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Digital Mobilization and Politicization of *El Caminata del Migrante*

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Abstract

Social media have become an important communication tool and backstage for the dissemination of information for Honduran migrants seeking political asylum and international refugee status in the United States at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry. This nonmainstream structure of communication can be conceived as a type of counterargument to international border policies. In this essay, I examine how Bartolo Fuentes's *Caminata del Migrante* post digitally informed migrant decision making processes, enforced migrant solidarity, and spurred a digital heterotopia providing a back and forth sharing of opinions and information between migrants, political actors, advocacy groups, and the press.

Keywords

Migrant Caravan, Honduras, Northern Triangle, Migration, Digital Migration Asylum, Heterotopia, Twitterverse, Mexico, Donald Trump, Immigration, Social Media

1. Introduction

It started with a single *Facebook* post on October 4, 2018 by a 54-year-old Honduran radio host Bartolo Fuentes announcing *El Caminata del Migrante* (Trek of the Migrants), which was to commence on October 12, 2018 at 8 a.m. at the Grand Terminal bus station in San Pedro Sula, the second-largest city in Honduras. The flyer read:

No nos vamos poreque queremos Nos expulsa la violencia y la probreza
(We don't leave because we want to but because violence and poverty expels us.)

Fuentes, a political activist on the Honduran left and a stalwart critic of Presi-

dent Juan Orlando Hernández, commented on his post a day later on Oct. 5, 2018 stating that "*Vamos a acompañar esta gente*" (We are going to accompany these people). The post immediately generated 200 shares and circulated via *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and *WhatsApp* groups. Because 90 percent of Hondureños use mobile telephony and have smart phone communication applications, the post was then shared and reshared through different social media platforms. *Noti Bomba*, a digital media site that focuses on Latin America is just one group that shared a live *Facebook* message (Figure 1) from San Pedro Sula on Oct. 12 the morning of the caravan assemblage.

> *En vivo desde San Pedro Sula. Avalancha de Hondureños se preparan para salir en caravana para Estados Unidos. ¡Comparte!*
> (Live from San Pedro Sula. Avalanche of Hondurans prepare to go by caravan to the United States. Share!)

The message received 290,000 views and 6003 shares. Hondureños showed up on foot, in cars, and in busses merging on San Pedro Sula to begin their trek to the US Border. These survival migrants created a digital diasporic community connecting online communities to offline communities to physically undertake the arduous caravan to the United States [1] [2]. Physical and digital communities merged together to create a "digital and embodied heterotopic space" [3]. Hondureños shared their migration plans, concerns, and strategies on the caravan and in turn received information about food, shelter, and transportation
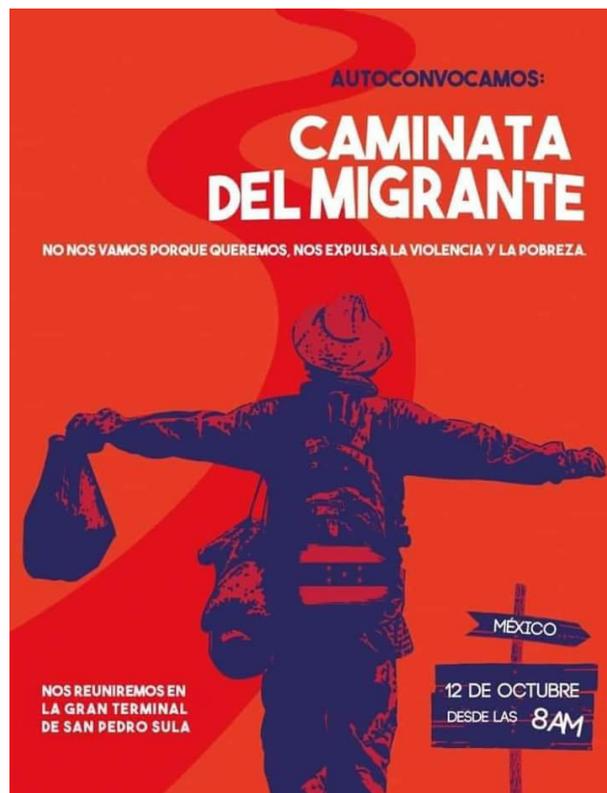

Figure 1. Original post by Fuentes.

along the route. Information spread digitally enabling human mobility and real time connectivity where heterotopic spaces linked people together in the securing of physical places while in transient and resources [4] [5].

"As soon as I read it, I knew I had to go," said Myra Mejia a mother I interviewed in Tijuana. Families arrived with infants wrapped in blankets, strollers with toddlers, preschoolers and children of all ages tagging along, she said. Six month pregnant, Genesis Barahona, said that once she saw the flyer on *Facebook*, she joined the caravan hoping that she could give birth in the United States. Another young pregnant couple with a five-year old son said the caravan was a safer way to travel. What began as 200 participants swelled quickly to 700 people fleeing *violencia y probreza*. "When I arrived at the bus terminal (in San Pedro Sula), there were 30 people. A few hours later, there were hundreds," said Jose Vijin, 32, from northwestern Honduras. By October 13, 2018 the caravan had spread through several media platforms and snowballed to 1000, picking up an additional 8000 to 10,000 migrants along the way [6]. Social Media participatory processes enabled news of the caravan to be transmitted simultaneously to hundreds of people surmounting horizontal, bidirectional and interactive borders in time and space [7] [8] [9].

In this research, I proffer that Bartolo Fuente's master frame geographically and politically mobilized diverse peoples with different ideologies, beliefs, and opinions to be argumentatively and interactively interconnected on the subject of the Honduran migration to the United States. To do so, I engage in both on the ground research and interviews with the migrant caravan and digital ethnography using both a big data and a qualitative analysis approach to analyze how frame alignment in social media networks transformed migration networks and mobilized men, women, and children from the Northern Triangle to seek political asylum and international refugee status in the United States at the The Otay Mesa Port of Entry. Important to this research is: 1) an examination of the extent to which the political rhetoric of these social media frames falls within the specific rhetoric of the international definition of refugee, 2) a dialectical analysis of competing discursive frames that interact with migrant discourses and communicate political responses, 3) an examination of the socio-political and economic factors, which motivated the migration, and 4) an examination of how social media discourses influence immigration policies and public opinion.

