I grew up in North America so I got used to that culture where it doesn't even mean anything, you know?

So, like Manuel, Andre is trapped in the limbo of being a deportee with the desire to work and an inability to do so. Andre expressed the frustration and disempowerment of returning to a relative's home and having to rely on their generosity, despite the family's existing struggle to support themselves. He had worked for years in the United States, helping to support his mother while living an independent life. Now, as a returnee, he had to readjust his expectations of productivity and return to the socially/culturally problematic status of an unemployed man being supported by family. And, as he explained, the challenges of his situation were intensified by the cultural

misunderstanding of his tattoos, which could theoretically permanently exclude him from the formal employment sector.

For *retornados* who were long-term residents in the United States, the return to Honduras creates a sense of profound displacement and loss. Although Andre and Manuel lived divergent migrant experiences in the United States, they both returned to Honduras and felt they were burdening their families, and had no real sense of connection with their “homes” in Honduras. From a systemic perspective, deportations which so profoundly impact individual’s stability and sense of self within a community creates massive trauma for migrants, particularly those who were long-term residents in the United States. The dissonance felt by both Andre and Manuel indicates also that their long-term options of employment and productivity in Honduras are low. As each indicated, there was a desire to return to the United States in order to escape that feeling of disconnection and of burdening their family. This is a key to understanding the impact of migration on migrants themselves: that their sense of the loss of the “American Dream” and their hopelessness for their futures in Honduras mean that they are apt to migrate again, and to continue to risk the journey in order to re-establish themselves with their families, their self-images, and their desired opportunities in the United States.

Summary

Honduran migrants understand the risks of the journey North. Narratives of disappearance, death, and dismemberment on the trains are pervasive in the national

dialogue: in the media, in politics, and on the micro scale of neighborhoods and families. This knowledge does not prevent migration because the push factors encouraging migration are strong enough that individuals take the risk of the journey, often making multiple attempts to get to the United States. The consequences of the micro-scale difficulties and dangers are the loss of life and limbs to the journey, and are then faced with a return existence in which they feel they are burdens to their families. Statistics of deaths and dismemberment are incomplete or non-existent, and therefore these interviews show the human side of a growing trend in globalization: that individuals migrate across continents to seek employment and security, and pay the price with their bodies and their lives. In informal conversations with Hondurans on buses and in my neighborhood, I heard affirmations that emigration is a consistent and overarching reality for all families. People I talked with had their own stories of migration and deportation, or had family members living abroad. Most also mentioned a neighbor or friend who had disappeared or been injured en route. They expressed a sense of loss and fear, but also consistently told me that they would travel *al Norte*, given the opportunity.

What is key to these narratives is the pervasive sense that people will continue to migrate, in spite of the dangers. These stories are not unique, but are indicative of a widespread phenomenon of suffering and loss in pursuit of economic opportunity. These interviewees express a consistent regret for their current situation, but simultaneously state that people will continue to migrate and that their situation would be better had they made it to the United States. They told me that they were not the first nor will they be the last to experience dismemberment and loss, but that they believed in the American Dream: the chance to work an honest job for a reasonable wage and thereby escape the

poverty and desperation of life in Honduras. In those cases when migrants suffer most at the hands of the disembodied migration system, they express a profound sense of loss at their inability to ever achieve the American Dream. Faith that such a promise exists has not been shattered, even for those whose bodies, lives, or families have been torn asunder.

CHAPTER IV

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN MIGRATION

This chapter focuses on the impact of contemporary migration on the experience of families and communities in Honduras. Because emigration is such a widespread phenomenon, the ‘loss’ of a loved one to migration is a part of daily life. As discussed here, the nature of migration means that this loss can take many forms, from the ‘soft loss’ of a transnational family struggling to maintain ties across vast geographic distance and indeterminate time; the uncertain loss of the family of a *desaparecido*; or the community-wide loss of a large portion of a population and the resulting instability of families and community structures. This chapter begins with the exploration of successful migration stories, and the structural violence which nonetheless creates a profound division between migrants and their communities back home. In this section, I will explore at length the implication migration has for family closeness and the relationship this has with financial security and the future of the family’s children. Next I will explore stories of *desaparecidos* and the impact this has on their families, whether those individuals are eventually recovered or not. Finally, I will use interviews with leadership of two organizations to discuss some of the broad themes of the community implications of migration: the umbrella research and activist perspective of Honduran migration organization FONAMIH and the results of family separation through the eyes of Juventud⁸, an organization that functions as a foster care system for street children. In this section, I argue that structural violence plays a key role in the experiences of the families and communities of migrants: that the dangers created by immigration policy

⁸ This organization’s name has been changed. “*Juventud*” means “Youth.”

and border enforcement strategies have resulted in the long-term separation of families and damage to communities.

Built on Remittances: Families in “Successful” Migration Stories

Family and community separation is an inherent aspect of human migration. To begin my discussion of the impact migration has for those remaining in Honduras, I examine the experiences of several families who have migrant family members in the United States and who are ‘successful’ undocumented migrants: they have jobs and relatively secure housing in the United States, are in contact with their families, and are regularly sending remittances home. For the families of these individuals, there is a delicate balance between missing their family member and enjoying the benefit the remittances bring to the family’s economic security. These families must cope with the long-term separation from their loved one, as well as the fear of deportation; the difficulty of raising children with an absent parent; and the problems of relationships maintained primarily on the transfer of wealth from the migrant to their family. Within this discussion of the problems of ‘successful’ migration are several key themes: the structural ‘push’ factors which encouraged the migration, the fear of deportation leading to psychological strain for the family, and the inability to visit with that family member, including in times of family emergency.

Don Fernando

Don Fernando⁹ is sixty-three years old and lives on a former banana plantation outside of El Progreso. He was born, raised, and educated there, and was employed by the foreign corporation which owned the banana plantation until 1998, when Hurricane Mitch damaged the banana trees and the company razed the crops. Don Fernando was part of a union which struggled for a dignified wage during the 1970's and 1980's. He took pride in the union efforts and dues he paid, and intended to work there until he died. When the company left after Hurricane Mitch, and after the community was torn apart first by the ten-foot flood waters and then by the crisis of unemployment, Don Fernando decided he would not work for another company again in his life. Although he runs a small corner store owned by his daughter, he says, "I do not know how we survive." The answer, which emerged in the course of our interview, is that the family survives because of the support of his son, who lives in the United States.

Two of Don Fernando's sons migrated to the United States. They, like many others, migrated to help their family and to provide a better future. Don Fernando spoke to the problems associated with migration, but his sons' actions fit within his understanding of the nature of family care for one another: "when you look after your children you are also looking after yourself and your future, because then the children will look after you." This expectation of intergenerational care was disrupted by economic and social factors, leading to his sons' migration and slightly improved conditions for the whole family. He explained:

One son sends us some money for a little food. The other has two small children and cannot send money. The reality is that there isn't very much work there and

⁹ Interview conducted on July 23, 2011.

they are both undocumented and that makes things very difficult, very difficult and sometimes their work doesn't pay them. They work and then aren't paid and they are left just like that, with nothing for their work.

This brings up several key themes in the relationships between remittance-sending migrants and their families: that the money sent provides for vital purchases like food; that the money arrives in relatively small amounts; and that the migrant experience is structurally proscribed in a way which impacts the Honduran family. When Don Fernando says that his sons are sometimes not paid, he is referencing a structure which allows employers to withhold wages because undocumented migrants cannot complain to the authorities for fear of deportation (Bacon 2008, Coleman 2007). Because of the nature of the relationship between the migrant and his or her family members, this common "small-scale" injustice impacts the food and housing security of families in Honduras, who rely on the regular receipt of remittances for conducting their normal lives.

