

The University of Arizona Press
www.uapress.arizona.edu

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Printed in the United States of America
21 20 19 18 17 16 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-3252-0 (paper)

Cover photography and design by Leigh MacDonald
Cover art: by Deborah McCullough, Social Justice Artist

The royalties for this book have been donated to the Binational Migration Institute.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rubio-Goldsmith, Raquel, editor. | Fernández, Celestino, editor. | Finch, Jessie K., editor. | Masterson-Algar, Araceli, editor.

Title: Migrant deaths in the Arizona desert : la vida no vale nada / edited by Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, Celestino Fernández, Jessie K. Finch, and Araceli Masterson-Algar.

Description: Tucson : The University of Arizona Press, 2016. | Proceedings of a conference held in March 2008. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 201607473 | ISBN 9780816532520 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Illegal aliens—Mortality—Arizona—Congresses. | Illegal aliens—Mortality—Mexico—Sonora (State)—Congresses. | United States—Emigration and immigration—Government policy—Congresses. | Immigration enforcement—Social aspects—Arizona—Congresses. | ICGFT: Conference papers and proceedings.

Classification: LCCJV6473 M52 2016 | DDC 325.799—dc3 LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/201607473>

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"CON EL PESO EN LA FRENTE"

A Gendered Look at the Human and Economic Costs
of Migration on the U.S.-Mexico Border

ANNA OCHOA O'LEARY

MARCELA'S STORY: "CON UN PESO EN LA FRENTE"

THIS PAPER BEGINS WITH A STORY. In March 2007, I sat in a stark office space provided by the managers of the migrant shelter, Albergue San Juan Bosco, in Nogales, Sonora. I was nearing the end of a year-long study titled "Women at the Intersection: Immigration Enforcement and Transnational Migration on the U.S.-Mexico Border." The aim of the study was to systematically document migrant women's encounters with immigration enforcement authorities. On this night, the hazards inherent in the migration process had once again surfaced with an outbreak of armed violence in Arizona, allegedly between rival bands of human smugglers. Five undocumented immigrants were killed in these incidents, two of whom were women.¹ It was in the context of this event that Marcela's story unfolded.

Marcela had migrated from the Mexican state of Hidalgo hoping to reach Texas, where she had family. Tragically, she had been abandoned in the desert after she fell, and her injury prevented her from keeping up with the rest of the migrant group as they were briskly led by their coyote through the desert. She had wandered in the desert for three days after being abandoned before being picked up by a Border Patrol agent and repatriated to Mexico.² This evening, upon reflecting on her ordeal, she recalled the coldness with which her *parianos*

(fellow countrymen) agreed to leave her behind, and the callousness with which the coyote considered her and ultimately, her misfortune. After all, she observed indignantly to coyotes, migrants represent nothing more than a cash commodity: "¡Así nos ven, con un peso en la frente!" (That is how they see us, with a peso on our forehead!)"³ Marcela's cynical remarks were understandable in light of the news article that day that highlighted the risks to which migrants are subjected. Indeed, the business of human smuggling has been further complicated by post-9/11 border-enforcement measures and the incrementally more perilous strategies involving unauthorized entry into the United States. The dangers and the corresponding price of safety are most certainly correlated to the increased obstacles to historical circularity of migration and the parallel increase in U.S. dependency on migration to meet its need for labor.

In this paper, the transnationalized economy of reaching and crossing the U.S.-Mexico border will be discussed in light of migrant women's experiences. Based on research on the U.S.-Mexico border in 2006-2007, stories shared by migrant women help illustrate what I have dubbed elsewhere as the "ABCs" of migration costs: those related to assembling, *biadoras* (border bandits), and coyotes (human smugglers).⁴ All add up to a formidable financial burden disproportionately shouldered by the most economically destitute, like Marcela, for an opportunity to work in the United States.

Human migration across international boundaries is a global phenomenon, with economic implications for migrants and for their sending and destination countries. Heckman notes that because human smuggling is a clandestine activity, it does not lend itself well to scientific inquiry.⁵ Moreover, smuggling has increasingly become dominated by powerful mafias that go to great lengths to assure that their identity is hidden. As such, accurate information about the amount paid to coyotes is illusive.⁶ For this chapter, some information on the costs of migration has been gleaned from a range of sources on human smuggling to help gauge the rise in the cost of migration in the most active migration corridor in the U.S. border region. However, primary data is drawn from testimonies of women gathered over twelve months of research on the U.S.-Mexico border. The data gathered in this research offers additional information about the cumulative costs of migrating, of which only part is the price paid to human smugglers. In this respect the research presented here is one of many attempts to address the gap in our knowledge about this elusive phenomenon as part of the overall experience of crossing borders surreptitiously.⁷

THE COSTS OF MIGRATION AND BORDER ENFORCEMENT ON THE ARIZONA-SONORA BORDER

The implementation of the Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond National Strategy introduced measures to make it more difficult to enter the United States using traditional crossing areas.⁸ The plan thus included the building of triple walls in highly urbanized areas along the U.S.-Mexico border where migrants were likely to find needed resources for crossing into the United States (such as shelter, food, and social support). The building of the wall in a well-trafficked corridor in El Paso, Texas, and in another well-trafficked corridor in San Diego, California, sent migrants attempting to cross into the United States toward the desert areas in between these two major urban centers. The Sonoran Desert area is one of the most isolated and thus more dangerous areas of the passage north.⁹ Because of the intense immigration activity in this area, the migrant shelter in Nogales, Sonora, was selected for the study. This city of approximately two hundred thousand inhabitants¹⁰ straddles the U.S.-Mexico border and lies fifty-five miles south of Tucson, Arizona, and within the area created by the 1994 Border Patrol Strategy.¹¹ By 2006, Nogales was approaching its peak of migration traffic north to the United States and back again via repatriation or removal from the United States.¹² As much as 48 percent of all migrants moving to or through Nogales were estimated to be women.¹³

