

## **ABSTRACT**

Title of Dissertation:           IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE U.S.-MEXICO  
BORDER: CASE STUDY OF GRASSROOTS  
ACTIVISM FOR THE MIGRANT AND REFUGEE  
COMMUNITY

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This qualitative case study examines the impact of globalization on the U.S.-Mexico border as it affects transnational migration and individuals who assist the poor in migration. This study begins by discussing the social, political, and economic context of the region and examines the global conditions that have led to a massive movement of people along the border. The grassroots, NGO community has been actively engaged in the issue of cross-border migration although there have been few studies examining their work. This study attempts to look at how grassroots communities have responded to the global migratory flows as they situate themselves within globalization and the U.S.-Mexico border.

This study specifically focuses on Annunciation House, a nongovernmental organization that assists migrants in the sister border cities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua and investigates how this organization and its networks have combined social services and activism with education in their advocacy work. The findings discuss the nature of the work and operation of Annunciation House; how the organization facilitates personal and political transformation of its humanitarian workers; how short-term and long-term staff members differ in their approaches to work; and how Annunciation House compares and relates to other NGOs in the region.

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CASE STUDY OF GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM FOR THE  
MIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITY

By

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to Ruben Garcia and the staff of Annunciation House whose commitment to welcoming the stranger has helped save tens of thousands of lives and accompanied those whose basic human rights have been stripped away to the point where their mere existence cannot be protected by the law.

A professor once told me in the early stages of my Ph.D. study that I would someday become instrumental in creating institutions for those who have been left out of formal institutional protection. It took me several years and the encounter with Annunciation House to truly understand and appreciate this calling in my life.

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This research has shown me how different lives meet on the border and intertwine in ways that are unimaginable. I am forever grateful to God for such an excellent journey and the awareness that has begun to spring up in my life. I will always be indebted to the many migrants who participated in this research for their selfless sacrifice of time; for openly sharing their wounds with me; and for finding a way into my heart and teaching me a great deal about love, courage, faith, and forgiveness. I cannot end here without acknowledging the Gospel of Jesus Christ that demonstrated so deeply in the work of Annunciation House and in the tens of thousands of lives that have come and gone through its doors—thank you for allowing me to walk through this journey.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

Globalization has undoubtedly caused local, national, and international sectors to meet and intertwine in ways that have historically been unimaginable. The topic of globalization has become widespread around the world with ongoing discussions surrounding its economic, cultural, technological, and political aspects and implications (Marginson, 1999; Singh, 2004). As such, globalization has been viewed through the various lenses of finance and trade; communications and information technologies; international movements of people; the formation of global societies; linguistic, cultural, and ideological convergence; and world systems of signs and images (Monkman and Baird, 2002; Marginson, 1999).

As extensive as the discussions have been, the term *globalization* itself has been contested, creating difficulty to define the terminology in the first place (Salt et al., 2000). While some define globalization as standardizing production and consumption leading to efficiency and wealth for all, others focus on the declining nation-state, the rise of supranational organizations, homogenization of cultures, strengthening global trade and finance, international social networks, and the growth of communications and transportation across time and space (Salt et al., 2000; Monkman and Baird, 2002).

Many purport globalization is a mere progressive stage in capitalism that began with the early creation and expansion of nation-states. The traits of global interaction may have changed, but the general notion of worldwide communication has remained unaffected. Features such as world-wide markets, the banking system, and the spread of

monocultural systems have much earlier roots that date back at least to nineteenth century imperialism (Salt et al., 2000; Currie & Subotzky, 2000; Marginson, 1999). Conversely, others view it as a completely new phenomenon where the uses of the term, its ideological foundations, and the intensified compression of space and time have brought dramatic changes to contemporary society.<sup>1</sup>

Carnoy and Rhoten (2000) define globalization as a multi-dimensional, multi-directional, and multi-level process. It has a strong base in economics, influenced by multinational organizations and transnational capitalists (TNCs). Thus, individuals experience globalization in multifaceted and uneven ways (Singh, 2004). Intensifying information and technology networks, transnational capital, high group interactions and migration, and an interconnected, competitive international economy are some of the ways individuals encounter globalization (Hoppers, 2000; Blackmore, 2000; Carnoy, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Grappling with globalization and its characteristics does not come without further caveats. Monkman and Baird (2002) purport that while we have focused on *what* globalization is, we have failed to explain, in detail, *how* it works. Unless we make explicit connections between globalization and the trends it creates, we run the risk of misapplying the very concept of globalization. Globalization should not be seen as an isolated independent force. Instead, the focus should be on the interpenetration and mediating influence of the global and the local forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Some believe such changes have damaged the world's prospects by colliding with commitment to international peace and promotion of international standards and norms. The wide gap between democracy and individualistic capitalism has caused concerns about the application of democratic principles and practices on both international and local levels (Jones, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> People may now entrust globalization and transnational capital to bring peace where nation-states have failed (Hoppers, 2000).

This has led many scholars to examine the distinct global, national, and local impact as a result of the globalization process. Although the task of differentiating various forces has not come without difficulty, one region that has received increased attention is the U.S.-Mexico border. This is an area that has witnessed international integration first-hand through free trade and flow of networks and information.

The U.S.-Mexico border region extends almost 2,000 miles and includes over 60 miles north and south of the actual dividing line. The area comprises six Mexican and four U.S. states with roughly 20 million residents total (Saint-Germain, 1998). People on both sides breathe the same air, drink from the same water source, and get exposed to same infectious diseases. People cross the border for employment, work for companies that conduct business on both sides, and buy goods and services across the borderline.

Many born on one side are raised on the other. People travel back and forth through means such as *la mica*, a border commuter card that enables residents of Ciudad Juarez to make unlimited trips to El Paso for up to seventy-two hours<sup>3</sup> (Rodriguez and Hagan, 2001). U.S. residents may also cross into Mexico by paying a 35 cent fare at the international bridge. Such crossings are done almost effortlessly, as there are no inspection points for entering Mexico from El Paso through the four international ports of entry – Bridge of the Americas; Paso del Norte Bridge; Stanton Street Bridge; and Ysleta International Bridge (City of El Paso, 2006).

Based on this human interaction and working relationship, the social division is not as clearly defined as the physical political boundary that divides the U.S. and Mexico (Staudt, 2002; Staudt and Coronado, 2002). This is shown by the Laredo / Nuevo Laredo border region that historically has seen high degrees of interaction, cooperation, and

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<sup>3</sup> But they must stay within the 25 mile radius.

dialogue across the border.<sup>4</sup> Its borders also see high flows of traffic and merchandise through maquiladoras<sup>5</sup> that are located in this region, and the public health sector has been active in implementing exchange nursing programs, workshops, and sharing of medical information (Rodriguez and Hagan, 2001). The Tijuana / San Diego region, known as the most active border in the world, has seen nearly ten million pedestrians and forty million automobiles crossing the border in a given year (Del Castillo V., 2001).

Once considered an outlier to national spaces, the border region has now become a vital playing field for political, cultural, social, and economic actors and has become what Staudt and Spener (1998) describe as *global crossroads*. Fox (2000) calls the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico the most expansive and profound illustration of global integration between the North and the South. Heyman (1999) views the border as the main image of U.S. economic and social change with the gradual relocation of foreign manufacturing plants to Mexico. Anderson and O'Dowd (1999) summarize the region as one that has carried distinct forms of identities, prosperity, governance, organizing, and reactions to globalization.

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<sup>4</sup> An example is Los Dos Laredos that developed cooperation agreement between the two mayors in 1994 to collaborate on construction of a new international bridge.

<sup>5</sup> Maquiladoras are primarily foreign-owned factory plants on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Even though the perception of the maquiladora industry may have seemed positive until the 1990s, expected to bring employment opportunities to the region, the industry has since been highly criticized for the physically strenuous and repetitive working conditions where workers are able to work for only months at a time due to the physical intensity (Domínguez and De Castro, 2000). This has resulted in employment to have a high turnover rate exceeding 100% each year. The unsafe working conditions have also caused numerous injuries and deaths from handling dangerous electrical materials and heavy chemicals without sufficient protection (Williams, 1999; Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Globalization has impacted the U.S.-Mexico border in many ways. With the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), foreign firms and transnational corporations (TNC) relocated to this region in vast amounts. This was immediately followed by a massive movement of people from the interior of Mexico to the region in search of work in the newly thriving industries. Migration became a natural outcome of this globalization process, as people gravitated towards industries that seemingly offered economic and labor mobility.

With the recession of the U.S. economy in 2000, however, many TNCs abandoned the region and relocated to other parts of the globe in search of cheaper labor. The working class in Mexico was harshly struck by this economic devastation, as workers were left without jobs or any other means of sustaining their lives. Many were subjected to substandard living conditions without the option of returning to their hometowns that offered decent amount of social services and infrastructure but with no work opportunities. With limited alternatives, the migrant poor resorted to crossing into the U.S. through legal and undocumented means in search of work and stability. This influx of border crossers naturally led to the heightened security measures and increasing militarization on the border that continues to this day.

Intensified border security has brought national attention and debate on undocumented immigration from the south of the border. This has created pressures especially in the political arenas to find resolutions to the intensifying immigration debate. The drawback of such action has been the deterrence of border crossers through the urban zones and into the desert terrain to find refuge in the United States. This has

resulted in deaths, physical abuse, and violation of basic human rights. Such realities launched campaigns such as “No Human Being is Illegal” throughout the border region.

One part of society that has actively engaged in the issue of cross-border migration is the grassroots, NGO community. While some organizations have concentrated on providing food, shelter, and medical care to those who have walked through the desert terrains to cross into the U.S., others have engaged in exposing human rights violations, demanding more fair treatment of the undocumented migrant community. These efforts have been difficult and often thwarted by civilian groups that have taken border patrol into their hands by scaring away border crossers with fire arms.

While the Congress and the media have given attention to the political and economic equation of undocumented migration, there has been limited focus on its social and humane aspects. There furthermore has been trivial amount of academic literature on the topic of Mexico-U.S. migration and the engagement of the grassroots community in humanitarian aid and political debate. There are very limited studies that document the work of these organizations, the lives of migrants, and the various factors that have led people to migrate north in the first place. The problem this study will address is how grassroots communities have responded to the global migratory flows on the U.S.-Mexico border and the impact they have had on the migrant community.

## **Purpose and Scope of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of globalization on the U.S.-Mexico border as it affects migration to the United States. This investigation provides the social, political, and economic context of cross-border migration and looks at how the grassroots community has responded to the migratory flows. This study is very relevant as empirical studies on border-based grassroots and NGOs have been almost nonexistent. Such studies are needed to consider not only the economic and political factors of Mexico-U.S. migration but also the social aspects of migrant life and the historical and contemporary factors that have facilitated transnational migration.

This study focuses on Annunciation House – a grassroots, nongovernmental organization working in the sister cities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua – and investigates how this organization and its networks have engaged in advocacy, activism, and education through social services. This is a case study that utilizes ethnographic techniques in data collection and analysis. The study begins by tracing the history of the organization and leads into discussions on present and past activities, successes and challenges, and outcome of its work. The analysis focuses on the specific forces of globalization that have affected the work of this organization, the personal and political transformations of its staff, and its engagement of the general public in raising global awareness of the poor in migration.



## **Research Questions**

There are two major research questions in this study. The first pertains to the overall framework of globalization and its impact on migration in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The second focuses on the specific work of Annunciation House and its impact in raising personal and public awareness on issues surrounding transnational migration. The questions are as follows:

1. What is the impact of globalization on the U.S.-Mexico border as it relates to cross-border migration and individuals who assist the poor in migration?
2. How does a particular NGO, Annunciation House, situate itself within globalization and the U.S.-Mexico border?
  - a. What is the nature of the work and operation of Annunciation House?
  - b. How does Annunciation House facilitate personal and political transformation of humanitarian aid workers?
  - c. How do short-term and long-term staff members differ in their approaches to their work?
  - d. How does Annunciation House compare and relate to other NGOs in the region?

## **Theoretical Framework**

Theory development as part of the research design is essential in case studies, because case studies require theoretical propositions and theory development prior to collecting the data. Theory development may not provide a grand theory at the onset of the study but creates somewhat of a blueprint to guide the research process. Thus, theory development becomes the main driving force for generalizing study results (Yin, 1994).

This study primarily utilizes theories on globalization, migration, and political organizations. According to Richmond (2002), there are two major types of migration:

proactive migration and reactive migration. Proactive migration is economically motivated while reactive migration results from various states of instabilities such as ethnic conflict, political upheaval, famine, flood, and environmental deprivation. What Richmond attempts to explain through this typology is that poverty and economic deprivation are not the sole factors causing migration.

Along with theories on migration, this study also utilizes theories on non-state, political organizations. I concentrate much of my analysis on the typology of political organizations theorized by Wilson (1995) on different types of incentives that organizations offer their members. By examining the incentives that motivate their work, we can learn about the overall mission of organizations and the direction they head towards. This furthermore helps point to the local, national, and global factors that contribute to their work.

Wilson (1995) explains there are three major types of incentives that drive the work of political organizations: material, solidary (or personal), and purposive. Material incentives refer to the money or concrete goods offered to members. Solidary incentives indicate the personal benefits and pleasures that come from affiliating with a certain organization. Organizations that offer purposive incentives establish single- and multi-issues purposes that they advocate for (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

Individuals drawn towards material incentives are often satisfied with the personal benefit and gain that come from participating in a given organization. An example is a trade union where members seek wage increases and workforce benefits for themselves. Personal or solidary motivations often include faith-based and charity-focused organizations. However, such organizations are often unstable without the

accompaniment of purposive incentives driving their work. Wilson considers purposive organizing as ideal of the three. Examples are women's rights and human rights groups (Staudt and Coronado, 2000; Wilson, 1995).

As the study proceeds to examine the impact of globalization and how Annunciation House has worked as a political organization, I utilize these theoretical frameworks to find parallels between theory and the work of Annunciation House, as they specifically relate to migrant-focused grassroots communities on the U.S.-Mexico border. This study examines to what extent material, personal, and purposive organizing can best facilitate migrant assistance and advocacy while simultaneously dealing with the global and capital realities on the border. The important work of Foley (1999) and Freire (1970) are also incorporated in examining the types of social learning and the levels of conscientization that occur within these social contexts.

### **Significance**

There is minimal amount of empirically-based studies on grassroots organizations located on the U.S.-Mexico border. Even the existing literature gives trivial attention to specific grassroots organizations that respond to the global migratory flows of people. Qualitative studies on the lives of those involved in this migratory process are rarely documented. This study attempts to fill this gap in literature and to theorize about the migrant-based grassroots community. This research also contributes to our better understanding of the globalization process by tracing the global trends in one particular domain and on the specific topic of cross-border migration.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Globalization

#### *Introduction*

Globalization has been a highly contested topic, representing tremendous diversity of issues as well as theoretical and political positions. Whether explained as advancing capitalism or progression of modernization, debates have crossed into discussions of progress, wealth, freedom, democracy, etc. (Kellner, 2002). As much as globalization has become a common term, the debates over intricately interlinked definitions and characteristics have made it difficult to reach a clear consensus on what globalization really is.

In this section, different views of globalization are presented as they relate to social, economic, and political actors and institutions. I first examine the rise of capitalism and neoliberalism along with the role of the state. I attempt to explain how the global economy has contributed in restructuring the nation-state. This will be followed by debates on the Global Age, cultural plurality/heterogeneity, and technology/communication. I conclude by examining the influence of Western hegemony and how it has become interlinked with the economic and socio-political discourse in globalization theory.

#### *Rise of Capitalism and Neoliberalism*

Much of the debate on globalization has revolved around capitalism and its neoliberal ideologies. This is in part due to globalization, by origin, being referred to as

the government sharing its responsibilities with the private sector and tailoring its activities to the interest of global capitalists (Dale & Robertson, 2002). Globalization has thus spread the message favoring free market ideology as the dominating force in society, leading many to identify the neoconservative ideology as the most prevailing influence in debate (Currie & Subotzky, 2000; Samoff, 1999).

The link between globalization and capitalism has gained influence beginning in the 1980s when neoliberal market theories became affiliated with institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Blackmore, 2000). As a result, international economic institutions became key in protecting the interests of leading capitalist nations. They soon assumed the role of the collective capitalist state and imposed loans, debts, and conditionality on the rest of the global community (Dale and Robertson, 2002). With the end of the Cold War,<sup>6</sup> rising references to globalization,<sup>7</sup> and the European Union serving as a model of globalization, regional organizations joined to help construct capitalist views on the global economy (Stubbs, 2000).

Global powers further advanced the neoliberal agenda and demanded more restrictions on state spending, reduced control of the economy, and export-led policies (Currie & Subotzky, 2000). For example, up until 2000, there was not one textile mill in Jordan that exported to large retailers in the United States. After three years, however, 40,000 workers<sup>8</sup> had been employed in over sixty factories that started producing solely

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<sup>6</sup> This transformed existing international relations into new relationships with one another.

<sup>7</sup> The fall of the Soviet regime brought a crucial shift in global relations, transforming and disrupting world politics, traditional national priorities, and possible expansion of Western values and capitalism.

<sup>8</sup> Less than half are Jordanians.

for U.S. companies.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, most of the factories are owned and operated by businesses from China, India, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Taiwan who import workers from abroad into the Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ) where the factories are located. Ninety percent of the working force are female under age 22 who earn about \$3.50 a day. These individuals are housed in dormitories with eight people per room with up to eighty people on each floor. When employees attempt to form unions, as 120 Bangladeshis had done in January of 2003, they are simply deported (Glantz, 2003).

The push for minimal state intervention has also forced governments to adopt structural adjustment programs, make provisions for unregulated trade, repatriation of profits, short-term investments, and free flow of capital and access to new markets (Currie & Subotzky, 2000). In so doing, they have rigidly integrated national economies of developing nations into the international political economy (Monkman and Baird, 2002). Civil society groups have identified continuing poverty as a result of conditions being imposed on countries for debt relief, creating a vicious cycle of debt accumulation.

For example, Bolivia, a country that has been under structural reform for almost two decades, has had severe negative side effects of a fragile economy, a productive sector in a standstill, and fiscal imbalances. Sixty-four percent of its population lives in poverty, and 11% unemployment and 60% underemployment rates of the economically-active population overshadow the urban regions. Even though Bolivia received \$628.8 million in debt relief in the first years of participating in the Heavily Indebted Poor

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<sup>9</sup> This is a result of a provision in Jordan's 1994 peace agreement with Israel that gave Jordan the authorization to export goods to the U.S. duty free with at least 8% of their industrial inputs coming from Israel.

Countries (HIPC) initiative, this is insignificant compared to nearly \$3.5 billion in new loans contracted between 1998 and 2004 (Oxfam International, 2005).

Another example is Mali where two-thirds of the population survives on less than a dollar a day. It is one of the poorest countries in the world where the annual per capita income in 2005 was \$242 and the Human Development Index of 172 (out of 175) in 2003. Even though the World Bank and other donor agencies identify cotton as a strategic instrument in poverty eradication, as Mali is one of the largest producers of cotton in sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank and IMF policy of promoting cotton-sector reform through privatization as a condition for debt relief has caused major losses for Mali and the Western African states (Oxfam International, 2007c).

As a requirement for receiving the Structural Adjustment Credit III, a loan of \$70 million that was approved in December, 2001, Mali was obliged to submit a proposal for cotton-sector reform. As a result, farmers report that the decreasing cotton prices have worsened situations of poverty and food insecurity. Falling household incomes as an outcome of depreciating cotton prices have often caused insufficient income to feed their families and to meet costs of education and health.

Globalization and neoliberalism have naturally come to complement one another,<sup>10</sup> further spreading the message that the primary objectives of nation-states is to consume and accumulate capital, which Hoppers (2000) describes as:

Twin objectives to be enforced through the two complementary strategies of the carrot of consumerism through which a system of total demand is created and the competitive stick of enforced economic participation. (p.102)

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<sup>10</sup> Neoliberalism opened economies to globalization, and globalization created difficulty for nations to resist neoliberalism (Monkman and Baird, 2002).

Fiscal efficiency has become a priority over quality and equity, as states have concerned themselves more with extending legal protection to the market than the welfare of their citizens (Monkman and Baird, 2000; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000).

### ***Role of Nation-State***

Along with the influence of the globalization rhetoric, the nation-state has undergone major structural changes. Although it continues to be the location of social cohesion and where social politics are fought out, the changes have certainly altered the traditional boundaries between the public and the private (Marginson, 1999). According to Keck and Sikkink (1999), many scholars now claim that the state no longer has monopoly over public affairs. Some argue that the nation-state has lost sovereignty to advances in international finance and trade. Globalization, as an ideological mechanism for deregulating economies, has therefore dissolved the function of welfare states and now depends on the depreciated role of the state to advance the market agenda (Jones, 2000; Salt et al., 2000; Currie & Subotzky, 2000).

Many argue that the state is now subject to the guidelines of the international market. No longer the regulator of public services, its role has been reduced to that of a mere provider in favor of capitalism (Blackmore, 2000; Jones, 2000). Nation-states have been given an uncertain future with globalization, further colliding with policies that redistribute wealth and provide basic domestic needs to developing countries (Walters, 2000; Chomsky, 1997). Others are convinced that we will soon witness a virtual nation-state working on behalf of global capitalism. Carnoy and Rhoten (2002) explain:



The virtual nation-state is the site of production, and it encourages and stimulates investments from at home and abroad that expand production activities... The role of the state is to negotiate for its own corporations' investments abroad and to attract foreign investment domestically. The state is a negotiating entity, using its diplomatic and commercial skills to enhance payoffs to the nation's resource." (p. 3)

Clearly, global economic competition has focused on economic policies that improve global competitiveness more than domestic issues that protect national political economy and social cohesion. Nation-states have been led by TNCs that maximize profits and returns to short-term investments and structural adjustment programs (Walters, 2000). For example, the Peruvian agricultural sector employs almost a fourth of the people in Peru, as cotton is a major crop in this country. But while there are 25,000 cotton producers in the U.S. receiving about \$3.5 billion each year in subsidies, there are 28,000 Peruvian cotton producers who do not receive any subsidies and have minimal alternative modes of sustaining their livelihood (Oxfam International, 2007b).

Nations have furthermore been pressured to attract global capital by reducing public expenditures and implementing policies favoring economic interests (Carnoy, 2000). Oxfam International (2007d) reports that approximately 25 developing nations have now signed free trade agreements with industrialized nations. This is added by over a hundred nation-states that are in current negotiations with free trade agreements (See Appendix C for list of developing nations in trade negotiations with the U.S., the European Union, Japan, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand).

However, I tend to side with Rust (2000), who cautions that although state autonomy has debilitated, there is no clear indication that state power has transferred to a system of global governance. To date, there has not been a global political body capable

of assuming the role of trafficking economic and cultural globalism, and nation-states have been behind the signing of free trade agreements. Neither is there a global capitalist society completely dominated by TNCs. Furthermore, majority of businesses are still conducted within national boundaries even though economics and nation-states have penetrated into one another (Rust, 2000; Salt et al., 2002).

Despite varying global pressures, the ultimate decision on how much globalization will affect a nation depends on state policies (Held, 1999; Waters, 1995). Transnational corporations are not necessarily transnational where they can encompass any national space of choice. Instead, they are situated in their own national boundaries with some offices abroad. The bulk of their assets are located in their home economies where national regulations serve as the primary force of intervention and control (Carnoy, 2000).

It can be argued, therefore, that nations can partake in the globalization process without losing their national autonomy and character. Nation-states may not be able to avoid the internationalization and globalization process, but neither are they obliged to submit to the dominant globalization discourse without question (Paramenter, 2000). Nation-states still guard their territorial and temporal space that regulates human interaction and capital. They continue to create the climate to conduct businesses and have the ability to reduce corruption, establish trust, and achieve greater social capital (Carnoy, 2000; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002).

The global economy cannot operate in complete isolation from the nation-state nor can capitalism remain sustainable without state provision. Property rights, contracts, and currency are established by governments. It is also through tax breaks given by

states that enable transnational capital to escape certain restrictions. Many of the major regional organizations and agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, the European Union, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, are all creations of national governments (Dale & Robertson, 2002).

### ***Technology and Communication***

Regardless of where we align ourselves with the debate between nation-states and global forces, there is no denying that globalization has penetrated into many facets of life, creating great flows of communication that have significantly altered our lifestyles (Marginson, 1999). The fact that these debates occur worldwide is an indication of the rapid speed in which information is disseminated across the globe. In many aspects, globalization is a new mode of thinking about economic/social time and space embedded in "increased competitions among nations in a more closely intertwined international economy" with information and innovation serving as the two of the primary bases of globalization (Carnoy, 2000, p. 46; Castells, 1996).

The grand impetus to cultural globalization has arisen from multinational investments and revolution in global communications. Globalization is a multidimensional process that includes the global economy, politics, communication, and cultural standardization and hybridization (Pieterse, 1995). This globality becomes possible through the technological infrastructure provided by the information systems, telecommunication, microelectronics machinery, and computer-operated transportation (Carnoy, 2000).

Advanced technology and information systems have greatly changed the cultural and political aspect of the global culture. At the cultural level, the flow of people and

information along with the exchange of goods and images has created new identities and imaginaries. At the political level, there is greater acceptance of pluralism, free elections, multiple democratic parties, independent judiciaries, and demands for human rights and social justice (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000).

According to Appadurai (1996), the two forces that have pushed cultural and political boundaries are electronic mediation and mass migration. Through this, we witness fundamental disjunctures between the economy, culture, and politics through different building blocks of our imagined worlds. He calls these financescapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, ethnoscapes, and ideoscapes. The first three scapes generally refer to electronic mediation, as ethnoscapes and ideoscapes fall under mass migration.

The emerging global culture has had high respect for technology, industry, and new social and technical division of labor (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). Regardless of how globalization is conceptualized, many actions have been driven by the perception of a more integrated world economy. The terms *electronic age* and *information society* have become appropriate markers in distinguishing contemporary globalization from its earlier forms (Salt et al., 2000; Currie & Subotzky, 2000, p. 125).

Much of the arising global trends can be traced to what Castells (1996) calls a network society where the market, capitalism, and consumerism have impacted all parts of social life through its system of ideas, information, and capitalist agenda. Daily subjectivities via electronic mediation have placed information dissemination at ease and have become intricately linked to politics. Through technology in globalization, we see greater democratic participation, such as global citizenship and human rights agreements (Blackmore, 2000).

It can be said that globalization has caused a phenomenon where the new global space has permeated through boundaries with compression of time and space (Raby, 2000). By diminishing the physical dimensions of space and time, globalization makes room for new types of human interaction and becomes “shorthand for describing the current global capitalist economy.” It also “reflects processes in which social relations are not only linked at the economic level but also permeate the political, social, cultural, and environmental spheres to impact on everyday life” (Walters, 2000, p. 197).

The interests and the goals of the individual have clearly crossed those of the nation-states through electronic mediation (Marginson, 1999). Since boundaries in time and space now intersect with great ease, people are able to transmit and receive information and events faster than ever before. There is now minimal difficulty when communicating with those in great distances (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). The function of the mass media in generating disjunctures between time and space has thus been great (Appadurai, 1996).

With the present “global consciousness” and “time-space compression,” the distance and time to travel between localities has reduced immensely. The connectivity across spatial boundaries has become abundant, as individuals are now able to be in multiple places simultaneously (Singh, 2004, p. 104). People not only identify themselves through the confines of a single nation-state but also through transnational, subnational, and even non-national ties and aspirations, giving way to increased transnational migration (Appadurai, 1996).

### ***Global Age, Cultural Pluralism, and Heterogeneity***

Globalization, filled with issues of cultural plurality and heterogeneity, signifies a world system that is distinct from national and local life and one that continues to define its existence (Marginson, 1999). Given this highly interconnected global networking and penetration of the global and the local, some raise the question of whether or not globalization has brought us to a brand new age that surpasses the era of the nation-state. Some believe we are at a Global Age where the globe has replaced the national boundaries as the focal point of sociopolitical movements, economic patterns, and culture. Such trends have enabled the local struggle to permeate their unique indigenous and political expression to the global audience through ways of new communication and information technologies (Walter, 2000; Hickling-Hudson, 2000).

Albrow (1997) describes the Global Age as an era where we can no longer depend on the notion of a society that provides an all-encompassing framework of theory and practice. The Global Age is one that moves beyond the time and spatial bounds of modernity. Its construction of global forces transcends all boundaries and into multiple directions, impacting every aspect of life in varying degrees (Albrow, 1997; Marginson, 1999). The Global Age has displaced the modern and transformed the new global forces in response to the unexpected changes in the direction of history.

Globalization is by no means an end product of modernity but rather, a transition period into a new global era. Intellectuals are called to disassociate themselves from the modernist ideas of the past century and to tap into the new Global Age by retrieving what is relevant from traditional thinking into the new era. Developing regions, especially affected by limited resources and the traditions of neocolonial institutions, are called to

the overwhelming task of moving toward the postcolonial global society. As globalization restores the boundlessness of cultural and national affiliations, it becomes more and more difficult to affirm individual identity within the confines of nationality, gender, age, and other social categories (Albrow, 1997).

As we move into the diversification of cultural expression and locality, this interconnectedness could also be a source of tension. However, this social and cultural transformation can give more attention to economic interdependence, rising of marginalized voices, environmental decay, and increasing presence of critical perspectives (Buenfil, 2002). Local groups can take this opportunity to reshape their identities without completely abandoning their indigeneity (Stromquist and Monkman, 2000). This all becomes part of the ongoing transformation of society and global community that continually defines and redefines itself.

### ***Western Hegemony and Marginalization***

We are far from a consensus on what globalization is and the types of impacts it has had on society. In my view, consensus is neither possible nor desirable. However, one concern that arises from the debates on globalization is the tendency for core industrial powers to monopolize the transactions and outcomes of the economy. Despite the plurality of ideals, people, and culture that has complemented globalization, globalization may result in a new form of colonialism dominated by Western hegemony (Hoppers, 2000).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Much of this criticism of globalization representing imperialism of the North has especially been made from the political left (Monkman and Baird, 2002).

Much of this critical approach derives from the notion that the Western ideology has been adopted as the global norm. Standing on the militant, technological, and economic authority of the Western influence, this ideology views all other social systems as deviant (Hoppers, 2000). It operates along the lines of the international regulatory mechanisms, such as the World Bank, who selectively disseminate statistical evidence of its successes and failures to further advance their own ideology (Loxley and Seddon, 1995).

These organizations continue to advocate for structural adjustments as the means to solve global poverty and inequality. They persistently push for transparency, cost effectiveness, efficient administration, and information management without consulting the target countries during the process (Blackmore, 2000; Hoppers, 2000). Core industrial powers have forced weaker economies to readjust their policies to be more compatible with their own economic design and have instituted the world economy with their own ideas of wealth and power. Meanwhile, the South has been subject to the second-class status in the process of preserving the standards of the powerful (The South Commission, 1990).<sup>12</sup>

The monopoly of the Western ideology can also be seen in the culture of consumption where globalization has become equated to the export of American ideology and what Ritzer (1993) refers to as the *McDonalidzation of society*. According to his argument, the global society is increasingly leaning towards the Western economic models of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through technology. This

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<sup>12</sup> In the case of Peru, because the preference is on non-traditional crops (i.e. asparagus, artichokes), small producers who grow traditional crops such as cotton and maize have tremendous obstacles in gaining access to the export market. Therefore, those benefiting from export opportunities are big corporations that have the ability to invest and gain access into the international markets (Oxfam International, 2007a).



is evidenced by McDonald chains worldwide whose centrally conceived business principles have permeated through international boundaries (Ritzer, 1993).

Ritzer (2004) explains there is nothing new about globalization. Globalization is merely a set of ideas and practices that have been confined to the Western ideology and homogeneity. As a result, local culture is disappearing and being replaced by Northern ideas and principles. More than before, the global culture is moving toward the homogeneity packaged by the dominant models of consumption. The world has become increasingly more uniform and has ultimately led to the globalization of nothing.

In this view, the only change globalization has brought is the imposition of the hegemonic message and its conservative neoliberal views to further subjugate the local and marginalized voice. Having become the ideology of globalization, neoliberalism pushes other perspectives (i.e. critical feminist and postmodern analyses) outside of the major policy framework (Monkman and Baird, 2002). This consequently causes groups and agendas to fall through the cracks and onto the periphery of the new market values (Hoppers, 2000; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002).

This impact can be seen on gender issues, as the conservative view of the market on women has often disregarded gender entirely<sup>13</sup> (Bakker, 1994; Vidovich, 1997). Feminist accounts have challenged globalization by contesting its gendered assumptions and contradictory relationships among transnational capital, state policy, reproductive labor, and gender relations. Feminist political economy has charged the globalization discourse for having derived rhetorical staying power from conventional patriarchal gendered meanings that have upheld competition and exploitation of marginalized groups.

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<sup>13</sup> When structural adjustment policies deliver privatization of public costs and limited social services, the burden falls especially on women.

They have also contested the practice of privileging corporations, governments, and international institutions in the public arena (Bergeron, 2001).

In the example of Chile, a country that has signed free trade agreements with 47 different states, the country has seen an economic growth of 5.5% in the last 15 years. However, this has come at the cost of its workers as the majority are women hired on temporary contracts. While the boom has made new jobs available to them, this has subjected women to long work hours, low wages, and hazardous working conditions. Majority are without sick leave, maternity leave, holidays, or health insurance. In fact, only half of the seasonal workers have contracts and access to the welfare system, and 66% do not have a pension fund. In the fruit-picking sector, 75% of the women work over 60 hours per week, and about a third of them do not receive the minimum wage (Oxfam International, 2007a).<sup>14</sup>

Such conditions clearly demonstrate that free trade, in many ways, has benefited TNCs while disempowering the working class, especially the women (Oxfam International, 2007a). Such system of marginalization, largely associated with the notion of a culture of inner and outer imperialism, allows the international system to reaffirm, systematically penetrate, and routinize the inequalities. Belief systems are shaped to maximize these values and to dismiss any attempts at creating alternative discourse. Globalization continues to suppress other development models and allows the imposition

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<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, when the Fair Labor Association released a study in November, 2005 based on announced audits of 88 supplier plants in 18 different countries, it showed that showed an average of 18 worker violations per factory. Such violations included excessive hours, health and safety hazards, underpayment, and worker harassment. The association speculates the number of violations to be higher since factory personnel have falsify records to conceal noncompliance to wage laws. And while factory personnel persist in their claim that employees are working 40 hours a day with overtime, interviews with workers show many are paid under the minimum wage and obligated to work extra hours each day without additional compensation (BusinessWeek, 2006).

of the Western hegemony to continue as the new omnipresent force (Hoppers, 2000). Feminist discourse on globalization has even contended that national sovereignty is no longer meaningful where globalization has altered the ways that people conceive of economic and political spheres (Bergeron, 2001).

## **Transnational Migration**

### ***Introduction***

Not only have alternative development models and the non-Northern rhetoric become marginalized by the globalization process, globalization debates have largely overlooked issues that fall outside the rhetoric on the flow of capital, goods, and information. Topics largely left out of the conversations have been the welfare of workers, the interest of consumers, and the protection of national identity (Carnoy, 2000). Issues of ethnic conflict, interest of marginalized groups, and production of new social divisions, networks, and movements have furthermore become ancillary and dismissed as local affairs (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). In this section, I shed some light on these issues by examining transnational migration in the domain of the globalization arena.

Transnational migration involves the constant movement of people and the social and economic dependence between migrants and non-migrants. Unlike previous population movements, migration now facilitates the construction of systems of social relations that transcend national boundaries (Rivera-Salgado, 1999; Levitt, 2005). The impact of migration has also gone beyond the migrants themselves and into the lives of non-migrants.

According to Richmond (2002), in addition to those who have permanently emigrated to another country, an estimated 120 million people are now working outside of their native countries. The International Labor Organization (ILO) analyzed a migration pattern in 152 countries and found that the number of countries known as major receivers of labor migration increased from thirty-nine to sixty-seven from 1970 to 1990. Likewise, the number of major sending countries increased from twenty-nine to fifty-five (Stalker, 2000).

According to Hamilton and Chinchilla (1991), many view migration as a result of capitalist development, its infiltration into underdeveloped regions, and the integration of these peripheral regions into the global economy. Whether coerced or contracted, capital penetration has resulted in direct recruitment of workers from the peripheral areas. Exporting capital from dominant economies to underdeveloped regions has also caused economic distortions and dislocations that result in emigration by displaced individuals no longer able to find employment in their countries. In many aspects, migration can be explained as the result of contradictions, dislocations, and opportunities as an outcome of capitalism penetrating into less developed regions.

### ***Impact of Diaspora***

With the flow of human migration, political impact has permeated across boundaries, and states have established major initiatives to engage the political and economic involvement<sup>15</sup> of their migrants (Appadurai, 1996; Basche et al., 1994).

According to Rivera-Salgado (1998), political activism of migrant populations and their

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<sup>15</sup> This includes ministerial/consular forms, investment policies that facilitate remittances, extension of political rights vis-à-vis dual citizenship, right to cast ballots overseas and run for public office, extension of state protection and services, and implementation of symbolic policies reinforcing migrants' sense of membership.

involvement in political processes in their home communities have directly challenged the power of the Mexican state to define its national political boundaries and memberships rights. Migrants have also organized strong lobbies to advocate on behalf of their home countries (Levitt, 2001).

International migration has further facilitated political and economic changes in countries under authoritarian and interventionist regimes. Those who adopt democratic and liberal views from abroad are likely to call for democratic institutions in their home countries. In a study on the voting behavior of Czech and Polish migrants, Fidrmuc and Doyle (2004) found migrant voting behavior (votes sent to home countries) to differ from compatriots back home. According to this study, diaspora groups in economically advanced countries tend to support right-wing parties at home, and those in less industrialized nations vote for the left.

Recognizing the influence of migrants on the voting behavior of their non-migrant family members, political parties have organized around migrants for contributions and support. Some have focused on migrants to solicit their support for regime change while others have sought support for their political candidates (Levitt, 2001). Some nations have even extended dual political membership to migrants,<sup>16</sup> voting rights, and federal agencies aiding them and protecting their interests.<sup>17</sup>

Governments have also discovered the instrumental role of hometown organizations not only to provide social support to the migrant communities but also to

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<sup>16</sup> This is given regardless of becoming a naturalized citizen elsewhere.

<sup>17</sup> This includes the Brazilian government offering group health insurance plans to its workers in New York, a Mexican health care agency in the LA consulate to assist the Mexican community combat AIDS, and expansion of the El Salvadoran consulate programs to provide legal assistance to undocumented Salvadorans, promotion of business development, and campaign to inform migrants of their rights in El Salvador.

raise significant support in building social services and infrastructure back home. These organizations have generated resources for regional development and have strengthened the migrant—non-migrant relationship in business, tourism, culture, education, sports, and health. The Haitian government, for example, created the Office of Diasporic Affairs in the 1980s, and the Mexican government has provided basic education, literacy training, and advisers to train its workers residing in the United States. This government has also given migrants the opportunity to obtain the Mexican high school equivalency from abroad (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003).

Furthermore, emigrants bring significant remittances to their home countries. Remittances refer to the capital generated back to the home countries, such as migrants sending money to family members back home. In the example of Mexico, emigrants generate over \$20 billion in remittances every year. Many of these funds flow to some of the most poverty-stricken regions in the country. Therefore, emigrants have become the third largest source of foreign capital following trade and tourism. Additionally, emigration has decreased the pressure on policy-makers in dealing with economic difficulties at the local and national levels (Orrenius, 2001).

With the rising network support and interaction, migrants are now more able to maintain simultaneous ties with both their host and home institutions. This has helped identify their diasporic identities without having to fully assimilate into the host culture (Marginson, 1999). The interchange with their home and host communities sets the preconditions for an extra-national society, and through transmission of ideas and transnational social relations, migrants participate in multiple relations in differing

dimensions and locations that expand their concept of citizenship and identity (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003).

### ***Causal Factors***

According to Courville and Piper (2004), labor migration signifies a hallmark of the globalization process along with the flows of goods and capital. Vast amounts of globalization literature have responded to this phenomenon by connecting economic integration to migration, as demonstrated by theories on the rise of cross-border flows and transnational networks (Castles, 2003; Castells, 1996; Keck and Sikkink; Appadurai, 1996). As previously discussed, however, the structure and nature of globalization does not allow equitable participation for all within the global community. Instead, globalization systematically continues to exclude specific groups of people and regions (Castles, 2003).

While studies have pointed to the flow of people, they have largely focused on capitalists, TNC personnel, and high-skilled workers, excluding the less-skilled from the South. These individuals have repeatedly been subject to short-term contracts, minimal legal protection, and narrow range of jobs; and Northern countries rarely admit their need for this group to meet many of their labor needs (Castles, 2003). The International Organisation for Migration (2000) states that the number of international migrants grew from 75 million in 1965 to 150 million in 2000. Unskilled workers made up a large portion of this international migrant population (Courville and Piper, 2004).

Many of the links between migration and labor date back to the third quarter of the twentieth century when internal and transnational migration was intensified by rapid economic growth, rising internationalization of economies, decolonization, and economic

development. During this time, W. Arthur Lewis created the *Economic Development with Unlimited Supply of Labor* model where he argued that an unlimited supply of migrant labor was key to expanding advanced economies by keeping wages low and profits high. He also claimed that migration would be the only means of ridding excess labor in the developing world (Lewis, 1954).

Theories from this era found their base in economics, viewing migration as largely finance-driven (Arrango, 2000). Nonetheless, such neoclassical approaches served more as a development model than that of migration. These models not only downplayed the heterogeneity of the migrant community, but they undermined the non-economical factors involved in migration. However, as the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed Asia, Africa, and Latin America replace Europe as the main provider of migrants, the volume and nature of labor demands significantly changed in the receiving countries, helping to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the migration process (Castles, 2003).

As capitalism is closely linked to globalization, it becomes clear that economics play a major role in migration, with the world capitalist system necessitating a free flow of labor through free trade, transnational corporate investment, currency unions, and brisk movement of capital among financial establishments. Delineating migration by “proactive migration” and “reactive migration,” Richmond (2002) expands the notion of migration that is caused by both economic and non-economic factors (p. 717).<sup>18</sup> Contrary to popular belief, poverty and economic inequality are not the sole causal factors leading

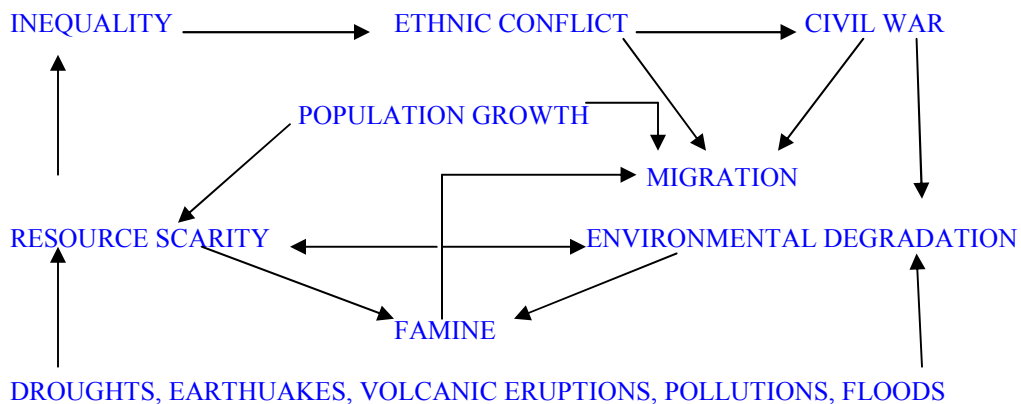
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<sup>18</sup> As previously discussed in Chapter 1, Richmond (2002) defines proactive migration flows as those that are economically motivated. Reactive migration refers to one that results from factors such as ethnic conflict, political upheaval, famine, and environmental deprivation.



to migration. Instead, it is a combination of push and pull factors that lead to both proactive and reactive migration. Below is a multivariate model summarizing the migratory process:

**Figure 1: Summary of the Migratory Process**



*Source: Richmond (2002)*

As illustrated in Figure 1, ongoing cycles of social, political, economic, and environmental factors contribute to both internal and transnational migration.<sup>19</sup> This is far from a linear, cause-and-effect process and entails a complex interlocking system. Natural disasters, for instance, are not the exclusive causes of environmental degradation. Years of civil wars and pollution also contribute to this process, ultimately making living conditions unbearable for individuals to sustain their livelihood.<sup>20</sup> Castles (2003) has found evidence that even in such cases, it is very difficult to distinguish between the

<sup>19</sup> Other factors such as shortage of jobs can also be added to this model.

<sup>20</sup> Pollution can very well be attributed to foreign factory plants and TNCs situating themselves in the underdeveloped regions.

environmental, political, and economic factors due to a range of factors that get involved in the process.

It is also important to keep in mind that the migration process is not always a voluntary one. For many, the ultimate act of migrating is not based on a choice but one that is forced.<sup>21</sup> This is known as refugee or forced migration and is a topic that has often been misunderstood and overlooked. Because refugee affairs have primarily been considered as a political issue, they traditionally have been excluded from migration literature that has focused on voluntary migration (Schmeidl, 1997; Castles, 2003).

According to Hamilton and Chinchilla (1991), refugee movements are typically caused by political conflicts – such as oppression, revolutions, and international wars – causing some to migrate and others to revolt. This extends to internal and development-induced displacements, refugee flows, and asylum seekers. In many countries where refugees originate, governments and insurgent groups have used torture and sexual assault as means of gaining control, as exemplified by the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (Castles, 2003).

Northern economies and their interests have had a major hand in instigating and prolonging civil conflicts and wars over valued resources such as oil and diamonds. And even when the fighting ends, post-conflict generally fails at restoring pre-conflict conditions and adds new, problematic social relationships to local communities. Such atrocities and forced migration, as a result, disrupt communities, traditional way of life, and economic resources as well as intensifying underdevelopment, debilitating social networks, and damaging community capacity (Castles, 2003).

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<sup>21</sup> Even in the cases of economic migration, many of the decisions are based on urgent search for survival.

Furthermore, underdevelopment in the South generally is not an economic concern of the North and is instead seen as a threat to national security. Castles (2003) argues that efforts by the international community – which she defines as powerful Northern states and the intergovernmental organizations – play an ambiguous role in preventing forced migration. While they have restricted entry into the North in the name of national security, these very nations have tried to contain the population in the South through military intervention, peace-keeping efforts, and humanitarian assistance. Ironically, the North does more to instigate migration than to prevent it by imposing its economic and political order that causes the conflict and underdevelopment in the first place (Castles, 2003).

These conditions have led many to desperately resort to human-smuggling as their sole means of survival or to remain in their countries as internally displaced persons. Cohen and Deng (1998) have found that the number of internally displaced individuals exploded from 1.2 million in 1982 to over 20 million in 1997. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1997) found that the number of nation-states with internally displaced individuals grew from five in 1970 to 34 in 1996.

Castles (2003) argues that refugee migration must be understood in the framework of world social transformation, with the increasing social divide between the *haves* and the *have nots*. Forced migration has naturally become an intricate part of the prolonging North-South divide that has worsened social inequalities and intensified conflict and migration. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1995, 2000) reports that the world refugee population increased from 2.4 million in 1975 to 10.5

million in 1985. This figure rose to 14.9 million in 1990 with the peak of 18.2 million in 1993<sup>22</sup> (Castles, 2003).

As will be discussed in detail in the sections that follow, forced migration intensified after the end of the Cold War<sup>23</sup> and became an essential element of globalization, North-South relationships, and global social transformation of the current era. Such delineations between economically- and politically-driven migration, however, should also leave room for the blurred distinction between economic and forced migration. As failed economies often signify frail states, competing oppressive regimes, and violations of human rights, it leads us to observe that there are multiple reasons for migration. It is undoubtedly difficult to neatly categorize reasons for migration (Castles, 2003). In the remainder of this section, I will discuss these factors specific to Mexico and Central America, as this region has been no stranger to economic and forced migration.

### ***Mexico-U.S. Migration***

The issue of migration to the U.S. ties deeply into the globalization of trade and capital where economic inequity across the globe has left many to migrate north. In the example of the Mexico-U.S. migration, Orrenius (2001) purports this migration as an outcome of push factors within Mexico (migrant family networks and human smugglers facilitating undocumented migration) and pull factors in the U.S (wage and employment disparities encouraging undocumented migration).

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<sup>22</sup> These figures only include those who fit the 1951 UN Refugee Convention's definition of individuals forced to leave their countries on the basis of individual persecution on specific grounds. Furthermore, certain nation-states have prohibited (Castles, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Thus, the dramatic growth after the Cold War became the most obvious reason for studying forced migration.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), over 30% of the total foreign-born in the U.S. is from Mexico, followed by 4.5% from the Philippines. This is not surprising, as Mexico is the largest exporter of migrant labor in the world with the Philippines right behind it (Courville and Piper, 2004). The table below presents the top five countries that send migrants to the United States:

**Table 1: Top Five Countries of Origin of the Foreign-Born Population Living in U.S. in 2005**

Country of Origin	Percent of Total Foreign-Born Population in the U.S.
Mexico	30.7
Philippines	4.5
India	4.0
China <sup>24</sup>	3.4
Vietnam	3.0
All Other Countries	45.6

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey, Migration Policy Institute Migration Information Source, 2006*

Referring to the table above, foreign-born is defined as those currently residing in the U.S. but born elsewhere. These statistics include immigrants, legal non-immigrants (i.e. refugees, foreign students and workers), and undocumented immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2006). And at the turn of the 21st century, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reported Mexicans to comprise approximately 60% of undocumented individuals<sup>25</sup> in the United States. Another 13% originated from the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Orrenius, 2001; INS, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> The numbers exclude Hong Kong and Taiwan.

