Handbook on Human Security, Borders and Migration

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3. The mantling and dismantling of a tent city at the U.S.–Mexico border

Cynthia L. Bejarano and Ma. Eugenia Hernández Sánchez

1. INTRODUCTION: *DISPLACED PLÁTICAS, TU AQUI Y YO ALLÁ*

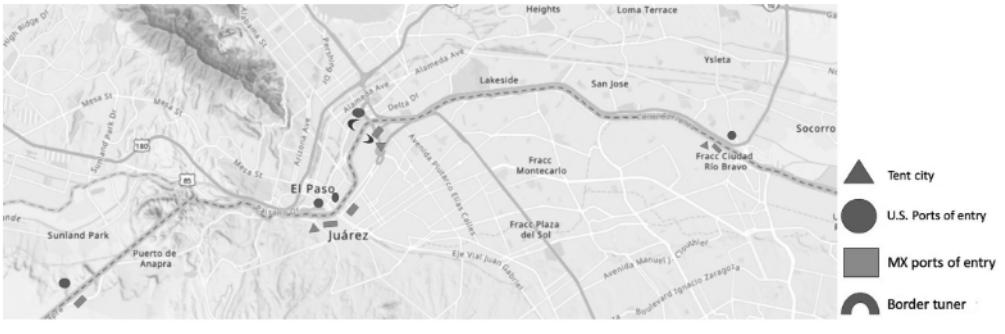
When people cross the borders between nation-states, regions, or even landscapes, they are changed by the experiences they endure. They in turn transform the places where they wait in anticipation of their next movement. Their language and accents, their social customs and beliefs shift as they adjust to the spaces and places around them, and the people they meet along the way. Networks are forged, lost, and reconfigured. People develop an aptitude for adaptation as their vulnerability intensifies. Migrants, like the sojourners that now gather at the northern Mexican border, were not only displaced from their home countries in Central and South America and Africa, they were forced to move across transborders for their survival. Mexican migrants became displaced within their country, living like nomads in what are popularly known as "tent cities."

Within these tent cities and shelters that grew in numbers, a gradual development among the enclaves of Central American refugees, were Mexican political asylum seekers, who became "*autoasilados*"[1] as they were transformed into internally displaced people moving from the interior of Mexico to the northern border. These burgeoning tent cities were mainly composed of Mexican "*autoasilados*," although all migrants struggled to be represented and seen by civil society organizations, law enforcement, and migration officials. Mexican *autoasilados* sought refuge within their own country, but their circumstances could not be understood with existing theoretical concepts, since their migration was a new phenomenon. For tent people, the future was either a tenuous and unpredictable one, or an assured death, if they remained in their hometowns. Suddenly, categories of citizenship were no longer solely assigned in accordance to the land one was from, or the land that emigrants traversed when crossing borders. Wingard (2013: 5) argues how, "immigrants as 'other' become both outsiders of community and insiders of economy." The practice of migrants creating a "tent city within a city," one tent at a time, or one shelter at a time, transformed the urbanscapes, political economy, and social relations of the border metropolis of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, where international bridges bind it to El Paso, Texas, U.S.; together, they share a population of over 2.0 million.[2]

The proliferation of tent cities across these urban international bridges linking Ciudad Juárez to El Paso uncovers competing discourses between groups of people that in turn represent geopolitical relations.[3] The phenomenon of being both displaced and disposable interlocks (Razack 2008) with ideologies of racism, classism, nativism, and sexism. The rhetoric of mass exoduses of migrant caravans—predominantly of women and children—in 2014, and in subsequent years, justified increased surveillance at the southern U.S. border. At international ports of entry, migration, inspection, and body scrutiny is part of a continuous formation that works to create a perpetual state of vigilance for Central American migrants in the area, for the growing number of internally displaced Mexican migrants from the interior, and the everyday

Mexican citizen and transnational migrants or binational citizens of Mexico and the U.S. that traverse the bridges linking the two nation-states.

In this chapter, we explore the tent city/settlement phenomenon via the interconnecting concepts of displacement, disposability, and debordering (Bejarano 2010). These practices foster what Hernández Sánchez calls a framework of *intersectional vulnerability* where we move from understanding specific identities, toward understanding specific practices of mobility in the Ciudad Juárez–El Paso border (2017). We explore how migrants shape the contours of a city through their modes of survival. We also describe the responses of locals and translocals who support them throughout their migrant journey, while others treat them like *disposable people*. We discuss the relationship between *displacement, disposability, and debordering* as interrelated concepts that help us establish the complex experience of migrants living in temporary tent settlements, while two neighboring and disparate countries argue over what to do with them. We next describe the inimitable project called Border Tuner (Lozano-Hemmer 2019), which allowed people across borders to literally hear each other's heartbeats and to speak to one another without limits (Figure 3.1). We end this chapter by discussing the ephemeral tent cities that disappeared without any knowledge of the tenants that lived in them.



Source: Google Maps, 2020.

Figure 3.1 *U.S. and Mexico ports of entry, tent city locations and Border Tuner*

Our intention with this chapter is to rescue the material experience as an axis to think of the border as a space of constant movement, which in turn generates long-term processes given the permanence (Giménez 1997) of that same movement. In Vogt's words, "Mobility is not an abstract process; it is a material and embodied one" (2018: 7). Displacement from one's own country while still living within one's country in tent settlements, thus, reveals the unavoidable materiality of mobility due to concrete situations of violence and unequal opportunities. There are no absolute numbers with this ephemeral settlement, but in September 2019, approximately 3,000 Mexican citizens from Mexican interior states like Guerrero, Michoacán, and Zacatecas arrived in Ciudad Juárez seeking refuge from drug violence (Isacson, 2019).

The groups of tents were mainly settled by Mexican migrants, but some people from Central America also came to live there. Tent cities are visually interrupting urban landscapes and revealing a long-term process of marginalization.

