

THE EFFECT OF RELIGION ON LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

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STATES

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Abstract

This paper explores the effects of religion on Latin American migration to the United States. It updates the existing literature on the effect of religion on the six stages of migration (decision, preparation, journey, arrival, settlement, and transnational linkages) by integrating field research with existing case studies to illuminate the ways in which religion plays an important part in each stage. It argues that deportation should be considered as the seventh stage of migration because of its ubiquity and the unique challenges it presents to migrants. It explores the effect of both institutional religion and personal faith on the migrant being pushed through the deportation process. The paper employs the use of qualitative interviews and a case study of the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana* in Tijuana, Mexico to explore the effects of religion on each stage of migration. While the study does not argue that religion is a part of every migrant's journey, it does provide evidence that religion is an important resource throughout the stages of migration, even to those who do not consider themselves to be religious. Finally, it invites more research be done to explore the effects of religion on the newly proposed deportation stage of migration throughout Mexico and Latin America as a whole.

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~ In memory of migrant 140704_003~

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Introduction

Life in Mexico is very difficult. If I try to buy a pair of pants, they cost 200 pesos. I only make 150 pesos a day. So I work all day and can't even afford pants. If I want a good plate of food, I will be charged 60 pesos. I am working to only be able to eat. It is not equal, what one makes doesn't cover his costs.¹

This Mexican carpenter lays out the quandary facing many born in the developing world. Since the latter half of the twentieth century a tide of migration has surged as the all-encompassing force of market expansion has displaced many from their traditional livelihoods. The destination countries, which push such expansion by their consumerism and claim to value a free market economy, are hypocritically the same enacting immigration restrictions to ostensibly protect the integrity of their national culture. Reducing migration to economics only, however, does not provide a complete picture: what convinces some people in similar destitute situations to migrate and others to stay? What allows some to be successful in their migration and others to fail?

People's decisions to migrate and their success thereof are anything but simple. They involve a complex set of motivations and interests, some of which are contradictory and others complementary. One such factor understudied until now has been religion. This study began with the research question of whether migrants who pertain to a religion rely on it in their migration experiences. As Charles Hirschman reminds us, "religious faith and religious organizations remain vital to many, if not most, persons in the modern world. It is only through religion, or other spiritual beliefs, that many people are able to find solace for the inevitable

¹ 140707_003 A 47 y/o man from Oaxaca.

human experiences of death, suffering, and loss.”² This study, which focused primarily on undocumented migration to the United States from Mexico, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic since 1986³, found that religion, namely the Catholic and Protestant ones widely practiced in those countries, can indeed have an important role in each stage of the migration process.

This is especially true given that the barriers to migration have increased in recent years throughout Western countries and specifically for migrants coming to the US. The human costs of migrating without documentation have risen dramatically every year; for example, in 1998, the known deaths of migrants crossing the border in the desert totaled 263. Fifteen years later, the number had increased to 445.⁴ It is this backdrop of peril and tragedy during the migration journey that continues to encourage the reliance on faith and religious counselors. This is especially true for migrants coming from communities with strong religious mores.⁵

As pointed out by Hagan and Ebaugh⁶, previous studies of religion and migration have emphasized religion’s role in the settlement of migrants. I found, however, that religion is often a central part of migration throughout its many stages. Indeed, religion can be an enabling factor or even in some cases a catalyst⁷ for immigration, especially in established transnational

² Hirschman, *Religion*: 1207.

³ This is the year in which the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* that provided a path to normalization for most undocumented workers in the U.S. was passed. This moment in history provides a natural historical focal point since those who were in the U.S. before this point were suddenly normalized and the phenomenon of undocumented migration continued and even increased from this point on.

⁴ “Southwest Border Deaths by Fiscal Year” CBP.gov - Home Page. Web. 28 Oct. 2014.
<<http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%20Statistics%20SWB%20Sector%20Deaths%20FY1998%20-%20FY2013.pdf>>.

⁵ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1147.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See page 7 for an example.

communities with cultures of migration. Not only does it provide institutional support to migrants in each of the stages of migration; but it also provides “spiritual resources” that help in the decision to migrate as well as a psychological comfort in light of the hardship that such a decision yields.⁸

These spiritual resources are employed in a similar way to the “magic” used by the Trobriand fishermen described by Bronislaw Malinowski nearly a century ago.⁹ The fishermen did not turn to spiritual rituals when fishing areas of the reef that were certain to have big yields. However, at the prospect of fishing in the dangerous ocean with less certainty of success, the fishermen obeyed strict principles of magic and taboo. I found that the spiritual resources that were relied upon by migrants and their loved ones (described below) provided a sense of control over a process that was often wrought with danger and risk and over which they had little to no control.

Structure, Method and Background

This paper will evaluate how religious institutions affect migration and also look at a “lived religion” approach that seeks to affirm migrants’ stories and experiences that do not necessarily mesh with official church doctrine.¹⁰ This two-pronged look into religion will illuminate both the efforts of those connected with religious institutions to assist individuals as well as the ways in which some migrants draw from personal religious resources throughout the migration process.

I frame this research within a broader field of scholars who have looked at the effect of religion on the first six stages of the migration process. It is not my intention to explore the

⁸ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1146.

⁹ Bronislaw Malinowski, “Fishing in the Trobriand Islands,” *Man*, Vol 18, Jun. 1918, pp. 87-92.

¹⁰ Cadge and Ecklund, *Immigration*: 360.

validity of religious beliefs or test the theses on which migrants' personal faiths are based. Throughout the research migrants will make theological claims that are central to the way that they understand their religion. This paper seeks to include those beliefs only in their utility as a resource in helping migrants navigate the difficult stages of migration, not as an attempt to either prove or disprove their claims. I use the six-stage analytical framework of undocumented migration set out by Hagan and Ebaugh. Stage one occurs as a potential migrant is deciding whether or not to migrate; stage two is the time spent in preparation for the journey ahead; stage three is the actual journey, stage four is the arrival in the receiving country, in stage five the migrant becomes settled in her new environment, and stage six is the development of transnational migrant linkages.¹¹ I will also add in a seventh stage: deportation.¹² The final part of the paper will introduce the effects of religion on that stage as observed in my research at the *Casa del Migrante*, a Catholic non-profit assisting migrants.

I have conducted formal interviews with 17 migrants at the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana* in Tijuana, Mexico as well as countless informal interviews. The group of migrants I interviewed were all men over the age of 18 and all, but one from Honduras, were from Mexico. Some of them had been crossed by parents or other relatives as infants or children while others chose to cross by themselves as adults. I talked to some who were crossing for the first time, and others who had crossed multiple times, including one 63-year-old who had crossed successfully 29 times and could not remember his number of unsuccessful attempts.

A note about the author: I am drawing from two areas in which I have been formally trained as an academic. In 2008, I was conferred the degree of Master of Divinity, and I undertook this project as my thesis for attaining a Master of Arts degree in Latin American

¹¹ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*.

¹² See chapter three.

Studies. Professionally, I have worked with migrants for the past three years, first with an advocacy organization seeking migrant rights and currently with an organization that seeks to serve as a resource for members of low-income communities by helping them to come up with community based solutions to community issues. Both professionally and academically I have been focused on spirituality and migration.

Literature Review

As I reviewed literature about this topic, I discovered that the effects of religion on the latter stages of migration (arrival, integration, transnational ties) were addressed in various studies, but there was a dearth of literature on the earlier stages. Moreover, none of the literature addressed religion's role in regards to the deportation of migrants. As outlined above, the 2003 article written by Jacqueline Hagan and Helen Rose Ebaugh "Calling upon the Sacred: Migrants' Use of Religion in the Migration Process" provided the structural framework used in this study. It used was based on a case study of a Mayan community from the Guatemalan highlands sending migrants to Houston. Hagan further elaborated on this framework and thereby provided the most in depth look at the effect of religion on each of the six stages of migration in her 2008 monograph *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope and Meaning on the Undocumented Journey*, in which she conducted extensive interviews with migrants in the early stages of migration.

Like Hagan, scholars have most commonly investigated religion's effect on migration through case studies. Peggy Levitt's 2001 monograph *The Transnational Villagers*, looks at a transnational community between the Dominican Republic and Boston. Levitt's rich analyses explored many themes, and she took particular care to expound on how religion facilitates migration and how migration has had an effect on the practice of religion in both the sending and

receiving societies. Similar to Hagan and Ebaugh's study, Levitt provided one of the most intimate portraits of the relationship between migration and religion.

A number of scholars have looked at the effects of religion on the latter stages of migration (settlement and transnational ties) while doing case studies on specific migrant and religious communities in the United States. Jeffery Burns (1994) and Michael Blume (2003) explored how Catholic migrants from Latin America have affected the theology and practices of the Catholic Church in the United States. Likewise, Kathleen Sullivan (2000) explored how both formal and informal programs are created in Protestant churches to accommodate recent migrants through a case study of the *Iglesia de Dios* in Houston.

Wendy Cadge and Elane Howard Ecklund (2007) reviewed case studies on the effect of religion on immigration to the United States and emphasize the need for further examination of the "lived religion" in order to understand how religion is impacting the lives of people outside the bounds of religious organizations. Their review called for more analytical data to be collected. In an attempt to answer that call, Phillip Connor (2012) explored how religion affects the decision stage of migration in his analysis of data from Guatemala. From this study he was able to show that Protestants were more likely to migrate than their Catholic counterparts, which he coined the "Protestant effect."

A number of sources have examined religion and migration in a broader context in order to construct more theoretical claims. Charles Hirschman (2004) looked at the role of religion in the settlement stage of migration and rejected the trend to reduce the impact of churches as mere tools of cultural assimilation. Instead, he argued that churches and religious institutions fill an important socioeconomic role by providing opportunities for social and economic advancement of first and second generation immigrants. Liliana Rivera Sánchez (2007) analyzed the

construction of public spaces through the transnational religious bonds created by migrants from Mexico to the United States, including religious organizations meant to influence public policy surrounding migration in Mexico and the United States.

One scholar who studied deportation and religion is María Dolores París Pombo (2012). Her work analyzed the failures of the Mexican local, state, and federal governments to implement effective programs for the integration of deported migrants and pointed to the possible role of religious institutions in filling the void. She did not, however, investigate whether this was really the case.

This paper will seek to provide an in depth look at all stages of the immigration process, with special attention to the oft-overlooked deportation stage. In order, the stages include: 1) the decision, 2) preparing for the voyage, 3) the journey, 4) the arrival, 5) the settlement, 6) establishing transnational ties, and 7) deportation. Besides bibliographic research, the main methodology and provision of new data provided by this thesis consists of extended, open-ended interviews and participation observation among migrants in stages 3 and 7 at the *Casa del Migrante* in Tijuana, Mexico.

Chapter One: Stages One, Two, and Three

Stage One: The Decision

While macroeconomic forces create conditions and environments that motivate migration, most do not migrate but stay home. Why do some migrate while others subject to the same forces stay? Individuals make decisions based on factors other than strictly economic ones. Many migrants, especially those who migrate without proper documentation, reach a point in the decision-making process when cost-benefit arguments are inadequate. The dangers ahead are known to be great and the promise of something better in the U.S. is not certain. For many with

religious mores, “the decision making moves from a rational, real-world level to a very private, religious, even mystical plane.”¹³

Jacqueline Hagan conducted a study of Central American and Mexican migrants that showed that most would-be migrants look for advice first from religious icons and clergy before consulting even with family or friends.¹⁴ Clergy from areas that lose many to the pull of a better life in the North understand migration counseling to be integral to the lives of their congregants. They find themselves in a position to grant the migrant some sort of authorization or legitimization for what otherwise is unauthorized, dangerous, and illegal. This sanctioning is particularly important when migrants are torn between supporting their families and themselves economically and staying on the right side of the law. Hagan found that almost three out of four migrants claimed to be waiting for a sign from God before making the trip. Their efforts to find this kind of enlightenment took the form of reading the Scriptures, seeking approval by a pastor, securing a *coyote* (a guide that smuggles undocumented migrants across borders), and even finding someone who is willing to lend them a visa.¹⁵ While some of these signs are clearly religious, the others are interpreted by the indecisive potential migrant as spiritual communication rather than pure serendipity; such spiritual confirmation provides solace and a sense of certainty.

One particular case involved a Guatemalan woman who was waiting for a clear sign from God that now was the right time to take her journey. She “challenged God” by asking that a specific person would agree to arrange for transportation on a promise of future payment. When this happened she still was not sure and decided to ask her pastor, who was known to discourage

¹³ Hagan, *Miracle*: 23.

¹⁴ Hagan, *Miracle*: 21.

¹⁵ Hagan, *Miracle*: 23.

people from migrating. The pastor told her that the time was right, thus providing two confirming signs – only clearly religious and the other interested as spiritual – to migrate.¹⁶

Although the woman in this case does not claim that she migrated because of religion, her belief system gave her the confidence in the face of uncertainty that her migration was somehow sanctioned.

Many of the migrants whom I interviewed also mentioned that seeking signs was an important part of the decision making process. Not all could point to tangible signs but spoke more of a feeling or sense that let them know that this was the right decision. A 47-year-old from Oaxaca, Mexico told me he was considering migrating because he wanted to be able to send money home to his family. He decided to go to mass at his local Catholic church to seek direction. In his words, “being there I got a great peace over me and I had the sense that everything would work out the way it was supposed to. Then I knew that if I die en route, it was destiny; if they take me through the desert and I get lost out there, I won’t come back and that’s okay.”¹⁷ In other words, whatever happened, he would be doing God’s will.

Another way in which religion is used in the first stage of migration is through co-opting religious rituals for the migration process. One ritual common among Pentecostals in the Guatemalan highlands is that of the *ayuno* (fasting and prophesying). While traditionally this has been a practice employed by practitioners looking for general guidance and direction, its use in the decision-making process is becoming more common.¹⁸ During this process a potential migrant will climb a mountain with a pastor and other participants to seek divine guidance. The

¹⁶ Hagan, *Miracle*: 24.

