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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

'Stuck' in the waiting room: African and Haitian migrants between liminality and mobility in a Mexican border town.

A Thesis Submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

By Julia Hause
Under the supervision of Dr. Gerda Heck

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in
Migration and Refugee Studies

Fall 2021

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Submitted to the Center of Migration and Refugee Studies
September 9, 2021

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts in Migration and Refugee Studies

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ABSTRACT

'Stuck' in the waiting room: African and Haitian migrants between liminality and mobility in a Mexican border town.

This thesis explores the border town of Tijuana, Mexico as a site of fragmentation and rupture along the migration journeys of African and Haitian migrants transiting the South American-Central American corridor towards North American destinations. Extra-continental migration of migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean to Latin America has been an emerging migration trend as global migration governance becomes increasingly restrictive and externalized. U.S. immigration and asylum policies implemented at the southern border have made migrating and making claims to international protection difficult for those migrants who arrive at the border. These policies, coupled with the indefinite U.S. land border closure since March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, subject migrants to remain in Mexico for protracted periods, often times several years, while they wait to cross the border and/or claim asylum in the United States. As they find themselves 'stuck' in Tijuana, this thesis looks at the ways in which African and Haitian migrants organize in their everyday lives for survival and mobility within the liminality, marginalization, and racialization which they experience in the city. These migrants practice dual organization, on the one hand to sustain themselves, and on the other to actualize their onward migration projects, through building social networks and care and use of urban space as temporary. In tracing the 'city from below' through the perspective of migrants and migrant mobilities, African and Haitian migrants are active in the socio-spatial transformations of the city. In organizing everyday life, migrants maintain their aspiration and desires for future migration to imagined destinations elsewhere. Suspended between the various thresholds of the city, this thesis shows how African and Haitian migrants negotiate, circumvent, and contest the multiple layers of migration and asylum governance which aim to keep them in Mexico, through their continued practices of mobility.

Keywords: extra-continental migration, mobilities, liminality, transnational social networks, place-making

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research problem and question

Restrictive U.S. immigration and asylum policies over the last few years have recently increased migrant bottlenecks in Mexican towns across the border. The dire situation in Mexican border towns has been exacerbated by COVID-19, which led to an indefinite land border closure that has forced international migrants to remain in these towns. Here, they have become increasingly 'stuck' as they are pushed to the margins of society to navigate their survival while they indefinitely wait for an opportunity to migrate. In Tijuana, the influx of migrants and their inability to leave the city creates additional pressure on already strained resources, as access to housing, employment, and medical care is limited (Brigida 2020). While some Haitian migrants have sought more permanent settlement in Tijuana since 2016, most Haitian, African, and other extra-continental migrants do not plan to settle, and rather maintain their sights on other destinations in North America. These migrants often do not claim asylum in Mexico due to experiences of migrant-targeted violence, racism, xenophobia, barriers to employment and housing, as well as linguistic and cultural hurdles (Priya Morley et al. 2021b). Therefore, residing in Tijuana remains temporary.

In this context, the following research asks: Along 'fragmented journeys' (Collyer 2007), what are the organizing practices of African and Haitian migrants navigating everyday life in the northern borderlands of Mexico? How does their protracted presence and daily activities of survival and mobility in Tijuana impact the social, economic, and political fibers of this urban locality? I argue that African and Haitian migrants lead everyday lives of dual organization, where on the one hand they organize to live day to day in Tijuana's urban landscape, and on the other, are consistently and simultaneously organizing to prepare their future migrations to 'elsewheres.' I argue that they facilitate and maintain this dual organization through their daily practices of building social networks and care relations, and through the use of urban space as temporary. The generation and reconfiguration of new socialities and spatialities by African and Haitian migrants both stimulates their immediate local urban mobility, as well as the possibilities of

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reinitiating transnational mobility, ultimately to achieve claims to protection in countries of refuge beyond Mexico.

'Extra-continental migration' of migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean to Latin America (Freier and Holloway 2019) is not a completely new phenomenon, yet movements of these populations have evolved significantly over the last 30 years.[1] South American countries have experienced an influx of African migrants beginning in the 1990's (Marcelino and Cerrutti 2021), and more recently tens of thousands of Haitian migrants from the Caribbean after the catastrophic 2010 earthquake which displaced over a million people (Audebert 2017). In the last decade, extra-continental migration through the South American-Central American corridor has garnered increased attention academically, and in regional and national discourses. A report by IOM (2019) shows that in Mexico, irregular extra-continental migration rose from 6,156 in 2014 to 29,891 in 2016, but lowered to 18,527 migrants in the first eight months of 2019.

After initially settling in Brazil, and several other South American countries, after the earthquake, Haitian migrants began leaving in 2016 as economic conditions worsened, looking towards to the United States as a new destination (Audebert 2017, Phillips and Ricker 2021). The arrival of hundreds of Haitian migrants in Tijuana prompted the U.S. to reduce its asylum processing and implement deterrence policies (American Immigration Council 2021a). As a result, many Haitians remained in Tijuana leading to the regularization of 4,000 migrants with temporary visas in 2017 (Marchand and Ortega Ramírez 2019). It is estimated that in 2016 around 20,000 Haitian migrants passed through Baja California, the Mexican state which Tijuana is located, alone (Pastrana 2018). Extra-continental migrants navigate the same routes from South American points of entry, usually entering on valid visas or other legal means, and migrate cross-continently with hopes of reaching North American destinations in the U.S. and Canada (Yates 2019). In 2019, African migration through Latin America was elevated in the media after thousands of migrants

[1] The use of 'extra-continental migrants' follows Freier and Holloway (2019) use of the term to include African, Asian, and Caribbean migration to mainland Latin American countries. In other publications, the term 'extra-regional' is similarly used to refer to migrants from these regions in Latin America (IOM 2019).

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were blocked in southern Mexico as a result of tightening migration management. In 2007, there were only 460 African migrants apprehended in Mexico (Solis 2019), which increased to approximately 3,800 in 2016 (Yates 2019), and 5,800 in 2019 (Solis 2019).

In Mexico, irregular migrants encounter the immigration system when they first enter the country through the southern border with Guatemala, where they are confronted with a militarized border, detention, and funneled into immigration processes for either asylum or temporary humanitarian protection. Prior to 2019, most extra-continental migrants were issued short-term 'exit permits' as they did not intend to stay in Mexico (Priya Morley et al. 2021b). In mid-2019, due to U.S. pressure on Mexico to curb all north-bound migration, extra-continental migrants were incorporated into similar immigration procedures to Central American migrants, in which they are pressured into asylum or humanitarian protection statuses in order to legally move within the country. These immigration procedures grant temporary one-year humanitarian visas, or permanent residence through asylum claims, to legalize migrants' stay in Mexico and deter their onward migration (Priya Morley et al. 2021a). With destinations in mind beyond Mexico, migrants typically wait in northern border towns for an opportunity to continue their migration projects. With already strained migrant resources in border towns, extra-continental migrants are disadvantaged in accessing support as most do not speak Spanish, nor are the bulk of organizations oriented to their particular needs. Urban precarity of African and Haitian migrants is exacerbated by anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and their largely irregular immigration statuses, creating tensions around securing longer term employment, housing, and protection, as they navigate temporary settlement.

1.2 Purpose of research

Although the migration of extra-continental migrants remains nominal compared to their Central American counterparts, their movements are important to highlight and trace as the growing and sustained presence of Black migrants from African countries and Haiti continue to alter the landscape of Mexican cities. Transnational migration does not occur in a vacuum, meaning, there are numerous localities encountered, crossed, and impacted throughout migration trajectories (Winters and Mora Izaguirre 2019).

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This thesis, thus, situates the migration of Africans and Haitians within this emerging corridor for further exploration into the ways in which migrants navigate urban localities in periods of migratory disruption. By presenting one of these localities, this research aims to further visibilize marginalized Black migrants in Tijuana, and highlight the ways in which they navigate and contest restrictive border and migration regimes through their efforts for survival and mobility. Regional migration governance has influenced Tijuana, like many other border towns, in becoming a sort of 'waiting room' for thousands of migrants seeking entry and/or asylum in the United States. Chakrabarty (2000) presents the waiting room in historical terms, in which the colonialized in European colonies were limited to always becoming, not yet fully human, developed, civilized, or worthy of their freedom. As a backdrop to this research, I contextualize Tijuana as a waiting room along a similar metaphor, as an urban space of containment for those not yet deemed legitimate, acceptable, or desirable for entry or protection in the U.S.; an enclave where migrants are indefinitely becoming and performing to negotiate their way outside the suffocation of the waiting room. The purpose of this research is to show the ways in which African and Haitian migrants engage in everyday acts of organizing, dwelling, and survival, as well as their impacts on the urban landscape, in their ongoing quest for mobility.

1.3 Significance of study

There are several reasons of significance and importance for this research. First, despite growing interest in extra-continental migration to Latin America, the topic remains understudied as the regional focus highlights larger scale movements of Central American migrants, and the more recent mass displacements in Venezuela and Colombia. Second, this research recognizes race in migratory experiences through situating the migration of Black African and Haitian migrants within the socio-histories of race in Mexico. In doing so, we are able to better evaluate the ways in which sustained racial hierarchies in postcolonial Latin America impact particular migration experiences, as well as the inclusion of Black migrants in urban centers. Third, migration studies literature often focuses on either migrants' countries of origin or countries of destination, neglecting the possibilities of migrants to impact the localities with which they engage en route. As global migration governance continues to respond to

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human mobility through the intensification of militarized borders, externalization, and technological and security apparatuses (thus making irregular migration even more dangerous and costly), migrants along these routes encounter various blockages that push them to remain in cities or towns temporarily as they re-adapt migration projects, or live and work temporarily to raise more funds for their migration. This research is important in that it centers one of these 'in-between' cities which migrants encounter, highlighting the ways in which transitory migrants are transformative actors in the urbanization and reconfiguration of social worlds in those spaces and temporalities of migratory intermission. Finally, in reaching beyond migration literature based on nationality, I show how shared migration projects connect various migrants with differential socio-histories and integrate them on the migration route, and subsequently emplace them within Mexican society. This research vocalizes the lives and experiences of Black migrants in Mexico, who are otherwise neglected in discourse around migration and mobility in Latin America.

1.4 Research contributions

This research aims to contribute to migration studies literature on transnational migration to elucidate the fragments and disruptions along migration journeys which migrants encounter, dispelling notions of transit migration as linear and consistent. In recognizing the inconsistencies of irregular migration this research further reveals the ways in which migrants in 'transit' are transformative constituents of the urban spaces and socialities with which they engage along ruptured, and often times, improvised migration trajectories. Likewise, this research contributes to a small, but developing, body of literature on extra-continental migration to Latin America and the emerging migration route north through this corridor. This research contributes to studies of urban migrants and refugees, highlighting the particular challenges encountered by marginalized populations in cities. In centering migrant experiences and subjectivities, this research engages migrant mobility from within, and contributes to a growing body of literature on the autonomy of migration.

Throughout this thesis I employ the term 'migrant' in the context of Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou and Tsianos (2015) use of the term 'subaltern migrant' to discuss mobile populations who both migrate and

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reside in cities mostly irregularly. Therefore, this includes irregular migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees across gender, race, and class. I do not aim to differentiate entirely from 'migrants' (in strictly economic or irregular terms) and 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers' (in strictly international legal terms), as individuals may embody multiple aspects of these political categories. Additionally, these categories are limited and based on juridical regimes of exclusion, and therefore do not adequately encompass human experiences of poverty, violence, instability, displacement, and subjugation. While most interlocutors for this research identified escaping at least one (but often times multiple) of the above-mentioned conditions, I strive to not reproduce hierarchies or an exceptionalism within human mobility, affording more legitimacy to one category over another, as is common within international discourse and regimes of citizenship (Casas-Cortes et al. 2014). Instead, my goal is to recognize the plurality of socio-histories and subjectivities of migrants through their individual narratives and experiences to further emphasize the complexity and 'messiness' of displacement and human mobility.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is separated into a total of nine chapters. The first four chapters address the research topic and purpose (Chapter 1), a review of literature on the background of research populations and city (Chapter 2), the theoretical framework for the research (Chapter 3), and finally, the methodology used to execute the research design, fieldwork, and qualitative data analysis (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 illuminates the plurality of thresholds which emerge in the city that constrict and limit African and Haitian migrants' socio-spatial immersion into Tijuana's urban society. Chapter 6 explores the navigation of these boundaries through the development of formal and informal systems of care, and the generation and circulation of mobile commons used to sustain migrants in their indefinite settlement in the city. Chapter 7 discusses the additional ways of making life in the margins through migrants' temporal place-making. This includes exposing the ways in which place-making while in transit is transformative of urban spaces, as well as strategic to maintain possibilities of onward migration in the future. Chapter 8 dives into the restrictions and conditionalities of global asylum regimes from the perspective of migrant mobility, highlighting the efforts of African and Haitian migrants in challenging these regimes and juridical barriers

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to their desired destinations of refuge through employing their transnational mobility in ways which circumvent and appropriate those systems. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes with the current situation on the border, a review of the main concepts of the thesis, and suggestions for future research on this topic.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review on Research Populations and City

I situate this research in the various literature of migrant mobility, urbanization, race and racialization, and contemporary outcomes of migration policy and governance in order to illustrate a fuller understanding of African and Haitian migration in Mexico and the socio-histories of these spaces which influence their lived experiences in Tijuana. First, this chapter details literature which documents the shifting migration trends of Haitian and African migrants which trace their emergence on migratory routes in Latin America. Following this, since Tijuana is the geographic and urban site of analysis for this research, I review literature which explores the historical urbanization of Tijuana to contextualize the temporary settlement of African and Haitian migrants there. Third, race and processes of racialization specific to Mexico are discussed to lay a foundational understanding of racial discrimination and marginalization in the country, which informs the experiences of Black migrants transiting through and residing in Mexican cities. Finally, I review recent literature on Haitian and African migration in Mexico and the recent policy initiatives which have emerged in response to irregular migrant mobility which inform migrants' temporary settlement in Mexico.

2.1 Haitian migration to Latin America

While migration is not a new phenomenon for Haitians, migration trends prior to the 21st century looked towards destination countries in the North, such as the U.S., Canada, and France, as well as to neighboring Dominican Republic and other Caribbean islands (Audebert 2017). Historically, the U.S. served as the primary destination of Haitians escaping political oppression, violence, and natural disasters from the 1950s until the turn of the century. The U.S. has traditionally avoided affording international protection through asylum for Haitians, particularly in response to the arrivals of Haitians by boat escaping a violent authoritarian regime in the 1970s. Cold War politics heavily influenced the blanket rejection of Haitians for asylum, considering them as economic migrants unworthy of international protection, as opposed to their Cuban counterparts (Lindskoog 2018). In an effort to stem migration from the island and evade international obligations, the U.S. began an interdiction program which intercepted boats headed for Florida throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in which asylum processing procedures

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were moved to the international seas and non-recognized refugees turned back (Kahn 2019). In the program's lifetime, 22,940 Haitians were processed at sea, of which only 11 were transferred to the U.S. for asylum and the rest forcibly returned (Congressional Report Service 2011).

At the same time, in the early 1980s, the Reagan administration implemented a return and expansion of immigration detention which target Haitian asylum seekers to be indefinitely detained, for no crime other than seeking international protection (Lindskoog 2018). This Haitian detention policy expanded to all asylum seekers in 1982, and became the backbone of the current immigration detention system in the U.S. In the early 1990s, Haitians fleeing the coup were intercepted at sea and transferred to the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo Bay for external asylum processing, which emerged as an extraterritorial detention buffer between the U.S. and Haitian refugees. Detention and interdiction throughout these several decades were critical tools in the U.S. effort to deter Haitian migrants. In the wake of the 2010 earthquake which caused over 200,000 deaths and a million displaced (Audebert 2017, Pacheo Pacifico et al. 2015), the U.S. issued Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for Haitians currently residing in the country, yet the difficulty remained for the thousands fleeing hardships which stemmed from the earthquake itself. France's response externalized their own asylum procedures to their territories in the French Antilles for Haitians seeking refuge after the earthquake, resulting in only 4.5% of all asylum applications being accepted (Audebert 2017).

As a result of global migration governance practices which make migrating and claims to asylum more inaccessible and dangerous to reach, mainland Latin America has seen an increase in migration from the Caribbean in the last decade. Haitian migration to the region has been primarily directed towards Brazil, and to a lesser extent Ecuador, Chile, and Peru. Brazil emerged as a viable option for Haitians to seek refuge following the earthquake as the asylum systems in North America and France became less accommodating. Research which focuses on Haitian migration to Brazil after the earthquake attribute Brazil's relatively stable economy, booming job market, and developing industries as the host of several global events, coupled with previously established geopolitical relations between the two countries, as making it an accessible option for Haitians fleeing instability (Audebert 2017, Miura 2014, Pacheo

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Pacifico et al. 2015). When Haitians began arriving to Brazil, the government reacted by administering humanitarian visas, rather than processing for asylum. This humanitarian visa scheme was also made available through the Brazilian embassy in Haiti in an effort to curb irregular migration to the country, but never fully eradicated it (Pacheo Pacifico et al. 2015). Between 2012-2016 48,000 Haitians were granted legal status in Brazil for 5 years with the right to work (Audebert 2017). Pacheo Pacifico et al. (2015) argue that the temporariness of Haitian migrants' residency in Brazil, while overtly offering humanitarian protection, also served as a convenient workforce, massive and quickly mobilized, to fulfill temporary jobs in preparation of the World Cup (2014) and Olympic Games (2016).

Audebert (2017) documents how the free visa schemes in Ecuador implemented in 2008 and the regularization of visas for Haitians after 2010 in Chile contributed to Haitian migrants taking up residence in other countries. While settlement in South America has been prominent, continued migration north towards the U.S.-Mexico border has increased in recent years following economic downturns and experiences of racism and xenophobia in South American countries. Additionally, the prospect of applying for Temporary Protection (TPS) status in the U.S. (which was originally designated in 2010 after the earthquake), served as a motivator to migrate north (Marchand and Ortega Ramírez 2019). In 2016, thousands of Haitians migrated to the U.S.-Mexico border from Brazil, and in response, the U.S. began implementing the 'metering policy' to limit the daily number of accepted asylum claims and effectively turned back asylum seekers to Mexico (American Immigration Council 2021a). Marchand and Ortega Ramírez (2019), in documenting the mobilization of civil society in Tijuana around Haitian migrants' arrival, notes that in response to the thousands of migrants 'stuck' in the city, the Mexican government regularized around 4,000 Haitians in Tijuana in 2017 with humanitarian visas authorizing them to live and work. The deterioration of Brazil's economy since the World Cup and the Olympic Games, the anti-immigrant government elected in Chile in 2018 which restricted visa eligibility, and the inability to return to Haiti due to grave political instability, violence, and deep economic challenges, continue to influence Haitian migrants' decisions to migrate north (Phillips and Ricker 2021).

2.2 African migration to Latin America

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Much of the literature on African migration focuses on South-North migration to European destinations. Despite the discourse on the migration ‘crisis’ in Europe, a study by Flahaux and de Haas (2016) on African migration trends globally confirms that the large majority of African migration and displacement remains within the continent. African migration to Europe increased as many African nations achieved independence throughout the 1960s, which sustained and deepened political instability, economic inequalities, and ethnic tensions in a number of African countries. Additionally, migration to Europe was actively facilitated for several decades by guest workers programs as part of initiatives to rebuild European cities after WWII, and until the 1980s migration to Europe from former colonies was possible (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). Gimenez-Gomez et al. (2019) study on African migration trends to Europe, reveals that Europe is not, and never was, the sole destination for migrants or refugees from the continent. East African migration from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan largely resulted in migration to the U.S. or Gulf states, while Southern African migration looked towards North America and Oceania. West African migration, suggested due to colonial, linguistic and cultural ties, coastal access, and geographic proximity, looked towards Europe as primary destinations (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

Gimenez-Gomez et al. detail the extensive policy formations enacted in the post-Schengen Agreement era to illustrate the border securitization, regional collaborations and externalization of migration policy between Europe and African governments in their attempts to tackle the “root causes of irregular migration” (2019, 1798). Since the 1990s, migration to Europe has largely been driven by violence, war, displacement, and other forms of persecution in various parts of the world culminating in asylum claims, yet the restrictive policies implemented by the EU have hindered refugees’ abilities to seek international protection (Gimenez-Gomez et al. 2019). Marcelino and Cerrutti (2012) note that structural adjustment programs, insufficient agricultural reforms, and the introduction of capitalist economies had severe, and often times violent, implications for African countries and recognizes socio-economic pressures as co-constitutive drivers of migration. Despite the grave political and violent instabilities of some African nations, a large majority of people affected are either displaced within the country or flee to neighboring countries, making those who escape to Europe the minority (Gimenez-

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Gomez et al. 2019). More recent EU policies at the turn of the 21st century, including the Global Approach to Migration (GAM) and creation of Frontex, have exacerbated the risks and cost of migration to Europe and have effectively reterritorialized EU borders onto the African continent further inhibiting migration North (Casas Cortes et al. 2015, De Genova 2017, Marcelino and Cerrutti 2012).

African migration to Latin America is part of a growing phenomenon in extra-continental migration of African, Asian, and Caribbean migrants to the Americas, which is garnering more academic interests in recent years. Shifting trends of African migration towards South American countries, particularly Brazil and Argentina, emerged in the early 1990s (Marcelino and Cerrutti 2012, Vammen 2019) as the EU formed under the Schengen Agreement, and migration management policies of 'remote control' and regional partnerships externalized EU borders (Freier 2011, Flahaux and de Haas 2016). South American countries continued to emerge as alternative destinations for African migrants in the 2000s following 9/11, as restrictive border and migration regimes took hold in both the U.S. and Europe, making migration to Europe more clandestine, dangerous, and expensive (Marcelino and Cerrutti 2012). In the last two decades, EU policies towards migration and asylum management have developed further, targeting land and maritime border control and deeper regional cooperation to contain migration on the African continent (Casas-Cortes et al. 2016). As African migration to Latin America has continued over the last two decades, scholars attribute shifting migration trends to ongoing conflict in regions of origin, environmental and economic pressures, the increased securitization of European borders, tightening U.S. immigration and asylum policies, and the relatively open migration policies and porous borders in Latin America (Cantor, Freier, and Gauci 2015, Drotbohm and Winters 2018, Freier and Holloway 2019, Marcelino and Cerrutti 2012, Vammen 2019, Winters and Mora Izaguirre 2019).

Early studies on African migration to South America highlight Senegalese migration to Argentina (Zubrzycki 2012), which emerged as an alternative international destination to Europe. Freier's (2011) discussion on emerging South-South migration flows of African migrants to Latin America shows West African migration to Southern Cone countries for settlement, and migrants from the Horn of Africa reaching Latin America as a transit space for onward migration to the U.S. Likewise, Marcelino and

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Cerrutti (2012) document Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina as entry points to the continent for African migrants, either by plane or stowaway, both for settlement or transit further north. As the 21st century brought restriction to European and U.S. borders, Cantor, Freier, and Gauci (2015) recognize the liberalization of immigration and asylum policies in Latin American countries. Freier and Holloway's (2019) study on the impact of open migration policies in Ecuador, explores how the free visa scheme implemented in 2008 helped in part to facilitate extra-continental migration to alternative destinations in South America. While some South American countries boast growing communities of African nationals, such as Senegalese migrants in Argentina (Vammen 2019), economic conditions and racism often influence onward migration of African nationals to North American destinations (Marcelino and Cerrutti 2012). In the last few years, Cameroonian migrants fleeing civil conflict, largely from the Anglophone region, have become a prominent group on this route (Priya Morley et al. 2021b), in addition to migrants from Ghana, Guinea, DRC, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, and Somalia (Drotbohm and Winters 2018, Yates 2019, Navarro 2016). Recent literature highlights Latin American geographies for transit migration purposes as African migrants reach South American points of entry and continue north. Studies on the impact of U.S. externalization policy measures on Central American countries reveal the experiences of securitization, discrimination, and violence which these migrants encounter in their irregular migration to the North America (Drotbohm and Winters 2018, Winters and Mora Izaguirre 2019).

While Drotbohm and Winters (2018) and Winters and Mora Izaguirre (2019) recognize that African and Haitian migrants travel the same routes in Latin America, no studies in the region discuss these populations together to explore the ways in which connections made on the route translate into localities of temporary settlement. In Mexico, recent reports published by Priya Morley et al. (2021a, 2021b) address these two populations separately from the southern city of Tapachula, yet acknowledges the overlapping experiences which Black extra-continental migrants experience in Mexico.

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Figure 1: Mapped routes of extra-continental migration in Latin America; Source: MPI, (Yates) October 22, 2019

2.3 Tijuana, a city of migrants and maquiladoras

It is widely recognized in urban and migration studies that contemporary 'globalized' Tijuana is a border town built by migration. In Herzog's (2003) study of Tijuana's relation to globalization, he calls the San Diego-Tijuana borderlands a "transfrontier metropolis" (2) in which border cities transcend the physical boundaries of nation-state territory, deterritorializing ideas of sovereignty and reterritorializing spaces of habitation which sprawl within and across the political border. This process can be largely attributed to the introduction of transnational industrial corporations to Mexican border towns in the 1960s, in the form of *maquiladoras* (export assembly plants), which heavily influenced Tijuana's emergence on the capitalist world economy stage over the last 40 years (Kopinak 2003). The boom of the maquiladora industry in the 1980s brought intense population growth as internal migrants from other Mexican provinces migrated to the border, rapidly altering the city's urbanization. With constraints on urban governance and planning, Tijuana developed highly unevenly resulting in an abundance of

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colonias, or informal settlements, and at the same time a movement of spatial enclosure for more privileged classes to segregate migrant industrial workers from the typical *tijuanenses* residence (Carrasco Gallegos 2009, Enríquez Acosta 2009). High rates of in-migration from other regions in Mexico support the *maquiladora* industry with low-skilled and low-wage labor, resulting in these migrants being pushed to the margins of urban physical and social life.

Kopinak (2003) traces the intensification of internal migration to Tijuana with the introduction of the Bracero Program in 1942, which facilitated labor migration of Mexican men for agricultural work in the U.S., additionally sparking the migration of workers' families to the border towns. The Bracero era triggered circular migration in which transnational migrants worked seasonally and returned easily to their homes and families in Mexico. With the end of the program and U.S. crack-downs on migration through restrictive immigration policy and enhanced border patrol, the Mexican government passed the 1965 Border Industrialization Program which established the *maquiladora* industry and free trade zones to initiate economic growth to the region (Enríquez Acosta 2009, Kopinak 2003). The boom of the *maquiladora* industry in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, with the signing of NAFTA, rapidly increased internal migration to the region (Trinidad Requena et al. 2019). Kopinak (2003) notes that while internal migrants came for the jobs at the industries, transnational companies also 'set up shop' according to the labor force, resulting in the growth of the clothing sector which employed mostly women.

Globalization and neoliberal policies in the borderlands also worked to maintain racial and gendered hierarchies within Mexican society to serve labor market needs. Mize (2008) marks the post-NAFTA era as the emergence of 'neoliberal nativism', in which "the political economy of free trade ideology meets the state-sanctioned violence against immigrants and *maquiladora* workers," (136). While the unrestricted flow of goods flooded the U.S.-Mexican border, the flow of people became heavily securitized and militarized, intensifying processes of illegalization. The low-wage factory work and minimal upward mobility in *maquiladoras* created a segmented labor market in which low educated and poor internal migrants filled low-wage industrial jobs, while educated Mexicans searched for employment outside of the factories (Kopinak 2003). Similarly, Mize (2008) documents the racialization of free trade

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which benefits Mexicans of European descent (i.e., white passing), while low-wage jobs are occupied by 'mixed' or Indigenous Mexican workers. As entering the U.S. becomes more difficult, Valles (2020) notes how international migrants are also engaging in *maquiladora* labor to sustain themselves in Mexican border towns as they navigate their transnational mobility. Haitian migrants in Tijuana have been a prominent labor force inserted into these factories.

Kopinak (2003) documents how internal and international migrants are limited to their poverty trapped in the tensions between wages and housing/living costs and in the fact that Tijuana has not sustained efficient urban governance to address issues of housing, land, and environmental concerns. Due to the hilly geography of Tijuana, land priorities are often given to foreign-owned industrial plants and wealthier gated communities, leaves impoverished urban dwellers to rely on self-constructed homes in informal settlements, which generally emerge around the industrial plants in which migrants work (Carrasco Gallegos 2009, Enríquez Acosta 2009, Kopinak 2003). The *colonias* are therefore spatially situated near devastatingly hazardous chemicals and materials as byproducts from the plants, and rarely have proper access to water, sanitation services, sewage and drainage, and are pushed to the ultimate peripheries of the cities where land can be occupied (Enríquez Acosta 2009). For example, media reports covering the development of "Little Haiti" a *colonia* just outside of downtown, revealed that construction of the anticipated houses for Haitian migrants settling in Tijuana were stalled as the settlement sat on a flood risk zone (Moya 2018). Juxtaposed to the *colonias*, Carrasco Gallego (2009) argues that the development of gated communities throughout the city are justified by the perception of urban insecurity, largely blamed on international migrants as the source of Tijuana's problems in traffic, crime, and disorder. In a recent study on Haitian migration to Tijuana, Marchand and Ortega Ramírez (2019) show how the city continues to be altered and shaped by the presence of international migrants, reflecting it is no longer just the globalized *maquiladora* industry connecting Tijuana to far corners of the world, but also the constant fluidity and mobility of heterogenous bodies transiting this space which continue to shape the city.

2.4 Race, racialization, and migration in Mexico

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Discrimination of migrants and refugees in host societies on the basis of race and ethnicity escalate their experiences of marginalization, exclusion, and criminalization (Sanyal 2012). Racialized discourse on the foreign 'other' enables and grows fear within the general population which exacerbates discrimination, xenophobia, and violence towards these populations. Freier, Bird, and Castillo Jara (2020) highlight the lack of academic discourse in forced displacement studies which recognize the role race and ethnicity play in influencing the reception and integration of refugees in host communities, citing a "geographical bias," (2) in the existing literature which focuses on the Global North. Studies on race and migration, therefore, have been severely limited in large parts of the world where most displaced populations reside. Freier, Bird, and Castillo Jara (2020) argue that literature has largely neglected the complex socio-historical processes of countries in the Global South which inform racial discrimination and xenophobic sentiments toward migrants and refugees in host societies according to socially constructed categories of race and ethnicity.

It is crucial, then, to situate the migratory experiences of Black African and Haitian migrants in the greater historical and contemporary discourse of race, racism, and processes of racialization in Latin America and in Mexico. The colonial projects in the Americas were based on processes of racialization which were used to justify the forced labor of Indigenous populations and enslaved Africans until 1542 and the late 1700s, respectively (Góngora-Mera 2012, Wade 2013). Race continued to be a foundation of modern nation building practices throughout the region in which the process of racial mixing was linked to notions of progress, modernity, development, and education (Wade 2013). Latin American nations proudly presented their populations as 'mixed'(*mestizaje*), while maintaining the inferiority of Afro-descent and Indigenous populations as "potentially redeemable through improvement, social hygiene, and education, but also ideally to be outnumbered and diluted by European immigration of superior racial qualities," (Wade 2013, 212-213). In these processes of subalternity, Indigenous and Afro-descent populations were racialized and sexualized in hierarchies against one another and always below the dominate 'white' *mestizaje* population (Gobat 2013, Wade 2013).

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Race relations developed distinctively in each Latin American nation based on the colonial legacy, and post-independence nation building processes. Literature on race in Mexico mark the Mexican Revolution in 1910 as a significant transition in Mexican society, in which the nation building project of the next 70 years would be concentrated in the systematic promotion and education of a single, homogenous, national Mexican identity based on *mestizaje* identity (Carroll 2013, Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar Tanaka 2016, Jerry 2013, Vaugh 2013, Vinson 2005). The *mestizaje* national identity project represented Mexico's progress towards modernity and development in its attempt to represent the ethnic heterogeneity of the country's people, while simultaneously promoting the country's 'whiteness' and selective history, of which Indigenous and Afro-Mexicans were excluded (Carroll 2013). Through cultural missions, the dominate *mestizaje* society sought to educate Indigenous communities, and effectively excluded the Afro-Mexican, or *afromexicano*, population as well as their history, identity, and culture, rendering them silent and invisible in the national narrative (Carroll 2013, Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar Tanaka 2015). It was not until the 1980s that Mexico began to shift the *mestizaje* rhetoric to a more inclusive discourse on the multitude of identities within Mexican society, including various Indigenous and Afro-Mexican populations. Yet, as Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar Tanaka (2016) argue, *mestizaje* remained an empty racial ideology within Mexican political and public discourse, which enabled "a process of racial and racist normalization that acts in such a way that allows Mexican people to express and be convinced by the commonly spread idea that in Mexico there is no racism because we are all 'mixed," (516). Therefore, its use only continues to conceal the racial and social privileges under this ideology, effectively perpetuating discrimination and systemic inequalities.