<sup>25</sup> The undocumented population refers to those who cross into the U.S. without legal documentation as well as those who overstay their tourist visas.

Migration along the U.S.-Mexico border, according to Purcell and Nevins (2005), was of little interest both to the public and policymakers until the 1970s but soon became a topic of concern with the rising attention on immigration and the integration of the Mexico and U.S. economies. With Mexicans internally migrating north in search of work in the maquiladoras<sup>26</sup> and additionally seeking opportunities in the U.S., the border region became a major channel for undocumented entry into the U.S. (Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).<sup>27</sup> This led to unparalleled expansion in federal action in policing the boundary from the late 1970s to early 1990s, perpetually leading to the present era of heightened U.S. border control and immigration debate (Heyman, 1999).<sup>28</sup>

Although seemingly a recent phenomenon, undocumented border crossing traces to at least the early twentieth century (Orrenius, 2001). Up until the 1920s, the border was neither demarcated nor a deterrence for people to move back and forth. However, with the World War I, the Cold War, and quotas limiting immigration from southern and eastern Europe, Congress established the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924 to secure its borders (Massey, 2006). But when the U.S. was faced with a surging demand for labor upon entering World War II, the government re-opened its border for Mexican guest laborers to work in the United States.

This treaty, known as the Bracero Program, was an agreement between the U.S. and the Mexican government to legally allow Mexican guest workers into the United States. Allowing the entry of *braceros* (farm workers), the U.S. was able to cover its labor shortages caused by the war (Massey, 2006; Calavita, 1992). Even after the war

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<sup>26</sup> With the enactment of NAFTA, many workers within the interior of Mexico were displaced, as many factories moved near the border.

<sup>27</sup> For example, in 2000, there were more than 1,000 illegal entries through the 40-mile region between Naco and Douglas, Arizona.

<sup>28</sup> However, illegal crossing has not significantly declined.

ended, the U.S. agricultural sector convinced the government to extend the program, and over 200,000 bracero workers came to the U.S. annually between 1942 and 1964 (Calavita, 1992).<sup>29</sup>

Braceros continued to fill the labor needs in the U.S. as the program continued even after the end of the war. However, the demand for workers continued to grow and eventually exceeded the number of visas set aside for the program. By the early 1950s, undocumented migration had gradually increased as employers began recruiting workers outside of the program (Massey 2006). And when the Bracero Program ended abruptly in 1964 without a replacement guest worker program, it triggered a new wave of undocumented immigration into the U.S. (Orrenius, 2001).

Migration did not become controversial until the Cold War during the McCarthy era. In response to the public concerns and fears over communism, the Border Patrol initiated *Operation Wetback* to detain such threat. This unduly targeted the undocumented community and began apprehending and deporting undocumented farm workers. This became a series of many border enforcement tactics, and by the late 1970s, the Carter administration had increased funds for INS linewatch hours on the border (Rosenblum, 2000). In the 1980s, the Reagan administration enacted the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and heightened the level of urgency for border and immigration enforcement even more (Orrenius, 2001).

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) along with the 1996 Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) are major policies that impacted migration on the border. IRCA was an attempt by the government to

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<sup>29</sup> Texas, California, Arkansas, Arizona, and New Mexico were states where the larger part of the bracero community resided (Orrenius, 2001).

decrease illegal migration by placing sanctions on those who employed undocumented workers. It also increased the Border Patrol personnel by 50% during the 1987-1988 fiscal year and tasked the Border Patrol with employer sanctions, employer education, and removal of criminal migrants (Meyers, 2005).

For the first time, IRCA placed legal consequences on individuals employing undocumented workers. However, this did not deter illegal employment due to insufficient number of Border Patrol agents to enforce every case but instead led to the proliferation of falsifying identifications.<sup>30</sup> This further cultivated the anti-immigrant resentment, shifting the language of the Border Patrol to *catching* and *removing* of undocumented migrants and amplifying the hostile undertone towards migration (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

The INS<sup>31</sup> continued to emphasize apprehension of undocumented workers but did not give much attention to actual worksite enforcement. Deportation of undocumented migrants did drop 50% three years following IRCA, but by the 1990s, employers and workers had found ways to work around the regulations. And without too many incentives to follow the loosely enforced regulations<sup>32</sup> or the reliable tools to determine worker eligibility, many continued to employ undocumented workers with counterfeit documents. With about 25 different documents in the formal system, it was

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<sup>30</sup> The April 5, 2006 report on cnn.com finds some illegal smugglers welcome tighter borders, because it would lead more people to seek their help crossing into the U.S.

<sup>31</sup> The INS has now become part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The major responsibilities of the former INS has been given to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS).

<sup>32</sup> Some employers also see sanctions as acceptable business expenditure since fines are below the cost savings from employing undocumented workers. Furthermore, many businesses are small and their locations too transient for follow up of enforcement policies (Rosenblum, 2005).



not simple for employers to verify validity of counterfeits without special training (Rosenblum, 2005).

There is no doubt that policymakers face a difficult task when tackling immigration issues. Receiving countries often attempt to minimize the financial burden of immigrants, try to restrict workplace competition to their own residents, and must answer public concerns about immigrant assimilation and cultural and linguistic erosion. At the same time, authorities in the U.S., for example seem reluctant to incur the needed costs to end undocumented migration. Thus, IRCA-imposed sanctions against employers of undocumented workers are seldom put into effect, and the de-facto policy since 1997 has been “once you are in, you are in” (Orrenius, 2001). Between the years of 1991 and 2003, for example, less than one-tenth of 1% of worksites in the U.S. went into employer investigation each year (Jacoby, 2005; Rosenblum, 2005).<sup>33</sup>

Border enforcement did continue, nonetheless, and 1993 marked the largest increase in linewatch hours and use of site-specific crackdowns. The strategy of this effort was to deter undocumented crossings from highly populated areas and into remote places where migrants could be more easily spotted. Known as *Operation Hold-the-Line*, this approach was first executed in El Paso in 1993 and then into other border cities until 1997.<sup>34</sup> Until 1990, up to three-fourths of all border crossing were into California, but with IRCA and with the operations in the 1990s, many border crossers shifted to Texas as the route of entry (Orrenius, 2001). The table below summarizes the percentage of the total foreign-born population in Texas by origin.

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<sup>33</sup> Neither did the 1996 IIRIRA bring significant changes since its three pilot verification programs were voluntary to employers (Jernegan, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Operation Gatekeeper, Operation Safeguard, and Operation Rio Grande were implemented in San Diego, Nogales, and south Texas, respectively.

**Table 2: Percent of Total Foreign-Born Population in Texas by Continent of Origin in 2000**

<b>Continent</b>	<b>Percentage of Texas's total foreign-born population</b>
Africa	2.9
Oceania	0.2
Europe	5.3
Asia	16.1
Americas	76.2
<i>Caribbean</i>	1.4
<i>Central America (Mexico)</i>	71.2 (64.8)
<i>South America</i>	2.3
<i>North America</i>	1.3

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Migration Policy Institute Migration Information Source, 2006*

This data indicates that an overwhelming 71.2% residing in Texas are from Central America; and more specifically, 64.8% are from Mexico.<sup>35</sup> Whether documented or undocumented, these numbers allude to the fact that many enter the U.S. by crossing into Texas and eventually settling in the areas nearby.

NAFTA also caused many to migrate to the U.S. when the free trade agreement broke down the traditional Mexican agricultural sector economy. In order to attract investment, NAFTA-related reforms privatized factories, airlines, railroads, and other major enterprises. This caused massive phases of layoffs, and Mexican ventures and farm workers found themselves unable to compete with the U.S. imports, the rising unemployed rates, and the devaluation of the peso that cost additional jobs. For millions of Mexicans, the only hope of escaping economic desperation was migrating north into the United States (Bacon, 2004). However, many were met with the additional 4,000

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<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the foreign-born in Texas accounts for 9.3% of the total foreign-born population in the U.S. The foreign-born in Texas constitute 13.9% of the state's total population.

Border Patrol agents who had been assigned to police the borders at the signing of the free trade agreement that caused their unemployment in the first place<sup>36</sup> (Heyman, 1999).

In identifying the determinants of the Mexico-U.S. migration, scholars (e.g. Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Orrenius, 1999) have found that the economic depression causes unemployment in the urban zones, reduces agricultural prices in the rural areas, and makes loan repayments difficult. Examining the Mexico GDP per capital since 1965, Massey and Espinosa (1997) have found proof that the increase in Mexican emigration is consistent with declines in real income. Migrants have also identified the need for funds to begin a business, build a home, medical care costs, and loan repayment as major reasons for migrating to the United States. As a consequence, Mexico has lost millions of working-age individuals to the U.S. with its towns and villages becoming severely depopulated (Orrenius, 2001).

As border enforcement continued in response to the Cold War and NAFTA, post-911 events elevated the focus on immigration even more, and the U.S.-Mexico border soon became a new symbol for war on terror. Even though Mexico did not have a significant Islamic population or any known terrorist cells in the country, the U.S.-Mexico border once again became depicted as a threat to the U.S. national security. According to Massey (2006), the border has now been “reinforced as a bulwark against terrorists rather than communists” (p. B11). He continues:

Those who criticize the illogic of building a wall between Mexico and the United States while the coasts are wide open and the border with Canada is undefended miss the greater symbolic point... And were it simply a hollow symbolic gesture, the continuing militarization of the border with a peaceful trading nation wouldn't necessarily be so bad—just another waste of taxpayers' money.

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<sup>36</sup> The Tijuana municipal government also responded to this influx of migrants by creating the Department for Migrant Issues to deal with rising undocumented Mexican labor although its effects are questionable (Del Castillo V., 2001).

Unfortunately, the U.S. border policies have had very real negative consequences... bolstering the border has not lowered the rate of illegal entry from Mexico. It has, however, tripled the death rate.

Stricter enforcement strategies have not eradicated undocumented crossings and instead have increased the number of Border Patrol agents at the actual ports of entry, leading to more dangerous attempts at border crossings. Migrants tend to seek irregular, sparsely populated gates of entry as established ports of entry become more restrictive. As a result, many migrants from Mexico ended up diverting their courses into the desert terrains (Orrenius, 2001; Staudt and Coronado, 2002; Hiscott, 2005). This placed deaths and injuries along the border at an all-time high with the official count of border-crossing deaths reaching nearly 500 in 2000 (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

Along with the skyrocketing number of deaths, atrocious human rights violations are being committed against migrants. While crossing the border, migrants become prone to abduction, physical attacks, sexual abuses, drug wars, and trafficking of women and children. *Coyotes*,<sup>37</sup> *banditos*,<sup>38</sup> and corrupt law enforcement personnel contribute to such violations by promising migrants to safely help them cross into the U.S. but abandoning them in the middle of the desert once the payment has been made. And sadly, such violations have become commonplace that many do not even bother reporting them (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

For those who do succeed in crossing into the U.S., life remains difficult as an undocumented migrant. These individuals must live in constant fear of being asked for residency documentation and the threat of having their homes raided by the Border

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<sup>37</sup> These individuals smuggle people into the U.S. for a fee.

<sup>38</sup> These are individuals who criminally prey on migrants in Mexico

Patrol. Even when they are able to find employment, employers call authorities on them once their services are no longer profitable or needed (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

The undocumented community also falls victim to deceitful practices of unauthorized individuals offering to help with legalization issues. The biggest problem especially along the U.S.-Mexico border is with *notarios publicos*, which in Latin American countries means a specialized type of attorney. This is contrary to notary publics in the U.S. who attest to signatures on legal documents. Due to the similarity in the words, however, many migrants enter these offices seeking legal assistance, and notary publics along the border have taken an advantage of this mix-up by openly advertising to provide immigration services for a charge.<sup>39</sup> This is a violation of the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act and has jeopardized the chances of numerous migrants seeking legalization in the country.<sup>40</sup>

As such, the migrant population has become highly subject to underclass status with lingering threats of exposure, subminimum wages, sexual exploitation, and unbearable living and working conditions (Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001). Such living conditions can be seen in the colonia districts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California that suffer from the absence of basic resources to sanitation, lacking portable water supply, insufficient sewages, and lack of safe and sanitary housing (Dolhinow, 2005).

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<sup>39</sup> Notary publics now openly advertise and charge people for these services. Clearly aware of their wrongdoing, they help with the paperwork but never sign the box that says “If someone helped you complete this form, please place their name and have them sign” and fill out the forms as if it were the client filing out the form. But when the paperwork gets submitted and something has been done wrong, there is no proof that the client is not actually the one that submitted the form. A lot of times, there is fraudulent information that’s included in the application. Although not a top priority, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbot has taken a harsh stance against notary publics and has shut some agencies down as a result.

<sup>40</sup> This information was gathered from an interview with an immigration attorney and director of a legal aid center.

Colonias are poor settlements along the U.S.-Mexico border that lack sewage systems, clean water, safe housing, electricity, and paved roads. Colonia residents are generally from outside regions or even from abroad who own small businesses or work in service jobs and factories (Staudt and Spener, 1998). In Texas alone, one fourth of the colonias still do not have treated water, and a third of the residents have cesspools where children contract cholera, tuberculosis, and hepatitis (Donelson, 2004). And even though migrant groups have organized around these issues, the U.S. has demonstrated minimal state intervention (Fox, 2000).

The colonias provide a unique insight to the transborder displacement that the binational economic integration has created. The concern over migrant living conditions and intensified control over cross-border labor migration<sup>41</sup> comes at a time the U.S. is pushing for deregulated national economy and economic integration with Mexico. This contradiction of urging integration while opposing the flow of migrants is a byproduct of increased economic cooperation without examining the social needs. TNCs may have praised the mobility of trade and workers, but the reality of migrant living conditions demonstrates the continual inconsistencies and asymmetries of this border region (Purcell and Nevins, 2005; González-Ortíz, 2004).

The contradictions and disillusionment the border region has witnessed has been a reoccurring theme in literature. While the state has attempted to internationalize the border space by dissolving national regulations and establishing a channel for goods and capital without impediments, growing barriers against the flow of people have taken place. The U.S. has supported capital accumulation through boundary liberalization but

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<sup>41</sup> This has created grassroots groups, such as the Voice of Citizens Together and the California Coalition for Immigrant Reform.

has taken rigid measures to secure the very boundaries from human migration (Purcell and Nevins, 2005). This supports the claim made by Anderson and O'Dowd (1999) that it is in the border region where the idea of cultural homogeneity and centralized political power is both conformed and disrupted.

In lieu of painting the picture of the genuine border that Meyers (2005) describes as “integrating the work, resource allocation, and information capacity of all ports of entry” (p. 1), this phenomenon has depicted the borderlands as filled with Border Patrol agents chaotically blockading undocumented migrants, drugs, and criminals from crossing the border. Instead of focusing on the positive aspect of cultural sharing and collaboration, migrants have unfortunately come to be viewed as threats to U.S. security, drain on public funds, diminishing employment for Americans, and invasion to the American ethnic and cultural identity (Purcell and Nevins, 2005).

### ***Central American Migration***

There is a common misconception when it comes to the U.S.-Mexico border that all individuals attempting to cross into the U.S. are of Mexican descent. While a large percentage of these individuals are from Mexico, migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border are much broader in context and extend to multiple races and nationalities. Many of these diverse individuals originate from Central America as well as other regions, such as Africa, Asia, and the Arab States.<sup>42</sup> As the southern Mexico border shares physical space with Guatemala and Belize, many Central Americans, especially, make their way into Mexico and travel further north into the United States.

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<sup>42</sup> During field research, I personally met individuals from Iran, Nigeria, and South Korea who had first made their trip into Mexico and then walked across the border into the U.S.

Central Americans have been in migration for both economic and political reasons, which in many cases cannot be separated from one another (Schoultz, 1987). Especially in the 1970s and into the 1990s, war and political conflict coupled with quickly failing economic conditions led to massive displacement in the Central American countries of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Refugee migration characterized the mass movement of people during this time period; and even though refugees have been a social problem throughout history, the rise in refugee migration especially during this time elevated to a global concern (Schmeidl, 1997).

Drawing from a vast collection of literature, Schmeidl (1997) identifies three groups of factors refugees generally must face: root conditions, proximate conditions, and intervening factors. Scholars (e.g. Clark, 1989) have argued that the root conditions that cause refugee migration are largely economic poverty that has existed many years before the actual out-migration. These economic instabilities cause nations to become susceptible to proximate conditions, such as ethnic and civil conflicts,<sup>43</sup> political violence, human rights violations, oppressive regimes,<sup>44</sup> and international wars.

For the most part, developing regions are more likely to produce migrants than industrialized nations. Refugees thus flee situations that have been created by a combination of economic deprivation and political forces that leave them no choice but to make a mass exodus. Nothing about this process is simple, as their journeys are unceasingly filled with confronting and negotiating with intervening factors that might

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<sup>43</sup> This is generally typified by intervention of other governments. While insurgency groups and the state fight over the distribution of power, outside countries use them as “pawns in a game of political affiliation.” In the case of the Cold War, ethnic conflicts were proxy wars of capitalist (U.S., Western Europe) and communist (Soviet Union) nations (Schmeidl, 1997, p. 288).

<sup>44</sup> Scholars argue oppressive governments are facilitated by an active engagement between external powers and the military.



either thwart (e.g. tight border securities) or actually help (e.g. migrant-friendly guest worker programs) their migration process (Schmeidl, 1997).

Scholars have found that the rising number of refugees correlates with a general rise in violence and human rights abuses in the world (Schmeidl, 1997).<sup>45</sup> Central America, especially from the 1970s to 1990s, was filled with rising violence by military forces and death squads. In Guatemala, for instance, a revolutionary movement involved indigenous and non-indigenous populations; Nicaragua was involved in massive repression and bombing of rural areas and then into urban zones; and radical movements in El Salvador, incepted in the 1970s, began a military attack in the early 1980s involving offenses against civilians in rural areas and massacre of entire villages (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1991). Olonka-Onyango and Tamale (1995) argue that the Cold War hostility consistently cast issues of human rights as ideologically foreign to non-capitalist governments.

According to scholars such as Ferris (1987) and Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo (1989), active collaboration of the military and external powers cause most government repressions. Above all, civil and ethnic conflict is usually characterized by interference of outside nations. This was clearly demonstrated by the increasing U.S. involvement in Central America beginning in 1979 that resulted in an exponential increase in militarization of the region and the use of technology during the conflicts (Leach, Miller, and Hatfield, 1985).

The U.S. link was also seen in the human rights violations that were being committed in the region. Although powerful nations may not be directly involved in

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<sup>45</sup> The 1951 Refugee Convention also concluded that oppressive states with dismal records in human rights violations typically led to forced migration.

human rights abuses, they often provide the means for it. For instance, El Salvador received U.S. military support during the numerous years of horrific human rights violations committed on its citizens (Schmeidl, 1997). In the 1980s, the U.S. prolonged the war by supplying bombs, helicopters, and other technology to El Salvador that caused many civilians to flee from their homes. In Nicaragua, the U.S. involvement contributed to its economic crisis and population displacement and emigration. The U.S. furthermore had a long involvement in Guatemala with its counterinsurgency agendas in the 1960s, military training, and antiguerrilla strategies in the early 1980s (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1991).

The Guatemalan civil war, which lasted from 1960 to 1996, took 200,000 lives, left one million people internally displaced, and resulted in 440 indigenous villages being annihilated (Jonas and Walker, 2005). Different factors – such as socioeconomic inequality, poverty, the Cold War, and the discrimination against the Maya population – led to the war in this country. The oppression of the Maya population persisted in the beginning stages of the Spanish conquest, but remedies were made when the government during the 1945-1955 era abolished forced labor and granted minimum wages, basic rights, and increased social welfare (Jonas and Walker, 2005).

Then in 1952, President Arbenz, who helped bring democracy after over one hundred years of military dictatorships, initiated a land reform that distributed land to over 100,000 peasants. A large portion of the land (413,000 acres) had belonged to the United Fruit Company – the largest banana company in Guatemala that had close ties to the Republican administration in the United States – and the Guatemalan government reimbursed the company \$600,000 based on the assessment the company itself had made

for tax purposes (Golden and McConnell, 1986). Nonetheless, the outraged United Fruit Company accused Arbenz of being a communist and gathered the support of the U.S. Congress. In 1954, the CIA ousted Arbenz and replaced him with military governments that reversed all liberal reforms (Blum, 2001).

Civil wars often materialize with high levels of political exclusion and inequalities in countries generally under weak and unstable political contexts. Power is then contended over between the existing government and an insurgent group or between two equally large groups (Schmeidl, 1997). When the military regime came into power in Guatemala, opposition guerilla groups – largely supported by poor Mayan peasants who had received significant benefits during the Arbenz administration – began to emerge in 1960, and the U.S. responded by training more military forces. And when the leftist Sandinistas overthrew the power in neighboring Nicaragua in 1979, right-wing governments in Central America and the U.S. joined forces and burned indigenous, Guatemalan villages that they suspected of supporting the guerillas.

By 1980, four major guerilla groups had created the National Guatemalan Revolutionary Union (URNG), but the military opposition trained and supported by the U.S., and the Israeli intelligence kept it from taking over power. By 1985, the guerillas had retreated to the mountains, and with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the URNG was not able to secure outside support. With the end of the Soviet Union, the Sandinistas losing the elections, as well as the U.S.-supported military unable to capture the guerillas, the two sides negotiated a peace agreement. A cease-fire was declared in December of 1996, and the signing of the Peace Accords brought the fighting to an end (Blum, 2001).

Since the beginning of the conflict, Guatemala has to this day continued to be ruled by military dictatorships with intensifying poverty, repression, and terror, in which the U.S. has had a large hand. From 1967 to 1976, the U.S. served as the only military contractor to the Guatemalan dictators, spending a budget of \$35 million. Although the Carter administration later cut off aid to the country, U.S. military schools continued to train Guatemalan officers. During the Reagan administration, \$2 million was spent on covert activities in Guatemala. It also sent \$3.2 million worth of military vehicles to General Lucas Garcia, whose regime became notorious for disappearances and deaths during its reign<sup>46</sup> (Golden and McConnell, 1986).

Human rights groups have estimated that the military regimes killed one hundred thousand people in Guatemala since beginning of the conflicts in 1954. In 1983, Amnesty International identified Guatemala as the country where human rights violations take place more than anywhere else across the globe. This came only two years after Amnesty International exposed the program of systematic torture used by the Guatemalan government. Other critics accused the government of genocide, systematically eliminating the lives of a whole nation (Golden and McConnell, 1986).

Guatemala is only one example of the political oppression and fighting during the era that added to the economic stagnation throughout Central America, becoming a major factor in displacement and migration.<sup>47</sup> The combination of political and economic crises additionally led to massive displacement and exodus in Central America. Guatemalans fled to Mexico and to the United States. Nicaraguans sought refuge in Honduras, Costa Rica, and also the United States. Salvadorans largely went to refugee camps in

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<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the Reagan administration lifted a five-year embargo on arms sales to Guatemala in 1983. It endorsed selling over military equipment and spare helicopter parts in the amount of over \$6.3 million.

<sup>47</sup> In El Salvador, for example, national production dropped 33% between 1978 and 1983.

Honduras, and some went to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the U.S., Guatemala, and Mexico. By 1987, approximately 85% of the Central Americans who fled their countries had settled in the U.S. and Mexico (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1991; Fagen, 1988).<sup>48</sup>

The table below indicates that in 1990, the majority of individuals seeking asylum in the U.S. from the Americas was from Central America.<sup>49</sup> The number of asylum applicants clearly exceeded the number of individuals from any other region across the globe. This number doubled in 1995 but has since subsided substantially after the end of the 1990s.

**Table 3: Number of Asylum Applications by Continent**

Region	1990	1995	2000	2004
Americas	59,355	119,824	13,662	16,782
<i>Caribbean</i>	4,388	4,486	4,414	5,826
<i>Central America</i>	54,480	110,930	6,393	5,259
<i>South America</i>	487	4,408	2,855	5,693
North America				
Asia	4,840	15,278	13,234	12,575
Africa	3,883	4,854	9,832	7,725
Europe	4,616	3,751	2,376	3,158
Oceania	421	88	236	47

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 1995-2005, Migration Policy Institute Migration Information Source, 2006*

A further breakdown of the Central American region shows most asylum applicants in the 1990s to come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Although not available through the census data, the number of Central Americans seeking refuge in the U.S. continued to grow since late 1970s. Guatemalans and Salvadorans seeking asylum in the U.S. persistently increased since 1979, and Nicaraguans grew rapidly since

<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, an estimated amount of a million Central Americans were internally displaced in their own countries.

<sup>49</sup> Data from 1980 are not available with the exception of the total number 26,512 asylum applications that were submitted in that year.

1988. However, precise figures are not available since most came to the U.S. without documentation (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1991).

**Table 4: Number of Asylum Applications from Central America**

Country	1990	1995	2000	2004
Belize	N/A	N/A	N/A	8
Costa Rica	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
El Salvador	22,271	75,138	1,736	1,421
Guatemala	12,234	22,006	890	1,508
Honduras	1,097	2,926	43	585
Mexico	122	9,148	3,669	1,563
Nicaragua	18,304	1,712	55	164
Panama	452	N/A	N/A	8

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 1995-2005, Migration Policy Institute Migration Information Source, 2006*

According to the United Nations, refugees are defined as individuals who have left their countries due to well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of their race, nationality, religion, and political opinion. These individuals seeking refuge are generally referred to as *asylum seekers* or *refugee claimants* (Lawrence and Hardy, 1999). They may also be referred to as *political asylum applicants*. Thus, many Central Americans fled to the U.S. in hopes of filing for asylum, although ironically, U.S. intervention into their local conflict had been an accelerating factor that intensified the fighting back home (Schmeidl, 1997).

There are two ways individuals can apply for asylum in the United States. For those who have left their country of origin but have not yet crossed into the United States, U.S. immigration officers stationed abroad can meet and interview them to determine their eligibility status. If they are determined as *refugees*, they are brought to the U.S. and granted asylum. The second method is for individuals to enter the U.S. on their own and to apply for asylum. When these individuals are granted asylum, they are referred to

as *asylees*. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services then coordinates services and programs to assist the resettlement of refugees and asylees (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2006).

In studying migration trends, Hamilton and Chinchilla (1991) find refugee policies in receiving nations to be often linked to their foreign policies and to carry out their gate-keeping functions. In the U.S., for example, refugees from socialist states have been highly encouraged and accepted while refugee status has often denied those from governments in good standing with the United States. As such, U.S. refugee and asylum policies have tended to discriminate against asylum seekers from Central America since the U.S. military was heavily involved in their conflicts. Although countless number of Central Americans fled to the U.S. seeking asylum throughout the conflicts, many were denied protection.

According to Golden and McConnell (1986), major contradictions in U.S. refugee policies came to light. In addition to countless denials for asylum, many refugees were returned home without being informed of their legal right to apply for political asylum. According to the National Center for Immigrant Rights, unaccompanied children were encouraged to sign voluntary departure forms that waived their right to apply for extended voluntary departure or the right they might have to stay in the United States. A staff attorney writes:

The children have been shipped back to El Salvador, back to the middle of a civil war, without even being able to speak with an attorney, without even seeing an adult [other than government agents], without having anyone accompany them, just because the INS, in an incommunicado interrogation convinces them that it is in their best interest to sign the voluntary departure form. (Golden and McConnell, 1986, p 41)

The UNHCR charged the U.S. for failing to fulfill its international commitment to refugees, but the U.S. ignored the warning and furthermore disregarded the Geneva Convention of 1949 that prohibited all participating states from returning refugees to war zones (Golden and McConnell, 1986).

Even when individuals were permitted to apply for political asylum, Central Americans rarely won their cases. In the 1980-81 fiscal year, only two of the 5,500 applications from Salvadorans were granted asylum. This was substantially different from 80% of applications of refugees from Afghanistan and 82% from Iranian refugees who were given asylum in 1983. In the very next year, only 2.5% of applications from Salvadorans were successful (Golden and McConnell, 1986).

Recognizing the near impossibility of Central Americans receiving asylum in the U.S. despite law suites against the federal government for unlawful deportations, members of the Tucson Ecumenical Council convened in 1981 to discuss this problem. Jim Corbett, Father Ricardo Elfred, Reverend Dave Sholin, writer Gary MacEoin, and Reverend John Fife were present in the meeting. Fife is a civil rights activist and Presbyterian minister who would soon become famous for declaring his church as a sanctuary for refugees. Together, these men would help give rise to the Sanctuary Movement that provided hospitality to Central American asylum seekers.

The Sanctuary Movement came into full form as the concept of sanctuary happened almost concurrently in the Chicago and Tucson areas. Individuals began talking with one another, communicating information and feed back, and forming alliances. This was a largely unstructured and loosely organized group of networks. And from thereon, individual churches began a more of an organized effort to offer sanctuary



and protection to individual refugees and families largely from El Salvador and Guatemala. The Sanctuary Movement became what Golden and McConnell (1986) call “in symbol and practice, a new march, a new willingness... to believe in the God of history and trust in the God of the oppressed” (p. 47), as its activists made the decision to go public with their work, as explained by one of the founders:

We decided to go public because we had all become aware that a full-scale holocaust was going on in Central America, and by keeping the operation clandestine we were doing exactly what the government wanted us to do—keeping it hidden, keeping the issue out of public view. (Golden and McConnell, 1986, p. 47)

1982, Reverend John Fife hung two banners outside of his Southside Presbyterian Church that claimed “This is a sanctuary for the oppressed of Central America” and “Immigration: Do not profane the sanctuary of God.” From then on, INS vehicles patrolled the church, ready to pick up refugees attempting to cross into the church. Fife publicly acknowledged that he was helping refugees cross the border and giving them shelter in his church. Although certain arrests could have been made, the government hesitated going into and raiding a church property. At one point, the church issued the following statement to Attorney General William French Smith:

We are writing to inform you that the Southside Presbyterian church will publicly violate the Immigration and Nationality Act Section 274(a). We have declared our church as a “sanctuary” for undocumented refugees from Central America... assert our God-given right to aid anyone fleeing from persecution and murder... we believe the administration of the law to be immoral, as well as illegal... (Golden and McConnell, 1986, p. 47)

During this time, Sanctuary Movement activists constructed an underground railroad, initially extending from the border into as far as Iowa. The Chicago Religious Task force on Central America (CRTFCA), a Chicago-based coalition of humanitarian and religious workers, came on board thereafter and helped expand and coordinate the

railroad into Chicago. Different churches throughout the country became sanctuaries, expanding north into Canada and east into Boston. The number of sanctuaries increased in phenomenal rates from 30 in 1982 to 30,000 by 1984. Religious leaders receiving Central American families also included Reverend Jesse Jackson who received five Salvadoran family members into Operation PUSH and stated the following:

The national headquarters of People United to Serve Humanity (PUSH) in Chicago joins with more than three thousand churches and communities of faith all over America to support 160 sites offering sanctuary to the innocent victims of war and oppression... We are going to create a network as great as the underground railroad that bought slaves to freedom more than one hundred years ago.... (Golden and McConnell, 1986, p. 54)

The Sanctuary Movement did end in federal indictments and convictions where five activists were given three- to five-year sentences. However, public outcry and an appeal from Senator Dennis DeConcini (Democrat from Arizona) helped reduce sanctions to probations (Bhagwati, 2003).

As illustrated by the event above, the Central American migration has been enmeshed with politics, consequential structural changes, and foreign intervention. International involvement (particularly that of the U.S.) became a major contributor of the intensified and prolonged fighting and displacement in the region. The American foreign policy has been more effective in producing refugees more so than policies that have prevented entry into the country in many ways (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1991).

Migratory patterns established in earlier periods continue to function even when the original circumstances no longer exist. Individuals who have settled in the U.S. during the conflicts have now continued to draw family members and their community networks to migrate. Contemporary migration trends have thus naturally followed the already established patterns and networks. By the mid-1980s, a large percentage of

Central Americans had family and friends in the U.S. where a whole network of people had relocated to the United States. These social networks in turn helped reinforce the institutional and structural links between the developed and developing regions (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1991).

Economic and political factors are clear causes of migration. Although much of the political battle has ended in Central America, many of these countries are still recovering from the environmental and economic devastation left by the wars. And until economic equity is established and wealth evenly distributed across the globe, people in search of better working and living opportunities will continue to migrate north into Mexico and eventually into the United States.

Trade liberalization may have brought new market opportunities and wealth, but the benefits certainly have not been evenly distributed around the world (Courville and Piper, 2004). And with unequal distribution of wealth and goods, migratory flows will continue to point toward the industrialized nations. How the receiving nations will respond remains to be seen although historical trends and patterns do not always point to the positive direction.

According to Bhagwati (2003), developed countries will continually refuse to accept the reality that borders are beyond control, and developing nations will continue to be overwhelmed by forces that are propelling out-migration. The ability to regulate migration may have shrunk, but the desire to migrate is greater than ever. Therefore, a significant shift in viewing migration is needed, and states must reorient their policies from restricting migration to seeking ways to benefit the North and the South.

## **Non-State Global Actors**

During the last several decades, globalization has very much influenced the socioeconomic status of many nation-states. While this has provided new opportunities for economic development for some nations, it has meant worsening economic deprivation for nations not able to keep up. This is demonstrated by a billion people who live with purchasing power under \$1 a day and one-fifth of the children in developing nations dying within the first year. Of the children who survive, half are malnourished and do not have access to proper sanitation, water, or basic educational and health services (Mitlin, 2001).

In discussing development in the globalization debates, it becomes clear that five decades of top-down international development has failed in many ways. A large part of the world's population still lives in devastating poverty, marginalization, and environmental degradation. Many of these consequences are the result of development that has only served the interest of TNCs and corporate powers, contrary to the goals of globalization that claim to eradicate poverty and revitalize natural resources and the environment (Walters, 2000).

Activists and scholars believe there are alternatives to the present situation, suggesting grassroots approaches that take on the issues of the local, environmental, gender, and social equality in order to strengthen human development over capital accumulation. Such methods call for bottom-up strategies that build up human capacities and values. These approaches denote full, participatory democracy in contrast to competitive capitalism that is more consumed with developing human capital to sharpen its labor and economic edge (Walters, 2000).

According to Sklair (2002) it is necessary to consider these alternatives, as capitalist globalization fails to preserve the future of most of the world population and environment. The current conditions of ecological unsustainability and widening class polarization simply cannot be resolved by global capitalism. These new social transformations should gradually eliminate the current principles of consumerism and replace it with the culture-ideology of human rights. Because political realism cannot deliver changes directly, Sklair suggests expanding the human rights ideology from the civil and political sphere to the economic and social arenas.

Needless to say, civil society is one sector that has demonstrated significant progress and has been regularly called upon to assist with poverty reduction plans. Mitlin (2001) identifies the varied roles of civil society as participants of strategy design, service providers, and watchdogs to ensure that governments fulfill their promises. Composed of NGOs, trade unions, and citizen associations, numerous international nongovernmental actors have brought changes at the national level by targeting global issues and institutions and creating visibility on the global level (Mundy and Murphy, 2001).

Prior to the Cold War, nongovernmental organizations often depended on resources from nation-states and were largely viewed as insignificant players in international policies and marginal to state-level politics. This view has now changed due to factors such as rise of new technologies, the neoliberal critique of the government, increasing pressure on nongovernmental actors to fill gaps in social services left by nation-states, and the increased growth and professionalism of international NGOs (Mundy and Murphy, 2001). In Guatemala, for example, international NGOs became very active after signing the 1996 Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace (Peace Accords)

and became involved in economic development, civil participation, human rights, advocacy, and democratization at a grassroots level (Blum, 2001).

The Peace Accords received a lot of attention from the international NGO community, as it focused on economic development, displacement, social services, civic participation, human rights, environmental protection, and streamlining government performance as well as establishing a civilian police force. For example, CARE provided programs in socioeconomics and civic participation. The Catholic Relief Services provided relief work and development projects. Redd Barna, the Norwegian Save the Children, works on children's rights, health, and education (Blum, 2001).

The work of non-state actors has become more prevalent as globalization has given attention to the mobility of capital and goods while overlooking the struggle of workers and the local. Many non-state actors have now filled the some of the gap in economic activities with social and environmental justice (Courville and Piper, 2004). The following sections examine the different types of non-state actors and the degree of influence they have brought to the global community.

### ***Civil Society***

When discussing non-state actors, the domain of civil society must be included to describe the various nature of nongovernmental entities to achieve social influence and advocacy. The idea of civil society dates back to centuries in Western thinking with its origin in Ancient Greece. The modern concept has its influence from great thinkers such as Thomas Paine and George Hegel in the 18th Century who described civil society as a separate domain parallel to the states (Ghaus-Pasha, 1999). The conceptualization of civil society was then renewed with globalization, as the trend toward democracy

provided space for civil society to fill the broadening gaps in social services as a result of reforms such as structural adjustments in developing countries (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004).

Civil society has now come to be identified as formal and informal, specialized organizations and local groups established by those demonstrating shared interest and values, separate from the formal state and the market. Groups include religious organizations, community-based organizations, mass movements, action groups, noncommercial organizations, and political parties. Civil society is an extensive concept that refers to entities existing outside the state and the market (Ghaus-Paha, 2004). Calhoun (1994) furthermore describes the concept of civil society as the capacity of ordinary citizens to join forces and create a public sphere that helps shape social and political decisions.

Civil society has been widely accepted as a necessary third sector, standing alongside the state and the market (Ghaus-Paha, 2004). Competing with nation-states especially, civil society has become an important entity in giving definitions to national boundaries, challenging state monopoly and its exclusion of civil society over boundary issues. The established link between boundary issues and civil society has thus pointed to civil society as an alternative or complementary to the statist approach (He, 1999). The idea of civil society intrigued many scholars especially in socialist states in the late 1980s and early 1990 since the concept combined the idea of democratic pluralism with continued role for state intervention and seemed as the appropriate remedy for societies attempting to recover from extremes of state socialism (Ishkanian, 2003).

According to He (1999) there are three major differences between the state and civil society. While governments have fixed views of national boundaries, civil societies

have been concerned with issues that extend beyond the physical boundaries of nation-states. Second, while the statist approach gives power to a few, civil societies empower and assign various tasks to NGOs. Lastly, civil societies tend to be much more flexible, loosely organized, and less costly than governments.

Civil society thus gained importance in promoting good governance by ways of policy analysis and advocacy, monitoring state performance, enabling citizens to identify their values and beliefs, and mobilizing marginalized groups to participate in public affairs (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004). Research has found that these organizations operate on a variety of functions, and about 64% of the staff and volunteers work in service functions, such as health and education. The table below breaks down the distribution of workforce of civil society by fields:

**Table 5: Distribution of Workforce of Civil Society by Fields**

<b>Service Function</b>	<b>64</b>
Education	23
Social Services	20
Health	14
Development/Housing	7
<b>Expressive Function</b>	<b>32</b>
Culture/Recreation	19
Professional/Unions	7
Civil/Advocacy	4
Environment	2
<b>Others</b>	<b>4</b>

*Source: Salmon, Sokolowski, and Associates, 2003*

Civil society groups additionally play a significant role in advocacy, such as basic human rights issues and addressing issues that have fallen off of the public radar (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004). Amnesty International, for example, has widely become a moral agent of human rights that has privileged human rights ideology beyond national boundaries (He, 1999).



From a progressive stance, Taylor (2002) describes the main motivation of global civil society as creating a better world with regard to social, political, and economic issues. This can be summed to advocating for a more just and freer global order. Batliwala (2002) explains that unparalleled possibilities through the new information and communication technologies have enhanced the globalization of civil society. Individuals, groups, and organizations can now easily participate in alliances, networks, and information exchange. Batliwala (2002) further describes this as an “autonomous global civil space” (p. 395) that even authoritative states cannot control. With the emergence of the global civil society, groups and networks of different and diverse attributes and structures have become active both in the local and the global.

Mitlin (2001) has found nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), one of the entities that falls under the umbrella of civil society, to receive increasing recognition during the last two decades for their ability to work directly with the poor and to operate on the grassroots level. NGOs have been more people-led, participatory, and in tune with local needs than formal development entities. Civil society has especially been instrumental in areas where NGOs have done the bulk of work in spaces restricted or limited to international governmental organizations, such as the Thai-Burma border, Tigray, Eritrea, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Ferris, 1993).

The term NGO was more commonly used than civil society until the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. The focus on NGOs shifted to the rising emphasis on the term civil society for several reasons. In Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Philippines, for example, social movements effective in pushing towards the process of democratic change did not fit neatly into the NGO category. Additionally, there was a growing

concern revolving around the usefulness and legitimacy of some NGOs as agencies funded by external sources. Therefore, the increasing focus on civil society evolved out of the necessity to expand the notion to reflect local action and different categories of associations (Mitlin, 2001).

Civil society organizations have also been increasingly recognized by governments as integral players in poverty eradication. For one thing, civil society groups are often perceived to have prerequisites, such as flexibility and participatory nature, for sustained development. Since many are locally-based, they help foster grassroots organizations to increase in number and to become more resourceful. Civil society groups also utilize innovative strategies when working with local communities in identifying solutions and require less funds than state programs (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004).

As Table 6 indicates, civil society organizations have undertaken different roles that have specifically targeted issues of poverty and development assistance:

**Table 6: Types of Roles Undertaken by Civil Society Organizations**

<b>Types of Roles</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Improve Local Business Investment Climates	Economic infrastructure provision and maintenance Improve policy for business Improved governance Investment promotion and marketing
Encourage New Enterprises & Livelihood Programs	Income generating project Micro-finance project Organize cooperatives
Deliver Social Services	Education Social welfare Health Integrate low income and head-to-employ workers
Training and Capacity Building	Entrepreneurial Vocational/Technical Institutional capacity building
Relief and Rehabilitation	Emergency shelters

*Source: Ghaus-Pasha, 2004*

As seen above, civil society groups have been active in two types of programs: economic and social welfare. The economic roles, in particular, indicate how civil society groups have widened their activities to participate in micro-credit, income generating, and economic programs to facilitate community growth.

Relief work has been one of the most traditional and common types of work engaged by the civil society in developing nations. Relief and rehabilitation have taken form through means of food distribution, income transfers, and emergency protection from natural disasters and conflict. These roles not only indicate the delivery of social services but also skills training and education that empower community members to become active participants of their growth (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004).<sup>50</sup>

Backer (2003) expands on the typology and adds the following to the primary roles taken by civil societies: data collection and monitoring; representation and advocacy; collaboration, facilitation, and consultation; acknowledgment and compensation; and parallel or substitute authority. NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, are renowned for data collection and compilation of reports on human rights abuses that have helped them enter relevant policy debates by challenging existing initiatives and proposing alternatives.<sup>51</sup> NGOs have also linked to grassroots organizations, community-based initiatives, and provision of critical services such as

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<sup>50</sup> Courville and Piper (2004) refer to empowerment as the “expansion of choice and action and is about individual as well as collective agency” (p. 50). Through empowerment initiatives, marginalized groups can be brought into the political sphere by giving rise to their consciousness through information campaigns and education.

<sup>51</sup> Another example is the Project to Recover the Historical Memory (REMHI) in Guatemala compiled 6,000 testimonies of the local community. These reports and information have over the years provided a basis for further re-evaluation, research, and education.

counseling torture victims. Groups have even contributed to providing restorative justice and assuming roles traditionally given to nation-states.<sup>52</sup>

Civil rights organizations have proliferated in various sectors of society and gained prominence and influence. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Amnesty International, and the International Rescue Committee have provided serious constraints on human wrongdoings and inhumane treatment of the global citizenry. When Attorney General John Ashcroft announced new policies following the 9-11 events that would reverse certain protections for immigrants, the ACLU, the Human Rights Watch, and several Islamic and Arab ethnic organizations fought back with lawsuits, public dissent, and lobbying. These actions secured reversal of several new policies.

Despite its successes, the civil society sector continues to share the difficulty of limited resources that deter further growth and ability to deliver services. Competition for limited funds and fundraising has created conflict among groups and prevented friendly coalitions. In other cases, organizations must expand their work outside their mandate in order to sustain themselves (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004). Even when funds are made available, organizations must modify their work, as donors often dictate how issues are to be addressed and discussed in addition to the types of projects to be implemented. This compromises the capacity of local NGOs to execute long-term projects since they must continuously adjust their work to meet the funding priorities of the donors instead of answering to the local needs (Ishkanian, 2003).

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<sup>52</sup> Examples are conducting investigation for truth commissions.

Civil society organizations are nonetheless playing accelerated roles in the local, national, and global arenas. As the global society continues to engage itself in democratic participation and accountability in decision making, civil society will continue to increase their roles. Also, as we must now deal with cross-border issues and internationalized society that have been created by globalization, civil society will continue to engage in roles that national governments themselves cannot operate effectively and legitimately (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004).

### ***Nongovernmental Organizations***

This section gives specific focus on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), one of the major entities under the framework of civil societies. Many NGOs have dominated the civil society sector and become well known for their active work representing non-state actors and have led various groups and individuals in engaging the local community to address wider social concerns. One thing to note before proceeding with the discussion is the common mistake of using the terms NGO and civil society interchangeably. It is important in these discussions to distinguish NGOs as one of the many elements that fall under the umbrella of civil society and not one that defines it (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004).

NGOs have received great attention for tackling many issues of poverty and development. Transnational NGO networks, especially, share the common purpose of eradicating poverty and enabling sustainable development by channeling funds, expertise, and information. They are typically involved in efforts to change institutional policies in favor of the poor and marginalized communities in developing countries. They may at times be asked to justify their activities and legitimacy. Many NGOs explain their

legitimacy by demonstrating their transnational nature of the work and their capacity to connect micro-level grassroots work to macro-level advocacy (Hudson, 2001).

As previously discussed, NGOs became a very significant group within development circles and civil society in the 1980s and 1990s (Mitlin, 2001). With the rising number of NGOs, projects such as community development, low-income housing, environmental protection, health care, popular education, support for micro-enterprises, and services for mothers and children were implemented by these organizations (Arrossi, Bombarolo, Hardoy, Milin, Coscio, & Satterthwaite, 1994). In the former Soviet states, for example, the number of NGOs rapidly grew when Western states and donors provided funds to NGOs to implement democratization and civil society (Ishkanian, 2003).

The term *nongovernmental organization* was originally coined by the United Nations when the 1945 UN Charter Article recognized NGOs as part of its accredited consulting organizations. Although the term was initially used when referring within the UN context, it has become broadly utilized by academics and activists, especially since the 1980s. The scope and definition of NGOs have since widely expanded (Martens, 2002).

Many NGOs are now understood as non-profit, professionalized organizations that often maintain a paid, permanent staff (Martens, 2002). Holsinski (2000) believes the NGO sector is no longer referred to as narrowly-focused, not-for-profit groups and instead extends out to include trade unions, employers associations, religious organizations, and the independent media.<sup>53</sup> Organized labor, for example, makes up one of the largest NGO categories and is a key entity in which workers connect to the greater civil society.

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<sup>53</sup> It could be argued that these entities better fit the category of civil society, however.

Kukita (1998) explains that NGOs can empower communities by gaining access to pertinent resources, raising consciousness, participating in the decision-making process, and influencing others. NGOs in social settings additionally become bridges and facilitators of change, staying closely connected to the grassroots community (Courville and Piper, 2004). Furthermore, NGO activists generally display a shared sense of solidarity and long-lasting emotion that keep them committed to their work (Lange, 2002). Kada (n.d.) explains that networks initially formed to address local concerns are largely conceived from NGO initiatives.

According to Hailey (2006), NGO leadership can be described as paternalistic, activist, managerialistic, and catalytic. Paternalistic leadership demonstrates patriarchal style of leadership that inspires loyalty. It generally has strong, close relationships with the staff and volunteers. Activist leadership is highly motivated and charismatic that engages in advocacy and lobbying work, generally focused on a single issue. Such leadership has the ability to channel the concerns of local and solidarity groups by inspiring others with articulate messages. Managerialist leadership, on the other hand, demonstrates high ability in management and establishment of reliable systems.

Catalytic leadership demonstrates broad world views and has the capacity to promote and execute change. Such leaders know to delegate the work in order to engage with external stakeholders and build coalitions, alliances, and networks. Nonetheless, one can understand the effectiveness of leaders when examined in the context of their relationship with their subordinates, as their success is often dependent upon the energy and the resources their colleagues can gather (Hailey, 2006).

Ideally, organizations would like to gather as much resources as possible, but in reality, resources are restricted due to the limited number of contributions and competition.<sup>54</sup> Wilson (1995) purports that in voluntary associations, authority and leadership become especially uncertain. The ability to get subordinates to do what the leadership wants is limited due to member indifference, and authority is often restricted and contingent since members can leave at anytime. Leaders must not only define and further the stated objectives but also keep the organizations from falling apart. Social stratification furthermore plays an important role in the existence of different types of voluntary associations and the types of people who will become members. The higher the social class, the more likely people are to join a voluntary organization.<sup>55</sup>

Since the early 1990s, NGOs have become deeply involved in international laws and regulations. By exposing violations of human rights and submitting proposals on human rights laws, they have become notable in human rights protection work and viewed as contributing to the improvement of international norms (Hailey, 2006). Many of these organizations do not receive state funds, as their work often targets the government in not providing better protection for its citizens.

In promoting human rights, many NGOs across the globe go to great lengths to document human rights abuses and disseminate the information to global society. The members of the Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan (RAWA), for example, have hidden cameras under their burqas (veil covering for women) to document executions and public beatings (RAWA, 2006). In countries such as Guatemala, human

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<sup>54</sup> Many associations thus try to secure more resources by dramatizing issues and advertising their causes.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson refers to social class as defined by one's education, income, or occupation.



rights NGOs have been threatened by government officials who consider human rights advocacy as dangerous (Blum, 2001).