Don Fernando also expressed a concern for the well-being and security of migrants in general. He said, "The life of a migrant is more difficult [than here in Honduras] because if someone doesn't have documents, then you cannot enforce your rights and then in the United States [indistinct] people's rights are violated all the time [...] They say if you are a migrant and you don't have papers then you have no right to anything." This concern for the rights of migrants is tied to Don Fernando's concern for his children, and the hardships and injustices they have faced while living in the United States. Beyond this personal concern, however, is a critique of the policies surrounding migration in the United States, which do not adequately protect undocumented individuals from unscrupulous practices, and which frequently punish the victims of

abuse with deportation (Bacon 2008, Coleman 2007). When asked what he thought about migration in Honduras, Don Fernando said, “I would give advice to migrants to think carefully about what you are doing and about the risks you are taking. [...] Think about what you will lose. Because it is difficult, difficult, difficult.” However, Don Fernando also talked about the difficulty of life in Honduras—the scarcity of jobs and the rising price of daily nutrition. When asked what he envisions for the future, Don Fernando said, “I will spend the rest of my life calmly, without many worries. My only worry is that I won’t have food.” Don Fernando is relying on a cultural assumption that children will take care of their parents after a certain age, meaning that he can relax and retire now that he is over sixty years old. However, this lifestyle is incumbent on the continued remittance flows from his son, which allow for small investments in the corner store, and for the consistent source of money for food, sent from a son he has not seen in almost ten years.

*Marta*¹⁰

Marta’s story is one of the classic breadwinning husband sending money to support the family back home. Marta is thirty-six years old, has four children, and receives about \$300 every month from her husband, who left eight years ago for the United States. In addition to economic necessity, Marta’s husband was forced to migrate due to a personal conflict with someone high-up in a local gang, which endangered his life and forced him to flee to the United States. However, after arriving in the United States and finding work in construction in Miami, he has helped his wife over time to

¹⁰ Interview conducted July 20, 2011

build a comfortably middle-class house, and their conversations about his returning to Honduras often involve a discussion of the ongoing expenses and the need to save money. In addition to building the house, the remittances her husband sends helps to pay for the family's food, the water and electricity, and the children's education. Marta also works as a cashier in a minimum wage job, which supplies a steady economic safety net, as well as providing for transportation and food during those weeks when her husband does not have a job. Marta discussed the logistics of having a transnational family, including the tension and difficulty of family ties across national borders.

The nature of a transnational marriage and parenting relationship is the balance between hope and fear. Marta explained, "The hope is that he will come home. [...] But we need to have savings for the house, and to know that we will be more or less stable." She described this as an ongoing conversation, in which economic and family pressures were weighed against one another in planning for the future. Marta cited the low minimum wage as a consistent pressure: that her job would not pay for the food for the family, much less for the children's education and transportation needs. This tension also emerged when asked about their fear of his being deported: "He has to be watching all the time, and he could end up here with nothing, and there are still problems with people here. We have a lot of worries for the deportation. Even though then it would mean being with him again." For Marta's family, deportation is a mixed fear: the familial longing to be with a loved one mixed with the ongoing economic and social pressures which resulted in his decision to migrate.

Marta is very critical of the United States' immigration policy as it currently exists, as a result of the tensions she has personally experienced. She said, "In my

opinion, there should be a permit to have papers and to be able to go. ... [migrants] should be able to go and come back, because many do want to come back. And there should be a good option. There are some permits, but it is only for the high class.” Here, Marta identifies the structural injustice inherent in current policies in what she sees as a class-based visa system the United States, which privileges skilled migrants and highly-educated individuals to facilitate their legal residence in the United States. Marta continued “That is part of injustice, that the people of the lower class don’t have access, that they won’t give them permits. The reality is that if people could wait their turn and know they would have a dignified chance to go and work and build a little house or help with a family business, that is their motivation but there is not the opportunity.” This structural inequality was often a subject of casual conversations during my time in Central America. They often held up their understanding of sympathetic motivations for migration as a critique against the US immigration policy which criminalizes migrants seeking the American Dream. The division between immigrants with documents and those without is partially this question of fear and family division: those with documents are often more financially secure, and thereby have the resources and legal status to visit family members, have job security, and not worry about deportation and human rights issues surrounding immigration status. Differential mobility between classes is fundamentally part of structural inequality and oppression of the lower classes, and is part of this argument of structural violence in relation to human migration.

A final crucial element of Marta’s experience is in the separation of families. This will be explored in greater length in the subsequent section, but it is important to note the impact on spouses and children even when migration is ‘successful.’ Marta

explained, “it is very difficult. For example in his case [indicates her son] when he talks to him they talk about the money [my husband] sends, but the relation of a father and son, they don’t have that [...] The older daughter remembers him because she was seven, but it is still difficult because as an adolescent you need a father’s presence.” Marta introduces a key element of transnational parenting: that because of distance and mitigating structures, the primary expression of the relationship between children and their migrant parent is in the form of remittances, rather than personal or emotional attachment (Nazario 2006, Sassen 2000, Schmalzbauer 2004, Sladkova 2007). This dynamic of economics as opposed to family ties also impacts Marta’s marriage: “It is difficult for me as well. To be support, as a wife and a support. The relationship with a couple isn’t just about money earned, it’s also about supporting each other. And a big part of that is being a support, like being a father. The remittances are the major support he can give.” Marta, therefore, lives in the role of offering all parental support for the developmental and emotional needs of her children, as well as receiving most spousal support either through financial contributions or through text message communication, which happens at least twice a day to check in. However, what is articulated here is a concern for the idea of ‘support’ being a necessarily broad theme, beyond simply wishing someone ‘good night’ over text and getting remittances sent on time. Marta was sympathetic to the difficulty of her husband’s life in the United States, and in the loss he has suffered in not being present for the children’s youth.

This dynamic contributes to their decisions about his long-term residence in the United States as well. When asked if her husband has plans to return, Marta told me “That’s something we think about all the time. For example, last year he wanted to, but

we reflected on it and thought ‘no, don’t come it will be hard and you will be stressed as well—what if the children need something and say ‘papi I need something for school’ and he wouldn’t have it.’” For this family, financial pressures are paramount in decision-making and in cementing the relationship of this father with his wife and children. In this community, the reality of economic migration and absent fathers is a common theme: Marta reported that every home on her street is supported by a migrant in the United States. Thus, Marta’s family and community is defined by emigration and the balance between economic gain and familial loss as remittances build homes, support families, and yet maintain geographic distance in the transnational family.

Migration and Family Separation

Marta and Don Fernando’s families represent the separation of families when the migration experience is smooth, the migrant is relatively stable, and the family unit remaining in Honduras is relatively intact and secure. Marta’s experience is the best-case-scenario for the family of an undocumented migrant: they have built a comfortable and secure home, are educating their children, are in regular and close contact, and discuss plans for his eventual return. However, even in this ‘successful’ migration story, issues of inequalities and dangers are present. In the following section, I address examples of migration that is not so successful, resulting in family disintegration and community destabilization. Here I will describe examples of the impact of migration in broken families from the perspective of children and parents of migrants.

*Julia and Marcela*¹¹

Julia is nineteen and Marcela is fourteen. Their father left nearly fifteen years ago, before Marcela was born. Their mother left nine years ago, leaving the girls with their grandmother, who raised them alongside many other members of the extended family and neighborhood children. When Julia and Marcela's mother left, their parents' relationship dissolved and they are no longer in regular contact with their father.

Although they receive remittances from their mother, they both spoke to the difficulty of being raised without the support of either parent, and the pain of a 'broken home' due to migration. Their mother sends approximately \$100 every fifteen days when she is working, but she does not always have a job. They talk with their mother on a daily basis, but are also coping with their mother having a new husband in Houston, and a son who they have never met. While acknowledging the work their mother has undertaken to support them, both girls wish frequently for a 'normal,' two-parent family, and to be returned to life with their mother.