Despite progress in enhancing the visibility of Afro-Mexican and Indigenous populations in Mexico, and Latin America as a whole, international migrants transiting the region still face violence, discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. Basok's (2019) study on transit migration of Central Americans, largely from the 'Northern Triangle,' i.e., El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras which includes Indigenous populations from these regions, notes that technological advancements of regional borders which function to categorize, mark, and record migrants' identities based on race, nationality, and

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ethnicity further subject them to harsh treatment (Basok 2019). Trevino-Rangel (2020) argues that despite human rights discourse which attributes Mexico's securitization of immigration policy and borders to post-9/11 pressure from the U.S. to crackdown on irregular migration, Mexico's anti-immigrant policies have been developing over the last 50 years. The intensification of violence against migrants in transit can be traced to migration industries which have developed out of policy intensifications, which justifies the militarization and securitization of borders. The result is clandestine migration, increased violence by criminal and cartel groups, corruption of border enforcement personnel, and ultimately the commodification of migrant bodies, in which various actors profit off both the facilitation of migrants' transit and the constraint of their mobility. Clandestine travel has increased the costs of the journeys factoring in *coyotes*, or guides, bribes, routine robbery, arbitrary detention, and extortion fees.

Due to the prevalence of racism and racialization in the region, Black African and Black Caribbean migrants in Latin America have difficulty being absorbed into communities unnoticed. Linguistic differences exacerbate this for Haitian and African migrants. This subjects them to similar experiences in their irregular migration, as confrontations with authorities, *coyotes*, and gang violence are prevalent (Drotbohm and Winters 2018). Along borderlands, race is used as an identifier of irregular migrants, as well as the criminalization of their migration (Winters and Mora Izaguirre 2019).

In Tijuana, African and Haitian migrants are often lumped together in public and media discourse, all grouped as *haitianos*[2] (Valles 2020). The significant presence of Haitian migrants in the city for several years has prompted a generalization among Black and non-Spanish speaking migrants as all being Haitian. The few studies on Haitian migrants in Tijuana only mention their African counterparts in passing (Marchand and Ortega Ramírez 2019, Valles 2020), and do not explore the ways in which these populations engage or co-exist. Other studies on Haitian migration to Tijuana focus solely on their arrival through the mobilization of civil society (Alarcon Acosta and Ortiz Esquivel 2017, Silva Hernández and Padilla Orozco 2020), as well as their socio-economic integration (Coulange Méroné and

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[2] Valles employs *Haitianos* as a blanket term for Black migrants which some Tijuana residents use to refer to Blackness in the city in comparison to Central American migrants.

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Ángel Castillo 2021). Valles (2020) engages 'respectability politics' in Tijuana traces public discourse which continues to racialize Central American migrants as criminals, while the increased presence of Black extra-continental migrants creates discourse which pins these migratory groups against each other, in which Haitians are docile, hardworking, and worthy of Mexico's hospitality. Yet, as this thesis will show, this discourse does nothing to quell the everyday racism which African and Haitian migrants experience in the city.

2.5 '*Haitianos*' Haitian and African migrants' temporary settlement

Since Haitian migrants' arrival in Tijuana in 2016, the city's landscape has changed. As noted in Section 2.1, thousands of Haitian migrants were regularized in Tijuana in response to U.S. policies which restricted and deterred Haitian migration. This prompted Haitians to enter local labor markets, both in formal and informal capacities, and shift from temporary migrant shelters to renting houses in residential neighborhoods. Those migrants who arrived in Tijuana after 2017 (and continue to arrive) experienced different immigration processes, many of them lacking immigration status or obtaining only temporary protection. African migrants, typically undocumented as they do not have the intention to settle in Tijuana for more than a few days, since 2019 have experienced longer and more indefinite settlement periods as particular immigration policies executed by the Mexican and U.S. governments aim to keep them for reaching the United States. This section will outline policy of the last five years which has significantly impacted the mobility of Haitian and African migrants, resulting in prolonged settlement in Tijuana, and other border towns. While U.S. immigration policies at large target Central American migrants, these measures also impact Haitian and African migrants, and therefore alter the ways in which they transit through and engage with the city.

The 'metering policy' was enacted in early 2016, under the Obama administration and initially targeted Haitian migrants seeking to claim asylum at U.S. ports of entry (American Immigration Council 2021a). The process required asylum seekers, initially only at the San Ysidro port of entry in Tijuana, to be placed on a waiting list, and turned back to wait in Mexico until their number was called to make their asylum claim. This process expanded under the Trump administration in 2018 to all ports of entry across

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the U.S.-Mexico border. In Tijuana, this list was informally managed on the Mexican side of the border, and Mexican border officials were informed daily on how many individuals from the list the U.S. would process. Metering resulted in thousands of individuals waiting in Mexico, in some border cities for up to six months, just to begin the asylum process in the United States. For Spanish and Portuguese speaking migrants from Latin America, this waiting process was exacerbated by the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP), or 'Remain in Mexico' policy enacted in December 2018, which returned asylum seekers to Mexico to wait for their immigration hearing (American Immigration Council 2020b). Haitian, African, and other extra-continental migrants were not included under this policy, yet migrants collectively were impacted as over 50,000 migrants were returned to Mexican border towns, as of January 2020, which put additional pressure on already scant migrant resources.

In July 2019, the Trump administration enacted the Asylum Transit Ban, which banned asylum claims in the U.S. from any individual who entered from the southern land border and transited through a U.S. government determined 'safe third country' since leaving their home (American Immigration Council 2020a). Alongside this ban, the U.S. developed several bilateral agreements with 'Northern Triangle' countries, including Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, to accept asylum seekers who transited through these countries (AILA 2019, American Immigration Council 2019). In response to migrants' migration to the border, Trump threatened Mexico with tariff increases in May 2019 if all northbound migration was not curbed. Mexican immigration officials adapted migration management to tighten surveillance, apprehensions, and detentions at the southern border with Guatemala, and militarized the border through deploying the National Guard. Before this moment, extra-continental migrants, including African, Asian, and Caribbean migrants without consular representation in Mexico (including Haitians), were issued an 'exit permit' (*oficio de salida del pais)* valid for around 20 days to transit through the country and leave Mexico, typically through its northern border (Priya Morley et al. 2021a). Following the tariff threats, Mexican officials began issuing exit permits only valid for exit through its southern border with Guatemala. This left thousands of African and Haitian migrants in the southern city of Tapachula stranded without a legal way to move forward in their journey (Priya Morley et al. 2021b).

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Tapachula functions as the gatekeeper of migrants exiting Central America on their journeys to reach North American destinations. Unlike extra-continental migrants, Central American migrants are required to make a claim for asylum in southern Mexico in order to be issued documentation to move through the country (Everaet 2020). In the summer of 2019, Mexican officials began processing African and Haitian migrants the same way, funneling them through asylum procedures after their initial detention. Yet, without consular representation in Mexico, the Mexican refugee agency, COMAR (Mexican Commission for Aid for Refugees), was not able to verify the identity of many African and Haitian migrants, resulting in them being rendered 'stateless' (Enrique, Personal Interview, May 19, 2021, Priya Morley et al. 2021b). Determinations of 'statelessness' resulted in the issuance of permanent residence in Mexico for many African and Haitian migrants who were in Tapachula between early summer 2019 until the end of the year. While this process of legalization of would-be migrants to the U.S. provided them with authorization to work and to settle in Mexico, many who received it did so against their will or knowledge of what the implications would be for their future migration (Priya Morley et al. 2021b). This process, for many 'legalized' them in Mexico, but rendered challenges towards making their asylum claims in other countries as they had originally planned. Permanent residence in Mexico, under international law, means that an asylum claim in the U.S. would require proof of persecution in both their country of origin and country of residence (IRB Legal Services 2019), i.e., Mexico, making a difficult process even more challenging. The rendering of migrants as 'stateless', critically effects their decision-making power around their own asylum, and attempts to immobilize them from realizing their migration projects. This leaves migrants who wouldn't typically settle in Mexico, due to linguistic and cultural differences, insecurity, violence, racism, and xenophobia, bound between its borders uncertain how to move forward.

Mexican asylum processes require applicants to remain in the state in which they apply for the entirety of their case determination period, or cases are considered abandoned. Under Mexican law, asylum procedures should take up to 45 days, yet in practice this is often extended to several months (Priya Morley et al. 2021a). In circumstances of delayed processing or rejected asylum claims,

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humanitarian visas are issued for temporary one-year protection. Asylum seekers could also be issued a "proof of procedure" (*constancia de trámite)* document, which is valid for 3 months, and effectively states that the holder should not be subject to deportation while their asylum claim is pending (Priya Morley et al. 2021a). In Fall 2019, these immigration processes created a bottleneck of mostly African migrants in Tapachula waiting to receive documentation to be able to leave the city. Without the ability to work and a lack of sufficient shelter and basic humanitarian aid, African and Haitian migrants organized protests, demonstrations, and a tent encampment outside of *Siglo XXI* (21st Century) detention center for several months (Priya Morley et al. 2021b). The "Assembly," a migrant collective of 4,500 African migrants of diverse nationalities and origins, made demands to the Mexican immigration authorities throughout the Summer and Fall months of 2019 to leave the state of Chiapas for those intending to continue migrating north (Priya Morley et al. 2021b). With the humanitarian crisis which unfolded in Tapachula in the latter half of 2019, according to Enrique Vidal Olascoaga, Coordinator of the Fray Matias Human Rights Center (CDH Fray Matias) in Tapachula, Mexican immigration officials began re-issuing exit permits to extra-continental migrants in the early months of 2020.

In March 2020, the U.S. land borders closed indefinitely to non-essential travel, which included the right to claim asylum, resulting in the suspension of the metering policy, leaving 15,000 migrants on waiting lists across border cities in uncertainty (American Immigration Council 2021b). Citing public health concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration suspended migration, including asylum, at the border. Under special authority of the Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Title 42 was invoked which authorized border officials to turn any individual away from the border, if they were deemed a threat to public health for communicable diseases (American Immigration Council 2021b). Under Title 42, those not returned to Mexico are held in U.S. immigration detention and then deported to their home countries without an opportunity to claim asylum.

On January 20, 2021, the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden occurred and a new administration change took place. Despite touting a more humane approach to immigration policy and migration management, deportations continued under the Biden administration, as well as the use of Title

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42 to expel migrants from the U.S. without access to an immigration hearing or credible fear interview. A report on the impact of Title 42 on Haitian migrants in the U.S., revealed that more Haitian migrants were deported in the several weeks of the Biden presidency (1,200 from Jan 20 – March 22, 2021), than in the whole of 2020 under the Trump administration (895 in Fiscal Year 2020) (Phillips and Ricker 2021). Since the border closure, few migrants seeking international protection have had a legal way to do so for over a year. Between March 2020 and February 2021, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) carried out 520,000 expulsions under Title 42 (American Immigration Council 2021b).

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Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This research situates the perspectives, experiences, and subjectivities of African and Haitian migrants in Mexico as the analytical point of departure, and recognizes the constitutive power migrants exude against and within hostile border and migration regimes (Casas Cortez, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015), and therefore, the "autonomy of migration" approach to migration theory is the foundation of this thesis. The autonomy of migration, initially developed by economist Yann Moulier Boutang (1998), flips migration theory upside down, in which migration and mobility are not merely responses to economic and social forces, nor to sovereign control (Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos 2015). Rather, the approach shifts the central focus from nation state sovereignty and migration governance, to the perspective of mobility itself, recognizing that human mobility does not conform and adapt to migration management, but rather the other way around (Scheel 2013, Scheel 2019). Moulier Boutang's original thesis introduced an autonomist Marxist approach to re-reading labor, capitalism, and governance through migration (Hess 2017), in which migratory movements are also social and political movements (Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos 2015). Migrant mobilities are, therefore, a "collective force" (Casas Cortez, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015, 899) which impact and transform border and migration regimes, challenging the notion that migration is a mere product of them. By analyzing from within migration (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018), rather than through the lens of sovereign governance, migration research reveals that human mobility precedes control, while still acknowledging that migration operates within complex structures of power.

This approach, in opposition to the traditional, and quite highly criticized, neoclassical theory, new economics of migration, and world systems theory which explain migration from outside forces, emphasizes the "subjective and social dimensions," (Scheel 2013, 579) of migration as to reject its reduction to objective structural causes and neglect of the subjective practices and desires of the migrants themselves. Situated in the AoM (Scheel 2019) approach, this research explores the mobility, as well as periods of immobility, of African and Haitian migrants in Mexico in which their everyday practices of organizing, building social relations and networks, and utilizing urban space contribute to the negotiation

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and contestation of repressive migration and border regimes which aim to restrict and control migration. Therefore, in each aspect of this thesis, migrants' perspectives are at the forefront, highlighting the ways in which their migration does not only succumb to border regimes of control, but rather how their struggles for mobility are part and parcel of impacting the mechanisms of these regimes. For example, the change in migration management at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2016 which implemented the metering policy was a response to an influx of Haitian migrants seeking to enter the U.S. on political asylum claims. Likewise, the Mexican response to African and Haitian migration at the southern border culminated in new immigration and asylum procedures to curb their migration to the northern border. Through the presence and mobility of African and Haitian migrants in Mexico, migration management and border control continue to adapt to their movements. Yet, as this thesis explores, in opposition to these regimes, African and Haitian migrants continually negotiate their mobility towards desired destinations.

The border town of Tijuana, Mexico emerges as the geographical and urban point of analysis for this thesis. In analyzing migrant mobilities to this 'transit' zone along their migration trajectories to North American destinations, I conceptualize Tijuana as a site of rupture along African and Haitian migrants' fragmented journeys through the Americas. "Fragmented journeys," as introduced by Collyer (2007, 668), re-positions transnational, and transit, migration as increasingly disrupted and non-linear as global migration governance becomes increasingly restrictive of irregular migration. Migrants transiting Latin America en route to the U.S. and Canada, increasingly experience blockages in Tijuana (and other border towns) as they confront U.S. border and asylum regimes which aim to expel and reject undesirable migrant bodies. The city, then, emerges as one site of rupture on this journey through which migrants must navigate their everyday survival and mobility. In keeping with the overarching AoM approach to this research, migrants' fragmented journeys in Tijuana are analyzed through the experiences of migrants themselves in the city spaces, highlighting the ways in which they overcome local and international barriers to their mobility. Likewise, utilizing the concept of fragmented journeys enables a connection between multiple localities which migrants' encounter along their trajectories. In this research, migrants'

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experiences in Tijuana are tightly linked to the southern Mexican city of Tapachula, where they first encountered Mexican immigration authorities. The fragmented journey enables an analysis of migrant mobilities which do not simply focus on the origin or destination of migrants, but rather intertwines the various localities which migrants pass through to reveal confrontations with structures of power and the navigation within and against those structures which make mobility possible. Situating this research in an urban space of rupture further challenges the misconception that migrants in 'transit' are neither impacted nor impactful to the localities through which they pass. Rather, the fragmented journeys of African and Haitian migrants reveal these 'in-between' spaces as important elements of socio-spatial transformations.

In addition to Tijuana emerging as an urban site of rupture, I employ Kihato's (2013) concepts of "liminality" and "thresholds" presented in *Migrant Women of Johannesburg: Everyday Life in an In-between City*, to reveal the particular characteristics of the city and the ways in which Black extra-continental migrants encounter urban boundaries which "are visible and invisible. Porous and solid," (2013, 18). Bound between the various thresholds of the city, migrants' mobility in Tijuana is plagued by stagnation and an inability to move forward or backward, suspended in the in-between. Within Kihato's 'liminal city' migrants experience indeterminacy, informality, and live in a constant state of temporality, in which imagined futures elsewhere keep migrants from 'settling' where they are. I utilize the concepts of liminality and thresholds to trace the subjectivities, racialization, exclusion, and immobility which African and Haitian migrants experience in Tijuana, to further engage the ways they contest the boundaries drawn around them. Everyday practices of building social networks and appropriating urban spaces stimulate not only migrants' local urban mobility, but also their transnational mobility, in which African and Haitian migrants are actively negotiating, circumventing, and escaping the thresholds inscribed upon them.

In exploring the evolution of social relations and networks of migrants in Tijuana, I situate their relation-making in Simone's (2019) *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South*, concept of "rhythms of endurance" which explores the ways in which urban poor and working-class populations manifest their circumstances into the possibilities of life through relations which come into being in an

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effort to make 'something' happen. Rhythms entail that every day "activities become devices" (Simone 2019, 59) for exchanging knowledge and information, and relational explorations for ways to work together in the moment. In Tijuana, African and Haitian migrants generate connectivity among each other, and with local city actors and organizations, to build networks of information and resource exchange which both support their indefinite stay in the city, as well as contribute towards progressing their onward migration to future destinations. Rhythms of endurance, therefore, provides a lens through which to engage both the intentional and improvised relations of connectivity and care by African and Haitian migrants in the city. The shared migration objectives of these heterogenous migrants and their allies interlinks them together in the city to find ways of working together to collaborate on making everyday survival and future mobility possible with each other.

The other aspect of this research examines the ways in which migrants in Tijuana contest the socio-spatial thresholds within urban spaces through their temporal practices of place-making to 'get by' in the urban landscape, but also to retain their prospects of migration. 'Place-making' theory broadly explores the ways in which social processes are constitutive in the production of space and place (Sen and Silverman 2014). Place-making reveals the ways in which people are not only active agents in the construction of place, but also infuse meaning, belonging, and socio-political processes into those places across varying scales, socio-historical contexts, and subjectivities. Within the fields of critical geography, feminist, and critical race studies, place-making concepts have developed to recognize the complex aspects of the construction of place as being "embodied" (Sen and Silverman 2014) and "relational" (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2019). Embodied place-making conceptualizes the body as co-constitutive of urban infrastructure, in which "a physical environment cannot exist without the human inhabitants who experience it in their everyday lives," (3). Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce (2019) recognize relational place-making by marginalized populations as competing political and social itineraries that are played out across multiple scales of power. These scholars explore relational place-making in the context of 'black geographies' to reveal structural inequalities within society, while highlighting marginalized black communities' experiences with, and ideas and visions of, places within those uneven structures of power.

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Situating embodied and relational place-making within mobility studies reveals the ways in which marginalized populations 'on the move' experience institutionalized uneven power and inequalities in relation to space and place during their mobility, while simultaneously drawing attention to the ways their very presence in those spaces contributes towards its transformation and (re)production. Analyzing the temporal place-making practices of Africans and Haitians in Tijuana shows how migrants cultivate over-lapping spaces of belonging and the ways in which experiences of racism and racialization, shared migration objectives, and irregularity, open up possibilities for collaboration. As their place-making is situated in spaces of rupture, fragmentation, and liminality, these migrants employ embodied practices to claim and reconfigure spaces of protection and belonging which are recognizable to them. At the same time, as migrants confront conflicting relations of power within the city, they contest their subjectivities through their use of urban space in temporary, and often times, fleeting ways which progress their struggles for transnational mobility.

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Chapter 4: Methodology

Fieldwork for this research took place over the course of six weeks, from January 3, 2021 – February 12, 2021 in Tijuana, Mexico[3]. Although, four of the six weeks (January 8, 2021 – February 5, 2021) was the main period of data collection due to two weeks of self-quarantine. Ethnographic research methods were used to gather qualitative data around migrants' experiences in migration and daily life. Ethnographic research entails not only documenting the lives of people, but the active observation and participation with the research population and the surrounding environment (Marvasti 2004). To complement interlocutor interviews, I observed migrants around the city in various spaces of employment, living, shopping, and worship, and participated in their everyday navigation of the city through visiting important places with migrants and taking walks throughout different areas of the city center. Aspects of this research continued even after leaving Tijuana, as I maintained communication with several interlocutors via WhatsApp to stay updated on border circumstances and their mobility practices.

In addition to ethnographic research methods, I employed the Autonomy of Migration approach to migration studies as a primary method of research design and data collection. This approach centers research from the perspective of migrants and migrant mobility, as opposed to studying migration through the lens of migration governance (Scheel 2019). Rather, the intricate and detailed notions of mobility, networking, and place-making practiced by migrants along their migration trajectories drives this research. From this approach, the research design seeks to situate migrants' experiences, voices, and power (*potentia)*[4] at the forefront of the research. Safety and precautionary measures were implemented in preparation for and throughout fieldwork to ensure ethical and safe research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety measures included self-quarantine, regular COVID-19 testing, socially distanced interviews, outdoor interviews whenever possible, and daily provided protective equipment for research interlocutors including medical face masks and hand sanitizer.

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[3] The fieldwork period was funded by the American University in Cairo Graduate Students Support Grants.

[4] Power in a Spinozian reading, as the force of the individual multiplied into the collective, fluid and active rather than static, non-sovereign power. See Large 2017.

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4.1 Research design

The border town of Tijuana, Mexico was chosen as the field site of this research based on previous exposure to the barriers of mobility which African and Haitian migrants were encountering there from an internship which was held from August 2020 – November 2020. The remote internship took place with the binational organization, *Al Otro Lado*, which has a field office in Tijuana. Through the organization, I was connected to John,[5] a Haitian migrant who settled in Tijuana after migrating from Brazil in 2016. When John arrived in Tijuana, he witnessed the chaos of U.S. border regime which restricted asylum and deported migrants to Haiti during a time of political and economic crisis, at which point he made the decision to stay in Mexico. Now a part-time community organizer for the San Diego based organization, Haitian Bridge Alliance, John worked with me throughout the fieldwork period as a paid interpreter in Creole. Prior to my arrival in Tijuana, John and I had meetings via phone to discuss the research objectives and he assisted in organizing trips to various sites to meet Haitian migrants. In addition to previous exposure to Tijuana, I wanted to choose a field site which would enable discussions on the entirety of migrants' journeys through the South-Central American corridor. As a border town, it is often the last urban center which migrants encounter before crossing into the U.S., and therefore meeting migrants in Tijuana allows for a reflection on their migration journeys as a whole. Likewise, I wanted to understand African and Haitian migrants' impacts on the socio-spatial reconfigurations of the city through their protracted presence, and the ways in which their daily negotiations for life and mobility challenged the border regimes that they confronted there.

I chose to include both Haitian migrants and migrants from the African continent as research populations for this study to question the ways in which shared migration trajectories influence the organization of migrants in urban centers, such as in their dwelling practices, employment, organizing of everyday life, and mobility. Recent literature on Haitian migrants in Tijuana typically recognizes the presence of African migrants in the city, but does not explore the ways in which these mobile populations

[5] Permission by the individual was given to use his real name in this thesis.

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engage with one another, or if (and how) urban spaces and resources are utilized between these populations. Additionally, experiences of racism, as well as linguistic and cultural barriers in Tijuana connected these populations in ways which differed from other migratory groups. While Haitian migrants are prominent in Tijuana, African migrants are heterogenous in origin and are far fewer in number. For this reason, I kept the category of African migrants broad to encompass any migrants from the continent whom I happened to meet. That being said, I only encountered migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries during fieldwork. While some interlocutors noted the presence of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, namely from Egypt and Yemen, I did not meet any of these migrants in the city.

I met interlocutors for this research through snowball sampling. John was a critical gatekeeper to Haitian migrants residing in the city. He helped to identify beneficial field sites to visit, such as migrant shelters and churches, and invited me to his work tasks to meet potential interlocutors. By walking the streets of Tijuana, I made connections with Haitian street vendors, some of whom became interlocutors. From previous connections, I knew one Cameroonian migrant living in the city, and met other African migrants by walking around near the areas in which they lived downtown. Unstructured interview questions were employed to document each migrants' story, the narratives, experiences, and challenges which they felt were important to share. These interviews were guided with leading questions around migration, daily life, work, home, social networks, and use of urban space and were adapted based on the information the interlocutor shared. In person interviews took place at churches, homes, shelters, plazas, restaurants, cafes, and on city sidewalks. Zoom interviews were arranged with migrants who had access to devices with Wi-Fi connection, and were helpful in maintaining social distancing. In the thesis, pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the migrants who participated in this research.

As part of the research, I conducted participant observation in areas of the city which African and Haitian migrants live, work, worship, and spend their free time. I spent two Sundays at a Haitian church where I observed the congregation during the services and the interactions of migrants together. Three field days were conducted at a migrant shelter where I observed mostly Haitian women and children living, cooking, and laughing together. I visited two homes of migrants and took note of their

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neighborhoods and living circumstances. I wandered downtown streets recognizing where Haitian vendors work on street corners and plazas, and the merchandise which they sell. I hung out in plazas and cafes with African migrants and observed how they move through the city. I walked to various points in the city with African migrants as they oriented me to the port of entry, their accommodations, a park where they used to play soccer on a local team, and other important localities. I waded through open-air markets hosting Haitian and African vendors and shoppers and observed the various businesses and economies present in those spaces. As part of this research looks at the ways in which African and Haitian migrants use, create, and reconfigure urban space, participant observation was not just of what migrants were doing or saying, but also the ways they interacted with their surrounding environment was studied.

Interviews were recorded with interlocutor consent, transcribed and translated into English for data analysis. Two interlocutors spoke English and the remainder of the interviews were conducted in French. A majority of Haitian interlocutors spoke only Creole, and therefore a French-Creole interpreter was hired to facilitate interviews. Throughout interviews and participant observation, I utilized a fieldnote book to take notes, as well as a voice recorder to verbally recap interviews and observations in the field. Data analysis of the qualitative data was executed through coding techniques which grouped common themes. Initial codes were re-grouped under focused codes, and these common themes were then analyzed for repetition and prevalence throughout the data. Research conclusions were shared with several interlocutors who I still have contact with to verify my understanding of their lives in Tijuana.

4.2 Limitations and challenges

Limitations and challenges for this research were heighten during the fieldwork period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A difficulty before even arriving to Tijuana was knowing how and where to reach the research populations for this study, as this was my first time visiting the border town. Under a pandemic, going out or spending time in public spaces, such as restaurants or cafes, where I might meet someone was restricted, and therefore hindered my ability to meet potential interlocutors for this research. Time was also a limitation, which was impacted by the need to quarantine before and after fieldwork. The research populations are highly mobile, and therefore I recognized that after meeting someone they could

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be gone from the city in a matter of days. Due to the border closure and heightened security because of the pandemic, African and Haitian migrants were staying in the city longer than usual, which made multiple interviews with some interlocutors possible.

While Haitian migrants were usually very open and willingly to speak about their experiences in Tijuana, African migrants were more reserved and fearful of engaging with an academic. My short time in Tijuana, and the relatively short time that migrants remain in the city, limited my ability to build rapport with African migrants in order to garner more interest and participation in the research. Snowball sampling with this population was difficult as most interlocutors revealed that they didn't know anyone else who would be interested to speak with me because African migrants are afraid of sharing any of their information. My additional understanding of this was that several migrants had poor experiences with academics and journalists sharing their names and sensitive information about them. Despite the pandemic and these other limitations, I was able to meet interlocutors through connections or simply by walking around the city, and conducting interviews outside in public areas was safe and secure.

4.3 Ethical considerations

An initial ethical consideration was whether fieldwork was appropriate during a global pandemic, and of course, the worry of putting interlocutors and myself at risk of contracting the disease. Yet, as the pandemic has temporarily immobilized many migrants in transit and along borderlands, an objective of this research was to highlight and understand how irregular migrants are managing these periods of restricted mobility, coupled with already securitized border regimes. While life during the pandemic stopped for many, and meant a reclusion to the safety of our homes, thousands of others around the globe were caught in transit as the pandemic swiftly shut down national borders. Ultimately, under the careful precautions of COVID-19 preventative measures, I decided that I could keep the research populations safe and share their critically important stories and daily lives in a border town impacted by the pandemic.

An additional ethical consideration was my positionality as a White American researcher in Mexico, engaging with minority, and highly surveilled and marginalized, Black migrant communities. Initial considerations were around interlocutors assuming my affiliation with the U.S. government or

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NGOs that could help them migrate to the United States. I considered that this could both hinder interlocutors' participation in the research, or influence particular responses thought to help them. To combat this, I introduced myself as a graduate student and emphasized that I was not affiliated with any government or NGO entity. Second, I considered the potential danger or exposure I may cause to migrants engaging with me in public spaces as Black migrants in Tijuana already experience heightened visibility. Due to the pandemic, outdoor spaces were prioritized for interviews, and therefore executing fieldwork in primarily public spaces meant being extra vigilant and aware of our surroundings.

4.4 Profile of interlocutors

During the four primary weeks of fieldwork, I encountered 37 migrants from Haiti and several African countries. Interlocutors for this research were from Haiti (32), Cameroon (2), Guinea (2), and (1) from the Horn of Africa (anonymity requested). I conducted a total of 39 individual interviews, and one group interview with three migrants from Cameroon, Guinea, and the Horn of Africa. Most interlocutors were only interviewed one time, as I only met them once. For example, the Haitian migrants whom I met at the church services (8) and at the Little Haiti shelter (14). Interviews with these migrants ranged from 15 minutes to 1 hour depending on the interest of the interlocutor. Interlocutors met outside of these congregated field sites (such as at homes, plazas, or cafes) were often interviewed for longer, between 30 minutes to 2 hours. Four interlocutors for this research were interviewed multiple times depending on their availability and interest, and 10 interlocutors remained in touch via WhatsApp after the fieldwork in Tijuana concluded. Haitian interlocutors previously lived in a South American country before migrating to Mexico, either Brazil, Chile, or Venezuela. The amount of time spent in these countries of first migration varied from several months to 12 years. African migrants entered South American countries, but often did not settle there for more than a few weeks or months, expect for one migrant from the Horn of Africa who lived in a South American country (anonymity requested) for five years. South American points of entry for migrants from West African countries were Nicaragua (via Cuba), Ecuador, and Brazil.

Depending on the period of time spent in South American countries, some Haitian interlocutors spoke various levels of Spanish which aided in their everyday lives in Tijuana. Several, at least three

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interlocutors who noted this, lived in the Dominican Republic for a number of years and were fluent in Spanish before even arriving to South America. African migrants typically did not speak much Spanish, expect for the migrant from the Horn of Africa who was fluent. Only four of the 33 Haitian interlocutors arrived in Mexico by plane, while 29 transited the South American-Central American corridor to reach Mexico. Of the four Haitian migrants who arrived by plane, one arrived from Chile on a tourist visa, which he then overstayed and applied for humanitarian protection in Mexico. Two women took planes, one from Brazil and one from Haiti, to join their spouse already living in Tijuana. Under Mexican law, obtaining residency in the country allows for family reunification which made it possible for their spouses to apply for them to come to Mexico. Finally, one migrant arrived in Mexico on a student visa as he applied for a graduate program while living in Brazil. Four of the five African migrants took the South-Central American route to Mexico, while the migrant from the Horn of Africa arrived in Mexico by plane on a tourist visa, which he overstayed and resided in Tijuana undocumented.

Three interviews were conducted with staff of NGOs in Mexico over Zoom and WhatsApp. Two staff were interviewed from the Tijuana-based organization, *Al Otro Lado*, and one staff was interviewed from CDH Fray Matias in Tapachula, Mexico. These interviews gave insight into the particular challenges which Haitian and African migrants experience in Mexico and the impact of U.S. immigration and asylum policies on their mobility. In Tapachula, the interview gave insight into the situation of African and Haitian migrants in 2019 when the Mexican refugee agency began processing these migrants under asylum procedures and determining them as stateless. The interview revealed that this was a temporary initiative which the Mexican government began under pressure from the U.S., and which was suspended by the end of 2019.

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Chapter 5: Liminality and the City

5.1 Introduction

As introduced in Chapter 1, I conceptualize the city of Tijuana and its geographical location on the U.S.-Mexico border as a metaphorical 'waiting room,' a waiting room which Chakrabarty (2000) describes holds those who have "not yet" (8) arrived. Chakrabarty's concept of the waiting room illustrated the colonial rationalization for keeping the colonized under the thumb of colonial rule without self-determination or self-governance. Tijuana, like other border towns in Mexico, is an urban center of indefinite waiting, where undesirable migrants wade in the 'not yet' and ambiguous processes of 'becoming;' becoming worthy, legitimate, acceptable, and desirable enough for a better life and/or international protection in the United States. The restrictive immigration and asylum policies of the U.S. which aim to reject, deter, and criminalize migrants, along with the border closure since March 2020, are constitutive processes that have influenced the transition of Tijuana as a site of transit for international migrants to an urban enclave of containment, liminality, and waiting. In Mexico, African and Haitian migrants experience additional subjugation based on racial hierarchies within Mexican society, which makes their attempts to stitch together a make-shift life challenging in particular ways. Thus, African and Haitian migrants 'stuck' in Tijuana navigate a plurality of thresholds which shape and inform their experiences in the city. These thresholds reveal the urban informality which they encounter, as well as the informality which they must practice in order to survive in the city.