Lawrence and Hardy (1999) add that many NGOs work to advocate for refugee rights by lobbying the government to defend their rights. Such organizations are usually small and ethnic-based but generally belong to a network of refugee advocates. In Canada, for example, over 100 organizations make up the national umbrella network of the Canadian Council for Refugees that was created in 1978. Similarly, the British Refugee Council functions as the main umbrella organization in the United Kingdom.

NGOs and networks have also worked to protect migrant rights. According to Courville and Piper (2004), with the rising power of multinational corporations resulting in free movement of capital and goods, nation-states have reasserted their power by strictly regulating border enforcement and immigration policies. This has consequently restricted the movement of people. Many migrants have thus become marginalized and often employed illegally, further subjecting them to abuse and exploitation.

Because both sending and receiving countries often lack the political will to protect and empower migrant labor, NGO activists are seen as likely agents for change. In response, different groups have taken on migrant worker concerns and succeeded in bringing more rights for migrants. In the case of the Philippines, NGO activism led to the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995; and in 2004, the Absentee Voting Bill allowed overseas migrants to participate in the national elections.

The engagement of NGOs in Asia has been prominent, as the continent is widely known for its regional networks and migrant NGOs (Courville and Piper, 2004). The late 1990s especially saw intensified migrant activism along with the establishment of the UN

Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants in 1999. In 2000, the United Nations set the official International Migrants Day for December 18th (Taran, 2000).

### ***Grassroots Organizations***

Struggles can also arise in relations between NGOs and grassroots organizations. One area of difficulty has been NGOs imposing their own objectives on local organizations. NGOs can fail to recognize the power struggles within the local community and not apply that reality to their work. NGOs have also undertaken the work without helping to develop the skills of grassroots organizations. This may have been overlooked, as NGOs and grassroots organizations are often mistaken as identical. While many NGOs are grassroots in nature, not all NGOs are locally-based, grassroots organizations<sup>56</sup> (Mitlin, 2001).

In general, grassroots organizations can include ethnic organizations, trade union affiliations, city-based federations, religious organizations, and NGOs. Ethnic organizations often focus on issues such as religious ceremonies, holidays, and social welfare. Trade union movements provide opportunities for low-income residents to organize themselves as well as federations that support grassroots organizations and offer assistance to resident associations. Religious groups and NGOs are known to have established various grassroots and charitable organizations (Mitlin, 2001).

On the other hand, the categorization of grassroots organizations includes anti-immigrant militia groups that report and apprehend undocumented entry into the United States. These vigilante groups actively use para-military strategies in implementing their objectives. One of the most notorious groups is the Minutemen (or the Civil Homeland

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<sup>56</sup> For example, a large international NGO from a metropolitan area might partner with a grassroots group in a rural, farming district.

Defense), in which its founder, Chris Simcox, has likened migrants to “a swarm of uncontrolled refugees” (Hiscott, 2005). Therefore, the concept of grassroots has expanded to all sides of the social and political spectrum.

### ***Transnational Networks***

Internationally-oriented civil society actors have grown in the past two decades exponentially in large part due to the unregulated practices of global capital and transnational corporations. With the rise in transnational movements and campaigns, citizen formations have both broadened and deepened. Different organizations and groups are now found in varying local and global domains of activism (Batliwala, 2002).

The understanding of grassroots work has been changed in response to globalization. Once specific to mean basic building blocks of society to signify the poor, labor, and working class, the term is now undergoing a major change. Batliwala (2002) argues that this widening term conceals the differences in structure, resources, and ideology between movements of activists. Not only do theories and analyses of social movements need to be sharpened, but we need to recognize that the grassroots movements are now becoming global and challenging the rights of non-grassroots organizations to lead and represent them.

The key activity of these transnational grassroots networks has generally been in advocacy work. This is evident in literature as scholars have referred to transnational networks and transnational advocacy networks as related terms. In discussing transnational advocacy networks, Keck and Sikkink (1999) define these entities as those who work internationally on an issue brought together by shared values, discourse, and exchange of information and services. They are voluntary, mutual, and carry horizontal

patterns of information exchange and communication. Their fluid, open relationships share centrally conceived ideas and values. Their network of civil societies, states, and international organizations collaborate on issues that pertain to human rights, women, infant health, indigenous rights, and the environment.

Transnational advocacy networks often appear when channels between domestic groups and their governments are ineffective for resolving conflict. These networks also surface when they believe networking will further their agenda and international meetings will create arenas for forming and strengthening their work. They tackle agendas by using strategies of information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics. They work to influence discursive positions of states and organizations, institutional procedures, policy change, and state behavior (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). They raise issues of moral and value content, government monopoly of information, and access to target governments restricted to domestic activists (Burgerman, 1998).

Networks are also communicative structures that are part of a larger policy community that links actors from various institutional and ideological standpoints (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). Central to their identity is the ability to generate and disseminate information quickly and efficiently. Members of these communicative networks extend to NGOs, research advocacy organizations, intellectuals, local social movements, foundations, media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and even segments of executive branches of government.

Networks often carry the dual participatory role of both domestic and international politics and seek multiple resources as if they were part of an international society (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). Burgerman (1998) adds that domestic organizations

are a necessary condition for transnational networks since they provide their international counterparts with a conduit into the national political arena and justification for intervening in national affairs.

According to Kada (n.d.), local objectives can expand into transnational objectives in three ways. In the first case, a network may expand into transnational objectives upon realizing its local objective is not attainable without changes made outside of its scope. Second, a network may become interested in extending itself to obtain similar achievements in other countries. Third, objectives may naturally move into the transnational sphere when membership is offered to actors in other states.

More motivated by values and less on material concerns, advocacy networks bring new rhetoric into policy debates as well as provide information and testimonies. They promote causes and advocate for policies not always linked to their own interests but of other communities (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). As networks and activists continue to demand greater voice in social and economic policies, their work will continue to organize political action across ideological, cultural, geographical, and issue boundaries (Bennett, 2003).

### **Political Organizing and Outcomes**

There is no doubt that current global efforts do not fully facilitate development for most of the world population. The class polarization and environmental deprivation continue to alarm us, and we must identify alternatives to the global capitalism that has degraded our material, political, and ideological world. As globalization and capitalism were not conceived overnight, there is reason to hope that alternative strategies will

eventually help us escape the bounds of capital globalization and onto a system that is more inclusive and egalitarian (Sklair, 2002).

As society increases its focus on the role of non-state actors, the study of organizations and voluntary associations become important, especially as they carry on activities revolving around social movements and causes. Although the civil rights movement is not heard today as it once had been in the 1960s, organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League are still actively carrying out similar activities as before. Many small and large organizations can be found today advancing civil rights, antipoverty, and peace-related causes as they provide continuity and predictability to social causes and processes that otherwise would be only episodic (Wilson, 1995). This section examines the nature of political organizing and the types of gains, transformations, and the informal learning that can occur through organizing, advocacy, and activism.

### ***Political Organizations***

When explaining non-state groups and actors, Wilson's (1995) typology of political organizations becomes useful.<sup>57</sup> In his classic analysis of political organizations, Wilson compares and contrasts various incentives that attract individuals to join organizations and social causes in the first place (Staudt and Coronado, 2002). He discusses the internal processes of organizations and examines how they are established, why members join, how they are led, and the strategies they employ in order to understand the behavior of organizations (Wilson, 1995).

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<sup>57</sup> In fact, Staudt and Coronado (2002) use Wilson's work in presenting their study of cross-border and nongovernmental organizations along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The study of institutional incentives is important, as they help explain the nature of the members, the reasons behind the work, and the types of benefits and transformations that can be gained through their involvement (Wilson, 1995). According to Hildreth (1994), incentives play a distinct role in manifesting the level of dedication and participation of the members. How an organization is to be maintained determines the actions and behaviors of the individuals in their organizational roles. Thus, gauging different reactions to incentives becomes important in identifying such patterns since they largely influence the way organizations are maintained. Incentives are particularly important in voluntary associations where most members do not earn income through their participation (Wilson, 1995).

From the early 1930s through the 1950s, powerful businesses, labor groups, and political machines were widely thought to be key decision-makers in society. This thinking shifted in the 1960s when increasing attention focused on ordinary citizens such as pressures groups and lobbies to affect public policy. Scholars began paying attention to organized interest groups, leading academics such as Wilson to provide a theoretical perspective on the behavior of formal organizations with special emphasis on voluntary formal organizations<sup>58</sup> (Wilson, 1995).

According to Wilson (1995), people have various motives for joining organizations. Even when individuals carry personal motives, they are still likely to respond to the rewards of affiliating with certain organizations.<sup>59</sup> Such incentives can include the exclusivity, recreation, and social privilege that come with membership. Others are simply drawn to the stated purpose of select associations. For these

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<sup>58</sup> Formal voluntary organizations include unions, parties, civil rights organizations, civic groups, and trade associations (Wilson, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Wilson calls this primary incentive.

organizations to sustain themselves, it is necessary to identify and disseminate incentives to recruit members and supporters and to perform certain roles. All members value the incentives with varying amounts of importance.

The three types of incentives described in Wilson’s work are material incentives, solidary (or personal) incentives, and purposive incentives (See Table 7 below).

**Table 7: Types of Organizational Incentives**

<b>Incentives</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Examples of organizations</b>
Material	Money or concrete goods	Unions, those often satisfied with individual benefits
Solidary/Personal <sup>60</sup>	Based on both the status and the pleasure of social interaction	Faith-based organizations
Purposive	Intention to carry out single-issue to multi-issue purposes	Human-rights organizations

*Source: Wilson (1995), Staudt and Coronado (2002)*

As explained above, material incentives are tangible rewards such as money or benefits that can be priced in monetary terms. Rewards include higher wages, special discounts, tax breaks, and fringe benefits. Organizations that typically rely on material incentives are business firms and trade unions with closed-shop agreements. A major consequence of material incentives is the danger of paying little attention to the stated purposes of the organization and creating debate amongst members over the proper allocation of benefits.

Solidary or personal incentives, on the other hand, are intangible, nonmaterial rewards that come with associating with a certain organization. Solidary incentives can be further separated into specific and collective solidary incentives. Specific solidary

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<sup>60</sup> Staudt and Coronado (2002) refer to solidary incentives also as personal incentives.



incentives are offices and certain honors given to particular individuals. Collective solidary incentives are rewards made on a group-basis. These include senses of enjoyment, conviviality, and exclusiveness of belonging to a group. Organizations that predominantly rely on solidary incentives depend on members who seek collective rewards over specific benefits since they are more easily distributed. One consequence of solidary incentives is that they cannot be precisely measured (Wilson, 1995).

Purposive incentives are intangible rewards and satisfaction that emerge as a result of having contributed to a worthy cause. These rewards rely on the stated purpose of the organization that originate from demands for a certain law, modification of certain institutions to benefit the larger public, and the adoption of certain practices.

Organizations motivated by purposive incentives work to benefit the larger public or society as a whole and not necessarily for the benefit of the members. Purposive organizing is the ideal of the three, as material and solidary motivations often lead into purposive ones (Wilson, 1995; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

Purposive incentives are highly influential and especially important when distinguishing different levels of group commitment. With the bulk of its objectives in humanitarian or political arenas, the variations within the purposive incentive category reveal insights on factors that lead one to join and participate in such organizations. In the example of the Sanctuary Movement, different degrees of involvement pointed to the commitment and the willingness of one to risk political and legal consequences for their involvement. Questions of whether participation would make a difference on federal refugee policies or the quality of life of those seeking refugee reflected in purposive considerations (Hildreth, 1994).

Purposive benefits can be further delineated as goal-oriented, ideological, and redemptive. A goal-oriented organization works towards a single purpose or a set of objectives in regards to a specific segment in society. Ideological organizations focus on a comprehensive set of theories, values, and assumptions that view life as a whole and tend to be theological or political. Redemptive organizations focus on changing the society and its institutions and also require their own members to exemplify the new order in their own personal lives (Wilson, 1995).

The difference between ideological and redemptive organizations is that while ideological organizations comprise of accepting a certain doctrine, redemptive organizations stress the importance of manifesting the personal characteristics that demonstrate their commitment. In redemptive organizations, their shared risks and intense camaraderie become similarly important as the purposes themselves. Furthermore, incentives generally differ in the precision in which they can be measured to direct or constrain individual behavior<sup>61</sup> as well as the extent in which they involve the stated objectives of the organization.<sup>62</sup>

Organizations obviously utilize diverse strategies as well as face constraints in maintaining and enhancing their needs. Maintenance includes survival of the organization, managing effective communication strategies, securing cooperative effort from the members. Such strategies and challenges significantly influence the way the organization defines and pursues its political objectives (Wilson, 1995).

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<sup>61</sup> For instance, material incentives are much more divisible than solidary incentives.

<sup>62</sup> For example, a member more interested in monetary incentives will be less interested in the stated purpose of the organization than someone motivated by purposive incentives.

Hildreth (1994) does caution, however, that the issue of incentives is much more complex than most analyses make them appear. When considering incentives, it is important to keep in mind that while any single association might offer different types of incentives, different types of individuals also respond to the same incentives in varied ways. Thus, we must take into consideration the levels of variation within one single category of incentives when applying our analyses of political organizations.

### ***Social Movements***

As previously mentioned, even when attention to specific social movements fades, different organizations continue and actively carry out the mission and the work of these causes. As individuals choose to engage in different organizations, their personal agenda and desire for various incentives and rewards manifest in their work. Oftentimes, individuals are impacted by specific social concerns and then convert their reactions to their engagement in different affiliations and causes. In tracing the roots of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, for example, Evans (1980) describes how personal interaction was necessary for one to truly participate in a social movement. She writes:

Cathy Cade, a high school student in Memphis, Tennessee, experienced the shock of discovery that "we are all people" when her Unitarian youth group held a meeting with a black youth group. Her family believed in integration but she rarely saw a black person of her own age. The next year, as a student at Carelton College, she elected to join an exchange program with Spelman College in Atlanta because she "wanted to relate to black people as people." (p. 35)

An Alabama native, born in 1924, Ann Braden was the daughter of an old southern family raised in the warmth and gentility of the small-town southern upper classes. While in college she had become convinced that segregation was wrong, a conviction that was reinforced when she went to work as a journalist after graduation. In her home town of Anniston, Alabama, and later in Birmingham, her deeply moral sense of justice was outraged by the brutality and blatant discrimination she observed on the "courthouse beat." (p. 48)

Likewise, Gutierrez (1994, 1995) explains the fundamental change in personal consciousness to be an essential impetus for social action and empowerment. Such notions are built on the work of Freire (1970) that calls for conscientization, or deep reflection of oneself in relation to the world, to be a vital precursor to involving oneself in social change. It is in this stage of conscientization where people come to conceptualize the political aspect of their personal experiences and to respond through action. Critical consciousness, facilitated through group dialogue, is key in empowering oneself.

By illustrating the civil rights movement and women's liberation in the 1960s, Evans (1980) too lends insight to personal politics leading to organizing and fighting for their causes. Similar to the Sanctuary Movement, there was no formal process of joining the movement, as individuals simply announced or became part of it through means such as protest marches. Such activities between 1960 and 1965 just came to be known as "the movement" that "implied an experience, a sense of community and common purpose" (p. 102).

The 1960s movement simply combined personal and moral optimism of the southern civil rights movement and cultivated the beginnings of a new feminism that claimed, "The personal is political" (Evans, 1980, p. 105). This depicted the multiple dimensions of oppression that women faced as well as the cyclical nature of their process of action and reflection of their reality (Olonka-Onyango and Tamale, 1995; Carr, 2003). In Brazil, women's organizations and struggles created immense learning opportunities and dimensions for women. This space provided an opportunity for them to discuss and to reflect on their experiences and moved them beyond their current understandings. This

learning facilitated emancipatory action that helped convey that their personal struggles were indeed a political fight (Foley, 1999).

The message of personal politics further complemented with “the local is global,” unveiling local conditions and the reality of patriarchy and gender exploitation in the third world to be connected with international conditions in multifaceted ways. The issue of gender oppression expanded from personal experiences to the broader issues of global politics. It made it clear that the emergence and growth of local issues of patriarchy and dominance were directly related to the rising discrimination of communities in the developing world under the current global political and economic policies (Olonka-Onyango and Tamale, 1995, p. 701)

Through such conscientization, people became empowered to address the local and global politics through series of experiences by conceptualizing their goals in deeper ways, gaining access and control over resources, and claiming mastery over their lives (Zimmerman, 1995). The empowerment stage has thus become a process helping to develop self-sufficiency, critical consciousness, reflection and action, and communion with others alike (Gutierrez and Lewis, 1999). Through this experience, individuals experienced dialogue and solidarity to action, where their changed concept of self led to a political identity (Rees, 1999).

According to Evans (1980), the women’s liberation movement was instigated by female participants of the civil rights movement and the new left. The new left provided a democratic ideology that focused on the personal experience, sense of community and cooperation, and the necessity to fight for the oppressed. Sharing of their own experiences soon came to be known as consciousness-raising, an important political tool

that demonstrated the direct attack on sex roles and personalized strategies to politics.

Through the new movement, millions of women modified their view of the world and of themselves.

Critical consciousness helped individuals uncover the political roots of their personal experiences that have been filled with powerlessness and exploitation (Gutierrez and Lewis, 1999). As consciousness-raising and political action have been collective in nature, feminists saw political dimensions of their personal experiences and struggles together. By uniting with others to recognize common conditions, they critically became aware of their relation to their surroundings (Parsons, 1991). Through this, they learned to actively proceed toward possible strategies and remedies for their lives (Alcoff, 1994).

Leaders and participants of social movements have also long recognized the power of emotion in building this collective action. As Aminzade and McAdam (2001) explain, emotions are a “necessary and exceedingly important component of any significant instance of collective action” (p.14). In the last decade, scholars found emotions to attract individuals to social movements, impact profound interaction, and shape movement strategies. This has helped scholars to focus on the strategic, organizational dynamics of social movements and emotions (Reger, 2004).

Goodwin, Jasper, and Polleta (2001) argue, however, that strong emotions are not sufficient in driving social movement activism. Movements along with movement organizations must become sites for transformation. Therefore, social movement organizations (SMOs) become an important space for individuals to join and explore responses to both personal and political events (Reger, 2004). Particularly during the

women's movement, SMOs provided a free space for women to explore and challenge the notions of gender oppression (Buechler, 1990).

Within this context, individuals were given emotional structures that formed their feelings and beliefs, referred to as *emotion cultures* (Reger, 2004). According to Taylor (2000), an emotion culture comprises of different backgrounds, values, goals, beliefs, and grievances that facilitate interaction. In the example of the nonviolent movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, an emotion culture stressing solidarity and democracy resulted (Epstein, 1991).

Reger (2004) purports the emotional-organizational dynamics occurs in three phases. First, individuals find the space to respond to the moral shocks in relations to rage and alienation. Second, they begin engaging in organizational-emotional work to form shared emotions. And once the reciprocal emotions are fostered and the day-to-day obstacles overcome, participants proceed into collective action. Accordingly, Reger (2004), in her study of the National Organization for Women (NOW), found that consciousness-raising gave these individuals an understanding of gender disparity that fueled their activism and that the formation of mutual emotions produced strong bonds and networks that kept them involved with NOW.

Many social activists had to first become disgusted with the prosperity and security surrounding their own lives. Instead of making changes in their circumstances, they searched for a community. Many entered into the world of activism and the growing arena of liberation. For many, it became a training ground for future critics, journalists, politicians, and lawyers (Evans, 1980). Through this period of critical interpretation, new understandings of their personal realities and surroundings paved the pathway for their

personal and social transformation that demanded socio-political restructuring of their own lives (Cox, 1991; Breton, 1994). And it is this political action that carries on the cycle of the empowerment process (Carr, 2003).

### ***Informal Education***

Engagement in social causes and movements not only become training ground for future activists and professionals, but these activities bring significant learning to those involved. According to Foley (1999), learning in social movement sites and actions is generally informal and frequently incidental. Learning is implicitly embedded in action and usually not noticed or articulated as learning. This type of learning can be explained as a way of “learning in the struggle” (p. 39) when one participates in social and political action. This emancipatory transformation moves transformative learning from the personal level into social change and action (Freire, 1970).

There is a vital learning aspect to human life that assumes diverse roles as well as creating problematic outcomes. Learning can be formal and deliberate, but most of our learning occurs in informal settings, embedded in our everyday activities. As we continue to learn in the various contexts where we live and work, we come across most of the learning that is often implicit and not predetermined. This is also called radical education or critical education in which we see a fundamental departure from conventional practices and attempts to rectify injustices by exploring their fundamental causes, their profound dynamics, and their determining factors. This then becomes emancipatory where people aim to free themselves from oppression and to take control over their lives (Foley, 2001).



Critical learning involves letting go of prior distinctive experiences and opening up space for new action and change. This process involves individuals stepping back from their experiences and reordering them by using concepts of power, conflict, values, structure, and choice. This clearly occurs informally through individual and group experiences, personal reflections, and actions. Although learning is an element of human life that takes many different forms, economic and political forces often come to shape our education and learning beyond our immediate control. It is thus necessary to be self-aware and strategically engage in emancipatory learning to raise their own consciousness about themselves and their surroundings (Hart, 1990; Foley, 2001).

In his study of informal learning in community houses for women, Foley (1999) found these houses as sites of learning where individuals learned in playgroups, in workshops, and through participation in different roles and responsibilities. Through these liberated spaces, they were given the time and the space to explore their experiences and to build relationships with one another. Women learned to overcome their fears and lack of confidence engrained by their gender socialization, fight for what they wanted, and actively engage in collective decision-making processes.

Continued participation made their own values clearer and helped them recognize people had diverse interests and values. Becoming more aware of themselves and the intricacy of interpersonal relationships, the houses became sites of struggle where they learned that conflict in social settings is unavoidable. They also learned how broader structural factors such as federal policies and funding sources impacted the operation of their community houses. This learning process came embedded in their daily activities through informal and incidental means (Foley, 2001).

Ethnographic accounts of learning in social action allow us to recognize the multiple dimensions of emancipatory and reproductive learning that arise as individuals struggle against different modes of oppression. This learning locates itself within a broader economic, cultural, and political analysis and sets the scene for local social action. The great impetus is the recognition that action is not only necessary but also possible (Foley, 1999).

This is further demonstrated in Foley's (2001) study on the New South Wales campaign, which was an attempt to save a rainforest in Terania Creek in the early 1980s. Foley shows that through their participation, activists obtained new knowledge and skills where they developed substantial knowledge of rainforest ecology and an insight into state operations. More significantly, their understanding of the world was deeply altered from believing that the value of rainforests was a given to realizing that it was something they had to struggle for. Their initial faith in the system was replaced by the intricate nature of power struggles and social interests. Within this context, they learned it was possible to establish expertise, construct new modes of organization, and engage in action.

Sociologists have argued that as society becomes heavily penetrated by capitalism, we are bound to witness social and environmental chaos as a result. This is because inadequate natural resources make it impossible for Western capitalism to be replicated to remaining parts of the world. With the changing intensity of capitalist invasion into our lives, it has also changed the dimensions of human life and our way of learning. A reorganizing capitalism has furthermore altered our learning by transforming

our right to education to an instrument of economic policy driven by world economic competition and crisis (Foley, 2001).

Critique of capitalism must be at the heart of emancipatory education, and research needs to extend beyond the tradition of focusing on individual learning and the formal education system (Foley, 2001). Contrary to formal education or organizational learning that focuses on delivery of information to its shareholders, emancipatory learning is geared towards achieving social transformations, justice, and equity to equip civil society to resist systemic exploitation (Fenwick, 2003). Emancipatory social change must make a “fundamental departure from dominant practice or experience” and free individuals from the systemic cycle of oppression (Foley, 2001, p. 28).

This type of action learning places more focus on the interests of the participants, not the implementers. The participant-centered approach starts with their own articulation of their experiences, proceeds into identifying the problem, and then eventually moves into critically analyzing both the internal and external factors contributing to their problems. From their own narratives, participants begin to make meaning and understand what is important to them in daily practice that constitutes their informal, everyday learning (Fenwick, 2003).

Through this, individuals confront institutional practices that unfairly marginalize one group while privileging another. The critical analysis of their experiences and perceptions of tension, injustice, and ambiguity help them link their analysis with a critical assessment of the greater forces surrounding the issue. By raising the questions of how power relations operate, individuals learn to trace the politics and restrictions of their environments for learning. This helps participants recognize the intricacy, context,

and contested nature of their learning process and facilitates the use of democratic “power with” rather than “power over” strategies (Fenwick, 2003, p. 629). As such, popular and radical adult educators frequently head toward social movements as sites and vehicle for transformation leading to social change where the relationship between this type of learning and social movements have become symbiotic (Welton, 1995).

As Eagleton (1987) has explained, human history has been typified by systems of domination through feudalism, capitalism, and state socialism that have brought both material and ideological aspects of hegemony. Dominating forces have been constructed in ideologies and discourses where people construct their own meaning. Messages of domination have become internalized in the human psyche, creating a continual struggle by ordinary citizens to maintain control of their lives. Thus, the struggle between domination and liberation has been depicted as continually contested, complicated, contradictory, and ambiguous.

Individuals are encouraged to critically examine their experiences, analyze them in the context of broader oppressive forces, and to partake in collective action to improve their situations (Fenwick, 2003). As Adams and Horton (1975) have purported, individuals learn to act democratically by being democratic themselves. In this, activist-based organizations contribute to this learning, teaching democratic participation through actions and engagement with one another.

As participants engage in group dialogue and development, they focus on participatory means of knowledge production. Knowledge does not get passed on as fixed product but one that results from appreciating the local and contextual knowledge systems (Endersen and Von Kotze, 2005). As Foley (1999) has illustrated informal

learning to occur through personal experiences and collective action, other scholars (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) describe social learning as peripheral participation in a multitude of communities where learning happens where individuals act and create meaning jointly.

People learn as they act, and their learning becomes both implicit and overt, creating a complex tapestry that is difficult to unravel. As difficult as it is, it is important to acknowledge this reality especially in critical and emancipatory learning. This realization helps us abandon predetermined formulas and quick solutions and instead engages us to continue understanding what we are actually learning in the places where we live and work. This is the true learning that will continue to challenge individuals as they participate in social action and empowerment (Foley, 2001).

### **Globalization and the U.S.-Mexico Border**

The impact of globalization has facilitated new spaces and networks across the globe. This is certainly the case on the U.S.-Mexico border, as networks flourish through family, personal, and formal networks. In the late 1990s, forty-seven million people crossed the U.S.-Mexico border each year to shop, work, visit friends and family, and attend school (Staudt, 2002).<sup>63</sup> People consistently move in different directions to the point where this constant migration has contributed to the argument of deterritorialization of nation-states. The concept of citizenry has gone beyond the physical boundaries (Staudt and Spener, 1998).

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<sup>63</sup> For many border residents, free trade had been occurring for years, as Mexicans came to the U.S. to buy goods and U.S. residents cross the border for basic foodstuffs as well as cheaper medical services and prescription drugs (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

The border region has lent itself to the extensive flow of information also through dissemination of media coverage from newspapers to television and radio stations that travel to both the U.S. and the Mexican side (Staudt, 2002).<sup>64</sup> Staudt and Coronado (2002) state that while the Mexican government in the past was able to control and manipulate the media, access to the Internet has drastically inverted this practice. People are now able to view information on labor, environmental, and human rights violations through the world-wide network. The use of media across the border has at times given victories to labor organizations and social activists in legitimizing their claims beyond their own networks and into the ears of law makers. Victories are shared via virtual space to inform other parts of the globe and to disseminate strategies for activists in their own national settings (Staudt, 2002).

Although power relations did change with more voice and leverage given to civil society in recent years, globalization and information network did not eradicate all inequalities. Neither has there been an equal distribution of wealth and information on both sides. This is explained by Alvarez (2001) who purports that uneven relationships and transborder interdependence occur where a political line divides nations at differentiated degrees of industrialization.

As two nations sharing one of the longest physical boundaries in the world, Mexico and the U.S. have become closely intertwined with one another. By the end of 1990, Mexico had become the second most important trade partner for the United States. The U.S. too became the primary economic partner to Mexico with imports from the U.S. far exceeding those from anywhere else. By this time, the U.S. had obtained ownership

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<sup>64</sup> This refers to the daily coverage of the other side of the border.

over some of the most prominent and rapidly growing firms in the Mexican economy (Domínguez and De Castro, 2001).

Referring to the U.S.-Mexico border as *globalization's ground zero*, Williams (1999) purports the relocation of foreign companies to the region was led by the rise of new division of production in the international market. With the increasing liberalization of international trade, capitalists headed to the Mexican side to enjoy the proximity to the U.S., favorable tax policies, a political climate conducive to business, relaxed regulatory governance, and plenty of cheap labor.<sup>65</sup> Within this neoliberal framework, the maquiladora industry was able to diversify production and further enjoy the provisions of NAFTA (Williams, 1999, Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).

The maquiladora industry, which became a major topic of interest in globalization discourse, has been in existence since 1965 when Mexico began allowing foreign companies to its border cities (Heyman 1999; Ortíz-González, 2004). This caused rapid growth of the industry and established stronger linkages to contemporary capitalism as well as the NAFTA treaty where the U.S. and Mexico officially recognized the increasing integration of production and migration (Heyman 1999; Ortíz-González, 2004). This widespread form of production grew from hundreds of workers in the 1960s to almost a million today (Williams, 1999).<sup>66</sup> By 1999, the industry had already become the third leading foreign exchange in Mexico (Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).<sup>67</sup>

Through rapid industrialization, the border region has become increasingly more cosmopolitan with an explosive population growth (Spener and Roberts, 1998; Ortíz-

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<sup>65</sup> The minimum wage is at about three dollars a day.

<sup>66</sup> This is also known as in-bond manufacturing or partial-assembly manufacturing.

<sup>67</sup> The industry employs majority workers younger than 35 and pays about \$5-6 a day for operating production of auto parts, computer chips, and medical supplies (Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).

González, 2004; Donelson, 2004). In the border city of Nogales, Sonora, the population expanded from 25,000 in 1970 to nearly 400,000 in 2000 (Hackenberg and Alvarez (2001). The Laredo / Nuevo Laredo region, the largest channel for trade between the U.S. and Mexico, has too experienced an accelerated population growth since 1990. In 1999, 38% of U.S.-Mexico trade passed through the region, and three million pedestrians had crossed its bridges in the late 1990s (Rodriguez and Hagan, 2001).

### ***Poverty and Environment***

Global movements and networks do not come without consequences, however. Staudt and Coronado (2002) caution that capitalism, the very entity that has been the foundation of this transformation, has also brought inequality and asymmetries to the border region. Much of the detriment brought by globalization— advanced capitalism, widening gap between the rich and the poor, and transformation of state sovereignty— is all evidenced on the border (Swanger, 2002).

Ironically, these conditions of high interchange and interaction have been driven by inequalities (Staudt and Spener, 1998). And despite the rising flow of capital and people across the boundaries, the local and state governments have not even been able to meet basic infrastructural needs of their residents (Donelson, 2004).<sup>68</sup> This has led one scholar to describe the border as a “1,950 mile-long open wound... where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 2-3). The Nogales, Arizona / Nogales, Sonora region, for example, is an area that has experienced unprecedented economic growth with very little planning and human resources. Despite

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<sup>68</sup> In Nogales alone, cited for its explosive population growth, industrialization has not seen parallel growth, and residents of Nogales still use the same water system that had been installed in 1945 with colonias housing the bulk of those in the labor force (Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).



over a hundred maquiladora plants and its location serving as the principal port for Mexican produce exports and Ford vehicles, many people in this community suffer from water management issues, narcotics, and drug trafficking (Del Castillo V., 2001).

Many U.S. southwestern states are indeed some of the most poverty-stricken areas in the country (Staudt and Coronado, 2002). The border region in Texas faces a dearth of job skills, stable jobs, and higher incomes that if this region were a U.S. state, it would rank first in unemployment, poverty, birth, and low education rates (Sharp, 1998; Staudt, 2002). Household incomes remain extremely low compared to the overall Texas economy, the unemployment rate is twice that of other Texas counties,<sup>69</sup> and a third of unemployed workers in Texas and one-sixth of the state labor force reside in the border region (Sharp, 1998).

Although free-market economists have projected export-oriented manufacturing to raise the standard of living for border cities, the presence of multiple TNCs and export manufacturing has only profited the firms and have done little to increase the living standards of the residents themselves. A study conducted by the Coalition in the Maquiladoras and the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility explains that it takes a maquila worker in Ciudad Juarez close to an hour to afford a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of rice while a dockworker in Los Angeles work three minutes for it (Bacon, 2003).<sup>70</sup>

According to Staudt and Coronado (2002):

A zone implies commonality, but we contest a superficial or romanticized view of that commonality. What makes border zones attractive in the global economy is not the common spatial location and ensuing transport efficiencies, but all the differences in wages. (p. 12)

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<sup>69</sup> This is as of 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Two decades ago, the minimum wage in Mexico could cover 93.5% basic necessities of families. Today, it only buys 19.3%. This is due to Mexican wages losing 81% of their buying power, according to a study by the Economics Faculty of the National Autonomous University in Mexico City.

This reality is not at all new since the region historically has been at an economic disadvantage. Although there are pockets of wealth, such as San Diego, the four states sharing the Mexico border – Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas – continue to see poverty along its area bordering Mexico. As a whole, the U.S. border region has an unemployment rate in the teens with the per capita income being one of the lowest in the United States. The bulk of its residents tends to be young, immigrant, and poorly educated (Harrison, Lee-Bayha, and Sloat, 2003).

Coupled with poverty, border residents have experienced major pollution and environmental deprivation as a result of rapid industrialization (Domínguez and De Castro, 2001). Even before the maquiladora industry had come into the spotlight, the border region already had been heavily industrialized and was suffering from toxic dumping and abusive labor practices. The occurrence of rare cancers among residents in certain border regions, discharges in waterways, chemical spills, workplace injuries, fires, and sexual exploitation of workers have rarely been openly discussed. The following sections discuss these specific challenges facing the border region.

### ***Power and Governance***

The current global economy and society have seen many changes, as ever-increasing flows of goods, people, materials, technology, power structures, multinational capital, and civil society have penetrated into and across international borders (Papademetriou and Meyers, 2001; Ortíz-González, 2004). It is in this domain that discussion generates on the devolution of power to lower branches of government to the breakup of nation-states, influenced by the power of multinational organizations such as

the European Union and the World Trade Organization (Papademetriou and Meyers, 2001).

The U.S.-Mexico border is no stranger to this rhetoric, as the issues of power and control have confronted the region head-on. While exhibiting the commonality of spatial boundaries that have existed throughout history in the forms of districts, units, and electoral representations, this region has also been called to give the international market more open access to resources and capital. This has not been easy, as the governments on each side of the U.S.-Mexico border have typically designed and implemented policies separate from one another (Staudt, 2002).<sup>71</sup>

The extent to which cross-border differences and complementarities exist depends on how much the state allows for openness and cross-border relations along the border. Therefore, one role given to globalization has been redefining the state-centric system. This comes with the push for transnational governance, supranational institutions, and new technologies to increase the flow of capital, consumption, and movement of people (Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999).

In many ways, we can argue that the border region signifies hybridity (Staudt, 2002).<sup>72</sup> However, Ortíz-González (2004) argues that the term hybridity exhibits only a partial depiction of the changes taking place on the border. It furthermore oversimplifies the dynamics of the integration process. This mistakenly implies that the issues of asymmetry have been resolved as well as distorting and overshadowing local concerns

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<sup>71</sup> Even formal border studies typically focus on their side of the border instead of placing the focal point on the region as a whole.

<sup>72</sup> Hybridity generally applies to the by-product of transcultural dynamics between elements such as local vs. global or modern vs. tradition. It also refers to a process that is largest yet fragmented (Kraidy, 2002).

and needs. Kraidy (2002) furthermore notes that hybridity maintains conceptual ambiguity and many divergences on its meaning.

Although many local residents have voiced concerns over the ever-changing sociopolitical nature of the region, their concerns have become subjugated by outside interests whose decisions do not factor in the lives that are directly impacted (Kraidy, 2002; Papademetriou and Meyers, 2001). For example, while the local residents suffer from congested traffic and pollution caused by the daily transit of goods into the area, only a fraction of the transit tolls comes back to the border region. In other words, the border is the function of somewhere else that leaves local residents to deal with this impact on their own (Ortíz-González, 2004).

There is evidence that especially in cases of security, decisions are made unilaterally and devalue the local voice. Border control policies exhibit inconsistent patterns, exemplified by the call for greater border enforcement<sup>73</sup> while simultaneously calling for freer commercial access to workers and consumers. Some border officials have become both prone to and part of the corruption and drug trafficking circles (Papademetriou and Meyer, 2001).<sup>74</sup> Ortíz-González (2004) notes:

Although border cities may be administrative fictions, their chaos is real. Similarly, much of their economy is fictitious but their poverty is very real. Aside from the inevitable uncertainties of market fluctuations, the deepening social impacts of accelerated demographic growth and infrastructure deficits make the uncertainty more perilous.” (p. 23)

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<sup>73</sup> This also includes the use of language and symbols that physically demarcate the distinct identity of each side.

<sup>74</sup> Further arrangement has also been made to expand the patrol zone to beyond the border cities during busy seasons to reduce delays at the actual border, affecting those not even in the border region.

### *NAFTA and TNCs*

The current inequality and contradictions on the U.S.-Mexico border is not a new phenomenon, as border regions throughout history have experienced uncertainty and imposition via wars, conquests, and formation of states. This is also the region where elites have shaped cross-border relations while interacting with outside forces (Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999). Manufacturers have cut expenditures associated with environmental protection, fired workers for demanding increased wages and new safety equipment, and hired police and thugs to deal with protesters (Williams, 1999).

As the U.S.-Mexico binational economy began to change in the 1980s and liberalize its trade policy with one another, Mexico began permitting import goods into the country without imposing high tariffs. This became the launching ground for the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA came into effect in January of 1994 and eliminated tariffs and expanded trade in the North American continent (Staudt and Spener, 1998; Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001).

This agreement changed the border economy and development in major ways. Newly established provisions of NAFTA encouraged many foreign-owned export factories to cross the border into Mexico. This was fueled by lower wage levels in Mexico, a high number of Mexican workers eager to work but not able to legally obtain higher-wage positions in the U.S., and lack of strict health and safety regulations (Staudt and Spener, 1998; Hackenberg and Alvarez, 2001). Recognizing the opportunity to easily identify a supply of workers at a lower wage, capitalists quickly sought profit by establishing production plants in Mexico and selling the finished products in the U.S. (Staudt and Spener, 1998).

NAFTA created the hope that the border region would become an important economic community with much prosperity. More trade would increase development of the tax base, freeing up funds to tend to infrastructural needs such as environmental and safety necessities. The promise for more jobs and economic prosperity for the region, however, did not come to fruition, as the agreement did little to foster border industrialization (Staudt and Coronado, 2002; Williams, 1999). Instead, workers faced the cruel reality of dramatic differences in wage and standards of living (Staudt and Spener, 1998).

TNCs moving production south of the border caused a detrimental worker displacement. By November of 2002, the U.S. Department of Labor had extended unemployment benefits to 507,000 workers whose companies had relocated to Mexico under the free trade agreement. In El Paso, Texas, the Levi-Strauss company, a major industry for the city, began moving its operations across the international boundary to its sister city of Ciudad Juarez soon after the enactment of NAFTA. This resulted in closing of sewing plants and factories with a loss of 7,400 jobs and laying off of additional 6,000 workers in El Paso. In total, NAFTA had eliminated 879,000 jobs in the U.S. (Bacon, 2004; Swanger, 2002).

Companies that moved to Mexico became part of the maquiladora industry that offered much cheaper labor costs and a more easily controlled labor force.<sup>75</sup> The push for this industry, however, was not the sole production of NAFTA. When Mexico was hit with a debt crisis in 1982, the IMF obliged the government to devalue the peso. Its

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<sup>75</sup> Ironically, the main U.S. region impacted by the move is not the border but the “Rust Belt” of the Midwest in which corporations set up partial operations in the South and abroad. The “Rust Belt” was known for its strong union membership, and this was broken by corporations releasing themselves of the burden of unions and finding operations elsewhere, such as the maquiladora industry at the Mexico border (Swanger, 2002).

policies forced reduced state spending and government subsidies for goods and services and purchasing of public lands and infrastructure by the private sector.<sup>76</sup> This eventually led maquiladora workers to become one of the cheapest labor forces around the world, and the push for privatization soon maneuvered Mexico towards the NAFTA agreement (Swanger, 2002).

Despite the projected job gains for Mexico as a result of the treaty, the impact on the Mexican workforce was more devastating than that of the United States. With the privatization of its major industries, the Mexican economy underwent the loss of over one million jobs during the first year of NAFTA. For a while, the growth in the maquiladora industry seemed to make up for some of the jobs lost, as more than 1.3 million were employed by the 2,000 border plants. But when the recession hit in 2001, U.S. consumers curtailed their purchasing power, and maquiladoras began terminating their employees. During this time, approximately 400,000 jobs were eliminated in Mexico (Bacon, 2004).<sup>77</sup>

This economic downturn was especially a major blow to Ciudad Juarez, one of the largest cities along the Mexico border. By 2003, 45% of the 350 maquiladoras had shut down in Ciudad Juarez. Approximately 60,000 to 80,000 workers had been laid off, and only a third of the 250,000 workers remained employed. As portions of the maquiladora industry began to relocate to China, there was widespread fear that this would mark the end of the industry (Chandler, 2005).

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<sup>76</sup> In 1992, provisions in the constitution that provided land redistribution to campesinos and protection of collective land tenure came to an end. Farmers consequently came into competitions with U.S. agriculture (Swanger, 2002).

<sup>77</sup> Wood (2002) believes the economic downturn of the U.S. economy and tax increases on goods arriving from outside the continent as a provision of NAFTA to be among the main reasons for the downturn of the maquiladora industry.

Perhaps the most serious consequence of NAFTA was its failure to protect Mexican workers and their rights. Even in cases where jobs became available for Mexican workers, their working conditions worsened. In the interest of attracting more foreign investment, the Mexican government worked with TNCs to keep wages low and to reinforce labor control. As a consequence, the minimum wage for workers was established at about \$4.20 a day. This put their wages under the poverty line, where maquila workers would have to work almost an hour to buy a kilogram of rice and another 5-6 hours to buy a gallon of milk (price set in Tijuana) (Bacon, 2004).

One of the major reasons the maquiladora industry became sought after by TNCs was the lack of independent unionization amongst maquiladora workers. Recognizing that the formation of unions was unlikely, assisted by the Mexican government that utilizes Labor Arbitration Boards to intervene in worker's movements and protests, businesses took an advantage of this fact. Although there is an option for workers to submit a formal complaint to the Labor Arbitration Boards without the companies finding out their names as long as 10% of the workforce is represented, the Labor Arbitration Boards is in the process of ending this practice as well (Bacon, 2004).

Contrary to lucrative profits for TNCs and capitalists, the border area has reaped lower wages for workers (Williams, 1999). Many organizations have protested this and challenged the harsh working conditions of the maquiladora industry, arguing that this is largely a majority-female workforce with wages below the poverty standards in Mexico. However, these wages remain legalized, pointing to the strong links between the government and corporations against the interests of workers and fair wages (Staudt,



2002). Meanwhile, TNCs continue to get away with firing labor activists and those who have been blacklisted without a thorough investigation (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

The neoliberal schemes of TNCs have also infiltrated into NGO work. As NGOs have taken on the responsibility of special projects on the border, working to improve marginalized communities abandoned by the state, they have become the channel in which neoliberal state policies make their way into the communities. Many NGOs now resort to funding from state agencies and donors who share neoliberal views, because outside funding has become more scarce and competitive. NGOs must often follow the guidelines of donor agencies that steer them away from communities and closer to the neoliberal interventions (Edwards and Hulme, 1996).

Furthermore, the border region has seen minimal amount of diffuse technology from the north to the south, linkages between border firms to the overall domestic economy in Mexico, and establishment of the domestic managerial workforce (Williams, 1999). The national-level recognition that NAFTA would need legal and regulation frameworks became mere declarations at the regional level (Ortíz-González, 2004). The enactment of NAFTA thus brought the undesired consequences of poor living and environmental conditions (Hackenberg, 2001).

This argument does not imply that all workers are anti-NAFTA. In fact, this agreement has allowed some Latinos to contribute to the legal system and the market with their bilingual abilities and bicultural backgrounds. However, it is clear that the U.S.-Mexico border has received both positive and negative attention as a result of this agreement. The volume of trade, migration, and transportation may have increased

across the border, but this same region is still awaiting many of the local benefits initially promised by the agreement (Ortíz-González, 2004; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

### ***Transnational Networks and Cross-Border Cooperation***

Given the social needs and demands global capitalism has caused on the border region, this section examines the cross-border efforts and the effects that have been generated as a result. In their survey of the North American and European borders, Papademetriou and Meyers (2001) found that border countries, although varying in degrees, generally conduct cross-border cooperation with one another, in which business interests create cross-border relations. Other efforts have also revolved around intercommunity issues, insufficient natural resources, shared infrastructure, and economic goals. Therefore, they argue that governments are better off cooperating with one another and working with the market to expand and regulate their boundaries than to work in isolation from one another. Regulatory practices that take into account the social and economic realities on the ground level are generally more likely to achieve public-policy goals.

However, many actors in the border region identify cultural differences and mistrust as the principal difficulties in establishing transborder understanding and collaboration (Del Castillo V., 2001). Contrary to the seeming picture of U.S.-Mexico collaboration, cross-border cooperation has been quite limited.<sup>78</sup> Very few NGOs actually function across national boundaries in the U.S. and Mexico. Most organizations generally concentrate on one side of the border, barely able to achieve their goals in one city (Staudt and Coronado, 2002). Local government institutions have come together

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<sup>78</sup> This is in part due to the highly centralized Mexican authority held in Mexico City.

both on formal and informal basis, but formal contractual agreement between the two nation-states has proven to be difficult.<sup>79</sup> Officials on both sides of the border may have created the illusion of sister city collaboration for many outsiders, but this has rarely been followed through on the ground level, complicated by differing political infrastructure and sovereignty (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

This was especially so until 1992 when the Mexico and the U.S. consulates jointly established the Border Liaisons Mechanisms (BLMs) to oversee daily relations across the border<sup>80</sup> (Domínguez and De Castro, 2001; Del Castillo V., 2001). Eight BLMs did come into primary crossing zones in the 1990s to assist border authorities in cross-border talks and cooperation at varying levels, but they offered minimal efforts dealing with the multiple problems of shortages in funding and personnel (Domínguez and De Castro, 2001).

This is not to suggest cross-border cooperation cannot exist, demonstrated by transnational and binational networks that have been instilled at the border, such as the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the North American Development Bank (NADBANK). However, organizations such as NADBANK have been less about cross-border cooperation activities and more for funding economic projects. While there is no doubt that the symbolic power of such organizations is great, the magnitude of actual impact is questionable (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

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<sup>79</sup> Therefore, due to the informal tendency of the understanding that occurs between organizations in this region, it is not easy to classify a baseline to measure and evaluate binational cooperation. This is why collaborations have been limited to immediate problem solving than long-term cooperation. Furthermore, substantial misinformation from both the public and private sectors have led to miscalculations and stress for both sides of the border when addressing cross-border cooperation in the region (Del Castillo V., 2001).

<sup>80</sup> However, it was not until 1995 when these commissions began to include federal and state authorities as well as the Mexico and U.S. consulates in the region.

The enactment of NAFTA did bring some interesting cross-border talks and coalitions by joining different actors that have identified NAFTA to affect their local, regional, and national interests. Highly varying degrees of topics representing labor, agriculture, human rights, capital, and environment came together to voice their concerns for the first time. Organizations that once considered themselves domestic joined the cross-border sphere to respond to the NAFTA proposal. This helped some groups to understand the perspectives of one another and to engage in joint activities. Such talks did not always lead to joint action or agreement, however. Opportunity to reinforce ties between societies was limited by the official policy aims, and the claims of human rights activist were often overshadowed by trade advocacy groups (Fox, 2000).

The arena that has received more extensive attention than any other binational effort has been in the environmental work. When the talks on NAFTA escalated, environmental activists and actors expressed concerns over the impact of increased trade on the environment<sup>81</sup> along with enlarged pressure on water resources and waste management as more Mexicans would migrate north in search of work in the maquiladoras. Such concerns were openly debated in Congress (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

In the end, the NAFTA agreement established three environmental organizations. The Integration Border Environmental Program (IBEP) would supply the guidelines for binational cooperation. The Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank (NADBANK) would work as sister organizations to certify and fund projects addressing water and wastewater projects

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<sup>81</sup> One example is increased air pollution due to more carrying vehicles crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

within 100 kilometers of the border (Domínguez and De Castro, 2001; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

As Staudt and Coronado (2002) note, if national boundaries did not exist, environmental concerns would be addressed at the local and community level. However, because the political boundaries divide the laws and regulations in which such issues are confronted, environmental issues have become foreign policy matters. Such discussions and policies have escalated to the higher levels of government instead of staying closer to the local community seeking its input. As talks proceeded to discuss expanding the mandate of the NADBANK, communities expressed the fear that extended funding would go to private businesses and allow the maquiladora industry to further seek funds to improve its own facilities. Less powerful groups and communities would find funding even more difficult, as the interest rate already stood high at 12%.

Along the lines of environmental deprivation as mainly caused by industrialization, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), a federation of individuals and groups from Canada, U.S., and Mexico, has demonstrated cross-border coalition involved in fighting corrupt practices of maquiladoras. This coalition has produced a network that has rapidly sent demands to business and government officials to meet the needs of its workers in the midst of rapid industrialization. Soliciting help from union locals and internationals, it has conducted meetings in conjunction with civil, labor, and human rights leaders against free trade, market liberalization, and militarization at the border. However, as its work proceeded, decision-making became more lengthy and drawn out. And even though membership peaked during the NAFTA debates, many left in defeat when the law passed (Williams, 1999).