Julia and Marcela were clear about the social dangers of growing up with migrant parents, and the difficulty of life without consistent parental support. Marcela said, "It is difficult for us to have them so far away. We were left here and it is difficult because we were left here without a father or a mother and sometimes we think about going to them, because we miss our mother. [...] There are many people who have one parent gone, but we are left here without a father or a mother." Marcela's statement about being "left" in Honduras is consistent with many children's experience, in which a member of the extended family or even a neighbor is left in charge of the children (Nazario 2006, Pessar

¹¹ Interview conducted July 22, 2011

2005, Sassen 2000, Schmalzbauer 2004, Sladkova 2007). Despite the contact they maintain with their mother via text messages and phone calls, they use the word “left” several times, and describe this with a strong sense of loss and abandonment.

Julia continued the conversation about the difficulty of living with migrant parents by describing the potential consequences for families, and the problems she has witnessed with her peers:

For many families when the children don't have their parents there it is very difficult and they lose their way. Without the advice of their father and mother, young people join gangs and have other problems. Our [female] cousin had a problem like that. [...] That won't happen to us, though. [indistinct] That's why we stay in contact like we do. We are always talking, and we live here with our grandmother, and she helps us.

Gangs are a prevalent problem in Honduras, and the concern Julia raises here is relevant for young people, even those who are not contending with absent parents. Although these girls express a confidence and a set of coping mechanisms, they express an awareness of the dangers they face as a consequence of the absence of parental support and supervision. Marcela spoke to the smaller-scale need for emotional support, saying, “it is a very difficult thing that with them far away and something sad happens they are not here.” Marcela also addressed the impact this has had on her schooling, saying, “because really it changes the way you think, the calm space to think. And then I kept thinking about seeing her, about talking with her.” Some of these impacts will be discussed at greater length below, but it is key here that Marcela and Julia are both intimately aware of the difference their parents' migration has made for their young lives and their development to this point. From emotional support to the lessons of morality and acceptable social behavior, these two young women have a clear idea of the lessons

which should be imparted by parents, and whose absence was placing them at greater risk academically, behaviorally, and developmentally.

Julia cites the support from their grandmother as a key piece of their success in not joining gangs or having ‘other problems,’ but they also cited the struggles their grandmother has faced to raise them and other members of their extended family. In the time that Julia and Marcela have lived with her, there were a total of twelve other children who lived full-time in the three-bedroom house, although usually there were only five or six children in the house at any given time. Julia explained, “My grandmother has five children in the United States, and only one helps her. Only one of them. He sends money for her. If the others send money it’s only a little bit and not frequently.” My interview with their grandmother is included below, but she has raised multiple grandchildren, as well as taking in neighbors’ children. Although Julia and Marcela had support from their mother and the emotional leadership from their grandmother, they were not raised in a state of economic or family stability. Central American culture provides a great deal more latitude for this adoption of extended family, and this is increasingly frequent in cases of migration, but this level of absent parents indicates an extreme degree of parenting by an accommodating older woman, particularly in light of the scarcity of her economic resources.

In addition to the potential risks of falling into dangerous behaviors as a young person, Julia also shared the pain of a transnational family who is not together to celebrate the milestones of life. Julia has an eighteen-month-old daughter, whom her mother has never seen. Julia said, “it was very sad during that time. That is a time when you want your mother, when you want advice from her. And now she is a grandmother,

and it was sad to not have a mother or a father at that time. And I need her for advice.” Julia did not elaborate on this experience, although she indicated that her grandmother now has to provide a great deal of childcare and parenting advice. Since Julia was parented in the context of multiple cousins and other children around, she knows how to take care of a child, but after our interview ended she expressed additional concern about the love of a mother for a child, and wanting to be there for her daughter. The pain she expressed was augmented by her lack of knowledge if her mother would return any time in the near future, despite many discussions of when and if she might come home. Julia expressed several times sentiments such as “Because now we have spent nine years without her, and without her here.” This pain was coupled with the knowledge that their mother has a new relationship and new family in the United States, including “a brother we have never met.” The familial ties are stretched in this case past distance alone, but through an absence of the parental figure for the milestones of life, and the existence of family members who have never met each other, and might never meet.

Migration of parents also serves to uproot and encourage migration for children, in a process of chain migration (see my interview with Andre, Nazario 2006). When asked if they had ever thought about going to the United States to join their mother, both women immediately answered, “yes.” Julia elaborated, saying “I thought about going, but not now. Now I want her to come back.” However, she had a story of planning a trip to the United States two years previously, which had fallen through due to unknown complications: “I was devastated because I was there thinking about seeing my mother and making plans. But then she told me I couldn’t go and she didn’t have a good reason why, just that I couldn’t go, and I was so sad.” Julia expressed fear of the journey and the

risks faced by women migrants, and was clear in her current position that it was better and safer for them to stay in Honduras and hope that their mother would return. However, Marcela still hoped to join their mother. “My mother is trying to get me papers, and if I get papers I will go. I am too afraid to go with a coyote because they fool people, or they rape girls or they leave them on the trail. [...] My grandfather was trying to get papers for my mother, but then he died and she didn’t get papers.” Here, this fourteen-year-old girl expresses many of the dangers and injustices of systems and policies in contemporary migration. She explained, “For me a better future would be to be there with my parents, with my mother. The best thing would be to have a mother or father here with me. Because really I don’t know them, and I can barely remember my mother but I miss her.” In response to this statement from her younger sister, Julia said with some force that “It would be better for her to return home and we can continue forward as a family with her. She needs to be here with us.” These statements express a sense of what makes a family, and makes a claim for their mother’s true home as still being in Honduras with them.

For these two young women, the nature of contemporary immigration has left them behind without the family support and presence they desire. The support they receive from their mother is offset by the need for her emotional support and parental guidance, and is only augmented by their father’s absence from their lives. While families are reconfigured in many ways in the modern world, and divorce, remarriage, and shifts in the members of a ‘nuclear’ family are not held constant, the experiences of Julia and Marcela are mediated by the nature of international borders and laws which have perpetuated the loss of their parents. Their parents’ decisions to leave exist within

an economic reality that fosters migration. And, as she expressed to her sister, Julia is concerned about the potential that Marcela will also choose to leave Honduras in search of their family. These young women are positioned within structural forces which they cannot control, and which interact with their happiness and future success in the world.

*Rosa*¹²

Rosa is Julia and Marcela's grandmother. She is 63 years old, the mother of nine (plus one adopted), although two children have died. She has raised many children in addition to her own: seven live with her currently, consisting of a mix of grandchildren and great-grandchildren from 18 months to 19 years old. Currently she has five sons living in Houston, and her stories and opinions offer insight into the challenges of raising this large family, living on remittances, and the pains of migration for those left behind. She also has the story of being the mother of a *desaparecida*: her daughter, Karla, who was lost for five years in southern Mexico, and with whom she was reunited in 2000. Rosa's story is a powerful one because of the degree of family commitment and struggle she has seen in her life, and the nature of her experiences with family migration.

Rosa's daughter Karla went north to try to get to the United States in 1995, to join her brothers in Houston. She, like many migrants, called her mother to let her know when she crossed the southern border of Mexico, and began her time as an undocumented migrant in Mexico. Rosa was reluctant to discuss the details of Karla's disappearance, saying only:

She stayed in Tapachula [a city in southern Mexico], working in Tapachula. In 2000 I went to look for her. It had been 5 years since I knew anything of her, 5

¹² Interview conducted July 22, 2011

years *desaparecida*. In 2000 I received a letter from her. In 2000 I went in search of her. And then in 2002 I was with her for four months, and we were talking and calling on the phone and I can't describe my happiness to know she was alive.