Until the implementation of Operation Streamline in Tucson, Arizona, in 2008,¹⁴ it was customary to simply remove most unauthorized migrants by repatriating them through the port of entry in Nogales, Arizona. Under this "voluntary" removal policy, most Mexican nationals apprehended near the border were fingerprinted and returned to Mexico without criminal charges. In practice, voluntary removal works to relieve immigration officials from having to incarcerate hundreds of migrants apprehended daily. However, in so doing, migrants are often apprehended and released more than one time,¹⁵ and this accounts for inflated apprehension figures reported by the U.S. Border Patrol. Nogales, therefore, resembles a highly congested "intersection" where the process of transnational movement north and south is disrupted by the daily grind of border enforcement.¹⁶ In keeping with the "intersection" analogy,¹⁷ migrants at the shelter where the study was conducted can be seen as temporarily immobilized in a

bottleneck of sorts: unable to move forward in their migration journey because of border-enforcement measures and unable or unwilling to return to their communities of origin.

THE RESEARCH: SITE AND METHODS

Approximately three kilometers south of the U.S.-Mexico border, Albergue (shelter) San Juan Bosco houses repatriated migrants who find themselves without a support system in the area upon their release from the custody of U.S. immigration enforcement authorities. Like other migrant shelters that have sprouted along the U.S.-Mexico line, Albergue San Juan Bosco is a non-governmental organization that accommodates both male and female migrants and provides the opportunity to interview migrant women who had been repatriated.¹⁸

In 2006–2007, when the research was conducted,¹⁹ migrants who had been repatriated or deported and who found their way to the shelter in Nogales typically stayed only one to two days before returning to their communities of origin or attempting to reenter the United States. Because of this, a rapid appraisal (RA) method was chosen for the research. RA emerged initially from development research,²⁰ but it has increasingly been used in the design and assessment of public health interventions.²¹ In RA, interviewees are active participants in the interview process, and a semistructured topic guide is used as a checklist of issues that are pertinent to the study. For the research, it was expected that not all topics would be discussed with all interviewees and that in fact each interview might depart from the basic questions to pursue interesting, unexpected, or new information. The emergence of data was enhanced by observation and secondary information (triangulation), and in this way RA helps capture detailed information on the issues that are of greatest importance to both the individual interviewee and the interviewer. As such, each experience also becomes situated within broader contexts, such as the social economic situations that ultimately informed decisions about migrating and crossing into the United States. In this way, the all too common border-crossing ordeals that culminated in apprehension by immigration enforcement agents were situated within the broader border-security policies and practices. This helped document the circular pattern of migrant entry-exit-reentry that has come to characterize this particular context, one in which stepped-up border enforcement is both cause and effect

of intensified efforts to cross when as more families are separated.²² At the same time, the need to satisfy the demand for labor in the United States has triggered its systems to facilitate border crossing. These include social networks,²³ employer/employee relationships,²⁴ and the logistical and organizational mechanisms of the human smuggling industry, including bribery and corruption of U.S. Border Patrol agents and other U.S. law enforcement officers.²⁵

Between February 2006 and June 2007, 129 women were interviewed at the shelter using a semistructured interview guide (the majority of these interviews were tape-recorded), through informal conversations, and by sharing activities such as eating or assisting with shelter tasks. Interviewing the women was often challenging because of the limited time that I had to solicit their voluntary cooperation and establish a measure of trust. However, I found most if not all of them were willing to talk to me about their border-crossing experiences. The shelter opens its doors at 7:00 p.m. every evening, and during a span of about three hours, migrants register, eat, wash, and bed down for the night. Few stayed beyond one night. A few respondents were reluctant to be tape-recorded, in which case I (or my research assistant) wrote notes during the interview and attempted to capture as many quotes as possible. Beginning in September 2006, I visited the shelter every two weeks, which provided for the systematic quality of data collection that was a goal of the research. With more visits to the shelter, I fell into the shelter's rhythm and gained rapport with the managers and volunteers. Being of Mexican heritage, while not a guarantee that I was a person to be trusted, was, I believe, also helpful in projecting myself as trustworthy (*de confianza*) and supportive among shelter guests.

THE COSTS OF NORTHBOUND TRAVEL

The distance and mode of travel are some of the most important factors for appreciating the material cost of migration. For those coming from Mexico, expenses begin with the initial financial outlay for the journey northward to the border. However, more than the absolute dollar cost of such an undertaking is the proportional cost to migrants based on their socioeconomic status. Table 5.1 shows that between 2005 and 2010, the southern states of Mexico had the largest percentage of emigrants, most of whom were destined for the United States. These are also the states that tend to be the most impoverished (table 5.2). The distribution of the sample of women interviewed in 2006–2007 indicates that

TABLE 5.1. Top ten sending states by percentage of emigrants 2005–2010

STATE	EMIGRANTS (%)
Oaxaca	83.9
Guerrero	78.1
Puebla	75.4
Guanajuato	71.9
San Luis Potosí	70.5
Michoacán	70.1
Morelos	69.4
Hidalgo	69.2
Chiapas	69.0
Veracruz	68.1

source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, "Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010," <http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/tabuladosbasicos/default.aspx?c=27303&s=est>.