Other sectors, such as gender equality and health, have seen some cross-border cooperation. When kidnappings, rape, and brutality to females infiltrated through the media, feminist groups on both the international and national levels began to support the *Ni una más* (not one more) campaign in 1998. Casa Amiga, one of only four rape crisis centers in Mexico, was also able to form binational and international networks with numerous links to the U.S. (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

Cross-border cooperation in the health sector has also been attempted along the U.S.-Mexico border in response to many who cross the international boundaries to receive medical services (Staudt and Coronado, 2002). In Ciudad Juarez, some physicians accept medical insurance from the U.S., which explains the fact that about 15% of medical patients receiving treatment from many of these physicians are from El Paso. Some pharmacies in Ciudad Juarez report up to 40% of their clientele to come from El Paso (Rodriguez and Hagan, 2001). Despite this increasing need for cross-border health care provisions, collaboration has not come without difficulties. The two national health systems are dramatically different from one another and bring challenges to cross-border contracting very difficult regardless of the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission (Staudt, 2002).<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, the sensitivity of environmental organizations toward intertwining the issues of health and natural resource has built some cross-border coalitions (Fox, 2000). But even in somewhat successful cases, both Mexico and the U.S. have been marked by great diversity within their own boundaries to make permanent changes. As a result, successful engagement of strong networks of cross-border support and activism on the U.S.-Mexico border has faced many challenges (Staudt, 2002).

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<sup>82</sup> Even with this establishment, cross-border reimbursements in public insurance have yet to occur.

Staudt (2002) notes that strategies of organizing cross-border are an alternative to local politics and face greater difficulties than transnational strategies due to overarching political institutions and complications with accountability that comes with cross-border coalitions. Transnational problem-solving strategies<sup>83</sup> in a global economy are already difficult to sustain. Attempting to achieve this in the context of multiple political entities is extremely difficult. Advocates must go beyond awareness-raising and take on the challenge of organizing to solve problems and work with institutions and policy implementation. They must also deal with issues that rise above national territories (Staudt, 2002).

The challenge with cross-border networking is the reality that only a few cross-border organizations have the personnel or the means to seek grants on both sides of the border and to create and sustain activities in equally supportive ways. They are very difficult to establish and sustain without funding and resources from institutions, as many of these organizations are faced with responding to the interests of their constituents and seeking sources from their own countries. Many of these groups resort to seeking funds from domestic organizations which, as a result, must tailor to the interests of their nationally-based donors (Staudt, 2002; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).<sup>84</sup>

Carillo (1990) further notes that different goals of advocacy groups can bar cooperation across the borders. This is exemplified by women's rights groups, as U.S. groups have focused on race and ethnicity while Mexican groups have concentrated on

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<sup>83</sup> Cross-border problem-solving mechanism is a subset of transnational problem-solving strategies. Cross-border refers to two bordering countries while transnational refers to multiple states that do not always share physical boundaries.

<sup>84</sup> This is not to say cross-border cooperation has not occurred at all. One example is the Federación Mexicana de Asociaciones Privadas (FEMAP), an NGO based in Mexico working with community bankers that has many cross-border connections. This NGO works with Grameen-style community banks for microentrepreneurs and generates funds largely from private foundations (Staudt, 2002).

issues of survival and class. However, groups have converged on some objectives, such as the reproductive rights movement. Immigrant issues have also gained ground in the recent years as U.S. and Mexican efforts have come to approach immigrant issues jointly.

Even when cross-border efforts are attempted, understanding the links to constituencies do not always translate into the same cultural and linguistic discourse (Staudt, 2002; Williams, 1999; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).<sup>85</sup> While activists on the U.S. side have utilized high-profile corporate campaigns<sup>86</sup> as consciousness-raising tools for organized labor to identify specific consumer products linked to abuses, Mexican activists have used informal and grassroots networks instead (Williams, 1999).<sup>87</sup> The national differences in approach and strategies can be further demonstrated in the case of maquiladoras where U.S. campaigns have used short-term media impact<sup>88</sup> while Mexicans have focused more on long-term shopfloor and community-based organizing (Fox, 2000). Each method has often struck the other side as odd due to strikingly dissimilar means of obtaining public attention (Williams, 1999).<sup>89</sup>

Even though issues of NAFTA and maquiladoras have brought talks across the border, many have come to see each other as adversaries. Williams (1999) notes that anti-trade and labor rights activists in Mexico have taken offense at U.S. anti-trade advocates who rally Americans against free trade by depicting Mexicans as low-paid,

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<sup>85</sup> And in other ways, joint binational efforts are difficult to implement due to the perception that one is stepping on another's toes (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

<sup>86</sup> One example is a U.S. campaign that boycotted Gap and Guess Jeans, which was not easily understood by their Mexican counterparts.

<sup>87</sup> Although some of their U.S. counterparts have viewed this as ineffective and too spontaneous, these types of support and donations are often results of relationships and solidarity that activists have intentionally built up for months and years.

<sup>88</sup> This includes televising brutal conditions of maquiladoras and exposing the termination of workers who organize.

<sup>89</sup> Other differences have arisen over meeting agendas. While U.S./Canadian participants show discontent toward Mexican activists for not properly addressing meeting agendas, Mexican counterparts have complained to U.S./Canadian members that they are manipulative in their insistence that they spend time following these agendas.



submissive workers who take jobs away from Americans. Such anti-immigrant campaigns, although against free trade, have deterred the possibility of collaboration and cross-border action.

The mere fact that political economic processes impact a border region does not imply the union of two sides to rally around the common cause. In fact, social movement theorists have claimed that the cross-border mobility that calls for standardization of multilateral regulation of capitalism is not likely without a strong organizational structure, wide-ranging common organization, and better modes of communication. To date, those that have attempted such movements have been subnational groups, as cross-border cooperative efforts have experienced too many structural and political difficulties (Williams, 1999).

### ***Civil Society and NGOs***

This section examines the role of civil society in responding to the special needs of the border region that many cross-border cooperative efforts have also faced. Fox (2000) presents two arguments on the role of the nation-state in the global era as it relates to civil society. One side believes international economic integration has facilitated changes in power structures between state and private capacity. This has changed the traditional civil society into a transnational civil society through the rapid communication, travel, and growing acceptance of international political norms. On the contrary, others argue that the international economy has, throughout history, reorganized itself and that most industrial activities still remain within the national boundaries with political leverage given to nation-states. In this view, transnational civil society has not fully formed.

In their study of NGOs on the border, Staudt and Coronado (2002) have found many human rights activists to be grounded in their religious and spiritual beliefs. For many, their work is an element of their personal aim for social justice, and it generally is their solidarity with the marginalized that motivate their work. Civic capacity, however, has generally been known to be frail in the U.S.-Mexico border region due to economic scarcity. Even amongst civil society actors that have organized with one another, their work has been affected by a heavily connected system of both support and enmity (Staudt, 2002; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

This, nonetheless, does not imply that civil society has not seen a vast range of networks, coalitions, and alliances over the years. It has to a certain degree. However, collaboration has not been as prolific as industrial and economic sectors have,<sup>90</sup> and only few NGOs have operated across national borders in the whole North American continent (Fox, 2000; Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

Civil society and subnational financial initiatives have provided links between cross-border cooperation and regional/local needs on the border. However, they typically form distinct networks around exclusively defined issues and rarely consult with other grassroots initiatives or NGOs (Scott, 1999). These narrowly defined topics generally contribute to their own side of the border to the point that only a few NGOs have actually worked cross-border.<sup>91</sup> Most have devoted energy targeting their own local, state, and national governments and agendas (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

Despite the scarce and challenging work of civil society groups on the border, one issue that has received attention is the living conditions of the colonias. NGOs and non-

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<sup>90</sup> Fox (2000) does note that collaboration has been more significant at the border.

<sup>91</sup> With the exception of organizations such as the North American Institute (NAMI) that has facilitated community service across the border.

profit organizations have been focusing their work on this community since the 1980s. By responding to the recent exploding population increase and economic growth at the border, they continue to advocate for basic services and community empowerment (Donelson, 2004).

Although colonias date back to the era where people came to the region through the *Bracero* program<sup>92</sup> from 1942 to 1964, they have continued to exist through the establishment of the maquiladora program and the 1986 Immigration and Reform Control Act (IRCA) that gave amnesty to some undocumented residents (Donelson, 2004). Ward (2001) explains that the proliferation and continual existence of these illegal settlements have been in part due to the inability and non-commitment of the state and local government to provide affordable housing. Without public subsidies for housing, many impoverished migrants have resorted to this way of living (Donelson, 2004).

As it is common practice of NGOs worldwide to address basic infrastructure and housing needs, NGOs in the border region have attempted to fill the gap left by local and state governments in delivering essential services to marginalized border communities (Donelson, 2004, Fox, 2000). Responding to state indifference and its inability to effectively respond, NGOs have taken this issue head-on. Faith-based and secular NGO networks in Texas, for example, started raising colonias as a major platform in the early 1980s. In this, the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (TIAF)<sup>93</sup> took a leading role with the active work of its predominantly female membership (Donelson. 2004).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> This program gave U.S. farmers authorized access to low-wage Mexican labor in order to alleviate labor shortage during World War II and to continue developing agriculture after the war.

<sup>93</sup> This is a national network of over 40 community-based organizations, one of nation's best examples of network of organizations rallying around development issues (Warren, 1996).

<sup>94</sup> This is representative of the borderlands that has been identified as special, gendered regions where it is the women that actively engage in community-based organizations and networks while men continue to dominate most positions of authority. In addition, women are those primarily employed at the

Throughout the mid 1980s and continuing on to the early 1990s, advocacy circles established NGOs for the primary purpose of meeting needs of the colonias. Local colonia activists also solicited the help of NGO networks to improve their conditions. Taking an advantage of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, independent groups even formed outside of the formal networks, and colonias in Arizona and New Mexico received funds to build their own water and sanitation districts (Donelson, 2004).

Despite accomplishments for the colonias, the work of civil society in general has been quite limited on the U.S.-Mexico border. Even in the colonia-serving circles, the majority of the groups have been informal, grassroots organizations without sufficient administrative staff, legal framework, or a clear mission. In addition, the lack of broad-based organizing activities has resulted in many NGO activities to be led by individual leaders as opposed to a well representing group of residents. This has become self-serving to a select few who have led their organizations into decisions satisfying their own needs (Donelson, 2004).

Unfortunately, colonia residents have become all too familiar with NGOs that have become susceptible to differences over priorities. Many have also become aware of potential risks and exploitation when working with them. This is a result of an accumulation of broken promises and insufficient follow-up from outside organizations (Donelson, 2004). Fredericksen and London (2000) explain that residents are furthermore hesitant to solicit public assistance out of mistrust of the government and the potential discrimination due to their ethnicity and economic status.

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maquiladoras, where calls for better working conditions and wages have not successfully infiltrated into the government-corporation collusion (Staudt, 2002).

Many NGOs that operate independently are rarely successful compared to NGOs tied to external networks that have been able to provide basic services such as electricity and water. Most NGO success stories in the colonias have revolved around service provision, as complex programs and education on political processes have been difficult due to the immediate basic needs of the communities. Many political activities are furthermore prohibited by federally funded technical assistance programs (Donelson, 2004).

Staudt and Coronado (2002) make the observation that in the border region, many lasting networks and organizations are built on personal and relational foundations. In the example of El Paso, many activists know one another,<sup>95</sup> where these friendships and kinship links evolve into looser issue-based relations to launch looser ties of people that provide resources to mount greater challenges to existing power relations. This is significant, as many rely on people rather than finances to expand their power and challenge existing power structures. Community-based groups and NGOs are therefore on the rise in El Paso where personal bonds tie people together as well as tear them apart as they seek the limited resources to sustain their work.<sup>96</sup>

Issues of funding have created a stalwart obstacle, as many of the NGOs must operate on external funding and non-paid staff members. NGOs that participate in capacity-training workshops and take advantage of such training opportunities obviously have the time, the staff, and the resources to do so. NGOs that are not able to participate are further disadvantaged (Staudt and Coronado, 2002). While national governance

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<sup>95</sup> Activists even jokingly comment about the small town, family feel to El Paso politics.

<sup>96</sup> While this could bring positive effects by facilitating collaboration and collective efforts, however, many networks are filled with personal relationships that have the power to influence boards and alumni associations to their own favor.

generally does not prohibit cross-border civil society to organize, they also do not subsidize, facilitate, or encourage it while businesses receive incentives, subsidies, and official support through national policies that encourage free trade. Discouraged by lacking funds and institutional support as well as complex travel, linguistic, and cultural barriers, many NGOs have focused on achieving the goals within their own borders (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

When it comes to support and funding from government and non-government sources, NGOs are caught in fine lines of maneuvering complex relationships. On one hand, when it comes to developing and sustaining organizations and civic engagement in the region, the existence of governance institutions can become vital. Since institutions exercise authority that can be challenged and contested, civil society can obtain power when the resources that the institutions raise and distribute are threatened. In this, civil society becomes instrumental in exercising its voice and power by the means of informal networks and organizing with those with similar interests and ideology (Staudt, 2002).

On the other hand, there is a lot of corruption within the government circles to the point where businesses in Ciudad Juarez have made donations directly to NGOs instead of the government. Organizations such as Defensa a las Víctimas de Violación (Defense for Victims of Violence) in Ciudad Juarez have taken strong stance against the government for ignoring women's issues. This, however, does not exclude corrupt NGOs that have also exploited the marginalized and the needy for private gain (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

In comparison to independent NGOs, NGO networks have extended much beyond service-orientation onto confronting structural inequalities. Networks have been

advantageous in fostering relationships with sources of power, helping to develop capacity for local NGOs, and developing solidarity and greater lobby base. Religious networks, operating away from federal funding, have especially been able to form political organizing to aim for these structural changes,<sup>97</sup> identifying political change as prerequisites to providing basic needs (Donelson, 2002).

Furthermore, NGO networks have been instrumental in developing technical skills and locating funding for local organizations. This has helped create a sense of community amongst dispersed colonia groups toward a common goal and purpose (Donelson, 2002). As the border region continues to struggle with and confront issues of social inequality and the asymmetric realities that face its residents, it may be worthwhile for activists and organizations to start examining modes in which NGO networks and greater circles of civil society can be facilitated to serve the needs of the borderlands that have been caught in between global and political forces.

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<sup>97</sup> This includes enhanced voter registration, securing commitment from officials for federal funding for projects such as after-school programs and public parks.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Rationale

This study examines the impact of globalization on the U.S.-Mexico border as it relates to migration by investigating a grassroots, nongovernmental organization located in the border cities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. Physically located on both sides of the border, the organization has addressed migrant issues that have surfaced on both sides of the political boundary for almost thirty years. An in-depth look into this NGO provides insights to the organization and analysis of grassroots activism and education facilitated by the NGO community.

The study seeks to explore the following questions:

1. What is the impact of globalization on the U.S.-Mexico border as it relates to cross-border migration and individuals who assist the poor in migration?
2. How does a particular NGO, Annunciation House, situate itself within globalization and the U.S.-Mexico border?
  - a. What is the nature of the work and operation of Annunciation House?
  - b. How does Annunciation House facilitate personal and political transformation of humanitarian aid workers?
  - c. How do short-term and long-term staff members differ in their approaches to work?
  - d. How does Annunciation House compare and relate to other NGOs in the region?

The methodology for this investigation is a qualitative case study that draws on ethnographic techniques of data collection and analysis. According to Stromquist (2006), there are many benefits to utilizing the case study method in examining organizations.



One, this methodology allows an in-depth look at the events and actions of the organization and high level understanding of its structure and leadership. When investigated as organizational products, the purpose, strategies, successes, and challenges of the organization obtain greater transparency. This focus helps capture the micro, everyday interactions as well as the macro, contextual conditions of the organization.

The case study methodology consists of an all-encompassing, comprehensive research strategy. It is therefore ideal for holistic, in-depth studies. Case studies incorporate direct observation, systematic interviewing, and other multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994; Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg, 1991). The use of multiple sources is referred to as triangulation. Researchers identify four ways of incorporating the triangulated research strategy: investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, data source triangulation, and methodological triangulation, as described below (Denzin, 1984; Patton, 1987).

**Table 8: Four types of triangulation**

Type	Description
Investigator triangulation	Several investigators examine the same phenomenon
Theory triangulation	Investigators with different theoretical view points interpret the same results
Data source triangulation	Researchers look for data to remain identical in multiple contexts
Methodological triangulation	One research approach is followed by another in order to increase precision and confidence in the findings

**Source:** Denzin (1984) & Patton (1987)

This study utilizes methodological triangulation where data is collected through multiple means of participant-observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews, and secondary data sources.

In case studies, the phenomenon under investigation is generally a contemporary event within a real-life context where relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated (Yin, 1994). Stake (1995) classifies case studies into intrinsic, instrumental, and collective studies. Intrinsic studies are conducted when the researcher has an interest in the case. Instrumental studies are when researchers attempt to understand the case beyond what is obvious to them. Collective studies refer to the investigation of multiple cases. Case studies may also be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. The main objective of exploratory studies is to define questions, constructs, propositions, or hypotheses. Explanatory studies are generally suitable for causal studies, and descriptive studies attempt to completely describe a phenomenon in its context (Yin, 1993).

This study is a descriptive, intrinsic study arising out of my interest in how grassroots, NGOs function and to generate a holistic depiction and analysis of one particular organization. This is a single-case study that examines the issues of migration and non-state, political organizations. I probe and critically examine the role of an organization that facilitates social services, education, advocacy and activism in the border region.

To fill a wide gap in data and literature on grassroots, nongovernmental organizations on the border, this single-case study analyzes the phenomenon of a migrant-based grassroots organization that has not been previously studied in depth. Proper measures, such as triangulated data collection, are taken to thwart potential

misrepresentation of findings and to maximize access to sufficient data. Throughout the study, I have continued to expand on the literature review and solicited assistance from researchers and experts in the field.

This study examines different aspects of the work of Annunciation House and its diverse group of staff, clientele, and community members directly and indirectly linked to the organization. These investigations add significant information for extensive analysis and enhance the insights into the organization as a whole. Although much of data collection occurs from individuals within different branches of the organization, the major interest is on the organization as a whole and the overall impact its work brings to the staff, clientele, and the greater community.

In order to facilitate this case study, I utilize qualitative, ethnographic strategies in data collection and analysis. Often faced with suspicion, distrust, and fear from the subjects, ethnographers must develop a status in the community that gives them rapport with the research participants.<sup>98</sup> My access into Annunciation House is through its summer internship program where I volunteered as a full-time, live-in staff.

Ethnographic methods were a good fit for the study, as I gained access into the organization as a full-time staff member and was honest about my research intentions upfront.

In ethnography, researchers must live with or near their participants and interact with them on a daily basis (Peoples and Bailey, 1994). An in-depth analysis is needed in this study in order to truly understand the operations of the organization, pressures and

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<sup>98</sup> In fact, LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks, and Singer (1999) explain that the researcher must create and maintain rapport with the participants in order to gain deep understanding of the community. Maintaining objective neutrality is therefore not possible in ethnographic settings since social distance between the investigator and the participants hinders one from establishing that relationship.

tensions that exist within and outside of the organization, and perceptions of staff, clients, and the greater community. Such data are not always quantifiable, and only through an in-depth study do many of the qualitative themes emerge.

An advantage of this in-depth, qualitative research is that no existing hypotheses are needed to guide the study. It is the observations and interpretive analysis that allows theory to be built from the findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Instead of hypothesis testing, qualitative studies build on observations, insight, understanding, and realizations (Cresswell, 1998). Through this, reality is constructed through personal experiences, accounts, and perceptions that come together to give insight to the everyday lives of those involved with the organization.

The purpose of qualitative studies is then to understand and represent different experiences and actions that people encounter and live through. Through the qualitative methodology, researchers try to understand certain phenomena by basing their findings on the perspectives of the individuals being studied (Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie, 1999). The use of qualitative research methodology is important in studying this topic since much of the information about the lives of migrants, their immigration status, and experience with the organization are highly sensitive.

In order to evoke and utilize the feelings, actions, meanings, and voices of the participants, this study utilizes thick description in presenting the data. Thick description is an important element in qualitative studies that helps create credibility and allows readers to feel and experience the events being described (Denzin, 1989). According to LeCompte et. al (1999), the trademark of anthropological studies has been the dedication to understanding the standpoints of the participants. Therefore, the voices of the

participants of this study are largely presented through direct quotes. This aligns with the argument that interpretive anthropology must present the responses and explanations that participants give within their own context (Geertz, 1973).

As LeCompte and Schensul (1999a) also suggest the use of vignettes to evoke the overall picture that the researcher is trying to paint for the readers, I utilize excerpts from my field observations and reflections to create snapshots of the individuals and the events that I encounter during field research. Since ethnographic research methods look for certain patterns, structures, and themes, vignettes can give the reader a more precise and fuller picture of the research scene. The vignettes will also give glimpses of my evolving relationship with the participants and gradual understanding of the community context.

This study by no means attempts to create the absolute truth about the migrant life and the grassroots community assisting their transition into the United States. Rather, it attempts to bring insights on existing issues faced by the grassroots and migrant community by gathering rich, comprehensive data from various sources of information and providing details and meaning in the lives of individuals on the border (Miles, 1983; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The focus of this study is thus geared more towards the role of the organization and its staff than the migrant community. The migrant accounts are utilized to provide crucial contextual information for understanding the mission and the work of the organization.

## Research Site and Participants

### *Research Site*

The research site for this study is Annunciation House, a grassroots, nongovernmental organization located in the El Paso / Ciudad Juarez border region. This organization has branches on both sides of the border, providing hospitality primarily to the migrant homeless and the refugee population. Established in 1978, Annunciation House is a Catholic, charity-based organization that engages in community outreach through hospitality, advocacy, education, and activism.

The name *Annunciation House* is the name of the first house that was established in this network. This work began in 1976 when a group of young adults met weekly for prayer and discussed how they could address poverty in the border region. In 1978, five individuals from this group moved into an old building owned by the Catholic Diocese of El Paso that soon became a home for the poor and the homeless. This effort came to be known as Annunciation House, and since then, the organization has expanded to become a cross-border network of homeless and refugee shelters, operating out of five different locations across the border.

Each of the five houses operates under a theme and accommodates specific populations. There are three branches on the U.S. side: Annunciation House, Casa Vides, and Casa Teresa. Annunciation House and Casa Vides shelter refugees and undocumented migrants. Individuals residing in Casa Vides are more long-term and generally in the process of recuperating from injuries or awaiting their political asylum hearings. Casa Teresa serves as the main administrative office.

The two remaining branches are located in Mexico. Casa de la Peregrina is located in Ciudad Juarez and offers hospitality to single women and mothers with children. Casa Emaus is located in a Mexican colonia region and is used to house volunteers who assist the squatter community through health promotions, music education, and support groups for women. The house also hosts community meetings, activities, and border awareness programs.

**Table 9: Annunciation House Organizational Structure**

<b>Name of House</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>
Casa de la Peregrina	Mexico	Shelter for single women, single mothers and their children
Casa Emaus	Mexico	Community outreach to colonia residents
Annunciation House	U.S.	Undocumented migrants, refugees
Casa Vides	U.S.	Undocumented migrants, refugees
Casa Teresa	U.S.	Administrative operations of organization

In ethnographic studies, it is important to keep in mind the flexibility and the fluid nature of the research setting. The original intent of this research was to study all branches of the organization and to give a cross-border analysis of its work. However, the actual field study concentrated on the U.S. side, because the organization had temporarily ceased most activities in Mexico at the time this research. Casa de la Peregrina was temporarily shut down due to staff shortages and the desire of the leadership staff to reevaluate their work in Mexico. The activities of Casa Emaus were also reduced to border awareness group visits. Details are given in the following chapter.

### ***Access into Research Site***

I gained access into the organization as a full-time, live-in intern for Summer 2006. I applied by participating in the annual selection process for summer interns. Along with the application, I submitted a written request to be able to conduct my research in conjunction to the internship. My application was accepted, and I was assigned to Casa Vides, the home for long-term and asylum-seeking individuals.

### ***Field Work***

Field research took place in conjunction with the summer internship program from June 1, 2006 to August 10, 2006. In preparation for field research, I visited the area one month prior to the summer internship and met with academics, area activists and legal providers to survey the region. I also participated in a tour conducted by the Department of Homeland Security. I then relocated to El Paso on May 28, 2006 and informally met with the Annunciation House staff and the clientele prior to the official start of the internship program. I spent the five days leading up to the commencement of the internship to further familiarize myself with the city.

The internship began on June 1, 2006 with a four-day orientation to the organization and the border region. The orientation sessions were led by the staff of the organization and covered various topics. The orientation began with a welcome from the director and other members of the leadership. Ruben Garcia is a co-founder of the organization and the executive director of 29 years. His greeting and presentation was joined by the administrator, house mentor, education coordinator, and house coordinators. Table 10 below lists the orientation schedule. There were a total of six new summer interns, including myself.



**Table 10: Annunciation House Summer 2006 Intern Orientation Schedule**

<b>Session</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Location</b>
1	Expectations and Orientation History and Work of Annunciation House	El Paso
2	Orientation to Casa Teresa	El Paso
3	Visit to an Immigration Court Hearing	El Paso
4	Orientation to Annunciation House	El Paso
5	Immigration Law & Volunteer Liability Volunteers & Political Involvement	El Paso
6	Prayer and Reflection in the Houses	El Paso
7	Guest Welfare & Serving Guests	El Paso
8	Orientation to Casa Vides	El Paso
9	Resources in Support of Guests	El Paso
10	Boundaries, Self Awareness & Self Care	El Paso
11	Volunteer Guidelines	El Paso
12	Border Perspective on the Mexico Side	Ciudad Juarez
13	Orientation to Border Awareness Experience & Emaus House	Ciudad Juarez
14	Orientation to Anapra Struggle on the Mesa	Ciudad Juarez

The purpose of orientation was to set the new interns in the context of the border region. The session began with the video *Dying to Live*, an attempt to examine the factors that have pushed people to the border. This led us to discuss the work of Annunciation House in giving assistance to those who migrate to the border and the events that led up to the establishment of the organization. The sessions rotated amongst the staff and held in various locations of the organization both in the U.S. and Mexico.

Each of the three nights during orientation was spent in Annunciation House, Casa Vides, and Casa Emaus, respectively.

At the conclusion of the four-day orientation, summer interns dispersed to their assigned locations. Four interns were placed in Annunciation House and two in Casa Vides. No volunteers were placed in Mexico. Although Annunciation House and Casa Vides are two different locations, they are approximately 20 minute walking distance from one another. Therefore, staff in the respective houses frequently met through informal means as well as through monthly, all-staff gatherings. The two houses also jointly coordinated social events for the clientele, such as weekly soccer games and the Fourth of July cook-out.

As an intern of the organization, I participated in all duties assigned to full-time staff. My main tasks consisted of shift duties, house maintenance, meal coordination and cleanup, client activities, client welfare and social services, and other administrative duties as assigned. I spent the first week making observations and letting questions and themes arise. I recorded my observations and questions and kept a record of my daily activities in a journal.

During this week, I met with the director of the organization and discussed my research intentions and plans to interview both the staff and clients of the organization. I received his permission to conduct the interviews on the condition that all clients understood the interviews were for a dissertation research. I made it clear that all interviewees would be given informed consent forms with the option of giving consent either in writing or verbally. The director also gave me permission to use the name of the organization in the study.

After the first two weeks of initial observations, I began interviews with the staff and clients. The month of June primarily concentrated on interviews with the staff of the organization. The month of July was mainly devoted to client interviews along with follow-up questions for the staff. I decided to wait a month before interviewing the clients for various reasons. For one, I wanted to get better acclimated with the client population. Second, I wanted to use the first month improving my Spanish-speaking skills. Last but certainly not the least, I wanted to build better rapport with the migrant community before proceeding with the interviews.

After becoming more familiarized with the organization and the clients, I proceeded to interview outside community members during the month of August. By the third month, many themes had emerged, and I was able to return for follow-up interviews and conversations with the participants. A major advantage of living and working with the participants was the ability to ask follow-up questions without having to formally ask for additional interviews. Many of these conversations occurred in natural settings, such as during recreational hours or over meals.

### ***Presentation of Self***

Due to my status as a full-time, live-in staff, I had a smooth and natural transition into the research site. Only the director and the leadership staff were aware of my research intentions from the onset of the summer internship. The rest of the Annunciation House staff learned about my research as I became more acquainted with each individual. Because a number of reporters and other researchers had examined Annunciation House, many of the staff members were familiar with research and were very receptive to my requests for interviews.

The client community, for the most part, knew me as a typically summer intern. As my relationship developed with each individual over time, I revealed my dual role as a volunteer and researcher. Because I had established a personal relationship with each individual before conducting the interviews, many seemed at ease when telling me about their personal journeys to the United States.

## **Participants**

### ***Recruitment***

Three groups were recruited to participate in this study: Annunciation House staff, its clientele, and outside El Paso community members. In recruiting participants for the study, the method of purposive sampling was used to identify potential subjects. Purposive sampling refers to selecting a sample the researcher believes would give understanding and insight to the research setting. Thus, the researcher selects specific participants expected to help expand the emerging themes and theory (Merriam, 1998; Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). In selecting participants within Annunciation House, I began with the director, the leadership staff, and the house coordinators. Once insights to the organizational structure of Annunciation House were explored with this group, I proceeded to invite other volunteers to participate in the study to gain an understanding and insights into volunteer life.

The client community was also invited to participate in the study. All clients interviewed were residents of Casa Vides. This specific group was selected for the study for two major reasons. For one, this group had experience living in both Annunciation House and Casa Vides and had grown comfortable with the staff of the organization.

Most individuals residing in Casa Vides are those in need of long-term stay and are transferred from Annunciation House where almost all new intakes take place. Second, I lived and worked with these individuals, where trust and credibility were built throughout the time, making it easier for them to share their personal stories with me.

Community members, the third group of participants, were recruited based on their involvement with the city and the migrant community. I began with contacting directors of other homeless shelters and legal aid agencies assisting the migrant population. Other organizations were contacted based on recommendations of participants and my personal contact with think tanks and research organizations that had connections with the border community. I also met with key academics in the region to gain background knowledge of the El Paso / Ciudad Juarez community and to receive critical feedback to my research and interview process.

### ***Sample Size***

A total of 44 individuals participated in this study. My aim was to gain an in-depth look at the Annunciation House organization and the community context in which the organization operates under. Interviews with staff and community members were largely conducted in English. All client interviews, with the exception of one, were conducted in Spanish. In order to ensure my understanding of client interviews were maximized, I hired a translator to assist me during the interviews.

This research began with the intention of interviewing 30 participants, with ten from each category. Once the goal was met, I expanded the sample size in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of each category, especially the staff and the community members. At the time of my field study, there were 13 adults and 10 children

residing in Casa Vides. All 13 adults were invited to interview, and 12 accepted the invitation. No minors were recruited in this study.

***Participant Breakdown***

All interviews were conducted one-on-one with the exception of one group interview, where I met with four staff members of an organization.<sup>99</sup> The individuals can be divided into the following categories:

**Table 11: Research Participant Breakdown**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
<b><i>Annunciation House Staff</i></b>	<b><i>15 (total)</i></b>
Director	1
Board Member	1
Administrator	1
House Mentor	1
Education Coordinator	1
House Coordinators	2
Current/Former Volunteers	8
<b><i>Clientele</i></b>	<b><i>12 (total)</i></b>
Political Asylees	3
Migrant Workers	4
Social Security Families	4
Victims of Domestic Violence	2
<b><i>Community</i></b>	<b><i>17 (total)</i></b>
Educators/Academics	4
Homeless Shelters	2
Legal Aid	3
Migrant Assistance/Support	2
Government/City Officials	3
Human Rights/Activists	4

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<sup>99</sup> I had intended on interviewing the director, but due to unexpected travel plans, he arranged for his staff to meet with me.

At the time of my field research, Annunciation House comprised four permanent staff members, two house coordinators, eleven volunteers, and various board members across the United States. The permanent staff members are those who have made an indefinite, long-term commitment to the organization. This team of four consisted of the executive director and founder, administrator, house mentor, and education coordinator. I refer to the permanent staff and board members as leadership of the organization.

House coordinators are generally one-year volunteers who work under the guidance of the house mentor in overseeing the daily operations of the house. Since only two houses of hospitality were in operation at the time of the field research, there were naturally two house coordinators. The eleven volunteers (excluding myself) were a combination of year-long, half-year, and summer volunteers. I refer to this group as short-term staff or volunteers.

All four individuals on the Annunciation House permanent staff, a board member, and both house coordinators were invited to participate in the study, and they consented to the interviews. Of the eleven volunteers, nine were invited to participate in the study. Seven of the nine consented to the interviews. Two individuals were excluded from recruitment due to departure from the organization<sup>100</sup> and conflict of interest.<sup>101</sup> Along with the seven staff members, a former volunteer who had returned to the region participated in the study.

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<sup>100</sup> I was not aware of the departure date of the individual until it was too late.

<sup>101</sup> This individual was also participating in a research project and was not a fully integrated member of the volunteer staff.

## Data Collection

This study utilizes ethnographic data collection methods of participant-observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and researcher reflections. In ethnographic methods, data must extend beyond good description, and the researcher must recognize the elements within the description that warrant attention (Wolcott, 1987). I conducted fieldwork and data interpretation simultaneously by inferring interpretations from the words and actions observed in Casa Vides and Annunciation House. As a live-in intern, I was able to observe different patterns and trends in their natural settings. As a researcher must keep an inquiring mind during data collection, I paid close attention to non-verbal clues and information. This helped in formulating and expanding on my research and interview questions.

As suggested by Wolcott (1987), I initiated the study with a small number of informants through a sequence of semi-structured interviews. Participating in the summer internship gave a natural pathway to gradually immersing into the context. I began with spending time with the leadership of the organization through orientation and then expanded the interaction to the house coordinators as part of my orientation to the houses.

In order to continue in-depth analysis of the data, I initially limited interviews to thirty individuals. However, as time permitted, I expanded the sample size to go beyond ten individuals per category. This helped fill in gaps found in the initial round of interviews and added to the depth of data analysis. This high number of interviews was possible, especially with the staff and the client population, because I lived with them and had easy access to them. Many interviews were requested and conducted on the spot, and



follow-up questions took place not only in formal interview settings but also during mealtimes, recreational hours, and informal visits to their dormitories.

In total, I resided in the El Paso / Ciudad Juarez region for six months. Although I could have extended my ten-week stay as a live-in staff, interviews with the staff and clientele had ended by the conclusion of the internship, and I had gathered sufficient data to proceed into interviews with outside community members during the third month. After I left Casa Vides, I remained in the region for additional three months<sup>102</sup> in order to elicit help from faculty members of the University of Texas at El Paso, the Annunciation House leadership and staff, and community activists during the data analysis stage. I left El Paso when the first draft of the dissertation had been complete but remained in contact with my informants. Below describes the stages of the data collection process:

**Table 12: Stages of Field Work**

<p><b><u>Preliminary</u></b>  <b>Arrival &amp; Move-in</b>          (May 27 – 31)</p>	<p>Preliminary assessment of field site          Informal observations          Check-in with Annunciation House leadership          Move into Casa Vides facilities</p>
<p><b><u>Stage 1</u></b>  <b>Field Site Orientation</b>          (June 1 – 4)</p>	<p>Meet with Annunciation House leadership/staff          Receive four-day orientation to Annunciation House          Review written materials/documents on the organization          Tour key sites in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez</p>
<p><b><u>Stage 2</u></b>  <b>Field Site Observation</b>          (June 1 – August 11)</p>	<p>Start participant-observation          Identify key informants          Identify emerging themes          Hire translator          Seek other researchers in the region          Draft a schedule of interviews and data collection          Document researcher reflections</p>

<sup>102</sup> I resided outside of the Annunciation House facilities during this time.

<p><b><u>Stage 3</u></b>  <b>In-depth Interviews</b>  (June 14 – August 11)</p>	<p>Continue participant-observation and review of documents  Interview leadership and staff of organization  Interview clients of Annunciation  Identify and interview outside community members  Identifying emerging themes  Document researcher reflections</p>
<p><b><u>Stage 4</u></b>  <b>Follow-up</b>  (August 11 – November 30)</p>	<p>Follow up with participants for further clarification  Document researcher reflections</p>

***Participant-Observation***

Through participant-observation, researchers come to discover the social world of the participants as they know it and are also able to generate new questions (Ball, 1990; Peoples and Bailey, 1994). In participant-observation, the researcher assumes a role within the field site and participates in the events being studied. This technique is commonly used in anthropological studies and provides certain unusual opportunities for collecting data, as ethnographers learn a lot by simply living amongst the participants. Through the casual, informal interactions, the researchers generate a good idea of the research site (Ball, 1990).

Participant-observation proved to be key in this field research. I entered the organization as a full-time, live-in staff and gained immediate access into the organization, the staff, and the clientele. Participating in the orientation gave me invaluable contextual information to the city and the organization. Many of the political and legal risks revolving around Annunciation House as an organization that openly works with the undocumented community were observed throughout the process. This

gave a good indication of the current concerns of the organization and the types of questions I should focus on during the interviews.

The participant-observation experience also allowed me to not only work with the migrant population but also to live with them. I resided in Casa Vides, the facility for longer-term stay for migrants and political asylees, and participated in all aspects of a full-time staff. Engaging in activities, such as meal coordination, guest recreation, house maintenance, counseling, and advocacy gave me unique insights into the work of the organization and the lives of the clientele. During my times off, I devoted many hours to informal interactions with the clients and built relationships with them. This naturally led to their sharing of their life stories and consent to interviews with ease.

The trust and credibility I built with the client population were crucial in my field research. Because many clients had resided in Casa Vides for multiple months, they were able to reveal some of their observations about other clients and their perception of volunteer work at Annunciation House, such as why they believe individuals come and work for the organization. In many ways, the clients found the dialogue therapeutic and often thanked me for asking and listening to their personal stories. It was important to gain access to their personal journeys to the U.S., as this would provide the context in which I would understand the work of Annunciation House and its staff.

In the initial stages, researchers may not understand the cultural context of the data and not know what questions need to be generated (Peoples and Bailey, 1994). In this study, I depended on my participant-observation data by spending the first part of the internship observing and attempting to understand the complex cultural intricacies that exist at Annunciation House. Since the first week of the internship was devoted to

training new volunteer staff, I took the time to carefully observe and ask questions to better understand the research setting.

My entry into the organization was made in the most non-disruptive manner possible since my research timing coincided with the summer internship. All staff and many clients were accustomed to the regular flow of new volunteers and quickly welcome the new staff into the community. In order to completely immerse myself into the work of the organization, I did not ask for special arrangements as a researcher<sup>103</sup> and assumed activities as a typical volunteer. Although my work as a doctoral student was slowly revealed to all members of the staff and clients, most of my activities were seen as those typical of the volunteer staff.

In participant-observation, greater emphasis should be placed on observation rather than participation. This usually requires researchers to live in the community to observe and record the daily behavior of participants (Peoples and Bailey, 1994). One of the challenges I faced was balancing my role as a participant (full-time staff) and observer (researcher). Because I was tasked with overseeing certain projects and tasks, it was at times difficult to not speak up and just observe my settings. It took conscientious effort and constant self-reminder that my role at the moment was not just that of a full-time staff but that of a researcher.

As I began to get accustomed with the dual role of researcher and staff member, I became less anxious about reminding myself of the research process as well as revealing more sides of myself as a researcher to the staff I worked with. Once I felt more comfortable as a researcher in the live-in situation, I was better able to ask for staff input

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<sup>103</sup> Special accommodations can be made for researchers where they participate in less amount of chores and tasks.

and their insights into my research questions. However, I remained cautious with the staff members prior to their interviews so that my interactions with them would not bias their responses during the in-depth interviews. I also avoided leading staff members in thinking there were certain answers I was seeking during the interviews. This was in my effort to allow participants to reveal information without preconceived notions or expectations.

Many of my interactions with the staff and the clients were informal, as it is in many participant-observation settings. Therefore, in cases where I was not able to record my observations in writing, I often took mental notes (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999a). I also kept a daily journal that documented my activities, thoughts, and reactions. Since all volunteers in Casa Vides are provided with a small, private room away from the client dormitories and living quarters, I was able to remove myself from the research setting when needed to record my thoughts and to store away all interview materials and consent forms.

Participant-observation in this study became a pivotal learning process where my exposure and involvement in the daily lives of the staff and clients facilitated deep analysis and relationship building with research participants. My participation as a staff member helped identify the patterns in leadership, hierarchies in practice, and cultural patterns of the staff and clients (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999b). This also gave me insights into staff dynamics, client interactions and struggles, and multiple layers of power dynamics amongst the staff and migrant community.

Another advantage I had was as a summer staff, I was required to give administrative support to the director once a week. This gave me the opportunity to not

only observe the houses of hospitality but also the administrative aspect of the organization as an active participant. I was able to take note of important documents, financial records, mailing lists, and other bookkeeping materials that gave me insights into the administrative side of the organization. This also gave me an opportunity to closely expose myself to the leadership on a weekly basis and to interact with those visiting the administrative offices. Through this opportunity, I learned about the different community activities and organizations Annunciation House was involved in. It also gave me a more clear understanding of the community networks and the dynamics between different NGOs and grassroots organizations.<sup>104</sup>

In sum, my time as a participant-observer became major to this research process. By being an active participant of the organization, I learned about the day-to-day tasks of the staff by living through them myself. Through my questioning of the varied operations of the organization, I gained a first-hand insight to the rewards and struggles of the organization. This helped clear some preconceived notions I had about the organization and to further refine my research and interview questions to better fit the context I was working in. This not only gave me good understanding of the field site, but it helped me immensely to prepare for the personal interviews with the staff.

### ***In-depth Interviews***

Along with participant-observation, in-depth interviews gave me dimensions into the lives of participants not easily available otherwise. I agree with Yin (1994) in that interviews are essential in case studies. They are commonly open-ended where participants are asked for facts as well as their own opinions and insights into a certain

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<sup>104</sup> In fact, I recruited a key community informant while working in the office.

phenomenon. In this study, in-depth interviews complemented participant-observation by identifying key participants and engaging in dialogue through semi-structured interviews.

I chose not to dive into the interviews at the onset of the study and waited until I was more acclimated with the organization and the house I was residing in. The orientation to the organization and Casa Vides lasted approximately one week. I gave myself another week thereafter to further immerse myself into the setting before asking for interviews from the leadership and staff. Interviews with clients did not begin until a month into my field study to better prepare my interaction with them. And because I wanted potential outside community participants to emerge with the themes that began to rise up with the interviews with the staff and clients, conversations took place after the interviews with the staff and clients had concluded.

All personal interviews lasted approximately 1-2 hours with open-ended questions. At the start of every interview, I provided each participant with an explanation of the research, my affiliation with the university, and the types of questions they would be asked. I explained there were no correct answers and that they should use their own personal experiences and opinions to respond in any way they desired. All consent forms were either signed or digitally recorded before proceeding with the interview questions. I also obtained permission from every participant to record the interviews. Sample questions are below:

**Table 13: Sample Interview Questions**

<p><b>Staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about the history and evolution of the organization.</li> <li>• What is the mission of your organization?</li> <li>• What are the different functions of this organization?</li> <li>• What is your function in your organization?</li> <li>• How is your organization funded/supported?</li> <li>• What is the administrative structure of your organization?</li> <li>• What relationships does your organization have with other grassroots organizations?</li> <li>• What relationships does your organization have with government officials?</li> <li>• What is your personal background?</li> <li>• What is your work and educational experience?</li> <li>• Describe your work day. What are your specific responsibilities?</li> <li>• What are your personal and professional goals through this work?</li> <li>• What are some challenges for yourself and your organization?</li> <li>• What are some changes you would like to see in your work and your organization?</li> <li>• What are your short-term and long-term goals?</li> <li>• Do you think globalization has impacted the U.S.-Mexico border? If yes, how so?</li> <li>• What are other forces that have come to influence the U.S.-Mexico border?</li> <li>• What is your take on the U.S.-Mexico border being referred to as a global crossroad? Do you agree/disagree? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What is the contribution of the NGO community on the U.S.-Mexico border?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clientele</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your personal background?</li> <li>• Tell me about your home country and your life there.</li> <li>• Why did you come to the U.S.?</li> <li>• Tell me about your journey to the U.S. How did you cross into the country?</li> <li>• How did you come to this cross-border organization?</li> <li>• Describe your typical day.</li> <li>• What are your short and long-term goals?</li> <li>• What type of social, educational, and legal support do you receive through this cross-border organization?</li> <li>• What is your relationship with the staff members and guests of this organization?</li> <li>• What outside activities are you involved in?</li> <li>• What are some positive and negative things about this organization?</li> <li>• What are your hopes and dreams?</li> <li>• What are your fears?</li> </ul>



<p><b>Community Members</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your personal background?</li> <li>• What is the function of your organization in relations to refugees and undocumented persons?</li> <li>• What is your organization/agency’s relation with the local community?</li> <li>• What are your perceptions of the cross-border organization?</li> <li>• What do you think is the future of the cross-border organization, and do you think it serves the best interests of the community and the special population?</li> <li>• What type of changes, if any, should take place at the local, regional, and national level to deal with the issue of this population?</li> <li>• What is the future of your organization as it relates to your clientele and the cross-border organization?</li> <li>• Do you think globalization has impacted the U.S.-Mexico border? If yes, how so?</li> <li>• What are other forces that have come to influence the U.S.-Mexico border?</li> <li>• What is your take on the U.S.-Mexico border being referred to as a global crossroad? Do you agree/disagree? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What is the contribution of the NGO community on the U.S.-Mexico border?</li> </ul>
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The open-ended nature of the questions made me receptive to all relevant as well as unexpected responses from the participants. Such questions help researchers explore both new and undefined domains as well as further break down existing factors into sub-factors. Due to the exploratory nature of semi-structured, open-ended interviews, I was able to explore the topics with my participants without feeling the constraint of having to ask certain questions (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999a). Given this flexibility, I was able to identify different themes and possible additions to the research questions as they emerged during the interviews.

All interviews were voluntary, and participants were asked about their personal life stories and backgrounds and their experiences on the U.S.-Mexico border. Staff members were asked about their personal backgrounds, factors leading them to Annunciation House, their specific responsibilities within the organization, and their

perception of the legal and political context revolving around immigration and undocumented migration to the United States. Community members were asked similar questions about their personal backgrounds, their work on the U.S.-Mexico border, and their perception of the current immigration debate and border politics.

Clients were asked about their personal stories and factors leading them to the U.S., their experience with Annunciation House, and their plans in the country. Because I found each client to have deep personal stories behind their migration, a large portion of their interviews concentrated on their personal life stories and their journey to the United States. Even when I probed about other things, such as their critique of the organization, their perceptions of their lives in the U.S., and comments on the global economy, the responses were less frequent and not sufficient for strong themes to emerge. Many were just grateful to have made it this far into the U.S. and were still formulating their plans after Annunciation House.

Many revealed their backgrounds as victims of torture, domestic violence, and economic deprivation and shared why they felt migration to the U.S. was their sole alternative to their living situations. Interviews with clients were extremely sensitive, and many opened up about their painful pasts. Many broke down in tears, which created a response in me to often cry with them during the interviews.

I found the interviews with the clients most difficult, as they were mixed with strong emotions and uncontrollable tears. There was, at times, fear on my part that the interviews could cause emotional damage to the clients being interviewed. I informed them throughout the sessions that we did not need to complete the interviews if desired.

Surprisingly, all participants insisted that we continue and expressed their gratitude for allowing them to share their stories.

I followed up with the clients after the interviews to ensure they did not become emotionally vulnerable from the interviews. I also consulted with the house coordinator throughout the whole process to ensure the interviews did not cause any threats or damage to the clients. In fact, the house coordinator was present at most of the interviews with the clients, as she served as my translator.

Although I had considered hiring a translator external to the organization, the benefit of having an insider assist in the process was extremely helpful for multiple reasons. For one, the house coordinator was familiar with all clients and their situations. Thus, she became the cultural broker between the clients and myself. Second, because she had already established relationships with the clients long before my arrival, many consented to the interviews with ease. Thirdly, since she knew a lot of information on each individual, she helped probe questions about their backgrounds that I would not have been able to otherwise. Additionally, this individual was fluent in Spanish, had served as a translator for different functions within the Annunciation House organization, and was familiar with the contextual language used within the client population.<sup>105</sup>

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they had questions and were invited to follow up with me if concerns arose. Once the interviews were over, I immediately proceeded to my private room where I downloaded the digital recording of the interviews onto my laptop and stored the consent form where I would have sole access. Once the interviews were transferred to the laptop, all audio recordings were

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<sup>105</sup> The translator also signed an agreement with me that all information revealed during the interviews would remain confidential and would not be used in her work as Annunciation House staff.

deleted from the digital recorder. This was followed by my personal reflections and mental processing of the information collected.

While many of the interviews with the staff and community members were straightforward, interviews with clients had a longer emotional impact on me. Many personal backgrounds were revealed to me that typically had not been shared with other volunteers. This gave me a deeper sense of responsibility as a researcher and staff member to protect the privacy and the psyche of the clientele. My translator even commented how she learned new information about the clients although she had known them for an extended amount of time.

Many clients ended the interviews with comments such as “I feel good. Now you know more about me. Thank you.” What I found very interesting is that these heart-felt interviews helped me to establish deeper trust and personal relationships with the clients. This in turn made me understand the work and the mission of the organization better and the reasons why so many individuals were committed to helping them. Understanding the background of the migrants also helped formulate questions for the staff and the impact of this work on their personal lives.