Although these details are not clear, many women who disappear do so because of falling into prostitution, which can lead to disappearance due to shame and an unwillingness to share these experiences with their families. The 'search' Rosa refers to is through COFAMIPRO, the organization for migrants and their families in the El Progreso area of Honduras. She described the support she received from the group, and the encouragement to continue hoping that she would see her daughter again. In those years that Karla was *desaparecida*, Rosa says that she "had already buried her in my heart." Rosa describes her daughter's reappearance as a miracle, and wept while describing it. Despite being reconnected with the family, Karla had made a life and family in Tapachula and did not return to live in Honduras. She became sick with meningitis and died in 2004. Rosa's discussion of Karla's story was brief because of her continuing grief, and anxiety regarding the future of her family in relation to migration.

Rosa spoke movingly about the impact of migration on her family, and on Honduran families in general.

Yes, [migration] causes a great separation of families. Because look, when the father went, his wife was left with three children and was pregnant. That was very hard, to help with those three little girls. And then when the mother left, she left those three girls with me. She left and left me here with this huge task. And I am old. ... So yes, because of migration there is a lot of family disintegration, and many young people joining gangs. Their parents send money to cover some expenses and think that's enough. And they miss their mothers and they miss their fathers and what they have is money that they send to me. That's all they get. [indistinct] Yes, it is hard, migration is a difficult thing when parents leave. [...] Sometimes children are left with older siblings or with grandparents, but sometimes no one is taking care of them. No one is giving them the love, the tenderness they need. [...] It is difficult, but I

raise them with a lot of tenderness. I love my grandchildren so much and give them a lot of love.

I just pray to God that I don't die before my children come home. Because we are all close to death... and there are so many ways to have accidents and die and with my children so far away, it is my task to make sure my grandchildren are OK. And I don't know what would happen if something happens to me. And if my children are deported then at least they would be returned to me.

This is a rich text: the voice of a woman who has thought extensively about the issues of migration and the struggles of supporting her family. Rosa expresses a similar fear of gangs and family disintegration, but from the perspective of a family authority figure left behind to do the best she can to raise an enormous number of children. She is critical of those who leave children to be cared for by family or neighbors who do not provide adequate care and tenderness (including a tension between compassion and criticism for the actions of her own migrant children). Rosa here outlines the struggles of a life which depends on an enormous degree of luck and familial duty, including her continued good health and the limited but ongoing support received as remittances from her children. She spoke of the practicalities of raising children without bitterness, but with a significant fear of both her own mortality and that of her children abroad. As she concludes here, deportation for her children would at least return them to Honduras and to their family.

Rosa described these remittances in greater detail. She said, "they [remittances] are not regular. They come every two months, or only when someone is sick or when I need to buy something, then they will send me something." Because of these remittances, she was able to build a degree of security for herself and her family, including her home on the outskirts of town: "Yes, thank God with the money they gave me I was able to put together this house. And every once in a while they send money for

food.” The description she gives of remittance patterns is consistent with national trends, which indicate that migrants generally give the most money soon after arriving in the United States, once they have established steady employment, are consistent remitters to their families in Honduras. However, as Rosa said, “they have many obligations also.” Once migrants are established in the United States, they often focus increasingly on their lives and (sometimes) establishing new families and communities there. Rosa explained that she is more likely to receive remittance money for specific needs or projects: “When I need something, when my granddaughter was pregnant, when I need medicine, then they help me.”

Rosa’s description of her attitude toward her children was inconsistent, indicating ambivalence toward the benefits and struggles created through their migration. She stated several times that life in the United States is very difficult for someone without documents, and that her children work hard. However, she was also critical, and expressive of her own needs and the needs of the children she is raising: “It is very hard. Right now I walk around with my heart in my hand, hoping that someone will send me a bit of remittances, just a little bit. They told me they would, they promise. [...] I worry that the children will go hungry, that there won’t be enough food for my grandchildren, and their parents don’t always help or send money.” Rosa expresses her relationship to her migrant children as one of broken promises, in which she has been left with the enormous responsibility of raising grandchildren and great-grandchildren without the support she needs and beyond the energy and comfort of child-raising years. This conflict between love of her absent children (especially in light of Karla’s death in Mexico) and the love and material needs of the children residing in her home was

consistent throughout the interview, and is a strong critique of the injustices suffered by migrants.

Rosa describes the ongoing separation from her children as a daily emotional burden. Like Julia and Marcela, Rosa also admits to thinking about migrating herself: “Even I think about going. I know I probably wouldn’t make it, I would die in the journey and I can’t even run.” Rosa relies on a kind of dark humor here, but she is also serious about her desire to migrate to see her children again: “I have been trying to find some way of getting an American visa, so that I could go and even just spend one week there with my children. [...] This dream almost makes me cry from happiness, this idea of being there with them.” She spoke of deportation as the mixed blessing consistent with other families of migrants: that it would mean both an end to the financial security offered by remittances (limited in this case) and in the chance to reunite as a family. Rosa reported, “I tell them ‘Help me put together the house more, in case you are deported. Help me get things prepared, so there is a place for you.’” Because Rosa cannot herself travel to the United States, she has thrown her energy into the practical advantages she can provide for her family members, both in the raising of their children and in efforts to build a secure home for them in Honduras. She criticized US deportation policies, and the constraints placed on circular migration for the damage this does to families: “It is a prison to worry this way always. ... They should have a protection, and the ability to return to see their families. I want my children to come here to visit me here, to see me. They should have the right to come back and see their family here.” This idea of the fear being a prison offers a rich critique of the impact of structural violence for oppressed

communities. For Rosa, the laws which restrict her mobility and which enforce fear and separation to her families are absolutely a question of human rights and social justice.

The story of separated families shifts with the death of a family member. Rosa stated many times that she is afraid to hear bad news from her children, or to suffer an accident herself. She said, “It makes me so sad and so afraid that I will receive bad news about one of my children. I pray to God that I will not hear bad news but I know it could happen at any moment. It could happen in so many ways.” As she described in the first long quote about family separation, she could die at any time, without a clear path for the safety and care of the children she is raising. Rosa spoke of this fear in the abstract until nearly 45 minutes into our interview, at which point she began weeping again, and told me “Perhaps, some day, I will get to see my children again. The truth is that I am sick. That I am very sick and I haven’t told them, and haven’t said anything to my children. I haven’t told them. But I want to see them so badly. Just two days, I pray to God for just two days with them there, or to have them here.” Rosa’s fears, therefore, are not the abstract concerns of an elderly woman facing her own mortality in a stressful situation. For her, the desire to see her children again is the immediate concern of a family member who is facing illness and uncertainty, and the desire to be with family at the end of life. The decision to keep her illness secret from her children was based both on a lack of adequate information and for fear of the decision she would be forcing them to make: the choice between remaining in the United States and the potentially final decision to return to Honduras to see her again. The structural impediments to circular migrations, which Rosa had already referenced, were keeping her from asking her children to come home, or even from informing them of her medical condition. She repeated her sense of

powerlessness and fear: “I am afraid. I am very afraid. I am afraid that I will die without seeing them again.”

Rosa’s story is one of extreme vulnerability and struggle as a result of the structures which first encourage migration and then damage the lives of migrants and their families. Rosa’s experience with the separation of families is a case of loss and anxiety on every level: as a community member witnessing the breakdown of neighborhood families; as a mother coping with the double loss of a daughter, first to disappearance and then to death; as a mother of migrants, with the complexities of anxiety for their wellbeing and the pressures of economic dependencies; and as the caretaker of multiple generations of children left to her care. Rosa is not unique in Honduras, either in her story or in her interpretation of her situation as part of a larger structure of social, political, and economic interactions. She describes herself as occupying a “prison of fear” in reference to the lives and safety of her children, who interact daily with the policies of US immigration enforcement and the uncertainties of life as a migrant. This image is a powerful one in understanding the impact of structural violence on the lives of Hondurans: that the common people are controlled by powerful forces outside themselves but deeply relevant to their lives. Rosa’s children were mobilized and motivated to leave their home and family for economic necessity. Then the bureaucracy of immigration and the grounded dangers of the journey have immobilized this family who desperately desire reunification and the security of a geographically unified family. As Julia, Marcela, and Rosa’s stories illustrate, the micro scale of the separation of families is a powerful force for the lives of those left behind.