According to Silva Santisteban (2008), mobility and its consequences for people of color, in this case internally displaced Mexican citizens and Central American migrants, is a process of

othering through what or who is considered "disposable." Borrowing from Castillo (1999) the term "garbage," Silva Santisteban develops an interpretative analysis of garbage as a symbol, that we in turn, use to analyze the treatment of migrants as *displaced, disposable, and debordered*. *Basurización* turns garbage into a verb that explains how the image of garbage represents something "barbaric" or "exotic-hyperbolic" (in Silva Santisteban 2008):

> Garbage(ing)/basurización has a double meaning: the obscure and loathsome, which causes disgust and repulsiveness; and the strangely addictive side that, despite everything, invites us to search through it to uncover the footprints of previous enjoyment. (2008: 64)

The idea of displacement in relation to *basurización* acts as a global phenomenon which socially constructs migrants into what Silva Santisteban calls symbolic *basurización*, that comprises: "authoritarian discourses based on a patriarchal and colonial culture [which] operates through … symbolic garbage/basurization … a way of organizing the other as a leftover element of a symbolic system" (Silva Santisteban 2008: 18). This makes evident the challenges people face when forced to migrate, and the barriers to inclusion wherever they arrive. Migrants who formed tent cities near the international bridges with hopes of having their asylum cases heard in the U.S., became an exoticized spectacle as Silva Santisteban (2008) implies, for observers to gawk at or to pity, or, conversely, to empathize with and advocate for.

Pairing Silva Santisteban's ideas with what we have witnessed people in the U.S. and Mexico claim about migrants, we use the term *disposable people* to further articulate the ideas of displacement and disposability that migrants endure. In their spontaneous settlements (tent cities), the dominant societies treated migrants like *disposable people*, non-entities to be discarded or eventually removed from public spaces. Neither the U.S. nor Mexico (because of the U.S.'s inhumane response through the Remain in Mexico policy) knew what to do with the tent people that materialized. Critics of the tent cities eagerly demanded their dismantling. Perhaps more than interrupting a system, tent people made evident the system of exclusion shared by both Mexico and the U.S. That is, citizenship is a category that requires further exploration as a heterogenous one and not a fixed category. On one hand, Mexicans seeking refuge within Mexico makes evident the process of alienation by local communities. On the other hand, when Mexicans seek asylum in the United States, their process is not recognized, ergo, *Remain in Mexico* becomes an affirmation. The presence of the tents represented a nuisance for some, an eyesore for others, but all the while, tent people lived as outcasts in these outdoor shelters, as if they had committed a crime or societal infraction. Migrants were dehumanized, criminalized, and racialized (Vogt 2018; Bejarano and Morales 2011). Their displacement for weeks and even months signaled their disposability. Conversely, though, migrants resignifed and debordered the meaning of public spaces and rebordered heavily geopoliticized areas, like Mexican walkways near international bridges and the iconic Chamizal Federal Park in Ciudad Juárez to establish their settlements. Migrants refused to be rendered invisible; instead, they made claims to space where the busiest signs of commerce and capitalism took place—near the lines of vehicles moving in between two countries.

Walicki reminds us of other sites of resistance worldwide, where people experience a collective fatigue for being harassed and persecuted. Walicki (2009: 25) states, "A characteristic of long-term displacement in Europe is the disproportionate number of legal sentences against certain ethnic groups, tired of the[ir] sponsors and how the media addresses the topic and [in concrete] how the world contributes to forgetting those who remain displaced". Throughout

this chapter, we will discuss a concept that we call "scales of humanity" to describe the vast range of responses toward migrants. Responses include the collective galvanization of civil society and everyday citizens across borders to work as volunteers, or who gave donations of time and resources, and range to the extreme inhumanity witnessed when U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents were instructed by supervisors and Washington, DC to bar entry into the U.S. of migrants asserting traumatic experiences for their asylum requests. Others like vigilante, militia groups preyed on migrants as they attempted to cross the border, or when practicing racist rhetoric that portrayed or alluded to migrants as disposable people.[4]

In response to these reactions, migrants and their advocates debated lawmakers and law enforcers including nativists[5] locked in disputes on claims to rights-making and place-making as makeshift tent communities were temporarily constructed. While migrants were displaced and assessed as disposable, they lived as squatters pushing back by debordering and reborder-ing public spaces as a temporary claims-making assertion. They deterritorialized public places to create "in the moment" home spaces as they waited for their next upheaval.

2. *DISPLACED PLÁTICAS*: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH DURING URGENT TIMES

Our analysis is based on discussions we call *displaced pláticas*.[6] We write this work from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and Las Cruces, New Mexico just 45 miles away from each other, as we each bear witness to the movement and obstruction of migrants at the border, and the raging debates that occur about them across the region. We write to bear witness and to reveal stories that can easily be erased from public memory—like the ephemeral tent settlements in Ciudad Juárez that vanished as we completed this chapter.

We both have worked as volunteers with migrants in shelters and as interpreters, and have collected donations and provided other needs to migrants for several years. We each have visited or worked with migrant children, youth, and families in several capacities for over 20 years. We reflect on our conversations about migration as *displaced pláticas* because, as citizens from Mexico and the U.S., and as women born and raised at the border, we too cross borders to visit each other, to reflect and write together, and to advocate for migrants across borders.

As migrant defenders and feminista fronterizas that engage the topic of migration as schol-ars, activists, and border people, we refer to our dialogues as *displaced pláticas*. We try to listen and to commit our time and advocacy to migrants even though we recognize that we cannot completely understand or conceptualize, or count, or conclude people's experiences. As such, we are displaced in two ways. We are displaced from migrants in not sharing their experiences, because we are not fleeing our homes as migrants and are privileged in writing this chapter, as we write from the comfort of our homes. We are also displaced from each other because of nation-state boundaries that often make working, advocating, and visiting each other complicated and mitigated by hours' long wait lines at international border crossings and obtrusive scrutiny by customs border inspections. What we know is that people's experiences are key to thinking about borders, global processes and the meaning of our own work in and out of academia. As ethnographers, we know that we must leave our home in order to be criti-cal of our own privileges. We talk, write and visit with each other often, but must cross interna-tional borders to do so. Our *displaced pláticas* are representative of our reflections, advocacy

work, and solidarity praxis of crossing the same international bridges where migrants have established their settlements.