In this chapter, I trace the urban thresholds which emerge, particular to Tijuana, and the ways in which the city itself becomes a "site of bordering" (Darling 2017, 183) within borders, where new boundaries are reinscribed at the local urban level. Migrants navigating the urban environment often do so in a state of irregularity, where their lack of, or fluctuating, immigration status becomes a mechanism for the state to 're-scale' nation-state borders in the everyday spaces of urban life. In this way, "urban services, civic and public spaces, and workplaces thus become precarious sites which may display the punitive reach of border enforcement at any time... As authority for immigration control is devolved to an

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urban level, it is argued that cities have 'become a kind of factory for the production of illegality" (Darling 2017, 184).

Urban liminality "brings into relief the notions of thresholds in the city – the physical, social, and psychological boundaries," (Kihato 2013, 17) and I add, economic boundaries, which impact the access to spaces, services, institutions, rights, and mobility for marginalized urban dwellers in daily life. Nation-state and political borders demonstrate geographical boundaries which lock up undesirable mobile bodies, while social thresholds are carved between populations based on constructed differences. Psychologically, they remain bound between their realities and imagined futures. To co-exist in the liminal city, migrants must navigate its "shifting boundaries" (Kihato 2013, 119) with fluidity, indeterminacy, and insecurity to lead everyday lives. Wading in the margins of this city means exclusion from the local society without an ability, or desire, to return home, and confronted with economic, social, and political limitations, "living in flux and aspiring to be elsewhere," (Kihato 2013, 16).

In coping with liminality, I argue that the informality which African and Haitian migrants practice between these thresholds is transformative of urban spaces and social processes, and continually motivates their desires and plans for onward migration. Tijuana, as a 'liminal city,' reveals how urban informality and uncertainty manifest between the thresholds of migrants' everyday lives, as well as the ways in which they encounter relations of power and negotiate them. I outline these thresholds to illustrate a story of the liminality, indeterminacy, and informality, which African and Haitian migrants experience. First, the chapter explores Tijuana in the context of the liminal city. The following sections trace the urban thresholds which emerge physically (political border and urban bordering), socially (race, language, and immigration status), economically (livelihoods), and psychologically (imagined futures).

5.2 Tijuana beyond transit, a 'liminal city'

I sat across from Amine[6], a migrant from Cameroon, one afternoon in *Zona Rio* at a shopping plaza not far from the house he rented with two other Cameroonian migrants. It was a chilly and windy

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[6] All names of interlocutors have been changed throughout the thesis to protect their identities and well-being, unless otherwise noted.

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late afternoon in January, but safety precautions pushed us to sit outside of the café anyway, ignoring the looming dark storm clouds above us. He wore a black hat with the city name 'Chicago' brightly etched into the front and light jacket. I made a mental note that we might not last too long, considering the current climate conditions. It was my first interview with Amine, so I ordered coffee as social gesture, but even more so to keep us warm. During our conversation, we were discussing his experiences with the 'metering policy' and the ambiguity lingering over its future. "They stopped the numbers. Just since COVID-19. We don't know how it will restart. They said that it would start again, but we are here and it didn't start again. But it's hard because a lot of people have left, arrived, all that. But I think that when the border opens, they will restart the numbers. I don't know yet, but I think that," he explained.

Out of curiosity, I asked him what his number was, the one he received from the port of entry when he arrived in Tijuana in early 2020. He responded, "I always have it with me," as he moved towards his pant pocket to remove his wallet. He filtered through the sections of the wallet, then filtered through it again. I waited in anticipation for him pull a card or receipt from the folds of the black leather, until he looked up, his face glazed over with a loss of expression. "It's lost," he mumbled. "It's been a longtime. It was just a small paper and they just wrote the number. But I don't remember it anymore. It's been a longtime that it's in my pocket. If it's not here, it's lost. I think that I will have to ask for another. I don't know. But I gave my name so maybe I can go and give my name and they look for the number."

Photo by Julia Hause: U.S.-Mexico border extending into Pacific Ocean, *Playas de Tijuana*, Jan 15, 2021

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This number, up until the border closure, was Amine's lifeline to claim asylum in the U.S. 'legally' at a port of entry, as opposed to crossing irregularly. Already, he had been waiting a year since receiving his number for it to be called. The pandemic put that on hold even longer, and with no clear understanding of if or how that process would start again. Losing the number meant a high possibility that he lost his place 'in line' to claim asylum, and made his wait in Tijuana even more undetermined. Originally from Francophone Cameroon, Amine fled the country after being accused of being a part of the separatist movement in the Anglophone region. He learned from a friend of the free visa scheme in Ecuador, which did not require Cameroonians to obtain a visa before traveling, and they left together for Quito in June 2019. Two months later, in August, Cameroon would be removed from Ecuador's free visa country list (BAL 2019). After a week in Quito, Amine met Haitian migrants who were on their way to the U.S. and he decided to continue migrating with them through six more countries to reach Mexico.

One of the most significant parts of the journey which Amine reflected on was his experience in the Darien Gap, a large swath of jungle which separates Colombia from Panama. The Darien Gap is a portion of the journey through the South-Central American corridor which is particular to African, Asian, and Caribbean migrants, which Central American migrants do not experience due to their geographic location, and which many South American migrants are able to avoid through alternative migration routes (Plewa 2021). Transiting the highly dangerous Darien Gap, migrants experience violence, robbery, wild animals, lack of food and water, and sometimes death and disappearances (Drotbohm and Winters 2021). Amine recounted his trek through the Darien Gap as a territory to, *'avaler des hommes,'* or swallow men, and which claimed the life of his friend with whom he migrated from Cameroon.

Emerging from Central America, the first city Amine arrived in Mexico was the southern city of Tapachula, where he was detained for 14 days and waited three months to receive documentation to travel north. Tapachula is a city which many irregular migrants must pass through to reach the northern border, and is the site where migrants' legal status in the country is assessed and decided. Consequently, the immigration status obtained in Tapachula impacts migrants' everyday lives in Tijuana, in terms of their ability to access labor markets, housing, social services, as well as continue their migration to north.

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Amine reached Tapachula in Fall 2019, at the time when the Mexican government was practicing an alternative immigration process which funneled African and Haitian migrants into Mexico's asylum system, rather than issuing an 'exit permit' for them to transit the country.[7] Without a way to verify their identities or countries of origin, migrants were rendered 'stateless' by the Mexican refugee agency, COMAR (See chapter 2.5 for statelessness in Mexico). In recounting his journey to Tijuana, Amine reflected on his experience in Tapachula and the process which he underwent to emerge under this political category, and subsequently, with permanent residence in Mexico.

"You have a process here in Tapachula, you can't work in Tapachula. You are not allowed to work. The situation is that you don't have work, you don't have money, and you don't have a place to sleep. You want to sleep on the street? No problem. It was very difficult in Tapachula, I lived there for 3 months before I got the card [permanent residence] … They [Mexican government] did that. The permanent resident card through a process where you are stateless. Yet, you registered, for example, I have a Cameroonian passport. I have an identity card from Cameroon. But I can't figure out why Mexico is putting this card that makes you stateless. I registered with my Cameroonian passport... When you are Cameroonian and you bring your passport to the immigration office, but they give you a card that you are stateless. I do not know why they have the intention to do that. They do not give you an explanation. When you ask why they gave you this card, they say that they don't know. So, you don't have a choice but to take the card. You are forced to take a card that you don't need. But you don't want to take the card, because it is a reason to stay in Mexico," (Amine, Personal Interview, January 24, 2021).

Amine finally arrived in Tijuana, but was blocked from claiming asylum by the metering policy. When he approached the port of entry, he was given a number on the waiting list which forced him to wait in Mexico until his number was called. The border closure, Trump's 'response' to COVID-19, but really a successive act in executing an anti-immigrant and anti-asylum policy agenda, suspended this process several months later leaving Amine in limbo. Amine sought refuge in a migrant shelter, *Espacio Migrante*, where he lived for the first three months while waiting for the border to re-open. In the meantime, the permanent residence card he obtained through being determined stateless enabled him to find a job to support his indefinite stay in the city.

[7] Interlocutors who passed through Tapachula prior to 2019, noted spending only several days to a week in the city before being issued 'exit permits' to transit the country. During 2019, migrants waited 3-14 months for documents.

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I situate Tijuana as a liminal city along what Collyer (2007) calls, a "fragmented journey," (668) in an attempt to trace the various boundaries and thresholds which characterize the city's informality, and the marginalization which African and Haitian migrants encounter there. Kihato's notion of the liminal city as an 'in-between city' conceptualizes the suspension which migrants experience in cities during periods of fragmentation where their mobility is disrupted due to individual constraints, as well as the institutionalized barriers imposed by global and regional migration governance. Rather than 'arriving,' migrants in the liminal city are always becoming, their settlement is not fixed, yet they remain drifting between the desires and agency of their own mobility, and the physical and socio-political structures which contest it. The liminal city emerges in an attempt to put words to the undefined and uncertain lives of transmigrants inhabiting cities bounded by their geographical, economic, social, and political circumstances, yet always imagining and desiring to be elsewhere.

Amine's arrival story to Tijuana reveals the barriers which irregular migrants confront as they navigate transnational mobility, and the border regimes in place which attempt to keep them from leaving Mexico. This physical boundary, the political border upon which Tijuana lies, is the most obvious threshold in the city. Yet, beyond the border, there are internal urban borders which re-scale immigration enforcement to local levels through police authorities, employers, banking institutions, healthcare providers, property owners, and various other city actors to surveil and exclude migrants from urban life. Socially, migrant groups are sorted, in which their incorporation into the city, and acceptability, is determined based on race, nationality, immigration status, and gender, in which their social and political rights are limited based on these categories of subjugation. Into Kihato's thresholds, I incorporate economic thresholds, which bind migrant livelihoods by the limits of Tijuana's labor markets. Finally, psychologically, migrants dream and manifest their mobility forward, toward other imagined futures. These thresholds are not rigid, rather they are fluid and unfixed, and operate as an interconnected web of limitation and containment, as social thresholds inform the urban boundaries which can and cannot be accessed in the city, and the economic activities and spaces available for income generation.

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Most interlocutors, if not all, whether they had four years or five months in the city, imagined Tijuana as temporary, as 'transit,' despite the growing protractedness of their time there. Tijuana emerges as a 'catch all' urban landscape in which migrants experience "arrested mobilities," (Boana and Astlofo 2020, 228) or a state of 'involuntary immobility' (Carling 2002) in which the biopolitics[8] of restrictive migration and exclusion are mapped across irregular migrant bodies residing in the city. While I hesitate to employ the language of 'involuntary' as to not minimize the power of migrants as active decision makers and creative maneuvers of violent border and migration regimes, I find it helpful to mention this concept as to convey the carceral environment which these regimes construct. The 'arrestedness,' or involuntariness, of migrants' mobility in Tijuana, hinges on the fears of the brutal U.S. immigration-industrial complex, the possibilities of being returned to Mexico, or worse, deported to their home countries, which keep them in a state of indefinite waiting in the Mexican borderlands.

Photo by Julia Hause: Overlooking U.S.-Mexico border from hillside neighborhood in Tijuana, Feb 2, 2021

[8] Foucault theorizes biopolitics as the intersection of life and politics and the bringing of life into order through political rationality (Adams 2017).

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While the city presents a plurality of challenges and barriers, the everyday informal practices of migrants in opposition to their own uncertainty actively delegitimizes the structural power which puts uncertainty in place, and reveals it as a "fragmented domain of multiple and competing sovereignties," (Alsayyad and Roy 2006, 12). Making life in transit means to be constantly improvising in an effort to move forward, despite the institutionalized mechanisms in place to suppress such movement. In which possibilities for living in transit are negotiated and sustained to circumvent capture and enable mobility beyond the boundaries of the city and the state.

5.3 Urban bordering and informality in the borderlands

In late January 2021, John and I met on a street in downtown, *Zona Norte,* to interview three Haitian migrants anxious to cross the border into the United States. At this point in my fieldwork, John had become a critical component to facilitating interviews with Haitian migrants in Creole, as well as was an invaluable gatekeeper to the Haitian community. While conducting interviews on a section of sidewalk on the street, there was an ominousness to our conversations, the desperation, frustration, and uncertainty that these men felt toward the fragments of their lives they struggled to maintain in the city. Anel, David, and Frantz shared a rented room in downtown Tijuana near the border, and just a few weeks earlier, were denied renewal of their humanitarian visas, and therefore were living in Tijuana irregularly. While Tijuana was not their intended destination, the fear of migrating to the U.S. with the strict border closure and possibility of deportations back to Haiti, kept them living in Tijuana indefinitely under uncertain circumstances. The three men met in Tapachula in September 2019 and waited several months for the issuance of documents to travel to the northern border. David initially applied for asylum in Mexico, attempting to receive permanent residence, but in Tapachula, his application was denied and instead was issued a one-year humanitarian visa. In early 2020, the three traveled to Tijuana with their temporary visas where they were greeted with the U.S. border closure. Without a way to move forward, they remained in the city working at *maquiladora* assembly plants until their visas expired on January 16, after which all three were let go by their employers. At the time of our interview, no longer with even a minimal income, they were facing eviction from their shared room by the proprietor.

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One of the migrants, Anel, confessed that this was his second trek from Brazil to Mexico. In 2016, his wife, child, and he left Brazil for the U.S.-Mexico border. When they crossed the border, they were detained and he was deported back to Haiti alone, his wife and child currently living with a family member in the United States. He fled Haiti a second time, first to Brazil, then he migrated the same route to Tapachula, Mexico in late 2019 with the hope of reuniting with his family. While he was telling his story, I looked up from the portion of concrete where we were congregated, to see the U.S. flag rippling in the wind on the other side of the border. It was right there. Family, (perceived) safety, and protection, so close he could almost touch it. Walking around *Zona Norte* there are points where you can see the 'other side' clearly, such as this patch of sidewalk that we had our interviews on. For migrants in the city, the waving U.S. flag is a daily reminder of the exclusion, rejection, distaste, and indifference that the state practices upon them, without even being on its land yet. After losing his job, Anel's desperation grew and he resorted to crossing the border. "Last week, last Sunday, I tried to enter the United States. The police [U.S. CBP] arrived and I was put in detention in San Diego Sunday night. Monday morning, they returned me to Tijuana. There were a lot of people that they returned with me... They didn't respond [when asked to claim asylum]. They didn't ask any questions," he explained.

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Photo by Julia Hause: *Zona Norte* looking at the border to the U.S. Flag waving on the other side, January 29, 2021

Although eligible, many Haitian migrants' one-year humanitarian visas were denied for renewal without another option to regularize their immigration status. This leaves migrants in ambiguous legal standing, still unable to migrate to the U.S. due to the border closure, turn-backs to Mexico, and a fear of ramped up deportations, yet stranded in Tijuana wallowing in the insecurity of their newfound illegality. As migrants encounter barriers towards continuing their migration and remain in Tijuana for longer, indefinite periods of time, they must look for longer term solutions for survival in the various economies of the border town. Navigating these economies is largely dependent on their legality, and therefore, the immigration status issued 4,000 km South and months before in Tapachula.

Thieme (2018) argues that urban informality and uncertainty operate non-linearly, and once in existence, continue to reproduce each other. These conditions co-exist and produce a rhythm between them which oscillates back and forth, in seemingly ongoing cycles of production and reproduction. The narrative of Anel, David, and Frantz reveals the ways in which informality in the city becomes cyclical as

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limits are encountered, breached, and stimulate new consequences. Overnight, these three migrants shifted into a state of irregularity which no longer allowed them to keep their factory jobs, and subsequently their home. Urban borders were re-drawn by their employers as immigration enforcement is rescaled and limitations are carved around the economic spaces which they can participate. This shift escalated the uncertainty and informality they experienced and practiced, and served as further motivation for Anel to irregularly cross the border. A cascade of ambiguity infiltrated their daily lives around housing, entering insecure alternative labor markets, and reinitiating mobility as chances of crossing into the U.S. without facing return to Mexico, or deportation to Haiti dwindled.

For African and Haitian migrants, the local police, employers, and the general public become agents of border policing and the mere presence of their irregularized bodies become a site of bordering within the city limits (Darling 2017). Practices of urban bordering by local authorities police migrants as easy extortion targets, impacting the ways in which migrants move through the city and the areas which they have access to. Several African migrants cited experiences of extortion, in which navigating their undocumented status was dependent on their ability to pay off local police who confronted them. As Kihato (2013) notes, "governance and the law are not static," (43), rather the multitude of urban actors can either support state governance or discredit and manipulate it, often times for their own benefit. These manipulations of the law create "hybrid practices that meld official with unofficial, formal with informal, legal with illegal," (Kihato 2013, 44).

Ibrahim, a migrant from the Horn of Africa, arrive to Tijuana in February 2020 from a country in South America where he had originally claimed asylum five years prior. Due to persecution of Afro-descent activists in that country, a movement he was politically active in, he fled again to Mexico with hopes of claiming asylum in the U.S. Ibrahim discussed experiences of extortion which he had been targeted for as an undocumented migrant by local police, forfeiting 1,000 pesos (~64 USD) since living in Tijuana. In the situations which unfold from an initial encounter with police on the street, Ibrahim explained that local authorities will confront him and put him in their car, after which he has money ready to pay for his release. The police take his money, drive a few blocks and drop him back off on another

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street not far from where the encounter began. "It's just that the police itself is a big mafia. So, if they see that you have 200 pesos in your pocket, they would like to take it away," Ibrahim explained. Extortion and bribing of local police are characteristics of urban informality, in which migrants comply with norms of corruption in order to maintain their residence in cities (Sanyal 2012) and avoid, likely negative, encounters with other authoritative bodies of immigration or legal enforcement. At the same time, police extortion produces disorder within state governance, as their malleability of the law actively discredits the legitimacy of the state.

The physical thresholds which African and Haitian migrants encounter in the city work beyond the political border which they are restricted from accessing. Practices of urban bordering emerge within the daily lives of these migrants as immigration enforcement is re-scaled to various city actors. Additionally, everyday racism and racialization produce heightened surveillance of Black migrants within the city's institutions and public spaces. Despite the seemingly positive rhetoric that Haitian and African migrants receive in Tijuana compared to their Central American counterparts, their marginalization based on race and immigration status influences the discrimination and harassment that they receive. These social thresholds will be further explored in the following section.

5.4 Blackness as a spotlight: "*Ay mi negro!* Me? No, I am not your *negro*"

On a late afternoon in early February, I met Ibrahim and Yannick at the entrance of the brightly colored Rodriguez Hotel[9] to walk together to a plaza near the El Chapparal port of entry. These two migrants arrived in Tijuana around the same time in the early months of 2020 before the U.S. closed its border. Yannick, a petrol engineer who fled persecution after participating in protests in Anglophone Cameroon, used to stay at the hotel with Ibrahim, but moved out due to the poor living conditions. The hotel, located a few blocks from the border, is known among African and Haitian migrants as a temporary housing option for those passing through, but more recently also serves as a long-term housing solution for those who remain in the city. Out front we were also joined by Ousmane, a migrant from Guinea and a

[9] Pseudonym used for the protection of migrant residents.

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resident of the hotel since October 2020. Ousmane reached Tijuana in late 2019 and crossed the border immediately, after which he was detained for nearly a year, denied asylum in the U.S., and deported back to Mexico. Since his return, Ousmane has been stuck in Tijuana trying to figure out how to migrate again.

While walking down *Calle Coahuila* towards the pedestrian bridge, the four of us moving down the bustling sidewalk in pairs of two, a Mexican man approached us with an imperative and blaring, "HAITI, HAITI, HAITI," pointing his thick first finger towards my new acquaintances. In Spanish, Ibrahim begrudgingly responded, "*Nosotros no somos haitianos*," we are not Haitians. The man asked in dismay, "Then, where are you from?" Looking at the each other, migrants from several corners of the African continent, Ibrahim quickly proclaimed, "We are from Africa," as we walked away. We reached the plaza and located a dry fountain in the center to perched ourselves on while we engaged in a conversation. Within five minutes of settling into the space, we were approached by a Mexican couple from Oaxaca questioning our presence in the plaza, as if it was not a normal affair. Ibrahim reassured them that we were simply meeting together, and the couple scurried off down the plaza. I looked over at Yannick, who was visibly annoyed by this encounter, as he exclaimed, "You see? This is just an example, this is what we face here in Mexico, these are the challenges. These are the challenges, life is not normal for us Blacks, especially us Africans. As normal citizens, we have to answer such questions. Maybe sometimes when you have to go buy in a shop, you have to explain all the time."

For the next several hours that I spent with Ibrahim, Yannick, and Ousmane that afternoon, I was able to briefly witness the spotlight which trails these bodies as they humbly wind through the urban landscape. Through the small glimpse into their daily lives, along with their testaments and those of other interlocutors, the everyday racism they experienced in public spaces, transport, shops, and public and private institutions was clear. On our walk towards the port of entry, Ousmane had commented on his daily encounters with harassment, "Even today I was a victim of racism, this morning at 7 am when I left to look for something to eat, a woman said to me '*ay mi negro*.' Me? No, I am not your *negro.*" Infuriated by this, Ibrahim cried, "*Negro, negro, negro, moreno*!' When they are 'humbling,' they say *moreno.*"

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In their studies, Vaughn (2013) and Weltman-Cisernos and Mendez Tello (2013) discuss contemporary language and *afromexicano* identity in which blackness is to be avoided and whiteness is associated as a preference, and the use of the terms *moreno* and *negro* (both indicative of skin color) in common identity politics, effectively erases all historical significance. Social hierarchies of race within Mexican society establish social thresholds for not only *afromexicanos* and Indigenous communities, but also for international migrants based on racial subjectivities. Therefore, Haitian and African migrants confront social boundaries in the city along lines of race, immigration status, and language which impact their access to particular spaces, services, and rights.

In Tijuana, conversations around Haitian migrants have dominated public discourse as local Mexican authorities elevate and alienate different groups of migrants for their own political gains. Valles (2020) engages "respectability politics" in his discussion on the implications of U.S. restrictive immigration policies on xenophobic and anti-Black sentiments across the border, and the ways in which hierarchies of migrant groups are formed. In Tijuana, extra-continental migrants, particularly Haitians, are touted as hardworking, deemed 'acceptable' and worthy of their place in Mexico, while Central American migrants are criminalized and labeled ungrateful of their host country. African and Haitian migrants residing in Tijuana are then 'rewarded' by positive public discourse for their docility, willingness to take any job, and quietness around their own exploitation and mistreatment.

This political discourse serves only to build negative sentiments towards Central American migrants and does nothing to dispel racist or discriminatory behavior towards Black migrants themselves. At the same time, African and Haitian migrants are lumped together as '*haitianos*,' which refers to Black migrants in the city regardless of origin, effectively erasing the differences between them. Due to the nature of their irregular migration and social hierarchies around race in Mexico, Black migrants are only expected and accepted in certain areas of the city and these migrants are surveilled in the urban spaces which they do appropriate. Black migrants outside of the urban zones of acceptability are frowned upon by some Tijuana residents. During his fieldwork in Tijuana, Valles (2020) describes a Mexican driver as "surprised to encounter *haitianos* in the coastal communities in Tijuana," in which his "mapping of the

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appropriate spatiality of Blackness revealed how residents and officials police the mobility of Haitian and other Black migrants outside of the urban core and into wealthier neighborhoods," (2020, 293).

In the plaza that same day, Ibrahim described the difficulty he and other migrants encounter with local banks to withdraw Western Union funds. These funds, which are sent to him from family and friends back home, serve as a lifeline for Ibrahim as he is undocumented and cannot find stable employment. Banks were a particular private institution which were identified by migrants as sites of discrimination, in which they restricted Western Union services for international migrants in the city. These restrictions reinscribed immigration enforcement within these non-state institutions, excluding international migrants from rights and services. Ibrahim explained one of his latest encounters with a local bank. "Sometimes they [bank staff] say, you have only the card [visa], so we don't give [money] with the card. And you have the passport, so you go with the passport. One day I went to go collect money, so I went to this bank. I knew they were racist. The bank called *Electra Azteca*, that one is 50/50, but there is a bank called *Coppel* that is the most horrible bank." When he got to the bank, the teller told him he had exceeded the monthly withdraw limit. Ibrahim recalled that he actually hadn't received any money through Western Union in the last three months, and rather than administered the funds, the bank teller directed him to call the company directly to ask about the discrepancy.

He called Western Union, gave them his information, and inquired about the limit which the teller told him about, "The person [WU] told me that, 'you don't appear on any list, I see on your transfer that the office you went to cancelled your transaction," Ibrahim continued. After he finished the call, he demanded that the bank administer the funds to him. But instead, they called the police. "I explained to the police, and they [bank staff] had to go back and reactivate my transfer, give me a new code, and then I went to another bank to get the money." I asked him why he thought the bank refused to give him the money, "because you are a migrant, or because you are black," he responded, "So even when someone sends you $50 you should pray before you go because maybe you will really need that money, like you don't have any for lunch or dinner, but they might say no. Most of the African migrants, the problem is when they are told like that they don't ask why, they are scared of the confrontation. So, when they deny

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them the money which is their right, they don't say anything and they just leave and figure out another way to get the money," Ibrahim added.

At banking institutions, liminality emerges through the unpredictable encounters with enforcement and insecurity around accessing survival resources. As Ibrahim reflected, many in the same situation under similar undocumented conditions would fear confrontation with police authorities and leave the bank immediately. The uneven power which exists between institutions and irregular migrants enables city actors to take advantage and execute discriminatory practices which limit certain groups from realizing the full spectrum of rights, services, and spaces of the city. These social thresholds are drawn and reproduced around complex socio-histories which categorize and subjugate based on racial hierarchies, nationality, and citizenship.

Language is also a barrier which African and Haitian migrants encounter as they attempt to access government services, immigration processes, or just simply live day to day. While some Haitian migrants have acquired the Spanish language, many lack the ability to fully express themselves, or feel comfortable navigating urban life. Particularly Haitian women expressed a low level of Spanish, and this built insecurity around accessing government services and employment. Women were largely constrained to their homes and spaces of dwelling as the primary caretakers of their families, which reduced their exposure to the language. African migrants typically did not speak much Spanish, and this further motivated them to continue their migration as soon as possible. Migrants noted a lack of language access at immigration offices, which required them to either use their little Spanish or bring a friend to translate for them. In medical institutions, migrant women recognized a lack of language access in hospitals while giving birth. Other women noted a lack of access to medical services in general due to their irregular immigration status, despite their right to these services.

5.5 Limits of livelihoods

For urban refugees, precarious urban life is often rooted in the ambiguous access (or non-access) to labor markets, adequate housing, and legal statuses which afford full rights and protections in the

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country of current residence.[10] Similar to the urban poor, these conditions often produce a slew of informal practices by refugees and irregular migrants in order to build a semblance of a life in city spaces. Roy's (2005) conceptualization of urban informality as "an organizing logic," (148) portrays migrants' experiences in Tijuana as interwoven between the fissures of formal and informal processes, in which daily economic activities and spaces are haphazardly improvised and connected to various geographies. The city's geographic positioning at the 'gate' of the Global South and the Global North cultivates a particular variety of informality. In Tijuana, migrant livelihoods are parallel with the poor Mexican population, which are largely situated in the low-wage factory economies of the *maquiladoras* and informal sectors. Economic thresholds emerge which trap poor urban residents between low-wage employment, expensive housing and costs of living, and limited labor market options. Yet, within these boundaries urban uncertainty is both a condition of obstacle and opportunity which is simultaneously produced and productive (Zeiderman et al. 2015). Uncertainty is not resolved, but rather "managed, displaced, deferred, reconfigured, or reproduced," and generates "conditions of possibility," (Zeiderman et al. 2015, 299) which produce resourceful and improvised urban livelihoods.

Despite initial objectives of the *maquiladora* industries to create more employment in formal sectors to absorb low-skilled Mexican labor (Heid, Larch, and Riano 2013), *maquiladoras* have been characterized and criticized for their extremely low wages, long work hours, gender divided labor, hazardous work conditions, and lack of social protections (Kopinak 2003). Particularly related to work conditions, wages, and hiring practices, *maquiladoras* ebb in between the fissures of the formal and informal economies maximizing off the exploitation of Mexican and migrant workers. In Tijuana, *maquiladora* plants were a vital source of income for many interlocutors and were the main vein which connected Haitian and African migrants to formal employment in the city. More international migrants, particularly Haitians, are engaging in *maquiladora* labor to sustain themselves until their migration

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[10] By residence, here, I do not mean legal membership to a place authorized by formal nation-state citizenship practices, rather residence by physical presence in a place regardless of legal membership (Darling 2017).

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projects can be realized. These factories provide economic space to absorb some of the surplus labor in the city and attract international migrants who do not have many other options in the formal economy.

Both Haitian and African migrants who worked in these factories criticized their dismal wages. According to research partners, incomes ranged between 1,200-1,950 pesos per week, approximately $58-95 USD, working between 3-5 days a week for 12-hour shifts. Other studies on *maquiladora* conditions confirm similar wages for Mexican counterparts, as *maquiladoras* are required to pay at least the Mexican minimum wage to all employees (Kopinak, Quintero Ramírez, and Hennebry 2019). Migrants who spoke of their jobs in *maquiladoras* were largely working in furniture and electronic manufacturing. They lamented how these salaries, particularly for families with only one working adult, could barely survive, pushing them to make difficult choices between basic necessities such as milk and diapers for their babies, food, medicine, and rent. While employed in the formal labor market, migrant workers still suffer from job insecurity as the moment their documents expire, or they are denied renewal, migrants shift into a state of illegality which no longer permits them to maintain their factory jobs. Likewise, the consistent supply of labor flowing into the city as a transit point before crossing into the U.S. increases low-skilled employee disposability, in which factory workers can be replaced at any moment.

Despite their 'formality,' some *maquiladora* employers take advantage of international migrants who reside in the city irregularly. Hiring practices which employ undocumented migrants for exploitative means maintains a pool of migrant labor who have few other options than to accept and endure the conditions and wages which are meagerly offered to them. These unofficial hiring practices actively distorts the urban formality and informality dichotomy, and contests the legitimacy of state citizenship regimes as laws and policies are circumvented to capitalize off of irregular migrant labor.

First arriving to Brazil from Cameroon, Yannick made the journey through seven other countries to arrive to Mexico with an objective of claiming asylum in the U.S. He arrived in Tapachula in November 2019, and underwent a similar process to Amine, in which he was denied an 'exit permit' and pressured into the Mexican asylum system. Yannick knew he was not going to remain in Mexico and refused to apply for asylum, leaving him undocumented to transit the country to reach the northern

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border. When he arrived in Tijuana in January 2020, he took a number from the waiting list at the El Chapparal port of entry to await his turn to claim asylum in the United States. Following the border closure a few months later, he remained in Tijuana for the next year anticipating his onward migration. During this waiting period, he stitched together informal jobs to get by until he was offered work at a *maquiladora* factory.

Sitting on the fountain in the center of the plaza, Ibrahim and Yannick talked back and forth about the border closure and the exploitation of migrants within the export processing plants. I asked them what they meant, to which Yannick contributed his own experience working at one, "When I went in there as a cleaner, they discovered my knowledge they put me up as a driver. A forklift driver. When they discovered I was even more intelligent, they had to fire a manager, I saw that they were paying him 6,000 pesos. They fired that supervisor, they pushed me up to take his place. I supervised for 1,950 pesos. I will show you my check. I cried. They come, they tell you sweet words 'oh you are so smart, you are so intelligent, stay here we will make you supervisor' I tell them, you call me supervisor, but am I here for names? I am here for money, give me the money for supervisor. Don't give me the name."

When I met Yannick, he had just left his manager position two-weeks prior. The wage exploitation which he endured was made possible through his undocumented status, therefore denying him any labor rights to hold his employers accountable to pay him fair wages for the work he was engaging in. In addition to exploitation and meager wages, many migrants, like Yannick, experience under-employment, where their skills, education, and passions are undervalued, overlooked, and taken advantage of. Upward mobility within *maquiladoras* is also rare, a majority of migrants remaining in low-paying factory positions. Yannick explained that he left the company due to a worsening gastro-intestinal illness that he couldn't seek treatment for as an undocumented migrant. Yannick's illness and inability to be treated subjected him to leave his job, and further served as an urgent motivator to cross into the U.S. irregularly to escape the exploitation and indeterminacy which consumed his daily life in the city. While *maquiladoras* are effective in absorbing surplus labor, African and Haitian migrants do not always have

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success finding jobs there due to discrimination and Mexican law which caps a limit to the number of foreign workers they can hire.

Informality is often presented as a distinct characteristic of borderland regions, as cross-border movement of people, goods, and services are prevalent and which occur in the peripheries away from the 'gaze' of the state (Koff 2015). Border regions are, therefore, "opportune spaces" (Staudt 2001, 24) for informal economies and sectors to thrive. Informality in Tijuana, which largely takes shape in agricultural sectors, tourism, unlicensed street vendors and shops (Koff 2015), exists in conjunction with the *maquiladora* assembly plant industry. While some international migrants find employment in the *maquiladoras*, most irregular migrants often cannot access factory jobs without work authorization, and therefore work in informal sectors for income generating activities. Alternatively, *maquiladoras* can be overlooked in favor of informal economies in which residents may have the possibility to make higher wages (Staudt 2001). Street vending, construction, open-air markets, and carwashes were common mechanisms of employment within informal economies which Haitian and African migrants engaged in.

