MEMORY AND RESISTANCE

A Thesis Presented

by

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MEMORY AND RESISTANCE

A Thesis Presented

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DEDICATION

Para todxs lxs migrantes
disidentes de las leyes que nos gobiernan
luchadorxs y héroes de un mundo sin fronteras.

Para todxs lxs revolucionarixs
sacudiendo al mundo que nos rodea.

Para mi gente
porque ustedes son un regalo
y yo me regalo a ustedes.

Latinoamerica no se vende.

To all migrants
Dissidents of the rule of law
Front line fighters and heroes of a borderless land
To all revolutionaries
Shaking the world around us
To my people
Because you are a gift
And I gift myself to you

*Latino America no se vende*
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ABSTRACT

MEMORY AND RESISTANCE

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The centuries-old neocolonial relationship between the United States and Latin America is marked by acts of silencing, either directly in the hands of U.S. foreign affairs organizations or by proxy governments economically supported by the United States. These attempts to de-memorialize the atrocities of the past consolidate the power dynamic between the inheritors of colonial rule, and those who were colonized. U.S. interventionist policies—borne of corporate interests, the safeguarding of capitalism, and a skewed sense of national security—have created mass and enduring violence in Latin America, resulting in waves of migration north, where the journeys of the displaced are often denied, erased, and forgotten. This thesis began as an exploration of the U.S - Mexico border wall, understanding it as a flagship banner of propaganda, and has developed into the analysis of a state of surveillance across the Mexican territory. By
analyzing and interpreting migratory paths through the states of Chiapas, Guanajuato and Chihuahua, the thesis centers, validates, and upholds the multiplicity and variability of the phenomenon of migration.

This proposal takes a critical stance towards the current state of refuge and safety throughout Mexico for migrants. Currently, humanitarian efforts deny the permanence of human mobility in the Americas by only affording provisional housing. Focusing on migration by foot, the thesis envisions a network of hyper-visible, and thus invisible, spaces of shelter that are permanent and rely on communal action in defiance of xenophobic laws. Nested within an already existing network of community chapels and working within the language of contemporary vernacular architecture, the spaces of shelter provide respite, information, as well as legal and medical services, and dismantle centralized approaches to humanitarian aid. Their existence as permanent structures memorialize migration, signify resistance, and attempt to provide dignity and power to those migrating through the Mexican territory towards a promised land.
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CHAPTER I

LATIN AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES

A. Memory as Resistance

The United States/Latin America’s political relationship is plagued by interventionist policies\(^1\) that have resulted in the disruption and destabilization of the southern territories. Starting with the Spanish/American war, the United States became the inheritor of a colonial relationship with Latin America, where it has filled both the role of an overprotective parent and an abusive partner.\(^2\) Two important CIA operations, “Operation Condor” and “Operation PBSuccess” played a key role in the disruption of democratically elected governments throughout the Americas. In 1975 the United States launched “Operation Condor,” a systematic campaign marked by the undercover installment of right-wing dictators and the violent suppression of political opposition. The United States placed into power General Juan Domingo Perón of Argentina and General Augusto Pinochet of Chile, dictatorships that are infamous for the disappearance of tens of thousands of civilians deemed “terrorists” for disagreeing with the military regimes. State institutions responded with silence, denying these disappearances, and avoiding fundamental legal obligations around the violent taking of victims.\(^3\) U.S. interventionism through “Operation Condor” normalized a dynamic that reverberated across South

\(^1\) The US interventionist actions in the American territory started with the Spanish-American war in Cuba. After years of conflict, and nearing the emancipation of Cuba from colonial rule, a Spanish attack on an American army base in 1898 resulted in the military intervention and eventual defeat of the Spanish army. The involvement of the U.S. government in the treatise of emancipation engendered a series of constraints on Cuba, whereby the newly emancipated country was now attached to the US. A new colonial relationship was established, this time between Cuba and the United States. (Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America*. (Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores, 1997).)


America: right-wing governments would seize and maintain power through the violent suppression of opposing political groups, and left-wing guerillas would respond with commensurate brutality. In Peru, the 1980s and 1990s were marked by human rights violations committed by the right-wing governments of Alan Garcia and Alberto Fujimori, as well as by the leftist guerilla group The Shining Path. Growing up in this context, my childhood was marked by a sense of economic and political instability amidst the attempts for national reckoning to memorialize our past so history would not repeat itself.4

Having grown up in South America during the 1990s, I experienced the reverberations of dictatorships, disappearances, and the ongoing exodus of migrants to the United States and Europe in hopes of a better future. I remember mass demonstrations across the continent which echoed the sorrow and resilience of my family and neighbors—public demonstrations that declared to the world that stories would not be erased, oppression not forgotten. In Peru, the public demonstrations over the two decades of internal terrorism inspired a network of museos de la memoria (memory museums), which immortalizes these atrocities and declare that never again will anyone endure such suffering. Another method of political resistance and remembrance was the formation of mutual aid groups by family members of the disappeared. In Argentina, the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, established in 1977, have continuously organized the “Marches of Resistance” as a memorialization of the 30,000 disappeared during the

repressive state of terror of the Perón regime. The 24-hour occupation of Plaza de Mayo is a form of protest, a symbol of solidarity, and a demand for answers for these mass disappearances. More recently, in October 2019, more than one million people took to the streets of Santiago de Chile, demanding, among other things, the re-writing of the constitution created during Pinochet’s military regime. The protestors were met with abusive police force, resulting in over 3,000 victims injured, 31 deaths, and 250 specific eye injuries from rubber bullets. Chilean civil society began demanding recognition of the promise of Nunca Más (Never Again) made after the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. Recent recollections of police brutality and military repression converged with more distant memories of the Pinochet dictatorship and colonial rule, placing memory at the center of current social struggles.

In the same way that “Operation Condor” destabilized South America and deepened inequalities inherited from the Spanish colonial rule, Central America suffered from the same interventionist approach by the U.S., exemplified by “Operation PBSUCESS” in 1953 and its direct implications on the 1954 coup in Guatemala, yielding decades-long internal armed conflicts. The documents exposing the US involvement in Guatemala were not revealed until 1997, a perfect showcase for the culture of secrecy and historical erasure in the Americas. A form of resistance throughout Central America

7 Badilla Rajevic, “Memory on Chile’s Frontlines,” 127-132.
9 Alvarado, Juarez, and Gettleston, “Historical Memory in the Digital Age,” 133-139.
are the networks for memory preservation and mutual aid, such as the Survivors’ Historical Memory Committee of Arcatao in El Salvador and the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo Historical Archive in Guatemala. Rosa Rivera Rivera, the co-founder of the Survivors Historical Memory Committee of Arcatao, belongs to a generation of Salvadoran revolutionaries who defied the elites in the 1970s and continuously fought for the rights of peasants in El Salvador. Women like Rosa witnessed the Salvadorean civil war, which resulted in 75,000 deaths, 85 percent killed by government forces and right-wing death squads that systematically tortured, disappeared, and killed dissidents.10 The Committee self-identifies as a collective of survivors; aiming to establish connections between the past and present struggles of El Salvador and to effect justice for the war crimes committed by the State during the armed conflict. For Rosa, the struggles of the past are directly connected to today’s generalized violence in the Northern Triangle.

In Guatemala, the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), the oldest surviving human rights organization in the country, was established by the family members of students who disappeared in the 1980s after being targeted by the CIA as communist threats. The GAM Historical Archive hosts over 3,300 documented incidents of forced disappearance, and it is a source for legal aid for families seeking justice. Since its founding, the GAM has faced repeated efforts to silence its work, wherein government and clandestine forces have attempted to erase all evidence of the war crimes committed during Guatemala’s 36-year internal war. The GAM Historical Archive has now digitized its documents,

increased their accessibility, and dissipated physical threads.\textsuperscript{11} Guatemalans, supported in their demands by the United Nations Development Program, have called for the Historical Archive of the National Police (AHPN) to be similarly digitized, as the archives are currently hidden from the public, delaying an already decades-long investigation into Guatemala’s history of human rights violations. However, the Guatemalan government continues to deny and erase all evidence the atrocities committed during the internal armed conflict. This act of forgetting is an erasure of Guatemalan history and a perpetuation of a flagrant injustice.

While the United States’ interventionist policies and operations in the Americas vary in motive and approach, the suffering borne of U.S. interventionism—through political destabilization, the imposition of authoritarian governments, and industrial globalization through abusive free trade agreements—is laid bare by the mass migrations of Latin Americans to the United States. The issues of inequality that the people of Latin America were fighting in the ’70s and ’80s—then met with terror and armed conflict—are today’s reality. Migration therefore stands as an act of self-resolution and defiance of the status quo, whereby migrants choose to take their lives, and the future of their families, into their own hands. However, migration has been defined as a matter of national security and as such the US government has engaged in war-like methods to fight off those arriving at its southern border. While in the past the disappearance of political dissidents was done by US backed military dictatorships, today migrants are abducted into detention centers and erased from the public sphere. Moreover, the US

\textsuperscript{11} Alvarado, Juarez, and Gettleston, “Historical Memory in the Digital Age,” 133-139.
government engagement in migratory policies of Mexico increasingly militarizes the territory through which migrants pass.