Our participation with other migrant advocates' engagement in the Border Tuner art installation, discussed later, as *platicadoras* talking back and forth to each other across the U.S. border wall apparatus is an example of how we re-interpret displacement. The main axis of our present work is to interrupt the way in which discourses on the border, migration, agency, academia, and advocacy are considered. We propose our *displaced pláticas* as a dialogue of transnational solidarity (Carastathis 2013; Galván 2014), understood as a process of separation, confrontation, mutual tensions, and critical friendships that channel solidarity in times of profound vigilance. In Mohanty's words, "home, community, and identity all fit somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities and friendships" (2003: 136). This relational component is the principle we want to engage with.

3. DISPLACEMENT: RUPTURES OVER TERRITORIES, CLAIMS-MAKING, AND SURVIVAL

The establishment of spontaneous tent cities signaled an aesthetics of emergency and urgency that emerged as asylum seekers were stranded at the border. Laddaga introduces the concept of "emergency" to describe temporal experiences that cannot be explained with fixed categories (2006). These temporal experiences (i.e. border crossings and migration) are unique in time and space but are also prevalent for the masses who attempt to cross borders and endure a preponderance of global state and nation-state vigilance. Thus, we embody what Laddaga discusses as "disjunctive relations" (2006: 98) to describe the disjunctive features of international ports of entry and their surrounding areas, and what was understood as a rupture of territory and claims-making through tent cities.

As migration refers to the traditional movement of people from one country to another, our discussion of displacement involves both internal and external migration. We include the disjunctive relations that were forged between migrants who were foreign to each other vis-à-vis the unfamiliar spaces that they collectively came to inhabit. We also argue that displacement is rooted in the tension between having the "right" kind of citizenship/legal status and access to rights' claims-making or not. According to Bello et al. (n.d.), the U.S. has not signed many of the treaties to protect people based on their values within themselves (by being human), while Mexico has signed many treaties, yet the violence makes evident the lack of follow through with these human rights protocols. It is not our intention to compare human rights to citizenship claims, but to show that both nation-state(s) unlawfully implement mechanisms of control that have material consequences for thousands of people and society at large. This is the case for tent people that were not shown the degree of empathy needed.

Displacement also involves a relationship with territory and control over that territorial claim. Although our present analysis is based on the actual experience of people inhabiting and creating new spaces and places of survivability, Monje and Burin (2008: 41) recuperate the historical discussion of privatization of land as a system that organizes belonging, and challenges us to consider, "any dispute to recuperate land for collective untransferable use from a perspective that assigns such a use as a basic human right." Migrants inhabiting public spaces while living in tents along the sidewalks of side streets adjacent to Mexico's international

bridges disrupt traditional uses of public spaces to make human rights claims to public land as sovereign, albeit, internally displaced Mexicans. Central American and other refugees also change the consumption of public use land, buildings, and local peoples by making assertions as migrants who have international and inalienable human rights to move freely and to live without violence.

Even though tent people move as the result of internal national conflicts and remain stagnated as a result of hyper U.S. surveillance, their autonomous agency is evident just by the presence of their tent cities along the three international bridges. Although it is important to stress that their places of settlement and their processes to have access to refugee status reveal an intention to enter through official state channels, their autonomous organization (internal system of organization) remains uniquely theirs. In Appadurai's words, "the smaller the number and the weaker the minority, the deeper the rage about its capacity to make a majority feel like a mere majority rather than like a whole and uncontested ethnos" (2006: 37). People migrate for their survival despite an intense vulnerability as they travel, but they also create a collective autonomous migration (Rodriguez 1996) process through caravans and temporary tent cities, that disrupts the governability of nation-states and the regularity of local systems and ordinances.

4. FROM MIGRANT CARAVANS TO REMAIN IN MEXICO POLICY

The relationship between nation-state empire building and the extreme enforcement of migration policies that build on historical patterns of exclusion and surveillance toward migrants, immigrants, and everyday people are central to this work. The emerging formations of even more restrictionist policies around migration are at the center of this chapter, as are the urgent responses to these policies by people balancing their survivability with experiences and feelings of "unknowing" waiting for permission to enter the U.S. from cities like Ciudad Juárez. "Migrants are caught up in what scholars have called 'regimes of mobility' and 'precarious transit zones' produced at the nexus of exclusionary state policies and increased circulation around the globe" (Voigt 2018: 7).

The most recent impetus for this exclusionary regime was triggered by the alarmist portrayals of caravans of women and children traveling en masse to the U.S. in 2014, as they escaped violence in their home countries. Women and children from the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) arrived at the U.S. border fleeing the gang violence, domestic violence, extreme poverty, food insecurities, and severe drought that contributed to their departures (Isacson 2019; Rosenblum and Ball 2016; Vogt 2018). In 2014, unaccompanied children and family units traveling together peaked at 27,000 in June, although the numbers dropped below 5,000 three months later (Rosenblum and Ball 2016). Subsequent numbers of migrants ebbed and flowed as nativists' anxieties fostered a hateful and racist rhetoric about the migrants leeching government resources, and bringing crime and violence to the U.S.—a nation already saturated with gun violence by its own citizens, and infamously having the highest rates of incarcerated people in the world (Alexander 2012). The migration from the Northern Triangle triggered the proliferation of the U.S. border enforcement apparatus, and the growth in public information campaigns that included the launching of the Plan for the

Alliance for Prosperity in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador (Rosenblum and Ball 2016), which in theory would help curb the out-flow of migration from Central America.

These deterrent developments did not halt migrants from moving northward. Surviving violence, in all its iterations, is a surefire mechanism for movement. In efforts to avoid the well-documented abuse of traveling alone or in small groups atop *La Bestia*, the train system vertically snaking up the eastern coast of Mexico, migrants began to travel together in large groups called caravans.[7] The first caravan arrived at the Tijuana, Mexico border in November 2018, where people were met with a violent response by U.S. border agents who tear gassed migrants as they neared the U.S. international boundary in Tijuana, while U.S. President Trump ordered the U.S. military on standby (Fry 2019).