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Photo by Julia Hause: Street market in *Zona Centro*, February 2, 2021

Street vending was a sector, which besides Mexicans, was dominated by Haitian migrants in Tijuana. At the time of fieldwork, street vending was particularly unstable due to COVID-19 and the lockdown which kept many people at home and without surplus incomes. On my almost daily commute downtown, I would drive by several locations where I would recognize the same few migrants occupying street corners and plazas connected by the main boulevards of the city. Arms full of toys, fruits, clothing and hats, car supplies, among a myriad of other items, would dangle in front of passenger cars as they wove through the city streets. I met Evens, a Haitian migrant who migrated to Mexico after living for a year in Chile, at his habitual vending location in one of the many plazas in downtown Tijuana. Previous to Chile, Evens lived for many years in the Dominican Republic, and therefore was fluent in Spanish. In

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the plaza, Evens carried with him stuffed animals and other toys to sell to passengers in cars which passed by. For him, street vending was unpredictable, every week bringing a different income, anywhere from 2,000 pesos to 1,000, or as little as 500 pesos ($25 USD) per week.

After our initial meeting, Evens and I met for an interview at a café in *Zona Centro*. He was not working that morning, and agreed to meet me before he went to the plaza to vend for the afternoon. He recalled how he got introduced to street vending through a Haitian friend. Together, they buy things at the market and return to the same plaza every day to resell the items. The plaza hosts a sizable roundabout which circulates masses of traffic throughout the day. In speaking about the conditions of street vending, Evens noted the difficulties in making an income since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Now, there is not much. I go out, I have a baby so I buy milk, and some things. When I sell something, it is good, because my wife, she stays at home with the baby. I only work. Here the house is difficult to pay. I don't have money to pay the rent. I pay 3,000 pesos per month…Every week it [the income] is different. Now, this week, there isn't any money. It's a little difficult, because the people don't have money to buy things. There are a lot of people who don't have work now in the pandemic, they stay at home," (Evens, Personal Interview, January 22, 2021).

While Evens was still going out almost every day to sell, other interlocutors noted giving up on vending as they were not making any returns on their initial purchases. While street vendors are not an uncommon sight in the city, in fact passing through a bare intersection or a plaza downtown is rare, Black migrant vendors stand out as international migrants among the general population making them an easy target for policing for vending without permits or without valid immigration documents. Several Haitian migrants recalled either being approached by police themselves and were forced to stop vending, or reported seeing Haitian street vendors being targeted by police and detained for vending irregularly. In his daily work, Evens vended with one or two other friends at the same plaza. This was their routine, and it was his friend, another Haitian migrant, who oriented him to the plaza as a profitable location for vending. In observing other street vendors across the city, it was common that Haitian vendors would be selling in small groups of 2-3 people. Over WhatsApp, Evens' vending partner expressed that vending in small groups enables a sense of physical security, but also serves as a strategy of pooling and sharing sales for income protection.

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Evens' street vending story reveals the ways in which income uncertainty within informal economies can serve as an opportunity to overcome low-wages in formal sectors, while at the same time present challenges to provide basic needs for his family. Despite having permanent residence, a status he received after his partner gave birth to their daughter in Mexico, Evens chose to engage in informal street vending as opposed to *maquiladora* factory labor. This way, he could maintain the possibility of achieving higher wages, as well as have more control over when he works and work conditions. Suspended between the thresholds of Tijuana's economies, migrants in the city navigate livelihoods to support their indefinite settlement in ways that both contest these limits and circumvent them in ways that are transformative of urban space and local labor markets.

5.6 Sentiments of 'stuck' and imagined futures

"Until now, I don't know what I will do. Because the president there [Haiti], the president who is there is very bad. Haiti it is not good at the moment. It is a very difficult situation, there are kidnappings. If a person arrives there, there is no security. The life of that person is in danger. That's why I need a country who can protect my safety. In Mexico, there is a difference, when I am in Mexico there is security, so you don't have to go through kidnappings, you are not bad. So, for the security here, Mexico is good. But, for the work it is difficult to find here. The salary is very minimum, so my spouse has to look where he can find money to pay the rent. There isn't milk for the baby, or diapers, I have to buy milk for the baby. So, we live like this, without anything to eat for the whole week. It's difficult for the family," (Esther, Haitian migrant, Personal Interview, January 21, 2021).

Psychological thresholds take form for migrants in the various aspects of their liminal lives, and are constructed around the restricted physical, economic, and social mobility they experience in urban centers of non-destination. These limits take hold as migrants remain suspended between lives back home and lives in the past, and an "imagined future elsewhere," (Kihato 2013, 18) drifting in the in-between. In Tijuana, African and Haitian migrants, among others who wait there indefinitely, are bound between the realities of irregularity, poverty, and discrimination, constantly holding Tijuana as temporary in their minds and maintaining ideas around mobility and future destinations. In conversations with interlocutors around onward migration, Tijuana was usually just a point of rupture, one of many, in their migration journeys which they anticipated would soon pass, like the others had. Lines were drawn in the minds of migrants in which Mexico could not be a final destination as the inability to make sufficient incomes,

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prominent language barriers, and everyday discrimination kept them from setting down roots. These daily limitations made it challenging to provide for families, in which parents with young children lamented their circumstances and desires to give their children a 'better life.' Additionally, African and Haitian interlocutors noted familial responsibilities in their home countries as prominent reasons to continue their migration. For example, Amine, in our second interview, reflected on his obligations at home and noted, "If you have problems in Africa, like in Cameroon, just because you come here [Mexico] the problems in Cameroon do not end. I have a daughter, from time to time I send money to cover food. You are between problems in Cameroon and problems in Mexico." His comment perfectly exemplified the suspension which he, and other migrants, experience as they wait in Tijuana.

The indeterminacy and insecurity of lives in Tijuana manifested stress and worry. Several African and Haitian interlocutors noted feelings of being '*esclaves modernes*', or modern slaves, in that the economic activities which they engaged were exploitative, dangerous, and barely compensated them enough to sustain themselves. Yet, for those who remained in the city, at least up until the time of fieldwork, there was a strong desire among many to enter the U.S. the 'right way,' to wait until the border re-opened, or to wait until it became 'their turn' to claim asylum. Sentiments of illegality were detested and rejected, as migrants longed to live legally in both Mexico (even if only temporarily) and in future destinations. At the same time, the everyday limitations and growing desperation which migrants felt towards their lives in Mexico cultivated an urgency to leave, no matter the political circumstances.

Even for migrants who had been residing in the city for several years, thoughts around leaving Mexico were often imagined in the immediate future. 'In several months,' 'maybe next month,' 'in the next few weeks,' were some common sentiments around future migration. Some migrants, like Anel, who had family living in the U.S., imagined reuniting together. Others focused more on immediate challenges, such as immigration detention, i.e., who will they call, how will they pay their bail bonds, and where will they go once released. Connections with members of the diaspora already in the U.S., particularly for Haitians, was a strong motivator for migrants to maintain their temporality in Tijuana. Haitian migrants, more so than their African counterparts, were deeply connected to communities in the U.S., which stems

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from the long history of Haitian migration to the U.S (See section 2.1). An island nation-state with a population of 11 million, has over 687,000 immigrants residing in the U.S., which is the largest Haitian population in the world outside of Haiti (Olsen-Medina and Batalova 2020). Haitian interlocutors all knew and had family and friends living in the U.S., many who were preparing to receive them on the other side. Paul, a Haitian migrant and second pastor at the *Igelsia Bautista Vida Eterna,* noted Tijuana as a stepping stone on his way to reunite with his family. "I would very much like that [to go to the U.S.], because since more than 45 years, all my family is there. My brothers, my sisters, all my family live there for more than 45 years in Florida," he recounted to me.

In their 'stuckness,' a few Haitian migrants spoke of entering the local university system, which helped migrants to opportunize their indeterminacy in the city. I first met Beatrice, a Haitian migrant who arrived in Tijuana from Brazil in 2016, at a Sunday service at the church, *Igelsia Bautista Vida Eterna.* As she sat down next me, she immediately asked what I was researching, and whether I was in university or if the research was for a job. I began to explain that I was a master's student, after which she instantly perked up and shared that she was a student as well, at the Universidad de Baja California (UBC), studying Business Administration. Like most Haitian migrants residing in the city, Tijuana was not her intended destination when she left Brazil in 2016. Upon her arrival, the restrictive U.S. immigration and asylum politics, as well as increased deportations of Haitians, motivated her to temporarily settle in Tijuana, which she noted was not an incredible shock for her, considering she has lived transnationally for most of her life. Leaving Haiti when she was just 12 years old, Beatrice relocated to the Dominican Republic where she lived for several years and began a degree in nursing, before migrating to Brazil in 2014. After two years in Brazil, she made the decision to leave and make the journey to the U.S. through the South American-Central American corridor with other Haitian migrants leaving Brazil at that time.

For three years, Beatrice lived and worked in Tijuana, before learning from a Mexican lawyer friend about the idea and process of applying to a university in the city. Fluent in Spanish from her years of living in the Dominican Republic, she took a placement test and initially applied to continue her nursing education. After being accepted to UBC in 2019, she changed her degree of study due to the

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distance of the nursing program campus and the fact that she must still maintain her job while in school, as she doesn't have any family to help support her in the city. Always admiring entrepreneurship, she began her bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Now 33 years old, despite 'settling' in Tijuana as an alternative to her initial migration project, Beatrice continues to imagine future aspirations of mobility which do not limit her to Mexico. At the church service that Sunday, she reflected on her future:

"I think when I finish my studies, I would like to have a visa to visit the U.S. to see how I can – I want to have work experiences, I would like to be employed for work in my career... In any country I can work. I can stay here for a while. I will stay here for the moment until it [university] is finished... I haven't yet decided [what to do after university]. I think that at the end of my studies, I will see jobs. For now, I would like to be an entrepreneur. I would like to have a business in my country in the future. But I would like to finish my studies and work to have experiences and when I have an opportunity to have a business in my country, whatever can help, commercial or industrial, but I would like to be an entrepreneur," (Beatrice, Personal Interview, January 17, 2021).

As migrants are confronted with geopolitical barriers, financial restraints, documentation challenges, and other material and social limitations to their transnational mobility, they must often readapt their migration plans according to these constraints, at least temporarily, and "redefine their migratory projects," (Alioua 2014, 81). Beatrice was one of several Haitian migrants whom I met in Tijuana now studying in local universities to obtain higher education degrees, as an alternative to their initial migratory aspirations and destinations. Within the disruption of migration journeys, the local universities emerged as a possible opportunity for educational and professional development for some Haitians who either already spoke Spanish, due to years spent in Spanish-speaking countries, or learned it upon living in Mexico. The insertion of Haitian migrant students into the local universities doesn't eliminate their experiences of indefinite waiting, but rather reshapes it into a progressive outlet of personal advancement. For Beatrice, continuing her education was an opportunity to benefit from the indeterminate time she is in Mexico and work towards achieving academic and professional goals, rather than remaining idle. As noted by Bork-Hüffer and Peth (2020) migration is a process which is constantly developing, adapting, circumventing structural limitations, and creatively capitalizing on opportunities.

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Yet, as expressed in Beatrice's narrative, committing to a university degree in Mexico for the time being does not necessarily equate with plans or desires for permanent settlement in the future. While pursuing higher education, Haitian students often maintain their ideas around their future migration to alternative destinations after they finish their programs. Pursuing higher education emerges as an interim aspiration, a mechanism to progress their lives forward, despite living in an in-between city. While entering university enables Haitian students to productively engage their temporary settlement, expand social relations within the university community, and claim space within these urban intuitions, accessing higher education is not a viable option for a majority of the Haitian migrants who reside in the city. Proficiency in Spanish is required for any program, as well as a financial ability to afford semester tuition fees. Other Haitian migrants expressed their interest in continuing their educations and to benefit from their time in indefinite waiting, but linguistic barriers and low-wage jobs inhibited their abilities to do so.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored the various thresholds which emerge within Tijuana's urban landscape which confront African and Haitian migrants' abilities to navigate their settlement in the city. Tijuana is presented as a liminal city, in which the physical, social, economic, and psychological boundaries generate circumstances of indeterminacy, informality, and uncertainty around migrants' daily lives and mobility. Beyond the political border, urban borders are demarcated by various city actors for the control and surveillance of international migrants. Socially, subjectivities based on race, nationality, immigration status, and gender sort migrant groups and impact their access to urban spaces, services, and rights. Economically, the tensions between low wages, high costs of living, and limited options in Tijuana's labor markets construct thresholds which migrants are bound between. Psychologically, they are suspended between the reality of their liminal lives and the consistent imagining of elsewhere. Their residence in an 'in-between' city, neither their origin nor their intended destination, holds restriction and surveillance, yet at the same time opportunity, in which migrants 'stuck' in the city are able to manipulate their survival through the malleable crevices of urban life and governance.

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Chapter 6: Rhythms of Care and Commons

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the urban thresholds which emerge within Tijuana's environment which produce everyday experiences of liminality and informality. Yet, as this chapter will unearth, these urban conditions are confronted with mechanisms and strategies of connection and care which enable transit migrants to make life and survive within Tijuana's urban landscape in the indeterminate moments of their fragmented journeys. In the everyday movements of constructing make-shift lives, migrants in Tijuana navigate the socio-cultural, economic, and political landscapes of the city through the fabrication of relations, both formal and improvised, to produce viable resources, information, care practices, and possibilities for cooperation in their efforts to sustain themselves. While this chapter explores the social networks and relations which enable organizing practices among African and Haitian migrants, the following chapter, will build upon these organizing practices by examining the ways in which migrants' use of urban space creates claims for themselves in the city, as well as maintains possibilities of mobility.

This chapter will highlight the ways in which the generation of social connections along the route, and in the city, enable migrants to maneuver their way through Tijuana in their indefinite wait for transnational mobility. In drawing upon both urban studies and migration studies literature, I build connections between the everyday "rhythms of endurance" (Simone 2019) within both formalized "infrastructures of care" (Alam and Houston 2020) and within the informal unanticipated alliances constructed between co-migrants and local allies which make life in the liminal possible. Through emphasizing the diverse networks which are created and sustained by highly mobile populations in the city, the daily practices of organization, cooperation, and care produce the circulation of "mobile commons" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013), or the invisible nodes of mobility knowledge, mutual care, material resources, informal economies, and services which perpetuate and reproduce movement. These transient commons are not only employed by bodies on the move, but are circulated in periods of stasis, in which migrants settling temporarily in urban centers utilize the commons to facilitate their protracted transit, and ultimately their survival, in non-destination cities.

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I aim to connect these concepts as to situate the ways in which migrants residing in Tijuana forge everyday life by constructing infrastructures of care and connectivity for the endless generation and exchange of knowledge and information, while exemplifying the ways migrants' embodied rhythms of endurance contest, negotiate, and are in constant conflict with rhythms of power. The daily activities and connections of migrants are transformative of urban space through their very presence within the city, the ways in which they utilize time in those spaces, and their (re)production of the social assemblages, despite the failures of inclusion and accessibility with which governmentality presents them. First, this chapter explores the everyday rhythms of care infrastructures embodied by non-governmental organizations, churches, and local associations to support transmigrant populations in the city. Second, the chapter transitions to the rhythms of unanticipated alliances and improvised relation-making to discuss migrants' self-organization in their efforts for mobility and life-making. Finally, I connect the ways in which the experimental organization of these formal and informal networks generate and facilitate the circulation of mobile commons to enable life in the city.

6.2 Infrastructures of care

On a sunny morning in mid-January, John called me to accompany him on several deliveries of diapers and baby formula to Haitian families around the city, as part of his community organizing work. I met John outside of the first home delivery, in the residential neighborhood of *Independencia*. As we unpacked his car, he explained, that before COVID-19, this pertinent humanitarian assistance was usually distributed at churches where Haitian migrants gather, or shelters, as he could reach a large number of people at one time. Since the lockdown, he and his organization, Haitian Bridge Alliance (HBA), have adapted to home deliveries of material aid to ensure Haitian families were taken care of during the pandemic. HBA is a sort of 'commuter organization,' located just across the border in San Diego, California, but which has staff regularly travel to Tijuana to deliver humanitarian aid to Haitian and African migrants. John is a local community organizer based in Tijuana to address migrant needs and facilitate such support through the organization's networks and resources.

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Photo by Julia Hause: John unloading diapers and baby formula for home delivery, January 21, 2021

We removed boxes of diapers and large canisters of baby formula from John's car on a quiet and empty residential street, and greeted the Haitian mothers receiving the aid. John introduced me, and I was able to explain my research and speak with them about their experiences in the city. These women were kind, welcoming, and tired, yet seemingly inclined to have a listening ear to the challenges of documentation, employment, healthcare access, and mobility that they confront in their daily lives. At the first home, we met Esther and Darline, two mothers who shared a house together with their spouses. Esther, who previously lived in Chile before migrating to Mexico, and Darline, who previously lived in Brazil, met each other in Tijuana a year before, as they both waited for the border to reopen to continue their migration. Since John was delivering material aid to the women, I was curious of their connections to local organizations and other support networks in the city. Yet, both women (and these sentiments were mimicked in the following home delivery with a Haitian mother, Mireille) could only recall John as the

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sole organization (HBA) that they received assistance from in Tijuana. Congregated in their kitchen area, Darline explained, "[I know] only John. I took his contact and this assistance from my friend, Esther. If I receive the aid that he brings every month, it's better because I don't work and the salary of my spouse is minimal. So, to receive the aid with milk and diapers every month, it's better."

In our conversation, both Darline and Esther lamented the lack of support and services they receive, their spouses limited incomes, and their ultimate desires to continue migrating to the U.S. Therefore, the assistance which John brought served to hold them over until they found opportunities to migrate. From my encounters and conversations with Haitian migrants, on this day and at other field sites, I could understand some of them were receiving organizational support, yet when asked about organizational knowledge, very few could recall any organizations which help them.

Haitian migrants began moving out of shelters and into residential neighborhoods since 2016 when migrants were increasingly blocked from entering the U.S. and fears of deportations back to Haiti kept them in Tijuana. This shift from shelters to rental properties continued to create new space for the forthcoming Haitian migrants en route to the city, but also developed an infrastructure of private housing and a pattern of renting which incoming Haitian migrants continued to practice through their networks already in the city. Urban infrastructure specific to Haitian migrants continued to develop to support the growing population, drawing migrants outside of the city center to inhabiting inexpensive areas of the city's periphery. For example, the area of southeastern Tijuana where the church, *Igelsia Bautista Vida Eterna,* is located now hosts many Haitian migrants in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The figures below were developed by Silva Hernández (2018) in a study to map the migrant populations in Tijuana. Figure 2 shows the distribution of Haitian migrants in Tijuana neighborhoods. The largest concentration is in the north, in *Zona Norte, Zona Centro, Libertad*, and a small area southeast of downtown where Little Haiti is located, *Divina Providencia*. Figure 3 shows the two neighborhoods were African and Asian migrants were living in 2018, concentrated in *Zona Norte*, but also in *Divina Providencia.* While I did not collect data on the neighborhoods which African and Haitian migrants lived in, the areas I learned of and visited correspond with these maps. Figure 4 shows the distribution of

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migrant services. Not all of these organizations cater to African, Asian, and Caribbean migrants, but I included the map to show the concentration of migrant services in the north of the city, near the border.

Map 3. Distribution of Haitian Migrants in Tijuana by Neighborhood

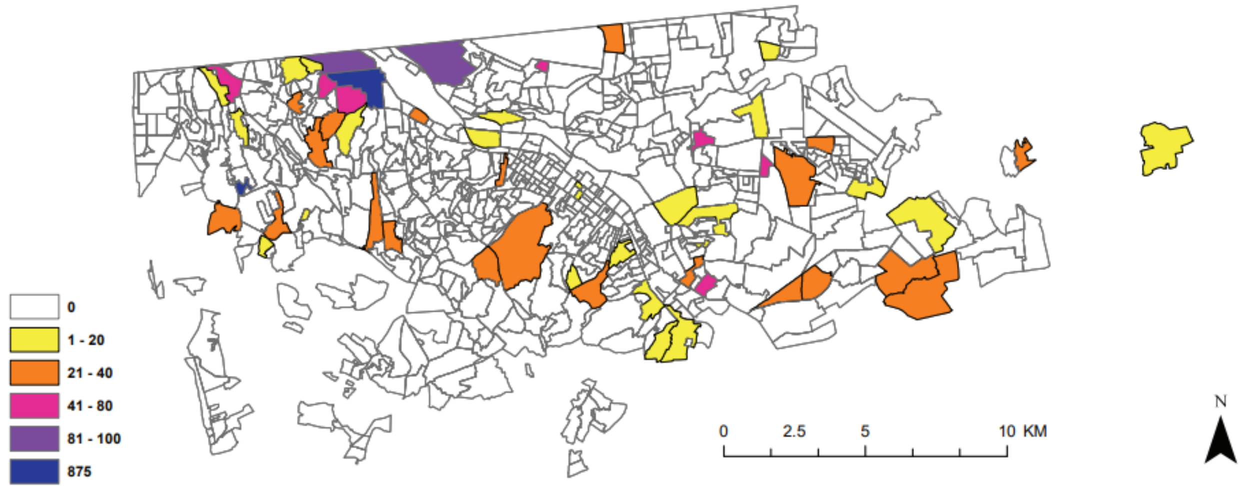

Figure 2: Distribution of Haitian migrants inhabitation in Tijuana; Source: Silva Hernández, 2018

Map 5. Neighborhoods Inhabited by Migrants from Other Countries

Figure 3: Areas of inhabitation of African and Asian migrants, Source: Silva Hernández, 2018

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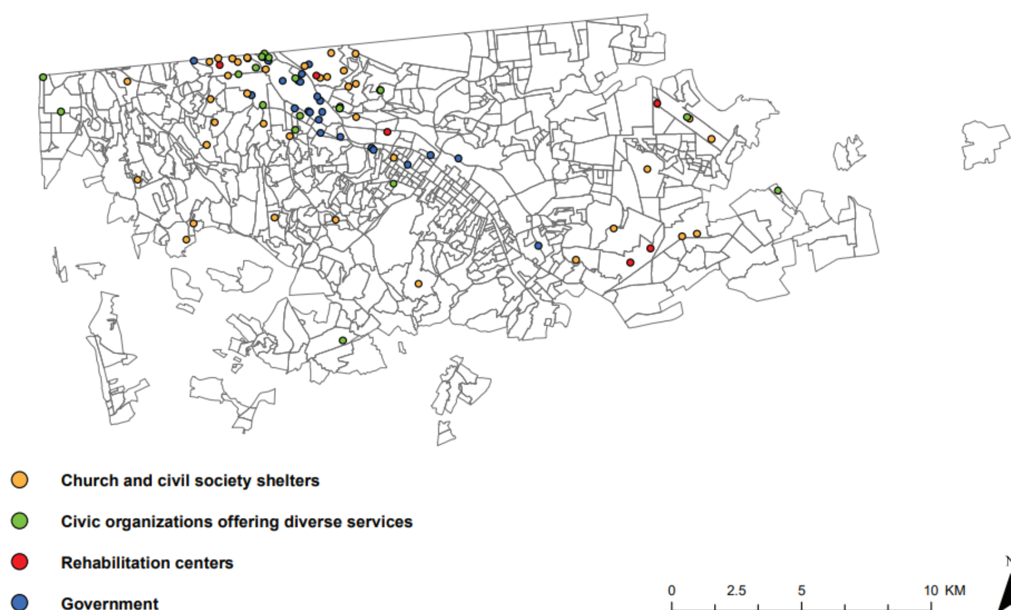

Figure 4: Migrant services in Tijuana, highest concentration in *Zona Norte,* Source: Silva Hernández, 2018

The sprawled nature of the Haitian community across the city complicates migrants' access to resources which are concentrated in organizations located downtown. It became evident that to combat this, John with HBA and other local organizations, sought to bring aid to Haitian migrants to meet them where they were at, rather than migrants coming to the organizations. For example, at the shelter, Little Haiti, located just outside of downtown in a nearby *colonia*, the Haitian residents noted several organizations (not necessarily by name), which come to the shelter to facilitate medical checkups through mobile clinics and deliver humanitarian aid. This centralized distribution of humanitarian aid makes it so migrants don't necessarily know where, or which organizations, material resources are coming from. John and Nelson, both prominent community organizers, recalled only 3-4 primary organizations which support Haitian, African, and other extra-continental migrants in the city, out of the approximately 36 non-profit organizations in Tijuana supporting migrant and refugee services (Castro 2018).

Care, as a system of practices, most often emerges in the cracks of state governance, in the form of non-profit organizations, NGOs, collectives, associations, and religious institutions to support marginalized people and communities. These systems can span bodies, organizations, locations, and time,

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and contribute to formalized infrastructures of care which are mobilized by and with subaltern migrants in cities. As care relations develop in complexity, new forms and meanings of spatialities, socialities, and ecologies emerge in cities (Alam and Houston 2020). For Simone (2019), practices of care are central to the everyday rhythms of endurance which are exuded by urban residents in their attempts to make life in the margins of society, in which “what is created does not so much ground or orient, but constitutes a politics of making home on the run, a form of fugitive graces, where particular operational entities, enfolding the human into something besides itself, come to the fore through practices of care,” (28). Transmigrants, as they filter through various localities along their migration journeys, are not isolated from the environments through which they pass. Mobile populations, particularly in periods of rupture, are enfolded into the localized infrastructures of the city, particularly systems of care, through which migrants can locate critical support during their migration trajectories, such as temporary shelter, food, and medical care. Through the increased and protracted presence of African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana, the landscapes of migrant care in the city have been challenged to adjust and adapt to migrants of new origins, racial subjectivities, and linguistic groups, and in turn has transformed this landscape.

In Mexico, there are no federal or local integration policies which exist to ensure the rights, access to services, and protection of migrants. Several recent reports show that while the Mexican constitution grants full protection of rights to all migrants regardless of immigration status, this does not happen in practice, as there are no mechanisms to facilitate or ensure its compliance (Priya et al. 2021a, 2021b). This was echoed in an interview with the Soraya Vazquez, the Deputy Director of *Al Otro Lado*. In this way, ‘integration’ processes, for lack of a better word, occur independent of the state, simply the presence of migrants and their particular circumstances provoke civil society, non-profit organizations, and other city actors, to mobilize and reorient their efforts towards meeting specific migrant community needs. While Tijuana has been a hot spot for transit migrants seeking shelter and services for decades, in 2016 new challenges emerged within the city’s care infrastructures as thousands of Haitian migrants arrived. Serving this new migrant population meant readjusting support, resources, and services to better

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address the needs of largely non-Spanish speaking, Black migrants in a city dominated by internal Mexican and Central American migrants.

In the gaping hole which the Mexican government leaves for migrants to 'keep their heads above water,' so to speak, there emerges civil society as the backbone of migrant care systems in Tijuana. Marchand and Ortega Ramírez (2019) note that at the height of Haitian migration to Tijuana in 2016, NGOs, shelters, and the general population were responsible for 98% of the necessities donated to support Haitian migrants arriving to the city. In the absence of government-run shelters in Tijuana at that time, new private shelters rose from the ground to accommodate people who had nowhere to go, churches opened their doors and filled their halls with hundreds of people. The Mexican churches which I visited during my fieldwork are just two examples of this, the church, *Iglesia Bautista Vida Eterna,* located on the southeastern outskirts of the city, converted its halls in 2016 as sleeping areas and the church, *Iglesia Embajadores de Jesus,* first sheltered Haitian migrants in the main church hall before developing a plot of land into concrete buildings for Haitian migrants settling in Tijuana, which would become 'Little Haiti.'

Beatrice, over a Zoom call on a rainy day in Tijuana, reflected on her arrival in Tijuana five years prior. She described the mobilization of the local population to support the consistent flow of Haitian migrants arriving at that time. Pulling into the bus station from southern Mexico, Beatrice, and the many others who arrived with her, didn't have a place to sleep or eat. For Beatrice, it was the numerous churches who made space for them, provided a place to come back to each night, and the humanitarian aid donated to them so they could eat and have a fresh pair of clothes, that made the initial existence in Tijuana possible. Local organizations are often a lifeline for humanitarian assistance, legal advice, and shelter that the federal and local governments refuse to recognize or provide. At the height of Haitian migration in 2016, these communities turned international as their arrival not only mobilized local organizations in support, but attracted the attention of other organizations located in the U.S. to bring aid and legal expertise, which was specific to Haitians and African migrants, to better support the growing numbers of these populations getting stuck for longer periods in the border town.

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For example, HBA in San Diego mobilized early on to support the growing displaced Haitian community in Tijuana by bringing food, diapers, baby formula, and other humanitarian aid in bi-weekly trips across the border. Although initially targeting the Haitian community, they began to encounter an increased presence of Black African migrants in the city as well and sought to support their particular needs. African interlocutors noted multiple organizations from across the U.S., specializing in Black immigrant justice, who additionally commuted to the border periodically to disseminate information, bring humanitarian aid, and provide legal and bail bond support for Black migrants in U.S. immigration detention. Additionally, Tijuana-based organizations collaborate with ethnic or nationality specific U.S.-based organizations to provide specialized legal and linguistic support for Ethiopian, Cameroonian, and other migrants from West African nations. In Tijuana, organizations intersect and cooperate in their efforts to reach African and Haitian migrants residing, largely informally, in the city.

During the interview with Anel, Daniel, and Frantz in late January, Anel explained how he got connected to John, as a known community resource, after he was returned from his border crossing attempt a week before. Anel's growing desperation to be reunited with his family led him to John. "I made contact with John. I have a friend who spoke with him about me. I was explaining my situation to him. Right now, I need help to reconnect with my family there. I am here, and she is there with my children. I need to go in [to the U.S.] to help her and work," he explained. John, interpreting the interview in Creole, followed up Anel's comment with further explanation as to how he is working to connect him to organizations for family reunification support. "Yesterday, he spoke with Haitian Bridge Alliance, and so far, HBA is speaking with *Al Otro Lado* to see what he can do." *Al Otro Lado* is a binational organization located in Tijuana, which specializes in asylum legal aid and reunification for separated families at the border. It is one of the few local organizations, along with *Espacio Migrante*, which were cited by Haitian and African migrants as providing support for Black migrants, in the way of information campaigns, shelter, humanitarian assistance, legal services, language classes, and advocacy. Without revealing to much hope in the process, Anel chalked up his fate to God, and to Joe Biden. "God knows

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everything. When there is another [U.S.] government, for the migrants, I don't know what [they] will do for us, us migrants," he sighed.

Photo by Julia Hause: Front entrance to *Espacio Migrante* shelter in *Zona Norte*, January 29, 2021

After a while of talking together, the men left, off to sort out their next challenge, eviction. John and I stayed on the sidewalk talking about their situation and any resources that might help them avoid leaving their single shared room in the city. It began to rain so we moved into the two front seats of John's car parked perpendicular to the 'land of liberty.' In settling into the passenger seat, I quickly glanced back to the row behind me. Stacked almost to the ceiling were boxes of baby diapers and large canisters of baby formula, all neatly packaged and labeled with the intended recipient's name.

In learning how John became a critical component of organizing within the Haitian community, he explained that when he arrived, he organized on his own informally and through a small Haitian-led organization in Tijuana. He was quick to identify challenges which migrants, including himself, were having with obtaining residency documents, as well as the right to work. This led to rigorous networking

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within the local government to demand space to speak about Haitian migrant issues and foster action on their behalf. He organized a meeting with delegates of the immigration department of Baja California, to continue the conversation around Haitian migrants' experiences and challenges in Tijuana. It was through this meeting, that he worked tirelessly to arrange, that John met a staff member of HBA, and subsequently continued his community organizing with them.

"First, I planned a meeting in 2018, a session with the people from [federal] immigration [INM – National Institute of Migration], and the director, there were four people from immigration that came to the session. It was in the IMAC [Municipal Institute of Art and Culture]. The director of immigrants [local government] here, he is my friend, so I talked with him to lend me a place. Really, all the chairs, the tables, the place, we borrowed the place to have the session. And he helped us too. It took two years, since I arrived in 2016, to accept one evening with us. All the people in my organization did not have patience, but I said to them, please have a little patience, for me. So, [I said] I am going to settle everything. It took three months to plan. I wrote letters that no one responded to. I passed by the director of immigration in the city municipal building, and I spoke with him and the Civil Alliance Association. The director in the [local] government, I spoke with them. I gave them a mandate to speak with the director, the delegates, to explain our problem. After that, he accepted, the August 4, 2018, that meeting."