An Organizational Perspective on Children of Migrants

Not all children of migrant parents are so successful as Julia and Marcela. Despite their poverty and the lack of parental influence, these two young women were raised by a caring family member, and have thereby avoided some of the worst dangers and social ills facing young people in Honduran society. Many young people are not so lucky, including hundreds who end up joining gangs, become homeless, or become addicted to drugs. For this broader perspective on the risks faced by the children of migrants in Honduras, I spoke with one of the leaders of the Honduran child welfare agency Juventud. This is a community organization which provides homes, education, and support for children from broken homes in the El Progreso area. The nearly 100 male children who live at Juventud are court-mandated, and removed from situations of physical and emotional abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, and abandonment by one or both parents. They are seven to nineteen years of age, and approximately twenty percent are the children of migrant parents.

This organization is intimately concerned with the worst results of family separation through migration. As described by Juventud leader Rafael, these children do not have the support or resources to be successful or safe in their communities. Some children were left with grandparents or neighbors, who either abandoned or lost control of the children over a period of time. He described many of the boys as having severe behavioral problems and suffering mental health issues, often exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse. Even with the support of Juventud, the overall efficacy rate for their clients' successful entry into the community with job retention is around 15-20%. He told me, "These children do not have opportunities. They are capable, but come to

nothing.” He described these children as being victims of the many risks of youth, chief among them the inability to make informed decisions and to be in control of your life. As he said, these are children from “bad families,” but are capable of achieving some better situation if it weren’t for the circumstances.

Rafael sees the worst case-scenarios that arise when parents migrate to the United States. He spoke at length of the unhelpful attitude surrounding parenting through monetary support, and that many children did not have the experience of parental love or support except through receiving American goods and American cultural items, such as footballs. He said that “it is worse if they have contact” with their migrant parents because of the ambiguity of that relationship, and the impermanence of that contact. He also spoke powerfully about the nature of migration and of parenting from afar:

“Migrants lose their family, and then what do they gain? The only gain is for themselves, through money. And that means that they are irresponsible.” This attitude condemning migrants certainly arises from Rafael’s role as the caretaker of abandoned children, without the balancing perspective of those children who are left in the care of responsible family members and who do benefit from the financial support of a migrant parent. However, this perspective is relevant in highlighting the question of push factors in migration: if the decision is made on the basis of what is best for a family, then who makes that decision? What criteria are used to determine if parenting through example or through remittances will be the best course of action?

Obviously the cases of Juventud are examples of what happens when the system is at its most broken. These children are truly abandoned, and not merely left behind for a short time. In one sense, they are worse off than orphans because they cannot be sure

of their status or their future. This sense of teasing out migrants' intentions when measured against the pain in their children's lives is a key distinction in addressing migrant decisions and the repercussions. And, again these are questions of social justice and equality. Rafael tells us that there is not the political will to support children in Honduras, nor the resources for their parents to make the decision to comfortably stay. And so children are left behind, and the risk of having a parent disappear, either to the journey as a desaparecido, or through the transnational abandonment for those children, result in this question: what do migrants gain?

Migration as viewed by a Honduran advocacy organization

FONAMIH's work with migration takes a much broader view for the research and advocacy for the rights of migrants throughout Honduras, much of which deals specifically with questions of the Honduran community and community development. FONAMIH is "a space of coordination and analysis [which links] civil and private organizations in collaboration and coordination with local people, government agencies, and non-governmental agencies in relationship with the phenomenon of migration" (FONAMIH 2011). Their General Objective specifies: "To promote respect and the defense of the Human Rights of the migrant population and their families, on the part of the Government of Honduras and society in general" (2011). For this portion of my analysis, I will be drawing on FONAMIH's work with community members and the specific observations made by one of their leaders, Yolany¹³, on the impacts of migration on Honduran families and community.

¹³ Quotes from group presentations and workshops June 30 and July 10, 2011

Yolany was clear that migration is essentially a structural issue, and one which creates massive disempowerment for poor people in Honduras. Migration is ubiquitous for Hondurans, and is understood to be fundamentally tied to structures of governance and economics. When speaking to a group of family members of migrants, she said, “Migration is more universal than Coca-Cola¹⁴”. This statement drew some laughter as well as discussion of the nature of international investment and the displacement of individuals. The critique is one in keeping with a view of globalization which allows for the free movement of goods and culture (i.e. the dissemination of US products and lifestyle values) but not the free movement of people. She specifically challenged the changing consumerist culture in Honduras, saying to a group, “If I put on Nikes, I think I am a poor person, improving myself. But it’s not that way. You are a tool of the United States and of consumerism.” This question of consumerism and identity politics is tied with the question of human rights and the influence migration has in Honduras: “to migrate or not to migrate is a human right. But now it is not an option: people have to migrate.” When asked why there is so much migration, she replied “it is not worth it because of the loss of your family, the uncertainty, the poverty living there, and the racism migrants confront.” From her position in the organization, she was able to list the risks illustrated by the interviews earlier in this chapter. She draws the same conclusion as many of my interviewees: “but they [the migrants] also can’t stay here.” One of the clear critiques Yolany offered the discussion of emigration to the United States was this trap individuals and families encounter, in which the risks are clearly known and the

¹⁴ This is an ironic statement: in Honduras Coke and Pepsi are present both as products and as brands advertised on billboards and on the sides of corner stores and houses. So Coca-Cola is omni-present, both as product and as corporate symbolism.

consequences are dire, but there is a sense of an overwhelming lack of choice for many Hondurans.

A key critique of migration in the context of families and communities is Yolany's perspective on the nature and implications of remittances from migrants. Because remittances do hold such a significant portion of the Honduran GDP (approximately 25%), the government works to support the interests of migrants and maintain the flow of income to the Honduran communities and State. Some scholarship even points to remittances as serving as a kind of replacement for social welfare or state infrastructure, as migrants from a specific community often band together to build parks, public buildings, or support local businesses (Castles and Miller 2009). As illustrated by Marta's story of 'successful' transnational parenting, remittances can mean a family's ability to live in a comfortable and secure household. However, Yolany provides an element of critique within this system of remittances and the Honduran community: remittances are complicated as they often mean that the family becomes dependent and stops working. What then? What does this mean here, and for the migrant?" This question leads back to the discussion of family breakdown and the nature of a transnational parenting arrangement, in which a migrant's love of family is primarily communicated through the money sent home, resulting in social strain and additional pressure to adequately provide for the family's needs.

Although Yolany's position is that of the larger structural observer, it is also important to note that she is speaking as a Honduran, as the family member of several migrants in the United States, and as someone who will reluctantly admit to her own desire to go to the United States, if only she could do so legally. FONAMIH's position is

a delicate one as it works to spur government action to improve conditions in Honduras, and to provide additional services to those most impacted by immigration. In this vein, the organizers walk a difficult line between calling out structures of injustice while also maintaining good relationships with government forces and potential sources of future funding. As they work to advocate for “retention, education, regulation, and recuperation” of migrants, they are calling for a transformation in Honduran society and the creation of a stable and just society. Yolany speaks of the ‘lack of choice’ many migrants face, and the nature of semi-forced migration due to economic necessity. These are questions of social justice, and questions of the nature of the Honduran community. When Yolany told me, “if I could go legally, I would,” she is speaking in concert with a huge swath of Honduran society: even those working for social change are tempted by the opportunities and lifestyle in the United States, in opposition to the oppression and insecurity of home.