¹⁷ Migrant 140707_003

¹⁸ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1152

belief is that the added measure of devotion in the time of prayer will increase the probability of the petition being answered.

One migrant I interviewed described how the Catholic Mass became a social setting in which the men of Guanajuato, Mexico would talk about whether migrating made sense for their families. The man was 73-years-old and left for the first time in 1958 when he was 17. At that point in time many of the men of Guanajuato were leaving as a part of the Bracero Program, and they would meet to talk about the journey and the risks of working in agriculture in the United States. The communal knowledge shared within the context of the Mass allowed these men to make informed decisions about leaving and for whom they would be working. This for them, however, was always a temporary working situation and not seen as a permanent migration. Even after his documents for working were no longer valid, he continued to cross the border because that is the only way he knew how to make a living. In all, this man estimates that he has crossed the U.S. – Mexico border 29 times successfully and has been caught a number of other times. He is convinced that he knows the way better than any ICE officer, although modern technology (i.e. infrared and night vision) are dissuading men like him from crossing the border so often.¹⁹

Although this study analyzes the effects of religion in general on the migration process, it is clear that some religions are more influential than others. In analyzing data from the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) Phillip Connor demonstrates that in the case of Guatemalan emigrants, Protestants are more likely to migrate to the U.S. than non-Protestants when controlling for many other factors that would affect a decision.²⁰ Perhaps Protestantism pushes people to migrate, or Catholicism dissuades people from leaving. Several studies

¹⁹ Migrant 140710_002

²⁰ Connor, *International*: 192.

throughout Latin America have shown Protestantism to encourage individual economic initiative, while Catholicism has encouraged more humble devotion to community.

While there are strong economic and political forces that encourage people to migrate, the reasons that some respond by deciding to migrate and others do not often go beyond mere economic rationale. For many, religion is one important piece of the puzzle. Some find answers within the context of private consultation with God and/or saints; others rely on community knowledge found in discussions with faith leaders or others that have made the trip themselves. Each migrant has a unique story about how religion affected their decision to migrate. Some indicated to me that religion played no role at all. Regardless, religion often plays a role in the next stage: preparation to leave.

Stage Two: Preparing for the Voyage

The next step is the time preparing for the journey and arrival in the new country. Although the preparations differ depending on whether one will migrate with documents or without, much of the experience is the same. One must find the money to cover the costs of travel and arrival in the U.S. Many end up selling most of their possessions in order to make the trip.²¹ Then, for whatever is not found, the migrant must find people to take care of those loved ones or possessions left at home. It is quite common for part of a family to migrate while the rest stays behind.²² Social relationships forged in religious communities are often utilized to care for the people and belongings left behind.

Many migrants and their families continue to pray either quietly or with others at this stage, and many turn to sacred images to seek a favorable result to the trip. Some purchase

²¹ Flores Yeffal, *Networks*, 68.

²² Hagan, *Miracle*: 32.

sacred images, have them blessed, and take them with them on the trip, while others visit local and regional shrines and leave “migration petitions” or make promises of piety in exchange for a successful migration.²³ Hagan’s study of migrants shows that those who prayed during this stage were seeking help in four different areas: completing travel arrangements; caring for those who were left behind; a safe journey; and assistance during the settlement in the U.S.²⁴

The most common religious practice of migrants preparing for the journey is additional migration counseling.²⁵ These sessions, no matter the religion, are therapeutic in both the presentation of migrant’s fears and hopes and the final blessings hopefully given by spiritual leaders. Such spiritual therapy comforts both the migrant and the loved ones left behind alike. But even when blessings do not affect the optimal outcome, many migrants do not question their efficacy. Hagan recounts the story of a priest who provided a blessing for a group of migrants departing the next day. A few weeks later they called him to let him know that they were detained in Houston, deported, and would be coming back for another blessing before they attempted the trip again. When the priest questioned why they would want to return if the blessing was unsuccessful, one responded: “Father, forgive me if I contradict you, but with that blessing we arrived as far as Houston. If we had not had your blessing, who knows how far we might have gone? Probably not even to the border.”²⁶

One field hand from Guerrero, Mexico had a similar experience when preparing for his journey to the United States. His father had died when he was very young, and his mom had moved to the U.S. shortly after. Having grown up essentially as an orphan, he knew intuitively

²³ Hagan, *Miracle*: 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Hagan, *Miracle*: 35.

²⁶ Hagan, *Miracle*: 38.

that he would migrate when he was old enough. His main motivation in making the trip was that his wife could open a daycare in the US where they would enjoy the security of a more stable place to live. After deciding to make the trip, he called the foreman (*mayordomo*) in the field where he worked in Mexico to hold “a meeting in the church with all of the members of the community. There you explain the motives you have for leaving and talk about why you want to leave and what you are going to do when you get there.” In the meeting people give their blessing and give advice for how to have a successful journey and be successful in the United States. This was important not only for the advice and connections but also in order to “honor the community even as I was leaving it.”²⁷

While the migrants in Hagan’s example sought counseling from a religious leader and this migrant chose his peers, the reasons and outcomes are the same. Both the religious and the work communities offered important bridges of security and sense of control over what is a chaotic and largely uncontrollable journey ahead. The skeptic would point to the fact that both of these migrants were deported as proof that their use of religion had no effect on their migration, but what the migrants gained did not necessarily have to do with the results of the journey but rather the confidence to move forward with this life change.

For those who seek to make the trip with legal documentation, one important challenge is working out paperwork with the appropriate embassy. In Peggy Levitt’s study of Dominican migrants from Miraflores, she found that religious communities played a critical role in this process. The documentation identifying many of the people she was studying was sparse, as the Dominican Republic had a relatively spare citizen recordkeeping system compared to the U.S. In order to meet the strict U.S. requirements to independently verify the identification of everyone applies for a visa, the US embassy decided to accept baptismal certificates when birth

²⁷ Migrant 140702_002

certificates were not available or appeared irregular.²⁸ This policy ensured a major role for the church as it provided credibility to those seeking to migrate via legal channels.

There are other necessary preparations unique to the undocumented migrant as well. One of the biggest resources upon which migrants rely in the preparation stage is information. The biggest decision that the undocumented migrant needs to make is which *coyote* to trust.²⁹ A popular refrain with the migrants at the *Casa de Migrante* was that a good *coyote* does not need to advertise his services. The point being that migrants should only trust *coyotes* who have been referred from trusted sources and not those who approach them. The dangers that are hidden in this decision are real. *Coyotes* are known for robbing people, raping women, kidnapping children, and not caring about the lives of the migrants they are smuggling.³⁰

In order to facilitate this decision, the Maya Pentecostals in Guatemala bring any perspective *coyotes* to the pastor to help them decide whether or not this particular guide was honest.³¹ At any point of the process, if the pastor starts to feel like the travel arrangements are not working out right or the *coyote* is not trustworthy, the church retains the ‘spiritual power’ to withdraw its support for the trip and advises the migrant to postpone or cancel the trip.³² In this case, the migrant is deferring to an institution they have always trusted to make difficult, life-and-death decisions in the black market.

As mentioned above, a typical religious action of those who would migrate without documents is *la promesa* (the promise). This is a covenant between the migrant and a sacred

²⁸ Levitt, *Villagers*, 176.

²⁹ Flores Yeffal, *Networks*, 68.

³⁰ Flores Yeffal, *Networks*, 70.

³¹ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1152.

³² Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1153.

image in which the migrant promises to perform some religious act of devotion in gratitude for a successful migration to the U.S.³³ These might include becoming a better Christian by going to church or praying more, performing familiar religious rituals upon arrival, including saying the rosary or lighting candles, or returning home to give thanks in the presence of the religious image with which the migrant has formed this covenant.³⁴ This is a common practice for the religious of Central America and Mexico and is believed to give special power to the vulnerable petitioner.

Various migrants I interviewed used the *promesa* during the preparation of their journey. For most it was as simple as making a promise to God that they would be serious about their faith and going to church if they only could make it successfully. This type of *promesa* ranged from a simple quick prayer made mostly out of habit to a more formal sincere promise made in the context of a formal church setting.

For one young migrant from Michoacán, however, the promise took on a more elaborate form. Having decided to cross the border alone at the age of 13, he describes his feelings as excited for the adventure ahead. Now at the age of 31, he points out that he was probably quite naïve to not have had any trepidation about what laid ahead. His mother, however, was very anxious about the trip and she is the one who made the *promesa* on his behalf. Before leaving, his parents took him to the place all migrants from his hometown go before setting out, *la Penita de Michoacán*, where a church for Saint Judas and the *Virgen de Guadalupe* stands next to a large rock. There his parents entrusted him to the care of Saint Judas, and his mother made the *promesa* to *la Virgen* that if she would make sure he arrived safely, she would walk barefoot for about 15 miles to next town. Upon hearing that her son arrived safely in the US, she followed

³³ Hagan, *Miracle*: 53.

³⁴ Hagan, *Miracle*: 54.

through on the vow and believes that this extra measure of devotion is what ensured her young son's ongoing safety. The migrant himself, however, does not believe and has since converted from Catholicism to Protestantism.³⁵

Without making a judgment on the supernatural element of *promesas*, the point is that by virtue of making this special vow the migrants and their families have gained an extra measure of confidence about what awaits them. Even when the migrant himself never valued the event, his family (specifically his mother) needed some reassurance that she had done everything in her power to procure his safe arrival. For many, the *promesa* is the final piece that allows them to be ready to leave for the unknown.

In regard to arranging for those left behind, including mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, and even children, proper preparations can allow the migrants the peace of mind to commit completely to the decision. A strengthening of religious faith can provide a sense of control that their loved ones will be protected. In the documentary film *Coyote: An Immigration Case Study*,³⁶ a young man from Guatemala, Caragüisa, decides to migrate and asks his grandmother her opinion. Fighting back tears because she believes that she will never see him again, she is asked by Caragüisa if she thinks the trip will go alright. She responds: "Of course I do, because I believe in God and sense it is him, not you... He is the one who performs miracles. Only Jesus can do that; he is the miracle worker. He made the whole world; he makes everything. He made the stars, he makes the day, the sun, everything." Caragüisa's grandmother uses her faith to encourage him before his trip but also as a way of assuring herself that he will be protected by a higher being on the journey.

³⁵ Migrant 140707_001.

³⁶ *Coyote: An Immigration Case Study*. Prod. Jorge Sanchez-Gallo. Writ. Choma Rodriguez. Films Media Group. 2009. Film.

Just before the migrants highlighted in *Coyote* leave on their journey, the *coyote* gathers them along with the family for a time of prayer. They ask God's blessing on the upcoming trip and that God lift the spirits of the family members who stay behind. This act of prayer functions as an opportunity for the migrants and their families to have closure on the trip and also gives a sense of control to the migrants' families.

Whether familiar blessings or more practical roles such as providing baptismal records for migration authorities, it is clear that religion can provide many an invaluable resource in the preparation stage of migration. This is probably the most unnerving part of the migration process because, to this point, all the migrant knows about what lies ahead are rumors and whispers. For many, religion establishes a sense of security that they come to rely on throughout the stages of migration that lay ahead. Migrants employ both traditional and personal religious resources in the lead up to what for many is the most revolutionary moment in their lives, the journey.

Stage Three: The Journey

The journey is the most perilous stage of migration and is often the most difficult to evaluate because, unless someone accompanies them on the trip, communication is unreliable. It is reasonable to assume that those migrants who are religious would draw upon their personal faith as a resource to give them tools to face great uncertainty and danger. And danger is what awaits many who make the trip, especially those who travel from Central American countries or southern parts of Mexico on the train infamously known as *La Bestia* (The Beast).

One Honduran migrant I interviewed described his trip with horrifying detail. "From Veracruz to Tierra Blanca lurk the gangsters and kidnappers. You get on the train for free but the bad guys come to charge a \$100USD toll. If they find women that they think are attractive,

they rape them. If somebody tries to stop them, they will kill them with a machete or gun.” This migrant described with horror some of the violence that he witnessed firsthand as well as his frustration that nothing would be done about it. “The police are behind this as well. We arrived at the train stations and the workers would just go hide in their offices. It is at the stations that they are charging their toll and doing their evil deeds. That is where the whole operation takes place... and the workers are just hiding in their offices? Why don’t they call the police?... The violence happens against everybody young ladies, old women, children.... They just throw them off of the train and let them die.” He went on to describe how the police were also involved in the violence and that the only law enforcement in Mexico he felt he could trust was the army.

He described evading the violence like this: “I disguised myself to be all grimy and camouflaged like a homeless person. I was dirty and smelly... I just passed for some piece of trash. The gangsters didn’t come close to me because I was really bad. But they watched me and told me not to look at them. They made me lower my head and said they would kill me if I looked up.”³⁷ This story is not unique. Even when a migrant doesn’t have to travel via *la Bestia*, most undocumented migrants still have to navigate the dangers of the U.S. southwest desert, which include getting lost and dying of dehydration, being kidnapped or killed by bandits, or even being abandoned by their *coyotes*.

The documentary film *De Nadie*³⁸ explores the difficulties faced by various migrants who have traveled from Honduras and El Salvador on *la Bestia*. The film highlights two main groups as the perpetrators of violence against the migrants. It records the migrants’ stories about Central American gangs or *maras* that have taken over the trains and taken advantage of vulnerable

³⁷ Migrant 140709_002

³⁸ Argüello, Lizzette, Iliana Martínez, Tin Dirdamal, and Alfonso M. Ruibal. *De nadie* No one. Van Nuys, CA: Amigo Films, 2007.

migrants. The main subject of the documentary, Maria de Jesus Flores from Honduras, was gang raped in front of her traveling companions by one of these gangs. Other migrants were robbed, abused, and left for dead. One young migrant, Adolfo, could only watch as his father refused to hand over their money to the gang. The gang members proceeded to beat his father to death and then raped his mother and beat her as well; she also died from her wounds.