A year later, Mexico's national guard responded similarly to a caravan of 2,000 African migrants in southern Mexico (Fry 2019). Ensuing caravans received the same fate, gaining momentum as they began their journeys in Central America, and then gradually lost people along the way who tried their luck in Mexico or elsewhere. In January 2020, Mexican security forces used pepper spray on 4,000 Central Americans at its southern border with Guatemala, increasing their deterrence tactics and what some have referred to as the invisible border wall fostered by the Trump administration (Semple and McDonald 2020). These migrant caravans resulted in a more regimented and dangerous restrictionist era of migration policies including the Remain in Mexico policy innocuously dubbed the Migrant Protection Protocol (Isacson 2019).

5. REMAIN IN MEXICO POLICY

The Remain in Mexico policy implemented in January 2019 by the Trump administration is an example of emergent borders working to further dispossess and displace people beyond their original uprooting. The Remain in Mexico policy forces asylum seekers to remain in Mexico—typically migrants remain at the northern Mexican border with the U.S.—while they await court dates, making it seemingly impossible for them to meet with U.S. based attorneys or other advocates; most migrants go without legal representation (Isacson 2019). This policy works to disrupt migratory flows and international protocols protecting migrants' rights to seek asylum in the U.S. and elsewhere. As of December 13, 2019, Mexico reported receiving over 60,000 non-Mexican migrants under this policy; nearly 18,000 people were sent to Ciudad Juárez to await their asylum hearing (Isacson 2019).

Through the Remain in Mexico policy, the U.S. has abandoned its adherence to international interventions and protocols to protect migrants in states of extreme vulnerability and emergency. The U.S. has ignored its commitments to the international community, instead helping to foster a predatory atmosphere at border transit zones (Bejarano and Morales, 2011). "As a signatory to the 1967 Protocol, and through U.S. immigration law, the United States has legal obligations to provide protection to those who qualify as refugees. The Refugee Act established two paths to obtain refugee status—either from abroad as a resettled refugee or in the United States as an asylum seeker" (American Immigration Council 2020).

We argue that the Trump administration not only breaks with U.S. and international migrant/refugee/political asylum protection protocols, but it equally refuses to see Mexico as a sovereign nation. Instead, it views it as an occupied territory of the U.S. by demanding the execution of U.S. policies like Remain in Mexico to be implemented in Mexico, and an increase in

Table 3.1 Tent city: between countries-within a city

U.S.	Tent city	MX
Metering: the process of vetting applications based on a fixed number allocated per day that can vary, and not specifically by specific asylum cases	Spontaneous settlements created in the contours of each of the main international bridges between Mexico and the U.S.	Remain in Mexico policy forced the hand of migrants to establish tent settlements
Metering occurs as a form of inspection of refugees at the middle of the international bridge	Autonomous organization of migrants established tent settlements	Violence forced internal displacement/ migration of Mexican citizens
Central Americans must return to Mexico after their application review	Migrants established a numerical system to present their cases in the U.S., although there were many lists kept by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and shelters, and by migrants themselves	Mexican government shelters were forced to respond to U.S. Remain in Mexico policy
Mexicans can apply for refugee status through the Humanitarian Asylum Review Process (HARP) applicable for Mexican citizens. They were also expected to wait out their asylum elsewhere through a "third safe country" agreement	Settlement locations near international bridges, were to keep migrants' place in line to have their asylum cases heard in the U.S.	Mexico responds by militarizing its Mexican borders, like the U.S., which increased militarization at the border

ever growing policies and agreements to further convolute asylum protections and migrants' rights-based assertions and protocols. Ultimately, migrants in Mexico experience dispossession, displacement, and a debordering phenomenon where the U.S. overreaches into Mexico and Central America by extending its ideology of border walls into other sovereign-nations.

Migrants in Ciudad Juárez and across the U.S.–Mexico borderlands remain cramped in shelters in need of support to care for so many people (Ortiz Uribe 2019), or migrants decide to take matters into their own hands by creating tent settlements. As earlier stated, about 3,000 Mexican citizens arrived in Ciudad Juárez in early fall 2019 (Isacson, 2019). Mexican migrants comprised the bulk of tent residents establishing settlements near the international bridges. As governments construct more elaborate and vexing policies, migrants experience daily consequences of "regimes of mobility" (Vogt 2018) that fortify stringent practices like metering at the international boundary line—the center point of international bridges.

6. METERING PRACTICE AT THE INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES: THE PRICE OF ENTRY

The practice of metering at international ports of entry, where people are systematically categorized based on their documents and nationalities, is a recent development.[8] People seeking asylum in the U.S. are rejected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents as they are turned away by the practice of metering. This is the process in which agents screen documents at the middle of the international bridges, a hairline space that demarcates Mexico from the U.S. Since migrants began arriving in larger numbers at the U.S.–Mexico border seeking political asylum, this most recent encroachment began. A few people can cross into the U.S. daily, as they wait in pedestrian lines with other border crossers. This second, new inspection

is another security apparatus coupled with concertina wire, large, orange jersey barriers, and even canopies meant to protect agents from the blazing sun. "A new rule would ban asylum for anyone who did not first seek it in a country through which he or she crossed en route to the U.S … [Although] [i]t is illegal [process called refoulement] to knowingly send people back to countries where they're likely to be persecuted" (Isacson 2019: 4–5).[9] Since 2018, from one moment to the next, asylum processes can change, and laws or protocols can be dismissed or ignored.

Those with the most extreme and violent stories might have an opportunity to at least secure an audience with a U.S. immigration judge, but they are forced to wait in Mexican border cities like Ciudad Juárez. These unabashed practices of displacing people and creating socio-cultural conditions mimicking war-torn countries with refugees forced into a liminal and temporal, and in some ways a stateless, space is nothing short of torturous and violent. Migrants released from the U.S. as part of the Remain in Mexico policy are returned to the Paso del Norte bridge in Ciudad Juárez at 9:00am and 6:00pm respectively, leaving those who cross in the evening more vulnerable as dusk settles in the city metropolis (Isacson, 2019). These practices foster the *intersectional vulnerability* that Hernández Sánchez calls the location where systems of oppression meet critical race theory (CRT) at the Ciudad Juárez–El Paso border (2017). Combined, these policies represent blatant racist and discriminatory policies like those of previous years, and we witness the worst rungs of what we call scales of humanity. Hence, the criminalization of immigrants deepens as institutionalized racism seeps across borders through the exportation of U.S. militarism.