Summary

As Juana suggests above, the question of the family and community experience of Central American migration to the United States is inherently linked with injustice. The interrelations between social inequalities and structural violence persist in ways which make certain populations particularly vulnerable, and which foster opportunities for violence and corruption. Juana’s cautious condemnation of government officials as linked to prostitution can be expanded and linked with Don Fernando’s experience of poverty as linked with international corporate farming, or Rosa’s fear that her children

will not be able to return in the case of her illness or death. The families who remain in Honduras, and who rely on their migrant relatives for remittances, are part of a structure which begins in poverty and results in the kind of powerlessness expressed by continued uncertainty and ‘prisons of fear’ in relation to their loved ones’ well-being and to their own futures.

This section has explored the voices of those who do not choose to migrate. As several interviewees stated, these individuals are well acquainted with the dangers of the journey and the pressures of life as undocumented immigrants in the United States. It is also clear from these interviews that family separation and transnational parenting are understood as key factors in many social problems in Honduras, including youth violence, drug abuse, and low educational achievement. Understanding the dangers and struggles of migrant life serves as something of a deterrent for the family members I interviewed, but many reported a desire to migrate, and had even pursued concrete plans for future lives in the United States. They cite the desire of children to reunite with migrant parents, and the ongoing desperation of low wages and job scarcity as compelling reasons for following their fellow migrants *al norte*.

The voices of these community members speak to the challenges and vulnerabilities of the families of Honduran migrants. Structural violence and human rights violations that undermine the security of migrants also have tremendous impact on the economic, social, psychological, and cultural wellbeing of Hondurans. Families and communities consistently call for a mechanism through which they might be reunited with their family members, and for reforms which will decrease the need for continued migration. As Rafael reported, “migration leads to the separation of families.” It also

leads to chain migration as the effects of absent parents and economic insecurity create an expanding cultural expectation that the United States is a solution, even through the desperation of a dangerous journey. It is conceivable that illness or emergency could disrupt the delicate balance for Rosa's family, and that Julia or Mercedes will be forced to make the difficult decision to follow a mother whose presence they can hardly remember. It is possible that Don Fernando's remittance-sending son would be deported, creating disaster not only for the security of the family in Honduras, but destabilizing the his family living in the United States. If Marta's husband is deported, she can celebrate the reunification of her close family, but would live in fear of violent reprisal from the local gang, as well as suddenly being forced to support a large family on inadequate minimum wage. Marta offers the 'success story' of migration in this section: that of rising economic security and family well-being based on the remittances of her migrant husband. Yet all that hangs in such delicate balance and under threat, as deportation would immediately send the family spiraling into lower-class standing with little hope of maintaining their current standard of living. These family stories illustrate the balance of need and opportunity facing Hondurans in the current context of social inequality and structural violence. Already vulnerable through lack of education, secure housing, jobs, healthcare, parental guidance, and protection against gang violence, these families face the additional hazards related to the migrant journey and immigrant experiences in the United States.

CHAPTER V

RE-IMAGINING THE FUTURE

As evidenced in the preceding chapters, the people of Honduras live daily with migration, its causes, and its impacts. As participants in an economy and society which encourages so many to leave their homes and communities to seek opportunity elsewhere, Hondurans witness changes in society and opportunity from the most intimate and grounded level. This brief final chapter addresses their views on their country's future and the potential mechanisms for addressing structural violence in Honduras, on the migrant trail, and in relation to migrants living in the United States. These interviews speak to the deep-seated nature of inequality and oppression, naming specific examples of structural violence and pointing to detailed concerns for the future. The nature of structural violence is such that these voices are not heard in the construction of the international contexts in which they live their lives and make their decisions. These Hondurans were disenfranchised and disillusioned by the coup of President Manuel Zelaya, and were not represented in the decisions to initiate CAFTA, build *maquila* factories, or figure as a discursive threat to US national identity. The inequalities which circumscribe their lives also limit the forum for discussion of their needs and opinions. By including their perspectives in my thesis, my intention is to provide space for these voices in opposition to structural violence. In this final section, I explore Hondurans' perspectives regarding the future of Honduras, the need for human rights on the migrant journey, and questions of immigration reform for those living as undocumented residents of the United States.

The Future of Honduras

As part of my interviews, I asked the respondents if they had hope for their futures and for the future of their country. In addition to the voices of my formal interviewees, this was a question I routinely asked the Hondurans I encountered on buses and in markets, and it was a subject which many people were quick to offer their perspectives. In all but a very few cases, they responded that they saw no hope. Those few who did answer with hope cited a faith in ‘the goodness of God’ to help guide them and their families into a better future. When addressing the specifics of life in Honduras and the future of migration in the country, all those with whom I came into contact offered a sense that life was only getting worse: that the prices of food and services were rising while wages were stagnant and unemployment was rising; that education did not help young people find jobs; that the government was corrupt; and that inequality was entrenched and unlikely to change. Paulo said, “The situation of this country is very bad.” Don Fernando echoed this simple critique, saying, “Here there is no hope that things will get better. Things will continue to get worse.” Paulo’s concluding remarks in his interview went even further: when asked ‘will things get better,’ he replied “Nah! There’s no way this country is getting better. No way. Well, for a few things are always OK. But that’s the people at the top. There is no hope for the poor.”

Pessimism in the face of current economic, political, and social conditions is reasonable, and it remains to be seen whether conditions will improve in the face of global economic crises in economies, food security, climate change, etc. (Hardoy and Pandiella 2009, Robles and Torero 2010). This hopelessness in the face of their country’s future is particularly striking from individuals like Don Fernando, with his

history of activism in a labor union and his stated desire to live out a simple life. This hopelessness is linked with migration as individuals chose to migrate to a place of greater hope in both reality and in discourse: the American Dream is touted as a source of hope for poor people who desire real work. For Hondurans who chose not to migrate, they are continuing in an environment of widespread structural disadvantage and resulting pessimism.

Addressing push factors

Beyond this sense of hopelessness, interviewees had many specific insights to the reasons for migration, and the responsibility of those in power to foster new opportunities to encourage potential migrants to stay. Marta offered a pointed and simple solution to the problems of migration: “I would want a law that would change the situation here in Honduras. That people could stay here in Honduras. [Indistinct] to help the poor people here, and the poor communities. Really that is the first thing they should do. ... A law of protection for Honduras, so that they people do not go. That is what will stop them, not a wall.” This statement sums up the essential flaw in the nature of the immigration debate. As Marta points out, the focus of the United States is consistently on a wall: on a structure which will end immigration through a single, simple solution. The wall is a solution from above: from the institutions which create structural violence. Marta’s critique addresses the issue from the on-the-ground perspective of those living out the push factors of poverty and insecurity. As suggested here, Marta sees this reality as the partial responsibility of the government, and calls for an effort to address the suffering of poor communities, and security for Honduran families.

Paulo also offered strong and sustained critique of the system as it exists in relation to poverty and insecurity. He said, “[the government] should increase the people’s salary. Because the people, at least the majority, leave because they earn so little, and they don’t earn enough to sustain their family. So it is better for them if they migrate even a long way for sources of work. Here there are so many people who do not have work.” In this statement, Paulo offers direct critique that poverty is the driving force of migration, and that the government is responsible for the suffering of its citizens.