I also noticed the attitudes and behaviors of the clients towards me had changed after the interviews. I sensed they felt closer to me and trusted me with their personal stories. As LeCompte and Schensul (1998) purport, such open-ended interviews facilitate understanding and establishment of positive relationships between the researcher and the participant. This was definitely true in my experience, as my interactions with the clients became more positive as a result of the interviews. This has led me to continue ties with several clients to this day.

### ***Secondary Data***

My understanding of the border and the lives of the migrants was further enhanced by my examination of secondary data that were collected in this study. Secondary data, as Yin (1994) describes, includes documents, archival records, and physical artifacts. Documents include letters, memoranda, agendas, announcements, meeting minutes, administrative documents, formal studies and evaluations, newspaper clippings, and articles. These materials help support and expand evidence from participant-observation and interview data in research findings (Yin, 1994).<sup>106</sup>

In this study, I thoroughly reviewed the Annunciation House website and its biannual newsletters, newspaper articles, and past interviews conducted with the director as part of my secondary data set. These materials became instrumental in gathering background information to the organization and the border region and prepared me for upcoming interviews. I especially utilized past stories written on Annunciation House and interviews conducted with the director so that I did not replicate the questions and was able to expand on questions that had already been explored. The use of secondary sources also helped fill in gaps left by interviews and observations.

### ***Participant Confidentiality and Informed Consent***

Case studies are multi-perspective analyses that extend beyond the actors and can give voice to the voiceless and the marginalized (Tellis, 1997). However, there is the caveat that potential harm can result regardless of efforts to give voice to marginalized communities. According to Warwick (1982), potential harm in research comes in forms

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<sup>106</sup> The abovementioned data will not only fill gaps left by observations and interviews, but they will be useful in orienting one to the research site and the community issues that revolve around the work of the organization.

of death, physical abuse or injury, psychological abuse of injury, damage to interpersonal relations, legal jeopardy, career damage or economic harm, and invasions of privacy.

Although much of the literature focuses on harms particularly to participants in laboratory settings, social research can also bring substantial harms.

Working with an especially vulnerable population of refugees and undocumented persons, I was careful not to discuss their life stories exclusively shared during the interviews outside of the research setting. Furthermore, I did not expose any of the participants to authorities based on their undocumented immigration status in the United States. I made it a point not to share my study and affiliation with Annunciation House with any government officials during the time of field research.

All provisions to protect the privacy of the subjects and to maintain confidentiality of identifiable information were taken in this study. No reference to names and location was provided in the transcriptions to ensure that the interviewees would not be identified by circumstantial information. All names used in this study with the exception of the director are pseudonyms. In addition, my laptop computer, interview notes, and written observations were stored safely in my private room where no other individual had access. During the data collection and analysis of the findings, I had sole access to all audio-taped and written materials.

### ***Cultural Sensitivity of Researcher***

I went into the research site with familiarity with the region and the Spanish language. Although I had not conducted formal research in the U.S.-Mexico border region prior to this study, I had spent time in the cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez on several occasions for both work and personal-related matters. I also had familiarity with

the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture as a former semester abroad student at the University of Guanajuato, Mexico in 2000.

I do believe, however, that one could never fully prepare for the research site. One challenge I encountered was the different dialects of the Spanish language that was utilized in Casa Vides. Because clients came from Latin American countries of Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico at the time of this research, these individuals used various dialects and idioms I was not always familiar with. Usage of certain words in one dialect did not translate identically into another dialect, and this at times caused misunderstanding between the clients and myself. It proved to be very helpful to have an experienced translator, who had knowledge of different dialects of the Spanish language, to mediate our conversations during the interviews.<sup>107</sup>

One concern I had entering the field site was the affiliation of Annunciation House with the Catholic faith and my unfamiliarity with the Catholic traditions and its religious rituals. However, it was explained at the onset of the internship experience that although Annunciation House began with and continues to operate on its Catholic roots, spreading the Catholic faith was not at the heart of the work conducted at Annunciation House and that religious activities would be optional and ancillary to the volunteer work. Time further eased this concern, as I found a large portion of the staff not to affiliate themselves with any particular faith.

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<sup>107</sup> My presence as a Korean-American also brought interesting reactions from the Latin-American population in the houses. Many asked about my ethnic heritage the native language I spoke at home. Many were surprised to meet and live with a Spanish-speaking Asian female.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Translation***

A little over two-thirds of the interviews were conducted in English, and the rest were carried out in Spanish. All but two interviews in Spanish were assisted by an interpreter, who translated simultaneously from Spanish to English (when participants spoke) and from English to Spanish (when I spoke). In order to ensure correct translation took place, the translator heard most of the interviews a second time on audio in order to double check her work. All staff and all but one community interviews was conducted in English. All but one client interviews was conducted in Spanish.

### ***Transcription***

As part of the analysis process, LeCompte and Schensul (1999a) suggest creating a management system for all data and evidence. I made separate files for each participant with the information arranged in chronological order of my interaction with them. Their files were grouped into categories of staff, clients, and community members. All recorded interview data were stored in my password-protected laptop, and artifacts were carefully stored in a box.

I reviewed and transcribed all interview materials. Both Spanish and English interviews were transcribed in English. Clarification questions were generally brought to the participants shortly after the interviews. Once this was complete, I re-read and conducted a thorough review of the printed text and identified initial themes and the need for further clarification. The daily field notes were also printed and reviewed to find themes and linkages between the interviews and the observation and reflection notes.



Different themes and categories of questions were color-coded with notes written in the margin. All printed materials were placed in respective binders according to categories of staff, client, community, and field notes.

### ***Coding with NVivo Software***

After the first review of field notes and interview transcripts, I imported all materials into the NVivo software program. The categorization replicated the printed materials in separate binders with the categories of staff, client, community, and notes. Furthermore, electronic copies of the secondary data were also imported into the NVivo software program for supplemental coding. In incorporating the field notes and secondary data into the NVivo software, I made clear distinctions in marking the datasets that they were to supplement the interview coding and not to dominate the coding process. All coded categories originated from the interview data.

In order to start the coding process, I re-read all notes and transcriptions to identify certain phrases, events, activities, and behaviors that occurred repeatedly in the data. I noted key phrases or themes through open coding. Reading through the interviews one-by-one, I compiled the varied codes and placed them into general themes of the organizational structure to guide the analysis. Once these general themes were identified, I probed further into each and conducted a second analysis of emerging codes and themes. This process resulted into a comprehensive view of the interview data and led to the themes found in the findings section.

By further categorizing the codes, I attempted to saturate the categories until additional information did not add new insights to the analysis. By reviewing the data again, I determined if additional interviews, observations, and document analysis were

needed. I utilized what Cresswell (1998) refers to as constant comparative approach in order to saturate the categories so that new information does not alter the construction of the categories.

### *Analysis*

Once all data were categorized, I conducted a last round of open and axial coding to ensure the categories had been created appropriately. The analysis of the findings coincided with the questions of how globalization has impacted the U.S.-Mexico border; how Annunciation House situates itself within globalization and the border region; how the organization facilitates personal and political transformation of its humanitarian workers; how short-term and long-term staff members differ in their approaches to work; and how Annunciation House compares and relates to other NGOs in the region.

The personal journeys of migrants and work of the Annunciation House staff and other community members were mapped out. The process began with tracing the factors that have led all three groups to the border and the types of impact and transformation they went through as a result of their experiences on the border, with the main emphasis on the transformation and work of the Annunciation House staff. The duration of coding and analysis was approximately one month.

The process of data analysis proved to be very strenuous and time-consuming. As Yin (1994) states, analysis of case study data is one of the most difficult and least developed aspects of this research method. However, Yin does identify four dominant analytic techniques that could be utilized in data analysis: pattern-matching, explanation-building, time-series analysis, and program logic models. In this study, I relied on the

explanation-building technique of analysis. Explanation–building assisted me in analyzing the data by constructing an explanation about the findings in this case study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Yin (1994) identifies four tests that generally assess the quality of research designs: reliability, construct validity, external validity, and internal validity. Construct validity refers to establishing accurate operational measures for the concept being investigated. This could be problematic as case study researchers have been criticized for depending on subjective judgments rather than operational measures to collect data. However, I increased the construct validity of this study by member checks and triangulation of data.

#### ***Member Checks***

I found member checks to be very helpful during the coding and analysis stage where I periodically revisited the field site and met with my participants in informal settings to discuss and further validate my findings. The findings were discussed with the leadership of the organization and through formal follow-up interviews. The final conclusions were mapped out to describe the organization from the standpoint of personal and global politics engaged by the staff, its networks, and its clientele. Findings were routinely discussed and refined by meeting with the participants, and the final draft was shared with the director of the organization for feedback.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation also enhanced the quality of data being analyzed and compiled into the findings section. According to Jick (1979), triangulation goes beyond scaling, reliability, and validation. It captures a more holistic portrayal of the phenomenon under study and uncovers unique situations that may not have been observed by one single approach. A single phenomenon can be observed from multiple perspectives as well as understanding new deeper dimensions that emerge. Triangulation also helps avoid idiosyncrasy (Hammersley, 1990). Through collecting and coding from multiple sources of data – such as interviews, observations, and secondary data sets – analysis brought holistic, in-depth dimensions into the organization.

### ***Reliability***

Reliability refers to the degree in which studies can be replicated using the same method to yield similar results. Since ethnographic data collection occurs in natural settings, the unique situations cannot be reconstructed precisely to always produce identical results (Yin, 1994; LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). However, Yin (1994) does suggest careful documentation of the procedure of the original research as prerequisite for allowing other researchers to repeat the study. In order to increase reliability, I took an accurate record of my daily activities and a master calendar of interview requests and sessions. I furthermore maintained a chain of evidence and created a case study database in order to increase reliability. I also created a comprehensive compilation of my notes, journal entries, and other documents.

Although some criticize ethnographic techniques such as participant-observation on the grounds that it lacks reliability, it is not possible to justify the observations

similarly to post-positivist methods and still retain its theoretical concern with the primacy of the social meaning generated by the participants. However, some of this was reconciled through member checks and triangulation in this study (Ball, 1990).

Credibility was especially built through member checks, as participants were openly made aware of my findings and analysis.

### ***Generalizability***

External validity deals with identifying whether or not findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study. People have criticized case studies for offering a poor basis for generalizing. Although external validity is more difficult when conducting a single-case study, this could be achieved by linking theoretical relationships (Yin, 1994).

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), validity is a major strength of studies utilizing ethnographic methods, as high internal validity can result from this method of data collection and analysis. Since my participant-observation was further enhanced by residing with my participants during field research as well as remaining in the area for four additional months following fieldwork, I was able to conduct continual comparison of data analysis to refine constructs and to ensure that realities of the field site matched my findings. I also elicited the help from university professors and activists to further refine the findings and analysis.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study examines the impact of globalization and migration on the U.S.-Mexico border but is limited to one border region. The investigation of grassroots work is furthermore limited to a primary focus on one organization and the networks in the community. Because this is a case study of one particular organization, the staff and the migrant population are also limited to those who offer and utilize the services of Annunciation House.

Additional limitations to this study are lack of control over legal and political conditions in which the organization and the migrant community operated under. Furthermore, observer effects may have impacted internal validity of this research. However, I attempted to minimize observer effects by first building trust and credibility with the participants before proceeding to the interviews. Having a translator who also worked as the house coordinator provided additional comfort and ease in which many migrants spoke with me.

## CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF FIELD SITE

### Introduction

This research takes place in the city of El Paso, Texas. Although the initial intention of the study was to investigate the context of sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, the actual research situated itself on the U.S. side, because the organization had temporarily ceased its work in Mexico at the time of this study. However, many of the staff and clients interviewed had worked and lived in Ciudad Juarez, and the findings reveal information on both sides of the border.

### Overview of El Paso

El Paso is the 21st largest city in the U.S.<sup>108</sup> and the fifth largest in Texas<sup>109</sup> with an estimated population of 600,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Together with Ciudad Juarez, it makes up the biggest binational metroplex and is home to the highest population concentration along the U.S.-Mexico border. With its thriving population bordering two nation-states, El Paso has been referred to as the *quintessential borderland* or an *aspiring global city* (Staudt and Coronado, 2002).

The city of El Paso was incorporated into the U.S. in 1873 following the end of the Mexican War in 1848. The city received its name, El Paso del Norte (the Passage of the North), when Spanish explorers reached the Rio Grande River in 1581 and saw a passage between two mountain ranges rising out of the desert. This mountainous terrain

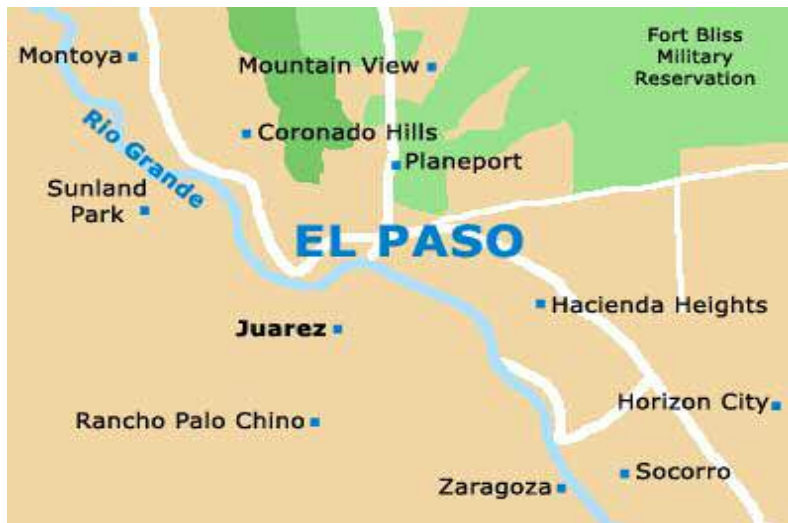
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<sup>108</sup> This is ranked by population, according to the 1990-2005 population estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau.

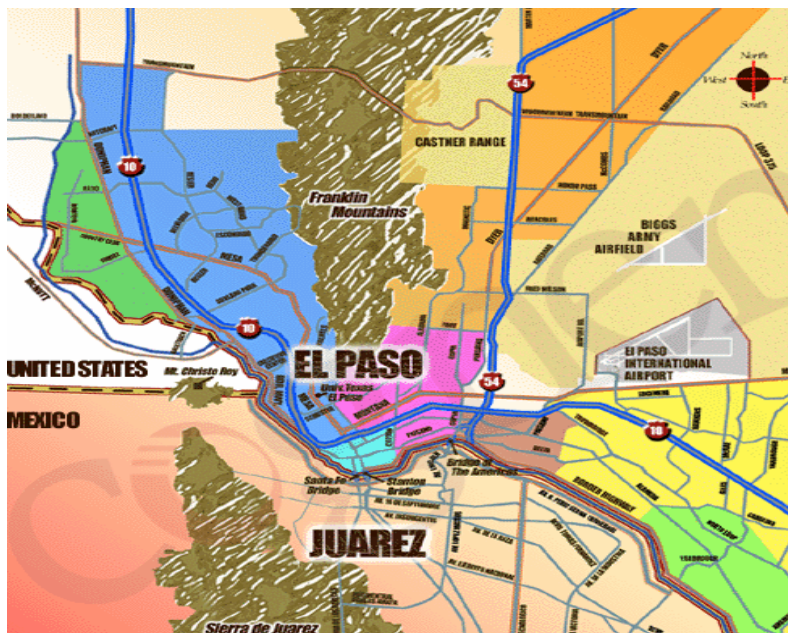
<sup>109</sup> This is ranked by population, according to the Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data of the U.S. Census Bureau.

continues to define the city, as the scenic route through Transmountain and Rim Roads display a breathtaking panorama of the city, showing the city as flat and expansive with mountain ranges dividing different parts of the city.

**Figure 2: Map of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez Region**



*Source: World Guides (2007)*



*Source: The City of El Paso Net (2007)*



As a city that spans over 400 years of history that blends Native American, Spanish, Mexican, and American cultures, El Paso continues to distinguish itself as a multi-ethnic city with nearly 80% of its population being of the Hispanic descent<sup>110</sup> (City of El Paso, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). El Paso is largely bilingual where both Spanish and English are commonly used in homes, schools, businesses, and worksites.

The downtown area especially displays the distinguishing ethnic flavor of the city, as much of its infrastructure and culture resemble the characteristics of Mexico and the greater Latin American region. People easily move across the international ports of entry where they travel back and forth between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso to shop in retail stores, visit friends and relatives, and take an advantage of tourist attractions on both sides of the border. Many cross into Ciudad Juarez to purchase pharmaceutical items, and others travel to El Paso to shop in the retail fashion district, largely owned by Korean vendors who have immigrated from South America.

**Figure 3: Downtown El Paso**



El Paso especially is a major distribution and manufacture center that sees an annual \$20 billion in trade between Mexico and the U.S. (City of El Paso, 2006). Four

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<sup>110</sup> This is according to the 2005 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau.

international border ports-of-entry – Bridge of the Americas Port, Ysleta Port, Paso del Norte Port, and Stanton Street Port – connect El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. According to the mayor of El Paso, the international bridges move approximately ten million people between the two cities each year. He explains:

We're the largest international border plex in the world. Our economies are very closely intertwined. We're the third largest manufacturing region in North America, second only behind Chicago and LA. We're ahead of Detroit and New York City, for example.

El Pasoans who work in Ciudad Juarez bring a total estimated income of about half a billion dollars a year that's earned in the maquiladoras in Ciudad Juarez but then live on this side of the border. So we estimate that number is approximately half a billion dollars a year. The half a billion dollars a year that is spent in our downtown retail district is mainly by people who cross the border to buy goods in our downtown area. [personal interview]

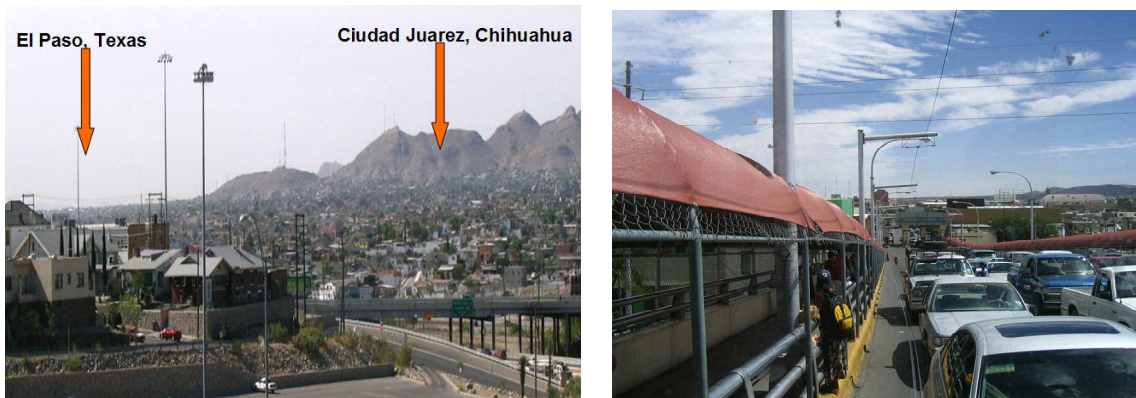
Although one of the heavily populated cities in the U.S. and a passage to millions of dollars of goods and services, the El Paso County is among the poorest counties in the nation, tying Bronx County for having the third highest poverty rate in the U.S (El Paso Times, 2006). One of the contributing causes of poverty is the lack of education engulfing the city (Johnson, 2006). A literacy study conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater has twice ranked El Paso last in literacy among the 79 largest cities in the U.S. (Bacamontes, 2005).

Signs of poverty are further demonstrated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development that found the estimated median household income in 2003 to be \$37,000 in El Paso. This is significantly lower than the average of \$52,100 and \$56,500 for Texas and the U.S., respectively. In 2001, the per capita income in El Paso was low at \$19,186 in comparison to \$28,472 for Texas and \$30,412 for the U.S. The low standard of living is evident in many parts of El Paso, as many live in dilapidated and

run-down homes with very little financial resources. Many schools and public facilities are poorly funded with many roads lacking proper pavement.

El Paso, nonetheless, is not the only city that suffers from poverty. Driving down Interstate 10 and the Cesar Chavez Border Highway that visibly divides El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, one can visibly witness the abject poverty of the colonia districts in Mexico where homes are built by cardboard boxes, tires, mattress springs, and plastic crates. Ironically, El Paso, with its city lights and paved highways running parallel to Ciudad Juarez, seems much more affluent and lively than its sister city. It is with this paradox that many El Pasoans conduct their daily lives—the dearth of Ciudad Juarez on one side and El Paso on the other, living simultaneous yet different lives with unparallel resources and environment.

**Figure 4: Panoramic View of the Sister Cities and International Bridge**



**Figure 5: Border Fence along I-10 Highway**



### **Annunciation House**

Annunciation House, the site for this case study, is an organization embedded in the poverty of El Paso. Located in one of the poorest parts of the city, this organization functions as a cross-border organization that has aimed its efforts in assisting the poor on both sides of the border. Formally established in 1978, the work of this organization operates out of five different sites, three of its locations on the U.S. side and two on the Mexico side, although one of the houses in Mexico was temporarily closed during this research. Its primary work has been providing hospitality to homeless migrants and political asylees often from Mexico and Central America. Each of the locations makes accommodations for distinct populations of migrants.

**Figure 6: Annunciation House (original building)**



The primary objective of Annunciation House is to provide food, clothing, and shelter to homeless migrants that arrive on the U.S.-Mexico border. Its work consists of providing access to basic social services, such as hospitals, telephone, counseling, church, and hospitality. Their reasons for arrival on the border vary, but the clientele of Annunciation House can generally be categorized into five groups: migrants in search of work, political asylees, victims of domestic violence, social security families, and children.<sup>111</sup> Details of each group are forthcoming in the following sections.

Annunciation House is the only organization in El Paso that openly provides hospitality to undocumented migrants. In fact, the leadership believes it is the only organization on the U.S-Mexico border that is primarily devoted to assisting undocumented migrants shortly following their arrival to the U.S. (Jones, 2006). A staff member explains, “From what I know of different organizations, this is the most justice-based organization for undocumented people that I know of on the border.” The work of

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<sup>111</sup> Children are usually accompanied by their parents but on occasion have been unaccompanied minors between the ages of 14 and 17.

the organization is typically spread by word of mouth, and it is commonplace for newly arrived migrants to show up at the door having traveled on foot for days in the desert or having swum across the Rio Grande. Others come with injuries afflicted while crossing the border and in search of temporary shelter to recuperate their health.

Although the primary work of the organization is to provide temporary housing to migrants, its stance on welcoming the undocumented and the belief that migrant needs are a social justice issue, the organization has also opened its doors to visiting groups and immigration activism work. Throughout each year, numerous groups from universities and social service agencies are invited to participate in border immersion programs, known as the Border Awareness Experience (BAE), and short-term stays in its facilities to learn more about the border and the work of the organization. It is through this informal learning in the social context that the organization advocates its work and justice for migrants.

In many ways, the physical structure of its buildings is also testament to its stance on immigrant rights and its social advocacy work. One of its buildings hangs a large banner that states “No human being is illegal” with the Bible verse, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me.”<sup>112</sup> Throughout the interior of the houses, banners and paintings display political messages opposing militarization of the border and condemning human rights violations that have been committed on the border. In one of the facilities, names of those who have died during the Central American civil wars in the 1980s are written one by one.

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<sup>112</sup> This is taken from Matthew 25:35, New International Version.

## *History and Philosophy*

In its near 30 years of existence, Annunciation House has become a strong symbol for migrant rights in the border region. According to Ruben Garcia, executive director and one of the five founders of the organization, Annunciation House did not start with a particular social cause. Instead, it is the discrete need of the homeless migrant population that has come to define the organization over the years.

Annunciation House evolved when a group of young Catholic lay people were invited in the winter of 1976 to discuss and wrestle with the idea of living life with a greater meaning according to the Gospel that calls people to the poor as “the life and presence of Jesus in the Gospels is so completely in relation to the poor” (Annunciation House, 2006). These individuals wanted to live in a way to allow themselves to know that there is a profound meaning in life. This group continued to meet on a weekly basis over the course of a year.

What became clear over their year together was that in order to live meaningful lives, they needed to place themselves among the poor and live in solidarity with them. These young adults soon found and moved into a facility in El Segundo, the largest barrio of El Paso. Garcia recollects that even at that time, these five individuals did not have the foggiest idea of who the poor were. “The poor are those who haven’t made the radar of the non-poor. Making it into the radar was the challenge,” he recalls.

The group then decided to conduct a survey of the area and found there were no more than two homeless shelters in El Paso – the Salvation Army and the Rescue Mission – only to be supplemented by the Presbyterian Church that ran a food pantry along with a clothing bank operated by a group of Catholic sisters. At the conclusion of their



assessment, the group found that it was difficult or almost impossible for those without documentation to receive any kind of services from the existing shelters. Garcia explains, “We concluded with the mindset that if Jesus were to come to the border, He would look like an undocumented person. This set our mission to define the poor as the undocumented, and we began our work of hospitality to migrants.”

Garcia, then a youth director in the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, was able to obtain part of a building owned by the El Paso Dioceses rent-free and opened its doors in February of 1978. With the mission of living a simple lifestyle and being in solidarity with the poor, the five young adults operated on the fact that in making themselves available to the poor, the poor would show the way and teach them to serve the community. They began with very limited resources and uncertainty of where their work would take them.

Then one day, they received a call asking if they would accept a young teenager who had been living on the streets. Soon after, others arrived at the door of Annunciation House, and eventually the building began housing up to 100 people at a time. The year of 1978 was around the time when Central America was about to explode with its civil wars. Thus, the house that initially began with assisting Mexican migrants expanded to providing services to Central American refugees (Annunciation House, 2006).

The organization very quickly assumed all parts of the building which continues to serve as one of its main houses of hospitality to this day. Soon after its inception, Annunciation House rapidly expanded to other parts of the El Paso region as well as across the border into Ciudad Juarez. In 1985, a group of donors approached the organization and gave money to purchase its second building, Casa Teresa, to be used as



its administrative offices. Casa Teresa was named after Mother Teresa, who actually gave the organization the name *Annunciation House* after a visit during the inception of the organization.

In 1989, an opportunity arose for the organization to expand its efforts to Mexico. Having heard about their work, the Catholic Dioceses of Ciudad Juarez approached the organization and asked if it would also open up a house of hospitality in their city. The organization agreed on the condition that there would be no strings attached and that the Dioceses would provide a facility for them. After several months, the bishop did make a house available that came to be known as Casa de la Peregrina. The house primarily accommodated Mexican internal migrants who had either moved to northern Mexico in search of employment in the maquiladoras or en route to the U.S. for work. Initially a co-ed facility, Casa de la Peregrina changed its focus to women and children when another organization, Casa de Migrante, built a large facility for men.

**Figure 7: Casa de la Peregrina**



*Source: www.annunciationhouse.org (Reprinted with permission)*

As the original Annunciation House building on the U.S. side became overcrowded, the bishop of El Paso donated an abandoned building that was left to the Dioceses in a will. This building came to be called Casa Vides and opened its doors in 1992. At this time, Annunciation House was involved in a high volume of asylum work for refugees fleeing Central America. Because the asylum process was a lengthy one, the organization decided that it would be a good idea to have a place that would operate differently than the original Annunciation House, given the long-term nature of the asylum application process. Thus, Casa Vides became a long-term house of hospitality mainly geared towards political asylees and others in need of longer length of stay.

**Figure 8: Casa Vides**

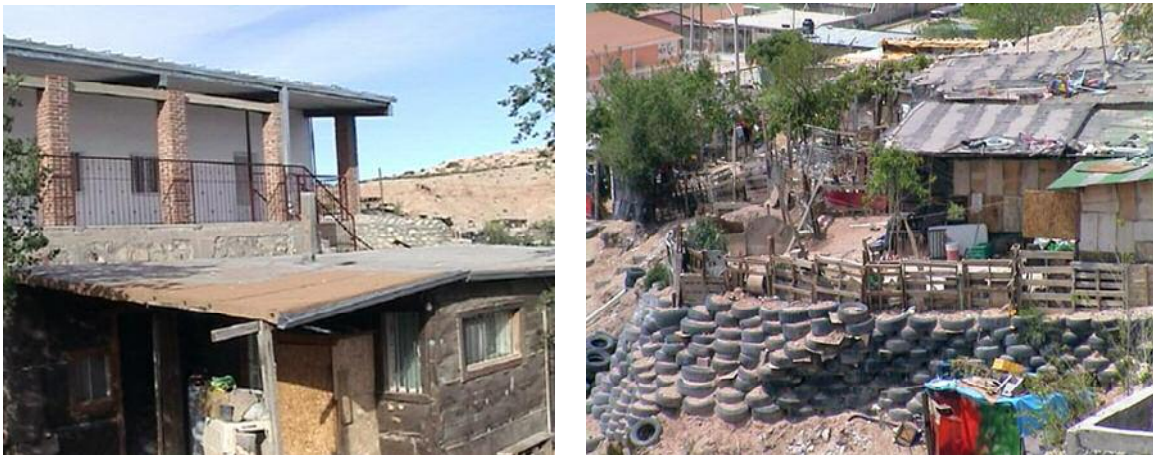


In 1995, the organization decided to open its fifth and final site in Mexico. At this particular time in history, a large number of people had been migrating north from the interior of Mexico to work in the maquiladora industry. For many of the migrants residing in Casa de la Peregrina, their main interest was to get established in the city and find a permanent place to live. As a result, many moved on to Anapra, a squatter land

located on the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez. Garcia recalls their decision to build a facility in Anapra:

We thought that it would be important for us to have some experience of the squatter experience that the poor have to go through, that they *do* go through. That, just as the poor, the only way to survive is to go and take over somebody's land, that we should go take over somebody's land and know what that's like, put volunteers out there and allow them to experience that and through their experience, the Annunciation House as a whole would benefit.

**Figure 9: Casa Emaus and Neighborhood**



*Source: www.annunciationhouse.org (Reprinted with permission)*

Therefore, when a former volunteer of the organization acquired a piece of land in Anapra and offered it to Annunciation House, the organization built a house that came to be known as Casa Emaus. Since the main objective was to accompany those moving to Anapra and working with the community there, they decided against running a house of hospitality and instead offered it as a community center and a place to stay for volunteers.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> All buildings were in operation during this study with the exception of Casa Peregrina, which had temporarily closed its doors due to shortage of resources and staff.

## *Staff*

Even after 29 years of its inception, the philosophy of accepting simplicity in life and being in solidarity with the poor remains as one of the main foundations of Annunciation House. The leadership continues to convey the message to its staff that Annunciation House is not a workplace in the conventional sense. It is instead a way of being and living at a particular point in life. The work becomes one's life, and living itself becomes one's work. This is partly influenced by Martin Luther King, Jr. who once said, "One comes to appreciate the reality that there can be no 'we' and 'they' in our lives, but only brothers and sisters—sacred and dignified" (Annunciation House, 2006).

Annunciation House to this day is an all-volunteer organization that survives on financial and in-kind donations. The main leadership consists of Garcia, founder and executive director, and two individuals referred to as the Core Community. Unlike the volunteer staff, Core Community members have committed to the organization for an indefinite amount of time. One of the Core members functions as the administrator of the organization who handles all logistics and behind-the-scenes operations of the organization, and the other is a licensed clinical social worker who divides up her time in the houses to provide guidance to the volunteer staff and to offer therapeutic treatment to the clients. Both community members are former volunteers, one from the early 1980s and the other from late 1990s. The education coordinator, although not a part of the Core Community, has also been with the organization for four years.

The leadership is assisted by the guidance of its Board of Directors. Board members serve on major committees – financial committee, outreach committee, quality of life committee – that look at the welfare and longevity of the houses and their mission.

The financial committee looks at different avenues of funding and is responsible for writing grant proposals. The outreach committee looks at volunteer recruitment and different network of support systems for the organization and its volunteers. The quality of life committee works on volunteer issues and investigates how different interpretations of immigration law can have implications for the volunteer staff.

In addition to the main committees, the board forms supplemental committees as issues arise or where their own professional expertise may be utilized. Currently, three members who work in the health field are looking at health-related issues that may affect the houses. The board is reputed to have unique insights to the operations of the organization, because all members are former volunteers. In preparation for biannual board meetings, the director creates an agenda and brings forward issues that are affecting the operations of the house at the present moment. Much confidence seems to be placed on the director as a board member explains, "If a decision needs to be made, we all have 100% confidence in Ruben to make a good decision."

Aside from the core leadership and the board, the rest of the staff consists of primarily year-long volunteers who live and work in the houses. Each house is under the leadership of a house coordinator, who typically is a seasoned year-long volunteer. Many of the volunteers are recent college graduates who have committed to a year or more of service. All volunteers are responsible for arranging their transportation to El Paso and are given a monthly stipend of \$250 only after they have recommitted after a year of non-paid service. All volunteers who complete a year of service are given \$500 towards their travel back home. Year-long volunteers are also provided with health and life insurance, and all volunteers are given full room and board.

**Figure 10: Casa Vides Volunteers with Ruben Garcia (third from left)**



To date, Annunciation House has hosted approximately 500 volunteers, in which only two have come from El Paso. All others have come from throughout the U.S. and abroad. Due to the transient and fluctuating nature of the volunteer community, there is no set amount of volunteers that staff the houses. The organization receives new volunteers on set dates in January, April, June, August, and November each year, and the number varies depending on the amount of applications received and accepted.<sup>114</sup> At the time of my arrival in June, the organization had been operating with eleven volunteers. This group was then joined by myself and the new summer volunteers, bringing the total up to sixteen. When I left in August, the total had gone down to seven with the mass exit of year-long and summer volunteers.

### ***Primary Functions and Responsibilities***

Volunteers are responsible for the daily operation of the houses and have four major responsibilities – guest servant shifts, guest welfare, weekly rotations, and permanent rotations. Annunciation House refers to its clients as guests or *huepedes* in

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<sup>114</sup> Volunteer applications are available on the organization's website and on the Catholic Network of Volunteer Services.

Spanish. I will use the terms clients and guests interchangeably. The table below describes the four responsibilities of the volunteer staff:

**Table 14: Four Main Responsibilities of Volunteer Staff**

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Description</b>
Guest Servant Shifts	Immediately responsible for the operation of the house Clean/maintain the house Answer the door/conduct client intakes Coordinate meals Distribute materials Notify and remind guests of activities in the house Respond to emergencies
Guest Welfare	Meet with assigned guests on a weekly basis Help locate legal, medical, and other resources Discuss plans for the next step in their journey Counsel guests
Weekly Rotations	Weekly assignments and special projects Different tasks rotated amongst volunteers on a weekly basis
Permanent Rotations	Permanent assignment given to volunteers Responsible for this task throughout entire stay

*Source: Annunciation House (2006)*

The normal business hours of each house are from 6am to 10pm. The 16 hours are normally divided into two 8-hour shifts. The volunteer on shift is required to be on site and coordinate activities during that time. The organization refers to this as *guest servant shifts*. The morning shift begins at 6am with the volunteer on shift unlocking all doors and giving door-to-door wake-up calls. The volunteer then makes sure breakfast is prepared, all toiletries are stocked, and all guests are getting ready for the day. The volunteer must stay in the house throughout the shift and respond to emergencies, keep the house in order, and interact with the guests. That volunteer is also responsible for keeping the communication channel open with the administrative office as issues arise.

The afternoon shift begins after lunch, and that volunteer is responsible for coordinating the meals and house activities for the rest of the day. At 10pm, the volunteer escorts all guests to their rooms and makes sure all lights are out. She or he then locks all exterior doors and makes sure the house is secure for the night. At the end of each shift, staff members record their activities in the shift log. All volunteers are required to spend the night in the houses with the exception of their weekly nights off.

The second major responsibility of the volunteer staff is called *guest welfare*. When guests arrive at Annunciation House, they are assigned to a contact person, known as the *contact volunteer*. This staff member then orients new guests<sup>115</sup> to the facilities and explains the house rules and regulations. The contact volunteer also meets with the guests on a weekly basis to determine the needs that arise, such as helping to find legal and health agencies, enrolling their children in schools, and finding options for employment if eligible. The contact volunteer also gives psychological and social support and counsels the designated guests in times of need.

Weekly and Permanent Rotations refer to specific tasks around the house assigned to each volunteer either on a weekly or permanent basis. Below is the description of typical weekly and permanent tasks:

**Table 15: Typical Weekly and Permanent Volunteer Tasks**

<b>Permanent Rotations</b>	<b>Description</b>
BAE	Receives and orients Border Awareness Experience (BAE) groups
Basement/Yard	Improve and maintain large public spaces
Clothing Bank	Receive clothing donations and maintain clothing bank for guests

<sup>115</sup> All intakes are taken at the Annunciation House building and must be cleared by the director.



Food Pantry	Maintain and monitor food supply
Car Maintenance	Keep house vehicle and van in working order
Guest Education	Coordinate and inform guests of educational opportunities
Guest Recreation	Plan and inform guests of recreational activities
Guest Resources	Maintain a resource list of legal, health, and mental health assistance
House Maintenance	Manage maintenance and repairs around the house
Human Rights	Research and track non-natural deaths on the border
Linens	Maintain and organize linen closet for guests
Records/Mail	Update guest records and forward all mail to departed guests and staff
Supplies/Ordering	Complete monthly order form and keep supply closet in order
<b>Weekly Rotation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Breakfast	Prepare breakfast for weekly staff meeting
Fruit Run	Contact food distributor and coordinate pick-up time
Guest Aseos <sup>116</sup>	Create weekly schedule of chores to be completed by guests
Kitchen	Clean and restock kitchen
Laundry Room	Clean community laundry area
Meeting/Inspection	Lead weekly house meeting and inspect guest living quarters
Tiendita <sup>117</sup>	Distribute one-week worth of personal hygiene supplies to guests
Volunteer Needs	Clean and maintain volunteer living quarters and office

*Source: Annunciation House & Casa Vides House Manual*

<sup>116</sup> *Aseos* translates to *chores* in English.

<sup>117</sup> *Tiendita* refers to *small store*, in the case of Annunciation House, the supply distribution room.

### ***Client Population***

The clientele of Annunciation House, referred to as *guests*, come to the U.S.-Mexico border for various reasons. For the majority, they arrive at Annunciation House in search of escaping difficult living conditions back home.

### ***Migrants in Need of Work***

One major group comprises of migrants from Mexico and Central America in search of employment. A migrant laborer shares his personal story:

When my parents got married, they went to go live in Mexico City in order to look for better opportunities. The only way to survive where they were from was to become a peasant. For this reason, he decided to leave home and look for work he enjoyed, which was mechanics. In the last mechanic shop he was working at, a man approached him, close to where we were living, and they became good friends. This man offered my father to become independent, proposing that he start his own shop. He had space to put a mechanic shop where he lived, and that's how my father learned to become independent...

Right when I finished school, this is when my father started having problems with his employee. He was trying to exhort money from us. And so, my father, deciding that he wouldn't employ anyone else anymore, and me having finished school, I decided to work with my father. And that's how I learned to be a mechanic.

In the year of 1996, he passed away, leaving me with the shop all alone. I have another brother who is also a mechanic, so the two of us ran the shop. We were working together in the shop up until this year. But both of us are married, both of us have families, and both of us have children. And it was obviously difficult with two bosses working together, because the earnings were cut in half. Sometimes there was work, and unfortunately, when work was low, there wasn't enough money to support the families. So I decided to leave the shop.

Being married comes the cost of children and raising a family, so my wife and I decided to build a house, a small house. Fortunately, the house is finished. I was able to get money on credit to finish it. And now I have to repay this money. I have to repay this money, so this is one of the reasons why I decided to come to the United States.

Another guest recalls migrating north in order to provide a living for his wife and children, as they were barely making ends meet in Mexico:

I am the eighth of twelve children. I was born in Tascla, and that's where I grew up, helping my father's work. My father was a peasant. I decided to come to the U.S. – more than anything, because I need work. There isn't a lot of work in Mexico. Sometimes there is work, but they're cheap.

I am married and have four children. The oldest is 12 years old. I also have a 9 year-old girl, 4 year-old girl, and a boy who is 1 1/2 years old. This is the reason I had to come to the U.S. I came with the intention of working to be able to give my children a better life, always with the dream to do something for them and then to return to my country.

Others share the same desire to provide better opportunities for their families. Asked why he decided to embark on the difficult journey of crossing into the U.S., a guest explained:

I want to help my siblings. I want my younger brother to become a teacher and to be able to say, "Look, this one is a teacher, and so is that one. I helped them do that." What I can't have, what I couldn't do, I want him to have. I wanted to study, but I couldn't. All my brothers, they studied, so they were able to get ahead and advance. But when it came down to me, there was no money left, so I had to drop out of middle school. I have already helped my two brothers, and they were able to better themselves. They now have their houses and their cars.

### ***Political Asylum Seekers***

In addition to finding work, others have made their way into the U.S. in search of asylum. Political asylum is granted to those the court believes would be in a life-threatening situation if they were to return to the country of origin. Once granted asylum, these individuals are generally given a work permit and a social security number.

A political asylee from the Dominican Republic shares the events leading to her arrival in the United States:

My relationship with my husband became impossible. He had many businesses, he was active in politics, and he worked in armed forces in my country. He liked to fight a lot, and more than anything, he was a womanizer. He had a lot of women and other children outside of marriage.

Our relationship was being destroyed. The trust and the care in the relationship were being lost. I spent 2 ½ years trying to fix things, but it never got resolved. When I told him I wanted to separate from him, that I wanted a divorce, he didn't say anything. At this time he had bought another house with a young woman and also had a child. And for this reason, he said it didn't matter that I would move out with my children.

At first, he started coming to the house more and more looking for the children. I never let him enter our house. And he came to realize that I didn't want anything to do with him. And for this reason, he started saying I had another man on the side. When I started looking for a job, no one would hire me, because everyone in town knew him and didn't want to have problems with him. I didn't have anyone.

He started to come after me and paid the town police officer to watch me. He intercepted my house phone and my cell phone. He said he had thoughts of killing the children, killing me, and killing himself.

My husband started bothering my children and asking them who was in the house and what I did in the house. He would tell them that I did drugs. My children were very confused. It was very difficult for them. It was their father telling them this, so how could they not believe their father? I told them not to believe anyone but to determine the truth themselves.

At this time, I had understood and realized what he had told me in the beginning – killing the kids, killing me, and killing himself – was true. He was capable of doing it. One thing that convinced me even more was when I went to go pick up the children and saw a man approaching me. He was carrying a cake, and before he came out of the car, he took his gun and came at me. That was when I got really scared and decided to leave my country. I had already gone to the police, to the courts, and to the officials, but no one was willing to help me.

I started telling people I needed an operation and began selling my things. I said I needed money for the operation, so I was able to sell these things without drawing a lot of attention even with the police watching me. No one knew anything. My children already had visas, because they had traveled to the U.S. before. My visa was expired, but I was able to renew it. I had all the passports with me, so I was able to come.

My children only found out when we were on our way to the airport to come here. My mother found out after I arrived in Miami. I told my younger sister the day I bought the ticket, because I couldn't go on lying anymore, but she was the only person who knew.

This individual lived in the U.S. with her three children as undocumented immigrants for several years until she found out that her situation was valid and compelling enough to apply for political asylum. She was able to proceed in court and was eventually granted asylum.

A former politician from Guatemala shares his reasons for coming to the States.

This individual had lived through the Guatemalan civil wars in the 1980s and came to the U.S. in mid-1990s. He recalls:

My pop, he was a politician, and somebody killed my parents when I was 14 years old. My dad's political position was central left, and *la derecha* [the political right] didn't like him. He had a lot of possibilities and took good chances in our country. This is the reason why they killed him.

Following my father's example, I studied political science and received my degree when I was 19 years old. The situation in my country was bad around that time. When I graduated, my friends and colleagues decided to work together. We were 12 friends. We didn't support any of the bad people [the right wing]. We were clean, and we didn't have a bad record. We knew the business. We would work together. No *derecha*, no *izquierda* [No right, no left].

There were a lot of political parties, but they didn't do anything positive for the nation. We wanted to be our own group, not a party. New ideas. New blood. Next day, I met with the president of my university. We were building free health clinics in all of the 23 zones of Guatemala City and asked him for medical students in their last year to provide services. They could get practice and get credit through the university. He said, "That's a magnificent idea," because the hospital in San Juan was full.

I spoke with pharmacies asking for [drug] samples. They said, "OK, we will give you all the medicine you need." I never had problems... They said it was a noble cause. I met back with the president. I talked to him and said we needed future lawyers for legal assistance for the people. He said, "You got it. If your plan is the same as the doctors, you got it."

At this time, we were living with a de facto government that completely dissolved the congress. So our group prepared candidates to run for the national constituent assembly. When the elections came, we won all the seats in Guatemala City. We took total control of the city.

After this, the big ones [politicians], it was a big surprise for them. The leader of an ultra right group came to my house and gave me a special invitation to meet with him. I didn't go. I didn't like him. He was a killer man. He had a bad record. I didn't like him. I also said "no" to several other politicians.

Everybody, all my people and I received invitations to traditional politicians. Nobody said "ok." We didn't want business with anybody. We took all the invitations from the bad people and pinned them on a black wall with a knife. One day, a person from the newspaper spoke with us. He was new. He was not a politician. We liked him. But something was with him during the meeting. He took pictures of the black wall and published it.

So I was in the meeting in Zone 3 when someone came inside. I saw the *kaibiles* [special operations of the Guatemalan military], the military people. The *kaibiles* had license to kill, national security. They broke my nose [with the handle of the machine gun]. I don't remember anything else.

When I woke up, I was on the floor. They gave me a piece of paper to sign. The paper said I was insurgent *guerrillero* [guerilla member] and that I opposed the government. I kept saying "no," and they tortured me. They put a bag over my face and punched my stomach and made me inhale the powder [that was inside the bag]. They put me in water. They electrocuted my private parts. "Sign it." "No." "Sign it." "No." They took off my nails of my hands and feet. They broke my ribs and used me for sex [sobbing]. Horrible.

They put me in one bag, no air, no nothing. A little bit of air, and they threw me, boom, into a big truck. They drove, boom and boom, me and the people. I didn't know where I was. I didn't know the place, nothing. They pulled everybody in one hole, one basement. Cold, dark, wet, smelly, nasty, ugly place. The only thing is to lick little licks of water [on pipes]. Maybe seven people died inside. The smell was ooh [horrible].

This individual remained captive for eighteen months until he escaped with a friend. After a few days of recuperation, they read in the newspaper that everyone else in the basement had been killed and that the military was after them. In fear of his life, he changed his name and escaped by crossing the river from Guatemala into Mexico and then proceeding to the United States. He too lived many years as an undocumented

immigrant until he was informed by a friend at church that he could apply for asylum.

He also won his asylum case and was given documentation to be able to live in the States.

### ***Victims of Domestic Violence***

In addition to political persecution, it is not uncommon to come across guests who have been victims of domestic abuse. Under a provision of the Violence Against Women Act of 1995 (VAWA), undocumented women abused by U.S. citizen/resident spouses or dependents are eligible to receive legal protection and the right to live in the U.S. with proper documentation (DMRS, 2006). A mentally disabled, undocumented woman who has experienced a series of abuse in her life explains:

I've been in the United States for 30 years. They [my family] brought me here, because my grandmother had died. And so my mother told my grandfather to bring me here, but I didn't want to come. I was 20 years old when my grandmother died. It was very difficult for me to be here. I still can't get myself accustomed to living here. I worked cleaning houses sometimes, sometimes taking care of children.

I have two children... battling alone without their fathers. They wanted a lot from me. Everyone wanted a lot from me, but I did the best I could. My mother told me to go to the doctor, so they could take out my uterus or do something so I couldn't have children. And a friend told me, "Lets go so that they'll give you money for the girl" when my daughter was little, when she was a year old.

In desperation, she sought the help of Annunciation House almost 20 years ago. Once she better established herself, she left the organization and found a place for her and her children. She continues:

So they [my children] were growing up, I put them in school, everything one does. I battled a lot with them as they were growing up. I had a lot of social workers. I had a lot. My children wouldn't listen to me. They would do what they wanted. So my son, the court had control of him. He wanted to come back with me, but the court said, "No, because you don't listen to her." He was 12 years old.

Her difficulty with the children persisted, and she found herself seeking the help of Annunciation House for the second time and then again for the third time at the time of this interview. Her relationship with the children worsened into a severe accumulation of emotional abuse by her daughter.

She [my daughter] would run us out of the house. She'd lock us out, and we would have to be with a neighbor. I didn't know what to do. Do I go to Juarez? What do I do? So my social worker helped me to see if they would accept me again. And so I came to Annunciation House [for the third time].

This guest is now residing in one of the Annunciation House facilities and in the process of applying to gain residency through VAWA. Because she is not in a state to emotionally or financially support herself, obtaining U.S. residency would help her receive federal and state aid to enter into assisted living for those with psychological traumas. Although her lawyer is hopeful about the case, she expresses her fears:

I don't know yet if I'm going to be able to arrange my papers, because they might ask for more things. I don't know. I'm a little bit worried, because they've asked me for a lot of things already— a letter from another state, how long I've been here, all those things. I haven't been able to arrange all my papers. They don't believe me that I had my children here with me.

In many cases, it is not only the VAWA applicants that are at risk but also their undocumented dependents. One such example is a current guest, a single mother of six children:

My mom died when I was 11, and I was left to support myself. I was tossed around different homes of relatives. Throughout my childhood, I was sexually abused by my uncles.

I was so lonely and just wanted the comfort of being in someone's arms. This loneliness led me to many men. Many were abusive towards me, and I didn't always have a say.

I became pregnant a lot, ten times. One child is living in Mexico, and six are with me. The other three died. I did drugs for 6-7 years. I made a lot of mistakes in the past.