This thesis aims to unveil and engage with the current battleground for U.S. foreign policy and the Latin American resistance. Fueled by hope for freedom and a better future, the pilgrimage north takes on a mythical dimension, where the walk to the promised land is nothing short of heroic. Migrants have become the current dissidents towards systems of control and power, and their stories are to be celebrated and memorialized.

Building upon contemporary critical dialogue on new ways of framing Latin American history, such as the work of Manuela Badilla, Karen Ortiz, Daniel Alvarado, and the NACLA periodical reports, this thesis moves away from the dominant victim-oriented narrative of remembrance, and centers memory in the structuring of processes of truth, justice, and social healing.¹² The role of the architect is not one of authorship but rather as a participant, a facilitator, and member in a larger network of activism. The architectural imagination, thus, can be activated for service to a cause. The architect/activist can be part of the formulation of methods to systemic disruption, by proposing strategies for inviting civil disobedience, as well as marking the territory with physical manifestations of memory.

¹² Badilla Rajevic, "Memory on Chile's Frontlines," 127-132.
A THIRD NATION: THE BORDERLANDS AND ITS EXTENSIONS

A. Problematizing The US/Mexico Border

The borderland territory that separates Mexico from the US is marked, punctuated, and at times highlighted by a wall.\(^\text{13}\) This wall, medieval in nature and thoroughly inefficient in its capacity to stop migration, is the most expensive propaganda banner for a migratory policy that is embedded in xenophobia and nationalistic rhetoric.\(^\text{14}\) The wall, as an artifact, morphs, changes, and accommodates itself to its surroundings, always keeping an authoritarian presence. While in heavily populated areas the wall takes on a triple layer of Corten steel, concrete pilons, and barbed wire, in other areas it disappears, giving way to flying drones and invisible motion sensors.\(^\text{15}\) Deep in the desert and along the Rio Grande, the wall is invisible and inexistent in its physicality. However, its disappearance is calculated. Heat levels along the desert make the crossing impossible, transforming the attempts of migrants to cross it into death sentences by dehydration. The southern wall is a visible and an invisible ghost, a myth of rite of passage, a Goliath to be defeated by David. It is with biblical faith that every year caravans are organized around holy week and that migrant prayer booklets are published and distributed. A seasonal increase in remittances is evident, money sent from all around the United States to pay coyotes\(^\text{16}\) to smuggle people across the border. Makeshift altars, speckled throughout the desert, receive increased visits, candles are lit with the last match carried in travelers’

\(^{16}\) Coyotes is the name given to human smugglers who get paid to help migrants cross the US/Mexico border.
bag. It would be erroneous to imagine a homogenous image of the Mexico/US border, as it is a varied and multicultural land that stretches 1,933 miles (about 3110.86 km), its reverberations felt deep within the two nations.

A treatise in 1848 in Texas defined the Mexico/US border as a land separated by the Rio Bravo del Norte (Río Grande) ending at the Gulf of Mexico.17 From its inception, the border was unstable and volatile. The Rio Bravo del Norte would change its course dependent on alluvial flows, and the borderline needed to be redefined after every flood.18 A series of large infrastructural projects during the 1940s attempted to solve this condition, by channelizing the river, and in with them water distribution agreements were settled in the borderland territory. Twenty years later, a binational Border Industrialization program enabled the implementation of foreign-owned factories in Mexico, which resulted in a population boom for Ciudad Juarez. With three times the number of people, the 1940s water distribution agreement became unbalanced, especially as the factories that led to this change were US-owned. Today, on the US side of the border, the city of El Paso has access to four dams that manage the water distribution systems for the region, while in the immediately adjacent city of Ciudad Juarez, in Mexico, water-trucks deliver water to informal settlements that have no access to potable water or sewage lines.19

The borderland is marked by incredible contrasts; however, it is also part of a culture of binational understanding of the world. The project Prada Marfa by design firm Rael

19 Velikov and Thun.
San Fratello is an exploration into immigrant architecture. Making use of adobe bricks for its construction, Prada Marfa is a free standing one-room building with a polished storefront and exposed structure on the back. The project highlights how a material that is indigenous to its location, earth construction, is not perceived as native in the US, having been vandalized and broken into more than once.\textsuperscript{20} The building is a site of opposite reactions, becoming a pilgrimage stop where people leave notes of encouragement for migrants under delicately piled rocks, where social media influencers stage photoshoots, and where people feel vitriol and attack the building with stones. Although the original design was of a simple approachable building with a large storefront, after multiple acts of vandalism Prada Marfa now has a surrounding fence made of welded wire mesh reminiscent of the border wall.\textsuperscript{21} This project is part of a larger work of analysis of the borderland territory by Architect Ronald Rael in the book \textit{Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the US/Mexico Border}. In the book, he provides an in-depth analysis of the US/Mexico wall and draws comparisons to borders around the world and architectural reactions of the past. Linguist Noam Chomsky discusses the violence of borders, and in particular the US/Mexico border by explaining the brutal occupation of the Mexican territory during the 1840s and the subsequent artificial imposition of a border, in \textit{Hidden Power and Built Form: The Politics Behind the Architecture}. He expresses that, like

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Rael.
\end{flushleft}
many other border walls, the architecture of the US/Mexico border is an architecture of violence.  

Rael also acknowledges the violence of the borderland territory and refuses to not engage with it. Rather than walking away from the border wall, Rael bases his proposals in Lebbeus Woods’ approach to the Israeli/Palestinian wall. In *The Wall Game*, Woods concludes that the only way to address an architecture of violence is to design a means to dismantle it. He proposes that through a complex set of rules, architects and builders on both sides can attempt to create a series of constructions that will eventually force an imbalance that will theoretically topple the wall. Rael, therefore, proposes that to fight the division that the border wall presents, we must carefully reconsider and reconfigure it to provide the necessary infrastructure for sustainable healthy cities through a proposal that integrates social, water, and energy infrastructure. However, to act based on these premises we must believe that the entire borderland is the wall, and the work of others show that the borderland is much more expansive.

The group AGENCY, based in El Paso, Texas, began an exploration of UV light exposure in the borderland territory. Their research was instigated by the fact that the leading cause of deaths along the border are due to heat exposure. In “An Ultraviole(n)t Border,” authors Ersela Kripa and Stephen Mueller expose the inventory of shade structures that serve the security state. Kripa and Mueller explore how the shade structures at security checkpoints and ports of entry orchestrate a biopolitical choreography, mitigating the impact of solar exposure for officers while facilitating the

inspection of bodies and vehicles in a shared territory that thickens and blurs the border line into a transnational border zone of shared atmospheric risk. At the Paso del Norte International Bridge, a canopy was extended past the international boundary to protect agents conducting irregular document checks and assisting in the number of “pushbacks” of asylum seekers, effectively denying them entry to the port beyond. This was only possible due to the inheritance of post 9-11 migratory policies, in which three countries, Iraq, Afghanistan and Mexico, are chosen as scapegoats. In 2005, only two years after the invasion of Iraq, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee called for the construction of 698 miles of wall along the US/Mexico border and amended the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration control act. George W. Bush signed the act to ‘help protect the American people’ from terrorist threats. In this context, the Merida Initiative between Mexico and the US was signed with the aim of combating drug trafficking, money laundering, and organized crime. The Merida Initiative, among other subjects, allowed US border patrol forces to act from within the Mexican territory without facing consequences. Moreover, it meant that the migratory patrol agents of Mexico became trained by their US counterparts, transforming them into a single security force.

This binational approach to migration has led to unnecessarily precarious circumstances for migrants seeking asylum. Such is the case of an encampment between

24 Kripa and Mueller.
25 Rael, “Prada Marfa: Immigrant Architecture?”
26 Rael.
Ciudad Acuna and Del Rio, two cities separated by a river that demarcates a national border. Haitian migrants have set up an encampment on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande, where they could file a claim for asylum for having arrived in US territory, however the encampment sits on the south side of the wall, within those 20 unusable miles, rendering them barely outside of the U.S. so that they would not be deported. Because of their undocumented status, people had to travel across the river into Ciudad Acuna where they could purchase food and water. However, Haitian migrants detained in Mexican territory without a permit to stay are faced with rapid removal proceedings. In September of 2021, US border patrol on horseback decided to intercede Haitian migrants who were returning to the encampment with food and water, pushing them out of US territory and leaving them in the center of the river. The thousands of people caught in this intermediate state were left with few options, to try and return to Mexico and find a way to legally remain in the country, or to turn themselves in to US border patrol and face the risk of immediate deportation. 

The merging of the US Border Patrol and Mexican Immigration marks a new era of instability and inhuman treatment of migrants where the U.S. intervention no longer requires a proxy dictatorship or political leader to exert control over a foreign territory. The implications of this new intervention are that the borderland territory no longer exists within a certain distance of the national borders, but extends to all the Mexican territory, making a sovereign country act as a tool for deterring migration. To investigate the way in which the Mexican territory is understood as the extension of the

borderland, this thesis turns next to the paths migrants take to cross and arrive to the US border.