7. THE MILITARIZATION OF BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER

We are witnessing the northern Mexican and southern Mexican borders further militarized as the composition of its people adjusts to absorb the asylum seekers expelled from U.S. borders including those who were never allowed to enter. Sassen claims that, "the notion of expulsion takes us beyond the more familiar idea of growing inequality as a way of capturing the pathologies of today's global capitalism" (2014: 1), and, we would add, the further reach of the U.S. to militarize borders. The historical and "real time" push to expel migrants from the U.S. with paramilitary policing tactics reminds us of Sassen's prediction. U.S. expulsion, in our analysis, is evident just outside the U.S. international boundary line including activity within the U.S.–Mexico border region. The practice of expulsion is most evident with Remain in Mexico, metering policies and practices at international bridges, and consequent asylum-seeking protocols prohibiting entry to the U.S.—all used to justify a military presence along nation-state borders.[10]

U.S. historical underpinnings of expansion and empire building ideologies seep into current U.S. influences of militarizing other borders. When migrants arrived at Ciudad Juárez, U.S. army soldiers stationed at Ft. Bliss Army Military Base assisted with the metering practice at the three busy international bridges, by waving people through to the U.S. side if they held up the right form of documentation.[11] "In Ciudad Juárez, the arrival of migrants was 'forced' (removal from the U.S.), and entire communities [were] expelled and displaced towards different regions, both in the U.S. and Mexico due to the presence of armed groups [which include] the army, [and] groups linked to cartels and mercenaries" (Sánchez Díaz and Ravelo Blanca 2019: 111–112). From approximately 2008 to 2010 there was, "an exodus of inhabitants of

Ciudad Juárez due to the violence … [due to what] was established by the fight for the city control between cartels and the widespread decomposition that resulted in a large number of homicides and femicides" (Sánchez Díaz and Ravelo Blanca 2019: 108). The violence that predated the arrival of migrants further justified the presence of the Mexican military.

The rhetoric of violence in Ciudad Juárez made the stationing of Mexican military soldiers near the tent encampments a "natural" response, and a defensible one laced with claims of protection for the tent people. Many, however, argued that their presence was to deter or outright stop migrants from attempting to cross into the U.S. as irregular migrants. The proliferation of the Mexican military redefined as border guards at the northern Mexican border spread to the southern Mexican border. According to the Hope Border Institute (2019), the joint agreement known as Remain in Mexico, "paused the tariff threats … [and] emphasized Mexican enforcement" stating:

> Mexico will send 6,000 members of its newly formed National Guard to the Mexico–Guatemala border to prevent further migration to the U.S.; The U.S. will expand the Remain in Mexico program across its entire southern border and will accelerate the adjudication of asylum claims; and Mexico will allow asylum seekers in this program to stay in Mexico while also offering jobs, healthcare, and education according to its principles. (Hope Border Institute 2019)

Aspects of the U.S. Low Intensity Conflict Doctrine (LIC) developed in the 1980s and exported across Latin America is relevant to this discussion. According to Dunn (1996), the LIC is:

> the establishment and maintenance of social control over targeted civilian populations through the implementation of a broad range of sophisticated measures via the coordinated and integrated efforts of police, paramilitary and military forces. One of the doctrine's distinguishing characteristics is that military forces take on police functions, while police forces take on military characteristics. (1996: 4)

The LIC practices were evident everywhere, since the U.S. and Mexican military were deputized as border guards to meter, inspect, and enforce immigration and migration laws at international ports of entry. Some days in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, the number of policing and military forces seemed to outnumber those of the Mexican *autoasilados* and non-Mexican asylum seekers gathering together in tent settlements, or waiting in shelters or at the international bridges to have their numbers called.

8. TENT CITY ENCLAVES AND THEIR DISPOSABILITY IN PLAIN SIGHT

Over several months in 2019, the landscapes surrounding the international bridges near the Paso del Norte crossing area, the Chamizal International Peace Park near the Bridge of the Américas, and the area bordering the Zaragoza bridge were transformed into Central American and Mexican enclaves. These three bridges are the most traveled crossing points of the five international ports of entry bridging Mexico and the U.S. to each other. Tents dotted pedestrian areas and children, men, and women congregated outside and around their tents. Walking the side streets where the tents were situated felt like one was crossing the threshold of people's homes. It felt as if we were crossing through their living rooms as migrants dusted themselves

from a disruptive night's sleep and busily organized their scant belongings inside their tents. Tourist buses would speed by the side street where "tent" people resided, as street vendors set up their stands to sell food to migrant families and passersby. The migrant industry of food posts across the streets from the tents seemed to be the only people pleased with this new settlement.

Tent people, clustered together near their makeshift houses, choking from exhaust fumes as hundreds of cars each day lined the passageways into the U.S. from Ciudad Juárez, came to be known as the 'tent cities" of the border. People continued to go along with their daily routines attempting a modicum of normalcy, while the spectacle of the tent settlements formed. We wonder what the young eyes of the three-year-old boys who we once saw sitting cross-legged outside their tents thought, as tourist buses and border crossers zoomed by nearly hitting them. We wonder what the older eyes of their parents felt living in a tent in efforts to keep their children from danger in their hometowns or countries.

Families sat and waited at or near the bridges to have their assigned numbers called. Asylum seekers were given a number to wait to be called to cross the border to meet with an immigration judge. Migrants were fearful of leaving their positions at the bridge, and leaving for a shelter, so they stayed near the bridge for safe keeping. Few migrants were ever able to cross to sit in asylum court proceedings, and even fewer had access to U.S. based attorneys. Despite the establishment of tent settlements, Mexican shelters swelled with migrants and remained cramped and in need of support to care for so many people (Ortiz Uribe 2019.)