Roberto shared a similar opinion that the government does not do enough to ensure the well-being of its citizens. He said:

The government does not want to help the people. It should be that there is work for everyone—for all young people so they do not choose to migrate [...] It would be good to have sources of money and work, but there are none. Also there are unjust laws. Electricity is very expensive. Water is very expensive. It isn’t worth much to go to the hospital for medicine because there isn’t medicine or a way to pay for it. Food is very expensive. There should be laws that keep things from being this way.

Here is a specific critique that the government is not only responsible for poverty, but is indifferent to the suffering of the people. Roberto voices dissatisfaction with the support for the functioning of daily life: food, electricity, medicine, and running water. He references ‘unjust laws’ in a vague way, but goes on with specific complaints of the high cost of living and low wages, which are fundamentally part of structured inequality and vulnerability. Roberto describes this list as the foundations for many migrants’ decisions to go to the United States: that it is a question of jobs and access to resources which forces the economic decision to migrate.

Don Fernando focused his critique on the disinterest and corruption of the government. He said, “The people want change. But the government, no. [...] The way

the government controls things, the people can do nothing. And the poor people, they are dying of cold, of hunger, there aren't homes, there aren't medications. And the government doesn't care that the people continue to suffer. [...] There is corruption.”

Don Fernando's list is very similar to Roberto's, and these two men place a similar burden of responsibility and accusation of disinterest on the members of the government. Don Fernando's use of strong language, stating that people are starving and dying of cold is an exaggeration in some sense (cold not being a concern for much of tropical Honduras) but is essentially a critique of the nature of poverty and the government's implication in the people's suffering. He was even more explicit in his description of government corruption: “The government is corrupt, thieves, getting everything they can from the people.” This sentiment was often echoed by individual Hondurans, even in casual encounters on busses or in neighborhood settings. As described in the first chapter, the coup of President Manuel Zelaya has introduced a widespread sense of corruption in the government, and a ‘business as usual’ cronyism for the protection of the very rich and the continuation of the poor as very poor. However, Don Fernando's critique is a broader sense of corruption and damaging indifference: that the whole system of government is not to be trusted and that Hondurans are universally robbed by and underserved by an indifferent system.

When asked about initiatives which might impact the system, Don Fernando stated “Unemployment will just continue. The people who benefit are always the same. The profits go to those exact investors, they do not help the people, none of the workers benefit, and the salaries continue to be low, there are no salaries with dignity.” For Don Fernando, therefore, there is no top-down solution to the problems in Honduras, and any

suggestion of aid to poor people should be treated with suspicion. He is here critiquing the economic structure broadly, and the idea that corporate investment or a neoliberal model of economic development is only a tool to further the interests of those who already hold power and economic privilege. This perspective probably arises from Don Fernando's time as a labor union activist, and the disillusion he experienced when his life and livelihood were eliminated for the profit of a corporation. His call for 'salaries with dignity' echo union struggles, but also a concern for human rights which stands in opposition to structures of inequality. He does not trust the government to act in the interests of the government, but rather in support of the 'owning' class. He is not alone in this opinion of the lack of government initiative or effort on the part of the poor: Roberto states, "Any talk of change from the government is pure talk."

Changing the Journey

For Hondurans whose lives have been indelibly altered by migration, the nature of the journey *al Norte* is a constant source of conversation. Honduran media play a large part in perpetuating the fear of gang violence and the risks to life and limb for migrants in Mexico. But for those family members who have lost a *desaparecid@*, this is not a distant news item, but a daily reality and tortured question as to the wellbeing of their loved ones. For *migrantes mutilados*, the safety of future migrants is a key question, and one which came up often in the course of the interview.

Francisco said, "I would change the way people can go, so they can have opportunities, so they can come [to the United States] in cars. That they can come with papers and with ease." From a structural concern, Francisco is talking about ending a

system in which migrants have no option but to ride on the dangerous tops of trains for fear of the immigration stops on the highways and the need of a passport to purchase long-distance bus tickets. He wants a mechanism for migration with dignity: for migrants to travel in cars and at their ease, presumably the way most people would choose to travel to a new place or new employment opportunity. Interestingly, Francisco offered another potential role for the government in protecting migrants, since the current system is so fraught with danger. He said, “enforce the border to keep people from leaving the country if they don’t have papers to enter Mexico, to keep people from leaving and being injured.” It is interesting that this former migrant, who spoke powerfully of the reasons that individuals might continue to make the decision to journey *al norte*, would advocate a kind of anti-emigration platform on the grounds that migrants should not be allowed to place themselves in danger.

Marta’s proposed solution to the dangers of the trail had a much more democratic and human rights-based focus: “There should be some law of protection for migrants en route, protecting them and protecting their rights. [...] There are so many poor people who are being killed in the journey and there should be someone there to protect them.” Marta names poverty as a root cause of the violence and abuses suffered by migrants. By framing the issue in this way, Marta suggests that violence is visited particularly on the poor, who do not have recourse in legal structures or confidence in law enforcement agents. Implicit in this statement is a critique of the democratic order, which does not handle all citizens equally in the case of migration. Marta’s critique is matched by a variety of human rights groups in Honduras, Mexico, and the United States, who call for

oversight of human rights issues and a focus on the needs of migrants to balance their vulnerabilities and scant resources on the journey.

Living the “American Dream”

For migrants and their communities, the idea of the American Dream is a constant in daily conversation. The essential idea is that the United States is a country where someone can find a job, work hard, and live a dignified life. This concept is a powerful draw for migration, even alongside the knowledge that the lives of Latin@ immigrants are extremely difficult, particularly when those immigrants are undocumented. However, what was expressed by Hondurans in interviews and in casual settings was a consistent belief in the United States as a land of opportunity, and as a source of improved status and a dignified existence. Alongside this belief was a consistent question for me as an American: why is the United States so resistant to immigrants? Why aren't immigrants valued for the work they do? Why are they treated like criminals when they are only trying to help their families? While this thesis cannot address these questions to their full extent, there is value in hearing the specific critiques and ideas of Honduras as to what solutions there may be to the structural violence encountered by migrants living in the United States. The same individuals calling for justice on the migrant trail also see the need for human rights protections within the United States and in answer to the suffering migrants often face.

Roberto's suggestion was the most simple and succinct. When asked, “what could the United States change to improve the lives of Honduran migrants?” Roberto replied simply, ““Instead of passing laws against migration, they should approve laws in

favor of migrants. They should allow them to stay to work.” Francisco’s response was very similar: “The reality is that your country [indicates interviewer] is independent and can make the laws it wants. But it would be good to have that source of income for people, those opportunities.” The essential argument here is that the United States should allow for migrants to have economic opportunities and not be harassed by anti-immigrant laws and policies. Their critique here lies in the essential nature of US policy which is perceived as blatantly anti-immigrant. What Roberto and Francisco are saying is as simple as not enacting laws which discriminate and increase the vulnerabilities of migrants, but rather support the simple wishes of Hondurans in the United States: to stay and to work.

Much of the critique of the United States policy had to do with the fear of deportation suffered by undocumented migrants, and the ensuing truncation of their lives and rights in the face of workplace disputes, mobility in their communities, and a sense of security in their communities. Marta said, “Migrants need to have protection and to have homes there, and to not worry always about being deported. They shouldn’t have to hide all the time, going to work and hiding.” This sense of surveillance and suspicion is often cited as a key concern for the rights and well-being of migrants and Latin@ communities in the United States: that Latin@s be profiled and assumed to be undocumented; those who are undocumented are afraid to take part in civic and social life in their communities and churches for fear of deportation; children fear the deportation of parents; undocumented communities do not report crime for fear of contact with state officials; and generally migrants live isolated lives ‘imprisoned by fear,’ as Marta described (Bacon 2008, Brotherton and Kretsedemas 2008, Coleman 2007, Zolberg 2006). The

concern voiced by Marta (and many other interviewees) is an essential question of the ability to develop a sense of security within the United States, in which a migrant can lead a life not dominated by the threat of deportation and the associated insecurities of a community under threat.