2. Literature Review

Information technologies have not only shaped and reshaped the way in which people communicate with each other, but have also fashioned a complicated interactive system of relationships at the personal, regional, national, and global level [10] [11]. Technological advancements have led to the social media revolution in which *Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram* and other Internet platforms, enable people across different geopolitical locations to instantly communicate, share and circulate information and meaning though low-key

channels. Social media have radically democratized the free flow of information enabling a diverse heterogeneous population to both receive and produce knowledge content. Social media platforms provide information and resources for "resource-poor actors" by functioning as an instrument of protest and resistance, and by performing "a new repertoire of collective action" and solidarity [12] [13]. Social media platforms have become an important communication tool and "backstage" for the collection and dissemination of information [14]-[21]. This is especially true for Hondureños. This nonmainstream structure of communication can be conceived as a type of counter narrative that acts to resist and oppose dominant structures [22] [23].

Migrant networks create social capital, the accumulation of tangible and possible resources, including bonds, linkages, and bridges to people who share the same sense of culture, ethnicity or identity [8] [24]. Social capital—networks of shared meanings, norms, and values—facilitates solidarity, trust, cooperation and mitigate the risks that migration entails [25]. Since social capital assuages individual fears and mitigates the psychological and social costs of migration, it makes it more conducive for people fleeing desperate conditions to take on the arduous journey of transnational migration [26].

Specific to this analysis is how the content information in Bartolo Fuentes's *Caminata del Migrante* post informed migrant decision making processes on whether to join in solidarity and migrate as a collective group. For Hondureños, the *Instagram Post* acted as a motivational discourse shaping the migration and connecting dispersed individuals into a collective organization [13] [27] [28]. Whether intended or not, the cognitive function of the post served to gather and disseminate knowledge and information about the caravan, which corresponds to what della Porta observes, is one of the fundamental benefits of ICTs for social movements [29]. The information about the logistics of the caravan then spread through relatively weak connections and affiliations rather than through familiar associations [15] [30]. These loose connections across geographical terrain functioned as a vital source of social assistance "pioneering" new ties and facilitating on the ground support of food, water, shelter, and transportation on the caravan route [31]. Fuentes's post created an imagined community of loosely connected individuals, joined together by common interests as opposed to prior connections [32] [33]. More importantly, the online platform demonstrates how "real communities can and do take root in Internet-based space" [34]. By constructing a legitimating frame of "meaning work," it inspired collective action and supported Honduran's ability to migrate [35].

While the concept of affordances is employed in many ways, I define social affordance according to Wellman, which he refers to as "the possibilities that technological changes afford for social relations and social structure" [36]. The affordances framework provides a necessary tool for understanding the connection between social media and collective migration caravans from the Northern Triangle. For Hondureños fleeing violence, poverty, and injustice, Bartolo Fu-

entes's *Caminata del Migrante* post offered a shared experience of solidarity and hope. While most studies examine the "what" and "how" of social media affordances and master frames this study examines the "political why," or what American political theorist Fredric Jameson (1981) refers to as the implicit historical and political dimension encapsulated in Bartolo Fuentes's master frame [37]. In analyzing Fuentes's frame, I excavate the historical and political wounds of Honduran society. History hurts, but through social media affordances it can also motivate, reconfigure, heal and become the impetus for social political change.

3. Methodology

In this study, I engage in a form of interdisciplinary ethnography that follows the migrants as they journey between localities and boundaries between both places of origin and destination [38] [39] [40]. In this sense, I historicize the complex Honduran migrant experience by engaging in an ethnographic exchange of direct and virtual communication, participant observation, on the ground interviews, and digital frame analysis of migrant Internet communications [41] [42] [43]. Integral to this analysis is the a driving question as to how one single post facilitated the cumulative "chain migration" of loosely connected individuals to the US/Mexico Border. To answer this question, I employ a master frame analysis approach to examine the development of the caravan migration through the symbolic construction of a master frame. I define framing as applied according to Erving Goffman, as a mobilizing discourse of articulation mechanisms, that performed a transformative function of mobilizing Hondurans in their pursuit for a better life free of violence and poverty [44]. I contend that the master frame served to integrate the mesomobiliation of actors of diverse interests and further served to form a collective system of shared meanings, varied responses, and opinions from non-migrant actors from across the globe.

This research focuses on the affordances of social media to mobilize people to leave their country of origin and migrate across borders. As an individual researcher it was an arduous task of extensive data mining and on the ground personal interviews with 60 asylum seekers at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry in Tijuana between November 2018 and January 2019. The central questions included:

1) How did you hear about the caravan?

2) If you learned about the caravan through social media, did you repost the information once you read it?

3) Why did you join the caravan and leave your country?

4) Do you have friends, family, or social contacts in the United States?

The questions led to other categories of questioning and data mining of social media responses. The answers to the migrant questionnaire were then coded according to the term refugee under 8 USC 1101(a) INA 101(a) (42). The term "refugee" means:

Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of *persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution* on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Answers to question three (Why did you leave Honduras?) were subsequently coded using AtlasTi based on the established five categories, race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. In addition to the collection of this data, I employed crowdsourcing data to examine content posts about the caravan on social media. These were also were coded using AtlasTi.

My research hopes to stimulate more research about the role of social media on migration decision-making process, increase understanding of the myriad socioeconomic, political, and environmental causes as to why Hondurans are fleeing their country, and make connections between US commercial and military involvement in Honduras. I first begin with the complicated political, commercial, and military relationship between the United States and Honduras followed by an examination of the desperate conditions in Honduras, which motivated the migrant caravan. Understanding the history of US involvement in Honduras is key to understanding the mass exodus out of Honduras. I then examine the master frame first established by Bartolo Fuentes.