The materialization of borderless space through the newly formed enclaves and the reinterpretations of what constitutes community and home in tent settlements reveals the necessity to carve out dignified spaces for those rendered disposable. Forging new relationships and networks of people is representative of the other end of the scale of humanity, the end of the scale that represents relationality through hope and dignity, and a common struggle for rights' assertions across national boundaries and truncated citizenships. "By focusing on the physical rehabilitation of central districts, practices of regeneration have often unrecognized the presence or rights of the communities inhabiting them" (De Carli et al. 2015: 152). One might argue that the tent settlements fostered a unique vibrance to the greater urban landscapes not seen before. Despite their vulnerability and their treatment as symbolic *basurización*, people living in the tent settlements organized themselves and practiced their own brand of agency by creating lists to have their names called during the metering practices at the international bridges, managing their home tents and food scarcity concerns.

Tent people also entered transnational solidarity logics which involved a transgression of the nation-state. A teacher from El Paso established a tent with two sections to provide instruction to 25 children (Net Noticias 2020) in the Chamizal Park. Tent people displayed a resourcefulness and dignity that could only stem organically from within the settlement, as they represented a visual materialization of rebordering spaces that demand urgent responses by border societies and the world order. The most immediate response was reaching across the dry Rio Grande/Rio Bravo riverbed to show our solidarity.

9. DEBORDERING THE MEXICO–U.S. "HYPHEN" THROUGH THE BORDER TUNER ART INSTALLATION

"Cada voz es un puente" (De la Rosa Carrillo, 2019)[12]

Given our geographic location at the Mexico–U.S. border, a hyper-militarized and volatile geopolitical space, we understand the imminent need to look beyond national, class, and race and ethnic boundaries to come together to form transborder movements of solidarity and forms of communication. Vogt asserts, "Scholars have moved beyond understanding of borders as fixed 'lines in the sand' to reconceptualize the political geographies where borders are 'enacted, materialized and performed'" (2018: 7). We recognize that, at times, we are characterized more so by our differences that manifest in national, social, economic, political and legal boundaries, although our identities as border people bind us together through language, families, culture, and border crossings.

Adding to the complexity of these cultural and border understandings is the displacement and disposability of Mexican *autoasilados*, and Central American migrants and other refugees, through the symbolic basurization of their experiences as migrants, and the establishment of tent cities where they survive their realities as squatters. These experiences speak to a form of structural determinism including, "the idea that our system, by reason of its structure and vocabulary, cannot redress certain types of wrongs … it is hard to think about something that has no name, and it is hard to name something unless one's interpretative community has begun talking and thinking about it" (Delgado and Stefancic 2012: 27). The unavoidable question then becomes: How can we cross the U.S.–Mexico border, or at least reach what people call "the other side" under such heavy militarized surveillance?

The Border Tuner art installation (Lozano-Hammer 2019) is a recent example that worked as an interlocutor of interpretive community/ies and as an interventionist. The Border Tuner sent light beams across the border between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. It consisted of three interactive stations on each side of the border wall, which were controlled by "searchlight beams using a small dial wheel. When lights from any two stations [were] directed at each other, microphones and speakers automatically switched-on to allow participants to talk with one another, creating cross-border conversations."[13]

The Border Tuner art installation responded to the question, "What new forms of intimacy and solidarity emerge?" (Vogt, 2018: 7) along la *herida abierta*/the open wound (Anzaldua, 1987). During the installation, called activations, people from both sides of the border were invited to engage each other by, literally, listening to each other's heart beats at one art station, while others radiated light beams across the border pulsating through the sky through the rhythm of their voice and word enunciation. The exchange of feelings and emotions reverberated through the air relaying stories through audio and visual expression that often cannot cross borders. Voices of solidarity traveled across the international border wall, as heartbeat pulses bounced through the border wall, and lights danced across the sky. Messages of solidarity crossed the border wall via airwaves moving in ways that bodies could not. Border Tuner entered a complex discursive and liminal space. Many questioned the cost of the installation in a context of need, yet no one proposed other ways to make possible intimate encounters that are fractured daily by both Mexico and the U.S.

It was an uncensored mechanism of communication between Juarenses, El Pasoans, and others. Every night for two weeks between 6:30pm and 11:00pm people could speak openly and liberally through these sound waves via microphones and mega speakers. People connected with each other, not by seeing each other, but by hearing distinct voices which snuck messages of solidarity and sweet greetings to perfect strangers. This allowed for a kind of displacement of the body to take place, and a debordering to occur. Messages and meaning making transcended the border wall, rendering it useless, as one art installation was temporar-

ily erected at the very place where the largest tent city overtook the Chamizal Federal Park in Ciudad Juárez. The counterpart art installation in El Paso was located across the street from the El Paso Chamizal Park (the international peace parks are in Mexico and the U.S.) and was situated in the grounds of Bowie High School.[14]

The echoing of incantations resisting the border wall, migration, and the human rights atrocities that the U.S. government willed when tent cities formed in Ciudad Juárez were proclaimed through the Border Tuner activations. How were we able to connect our *displaced pláticas* through this resistance medium? The Border Tuner was a new doorway at the U.S.–Mexico border that could not be closed. Air restrictions could not stop messages of solidarity from reaching the other side. Bodies were not crossing, but ideas freely represented the expansions of bodies.

A dialogue took place between two migrant advocates in Ciudad Juárez, Maru and Leticia, and three in the U.S., Cynthia, Cristina, and Zaira. For 30 minutes, we engaged in conversation back and forth in Spanish and English responding to each other across the border, so that a broader audience in Mexico and the U.S. could understand that we would not be limited by languages or borders. Over the course of one week, each evening's activation was distinctly named. Our activation was called "*Las Platicadoras*" and it was described as an "activist and academic collective that works with migrants and refugees in conversation."[15] The following is an excerpt from part of our *displaced pláticas* as *platicadoras* discussing migration:

> ***Platicadora* Zaira in El Paso**, states in Spanish: Remain in Mexico is a program requiring migrants to wait in Mexico as their asylum requests are pending. Asylum Seekers must wait in Mexico for their court hearings in Mexico after being processed by U.S. immigration officials. Migrants can wait for several months while immigration courts scramble to accommodate cases. Since January 2019, close to 70,000 asylum seekers have been returned to various Mexican cities (13,000 are children and 400 infants) …
>
> ***Platicadora* Maru in Ciudad Juárez**, responds in English: Estas cifras nos muestran un patrón que vulnera históricamente a las poblaciones de color. Pero qué hay de los encuentros uno a uno? Que pasa en esos espacios de asilo, de movimiento entre ideas y personas?
>
> ***Platicadora* Cristina in El Paso**, shares a story about an interview with a migrant from the interior of Mexico in Spanish, and
>
> ***Platicadora* Leticia in Ciudad Juárez**, shares a poem about migrants since she operates one of the migrant shelters in that city in Spanish.
>
> ***Platicadora* Cynthia in El Paso**, ends in Spanish with saying that migrants need radical love and radical friendships, and that the migrants at the Parque Chamizal in Ciudad Juárez are not alone.