B. Migratory Paths

The stories of migration are usually told as a start and end, with no in-between. However, it is the middle path that stays in our memories, marking feet with calluses and thickening skins. The path, too, is where conflicts play out, where desperation arises, and where solidarity shines. The paths of migration through the Mexican territory are infinite, varied, and ever-changing. Once inside the country, migrants can take different directions, travelling along the Pacific or Atlantic coast, or along one of the many inland options. Some even travel by sea, avoiding spending too much time in a land that is at once incredibly generous and welcoming as well as dangerous and ruled by xenophobic laws. Only 20 of every 100 migrants crossing through the Mexican territory make it to the US border\textsuperscript{29}, making the path the central stage of the story of migration. Three different paths, sequential in time and examples of the evolution of travel, have been explored to understand what memories migrants are carrying with themselves.

“La Bestia” is a freight train network that covers the Mexican territory, carrying goods from North to South and vice versa, making periodic stops at centralized locations. Its multiple lines all converge in Mexico City, and then split to reach the upper and lower corners of the country. To the south, the states of Chiapas and Tabasco host the final train stations, with the state of Chiapas seeing the highest number of migrants arriving in Mexico. To the north, six different stations arrive at the border with the US, at Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros, all departing from Mexico City. Many of these final northern destinations land migrants within 100km (about 62.14 mi) to 355km (about 220.59 mi) from important US cities, to which they can walk between 3 to 9 days. As such, the network of freight trains gained popularity

30 Casillas.
among migrants looking to travel north with speed. However, “La Bestia” is not made for people – migrants catch rides along its few stops and travel on top of wagons, hanging from the sides, or in between carts. The trains reach high speeds during the day and night, and there are no services such as bathrooms or water, nor are there safety measures. In 2010, media attention began to focus on the migrants who were climbing on the trains. This led to a series of documentaries exposing the stories of people who had tragic accidents along the ride, resulting in missing limbs as well as some deaths.31 In addition, media attention captured the organized criminal activity taking place within the trains, as well as the high levels of sexual abuse endured by women on the ride.32 Nonetheless, the film “La Bestia: El Tren de la Muerte” by Francisco Pena makes a point of highlighting the community responses in form of acts of solidarity that began surfacing along the train path.33

33 Pena, *La Bestia: El Tren de La Muerte*. 
At Tenosique, Tabasco, Father Tomas Gonzales leads the organization of “La 72,” a non-profit pilgrim’s shelter. On the other side of the train line, at Ixtepec, Oaxaca, Father Alejandro Solalinde hosts migrants at “Hermanos en el Camino.” Both clergymen have become targets of hostility from the government, as well as receiving death threats from organized criminal groups that profit from smuggling migrants across the country. To clarify, Mexican migrants travelling through the Mexican territory can do so as citizens of their own country. However, migrants from Central America need to apply for permits to be allowed in Mexico or are otherwise travelling illegally. Without having even entered Mexico, the wall makes itself present.

The most prevalent method for crossing the border nowadays between Guatemala and Mexico comes from the program “Frontera Sur,” started in 2014 in response to pressure

34 Pena.
applied by the Obama administration in the form of diminishing aid for the country. Here is a simple but clear example of the far reaches that the US government has well beyond its own territory, transforming the visualizable Corten border wall into simple propaganda, but effectively turning the country of Mexico into the border wall itself. “Frontera Sur” is the implementation of policies of detention and deportation of Central American asylum seekers as well as the absurd construction of a symbolic border fence. This program, however, puts into context the position that Father Alejandro Solalinde and Father Tomas Gomez, the founders of the pilgrim’s shelters in Ixtepec and Tenosique, because they are acting against US interests expressed in Mexican migratory law. In a farfetched attempt to legitimize their actions, the religious leaders have claimed that they act in Mexican territory in service to the Vatican, and that once within the shelter migrants have entered international territory, therefore arriving to safe heavens. The claim is one that has no legal basis, hiding behind the protection given to religious institutions in a deeply catholic country. This is the same claim made by sanctuaries throughout the US that shelter prosecuted migrants. It is worth noting that religious institutions throughout the US that are part of a Latinx community, referred as a Barrio, have implemented shelters in their buildings, and this act both as safe havens for undocumented migrants as well as other members of the community in need. The shelters also have rapid escape routes in case of ICE raids, which are announced via mutual aid encrypted messaging cellphone applications.

Back in Mexico, with the fear of being deported and in hopes of landing closer to the US, migrants climb onto an unsafe train that is plagued with dangers and continue their trek north. “La Bestia” carries with itself the highest and purest hopes of migrants in a holy pilgrimage to a promised land, as well as the lowest and most putrid desires of humankind. Along the route is another beacon of hope, in the town of Guadalupe, between the Orizaba and Tierras Blancas stations, in the region of Veracruz: A citizen’s group called “Las Patronas” – often translated into “The Bosses” erasing the embedded religious meaning of the name. Las Patronas of Guadalupe are not the bosses, they are the patron saints for the people in the train, Patron Saints like Virgen de la Guadalupe, the most ubiquitous saint in Mexico.
In 1995, two sisters, Norma, and Bernarda Romero, started the initiative after an afternoon in which they were walking along the train tracks having just gone grocery shopping. On their walk back home, they saw the train pass by with migrants on its roof and between wagons, and heard someone scream “mother, please, I am hungry.” Immediately, they began tossing the food they had just purchased onto the people on the train providing at least a morsel of food for those in need. Today, the group has over 20 members, and has worked with the group “Arquitectos con la Gente” to improve their facilities and increase their services, running a shelter of their own.

The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, akin to the Virgin of Lourdes and Virgin of Fatima, is one of a private revelation to an impoverished person who must convince powerful people of the veracity of their story. This provides a cultural basis, or a foreshadowing, to the attitude and actions of Father Solalinde, Father Gomez, and Las Patronas group, where those in need ought to convince the authorities of the miracle of their actions. In 2014, the same year that operation “Frontera Sur” was started, the state of Veracruz, home of Las Patronas, filed a lawsuit against the freight companies Ferrosur and Kansas City Group, main operators of “La Bestia,” for allowing migrants to travel on their trains. As a result, checkpoints were installed as well as cameras for catching migrants and removing them from the train. Ever since “La Bestia” is no longer an option for travel, and as a result more desperate methods have risen.

39 Casillas, “Arquitectos Con La Gente.”
In 2017, a drought in Honduras led to region-wide crop failure, triggering the famous 2018 “Migrant Caravan.”\(^{40}\) Although caravans had been organized in the past by grassroots groups such as “Pueblo Sin Fronteras,” none had been quite as meaningful. The caravans, known in Spanish as “La Viacrucis del Migrante” meaning “The Migrants Path to the Holy Cross,” are organized to depart during Easter week and are generally made by foot. The 2018 caravans started in the town of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, with a couple hundred people walking towards Mexico. The route included crossing to El Salvador and then to Guatemala to enter Mexico through Ciudad Hidalgo in Chiapas. As more people joined, it is estimated that over 10,000 people walked the entirety of the Mexican territory, meaning that approximately 40,000 people took part of the 2018

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caravans.\textsuperscript{41} While migrants were walking, the UN mobilized to provide tents and blankets while also assisting the Mexican government to implement a “voluntary return” program that sent people back to their country of origin. In addition, while people continued to join the walking caravan, the US government, bargaining aid funds, requested that the Mexican government stop issuing asylum and humanitarian visas on its southern border, thus blocking the only method of documented migration for Central Americans. Over 9,000 people were waiting in the city of Tecun Uman, Guatemala, for their humanitarian visas; none of them would ever see them go through.

To plot the walking path of a migrant, crossing from Ciudad Hidalgo to Matamorros, walking 12 hours a day, 7 days per week, with no rest and at a constant pace, it takes 40 days (about 1 and a half months). The similarity to the Talmudic story of the Israelites traveling the desert for 40 years to arrive to the promise land is undeniable.\textsuperscript{42} While in 2014, when the route along “La Bestia” was feasible, there were few shelters and most of them were led by religious figures, today REDODEM is a civilian organized network of individual shelters that support migrants along the way. With 23 shelters in 13 states, the civic support to migrants has doubled. REDODEM displays civic engagement and outrage on behalf of the people of Mexico. However, while mutual aid networks grow, so does governmental pressure to deter migration, as seen in Vice President Kamala Harris’ address to the people of Guatemala in the early summer of 2021.\textsuperscript{43} This response demonstrates that there is fertile ground for the growth

\textsuperscript{41} Amnesty International.

\textsuperscript{42} The Palestinian Talmud (Ta’anit 9:11, 69c)

and implementation of a larger support network to migrants that defies governmental rule and thrives in solidarity.