4. A Contextual Review of United States Involvement in Honduras

Honduran migration to the U.S. Southern border is complicated by a deeply rooted American commercial, political, and military presence in Honduras. As one of the first Banana Republics, Honduras has had a close relationship with the United States as early as the 1890s when banana companies displaced existing political systems and agricultural landholdings and production to the detriment of the local population. Today's humanitarian crisis can be traced to a historical trajectory of American and foreign exploitation of resources and political corruption. Historian Walter La Feber writes in "Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America," that "Honduras has become the closest ally of the United States in the region while remaining the poorest and most undeveloped state in the hemisphere other than Haiti" [45]. LaFeber describes how American companies bought up land, constructed infrastructure transportation systems for banana export and initiated their own banking structures, establishing Honduras as a mono-crop economy and a foreign-controlled reserve whose resources went straight to the United States for consumption. Hondureños were basically displaced from close to one million acres of land and resources by American companies, which were supported and protected by the US govern-

ment. To secure American commercial interests, the US with the help of entrepreneur Samuel Zemurray, deposed Honduran President Manuel Bonilla and US General Lee Christmas and then entangled itself in a successful coup against President Miguel Dávila enabling Bonilla to victory in the 1911 presidential election. Bonilla immediately granted concessions and tax incentives to the United Fruit Company (rebranded as Chiquita Brands) and the Vaccaro Brothers. (rebranded as Dole Food Company). La Feber sums it up: "North Americans not only controlled the nation's economy but as a result of direct military and political intervention, the nation itself" [45]. In turn, Honduran elite became financially dependent on US support to maintain their wealth and political status.

During the Reagan Era of the 1980s, the US gave 77.5 million in military aid to Honduras and used the country as a military staging ground to train Nicaragua's contra right-wing rebels in the guerilla war against the left-wing Sandinistas. US political, commercial, and military were so strong that Honduras got its nickname "U.S.S. Honduras" and the "Pentagon Republic." The Reagan administration also reshuffled the Honduran economy by pushing for deregulation of the coffee market, liberalization of trade policies, and exportation of manufactured goods—all to the benefit of the global capital market and to the detriment of Honduras's traditional agricultural economies. A century of US pilfering of Honduran resources was further enhanced by the 2005 CAFTA free trade agreement with the US, which led to more hardship for small-scale farmers and subsequently more rural migration.

The election of liberal reformist, Manuel Zelaya, brought hope for many Hondureños suffering from food and job insecurity; however, his attempt to establish a plebiscite and replace the 1982 constitution, invited the wrath of the Honduran elite oligarchy [46]. In 2009, Honduran General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, a graduate of the School of the Americas, a U.S. Army training program and nicknamed by some as the School of Assassins, staged a successful coup against Zelaya. While the Organization of American States, the 35-country forum condemned the coup and urged for Zelaya's return to power, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remained silent, and did not support Zelaya's return.

Five months after the coup, President Porfirio Lobo was elected president in yet another controversial electoral process in which Lobo was backed by some of the same factions that implemented the overthrow of Zelaya. While many major international observers not funded by the US boycotted the election, President Obama was quick to recognize Lobo's victory. Migration was further motivated by the 2013 election of Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, whose National Party backed the ousting of Zelaya. Hernández triumphed as the fifty-fifth and current president of Honduras amidst allegations of voter fraud. Similar to the Obama Administration's silence on 2009 military coup, human rights abuses, and the election of President Lobo amidst voter fraud recognition, the election of Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado's election was met with restrained foreign policy [47]. As a result, the year 2014 brought with it another surge of Hondurans flee-

ing the country. The Obama Administration responded by tightening its policy of "prevention through deterrence," increasing its "capacity for enforcement and removal proceedings," instituting harsh penalties on detained migrants, and dedicating itself to a swift "return of unlawful migrants to their home countries" [48]. In 2016, The Administration reduced its refugee admissions from "the Latin America/Caribbean region by 2000 'from 5000 in 2014 to 3000 in 2016', while simultaneously promoting its Alliance for Prosperity Plan aimed at preventing further migration by improving security and foreign investment in the NTCA" [49].

Staying true to his campaign rhetoric on immigration reform, President Donald Trump went even further than the Obama Administrating by implementing an aggressive agenda of immigration policies. The far-reaching immigration policy changes include, but are not limited to: 1) a "zero tolerance" policy, which has been responsible for the separation of children from families at the border; 2) the deployment of 4000 troops from the National Guard and 5200 active duty military to the Southern border, 3) increased investigations into family units, and 4) the construction of controversial physical barriers along the Mexico US southern border [50]. In addition, on March 2019, Trump declared its decision to shut off "U.S. foreign assistance programs in the Northern Triangle countries because of the unprecedented flow of migrants from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador" [51].

The Trump Administration has maintained US foreign interests by recognizing the 2017 reelection of President Juan Orlando Hernández amidst allegations of voter fraud, "deliberate human intrusions in the computer system," "deep irregularities and violence" [52]. The Trump Administration discounted the evidence of poll observers and the appeals for a "new election by the Organization of American States, members of Congress and the opposition Honduran Alliance Against Dictatorship party" [53]. This resumes Washington's legacy of disregarding political corruption and human rights abuses in favor of American transnational corporate interests and global capital geopolitical interests. Once again, the United States demonstrates its position on defending human rights and championing democracy. As long as the commercial interests, organized crime networks, and corrupt government officials work hand and hand to produce revenue, America will continue to show "restraint."

For the past decade, US foreign policies and involvement have devastated Northern Triangle countries (NTCA) of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador [54]. Transnational drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and criminal transnational organizations (CTOs) have monopolized key transportation routes for drug smuggling activities. Failed nation states have been rendered powerless and inept at combating widespread poverty, gang violence, homicide, femicide, and pernicious class stratification and governmental corruption. The Northern Triangle is a violent battlefield of competing interests whose governments face transitional, systematic problems of governance making it especially difficult to

provide infrastructure services and protections to its citizenry. While there are multiple causes for migration and forced displacement, it is quite clear that organized criminal groups are responsible for increasing levels of violence and human rights violations and also "in part" responsible for the migration to the US. I state "in part" because later in this section, I detail how US involvement led to the creation of a "gang governance" society.