This woman eventually had a long-term relationship with a man who fathered six of her children, but the relationship was physically and sexually abusive. Her partner forcibly confined her inside the house and made threats to kill her. She escaped on several occasions and lived on the streets and in homeless shelters in Ciudad Juarez. As her partner aggressively searched for her, she decided the only way to escape him was to cross into the States.

Life in the U.S. was no different as she moved from shelter to shelter with her children. A year later, however, she met a U.S. citizen, and they married. “Everything went well. He was very nice and treated me well,” she remembers. But soon after they married, they started having marital problems, and he too abused her physically and sexually. “I was very scared and felt very ashamed,” she said, as he periodically withheld food from her and the children and physically assaulted her in front of them. She recalls, “It wasn’t normal to leave us without eating, to push me to the street, with my children... I felt humiliated, unprotected. I felt very bad.”

During the arguments, he would make calls to the police to report that there was an undocumented woman living in his house. In the course of these events, she also found out that her husband had a criminal record for child molestation. She fled the situation with the children and was placed in a shelter for battered women in El Paso. She eventually found her way to Annunciation House and began her paperwork to apply for residency through VAWA. On the day of her hearing, despite the urging of the prosecuting attorney to allow her to stay in the U.S., the judge denied her case and ordered deportation. She is now in the process of appealing the decision and meanwhile

lives in the same fear and uncertainty that has consumed most of her life. She broke down one day and said:

I feel like I'm in a pool of water and can't get out. I can't breathe. The only thing I want is to keep my family together. I was separated from my family as a child, and I don't want my children to live the same life as me. My dream is to see my children grow up. But I don't know what will happen if I have to return to Ciudad Juarez. I won't be able to raise them and will have to put them in an orphanage. I love my children very much, and all I'm doing is to keep them together as a family.

### *Social Security Dependents*

Another common group of people who stay at Annunciation House are spouses or dependents of deceased U.S. citizens or residents who are eligible to receive their Social Security survivor or dependent benefits. However, when these survivors or dependents are Mexican citizens, they are required by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to spend 30 consecutive days in the U.S. every six months instead of just visiting the U.S. consulates in their countries. The only alternative is to physically report to the SSA office every 30 days (Boucher, 2005).

This is easier said than done. In order to come to the U.S., these individuals must first receive an award letter from SSA stating they are eligible for benefits. They then apply for a non-immigrant B2 (tourist) visa through the U.S. Department of State by proving that they meet the required economic solvency threshold.<sup>118</sup> The final say on whether or not they can enter the U.S. rests on the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) when these individuals come to one of the U.S. ports of entry. Their entry is usually

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<sup>118</sup> They must show reasonably good and permanent employment, financial connections, close family ties, and social/cultural association that indicates the individuals will return to their country of origin instead of permanently settling in the U.S. (Boucher, 2005).

granted after filling out a customs declaration and Form I-94 to be filled out at time of entering and leaving the U.S. (Boucher, 2005).

Because three separate branches of the U.S. government are involved, many Mexican individuals are lost in the process and are often denied entry by one branch but not by another. This is further complicated, because individuals must interrupt their lives every six months and fund their own travel to the U.S. in order to receive benefits.

Guests explain:

When I reported to the Mexican consulate for Social Security, there in Guadalajara [Mexico], they told me that I had to the U.S. as soon as possible and report to the Social Security office, because if I didn't the social security benefits wouldn't be given to me. Once we presented ourselves [to Social Security], the checks would start coming.

I wanted to come when the school year was over [for my son], but I wasn't able to because of the dates [set by Social Security]. And so we had to suspend his school year [to come here].

I had to ask for money from four different cousins, and that's how I was able to get ahead in the costs of the journey—costs for a passport, for visas – because you also have to pay to apply for a visa and get bus tickets, because it's the cheapest.

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Look, the difficulty with Social Security, how do I want to say it without offending anyone? They don't take many individuals into consideration... I haven't had much support from the Mexican Consulate or Social Security or the American Consulate. What they give me [amount of pension] is very little.

For many guests, there has been confusion over proper procedures of receiving their benefits. One explains:

Yes, it's confusing, because every time you go a different person attends to you. You don't deal with the same person all the time. Sometimes they give you incorrect information. That's why, in my case, I have had to stay a month and a half.

Another explains the confusion that has revolved around her benefits, because she had not been informed of all procedures and paperwork that were needed in order receive her benefits.

No one has helped me. My pension had been suspended as of December [of last year]. And there at Social Security, they didn't tell me it was suspended [because I hadn't signed a form no one told me about]. I called yesterday, and they finally said they will give me the money if I come to Social Security and sign the form.

At another point, there was confusion as to where the pension had been deposited. When Social Security dependents complete their 30-day stays, they do not receive the payments directly. Instead, they must first travel back to Mexico, where the amount is deposited into a Mexican bank. According to a guest, she had to “battle and battle with the bureaucrats” to locate her money, as she explains:

The Mexican Embassy told me to go to the Consulate and that they would help me, because they said the money was already in a Mexican bank. [When I finally located it], the amount was supposed to be \$4,400 dollars, but looking at the bill, it didn't add up. It only came up to be \$3,000 [because they had deducted processing fees I didn't know about]. It's not fair...we do everything they tell us, and then they don't give it to us.

Even when all paperwork is in order, the travel to the U.S. is difficult. A guest describes her trip from Durango, Mexico to El Paso:

It's more difficult, because I only live on what they give me from Social Security. The amount is no more than \$257 a month. It's the only income I have. And to come back and return, it's difficult. That's what I would like them to do... for them to take this [requirement to be present in the U.S.] away, to have to come here. If one doesn't come, they don't give us the money. They don't give us anything. And if you're sick, Social Security says, “It's ok. You just don't get any money.”

In fact, one of the guests is considering applying for residency in the U.S. in order to avoid the constant travel and deductions made from the benefits:

This is my goal, because there at the social Security office, they tell me that in reality in this country, once we have our residency and citizenship papers in order, they will give us the full amount of the benefit and not deduct the fees that they do now. With this extra money I would be able to pay rent.

### *Unaccompanied Minors*

Most of the children who stay in the Annunciation House facilities are dependents of VAWA applicants and Social Security families. However, there have been cases where unaccompanied minors have been assisted by the organization. A staff member explains how two unaccompanied minors have come to stay in one of the houses:

Eduardo and Maria [before becoming unaccompanied minors] were former guests. Their family is originally from Cuernavaca and came north with movement of the maquiladoras. They basically were not able to survive in Cuernavaca.

They have 5 kids. Dad has chronic uncontrollable diabetes and has had back injuries, so he's not able to work effectively and well. Even though he does masonry and building by trade, they've been chronically on the edge, on the fringe, you know, homeless for a period of time. I think all in all, their family spent... about 7 years in all of our houses. That was broken up at different times.

But at one point, the family moved out and was living independently in El Paso. One day, the Border Patrol came to the family's house when they were unloading groceries and picked up the family. Eduardo and Maria weren't home from high school yet, and they came back to the house as the Border Patrol was picking up the family.

When they started talking to the kids, Eduardo and Maria showed them their school IDs and said, "You can't take us. What about our school? We won't get our diploma, and we've been studying here five, six years." By providence or whatever you want to call it, the Border Patrol agent said, "Ok." And so the agent took mom and dad and the two youngest kids and left Eduardo and Maria and one of their younger brothers who was 8 at the time and left them in their apartment in El Paso.

So the next day, Eduardo and Maria came to Casa Vides and said, "We're here in El Paso by ourselves. Can we come and stay at the house?" So of course since we had known them and their family for so long, we took the kids back. Originally, mom and dad thought they could cross back into El Paso right away.

When it became clear their mom and dad wouldn't be able to cross, we took the 8 year-old back across the border to be with his mom and dad.

Eduardo and Maria continued to stay with us and go to school, and it was clear their mom and dad were barely making go of things, not able to cross back. The kids stayed with us by themselves maybe 7, 8 months in Casa Vides. It became clear at some point that it's hard to live in one of our houses indefinitely.

So [my spouse] and I had talked previously about the possibility of offering hospitality in our home. Having talked about that and seeing the urgent need for Eduardo and Maria, we brought them to live with us. We went to the process of applying to be their managing conservators, their guardians, and then with them applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa (SIJV).

SIJV as a small component of immigration law that allows for the process of legalization for unaccompanied immigrant minors in the U.S. who cannot be returned to their country of origin, because they have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by their family. The U.S. prefers under any circumstance to send a child back to his or her family in their country of origin. Only in the cases of to be determined that it's a safety risk, that it's not in the child's best interest to be returned, is there possibility to apply for this visa.

Nevertheless, the child cannot be in the country without having an adult legally responsible for him or her. So before the child can apply for the visa, the child needs to be 18 or having a guardian they call managing conservator.

At the time of the interview, a year had passed since this staff member took Eduardo and Maria in. Eduardo is now attending college, and Maria is in her final years of high school.

Annunciation House has also seen guests that do not necessarily fit into the common categories. Consider the story of a 10-year journey of a former unaccompanied minor from Guatemala who came to the U.S. because he had nowhere else to go:

My name is Manuel. My date of birth, who knows. My papers there say the 8th of July and my papers here say 20th of August. I come from a small village in Guatemala. My age I don't know. I say I'm 27, but I really don't know.

My father was a good person when he wasn't drinking. But when he came home drunk, he would hit my mother and would tell her that he was going to kill her. One day he took a knife, and I thought that he was going to kill her. I was very scared.

We went to go visit my maternal grandparents one day. My father left us there. He said he would return very soon and went to his village. We waited, but he didn't return. After a while, my mom got desperate, and we left.

When we arrived in my father's village, my mom met up with an uncle who told her that my father had died. Some people had stabbed him in the back with a knife, and it had gone through his heart. He was attacked by about seven people, and one of them put the knife in his back. Before he died, my father was able to grab one of the attackers, and he was the only one they were able to catch.

After that, we returned to the city. My mother was very sad and unkempt. After a few months, my paternal grandparents came to visit us in the city. That is when I found out that I had half siblings, that my father had had another woman. That was about when my life started ending.

My half siblings would come to bother us... They would tell me that I was a bastard and that I wasn't anything. My father had left me some land, but they said that I didn't have a right to anything. That was when my mother started to get afraid and sent me to live with my aunts and uncles in the village. I was there and I studied, but I was never comfortable there. I started to fear seeing my mother die, or my great grandparents or my cousins, everyone that I loved. Then a friend I loved a lot died from a snake bite. I became very scared, and after a while, my half siblings started to come around and continue with their harassment.

I met a friend who said we should come here, to the United States. He told me that I could forget about everything that was going on in Guatemala, about the land, and everything that was so hard in my life. And so we came. I don't remember my age. When we left I didn't say goodbye to my grandparents or anyone else. I just left.

When I arrived at the border between Guatemala and Mexico, I remember looking at it and thinking that my destiny had been already decided. We crossed and arrived in Tuxtla Gutierrez and worked in a coffee farm for a few months.

We were able to save some money, and my friend and I began discussing crossing one of the immigration check points there in southern Mexico. It was notorious for being one of the worst check points in Mexico. They would take people out of vehicles and beat them and rob them. We decided to go around the checkpoint, and so we went around it walking through the jungle. We had to walk 24 or 36 hours. I don't remember.

We arrived at a village and caught a train. We had already been on the road for a few days without having had anything. I was very hungry and thought I was hallucinating. We passed through a village where people lived close to the train tracks. They threw soda bottles full of water and bags of food toward us. It was something.

We got as far as Veracruz, but when we got there, there was an immigration round-up taking place. We all ran. I climbed a tree, and my friend hid in the bushes. They were rounding up a lot of people. There were a lot of Salvadorans and other Central Americans.

A train later passed, and my friend got on. I ran after it too, but I fell. I couldn't reach it. I ran and did everything that I could. That was where we got separated. And so I found myself alone. An intense fear came over me. I was fearful of all the people. I slept up in the tree waiting for another train to pass by. I got on and rode it for a long time.

I walked to a lot of places too. I arrived at places in the desert, in the Sierras, Durango. I went to Correon and Monterrey. And from Monterrey to Copilar, I don't remember very well. But I walked and rode trailers and semi-trucks. I remember I would arrive somewhere and climb on top of houses. Sometimes I would help people with their work and things like that in need of clothing and food.

From there, I arrived in Chihuahua. I went to work in the mountains and met a friend. We worked at a lumber company. When they put me in charge, everyone started asking about who I was, where I was from, who was my mother and father. Those were the questions when I heard, I would pray, "Please don't ask me that. Please don't ask me that." I didn't know what to answer.

Time passed very fast. I don't know how long. I don't know what happened. Maybe it was change of government or something, but the company went bankrupt. I left for Palomas, Chihuahua and did a lot of things. I worked in a butcher shop, worked as an electrician. I learned a lot of things in that city.

One day, I was walking back to my house. I don't remember very well. I arrived, and there was a friend in a truck. There was a truck and also a van and a bag of garbage, things I didn't know. I kept walking when he approached and asked if I wanted a ride. I said sure and got in the back. There was a woman in the front with a child. As we started leaving Palomas, I said, "Hey, I don't live there. I live back there." He told me that we were just going to run an errand and would come right back.



Half way there, he told me that the back tire seemed to be out of air. He asked me if I could check it out. I got out and looked at it. When I told him yes, I felt something enter my face very, very quickly and roughly. I felt all side of my face breaking. I became very dizzy and couldn't see anything. I faltered backward a little bit and felt something else pass by the side of my head. And then I felt something in the back of my head. I couldn't move. I heard him say, "Why isn't he falling?" and he kicked me on the side and hit the back of my neck with the butt of a pistol. I fell to the ground.

A lot was coming out of my mouth, and I couldn't move. I felt like I was dying, like everything was leaving my vein. I heard him say, "Yeah, he's dead," and he left. I felt something grab me by the shoulders and lift me back. I started to choke on my blood. I was so scared and prayed, "Oh my God, I can't die like this."

I got up and walked. I don't know how long... an hour and half. There were a few houses on the way, so I knocked and asked for water, but all they did was look at me and tell me to get out. I kept walking maybe 15-20 minutes and started seeing lights ahead of me.

I arrived, and when the light hit me, there was a state patrol man. He asked me what happened and where the people who assaulted me were so he could arrest them. I told him I hadn't been hit but that I had been shot. He told me it couldn't have been a bullet, because I would have been dead. I showed him where I had been shot. He hugged me and told me to calm down and not to fall asleep. He said an ambulance was coming.

At that point, I became very dizzy. The world was moving around me. I started becoming very disoriented. Things became very blurry. I heard many things, but I don't know if they said those things or if they were hallucinations. After that, I don't know.

The next time Manuel woke up, he found himself surrounded by doctors at Thomason County Hospital in El Paso. Due to the severity of his injuries and close proximity to the U.S. border, he was most likely air-lifted from Palomas to the El Paso county hospital. Manuel to this day has no idea how he came to the States. After receiving several reconstructive surgeries, he has been able to regain most of his health, but due to the trauma of the accident, he has lost many parts of his memory. Through his

stay at Annunciation House, he has regained pieces of his memory, but not every event of his journey or life has been recalled.

### *Complications that Accompany the Journey*

Although it is Manuel's injury that has brought him to the U.S., others have suffered serious injuries in their own attempts to enter the country. In most cases, out of economic desperation, migrants risk their lives to be able to cross into the United States.

One recounts his ordeal in crossing the border:

It was very early morning. We [group of seven] succeeded in crossing the border line, being inside of American territory, but we had to run, because we saw a light of a car approaching us. I was the most unfortunate of the seven. Because we didn't know the terrain, we didn't see that there was a small canal. I was the person farthest on the edge, and I fell. I fell, and as we were running very quickly, I lost the ground beneath me. I fell and fractured my knee. Falling, I tried to stand up again but fell again. I couldn't move, so I stayed there.

Another person who fell with me, a woman, fortunately, nothing happened to her. She tried to stay with me, and I told her "no," because she was running the same risk I was, that they would catch us and return us to Mexico. I told her to go ahead and catch up with the rest, because I was sure that I was going to have help. And so she left. That's how it was. It happened at around 2 in the morning.

I was feeling very bad, because I had been coming with this desire to come and work to send money to my family, but immediately, that was gone. I felt very bad, almost depressed, for having broken my knee and not being able to go forward. In those moments, I asked God to help me so that someone would come and help me, because I was there in the canal.

I stayed there until 8 or 9 in the morning until an American gentleman came. He helped me. He did me the favor of calling an ambulance. The ambulance came, and immigration came. They asked for my name, where I was coming from, and how many people were with me. They put me on a stretcher and put a neck brace on me.

I arrived at the hospital, and they told me the news that I had fractured my foot and my knee. The fracture in the foot was small and didn't need surgery, but my knee unfortunately needed surgery. I spent the whole day in the hospital.

Another describes how after several unsuccessful crossings ended up in a severe injury:

I first tried to come through the border of Laredo. The person who was bringing us had us get on a train. But unfortunately, at the second check-point before getting to San Antonio, immigration caught us, and they returned us to Laredo, Mexico.

After that, we found another person, and he decided to take us through Piedras Negras. This crossing, we had to walk about 15 hours. That's what he told us. But it was more. But unfortunately, in my case, I had trouble with the rocks. This knee unfortunately is bad from soccer. I suffered a lot on the journey, on the walk.

Fortunately, I was able to arrive at the town we had to arrive at. The people I was with really helped me a lot. I was practically dragging my feet. We were in the village we had to arrive in. It was night, and we had to run, but I couldn't. I stayed standing. And so I was left alone. The people I was coming with, I didn't see them again.

And so there wasn't another manner for me to go but to turn myself in to immigration. So this next time, they returned me to Mexico, to Piedras Negras. From there, I decided to go to Mexico City to my family. I rested there for one week, resting my legs, recuperating my legs and blisters at the bottom of my feet.

I decided to come again, so I tried again, this time by the border of Ciudad Juarez. Here in Juarez, I didn't have to walk a lot. But upon trying to jump a very high fence, out of desperation and fear, I put up a foot and tried to jump to get a hold of the wall. But I fell and broke my ankle. I tried to run two times, but I fell, and I couldn't go anymore. I was very close to the freeway, and that's when immigration didn't take too long to pass, and that's when they saw me. That's when he came up to me. I told him I couldn't walk, because I had broken my ankle.

What immigration did before anything else was to check me over, that I wasn't carrying any weapons. When they realized that I really couldn't stand up, they called an ambulance. The ambulance decided to take me to Thomason Hospital. They checked me out at the hospital. They took x-rays of my foot, and in fact, I had broken my ankle. And that was when they operated on me.

Even when some successfully make it into the U.S., they still put their lives and health in jeopardy in pursuit of their final destination. A guest who was headed from Tucson to Atlanta describes his injury:

I had made it to Tucson and got on a train. But I got on the part of the train where the cars link together. When it got going, the cars closed and caught my foot in between them [and a large portion of my flesh came off]. The train stopped, because there was another train coming. I got off the train. I wanted to walk, but I couldn't. I had to crawl up to the freeway. I asked for a ride but had to wait for about half an hour until anyone passed.

A police officer came asked my name and where I was from. He called an ambulance, and they took me to a small town. I don't know what it's called. From there, I got into an airplane. They told me they were taking me to Tucson, but they brought me to El Paso. My foot had kind of fallen in half when the cars squished my foot together. From the middle down, it kind of fell off and fell down. I lost a lot of flesh.

A guest recalls witnessing a similar injury during his journey from Guatemala:

I remember riding on top of the last car when we decided to move forward. When we got to the part where the cars hook together, we saw a person with his leg caught in between the cars. We wanted to help him, but he told us to go away and to leave him alone. He said if he was going to be left without his legs, he would rather die. He didn't want to burden his family.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to run across guests who have made their stop at Annunciation House due to serious injuries while attempting to cross. I also came across a 25 year-old single mother of two, who had left her young children with her mother in Mexico, in order to find work in the States. In attempts to hop on a train en route to the U.S., she slipped and lost her foot under the train. With her hopes of finding economic provision and sustainability for her and her children now shattered, she recuperates in Annunciation House, as her desperate living situations have worsened even more dramatically as a result of her quest for mere survival.

Guests who have sustained such injuries and in obvious need of long-term therapy and post-operative care are typically assigned to Casa Vides. Their stay ranges from days to months, and for the longer-term injured guests, much of their time is spent in guilt, sense of failure, desperation, and depression. One injured guest explains:

Because I can't move around, because I have to walk around in crutches, I do get a little desperate sometimes. The first few days I was here, when I was in bed, I got really depressed, and I cried in the bed for my family and for the bad luck.

Special care is provided to injured guests, as the staff helps to coordinate their rides to and from medical appointments, excusing them from shared house chores, and keeping their time occupied with recreational hours and English classes.

### ***Funding and Resources***

It is with a heavy heart and a strong commitment towards migrants that Annunciation House operates under. In order to do so, financial sustainability holds a huge stake in proper functioning of the houses, as it typically costs the organization approximately \$180,000 each year (Jones, 2006). Almost all of the financial resources come from private donations of individuals and groups. Most donations are received spontaneously from those who have heard about Annunciation House by word of mouth. Spontaneous donations continue to be the number one source of income for Annunciation House.<sup>119</sup>

Although there are plenty of communities in El Paso that do not know about Annunciation House, there are many people and groups, especially communities of faith, who do know about the organization and make contributions that range from bringing bread on a weekly basis to throwing holiday dinners for guests. A staff member explains the range in which in-kind and financial donations have been made:

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<sup>119</sup> Most of the donations do not come from organizations but from individuals. Donations range from monthly checks to food and clothing left at the doorsteps of Annunciation House.

I know that there are some people who have been giving \$20 a month to Annunciation House for the last 20 years. Some folks can make a very sizeable, one-time contribution... some people who come in and help make copies and answer the phone in the office... you know, a real variety of contributions. Someone who will come and give English classes for 6 weeks or just gifts across the board.

Many also attribute the financial and resource sustainability of the organization to Garcia, who over the years has built trust and close networks with various communities. One explains:

There's that part of me that's very pragmatic and is aware of what all the people of Annunciation House, led by Ruben, have done over the years to build and protect the integrity of Annunciation House as an organization.

People throughout El Paso, and more broadly now, know Ruben, of his leadership and integrity with which he leads his life, and the guidance for this work. I think there's a real respect for the fact that Annunciation House, in spite of our struggles and limitations, has continued to persevere and has continued to be involved in the works of mercy in serving the most vulnerable of this community and even at the personal risk and cost of this leadership. It's especially Ruben I'm talking about.

This trust and reputation is something that has been generated over years of integrity and commitment to the migrant population. This also extends to the fact that many young individuals, upon hearing about the work of Annunciation House, choose to give up part of their lives to contribute to the organization. A leadership staff explains:

If it weren't for the myriad of gifts and people, our organization wouldn't be able to sustain itself. That's also been an organic process. It's not something you know you can strategically plan for. It's just been spontaneous gifts of time and talent.

I don't know how many times I can tell you, months into the future, I wonder how in the world we're going to keep the houses open with the number of volunteers scheduled to be here. Then what do you know? Within a period of time, the number of volunteers we need to sustain the houses shows up.

Asked if Garcia ever feared having to close down the organization due to financial constraints, he answered:

Not for economic reasons. Never. Let's say that you come to me and say, "I want to do this kind of work, and I need a place to do it," and I own that building next door. We used to use it for this or that. We no longer do. It's tax exempt, and so we don't have to pay property tax. It would be your responsibility to pay for electricity and whatever. So you move into it, and you're willing to do what you're going to do for free without getting paid. Your overhead's going to be real, real low. Real, real low. So it's possible to do a lot of things if you're willing to do them with whatever is available. It's possible to do a lot of things.

In addition to financial donations, food and clothing donations pour in continuously. This includes local grocers who donate items that have passed the expiration date but are still edible as well as local food vendors who donate food during special events. Others groups and individuals periodically arrive at the door of Annunciation with various items. Such donations have helped build a clothing bank in the basement of Annunciation House for guests to have access free of charge. And thus, Annunciation House perseveres to operate its houses with the given resources and donations that continue to pour into the organization. Having seen the constant flow of donations over the length of his stay, a volunteer explains, "I don't see problems as long as donations come in and people are willing to support the house."

### ***Outcome of Work***

To many guests, Annunciation House becomes the first and one of the few faces that welcomes them to the country, as they persist in their hope and trust that life in the U.S. might somehow give justice to their deprived situations. A guest describes the time she first stepped into the premises of Annunciation House as "a moment that I will never forget." She explained with tears, "We were there in front of Annunciation House for the

first time... one of the volunteers came out the door and she was the one who received us and was very nice, like all of you are.”

Guests often recall the presence of volunteers as easing of the tension and fear that had surrounded their long and difficult journeys to the United States. When asked why many would make the difficult journey of coming to the U.S. in the first place, guests said the following about the United States:

America is the first potential, the best potential of the world economically, technologically, scientifically, socially. If I had stayed in Mexico, my life would be full of drugs, of money, and many, many problems with my wife... about the lack of money and the pressure of not being able to save money, to cover the money that I owe.

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For me, America signifies a lot, because it's very strong and very powerful. Fortunately even people arrive illegally, they can find work. And when they know how to take advantage of the work, they can get their families ahead.

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One, you can earn more money here than there. You can buy what you want... your house, your truck. You travel and go where you want... you go to the beach.

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He [ex-husband] knows where we are. And he's thinking about coming next month, because the children want to see him, and he says he wants to see the children. Because here, I have trust in the fact that you can call the police and they come very quickly. I didn't have that confidence, that trust, in my country.

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I was thinking what a lucky man I am. I'm alive, because I'm here. I'm working. I'm liberated. I have everything.



As Annunciation House receives these individuals without judgment, the guests are grateful for the compassion and the services that they receive from the staff. Many are impressed and surprised by the services they receive from the Annunciation House staff and express the following:

It's very admirable the work that this organization does, everything in coordination and cooperation. The houses have a very good working relationship and communication with the Consulate, Social Security... everything in coordination... everything has turned out very well with me.

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I wouldn't know what to tell you, but from my situation, for me, I've learned a lot, because I didn't know good people existed. Here it's living amongst brothers. It doesn't matter if you have money. It doesn't matter if you're well dressed. You don't have to be well dressed for them to acknowledge you and say hi to you. I think that this is the place where the Berlin Wall falls. It's to see someone else as the child of God. It's this knowledge.

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I think Annunciation House exists, because there are people like me who exist, people like me. It's a beautiful thing. It's to come here and to unlearn a lot of things. You [volunteers] come and live here. You eat differently. You eat with us. You live differently. And I think it's harder for you all, because you guys come here voluntarily. We're here, because we need to be here. And when one unlearns something, of the goodness of things, and abundance of things, it's more painful than learning is... For you all, I see your cases are kind of same as mine but different. I came out of an obligation, not because I wanted to. So I kind of step away from that, and I look at you all, living lives that are different and voluntarily.

Many simply express their gratitude for being part of Annunciation House, as guests explain:

My family right now is calmer, because I've told them that they have helped me here at the house with the discount on medical treatment and everything. Here in the house, they have helped me get back on my feet. For this, I thank them a lot.

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I think it's difficult to maintain a house like this. Very difficult. You have to put yourself at the disposal of the guests. To maintain a house like this, to all the people who give donations to be able to have people say, "Here, I give you this." It's difficult. I don't know how to tell you. I thank God for houses like this. Where would people be in cases like mine or in worse conditions than mine?

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All of us who are here, we are all lucky, because we have been chosen. I know not everyone has the good fortune of being here. From my point of view, and thanks to God for putting all of these angels in my path, I am always going to be thankful. If it weren't for all of you, all the work that you do and for the direction of the house, none of this would be possible.

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Thank you for all you do for all of us, because I know it's not easy. There are a lot of costs, bills and everything required to maintain a house, a lot of money... It's not easy.

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I am very thankful, because they have helped me a lot, because I don't think anyone has to pay anything. Everything is given for free. More than anything, I notice and appreciate what you're doing, because not everybody can be in this type of life, living with people.

One particular guest, Manuel, was able to relocate his long-lost mother as a result of his stay with the organization. Due to the physical trauma of his journey to the U.S., he had lost a lot of his memory, including the exact location of his hometown. One day, he started sharing bits of information he could recall with another guest also from Guatemala. He wrote down what might have been his address and showed it to the guest. He explains:

He said it was a valid address but needed to be fixed it a little. I then asked for an envelope and mailed a letter [using that address]. The letter was sent to an uncle, because that was the only address I could remember. After about a month, my uncle called me, and it was such a happy moment. I soon got in touch with my mom [for the first time in over ten years]. She couldn't believe it. She said, "Manuel, I thought you were dead!" All this happened while at Casa Vides.

I think that when someone does something with their heart, it blooms and grows like a flower. These houses are sentiments and desires of good people. They all get together in one place, and it's this house. Riches are not important, because the riches we have aren't material. They're not things we can put in our hands. It's like the presence of angels, because I have seen them.

Here, I was able to put my life together. I arrived with my life dead, very malformed and incomplete. But because of you all, I regained my family, which is most important, my health, friends, good friends, and very good feelings.

**Figure 11: Casa Vides Guests**



Hearing stories such as this, the volunteers of Annunciation House understand the magnitude in which their work impact different lives. But in addition to receiving and learning about the compassion that is driven behind humanitarian aid, the guests also came face-to-face with their own stereotypes and preconceived notions about the

American society. This came about as many of the reactions, despite their gratitude, were of confusion as to why a group of Americans would give up the comfort of their lives and enter into voluntary poverty.

To many, the lifestyles that the volunteers had left behind were the very things they were aiming for. While some addressed this issue in a more indirect manner, others openly express this confusion. Some guests are convinced that the work of the volunteer staff is not a complete act of charity and is something many young adults are obligated to do in order to advance their own careers and education. Volunteers recall their conversations with guests:

One of our guests told me, “You white people are crazy. You *gringos* are crazy.” I mean he just said it... He said, “There’s a group of you white people at times... you *gringos* decide you like brown people.” But to their perspective, why are we here? I mean we could be out in the world making money. There’s a volunteer who used to be an engineer who could be making money or people with advanced degrees who could be making money, but they’re here. And I think that looks ridiculous to a lot of people. Because that’s exactly what they’re trying to do, to get into the workforce and start making money. And we give that up to be here for a while... So it’s kind of bizarre to them.

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Talking with the guests, sometimes they’re like, “Why are you here?” They don’t understand why we’re here. At Annunciation House, you go out for a while and head toward the door, and the guests ask if you’re going home. They don’t understand that you live there with them.

They see the glamorous lifestyle that is broadcasted to the rest of the world that is the U.S. Whether or not that’s true in our own lives, it is true in comparison to their lives to a certain extent. And I think too they’re struggling so hard and risking for a fraction of what we have, a fraction of the stability, being able to feed their children, have food in their refrigerator, a small level of comfort in life. There’s this kind of mystification of, “If you have that, why would you give it up? If you were so comfortable, why would you willingly put yourself in a position where it’s not comfortable or not as comfortable?”

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I think some of them don't realize we don't get paid. That's a safe bet. And I think some of them aren't sure what to think about it.

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I don't think they really understand why I'm here, because they don't even get the fact that we're here unpaid. They think it's just ludicrous, and I'm pretty sure there are people in the house, even though Ruben stopped by and said, "I can't tell you how many times people ask me, 'You pay your volunteers, right?'" He tells them every time, "No no no, we don't pay our volunteers." He goes over and over this, but they still don't believe it.

If you think about it from their perspective, they're probably pulling out reasons why we would be here unpaid. It doesn't make sense to them. You have the ability to work. We have our citizenships. Why aren't you out working? You're a college graduate... In their heads, they have the opportunity to get jobs and get paid, getting benefits. They would do it in a heartbeat, so it's hard to bridge the gap. Why in the world would you live here unpaid living in a house of bunch of people trying to get further, trying to get into the U.S.?

Even the leadership recalls different comments they have received from the guests. One particular individual explains:

[This happens] all the time. I've had funny comments. They can't figure us out. I know a couple of times, people thought we were orphans and that Ruben took us in off the streets... To me, I can understand it. Probably or for most volunteers, volunteers are coming from middle upper-class families... Everyone's following the American Dream, but when they get to it, they find it's not what it's cracked up to be... you start to look for something else. Most of us come from families that are fairly stable.

Asked if it is important that the guests fully understand the reasons for volunteers coming to Annunciation House, a leadership member responds:

It seems to me that it's more important to the volunteers than it is to the guests. Sometimes that comes out of volunteers' need to be justified or compensated or to feel there's appropriate extension of gratitude of what they're giving up. But I don't think that we as volunteers know or appreciate the kinds of risks and sacrifice the guests have made to be in our houses. And are we always looking for that or trying to understand that? Not necessarily.

When directly asked why they think volunteers devote their time to Annunciation House, guests express their confusion:

How many people would be able to leave their families for this house of crazies? I don't know how to explain it.

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I don't know. I don't know why they want to work here. I don't understand a lot.

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I don't know. I have no idea. I don't understand white people. You know, if they have the chance to live normal lives with a wife and kids, buy a house, and, work normal jobs, what happened? What's the point?

Honestly, when we talk, we say, "Crazy *gringos*." They have intentions to make everything good, but they don't work. It's like Mr. Bush. He has good intentions, but they don't work.

Others believed volunteers were somehow obliged to work in the houses in order to fulfill educational or professional requirements. Guests explain:

Well, I don't know, because I don't know if they're in some way obligated to volunteer their services through school or if it's something they're just doing.

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I've noticed that all of the people, all the volunteers are doing community service.

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People don't understand. Look at Franco. He doesn't understand why you work here. He doesn't understand it. He thinks you have to do it. He said, "Nobody pays anything, but they're ordered by the school. If they don't come to take the practicum here, they don't pass." This is bad information. He thinks you guys have to do it.

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I think because they're going to have a career, so they come to get to know different people. To get to know people from different places. It's something for you all.

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I think they come from a variety of states here in the country, from universities where they're studying. And afterwards, I think they continue with their studies... after they finish their time here. I think it's very good work they do here. To live with people from other countries, with other customs, sometimes the problem of the language, it's hard.

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I think they come to finish something in their careers, their schooling, but I really don't know. It's not necessarily a trap but kind of a trap that they have to be here so that others can arrive. That's how it's supposed to be. They were destined to do it to give a hand to someone else.

Despite their confusion over why volunteers work at Annunciation House, however, it is clear that the guests acknowledge and express gratitude for the assistance they receive from the organization. One explains:

There are some nights I go to bed thinking about this, because God is our blessing. We eat what there is. I think because they're [volunteers] in their country, they're in their place. You have everything. And then you come here and have limitations. You eat what we eat. [The food here isn't exactly] a grand buffet. It would be like a king or a prince lowering himself to be with the peasants. When you're a king or a prince, you're in your kingdom... It's a very big change in two societies. I think that when the volunteers come, they come to know. They come to learn. They come to see what the real situation is. And to do this, they have to lower themselves.

Being part of the Annunciation House live-in facility also comes with challenges of communal living where guests, on a daily basis, must negotiate living with people of different cultures, personalities, and preferences. When asked how the organization and the staff can improve to better serve the guest population with these challenges, they generally express the following:

Not one. On the contrary, I'm very appreciative of you all. Like in this moment, you all take the time to get to know someone.

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Nothing has been a problem. I feel very good, because you all are very good people. You are all attentive and very patient. I am always thankful that you all listen to me. Even if it's just to ask permission for something, everyone always listens.

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They hear me and support me. I didn't think that they were going help me at all. In Mexico, they stay with their arms crossed. And thanks to be God, they heard me, and they supported me. Yes, they listen when there's a problem or a complaint, and they try to solve it.

However, when the discussion shifted from the organization to discussing difficulties and areas of improvement for the guest population, their responses changed. They expressed some of their discontent over the behavior of other guests and the inconveniences that have come with communal living. The following responses summarize their discomfort of living in a community comprising different personalities:

It's hard. It's hard. It's something in my case you have to bear. Imagine — if it's hard to live with people you know, think about living with people who you've never seen before in your life. It's... how do I tell you, it's difficult.

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I don't know... to get to know everyone... there are some that only think [of themselves]. I don't know. It's weird. You find someone of one humor and another person that's very different.

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Roberto doesn't understand anything... Everyday, we have to turn off the lights at ten, but he still takes a bath after ten. It's illegal to take a shower after ten [according to house rules].

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Araceli... I went out with her [and her son] twice. She cuts you off very fast. It's like she gets angry at you very fast. Like everything. She doesn't like anything. That's how her personality is. Rubi is good with me, but she can't go off walking around with me. It's ok. We talk about little things. Or sometimes it's better to be alone.



Guests also indicate the lack of cooperation amongst the guest community members and noncompliance to house rules as some of the major challenges. They feel particular guests take the resources and provision of the houses for granted:

Some people think “Oh, give me everything, because you feel sorry for me, because I have nothing.” Like right now, we have no soap. So I say, anyone who wants to do some washing, let them buy their own soap. I say this so that they will value it more. Everything would be different, because nothing would be lacking, and everyone would value everything more. Right now it’s “Why should I worry? They give me everything.”

An example with food... People take what they take, and they throw it away. And there’s not an appreciation of what we have, like soap. They know that we don’t have soap, but they leave soap on the floor and in the bathroom and all over the place.

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[People should] respect the rules of the houses more. I’ve noticed that people take an advantage of this. There are people that are very abusive in a sense. It’s to be like wanting more than your share. It’s like if you give me a popsicle, and I take the popsicle, and then I take the other ones too. They take an advantage of the good sentiment of the volunteers.

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Sometimes they don’t pay attention to what they need to do in the house.

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The house would work better if people said, “Could you do this please? Could you do that?” and people were willing to help and be polite. Ruben told us at the last meeting that for those who can, they should help out... the tables, the chairs. Carlos, he left. He should’ve been here helping. It’s not just. It’s not right. The chairs, the tables, you all did it, not them. The food is free. It doesn’t cost anything. You don’t ask for anything. You don’t ask anything of us... There’s a lot of tension among the guests of the house.

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Sometimes, people who come are grateful, and sometimes they’re not. There are some people who come here who see the work of the volunteers as an obligation that they have to help them. But it’s not an obligation.

Other guests suggest on how the situation could be remedied by the following responses:

This is just an opinion, but I think before this house accepts anyone, they should say, “Ok, we will accept these people. They will be welcomed, but we are going to ask for cooperation in the upkeep of the house.” Everyone would have to participate in order to stay, and I think that it would make people value this house more.

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I’d like [the work of Annunciation House] to continue, but I would like it to see it self-sustaining so that the people who come do something, some type of crafts, some type of, something like that to sell so that the houses can sustain themselves. Because when you have to work for something, you value it more. When everything is given for free, it’s very easy not to appreciate it. It’s very easy not to value it... Not necessarily that this would completely and totally sustain the houses but just to create a little bit more investment by the guests so that it’s valued more. There are a lot of wasting going on of different things of food, values of different things, and that’s why we are the way we are.

In many cases, however, much of the non-compliant guests are individuals who are coping from loss of control and personal identity. Volunteers explain:

There’s also less pretty things that you learn. You learn about how people react to a powerless situation. When people feel powerless, they tend to strike out. They try to find control in whatever way they can. And sometimes that means striking out on us, because we represent structure and restriction to them, so there’s that aspect too.

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When [a migrant] makes it here, he doesn’t have the choice of how he will get paid, if he will get paid fairly. It’s luck of the draw of his employer, because his employer can always hang that undocumented card over his head and say no no, so his life is filled with inability to make his own choices. Because of the circumstances he has lived in Mexico, and now he’s here, he’s still at the will of other people. So he has lost all ability to control his life. He can’t even make the choice to live with his family.

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[One particular guest] was a very demanding person, very much in charge of himself. Control was huge. And to me, I didn’t know. I was just a new volunteer trying to survive in Vides... He was so control-oriented. So yes, very controlled. He was looking for respect. I think a big concern of his was that we were going to think of him as stupid and dumb, because he was from Africa... the stereotypes.

Pride was huge for [a lot of guests]. Also, trying to live in a different culture, a lot of people react that way. They would put their music on, and it was so important to them. They would do dances in the background. You know, culturally based language to and to hear their language. Then they would be a lot easier to talk to when they were in a comfortable environment. But any time they weren't in control [it was difficult].

In many ways, it is very hard to generalize the situations of the guest, as many come from a variety of experiences. In the example of the guests who are seeking political asylum, these are individuals who have experienced unavoidable threats made to their lives for associating with a certain group. Repeated attempts have been made on their lives to the point they have had to leave their own homes in search of refuge in another country. These people have been incarcerated, tortured, and have lost homes, businesses, and family members. Many of their family members have been sequestered or killed. These individuals have literally lost everything, and it has been individuals in places of power and authority that have taken their livelihood away from them. A member on the leadership team elaborates:

I know of an Iranian man who had to cross sixteen different countries to get to the United States. He actually walked from Venezuela to get to the border here. And of course once they show up here, they're incarcerated again. They've finally managed to escape with their lives, and what happens is they're incarcerated. Sometimes they're given legal representation. Rather, they have legal representation if they have it.

Now we have a man from an African country who solicited legal help locally and across the country, and no one would take his case, because everyone is so backlogged. The point is, there's a whole array of traumatic experiences that have denied folks access to their rights and just power over their daily experience form all sorts of levels, from systematic to the micro.

The guests who come to Casa Vides, they've come directly from the detention center or have been told what to wear, what time to wake up, what time to exercise... by those who are jailing them for having committed what crime? No crime. So they have whole series of experiences that we as volunteers have greater or less sense of experience over.

All of a sudden, these individuals are placed in the facilities of Annunciation House, and in some ways, there is tremendous amount of freedom, but on the other, there is also imposition of arbitrary roles and house rules that they must abide by. A leadership member who has observed such dynamics over the years explains:

We're fairly young and inexperienced and make our share of mistakes and errors and are more or less willing to admit them. So that comes back to the experiences guests bring with them. Are we always aware of that? Do we always know what sacrifice or what they give up to be here? Do we appreciate that? No.

So sometimes our interaction of our respective guests and volunteers... could create a reaction, because all of a sudden we're living in a kind of arbitrary working situation together. We have come from very different circumstances, and we're trying to understand from a very basic level that we can have some sense of control over ourselves, our daily lives. It's a unique experience we have to figure out together.

And for others, they are simply afraid. They are afraid of their futures and highly concerned over their undocumented status. One explains:

In truth, yes, I'm very afraid. I fear returning to Mexico and to find myself dead. It's a drama [living as an undocumented person]. I would like to be able to walk, to walk freely without having to guard my every step, to be able to work, and to see immigration or border patrol not to have to be running. It's very scary for me.

In other cases, they are worried about their families back home, as one explains:

And even though there are times, you know, when we get very depressed, we have to be strong and think of the future... you know, what we're doing for our families. This is for them so they can get ahead... But it's difficult being far away from them. I want to be with my family and children.

Family burdens are also added by the stress of having to figure out their next step after Annunciation House, as it is a strict policy of the organization not to assist guests with their plans of traveling into the interior of the country or seeking employment.

Some must resort to coyotes to get to another destination. A guest explains:

Even though I don't know them or have a lot of trust in them, it's that point that you put yourselves in their hands to be able to arrive at your destination, where you want to go... but they're the people who succeed in helping people.

More than anyone else, the guests seem to know the difficulty of finding permanent residence in the U.S., as a guest responds, "No, it would not be easy for me or my family—the language and the migratory situation and for legal documents" at the question of whether he would ever immigrate to the U.S. permanently. Instead, many plan to return to their countries once they have earned enough finances to be able to support their family members. Guests share their short-term and long-term goals:

No, to live here, no. I feel like it's beautiful here, but no. I simply want to return to my country. Short-term is to recover [from the injury] and to be able to work. And after the years I have planned to stay and save a little bit of money, I want to be able to return to my country.

[I want] the life that every parent wants for his children. I want them to study, have food to eat, have clothes to wear, have a house... so that tomorrow, they could have a career and a way to defend themselves.

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[I want] to work here in the U.S. for the duration of the time necessary to cover my finances and hopefully be able to buy my own mechanic shop.

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I want to be in Mexico again with my family someday.

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Right now, I have this goal to be able to build my mother's house. I want to be able to have some type of a store or business so that she can live. That's what I ask... if God allows me to have this life and to continue living. [I want to return someday] and build a school in my village, to teach, and to help with whatever I can. These are my dreams. My dreams.

## Casa Vides

Casa Vides is where I spent my ten weeks as a full-time volunteer and met the many individuals who shared their life stories with me. The house is a red rectangular building located in *Segundo Barrio*, known as one of the most worn down and dangerous parts of El Paso. The house holds a 40-45 person capacity, and guests typically consist of political asylees, social security families, injured migrants, people with pending legal cases, and at times, unaccompanied minors.

Although located across the street from the fire department and two blocks from the El Paso Convention Center, my initial impression of the neighborhood is that of fear and anxiety. To the right of the house is an old car shop that seems hollow and abandoned. Across from the house is another shop that is gated in for the most part. The street intersects Paisano Street, the road that takes one straight to the New Mexico state line, one of the most impoverished areas made up of dirt roads and small square-like houses on the verge of crumbling down.

I can still remember what the neighborhood sounded like during my first visit. What I heard was that of a stillness engulfed in neglect and sadness. Looking at the house, I wondered what my state of safety would be and whether or not I would be able to endure life in such a place. Although an 8 by 11 inch sheet of paper taped to the door indicated that I was at Casa Vides, old signs painted on the side of the building by previous occupants said otherwise. Stray animals roamed around house, in search of something to eat and a place to rest a while. Children were busy playing around the house, hanging on fences, and climbing on cars parked on the street.

**Figure 12: Casa Vides Neighborhood**



The gloominess I initially felt in the exterior of the building is even more apparent inside the house. The main floor is divided by an open area with tables and chairs where people are eating rice and beans. On the right are beat-up, old couches of different colors and designs. The cushions are filthy and torn, yet I see men with crutches sitting and staring into space. The mood of the house is solemn, and no one seems to notice or care that a stranger has walked in. Instead, they are going about their business, some cooking in the kitchen, others eating in silence.

I come to find out it is lunchtime, where the kitchen is open for guests to cook whatever they want for themselves. Their plates and silverware seem to have been around for ages, as they are chipped and bent out of shape. There is an orange water cooler that has been filled with water straight from the faucet. I see a child running to the cooler, placing his mouth underneath, and drinking straight from it. Only moments later, a man with crutches pours water into his mug, not knowing a child had contaminated it with his mouth.

The kitchen is long and narrow with a commercial oven and refrigerator. The area is consumed with various ingredients and a shelf full of old pots and pans. Most of the pots are made of thin steel and seem like they went through war and back. They are crumbled, old, and in my opinion, in need of being tossed out. The end of the kitchen leads to the laundry room stocked with bleach, pinesol, and laundry detergent. There are two washers but no dryers. I am told that due to the desert-like climate of El Paso, clothes hung outside can dry within thirty minutes. Thus, the idea of using a dryer becomes a laughing matter.

Out in the yard, clothes lines are filled with shirts, pants, and blankets. There is no lawn but ground covered with sand and dirt with an old picnic table under a large tree.

**Figure 13: Casa Vides Guests in the Yard**



The area is gated in, as the yard connects to a small alleyway behind the house. There is even laundry drying on the fence. It seems people try to hang their clothes wherever they can find space. Toys and dirty laundry line the side of the yard, waiting to be picked up. The sun is scorching with its 100 plus degree weather. The heat is extremely dry and painful. However, the inside of the house is not too different, as the building operates



without central air conditioning. At certain hours, the swamp cooler<sup>120</sup> is turned on, but most of the time, the doors in the back remain open to keep the air circulating.

The rest of the first floor is occupied by a communal living space for men. It is a large room with six sets of bunk beds and a twin-sized bed. There are wooden lockers where people may place their personal items, but they are responsible for purchasing their own locks. Linked to the dorm is the bathroom area with two individual showers, toilets, and urinals. There is not a door that separates the dorm and the bathroom area but a small hallway that links the two. The area is dark and hot. The ceiling fan oscillates in mediocre speed and seems to do little to cool the room. There is no sense of privacy for the men. The only private space ironically is a small room within the dorm where a male volunteer stays. The door usually remains locked.

The second floor is the female and family unit along with a living area for volunteers. No staircase links the two floors from the inside, so one must go outside of the building in order to proceed upstairs. Immediately entering the door, one is greeted by two bathroom stalls and a washing area that also links to a hallway to the rooms. Unlike the male dormitory, the women and family units are comprised of five different rooms. Occupancy of each room ranges from 4-6 people. On one end of the hall are two toilet stalls, and two sets of sinks are located at opposite ends of the floor. There are also two shower rooms, each on opposite sides of the hall.

A small office and a living area for volunteers are located upstairs. The office is a tiny room with an old computer and cabinets and shelves. The volunteer living area is a small suite with three bedrooms. The common area is just big enough for two couches, a

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<sup>120</sup> Swamp coolers are cost-effective evaporative cooling systems that take the heat from the outside and fan it through water-wetted pads to cool the temperature inside. Swamp coolers use significantly lower amount of electricity and are commonly used in the dry climates of the southwestern region of the United States.

TV, and a bookshelf. Two of the three bedrooms are single-occupancy, barely adequate to fit a twin-sized bed and a dresser. The third room is double-occupancy, the size of the first two rooms combined together. There is also a shower in the volunteer suite but no bathroom, so volunteers must use the stalls in the guest corridors. The suite also leads to a small porch outside where volunteers often catch the cool night breeze after their long, tiring shifts.

I am told one of the single-occupancy rooms is mine. A sign with my name written in crayon greets me. I enter the small stuffy room and look out the window and see the dark shop straight across. The same children are running down the street. Although I am pleasantly surprised to be given a private room, I feel as if I am in a convent—a very modest room with very simple furniture. I wonder how safe my room is, having the window facing the street head-on. I also wonder how safe my own belongings will be in the room. I contemplate whether or not I should keep everything locked up.