Haitian Migrant, by Cami Quinteros

Today, migratory paths and legal frameworks are informed by the COVID-19 worldwide crisis, as exemplified on the role of Title 42 and the migration of Haitians to the US border. On January 10, 2010, a magnitude 7 earthquake traversed through Haiti, leaving an estimated three million people affected, and 316,000 people dead.44 Many Haitians saw South America, in particular Brazil and Chile, as locations that could support an influx of migrants.45 As the COVID-19 crisis became more acute in early 2020, governments around the world introduced a series of lockdowns that affected local


economies and travel. Countries with emergent economies, such as Chile and Brazil, did not have the capacity to support their citizens as well as migrants, leaving Haitian workers in peril.\textsuperscript{46} In the U.S, the Trump administration invoked the World War II era healthcare provision Title 42, which authorized U.S. border officials to deport migrants to stop contagious diseases. Moreover, Title 42 also meant the halt of issuing tourism visas and limited travel by plane to only essential trips.\textsuperscript{47} This caused generalized panic among migrants, since the most common route of migration is to travel by plane and overstay tourism-visas.\textsuperscript{48} With the election of Joe Biden in November of 2020 and the re-instalment of Haiti as a temporary protection country in 2021, Haitians who had fewer and fewer opportunities available began to walk north, under the impression that the Biden administration would be more permissive of migrants.\textsuperscript{49} All of the above reasons resulted in one of the most dramatic and heroic treks seen in modern times. Haitian migrants began travelling by foot from South to North America, encountering and unveiling the reality at the Darien Gap.

\textsuperscript{49} Paul, “Por Que Tantos Haitianos Se Estan Yendo de Chile?”
The Darien Gap, between Colombia and Panama, is a 60 mile stretch of thickly vegetated jungle known for being one of the most dangerous places on earth. It is controlled by FARC paramilitary forces, swamps, drug traffickers and deadly creatures such as venomous vipers and black scorpions. The heat can reach 95 degrees with over 90% humidity, and it takes between 20 and 50 days (about 1 and a half months) to cross the 60 mile span. Moreover, the water in the Darien gap is dangerous to drink and Cold War-era land mines plague the territory. UNICEF reported that 19,000 migrant children

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and over 91,000 migrants have crossed through the Darien Gap hoping to make it to the US. Nevertheless, arriving to the US implies a longer path, with a series of stops along the way, a road that takes migrants through territories with multiple levels of patrolling and through encampments that hosts thousands of people waiting to be assimilated into the U.S. migratory system.  

Ciudad Acuna/Del Rio, at the US-Mexico border, is the home of Del Rio International Bridge, a piece of infrastructure that boasts about providing a safe and efficient border crossing for all citizens. Ciudad Acuna, on the Mexican side, has been a landing spot for migrants to wait for their asylum cases to be processed under the Trump era “stay in Mexico” policy. Informal encampments have grown over the years, hosting mostly Central American migrants. For Haitian migrants, however, whose black skin makes them targets for migration enforcement, Ciudad Acuna has become a place of hostility. Mexican migration enforcement sends convoys of agents to apprehend migrants on the streets, running after them, hand cuffing and loading them into vans. These forces are made up of agents that have been trained in the US with the same military tactics that are used on Mexican migrants, where people are stripped of their belongings, including the documents they have carried in their travels and are necessary to apply for asylum or humanitarian visas. People find themselves running away from Mexican migratory forces and crossing the river into the US only to be met by American horseman who have been trained under the same supervision.

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52 Duvillier, “2021 Records Highest Ever Number of Migrant Children Crossing the Darien Jungle towards the US.”
These three consecutive stories highlight some of the paths people have taken to arrive at the border wall. Once at the wall, there is a mixture of people and an encampment of waiting, a state of limbo. Often, people will cross the border wall without receiving asylum, in which case the necessity of safety extends into the US territory. Asylum and refugee laws were developed as a response to the identity prosecution suffered by Jewish people during the Holocaust, a promise to not repeat history again.\textsuperscript{54} However, international laws have forgotten to include the migrant identity under their claim, leaving those in most need without recourse.

CHAPTER II

FRIENDS AND ALLIES

A. On the Border Wall

The US/Mexico Border wall is not new, but rather an artifact that has been implemented and grown over time. Its existence, presence, and growth has generated numerous reactions, from pro-wall civilian movements to anti-proposals for its expansion on the part of architects. Three firms, Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, Rael San Fratello, and Agency, have dedicated large part of their oeuvre to analyzing, dealing, mocking, and deconstructing the border wall. In their work, they have developed stands on what meanings the wall carries with itself, and how it can be dealt with.

Transforming the Border Wall

Ronald Rael and Virginia San Fratello share a Bay Area practice actively involved in the borderland territory. Their work focuses on reconsidering the border wall and interacting directly with it. Since the early 2000s, they have developed numerous proposals for interventions and alternatives to the United States-Mexico border wall. Many of their designs were inspired by stories of “people who, on both sides of the border, transform the wall, challenging its existence in remarkably creative ways.”

Rael and San Fratello engage with the territories directly adjacent to the wall as well as with the wall itself, understanding the border wall phenomenon as time-based that is now part of our cultural identity. Rael states: “There was a time when there was no wall. There was a time when the wall was just an idea for national security. There was a time when the wall began to be proposed. And now there is a time when the wall is clearly fixed within our cultural identity.”  

Understanding the ways in which the wall has changed over time is a critical element of their practice, and a concept that I have rescued for this thesis. From their analysis, the borderlands have evolved into a more exclusionary territory due to the propaganda of the construction of the wall, therefore their interventions challenge the wall as an artifact in and of itself. On July 28, 2019, they installed three pink teeter-totters into the border wall for families to play on. Their design serves as a metaphor, as Rael said, of the “border as a literal fulcrum between US-Mexico relations,” with “actions that take place on one side of a teeter-totter [having] direct consequence on the other side.” For an hour, a small section of the wall between the two countries became a site of joyful connection rather than violent division. The Teeter Totter Wall was an rebellious act, installed without permission and providing a moment of playfulness and joy pivoted on an artifact of violence. Their engagement with the human level interactions was inspiring for my own thinking about migrants, and ideating a proposal that provides shelter, rest, and positive memories in the face of an arduous path.

58 Rael.
59 Bodinson and Cannon, "MoMa: Rael San Fratello Profile."
On their website, they state that the intent behind Teeter Totter Wall is to highlight the delicate balance in US-Mexico relations: “The trade and labor relationships between the U.S. and Mexico are in delicate balance. Mexicans throng to the U.S. to find work, but often long to live comfortably in their own country. U.S. industry and agriculture are dependent upon immigrant labor pools, yet the Department of Homeland Security, Border Patrol, and Immigration and Naturalization Services have made it increasingly difficult to attract foreign labor. The Teeter Totter Wall demonstrates the delicate balances between the two nations.”  

Prior to The Teeter Totter Wall, Ronald Rael wrote a manifesto, *Borderwall as Architecture*, in which he re-examines the 650 miles of physical barrier that divides the two nations. The book is both a protest of the wall and a projection about its future. Through a series of propositions, including The Teeter Totter Wall, suggesting that the nearly seven hundred miles of wall is an opportunity for economic and social

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60 Rael and San Fratello, “Rael San Fratello Firm’s Website.”
development that encourages its conceptual and physical dismantling, the book takes readers on a journey along a wall that cuts through a “third nation” — the Divided States of America.61

More recently, in 2021, the firm organized a network of mud ovens along the border called “Pedacito de Tierra.” The intent was to create spaces of refuge for people on a journey of migration by organizing dinners in private gardens. Organized during the COVID-19 pandemic, “Pedacito de Tierra” centered itself around a virtual table, physically located in Nogales, Mexico, welcoming hundreds of community members around the world to join for a decentralized meal and conversation about shelter and the practice of what it ought to look like. The gathering convened design, musical and culinary creatives - unbound by borders - to guide a meaningful conversation about belonging and the importance of cultivating “pedacitos de la tierra,” or “pieces of earth,” wherever we may be.62 With this action, Rael San Fratello lay the foundation for a

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61 Rael and San Fratello.
62 Rael and San Fratello.
citizens oriented decentralized network interested in providing mutual aid to migrants on their travels. The concept of decentralization and the understanding of a network that is ready to engage in mutual aid efforts is one that I took forward in my design proposal.

**Problematizing the Border Wall**

While Rael San Fratello engage directly with the wall, my research showed a more expansive and tacit presence of the wall along the Mexican territory. The work of Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman understands the wall as a phenomenon, a symbol, and a gateway for cultural interaction between Mexico and the United States that expands beyond its physical manifestation. They are interested in the bodies moving north, as well as the objects moving south. Moreover, their work acknowledges how migratory patterns affect more than the border territory and instead embrace a migratory state of mind. I was attracted to this approach to the wall and triggered a way of thinking that understood migration not as a singular trip but rather as a constant cycle. For Forman and Cruz, the border itself is understood to be more militarized each day and remains porous through the counter-tactics of those who transgress it. Actions such as the digging of underground tunnels and people crossing in the cover of darkness render the physical wall obsolete in the face of migrants’ hopes. This idea of transgression in the name of hope became central to my own proposal.