From the many interviews conducted, migrants substantiated that DTOs and CTOs operate to terrorize its local communities by violating human rights with impunity and denying men, women, and children the right to feel safe and secure in their homes, schools, and businesses. Many migrants, like Luis Miguel from Honduras, reported that he left his country because he was being blackmailed to pay money every month to a local gang; failure to do so would lead to death and/or threats of death either to him or members of his family. Other migrants claimed that they were being "pressured" into joining a gang or "would be killed."

In fact, Honduras and other NTCA countries have reported an epidemic of some of the highest homicide rates in the world [55]. According to UN reports, Honduras has also one of the greatest femicide rates in the world[1]. Women report incidents of rape, sexual violence, and domestic abuse. These reports confirm earlier research on the precipitating motivating factors for migration from the Northern Triangle, and particularly Honduras [56].

It is no surprise that the caravan kicked off in one of the most violent cities in the world—San Pedro Sula. It is also no surprise that the motivating factor that influenced Hondureños to join the caravan was and is a real and pervasive danger and fear—fear of homicide, fear of threats to a person's body, family, and home, and fear of being forcefully disappeared [57]. This pattern of fear and violence operates with impunity pervading every facet of daily life. Simply put, Hondureños suffer from serious security issues and human rights violations because of an indiscriminate gang governance system where CTOs DTOs, paramilitary forces, military forces, rogue police officers, vigilante squads and other actors produce arbitrary systems of civil protections and social justice. Hondureños survive in the margins of these "occupied" communities of "parallel power systems" with little access to health care, education, economic opportunity, and basic social services [58] [59]. 62% of Hondureños live below the poverty line and refugees report that "finding work" as a reason for migrating to the US [60]. Only 50% of children aged 3 - 17 go to school because they either have to work and contribute to the family income, or gang surveillance prevents them from leaving their home [60]. Children as young as six years of age are often encouraged to act as "*bandera*s"—young vigilantes responsible for monitoring the neighborhood and community activities [61]. Violence and intimidation govern personal and social behaviors interfering with any and all democratic processes;

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[1]"Human Rights Violation," United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE Campaign to End Violence against Women, Accessed January 10, 2017.

consequently, people are disempowered from trying to improve their living conditions in their communities. Approximately, 174,000 Hondureños were forcefully displaced in 2015 citing gang violence and gang lord governance, and competition between gangs such as MS13 and Barrio 18 for territorial control as one of the major reasons [62].

MS 13, also known as *Mara Salvarucha*, is one of the most notorious street gangs in the Americas with cells extending from Honduras to the crime-ridden streets of Los Angeles. *Barrio* 18 also known as the 18th Street Gang holds the title as being one of the largest gang organizations in the Western Hemisphere extending from Central America to the US and Canada [62]. Barrio 18 and MS13 battle for territorial control of San Pedro Sula; 51% of gang members affiliate themselves with Barrio 18, while 49% with MS13. In addition to the top two gangs, other gangs can be categorized into three groups: derivatives, militias, and *barras bravas*.

Derivatives are groups derived directly from the two major gangs—Barrio 18 and MS 13. Derivatives work in some capacity for these larger DTOs and have loose affiliations and alliances. For instance in the Rivera Hernandez District of San Pedro Sula, the *Vatos Locos* and the *Ponce* once operated under MS13 [62]. Other derivatives claim their community as their identifying factor like the *Parqueños* and the *Olanchanos*, gangs who drift in and out of alliances.

Other gangs affiliated with organized crime include, *Chirizos*, West Side, and the *Mara* 61. Members of the *Chirizos* gang once worked for *Barrio* 18 and MS13 in various capacities and now have created their own *bandas criminales* controlling parts of the city of Comayaguela. Overall, Honduras reports to have approximately 116,000 gang members operating within its borders. In fact, in addition to the gang members, there are various actors who assist and collaborate with them in an array of services: "lookouts, drug dealers, drivers, messengers; family members, girlfriends, friends," recruiters and recruitees [62].

Militia vigilante groups of civilians have risen in response to the gang violence. Reports of certain groups like *Los Pumas* in *La Ceiba* have shown that vigilante groups have also become power hungry and predatory in nature [63]. Los Pumas started as a vigilante group to protect its community and banish gang activity. Upon taking control of *La Ceiba*, *Los Pumas* unleashed its own war of violence, criminal activity, and terror on the community. Gang affiliation also extends onto the soccer field where soccer fanatics known as *Barras Bravas* (fierce followers) fervently support their soccer clubs by organizing fandom support in stadiums. Honduran soccer leagues' affiliation with gangs like MS13 and *Barrio 18* is complicated; yet, two *Barras Bravas* groups have aligned with the gangs: the *Ultrafiel* (*Club Deportivo Olimpia*) associates with *Barrio 18*, and *Los Revos* (*Club Motagua*) associates with MS13 [62].

Violence, murder, extortion, and rape operate in a system with little to no retributive punishment or legal recourse as gangs operate in tacit complicity with military, paramilitaries and police officers. Gang Lords yield power and control

territory and its resources with impunity, which only perpetuates more violence and forced displacement. While there has been some effort to strengthen and improve civil services and legal protections, improvement projects are exasperated by the monopoly of local power by gang lords and their interlocking systems of control. Oftentimes, programs, goods, and services meant for the people of Honduras end up in the hands of gang members for distribution. President Juan Orlando Hernández, who assumed office in 2014, has bolstered Military Police (*Policía Militar del Orden Público*), (PMOP) throughout the country as a temporary strategy to combat violence. PMOP's primary purpose has been to support "*Operation Francisco Morazán*," a military policing campaign to enter some of Honduras most dangerous neighborhoods and disempower its criminal gangs [64]. As with most power struggles in Honduras, the military police have been charged with employing unreasonable force against its civilian populations, especially dissenters, activists who disagree with Hernandez's policies and lawyers and journalists who investigate government activities. In 2016, CONADEH *Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos* de Honduras reported 13 killings and 16 violent attacks on lawyers [65]. In 2013, military police ransacked the Tegulcigapa home of activist Edward Espinal driving him into hiding. In 2014, military police beat the director of *Casa Alianza*, José Guadalupe Ruelas García, in front of the presidential palace. Ruelas García's organization advocates for children's rights and protections from sexual exploitation and trafficking as well as drug addiction. In 2016, environmental and indigenous rights activist Berta Cáceres was murdered with evidence alleging that Cáceres was on a military hit list [66]. Further evidence in this case confirms how military police often act as "enforcers" for development projects. Military police corruption, militarization of public life, and collusion between government officials, gang lords, and transnational corporations have heightened vulnerability and insecurity amongst Hondureños. In a world where impunity is the law, Bartolo's Fuentes's call to action to "*no nos vamos*" and caravan to escape the "*violencia y pobreza*" offered a beacon of hope for many Hondureños.