While there were many stories from migrants about the violence committed by gangs, perhaps most alarming was the documentary's claim that 51% of assaults on migrants in Mexico are committed by police. Migrants recounted ways in which the Mexican police would pursue them into the jungles and take their shoes, money, and anything of value just like the gangs. One of the migrants, Santos, was assaulted by the police and had to be treated for broken ribs from the experience. When asked how he felt about it, he referred to the police as "thieves with permits." One of the police officers interviewed for the documentary unwittingly framed the problem of police assaults perfectly: "If a migrant is robbed or gets beat up, they can file a complaint; but they would be deported back to their country."³⁹

Once a migrant has successfully navigated the dangers awaiting them in Mexico, s/he is faced with dangers in the United States. In 1995, the US border patrol implemented a strategy to flood major urban areas along the Mexico border with agents with the intent to make crossing there more difficult. The result is that many more people seek to cross in the desert. Migrants traversing the US desert face many dangers that include starvation, dehydration, heat exhaustion, and hypothermia. The documentary *Mojados: Through the Night*⁴⁰ records the journey of four Mexican migrants through the Texas desert. The men walked four days and had to battle

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Davis, Tommy, and Sin Panache. *Mojados through the night = Wetbacks: through the night*. Buena Park, CA: Vanguard Cinema, 2005.

extreme temperatures while trying to navigate to their destination without the benefit of a map or a compass. They ran out of water quickly and had to drink water from ditches and cattle ponds while trying to evade detection by the border patrol. When they finally arrived at the house they were looking for, they were not allowed to stay very long because the migrant who received them feared they would be detected. They were once again forced out on their own, and three of the four men ended up being captured by the border patrol despite their days of toiling through the desert.

Both in Mexico and the United States, dangers await many migrants who set out on this stage of migration. Many use religion in both tangible and intangible ways to navigate the journey. One of the most measurable ways is through an intricate network of religious faith communities, organizations, and individuals along the way that help migrants.⁴¹ These entities provide shelter, education, food, and emotional, spiritual and psychological support. The individual parishes and congregations along with individual philanthropists along the way are too numerous and informal to document, but according to many migrants who have benefited from their aid, it is clear that their assistance is abundant and vital.

Organizations are a bit easier to follow. The Guatemalan Human Mobility Program is a religious organization that seeks to provide training and information for displaced migrant groups, hand out information on well-worn migrant paths in Mexico, broadcast information about potential dangers, document cases of abuse, and facilitate communication between parishes on migrant routes.⁴² This network provides a critical service to undocumented migrants crossing the dangerous border terrain from Guatemala into Mexico. The number of migrants passing through Guatemala is too great for the government to successfully handle and the

⁴¹ Hagan, *Miracle*: 84.

⁴² Hagan, *Miracle*: 93.

religious institution enjoys the freedom of not having to turn away non-Guatemalans who find their way into the parish.

The largest and perhaps only transnational religious congregation solely dedicated to directly aiding migrants in each of the stages of their journey is the Missionaries of St. Charles Scalabrini, an order of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴³ Founded in the late nineteenth century with the mission of looking after migrants from the Italian diaspora, its mission has changed along with migration patterns. Now they operate the largest network of facilities for migrants: the *Red de Casas del Migrante: Scalabrini* (Network of Migrant Houses: Scalabrini⁴⁴). With three locations across Mexico (Tijuana, Baja California; Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas; Tapachula, Chiapas) and two in Guatemala (Tecún Umán, San Marcos; Ciudad Guatemala, Guatemala), they seek to assist the migration journey by “creating a pastoral network of shelters for migrants, working in conjunction with other non-governmental organizations and churches. The network aims to promote and protect the Migrant in all aspects of his or her life, particularly cultural, social, and spiritual.”⁴⁵

The *Red Casas del Migrante* has had a key role in assisting the migrant journey by providing food, lodging, and clothing for migrants as well as critical humanitarian, educational, psychological and spiritual assistance to both migrants en route and deportees. Between 2008 and 2012 the network served over 41,000 migrants from all over Mexico and Central America.⁴⁶

⁴³ “Missionaries of St. Charles Scalabrini.” Missionaries of Charles Scalabrini. Web. 29 April. 2013. <http://www.scalabrinians.org/>

⁴⁴ Author’s Translation.

⁴⁵ “Red Casas Del Migrante Scalabrini.” Red Casas Del Migrante Scalabrini. Web. 29 April. 2013. <http://www.migrante.com.mx/>.

⁴⁶ *Revista*: 16.

They also make a point to provide networking assistance and information to anyone who wants to cross the border in order to make the journey as safe as possible.⁴⁷

The migrants I interviewed were clearly benefiting from all the services The Red provided in Tijuana, as will be discussed later in the section dealing with the deportation stage. The Honduran migrant that I interviewed, however, had an interesting take on the important role of the Scalabrini mission and that of other groups trying to serve migrants along the way:

Other [migrant houses] on the route from Honduras helped but there was a lot of bad will as well. The food that they gave us was the worst. The good food would be all eaten by those who were working and helping there. Sure, I am thankful because without them I would not be able to stay in the house, but they treated us very poorly. Maybe a migrant would arrive at the house who was ignorant and would spit on the floor... but you only have to tell them 'use the garbage can;' but when you say it with a mean tone, that is bad. There are people who think that they are the owners of the migrant houses but they are only volunteers.

This migrant found that he did not have the same experience at each of these migrant houses. The way in which he identified which houses were good to stay at and would treat him well was telling: "The migrant houses like this one, that has a *Virgen*, help us a lot. But the ones that don't have any religious [iconography] treated me very poorly on my journey."⁴⁸

The idea that there was a difference in the quality of each of the houses was telling. It is easy to be skeptical of the migrant's claim that only the religiously motivated migrant houses treated the migrants with dignity and the rest were abusive. However, the migrant is using his religious sensibilities to decide which houses he wanted to use along the way. The journey of the migrant is filled with people looking to victimize and take advantage of this vulnerable population, and the migrants don't have access to an online rating system that will let them know which houses are good and which are bad. This migrant solved the problem by applying a strict

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Migrant 140709_002.

criterion of religious iconography, whether accurate or not, to discern well-intending migrant houses from those with less than pure motives.

Among the Guatemalan Pentecostals studied by Hagan, the role of pastors was relevant when a journey was unsuccessful. The *ayunos* (fasting) is important for the family that is anticipating news from loved ones from whom they may not have heard for months. Families will make the trip up the mountain and participate in the prayer services with the pastor in hope their extra measure of devotion will result in their prayers for the migrant's safety and success be answered. If a migrant is known to be detained by authorities, the pastor will often contact family members in the U.S. or attempt to solicit legal help for the incarcerated migrant. On rare occasions he will help the family of the detained economically since the cost of migrating often forces families to sell or mortgage everything they have of value and thus having nothing left to shoulder the costs of deportation (i.e., the price of transportation back to the community).⁴⁹

Many of the migrants with whom I spoke indicated that their personal faith played a key role in the journey stage of migration. One of the most common things for the Catholic migrants was to carry the images of Christ, *la Virgen*, or one of the other saints for protection. Some indicated that the images helped protect them along the way and others indicated they carried them because they had prayers written on the back that they could recite in times of great need. One migrant from Guanajuato, Mexico put it to me this way: "In my wallet I have images, *Sacred Heart of Jesus*, *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, and *la Virgen de San Juan*. I carry them because I always ask God for help and if he cannot help me, maybe he can send me anyone of his servants. That is why I carry them."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1155.

⁵⁰ Migrant 140704_002.

Other migrants just used direct prayer as a means of making the journey go well. One migrant from Puebla, Mexico confessed: “I prayed a lot throughout my journey. The Lord blessed me a lot, showing me the way. In the blessings for which I pray, the only thing I focus on is this: ‘Here I am Lord and let your will be done.’”⁵¹ He expressed that this prayer brought him comfort and direction throughout his journey. This sentiment was shared by many of the migrants with whom I spoke, as they used religious belief and iconography to feel protected in a general sense throughout the journey.

Many migrants also experience times of acute need during the journey stage. For some, they find themselves trying to evade capture by migration officials, while for others, as mentioned above, there are even greater dangers that threaten life and limb. One of the ways in which Mexican migrants have traditionally communicated the significance of religion in these more perilous moments of the journey is through the art of *retablos*. This is a Mexican religious term used to describe votive paintings on tin. These paintings were intended to denote thankfulness to a saint or sacred image in a difficult situation, whether it be medical, legal, or migration related.⁵²

Retablos thus condense the most extreme of human emotions – fear, sorrow, apprehension, gratitude, relief, horror – onto small sheets of tin painted in the most elemental of styles. Looking at people depicted in the throes of a circumstance that appears to have no earthly value...⁵³

Retablos centered on migration are an attempt of either the artist or the person who has hired one to express worship through the medium. They offer a rare glimpse into the soul of a migrant as

⁵¹ Migrant 170709_001

⁵² Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 71.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 27.

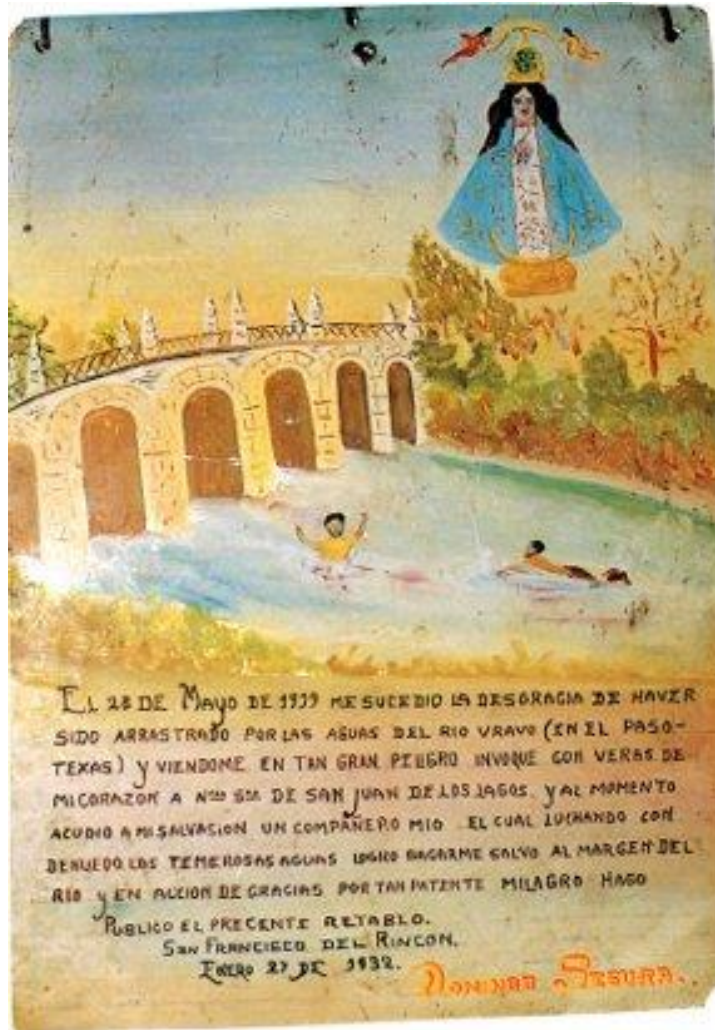
she processes the dangers she confronted and the internal religious resources upon which she drew for comfort.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 below are examples of how migrants utilized religious imagery in their migration journeys. Figure 1 represents the trouble faced by Domingo Segura as he attempted to cross the Rio Grande River along the border of Mexico and Texas. As he was crossing he started to drown in the current and called out to “Our Lady of San Juan” for help. At that moment his friend summoned the courage to help him. This *retablo* is illustrative of the many physical dangers migrants are subjected to during their journey, such as drowning, robbery, rape, or other injury and the reliance on religious resources to gain a sense of control.

Figure 2 exhibits the travails migrants face while walking through the desert heat with limited supplies and low access to water. Braulio Barrientos describes the terror of running out of water in the desert and feeling terrifyingly lost. He too called upon the Virgin of San Juan, one of the more popular shrines in Mexico, to whom he attributed to the strength to him and his friends to carry on.

Figure 3 illustrates one of the greatest worries of immigrants, being caught by immigration authorities. In this *retablo*, Maria Esther Tapia Picón gives a simple thanksgiving for not being detected as migration authorities closed in on her position. Unable to do anything but hide and pray, Tapia Picón saw the inability of the migration authority to detect her as a result of her praying to the Virgin of San Juan. Whether or not these were supernatural events is inconsequential. The point is that religious resources helped migrants and their families deal with danger and uncertainty.

Figure 1: Retablo of Domingo Segura.⁵⁴



Transcription and translation of Figure 1⁵⁵:

El 28 de Mayo 1929 me sucedio la desgracia de haver sido arrastrado por las aguas del Rio Vravo (en El Paso-Texas) y viéndome en tan gran peligro invoque con versa de mi corazón a Ntra. Sra. De San Juan de los Lagos y al momento acudio a mi salvación un compañero mio el cual luchando con denuedo las temerosas aguas logró sacarme salvo al margen del río y en acción de gracias por tan patente milagro hago public el precente retablo. San Francisco del Rincón. Enero 29 de 1932. Domingo Segura.