TABLE 5.2. Mexican states by percent of population living in extreme poverty

STATE	POPULATION LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY (%)
Chiapas	38.3
Guerrero	31.8
Oaxaca	29.2
Veracruz	18.8
Puebla	17.0
San Luis Potosí	15.3
Campeche	13.8
Tabasco	13.6

TABLE 5.2. (continued)

STATE	POPULATION LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY (%)
Michoacán	13.5
Hidalgo	13.5
Yucatán	11.7
Zacatecas	10.8
Durango	10.5
Tlaxcala	9.9
México	8.6
Guanajuato	8.4
Nayarit	8.3
Querétaro	7.4
Morelos	6.9
Chihuahua	6.6
Quintana Roo	6.4
Tamaulipas	5.5
Sinaloa	5.5
Jalisco	5.3
Sonora	5.1
Baja California Sur	4.6
Aguascalientes	3.8
Baja California	3.4
Cahuilla	2.9
Colima	2.5
Distrito Federal	2.2
Nuevo León	1.8

source: Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, "Medición de la pobreza: Anexo estadístico de pobreza en México: Anexo estadístico 2012," <http://www.coneval.gob.mx/Medicion/MP/Paginas/Anexo-estad%C3%A9stico-pobreza-2012.aspx>.

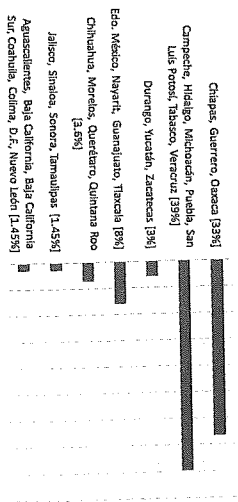


FIGURE 5.1. Distribution of sample ($N = 125$) of Mexican-origin interviewees by state of origin and percentage living in extreme poverty in sending states

the overwhelming majority of them were from these extremely impoverished states in Mexico (fig. 5.1).

Although the cost of this bus fare varies by point of origin, it is first important to factor distance into the initial financial outlay: more is paid by those who are coming from farther away. In general, the proportional cost in transportation fares will be more for resource-disadvantaged populations, and because most of these will be coming from farther distances (from mostly southern states in Mexico), more is needed for food, water, and shelter. These initial financial investments may be lost if the traveler is apprehended. Finally, it is also important to consider that while entry into the United States is an uncomplicated matter for those able to obtain visas—usually by providing a combination of documents that prove some proof of economic stability (e.g., wage receipts for the last six months, business tax receipts, retirement income receipts) and material holdings (e.g., property tax receipts, bank accounts, utility receipts)—providing such required documents is nearly impossible for resource-depleted migrants whose movement is largely driven by their poverty in their communities of origin in the first place. Not surprisingly, for many migrants who cannot provide such documents, most of the subsequent informal costs associated with migration (banditry, bribes, and smuggling fees) are related to avoiding apprehension for entering the United States “without inspection,” that is, in a place other than an official port of entry.

With growing economic disparities between the United States and Mexico (in part aggravated by the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] signed in 1994) and the hardening of border-security measures that began in 1994 with the Border Patrol National Strategy, the cost of crossing into the

United States without authorization has spiraled upward. With increased security measures implemented largely in reaction to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 and the U.S. war against terror, avoiding apprehension has become even more time consuming, more complicated, and therefore more expensive. I have argued elsewhere that as human smugglers become increasingly influenced and controlled by lucrative smuggling economies, they are more likely to succumb to the trend of commodifying and dehumanizing migrants, and this paves the way for their abuse.²⁶ Allegiance to powerful smuggling rings in essence works to devalue the commitment to human relationships and ultimately foments distrust and suffering and ultimately imperils lives.

The initial costs associated with avoiding apprehension must also be multiplied by the number of times the border crossing is attempted. In making the decision to repeat the attempt to cross, migrants weigh the price of failure. With no change in the economic conditions that prompted their migration to begin with, there are few options except to try again. If they do not succeed in crossing, the initial financial outlay is not only lost, but in addition, families in sending communities may need to come up with additional funds to pay for the bus fare home, losing in the process any hope for economic relief that employment in the United States would have provided.

LOANS AND INTEREST

To finance the initial migration journey, many migrants borrow the money and may put up their meager properties as collateral. On March 24, 2007, I interviewed Concepción at the shelter. She reflected on the futility of her efforts and the ultimate outcome of her investment:

El dinero, que con aquel sacrificio que ahorra uno para pagar el camión, para terminar donde mismo.
(The money, that with which such sacrifice one saved to pay for the bus, to end up none the better.)

The other women who were with Concepción that night described in more detail the moneylending process: The loans came from moneylenders, landowners, or business owners. They charge a high interest rate and/or take properties

as collateral to offset the risk of borrowers disappearing. Reina, another migrant woman, was on her way to the United States to join her husband when she was apprehended. Her husband had worked in the United States for four years. She borrowed 1,000 pesos (about US\$100) and would be accumulating debt of 200 pesos (about US\$20) a month in interest. This financial burden weighs heavily on the decision to return home after being apprehended. For example, two women from a group of three, Ana and Rosalinda, all from Veracruz, had decided to stay in Nogales to look for work to pay for the bus fare home. However, for the third woman from this group, Agustina, there was no going back. She would not return because she borrowed money from a woman who had her sign a contract saying that if she did not pay the 1,500 pesos she borrowed her parents will lose their land. She was worried because she would have to stay in Nogales long enough to save that money to send home and pay the lender and then work more to pay for her return. She explained that there are people who are well off who make these deals with people who are willing to cross, and many lose their land, which is the only thing they have, if they cannot make it across the border. She said that these rich people make them sign a legal document, and as a result, they legally lose their land. Agustina, who was twenty-four years old and had two children who lived with their father, was hoping to help support her mother with money because although her mother had a husband, she was elderly, and she was responsible for the care of her younger brothers.

Ella tiene marido, pero él ya no puede trabajar. . . . Tengo hermanos que están chiquitos. . . . Cuando estaba chiquita mi papá empezó a tomar, y pues yo nunca pude ir a la escuela.