At this time, John was organizing with a small Haitian organization. He recalled that at the meeting that finally came together in August, there was a staff member of HBA filming the event for them. He spoke with the HBA staff, and they discussed meeting with the director of the organization to see how they can collaborate their efforts. Shortly after, they arranged a meeting at a local Baptist church. "We had a meeting with them," John continued, "But it was difficult because there were two trucks that brought food that day [from San Diego] ... so the HBA director did not have time because there were a lot of problems at the border too. I had a hard time, I stayed in the church [waiting]. I live very far, and I stayed. He [the co-organizer] was angry, he said, 'I have another meeting with someone, and they don't respect our meeting' and he left. After that I stayed alone. Then the director of HBA finished her operation and came with the others. She came with me in a room with an African pastor of the Baptist Church of California. So, we started to plan an operation to start working together."

The excerpt above from my conversations with John, demonstrates the fluctuating rhythms of organizing employed to make 'something' happen, and the intricate web of civil, city, and state actors brought together in order to raise the concerns of Haitian migrants. The repeated writing of unanswered letter, the movements to and within government offices, the arrangement of the hall neatly lined with

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chairs, the waiting. John's story, along with his involvement with Anel, reveals the layers of organizing which make up infrastructures of care within justice seeking communities, in which organizing around distributing humanitarian aid to migrants is occurring in parallel to organizing for political recognition and rights. Rights which go beyond the ability to just inhabit the city, but rather the right to access and utilize the city to meet personal needs and desires (Simone 2008).

Beyond formal organizations, migrant-led associations in Tijuana emerge within the web of care systems and operate in highly mobile and uncertain environments. The *Coordinación de Estudiantes Migrantes Haitianos* (CEMH), a collective of Haitian university students in Tijuana, is an association which developed out of migrants' experiences of urban liminality and legal limbo. While one particular university is not the home of CEMH, the local university system serves as the common affiliation which interconnects the students of the association to come together and organize critical migrant support within their own communities. Later in our Zoom interview, after discussing her arrival in Tijuana, Beatrice was elaborating more about migrant support services and systems in the city and expressed that she was a member of the CEMH student association. She explained the objective of CEMH is to bring Haitian migrant students, across the various universities in Tijuana, to organize together to identify needs and deliver support, aid, food assistance, and housing solutions for migrants in the community.

The president of the association, Nelson, who is also a PhD candidate at the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, explained that he leads and connects at least 20 Haitian migrant students across the public and private universities located in the city to organize cultural activities, mobile health clinics, and to distribute aide to migrants and families. Unlike the majority of Haitian migrants in the city, Nelson migrated to Tijuana intentionally to pursue his graduate education. In speaking of the community, he recognized that nearly all the Haitian migrants residing in Tijuana anticipate migrating to the U.S. when the opportunity presents itself. Their role as the association, then, is to support these communities in transition. Those few Haitians who have alternative ties to the city, such as through education, build systems of reinforcement to buttress the Haitian migrant community to help them endure in the city until they move-on to their next destinations. The association uses Facebook as another method of

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communication to share educational opportunities, community work, and encouragement as well. This post is from Haiti's Independence Day, posted on May 18, 2020:

« ¡ Feliz día de la Independencia de HAITI ! Hoy más que nunca llevamos la bandera en alto, nos toca enfrentar una batalla importante para proteger lo más valioso: la VIDA! Honramos esta fecha importante, con el compromiso de seguir cuidándonos entre todos. »

"Happy HAITI Independence Day! Today more than ever we carry the flag high, we have to face an important battle to protect the most valuable: LIFE! We honor this important date, with the commitment to continue taking care of each other."

Alam and Houston (2020) argue that care infrastructures, and the associated labor, "coalesce to form intimate nodes of life-support in cities that are quietly remaking forms of sociality, collaboration, democracy and justice," (1). From this post, it is evident that community support is central to the mission of the association, in which protecting life and each other is a source of pride and responsibility, one that binds Haitian migrants in Tijuana together. The associations' efforts for migrant justice enables the forging and sustaining of everyday life in the city, crafting new forms of support, rights, and access. Nelson elaborated on these sentiments in our interview, "We organize in patriotic ways, like we organize just to get past the difficult situations and each one helps the others, it's like this…If I have something to give to someone who is vulnerable, I give things to them. If someone has migratory [document] problems if I can help him, I help him without a problem. It's how we live. Each one helps the others."

Within complex structures of restriction, care infrastructures emerge and mobilize to promote the rights of migrants and their access to the city and its resources. These care practices which organize support, aid, and assistance exemplify relation-making which enables life, and the ways in which migrants encounter each other and others outside the community within the urban landscape give way to these relations. Beyond formal organizations, religious institutions, universities, and community-based associations, there are relations which emerge within the cracks of social life and urban space which (re)produce practices of embodied 'rogue care,' it is these unanticipated alliances within and between migrant groups that I will highlight in the following section.

6.3 Unanticipated alliances: improvised relations from the route to the city

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Formalized infrastructures of care do have particular impacts on migrant communities to address conditions of systemic exclusion and marginalization. Yet, as civil society organizations make up the bulk of migrant support in Tijuana, resources, aide, and services are often limited and stretched thin. Beyond formal care structures, migrants themselves form systems and infrastructures of their own informal and improvised care practices which serve to support and attend to the needs of co-migrants in the absence of organizational and governmental capacity. Mutual care and support, in the absence of formalized care, emerges as "rogue care" (Simone 2019, 90), or the practices of care which exist outside, underneath, and undetected from the institutional gaze. The rhythms of rogue care are embedded in subaltern urban social relations that are cultivated in the moment to explore the possibilities of producing a place to live, to generate livelihood, and to mobilize the potentialities of a life. These alliances among urban residents emerge within the folds of everyday life, rippling through time and space 'spiraling' (Simone 2019) collecting and releasing bodies, activities, relations, information, and operations at unfixed and unplanned moments. In this border town, migrants must consistently adapt and collaborate with whoever is there in the moment, and under the particular material conditions of that moment. Therefore, rogue forms of care produce a "series of rhythms that enable surprising, frustrating, and sometimes confusing, sentiments and practices of residents caring for and enduring with each other," (Simone 2019, 137). This care evolves as a temporary anchoring to the physical geographies where migrants find themselves, holding together the shards of their fragmented lives and migration projects as they continue to imagine their futures elsewhere.

Similar to Simone's notion of 'strange alliances,' in the context of transit migration, Collyer (2007) conceptualizes "spontaneous social networks" (682) to describe the ways in which irregular migrants on routes interact and engage with one another concerning their mobility. I borrow both of these concepts and use the notion of 'unanticipated alliances' to conceptualize the ways in which migrants in Tijuana surge in and out of various connections, groups, associations, and collectives in their efforts for not only survival, but also for the production of space which is recognizable to them. Unanticipated alliances seek to capture the unexpected connections which forge both one-off relations, as well as

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construct complex social networks of a multitude of migrants and city actors, and which intersect nationality, race, language, gender, and class. These alliances are not always stable, they break and diverge, as well as grow and connect rhizomatically (Deleuze and Guarttari 1987). As Tran and Yip (2020) note, "In a space-time setting different rhythms intersect. They may clash or harmonize, producing reliable moments of regularity and times of disruption," (260).

While not all African and Haitian migrants interact, or even organize, with one another on migratory routes or in Tijuana, I emphasize these two migrant groups in this research to exemplify how individual migratory trajectories have the capacity and capability of morphing into collective cooperation with others on the move who share migratory objectives, and face similar obstacles and experiences in those migrations (Alioua 2008, Alioua 2014). In this way, collectivity is not based on ideas of belonging or aligned solidarity, rather migratory collaborations are constructed upon the mutual needs, objectives, and resources of people in and across localities. Trust among individuals, is therefore, "initially founded not on the intimate knowledge of the other, but on the fact of sharing the same project," (Alioua 2014, 90). These concepts are useful in understanding the ways in which African and Haitian migrants who often first connect on the migration route, continue to build relations and collaborations throughout their migration projects. In addition to shared migratory trajectories, African and Haitian migrants' infrastructures of care and connectivity overlap based on communalities of language and racial subjugation in Latin America. For example, the U.S.-based organizations which mobilize their staff and resources to Tijuana target assistance to Black extra-continental migrants on the basis of the particular violence and discrimination they experience in Mexico. As minority migratory populations in Latin America, the collectivity of heterogenous migrants of African origins with Haitian migrants helps to visibilize each other, their experiences in migration, and the conditions which prompted their mobility through the South American-Central American corridor.

In conversations with interlocutors around their relations with other migrants and Mexicans in the city, engagement with those of different nationalities was largely dependent on where migrants lived. Haitian migrants living on the outskirts of the city were less likely to have encounters or interactions with

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migrants other than Haitians. In Tijuana's periphery, with Haitian congregations established in several Mexican churches to host services, neighborhoods have developed to house enclaves of Haitian migrants around these areas, which makes it is easier to remain within those compatriot networks. Several Haitian interlocutors commented on their greetings with African migrants, or even Cuban migrants, at the immigration offices or in the markets, exchanging bits of information on how they are managing to live in Mexico. Others, reflected on their migration route to Mexico in which they traveled in large groups comprised of African, Caribbean, and Central American migrants.

African migrants residing in Tijuana were much more likely to have had interactions and fostered connections with Haitians both on the route and in the city. African migrants generally stay in the downtown areas, with close proximity to the border and informal livelihood opportunities, which increases their exposure to migrants of other nationalities. For African migrants who flew from West African countries to Latin America, meeting Haitian migrants in their first countries of migration, such as Brazil, Ecuador, and even Nicaragua via Cuba, was a critical way of being informed of the migration route to the U.S., and subsequently African migrants became migration partners with Haitian migrants. Abdoul, a migrant from Guinea, fled the country in early 2020 after being detained and tortured for his political opposition. Through a connection he had at home, he was able to quickly obtain a visa to Cuba, where Guinea has diplomatic relations, and left his country almost immediately. For Abdoul, Cuba was a transit point which he utilized to reach Central America. Networks of Guinean students living in Cuba pointed him towards the region, and he found himself eligible for visa requirements to go to Nicaragua. When he reached Nicaragua via plane, Abdoul began looking for options of protection in the country, he started Spanish classes, and anticipated to claim asylum once his tourist visa expired. His spontaneous encounter with Haitian migrants in the country sparked his imagination for onward migration.

"I was walking in the market [in Nicaragua], but I was scared because I didn't understand the language. I saw a group; I saw Black people. I passed them and saw who was speaking French, and I asked where are you from? They said from Haiti. I said, you are Haitians, okay. I heard of Haiti, I saw it in school, I studied Haiti and how it is in the Caribbean. They were men, women, and children. So, I asked, where are you leaving to? They said they are on the route to go to Mexico. They said here [Nicaragua] is not good, so let's go. So, I went to the hotel, took my things and we continued together… I didn't have contacts. It

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was the Haitians that had the contacts. The Haitians are used to the route. Because they have friends, they take the road. They are not far from here. They are in the Caribbean. They are on the same continent, so they know how it goes, how to follow it, direct people who to pay. Because they understand French a little, that is how I took the route to Mexico," (Abdoul, Personal Interview, February 2, 2021).

In Abdoul's migration to Mexico, he noted being the only African, out of 98 Haitians migrating together, and for Yannick it was a similar experience. Landing in Brazil from Cameroon, Yannick stayed for three months in a hotel attempting to assemble a life there. Lacking knowledge and familiarity with his new surroundings and the language, Yannick encountered situations of sexual harassment from strangers he thought were helping him. He felt his life was in danger to remain there, and was looking for an alternative country in the region to migrate to. One day, he met Haitian migrants in the city who informed him of their journey to the U.S. and decided to join them. A small group, at first, expanded in Ecuador when they joined a group of 80 migrants, mostly Haitians, but also other African and Cuban migrants. These large groups, as Yannick explained, would break up periodically in challenging sections of the route, such as the Darien Gap, by fast, medium, and slow mobility.

The stories of Abdoul and Yannick's migration to Mexico reflect the non-linear and fragmented reality of 'transit migration,' in which the complex, and "essential details of the process," (Collyer 2007, 681) reveal unanticipated relations, crafted in a particular time and space, which alter and facilitate individual migration trajectories collectively. Although interlocutors noted that almost everyone they knew from the route had already left the city to cross into the U.S., the connections they made along the migration route undoubtably helped them to acclimate to living and working alongside each other, and those practices continued in Tijuana. While sitting at the plaza near the El Chapparral port of entry with Yannick one afternoon, a friend of his walked by us, raised his right fist high and called out, "Africa for life!" in our direction. He smiled and waved at the man swiftly walking towards the bridge leading into downtown. "This is one of them," he said, referring to Haitian friends who are interested in seeing Africa.

Unanticipated allies emerged in multiple facets of urban life, not always existing as a stable force, but often as one that undulates, surfacing briefly and receding, until another undetermined encounter. During 3-days of interviews at the Little Haiti shelter, residents often recounted finding the shelter, tucked

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away into the hills of Tijuana, through a random encounter on the street or from contacts on the route. Junior, a Haitian resident of the shelter, remembered receiving help from someone, but didn't exactly know who it was who had helped him. As Junior recalled his arrival to the city just five months earlier, with John sitting next to us interpreting in Creole, it was in those moments of reflection that the two realized who the other was, although not ever meeting before.

"There are friends when you are on the way," Junior explained. "I spoke to them on the phone and we communicated, and I received information of the shelter here. But when I arrived in the center of Tijuana, I didn't know where I had to go. There was another person who helped me to come here." During Junior's explanation, him and John conversed back and forth for a few moments in Creole. John re-emerged from their quick dialogue to further reflect on the moments when Junior arrived in the city. John explained to me, "When people arrived in the center of Tijuana, the person that saw the Haitian migrants had called me, but I couldn't [come] because I live very far. So, I called another person that is in another church... he told me he doesn't have a car but he can pay the cab to help him to come here. Now, I remember." The entangled relation between Junior and John, reveal the intricacy and connectivity of Haitian networks in Tijuana. Simply arriving to the city center, opens doors for Haitian migrants to meet unexpected allies to help guide them through the city and direct them towards resources, accommodations, and local knowledge.

Unanticipated alliances generated in the city are not isolated to migrants, but additionally evolved outside of migrant groups with the general public of Tijuana. Some of these encounters resulted in connections to jobs, housing, and material assistance, and were largely a product of being at a particular location at a particular time, unexpected and unorganized. For the two interviews which I had with Amine during fieldwork, each time we met on a Sunday afternoon, as this was one of his days off from his job as a printer maintenance technician. After so many interviews with interlocutors limited to factory labor and informal jobs, I found his employment to be a bit random. Formerly a welder in Cameroon, Amine explained how he came to find this job and recounted a single day at the local immigration office. In his first few months in Tijuana, Amine made a visit to the immigration office to receive his Mexican social

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security number. Standing at the counter in the immigration office that day, struggling to communicate with the staff in Spanish, Amine was approached by someone who asked him if he spoke French.

"To find this job, I was lucky to run into a French man at the immigration. I went to immigration to get my social security number. He also has a permanent resident card, and he came to ask for another one, and that's when I was there. I needed service, and at this time I didn't speak Spanish well. I tried to use my phone in Spanish to ask for a service, and he asked me if I spoke French and I said yes. He told me that he is not Mexican, he is French, and we exchanged numbers. He works in a company here [Tijuana]. He asked me how long I had here, and if I work, I said no. He invited me one day to his company and I started to work. It's not a job that I knew before, so it was a friend who helped me look for the job," (Amine, Personal Interview, January 24, 2021).

This unexpected encounter, made on the basis of a common language, changed the trajectory of Amine's experience in Tijuana. The encounter, which led to a meaningful alliance and friendship, enabled Amine to quickly start making a (small) income, avoid exploitative factory labor, and additionally, he learned a new skill that he will carry with him into his next destination(s). Through performing the various rhythms of everyday urban life, navigating municipal bureaucracy, practicing the strange words and sounds of a new language, new relations were formed between two seemingly distant individuals.

As this section sought to demonstrate, unanticipated alliances emerge and rogue care is practiced in the daily fluctuations and movements of transmigrants to and within the city. Rhythms of uncertainty and liminality direct migrants towards working together, no matter how minute or grand the collaboration may be. Practices of care, both within formalized and informal settings, provide migrants with new relations, knowledge, security, and mechanisms of support. These relations give way to the creation, circulation, and adaption of mobile commons shared amongst transmigrants in their efforts to facilitate shared migration projects and survival in the city, which will be further explored in the following section.

6.4 Mobilizing the commons

As I have attempted to portray thus far in this chapter, the everyday embodied rhythms of migrants, pulsating within a multitude of temporalities, localities, and at fluctuating frequencies, create conditions for migrant care systems to grow and unanticipated alliances to occur. These interactions, encounters and relations, no matter how intense, or brief, enable possibilities of life-making, survival, and mobility, that

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might not have been there otherwise. It is within the "urban tissue" (Simone 2019, 108), that the plurality of activities and connections are held in place and enable people to function in such a proximity for the generation and exchange of resources, information, and support.

In critical migration studies, mobile commons are the immaterial knowledge, "infrastructures of connectivity", informal economies, and transnational alliances which create, induce, and reproduce mobility for subaltern migrants globally (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 191). That is, the "shared knowledge, affective cooperation, mutual support, and care," (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 179) that encompass the rights generated and claimed by migrant mobility, and mobile populations themselves. The circulation of mobile commons is not restricted to the act of migrating, the knowledge used on migration routes to physically move from place to place, but the commons can also be generated and used in periods of stasis, or temporary settlement, to ignite the social, economic, and political mobility of people within a particular locality, while still maintaining ideas around being on the move and imagined destinations.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will be focusing on what Papadopoulos (2006) calls 'World 2,' the world of the mobile commons. A world beyond Westphalian notions of citizenship and rights, in which "people on the move create a world of knowledge, of information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of services exchange, of solidarity, and sociability, that can be shared, used, and where people contribute to, sustain, and expand it," (190). In World 2, communality, reciprocity, and the circulation of knowledge, is critical for the continued access to mobility by migrants everywhere, in which "multiplying access is the gift economy of migration," (Papadopoulus and Tsianos 2013, 190).

In Tijuana, mobile commons were generated, circulated, exchanged, and adapted through social networks based on mutual care infrastructures and unanticipated alliances, and which were critical to sustaining daily practices of life and mobility. Interlocutors, in their recounts of their journeys and experiences in the city, were recipients of mobile commons, and in return, were circulators of the commons as well. The exchange of knowledge, information, hospitality, material resources, and care enabled cooperation between migrants which enhanced their abilities to forge lives along their fragmented journeys. Among African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana, mobile commons were circulated and adapted

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through orienting new migrants to the city, exchanged as information and material resources to help migrants find housing and jobs, and reciprocated through practices of mutual care to financially support and ensure the well-being of other migrants.

Welcoming and orienting new migrants to the city exemplifies the cooperation and support migrants practice towards one another as they facilitate the circulation of local knowledge of survival. With little knowledge of the city prior to arrival, nor a clear idea of the exact situation on the border in terms of crossing or claiming asylum, new migrants in Tijuana relied on 'veteran' migrants' information on border procedures and advice, such as on housing or where to access food, to initially settle. Urban centers along migration routes which host migrants in their transit and temporary settlement, provide ground for locating others who share similar migratory trajectories and who can orient migrants "how to fit in, in order to survive until their next departure," (Alioua 2014, 90).

Near the pedestrian bridge leading towards El Chapparal port of entry, Yannick and I met one afternoon for an informal walking tour of the pedestrian gate and to better understand how Yannick moves through these bordered urban spaces. Standing in the now, empty pedestrian gate, Yannick noted the chaos and anxiety which regularly pulsated through this space before the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the plaza was usually crowded with asylum seekers lined up waiting for 'metering policy' list numbers to be called. The sharp juxtaposition of this plaza reveals the duality, and unevenness of the U.S.-Mexico border, in which tourists from the U.S. flow swiftly and freely into this transnational space, while asylum seekers bottleneck on the opposite side of the pedestrian gate entrance, ambiguously waiting for their chance to step foot on U.S. soil. As we glided through the abandoned port of entry, Yannick recounted how he engages with new African migrants who arrive to the city. He recalled how, before the border closed, he would bring new migrants to El Chapparal to explain the 'system' to claim asylum, i.e., put their name on the metering list to receive a number and show them where to line up to hear list numbers called. With his arms stretched outward, he motioned to an invisible long straight line parallel to the brightly colored, and life-size, México sign which leads up to the pedestrian entrance.

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Photo: Asylum seekers at El Chapparal port of entry; Source: KPBS News, October 31, 2018

Photo by Julia Hause: El Chapparal port of entry closed during COVID-19, February 3, 2021

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As the sun began to set at the border, Yannick and I made our way back to the pedestrian bridge to cross into downtown. We descended the bridge, walked a few streets towards the center where we arrived in front of his accommodation, 'Bed Space' he called it, as it is just "a place where we put our heads." This series of connected apartments house a dozen or so migrants in each, and is shared by Haitians, Africans, and some Hondurans. As a veteran migrant, Yannick was able to negotiate partitioning off part of the shared and congested room with ply wood boards to construct a minor semblance of privacy. He noted that he shares this 'room' with another African migrant whom he invited to live with him when he arrived in the city. In front of the buildings there were a half dozen or so residents, sitting on the sidewalk at the steps of the apartment doors on fold up chairs, curled in towards each other chatting and laughing together. As we approached the building, a few heads looked up towards us and waved to greet Yannick's arrival. At night, he explained, he returns to this space after a day of working or drifting through downtown searching for information concerning the border, and hangs out with fellow residents on these chairs sharing with each other their experiences of life, migration, and most importantly, plans for their onward migration.

Photo by Julia Hause: Pedestrian bridge leading to the city center, February 2, 2021

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Support around housing hospitality, information on affordable and accessible accommodations, and resources for local employment, were disseminated and exchanged through the spontaneous connections between migrants built along their journeys and unexpected encounters in the city. Likewise, commons which were acquired through local organizations were circulated among migrants in their efforts to support each other in the city. I initially met Abdoul when I walked by the Rodriguez Hotel one day in downtown Tijuana. As I was speaking to another migrant out front of the entrance on the sidewalk, Abdoul approached us with a friend from Mali. Abdoul was a resident of the hotel and we began chatting briefly about his life in Tijuana, and subsequently arranged to meet again another day. In our interview, Abdoul spoke frequently of the other migrants who he had met on the route and since he had arrived who had helped him immensely get acquainted with life in Tijuana.

His reflections took him back to the three months he spent in Tapachula, and the relations he made with other African migrants who he met there. When he arrived in the city, he was put in detention for several days and after agreeing to apply for asylum in Mexico, Abdoul was released to await his case decision in the city. He explained that during this time, he met a Cameroonian migrant who was going through the same asylum process. During the several months wait, the two would frequent the local immigration office together to check up on their asylum cases. When the Cameroonian migrant's asylum case was approved before his, she left for Tijuana leaving him behind. Abdoul's asylum case was denied after he got sick for several weeks and missed signing into the COMAR office, which rendered his application 'abandoned'. When he initially applied for asylum, he was issued a 'proof of procedure' document valid for 3 months to prevent his deportation from the country while his case was pending. After his case was denied, Abdoul decided to leave southern Mexico with only his 3-month document in hand. On his way north, he called the Cameroonian migrant for advice and information on where to go along the border. She instructed him to come to Tijuana and gave him the address of the Rodriguez Hotel.

Upon arriving to Tijuana, Abdoul was confronted with the border closure, and decided to wait until it re-opened to claim asylum. Without a valid visa, or work authorization, Abdoul embarked on his irregular stay in the city. His luck turned around when at the hotel he met another African migrant who was

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organizing his departure from the city. Before crossing the border irregularly, he left behind his humanitarian visa to Abdoul, still valid for the next 11 months. This visa opened the doors to formal employment within the *maquiladora* industry to sustain himself as he waited for the border to re-open. At the start, Abdoul took this migrant's place directly at the plants that he worked for, before changing jobs.

"I had two or three companies, because where I worked with the left-behind document. He [visa owner] worked at two companies at the same time. He did three days here, and four days there. But after one week, I changed [companies]. I took his document and I left for another company. The supervisors change, the people [at the company] change. More or less, they don't know the difference between us... To see that all of us are black, that we have black skin, it is not easy, it is not easy to notice me. I'm not the only one, there are many people who work with other people's documents," (Abdoul, Personal Interview, February 2, 2021).

His practice of identify flexibility enabled him to overcome his undocumented status and participate in *maquiladora* labor, but additionally, this visa, once passed along to him, entered into the world of the mobile commons as an informal material resource to sustain his local mobility. The circulation of this resource became part of the commons as it was passed from migrant to migrant to support their survival, evade surveillance and, therefore, enhance future mobility. This exchange of material resources serves as an example of mobile commons which do not exclusively exist by word of mouth, but rather exemplifies how mobility knowledge is complemented with material resources which are circulated to facilitate the survival and mobility of others.

Mutual care, as part of the mobile commons, was often facilitated through the circulation of financial support and physical care practices which sought to sustain temporary inhabitation in Tijuana, as well as support mobility along the migration route. Practices of financial care were common among African and Haitian migrants, and were often cyclical, in which paying for transportation for someone to reach accommodations or leaving a new migrant with some cash for them to buy food, were regular gestures of care. This solidarity was not practiced along singular lines of national or linguistic belonging, rather heterogenous migrants whose individual journeys aligned sparked everyday practices of collectivity for the benefit and well-being of each other. For single migrants without any familial support, extending physical care in times of illness was another critical act which enabled the continued mobility of migrants.

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In addition to benefiting from local knowledge and resources in Tijuana, Abdoul shared his experiences of mutual care between him and other migrants. During his time in Tapachula, Abdoul met several other Africans who were already in the asylum process and were renting a house as they waited for their case determinations. Abdoul was invited to stay with them, where he slept and ate for free. When he fell ill for several weeks, the other migrants in the house cared for him until he was healthy enough to leave southern Mexico. These care practices were reciprocated shortly after Abdoul reached Tijuana, when he met a single Angolan migrant who was sick and needed medical treatment. In that moment, he arranged to take them to the hospital and purchased their medicine as they didn't have the money to do so themselves. In our conversation, Abdoul reflected on how he views African, as well as Haitian, migrants supporting each other in their journeys. For him, it is not only their shared migration projects or African ancestry, but also the role religion plays for him in practicing care with fellow migrants.

"Yes, Africans, I pity them. Africans, even the Haitians, they are kind to us, because they have ancestors who come from Africa. They have pity for you. If you didn't eat, if you are hungry, they give you food to eat. If you don't have clothes, they give you clothes. It's a little bit like that. There is a kindness between us. I like to do that with a lot of people. I can see an African and I see that he is in need, I give him money, 200-300 pesos…We do that, because our religion recommends that, Islam too, says that you must have mercy on the person next to you," (Abdoul, Personal Interview, February 2, 2021).

This analysis of rhythms of endurance as a conceptual framework to understand how migrants generate and exchange mobile commons through a multitude of relations does not aim to romanticize the collaborations, care, and labor that has been presented here as seamless interactions and perfectly articulate projects. Rather, there is immense trial and error, and trial again, which goes on within working, dwelling, and surviving together to make life and mobility possible. There are embedded politics and distrust, both migrant to migrant and migrant to institution (NGOs, humanitarian aid, the state), and these conflicts were evident within the layers of conversations with interlocutors in Tijuana. Some migrants would differentiate themselves from others, as if their mobility were somehow less controversial. This differentiation was usually along the lines of education, and therefore class, in which low-educated Haitian migrants were perceived by university educated, middle-class African migrants, as lackadaisically crossing the border irregularly without an understanding of the repercussions. The repeated sentiments of

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feeling 'left behind' by African migrants who drew these lines between themselves and others, as I could detect, came out of frustration for their own situations, and perhaps a bit of jealously, knowing that the others are somewhere on the 'other side', and they remain. This dimension of class construction and dynamics, in regards to migration desires, projects, resources, and actualizing mobility, between African and Haitian migrants in Mexico and Latin America is not fully explored in this research, but which could be developed upon with further research.

While this chapter reflects on the perfuse amounts of collective work and solidarity within organizing survival in Tijuana, not all connections and networks led to something that was expected or promised. Fellow migrants offering support in the future, that they often are not able to follow through on is an example of when these alliances diverge and fissure. Maybe the offer is genuine and maybe it is not. The reality of precarious mobility is that when it comes time to tap into those networks and resources, phone lines are disconnected, minds change around their willingness/ability to help, or malorientation and misinformation from others leads to ruptures in mobility and distrust. Amine's reflection below reveals that even in navigating transnational mobility with each other, co-migrants giving and taking and utilizing one another for support to achieve their shared migratory objectives, these alliances can be constructed and collectivity practiced, yet the individuality and singularity of migrants on these journeys remains.

"You know, when you are here, someone can say, for example a friend, stay for 2-3 days. [But] he is distant because you have not come yet. You find out when you pass by, you call his phone and it doesn't go through. You must be strong when you know someone, you must know that you are alone. If you are lucky for 2-3 days that's fine, but if you aren't lucky, you don't stress. Actually, you have a plan B," (Amine, Personal Interview, January 24, 2021).

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, African and Haitian migrants' social network and care building was explored through both the formalized infrastructures of care in the city, and through the unanticipated alliances formed between migrants and various city actors. These relations came into being through the everyday rhythms of endurance exuded by migrants in the city as they stitch together activities to organize their survival and mobility. In this way, these activities became mechanisms to explore ways of being together

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that rely on relationships in the moment for possibilities of collaboration. Within the daily tasks of labor and care, rhythms of endurance are unique, and repetitive, measured, and spontaneous. To the naked-eye, the embodied rhythms of wandering the streets seeking shelter differ from those calculatively waiting for aid to arrive at home, and those of happen-stance encounters in the public urban spaces. Yet, for migrants in the city these various actions and motions of their daily lives are all fragments of their life in waiting, a waiting which is fueled by negotiations for place and social connections to sustain themselves until migration projects are remobilized and migrants move on to the next locality. Through the multitude of care relations generated, mobile commons are created, adapted, and exchanged between migrants to further enable their temporary settlement and indeterminate waiting in the city. Along fragmented journeys, mobile commons emerge as a "refusal" (Papadopoulus 2006, 166) to the systems of control which seek to immobilize migrants in Mexico, as the practitioners of these commons operate indistinctly, circulating and circumventing between and beyond the scale of the institutionalized actors which seek to control them. These everyday rhythms of care and commons serve African and Haitian migrants to manage their protracted transit in Tijuana, and sustain possibilities for future mobility, while producing a plurality of networks to support their mutual care, connectivity, and justice.

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Chapter 7: Making place in a liminal city

7.1 Introduction

As illustrated by Tran and Yip (2020), “As human beings unfold their daily activities in their immediate space, they are at the same time defining a rhythm and hence they are both rhythm-makers and place-makers,” (260). The last chapter demonstrated the ways in which the everyday rhythms of endurance practiced by African and Haitian migrants residing in Tijuana produce urban life-making practices and ‘in-the-moment' social networks and alliances which enable the interconnected ways migrants create, exchange, and adapt invisible nodes of knowledge of mobility to produce affective infrastructures of care and connectivity in the city. Building off the last, this chapter will address the strategies of survival and mobility through migrants' practices of place-making and use of urban space as transmigrants in the city. This chapter will address the following questions: How do migrants utilize and impact urban space along fragmented migration journeys? What are the possibilities of Haitian and African migrants to claim and reconfigure urban space in their efforts to make place for themselves in a ‘liminal city’? And finally, how are migrants negotiating and renegotiating their ‘right to the city’ in relation to other (power) assemblages in these urban spaces?

I argue that through place-making, African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana navigate the plurality of urban thresholds, which produce their socio-spatial exclusion, through their use of urban space in ephemeral and non-committed, or settling ways. In this way, transmigrants are able to facilitate their immediate local mobility, while simultaneously maintaining the possibilities of reinitiating transnational mobility, in which their lives can be ‘picked up’ and mobilized at any moment. An analysis of place-making enables a deeper understanding of how migrants, no matter how ‘settled’ or temporary, participate in the (re)creation and transformation of urban space and contribute to cities’ urbanization, all the while in constant negotiation with structures and systems of power (Bork-Hüffer and Peth 2020). Through identifying the place-making practices of African and Haitian migrants, I employ the notions of Everaet’s (2020), “inhabiting the meanwhile” and Bork-Hüffer et al. (2016) “transient urban space” to highlight the

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temporality within efforts to create and make claims to urban space during periods of ruptured migration and indefinite waiting.

Through migrant narratives and my own observations in Tijuana's urban landscape, I found that migrants navigate their mobility through the appropriation and use of already existing infrastructures in the city as to cope with urban exclusion, as well as to maintain access to and mobility within city spaces for their everyday survival. Zein (2020) employs this concept of migrants' utilization of existing urban infrastructure through which they "ascribe new meanings to these already existing productions of Beiruti space," (1). I borrow this concept, and further develop it in the context of transit migration, in which existing urban infrastructure not only serves as potential creative spaces for excluded urban dwellers, but also actively supports migrants' temporality as they inhabit imagined transit spaces. The indeterminacy of African and Haitian migrants' lives in Tijuana characterizes it as a liminal city, where dwelling in the margins of society gives way for innovative and transformative uses of urban spaces to fulfill immediate needs of survival, as well as maintaining ideas of onward migration and imagined destinations.