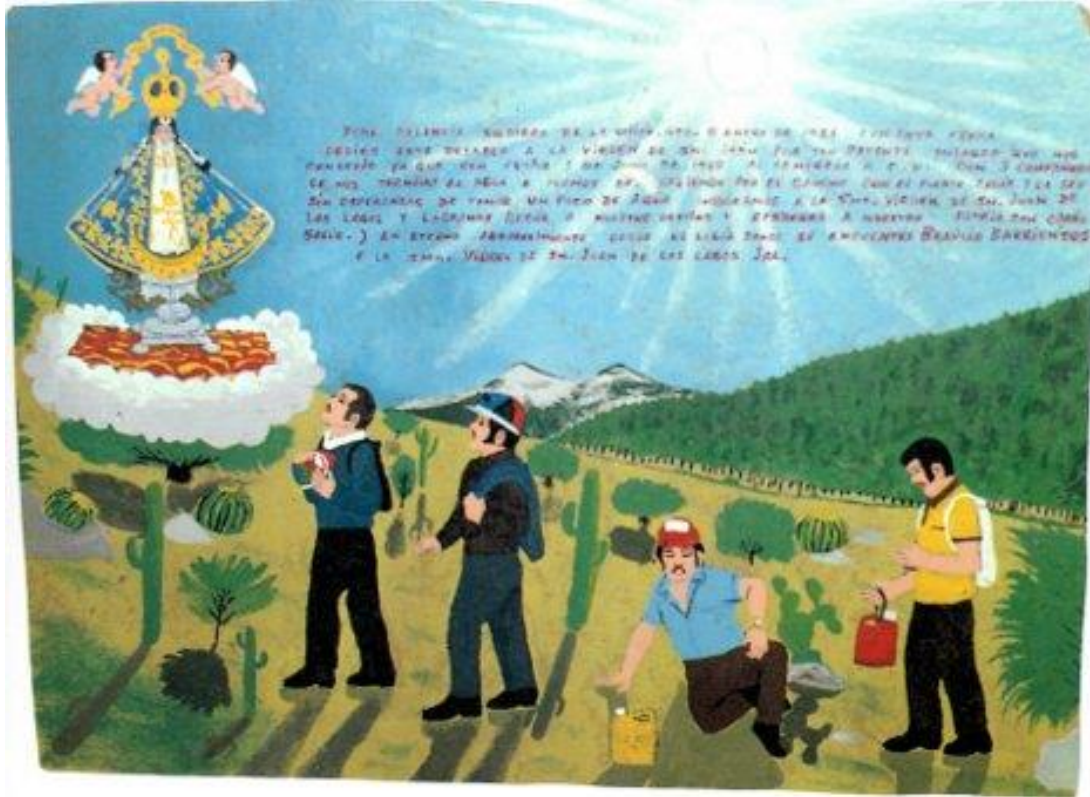
The misfortune happened to me on May 28, 1929. Being dragged along by the waters of the Rio Grande in El Paso, Texas, I saw myself in such great danger that

⁵⁴ Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 133. Although this *retablo* is outside of my specific time period, it is a useful illustration of how migration is interpreted religiously.

⁵⁵ Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 132.

I invoked Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos with a true heart, and at that moment my salvation came from a friend who, bravely fighting the fearful waters, was able to pull me to the river bank. In thanksgiving for so apparent a miracle, I make public the present retablo. San Francisco del Rincón. January 29 of 1932. Domingo Segura.

Figure 2: Retablo of Braulio Barrientos.⁵⁶



Transcription and Translation of Figure 2:⁵⁷

Rcho. Palencia. Sn. Diego de la Unión, Gto. 11 enero de 1986. Con esta fecha dedico este retablo a la Virgen de Sn. Juan por tan patente milagro que nos consedió ya que con fecha 5 de Junio de 1986 al remigrar a E.U. con 3 compañeros se nos terminó el agua que llevamos siendo me el camino con el fuerte calor y la sed sin esperanzas de tomar un poco de agua. Invocamos a la Sma. Virgen de San Juan de los Lagos y logramos llegar a nuestro destino y regresar a nuestra patria con salud. En eterno agradecimineto desde el lugar donde se encuentre Braulio Barrientos a la Sma. Virgen de Sn. Juan de los Lagos Jal.

Rancho Palencia, San Diego de la Unión, Guanajuato. January 11, 1986. On this date I dedicate the present retablo to the Virgin of San Juan for the clear miracle

⁵⁶ Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 135

⁵⁷ Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 134.

she granted on the date of June 5, 1986. Re-emigrating to the United States with three friends, the water we were carrying ran out. Traveling in such great heat and with such thirst, and without hope of drinking even a little water, we invoked the Virgin of San Juan and were able to arrive at our destination and return to our homeland in health. In eternal gratitude to the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos from the place where you find Braulio Barrientos.

Figure 3: Retablo of M. Esther Tapia Picón.⁵⁸



Transcription and Translation of Figure 3:⁵⁹

Damos gracias a la virjen de San Juan por librarnos de los de la migración al pasar a los Angeles. León, Gto. M. Esther Tapia Picón.

We give thanks to the Virgin of San Juan for saving us from the migration authorities on our way to Los Angeles. León, Guanajuato. María Esther Tapia Pecón.

Although none of the migrants I interviewed had recorded their stories on *retablos*, many of them had encountered intense times of need and turned to religion. One migrant from

⁵⁸ Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 137.

⁵⁹ Durand and Massey, *Miracles*: 136.

Morelos, Mexico did not consider himself particularly religious but did say he believes “there is something out there.” He had attempted to cross the border four times and had been caught every single time. This last time that he attempted to cross he heard the migration officials close and he said a prayer right when the migration officials were about to catch him, asking God to help him avoid capture. “I said it in a moment of desperation.” Another migrant, from Zacatecas, Mexico, found support in his time of great need through prayer. “I feel like God has helped because I have not come across any major problems. When we pray and ask God, things work out because nothing terrible has happened to us. One time some men did find us up in the mountains and assaulted us and took everything from us and threatened to take our lives as well. We begged God to stop them and ended up telling the men that we would give them everything that we had if they let us go. The men agreed to this, and we just gave them part of what we had and they let us go. I feel like God was there protecting us in our journey.”⁶⁰ In their time of great need, this migrant used prayer as a means of having some control in a situation in which they were at the absolute mercy of the men holding them captive. The migrant felt like the ability to rely on this prayer was the key to getting him through this harrowing situation which many migrants face.

The journey stage of migration is full of examples of both institutional and individual uses of religion. Whether it is the continued role of clergy in keeping families connected throughout the time of transience or the institutional fortitude of religious missions for helping migrants, religion provides a major catalyst and resource for migration. The clearest evidence of this can be found in the testimonies of migrants who have made the journey and relied in some way on religion. The use of *retablos* is both a practice of religion as well as a beautiful recounting of the impact of religion on many personal migration journeys.

⁶⁰ Migrant 140704_006

Chapter Two: Stages Four, Five, and Six

Stage Four: The Arrival

The arrival is the final stage of the physical journey of the migrant to the receiving community. Until this point in the study, the United States has been referred to in broad terms as the receiving society. But the migrant must arrive in a specific community with specific needs to be met. They must have shelter, food and water, and clothes that will help them survive. They also must be able to find family or contacts that were expecting them as well as inform those who have sent them of their safe arrival. This can be a critical time for migrants because an unsuccessful arrival will mean the perilous journey was for naught. But it is also critical for those who are left behind who often will not have heard from their family throughout the duration of the trip.

Perhaps the most immediate need for someone who is just arriving in a new community is lodging. Most migrants need to rely on others for lodge for three months to a year before they are able to housing on their own.⁶¹ In the case of the *Iglesia de Dios* (Church of God) in Mimosa Park, Houston, members often house new arrivals in their homes until they are able to locate housing and jobs on their own.⁶² Although this is not an institutionally organized practice for this faith community, it is an example of resources afforded to migrants via religious connections. This church movement is based in Guadalajara, Mexico and boasts a membership of around 1.5 million people worldwide. Immigrants who were members of an *Iglesia de Dios* church in their sending community arrive to their new community with a letter that establishes them as a part of the church family and grants them immediate and unmitigated access to church resources.⁶³ This

⁶¹ Flores Yeffal, *Networks*, 75.

⁶² Sullivan, *Iglesia*: 147.

⁶³ Sullivan, *Iglesia*: 147.

is a formalized version of what happens with many faith communities across the U.S. as they establish relationships with religious institutions in sending societies. This immediate access helps provide for the physical needs of immigrants and mollifies concerns of families waiting to know that the migrant has found a secure and trusted environment in which to stay.

Many of the migrants I interviewed benefited from a church community or were aware of other migrants who had been helped out by one. One migrant from Michoacán, Mexico was only four years old when he migrated and so has no recollection of whether or not his family received help from the church when they arrived. Having lived in the US for most of his life, however, he knows very well the importance of this kind of assistance as the church his family attends provides help to recently arrived migrants by helping them find jobs, providing money for housing, and establishing relationships within the existing Hispanic community.⁶⁴ Another migrant who crossed with his parents at the age of nine also did not remember having received help with the arrival process but knows that this is what his church does. “In my church they give out food, clothes, they help you with rent, and they help you find a job.”⁶⁵ For these two young men, helping with the arrival process was just something that they expected the local church to do. Whenever a migrant would show up in the community looking for help, they knew that it was the role of the church to step up and help.

Many of my interviewees benefited directly from this type of assistance. The man from Zacatecas, Mexico who had a run-in with muggers in the mountains during the journey found help from a local church upon his arrival in Phoenix, AZ. “I was in a church there and they gave me a house, and I stayed there almost a month because they gave me a job right in the church. They gave such great help. I was able to work a short time and I did not have to worry about

⁶⁴ Migrant 140704_004.

⁶⁵ Migrant 140707_002.

paying rent. I just went to church. When I was ready to move on to Idaho, one of the members of the congregation knew a pastor, which allowed me to have a faith home there before I even arrived. They also helped me get established in Idaho.⁶⁶ The migrant from Guanajuato, Mexico who had crossed the border 29 times received similar help: “When I was working in Escondido, a church helped me with food and a place to stay. They helped me establish myself, which allowed me to have success in my work. They prayed for me and I never have forgotten about all they had done for me.”⁶⁷

These migrants have experienced and seen firsthand the importance of faith communities taking part in the arrival stage of migration. Although some migrants are anticipating meeting somebody in their destination communities, many more arrive without any idea of how they are going to get established. As we have seen in the journey phase, even if somebody plans to take some money with them to help get established right when they arrive, there is no guarantee that they will arrive with that money.

One more form of assistance offered by faith communities that can be invaluable to the migrant is informing family members and other loved ones of the migrant’s arrival. For many migrants and their families, this can be very tricky. This is especially true in areas where the means of communication are difficult (i.e., lack of reliable telephone, poor mail service, etc). Many families waiting for news rely on a religious institution to disseminate news. Often news of arrival that cannot be directly communicated to the family can be communicated to the pastor or faith leader who enjoys better access to amenities such as a telephone or the internet. The faith leader is sometimes also the point person to whom to send pictures and letters documenting safe

⁶⁶ Migrant 140704_006.

⁶⁷ Migrant 140710_002.

arrival so that the family can be reassured that the migrant is indeed doing well.⁶⁸ This reaffirms the role of religion as a conduit of services and important functions in the migration process.

Whether the danger is physical, spiritual, or emotional, the arrival of the migrant to the receiving society is one of the most critical points in the process. It is clear that religion serves as a conduit for meeting many of the initial needs confronted by the migrant in their new society. Some migrants find food and a place to stay through a welcoming faith community, while others find that their religious ties can help put them in touch with concerned family members. It is not surprising to see religion playing a critical role in the next stage of migration in which migrants must become acclimated to their new community.

Stage Five: Settlement

After the initial needs of a newly arrived migrant are met, he will face many other challenges as he attempts to navigate his integration into the receiving society. There are physical needs such as finding a permanent place to live and a source of income. There are also acculturation needs that include language and culture as well as more tangible needs like enrolling children in schools. There are legal concerns such as learning societal norms and laws that differ from those of the migrant's sending society, such as pulling over when an emergency vehicle is operating its lights even without a siren or adhering to strict traffic laws.

For undocumented migrants, it is important to learn what behaviors and locations put one at a higher risk of being detected. In order to find work, many must also figure out how to obtain false documents that can be trusted, which employers will not question their legal status thoroughly, and how to avoid detection once they are working.⁶⁹ Nadia Flores Yeffal discusses the importance of migrant-trust networks in meeting the complex needs and giving accurate

⁶⁸ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1155.

⁶⁹ Flores Yeffal, *Networks*, 79.

information to migrants trying to settle in their new communities.⁷⁰ For many migrants, religious institutions and communities form a critical part of those trust networks as they attempt to settle into their new environment.

By giving newly arrived migrants a chance to interact with more veteran migrants, or even natural born citizens, religious communities provide spaces of cultural adaptation, social cohesion, and the formation of a new identity.⁷¹ Immigrants who involve themselves in a faith community upon arrival join a group of people that often consists of more established migrants and non-migrants. The new contacts help form the migrant's worldview and understanding of the United States, the relationship is always reciprocal to some degree, as the new arrivals also influence their hosts in the faith community and sensitizes them to issues surrounding immigration.⁷² Religion provides a quick avenue for many migrants to find other people who will help guide them in their attempt to understand and become a part of a new cultural context.

Although the potential critical role cultural assimilation filled by faith communities should not be diminished, even more essential is the economic opportunity often provided.⁷³ Some faith communities have formal economic and legal programs run by the professional clergy, which is especially critical for those who have no family or diaspora connections. The *Iglesia de Dios* in Houston does not have a formal assistance program for migrants, but services such as food, clothing, healthcare costs, and assistance for widows and orphans are consistently provided through informal relationships within the church.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Flores Yefall, *Networks*.

⁷¹ Osterhaus and Loucky, *Religion*, 277.

⁷² Levitt, *Religion*, 778.

⁷³ Hirschman, *Religions*, 1206.

⁷⁴ Sullivan, *Iglesia*, 147.