(She [her mother] has a husband but he cannot work. . . . I have brothers who are little. . . . When I was little, my father began drinking, and well, I was not able to go to school.)

Agustina had previously lived in the United States and worked in the fields. She had been living with a man who had a drug-abuse problem. He promised her that if they returned to Mexico, he would stop, but he did not. So she left him, and she was returning to the United States to look for work. Since she had attempted to cross twice and had been both times repatriated, she had decided not to try again. Like so many other women, their smugglers had lied

to them about how long it would take to cross into the United States and how long they would have to walk. Her cousin who accompanied her on this night explained,

Nos dijeron que iba a ser una noche . . . nos faltaba agua . . . estábamos desesperadas porque era mucha subida y bajada. . . . A veces se ve un bordito y se ve la barranca . . . muy feo.

(They said that it would only be one night . . . we needed water . . . we were desperate because it was a lot of up and down hill climbing. . . . At times, you can see the unevenness and you can see the gorge . . . very ugly.)

Anoche estábamos como dos horas con el frío, y todavía caminamos otra vez como dos horas. . . . Nos dejaron caminar todo el día, ya como a la una de la tarde, ¿no? Y ya es cuando nos agarraron a la una de la tarde.

(Last night we were two hours in the cold, and we still walked another two hours. . . . We walked the whole day and around one in the afternoon, yes? And that is when they caught us at one in the afternoon.)

The magnitude of the costs due to the “bottleneck” created by apprehension and repeat crossing cannot be comprehended fully without considering the numbers of apprehensions in the Tucson Border Patrol Sector alone. Beginning in 1997, the Tucson Sector became the busiest of the southwestern sectors. According to a Department of Homeland Security website,²⁷ the Tucson Border Patrol Sector, which includes Nogales, led all other sectors with 439,090 investigations in 2003. Arizona has also had the most voluntary departures when all field offices were considered, a total of 395,597 out of a total 887,115 reported by all field offices for 2003. Of those migrants who are removed or deported, it is estimated that over one third would reenter the United States without authorization.²⁸ As a deterrent to repeat unauthorized reentry without inspection, progressively longer prison terms—based on the number of times they have been charged with this violation—are imposed on those who are reaprehended.²⁹ The high recidivism attests to the economic imperatives that outweigh the risk of serving longer prison terms if reaprehended. In Arizona, about thirty-one thousand individuals, the vast majority of whom are Mexican nationals, were imprisoned in 2004. Even without the implementation of Operation Streamline in 2008, this prison population has been growing.³⁰

THEFT AND COST OF SUPPLIES

The loss of personal valuables is necessarily added to the cost of the initial migration journey. Through the course of the research, it was not uncommon to field complaints from migrants who stated they had been robbed by Mexican police or while in the custody of the U.S. Border Patrol. While interviewing Lydia and Lucila in February 2008, Lydia complained that she lost seventy pesos in detention, a little over the average fifty-five pesos minimum daily wage in Mexico). She suspected that when forced to relinquish their possessions when under custody at the U.S. Border Patrol station, the money had been stolen. They, too, had taken out loans to make the trip.

Returning briefly to the case of Rosalinda from Veracruz who had already borrowed money to make the trip, on that March night that I interviewed her, she was upset because she was repatriated to Mexico with no money. Rosalinda says that she lost everything when they were apprehended because she had given her backpack to a young man who was helping her with it, and when they were stopped, he took off with it. She had her money and ID in there.

SUPPLIES

Because for many, food and supplies are precious and hard-earned commodities, they were shocked at having to throw away all of their food supplies carried in their backpacks after being apprehended by the Border Patrol. One migrant woman interviewed on February 10, 2007, was particularly emotive when she explained, "Cuando llegaron [las autoridades] nos tiraron todo, todo, todo . . . agua, todo lo tiraron, luego nos llevaron en el carro" (When they [the authorities] came, they threw away everything, everything, everything . . . water, everything was thrown away, then they took us away). For resource-depleted migrants, food was a harmless necessity, and the practice of throwing away food was wasteful and made no sense. Their regrets were aggravated once they were in detention for many hours and hunger set in, especially in light of the fact that they had been for many hours or even days trekking through the desert. Their want of food while in custody of agents was a frequent complaint. Agents would distribute some crackers and juice, but this was hardly enough. For those who would eventually reattempt to enter (and perhaps as a Border Patrol

strategy to discourage a subsequent attempt), the loss of supplies also meant that they would have to repurchase them. The neglect or inability to do so could lead to potentially deadly consequences.

LODGING

An important characteristic of the Nogales landscape is the proliferation of small hotels, *hoteles* that cater to transnational migrants. On any day, one may observe shuttle vans from Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora and two hours south of Nogales, drive up to any *hotelito* and drop off groups of passengers with all the telltale signs of destitute migrants en route: backpacks, caps, sneakers, jackets, an aura of extraneousness. They are hurried into the *hotelito* while the wary-eyed doorman scowls at onlookers with cameras that may be paying too much attention to the activity. *Hotelitos* serve as interim safe houses for migrants while the necessary arrangements with coyotes are made. Understandably, such establishments guard their privacy. In this way, *hotelitos* embody the force of transnational movement that runs counter to the forces that attempt to impede it. As if standing in defiance of the security systems designed to impede migration, the colorful and brazen *hotelitos* that adorn the city's streets are Nogales' best-known "secrets," catering to illicit activity (human smuggling is also against the law in Mexico), often within yards of the wall that separates them from the United States and often within sight of officials who undoubtedly know of their purpose. Not staying at a *hotelito* exposes migrants at risk of physical abuse by bandits and extortion by corrupt police.