I explore the place-making strategies of Haitian and African migrants within Tijuana's existing infrastructure through three different areas: the manipulation of Tijuana's built environment to cultivate urban belonging, the appropriation of public open spaces, and temporal practices of dwelling. Section 7.2 explores the transformation of Tijuana's built environment through the development of 'Haitian churches' and use of Haitian restaurants as urban spaces of belonging. Section 7.3 traces African and Haitian embodied practices of claims to public open space in plazas and streets for personal and economic activities. Section 7.4 details the temporal dwelling practices of these migrants in their efforts to 'make home' and leave 'home' at any moment. While African and Haitian migrants overlap in their efforts of cultivating spaces of urban belonging, the place-making practices and infrastructures of Haitians migrants reveal the distinct ways these populations cooperate, as well as diverge and differ within city spaces.

7.2 Place-making in a transient urban landscape

Through my own observations during fieldwork in January 2021, the presence of Black migrants in urban space was prevalent. On my daily drive from my accommodations in *Playas de Tijuana* to *Zona*

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Centro, I would wind through the curvy highway, hugging Tijuana's hilly terrain on one side, and the towering, U.S. border wall on the other. Entering the perimeter of the city center, I periodically encountered Haitian street vendors selling oranges or car equipment in the median of the roads. Driving further down *Calle Benito Juárez,* I would pass by a carwash which employed several Black migrants working outside moving cars through the garage and wiping them clean. Haitian migrants occupied street corners, highway medians, and plazas as street vendors promenaded through the urban center and periphery residential neighborhoods. In *Zona Norte*, Haitian and African migrants congregated around Haitian owned businesses, particularly barber shops and restaurants, and engulfed full boulevards as curious shoppers and vendors at bustling open-air markets.

These observations reveal the accelerated emergence of infrastructure developed by the Haitian community in Tijuana, and the ways in which these spaces are now utilized by others, particularly African migrants. I position these spaces as transient urban space (Bork-Hüffer et al. 2016) to highlight the fluidity of not only the people who appropriate and utilize them, but to also conceptualize the infrastructure itself as fluid, unfixed, and constantly changing. It is within these spaces of appropriation, creation, and transformation that 'inhabiting the meanwhile' takes shape, in which place-making in transit actively transforms waiting space into productive "temporary social worlds," (Everaert 2020, 2).

As noted by Zack and Landau (2021), "human mobility is powerfully associated with the spatial transformations of highly networked urban centers," (2). These transformations are not isolated to circumstances of migrant settlement in a place, rather they continue to manifest in the 'in-between' spaces of migrants' transit through various localities (Godin and Donà 2020). Mobility in and through Tijuana consistently reshapes the socio-spatial infrastructures of the city. The urban landscape and atmosphere evolve, in which the physical built environment is transfigured, adjusted, and reclaimed to serve the survival needs and objectives of those who move through the city. Migrants' everyday activities in the city manifest transformation and claims to urban space despite their inherent socio-spatial exclusion based on their status as the migrant 'other' and the processes of racialization which marginalize Black communities

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in Mexico. As Young (2011) rightly notes, “the city in its entirety is not a refuge; rather spaces within a particular city are claimed as refuge,” (536).

7.3 Tijuana’s built environment as urban belonging

Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce (2019) illustrate place-making within ‘black geographies’ as “people ‘make’ place through networked political and social relations,” (1010) in which “overlapping and competing place-frames that are experienced at multiple scales simultaneously,” (1010) produce practices of relational place-making which are in constant negotiation with each other, and particularly with relations and assemblages of power. In Tijuana, the uneven power imbalances of the U.S. and Mexican border regimes, in conjunction with the structural inequalities, insecurity, and surveillance of migrants in the city, produce migrant place-making practices which are inherently intertwined and confrontational within these relations of power. Within the daily negotiation for space, security, and recognition, African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana manage the “temporal uncertainty,” (Everaert 2020, 8) of their settlement in the city through creating and transforming urban spaces into places of joy and celebration, belonging and enduring (Hunter et al. 2016).

In this section I will show how African and Haitian migrants make place in ways which enable them to circumvent settlement by utilizing Tijuana’s existing built environment to create enclaves of welcoming space for Black extra-continental migrants. Spaces, which both serve to facilitate their temporary settlement and foster places of connectivity for migrants to exchange mobility knowledge for their desired onward migration. I observed two prominent spaces where migrants appropriated existing infrastructure to cultivate spaces of belonging. First, Haitian migrants' worship within established Mexican churches, and second, Haitian and African migrants’ use of Haitian restaurants to access welcoming commercialized urban space. While both of these sites foster space which is created, negotiated, and endured in the city, they still function within the broader context of discrimination, poverty, and violence that plague migrants’ experiences in Mexico (Hunter et al. 2016).

7.3.1 Haitian churches

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The first Sunday morning of fieldwork, I drove 30 minutes to the edge of the city's periphery to attend a church service which John had invited me to a few days prior. I felt curious, yet unsure about leaving the city center almost immediately in my fieldwork, unknowing and slightly skeptical of who would attend a church service on the outskirts of the city. The drive took me southeast, through the hilly geography of Tijuana's landscape. On the elevated highway, I could see speckled in the valley below, massive *maquiladora* industrial plants sitting adjacent to residential neighborhoods. The road curved tightly around a colossal singular hill protruding from earth, *Cerro Colorado,* and as the peak drifted into my background, I arrived in the zone of *Florido III.* I approached a light gray building with a small gravel section for parked cars positioned adjacent to the church *Igelsia Bautista Vida Eterna,* which I would learn, is a Mexican Baptist church which hosts Haitian services in Creole every week.

Photo: Front entrance to *Igelisa Bautista Vida Eterna* in *Flordio III* neighborhood*;* Source: Google Maps

The gate at the entrance to the church compound led to the main church hall facing the main road and was accompanied by the long concrete building stretching perpendicular to the hall on the left, along with a single toilet, guarded between four tight, wooden walls plopped in the middle of the compound. As I entered into the space, the melodies of the organ beamed from within the church hall in unison with the

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pastor boisterously speaking out to the audience over a speaker system. With the door open to the main hall, I peaked in to find 10 or so rows of church pews filled with Haitian church goers, dressed in formal suits, dresses, and topped off with protective masks on their faces. In the last row of pews, closest to the doorway in which I was standing, there were several Mexicans with their children listening to the service. After a few moments of observing, I retreated from the hall to meet John in front of the long gray building, where we were soon accompanied by the pastor once he stepped out of the service.

Daniel, the Haitian pastor, oriented me to the compound while the church service was still finishing up. The Mexican pastor of the church approached us and John introduced me briefly. With my limited Spanish, I was unfortunately not able to speak longer with the Mexican pastor, yet he welcomed me to the space kindly. Daniel explained that the long building is used for social gatherings, study groups, and previously served as a shelter for Haitian migrants that arrived since 2016. The door to the long gray building faced the interior of the compound and looked out onto the rear-side of the main church hall. As he pointed to various structures to explain their use, loud and joyous singing rang from the church hall and filled the entirety of the compound. His finger shifted to the rear-side of the church hall as he pointed to a large metal wash tub sitting adjacent to the back door of the church. With a grin, he explained that the tub is used for baptisms, a social activity for Haitians, he noted, was not happening in the church before he arrived in Tijuana. Daniel's pride for the social activities they now host in the church exuded from his lips, "In the church we do social activities like marriages, baptisms – Do you see the pool?"

We set up a table and chairs in the compound to conduct interviews with members of the church, and I initially sat down with Daniel until the service let out. He traced his arrival to Tijuana in 2019 from Chile, after he received a call from a friend of his, who explained that the Haitian pastor of this church was leaving to cross the border, and that he should come to Mexico and serve in the church. From our conversation, it seemed Haitian pastors who pass through these religious spaces are almost as transient as the Haitian congregations themselves. The high mobility of those who embody these spaces, enables pastors to also move in and out of these spaces depending on their own personal migration projects.

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"For the moment [in 2019], I was living in Chile. I came here by plane like a tourist. I was the pastor at a church in Chile. It is by friend's contacts that I found the church here. Here, it was a shelter to receive immigrants. So, the pastor here left Mexico for the US. He called me to come be the pastor. When I arrived, I was working for 10 months. Here in the shelter, it was complicated, there were a lot of Haitians. There wasn't a pastor who was doing social activities too. And here it was an infirmary too. When I arrived, I saw two groups of people were together, one group was Mexican and the other Haitian. I saw the bathrooms, and I saw that there isn't a sink for the people. So, I built a team plan to recoup funds to resolve the sanitation problem... And the immigrants weren't working to be able to give money, so I must find support from other people to realize this project... It is the role of the pastor who must see things and respond to problems," (Daniel, Haitian Pastor, Personal Interview, January 10, 2021).

Daniel came to Tijuana through his transnational social network with an opportunity to support the Haitian community, which he sought to embody in both spiritual and material ways. Daniel came to Tijuana with training in nursing, which allowed him to uniquely support the Haitian migrants living at the shelter with medical assistance that they were not receiving elsewhere. Beyond the church, Daniel worked at a *maquiladora* assembling furniture and shared a house in the city with his cousin.

In discussing the organization of the church, he explained that it is not only a site for Haitian worship, but they operate alongside and in collaboration with the Mexican pastors and congregations which precede them, hosting collective services with Spanish interpretation provided at the Creole services. Additionally, he collaborates with the Mexican pastor on various church activities, such as the choir, which brings together members of the Mexican and Haitian congregations. As reflected in Daniel's narrative above, his prioritization of social and cultural activities centers the church as the heart of gathering. He noted organizing events for eating together, or going to the beach, as activities of pleasure to bring the community together. A point of contention was the sanitation of the toilet on the premises. As it stood, the single toilet did not have a sink or any other washing area, nor was there a separate facility for women. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the need and urgency for such provisions. Daniel expressed that fundraising to build a modern bathroom in the compound was a critical project he was working on, particularly so that women and children could have access to better hygiene and privacy. In addition to organizing at the church, Daniel noted his use of digital platforms such as Facebook Live,

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through which he streams the Sunday services and hosts a radio show which addresses particular issues at home and in the Haitian diaspora, and most recently disseminating information on COVID-19.

Several interlocutors for this research noted three main Haitian churches housed within Mexican churches, with the possibility of other smaller congregations located throughout the city as well. The other two churches are located closer to the city center, *Igelisa Embajadores De Jesús* located next to Little Haiti in the *Alacrán* canyon, and the third, *Primera Iglesia Bautista de Tijuana* (First Baptist Church of Tijuana) in *Zona Centro*. These churches not only connected Haitian migrants physically through their weekly services, but linked the community digitally through WhatsApp groups. Through WhatsApp, each church has its own group which facilitates mass communication between Haitian migrants in Tijuana in a quick and efficient manner. These WhatsApp groups instantly connected Haitian church members to any events, news, or information that is shared on the platform, relevant to the church, but also around the border situation, U.S. politics, and conditions back in Haiti.

Since their initial arrival in Tijuana, Haitian migrants have actively established their presence within Mexican churches in which these churches now host Creole and multi-lingual services led by Haitian pastors. Haitian organized church services within the physical structures of Mexican churches in Tijuana, which I refer to as 'Haitian churches,' serve as repetition and familiarity, in an otherwise insecure environment, and emerge as a space within Tijuana's urban infrastructure which provides "local space and recognition", (Berraine 2020, 426) and "places of transnational belonging and mobility," (430). Similar to the 'house churches' in Morocco (Berraine 2020) Haitian churches, and their transient congregations, have stimulated alternative mobilizing activity, in which they are a site of circulation of individuals, financial support, aide, and information.

The ability of Haitian migrants to claim, reconfigure, and transform already existing religious infrastructure for their own purposes and objectives, enables practices of ephemeral place-making which cultivates spaces of belonging, without the necessity of rooting themselves physically and financially into the local community, as most Haitian migrants who attend these churches intend to migrate. These churches exist suspended in these spaces, in that they operate in the city, yet are not physically and

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permanently marked as part of its urban infrastructure, or as Zack and Landau (2021) describe as, spaces "within', and yet not 'of' the city; neither transient nor embedded," (3). For many, Haitian churches serve as a stepping stone in their disrupted migration trajectories, a familiar space of language, worship, and relations which prosper into temporary social worlds until they move on to their next locality.

Steeped in an otherwise insecure urban environment, where many migrants are isolated to their spaces of dwelling or their low-wage jobs, these religious spaces provide a relative relief of security and protection which differs from their everyday experiences with poverty, illegality, rejection, exploitation, immobility, and discrimination. The repurposing of Mexican churches to create uplifted Haitian space, produces spaces of belonging, joy, and creativity (Hunter et al. 2016), as well as satisfaction, rejuvenation, and support. In this way, Haitian churches embody critical sites of social interaction, activities, physical and digital connections, and community organizing around migrant needs. They serve the community for weekly spiritual and social engagement, aid distribution, resource and knowledge circulation which infuse meaning, belonging, and mobility into these urban spaces.

In catching up with Beatrice over WhatsApp in June, I noticed her picture was of her in a wedding dress. I congratulated her on her marriage, which she noted took place at one of the Haitian churches in the city. The facilitation of cultural and religious social activities mimics an atmosphere of 'normalcy,' that life can go on and life events can be celebrated, even in periods of uprootedness, transition, and uncertainty. Within the liminality of these intermediate migratory spaces, migrants carve out not only their right to the city physically, but also socially and emotionally (Lyytenin 2015).

At the same time that these churches connect Haitian migrants to this urban locality, they also serve as sites of organization and exchange for migrants to reinitiate their transnational mobility to other cross-border destinations. On the Sunday following the January 2021 U.S. Presidential inauguration, Beatrice and I connected over Zoom. At church that morning, she explained, Haitian congregants were buzzing about the (perceived) renewed possibilities of transnational mobility, following the news of the 100-day pause on deportations declared in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since I was not present at that service, I asked her what the sentiments were like among Haitians, "There are a lot of people that are

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talking about the government decree from Joe Biden, they are all interested to cross now that there is a change," she explained. "They are all interested, there are some people who have been here for 2 years, 4 years, there are some people also who called me with only 4-5 months here. Everyone is interested in this moment. For right now, they only talk about crossing. I have a friend who wants to go in this week. To go to Acuña[11] I think. And after this week, I will know if there are good results or not."

Here, the church emerges not only as a place of worship, but as a site to gather and exchange information and resources on the potentialities of migration. Migrants discuss news on the border, possible sites of irregular entry and the experiences of others who have already crossed that trickle back to those who remain in Tijuana. In Beatrice's church WhatsApp group, migrants shared news reports on the Attorney General, Ken Paxton, who suspended the pause on deportations in late January sighting it as unconstitutional.[12] Beatrice commented on the miseducation of many migrants on these initial immigration policy changes from Biden, as new migrants crossing the border are still subject to turn-backs to Mexico and deportation. The following week when I checked back in with Beatrice, she noted at least ten migrants who were regular members of the church were no longer in the city.

As Haitian churches sit at the core of the community in Tijuana, webs of transnational networks develop around them, connecting migrants in Tijuana to each other and to those already across the border. These networks are utilized as mechanisms of knowledge circulation around U.S. border and immigration politics, both physically in these religious spaces, as well as digitally through community platforms. While people shift in and out of these places at a high frequency, the spaces themselves change, adjust, and transform with whoever is present in those moments, and in relation to the broader context of shifting global migration governance. Haitian churches emerge in transient urban space as sites of constant becoming and not becoming "socio-spatially embedded" (Bork-Hüffer and Peth 2020, 33) in the city. The appropriation of existing religious infrastructure without the physicality of Haitian-funded churches in the

[11] Ciudad Acuña, Mexico is a border town opposite of Del Rio, Texas, USA
[12] Juliàn Aguilar, "Federal Judge temporarily blocks Biden's 100-day deportation moratorium after Texas sues administration," *The Texas Tribune*, January 26, 2021. https://www.texastribune.org/2021/01/26/texas-joe-biden-deportation-moratorium-ken-paxton/ (accessed July 23, 2021).

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city puts the embeddedness of these spaces in constant flux. On the one hand, they serve as stable sites of belonging, security, and community support, while on the other, enable prospects of migration and are consistently adjusting and readjusting to the changing circumstances of migrants' transnational mobility.

7.3.2 Haitian restaurants

The first time I met Amine, a topic of conversation which emerged was the general racism and discrimination that he experiences in Tijuana, and he narrated what it meant to be a Black migrant in this city when encountering commercialized urban space. When he made these reflections, we were sitting outside of a Starbucks café in *Zona Rio*, adjacent to a shopping mall and looking out onto a plaza which hosts a number of Haitian street vendors. Before he spoke, Amine looked down at his cardboard cup, the green lines of the Starbucks logo beaming back at him. He picked up the cup, set it back down on the table, and lamented, "For example, several times I was in a café, a bit like here. When you arrive in a café, there is someone who asks you what you want, all that. But me, I arrived there and nobody asks 'what do you want?'... Like I am not a person who will buy something."

For Amine, life in the city is one of constant surveillance, even by the general population, in that he is not expected, or welcomed, to exist within particular commercialized urban space within the city. This raises concern over migrants' and other subaltern urban populations 'right to the city' (Lefebrve 1996) in that they are tolerated to physically live there, yet particular social hierarchies and urban politics reduce their access to areas of the city, as well as their ability to "actualize and/or transform specific aspirations," (Simone 2008, 114) in city spaces. Haitian restaurants emerge as a site of relationality, in which processes of making place is in confrontation with urban relations of power (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2019). Accessing, utilizing, and appropriating commercialized urban space through Haitian restaurants in downtown Tijuana, then acts in direct contestation to urban exclusion. Amine manages this exclusion by frequenting Haitian restaurants where he feels more at ease and welcomed around other Black migrants.

Amine then asked me if I had been to a Haitian restaurant yet in the city, at which point in my fieldwork I hadn't. "You'll never see a white person inside," he said. "Go, experience it." I told him I

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planned too. “For example,” he continued, “you are downtown and in a Haitian restaurant, I have never seen a white person in a Haitian restaurant. It’s not because the food is bad. No, it is because they have to buy from the white restaurant next door. Maybe it’s because they speak Spanish, but Haitians also eat next door and maybe they don’t speak Spanish. They just want to eat next door. There are several Haitian restaurants here, because the Haitian community is very strong,” he explained. In speaking about the atmosphere of Haitian restaurants, the lack of White interest in eating at Haitian restaurants informed Amine’s understanding that people frequent the urban spaces in which they feel most comfortable around people that look like themselves, or share a language.

Haitian restaurants, which have emerged throughout downtown Tijuana since 2016, have become a site through which migrants utilize current infrastructure to facilitate and make place for themselves during their temporary settlement in the city. In Haitian owned restaurants, migrants access employment, familiar foods, and inclusion into commercialized space. While these restaurants are explicitly Haitian, and offer culturally specific cuisine, these spaces are accessed by both Haitian and African migrants, as well as some locals, and produce one of the very few commercialized urban spaces which is welcoming to and dominated by Black transmigrants. Haitian restaurants, therefore, serve as a site of place-making where migrants reconfigure insecure and exclusionary urban space into “places of protection,” (Lyytinen 2015, 595), in which accessing these restaurants provides relative respite from the general hostility they face in Tijuana’s urban core. Through developing small businesses, Haitian entrepreneurs have transformed Tijuana’s landscape offering commercialized urban space where Black migrants access familiar foods, spaces to speak their own languages (Creole, some West Africans French), and exist in relative comfort and security outside the gaze of the general population. Haitian restaurants become sites of enduring, belonging, and resisting the restriction and discrimination Black migrants experience on the basis of their racialized bodies (Hunter et al. 2016).

Migrant owned restaurants not only create spaces of belonging, but also build niche economies which contribute to supporting the local migrant population, particularly migrants residing irregularly, in employment opportunities which sustain their temporary settlement in the city. I met Beatrice one Sunday

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after church in late January at a Haitian restaurant located in *Zona Centro*, before we walked to the near-by open-air street market. The restaurant, unmarked from the outside but draped in the colors of the Haitian flag, was buzzing with customers dining in and also taking food for carryout. The loud clatter of pans in the kitchen, the mumbled conversations of diners at their tables, and the laughter of the restaurant employees chatting amongst each other set a distinct, undisciplined, yet comforting rhythm to this space. The restaurant was occupied by mostly other Haitians, and one Mexican woman sitting at a table in the corner near the kitchen chatting in Spanish with one of the Haitian employees.

Photo by Julia Hause: Front entrance to Haitian restaurant in downtown Tijuana, January 31, 2021

When I walked in, Beatrice was sitting at a table in the center of the dining room with a large plate of fried plantains, beet and potato salad, and fried chicken. She quickly motioned to me and introduced me to Emmanuel, a Haitian migrant employee at the restaurant. Emmanuel and I sat at a table pressed against the left side of the dining room, and in the brief few moments that I spoke with him, he recounted the restaurant dynamics, his time in Tijuana, and his aspirations for mobility. The

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establishment, employing five Haitian migrants, opened a year prior, taking over for another Haitian restaurant which preceded it. During the pandemic, the restaurant remained open, and his employment was largely not impacted. Emmanuel noted that even after four years of residing in the city, he still imagined new destinations and cited the U.S. presidential administration change as a reason of hope to reinitiate his migration.

"This (Tijuana) is not my destination. Until now, well you already know, with President Trump no one could cross the border, like I was going to, but now I think about crossing the border. In a few months, next month I want to try. Now I still have a few things to do, that's why I am [still] here and I don't want to go through now, but during the next month... I think a lot of people want to cross. So, I'll see how they control the situation and then I'll decide what to do," (Emmanuel, Personal Interview, January 31, 2021).

The restaurant, currently serving Emmanuel's immediate needs of income generation to survive day to day, provides him with a space in which he can speak his own language, interact with other Haitian and African migrants, and build social relations, yet it remains a temporary situation, one which he will leave the moment he finds migration to be possible again. While this restaurant, and the several other scattered throughout the city, remain part of the built infrastructure in Tijuana, the ways in which they are utilized by transmigrants along their migration and in periods of indefinite waiting, contribute to their own transience and continual transformation. As Emmanuel noted, this restaurant was new, just a year old, and had transitioned hands from one Haitian owner to the next, reinventing and altering this space along the way. Despite imaging life elsewhere, Emmanuel navigates his own waiting through working in this restaurant, until he finds the opportune moment to move on.

7.4 Urban public open space

Beyond claims to existing infrastructure for the reconfiguration of urban spaces which are accessible and recognizable to African and Haitian migrants, migrants also demonstrate mechanisms of ephemeral place-making which evade formalized urban structures all together, in which their presence in these spaces become less measurable. Zein (2020) notes that "as marginalized communities often find commercialized city spaces as uninviting, they reclaim existing spaces in ways that 'transgress architectural boundaries and normative behavior," (15). In managing urban socio-spatial and economic

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exclusion, African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana turn to public open spaces for opportunities of life-making which evades a necessity to settle in the city more permanently, therefore maintaining their mobility for future migration. The appropriation of these spaces produces knowledge, resources, and informal economies which support migrants' temporary residence. This section will explore the use of the plaza and the streets as sites of making place among African and Haitian migrants through their embodied utilization of open urban space through fleeting and transient daily practices.

7.4.1 Plaza as information

The plaza adjacent to El Chapparal pedestrian border crossing, as Ibrahim informed me, on a typical day would be filled with tourists coming from the U.S., as well as migrants waiting on the periphery of the port of entry anxiously listening to waiting list numbers being called for their 'turn' to claim asylum. Since the pandemic and the indefinite border closure, this plaza and the port of entry remain strangely, and eerily, silent. Despite this, for Ibrahim, the plaza signifies information, and he interacts with this open environment almost daily to elevate his ability to acquire information, knowledge, and resources from any individuals whom he may come across. Appropriating the plaza for the acquisition of these assets entails bodily expressions of walking between downtown and the port of entry, circulating the plaza, sitting on its concrete surfaces, waiting and observing, seeing any activity at the port of entry, speaking with authorities and other migrants in the area, and searching for organizations for assistance. These daily, mundane activities which Ibrahim, and other migrants in similar circumstances, practice are what Sen and Silverman (2014) call 'embodied place-making' in which the body is a central actor in the construction of place, and "the city becomes a place where racialized and gendered experiences (among others categories) are performed through the acts of walking, mapping, seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling," (Zein 2020, 9). These activities are ritually performed with the hope of generating new social relations and learning bits of new information regarding U.S. border and asylum policies that may influence their current livelihood, as well as their future mobility.

The plaza, as a site of spending unstructured time, is transformed by migrants as they reclaim its empty, open, and public space and commodify it for gains of information and networking that will,

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ideally, assist in their planning, decision making, and action around their continued transnational migration. In early February, on the day I met Ibrahim, Yannick, and Ousmane outside of their hotel, Ibrahim had just come from the plaza where he spent several hours lingering around in his attempt to muster up any new information on the status of the border. He offered to take us back, and to orient me to a typical day of awaiting discoveries. Early on in our time together, I began to understand Ibrahim's dedication to the plaza when we ordered coffee from the nearby D'volada café, and the barista already knew his order. "I come here a lot," Ibrahim explained. Residing in Tijuana irregularly, on a visa overstay, Ibrahim was not employed consistently and often had to take odd jobs from carwashes or factories who would overlook his undocumented status. Ibrahim described how he comes to the plaza in search of information and organizations that can assist him with preparing his (future) asylum case in the United States, the additional unstructured time enabling him to devote a significant part of his days to waiting in the plaza.

Photo by Julia Hause: Plaza adjacent to El Chapparal port of entry, site of field interview, February 2, 2021

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Photo by Julia Hause: Overlooking the plaza from the pedestrian bridge, February 2, 2021

Through his days spent loitering, he made a connection who, every so often when they run into each other, provides him with some material assistance, such as food and clothing. He explained that Lucia, a Mexican American woman who informally organizes material aid for migrants in Tijuana, mostly deportees forcibly returned from the United States, facilitates her humanitarian work out of a shop in the plaza where she keeps donated and collected items to give to migrants in the city. Ibrahim reflected on their initial encounter, on a day while he was sitting on the same fountain we were currently occupying. The pair struck up a conversation, after which Lucia gave him some small material goods to help him with his stay in Tijuana. Our conversation diverged from Lucia and her humanitarian aid, yet later that afternoon, Ibrahim spotted her walking towards us in the plaza. Seeing her approach, Ibrahim smiled big and greeted her in Spanish, and then introduced me as well. She inquired if he, Yannick, or Ousmane needed any clothes, so they gave her their pant sizes and she disappeared into her shop to search for some items she might have laying around. After some time, the four of us got up from the fountain

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where we had spent the afternoon and walked over to her shop. Pulled up to the front of the store front, there was a small-sized white moving truck with a man unloading large bags of rice, loaves of bread, and other groceries. Ibrahim, Yannick, and Ousmane, jumped in to help carry items from the truck and pass them to Lucia in the shop. She emerged with some pants and sweatshirts for the guys, they thanked her and we left, making our way back to the pedestrian bridge towards the city center. Sitting at the plaza fountain passing the time, waiting to meet someone who might have new information about the border, connected Ibrahim to Lucia as a repeated source of material assistance. In describing their relationship, Ibrahim noted, "She comes from San Diego, so sometimes she comes [to Tijuana]. So, as I am sitting here, sometimes she sees me, and she calls me and I take some bags of food. If I have enough food, I share with some guys who are there [African migrants at the hotel]."

This utilization of open public space enables migrants to situate themselves within the urban landscape, claiming their right to the city, while simultaneously transforming that space into a resource for their temporary settlement and potentialities of onward migration. The embodied nature of these practices, enable migrants to make place for themselves without having to invest in settlement in any one physical location, as the rhythms of the plaza are centered in motion, verbal exchange, and waiting. Any 'profits' (relations, connections, information, aid) made from a trip to the plaza contribute towards gathering enough understanding on the border situation to assess reinitiating mobility.

As noted in Chapter 5, being Black in Tijuana's urban landscape is accompanied by surveillance and questions. Before it was Lucia who approached us in the plaza, it was a random Mexican couple from Oaxaca who questioned the presence of Ibrahim, Yannick, and Ousmane, and before them, it was a Mexican man shouting on the street "Haiti!" at these three African migrants. Exposing themselves to the urban environment often means eyes trailing them through that space, as Black migrants stand out among the general Mexican and migrant populations. In Tijuana, the tension between the physical and socio-political structures restricting the local mobility of migrants is constantly being negotiated through African and Haitian migrants' reconceptualization and manipulations of urban spaces despite these structural limits.

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7.4.2 Streets as business

The streets of Tijuana are additionally utilized as spaces to execute informal economies, where migrants practice street vending as their source of income generation, as well as occupy city asphalt of informal open-air markets for buying and selling of goods and services. In both of these settings, migrant vendors appropriate non-commercialized urban space, such as public streets, sidewalks, plazas, and traffic circles for their own, highly mobile, profit-making endeavors. For informal vending, migrants appropriate already existing public space, free urban infrastructure, to conduct their businesses and generate income to sustain their lives in the city. These 'mobile' businesses which are easily portable, disassembled and reassembled, provide activities of income generation for migrants outside of formal labor markets, while at the same time enabling migrants to easily, and swiftly, mobilize themselves in an event of reinitiating their migration projects, in that they have not invested their time or financial resources into a physical space of employment, or entrepreneurship, that may otherwise tie them to this urban locality.

In the informal open-air markets of the streets, *Calle Coahuila* and *Baja California*, migrants of diverse nationalities and local residents centralize their businesses to several streets which operate most days of the week, but to a larger scale on the weekends, where one can find anything from clothes, and produce, to new and used electronics and accessories. Haitian migrants, and to a lesser extent Africans, have a strong presence in the market as both vendors and shoppers, in which they have inserted themselves into this already established market infrastructure for both livelihoods, as well as to access cheap material goods and services. On the Sunday afternoon that I met Beatrice at the Haitian restaurant, we walked together to the market, as she suggested it was an ideal location to observe everyday life of Haitian and African migrants in the city. Just a few blocks away from the restaurant, we turned the corner onto *Baja California*, where the street exploded with vendors, chatter, and commotion. The street was lined with blankets laid on the ground advertising shoes, clothing, purses and bags, along with other accessories. Small event tents of various sizes were propped up sequentially selling similar items, loosely guarded by their vendors sitting next their tables of merchandise in fold-up chairs, yet more diligently conversing with friends and children sitting with them, other vendors, and shoppers who passed by. The

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presence of Black migrants in the market was prominent, Haitian vendors selling clothes were positioned adjacent to Mexican vendors selling phone accessories, while shoppers of various nationalities thronged through the streets, eyeing the various merchandise.

Turning right onto *Avenida Miguel F. Martinez,* vegetable stands lined the street where several Haitian and African migrants were selling fresh produce, followed by event tents propped up housing Haitian vendors selling culturally specific products of corn for cooking, body creams, drinks, hair pieces, and beauty products. Crowding both the sidewalks and the width of the street, we passed used clothing vendors and hair braiding tents run by Haitian migrants. As we walked through the market, Beatrice stopping periodically to purchase produce for the week, she commented that this market is helpful for people who do not have valid work permits, as they can come here and make money informally on the big market days of Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Seeing specific Haitian cultural products make it to the streets of Tijuana, Beatrice explained that Haitian vendors acquire them from cross-border networks, in which U.S. residents will bring products to Tijuana for them to sell to the Haitian population in the city.

While we navigated the crowded streets, Beatrice, still dressed in an elegant black skirt, blouse, and tailored jacket from the Sunday church service, was stopped by a young Haitian man inquiring of a church that she knew of for him to join. In that moment on the street, they exchanged Facebook accounts for her to send him the pastor's contact information. This quick, yet impactful interaction, revealed that the open-air markets serve not only as a means of income generation and affordable shopping, but additionally as a meeting place for building new social relations, local connections and contacts, and the acquisition of local knowledge. The open-air markets on these streets of *Zona Norte*, have cultivated such a participation of Black migrants in the city, that their presence and businesses transform this urban space successively over time, and even on a daily basis. The everyday activities of erecting and dismantling businesses, the capitalization of 'in the moment' opportunities of income generation, and the use of transnational networks in these informal spaces contribute to the fluidity, transience, and the ever-changing configurations of these markets.

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New products from cross-border trade and services, such as hair braiding, emerge in these markets that were likely not present in these same spaces even five years prior. Haitian and African migrants who utilize these spaces for goods and services contribute to making these spaces welcoming and accessible to other Black migrants who pass through the city. Additionally, these typically economic driven spaces, are recreated as spaces of community and relation building, information and resource sharing. Migrant vendors utilize street and market infrastructures to facilitate income and social capital generation to support everyday life. At the same time, the non-physicality of these businesses, which transcend the limits of urban architecture, enable movement within and from the city at any time.