Forman and Cruz have developed a series of projects in which they deconstruct and re-construct the border wall as a method of understanding its embedded meanings and configurations. The project “Border Fence” is a photographic reproduction of the border

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wall installed on the 11th Architecture Biennale in Venice. Here, Forman and Cruz decontextualize an already absurd wall, and place it in a location that is meant to be a threshold and invitation into a festival. By asking Biennale attendees to cross though the border wall at the entrance, the absurd and harmful reality of the border wall is exposed.


With the project “Casa Familiar: Living Rooms at the Border,” Forman and Cruz bring a cross-cultural understanding to their architectural proposal. They place perceived normative buildings above open-air living rooms that can be inhabited as desired, such as for small businesses or street level neighborhood activity. Here, they make use of Latin American imported models of zoning. In addition, investigation of architectural form and use has led Forman and Cruz to map the density of land use, comparing San Diego and Tijuana to show a clear influx of Latinx culture into US territory. This project opened my eyes to the dramatically different way of land use between the United States and Latin America and has fed an evolving stream of thinking about multiplicity of use, transgressions towards strict zoning parameters, and city-making through densification and multigenerational inhabitance.
The work of Forman and Cruz is a complex mix of research and design, where they continuously showcase their understanding of borders as not something fixed in a single place, but rather as a phenomenon that is present in neighborhoods, cities, and states. Their work acts as a steppingstone for my understanding of the border wall and its ramifications, where I have been able to grasp the idea of the impact of the wall as an artifact beyond its physical presence.
Analyzing Surveillance at the Border Wall

Ersela Kripa and Stephen Muller are educators at Texas Tech University College of Architecture, based in the borderland city of El Paso, Texas, who co-founded the firm Agency. They use advanced computational analysis centered on hackable infrastructures, such as the surveillance systems along the borderland and their research and visualization efforts focus on data transfer agency to marginalized urban communities. Their work with data management and the hacking of larger systems of control was critical for my understanding of computational approaches to activist architecture, as well as understanding how data visualization could make information available to larger audiences.

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Kripa and Muller have engaged in forensic architecture, uncovering a growing geography codependence between military training centers and urban morphologies in the developing world. In their book *FRONTS: Military Urbanisms and the Developing World* they have analyzed over five hundred training sites that equate developing world neighborhoods to war zones. This analysis, however, has not stayed in the academic world of books but has expanded into a publicly available GIS database, cataloguing the training sites and relating them to cities in the global south. The contention of the book is that, by simulating and training in brick-and-mortar urban environments, the military is inherently criminalizing specific morphologies and contexts. The work of Kripa and Mueller is connected to that of Eyal Weizman, who has unveiled the calculated methods used by the Israeli army to control the West Bank via “almost starvation,” and providing people with only some electric power, and only some water.65 Kripa and Mueller analyze data to point out how the calculated methods of control that Weizman exposes in the middle east are also being used in the Americas. They point out political biases in the architecture used by military training, as well as tacit methods of environmental control.

The deeply analytical and data centered work of Agency exposed me to a new method of understanding realities, whereby the data shows a certain “truth” and the role of the designer is not to challenge or criticize it but rather act upon it. Moreover, the work of Agency expands on what Forman and Cruz have been developing in their research about mixed morphologies and border mentality expansion beyond a single territory. What Kripa and Mueller unveil in their work is a method of militarized control of the global south from US based training centers, akin to the training of Mexican immigration patrol officers by their US counterparts and the expansion of a military state of mind. Based on their research,

Kripa and Mueller have developed a series of nimble but smart interventions that have a transgressive spirit.

Their project “Spectral” translates their in-depth research into a viable installation that transgresses and challenges surveillance paths. As it is explained in their artist statement, “Spectral” considers the aerial activities, such as commercial and military flight paths, and speculates on a future in which urban spaces engage with aerial imaging technologies. Beyond the visible spectrum, these technologies record and analyze sub-perceptual shifts in heat signatures, radio waves, and radiation. They transform the city into a multispectral environment, where previously invisible activities are newly detectable. Constructed from infrared obscuring material, “Spectral” is a public gathering place—a “safe space” where visitors’ thermal activity is shielded from the view of multispectral cameras.66 This incredibly smart, nimble, and pointed method of counter-surveillance inspired the idea of hiding in plain sight that I included in my proposal.

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B. On Community Networks

Having an understanding that my project will expand a large territory, and that it proposes a series of shelters, refuges, and spaces of care that are not privately owned, the following series of case studies are an attempt to understand how such networks have worked in the past. A few important questions guided the search for the following case studies: 1) Who owns the network, 2) Who maintains the network, 3) Who hosts the network, and 4) How does the network look like. Three communally or publicly owned spaces of shelter, the Hermitages of Cantabria, the Transhumance house barn, and Seven Chapels along the Danube, are both historic and contemporary approaches to the question of owner-lessness shelters at a small scale.

Community Owned Transient Networks

A way of impermanent nomadic practices that take place throughout the world is transhumance pastoralism. Transhumance is organized around the migration of livestock between mountain pastures in warm seasons, and lower altitudes in the rest of the year. Transhumance activity takes place all over the world and these sites have developed into transient networks that are communally owned. The Tsielingato, a cooperative of sheep and goat farmers founded on respect and protection for the environment, developed in the Balkans during the eighteenth century and was an important force in the balance of ecosystems. Due to societal changes, nomadism is nearly extinct in the European context, which has contributed to the unbalanced use of pastureland resulting in fires, erosion, and degradation of extensive areas in the Mediterranean region. An understanding of the

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role of humans in the management of ecosystems has led to a new wave of people becoming interested in transhumance pastoralism, exemplified in the revival of “Fiesta de la Trashumancia,” a festival hosted throughout Spain that sees thousands of sheep cross through the center of Madrid as a celebration the tradition. This case study will focus on the transhumance networks at the Valles Pasiegos, formed by the Valleys of the Pas and Miera rivers, in Cantabria, Spain.

The Valles Pasiegos are a joint comarca, a territorial subdivision of a state used in the Iberian Peninsula and its former colonies to demarcate communal land with marks in the landscape, thus challenging the idea of sole ownership and fixed borders from their
political inception. A comarca, in the Spanish context, is an autonomous community. The Valles Pasiegos are divided between central towns, where permanent settlements and fixed housing units reside, and “invernas” or “winterlands,” where large expanses of grazing areas are spotted with modest transient housing for shepherds and livestock. These modest transitional dwellings are communally owned, allowing any shepherd to stay in them in exchange for maintenance, upkeep, and general labor, and have a clear typology with a mixed program of housing and barn, called a house barn. They have two levels, housing livestock on the lower level and the shepherds with their family on the second level.

The model of the communally owned house barn in the Valles Pasiegos provide certain clues for the success of a network. First, the small and easy to maintain typology results in a building that doesn't require too much labor to stand the test of time. However, the exchange of stay for maintenance is a social contract that won't be broken since the use of the buildings has provided ease for shepherds who rely on seasonal pastoralism. Moreover, the clearly utilitarian separation of spaces makes it so the use of the building is clearly understood and so that the spaces can potentially be used by multiple people and animals at the same time. When thinking about my own proposal, questions of maintenance, separation of space, and relationships between locals and nomadic communities can be answered by looking back at the Valles Pasiegos house barn.

Networks of Refuge

The question of who owns the network guided the following case study. When thinking about the pilgrimage of migrants through the Mexican territory, it is conceivable to

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think of people as being prosecuted and needing a place of refuge. An example of such places of refuge can be found in Northern Spain, in the hermitages of Cantabria. The hermitages are a network of rural shrines and chapels, some carved into rocks, developed from already existing caves, or stand-alone buildings. These hermitages date back to the Visigoth invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 400 AD and the introduction of Christianity to the region. While their inception was as hidden places of adoration for early catholic converts, they later became places of recession and refuge. In 700 AD, the Umayyad conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, the Al-Andalus, expanded as far north as Pamplona. Sheltered by the Cantabrian Mountain Chain, Cantabria and Euskadi where protected and became the center of resistance to the conquest. Originally owned by no one, carved out of stone by religious hermits who retreated to the mountains, the hermitages became a symbol of resistance for the crusaders. The hermitages are generally at walking distance from one another, at about 8-hour increments. While each building is self-sufficient, the network suggests that those inhabiting them could interact with one another and exchange knowledge and goods.71

![Cantabria Location and Hermitage Network Example at Ebro Valley, by Cami Quinteros](image)

71 Barroso et al.
Because of their inception as religious retreats, the hermitages have never had a singular owner. They are speckled across the Valderredible Valley, along the river Ebro, and are part of the path towards Santiago de Compostela. Their nature as places of shelter and refuge along a walking pilgrimage supported my thinking about decentralized and continuous networks for migrants. Their separation of 8-hours walking provided me with a feasible number of hours a person is willing to walk.