The Pentecostal Maya community has also taken advantage of the informal networks formed in the churches in Houston, TX. Although there are no formal programs in these churches, the networks are so strong that many Catholic migrants decide to convert upon arrival to Houston in order to benefit from the connections.⁷⁵ The Dominican migrants also found the informal networks to be the most advantageous upon their arrival in Boston. Many pointed to the Church as a place to go to connect with people despite their new fast-paced lifestyles. Whereas life in Miraflores, Dominican Republic was community centered and less hectic, the high-speed culture in Boston proved overwhelming for many. As these migrants find success in their new home, the church also serves as a stage from which to act on their enhanced social status while fulfilling religious obligations.⁷⁶

One migrant I interviewed had a very compelling story about how conversion to a religion helped him settle in the United States. He came from a home in which his mother abused him and he rarely saw father because he was in the military. He described his mom often burning his hands and sticking needles in his fingers as punishment, and at age 12 he ran away from home. Somebody invited him to cross the border, which he did in order to escape home. He said that he didn't become religious until much later in life. He felt like he was losing control of his life when he was involved in violence and drugs and decided that converting to Christianity was the way to go. After studying for a little while he decided he wanted to follow Judaism by which he means Messianic Judaism (People who follow Judaism but believe the Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies).

That's something that I guess I went through, a very difficult time when I found out my father got killed in Michoacán. It was painful to imagine the way in which he got killed. Two guys choked him. It was hard to figure... that they took his life

⁷⁵ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*, 1156.

⁷⁶ Levitt, *Villagers*, 169.

right away. I started drinking, smoking, using drugs. I was to a point that I was carrying a weapon. I was upset at the whole world. I remember myself saying that I had no god... I was my own god. Obviously, I was in the dumps. And I got to the point that it didn't matter how many drinks, smokes, or woman, I was still feeling miserable. That was 2005-07 when I started having nightmares, nonsense thinking. I got to the point where I got very scared and wanted to get out of that but I couldn't because I was an addict. I tried but I was getting deeper and deeper. The only thing that helped me was giving my life to Christ. I did it, it was hard and difficult, and I started studying the bible. And started practicing Judaism. Somebody talked to me about giving my life to Christ.

I got involved in a Christian church and started studying urban ministry. I started studying theology that was based on the Greek point of view. They were like college courses that we were taking. When I started understanding the religious or the faith doctrines, I decided to follow Judaism. They are not really watering down the gospel. You are either all in or you are not in at all.⁷⁷

This is significant because he found religion while trying to navigate difficulties of life as an undocumented migrant in a foreign land. Religion became an important way to regain control of his life's narrative.

The migrant I interviewed from Guerrero, Mexico, who had consulted with his whole village at church when making the decision to migrate, found a church very involved with its local community when he arrived in the US. After having been in the town for a short while, he went to the local Mexican grocery and people there were inviting the community to church. The church had a specific mass for migrants and other Spanish speakers on Saturdays. Shortly after arriving at the church he took on a leadership role in helping serve during the Eucharist sacrament (communion). The church helped many find jobs, such that many employers from the community knew to go to Saturday mass on to hire migrant labor.⁷⁸

Many faith communities contribute to migrant well-being, but none so much for Latino immigrants as the Catholic Church. Although not every parish follows the charitable ideals

⁷⁷ Migrant 140702_001.

⁷⁸ Migrant 140702_002.

regarding migrants espoused by the hierarchical church, the vast majority in areas with large Latino populations offer services and other sacraments in Spanish. This includes baptisms, blessings, premarital counseling, weddings, and many other important markers of a migrant's faith. The Church also provides many social services, including employment information, rent information for housing, food pantries, and health services.⁷⁹ These are extremely critical to the undocumented migrant because governments typically fall short in such responsibilities.

One Catholic migrant from Puebla, Mexico talked about the important relationships he and his family had forged via the local church. He and his wife joined a group of married couples that study the Bible together and discuss issues pertaining to migrants, such as how to raise children, how to manage being undocumented, and how to keep a happy and productive marriage. One of the most important things, according to him, is the support that they offer one another when going through difficult times. His children are all involved in the church youth group where the specific needs of immigrant children are addressed. This faith-based community has provided a sense of peace by providing critical support.⁸⁰

One migrant originally from Michoacán, Mexico migrated at the age of 13 and was in the US for 51 years. He crossed the border by himself in order to find work because he watched his father work very hard and never have enough money to support the family. He made a life in the United States and has two grown daughters with their own families. Although he never was very big on theological debates, he thinks church is really important: "In church we give one another a hand. There are times when people say that they need me to help fix their car, and I do. There are other times that I need something, and all I have to do is ask and someone helps me. It is

⁷⁹ Rivera Sanchez, *Migrantes*: 259.

⁸⁰ Migrant 140703_001.

about doing life together. I am available 24 hours a day, if someone needs me, they can call and I will get up and go help.”⁸¹

Another way in which religious organizations help in the settlement stage is by providing the undocumented migrant with direct legal assistance. In the late 1980s and early 1990s some American churches created the sanctuary movement to protect undocumented migrants who had fled warfare in Central America.⁸² Since, the Catholic Church has created a legal organization dedicated to migrants called Justice for Immigrants (JFI), which works to create pathways for the undocumented to gain legal recognition.⁸³ I have also found through my research that people receive legal advice among the informal bonds formed in the local church. Often this comes in the form of migrants sharing experiences and information about attorneys. One migrant I interviewed from Oaxaca related having direct access to an immigration attorney through his local church: “Religion helps because it is all about the people coming together. If the people come together in the church they can help one another. I am a carpenter and I help people who have things that need to be built or fixed. Another person in the church was a lawyer and he helped with our migration papers.”⁸⁴ Access to professionals in the church gives congregants crucial advantages that other migrants would be less likely to have.

In summary, as a migrant settles in a new community, physical and social needs must be met. Religious institutions can play a critical role in both formal and informal ways by connecting recent migrants to people who are more established and also providing programs designed to meet the needs of migrants. Whether it is through familiar support systems found in

⁸¹ Migrant 140705_005.

⁸² Hirschman, *Religions*: 1229.

⁸³ Rivera Sanchez, *Migrantes*: 265.

⁸⁴ Migrant 140707_003.

traditional US church structures like youth groups or marriage support groups, or through informal networking, migrants use religion to gain the support they need. Some churches have a conscious strategy of attracting migrants via services, where others simply serve as a space where migrants can come together for support. What is clear is that organized religion can serve as a common space where migrants feel more at home in a foreign and sometimes unwelcoming land.

Stage Six: Forging Transnational Bonds

Dreams of world citizenship have always figured large in the Western imagination. They were part of Kant's vision of a 'perpetual peace' in a world that would be liberated from irrational prejudices. Goethe envisioned a world society that would overcome the limits of German militarism. Marx predicted that an international society would emerge in which workers would unite to overcome capitalism's bonds.

Religion has also provided grist for imagining memberships beyond the nation. Implicit in Augustine's idea of the City of God, where the legacy of Roman global society would be perfected, was the idea of belonging to several communities at once. Luther spoke of 'two kingdoms' He believed people could belong to the kingdom of God and contribute to the kingdom of the world at the same time... Thomas Aquinas saw individuals as members of families, nation-states and the human community, and grappled with how life could be organized across all three.⁸⁵

The final stage of migration included in Ebaugh and Hagan's model is the forging of transnational bonds between the sending and receiving communities. This stage has not traditionally been considered when looking at migration, but the majority of contemporary studies on migration include a focus on transnational connections. As intimated in the above quote, the concept is not foreign and have been expressed in the writings of great thinkers throughout history. With the interconnectivity of globalization, it is not surprising that advances

⁸⁵ Levitt, *Religions*: 766-767.

in communications technology along with the increased numbers of migrants have created opportunities for communities not only to remain connected, but to exert real influence on one another across national borders. Migrants' practice of religion both enables this process and is deeply affected by its reach.

The most notable example of migrants forming transnational religious bonds is the cross influence of rites and rituals. In the case of Maya Pentecostals in the U.S., the structure of the church and its practices closely resemble those of the home churches in Guatemala. From the service and Sunday schools to the maintenance and construction committees, the churches have few distinguishable differences.⁸⁶ One important difference, however, in this community and many communities affected by migration is the amount of money available to those who have migrated. The Guatemala Pentecostals were particularly successful in recruiting financial help from migrants in Houston for their church.⁸⁷

Religion also allows migrants to participate directly in what is going on in the sending community. When a group of immigrants develop strong religious mores in its new society, it tends to have an effect on the practice and belief of the home country. This can be either a moderating effect or a radicalizing movement.⁸⁸ For the Dominicans left in Miraflores, the practices of migrants in the U.S. have started to flow back and create syncretisms in Dominican Catholicism. One example was the clergy in the Dominican Republic began to be viewed less as a spiritual companion or a guide and more as an employee of the congregants.⁸⁹ Another change was the abandonment of some of the folk-religious practices that were typical in Miraflores and a

⁸⁶ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*: 1156.

⁸⁷ Hagan and Ebaugh, *Calling*. 1157.

⁸⁸ Levitt, *Religions*: 768.

⁸⁹ Levitt, *Transnationalism*: 173.

return to practices familiar only to the orthodox Catholic Church. A third change was that as a direct result of the clergy from Miraflores visiting congregations in the U.S., a new after-service coffee hour was instituted as a way for parishioners to meet their priest on a more intimate level.⁹⁰

In the case of *Iglesia de Dios*, transnationalism is a way of life for the migrants who attend. The church's main center is located in Guadalajara and considered a major pilgrimage site by congregants in Houston. Migrants with documents are encouraged to participate in reduced rate caravans to visit the main campus, which they tend to view as a Christian Utopia. However, many migrated for economic, not religious, reasons. As a result, the survival of the Guadalajara community depends heavily on the remittances that can be provided by migrants.⁹¹ This relationship is not uncommon in the transnational religious landscape. As migrants leave a faith community, their view of that community is raised to a high level because their identity lies there and they now have the means to patronize with remittances, which in turn are eventually depended upon by the depopulated home community.

The migrant from Zacatecas, Mexico who was assaulted in the mountains of Mexico in his journey found that the church helped him to directly support his family back home. Unsure of how or where to send money, he relied on the church to give him instructions, including when the money could be sent.⁹² Remittances are now relied upon by families, communities, and the nation alike. Even though the last decade has seen a decline in remittances to Mexico, the World Bank has still been able to track over \$20 billion US dollars flowing into Mexico for the year of

⁹⁰ Ibid: 176.

⁹¹ Sullivan, *Iglesia*: 148.

⁹² Migrant 140704_006.

2013 via remittances.⁹³ The remittance economy has become so essential that states such as this man's home of Guerrero, Mexico have created programs in which remittance money donated for the state infrastructure improvements will be matched by the state government. These programs have come to be known as the *dos por uno* programs.⁹⁴ It might be more accurate to describe these programs and three for one since often cities, states, and the federal government will match these remittances. When churches like the one visited by this migrant in Idaho and others start to play a direct role in the administration of remittances, they become true actors on the international stage.

Perhaps one of the most striking ways in which migrants participate in religion transnationally is through the celebration of religious milestones across borders.⁹⁵ Now, weddings, baptisms, births, deaths and other religious occasions traditionally celebrated by a singular faith community are observed by migrants thousands of miles away. This can be through phone calls, the internet, or even letters sent with updated information about what is going on in the lives of the community as a whole and how that is relating to the wellbeing of the church or faith community. Modern communications has allowed for an ongoing connection to those who would not be otherwise accessible. This phenomenon shows the power of religion in maintaining strong connections with sending communities even while it helps to assimilate the migrant to her new environment.

The migrant from Guerrero, Mexico who was given guidance on his decision to leave (by the group of men who came together in his church), reported that his sense of identity relies on

⁹³ "Total Remittances Received in Latin America and Mexico." *Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project*. November 14, 2013. Web. November 2, 2014. <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/11/15/remittances-to-latin-america-recover-but-not-to-mexico/ph-remittances-11-2013-1-01/>>

⁹⁴ Fernández and Montaña, "Migrantes."

⁹⁵ Hagan and Ebaugh: *Calling*: 1157.

continuing to participate in his sending community. In his village they share the annual responsibility of making a feast for the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. This is his year to host the feast at his house. “This December I have a commitment to la *Virgen*. I am in charge and it is my turn on December 18 to make a floral arrangement for her. It is a very beautiful and big arrangement, and can cost around ten thousand pesos. We will invite a young girl to be adorned like *la Virgen* and all of the people will come to this feast. I have to buy a cow to kill so that the guests can eat. I will have it done in the house of some relatives and I will send the money on to them in order to follow through on my part.”⁹⁶ Although he has every intention of settling in a new place and making a new life for himself, he also values following through on his commitments to his home town and has connected the two through this religious festival. The cost will be great, and he expressed doubt over whether or not he would actually have the money to follow through on this promise (especially having just been deported), but his devotion to his home town faith community even while trying to establish his family in a new country demonstrates how inextricable his home town and religion are to his identity.

In short, the forging of transnational bonds between migrants and those who have stayed behind is facilitated by religious connections. While migrants gain social and emotional capital from remaining connected with roots, the sending communities are connected with a much needed source of financial support to continue with the functions of the faith community. Ironically, the more people migrate, the stronger is financial support for community strengthening religious festivals back home. As the transnational bonds are strengthened, it gives more people a direct tie to the U.S. and forges stronger connections that can be used by friends and family who consider embarking on the migration process.

⁹⁶ Migrant 140702_002.

Chapter Three: Deportation

Migrant 140704_003

The most memorable migrant I met during my research gave me one of the shortest interviews I conducted; it only lasted about 15 minutes. Carried into the U.S. at age three by his mother, he had no memory of Mexico. He spoke English because his Spanish was very limited. When I asked where he was from in Mexico, he responded: “I was told I was born in Jalisco, Guadalajara. But I am not sure.” Like many of the men I interviewed, he had spent time in prison and was deported at the end of his sentence. This migrant was arrested at the age of 16 and was 33 when he was deported. He had spent the majority of his life in prison.

Similar to almost all of the people I interviewed, this man appeared scared and uncertain. His demeanor was otherwise unremarkable. He got involved with a gang at a young age, “because I was lacking family leadership at home and grew up in poverty. Right where I lived, it was commonplace for kids to start hanging out, rebel, and stuff like that.” Tijuana, however, was an experience like none other. He was overwhelmed and unsure of what he was going to do next.