STRATEGIES TAKEN TO AVOID COSTS

For some, like Lila from Guatemala (interviewed in February 2007), certain precautions were taken to avoid additional costs associated with apprehension. It appeared that there were others who were also from Guatemala in Lila's group. Because they were from Guatemala, the guide had instructed them to say that they were Mexican if they were caught; otherwise, they would be deported to Guatemala, and it would only cost them more money to try to get back to attempt again to reenter the United States. For Lila, this advice and a stroke of good luck ensured that she would not suffer a major economic setback.

Así gastar menos, porque si a mí me van a detener va ser un buen rato porque... a mí me deportaron una vez, y así son los reglamentos... De plano me van a dar unos seis meses, un año, qué se yo... Por mi está bien [ser deportada hasta Guatemala] pero no me deportaron hasta allá, pero aún me tiraron aquí no más y sin dinero y sin nada... Lejos de mi familia, no puedo hablarles, no tengo dinero para decirle a mi mamá [en Guatemala] que estoy bien, no tengo para escribirle, ni cómo llamar a California más decirle que estoy bien, que donde estoy para que le puedan avisar a mi mamá, la verdad no sé qué hacer. Mi hermana está en Bakersfield con mis niños. Pero no tengo dinero para comprar una tarjeta para llamarles para decirles que estoy bien.

[This way, you spend less, because if they detain me, it will be for a good while because they deported me once, and those are the rules... For sure they will give me six months or a year, but I don't know... That's fine by me [to be deported to Guatemala] but they didn't deport me all the way there, but still they threw me here without any money and with nothing... far away from my family, I can't call them, I don't have money to let my mother [in Guatemala] know that I'm fine, I don't have anything to write her with, nor can I call to California to say I am fine, or where I am so that they can let my mother know. The truth is I don't know what I will do. My sister is in Bakersfield with my children. But I don't have money to buy a [phone] card to call them and let them know I'm OK.)

While the shelter provides a safe refuge for migrants, another alternative is to immediately reattempt to cross the border without waiting or without re-trying. This decision involves boarding a shuttle immediately upon repatriation for

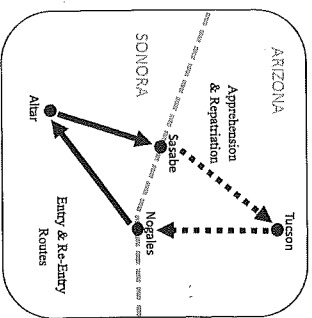


FIGURE 5.2. U.S.-Mexico border showing the circular pattern of migrant entry and exit and reentry in the Arizona-Sonora migrant corridor

the two-hour trip west to Altar, Sonora, the proverbial *antesala* (waiting room) for migrants going north. This pattern of entry-exit-reentry then assumes the aforementioned circularity depicted in figure 5.2, one that may be repeated several times until migrants either succeed or give up and return home.

THE COSTS OF BORDER BANDITRY: LOS BAJADORES (THE BANDITS)

Adding to the cost of migration are those associated with the almost certain assault from *bajadores*, the bandits who take advantage of the remote migration routes to rob migrants. The name *bajadores* comes from *bajar*, the Spanish verb that means to "pull down," and refers to the tactics these bandits use of forcing victims to pull down their pants at knife-point or gunpoint in order to keep them prostrate and to facilitate a body search for valuables. During the interviews, other words used to refer to the bandits surfaced, such as *cholos* (gangsters) and *panzillas* (gangs). For example, Florencia and her husband borrowed money from her brother to go to the United States to work. They still had their land, but she did not know how they would pay the money back.³¹ Their second attempt at crossing had dissuaded them from trying again. The couple had contracted a coyote to help them cross into the United States, although she did not know the details of this agreement. Of the robbery by bandits, she said,

Nos robaron... Nos quitaron el dinero, los Cholos, vimos a tres. Veníamos como ocho, y a uno le quitaron \$1,500, a otro \$800, a otro \$300, nosotros le dimos \$1,500, y ya no hay nada porque nos quitaron todo... Si no traes nada, te van a pegar.

El camión nos cobró caro, \$3,500 a Hermosillo, salimos de Oaxaca en autobús, 20 dólares de Altar, Sonora.

[They robbed us... They took our money, the *cholos*, we saw three. We came with eight others, and from one of them, they took \$1500 [pesos], and another \$800 (pesos), and another \$300 (pesos), we gave him \$1500 [pesos], and now we don't have anything because they took everything... If you don't have anything, they beat you.

The bus charged us \$3,500 [pesos] to Hermosillo; we left Oaxaca in the bus, \$20 [dollars] from Altar, Sonora.)

Gladis, another migrant woman, explained that their journey to the North began with a group of eighteen other migrants. Gladis was traveling with her husband and an uncle, and they were robbed by *ladinos*. When their group encountered the bandits, there was already a group of about fifty migrants ahead of them who were being robbed. This large group of migrants were searched extensively for any valuables or hidden money. Because there were so many ahead of them, Gladis's group of eighteen was let off with a cursory demand for cash. She handed over her fifty pesos and considered herself fortunate. Her group had been spared the humiliation that comes with having to strip and be physically searched.

COYOTES

The term *coyote* is one of the most common terms to refer to a human smuggler in the U.S.-Mexico border region. A discussion with almost any border denizen will refer to commonalities between coyotes and human smugglers in that they are both sly and masters in the art of camouflage. Human coyotes will often "disappear" when migrants are caught, much like how the four-footed desert creature blends into the environment. If perchance they are apprehended with their group, unless they are identified by any individual, they very much blend into the group of migrants, frustrating officials' efforts to isolate them for prosecution under Arizona's harsh antihuman trafficking statute. Some refer to the coyote as a coordinator or head of the human smuggling ring, which is hierarchical in structure. They are unlike the guides that lead migrants through the desert and are subjected to the same risks. As smuggling "coordinators,"³² coyotes organize the step-by-step migration process and outsource certain smuggling actions, such as guiding across a border or transporting smuggled migrants to their final destination. However, consistent with the analogy to their four-footed counterpart, these, too, are individuals who are rarely caught.