After the self-guided tour of the house, I head back downstairs to see the house in more detail. One thing that catches my eye is a huge mural in the dining area. The painting represents different migrants with a quote by Bishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated in El Salvador. It says “*Si me matan, resucitaré en mi pueblo.*” This translates to “If they kill me, I will be resurrected in my people.” This quote coincides with the theme of Casa Vides, which is in memory of many individuals who died in Central America during the 1980s. The name of the house is specifically named after Gabriel and Gladis Estela Vides, young parents of six children from El Salvador who were killed as result of their efforts in helping promote the rights of workers. I come to

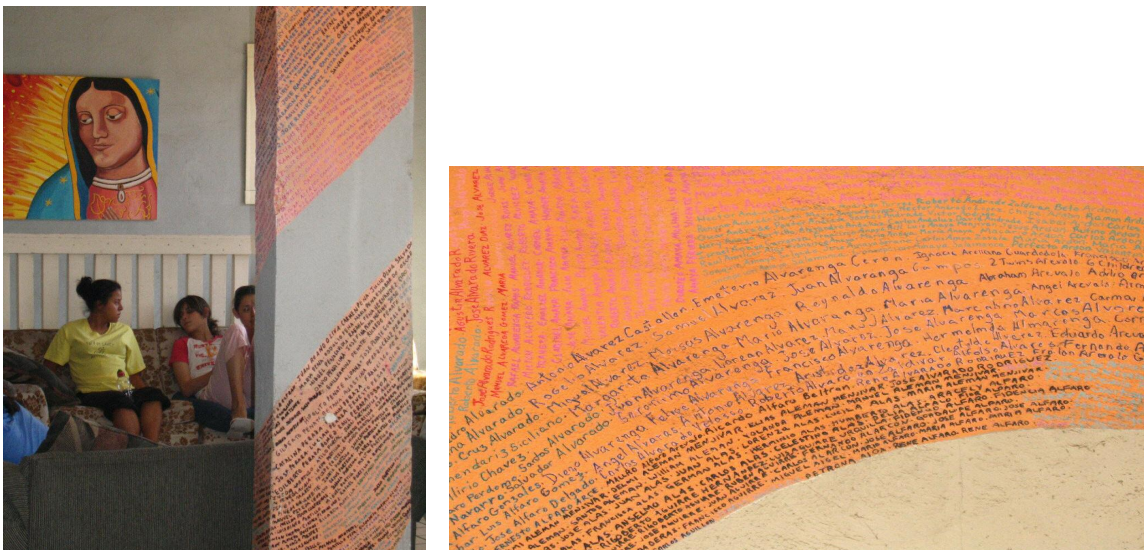
find out later that Ruben Garcia, the director of the organization, adopted these children and raised them on his own.

**Figure 14: Casa Vides Mural**



Adjacent to the mural are names of hundreds of people whose lives were lost in Central America. These names spiral along the walls throughout the room.

**Figure 15: Names of those Killed during Central American Civil Wars**



Walking through Casa Vides, it becomes apparent that this is an extremely humble house with very little material possessions. The dining tables are wooden folding tables with metal seats. On the side are black crates with dried fruits and vegetables. Many food items are donated by vendors after the items have lost their freshness. It is commonplace to find more dried up vegetables than fresh ones in the crates. Bread is often donated by grocery stores after losing their “made fresh daily” qualities. Flies and cockroaches swarm the dining area, but it does not seem to bother anyone else. A mother jokes about her one-year-old daughter who is so accustomed to killing cockroaches that one day, she mistakened watermelon seeds for cockroaches and started attacking her watermelon.

I am told the menu items change as different donated items come through the house. Guests take turns making breakfast and dinner for the entire house with whatever ingredients that are available. Because the organization is only able to purchase basic items such as rice, beans, and sugar, all other food items are at the mercy of donors.

**Figure 16: Typical Meal**



When brown, leaky bananas are donated, guests enjoy banana bread. When hamburger meat (very rarely) is donated, people flock to the refrigerator to enjoy some protein. And when the donations run low, people resort to eating rice and beans until something different is delivered. Sometimes when expired milk cartons are donated, they are frozen until the day of use. I remember drinking out of a carton with a February expiration date.

It is one of the major responsibilities of volunteers to sort through the donations and deem what is good and what is not edible. When fruits come in, volunteers sort through and cut away rotten pieces. I remember cutting through a pineapple that had been eaten away by insects and left with only a quarter of it edible. Guests still enjoyed the “fresh” pineapples and ate them in thanksgiving in the fact that we had something different. I am constantly reminded of the Guatemalan politician whose eyes gleamed whenever pineapples came in with the donation pile.

One of the least favorite things of the volunteers is cutting through pre-packaged vegetable bags and salvaging any pieces of vegetables that may be edible. The strong odor of the rotten pieces pierces through our noses whenever the bags are opened. Another is sorting through leaking apples and mangos and determining what is safe to eat and what is not. Canned food items are similar in which they are sorted by the condition of the cans. Cans with swollen tops are tossed out in order to prevent botulism.<sup>121</sup> More than half of cans must be thrown into the trash.

Yet when donations come in, guests entertain themselves by picking through the pile and finding something to satisfy their appetite. I rarely heard guests complain about the food items, and they were almost always thankful that there was something to eat.

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<sup>121</sup> This is a form of food poisoning that can be caused by swollen, rusty, or damaged cans (Clemson Extension, 2007).

Many have told me that they are so thankful to be at Vides, because without it, they would be on the streets. Thus, they rarely saw reasons to complain about the food, because in their opinion, everything had been given freely. A volunteer recalls the gratitude and hope with which many of the guests lived their lives:

Not a day goes by that I don't hear the words "*Gracias a Dios* [thanks to God]" or see an act of kindness and love between guests, between volunteers, and between guests and volunteers... where jokes are made, songs are sung, prayers are given up to God, and smiles exchanged... and where a story is shared that appears to be so insurmountably hopeless that us volunteers can't even fathom it, that some person who carries that burden shows us that hope really exists and that we are living amongst a people of hope in a house of hope.

Although many of their living situations had been nothing but cruel, the guests have learned to once again acclimate to their current situations and to cope. And it is through the guests that many volunteers have gained strength to work in the houses. According to a staff member:

The most beautiful thing about Casa Vides is when thinking you can't go on or that this work is just too hard and someone in the house says something or does something at the moment you need it most, and you are uplifted once again.

Living through this experience by working and living with the client population can come with many challenges. One of the most grueling things I found about being on staff is the physical labor that constitutes this work. Sweltering through the desert-like weather, getting up early in the morning to get the house in order, running around the house all day fixing problems, and spending endless hours cleaning takes a huge physical toll on the volunteers. This is added by the emotional needs of the guests who are struggling themselves to get their lives in order.

From managing guest welfare – where volunteers are required to hold weekly sessions with their designated guests to help find emotional, legal, health, and other

solutions – to the daily task of keeping the house in order, many volunteers find themselves struggling every day with the inconvenience of tailoring their lives to the needs of others. There is no such thing as a typical day at Vides when various needs arise at different times. One example is when we unexpectedly had to postpone dinner arrangement in order to save the house from flooding when a downpour of rain threatened the infrastructure of the house. We spent dinnertime running through the rain carrying sand bags and lining them against the wall. Some volunteers have had to treat the children who came home with head lice while others had to put a stop to a fight between guests.

One of the constant struggles the volunteer staff deals with is the guest chore list. Even though the guests rarely complain about the food, being assigned to do chores is another story. At Vides, guests are generally assigned to 5-7 chores each week. Each day consists of chores such as cooking breakfast, doing the dishes, mopping the dining area, cleaning the bathroom, etc. Each chore must be completed by the end of the day, and the volunteer on shift monitors the completion of all tasks. It is the responsibility of the night shift volunteer to check the chore list and remind guests who have not completed them.

Whenever new lists are posted every Sunday night, many rush to it and start complaining about the chores they dislike, the fact that someone else has easier chores, the unequal number of chores assigned to each individual, and more. Several also have repeated problems with the house rule that all guests must eat dinner together at 6pm and where unexcused absences lead to extra chores. I remember reminding a guest that it was his turn to clean out the grease trap when he sternly refused and called me a liar in front

of everyone. It took a very heated conversation to get him to comply. Other volunteers have also experienced similar situations when smiles turn into vicious frowns when reminded of an extra chore due to an unexcused absence at dinner.

Thus, gauging the reactions of the guests becomes one of the most difficult challenges. However, many volunteers try to imagine the situation in the shoes of the guests. Our interpretation is that many guests have been forcibly taken out of their lives and placed into a state of powerlessness. The volunteers represent the power structure, and many resent it. Their life atrocities have deeply impacted their psyche to the point where they feel the need to reassert some of their power in ways of refusing house chores. This was especially common with torture victims.

Life at Vides definitely is not one of luxury and without problems. Aware of such intensity that surround the work, all new summer volunteers are pushed into this intensity from the first day of training. This led me from the first day whether or not I would be able to survive this experience. The organization does make special cases for volunteers to help deal with the stress level. Even though volunteers are required to spend the night in their assigned houses, everyone is given one night off each week. This often means spending the night on the second floor of Casa Teresa, a space for volunteers to rest on their days off. This area is furnished with a full kitchen, dining room, living room, dormitories for men and women, and an old computer with internet access.



### **Field Notes: Day 1**

We started the day with orientation and greetings from Ruben [director]. He told us the history of the organization and volunteer expectations. I was very excited to have finally started. However, as the day progressed, I realized more and more how removed I would be from the lifestyle I had grown comfortable with.

Lunch was horrible—rice, beans, and fries. The juice tasted like cleaning solution. I had a lot left over. However, by dinner, I gulped everything. I didn't care about anything. I was just hungry and not knowing when I'd eat next, I ate like there's no next meal.

The day was grueling. Lots of heat, lots of walking, lots of drinking water straight from the faucet. At 8pm, we watched *Senorita Extraviada* [documentary on the femicides in Ciudad Juarez]. I fell asleep toward the second half. I'm tired. I don't think I realized how difficult this would be. It's only Day 1, and I'm cranky. I keep in mind that in participant-observation, observation is more important than participation.

I definitely am not here to fully participate in the experience. It is this thought that kept me going today. I'm not sure if I'd stick with this experience otherwise. I'm not here for the deeper/greater significance. I need to proceed with the dissertation. I have to view this difficulty as part of the dissertation process, not an Annunciation House staff experience. This is what keeps me going for now. Lord, help me.

At other times, volunteers have opportunities to spend some time at Casa Emaus, the community center on the Mexico side of the border. During orientation, the summer volunteer cohort spent the night away at Casa Emaus and engaged in intense reflections of our experiences. Casa Emaus is a simple building with a living/dining area and two dormitories that is surrounded by other homes made out of similarly cheap materials, children playing in the dirt roads, and music blasting from neighborhood parties. Standing in one of the most impoverished places in Mexico and seeing across the fence, the sign of wealth and economic freedom of the U.S., we tried to put ourselves in the context of those migrants who attempted to escape their own realities by crossing the border. This helped put our own struggles into perspective.

Even though the grueling everyday tasks of working at Casa Vides overwhelmed me at times, it is through this experience that I was able to gain insights into the life of an Annunciation House staff. Not only was I able to document the lives of those involved with Annunciation House, but I was also able to experience a personal transformative learning process that both overtly and covertly manifested itself through my field study. The following chapters explain and describe to what extent informal learning happens within the social context and how global realities have come to shape the work of organizations such as Annunciation House.

**CHAPTER 5: PERSONAL IS POLITICAL**  
**HOW PERSONAL JOURNEYS LEAD TO POLITICAL AWARENESS**

**Introduction**

Annunciation House is an organization that has undergone near 30 years of changing political atmosphere on the U.S. Mexico border. From the massive influx of Central American refugees in the 1980s to NAFTA-displaced workers in the 1990s, the organization has received migrants affected by diverse legal, political, and status adjustment issues. Now with increased national attention on border militarization and immigration reform, intensified legal issues have once again affected the migratory flows of people receiving services at Annunciation House. This chapter examines the political context in which the staff of Annunciation House operate under and in which the migrant community continues to seek services. It will explore ways in which this work facilitates the personal and political transformation of these humanitarian aid workers who find their way to Annunciation House.

***Changing Political Context***

Although the guest population and the legal context surrounding these individuals have dramatically changed on the border, the leadership of Annunciation House persists that its work of providing hospitality has not changed. However, it does acknowledge that the nature of the work sheltering undocumented immigrants has become intensified in the eyes of the law and the work of the organization made more difficult. “We’re doing the same work we’ve always been doing, but the political climate has changed,”

explains one of the members on the leadership and continues, “It’s almost kind of the goal post of the game made less wide.”

The work of Annunciation House especially took a dramatic turn post 9-11. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 changed the American mindset to one that associated foreigners with terrorists. Although the terrorist attacks were committed by visa holders who did not enter the country through the Mexican border, the focus was soon placed on the U.S.-Mexico border region and its undocumented population. Following September 11th and the enactment of the Patriot Act, migrants became increasingly viewed as possible terrorists. A volunteer comments:

If you look at September 11th, first of all, none of those people came in from Mexico. But why is there such a double standard with the U.S.-Mexican border and the Canadian-U.S. border? At the U.S.-Canadian border, there are no check points.

Nonetheless, Border Patrol responded by increasing enforcement and resettling agents from the interior of the country to the border region (Hope, 2005; Garcia, 2005).

According to a personal interview with a Border Patrol officer, on average, only 10% of individuals apprehended on the border have criminal records.

According to Garcia, the director of Annunciation House, these events only intensified a policy for the last 25 years that he believes has “consciously called for the increased use of force as a tool of border enforcement.” This has been a slow but consistent attempt at militarizing the border with increased use of military technology and intimidation tactics to deter migrants. It is a policy that makes Border Patrol enforcement “more lethal and ever more indiscriminate as to who and how it takes human lives” (Garcia, 2005, n.p.).

Annunciation House unfortunately has had experienced such use of force in its own backyard when one of its guests was shot to death by a Border Patrol officer on February 22, 2003. Juan Patricio Peraza Quijada, a 19 year-old Mexican migrant residing in Annunciation House, was confronted by Border Patrol officers in the parking lot of Annunciation House. According to the El Paso Times, Quijada fled in the middle of the confrontation and allegedly threw a ladder and picked up a metal pipe to deter the agents from pursuing him (Chavez, 2003). The officers called for back-up, and six to eight Border Patrol agents arrived and formed a semi-circle with their guns pointed at him. This led to a shouting match and ultimately ended with two gunshots, killing Quijada instantly (Garcia, 2003).

**Figure 17: Parking Lot of Annunciation House**



This raised an outrage in the community, as organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Border Network for Human Rights questioned whether or not the Border Patrol had the right to stop Quijada simply on his way to take out the trash. It is suspect that Quijada was unfairly targeted due to his Hispanic features. Garcia believes this incident should not have occurred, as Border Patrol has an informal

policy of not approaching social-service agencies (Chavez, 2003).<sup>122</sup> He states, "If you are poor, if you are undocumented, then it makes it acceptable to be treated in a disposable manner" (Hernandez, 2003, n.p.; Chavez, 2003).

Following the death of Quijada, the house continued to be monitored by Border Patrol with helicopters and unmarked vehicles circling its premises. As a volunteer recalls, "The political situation was very much in question, and some of the volunteers decided to leave." This particular volunteer left his current assignment in Casa de la Peregrina, the house of hospitality in Ciudad Juarez, and voluntarily moved into Annunciation House due to the departure of other volunteers. Another former volunteer explains:

There was a lot of talk about federal prosecution. And really, it was politically [motivated], and now I see that. But at that time, a lot of volunteers left. There was myself and one other person there with a lot of very frightened guests. And I was scared. We had meetings with people who really knew things they shouldn't have known about me. I don't know where they even got the information. And it was scary. I mean it was a serious conversation.

Ruben sat down with us and said, "It's five years in prison for every undocumented person in the house, and there's 70 people in the house." And if we were prosecuted, would it be the director? Was it going to be the coordinator of the houses? Was it going to be all the volunteers? What was going to happen? And it was scary. It was really scary.

Another explains:

It was politically volatile. We had to actually fill out a form admitting that we were knowingly doing what we were doing with this type of work and the risks, the potential risks.

When asked about the climate of the house at the time, a volunteer described it as "very somber... quiet... Everyone was hit in the head with a stick... sort of dazed." And although none of the Annunciation House personnel was were arrested for their work

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<sup>122</sup> This was confirmed by a personal interview with a Border Patrol agent.

following Quijada's death, the changing political context on the border makes the work difficult and continues to be a major theme that concerns the organization.

In addition to growing hostility as result of September 11th and increasing use of force and militarization on the border, current talks on immigration reform and border enforcement have also brought a wave of changing politics on the border. A big topic of concern for Annunciation House is the possibility of criminalizing those providing humanitarian assistance to undocumented immigrants. Although Annunciation House is a homeless shelter and is not aiding or abetting undocumented immigrants from further advancing into the interior of the country, the mere fact that it provides food and shelter to this population may be viewed as criminal offense in the eyes of the law.<sup>123</sup>

One indication that the U.S. may be going in the direction of criminalizing those providing humanitarian aid is the passing of the Sensenbrenner Bill, H.R. 4437 in the U.S. House of Representatives on December 16, 2005. This bill, sponsored by the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, James Sensenbrenner (R- WI), included provisions that criminalized not only the undocumented but also humanitarian aid workers. According to Garcia, H.R. 4437 proposes "criminalizing all undocumented people and raise the way that we define being in a country as an undocumented." He believes the U.S. is at a point where it has never been before, explaining that "even with the Chinese Exclusion Act which basically kicked out all Chinese people, there wasn't an aspect that if you help them, we will criminalize you" (Mack, 2006, n.p.).

The Sensenbrenner Bill, which quickly passed through the House with little debate or discussion, is representative of the anti-immigrant sentiment that has been

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<sup>123</sup> In fact, Annunciation House has been raided by the Border Patrol on several occasions throughout its existence under suspicion that the organization is committing a felony by housing undocumented migrants.

penetrating across the U.S. and changing the political context and debate on the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition to criminalizing humanitarian work, the bill would provide funds to build a 700-mile wall along the border. Congress has also considered several other pieces of legislature, such as H.R. 437 (Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act) also sponsored by Sensenbrenner along with Peter King (R-NY), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee. This bill calls for changes to immigration law that gives predominant focus on enforcement with minimal attention to the labor and humanitarian aspects of immigration (Mack, 2006).

Although the Sensenbrenner Bill did not pass in the U.S. Senate and has yet to be enacted into U.S. federal law, the fact that such legislation passed in the House with ease is indicative of the changing political climate that increasingly points to harsh prosecutions of immigrants and humanitarian aid workers. This political reality was exemplified by the arrest of two college students who were volunteering at an organization, No More Deaths, on July 9, 2005.

No More Deaths is an organization that provides basic humanitarian aid to migrants crossing the desert south of Tucson, Arizona and has close networking ties with Annunciation House. Led by Reverend John Fife, one of the early leaders of the Sanctuary Movement, its mission is to prevent deaths of migrants who are crossing the desert into the United States. Volunteers set up stations in the middle of the desert with food, water, and first aid kits, providing these amenities to those in need. The organization is also active in educating the public about migrant deaths and U.S. policies that have pushed undocumented migrants to cross through deserts and away from urban zones (Sharar and Fontana, 2005).



While working the stations, two student volunteers from Colorado – Shanti Sellz and Daniel Strauss – came across three immigrants suffering from severe blisters, vomiting, and bloody diarrhea. These men were dehydrated to the point where they could not even retain water. Sellz and Strauss consulted with a volunteer doctor and an attorney, and they were advised to drive the men to a Tucson clinic for immediate medical attention. On their way, however, Sellz and Strauss were stopped by the Border Patrol, arrested, and charged for transporting undocumented migrants (Sharar and Fontana, 2005; Montini, 2006).

Sellz and Strauss soon became the focus of a courtroom battle over legal premises of humanitarian aid. They stood by the stance that offering assistance to migrants in need did not constitute a crime and turned down a plea bargain. By accepting the plea agreement, they would have had to state that they had ulterior motives of wanting the migrants to remain in the United States (Sharar and Fontana, 2005). Instead, Sellz and Strauss decided to stand trial and risk going to prison.

The trial for Sellz and Strauss was scheduled to begin in October of 2006, fifteen months after their arrest. But in September of 2006, U.S. District Judge Raner Collin dismissed all charges on the basis that these students were adhering to the guidelines that other volunteers had not been persecuted for following. The judge also found that the government for years had led No More Deaths volunteers to believe that providing care to ailing undocumented migrants was not illegal. Thus, Judge Collin concluded that Sellz and Strauss could not stand trial for what had been deemed lawful (Montini, 2006; Stanton, 2006).

The charges being dropped did bring momentary relief for humanitarian aid workers, but the 15-month battle showed how the law can be interpreted so arbitrarily and in different ways. A staff at Annunciation House explains:

Personally, the fact that the charges were dropped, I don't know that made anything different... ultimately we're left feeling there is a real arbitrariness. There's that real sense of not knowing and not being able to predict either how the law – as it stands and has stood for many, many years – may be interpreted or implied in this current political context.

And we have seen now some of the ways that can be interpreted or implied. That's taken together with all the money that's continuing to go into Homeland Security and taken together with all the anti-immigrant [sentiment] that gets blurred with the anti-terrorist rhetoric. And so, all of those factors taken together seem to be like a powder cake for us.

Another explains:

The thing to remember is that Shanti and Daniel were arrested with the existing immigration laws. It had nothing to do with new laws... What happens with these proposals is they'll throw out some really extremist legislation, and then when it's time to negotiate, it comes back and gives the impression it's become more moderate.

But the thing is, it's extreme to begin with. So the whole thing about arresting people who assist migrants and arresting undocumented migrants is kind of a radical thing. I think even if it's negotiated, it will have a lot of the punitive for migrants and people who work with migrants.

Garcia also believes that the changing environment of the U.S. makes it increasingly difficult for humanitarian workers and activists to speak and act on behalf of the migrant poor without coming under constant attack (Garcia, 2005). Asked if Annunciation House has received increased negative response to its work, he answered, "Certain people letting me know that they disagree, oppose, would like to see house shut down. That kind of feedback does come." This is in addition to certain donors cutting off support to the organization. "Certainly, the overall climate that we're operating under is pretty scary, so we'll have to see where that takes us," says a leadership staff.

### ***Volunteer Work and Personal Political Impact***

Although the basic mission of providing food, clothing, and shelter to the migrant poor may seem straight-forward, the intensifying border politics has very much merged this work with many political implications and debate. Many volunteers come to Annunciation House initially attracted to the idea of participating in humanitarian aid and cross-cultural exchange. However, immediately after their arrival, volunteers are placed in a time and a space where they must begin to critically examine the politics behind humanitarian assistance. They must constantly grapple with the question of what universal human rights are and how those without legal documentation must struggle for their daily right to food and shelter.

Given this context, it becomes difficult to remove politics from the work of the Annunciation House. What appears unique about this organization is that those who come to the organization are neither advocates nor activists prior to coming to the border. Instead, volunteers come from all walks of life and somehow stumble into the political battle and eventually transition into their advocacy and activist roles. Through this, their personal motives convert into the purposive desire for social justice beyond the basic delivery of food and shelter.

From my ongoing observations, interviews, and informal contact with the Annunciation House staff, I have found that there is a large element of personal mission that guides these individuals as they affiliate themselves with the organization. They arrive on the border not to partake in the political battle but to participate in their own personal journeys that are influenced by their desire to work in hospitality while immersing themselves in a different culture and language. It is this personal quest for

experience that guides them to the border, and through their eventual exposure to border politics, they consciously and subconsciously transform into political actors.

### ***Multiple Layers of Organizational Work***

Findings in this study indicate that there are multiple layers to staff work and involvement at Annunciation House. I have found there are fundamental differences between the year-long (or less) volunteers and those on the leadership level and/or those who have made multiple-year commitments. Although not intentionally divisive, their personal motivation and mission are decisively different from one another, and this in turn impacts the type of work and advocacy they engage in.

This chapter primarily presents the findings made on the short-term volunteer staff. This group is more driven by their initial personal quest for a wider exposure to humanitarian aid, culture, and language. As the personnel advances into long-term responsibility, their work becomes much more focused and specialized. More to their initial mission and personal journey, their efforts become instigated by their broader and global desire for social justice. Findings on the long-term cohort will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The following sections describe the personal journeys of volunteers at Annunciation House. These sections attempt to drive the point that those who come to the border are largely on their own personal journeys that unexpectedly get tested and challenged by border politics. The sections will trace their paths of transformation arriving at their desire for social and political justice. Their varied reactions to the work, interaction with migrants, and confrontation with the changing political context and

implications will point back to the personal mission and journey each individual embarks on.

The findings will also discuss how the migrant population serves as a critical training ground for the volunteers. In many ways, these migrants come to play more pivotal roles than the organization itself in delivering learning and conscientization of short-term volunteers. True social learning occurs through this personal exposure and impact with the migrant community. And as a result, these humanitarian aid workers enter into the personal and emotional politics of migrant rights and immigration reform that will most likely leave a permanent mark on their lives.

### **Personal Transformation**

The topic of personal journey serves as one of the major themes when examining the motivation of individuals engaging in justice-based grassroots work on the border. Not only are they on a path of demanding social justice for the poor and the underprivileged, but they are also in search of their own personal selves with the quest of learning more about themselves and searching for future direction in their lives. This is observed by Garcia who has seen over 500 volunteers come through Annunciation House:

Volunteers continue to come, to a certain extent, because they, too, are hungry and looking to be fed. At some level they have come to acknowledge a poverty of spirit in their lives to which they need to respond. They want to know something about themselves that can only be gained by placing themselves among the poor. Many have reflected on how privileged their lives have been and that this privilege demands a certain response. (Morton, 2005, n.p.)

This inner hunger not only becomes the reason for many to decide to come to the border but also continues to facilitate their work and transformation process after their arrival. Through structured learning – such as being educated on different debates and politics revolving around immigration through literature and orientation – they learn to conceptualize the reality of border migration. As their time progresses with the organization, they build on and expand their intellectual conceptualization of the border and begin to personalize these realities by participating in the daily struggles of migrant life themselves.

### ***Factors Leading to Arrival on the Border***

After speaking with both current and former volunteers, it becomes clear that their initial motives for coming to the border are more for personal reasons. These motivations can be categorized into humanitarian and cultural reasons. Humanitarian motivations refer to their desires to give humanitarian aid through volunteer work. Cultural motives refer to their wishes for a cross-cultural and linguistic exposure. Many of the volunteers wanting a cultural experience are those who have already spent some time abroad in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, and Mexico and wish to continue the cultural experience.

Below describes the humanitarian motivations of short-term volunteers for arriving on the border and working at Annunciation house:

Well, I knew I wanted to do volunteer work after college. I knew I wanted to do it in a Hispanic community.

Ever since my freshman year in college, I knew I wanted to give up one year of volunteer service... I just wanted to work with the poor. I always had a special place for the poor, for the homeless, and especially working with the Hispanic population, so that's what really brought me down here... I just really want to be with the poor, and I want to dedicate my life doing that.

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I was already looking for volunteer programs. Mostly I was looking abroad, but I wasn't finding many that were feasible. A lot of them require that you either pay to get there or you raise money just because of their own financial situations... I also tried communicating with other organizations, and I got a lot quicker response from here.

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Coming to Annunciation House was a bit of a fluke. I just ran across the name of the organization and the work they were doing, you know the volunteer guide, and my work had progressive Catholics and some Catholic workers, so the philosophy of working at Annunciation House seemed similar to that.

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I think that we are very, at least I, just being open, just by allowing myself to be outside of my comfort zone to talk to those who have been thrown away by society [migrant poor].

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Working with the poor [abroad], I had this great joy of helping people with water and food and shelter and health and essential things, helping people with what they needed. Whereas at home, I was working on my desires. So how can I help those in need but then also help, well in some ways, need for those who are ignorant and need to be educated? So it's been a really good fit for me to come down and work on the border and work on both sides... In some ways it [border reality and conflict] represents my own personal conflict.

The desire for a cross-cultural experience and exposure to the Spanish language is another major factor leading the volunteers to the border, as summarized by the following:

I came down originally to spend a few months to learn some Spanish.

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I majored in human services and Spanish, and I'm really interested in doing social work.

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I make choices in my life that reflect my belief in people deserving respect and care. But I'm not doing this for a religious reason. I'm doing this, because I wanted a cross-cultural experience that would teach me Spanish... It would be learning Spanish yet doing something worth doing, because you're helping poor people.

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My parents [allowed only] one year of volunteering, and if I was going to do it for a year, I didn't want to leave the States. I thought "What's the point?" In my mind, people were telling me if you go somewhere it takes you a year to get used to it and to know the people and to speak the language right... And Spanish, I had lost a lot of my Spanish skills pretty much for not using it, and I wanted to get it back.

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I wanted to pick up a little of Spanish before going back to school and live in a different part of the country, so I came down here since I knew about it... Mine [reasons for coming] were more self-serving as far as learning Spanish and seeing a different part of the country... I had no real attraction to the border as such or the border issue or the immigration issue. I'm not political in nature at all... I was interested in the border as anybody else, like an average person. I probably wasn't that interested.

Few volunteers shared other specific reasons for coming to Annunciation House outside of humanitarian and cross-cultural motivations. One volunteer was attracted to the idea of working with migrants of different demographics and the fact that Annunciation House did not try to clump migrants and their situations into one category. Another wanted to work in the Hispanic community and be "somewhere politically involved, from that angle, with the undocumented." Another volunteer stated it was her participation in the organization's Border Awareness Experience that brought her to Annunciation House. For another, the reason was unclear. She explains, "I came to Annunciation House in 1986... when [friends] asked me, something jumped inside of me to do this."



### ***Structured Learning: Conceptualizing Border Reality***

When these volunteers of different motives arrive at Annunciation House, they receive a thorough orientation to the organization and border politics. New volunteers learn about the history of the organization, the nature of the guest population, volunteer rules and regulations, overview of other social service and legal aid agencies available, and more. The aim of the orientation is to provide the context in which the volunteers will be working. A volunteer reflects on her minimal knowledge of the border prior to joining the organization:

I guess it's like I didn't understand. I never researched the reasons why people cross the border or the difficulties involved in it. I knew some of the stuff, but there's a lot of things involved that I just didn't know about.

Some attributed their ignorance of border issues to their hometown locations. They explain:

When you're on the border, everything revolves around it. The news doesn't reach farther north or at least where I was. But down here, everything centered on the border, the issues of the border, and the economic issues of the border. Whereas in my home state, it's distant to them. Here it's all consuming. It's all you see in the news. You read the newspaper, and it's about people dying trying to cross over. You don't hear any of that farther north.

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Just being in El Paso is quite different from [my state]. The weather's different, the culture's different, and the awareness of the world is different. So much here is focused on the border. Where I come from, people don't think about the border itself so much, because we're not on the border. We're a long way from the border.

It is during these orientation sessions where new volunteers learn about border politics from the angle they generally had not been exposed to prior to coming to Annunciation House. In my own personal experience and through conversations with the staff, one of the most intensive moments during orientation comes when first learning

about the political risks and possible criminal exposure for anyone associating with Annunciation House. According to the leadership, former volunteers have been arrested in the past for driving guests to hospitals, the phone lines have been tapped, and the organization has been raided by the Border Patrol on several occasions.

It becomes very clear to new volunteers from the onset that the journey they have embarked on is not merely about providing hospitality. Rather, it is becoming politically intertwined with the border region and its people and making the decision to partake in social justice work. Many new and former volunteers vividly recall their initial reactions when learning about their political risks. They explain:

When I first came here, I was so scared. Ruben, after he gave that talk, he said, “Any reactions?” And right away I said I was confused, numb, and scared. I wasn’t where I’m at. I didn’t know what I was doing was right. I thought I was a criminal. I thought I was doing something bad... I thought about it all the time.

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I was sitting here [during director’s talk on political implications] like ok thinking they just asked me to be a driver yesterday.

I don’t think I would’ve come [if I would’ve known about the political risks]. The minute my parents read and look at that, it would’ve been a lot easy for them to convince me not to come.

I don’t think I did my homework very well. I knew by working with the undocumented, there were legal implications in that, but I always thought you know, there’s probably a clause... I thought there’s probably a clause for hospitality or humanitarian aid, and so I was sure that they have a loophole that they work off of, that this organization works off of. I just made a general assumption about that.

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I chatted with the director actually. We set some time aside, and we chatted. I just gave it some time. I gave it a week and said I’ll see how I feel. At the end of the week, if I feel there’s a threat of being arrested or doing time, you know, I’ll leave... I had felt nervous, because people had been talking about it.

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I did not fully know... I'm not exactly sure what I thought of the whole subject. I was wondering why the Border Patrol didn't sit in front of the house all day and grab people as they came out.

There have been incidences where new volunteers, upon hearing about the political risks, have decided to leave the organization. During my field research, in fact, a member from my summer intern cohort decided to leave out of fear of criminal exposure. Volunteers comment on that incident:

To me, it's a price you pay. I know Ruben feels terribly about those situations too, but realistically who's going to be gung ho about coming? Who would put an asterisk with a disclaimer, "You might get arrested"?

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I could understand why I wouldn't want to put my future especially if you're very career-driven. I wouldn't want to put my future on the line if there's a slight chance that it could affect your future plans, if you had solid future plans.

### ***Learning through Struggle: Personalizing Border Reality***

As formal training by the organization opens the door to learning about the border context and its realities, education and realizations continue as volunteers struggle with these issues through their interaction with the guest population. Initially believing they are on the border to give humanitarian assistance to the migrant poor, their psyche changes as they learn about the greater political structures that have contributed to the poverty and have pushed them to migrate north in the first place.

Through their daily struggles with the work and human interactions with the guests – listening to migrant accounts, experiencing poverty first-hand, getting involved with social services, and experiencing the physically grueling tasks as staff members – volunteers experience informal learning within this context. The leadership believes that during their year with the organization, volunteers undergo an intense educational

experience as they learn about issues of immigration and the complexities that surround migrant life. In many ways, they do not recognize these experiences as educational. Instead, these learning moments become embedded in their day-to-day tasks that sculpt their learning process on the subconscious level. Through the daily struggles and joys of their work, unique insights to their personal growth and transformation processes are conceived.

### ***Impact of Migrant Accounts***

For volunteers, much value is placed on the personal stories they hear first-hand from the migrants. Through sharing of their personal struggles and pain, volunteers realize the greater political and legal structures that have impeded economic prosperity for these people. These accounts become major instruments in challenging and transforming the psyche of the volunteers towards their personal quest for justice and social equity. Volunteers explain:

I guess when I came down here, that's when my eyes started to be opened with the undocumented and their situations.

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It's good to know, there are some awful stories, but there are some that aren't as awful, and also economic, such a wide range. And the guests help you get that range. It puts kind of more of a face to what's happening at the border.

They're not all what the stereotypes often are. I think being in that presence for people is important. Sharing that humanity is the important thing.

You know, when [a newly arrived guest] showed me his ID, his wallet was wet. He had just crossed the river, and then he came here. In the clothing bank when he first came here, he was like, "I can't believe this kind of place exists. You all are wonderful, *amable* [kind] and have all these big hearts." Next day we went to the pool, and he was like, "Yesterday I was in a dirty, disgusting river. I'm now in a pool with chlorine." It was real. It makes it all worthwhile, guests like that. It's so beautiful.

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I would say that the undocumented are not terrorists. They're poor, fair, and faithful. They're hard working, they're hopeful, struggling, and sacrifice so much. They risk lives so their children can eat.

They're just struggling. They're suffering. They've had less chances and less education. And even if people make mistakes and put themselves in bad situations, you still have compassion for them, because they're trying their best.

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There are times I'd sit down with somebody, and they'd unload, like this woman who was locked up for three weeks... to be relieved and to tell someone, someone who will be sympathetic to you and believe you... I've always been interested in people but now even more so. I want to hear their stories.

A woman we talked to was 24 or something, from Honduras. She was a model in Honduras. She was really cute, nice, and everything. Her husband and she hopped trains, and it took 2 months through Guatemala and Mexico... and that was really intense... a woman my age doing that so far away.

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Probably the greatest difficulty is listening to people's stories and being unable to fix things for them, because there's a lot of awful situations when working with poverty-stricken populations, and there's a lot you can't do for them. I mean, if our government doesn't want to give people legal support to stay here, they're not going to no matter how much that particular person may need it... So it's difficult hearing the stories.

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I had this profound moment where I was realizing that here Armando is in the hospital where he's worrying about a \$360 bill and wondering how in the world this money is going to come so he doesn't get kicked off the discount therapy... I was just thinking about him and thinking about how he doesn't have a choice to be here. He doesn't have a choice of where he lives. He doesn't have the choice of how he lives. He doesn't even have the choice about when he gets here.

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This morning I was talking to a guy from Honduras, and he's never ever been in school. He's from a small *pueblito* [village] from Honduras. He doesn't know how to write, never been in school, his parents couldn't afford, so now he's here. And he's telling me he's now the dream of his family. They're now looking at him to be the savior. They were crying with tears of joy when they heard he made it to the U.S. So for me to hear this story, this story piles onto all these stories, which have all become one big numbing story, and I think the cup is overflowing for me.

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Sometimes in certain situations of a servant, that's part of it... I just feel like a witness in times just to see, just to be with people into being a witness to them in their situation and what they're going through, what they're doing. Just to give validity and legitimacy to their situation.

### ***Voluntary Poverty***

Through such accounts, volunteers start realizing how privileged their own lives have been. These confrontations with harsh realities of migrants start challenging their own lifestyles and way of being. A volunteer explains:

There are some things that are out of my control, out of the guests' control, out of everybody's control. Learning that is harder when you're from a background where you have planned things, and they have gone through time and time again. You overcome obstacles and put your foot forward slowly, and you've only had little barriers along the way. So it's a good lesson to know that you can't always control things, and sometimes you have to let that happen.

It's almost like a different lifestyle or mentality I've been brought up with. My parents said, "Build yourself up, build yourself up," which is great education. That's good, but here, seeing these people, they're just struggling to live, to make a living. Seeing simplicity in their lives, the simplicity.

Having given up many of their material privileges, volunteers must learn to utilize one another not only as their resources but as elements of survival. A volunteer explains:

You prepare yourself to live amongst the guests, but you never prepare yourself to live amongst the volunteers. And so here we are, working day in day out together, sharing meals together, passing on the phone for shift together, and relying on each other for entertainment outside of this.

I mean, it's almost you have more qualms about volunteers than with guests. I guess you think you have to prepare yourself to live with people who have a very different life, but actually people you work with have semi-similar lives in the sense we pretty much come from backgrounds that are pretty much middle class at this point.

Others add to the discussion on their privileged backgrounds as follows:

My childhood was... it was my sister and I and my parents... I had great education – elementary school, middle school, high school, college – great education. I never wanted anything – gosh, piano lessons, sports... My parents gave us everything so that we would have a well-rounded life. We really never wanted anything.

Just as a middle class U.S. citizen, there were things that I just subconsciously took for granted that all human beings in the world should have and be able to have things like air conditioning, hot water, toilet paper, things like that, which are not necessarily norms for all people.

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I was born here. I have innumerable opportunities. I've got a good education. I'm bilingual. I've got a university education.

Yet these young adults choose to strip themselves from the material privilege they have known and continue to enter into solidarity with the migrant poor. And by building a trust with the guests and walking in accompaniment with them, they learn about the rewards of their voluntary poverty. Accompaniment, in the context of Annunciation House, refers to walking through the journey of migrants with them and being a listening ear, resource, and witness to their struggles. Volunteers articulate on their conceptualization of solidarity and accompaniment with guests as follows.

I see that solidarity is important. We really have to look at and think about and what it means to each individual, to each of us, and to do the best we can.

I remember when I had to go to MHMR [Mental Health and Mental Retardation] with Lorena. I remember I was going to go to bed early that night. She comes to my room and is just a mess. I ended up staying up the whole night calling the police and calling 911, and then coming and then taking her to the intake clinic and then taking her to the hospital and then waiting for her until like 6 in the morning. I remember feeling that's what accompaniment means.

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Solidarity, being in solidarity with our guests. How can you understand or help unless you come and live like they do and try to see the world like they do?

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It can be an advantage just to be living with the people you're serving, and you really get to know them. You really create a deep connection with them.

One interesting element is that some of these volunteers, throughout solidarity with the guests, realize that their own privileged backgrounds can be used to advocate on behalf of this population. A volunteer notes:

For instance, one of the guests said, "Thank you for coming to the hospital with me. I really feel like it wouldn't have happened without you there." That's really rewarding. So I feel even if I'm just a white person present with one of my guests in the hospital, it does make a difference. And it's an easy thing to do, because I'm white... My whiteness and my middle class background is something I can use as an advocate for somebody.

I believe it's his first time [in the U.S.], and he's already picked up that just being white sends you to the front of the line. You have opportunities other people aren't gonna have here, and people are going to deal with you probably quicker... He's picked up that if anybody's gonna be discriminated against here, it's going to be him. And I would venture to say that being white is a privilege not only here but also in his country too.

When asked about the financial inconvenience of entering into solidarity with the poor, many surprisingly responded with their positive experience of not having to worry about finances:



Financially, not having financial resources, I don't feel bad at all about it, because I still feel I have everything. If I need clothes, I can get clothes from the clothing bank [located in the basement of Annunciation House]. If I need medicine, well, there's the Opportunity Center [free clinic]. I've got all the [donated] food here for free.

In fact it's nice not to worry about money... It's nice not having the thought of paying the bills, doing this and doing that. I can focus on what I'm doing here. It's nice taking out the whole money equation.

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Well, I think really you just have to be comfortable. You just have to feel comfortable with yourself. You certainly can't have the type of personality where you always want to keep up with other people, because we absolutely can't keep up with other people. But I think if you feel comfortable with yourself, with your lifestyle, and also if you feel you're doing the right thing, it can't be so hard.

I think what's true for all of the volunteers is that one of the reasons we come down here is that we've seen... we've lived the American Dream. And you realize it's not all that's cracked up to be. Like you've lived a life where you have no needs, but you're looking for something more than that.

Even with voluntary poverty, however, there are aspects of class privilege these volunteers cannot completely eradicate from their lives. No matter how much they try to live in solidarity with the guests, they will always have an element of privilege that will never place them on the same playing field as the guests. This is acknowledged by the staff:

We try to live in solidarity, but we come from such different worlds. The whole idea of solidarity, I think that's tricky, because there are many ways of being in solidarity with someone... I mean we can be in solidarity with someone to a certain extent, but we're never going to be able to take ourselves out of our background, our cultures, our education, our families. And so, I can say I'm in solidarity with these people, yet I go out to eat a couple times a week, I drink my Diet Coke, I watch TV, and do all these things they can't do.

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He [guest] sees that we have this mobility that he doesn't have. As far as mobility we have in the sense, I'm sure he picks up on the fact that we can go away for a couple of days. Probably he knows we bought soda for ourselves. He picks up on the things we have that we can do without thinking twice about it. I would guess he picks it up from things like when volunteers go home. He knows they have the financial means to go home.

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And you know, really, as a well educated person over here, if we ever decided you know this is not working out, we could go and get 50 grand a year job easily. So we have a lot of options, you know?

I too felt the privilege of being able to walk out of this situation anytime I wanted.

I experienced a profound moment when it was my turn to sort through donated food items and pick through parts of rotten fruit. It made me sad that I had come to this and that I was eating out of trash that people had disguised as donations. I began reminiscing about the days I used to eat fresh fruit and looked forward to going back home at the conclusion of the study. But it hit me at that moment that for our guests, they have no other option than to stay in their places of oppression and dearth.

Situations as such often remind volunteers of the large baggage of privilege that they must continually unload, often pushing them to the limits of feeling discomfort with their own lives. An individual on the leadership staff observes:

As we engage in the guests and their reality and become more in touch with our own invisible backpack of privilege, the more we're given a different set of experiences to reflect on, the more we're aware of all the ways we have been deservingly and undeservingly given the power. That becomes really uncomfortable and weighty.

"Gosh, I have all this education. Gosh, I have these parents who can buy me plane tickets... Gosh, I'm from this religious background, I'm from this ethnic background, I'm from this sexual orientation, and all of these things, and gosh, this backpack is really heavy..." I start to figure out how to deal with that, how to make sense out of that, how I reconcile with that all of sudden... living with and being in relationship with someone who's categorically denied access to any of those kinds of status or tools for accessing power.

We realize we share so many of the human experiences, and I have this huge invisible backpack and begin to wonder where the hell is the justice and equality in that. So, I'm myself part of that discomfort.

Volunteers begin feeling powerless and wonder why is it that others have not been given the privileges that they have been carrying around. They start wanting to do something about that out of their real, profound discomfort with their own sense of power and powerlessness. A member on the leadership staff explains:

[You begin feeling] "I want to do something about that." It's natural instinct to say, "I want to fix that for you. I want to make it better for you. I want you to be able to have papers, have a job, all of these things." So it's profoundly uncomfortable for us. And we walk around with these [house] keys, when we make an *aseos* chart [chore list for guests], when we set deadlines. These are profoundly uncomfortable... to give someone an *aviso* [warning] or ask someone to spend three nights outside of the house. Those are things that always, always, always cause us a lot of angst, because it's real profound discomfort that we have with our power and with our powerlessness too.

Another area of privilege volunteers hold over the guests is the fact that the volunteers have a huge influence over the daily operations of the house. Volunteers have confided in me that they often perform their duties based on how they feel that day. In other words, a lot of the work and care that goes into the guests is often dictated by how volunteers are feeling. This reality makes one wonder whether or not one can really live life and serve those without letting their own feelings dictate their work.

### ***Guest Welfare***

Along with the challenges of walking in solidarity with the guests are the pressures of wanting to provide quality social services to the guest population. In addition to the daily administrative operations of the house, volunteers must reconcile with the fact that their actions directly and indirectly affect the lives of the migrants.

Volunteers speak about providing guest welfare to the migrants:

I guess guest welfare is one of my favorite parts even though it's one of the most exhausting parts.

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I really want to master guest welfare in the sense I want to feel like I'm not always second-guessing. You're assigned to people specifically to help them as problems arise, and you're the go-to person. I want to master the arts to feel like I am I doing the right combination of promoting their independence and holding their hand and walking down their journey... to master that and to master where I can talk them so humbly and so honestly. I think honesty is so important. I just want to do a good job while I'm here. I really, really do.

Others explain their uneasiness with providing guest welfare:

I think it's a more complex issue that could use more training for it. Social work is not an easy thing to do, and there are a lot of people [volunteers] who have trouble with it.

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[I didn't like] guest welfare at first, because I didn't know what I was doing. At first it was kind of, it was more frustrating at first. Now I understand what people are saying most of the time. At first it was difficult. It makes it difficult in situations that are more intense, a little more awkward. You don't have the language to compete with people. But oh yeah, 90% percent of the time it's cultural.

For some, having to deal with the pressures of the work causes feelings of powerlessness:

Powerlessness comes in that we talk a lot about, at least during my orientation they talked a lot about the poor, the poor losing their choices, losing their options. I feel like coming here, a lot of our options are taken away, a lot of our power is taken away. A lot of times I relate more to the guests than to necessarily other volunteers or necessarily the organization as a whole. My position here is without a lot of power. A lot of giving responsibility for things but not the power to see them through. Not given the tools I need to do what I'm asked to do. And that's not empowering. Or giving a position where people in authority aren't necessarily going to listen to my ideas, and that's an unfamiliar situation for me.

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[Someone in my family] is schizophrenic also. I told my mom about [having to provide guest welfare to a schizophrenic guest], and she's really uncomfortable that I'm mildly responsible for this schizophrenic woman. There needs to be someone else to be in charge of her. Clearly you're not trained. I know I'm not trained... I'm not her social worker... But she finally got her pills. End of story.

Frustration after frustration after frustration... waiting for intake at MHMR [Mental Health and Mental Retardation]... It's weighing on me a lot.

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We can't give justice to those who are being denied it. We can't, you know, there's a lot we can't do. We can't fix situations. We can't change the past what's happened to them. We can't even heal people sometimes whether it's physically or emotionally and sometimes there's nothing anybody can do.

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There's a point where I have to try my hardest to detach, but often when you're in the midst of a situation, in that situation, you feel in which you feel there's more you can do. That does weigh heavy on a person doing this work. I worry all the time, if I had done this or that better, I would have been able to work something better out for this person.

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I think everyone copes in different ways, and you just do the best you can, and sometimes you have to escape it all. I mean, that's why time off becomes so important. Because there is a very heavy and emotional burden trying to help people who are in terrible situations. The thing is, when things don't work out, it doesn't matter that their situation was terrible to begin with. You still wish you could've done something differently to make it turn out better.

Others comment on this powerlessness as they struggle to uphold and enforce the rules and regulations placed on the guests:

I had always felt difficulty with Adriana. Who am I to tell her anything? Look at what she's been through, and she had 6 kids, and I'm gonna be nagging her about her kids wearing shoes? And then with these people... gosh, you've come to America. You've made it. You were politically oppressed or religiously if you're from Eritrea usually. Who the hell am I? Some random girl who just decided to volunteer.

Joanna [house coordinator] and I, we both cried in front of them [non-complying guests] that night, which we hadn't done before... we just felt like they didn't respect us. We didn't know what to do. We were hurting their feelings, but we had to go by the rules. It was dramatic to us. It was personal... it was really personal.

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Rules for the guests... if they're not eating at meals [at designated times], they can't eat. One time a mom came back late with a kid, because she was working. Of course I'm going to give you some food. You have an 8 year-old kid. Like I'm not gonna not feed you, you know?

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That's the most difficult thing. Anything you do that involves a lot of people involves cooperating with people you may not agree with... a lot of agencies involved, volunteers involved, a lot of poor people involved, and you know looking out what's best is very difficult.