5. Digital Mobilizing Migration from Below

Bartolo's Fuentes's symbolic construction of the master frame, "*Caminata del Migrante*," mobilized heterogeneous peoples of all ages from geographically disperse regions of Honduras to collective action. Hondureños interpreted the frame as personally and contextually meaningful and left their homes, families and communities to trek along with other asylum seekers for the 63-day, 2,199 miles journey to the Tijuana, Otay Mesa Border. The frame leads with the declaration that the status quo of "*violencia*" and "*pobreza*" is malevolent and ruinous to the health of the people. The only choice is to leave, not because "we" want to, but because "we" are forced to do so by the precipitating circumstances—violence and poverty. Asylum seekers identified with the master frame and mobilized according to individual schema that fits into the *Caminata del Migrante's* concep-

tual framework. A schema provides the basis by which someone relates to the events he or she experiences [67] [68]. The general diction of the frame, employs an inclusive first person plural of "*No nos vamos porque queremos*" (we don't go because we want to) and suggests a forced involuntary behavior. "*Nos expulsa la violencia y la pobreza.*" (The violence and the poverty expels us.) This subsequent declaration offers what Snow and Bennett refer to as a diagnostic dimension and the dominant impression that violence and poverty drive and propel the migration [67]. The attribution of causality is evident. Hondureños are leaving because they are forced to do so.

The frame's diction choices of "violence" and "poverty" are both abstract enough to reach a broad range of people. Violence in this context can include a physical behavior of physical force, battery, assault, and murder as well as psychological and emotional violence of coercive behavior including disappearance of a loved one, extortion, coercion, racism, sexism, and homophobic behaviors. Poverty is also abstract, and like violence, "inherently malleable" [69]. Poverty is a concept employed for a state of being extremely poor and without life's bare necessities. Both concepts appear negotiable and renegotiable by the recipient to include the effects and the causes [70]. Collective frames are adaptive evolving structures, which are reinterpreted and reconceived by each receiver. When the caravan mobilized and expanded, the collective frame took on a strategic "outcome of negotiating shared meaning" [71]. The construction of an inclusive identity crafted an identify field of protagonists—those fleeing violence and poverty for a better life, and antagonists—those responsible for the causes of violence and poverty, which triggered the migration.

Important to note is that violence and poverty in Honduras work together and go hand in hand to produce desperate living conditions. As of 2017, 64 percent of Hondureños live in poverty producing an environment where criminal activity and violence thrive. As herein mentioned, with little economic opportunity young men often join gangs and criminal bands to improve their livelihoods. Fuentes's flyer hails people to flee because the culture of crime and violence has created what Gary Haugen refers to as a locus effect that is not being addressed [71]. Haugen astutely defines the crushing impact of the plague of violence on the poor, and how lawless violence acts like the intrusion of devastating locusts undermining any hope of improving the quality of life.

The narrative of violence and poverty resonated with Hondureños with 90 percent of those interviewed identifying it as one of the critical factors for migration. Koopmans and Olzak explain the processes of resonance as:

Resonance has two types of ripple effects. First, resonance enhances reproduction of a message, because, in the eyes of journalists and editors, the message has become more relevant and the actors articulating the message seem more "prominent". Second, messages that resonate travel farther. Through the reactions of other claim makers, the message of the original

speaker is at least partially reproduced and may reach new audiences. [72]

Here, we see how the frame produced a collective identity able to mobilize people individually under a broad schema of violence and poverty. Individuals were asked question three, a broad question as to why they joined the caravan and left Honduras and responses were classified according to the categories and dimensions under 8 USC 1101(a) INA 101(a) (42). Individual responses were qualitatively interpreted and categorized under violence and/or poverty and then subcategorized under the legal qualifications for refugee status where in a person "is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of *persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution* on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." Most respondents cited lack of economic opportunity and fear of local gang violence, which jeopardized the safety and protection of themselves and their families. Fuentes's observation traveling with the caravan confirms these findings: "All leave to search for work. All want to work and stay in Honduras, but the conditions do not exist for Hondurans to work, either because of harassment or extortions. People have no land to work on, and the cost of living is too high." What evolved is an international interplay of rhetoric on the migrant caravan, all which originated from Bartolo Fuentes's October 12, 2018 master frame.

Frame bridging and "logical" connections were thus made between extortion and violence, losing or fear of losing children to gang recruitment, domestic abuse, drugs, war taxes, work opportunities, better life for children, etc. After listening to and rereading the responses, it becomes quite evident that the testimonies reveal a fundamental violation of basic human rights under the 1949 Declaration of Human Rights. Since violence and poverty resulting in the undermining of basic human rights is widespread in Honduras, identification of shared lived experiences connected people together through networks of meaning under the master frame [73]. The flyer was then diffused across social media platforms, "passing on the "information along established lines of interaction" [74]. The frame was then brokered through, "the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites" bridging the "cognitive" and "relational mechanisms" together [75] [76]. When asylum seekers shared and retweeted the post, they created their own individual platforms of networking and micro-mobilization of potential caravan recruitees. The bridging of people and content about the caravan produced solidary and the construction of a collective identity for asylum seekers and opened up networks for the promotion of social and economic justice for resource poor actors suffering under repressive structures.

The posts' content resonated with perspective asylum seekers as a discursive opportunity linking people together by the framing processes [52] [74] [75] [77]. Establishing the connection of social injustice and the nation's inability to address social reform demonstrate the frame's relationship between power and

powerlessness, social injustice and opportunity. Moreover, the framing demonstrates "the political conditions under which specific discourse become imaginable" [78]. The framing confirms Fuentes comment that the "objective of the people is to flee Honduras because of the economic situation, insecurity and the lack of hope that things will change."