The rupture of the international boundary line and border wall did not disrupt the *comunitatas* that inspired action and intervention across the dry Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. "Victor Turner calls communitas—the sense of solidarity that people experience through the shared experience of liminality" (Turner 1967, cited in Vogt 2018: 174). Border Tuner was an opportunity to collectively confront and dismantle popular troupes about migrants across forbidden spaces near the U.S. border wall. The Border Tuner activations worked to deborder the international boundary line, and to reborder the relationality across and between migrants and their defenders. The Border Tuner art installation and the *Platicadoras* that spoke in solidarity with migrants worked to undo regime building. If nation-states continue to construct borders, the art installation allows us to deborder and to reimagine the Paso del Norte region without borders

or walls. For one night, we were able to reborder an international boundary into a liminal, fluid collective transcendence.

10. THE DISPLACEMENT AND DISPOSAL OF TENT CITIES, DEBORDERING SETTLEMENTS ONE AT A TIME

Throughout the summer of 2019, as temperatures soared, migrant families began to assemble one tent at a time. In the summer, they weathered the incredible heat and dehydration, while the fall proved increasingly difficult as tent settlements swelled, and winter proved intolerable. Spring never came for tent people. Migrants relied on the kindness of strangers, and civil society organizations in Mexico, that coordinated food and clothing efforts for tent settlements, and within Mexican shelters. U.S. organizations worked creatively to get supplies across the border to families. Children were growing ill and fears of a spread of illness and fatigue grew across the settlements. The uncertainty of knowing their fate caused severe anxiety and illness.

In December of 2019, 100 Mexican migrants were removed by Chihuahua state police from the tent cities, after they threatened to separate parents from their children near the Paso del Norte bridge in downtown Ciudad Juárez (Chavez 2020). Near freezing temperatures prompted the eviction. Families were loaded onto shuttles and taken to a government operated shelter, but their whereabouts were not known. Families did not want to leave the tent settlement for fear of losing their place on a list that they initiated to present their asylum claims in the U.S. (Castro 2019). Although there was never a consensus from Juárez officials on exact numbers of migrants living in these settlements at any given time, by December 2019, the number of migrants across the three busiest international bridges was estimated to have dropped to 600 migrants (Castro 2019). As stated earlier, Isacson (2019) claimed roughly 3,000 Mexican migrants had arrived in Juárez in September 2019. As quickly as they had arrived, by early January 2020, the tent cities had vanished, and the migrants were gone. The process of removal was abrupt and justified by inhabitable outdoor weather, although others argued that death threats instigated the demise of tent settlements.[16] They were disposable communities, disposable tents, and disposable bodies. Displaced and disappeared. All migrants' bodies became disposable and forgettable.

The tent city phenomenon was surreal and ephemeral. It is disconcerting how swiftly the settlements vanished and how the visible was rendered invisible and silent. The whereabouts of tent city people is unclear after their eviction and disbandment, and it is unclear if the lists they kept to hold their place in line to seek political asylum was honored, or how, from a distance, they could maintain the network of migrants, communication lines, and order that they organically initiated. Where are the families, the children, and their "at the moment" homes/tents? We return to the paradox again, where the tent people were gone slowly at first, and then almost immediately. In a sea of people and an air of displacement, disposability, and debordering, people vanished into thin air.

11. CONCLUSION: *DISPLACED PLÁTICAS*—LESSONS THAT CHALLENGE DIASPORIC UNDERSTANDINGS

This chapter is an immediate and necessary response to the tent settlements that emerged in Ciudad Juárez. The urgency of seeing the mantling and dismantling of these tent settlements was imperative to bear witness to and to write about, despite our inability to conduct traditional fieldwork. We relied on our ethnographic training to observe what was openly and publicly unfolding in our borderlands' communities, as active witnesses and migrant rights advocates. We developed a method we call *displaced pláticas* that we argue moves relationally between people's temporary settlements and our own historical subjectivities. The tent settlements near international boundaries were spaces of interest, concern, and intimacy for us, as we worked to better understand how migration was unfolding at the Mexican border in ways that had not been seen before.

People living in temporary tents along international bridges at the northern Mexican border with the U.S., challenged popular tenets about migration. We tend to think in paradigms of migrants as people traveling northbound without documents to cross into the U.S., or who move southbound into Mexico as the result of deportation. Tent people created autonomous communities, not only by moving across their home country, but by claiming rights of *autoasilamiento* in Mexico. Although we recognize migration as a historic process, our intention in this chapter is to deepen the understanding of migration as a current and ever changing one. We witnessed the expanding forms of migration taking place, and the real time implications for migrants and local people, as their ways of life shift and take on new meaning.

New forms of diaspora take shape as we begin to comprehend the challenges people confront when moving across multiple contexts of violence. Here, we discuss dispossession as part of the long-term process that is expressed, particularly for tent people, as a displacement from their home communities. Thus, the first challenge we addressed in this chapter was to understand a temporary settlement of mainly Mexican refugees within Mexico, which disrupts ideas around binaries of what is nationality and citizenship, and migrants and foreign status. Central American migrants and other international migrants were joined by an unsuspecting group of *autoasilados* from Mexico, thus, revealing their fermenting internal displacement within Mexico, which helped to shape the complexities around what it means and looks like to flee from violence outside and within one's country. This internal displacement forces us to reconsider how migration is taking shape in the U.S.–Mexican border in ways only heard about in war-torn countries in which citizens are scattered across, yet within their national borders, looking for safe spaces to reimagine home within familiar contexts.