“This is the first time I have been back to Mexico. I feel like an alien from another place and it’s a little hard for me because I was taught different, a different place so everything is a little weird for me, a little hard for me. Maybe a little harder than the common Mexican but... now I believe in God so I think that it’s an obstacle, everything right here is an obstacle and I just have to put my effort to overcome.”

When I asked more about his religious upbringing, he was ambivalent, indicating that his mother had tried to impose religion on him and his siblings. But it was seen more as a tool of threats and discipline in order to get the kids to behave. He felt smothered by the way his mother talked about faith, so he pushed it away. While in prison he started to believe in the existence of a higher power but still did not consider himself a “religious person.” “Now,” he said, “I believe that everything happens for a reason.” Like most of the migrants I interviewed, he had never

heard of the *Casa del Migrante* where he found refuge. He expressed deep gratitude for the services he was receiving and said that he felt “blessed” to have a place to stay and be able to get in touch with his loved ones in the states.⁹⁷

By and large, the interview was unremarkable in that his answers were not very expansive, which explains the brevity of the conversation. What made this migrant memorable was not the interview. Within hours afterwards, and only two days after being expelled from the US, he overdosed on heroin. It is not clear whether it was intentional or an accident, but what was clear was the high cost and heavy burden many migrants experience when things go awry in their receiving country. Many migrants’ journeys do not end with strengthened transnational bonds, but instead with the harrowing stage of deportation.

Deportation as a Stage of Migration

Up until this point, this paper has followed previous scholars in outlining six stages of migration. It is my contention, however, that a seventh stage must be added for Latin American migration to the United States, namely that of deportation. The burgeoning number of migrants paired with more restrictive US immigration laws and greater enforcement have caused the number of deported migrants to increase. A change in US policy towards Mexican migrants that keeps most deported migrants in border cities has created an enduring space in the migrant journey between hometowns and U.S. residences. Not only the migrants but also the Mexican and American governments are learning to navigate this new reality. Some migrants turn to personal faith as well as religious institutions to cope with this harrowing stage of migration.

Globalization has brought new challenges to policy makers and citizens. One is mass migration and, more specifically, mass undocumented migration. The ease with which people move great distances away from home is unprecedented in the history of the world. Many have

⁹⁷ Migrant 140704_003.

taken advantage of this in order to flee conditions caused by globalization that makes staying at home untenable. As the numbers of undocumented migrants have increased, the technology that allows countries to track people crossing large land borders has increased in effectiveness and efficiency. As a result, no one would have imagined that it would be possible to know whether someone went through official channels when migrating. With the advent of this more reliable data, societies have been given a new tool in debating the question of how many people should be allowed to immigrate and what to do with those who are caught having immigrated without proper documentation.

The migratory relationship between the United States and Latin America has fluctuated from completely open to tumultuous and difficult. Over the past few decades, migrants from Latin America have seen possibilities for documented migration decrease and the barriers to undocumented migration increase.⁹⁸ Until 1965, there were no limits on the number of immigrants from Latin America to the United States, and the Bracero Program (1942-64) had been responsible for importing up to 450 thousand temporary workers per year. In 1965, Congress imposed a cap on migrants from Latin America to 120 thousand per year and only 20 thousand resident visas per year were to be granted to Latin Americans. In the late 1970's the number of immigrants allowed to come to the US from Latin America was combined with the total number of migrants allowed worldwide, which was capped first at 280 thousand and then reduced to 270 thousand.

As the policy of the United States became more restrictive, the enforcement became greater. Between 1986 and 2004 the US – Mexico border became the “most militarized frontier

⁹⁸ Massey and Riosmena, "Undocumented," 295.

between two peaceful nations anywhere in the world.”⁹⁹ The border patrol became the largest branch of government to carry weapons other than the military itself. The budget increased 1000%, the number of officers tripled, the number of hours spent patrolling grew by a factor of eight, and the internal deportation numbers expanded by a factor of ten.¹⁰⁰ While the immigration bill passed in 1986 reduced the number of undocumented people to around 3.5 million by 1990, the number immediately started to grow again and was about 12 million by 2006 (60% of whom were estimated to be Mexican). About half of all people of Mexican birth in the US are undocumented. Even more impressive is that out of all people in the United States who are of Mexican heritage, one fifth are estimated to be undocumented.¹⁰¹

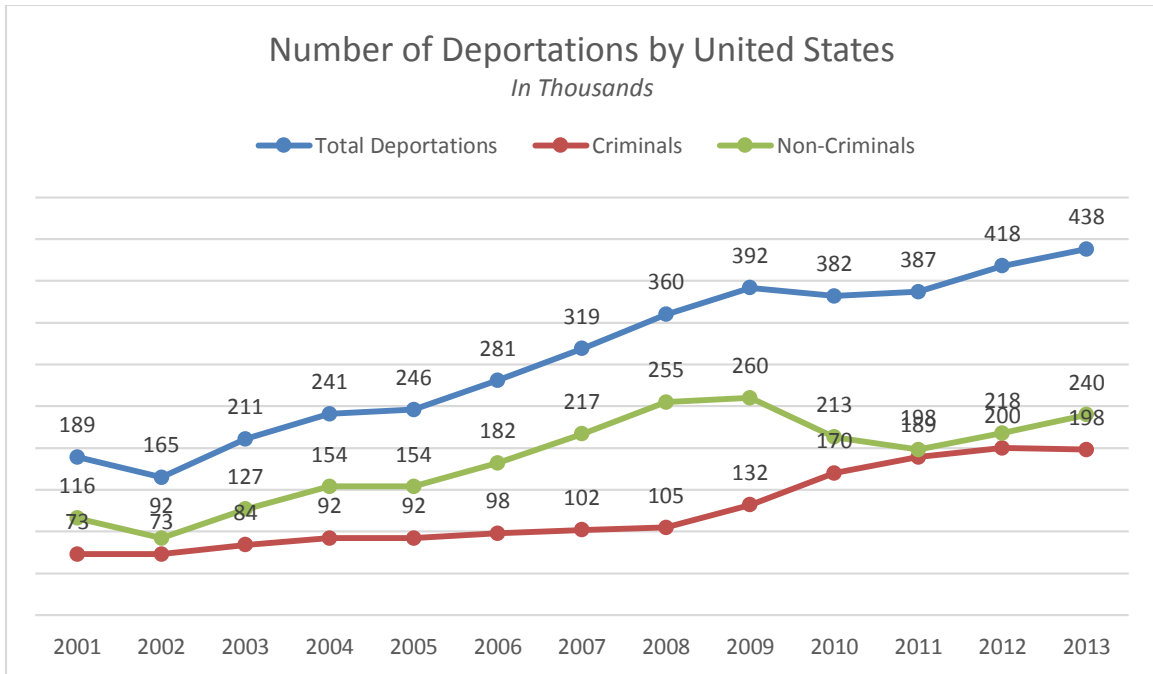
As the number of undocumented migrants and enforcement officers have risen in tandem, the amount of deportations has followed suit. The table below breaks down deportations of convicted criminals and non-criminals.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Massey and Riosmena, “Undocumented,” 295.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Massey and Riosmena, “Undocumented,” 296.

¹⁰² Data taken from: Gonzalez-Barrera and Krogstad, “Deportations.”



Deportations were relatively rare when Hagan and Ebaugh laid out their six stages of migration, although they did acknowledge it. Given the new era of mass imprisonment and deportations and the undocumented, I argue that deportation merits consideration as its own stage. Hagan, in fact, agrees, , not only due to the dramatic increase of deportations from the United States but also because of an important change in US policy towards deportations.¹⁰³ As the number of deportations increased in the early 2000s, the US Department of Homeland Security initiated Mexico Interior Repatriation Flights. This program was responsible for flying Mexican deportees from the United States directly to their home state or somewhere close, at which point they would be bussed to their home town.¹⁰⁴ The end of this program, in 2011, meant that all Mexican migrants would henceforth be deported to border cities along the Mexico – US frontier. This has caused a major change in the experience of deportation for the majority of deportees.

¹⁰³ Interview with Dr. Hagan over the phone: January, 29 2014.

¹⁰⁴ The important exception to this is when migrants attempted to mislead authorities about their hometowns and countries. This was not very easy, however, as many migrants with whom I spoke reported that US immigration officials would ask very detailed questions about origin that made it very hard to misrepresent where one is from.

In 2000-2001, repatriations to Mexico from all over the world reached over 1 million per year and have since stabilized to between 500,000 and 600,000 per year.¹⁰⁵ They were largely been repatriated to major metropolitan areas of six Mexican states: Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and the Distrito Federal. Tijuana has received the vast majority of repatriated migrants,¹⁰⁶ but it's a place largely unfamiliar to migrants. Many ultimately decide to remain transient with the goal of reattempting to enter into the US without documentation. Reentering the journey stage of migration is more difficult because they have to do so without the benefit of the support system with which they planned their first trip.¹⁰⁷

Since a number of migrants I interviewed had either been in prison or arrested on a misdemeanor charge, it is important to understand the particular challenges people coming out of correctional facilities face. The reintegration of prisoners into society is difficult even for those who are going back to the communities where they were arrested. When somebody gets out of prison they have to find a place to live, secure formal identification, reestablish ties with family, return to high risk places, and find a job often with a poor work history and criminal record. The success of this integration is dependent not just on their willingness to change but also on a number of social factors. These include acceptance by family, friends, and neighbors, establishing a life with housing, work, and transportation, managing obstacles such as drug

¹⁰⁵ Paris Pombo, "Procesos," 46.

¹⁰⁶ Paris Pombo, "Procesos," 3

¹⁰⁷ As during the other stages of migration, the deportation stage is wrought with dangers and hardships. One main difference is that while each of the others stages are initiated by the agency of the migrant, the deportation stage is a forced migration initiated by the US government. It might be tempting for the reader, and indeed even the author, to try to make a moral argument about deportation policy or procedures. The scope of this paper, however, is not to evaluate the morality of deportation or of the decisions of migrants any more than it is to discuss the validity of religious beliefs. The point is merely to describe and understand what migrants are experiencing.

abuse, physical and mental health problems, and financial obligation.¹⁰⁸ Out of all of these, the prisoners who seem to show the greatest measure of success are those indicating a strong family support.¹⁰⁹ When prisoners are deported at the end of their incarceration, they are less likely to benefit from the support so critical to their reintegration into society. Such was the case of the migrant discussed at the beginning of this section. He passed away without the benefit of a supportive family. His family was willing to help him but had trouble contacting him across the border. Isolation is certainly not unique to this deportee.

The Mexican government has put forward programs to attempt to reintegrate deportees into society, but they are underfunded and/or poorly conceived. The government will offer discounted tickets to various places in Mexico but not every day and not to every city. So, even those who want to go home may not be able to do so or might be stranded in an unfamiliar city while waiting to return to their place of origin.

While this government service might seem like a welcome one, many deportees have lived for many years or nearly their entire lives in the US. The migrant described at the beginning of this section was not even sure about where he was born. Regardless, they may have cut all ties to their ‘hometown.’ Thus, the programs have had nearly insurmountable challenges, creating another opportunity for religious institutions to fill the void.¹¹⁰ One particularly renowned one in Tijuana, Mexico, the city receiving the most deportees, is the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana*.

¹⁰⁸ Christy A Visher and Jeremy Travis, “Transition from Prison to Community: Understanding Individual Pathways.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 29 (2003), p. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Visher and Travis, “Transition,” p. 100.

¹¹⁰ Paris Pombo, “Procesos,” 44.

Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana¹¹¹

In order to better understand the ways in which religious institutions have stepped up to meet the need of migrants undergoing the deportation stage, I conducted a case study on the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana (Casa)*. It has been successful in creating a partnership with the city, state, and federal governments to provide for the needs of migrants, such that every migrant deportee is offered shelter at the *Casa*.

History

The Scalabrinians are an order of the Catholic Church founded by Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini in 1887 as a response to the Italian exodus to the United States. While fulfilling his duties as bishop, he decided to go one day to a train station in Milan here many were waiting to leave to the United States. They were going to take the train to Genoa and from there disembark by boat. According to Father Pat Murphy, the current director of the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana* in Tijuana,

It was an inspirational moment for him. He would talk about the train station in Milan as his conversion when he said he was going to take care of these people. Who's going to be there to take care of them on the other side? He worried about the spiritual aspect but also the social aspect. Back in the 1880s there were coyotes of a different type who were ready to take advantage of new immigrants, pay them lousy wages, and give them horrible places to live. It's nothing that's new to this era, it existed before. So, [Bishop Scalabrini] decided that he would found a little community [and] from the beginning he had the idea of having priests, sisters, and lay people working together. Actually, he founded a lay society called the San Rafael Society, which was a lay organization that cared for immigrants. And from the beginning, back in the 1880s this was kind of a revolutionary thing.

That was 1887, flash forward to 1987 in April, that was when the house here was founded. The previous year or two the bishops of Mexico had asked the Scalabrinians if they would come here and offer some sort of pastoral response to what was the thousands of immigrants who were coming here to cross. And so we were given this little parish; where the casa is was an empty lot. After being here

¹¹¹ Information about the history and programs of the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriniana* in Tijuana is taken from my personal observations and an interview with the current director, Fr. Pat Murphy on July, 5 2014. Quotes in this section are attributable to that interview unless otherwise indicated.

for a few months Fr. Rigoni, after consultation with many people, decided the biggest thing they needed was a house for migrants. So this was the first *Casa del Migrante* in Mexico made 27 years ago. And back then from 1987, for the first 25 years, we were taking care of immigrants who were coming from the south to go north and, the last seven or eight years, we had the immigrants who were coming from the north to the south via deportation.