The label *pollero* (from the Spanish, *pollo* [chicken]), also has its analogous reference. In this analogy, migrants are much like chicks, and a guide who is responsible for keeping group members together on the trek through the desert is like a mother hen. Throughout the interviews, and indeed throughout the border region, *coyotes*, *polleros*, and *guías* (a more neutral word and Spanish for "guide") are often used interchangeably, and whenever anyone raised a question

about whether there was a distinction between them, it was more likely to make for a lively conversation than to agree on a definition.

TRACKING THE COSTS OF SMUGGLING

A variety of published sources, in addition to the information provided by the research here, can be used to argue that increased border-enforcement measures have contributed to the upward spiraling costs of migration.³³ As Lee states,

Fees have gone up as the United States has cracked down on its borders after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. The cost to cross the Mexican border has increased about 50 percent, in part because improved surveillance technology has made the trip more difficult.³⁴

For those contracting coyotes in the late 1980s, migrants reported paying as little as \$50–\$200 for each.³⁵ Petros reports that in 1996, the cost of smuggling migrants to the United States from Mexico was \$50.³⁶ Later, Spener reports that the price of crossing the Texas border at the Rio Grande and reaching Houston or Dallas was rising, from \$500 to \$700 per person to \$1,000.³⁷ At that time, migrants reported that \$1,000 was not too much to pay. More recently, the reported amounts paid to human smugglers vary widely but are consistently higher. A 2004 study of 538 cases from papers, reports, journals, newspapers, magazines, and conferences worldwide reports that migrants to the United States from Latin America are paying an average of US\$2,984.³⁸ This average amount paid is consistent with the approximately \$3,000 reported by Lee and the Associated Press.³⁹ Migrant women sheltered at the Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Sonora, between January and April 2010 reported to shelter administrators having paid the following amounts: twenty-three reported \$1,000; ten reported \$1,600–\$2,000; thirty-eight reported \$2,100–\$3,000; fourteen reported having paid \$3,100–\$4,000; and one reported having paid more than \$4,000.⁴⁰

Without a doubt, the costs of smuggling are a significant part of world trade. An Associated Press article reports that a truck loaded with ten "illegal immigrants" is worth about \$25,000 to a human smuggling organization.⁴¹ Using court records, the reported figure was the "upfront costs to the immigrants,"

which are reported typically to run about \$2,500 a person. The report from the Arizona Financial Crimes Task Force estimates that payments to a single collector of smuggling fees can reach \$70,000 per day. An analysis done in February 2006 showed that in a two-month period, about \$28 million in wire transfers were sent from the United States to 201 Western Union stores in Sonora, Mexico—transfers suspected to be tied to human smuggling.⁴²

My study suggests that the range in the cost of migration is related to smuggling route and therefore the smuggling mode. This is also an important dimension that needs to be factored into the assessment of migration costs.⁴³ The mode of travel is more than transportation and may require assistance, specialized knowledge, infrastructure, or equipment. For example, my interviews of women for this study revealed various modes of crossing: some climbed over the border fence, some entered the United States through underground tunnels, some crossed packed in vehicles, and others crossed through the port of entry in cars with borrowed documents (*papeles chuecos*).⁴⁴ This latter mode was the most expensive, costing nearly \$3,000 per person. Mari, a migrant woman from Yucatan, contemplated asking her grown daughter to raise the money so that she could cross. Ultimately, she decided it would place too much of a burden on her daughter and her family, and she returned home.

Entering through the port of entry either on foot or in a vehicle with *papeles chuecos* is by far the safest, especially if the person crossing is a child or an elderly individual. In doing so, they avoid the dangerous crossing on foot through the desert or the risks associated with climbing the thirty-foot wall and falling to the other side. While entering with *papeles chuecos* is the safest, it bears the greatest punishment if the migrant is caught. Those in possession of such documents who are caught may be charged with identity theft and face severe penalties that are added to charges of unauthorized entry. The least expensive and therefore most common mode of crossing among resource-disadvantaged migrants is to walk two to four days through the desert. For example, Azucena and her husband agreed to pay \$750 to cross the desert in this fashion, according to my field notes dated May 3, 2006.

García Castro's research shows that the variance in fees may also vary based on the degree of familiarity between migrants and certain coyotes, *coyotes comunitarios* (community coyotes).⁴⁵ This nuanced understanding of coyotes has also been documented by García Castro and by Sanchez.⁴⁶ Having interviewed admitted smugglers (including some women coyotes), these authors qualitatively challenge notions of the coyote as ruthless criminals solely motivated by