7.5 Dwelling in temporality

The Sunday that Beatrice and I walked to the open-air market from the Haitian restaurant, was the same day that I first approached the Rodriguez Hotel and met Ibrahim and Abdoul. I had previously asked Beatrice about her networks with migrants of different nationalities, and if she knew any African migrants still residing in the city. Living in Tijuana for almost five years, she responded that everyone she knew had already left, as African migrants generally do not stay for too long before continuing across the border. She followed up this response with the name of a hotel that she knew was primarily inhabited by African migrants passing through the city, at least this was still the case a few years ago. Unsure of who or what we would find, we took our chances and walked down the street which she remembered the hotel being located, as it was also on our way to the market. As we neared the hotel, walking North in the direction of the border, Mexican shops and pedestrians began to drift behind us and the street transitioned into streams of Black life.

As we inched closer to the hotel, we passed a Black-owned, presumably Haitian, barber shop with their chairs full and an overflow of people standing outside of the building chatting on the sidewalk. As we reached the brightly colored hotel, Ibrahim was standing at the entrance and we were soon joined by Abdoul. As we spoke out front of the hotel, sharing my research and speaking briefly about their migration histories and how they found themselves in Tijuana, several migrants exited the hotel carrying a large wooden table and other pieces of furniture and placing it on the street. Ibrahim watched them do so,

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then looked to me and commented that they were about to leave town. The hotel, as he explained, at that time was occupied by mostly Cameroonians, Ghanaians, Guineans, as well as a few Malians and Haitians. A few days later when we met again, Ibrahim asked me if I remembered the migrants moving furniture outside of the hotel, which I did, and informed me that they received word that they had already been deported back to Haiti.

Hotels and migrant shelters offer obvious spaces of short-term dwelling for irregular migrants as they pass through multiple localities throughout their migration trajectories. In Tijuana, these short-term stays, for many, have prolonged to reach a year or several, dwelling in the same ‘temporary’ spaces where they sought shelter when they arrived. Despite their inadequacy as living spaces, migrants noted that staying in these temporary spaces was beneficial as they anticipated their transnational mobility at any moment, and as the private housing market was too expensive to rent and difficult to access as irregular migrants due to racial discrimination and xenophobia. Migrants who did manage to move into rental properties, either houses or single rooms, navigated their mobility through month-to-month rentals. The similarity between these three dwelling spaces, hotels, shelters, and homes, is that they were all conceived as temporary by the migrants who inhabited them. In conceptualizing the place-making practices of populations on the move, I build off Kihato (2013) notion of dwelling in temporality, and Everaert’s ‘inhabiting the meanwhile,’ in which migrants in localities of rupture “expand the meaning of home-making to one that allows for impermanence, movement, and temporary attachments,” (Everaet 2020, 8). In retaining the notion that transit migrants are constitutive in the transformation of the liminal cities which they encounter, African and Haitian migrants dwelling practices in Tijuana are grounded in their abilities to make claims to urban spaces, and in turn, reconfigure those spaces.

In exploring the dwelling spaces of migrants in Tijuana, it was evident that the common understanding of ‘home’ as a private space, as an investment, and a space of security and control (Zein 2020) were not applicable to most migrants’ experiences. Rather, due to the temporality of migrants’ ‘transit’ in Tijuana, their fluctuating immigration statuses, and insufficient incomes, migrants’ dwelling practices were largely situated in shared spaces that were non-private and lacked a need or ability to

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invest in those spaces. The racialized subjugation of African and Haitian migrants largely dictated the spaces which were available to them to live, in addition to the general competition between migrant groups for limited resources provided by civil society, such as shelter space. Gender and family dynamics also influenced inhabitation, as most African migrants are single men, but many Haitian migrants migrate in small family units with spouses and children. The desire for temporality in the city, influenced African and Haitian migrants' decisions stay in shelters or hotels where there was a lack of privacy and little control over their own lived environment. Therefore, spaces of dwelling for African and Haitian migrants were less about comfort and security, but rather a space of reprieve from the daily marginality which they experience in the city (Kihato 2013). As one of the only places migrants could exist in relative security and inclusion, their dwelling spaces become a place of socio-spatial confinement (Pasquetti and Picker 2017), particularly for migrant women who operate as the primary caretakers of their families.

In Tijuana, limited and unstable incomes often inspired migrants to share dwelling spaces with other migrants and families. For example, Esther and Darline shared their home with their spouses and children, and one other single Haitian migrant, making them a total of five adults in the house. The families shared the expensive housing costs as a way to cope with single adult incomes, as Esther and Darline took care of their children at home, and to make their protracted stay in the city less financially burdensome. In recalling how they each found the house, they noted their connections with other Haitian migrants who previously lived there, and left for either alternative housing or to cross the border. Darline and her spouse, replaced their cousin in the home, and Esther moved in after she met a migrant who was leaving for the U.S. In explaining how she found finally found the home, Esther noted her previous networks already in the city once she arrived:

"I lived at a friend's house when I arrived, who lived in *Libertad*, it's an area here near to the border. I was only there for a month and after I came to live here. I live with my husband. It is very difficult for immigrants in Tijuana. Because there is no work and the salary is minimum, so it doesn't correspond to the needs, the necessities, it's very difficult. The place I live is not comfortable but I have to, because it's very difficult to find a room to sleep, a place to rent in Tijuana, for immigrants. A friend of mine who was here in the house, they wanted to cross the border and that's the moment that I met them. I was looking a lot, but I couldn't find a house. But when the person left the house here, he passed his room to us. There isn't a contract, I pay the owner month by month," (Esther, Personal Interview, January 21, 2021).

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Their home was attached to the back of a larger house inhabited by a Mexican family, and was equipped with bare essentials which the families needed to cook and sleep. They noted that no other Haitian migrants lived immediately near them, that they only had Mexican neighbors. Their presence, and the circulation of Haitian migrants through this home in a Mexican neighborhood, actively altered the dynamics of the area. The two mothers noted that they left the house only out of necessity to go to the supermarket and occasionally church, but other than this they were often confined between the walls of their home. In sharing their living space, the two women expressed cooking and preparing meals together for their families, their home being one of the single sites of relative security and inclusion that they experienced in the city. Despite renting a home, these migrant women did not feel settled, imagining their futures elsewhere and anticipating their future mobility. The lack of investment in their dwelling space was attributed to their spouses' low salaries and the fact that both women expected to migrate to the U.S. relatively soon. As noted by Kihato (2013), for transmigrants, home in the liminal city is always temporary. With insecurity around livelihoods, stable and sufficient incomes, and uncertainty around migration, migrants' homes become sites of indefinite waiting, in which migrants do not aspire to financially or physically settle, yet the possibilities of their onward migration remain ambiguous.

One difference in the experiences of these two women, which informed their sentiments of security and mobility within the city, was their differing immigration status. Esther and her spouse, lived in Tijuana for a year and half with expired humanitarian visas, and therefore navigated the city irregularly. Darline obtained a permanent resident card during her seven months wait in Tapachula. In Tijuana, Darline's spouse was working for a local gas company, while Ester's spouse worked informally in odd-jobs that would arise, mostly assisting a shopkeeper and receiving a minimal wage and unstable work hours. Under Mexican nationality law (Consulado de Mexico 2021), Esther and her spouse were recently eligible for permanent residence cards as Esther gave birth to their daughter several months earlier in a Tijuana hospital. Although, they were blocked from doing so when the hospital wouldn't issue the child's birth certificate as they couldn't verify the mother's Haitian nationality, which is required.

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By the time I met Esther, this topic had surfaced in prior interviews with several other Haitian women. These women recounted that they were being asked to have their birth certificates legalized by the Haitian government to include their nationality on the Mexican birth certificate. With the political and social challenges which Haiti is currently engulfed, these women found it nearly impossible to have this done for them inside the country while they remained in Mexico. Without the child's Mexican birth certificate, migrant women cannot apply for permanent residence, which they need to access employment, healthcare, education, and other government services (Priya Morley et al. 2021a). Deputy Director Soraya Vazquez at *Al Otro Lado*, noted that recently this requirement changed to allow migrants to request a certified letter from their country-of-origin consulate located in Tijuana to verify their nationality. Yet, for Haitian women who do not have a comprehensive consulate office in the city, they still could not obtain the certified letter required and their child's birth documentation remained precarious.

For Esther, the missing birth certificate impacted her family's ability to sustain a life in the city, pushed to informal and insecure jobs and a lack of social benefits, and additionally prevented her family from migrating to the U.S. as they waited for the documentation. The circumstances Esther encountered in Tijuana left her and her daughter wallowing in informality, uncertainty, and immobility, and often isolated to their home. Despite these implications on their mobility, Esther's inhabitation of her home remained temporary. The shared home and month to month payments enabled her and her family to either pass on the room to another migrant, or leave the house at any time, as they are not tied to any formal contract. In our continued conversations over WhatsApp, Esther shared that Darline had left for the U.S. just weeks after our interview, but she remained as they still lacked her daughter's documents. Six months later, in June 2021, I received a message from Esther that they finally received the birth certificate and are planning to cross into the U.S. as soon as possible.

The Rodriguez Hotel was a site of mixed dwelling, where African and some Haitian migrants resided during their anticipated 'transit' through Tijuana before crossing the border. Migrants typically pass through the hotel for only a few days before continuing their migration, yet due to the border closure in early 2020 in response to COVID-19, several migrants have been residing in the hotel for over a year.

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Residents lamented over the unsanitary living conditions of the hotel and the racist and exploitative management of its exclusively Black and largely undocumented clientele, yet that there are few other housing alternatives to support their temporary stays in the city. To avoid committing to expensive rental properties, dealing with discriminatory property owners, and navigating competitive shelter space, the hotel offered one of the only spaces for African migrants, mostly single men, to have housing in the city. Yet, in this space they were confronted by racist management practices which created an insecure, policed, and violent living environment for its Black residents.

Ibrahim was living at the hotel since he arrived in Tijuana in early 2020 and recounted many of the behaviors which they were forced to tolerate in this space. He explained that the staff regularly called the police and threatened the residents if they paid rent past 12 pm or if they make simple complaints about the hotel conditions. "He comes with knife. 'GO OUT! I'll call immigration!" Ibrahim mimicked the hotel staff. "They once called immigration on certain guys, and immigration came and put them on a chain, handcuffed them, but with a long chain. So, whenever we complain about something, they say 'call immigration so they chain these people," he explained. The hotel, the dwelling space of hundreds of African migrants at a time, becomes another site of their 'arrested mobilities' (Boano and Astlofo 2020) beyond the nation-state borders which dictate and disrupt their mobility, to the localization of their living spaces. The hotel staff cultivate an environment of fear and insecurity where undocumented residents might encounter immigration enforcement at any time, even within the boundaries of their make-shift 'home.' Migrant residents' irregularity subjects them to a position of subordination by the hotel staff, where they have little ability to hold them accountable due to concern of their own detection by local police and immigration authority. This enables the hotel staff to police and surveil their own residents, and maintain the poor living conditions through instilling fear and docility. Yannick, a former resident of the hotel, reflected that the staff would often restrict the water so that residents could not use it. The selective restriction of water limited the control residents had over their lived environment and dwelling practices.

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"I used to pay 4,500 pesos [per month] in the hotel. I was staying there for two months, and I still have to go out to buy water to flush the toilet. I had to go out and buy water to take a shower. Because they [hotel staff] are the ones who are controlling when they open and close the tap, [only] when they want to take a shower," (Yannick, Personal Interview, February 2, 2021).

Despite the insecurity, exploitation, and violence which the hotel's Black residents experience, residents navigate the hotel rates by sharing rooms with 4-5 migrants at a time, usually without the knowledge of the hotel management and endure the poor living conditions as they understand their stay to be temporary. As noted at the beginning of this section, the prominence of African and Haitian migrant residents at this hotel has transformed the area and the infrastructure surrounding it. Situated adjacent to the open-air market, and only a few blocks from El Chapparal port of entry, the location of the hotel serves residents in the informal daily practices which they execute to survive in the city, while also enabling them pick up and leave instantaneously.

Migrant shelters were the third space of dwelling which African and Haitian migrants inhabited during their stays in the city. Little Haiti, a shelter comprised of a series of concrete buildings built next to the church, *Igelisa Embajadores De Jesús,* where hundreds of Haitian migrants initially sought shelter when they arrived in 2016, was developed with the objective of providing permanent shelter for Haitian migrants settling in Tijuana. Led by the Mexican pastor of the church, Pastor Gustav Banda Aceves, the construction of the buildings began in 2016, but was stalled due to their development in an environmental risk zone, leaving only several of the planned 100 houses actually built (Alarcon Acosta and Ortiz Esquivel 2017). At the time of fieldwork, the shelter housed around 80 migrants who were living communally in the buildings. Residents were comprised of couples and families, as the shelter limited housing to Haitian families. The construction of this shelter aimed to help fill an incredible need for housing for Haitian migrants as they began to settle in the city (Marchand and Ortega Ramírez 2019). The shelter provides free housing, which is critical for irregular migrants who find challenges in accessing employment and provides a high degree of mobility for those not intending on settling long-term.

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Photo: Entrance to 'Little Haiti' shelter; Source: KPBS News, July 9, 2021

The shelter, tucked away in a canyon *colonia* just 9 km southwest of the city center, feels worlds away from the bustling border. The dirt road which leads to the conglomeration of several concrete buildings etched into a hillside is littered with roaming chickens and neighborhood children. The informality of their communal dwelling feels outside of the state's gaze in this peripheral enclave, in which possibilities for their irregularity are expanded by the relative protection that this secluded space brings. On the first morning that I visited the shelter, I approached the wooden gate leading into the compound which read "if you do not live here, do not enter." Inside the compound, women crowded the common areas, washing clothes to hang on the lines which hung above the courtyard and preparing food. In sitting down with residents, many initially reflected on their appreciation for the shelter, after which they would reveal the lack of comfortability they felt with the communal living conditions, which limited any possibility of privacy or personal control over the living environment. Most residents were seeking

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alternative housing options to transition to, or were preparing to cross the border soon, and therefore the shelter served as simply a transit point.

Several residents noted that they had little say in the organization of their inhabitation at the shelter. To manage the communal living and cooking space, as well as food resources which were often donated to the shelter, the residents practiced communal cooking and shared meals, in which weekly food money was collected from each family by one of the church leaders to make food purchases. Inter-resident conflicts arose when some families couldn't pay the weekly food allotment, but the shelter organizers ensured everyone still ate regardless of financial contribution. In discussing outside humanitarian assistance, one resident noted that while organizations come to the shelter to offer medical services and leave aid, the aid that they leave is often not redistributed to the Haitian residents, and rather partitioned by the organizers to other residents and migrants of the neighborhood. One Haitian woman reflected on a recent circumstance of this management:

"Yesterday, an organization from the U.S. came, they brought milk for the babies, but she [shelter organizer] took all the milk that the organization brought, like one box of milk for each baby, and she made one box of milk for two persons... I can't talk with her because she has the power and when she does her thing, I don't know how it was before, that's why I can't talk. But I see things," (Little Haiti resident, Personal Interview, January 14, 2021).

Despite the initial objective of Little Haiti to develop into a neighborhood for Haitian migrants and a welcome center for new migrants arriving, most of the residents inhabiting this space interpreted their stay as temporary. Yet, the construction of this place has transformed this *colonia,* through the physical architecture, the demographics of its residents, as well as through the ways outside organizations interact with this area as the shelter continuously draws in aid and on-site services from both local and international organizations.

Dwelling in the temporality of 'home,' migrants experienced a lack of control and privacy in their living spaces and practices. Yet, these domestic spaces remained a site of much time spent in the city, particularly for women not engaged in outside income generating activities. Confronted with insecurities, exclusions, and uncertainties in Tijuana's public sphere, these spaces offered a relative reprieve of

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security, inclusion, and agency not felt or found elsewhere in the city. Unstructured time outside of work or organizing migration was almost exclusively spent in domestic spaces, as migrants did not have many places, nor the financial ability, to spend time in other areas of the city. Migrant residents of the Rodriguez Hotel noted spending free time together in their hotel rooms, while other migrants who rented houses reflected on the small social gatherings with migrant friends or co-workers to off-set the urban exclusion and confinement which their dwelling spaces brought.

7.6 Conclusion

Despite their temporality, migrants in the liminal city are impactful through their (re)use and (re)creation of urban space, and therefore are active participants in the ever-transforming urbanization of those places. This chapter exemplified the ways in which African and Haitian migrants make place for themselves amid Tijuana's urban landscape through the use of already existing urban infrastructure to both endure their everyday lives in the city, while also maintaining ideas and possibilities around reinitiating their migration projects. Within Tijuana's built environment, Haitian migrants reconfigure Mexican churches for their own religious practices and creation of spaces of urban belonging. Likewise, Haitian restaurants emerge as sites utilized by African and Haitian migrants to find welcoming commercialized urban spaces. In public open space, these migrants make place for themselves within plazas and the various city streets for their personal and economic gains. In their dwelling practices, Africans and Haitians practice temporality which helps to maintain the possibilities for their future mobility. The reconfiguration of bound and unbound urban infrastructure reveals practices of making place which produce enclaves of space which is welcoming, and fosters sentiments of belonging, protection, endurance, and joy, in spite of the daily structural inequalities and violence inflicted on and towards Black migrants in the city.

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Chapter 8: "It's better to live in the cold in Maine than die in Cameroon"

8.1 Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has presented the various thresholds which emerge in the city that African and Haitian migrants encounter, navigate, and contest in their everyday lives (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 argued that migrants in their temporary settlement in Tijuana develop and employ a myriad of social connections and networks, along with other mobile commons, to make life in this city possible. Chapter 7 showed how practices of place-making in transit are constitutive processes which impact the transformation of urban space and urbanization, while continually maintaining the potentiality for migrants' future mobility. In this chapter, I show that rather than accepting Mexico as a country of asylum or residence, migrants in Tijuana actively refute global asylum systems which aim to control and confine them to certain nation states based on geopolitics and proximity rather than choice. I argue that African and Haitian migrants manage their transnational mobility and contest these institutionalized restrictions through maneuvering around their assigned immigration statuses, or non-statuses, in Mexico, and through building transnational social relations to support them in the anticipated blockages and disruptions they encounter as they embark on destinations beyond Mexico.

In this chapter, I explore the desires, preparations, and movements of migrants in Tijuana to cross-border destinations through their contestation of border and asylum regimes which aim to contain them in Mexico. Within the autonomy of migration approach, De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli develop "autonomy of asylum" as a reimagination of the theory through the lens of refugee studies and juridical regimes of asylum. The autonomy of asylum thesis recognizes that the historical formation of the international juridical asylum regime is based in government efforts to contain and manage excess human movements, and therefore asylum is rooted in the politicized struggle over refugee and migrant mobility. In this approach, these regimes are put into question by centering the negotiations, contestations, and often times, outright refusals to these systems made by those who attempt to access them in their quest for mobility and international protection.

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This analysis, from the perspective of African and Haitian migrants' onward migration from Tijuana, looks at the "radical practices of freedom enacted by migrants/refugees," (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018, 242-243) to infuse desire and choice into their mobility, the conditions of their "refugee-ness," (248) and claims of asylum. The first section situates the autonomy of asylum within migrants' practices of actualizing their onward migration to aspired destinations. Within these various activities and practices, in the following section, I re-expose the concept of 'mobile commons' to explore migrant digitalities and transnational social networks as sites of preparation and organization in migrants' efforts to reinitiate their mobility to destinations beyond Mexico.

8.2 Maneuvering Mexico's immigration regime

As discussed in Chapter 5, Mexico is often not considered a sufficient country of destination or refuge by African and Haitian migrants who temporarily settle there for several reasons. The economic conditions which migrants encounter consisting of low wages, expensive housing and living costs, and the limited labor market options make settling in Mexico challenging as they attempt to sustain themselves, their families, and often times, family back home. Additionally, linguistic barriers, racism, violence, overall insecurity, as well as strong social network ties to family and friends in the U.S., contribute to migrants' determinations to leave Mexico. Continued violence, instability, and political persecution in countries of origin and previous residence maintain migrants' inability to return to those places, suspending them between their pasts, present realities in Mexico, and imagined futures elsewhere.

In migration theory discourse, Collins (2018) introduces 'desire' as a lens through which to analyze and understand migration drivers and outcomes. In theorizing migration beyond economic drivers and as malleable flows between global push-pull factors, desire as a migration theory enables the consideration of not only agency in migratory decision-making, but also the innate aspirations of migrants on the move which are often neglected within migration literature (Collins 2018). This neglect has been driven by the misconception that desire and aspiration are almost luxury emotions not afforded to lower-class and/or irregular migrants. Yet, as argued by Collins (2018) through the social theories of Deleuze and Guattari, "desire constitutes the human condition, the continual attempt to reaffirm our status as a

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becoming-subject," (967). Therefore, desire is inseparable from the human condition and is an active energy which draws in various bodies, objects, and ideas together to form social worlds.

Similarly, choice and agency are characteristics of migration which have been largely ignored in migration and refugee studies, and within the broader global juridical refugee and asylum regimes. Those on the move seeking international protection are most often portrayed as vulnerable victims rife with desperation who do not have any option but to "accept the conditionality and the limitations of the asylum regime in a sort of 'losing game' game dynamic: the price of becoming an asylum seeker is presumed to involve a sort of forfeiture of migrants' autonomy of movement and freedom of choice," in which "to seek protection is fashioned as a voluntary submission to a regime that authorizes itself to decide for and dispose of 'refugees' as its docile supplicants," (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018, 246). Any divergence from or resistance to this compliance assumes an illegitimacy to their claims. Disobedient asylum seekers are positioned as mere 'economic migrants' attempting to take advantage of the system, in which their desperation is measured by wealthy nation states as unsatisfactory in that they refuse to forgo all autonomous thought to comply with the rules of asylum regimes globally. Conversely, autonomy of asylum recognizes migrant mobility and claims to international protection as existing largely outside the pre-determined notions of seeking refuge, in which movements of people in their efforts to reach aspired conditions and destinations of asylum occur autonomously of these regimes, yet not removed from their structures of power which seek to control them. In turn, these movements which defy and challenge migration and asylum management systems, force these systems to continually adapt.

African and Haitian migrants have increasingly been subjected to Mexico's asylum regime, in which affording them protection in Mexico is meant to limit their onward migration to northern North American countries. Mexico emerges as an "obligatory space of asylum" (De Genova, Garelli, Tazzioli 2018, 251), as irregular migrants, due to global immigration regimes, are required to transit through various in-between spaces to reach aspired destinations and fall into policies of containment where they are pressured to claim asylum in intermediary places. Through documenting migrant narratives of circumvention and negotiation of these processes, migrant mobilities illustrate their "flights from capture

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within the meshes of power enacted by the asylum regime itself," (De Genova, Garelli, Tazzioli 2018, 251).

I argue that these migrants, rather than accepting their liminal status in Mexico, actively negotiate their place within Mexico's immigration regime, as well as the international asylum legal system, in that despite the immigration statuses (and non-statuses) afforded to them in Mexico, migrants remain focused on choosing their country of protection, rather than being dictated one. Through their mobility practices, migrants present a refusal to being a "problem to be solved," (Simone 2019, 23), in that affording any sort of legal status in Mexico resolves their challenges of displacement and marginalization, as well as relieves the U.S of its man-made 'crisis of rights and responsibility' (Torres 2018) whose policies and geopolitical pressures strategically evade affording international protection to those at their borders.

Through their cross-border mobility, these migrants actively contest and negotiate asylum and border regimes of exclusion, yet their border struggles (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) remain enmeshed within them. Despite their 'stuckness' in Mexico, African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana continue to choose their country of asylum and their conditions of 'refugee-ness' by circumventing, contesting, and appropriating the Mexican immigration and asylum regime and associated legal statuses. Below I will detail two separate narratives to exemplify the ways in which these practices of asylum negotiation took place in Tijuana. It should be noted that through these narratives, it is not my intention to emplace the individual autonomy or agency of migrants as the sole driving force of their mobility practices, but rather feature examples of the ways in which migrants collectively enhance and actualize their mobility and claims to international protection in opposition to the structural barriers imposed on them.

After trekking from Brazil, Yannick emerged from Central America in late 2019, where he entered the Mexican state of Chiapas and was taken to the *Siglo XXI* detention center in Tapachula. He noted at that time, there were several thousands of Cameroonian migrants in the city. He was in Tapachula at the height of Mexico's attempt to funnel African and Haitian migrants through the asylum system as a response to pressure from the U.S. to curb all northbound migration. In discussing his time in detention, Yannick noted that he, among others, were actively protesting the processing of asylum in

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Mexico, in which he participated in a three-day hunger strike to contest the rendering of African migrants as 'stateless,' subsequently resulting in permanent residence in the country. He continued to refuse pressure to apply for asylum, and eventually emerged from detention and remained undocumented as he transited to Tijuana. During an interview, discussing his aspirations for onward migration from Mexico, Yannick explained to me, "I am waiting to claim asylum. I want to claim asylum in America. I studied in English. Why would I waste my life here, no one understands me here; my life is at risk here."

While Yannick felt, as a Black migrant in Mexico, unsafe and insecure, his sentiments quoted above also reveal the explicit desire he had to 'save' his asylum claim for the U.S., as his chosen destination to seek international protection. His language and education background foregrounded his aspirations for a better life in the U.S., with security, legal status, and access to a beneficial economy. The efforts he made in Tapachula to evade and circumvent the asylum system, to him, were necessary in order to emerge without any legal ties to Mexico that could negatively impact an asylum claim in the United States. In Tijuana, Yannick navigated life undocumented for a year as he awaited the border to reopen to claim asylum legally at a port of entry. Several weeks after I left Mexico, I heard from Yannick that he could no longer wait in the city as he wasn't working and feared he needed medical attention for his worsening gastro-intestinal illness. In a matter of days, he left to cross the border irregularly while it remained closed. After Yannick crossed into the U.S., I received a few updates on him while he remained in immigration detention from Ibrahim, who was in contact with a mutual friend of theirs that Yannick was calling from detention. Yannick re-emerged at the end of May when he contacted me over WhatsApp from a U.S. number. He informed me that after over 100 days in detention, he had won his asylum case and was staying with family. Yannick's evasion of Mexico's asylum procedures, in the end, paid off as he was able to make his asylum claim in his refuge country of choice, rather than being subjected to remain in a country simply due to geopolitical pressures and international legal scripts.

While undocumented, as well as temporarily protected, migrants in Mexico actively sought to continue their migration to the U.S. as their preferred country of destination for international protection, migrants who obtained permanent residence in Mexico were also active in imagining their futures and

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acting on desires to migrate out of Mexico. For African and Haitian migrants, permanent residence was usually obtained by a positive resolution in their asylum case, by being determined stateless, or by giving birth to children in Mexico. While some migrants received permanent residence against their will through asylum procedures they didn't want to partake in, others obtained residence as a strategy of survival in Mexico despite knowing they would not settle there permanently. Evens navigated permanent residence in the latter way. Arriving to Tijuana a year before, Evens' partner gave birth to their child in Tijuana, and therefore under Mexican law they were both eligible for permanent residence. While he applied and received residence in Mexico, he noted in our interviews that he had no intention of settling in Tijuana, but rather planned on migrating to the U.S. when an opportunity arose.

"Yes, [I plan] to continue the route, because my family there in Haiti, they look for me to send them help, but here there isn't an opportunity to do that," he said. I inquired when he thought he might try and cross the border, "I am waiting for the disease, Coronavirus," he responded. "In one month, two months, three months, I don't know. I am waiting for the situation to improve. I know people who have crossed into the U.S., but there are no papers. But they live like that. It isn't good because there are no papers, but they work anyway. And it's better than here." I asked him, due to his residence, what he knew about Mexican citizenship, if citizenship in a country was even important to him. "I don't think it will expire [permanent residence card]," he responded. "But I don't know. I heard from people who said that if you stay here for 10 years I can go to immigration and they will give me an opportunity for a passport here, for Mexican nationality. But 10 years here, without going. I don't know. I don't want to do that because I going to try to go there [the U.S.] for my family, because my family is not good."

For Evens, accessing a permanent residence card in Mexico gave him the security of legality in the country, as he and his family resided there indefinitely in their wait to migrate to the U.S., but it did not serve as a motivator for him to set down more permanent roots in the city, nor did the prospect of citizenship in the future. Despite his status, he made his own decisions on whether to settle or to try migrating, citing his family, both with him and back home, as primary motivators to continue to a better life and economic conditions in the United States. Even residing in the U.S. irregularly was a more

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attractive option than his reality in Mexico. In this way, Evens manipulated his ability to settle in Mexico for merely temporary gains, while maintaining his sights on onward destinations. A few months after we met, my messages ceased to pass through to his Mexican WhatsApp number. I contacted his vending partner, still in Tijuana, who informed me that Evens had crossed with his family into California. While Evens did not obtain permanent residence specifically through Mexico's refugee agency as an asylum claim, the residency outcome was the same. In this way, he actively appropriated and contested Mexico's immigration regime simultaneously, in which he manipulated his access to an immigration status to afforded him security in Mexico, while knowingly leaving that status behind to reach his preferred country of destination acts as a refusal to the national and international legal systems which seek to keep him across the border.

Evens' migratory trajectory which led him from his home country of Haiti, to several years living in the Dominican Republic, to relocating briefly to Chile and leaving Chile due to difficulty obtaining a visa and rampant anti-Black racism, to migrating through ten countries to reach Mexico through which he received permanent residence, just to leave again for a final chance at a life and protection in the U.S., exemplifies the intensity through which desire and "incorrigibility" (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018, 245) operates in the minds and activities of migrants and refugees. Additionally, it is the "appropriation of political spaces where the borders of asylum's institutional politics are contested and where refugees' subjectivity breaks out of the forced mobility trap through their efforts to exercise the freedom to choose their own pathways for life in refuge, demanding an alternative variety of protection that differs from and exceeds the official humanitarian pathways that are offered," (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018, 252). Evens' unwavering objection to exclusionary immigration regimes and normative procedures of protection enabled him to maneuver through border regime after border regime to finally arrive at his chosen country of protection. Although I've lost touch with Evens since crossing the border, On May 21, 2021 the U.S. declared an 18-month Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for all Haitian nationals presently in the country. With the high denial rate of Haitians within the U.S. asylum

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system, which was 86% between 2012-2017 (Yan 2018), TPS is an alternative avenue to gain protection for thousands for Haitians residing there, which if still in the U.S., Evens too would now be eligible for.

Appropriating Mexico's immigration policy to secure work authorization and public benefits while still maintaining ideas around onward migration was practiced by other Haitian interlocutors as well. Although, due to bureaucratic barriers not all who aimed to achieve permanent residency in Mexico were successful. Similar to Esther (in Chapter 7), Tamara, a Haitian mother, experienced challenges receiving her son's birth certificate from the hospital she gave birth in Tijuana, and therefore could not apply for permanent residence without the documentation. Two years ago, her and her spouse left Venezuela after six years of residence and migrated to Mexico with hopes of reaching the U.S. When they arrived in northern Mexico, her spouse crossed the border with one of their children alone, but was deported back to Haiti. Since his deportation, Tamara has been a single parent of two, residing in the Little Haiti shelter, without an ability to apply for permanent residence which would enable her to find stable employment in the city. Tamara estimated that she would be waiting in Tijuana for 3-4 more years, or however long it took for her husband to make the route again to meet each other in the border town. After which, she reflected, their plan was to cross into the U.S., again. Accessing permanent residence in Mexico would create access to aspects of life which Tamara currently does not have. While she doesn't maintain ideas of permanent settlement, the indeterminacy of her time there makes residency an important strategy and resource for survival.

These several narratives which reflect the circumvention, appropriation, and contestation of Mexico's immigration and asylum regimes reveal the ways in which African and Haitian migrants, despite policies and pressures to remain in the country, navigate these regimes through their own desire and choice for mobility. Through their disobedience, regional and global asylum politics are disrupted and delegitimized by the very actors who access these regimes, exposing the deficiencies and malleability of systems of exclusion, conditionality, and control. The next section will discuss the role of migrant digitalities and transnational social networks in preparing to migrate from Mexico, as well as how mobile commons are utilized to organize and actualize mobility in the face of carceral border regimes.

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8.3 Preparing migration: migrant digitalities and transnational social networks

On a street overlooking the border, we sat in John's parked car as rain lightly let loose over Tijuana, the dark clouds filling the sky and casting a bleakness across the city's already lackluster infrastructure. We had just finished the interview with the three Haitian migrants, Anel, David, and Frantz, in the city center. I had asked John, who at this point in my research was a critical artery for conducting interviews with Haitian migrants as an interpreter and gatekeeper to multiple field sites, to sit down and have a more intentional conversation about his experiences in Tijuana, beyond the bits of information I had learned from him as we spent time together over the few weeks of field work. He graciously agreed, and due to the recent U.S. administration change just a few days before, we spent some time discussing this current moment on the border.