We have had roughly 230 thousand people come through the house since the founding. The mission is to offer hospitality to migrants. Hospitality is a place to stay, food, clothing, orientation with the help of a social worker and a psychologist now. But basically when we started we were just giving people food and clothing... usually food and shelter and maybe some medical attention because they were going on, they were going to go north and didn't stay here as long. Now people get deported, and they are deported because they don't have papers and so they never imagined they would be in Tijuana as a deportee. So they are here maybe without a plan of action.

So, I think today the two things we have to offer people: first is security, that you come into the house and you are going to be safe; then begin to offer them hope, 'ok, you've been deported, it wasn't your decision, but we are going to give you some hope for the future; for what you are going to do.' So, now the focus has changed, we are still giving food, clothing, and shelter, but we are also giving them more orientation as to what to do with their life. If they are going to stay here... automatically you're deported because you have no papers... if you're a Mexican, you come back to Mexico, but you still have no papers. [Therefore] simple things like helping people get their birth certificate seem to be the key to opening up the doors to getting all the other papers you need to get a good job.

Fr. Murphy described the organization's mission as changing and responding to the needs of the migrants they serve. The increase in deported migrants using the house has forced the *Casa* to rethink the types of services they offer to match the needs of the migrant. As a result, migrants have come to rely on this religious institution in order to facilitate their repatriation into Mexican society. Repatriation, however, is traditionally the role of the state. In order to help migrants with this process, the *Casa* has developed a relationship with the local, state, and federal government of Mexico.

Relationship with Government

The *Casa* has an office right at the San Ysidro border crossing through a coalition of six different groups between Tijuana and Mexicali. The director of the coalition writes grants to fund her salary as well as that of a social worker, a lawyer, and a driver providing transportation for migrants from the border to the *Casa* and from the *Casa* to various government offices that they need to visit. As Fr. Murphy describes, “the presence at the border is important because the first friendly face they see are people from the *Casa del Migrante* who are inviting them to come over here if they need a place to stay. If not, maybe they need a bottle of water, a phone call, a burrito, or just orientation.”

Fr. Murphy went on to explain how the unwillingness or inability of the government to effectively deal with migrants, directly affects the *Casa*:

We have love/hate relationship with the government of Tijuana. They promised us a certain amount of money per month for the year of 2014. Just this week [first week of July] we got the first three checks for January, February, and March. So if we were really needing those checks to survive, we would have died a long time ago. Fortunately, we weren't waiting for those 25 thousand Peso [around \$1847.00 USD] checks. But when the government has money set aside to help places like the *Casa*, we believe that they should give it to us in a timely fashion and not make us jump through hoops. There have been times where I have been critical about the government in the press and they don't like that, but it also produces results. They could be doing a lot more and so part of our job is to be advocates to push the government, city and state, to do more.

The city government changed in the last year. The previous administration was constantly talking about the migrants being criminals, being the reason why the crime rate was so high. And the press asked me about it and I said, ‘No, they should come and visit and find out who the migrants are. They are talking about people who have been living in the canal for years. They are the real problem for drugs and alcohol.’ Now there is a more *Casa* friendly face [in city government]. The mayor speaks positively and said that he wants to work with us. He had been here before in the past and so he knows the *Casa*, he knows the work we do. But we are still waiting to see how we can put some meat on that relationship.

The state government of Baja California has given us a few measly checks and a lot of promises, and now we have to see ... if we can get a better working agreement. The best branch of the government we have worked with has been the

federal government through the immigration department. The delegate in charge of that really wants to work with us and we have been able to work together. We have helped him and he has helped us.

It is clear that although there is an explicitly collaborative role with the government, the government is not fulfilling the promises it has made regarding their support of the deported migrants. Implicit in this relationship, the *Casa* has agreed to take on the role of helping migrants as they arrive in Mexican society. Although Fr. Murphy does not believe that the government would be able to do as good of a job that the *Casa* does, he does think that it is the responsibility of the government to support the work done by providing funding. To assert that the government has an interest in making sure that migrants integrate well into the society is a fairly safe concept. The fact that the government has entered into a funding relationship with the *Casa* insures that every adult male deportee will find temporary safe harbor. It is the religious institution that provides that shelter and basic needs.

Security

One of the first things I noticed upon arriving at the *Casa* was that security is of paramount concern. The majority of migrants arrive directly to the office on the border, which gives the staff and volunteers a certain degree of certainty that the people are indeed whom they identify themselves to be. There are also quite a few people who arrive directly to the front door, and the *Casa* takes great care to verify the story of anybody claiming to be a migrant looking for shelter. At first blush, it seems harsh to interrogate a desperate migrant, but it does not take long to realize that criminals would like access to migrants. According to the *Casa* staff, anyone from *coyotes* looking to sell their services to gang and cartel members who offer work but are actually looking to kidnap and hold migrants for ransom appear.

Another threat from whom the *Casa* offers security is the city police. Fr. Pat Murphy explains:

Migrants complain about being victimized by the police because they would be beaten and robbed by police. If they had a credential from the *Casa*, [the police] would rip it up. If they had any papers they would rip them up and even judges would accept bribes. Corruption is kind of the norm and that's why migrants fear the police. And even less will they go make a denouncement against them because they fear for their lives and fear nothing will come of it.

We have a lawyer, and if someone wants to do an official denouncement, the lawyer can do that. But one of the problems is that the migrants don't stay around too long. When you bring it to the human rights office, they give you a lot of hassle and it becomes the good 'ole boys club where everybody is protecting everybody. But when there are cases worth fighting for, we will denounce them in the press and make noise about it, and that kind of helps.

The migrants, however, are not the only ones that the police have had a history of trying to intimidate and manipulate: "The police tried to intimidate the *Casa* one time two years ago. They wanted into the house to look for somebody and the previous director said no, they need to have a warrant. The police wouldn't leave and it was kind of standoff, so we just called the press and they came and the police left pretty quickly. It was just a fishing exhibition." It is clear that some members of the police see migrants as a nuisance and even a danger to society, whereas others are simply predatory. As a result, even migrants who do not break laws find themselves victimized by so-called 'public servants'.

The security that the *Casa* provides is vital to deportees. Without this protection, they might be unable to assert their rights when they become victims of a system that tends to prey upon them. Being deported often puts a target on their backs. Expelled from the United States because they have no the proper documentation or committed some type of crime, when deportees arrive in Mexico, they are met with suspicion and contempt. They are transient without a place to stay and both vulnerable and considered to be a threat due to their desperation. The *Casa*, therefore, dramatically reduces their vulnerability from both overzealous and corrupt

officials. In the Casa deportees find the information and advocacy necessary to avoid falling into the hands of police and the means to fight back when they have been wronged.

Services

As Fr. Pat indicated when discussing the history of the *Casa*, the types of services required by migrants have changed drastically over the years. When most of the migrants were heading from the south to the north, all that they required was a place to lay their heads and prepare for their journey across the border. Now that the majority them arrive as deportees, their future plans have been catastrophically altered. Some would like to cross back into the US but do not know how; others want to look for work but do not have the necessary documentation in Mexico. The services I observed while at the *Casa* were broad reaching and included help getting documentation like birth certificates, DIF (Integral Development of the Family) cards, and other paperwork that might be required to get a job and establish oneself in Tijuana. The *Casa* also offered the services of a social worker, lawyer, and psychologist, as well as physical help in the form of trips to the bus station (for those wanting to go home), regular visits from a doctor and Red Cross, dental assistance, haircuts, and nightly workshops designed to educate migrants on their rights and options.



Figure 4: Inside the Casa with Rooms for Migrants and Volunteers and Students.

Fr. Pat indicates that the services they offer are all essential to the success of the migrants:

Last night one of the fellows said, ‘I have my birth certificate, now I can go... and they’re offering me a job and I will be able to get it.’ So it was just a piece of paper that we printed off the internet, but it makes such a difference in his life. That he can be able to get a job and do something.

So now, in the last year or so since I have gotten here, I have seen it as a real need to not only give them food, clothing and shelter, but also help them to get their life together so that they can get a job, get reestablished, give them another option besides trying to cross again. It’s always their decision [whether or not to cross back into the US], but sometimes people have been told when they come back that if they are caught again, they will go to jail for 10 years. So, if you are in jail for 10 years, you are not going to help anybody. So, it is better you’re here earning less, than being in jail, earning nothing; that would be my point of view. People are still desperate enough that they still try to cross. So, we are trying to give them more orientation, more of a chance, more assistance in this time of transition. Some guys fall right on their feet, they get a job, they get an apartment, they are doing fine; others leave the house and they end up in the canal which is a drug infested, alcohol infested place, where people are doomed for their life.

Many migrants commented to me during my time at the *Casa* that they were very pleased with the assistance that they were receiving. Many indicated that they would have been completely lost if it were not for someone helping them with the necessary steps for getting established in Tijuana. According to the migrant whom I interviewed from Puebla, “I see that the *Casa del Migrante* has people that are trying to help people. Even though I am still very concerned for my safety and I still don’t feel very comfortable sleeping with people whom I don’t know, I think that the *Casa* is a safe place. They take us to DIF [to get identification for employment]; if you want to return to your hometown they take you to immigration so that you can get a ticket; if you want to go to a hotel, they tell you how to do it; the woman yesterday even helped me to make a resume. Even though she didn’t find any work in Tijuana for me, she found two jobs in Puebla that would hire me if I decide to return with my family there.”¹¹²

The main complaint that I heard from migrants who were at the *Casa* was the lack of time available to them. In order to continue to have open spaces for arriving migrants, the maximum most migrants are allowed to stay is 12 days. They are normally given less time if they had used the services of the *Casa* on a prior occasion. This is frustrating to many, especially those who are trying to get established in a new place.

As a response to this need, the *Casa* recently started to pilot program for transitional living. Fr. Murphy described it like this:

We have started a pilot program, a transition project, in which we give the immigrants extended time at the house, some psychological help with a counselor to get their lives together, assistance in trying to find a job. We just hired somebody who is going to work just to help people get back into society, looking for a job, and all that. So, I think [our future is taking] on more of a role of working with those who are here and trying to help them have a smoother transition. I look at it as saving lives; if we let somebody go and they are not prepared for life in Mexico, they are going to end up in the canal with alcohol and

¹¹² Migrant 140703_001.

drugs or working for the cartels, which is another option in which they are going to make a lot more money but might not live as long.

I was able to interview one of the men who was in that program and he discussed the importance of finding a job and having the time and space to be able to get settled in his new city: “The program has helped me so much because I had a great pressure on me. I didn’t know where I was going to sleep, where I could make money, or even what to do since I didn’t have any money or friends here.”¹¹³ In order to be a participant in this pilot program, the migrants need to be committed to staying in Tijuana and trying to make a new life in the city. If they are accepted to the program, they are allowed to stay at the *Casa* for up to three months. Fr. Murphy indicated that he would like to see the program expand soon, assuming they see success.

¹¹³ Migrant 140709_001.



Figure 5: Shrine to la Virgen at the Casa. The cross reads "No Olvidado" or "Not Forgotten"

As mentioned above, the *Casa* is a Catholic institution motivated by faith to serve migrants. It is important for this study to question whether the status of the *Casa* as a religious institution has any further significance or if a non-religious institution could do the same job. Fr. Murphy explained:

Those who come here, some are deported from jail and, for some folks, jail has been a conversion experience. Those who come here always say what faith they have or if they have no religion. But the vast majority profess some kind of faith.

One of the things that strikes me and is a very humbling moment is when someone comes and asks you for your blessing because they are going to cross. There is no ritual in the Catholic Church that is a blessing for crossing the border illegally, it doesn't exist. You kind of do a spontaneous blessing. Many are convinced that because they receive this blessing that things are going to go well. I never know if they go well or they don't go well.

The vast majority of people who come here have faith and part of their journey coming here, even if they lived in the states for 20 years, in my experience is that all the undocumented folks have lived with great faith. I don't know if I could live under the shadow of just not knowing if you are going to go home from work or not, if your wife is going to get home from the night shift. Faith may not always be the official practicing faith, but there is a sense that there is faith.

We have a little shrine to the Lady of Guadalupe [pictured above] and migrants continue to put rosaries over her head. I think she is going to tip over. But the symbols they use almost on a daily basis... someone will be so grateful for being in the house that they will kneel down in front of the statue and say a prayer for those who are going to go out. Some, of course, will come and ask for confession or just to talk about their faith. Some come here because they have had some kind of conflict with their wife or loved one and so they are looking for reconciliation. Sometimes their faith has been challenged by drinking or drugs so that also kind of messes up their human relationships so they look to God for forgiveness in that sense.

We have a mass on Tuesday and a mass on Sunday which we ask them to attend and they form the choir which is a kind of light moment because sometimes we are not the best voices in the world but they try. I think they see the Casa as even more a place of security because it has a religious aspect instead of going to a government building. The government could do what we are doing but I don't think they would do as good a job because it would just be a job. Whereas, for us, this is a mission.

Fr. Murphy's words echo those of the Honduran migrant who, above, talked about the importance of going to a migrant house that had the *Virgen* on display. Another migrant backed up these sentiments when he talked about the conversion experience he had while at the *Casa*. Born in Mexico City, his mother took him across the border at four years old and he grew up in a very religious household. Despite growing up very involved in church, he went down a path of which he was not proud getting involved in gangs:

I was doing really bad [*sic*]. God gave me a lot of different messages from different people. God hears everything but he doesn't give you what you want when you want it. Although I was disappointed that God didn't let me out in the US and avoid deportation, I felt God speak to me in the mass yesterday and I know that he is answering my prayers in a different way. I cried as I felt God with me. There are still things that I have to come through but I know he will

bring me through because he has done it before. I have seen it with my own eyes.¹¹⁴

This migrant was able to capitalize on spiritual experience of the mass offered at the *Casa* in order to make a decision to change his approach to life and outlook on deportation. This is a unique experience that can provide the motivation and the capacity to learn a new way on how to live more constructively. At the *Casa*, religion is an important and integrated part of the services offered. While non-religious organizations might be able to offer many of the social services that they offer, the services that are meant to speak to personal faith are unique to religious institutions such as the *Casa*.