**Cantabrian Hermitages Examples, photos by Cami Quinteros**

**The Contemporary Network**

While the last two case studies show a historic network of shelter, Seven Chapels Along the Danube is a project developed in 2017 by Peter Fassi. The chapels sit along the Swabian Danube Cycle Path, between Stuttgart and Munich in Germany, and are always open and accessible by anyone. The buildings are austere and simple, designed by seven different firms, and all share the presence of a cross. Anaxu Zabalbeascoa, a Spanish historian, has studied the development of modern church buildings and asserts that
contemporary churches have moved away from the opulent past that characterized the catholic church, and instead make themselves notable through humility and austerity. The Seven Chapels showcase this humility and austerity, and are clearly contemporary in their design and conception.

The Seven Chapels along the Danube. Photos by Celia Uhalde for Divisare Journal

The chapels act as markers on the horizon, and their modest size invites small groups and individuals to spend time in them. These chapels highlight a contemporary change in religious construction and invite designers to re-consider the role of such buildings for civil society. Rather than only considering chapels as a place for religious service, there is a spirit of universal access for rest. While this network is austere and minimal, without the allocation of space for people to spend the night and with a public

ownership model rather than communal, the chapels are an example of simple yet beautifully crafted spaces of refuge and shelter. Their connection to the outdoors is notable, especially as they cater to bicyclists. This project provided an aesthetic and contemporary base for my interventions, as well as an austere but carefully considered details that embrace dignity and well-being rather than improvisation and emergency-like interventions.
CHAPTER IV

SETTING UP A NETWORK, FINDING THE RIGHT TOOLS

A. Hyper-Visibility as Invisibility

Understanding the paths of migration through the Mexican territory over time suggests that a network of mutual aid for migrants, operated within a grassroots mentality and born out of civil disobedience, is necessary. These safe havens would need to exist at certain distances from one another, informed by the speed in which migrants could get from one to the next, and be ubiquitous so that the paths of migration can be everchanging. Considering that migrants are targets of governmental violence as well as organized crime, the mutual aid networks need to work in such a way that they do not pre-dispose a path and therefore expose migrants to further dangers in their travels.

Although the transportation methods for travel vary, including train, bus or boat, the most extreme cases are those who travel by foot. This thesis focuses on these walking travelers, plotting a network of safe havens, thus generating a plethora of options that can be mapped on the Mexican territory. The sheer number of safe havens will provide a hyper-visible and ubiquitous network, rendering it as part of the urban background and therefore invisible. My proposal is embedded in a contemporary architectural language, taking inspiration from commonly used materials such as CMU blocks and tin roofs. Because of this material camouflage, and staying as small interventions, the shelters can hide in the homogeneity of the city. This homogeneity is an important marker of the self-built contemporary vernacular of Latin America.73 This “contemporary vernacular”

73 Paul Oliver, Cobijo y Sociedad / Shelter and Society, First (Madrid: Blume Editorial SA, 1978).
typology, as proposed by Nezar AlSayyad, is understood as active and ever-changing, accommodating ambiguous and multiple configurations, recognizing that the only element that lasts in tradition is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent, as a way to find the eternal and immutable.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, contemporary vernacular means that buildings are communally conceived and constructed rather than authored by an architect and constructed by a builder. This means buildings are inhabited and used before they are completed, because the activities that take place within them are the propelling force for their conception. They are not a finished product, but a mirror of a community that is changing, growing, building itself. This opens the opportunity to add, append, and attach shelter and needed services for migrants.

For Maldonado and Lara, a main characteristic of “contemporary vernacular” is the dwelling understood as a chain or series of “rooms” that act as multifunctional areas, such as a bedroom-kitchen-living, or the shop-parking-guestroom.\textsuperscript{75} In her book \textit{A House is not Just a House}, Tatiana Bilbao offers a series of housing proposals that embrace the ambiguous and multifunctionality of areas while servicing local traditions. In the book she presents the project \textit{Sustainable Housing Ciudad Acuna}, where the street-facing areas of the housing units are left for resident interpretation, sometimes turning into walk-up window bodegas, or providing outdoor cooking areas.\textsuperscript{76} This thesis proposes to work within the tradition of the multifunctional and ambiguous, carving into spaces and


\textsuperscript{75} Maldonado and Lara.

\textsuperscript{76} Tatiana Bilbao, \textit{A House Is Not Just a House: Projects on Housing} (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2018).
attaching extensions to extant buildings, thus collaging itself onto the fabric of the city/town, and honoring its identity and existence.
B. **Mapping Territorial Networks**

Mapping and cartography has been understood as the means to represent the surface of the earth as faithfully as possible, and that premise is now being challenged. The cartography challenge comes upon the question of faithfulness, and the acceptance of the inherent lack of neutrality of the cartographer. Geographer Brian Harley argues that the process of mapping is not neutral or objective, but it is an action laden with power in *Deconstructing the Map*. He contends that mapping consists of creating knowledge, rather than simply revealing it. Thus, maps are products of privileged and formalized ontological frameworks, and they also produce knowledge about the world. Maps are therefore a product of power, and they produce power. A response to this is found in counter-mapping, the act of creating maps by diverse interests that provide alternative viewpoints to state-sanctioned and commercial cartography. Counter-mapping not only reveals the politics of mapping, but also subverts the primacy of established maps.

Contested territories, such as Palestine, have become the centers of discussion regarding counter-mapping. Professor Edward Said, addressed the counter-mapping efforts carried by Palestinian refugees (Palestinian nationals that have been forcibly removed from Palestine) by stating that “In the history of colonial invasion maps are always first drawn by the victors, since maps are instruments of conquest. Geography is therefore the art of war but can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counterstrategy” Within this counterstrategy, geographer Linda Quiquivix tells us the

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78 Kitchin and Dodge.
story of how Google Earth began being used by Palestinian refugees who refused the erasure of their plight and created the Nakba Layer, geolocating destroyed and existing Palestinian villages. Under the 1990s Oslo peace process, Palestinian leadership entered negotiations under the premise that it accepts a geography limited to the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a premise that marks the beginning of the Israel-Palestine conflict in 1967, erasing the occupation from 1948 onwards that caused the refugee exodus. The Nakba Layer, thus restates the years from 1948 to 1967 as part of history and validates the right of Palestinian refugees to their native land. The use of Google Earth and the Nakba Layer, as explained by Quiquivix, presents a study of counter-cartography, one that is facilitated by participatory information sharing and production of maps from ordinary people.

However, to engage with map-making without first analyzing the tools of their making would be a severe oversight. Google Earth and ESRI stand as the main interfaces for civilian access to satellite imagery, but the access to data that we currently get, as explained by cartographer and artist Denis Wood, “merely hints at the insane apparatus of surveillance and control that the world of map-making has mutated into.” Architect and professor Laura Kurgan further explains how current map making using satellite imagery is in fact a composite, a patchwork of satellite data artificially assembled. Therefore, it no longer is the integrating vision of a particular person standing in a particular place, but

82 Quiquivix.
83 Quiquivix.
84 Wood and Fels, *The Power of Maps*.
85 Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance* (Zone Books, 2013).
rather an image that no human could see, an image that can be updated with new data, bearing a history that mixes instability, precision and ambiguity, and that raises questions about the intersection between the physical and virtual space. Kurgan continues her discussion by stating that the fact that these are virtual images does not make them any less true, but that they provide pause to consider what we mean by truth today. Moreover, she centers civilian users within these technologies, stating “we do not stand at a distance from these technologies, but rather are addressed by and embedded within them.”

This thesis places counter-mapping efforts within this theoretical discussion, in alliance with displaced peoples to restate and solidify the history of mobility of migrants...
across the Mexican territory. Thus, this counter-geography becomes an act of memorializing and storytelling from the bottom-up, where counter-cartography and counter-mapping are necessary at a time of war. Kurgan explains that in the “post-Cold War” period, war fighting has become invested in image and information technologies where the borders between civilians and the military, domestic, and international became blurred. In a response to the US government actions and impetus to deal with migration as a matter of national security, this thesis considers the Mexican territory as a ground of warfare and resistance. Aligned with the assertions of Linda Quiquivix, the counter-mapping presented here are the routes undertaken by people in struggle who believe in something and act upon that believe, transforming the map into an element of force within a political battlefield.\(^{88}\)

Walking Map of Queretaro and Guanajuato, by Cami Quinteros

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\(^{88}\) Quiquivix, “Art of War, Art of Resistance: Palestinian Counter-Cartography on Google Earth.”
The use of digital tools provides access to interpreted satellite imaging, such as the use of high-resolution satellite imaging for the segmentation of roads and buildings. This information can be accessed through open-source databases such as Open Street Maps and directly connected to the Rhino interface via the Grasshopper plug-in Urbano. In these composite maps, the aim is to extract information from each site, such as how many buildings might be available for intervention. By layering data sources, such as accessing Google Places API data, one can analyze mobility patterns such as the walking distance from town to town or walking distance from building to building. Additional layers can be added, such as GIS extracted topographic lines, which begin to access experiential aspects of each terrain – is the walk at an incline or along the sea? Are migrants between mountains, or on flat expanses? Is there access to surface water, or are they walking through vast desert landscapes?