economic gain.⁴⁷ Instead, the activity is also largely social. These authors provide a rare glimpse into the social commitments between coyotes and family members, and, consistent with many of the supportive values that work to keep families together, the job of coyotes is shown to be also driven by their desire to remain in good standing with members within one's social network. Based on the coyotes' familiarity with their clients—as family members, as former clients, as friends or relatives of former clients—coyotes "*comunitarios*" ("community" smugglers) may offer discounted rates and in this way they help reduce not only the cost of crossing but also the risks associated with crossing as they may be more likely to feel social pressure to ensure the safety of those they are helping cross (which many times includes children). Offering "guaranteed smuggling services" is one way of dealing with the possible client's assessment of the risk involved, and due to the illegal nature of the activity, building trust is only possible through word of mouth among the migrants.⁴⁸ For example, an interview with Rosita, further detailed below, reveals that her father borrowed the money and arranged for the coyote to help her, her husband, and their young child cross into the United States. In addition, because the coyote was a friend of the family, they were only charged \$1,100, and because she would be bringing her baby, he would arrange for the shortest route possible. Similar accounts dot the literature on border crossing and provide a nuanced understanding of the social context of human smuggling that is inherently varied and that factors into the costs of migrating.⁴⁹ As a business activity, there is a high premium on a coyote's good reputation.⁵⁰ However, as I have argued elsewhere, maintaining a good reputation is subverted by the lure of greater profits and excessive demands made on those charged with escorting migrants through the desert.⁵¹ Moreover, with a reputation comes a risk of being identified by authorities. This encourages the elaborate use of client recruitment by middlemen who also operate clandestinely, are themselves partially or imperfectly informed about the whole operation, and results in greater risk for migrants.⁵²

ADDING THE COSTS OF STAGE MIGRATION

The costs of migration necessarily include those expended over time and are related to "stage migration" of entire families. *Stage migration* is a term defined by Hondagneu-Sotelo and refers to the piecemeal reunification of families that begins with the initial migration of an adult and continues with the subsequent

migration of spouses and each child over a period of time.⁵³ Rosita, one of the women interviewed in February 2007, exemplifies the process that looks like an installment payment plan for assuring that families might eventually be together. Rosita's parents left their children in Paracho, Michoacán, ten years ago when they migrated to the United States. At that time, Rosita was nine, the oldest of four. The children were left with Rosita's grandmother and aunts, and Rosita helped raise her younger siblings, the youngest of which was a little over one year old. Over the years, Rosita's parents had arranged for the children to journey to the United States and be united with their parents. Rosita was the last of the siblings to make the journey.

In the last few months, Rosita's father had called them and urged them to make the journey because there was much work in Oregon. Rosita's father worked in the agricultural sector, routinely working the potato harvest. Not surprisingly, Rosita and her husband's decision to follow her parents to the United States was based on economic need. She stated, "A veces ni de comer teníamos" (At times we didn't have anything to eat).

In another example of stage migration, in February 2007, two women and a minor, Alva (nine), Lydia (twenty-two), and Lucila (eighteen) had arrived at the shelter. The three were not related but rather were *amigas* (friends) that came from a village in Santo Domingo, Oaxaca. They were also friends to the child's mother and had been charged with helping little Alva cross the border so she could join her mother in Atlanta. Alva was a petite, wide-eyed little girl. She seemed attentive and happy and only shyly smiled and answered an occasional question when asked. She had not seen her mother since she was three years old. Her older brother, age fifteen, had been able to cross.

CONCLUSION: GENDERED IMPLICATIONS OF UPWARD SPIRALING COSTS OF MIGRATING

On July 19, 2008, an article in *El Imparcial*, Sonora's state newspaper, again brought my attention to the problem of human smuggling.⁵⁴ My thoughts turned to Marcela and that night in February 2007, when I met her. The article, "Alertan sobre secuestros entre 'coyotes' in Arizona" (Alert regarding abductions by "coyotes" in Arizona), reported that for smugglers, each undocumented migrant represented US\$2,000—\$3,000. The article went on to report that the violent competition for migrants had reached a new high, with confrontations

between bands of "coyotes" while abducting migrants from other bands. In 2007, the Phoenix, Arizona, police department had registered 356 cases of persons held hostage in drop houses by coyotes awaiting payment.⁵⁵ Thus, it seemed that Marcela's appraisal of the coyotes rang true: for coyotes, migrants were only regarded for the price they brought: migrants displayed the proverbial *peso on their forehead*. The article further reported that smugglers were fully armed and increasingly neglected the safety of innocent victims. If families did not send the money for the release of their family member, they were badly beaten. Accompanying this article were unsettling pictures of about twenty dependent migrants, unclothed save for their underwear, sitting on the floor of the safe house in Phoenix. The removal of their clothing, presumably to prevent anyone from escaping, also dehumanized them.

The rising costs of migrating and the associated violence as the stakes are raised have particularly grave implications for women migrants.⁵⁶ Castro Luque and her colleagues have documented a dramatic increase of 32 percent in the number of women migrating through Nogales, Sonora (from 4.9 in 1994 to 37.1 in 1998).⁵⁷ It has been argued that this dramatic rise in female migration is related to the neoliberal structural adjustment policies introduced by NAFTA in 1994, such as those that have resulted in the feminization of poverty in many other developing countries.⁵⁸ Gendered migration patterns, those in which the movement of unaccompanied men is followed by that of wives and other family members, are also undergoing change.⁵⁹ These studies suggest that more recent female migration patterns are less likely to follow a "stages" approach to migration, where women migrate after the initial stage that begins with their husband's migration, and more likely to resemble patterns established by their unaccompanied male counterparts.⁶⁰ My study here suggests that an overwhelming majority of women are increasingly traveling "alone" as *madres solteras* (single mothers). It can also be assumed that with the increased feminization of poverty in disadvantaged parts of the world and with families strained economically, women may be less able to count on more reliable, and therefore more expensive, modes of crossing. This increases their vulnerability to assault and banditry. In the interviews, there were several accounts suggesting that women and children were differentially treated based on the perceived liability that slower moving individuals would pose for the guides.⁶¹

For example, Yesenia, a migrant woman from Chihuahua, recounted how before arriving in El Sasabe, Sonora, they were exchanged twice among bands of smugglers. After the second exchange, the coyote seemed reluctant to guide

them through the desert because they were accompanied by children, and he tried to dissuade them by asking the women whether they knew how long they would be walking.