Rosa was more detailed in her critique of United States law and more specific in her recommendations for reform. She said, “in my opinion, there should be a permit to have papers and to be able to go. [...] They should be able to go and come back, because many do want to come back. And that should be a good option.” Essentially she is advocating for a workable strategy for circular migration: for the economic benefits of temporary migrant labor coupled with the chance to legally return to Honduras with a sense of dignity and security. This argument is essentially a call to return to the pre-CAFTA idea of the mobility of labor and value of circular migration: that temporary workers benefit economically and that US companies benefit from the labor of migrants. What Rosa is asking for sounds like a radical reformation of immigration law and regulation in the United States, but is essentially a return to the Bracero Program and an understanding of migrants’ needs and desires.

Rosa also spoke to the inequalities and injustices of the existing immigration system. In reference to the availability of visas to the United States, she said,

There are some permits, but it is only for the high class. That is part of injustice, that the people of the lower class don’t have access, that they won’t give them permits. The reality is that if people could wait their turn and know they would have a dignified chance to go and work and build a little house or help with a family business, then that is their motivation, but there is not the opportunity.

This quotation is of enormous importance in addressing the structural violence in relation to immigration in the United States. For the first time in the interview, Rosa used the word ‘injustice’ to describe the situation faced by her and her family. She speaks directly to class inequality, and the fallacy of the visa process when applied to poor migrants or Hondurans without ‘access’ or connections that are available to the upper class. She states her firm belief that Hondurans would go to the United States with documents and in a regulated fashion if they had hope of doing so with dignity and with opportunity. She names again the simplicity of the reasons for migrating: the chance to work to build a house or small business. Implicit in this call for justice in the visa process is the idea that all Hondurans deserve the opportunity, and the existing structure is inherently unequal. She is calling for a change in the United States to encourage justice and the human rights of all individuals, not only those who already have money and who therefore have connections and opportunities. When Rosa is speaking of immigration reform, she is calling out the system for its preference of wealthy Hondurans who already have the means to live a comfortable life. Her critique is one of structural violence: that the existing system privileges the privileged and oppresses the vulnerable.

Summary

In these voices of Hondurans living out the realities of migration, there is a fundamental and pressing question of reform on all scales of migration: in Honduras, along the migrant journey, and in the United States. While the recommendations recorded here do not have the weight of policy analysis or formal training in lawmaking,

they do have the immediacy of painful personal experience to encourage the call for change. These voices advocate for change in the simplest possible terms: the availability of a dignified life in their home communities, the protection of human rights on the road, and recognition of the needs and dignity of immigrants living in the United States.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I opened my introduction with the story of a fourteen-year-old girl who died in an Arizona desert in the pursuit of the American Dream. Over the course of this thesis, I have offered other stories of personal suffering within the structure of immigration from Honduras to the United States. As globalization has altered the mobility of goods, ideas, and people around the world, new systems of vulnerability and inequality have been constructed which drive individuals to knowingly risk life, limb, and community cohesion in an attempt to better their lives through migration. Structural violence is an often invisible force in the world, in which the 'status quo' allows for widespread suffering which is largely unseen or unrecognized: victimization and suffering of this nature are often not examined as part of a deliberate construction. When viewed together, the death of Josseline is related to Fernando's loss of a leg, and to Rosa's fear that she will not see her migrant children again. Immigration policies are situated such that individuals suffer through macro-structures put in place to serve a national myth and discourse: that of closed borders and national security, in opposition to the threat of the undocumented "Other," whose human rights need not be respected.

In this thesis, I have elaborated on Joseph Nevin's critique that "US authorities are arguably responsible (at least partially) for the deaths by knowingly 'forcing' people to take death-defying risks" (Nevins 2010, p. 174). This is the root critique of structural violence: that those in power are responsible for the on-the-ground consequences of the policies and macro-structures put in place. The interviews I have analyzed in this thesis provide a context for the individual lives touched by international migration structures.

Migrants exercise their agency when they make the choice to leave their communities and set out on the journey across countries to enter the United States, with hope for their families and the pursuit of the American Dream in mind. However, this individual choice is couched in a economic and social history which has constructed inequalities such that the pull factors encouraging their entry to the United States are made all the more attractive by the push factors which circumscribe life in their community of origin. Although the individuals I interviewed evidenced a strong sense of individual purpose and personal struggle, they were also intimately aware of the oppressive systems which define the Latin@ migration experience.

My thesis is fundamentally concerned with the voice of migration from the perspective of communities and returned migrants in Honduras. These individuals are the victims of global migration patterns: they are the damaged and the abandoned, and those for whom migration has resulted in profound damage to body and community. These voices are positioned within a global discourse of trade, economics, national identity, international human rights, and the rights and responsibilities of sovereign nations. However, the individual is often rendered invisible by these large constructs, and the scale of personal agency and vulnerability is often lost within global discourse.

My research questions ask 1) how is the experience of Honduran migrants shaped by structural violence? 2) In what way does this violence articulate with the processes of Honduran migration? 3) What is the nature of the tension between the push and pull factors affecting Hondurans and the barriers – natural, legal, and structural – that are erected to prevent their successful entry into the United States? Through my research and analysis, I offer the conclusion that structural violence intersects every aspect of

Honduran migration, from the construction of push and pull factors motivating migration to the implications of natural, legal, and structural barriers.

An examination of migration through the lens of structural violence allows for a critical perspective as to how inequalities are deliberately constructed and/or allowed to persist through systematic injustice. My thesis provides several specific examples of this within the context of Honduran migration, focusing on the experiences of individuals within macro-structures which they do not control and against which they exercise limited agency. Several interviewees explained their decision to migrate as a direct response to situations of extreme poverty: they worked for international corporations at long hours and for extremely low wages, and without hope of ever making enough money to support their families or improve their futures. This experience is rooted in economic structures set in motion by the Central American Free Trade Agreement, as well as being situated within global systems of food insecurity and a national context of low wages and high prices for the necessities of life. These systems force individuals to make decisions founded on desperation: the ultimate choice is between remaining in Honduras and barely surviving or attempting a high-risk journey to the United States.

Structural violence is intrinsically part of the migrant journey. Migration is combatted through a deterrence model, which, as Joseph Nevins explains, is a strategy which promotes human suffering in order to discourage future migrants from attempting the journey. The interviews conducted with *migrantes mutilados* indicate the impact these dangers can have for individuals: the loss of limbs and a future predicated on the physical damage done by the migration route. The right to migrate is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the current system of immigration law has

been routinely condemned as in violation of international human rights law. As Francisco explained, the migrant journey is without human dignity, and this is a consequence of the laws which forbid normal forms of travel for those without government permits for their presence. The dangers of the road result directly in men like Francisco losing their limbs in what is known to be a deadly journey, but their choices are encoded by circumstance in which there is no viable alternative.

My interviews did not reveal a sense of hope for change in structures of violence as related to Honduran migration to the United States. Even in the final section while discussing proposals for reducing the dangers associated with the journey, or in mitigating the reasons for out-migration, there is little sense of hope from the community members. My analysis offers some specific areas in which human rights might be more fully protected, particularly through greater oversight of immigration enforcement personnel in Mexico, on the US border, and in the interior of the United States. However, the root of my argument lies in the desire for an immigration policy which acknowledges the needs and agency of the individual migrants and their communities, and which holds human rights as an integral piece of the immigration debate. With globalization, the rhetoric of 'illegal aliens' has created a discourse of 'national security,' which position migrants as an enemy force, and as a class of people who are a criminal and dangerous presence in this country. The essential answer to the question of structural violence in relation to migration is to maintain this perspective of the migrant as an autonomous human being, entitled to rights and protections in the context of global structures.

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