On October 13, a day after the posting of his migration flyer, Bartolo Fuentes added a comment to his original post declaring that "We will accompany the people" further stating that "it is a shame that there aren't institutions that can help to avoid the migrants from leaving and falling into danger." The full comment reads:

> *Vamos a acompañar esta gente. Es una lástima que no hayan instituciones que puedan apoyar para evitar. Es una lástima que no hayan instituciones que puedan apoyar para evitar que los migrantes se vayan sin orientación, a caer al peligro. Apoyemos por lo menos en su salida. Denunciemos la situatión terrible que estamos viviendo en Honduras: desempleo, inseguridad. Y a quienes prostemaos nos persiguen o disparan bala viva.*
>
> (We are going to accompany the people. It is a shame that there aren't institutions that can help the migrants avoid leaving and falling into danger. At the least, we will help in your departure. Let us denounce the terrible situation that we are living in Honduras: unemployment and insecurity. And those who prostate and persecute us, or shoot us with bullets.)

In Figure 2, Fuentes's appendage to his flyer, we witness how he elaborates on the elements of fault attribution, political denunciation, and what Blumer refers to as a form of interactive determinism, emergency and human agency [79]. Fuentes's post and his additional support of accompaniment expanded the original message to include a logistical resource of protection and safety for resource poor actors. He proceeds to charge the government for the mass migration, blaming the Honduran government and its institutions for failing to provide social and civil protections for its citizens, which renders them suspect to "falling into danger." Because the government has failed its citizens, the least he and other Hondurans who have the ability can assist in the caravan's departure. Fuentes then condemns the deplorable conditions of "unemployment and insecurity" and broadly charges an inclusive "those" who are responsible for the persecution and physical violence. In Fuentes's appendage we witness the formation of an "an epistemic community" of people who suffer under the hands of the multiple actors who perpetrate violence and a government that enables the violence to continue with impunity. The Honduran government becomes a target for "both problems and solutions" [80].

95 percent of the adult Honduran asylum seekers interviewed claimed that they first received notice of the caravan through social media. The remaining people heard about the caravan from word of mouth from people who first saw the post on social media. Economic opportunity was the key reason (90%) as to

Figure 2. Fuente's appendage to original message.

why Hondureños were leaving their communities. Unfortunately, economic opportunity alone is not a basis for seeking asylum status. There needs to be a nexus to the criteria for "*persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution* on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." I noticed that answers to question three varied and was influenced by the location where the question was asked. At the Benito Juarez Sports Complex as well as at El Barretal Shelter, Hondurans were less likely to claim fear of violence as a reason for leaving. On the other hand at *El Chaparral* where Hondurans awaited their number or spot to enter the San Ysidro Port of Entry for their fear of return interview, it appeared that asylum seekers had been prepped to answer pursuant to the legal qualifications for refugee status. As a probono legal volunteer at *Al Otro Lado* working with migrants seeking asylum, I personally engaged in workshops to prepare asylum seekers for their credible fear interview prompting them to elaborate on the conditions that make economic opportunity in Honduras impossible. In this study, I do not use any of the

information pertaining to my work in guiding asylum seekers at *Al Otro Lado*.[2] I can say, however, that there is a link between lack of economic opportunity and violence confirming my findings from the interviews at the migration camps. (It is important to note that the Benito Juarez Sports Complex as well as *El Barretal* was shut down because of incidents of violence and unsanitary conditions. The majority of the migrants I interviewed were those Hondurans who remained camped outside on the street of Benito Juárez Sports Complex after it had been shut down and deemed unsanitary.)

The asylum process is an arduous and time consuming and can range from six months to several years. According to the Migration Policy institute (MPI), USCIS reported "352,277 affirmative cases pending; EOIR reported 821,726 total immigration cases pending, of which MPI estimated roughly 30 percent were defensive asylum ones" [81]. Many of the refugees I interviewed in January 2019 had arrived in mid-November and were still living on the streets in cramped tents in January. The length of waiting time depends on whether the facts of each asylum seeker and whether he/she filed an affirmatively or defensively. Pursuant to the affirmative asylum process, the asylum seeker must file for a preliminary interview within 45 days after the application is filed with a final decision being made within 180 days of the application date. Unfortunately, with the unprecedented amount of applicants the immigration court system is backlogged with increasing caseloads. According to a recent report from the USCIS, approval rating for affirmative asylum cases has decreased over the last few years even with the influx of refugees. In 2016, 43 percent of the petitions were approved compared to 37 percent in 2017, and 30 percent in 2018. While the amount of migrants seeking asylum at the Tijuana border has grown to 10,000 as of August 2019, the number of asylum approval rates have dropped significantly [82]. If past statistics from 2012 to 2017 are any indication, then 78.1 percent of Hondurans will be denied asylum [83].

An examination of court records by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University (Figure 3) revealed that 1155 "remain in Mexico" asylum cases had been decided by the end of June 2019 only 14, or 1.2% had attorneys to help them through the process.[3] Not one individual received asylum, and 12,997 cases remained pending [83]. The majority of Hondureños, I interviewed, however, were unaware of the lengthy and arduous asylum processes unless they were contacted by immigration advocacy groups. In fact, many of the Honduran migrants who were taken across the border to US processing centers have been sent back to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) also known as "Remain in Mexico." Under the MPP, asylum

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[2]While working at Al Otro Lado, although many precautionary measures were taken, we received daily threats to our safety as volunteers. These threats escalated to death threats from criminal organizations demonstrating once again the complicated relationship between asylum seekers, human rights defenders and the myriad actors impacted by the asylum seekers.