These maps explore the individual path of a migrant, and the multiplicity of decisions that must be taken along the way, by superimposing and patching segmented satellite images that make up a collective movement. The maps no longer express the path of an individual, but that of a collective, people who can interact with the maps and change their data as they navigate the physical world. The maps, based on big data analysis, are then everchanging, providing the basis for what can become a nuanced encryption of pathways and resources along the routes of migration.
C. **Hacking a Religious Network**

Using the Urbano plug-in for this counter-mapping provides access to datasets otherwise unavailable, filling in layers of information to this map. However, the tool lacks an important landmark and amenity present in Latin American towns and cities: the chapel. While chapels can take on many forms and sizes, chapels in the Chiapas, Queretaro/Guanjuato, and Chihuahua are characterized by a clear marker, a central altar, and by an open plan. These spaces can be outfitted with plastic chairs for ceremonies, or can act as a transit stop, market, or memorial space. These simple structures are widely present and are part of the fabric of the city. Smaller altars are also mounted at corner
stores, tailor shops, taxi stations, and side of the road enterprises such as street food stands. To find these chapels and locate them on the maps, I created a filter within the Google Places API using a python script that would provide their geolocations based on keywords. Example of maps in each of the three regions, in the cities of Tonala in Chiapas, Irapuato in Guanajuato, and Chihuahua in Chihuahua, show the ubiquitous nature of these religious spaces. Moreover, the locations of the chapels primarily relate to locations of higher population density, with more sporadic chapels in areas of lower population densities. It is important to note, however, that even in smaller towns there are multiple chapels and churches: churches are denominational and privately-owned even though they provide public programming, and chapels are communally owned, non-denominational, and often open air with a simple canopy and few security locks.

The chapel network provides an existing, communally owned, series of buildings and sites that can be altered and expanded to provide safe havens for migrants. Considering the religious background of the efforts led by groups of Las Patronas, and Father Gonzales and Solalinde, it is plausible to imagine that the chapels could serve as a ubiquitous, affordable, and accessible network of spaces to serve migrant travelers.
Chapel locations in Tonala, Chiapas, by Cami Quinteros

Chapel locations in Irapuato, Guanajuato, by Cami Quinteros
Chapel locations in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, by Cami Quinteros
D. Understanding the Experience of Travel

In the book *The Open Veins of Latin America* Eduardo Galeano gives a historic context as to why rules and laws in Latin America are not understood as real, but rather as a suggestion. He explains the story behind the Law of Burgos, a series of edicts published by the Spanish crown at the insistence of Jesuit priests who believed that the native people of the colonies should not be enslaved and tortured. The Law of Burgos emphasized the kind treatment and support of wellbeing for native peoples. The signing of this law was an important episode in the history of Latin America, and in 1920 Diego Rivera completed a mural depicting the moment it happened. However, the importance of this episode was captured as a political commentary, because the law was never implemented or actualized. The signing of the Law of Burgos remains an unfulfilled promise in a place that had, and continues to have, a majority native population. It is Galeano’s claim that the Latin American understanding of law, and lawlessness, has the Law of Burgos as its basis and has continued to be built upon with a series of post-colonial semi-feudal governments that considered themselves above the law.

My intention was to enter the realm of lawlessness and understand the path of migration at a more interpretative level. The use of Artificial Intelligence through StyleGAN models provides a path into the imaginary. A StyleGAN is a neural network for Artificial Intelligence predictions that works based on the use of a Generator, and a

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89 Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America.*
90 Galeano.
91 Galeano.
Discriminator.\textsuperscript{92} AI neural networks are fed databases, as StyleGAN is made up of images, from which they learn patterns. For example, if the database is made up of photographs of landscapes, the neural network will begin to learn that the sky is above the landscape, if all photos are positioned accurately. However, the neural network only understands what it is given in the database, and if landscape photos that are offered upside down, it will predict that the sky is always below the landscape. Thus these neural networks do not understand semantics or semiotics, and those are only derived from the way in which databases are managed.\textsuperscript{93} What makes a StyleGAN interesting for this thesis, however, is not in its complete operation where it manages to understand patterns and generate realistic landscapes, but in the moments when it is trying to understand patterns but does not follow all rules. These images, created by the StyleGAN Generator in training, are part of the back end of the neural network and are a sub-group of what is known as The Latent Space.\textsuperscript{94}

StyleGANs are computationally heavy models and require the force of a powerful, and expensive, graphic processing units (GPU). Companies such as RunwayML have created pre-trained models with simple images, such as landscapes, satellite views, or an archive of bug photos, and provide the possibility of applying transfer learning to your own dataset. This frees the users from having to create a dataset with thousands of images and provides access to powerful cloud-based GPUs. Moreover, if the user decides to


\textsuperscript{93} Gabriella Rossi, “Visual Encoding Workshop” (Online Lecture, Institute of Advanced Architecture of Catalunya, June 14, 2021).

\textsuperscript{94} Rossi.
create a trained model on a completely new dataset, the model then becomes available to other members of RunwayML, creating a collaborative work environment where multiple programmers influence one another.

This dataset was created by collecting images from Google Street Maps, where I took a series of 6-hour virtual walks in Chiapas, Guanajuato/Queretaro, and Chihuahua. Each walk was its own dataset made up of 350 images. Each was fed to the RunwayML landscape model for transfer learning, and the output was a series of imaginary places. The images show places that live only in the interpolation of the walk, like the smudged memories of a walker. While the role of big data and algorithms is usually understood within a black box of decision making, belonging only to those who have the means to access, this misuse of styleGANs provide new access to the imaginary, the poetic, the images in-between facts, the memories that are interpolated from experiences. These compositions belong to the world of error and the political space of its dissent.\footnote{Hughes, \textit{The Architecture of Error} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014).}
Latent Space Images, by StyleGAN programmed by Cami Quinteros
CHAPTER V

A HIDDEN NETWORK OF MUTUAL AID

A. The Chapel

In Latin American contemporary vernacular architecture, buildings are communally conceived and constructed rather than authored by an architect and constructed by a builder. They rely on simple construction systems, such as tin canopies with steel columns, or cement block (CMU) load bearing walls. These two systems consistently fell into a 10ft by 10ft (3 by 3 meters) grid, providing a standardized base for intervention. Moreover, the chapels are constructed over time, iteratively. They are occupied and used before they are completed, because the activities that take place within them are the propelling force for the conception of the building. They are not a finished product, but a mirror of a community that is changing, growing, and building itself.

Considering that network of mutual aid relies on the willingness and buy-in from people across the Mexican territory, it became critical for my thesis to propose a nimble intervention that focuses on opportunism and resourcefulness that align and do not overpower the current context. Based on this analysis, my attitude towards community chapels falls into three categories: Appending, Expanding, and Multi-layering.
An **appended chapel** is the introduction of new building materials to an already existing building, thus making use of shared walls and land. The appended chapel tends to appear at the front courtyard of a building, where the entrance is transformed over time, acting as an appendage of a larger building.

![Expanded Chapel, Analysis by Cami Quinteros](image)

An **expanded chapel** consists in the build-up of an already existing building, where the chapel becomes the central activity of that building. An example of expansion is the addition of markers of religiosity, such as the addition of a campanile or bell tower, or as a second floor. The chapel might then expand as the congregation grows.

Finally, a **multi-layered chapel** is one where no new materials are needed; the chapel is inserted into an extant space that can host multiple uses. For example, the introduction
of a chapel in the street-facing living room of a first-floor apartment suddenly converts a private home into a public institution. The private home does not cease to exist; its use has been reimagined and reinterpreted. Moreover, this reinterpretation can happen daily, with the re-organization of furniture around the space as needed. Architects such as Alejandro Aravena and his firm, Elemental, have embraced this multilayered typology in Latin America to provide low-cost housing without falling into the trappings of traditional spatial uses.96

These three typologies inform the opportunities to add, append, and attach shelter or other services for migrants upon existing buildings. Using the tools of the appended, extended, and multilayered chapels for the reframing and reimagining of the chapel is a method of hiding in plain sight, and the new programmatic elements added to the chapel

become the embodiment of solidarity and offer the possibility for opportunity and transgression.

This thesis tests this strategy through the design/reconfiguration of four different chapels across the previously studied areas of Chiapas, Guanajuato/Queretaro, and Chihuahua. By using these case studies, the suggested planning of nimble interventions demonstrates the needed spaces for pilgrims along their migratory routes.

B. The Chiapas Chapel: Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe

Located in the city of Tonala, nearing the border of Chiapas and Oaxaca, in the southern end of Mexico, the Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe Chapel sits in front of a plaza on the periphery of the city. Although Tonala is a city, the surrounding context is mostly rural, and most buildings are single story structures. The chapel sits next to a school to the west, and a library to the east. Across the street is a plaza and park with a concrete soccer field.

The chapel shows signs of a classic community chapel development, featuring a corrugated tin roof with columns at 10ft (3 meters) increments. The front façade appears to have been developed later and is placed to the west of the central axis of the plan. This
provides an opportunity to fill the east side of the chapel with dormitories as well as a kitchen and dining area. To the rear of the original chapel, a double-height storage room has been subdivided, creating a second floor, and creating a medical center and medical needs storage area.

First (Left) and second (right) floor plan, where dark poche hows original building existing conditions and colored elements shows interventions. Drawings by Cami Quinteros.