The previous day, he had mentioned that migrants were traveling to an adjacent border town, Tecate, to cross irregularly into the U.S. and paying guides a couple hundred dollars to cross. He mentioned another border town, Acuña, across from Texas, that migrants were traveling to as another irregular point of entry. He said he knew a guide who called and informed him that he was taking migrants across from Tecate for $200-300, but John refused to pass his information along to anyone because he knew many migrants were just getting returned to Mexico, or worse, deported back to Haiti. He opened his phone and located a WhatsApp message which was sent to him containing a video. He played the video which revealed a green, isolated, landscape on the ridge of a river. The green grass was tall, lush trees lined the river bank, and a tall metal tower loomed on the other side. A young man's voice spoke over the video in Haitian Creole, which I didn't understand, but John informed me that he was explaining that the tower on the other side of the river was the U.S., and that he was about to cross the river to reach the other side. This migrant was in Acuña, documenting and publishing his anticipated border crossing on the social media application, TikTok, sharing with others his migratory experiences.

Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos (2015) emplace digital technology into migrants' everyday lives of struggle and mobility in which they argue, "digitalities must be fully integrated into the social, not as 'add on' or 'external' devices, but as fully interwoven dimensions of existence, praxis, and

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living," (11). Through centering digital technology as a means of mobility knowledge production and circulation, migrant digitalities are a method of elevating agency and reproducing "new socialities" as well as "infinite new plateaux for praxis that reshape the borders, social space, citizenships, and living," (12) that takes place along migration trajectories and in the urban centers they encounter. The video which John shared with me, is just one example of how social media platforms are being utilized by migrants as digital spaces of connectivity and knowledge transfer to enhance the mobility of others. It also reveals the ways in which migrants creatively employ applications, beyond their intentional use, to navigate and contest strict border regimes and share those experiences. As noted throughout this thesis, WhatsApp is another digital platform which was used extensively throughout migrants' journeys and periods of settlement as they connect with others around them and maintain relations with those who've they been separated from, both on the route, back home, and in their aspired destinations. In Chapter 7, I briefly engaged the ways in which WhatsApp was used in Haitian church groups to share critical information, news, and updates on U.S border politics. Additionally, WhatsApp groups were generated between migrants and local organizations in which organization staff would share news on the border with migrants residing in Tijuana. In our interview, Amine explained his digital networks which support him in gathering information on the border situation. As a member of a 'Black Lives Matter' WhatsApp group with the local organization, *Espacio Migrante*, he would receive articles and updates. As he notes in the excerpt below, migrant created groups also served particular purposes along migration trajectories.

"We have a platform, it's basically a platform of *Espacio Migrante*, but it's 'Black lives Matter.' It's where the director often shares immigration information. It's in this platform, there are many migrants in there, every time they publish immigration information. We have here a platform, but it doesn't work anymore. It was created to help people who have disappeared. It is for Cameroonians who find themselves in Tijuana. As many have left [across the border], the group doesn't work anymore. But we take information from the Black Lives Matter WhatsApp group. There are Africans, Americans, a Brazilian, Haitians, it is a mix [of people]," (Amine, Personal Interview, January 31, 2021).

According to Haitian interlocutors, various technology platforms were critical for staying informed and gathering news particular to U.S. border and immigration politics in Creole, including radio stations, television channels, Facebook Live and YouTube, which helped in their own decision-making

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regarding migration. It should be noted that in discussing the use of digital platforms as a strategy of mobility, I do not aim to elevate the "connected migrant figure" (Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos 2015, 41) as exceptional, but rather to add to literature which recognizes digital networks and platforms as interconnected in the everyday lives of migrants and people on the move. My discussion, then, is to highlight the ways in which every day digital connections and engagement are employed in migrants' efforts to be mobile themselves, as well as maintain pathways of mobility for others.

In addition to news outlets advising migrants on the border, Haitian migrants, in particular, noted their social networks in the U.S. as resources to advising on the border situation. Migrants' transnational social networks cannot be discussed without recognizing the incredible connectivity which digital technology brings to creating and facilitating relations across the globe. In this way, migrant mobility and the circulation of mobile commons are not removed from digitality, rather social assemblages within the city are elevated through the calibrated use of digital platforms to collect and share contacts and information. These digital platforms are not only used to connect family and friends in the diaspora, but enable a myriad of other social relations which assist in migrants' organization and preparation for their onward migration. For African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana, this calibration entailed engaging various transnational social actors, including family, friends, co-migrants, and organizations, to gather credible information on the border, collect contacts of pro-bono lawyers, connect with organizations who pay immigrant bail bonds, and develop sponsorship contacts to prepare for the moments and procedures which arise after crossing the border.

As noted by Amine in one of our interviews, "The problem is not detention. It is the bail you have to pay to leave detention." While systemic inequalities in immigrant bail bonds are under researched, one U.S. based organization in Texas which supports an immigrant bail fund found that between 2018-2020, Haitian migrants were subjected to bonds that were 54% higher than other immigrants they served (RAICES 2020). This organization cited an average bail bond of $10,500 USD, while Haitian immigrants were posted at an average of $16,170. The predatory immigration bail bond system prompts migrants to plan ahead on how they will pay to leave immigration detention once they encounter U.S. border officials,

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as well as where they will go once released. Both African and Haitian interlocutors noted the knowledge circulation of U.S. based organizations who support immigrant bail funds and legal representation between migrants, as each individual worked to gather contacts, phone numbers, and names of people who might be able to help them once on the other side. On the day that I approached the Rodriguez Hotel and initially met Ibrahim and Abdoul, we stood outside the hotel talking about the challenges of preparing such contacts and accessing them once in U.S. immigration detention. Abdoul noted that he didn't know of any organization yet which helps to pay for immigrant's release from detention, which prompted Ibrahim to share with him a U.S. organization, Cameroon American Council, which supports Black immigrants in bail bond payments.

Several days after this encounter, Ibrahim informed me that he was in communication with several migrants who had already crossed into the U.S., who advised him to cross the border in Mexicali, another border town just east of Tijuana. He divulged that he was contemplating this, as he had lost hope in the border opening anytime soon, and saw an irregular crossing as his only option. In a few days, he said, he would probably be gone from the city. A few days turned into several weeks, as the continued deportations of African and Haitian migrants from the U.S. made crossing the border even more risky, coupled with a cold which effectively deterred Ibrahim from leaving Tijuana in the middle of a global pandemic. In mid-March, he informed me that he recently was connected with a U.S. based organization, Human Rights First, which was helping him to apply for humanitarian parole, which, if granted, would enable him to enter legally at a U.S. port of entry. In a WhatsApp voice message, he explained that the organization provided him with a lawyer and he located a family he knows in the U.S. to sponsor him on his application. As he spoke, he was on his way to take his psychological consultation to accompany his application, but was feeling skeptical of his chances as low numbers of humanitarian parole applications receive approvals.[13] In the voice message he continued, that if he was denied for parole, he would have no

[13] U.S. Government Accountability Office (2008) report analyzed case outcomes between 2001-2007 and found a 24% approval rate of humanitarian parole cases.

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option but to cross the border irregularly, and "continue my way as the others have done so far," (Ibrahim, WhatsApp, March 15, 2021).

Just a month later I received a message from him that he was granted humanitarian parole, and was currently living in a city on the West Coast of the U.S, staying with his sponsorship family. In my conversations with Ibrahim, during fieldwork and the several months afterwards, he was consistently interconnected with local organizations, their services, and mobilizing support and organizing advocacy for African migrants in Tijuana. This interconnectivity that he had with organizations in Tijuana, and across the U.S., along with his engagement in community organizing, ultimately culminated in his ability to seek asylum in the U.S. legally, as he initially had planned and hoped for. While humanitarian parole does not guarantee him asylum, it enables him to proceed with the process in the U.S. rather than trapped in Mexico or in immigration detention.

Ibrahim's story on how he finally arrived in the U.S. shows the importance of transnational social networks, between relatives, migrants, and "communities of justice," (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 191) which through these connections, preparation for migration is made possible. As asylum protection is inherently a regime of exception and exclusion, the expansiveness and creativity which migrants practice through multiple social spheres is imperative to actualize migration projects. Similarly, the following narrative of Amine highlighting his navigation of legality, digitalities, and transnational social networks, reveals how migrants actively contest the limits of asylum regimes through their petitions for protection, while in the same stroke, their refusal "to accept the spatial traps and restrictions imposed by the asylum regime's 'rules of the game'," (De Genova, Garelli, Tazzioli 2018, 248) in which migrants actively inscribe choice, desire, and agency in their trajectories for claiming international protection within systems that were never intended or designed to recognize such power.

As detailed in Chapter 5, Amine embarked on his asylum process in Mexico when he arrived in Tapachula in 2019. As Cameroon does not have consular representation in Mexico, he was determined stateless and issued permanent residence. Despite his legal status in Mexico, this was not his intended or aspired destination and he maintained plans to migrate to the U.S. to seek international protection there.

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For Amine, Mexico was not a destination where he could find security, or economic stability to take care of his family back home, and felt additional barriers to life in Mexico due to linguistic differences and prevalent racism. At the time I met Amine in Tijuana in late January, his focus was to leave the city soon, and therefore was contemplating the complications of having permanent residence as he attempts to enter the U.S., as well as the foreseen barriers to paying immigration bail. An additional challenge for Amine was where to go once released from detention, as he did not have any close relatives or friends living in the country. In discussing his preparation, I curiously asked Amine how he understood his chances of entering the U.S. while obtaining permanent residence in Mexico. "There is a person who passes [the border] with the card, and there's no problem. [Others] they are sent back to Mexico. The other has a chance to pass and follow a normal process in the United States," he explained. "I know two or three people with who I traveled the route, and they went to the U.S. and had the permanent residence card. They crossed. It has been six months… [At the house] We are all Cameroonians. We had a Togolese migrant but he already left to the U.S. He is in the U.S. now. He also had the permanent residence card and he is in the U.S., no problem. That's why I said some pass, and some do not."

During this conversation, Amine he was extremely conscious of the implications his permanent residence status in Mexico had on his chances to enter the U.S. successfully, as opposed to being returned to Mexico or deported. Yet, the mixed results he had seen from other migrants in similar situations complicated his understanding around what will likely happen to him when he decides to cross the border. He continued to reflect on the most recent situation of migrants crossing that he knew of, "Last week, there were six people who crossed, and they sent back all six. This week four people crossed, and they sent back one person. But they did it [crossed] in different places. Because last time it was six in the same place and they sent back all six. This time, they crossed at different places. We don't have the news of the other people. That means they haven't been sent back [to Mexico]. The people who have been sent back, they call us." It was evident that despite the uncertainty and risk, crossing the border was something Amine was determined to do. His engagement with migrant networks continual served to update him, in real time, on the border situation and the possible outcomes for himself when the time came to cross.

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The second time we met, a week after the first, and at the same café in *Zona Rio*, Amine elaborated on his mental state in that current moment. Since our first meeting, in the time span of just that week, increased movement had re-awoken the 'irregular border'[14] as the Biden administration settled into their first few days in office. News of the movement trickling back to migrants residing in the city sparked new sentiments of urgency, stress, and anticipation. "At this moment, you think that you have to enter, [but] I don't know how it will go. You don't know if they will send you [back] here. You reflect on how you will enter, all that. Waiting for the border to open, it's very stressful… When you pass the fence, I think of the bail, it comes to like 5,000 USD. I have someone who passed the fence and he had bail for 12,000 USD…For example, you pass the fence and someone helps me with 12,000 dollars. I don't know how I will pay 12,000 dollars," he explained in a worrisome tone. Immigration bail bonds serve as a huge financial barrier to migrants to be released from immigration detention. I reflected on my previous conversations with other migrants in the city who had discussed U.S. organizations which help to pay bonds to release migrants from detention and asked about his own knowledge or networks with these networks. "I learned that organizations help with the bail. That's why I think about the price. If it happened to me, I hope that an organization can pay," he noted, seemingly not having much hope in that possibility.

Yet, it wasn't simply the bail bond worrying Amine. "You need an address of someone in the U.S. and someone who can post bail," he proclaimed. "When you don't have an address it's complicated. I don't have someone who can give me an address. Me, for example, I have to buy an address so I could find someone that I could arrange with him that I pay him to give me his address. So, I have to pay for the address and prepare the money for the bail. In case there isn't an NGO that can help me," he said. In his migration planning, it is not only how and where he will cross the border, but more specifically, how he

[14] Here I speak of the 'irregular border' as opposed to the 'border' through which individuals pass through at ports of entry. Since COVID-19, the border has been off-limits to asylum seekers, as U.S. policy determined their migration 'non-essential.' The border, as I myself passed through multiple times during fieldwork, was very much alive and functioning. The differential treatment of cross-border travelers and irregular migrants pushed all irregular migration to the U.S. to the 'irregular border,' or unauthorized points of entry.

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will manage the looming consequences of doing so, paying the bail bond amount and securing a place to go and live once he is released. As he mentally processes these realities, Amine flips through all those who he has come to know through his migration who have already done what he is also planning to do, assessing their outcomes meticulously in an attempt to better understand his own. His idea to 'buy' an address is in an effort to circumvent long-term detention and to be released on parole, in which he can await his immigration hearing outside of detention. "This makes it a bit complicated," Amine continued, "you have to think carefully before you enter to avoid difficulties. If you enter the country, you might stay 6 months or a year [in detention], or you might be deported."

The prospect of deportation back to Cameroon haunted Amine. "I want to ask if the United States has the conscience to send people [back] to a country to die? I want to ask that question," he said. "But also, you can go to Canada. But to go to Canada you also have to go through the United States. And it is a little easier in Canada, but the problem is the U.S., the U.S. blocks it. Because I think that the immigration process in Canada is easier than the U.S.," he continued as he contemplated his migration. I asked if he knew anyone in Canada. "Not really," he said. "Canada is the specialty of Ghanaians and Congolese."

Returning to his prospects in the U.S. and in the absence of a close relative or friend to go stay with, I asked him if he had thought about what state he would go to once released from detention. "I might like Maine," he quickly responded. "I prefer Maine because when I did research on Maine, it was not full of immigrants. And it's easier to do the hard process [asylum] to have papers in Maine than in, for example, San Diego. And you can't live in San Diego because it's so expensive." I was surprised by this answer. Amine was the first migrant I had met that didn't have a close relation in the U.S. to receive him on the other side. And Maine, of all places. The farthest corner in the U.S. from where we were sitting in Tijuana. Stunned, and slightly confused, by his answer, I fumbled with my initial reaction, commenting on the harsh winters there. "It's true that it's so cold there, but it's better to live in the cold in Maine than die in Cameroon," he concluded. After hearing about Maine from Amine, I did my own research and learned that in recent years, Maine has received recognition as a state with migrant friendly policies as it is one of the only states in the country which has welfare programs for those still in asylum proceedings

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to help support them financially, and since 2019, the state has welcomed hundreds of African migrants coming from the southern border.[15] Amine's desire to settle there is a strategic decision to find a home which is affordable and is perceived as being welcoming to migrants, and although he didn't mention it, now boasts a growing African migrant community.

Due to the transient nature of Tijuana as a border town, sharing contacts and maintaining digital communication between migrants is an important practice to hear updates, learn from experiences, and share knowledge and information around navigating the border. In Amine's narrative, silence also emerges as a form of communication between people on the move in which no news is considered good news, that those migrants have crossed into the U.S. successfully and are likely in detention waiting further immigration hearings. After I left my fieldwork in Tijuana, Amine kept in touch, updating me on his plans and preparations to migrate. In March, he was preparing potential contacts for sponsorships in Maine and locating pro-bono lawyers who might be able to take on his asylum case once in detention. Several weeks later, he informed me that he was advised by a lawyer he knew in Tijuana that his chances of reaching the U.S. without being turned back to Mexico may be higher if he migrated with his family. He explained that after receiving this advice, he arranged for his partner and children to leave Cameroon for a neighboring country to apply for Mexican residence visas.

Their visa eligibility was made possible by Amine's permanent residence status, in which they were also issued residence in the country. Amine employed the benefits of his residency to apply for family reunification to bring his family to Mexico, with the intention in mind to swiftly leave the country soon after their arrival. This manipulation of his residence status was creatively deployed to increase their chances of successfully entering the United States. After several days, I heard from Amine again, this time with photos of his partner and two children's Mexican visas, printed and stamped into their

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[15] Kevin Miller, "Gov. Mills takes emergency steps to allow asylum seekers to qualify for state assistance," *Portland Press Herald*, July 18, 2019, https://www.pressherald.com/2019/07/18/mills-takes-emergency-steps-to-allow-asylum-seekers-to-qualify-for-ga/ (Accessed July 22, 2021).

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passports, ready for travel. Following his family's arrival to Mexico, Amine secured a sponsor through a contact he made at an organization in Tijuana, and headed for the border. I heard from him again a week after he was released from detention, now waiting for their chance to claim asylum through future immigration hearings in their current state of residence. Surprisingly, it was not Maine that he ended up, but rather a sunny state in the American southeast. Along with this news, Amine sent a photo of him and his family standing and grinning widely in from of a welcome sign posted into the front yard of their new, although temporary, home.

Amine's migration story portrays the agency and successive acts of freedom which he made to maneuver through multiple juridical protection systems in order to seek asylum based on his own decisions, terms, and conditions. The process which he underwent to be determined stateless and granted asylum in Mexico did not prevent him from utilizing the status benefits to work, support himself in the city, and apply for family reunification as strategy for mobility. Despite his legality in the country, Amine was not willing to settle for the 'protection' forced upon him in Mexico, and rather manipulated his circumstances to enhance his transnational mobility to his desired country of refuge. His ability to do this was complemented by the digital social worlds he engaged and the transnational social networks he developed throughout his migration and time in Tijuana. While this chapter has exemplified several narratives of migrants and the ways in which they overcome regimes of restriction, not all migrants experience such outcomes in their own efforts for protection. For example, Ousmane underwent the same process of 'statelessness' in Tapachula in 2019 as Amine, yet was returned back to Mexico in October 2020 after spending almost one year in U.S. immigration detention. While in detention, he applied for asylum but was denied. Considering he had been issued permanent residence in Mexico, he was returned to Tijuana rather than deported back to Guinea. Until now, Ousmane remains in the city dreaming of a way to migrate to the U.S., yet effectively stalled without a way to re-access the U.S. immigration system.

Ousmane's protractedness in Tijuana reveals that not all migration projects culminate in an 'arrival.' For him, Tijuana is simply an anchoring, holding him in place for the moment as he navigates

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the liminality which both the U.S. and Mexican immigration regimes have bound him to. Suspended between this everyday liminality and his aspired mobility, Ousmane passes his days in the city investigating how he will somehow manage to leave. While I was in Tijuana, I connected him to John for legal aid support through HBA. A staff member there referred him back to an organization in Tijuana. His case is complicated, as he already signed a deportation order after losing his asylum case. Therefore, his prospects of migrating again do not look promising. We have kept in touch over WhatsApp and he noted that many African migrants are still arriving to the city, but they aren't staying long. At 21 years young, Ousmane started his journey from Guinea to Ecuador two years ago, with spending one of those years locked up in detention for the 'crime' of claiming asylum. Ousmane's ambitious migration project has culminated to his residence at the Rodriguez Hotel in *Zona Norte*, inhabiting the space simply to inhabit 'somewhere,' watching as other African and Haitian migrants filter through that same space, as he once imagined he would do. In this sense, Ousmane's 'project' will remain just that; an unfinished, ongoing, every becoming collection of acts and imaginations towards an aspired final destination.

8.4 Conclusion

Desire, choice, and agency are rare themes when engaged with migrants' confrontations with international refugee and asylum regimes in policy, media, as well as migration and refugee studies discourse. This chapter explores the ways in which migrants in Tijuana inscribe these characteristics into their mobility practices to achieve access to chosen countries of destination and refuge, beyond the traditional pathways dictated by international protection regimes. Migrants in Tijuana revealed through maneuvering around and within their immigration statuses (and non-statuses) in Mexico, that mobility and asylum are possible beyond the juridical regimes and rules which aim to control such movement. Through evading documentation in Mexico, as well as manipulating residency benefits, migrants were effective in contesting global and regional legal systems of exception and exclusion to negotiate their mobility and claims to international protection. Along with navigating their asylum, African and Haitian migrants in Tijuana prepared for their onward migration through the use of various digital platforms as

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sites of circulation of mobile commons, and transnational social networks to organize connections and support as they embark on their cross-border migration to the U.S. The use of digitalities and social networks enabled migrants to gather information, prepare cross-border contacts, arrange sponsorships and legal assistance to further enable their mobility.

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Chapter 9: Conclusion

I woke up on March 3 to several photos and videos in my WhatsApp messages from Ibrahim. I had returned to Cairo from Tijuana just two weeks before, and deeply longed to be back visiting Sunday church services, conversing over coffee in the plazas of downtown, and wandering through the streets taking note of the urban sites which possess meaning to interlocutors in the city. I opened the photos in my inbox to find images of a migrant tent encampment, one that seemingly popped up overnight at the gates of El Chapparal port of entry. The bird's eye-view photos of the camp captured colorful tents which lit up the otherwise mundane arrangement of concrete and asphalt in the plaza. The camp resembled a patchwork quilt, a seemingly random and unmethodical configuration of splashes of color, yet neatly organized into recognizable rows. Ibrahim was still in Tijuana and had started volunteering at the growing migrant tent camp. "Yeah, that place where we had coffee [El Chapparal], they are living there now. This picture is from five days ago, now there are many more people. These people are not MPP, they are on the waitlist, like me, and some of them are newcomers, and actually today they went to protest," he recorded in a voice message.

The video he sent showed several Central American migrants wearing t-shirts which read "Biden please let us in," at a protest in front of the San Ysidro port of entry, just adjacent to El Chapparal. Ibrahim noted that there were already around 1,000 migrants living at the camp, mostly Central Americans but also some Haitian migrants too. The encampment took form in conjunction with the Biden administration's announcement in mid-February of the anticipated processing of asylum seekers in the MPP (Remain in Mexico) program for entry into the country. Under this Trump-era policy, asylum seekers from Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries were sent back to wait in Mexico for their asylum court hearings in the United States. Those left out of this newly announced initiative were the thousands of migrants on border town waiting lists and those who had arrived after the U.S. border closed, which suspended the metering policy procedures. African and Haitian interlocutors for this research were among those left behind by the Biden administration, as many of them were previously on

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the wait list or hadn't been able to access it. In late February, as MPP migrants were beginning to be processed in small numbers to enter the U.S., the 'not yet,' migrants began staging protests in Tijuana. The residents of the migrant camp had a clear message to the Biden administration: End the border closure and provide an avenue for the thousands of asylum seekers not in MPP to enter and make their claims to protection.

Photo: El Chapparal port of entry during migrant tent encampment; Source: Ibrahim with permission to use

By the 100th day (May 28) of the migrant camp in Tijuana, there were a recorded 200 tents and approximately 2,000 migrants living there (Rivera 2021). Racism against Haitian migrants living in the camp has also been documented, in which malicious sentiments and actions from other migrants, such as verbal abuse, withholding of resources, and harassment (Rivera 2021), makes the need to leave the camp and the city even more dire.

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Photo: Migrants from tent camp protest at San Ysidro port of entry; Source: Business Insider, March 22, 2021

Photo: Migrants from tent camp protest at San Ysidro; Source: KPBS News, April 21, 2021

Over the months since leaving Tijuana, several thousands of extra-continental migrants, including Haitians and Africans, have been blocked behind borders in countries such as Panama, Colombia, and

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Peru (Mixed Migration Centre 2021), and more recently movement at these borders has prompted migrants to continue north. Additionally, the catastrophic situation of COVID-19 in Brazil has influenced more Haitians to leave towards North American destinations. In Mexico, it is estimated that between 5,000-10,000 Haitian migrants are between Tapachula and Tijuana either waiting to cross into the U.S. or are en route to the northern border (Resendiz 2021). Since early this year, the militarization of borders continues to trickle farther south in the corridor, as the Mixed Migration Centre (2021) reports Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru are responding to increased irregular migration. Yet, as we have seen in other parts of the world, these militarized and securitized reactions to cross-border migration will not deter migrants, but only increase the risk, danger, and cost which irregular migrants experience on the route. As the violence of migration governance, conflict and instability, and structural inequalities persist globally, we can expect extra-continental migration to and through Latin America to continue, in which more African and Haitian migrants will find themselves in Tijuana, along with other border towns.

9.1 Theoretical Takeaways

This thesis has shown that despite migrants knocking at the gates of the U.S. in their quest for mobility and protection, North America was not always the initial destination for many, but rather it became the aspired destination for Africans and Haitians migrating within Latin America as they continued to encounter barriers to their own survival and security in others places. For example, a Haitian mother living in Venezuela for 10 years has now found herself in Tijuana with her seven children because of the grave economic and political circumstances in the country. These same economic and political factors that are not only displacing immigrants, but millions of the country's own citizens. This cross-continental migration route consists more of fragments and improvised trial and error, than strictly 'transit' migration to North America. The U.S., and also Canada, emerge as the last stops, in a chain of nations and borders, to finally find protection and stability after years of movement and indeterminacy. In that realization, interlocutors for this research were doing everything possible to ensure that this is where they made their final settlement, so that uprooting their lives for the umpteenth time was no longer a constant worry, or an anticipated disruption looming somewhere in the near future.

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While Ibrahim, and several other interlocutors, finally did 'arrive' in the U.S., as briefly discussed in Chapter 8, not all migrants do. In Tijuana, like other sites of rupture along this vast journey, migration projects become indefinitely stalled, compromised, and fragmented. Inhabiting these liminal urban spaces, "between and betwixt" (Kihato 2013, 17) migrants' past lives and imagined futures, means making 'home' in these places remains temporary, suspended, and fluid. What, then, does liminality, indeterminacy, and fragmentation mean for the 'migration project'? Do the migration projects for these migrants ever really conclude? Likewise, for migrants who arrive in their destinations, do their migration projects end once they reach that soil? Or do they embark on a continuation of that project, as a reconfiguration of their desires and aspirations which entail new challenges, new relations and activities, and new imaginations, for what their lives in those places will be? For those migrants who remain 'stuck' in Tijuana, migration projects continue to exist in the imaginary, even if the prospects of mobility seem insuperable. Wading through the urban landscape, migrants are anchored in Tijuana by the threads of improvised relations, resources, social support, and urban spaces which enable them to stitch together lives in the margins of urban life.

This thesis explored these webs of threads which interconnected African and Haitian migrants to each other, and to various city actors and the urban spaces they inhabited and appropriated during their time in Tijuana. Suspended in a border town where most migrants did not anticipate spending more than a few days, African and Haitian migrants organized their protracted transit for survival and mobility in opposition to the liminality which was inscribed into their everyday lives. Interconnected along the migration route based on their subjectivities as extra-continental irregular migrants, and as racialized bodies, African and Haitian migrants' lives intersected in the city as well, as they built upon existing relations from the route, shared language, and experiences of racism, to carve out spaces of existence for themselves. In Tijuana, various physical, social, economic, and psychological thresholds encountered by migrants were identified and explored in Chapter 5, and through migrants' experiences in the city, recognized the ways in which their very presence challenged the limits drawn around them.

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Chapter 6 built upon this liminality to explore the everyday rhythms of endurance exuded by migrants through their daily activities culminated in improvised relations which gave way to care infrastructures in the city, as well as to practices of rogue care between one another. Just like the collective cooperation on the route, individual objectives of survival in the city produced collective activities which enabled migrants to survive with each other. These relations provided mechanisms for the endless generation and circulation of mobility knowledge, local information, material resources, mutual care and support, and other mobile commons, which further permitted life-making and mobility-making in, and beyond, the city. Parallel to their lived realities, these relations and ongoing exchanges of information, visas, money, humanitarian aid, and care between migrants created a world of their own. One of rights, possession, power, and potentialities for mobility, within political geographies which consistently model exclusion, dispossession, and control.

Through analyzing the "city from below" (Kihato 2013, 14) from the perspective of migrant residents themselves, their everyday organizing for survival and mobility revealed the ways in which they utilized, repurposed, transformed and, in turn, infused new meaning into the urban spaces they appropriated. Chapter 7 highlighted how these spatial appropriations gave way for urban sites of generation for collective commons, the creation of spaces of belonging, and the contestation of border regimes through migrants' local and transnational mobility practices. Their (re)creation of city spaces as sites of belonging and spaces of mobility and meaning enabled migrants to endure, all while maintaining their temporality and imagined futures elsewhere. In Chapter 8, even with the precarity of their lives in Tijuana, migrants' aspirations for mobility revealed the strength, creativity, and powerful forces through which desire operates in the everyday activities of making life in the 'in-between.' Through a 'politics of presence' (Darling 2017) African and Haitian migrants created new socialities and spatialities in the city which transformed the multiple layers of Tijuana's urban landscape. Their physical presence in opposition to their subjectivities and racialization, coupled with their everyday activities, gave way to new understandings of rights and urban access beyond notions of legality or citizenship. Additionally, the social and spatial infrastructures which African and Haitian migrants built and utilized in the city carry on

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to support new arriving migrants as they inhabit the city long enough to pursue their migration projects. Beyond being co-constitutive actors in the socio-spatial transformations of this border town, African and Haitian migrants' mobility was a political process, an act of democracy (Aradau and Huysman 2009).

Although the migrant tent encampment is a highly visible contestation of migration governance, migrants' everyday lives in the margins of Tijuana's society, piecing together activities to see another day which might bring them closer to migrating, served as refusals to subscribe to the hostile border and migration regimes. With every crossing (and attempted crossing), every manipulation of Mexico's immigration policy, every network and relation formed, temporary intention, grasp at the prospect of leaving Mexico, and every demand to protection in the U.S., interlocutors for this research were active in eroding nation-state ideals of sovereignty, governance, and control. They made political claims through their daily activities which refused settlement and through their choice for mobility and international protection that the regimes themselves tell migrants is not possible.

Beyond developing a deep understanding of the methodologies, experiences, barriers, and tragedies which interlocutors lived throughout their migration along this corridor, this research, which centered the border town of Tijuana as a geographical and urban point of analysis, revealed most notably the breadth, depth, and complexity through which migrants in 'transit' are impactful and transformative in processes of urbanization and social and political reconfigurations in the localities which they encounter in their migration. Situating this research within a 'rupture' along migrants' migration projects to destinations in North America through the notions of the 'fragmented journey' and 'liminality' which they encountered Tijuana's urban landscape revealed the importance of engaging 'in-between' urban spaces along migration journeys to understand the nuances of migrant mobility. Additionally, rather than simply identifying the challenges which migrants, particularly those racially 'othered,' experience in Mexican border towns, this research highlights the resilience and creativity through which migrants combat the various thresholds imposed on them through tactical uses of social networks, care relations, and appropriating urban spaces.

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By theoretically framing this research through fragmentation, liminality, and indeterminacy, it showed how the mobility of irregular migrants still remains contested, negotiated, and ultimately possible despite all the mechanisms in place to restrict and immobilize them. This framework further pushed the notion of transnational migration as non-linear, messy, suspended, and disrupted, while connecting multiple localities on the route to reveal confrontations with structures of power which impact their experiences in non-destination cities, and in turn reveal the ways in which migrants themselves reconfigure those places. Additionally, it traced the subjectivities, racialization, exclusion, and periodic immobility to engage more deeply the ways in which these boundaries are contested through everyday activities and relations of organizing, connectivity, care, and mobility.

Through the insight into African and Haitian migrants' lived experiences in Tijuana, I hope that future migration studies research is inspired to interrogate more intentionally into the spaces of rupture and fragmentation which migrants encounter in their irregular migration. By doing so, further understanding of the ways in which migrants organize for survival and mobility, as well as the transformations and reconfigurations which are reproduced in these spaces, will reveal social processes related to mobility and urban life. Likewise, this research can encourage scholars to look beyond migrant place-making based on settlement to further question the ways in which migrant temporalities are also transformative of city spaces. While this research took a particular focus on migrant racialization in Latin America, more critical research is needed on the dynamics of class and migration in this region.

In situating African and Haitian migration within the socio-histories, racial hierarchies, and structural inequalities of global migration governance, this research shows the need for expanded organizational support for migrants in the absence of the Mexican government. Particularly for longer term solutions to adequate housing, employment, and racial justice, as blockages in Mexican border towns remain. I recognize that visiting Tijuana during COVID-19 was a particularly distinct moment on the border, and this impacted migrants' engagement with the city in specific ways. Future research in this locality will be interested to see how migrants' insertion into and navigation within the city changes over time, especially as Tijuana becomes increasingly frequented by extra-continental migrants transiting the

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Americas. Further, more ethnographic research within the various localities of confrontation and fragmentation, which extra-continental migrants encounter along the South American-Central American corridor, is needed to more critically engage the methods of mobility and knowledge production (Hess 2017) which migrants inscribe throughout their migration projects, as well as to identify the reconfiguring violent structures of power which continue to develop and react to irregular and 'undesirable' migration.

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