[3]"Remain in Mexico" is a new migration policy instituted by the Trump administration to have migrants wait in Mexico while their petitions for asylum are processed and adjudicated.
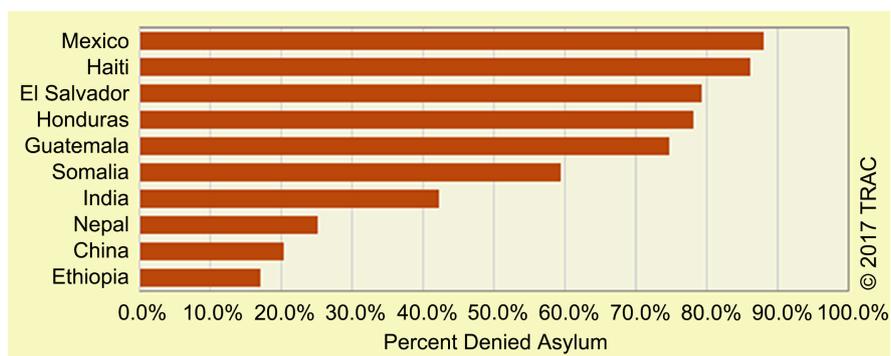
Figure 3. Transactional records.

seekers must "remain" in Mexico for their U.S. immigration court hearing. Presently, a $1.65-million Assisted Voluntary Return Program funded by the U.S. State Department, is transporting thousands of asylum seekers on the U.S.-Mexico border back to Central America [84]. According to Christopher Gascon, director of IOM UN migration, 37,578 asylum seekers were returned to Mexico to await the outcome of their asylum cases and 400 have boarded buses to return home [85]. Honduran José Mario Sarmiento who boarded a bus back home from Tijuana said the processes for asylum had become "too difficult," reflecting the sentiments of other migrants who got tired of waiting in political limbo at migrant shelters in Tijuana. Certainly, more research is needed to examine whether Migrant Protection Protocols and digital communication of migration status will curb the migration flow from Honduras.

6. Political Dimensions of *Twitterverse*

As I have argued, there has been a powerful transformation in the ways in which people receive and circulate political discourses about the myriad factors concerning migration processes. Migrants from the Northern Triangle gained political agency and social affordances through social media communication enabling them to network, collaborate, and engage in political events, issues, and activities directly related to their lives and livelihoods. The social affordances of social media enabled the migrant caravan to unite virtually, physically, and logistically in solidarity [86] [87]. The political advent of *Twitterverse* has become a revolutionary platform, which enables its users to participate in the sharing of ideas. This platform of interactivity and communication between political actors, citizens, advocacy groups, and the press, fosters a virtual power dynamic [88].

In the early stages of the migrant caravan in October 2018, a myriad of people from diverse geographies and ethnicities posted a wide array of comments, advice, and opinions creating a *Twitterverse* of democratizing communication for debate, virtual talk back, and the interchange of ideas. Some comments like that of Osmar Adolfo Aguilera Chavarria showed support for the asylum seekers. Chavarria writes:

Hermanos hondurenos todos los que viajan les deseamos feliz viaje llora-

mos su partida, y comprendemos esa decision, ya en nuestro pais no es facil vivir, es terrible lo que nos sucede, no hay seguridad, desempleo las autoridades se roban todo lo poquito que nos quedado bendiciones a todos.

Honduran brothers, to those who travel we wish you a happy trip and we cry for your departure and understand the your decision and that in our country it's not easy to live with what happens here, there is no security, unemployment, the authorities steal what little that affects us blessings to all.

Similar to Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan's research, which examins the political mechanisms of tweets and retweets in Germany, political posts and tweets about the migrants increased as news of the caravan crossed geopolitical borders [89]. The upsurge of virtual communication also fueled political polarization. On October 23, 2018 Comedian Hari Konabolu tweeted: "White people who traveled great distances to find prosperity were 'pioneers'. Brown people who do the same thing now are part of a 'migrant caravan'." The tweet obtained more than 10,000 retweets and 36,000 likes in 24 hours and as of this writing 571 comments, 13.7 k retweets and 46.5 K likes. 15,224 posts engaged in *Reddit* discussions alleging that "Re: Hundreds of ISIS Terrorists are sneaking in with the Honduras Caravan." North Carolina writer Loretta Malakie also known as "lorettatheprole" added a conspiracy theory to the migrant caravan formation cycle by tweeting the single word: "Soros" on Oct. 14, 2018 along with a link to an article about the caravan. The George Soros/caravan conspiracy theory linking him to the funding and support of the caravan spread across several social media groups reaching 127 million followers further demonstrating the affordance of social media to influence public opinion.

Political leaders have effectively mastered social media to accomplish political agendas, driving the political boundaries of *Twitterverse* to extremes. This is especially true for politicians like Trump with extreme ideologies who seem to have many online followers on Twitter [90]. Trump's candidacy prompted new tactics and strategies to commandeer "Internet forces." Many of the Honduran social activists I interviewed argued that Trump's heightened rhetoric about the caravans from the Northern Triangle heading to the U.S. southern border was a political maneuver used to reinforce his agenda for tightening immigration laws and building a wall. On April 2, 2018, Trump tweets:

Honduras, Mexico and many other countries that the U.S. is very generous to, sends many of their people to our country through our WEAK IMMIGRATION POLICIES. Caravans are headed here. Must pass tough laws and build the WALL. Democrats allow open borders, drugs and crime [91].

His post received 72.7 K likes and 18.1 retweets. In response to the *Caminata del Migrante*, headed from Hondruras, on October 16, 2018, President Trump received 136 k likes and 38.9 retweets when he threatened President Juan Or-

lando Hernández of Honduras that if the "caravan is not stopped and brought back to Honduras," he would immediately cut off aid [92]. He then blamed the caravan on the Democratic Party and denouncing it with this Tweet on October 18, 2018:

> I am watching the Democrat Party led (because they want Open Borders and weak laws) assault on our country by Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, whose leaders are doing little to stop this large flow of people, INCLUDING MANY CRIMINALS from entering Mexico to the US… [93]

President Trump's tweet immediately received 15.9 K comments, 21.5 K retweets, and 80.9 K likes. Between April 2, 2018 and December 28, 2018, Trump tweeted 35 times specifically about Honduran caravans receiving 1,288,700 likes and 434,000 retweets. His tweets contain invective language alleging the caravan consisted of "an invasion" "of some very bad thugs and gang members," and "some bad people," with "Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners" in the mix [94]. This widespread circulation of invective misinformation across *Twitterverse* allowed Trump to push his agenda and exploit his position as a political leader. "CRIMINALS in the Caravan" [95]. He asserts, "We will stop them. Catch and Detain! Judicial Activism" [95]. His tweets on the caravan itself received 3598.1 k and was retweeted 890.1 k. His rhetoric consistently blames the Democrats who "created this problem." In one of his many tweets he alleges that it was an "National Emergy" (misspelled) that "Must change laws!" and that the caravans are a disgrace to the Democratic Party"; Trump's twitter call to action is: "Change the immigration laws!" [94].