The medical center is subdivided with curtains, and one of the beds has been given further privacy by providing an acoustic wall separation. This is a particularly important separation due to the high number of sexual violence encounters endured by people along the migratory path.97

Separating the dormitories and medical center, on the second floor, versus the kitchen and dining area, on the first floor, provide safety measures by making use of retractable and hidable staircases and lockable doors. Moreover, each room is provided with a

97 Roldan Davila et al., “Construyendo Un Modelo de Atencion Para Mujeres Migrantes Victimas de Violencia Sexual, En Mexico.”
lockable and secure storage for important documents and valuable possessions.

Meanwhile, the kitchens and dining areas on the first floor have retractable doors so the space can be fully opened to the community, providing a space of encounter, and sharing.
C. **The Queretaro/Guanajuato Chapels: Capilla Bambu and Nino Manuelito**

Further north, in the Queretaro/Guanajuato area, two chapels demonstrate the workings of a multilayered network. The Queretaro/Guanajuato area is just north of Mexico City. The peripheries of the cities maintain a certain informality, especially along the commercial corridors. Capilla Bambu sits in one of these commercial corridors, surrounded by parking lots and bus stations, as well as a mid-sized ad hoc market, or *Tianguis*. The chapel currently is under-developed, anchored against the adjacent building on the east, where a single eave roof lands on a wall made of refuse wood and tin panels. The chapel shows clear signs of the characteristic contemporary vernacular progressive construction, with naked rebar frames patiently waiting for the time a cement column might be poured around it. The congregation is active, with an altar at the back end that has flowers and lit candles. This chapel is an example of a place that can expand to include shelter and solidify its own construction as the result of welcoming others.

*Site Plan and Axonometric of Capilla Bambu. Colored areas in axonometric drawing highlight proposed interventions. Drawings by Cami Quinteros.*

The intervention consists of the introduction of half a second floor, where dormitories are placed, as well as a back room for storage and an information center, a place where migrants can receive legal advice as well as scan their documents and look at
maps for the trek to come. In addition, the site offers the possibility of including a garden for emotional counseling, and a kitchen which acts as a place of encounter for both the local community and those passing by. Due to the small size of the chapel, the kitchen folds and unfolds for its use, so that the congregation can continue to assemble in their own space.

*Emotional Counseling Garden Area. Drawing by Cami Quinteros*
Kitchen Area, folded in when not in use. Drawing by Cami Quinteros

Kitchen Area, unfolded and being used. Drawing by Cami Quinteros
The Capilla Bambu, however, can only host a limited number of spaces and services. Therefore, taking advantage of the urban and densely populated nature of Irapuato, the Nino Manuelito Chapel was identified as a supporting space for elements that do not need high protection or necessitate socialization for exchange of services. One such element is the placement of items such as shoes, backpacks, rain gear, water bottles, period pads, soap, etc., on a shelf where people can go and pick them up as they need them.

Site Plan and Axonometric of Nino Manuelito. Colored areas in axonometric drawing highlight proposed interventions. Drawings by Cami Quinteros.

The Nino Manuelito Chapel is an appended chapel, in that it has taken over the entrance of another building, as such it is small and can only host a couple of benches and an altar. The intervention here is minimal and at the scale of the human body, or furniture. By placing a shelf on the underside of the benches, people can easily drop off donations and migrants can access them immediately. The Nino Manuelito Chapel is 15 minutes away from Capilla Bambu, and they act together as a web to provide aid to migrants crossing through Irapuato.
D. The Chihuahua Chapel: Santo Tomas de Aquino

The city of Chihuahua is a large sprawling city in the northern desert, 75 hours (about 5 days, stopping in the wilderness to sleep) by foot from the US/Mexico Border. In this northern region, migrants must act with caution because migratory patrol becomes more present. In addition, it can be expected that by the time people arrive in Chihuahua, they are increasingly tired and may need to stay at a shelter for a longer period. Moreover, at this point migrants need to start preparing their legal arguments for asylum upon arrival at the border and must ensure the safeguarding of their documents for the legal battles to come. Santo Tomas de Aquino is the largest chapel in this case study group, and it sits at the northern peripheries of Chihuahua City. It is a standalone building, near a highway and commercial area, in an area that is surrounded by desert dunes. In this context, the importance of safe indoor/outdoor opportunities is imperative, as well as access to information and legal representation.
Here, in the same way as with the other chapels, a kitchen area is located at the lower floor which expands into a dining room. However, the dining room is much larger because it acts also as the information center and a place where other gatherings can happen. Because the chapel is symmetrical, a symmetrical intervention with two identical structures to each side of the entrance of the chapel recall the sacred floorplan present in catholic churches – the intervention transforms the footprint of religious service from a rectangle into a cross-shape.

*Site Plan and Axonometric of Santo Tomas de Aquino. Colored areas in axonometric drawing highlight proposed interventions. Drawings by Cami Quinteros.*
While the lower floor is organized around a kitchen and the information centers, the upper floor has dormitories that are arranged around a courtyard. The courtyard offers visitors protected access to the outside, while also providing opportunities for cross ventilation in the bedrooms.
E. **Spatial Familiarity**

Except for the Nino Manuelito Chapel, all interventions share a similar kit of parts. Because of the 10ft by 10ft (3m by 3m) common structural grid, all dormitories measure 10ft by 8ft (3m by 2.5m) and all common spaces have measurements at 10ft (3m) increments. This provides an opportunity for the design and elaboration of furniture that can be deployed throughout the network so that dormitories, kitchens, and information centers all have a common language. This presents a spatial familiarity to migrants as they arrive at new places to seek shelter.

*A kit of parts: Furniture. Drawing by Cami Quinteros*
In addition to using this furniture set, plaster interior walls and exposed brick exterior cladding maintains continuity among various interventions. The plaster has a soft texture that is commonly used in the style of vernacular architecture in the region, while the exposed brick exterior is a common characteristic of the contemporary vernacular chapel and indicates that more can be built onto the structure. Throughout, amber glazing is used to provide access to light at the same time as privacy. The amber glazing is slatted, like shutters or French blinds, on the vertical windows while it stays as a solid sheet of glazing on the openable skylights. This combination encourages cross-ventilation and provides a soft amber light through all dormitories across the network of shelters.

*Cross-ventilation diagram for dormitories. Drawing by Cami Quinteros.*
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

C. The Reality of Migration

The process of learning about the reality of migration through the Mexican territory has been an emotionally challenging process. The reasons for migration are varied, and the groups of people who traverse the path of migration changes over time, and even through different seasons. While at the start of this thesis I presented the new wave of Haitian migrants, by the time this work is being concluded most Haitian migrants have been absorbed into the U.S. detention centers and are being processed for asylum or deportation.98 Today a new wave of people has arrived, many of them Senegalese men who are being prosecuted for their sexual orientation and gender expression. Once the plight of the Haitians crossing the Darien Gap was highlighted, it is now understood that people from all over the world are being trafficked through that inhospitable jungle. In the first three months of 2022, the number of Venezuelans crossing the Darien has tripled.99 Migration changes, but it never stops.

This thesis has taken me on a few different paths, attempting to produce accurate research with a sense of empathy for those who march north in search of a better life. I have identified underlying legal frameworks of border control and understood that their current state is one that represents governments and not all citizens. I have hacked and misused big data, existing in the politically transgressive space of error, first to map and understand mobility routes, and later to engage with collective memories to move away

98 Paul, “Por Que Tantos Haitianos Se Estan Yendo de Chile?”
from the singular experiences, or testimonials that are prevalent in humanitarian efforts and that often deny the patterns of migration experienced by whole communities. I have analyzed local vernaculars, to create a network that is both ubiquitous and invisible, to question the role of the architect author, and always concerned with safety and dignity of the people I hope to serve. In so doing, this work uses the visualization of a phenomenon to explain, to mark, and to solidify the argument that migration is not elsewhere, but that it is here.

This work necessitated two additional maps. Gathering data from the United Nations and the World Bank, I compared the number of citizens living abroad for each country in the continental Americas versus the number of remittances received.\textsuperscript{100} Those numbers provided a basis for setting up agents walking through a mesh. The first map shows the result of a disjointed mesh, one that has been sliced at the points where we are meant to believe that borders are stringent and solid – such as the Darien Gap, the Guatemala/Mexico border, and the Mexico/US border. The second map is of the joint mesh, showing how borders are porous, and people move from place-to-place challenging these artificially invented borders.

Based on these maps, my thesis questions the basic architectural paradigm that humans are sedentary rather than nomadic. And although I focused on Mexico, the network does not end at a given border, borders are ultimately meaningless. The movement of people is in continuous flux, never-ending. It is a cycle that does not have a

\textsuperscript{100} The World Bank, “Personal Remittances, Received in USD,” Governmental Website, The World Bank, April 24, 2022, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT.
beginning and end, but one that lives in our communal memory, forever. This thesis is not a solution to a problem, but an invitation to do more.

*Migratory Maps of the Americas. Drawing by Cami Quinteros.*