The second challenge we engaged was to frame an interpretation of these tent settlements that captured the tension represented by tent people's desire to be recognized by Mexico as *autoasilados*, and their temporary—or otherwise—living arrangements within their adopted city, which had experienced decades of violence. Their complex realities were magnified by continuously emerging and mercurial U.S. policies like Remain in Mexico, which created a bureaucratic wall by implementing metering practices and increased militarization on both sides of the border. Throughout our chapter, we discussed displacement and basurization (Silva Santisteban 2008), in order to address why people were constantly excluded from asylum protocols to safeguard their rights, and why we argued that migrants were considered by people in power as disposable.

Our decision to use the construct of disposability is one that shows how dehumanization is superimposed on communities which are marginalized, and which results in exile from their home communities for their own protection. This exclusion by their own country has allowed corruption and crime to go unchecked with few to little safety measures in place for *autoasilados* or others seeking refuge. Their hopes for asylum in the U.S. are often thwarted, as their retelling of human rights atrocities are rejected, and migrants are expelled at international bridges without any further thought—thus, our insistence on using symbolic basurization and what scales of humanity conjure.

Although we were not engaging with tent people daily or even weekly, like other border crossers, we observed their tent settlements grow with each passing week and across several months, and we spent copious amounts of time listening and reading accounts of asylum cases, the development of metering policies, and tent people's concerns and organizational processes, and would lend a hand at shelters or offer other forms of support to migrants. We learned valuable lessons from the people that came and vanished from the public sidewalks and spaces they occupied.

To address these questions and to lend our voices to what was visibly and viscerally occurring in these tent settlements, we participated in the Border Tuner (art installation) that bridged our voices between Juárez and El Paso. We wanted all border people to recognize the human rights injustices occurring under our noses. Border Tuner represented a unique opportunity to reveal the tensions of the parts of our analysis and discussions that could not enter conventional academic mechanisms. By engaging our *displaced pláticas* performatively, we were able, with other migrant advocates, to enter border spaces in unconventional ways to further visibilize migrants in spaces where they were not permitted—the U.S. side of the border.

More research is needed to understand the next steps for people under *autoasilamiento* in border communities. Migration is forever changing as Mexican *autoasilados* have taught us. There is still much to discuss in terms of methodological practices, and how interdisciplinary practices and concepts help us to create more robust approaches that explain the ill-conceived responses to safeguarding people from violence and processes of displacement, disposability, and debordering.

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NOTES

1. *Autoasilados* describes Mexican nationals seeking asylum in the U.S., who were internally displaced from their home regions. They sought asylum from within their country as they tried to flee violence, solely to be displaced inside their home country to face other violent experiences.
2. El Paso's population is 680,000 and Ciudad Juárez's population is 1,500,000 (Isacson, 2019).

3. The international bridges or entry points between the sister cities of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso consist of five international ports of entry, with two others nearby. One port of entry is east of El Paso in Fabens, Texas/Caseta, Chihuahua, and another is west of El Paso in New Mexico at the Santa Teresa, New Mexico/San Geronimo, Chihuahua crossing. Other entry points dot the international boundary across the 1,952 miles of the international boundary line (Ortiz 2015).
4. A militia known as the United Constitutional Patriots led by 70-year-old Larry Mitchell Hopkins was detaining migrant families at gunpoint near the border in New Mexico; Mitchell Hopkins was arrested for being in possession of several firearms and ammunition in 2019 (Ortiz, 2020). On August 3, 2019, a 21-year old from Dallas, Texas killed 22 mostly Mexican and Mexican-Americans and wounded 24 more in a Walmart at El Paso, Texas claiming he wanted to "kill as many Mexicans as he could" (Bogel-Burroughs 2019).
5. Nativists have typically been U.S. born citizens who feel that immigrants do not belong in the U.S. Historically, U.S. nativists included, "eugenicists, xenophobes, scholars, Klan members, labor organizers, and others" who voiced their racism and xenophobia toward immigrant groups including the Chinese, Italians, Polish, Slovanians, and Mexicans (Lytle Hernández 2010: 27). See Mae Ngai's discussion on nativism in her book, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2004).
6. Ochoa Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016: 4) address "how *pláticas* can be a strategy to collect data as well as part of a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology." *Pláticas* also represents a "potential space for healing" and "relies on relations of reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity" (Ochoa Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016: 13-14).
7. On October 12, 2018, a group of 160 Hondurans decided to travel together to the United States for their safety, and, at one point, the number of migrants grew to thousands when it reached the southern Mexican border (Fry 2019).
8. Seeking political asylum within the U.S. requires meeting five categories. "Asylum is a protection granted to foreign nationals already in the United States or at the border who meet the international law definition of a "refugee." The United Nations 1951 Convention and the 1967Protocol define a refugee as a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country, and cannot obtain protection in that country, due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted in the future "on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." Congress incorporated this definition into U.S. immigration law in the Refugee Act of 1980" (https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states).
9. In October 2019, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security launched two programs, the Prompt Asylum Claim Review (PACR) program, and HARP, specific to Mexican citizens to expedite their applications while in Customs and Border Protection custody, although they have little to no access to legal counsel (Isacson, 2019).
10. Dunn defines 'militarization' as "the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment, and forces" (1996: 3).
11. Both authors experienced this process. For several weeks to months in late 2019, army soldiers supervised the metering practice at the midpoint of the international bridge, as young soldiers waved people through the waiting line to cross into the U.S. approving or disapproving border crossers' movements.
12. The Border Tuner Art Installation was curated by León de la Rosa on the Ciudad Juárez side and by Kerry Doyle in El Paso, with programming direction by Edgar Picazo. León made this comment to describe the art installation.
13. See https://www.bordertuner.net/home.
14. This high school is famously known for a student led lawsuit against the El Paso Border Patrol Sector in the early 1990s for racially profiling Latino students. The Latino students won their civil lawsuit against the border patrol (Dunn 2009).
15. See https://www.bordertuner.net/events.
16. Some families claimed that a group of smugglers threatened to burn the settlements if migrants attempted to cross into the U.S. on their own. The Juárez Secretary of Public Safety stated that he was not aware of this claim, but that his office maintained constant vigilance of the tent settlements for the migrants' safety (Martínez Prado, 2019).

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