Donald Trump's aggressive and brazen ability to use Twitter for political means has enabled him to not only communicate directly across political and geographical horizons, but to promote his political agenda on border controls. His rhetoric, albeit always political, became increasingly partisan and polarizing as the 2018 midterm elections approached. "Must pass tough laws and build the WALL. Democrats allow open borders, drugs and crime! ineffective U.S. immigration laws are. Remember the Midterms!" [94]. Trump's urgent tweets for the construction of the wall began as early as 2014 when he tweeted: "SECURE THE BORDER. BUILD A WALL!" Between October 22, 2018 and January 31, 2019 (roughly the time the Migrante Caravan was en route and arriving in Tijauna) Trump tweeted fervent messages for the construction of the wall 103 times. His wall commentaries received 11,836.600 likes and 2,652,100 retweets. In response to the *Caravan Migrante* from San Pedro Sula, on October 22, 2018 he received 59.8 likes and 25.4 retweets for this message: "Shock report: US paying more for illegal immigrant births than Trump's wall" [94].

During a personal interview on December 18, 2018 with Salvador Aguilar, a community spokesman for the Honduran community living on the streets outside the Benito Juarez Sports Complex, one of the reasons that the caravan ended up in Tijuana was because "Trump wanted to increase support for the wall" and demonstrate "the need for a wall." Aguilar claims that the people are

being "used" and that the caravan was redirected to Tijuana "for political reasons for the wall. There were other routes we could have taken." He as well as others I interviewed at the Benito Juarez Sports Complex believe that the caravan "is a political tool" to increase political support from Trump supporters, Republicans, and Democrats. "*No somos criminales*," said Aguilar who was injured on November 25, 2018 during a planned peaceful migrant march to the San Ysidro Port of Entry that turned violent as hundreds of desperate migrants tried to storm the border fence. According to Aguilar, helicopters fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Aguilar was hit five times in the leg as young families with small children ducked for cover.

Trump took the storming of the border incident as more ammunition to influence his constituency for a wall. In fact, The 2018-19 thirty-five day United States federal government shutdown developed from a deadlock over Trump's demand for $5.7 billion in federal funds for the border wall.[4] Trump refused to sign legislation unless it included border wall funding [96]. On December 24, 2018, Christmas Eve, Trump tweeted:

> I am all alone (poor me) in the White House waiting for the Democrats to come back and make a deal on desperately needed Border Security. At some point the Democrats not wanting to make a deal will cost our Country more money than the Border Wall we are all talking about. Crazy! [97].

While in the Oval Office during the government shutdown, Trump tweeted eight more times about the wall. President Trump's public tweets and speeches denouncing the caravan led to a discursive interplay of threads—information, comments, and opinions about Trump's position. He admonished that part of his presidential campaign promise was a "Wall at the Southern Border" and that "elections have consequences" [98][5].

Though the examination of the political repartee of tweets on migration by political and non-political actors, we observe a dominant clustering effect of shared political ideologies, which in turn creates clustered segments of political polarization. While Bartolo Fuentes' Facebook Post successfully mobilized Hondureños to join the migrant caravan to the United States, President Trump's deployment of invective tweets halted the caravan at the Otay Mesa Border.

While Social media platforms lowered the threshold for migration from Honduras in October of 2018, it also instigated a political backlash from anti-immigration politicians. The interjection of social, political, and personal commentaries about the migration established a digital community of diverse ideas and opinions that hastened the reorganization of US migration policies. Migrants, NGOs, social advocates, political actors and non-political actors have seized upon technology and digital media for migration information in order to

[4]The 2018-19 United States federal government shut down occurred from midnight EST on December 22, 2018 until January 25, 2019.
[5]A master frame refers to a generic type of collective action frame that is wider in scope and influence than run-of-the-mill social movement frames (Snow & Benford 1992).

sway migration policies worldwide. As digital media develops, politicians like President Donald Trump have commandeered *Twitterverse* to sway opinion and gain electoral support by communicating political agendas to the public through tweets, posts, shares, and text messaging. The power of digital media has not only influenced migration patterns, but also political rhetoric, policies, and legislation concerning migration.

7. Conclusions

Most social movement theory and migration studies have focused mostly on social media theory in analyzing cross border digital mobilization. Little research has synthesized an interdisciplinary approach to fully understand the lived experiences of resource poor actors from the Northern Triangle. This case study hopes to provide this historical foundation as well as an ethnographic framework for understanding the political and social affordances of Bartolo's Fuentes's call to action to "*no nos vamos*" and caravan to escape the "*violencia y pobreza.*"

In this essay, I have presented that what transpired was a rapid digital revolution, which beckoned people across borders to join the caravan forever changing the relationship between migration patterns, social media, and digital technology in Central America. The interjection of social, political, and personal commentaries about the migration established a digital community of diverse ideas and opinions that hastened the reorganization of US migration policies. Because today's refugees and survival migrants employ smartphones and social media venues to communicate and share information, the October 4, 2018 *El Caminata del Migrante* post vastly accelerated political information to reach migrants across borders. I have, moreover, shown how channels of communication and established migration networks actively facilitated mobilization and transformed migration patterns and policies. Fuentes's post offered both a resistance narrative and a beacon of hope for Honduran migrants seeking political asylum and international refugee status in the United States. Based on these empirical findings, I conclude that the myriad affordances of social media have politically revolutionized migration patterns and policies. This case analysis hopes to encourage more research on digital migration from Central America and inspire more specific research on how vulnerable survival migrants use digital media and technology as a socio-economic and political means to gain access to resources and improve their lives.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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