¿Si saben cuanto van a caminar? . . . Van a ser tres noches, quizás cuatro porque vienen niños. (You do know how much you are going to walk? . . . It will be three nights, maybe four because you are coming with children.)

They replied that they were determined, but after all was said and done, they were ultimately left behind. She felt that their group was left behind because it was smaller in number and in it were women and children. Margarita, in her interview, mentioned that the last *pollero* (smuggler) they hired told her that he would charge her more to get them across because they were women.

Scholars have consistently pointed out that rising costs of migrating and smuggling have increased with increased border enforcement.⁶² The intensification in one process (enforcement) provokes a challenging response by the second process (migrating).⁶³ With costs mounting, financially weaker segments of society will increasingly become marginalized and made more vulnerable. Worldwide, being female and poor increases the likelihood of being discriminated against, and differentiated access to mobility and labor markets based on gender can only mean increased dependency and subjugation. The increase in the migration of women coupled with increases in migration costs can only predict greater risks for women especially as border-enforcement measures intensify.

NOTES

1. Quinn and McCombs 2007.
2. O'Leary 2008.
3. Field note entry, March 2007.
4. O'Leary 2009a.
5. Heckman 2007.
6. Petros 2005.
7. The policy report by Petros (2005) is a rare attempt to systematically collect and analyze the costs of human smuggling worldwide.

8. This strategy involved the intensification of border closures known as Operation Hold the Line (1993), Operation Gatekeeper (1994), and Operation Safeguard (1995). See Nevins (2002).
9. Cornelius 2001; Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006.
10. According to the city's web page, http://www.municipiodenogales.org/mapas_Nogales.htm, in 2005, Nogales, Sonora, had 189,756 inhabitants.
11. Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006.
12. Castro Luque, Olea Miranda, and Zepeda Bracamonte 2006.
13. Castro Luque, Olea Miranda, and Zepeda Bracamonte 2006; Monteverde García 2004. This figure is consistent with the percentage of female migrants in Latin America and North America (Zlotnik 2003).
14. Up until 2008, many undocumented migrants who were apprehended in Arizona were "voluntarily" removed from the United States at the Nogales, Arizona, port of entry. However, in 2008, there were changes in the voluntary removal policy in the U.S. Border Patrol Tucson Sector with the implementation of Operation Streamline. This policy change, a modified version of a pilot operation implemented in the Border Patrol's Del Rio, Texas, Sector in 2005, essentially selects certain undocumented immigrants who have been arrested for immediate prosecution for illegal entry. Because of Operation Streamline, a percentage of arrested migrants now face punishment of up to 180 days in jail, and formal deportation procedures are initiated once they complete their jail sentence. In Arizona, the program began with the prosecution of forty arrests a day and has added to this number, with a goal of reaching one hundred per day by September 2008.
15. However, if and when found guilty of this charge, migrants serve sentences, after which they are deported. The vast majority of the detainees in Arizona, roughly between 75 and 90 percent, are serving sentences for illegal reentry after removal.
16. Cunningham and Heyman 2004.
17. O'Leary 2008, 2009c.
18. Albergue Plan Retorno, a governmental organization discontinued in the spring of 2007, sheltered only men, and Albergue Menores Repatriados typically only shelters unaccompanied minors under the age of eighteen, although on occasion, women may also be sheltered there.
19. Support for the initial pilot study for this research was provided in early 2006 by a Social and Behavioral Science Research Institute (SBSRI) Small Grant

at the University of Arizona. The research subsequently was made possible by a Fulbright grant awarded for 2006–2007.

20. Carruthers and Chambers 1981.
21. Robert Chambers might be the scholar most commonly associated with pioneering “rapid rural appraisal” techniques. Bebe (2001) provides a comprehensive history of the adoption of the method in a wide range of disciplines. Often known by different names, *rapid assessment* remains consistent with the early procedures advanced by Chambers and others.
22. O’Leary 2009c.
23. Fussell 2004.
24. Granberry and Marcelli 2007.
25. Erfani 2009; Blankstein and Kay 2015; Garske 2013; Hernández 2015.
26. O’Leary 2012.
27. U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007, table 36.
28. This figure is taken from a June 9, 2005, article in the *Arizona Daily Star*, Tucson, Arizona.
29. Alvarado 2004.
30. Ibid.
31. Field notes, May 4, 2007.
32. Heckman 2007, 5.
33. Petros 2005.
34. Lee 2006, 1.
35. Conover 1987.
36. Petros 2005.
37. Spener 1999.
38. Petros 2005.
39. Lee 2006.
40. Kino Border Initiative 2010.
41. Associated Press 2008.
42. Ibid.
43. Petros 2005.
44. Literally, *papeles chuecos* means “crooked papers”—documents known to be used wrongfully.
45. García Castro 2007.
46. Sanchez 2014.
47. Izcara Palacios 2014.
48. Heckman 2007, 4.

49. Petros 2005.
50. García Castro 2007; Petros 2005.
51. O’Leary 2012.
52. Heckmann 2007.
53. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994.
54. *El Imparcial* 2008.
55. Generally, smuggling fees are due when immigrants arrive at a drop house, a place where those who just crossed the border are temporarily housed. Once the migrant has arrived, the drop house operator will telephone the migrant’s sponsor, usually a family member who has agreed to come up with the smuggling fee, with instructions on how to pay. Once the money is received, the migrant is let go or taken to his or her final destination.
56. Ruiz 2009.
57. Castro Luque, Olea Miranda, and Zepeda Bracamonte 2006.
58. Marchand and Runyan 2000; Sadasivam 1997.
59. Cerniti and Massey 2001; Donato 1993.
60. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994.
61. O’Leary 2008.
62. Erfani 2009; Heckmann 2007.
63. O’Leary 2009c.