Institutional Religion in the US

While the *Casa* serves as an important institution after deportation, what role does religion play in the U.S. during deportation proceedings? For many migrants, their connections to faith communities serve important roles in personal encouragement, building networks in a new city, and taking care of those who were left behind in the US. Nobody with whom I spoke knew for certain that they were going to be deported before it happened. Although it can be anticipated that those who are taken off of the street by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would not be expecting it, what was not so obvious was that even people who had served long prison sentences were not made aware of their pending deportation in any official way. More than one migrant told me that they were waiting to be released after having served their sentence and ICE would show up and take them into the deportation process. Some even had family and children waiting for their release at the jail but instead they never got to see each other.

¹¹⁴ Migrant 140709_003.

For the Messianic Jewish migrant from Guadalajara, Mexico, his deportation was marked by a transnational effort from his rabbi to help him through the process. He was picked up after a warrant was issued for his arrest for failing to appear in court to deal with a DUI charge because he was afraid that he might be deported. When he was in the immigration detention center, he wrote a letter to his rabbi and explained his situation, and this is what happened: “My Rabbi went and visited me at the ICE detention center that I was in. He came and visited me and gave me a backpack. He came and prayed for me and wished me good luck. I got his information, address. Once I get established I am going to try to come back and see if he will be able to help me through the congregation with some clothes or maybe some cash. Some religious material. The most important thing is continuing to be fed spiritually.”¹¹⁵ This migrant indicated the importance of the rabbi’s visit because he viewed him as a teacher and guide through all of life. He also helped him by doing some investigation on faith communities in Tijuana he might be able to join: “He found some information about the congregations in Tijuana. There is one place in Tijuana that I called and maybe I just dialed the wrong number. I looked up another one on the internet and there is one right here in downtown. I called them and the guy that answered said that I am not the guy in charge but I will give the message to the person in charge. But I haven’t heard from them.”

When I asked him to elaborate on how he planned to remain connected to his faith community back in the US, he responded:

[The rabbi] puts some sense into me. He knows my personal life. He’s been there for me. It would be selfish for me to just move on with my life and not let them know how I am doing. They are praying for me. They are asking God to help me. They probably question themselves what happened to this guy. They want to hear from me because I am part of their family and they are part of my family also. When you get into a community and they welcome you, there is something, you cannot just say I got kicked out of the US and I am not going to have contact with

¹¹⁵ Migrant 140702_001.

them. They are over there and I am over here. It was one of the hardest parts of being deported... leaving them behind. Because you are getting fed spiritually, when you have a difficult life like mine, mentally and spiritually they are something that you are drinking from. It is hard not to be there because basically that has been taken away from me.

The religious connections he had made continued to pay off through the deportation process. He had not been contacted by the congregation in Tijuana yet, but he did have success getting in contact with some friends: “One of my friends knew my situation because of the congregation. So they called me and he said that they would help me out. They showed up yesterday and they took me to several places, but they couldn’t find anything. They brought a toaster and a blender, some t-shirts. They brought some stuff so that I could help [myself]. One of the prayers of the rabbi was for God to open the doors that were meant to be open and close those that were meant to be closed.” For this migrant he found open doors with people who were an integral part of his faith community in the United States.

Other migrants also have found the support that they got from the faith community to be critical. The migrant I interviewed from Puebla, who was involved in the marriage support group, found that the relationships he and his wife had built there were still critical to him: “The marriage support group is praying for me so that everything will turn out alright. There have been various other people from that group who had been deported, and we always pray for and support the families. Sometimes they are even able to help out economically when people have a little something extra.”¹¹⁶ This support that he was confident his family was receiving from the group helped him know that things would be alright until they were able to reunite.

Many others found help through the professional clergy who visited, even if they were not a part of the faith community in which they were involved in the US. The migrant from

¹¹⁶ Migrant 140703_001.

Guanajuato, Mexico who carried images with him on his journey north said this about his time in the immigration detention center:

The priest who came to the detention center to give me God's word helped me a lot. That is why I am here today. Another pastor from the Christian religion visited the migration detention center as well. In the prayers they said there... I was feeling really down... and those prayers they said there changed my attitude and even today I still feel at peace. In my chest I felt a heavy weight, and after those prayers it has been lifted off of me and I am more motivated to keep on surviving because I felt like my life was a grave since I was detained. Now I am thankful to God because I have life and it is because of him I have everything... Because of no one else but him and I give him everything because he gave it all to me.¹¹⁷

This migrant found that he was able to feel at peace with the process through the prayers that were offered by both the priest and pastor who visited him before he was going to be deported. He told me that he was feeling so down because he had a little daughter back in the US and he was not sure if he would ever see her again. For the time being, however, he seems to have relied on the clergy to help him see that life was not ending and to give him hope that things would work out alright.

Personal Faith as a Resource

Beyond the institutional elements provided by the *Casa* and other faith communities in the US and abroad, migrants repeated mentioned the importance of personal faith during their deportation process. Migrants used their personal faith to foster hope and guidance in a desperate situation. The migrant from Puebla found that he could rely on faith to help him a lot when he felt alone and uncertain in immigration detention:

While I was there, I was very frustrated and I felt like I would not be able to carry on. The first 15 days, I felt like it was over; I couldn't even breathe. I was locked up and there was no fresh air, just air conditioning. So I prayed a lot in the detention center and asked God to take away my burdens, the weights that were on me. I asked for him to help me and I left it in his hands. I asked Jesus Christ to take away all of my bad thoughts and help me stay out of problems with the

¹¹⁷ Migrant 140704_002.

other inmates, and because of that I never had any problems, there wasn't any fights or aggression in the time I was there.¹¹⁸

This migrant, like many with whom I talked, was scared to be in the detention center and used the resource of prayer to calm his nerves.

Many migrants talked to me about how disorienting the process of deportation was. They were utterly lost. Often people do not appreciate the little comforts of their daily lives until they are taken away. Simple things like knowing where to buy refreshments, how much things should cost, and unsafe parts of town are all things that deportees to Tijuana do not know. Because deportees often have never lived in Tijuana and some had never lived in Mexico at all, they must rely on the generosity of others to navigate the city. Some leaned on their personal faith to have the courage to find their way in both the short-term and in future plans.

One migrant from Mexico City talked quite a bit about how he thought God was leading him during his deportation stage. In the United States he converted to Protestantism after going through a drug rehab program that he felt saved his life. Thereafter, his main desire was to reconcile himself to his estranged wife and child, but he knew they would be skeptical about his recovery. After being deported, his faith enabled him to perceive it positively: "Maybe God let me be in this situation because I am dealing with the consequences of my own actions... but maybe I need this. Maybe God let it happen so that I can learn how to be a different person, be more responsible, [and] appreciate the things that I have. If I were there, I might go back to my old life and old friends. But here I am going to be able to show my family how I am a different man. Sometimes my family doesn't trust me because of what I did. Now I have a chance to prove to them that the change is genuine."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Migrant 140703_001.

¹¹⁹ Migrant 140710_001.

He also relied heavily on his faith to navigate the deportation stage. Unsure of what steps to take and desiring to establish a new life in Mexico, he found that he could use his faith as a tool on which he could rely when decision-making became cloudy:

I prayed to God for some help to do the right thing in Mexico. I went downtown with some guys and we were threatened by a gang, but we weren't attacked. We kept going and my leg started to hurt, so I told the guys that I would go [back] to the *Casa del Migrante*.

When I saw the doctor there, he said he could not help me, so he helped me find the right bus to go to the hospital. As I was getting there, I started to feel better. And a guy sat down next to me. We started talking and he said that he was tired from working all day. I told him that I needed to get a job but he said that he doesn't help anybody because he doesn't trust anybody. He asked me what I used to do and I told him that I used to work in security. He said that is what he does and then asked if I had all of my papers. I told him I didn't and so he gave me his card and told me to call him when I get everything together and that he will get me in at the place he works. He said that he didn't know why he was helping me but something inside him made him want to. It was another example of how God really listens to me.

Another example is that I went out to work because a guy said that he was going to pay 200. I thought that he meant dollars and I thought that was very good. But when I got there he said pesos [about \$14.78 USD] and I decided that I wouldn't work. I was going to mess up my shoes that cost more than that. So when I got back here a guy called looking for a welder and I know how to do that, and he said he was going to pay 1000 pesos [about \$73.88 USD]. So I can tell that God is looking out for me.

These two examples display how faith can be used by migrants who do not feel they have enough information to rely on their own decision making or connections to get things done in their new, unfamiliar context.

Another element of decision-making that each deportee faces is what to do next. The immediate choice before them is whether to attempt to cross the border again without papers, go to a place in Mexico with which they are familiar or have resources (i.e., their hometown), or establish themselves in the city which received them (in this case Tijuana). Each decision presents different challenges, especially for those who do not have connections to any city in

Mexico. The dangers of crossing the borders without papers are many and range from death in the desert to long-term incarceration in the United States. But still the pull to do so is great, especially for those with family left behind. Establishing oneself in Tijuana is also a very difficult proposition especially considering that the wages people make are considerably less than those in the US. Some migrants with whom I spoke, however, relied on their faith to give them insight in the choice they felt they should make.

The messianic Jewish migrant had faith to come to a decision that felt right:

Something that we have been reading [in church] is to be obedient. We have to abide by the laws in the land. So basically practicing being obedient is staying away from illegal activities that won't be good on my behalf. I don't think I will break the laws by smuggling myself back in. It goes against my religious standards. I am not feeling like disrespecting that. That is why I am looking for a job, trying to establish here. What I got is probably something that I deserve. I have to be honest with myself. You're the government and you have to establish your rules and your regulations.¹²⁰

In conclusion, deportation deserves to be considered as a stage of migration because of both the quantity of migrants deported each year and all of the complex challenges that face deportees. Whether through institutional religious organizations like the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriana* in Tijuana and churches in the United States or through resources provided by a personal faith, it is clear that migrants depend on religion throughout the deportation stage of migration. As people continue to be deported into communities unfamiliar to them, they will need new sources of help. Institutions, both religious and secular, will hopefully adapt in order to ensure the complex needs of deportees are met.

Conclusions

At the start of this project I sought to understand two questions: a) whether religion played a role in why migrants of similar economic circumstances arrived at differing conclusions

¹²⁰ Migrant 140702_001.

regarding the decision migrate, and 2) if religion is important in the migration process, what roles does it play. In order to accomplish this, I traveled to the *Casa del Migrante* in Tijuana, Mexico where I was able to do qualitative interviews with migrants and staff about the effects of religion on each of the stages of migration. I traveled there specifically because Tijuana has been the main recipient of migrants deported from the United States since they stopped flying migrants to interior Mexican states, and the *Casa* is a well-known religious institution whose purpose is to serve those migrants.

While I was there, I discovered that religion needs to be seriously considered indeed, as it can affect every stage of the migration process. While religion does not have the same effect for every migrant everywhere, religion can provide important tools for migrants able to take advantage of them. The extent to which any migrant will benefit from the personal faith and religious institutions is relative to their background and the circumstances in which they find themselves; for some migrants, religion is the main catalyst for migration, and for others it gives them the courage or confidence needed to make decisions.

Religion is often critically important in each stage of migration. In the first stage, the decision, potential migrants who are already predisposed to migration may decide based on advice from faith leaders and the perception of signs confirming their presentiment to stay or go. In the second stage, preparations for the journey, faith communities can play a role in helping prepare for the journey by making sure physical preparations are in order as well as assuming a supportive role to those left behind. In stage three, the journey, migrants rely on personal faith to deal with obstacles and on institutional religion for physical needs that governments either cannot or will not provide. In stage four, the arrival, migrants are often met by both formal and informal attempts of local religious institutions to provide for their basic needs and connect them

with those they left behind. In the fifth stage, the settlement, religious institutions help migrants through acculturation and acclimation in their new home and socioeconomic advancement. In stage six, the establishment of transnational ties, religion can serve as a catalyst for transnational connections that keep diasporic communities in touch with the homeland and facilitate future migration.

This researcher proposes that a seventh stage of migration needs to be included in discussions about contemporary migration, that of deportation, since instances of deportation have increased and provide unique challenges. Faith communities such as the *Casa del Migrante Scalabriana* have been at the forefront in helping migrants through this stage by providing security, social services, and faith support to deportees. Other faith communities help deportees and their families in material and emotional ways. Personal faith is also a key for many deported migrants who are faced with difficult decisions in an unfamiliar context.

Based on the evidence collected in this research, the new stage, deportation, needs to be considered when discussing the effect of religion on Latin American migration to the United States. Each of the six previously discussed stages of migration could use further investigation and more diverse data. This paper adds to the limited data that is available in the early stages of migration through interviews with deported migrants but also shows that the effects of religion on the decision, preparation, and journey stages of migration are underrepresented in studies on the topic. The information gathered as part of this research regarding the six stages was collected from migrants who reported on past attitudes and actions; some of these migrants were recalling events that happened decades earlier. A better understanding could be formed by research conducted with migrants while they are participating in these early stages.

Research on the effect of religion on the deportation stage of migration also should be explored further. Scholarship could focus on migrants who are deported to places other than Tijuana, Mexico. Investigating different sites throughout Mexico and Latin America would give a better understanding of how migrants deported to locations away from the border might differ from those deported to Tijuana. The contribution of this paper is an initial investigation and should serve a launching point into a deeper understanding of the effect of religion on the migration from Latin America to the United States.

This paper addresses questions that socioeconomic or political analyses of migration have left out. It contributes another piece to the puzzle of what is causing and facilitating the migration of people from Mexico and Central America to the United States. This research was not intended to determine the percentage of migrants who are influenced by religion, nor to measure the extent to which religion plays a pivotal role in migration and migrant success (although both merit future study), but to explore whether and how religion is important. An additional dimension that this research uncovered was that religion can be critical not only to members of organized churches, but to non-members as well, further demonstrating that religion's role has been underestimated.

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