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Most of the time when you're working with people, it's not pretty. There are moments of beauty, moments when someone touches you and you touch them. Those moments are beautiful. There's also ugliness when working with people. And that's why it's important to hold onto compassion, because when you work with people, there will be frictions.

### ***Physical Intensity***

Adding to the mental pressures are the challenges that are physically demanding in nature. Volunteers are called upon at any hour of the day to respond to certain needs and emergencies. They describe typical occurrences around the houses that cause them to expend a lot of physical energy:

Here, the work is your life, and your life is your work... The challenges are sometimes being inconvenienced. You know, when I'm on shift and people are asking me a thousand things at once, I do get annoyed, and sometimes I don't treat people well. It's not their fault, but sometimes I get real snappy with the guests. Being inconvenienced is really challenging.

You can be on shift and the [Border Patrol] can call and want to bring two people, the sink can break, the kids are fighting, and you have to handle it.

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First coming here, I thought this was great, but living in the same place where you work is really draining. You want your privacy. You want to be alone. But a thousand guests are, you know, asking you for things. Yeah, the frustration and just being a servant... serving them becomes challenging.

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It does become a bit overwhelming at times... I feel like I'm very busy. I know I work more, because I personally like keeping tabs on myself of what I'm doing. I know I work more than a 40 hour week. So hour-wise, I'm pretty busy. I'm doing a lot of things.

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I guess too you feel like you do a lot of babysitting and looking after people...

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I'll admit. I was considering coming here earlier in spring semester. And then I knew this was a lot of work, like physical work. I didn't really want to do that this summer, so I applied to some other things, but I kind of I came back to that. So I knew it was going to be a lot of chores also.

In the midst of the everyday chaos, however, such physical confrontations and interactions are helpful in building relationships with the guests. One of the common interruptions while being on shift is the arrival of donated items. The volunteer on shift is responsible for sorting through the boxes, determining what is and is not edible, and then stocking the items in the kitchen. This often creates opportunities to connect with the guests.

### **Field Notes: Day 42**

I spent quite a bit of time sorting the vegetables and preparing them for tomorrow. I peeled a lot of the carrots and made them into carrot sticks. That was a great opportunity for Luis and Pablo to visit me in the kitchen and chat. Luis and I had a really good conversation. I started by asking about his mother and when he had planned to see her.

He also said he didn't wish to live beyond age 50. He didn't want health complications such as diabetes at an old age, justifying his reason to live a short life. He also shared with me his current situation. I asked how he'd try to get out of El Paso and if he was going to use a coyote.

Luis and I talked about the North Korean missile issue, and he asked how I felt about it. I said I didn't have an opinion, because I'm not informed on either side. He asked if I believed a world war would occur, and I said I believed (and hoped) that it would occur after the second coming of Christ. But even if it did occur before the rapture, I would be ready to either live or die, because my life is not mine anyway. I said that's why I believe God sent me here as part of His plan for my life... This came about, because Luis had asked about my reasons for coming to Vides. I told him while there is literature from the government and political point of view of the border region, it was missing the personal life stories of those who live here. I said that was my reason for doing the interviews.

Pablo came in periodically, and we also chatted. I asked how his family felt about his injury. He said they were worried at first but that they're ok now. I told him that his family didn't worry, because they know him to be a strong person. I'm not sure if that got through him or not. The rest of the time was spent on all of us (Luis, Pablo, Jorge, Paco...) going back and forth with one another. It was a lot of fun.

### ***Personal Journey Continued***

Despite all physical and psychological hardship of their tasks, volunteers continue to commit themselves to the work and also to their own personal goals and agendas.

Some use their time on the border to figure out what they want to do with their lives.

More importantly, they learn about the importance of spiritual and personal fulfillment through this work. Volunteers explain:

I would love to continue working with the Hispanic population... [It's the poor] who are lost and feel like they don't have a home. I love this quote from Mother Teresa... everyone is called to be loved and to love. And that's really what I want to do. To continue loving and letting people know they're loved.

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I don't think I'm doing this just because I'm Catholic. If I were any religion, like Hindi or New Age or whatever, like I said, even if I wasn't anything, I would still be doing, because that's what causes my joy. It's that simple. It's what causes my greatest joy.

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Year-long volunteers, you know, you have the time to do this for a year. It's because you don't have set plans, and you work those out when you're here.

[Perhaps I'm here because] I don't have anywhere else to go? What keeps me here is I believe in the work, I believe in the guests. I made a commitment, and when I make a commitment, I fulfill the commitment. There's a lot of good and wonderful things here. And I've learned a lot by being here.

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And I find myself at a point sort of like I'm not, I don't see other paths. Or there are some paths, but I don't know where mine is. So in some ways, I don't know where else to go.

### **Political Transformation**

Not only do volunteers incidentally learn about themselves and migrants through their interaction with the guests, but they internalize what they have learned and begin shaping and transforming their political stance on immigration and the politics revolving around the migrant population. Although instigated by the formal training provided by the organization at the time of their arrival, their direct exposure to those affected by migration and border policies facilitates their reaction to and reflection of the political realities. Through this, they must both internally and externally make the conscious decision to criminally expose themselves through this work and to allow their personal journey of discovery and reflection to become a political one.

*Accepting Humanity and its Consequences*

Coming from different backgrounds and political opinion, volunteers arrive with their own notions of what the border is like. And for some, they are of no strong opinion either way. However, what becomes clear to many of these volunteers is that despite one's residency status in the eyes of the law, everyone is entitled to their own dignity and basic treatment as human beings. Volunteers raise this issue with the following comments:

Priority of our work is not about somebody's documented status. It's about hospitality and caring for someone whether it's for food, water, or a place to sleep. So these realities to me personally are greater... Do you have an ID that says you're ok to be standing on this piece of land? Who decides this is mine and that's your's?

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Humanitarian aid is really very simple. If a human needs aid, you have to give it to him no matter who they are. They're humans at a very basic level. If they're thirsty, you've got to give them a glass of water. That doesn't make any sense not to give that person a glass of water. It'd be inhumane not to. If they're hungry, just give them food. If they're naked, [give them] clothes. If they're tired, they have to sleep. These are just basic. This is human nature. This is part of being human. Unless we didn't believe he was human, then ok, don't give him water, don't give him food. But if he's human, good God, let's be humane.

What I try to do, what I could offer is to make their day a little better. There's not much more I could do. I try to offer, I try to be just and fair working with them. I try to offer, when I give them clothes, they're clean clothes, they're clean sheets, the food is not dirty, there's no bugs in them. If they're sick, I'll get them a doctor's appointment right away. I wont wait until tomorrow or the next day. I try to serve them prompt, honest service, which is what they deserve, as the best I can. That's what I try to offer them.

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I believe that we owe it to these people to give them food, shelter, and medical care, because they're human beings, and everyone deserves that.

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You know, it's completely humanitarian aid, so I'm not aiding or abetting them... Just by doing this work, you're making a political statement. I'm not a political person in the sense that I'm not going into politics. So it's kind of just being here. Being here means standing up for human rights and things.

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Well, by the time [a guest] gets here, he's hungry, he's thirsty, and he's exhausted. And he's planning on hopping on the train, and he's planning on holding onto that train. For him, he doesn't know how long... Well, having a spot where he can rest and replenish, I see it as prevention from death, because it's not going to stop him. If this place falls to the ground, it's not going to stop him from getting on that train. It's just giving him the ability to recuperate so maybe he doesn't die in the process of it... We are saving lives and their mentality, because if somebody's gonna make a dehumanizing journey as it is, this is not going to stop them if there's no place to rest. They're going to continue on.

I would put all my money down that we have prevented people from falling off trains by physically replenishing them and emotionally replenishing them. I really think in that way, it's humanitarian, and the law kind of steps away from it and lets humanitarian aid aside. I think in that sense we have definitely been part of preventing deaths.

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Clearly people need to come and make money to feed their family... I don't see a problem with them coming here. So I don't see a problem with giving people food and shelter, an ear, and a heart. I think that's pretty cool.

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I guess the biggest realization for me was... I just came to see over the time as people, not different because of their legal status or not different because of their ways or anything. They're just people, you know, like you and me, anywhere else people looking for something better.

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I believe in the human value of people, so I keep doing things that will reinforce the human value, and I'll try to remedy the economic situation. It's not like a lot of new revelation. This is important work, and I'm glad I'm doing it.

Through such basic realizations that they are assisting humanity to its basic right to food and shelter, volunteers evolve from initially being concerned with the political climate to being able to accept possible legal consequences for their work. Below are

responses of the very individuals who for many, had expressed concern in the initial stages of their work:

I mean, I'm really careful about it. I'm not stupid. But now, just after a few months, just after knowing one person well and living with them who's undocumented, it's completely worth it. I think the commitment and my resolve about it grew.

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For humanitarian aid... I don't think it should be [illegal]... I don't think I would feel comfortable with myself stop giving food and shelter to the needy.

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We don't think these people are criminals. We see them as any other people, the same human spirit, the same ability to love and provide for the families and do all the things any human race is capable of doing. It's just they've been dealt a horrible hand. They've been put in a situation where they have no choice. I say this over and over again. If we were in the same situation they were in, we'd be doing the exact same thing.

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I would definitely accept that, and I would fight for it. I remember thinking how disgusted I was when the No More Deaths volunteers got arrested and how that's just ridiculous. If I'm going to drive someone to the hospital or drive them to soccer to have a little fun in the life, it's just completely ridiculous for that to be illegal and I'm arrested.

In the past we had volunteers who were arrested for taking people to Music Under the Stars [outdoor concert]. I said, "That's it. I'm not driving the guests. I don't want to get arrested." But now, being with the people... the people really change you... How do I say this? They're people. I don't see anything wrong despite their documentation status. There's nothing wrong with driving people.

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I feel like if the government wants... it's in God's hands if He wants me in this struggle. I don't want to get arrested. I don't want that to happen. But I feel that connection. I've been given so much in this life. I feel that responsibility for what I've been given.

This is not going to prevent me, not from the angle of "I believe in this work." I know I should be here. I should be doing this. So what can I do about it?

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[I am willing to accept the political risks.] And that's one part where my faith comes in. If I had to go to prison or jail, I'd do it, because I would go to jail for Christ, because Christ is present in the poor... and that would be my constellation. Whether it be for the poor or Christ, I'd feel I would be at peace if I were arrested today.

As long as I believed in what I was doing... it wouldn't matter. I would always be able to go back to [the fact that] I believed in what I was doing at that time. And that's my safety net, because I know that what we are doing here is ok.

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Yes, there is a risk, and I will take any of it.

**Field Notes: Day 39**

On my way upstairs, I went to the office to verify next week's schedule. Sophia had put down drop-off/pick-up times for the drivers. This has brought a thought to my head. At first, I couldn't even fathom being a driver and taking guests around, but I'm now wondering at the possibility of me being able to do that. If asked today, I'd still say no, but at least I'm not completely closed off to it anymore.

This brings me back to Jean's comments about knowing the implications yet kind of loosening up on the fear since nothing has happened. You just forget about that... You know it's a danger but when nothing happens, you just go about the day. I'm definitely not as fearful about being here or going to A House for errands. Have I become numb? Have I become bolder? Have I become more accommodating? I don't think my moves have become any bolder than before. Maybe it's more of desensitizing myself?

***Dealing with Political Risks***

A volunteer describes the willingness to accept the work of Annunciation House itself as being "passive aggressive against the unjust laws of the United States." He further comments, "I think the United States has great laws and great things, but like any country, we've got a ways to go, separating the rich from the poor." And though the staff members make the conscious choice to stay with the organization and risk possible prosecution, they remain vigilant, as many have revealed political implications as one of

their major concerns even after making the decision to stay. They must constantly struggle with the possibility of this work affecting their career and future plans, as they explain:

I think it's a lot more complicated than a lot of people [think], even people in the organization. I guess my opinion is that it's more complicated. I have no desire to go to the big house.

I don't like leaving traces. I don't think there will be any legal implications for someone like me, in all honesty, especially after I leave. But I would feel more secure if they didn't have a record of me. I would like to take my file from the organization when I leave, but I think that would be rude to ask.

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It's scary. I mean, they think they're trying to be realistic with people, but it is really scary. You sit there and have this very intense conversation, and even at this point, if you had a federal charge, if you were charged and it was dropped, you're still screwed if you want to be a doctor, lawyer, teacher... all these things even having the charges that were dropped would be a problem for the rest of your life, and it's scary.

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I would have to consider what I want to do with the rest of my life, because civil disobedience is a choice. It does go on your record if you're convicted. So I would have to consider what I'm doing and whether that would be a problem for me. You know, I mean, I don't want to be a lawyer, so it wouldn't be a huge problem for me anyway. Still, I don't know what I would decide, because it hasn't happened yet... So if an unjust law were passed, I would have to consider whether or not I'm called to protest that. And whether I believe in the cause, I would have to consider other factors.

And with their constant struggle with and questioning their work, volunteers must cautiously complement this internal process with their visible actions, as they are often consumed with the thought that they could get arrested at anytime:

When we talk about what we do, I can be arrested at any time. I have to be very careful and know who I'm talking to.

Taking guests to soccer... putting someone in the back, but I was like, "Hey be good. Put on your seatbelt." Just because I knew I had people in the back... that was against the law anyway. The police would have to pull me over and realize I had all these undocumented people in the back of my car. I was praying my whole way to the park and driving really carefully. Really carefully.

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When I first came here, I was coming back from a walk... there were probably about 20 cop cars in front of the house in their full ride gear. I had no idea what was going on. I took a loop around the block. I didn't just want to go in. [It ended up being] a parade of something, and they were getting ready for it. But I said, "This is it. This is the day I get arrested."

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When we were walking to the pool last week, we saw the Border Patrol, and I [panicked] for a second, because it would suck if I took them to the pool and then they stopped us. We had a group of fifteen people.

For others volunteers, they deal with the stress by distancing themselves from thinking about the risks. Several staff members have made peace with the fact that the possibility of arrest is probably remote from occurring:

It's one of those things you can't fathom until it happens, so how could you emotionally prepare for that? You really can't, so you just try to imagine what it would be like to be arrested for something like this... But it's scary and can't fathom [until it happens].

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I think in certain political contexts, it strengthens the controversy of what we do. There are times when I'm a little bit more worried or concerned about things. And then maybe after you worry about something for a while and nothing happens, you stop being worried or concerned, and I go about my days and duties.

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Now I don't think about it. If I were to be stopped, I mean, I'm not. I can't imagine. I know it happens, but I can't imagine being arrested for driving these people to a soccer game or to church.

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Our work is not geared into getting people further into the country or across the border. It's basic humanitarian aid, so I don't think there's much chance of really being prosecuted.

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I don't know. I'm not too worried. It's not like I would like to serve jail time right now, because I have one year of school, and I'd like to finish that. But I don't really think it would really happen. You can't dwell on it.

It's kind of how life is. Are you going to love everything? I guess with the legal context, it's understandable. You don't want to mess your plans up, but it's miniscule risk. There's nothing you could do that you love everyday, is there? Is that really true?

### ***Political Stance on Migration***

As volunteers wrestle with all challenges that come with the work, their own political stance continues to develop. Their thoughts depart from solely concentrating on humanitarian concerns and move into the issues of domestic border and immigration politics. This is detected in the voices of the volunteers when giving their own observations of border politics and the physical boundary that separates the two nations:

There is this huge simple division of how our governments have closed us off of each other. The division is the governments, and it's artificial. I mean, you know, we're one people, we're one church.<sup>124</sup>

We're only talking about the poor people. We don't care if the rich people come... It's a poverty thing. All borders, when there are large amounts of people crossing and impoverished people crossing them try to improve their situations...

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<sup>124</sup> A native of El Paso also comments on the division set by the government:

You know, it's funny, we don't think of ourselves as that. I think here in El Paso, we're so used to living a binational existence. It's almost as if, I think we really consider ourselves as... maybe not one city, but one community. Because we've lived here and we've lived with crossing international boundaries, it's not anything new to us. We cross all the time. We have a lot of residents who live in Juarez and work in EP and cross the border every day. It's just not anything big. I think we're so used to living in this environment.



It is completely inhumane in every way not to take into consideration that “Oh if we concentrate on the urban populations, they’re just gonna stop coming.” Bullshit. They need to come. And it’s been proven how they die in the desert trying to get through Arizona. Anyway, people need to look at reality and look at people’s lives and the reasons they come here.

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This is totally exemplified when Operation Hold the Line came about. They were trying to tighten border security in the cities, because there were big ports of entry, and people said, “We’re still coming. We’re gonna go through these really dangerous, really physically wearing desert and die along the way.” And they still came. It didn’t stop people from coming. People were just dying to come over here.

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When you watch the mainstream news or read the mainstream media, you get the impression that the U.S. is being invaded by undocumented migrants and drug traffickers...like it’s a complete lawless area. But for those of us who live down here, we see that’s not the case.

Asked for suggestions on improving border relations and better immigration reform, they say the following:

Making immigration policy that would make any sense... also, making it easier legally. It’s almost impossible from Mexico if you’re not a brain surgeon to come here legally.

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I guess the first step is just making it possible for people to come here legally. If your spouse is here, you have to wait 5-7 years or like for your children. That’s clearly ridiculous. They keep cutting money, but [they need to] spend more money and hire more people so the process can be sped up a lot.

Even from security measures, clearly making it easier for people to come here legally. I don’t care personally, but I think the general populous would like to know they aren’t murderers coming to our countries. If it was a way for people to come with paper work, it would be better for them, better for the U.S. public in general.

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Guest worker programs may be the only feasible. I don't know, I'm depressed about the whole political situation. Family reunification has to be a big part of that. You need to have families that work together, live together. I'd be giving out more papers obviously. So I guess guest worker would be the minimum, the bare minimum. No fences.

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Immigration is federal law. It comes through Congress and pretty much in Washington, DC, and people who make the laws don't live here and deal with the laws, the consequences of what is actually border reality. So the whole "The Mexicans are coming" is just pure saturation. Whether we like it or not, there will be undocumented people in this country always.

The core message of the volunteers regarding immigration issues is to make legalization more migrant-friendly and accessible to a larger populous. This spurs from their first-hand interaction with many honest, hard-working migrants who have come to the U.S. in search of work and protection. This is effectively summarized by Garcia:

There is a solution to the immigrant issue: legalization. People enter the US illegally because the avenues for legal entry are so restrictive and insurmountable for the vast majority of immigrants. The US economy creates hundreds of thousands of low-paying jobs that are then filled by undocumented immigrants who must first pass the gauntlet known as the journey to el Norte. If the immigrant survives, he or she gets one of these low-paying jobs. It is designed to work this way and the political will to end this deadly cycle of employment for the survivors of border gauntlets is absent. And not only is the necessary political will to bring about immigration reform absent, the alternative has increasingly been to apply armed force against immigrants and thereby create, in effect, an environment of low-intensity warfare with the corresponding use of military technology and the resulting casualties. (Garcia, 2005, n.p.)

Such messages of the Annunciation House staff were also shared by various community members of the El Paso region:

I would open it up to allow some kinds of means of work for the poor of the world that desperately want to work. I have deepest respect for these folks that cross 200 miles of the Arizona desert. I think if they want work, they should be given work.

Let the people who are already in participate in a guest worker program and then apply for citizenship or apply for residency and become legal in a legal way instead of legal in a surreptitious way.

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Well, I think what they're talking about now – which is dealing with the enforcement side of the issue first and only then talking about legalization – is completely backwards. We have to look at the root sources of the problem, and the root sources of the problem, the reason why we have over 10 million undocumented immigrants. First of all, there is a demand for non-skilled labor that has to be filled. So there's the demand, the U.S. has a demand for it. But no legal mechanism exists for the lower skilled labors to fill that demand, so the only way to do it is to come illegally and work illegally.

The quota system that our immigration laws use to determine when a person can immigrate and establish residence... is just so outdated. The number available for immigrant visas is so low that it easily takes 10 years for a family member to immigrate to the U.S. So to expect that family members would be separated for those 10 years, to me, it seems silly for a family to remain separated.

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I wish we could change the laws and modify them and make them a little more compassionate, in terms of taking into account different realities of people. And also make the law more realistic in terms of what we need in this country. We can't be limiting people. Otherwise we're going to end up like France or Germany where they don't have workers to fill the workforce and not be able to sustain their economy. If we can change and put a dose of little reality, little dose of humanity in the laws being considered and ultimately approved by Congress, then I think, I hope we can help the day-to-day realities of those that are being impacted.

The border community, however, is not in a unanimous agreement about immigration reform. A local school teacher comments:

I see what they're doing with the new border and things. As U.S. citizen, I don't think they should let everybody, anybody in at anytime. There has to be some kind of control. I think there should be a little more strict regulations. I really do. You know, because it hurts the U.S.A. You know, I realize we're probably the richest country and have the most, and I'm very much in favor of helping those in poverty. I really am. Or I wouldn't be working where I'm working, trying to help the people I help, but I think it needs to be fair. The U.S.A. can't support the whole world either.

Even for some volunteers, they did not know where they stood with the immigration debate:

To be honest with you, I don't have a clear idea of where I stand on the whole immigration issue. Should people have residency? Because you know, I think about how I drive a car and pay insurance on my car. So if I hit somebody, it's going to be taken care of. But some of our guests have cars, and if I was driving down the street and they hit me, I would be out of luck. Stuff like that. As far as them getting medical services and just sticking people with the bill, I don't like that at all. So I don't know what I really think of it.

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Well, the immigration aspect of aiding people to come into the country illegally is a shaky issue. While I don't agree with the immigration policies of this country necessarily, I'm undecided on the best way of going about changing them.

### ***Evolution of Personal and Political Statement***

Reflecting on their experiences at Annunciation House and all the learning that has occurred both on the conscious and subconscious level, volunteers indicate they will continue their personal journeys as they look to move on from Annunciation House. But different from their time of arrival, many express their desires to interweave their border experiences into their future plans. For many, their personal and political stance has evolved to become more intentional about involving themselves in advocacy and education. They explain:

I would like to go back to school to get my masters in social work... working with the underserved population, the poor, the needy... some type of social work.

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Law school... I think there is a lot of need for lawyers who want to actually help people. I don't necessarily want to practice law. I don't know where it's going to take me... I could do human rights work, Human Rights Watch, accompaniment projects. Maybe I won't be able to do much, but maybe my education will at least help me in some way. So there's that kind of possibility.

I also see myself networking for a Human Rights Watch base... I'd rather be working directly with people like our houses.

We [my significant other and I] plan on leaving the country. We both want to spend more time abroad.

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I'm planning most likely going to graduate school. I feel like learning is a very powerful thing. You can affect a lot of people by teaching and increasing our general body of knowledge as whole, and I'd like to do that. [In the immediate future, my significant other and I] would like to go abroad and get a little more cultural experience, language experience, travel a bit, you know, that kind of thing.

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I just want to have a lot of experiences, see a lot of places, meet a lot of different people, do a lot of interesting things that are all good... Maybe I should want to make something or start something important, but honestly for now, I just want to have a lot of experience doing good things. Make some good in the world that's also interesting to me.

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When I go back to school, I may try to get involved with a group, you know, a Hispanic group if there is one.

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My long-term goals is to use what I've learned here – whether it's non-profit organization, social work, or teaching – and use it as a platform not only as a place to bring awareness about border and immigration issues but also just to be in a field that I can help with. I don't know where immigration is going... it doesn't always look good. I just want to help wherever I work to be able to help further immigration reform in a really good way. I want to use my future job definitely as a platform for this kind of stuff

For others, they specifically aim to go into broader policy work, as they have felt the limitations of doing work on the grassroots level. Their restrictions can be summarized as follows:

I know what boils down to it, like temporarily feed and clothe someone and help them get further into the U.S... they're still undocumented, and they still don't have the rights a citizen has or someone with residency has, and so to be at a political level where to change the laws so they promote somebody having independence and social justice, all in one.

I think there's frustration, part of what we're doing here is putting a band-aid on the problem. It's a quick fix. People come into the country, and because they came here, they're homeless. But it's treating a symptom. It's like approach to medicine. The symptom is that people are coming here and they're becoming

homeless and they need help and they need shelter. But the underlying root of the cause is the reasons that they felt they needed... had to come here in the first place. So there's the frustration in that there's so much of what we're doing is surface level.

According to the leadership, such transformations are regular part of the work, as volunteers must come face-to-face and in intimate working relationships with the migrant community. These relationships move them out of the model of charity and into that of justice. One explains:

It's so much easier to give charity, to give food, to give clothes to someone or some group that we put into some kind of box identified as different from ourselves. I see that model working more easily. But when I'm in the framework where I'm in relationship with you and I recognize your dignity and the dignity of your experience, and that experience resonates with mine and resonates with my dignity as a person, I'm in a whole different framework. And there in that framework, I see that commitment to justice necessarily has to come out of that.

All of a sudden, all these barriers that distinguish between you and me – whether it's around ethnicity, race, religion, socio-economic status, or whatever – all of that has fallen away. And justice, that model, has to come out of it.

Another leadership staff, who has seen volunteers come and go since the 1980s, reflects on the experience as a new volunteer and that of young adults that he has seen cross paths with the organization:

I've always been one of those sit-on-the-fence kind of people. I had opinions, but I never really stuck to them. Being at Annunciation House made me get off the fence and decide what side I wanted to sit on.

I notice with the students that come down here. They're very black and white with their views, but it becomes very gray when they come down here. But then as things get gray... after that, it becomes clear, and you decide what side you're going to sit on. You do it with a lot more firm footing than before.

After these years, I feel I'm on the same side I was when I first came here but with a lot more firm footing and sure about that. The other main change is, I don't sit on the fence anymore. I know what side I want to sit on, and I feel comfortable with that. Some people choose to bury their heads in the sand, but I don't think volunteers do that, because they're here too long to do that.

## **Institutional Role in Social Engagement**

As the volunteer experience continues to challenge the staff members to critically analyze the world around them, it becomes clear that the process of this consciousness-raising and awareness of migrant lives and struggles is directly taught by the guest population. It is in this development where the staff decide what side of the political fence they want to sit in. More than anything, this direct correlation with the migrant community plays a major role in changing and reshaping the mentality of the volunteers to step out of their comfort zones and to enter into a model of social justice. Annunciation House as an organization may provide the institutional space for them to engage in this experience, but ultimately, it is from working intricately with the guest population that brings about this awareness and commitment to social justice. This can be summarized as follows:

The unique thing that happens here is that you're in direct relationship and forced into an intimate relationship with the guests and with the volunteers. I think that relationship really forces you to be more self-aware, aware of who you are, and how you are with respect to other people and all the multiple system levels. And I think that's really challenging for people.

I think the amazing thing is that volunteers don't expect the relationship that exists between them and the guests, because on the surface, there's so much difference. There's so much apparent difference and all the domains of different cultures. [But nonetheless] people end up connecting deeply in the human experience, and I find that very powerful for them.

Hardly any of us come with that experience or will have that experience again, so growing in maturity in terms of that responsibility and the consequences of our actions [is important]. I think I see people grow in humility... to make mistakes and have to make amends for those mistakes that we make. It's not like we can hop on another task or a job. We're really in relationship, so we have to clean up our messes.

I see so much people grow in confidence itself, because what we have here is so few. We have so few resources, so few materials, so few monetary resources, expertise, professionalism, yet we make due. So I find volunteers get confidence with what we make due rather than what it is that we wish that could be, because it's not that way.

### ***Ancillary Role of the Organization***

Accordingly, many volunteers have revealed that they do not perceive their time on the border as working for a particular organization. To them, it is more about their personal interactions with the migrants on the ground level. Annunciation House has provided the means to meet these guests on a personal level, but their cognizance of the organization generally ends here. As repeatedly detected in the interviews, volunteers consider migrants as their frame of reference rather than the organization when discussing their experiences of learning and realizations.

In fact, the majority of the volunteers seem distant from the administrative functions of the organization. Some responded with comments such as “I never think about things from the administrative, organizational view” when asked to comment on their interaction with the administration and their perceptions of Annunciation House as an institution. This sense of detachment from the organization structure is illustrated by the following comments:

It's really like working for a group home. You're doing the work at the group home, and the organization supports the home and the wellness of it, but I'm not part of the leadership... I'm a volunteer that works directly with people.

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I really don't know how they work all that out. They must have a system that works pretty good, because they've survived all these years. You know, I don't really see that side of the organization... I don't actually know how they run things.

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That's really hard, I think. The leadership has been there a long time and has seen groups of volunteers go through. I think the leadership is coming from a particular point of view that's not necessarily reflected in how the volunteers are doing things.

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You know, I don't sense higher management coming in and being very intimate with the houses. So it's kind of "Well show me by example. Come and spend some time with the guests and show me, because this is what you believe in strongly." But on the other side, I know they are so busy running this organization and so busy doing other things, I mean about bring about awareness.

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I'm here. I'm just a kid. I'm here for several months. But some people devoted their whole lives to this. And I don't know even when they started, what they were thinking exactly, and why they're still here serving this population. I don't fully understand it. That's a big commitment. It may be the length if someone stays longer, they start to get a sense of that partially.

While the disconnection from the leadership keeps volunteers focused on the migrant community, this has resulted in some difficulty and confusion on the job:

I think that comes up a lot. I think that's what the expansion of the organization has done with that, and I don't know. I feel like the focus of the organization has been split in some ways. Sometimes I feel like it's not large enough to accommodate things they strive for, so in a lot of ways, they're spread too thin.

[I don't have one direct person to answer to] and have to answer to everybody else. It's not like the leadership tries to make clear cut levels, but I don't feel like they're necessarily maintained.

I think there's potential for confusion. Well, who am I responsible for? Basically, who do I need to be on the same page with? Who needs to know what I'm doing, and who needs to approve what I'm doing?

Yeah, there's not a lot of clear structure. There's a lot of confusion about who's in charge. We have a coordinator... But at the same time, I think that as far as higher up and the administration... it seems like there's definitely the higher authority figures, and if you're told to do something by someone of higher authority, that's basically what you do.

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I think too one of my difficulties is that they don't live in the houses. No matter how much they're here, they don't live here. I just think there's a kind of lack of... there's gap in understanding, I think, between the volunteers and the directors.

Because they're not in the houses, that ideal is still there. I know when I came here, I had a lot of ideals. I still do. But being here working on the ground level gets me frustrated with all these organizations, and I'm kind of coming back to reality how really can this idea be achieved and not just be all fuzzy, warm, and idealistic.

When probed further, the volunteers did share that in the rare occasions where they had to work closely with the administration, they felt many of the tasks were centralized and micromanaged. As much as the leadership has faith in the volunteer community to run the houses, some volunteers purport that the leadership would override any decision the house coordinators or the live-in volunteer community would make if it did not align with what the leadership wanted. One comments, "So again it looks like they have all this faith, but then they will just discard our opinions, and that's kind of frustrating in that sense."

This was similarly reflected in the response from a member on the leadership who said the following about their decision-making processes:

It depends on the kind of decision to be made. Really all the decisions that have to do with the day-to-day operations of the house, the houses, and the organization are made at the level of director Ruben or with the core. And of course there are some decisions that are made with the conjunction of the coordinators and *even some* made with consultation with the volunteer feedback.

What was revealing through the interviews, nevertheless, was the acknowledgement on both sides that their best intentions were still on the well-being of the guest population.

The response below summarizes the attitude of many volunteers despite their disjunction from and occasional frustration with the administration:

So in that sense, I feel like we're on the same page in the sense that we all want the best for the guests. They want us to accompany our guests, they want guests to make plans, they want guests to move forward and want them to be self-sufficient and independent. I think we're on the same page in that sense. They haven't lost sight of what the people want... I think Ruben knows what our guests need and what works well for them, and I don't think he's lost sight of that.

### ***Primary Role of Migrants in Social Learning***

Unsurprisingly, volunteers elaborate much more when referring to their experiences with guests as their sources of learning. They attribute the bulk of this realization and growth to working directly with the guests and at times living with other volunteers. One explains, "I think you could say that in general, as volunteers, we're overeducated and have more education than we need. What the guests do is put a face on that." This idea is further elaborated by the following:

Sometimes it can come across as a little patronizing when you say I get a lot more than I give, but it's true. It can sound a little patronizing to say that, but I think it's accurate that we learn a lot more than we teach. We receive a lot more than we give. And I think that when you compare Annunciation House to other places, we should be grateful, because we have the opportunity to be in contact with the people we're in contact with.

Furthermore, their articulation on their learning process also reflects their own personal journeys:

Being with the people and talking with them, there's no one who sat down with me who said this was ok and that was ok. It was personal, day-to-day being with the people and doing guest welfare. That's what converted my heart, just talking with them and literally people saying, "We're not here to rob."  
One guy said to me, "We're not here to rob. We're not here to steal. We just want to work and help our families at home." It was the people and being with the poor [that changed me].

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Probably when I came down [I thought] I was going to work with Hispanics and people who don't have a lot of change in their pockets. But spending some time with them, I necessarily don't look at them as a specific class of people, poor or anything like that... I guess it's tough for me to look at it that way. I just don't see these people as poor people... Yeah, just a person... That's probably the biggest development for me.

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Yeah, that's a funny thing. That's the reaction I get when I say I'm going to work with the poor. They say, "Oh, you're such a good guy. You're going to help those poor people." I tell them, "I know I'm going down there, but it's me who gets helped." You know, they're going to be ok even if I'm not here. Mexico's been around 500 years. They're going to be around 500 more. They don't really need me.

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I think being here will keep ribbing you, nabbing at you, picking at you to become vulnerable... to be able to be vulnerable and out of fear... I think it's a great challenge.

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I think also learning about poverty is learning about the decisions people make. Being in a shelter where you are provided food and shelter and clothes, people still go out and buy clothes and food, of course. They also go out and buy TVs and cell phones. I think that those of us who aren't in their shoes look at that and ask why they do that, but for them, it's something important enough to be able to use some type of electronics to get away a little bit... There's always that desire to be "normal." I think in that way they experience poverty differently. I don't think I knew that before coming here. I'm so much more impoverished than they are.

In addition to their self realizations, volunteers indicate many of their lessons to evolve through their reflections on people:

They teach me a lot. In general, the human spirit is very resilient, and people are always looking ahead with hope. They're always looking ahead to find a better way and a better life. And most people underneath are loving people. They want to reach out to others, and they want others to reach out to them.

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I think I've also learned you never know what they went through. You don't know what they're dealing with. And you don't know necessarily what you say will affect them. I learned how patient people can be and forgiving.

[I've learned] how present you can be to someone and being focused on them and giving them... having seen people and in their faces more dignity they feel.

I know I've grown and learned a lot.... I think we get to watch each other grow.

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I've learned Spanish. I've learned cultures... I get to hear their stories, a lot of positive interactions with guests, learning something about other people, learning things about how they live and positive interactions with other volunteers, because we do come from all over the country, different cultures, different backgrounds. We have international volunteers at times. So there is learning there.

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I really questioned about the undocumented [in the beginning]. I thought I was being criminal with what I'm doing, but I guess I've learned that these people are people despite their documentation status. They're people, and they're homeless.

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Hearing [expressions of gratitude from guests] makes you want to be better for other people too.

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I have never found more meaning in my life than the time I spent there.

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My views became very well balanced when I met people. They gave me a more balanced view. I was very idealistic about revolutions, and I met people and realized most people are caught in the middle. They would rather have a peaceful life. So I think the guests are a great educator for us, first of all, about why they're coming. Their whole situation is an educator. Just in other ways, in terms of their generosity and their faith and all those kinds of things. I was an atheist when I came down here, but by meeting the guests, you meet people who have experienced a lot more than you have, and it gives you respect for other opinions and other ways of thinking about things.

In speaking with the staff and the leadership, this transformation is a direct result of their ongoing reflections of their time spent with the migrants. The change that occurs within those working with the migrant poor is further explained by Garcia who, time and

again, has witnessed such accounts of transformation as a result of working with the guest population:

This is why our guests offer us something that we don't have. People in our houses, when you sit with them and talk to them, it dawns on you, "What you're saying is, one morning you literally walked out of your house in Honduras and simply started walking north? Did you have health insurance in case you got sick?" "Nope." "You have some kind of pension that was going to help keep you?" "Nope." "Do you know people along the way to stay in their homes?" "Nope." "You planned it out; you had AAA plan the trip for you?" "Nope." "You literally, literally simply walked out the front door with whatever was in your pocket?" "Yup." "Here you are. What do you want?" And out comes "*Pues, primero Dios* [God willing]."

In the world you and I live, "God willing" basically is what we say after we've done all the research, consulted everybody, made sure all bases were covered, and took care of all security needs. Then we say, "God willing." So when you and I say "God willing," we say it from a very different posture from where our guests say "God willing." Our guests literally place their entire being at the disposal of God and trust that.

You and I only do that after we make sure there are all kinds of safety things in place. Then we say "God willing." The truth is, bull. It's "God willing" and all these things being in place. And that's something you and I can't give our guests. That only our guests can give us. Of course it scares us and quickly judge it to be unrealistic. As if faith is realistic to begin with.

Asked if he, as a staff member of nearly thirty years, still feels the impact of transformation in his life working with the migrant poor, he responds:

Absolutely. I think it's a mistake to think that any one person's transformation is on any different level than anybody else's. I think that we are all transformed all the time. Perhaps at different times in our lives, we reflect more on how we are being transformed. And as a result, we are more conscious of it. And we're much more verbal and perhaps more eloquent. But we're all being transformed. We're all being changed all the time. I am continually reflecting on how God is speaking to me. And as I reflect on that, inside of that, it changes me.

You will do great things if you set some time aside to reflect on the greatness that has been given to you freely. And the world certainly is hungering for the great things that are at the reach of each one of us if we reflect on and allow ourselves to fully enter the gratitude of the greatness that has been given to us freely beginning with the life in itself.

Garcia encourages his staff to continue allowing themselves to flow and to reflect on what is happening around them day in and out. Too often, people go through the day oblivious to the fact that underneath all this, they are being transformed. But true transformation only occurs if people take the time to reflect on that. “So whether you’re at this for a year, 30 years, or whatever the case may be, we continue to be transformed,” he explains. Within this context, migrants will continue to flow through its doors and into the lives of the Annunciation House volunteer staff. These individuals will continue to impact these lives and take them to new and different places. And as they allow themselves to reflect on these experiences, they will continually be assenting to be taken to different impacts of transformation.

### **Discussion**

This chapter examined the ways in which the work of the Annunciation House has affected the personal and political transformation of its staff engaging in humanitarian aid work. It found that many of these individuals seek to work on the U.S.-Mexico border for various reasons of enriching their Spanish skills or in search of a cross-cultural experience. Others look to find greater meaning in their lives by giving up their time and entering into voluntary poverty.

For most, making the decision to come to Annunciation reflects a personal quest for the greater significance and meaning in their lives. In many ways, one can describe the time spent on the border as something that begins and ends with a personal agenda. Many of the volunteers observed at Annunciation House fit this categorization of individuals embarking on a personalized life journey, consumed by life-impacting

changes and political realizations as facilitated by the opportunity of directly working with the migrant poor.

What these volunteers end up with, however, is a political journey that begins to challenge their own notions of basic human rights and the highly politicized nature of humanitarian aid work on the border. These young adults are forced to make the conscientious decision to accept the possible legal consequences of affiliating themselves with the undocumented community and to modify their personal motives to a visible fight for the basic human rights of individuals prone to abuse and exploitation on the basis of their documentation status.

Seeing the great potential for learning and political engagement at Annunciation House, it may seem from the outside that it is this great institutional structure that facilitates learning and social transformation. At least that is what I was expecting to find in the beginning stages of my study. However, it was found that the real impacting changes in the volunteers evolve after coming in personal contact with the migrants themselves. Annunciation House as an organization merely becomes the training ground or a space in which such powerful interactions can take place, but the true transformations occur with the ongoing interaction and struggles between the volunteers and the migrants.

As the organization provides the space in which interactions and transformations can occur, the magnitude of impact is left on each individual. At times, they must deal with the duality of being empowered and the sense of powerlessness they feel within their work. Empowerment and reflections often do not have much to do with the organization or what the organization has done. A lot of it has to do with their own internal processes



and personal experiences. Volunteers must challenge themselves on what they have chosen to take away from the experience and what they have chosen to push themselves towards.

It has been found repeatedly throughout this study that the volunteer experience at Annunciation House is one that is left up to the individuals themselves, and it is not always the role of the organization to pinpoint and precisely determine their learning outcomes. This was evidenced by the distanced positions between the volunteers and the administration along with the perceived lack of clarity and focused roles given to volunteers. With the organization at somewhat of a distance from the volunteer community, interactions and decisions are negotiated amongst the volunteers and the guests within their day-to-day operations. It may be safe to say that as much as the organization and its staff exist for the guests, the guest themselves exist for the volunteers.

Experience with Annunciation House also teaches one that true learning and advocacy evolve when the individual is personally impacted by the social issues. One must first become educated on such topics and personally endure the hardships faced by the exploited to arrive at a deep impacting realization of the cycle of oppression that has been imposed on the migrant poor. Through these direct struggles, individuals learn to rally for different causes and decide how much of this impact they will take away. Whether or not it is recognized at the conscious level, the pain and afflictions endured by the borderlanders will guide the way in which these individuals choose to live their lives and conduct their careers and educational processes.

Politics is very much personal to many who choose to live on the border. Perhaps their path to personal politics begins when the volunteers must make the conscious decision to accept the possible political risks and to remain with the work they have set out to do. It could also be the recurrent concerns and fear in the back of their minds that continue to mold their stance on immigration and border politics. With fear, in combination with compassion for the migrant poor, the personal journeys become political. And in so doing, their politics become personal.

One begins to wonder if similar type of personal political impact would have been achieved should the organization and its administration operate differently. And what makes former volunteers return to the border region and further commit their time as administrators and board members? What is the next level of change and impact once a volunteer returns for the second or the third time? These are some of the questions that will be explored in the following chapter, as one grapples with the idea of even greater and broader global impacts coming to shape the work of Annunciation House and the border community.

Meanwhile, present and future volunteers will persist on this journey as they continue to ask questions such as – Why am I here? What am I doing? Is this worth it? Is this what I really signed up for? What am I doing with these people? How can I emotionally deal with the burden of these guests? Am I truly breaking the law? Will this affect my future? As an individual who has had to endure all of these issues first-hand, I can attest to the fact that these questions never lead to one solid answer. It is up to each and every individual within this process to arrive at their own conclusions. But one thing

is certain—the borderland never will be the same as a result of this experience. This is indeed personal politics.

**CHAPTER 6: POLITICAL IS GLOBAL**  
**HOW GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING REFLECTS GLOBAL TRENDS**

**Introduction**

The U.S.-Mexico border has often been referred to as the *laboratory of the future* or the *global crossroads* where the first and the third worlds meet, where wealth and poverty stand side-by-side, and where the *haves* and the *have nots* face one other. And in the midst of the disparaging differences between the rich and the poor, many would view the impoverished as “poor in a vacuum that the poverty of the poor and the reasons why the poor are somehow accidents of nature” (Garcia, 2005, n.p.). And that convinces many that the mere acts of charity and compassion are sufficient and are our only required responses. Believing we have little control over the forces of poverty, we excuse ourselves from the “responsibility for the oppressive reality that the horrific suffering in which so many of the world’s poor eke out of existence” (Garcia, 2005, n.p.).

Such portrayal of reality is very much alive on the U.S.-Mexico border, as the clear delineation between wealth and poverty exists in the daily lives of borderlanders and those who come to seek refuge in this assumed global hub of the world. In fact, working with the migrant poor on the border, many come to realize that somehow this economic system of oppression is linked to the lifestyles that they have come to enjoy and embrace for many years. Although we will never be able to fully grasp the global realities that have subjected many to their impoverished states, many receive the dosage of reality that uniquely manifests itself when placing themselves on the border.

The longer people devote themselves to seeing some form of economic justice on the border and the greater society, the more of a confrontation they have with the global disparities. This has drawn the attention of many advocates, activists, and social service providers in the El Paso community who have much to say about globalization as it especially impacts the border:

I think one of the biggest issues is that when you have this [globalization]... It's bigger than itself... It's a process that was inevitable. It was going to happen. When you have a particular country or an economic system that has hegemony on it, that's where you run into problems.

[Globalization] is a force. You can't really stop that force, but there are certain things you can do to keep people's dignity, rights, and who they are... There have to be policies that give people's security and allow for labor to move freely, allow people to move freely, for people to cross freely as they're supposed to, and retain some of their culture, not to have their culture all used up and promoted and gain money out of it.

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Well, [globalization is] great if you're American. You get cheap clothing. You get everything cheap. And big businesses make money. But if you're a poor country, it's not great. It's a sad place to be. Globalization is almost how it is today. It's almost recipe for disaster. We can't go on much longer like how it is. Eventually, it's going to spiral out of control.

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I don't see that as the bright vision of the future... how globalization can affect us for the positive in terms of day-to-day looking at humanity, human issues. Even the fact that I came across the border bridge Saturday and you have children selling you candy and gum, and these are kids 5, 6, 7 years old standing in the middle of 4 or 5 lanes of traffic on the bridge. So far, globalization to the extent that it's positive, it's the way of the future, it's going to bring us positive changes, that's still out there. That's not the reality of today. Not on this border.

It is oftentimes this economic impact of globalization that has attracted many migrants to the U.S. side of the border as well as NGOs and service- and justice-oriented agencies to assist these individuals. From the disparities the global forces have created on the border arise issues of justice and need for humanitarian assistance. This has led to

the establishment and persistence of numerous grassroots organizations that continue to respond and attempt to balance the global forces that, to many, seem unavoidable.

When studying organizations such as Annunciation House, it becomes evident that organizers and leaders of such social justice and service organizations not only have a deep commitment to meeting the immediate needs of the borderlands but also work to challenge the broader global trends that have come to mark the lives on the border. Beyond the issues of U.S. immigration and border enforcement, many of the personnel have honed in on the exterior global forces that have aligned themselves with U.S. domestic and foreign policies as well as U.S.-Mexico binational relations that have come to affect the local community in the first place.

As the previous chapter has focused primarily on the group of individuals whose work on the border is more or less transient, this chapter moves more into discussions on those who make a more permanent mark on the border and commit to grassroots activism on a longer-term basis. By examining how their views and scope of work have become parallel to the global forces that have had a major hand in border politics, I explore the phenomenon in which Annunciation House has been able to transform its basic mission of humanitarian assistance to engaging the public in raising global awareness and activism for the migrant poor.

The discussions in this chapter focus on the leadership staff although the views of outside community members and the volunteer staff are presented to complement their responses. In this study, the leadership refers to the director, board members, core community staff, and the education coordinator. Although their reasons for commitments vary, I have found these individuals to share the commonality in possessing a much

broader scope of their work and motivation than those of the short-term volunteer staff. Some volunteers do identify the various global forces that affect the border, but their observations largely revolve around their immediate migrant population. The insights of the leadership staff extend beyond the local and national politics of immigration.

A former volunteer also notes that the members of the Annunciation House leadership staff have been on the border for a long time and have seen diverse groups of volunteers go through. Therefore, the leadership comes from a particular point of view that is not necessarily reflected in how the volunteers are doing things. The leadership exhibits an element of personal mission similar to that of the year-long volunteers, but their sense of commitment seems much greater in magnitude. Their stay with the organization often comes with the sacrifice of their prior professions and educational opportunities as well as relocating to the border with their partners and dependents.

Take the house mentor, for example, who initially came to Annunciation House in 1998 as a summer volunteer. After ten weeks of service, this individual decided work was not complete and ended up staying for two additional years. This came at a cost of putting graduate school on hold and giving up a graduate fellowship. During two years, this individual met and married another volunteer in the organization, and together, they served in one of the houses in Ciudad Juarez.

After the two years, this individual left for Chicago and worked in a community-based organization in a Mexican immigrant community and also went on to the University of Chicago to receive a master's degree in social work with clinical focus on family and community impact. In 2003, this individual decided to return to El Paso to

serve as a core member on the leadership staff. When asked about specific responsibilities, the individual describes:

Of the five days I give to the organization, I'm supposed to supervise all of the guest welfare, do therapy for some of the guests, and provide mentorship and guidance to all of the volunteers. That's on the practical level. On the professional level, I do collaboration with agencies and outreach, administrative tasks, staff development... event planning, fundraising, and all sorts of inquiries from volunteers and visitors. I have ten or twelve major tasks.

I'm going to meet with a social worker at [the county hospital] and try to get on the same page for services for our guests who are injured. I'm also going with Carmen today to [a center] to understand more about voluntary foster care [for her children]. I have a meeting next week with the director of La Casa looking at childcare options for our guests and go to the Homeless Coalition meetings to understand what the other shelters and groups that serve people who are homeless.

The house mentor is joined by another former volunteer who also serves on the core leadership. This individual is originally from England and came to Annunciation House in 1991. During first year as a volunteer at Annunciation House, this individual met and married another volunteer working in Casa Vides. After they had spent a year together, they decided to move out to Ciudad Juarez where they started the Casa Emaus project.<sup>125</sup> The goal was to immerse themselves in the colonia district, where they ended up living for four and a half years.

At the conclusion of their time, they moved to the Midwest where they lived and worked in a poor immigrant neighborhood. They decided to move back to El Paso in 2002, where this individual now functions as the administrator for the organization and the administrative coordinator of the border awareness programs. The main responsibilities of this individual are described by the following:

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<sup>125</sup> This project consisted of building and operating Casa Emaus, one of the organization's facilities in Mexico.



I coordinate the border awareness work, and I also have general administrative responsibilities—office type of work, paying the bills, managing all the bank accounts, insurance, and dealing with things that come up... making sure things are running smoothly within the organization... After you've been here longer, your time becomes valuable, and you ask yourself, "Is it more beneficial for me to spend 8 hours doing shifts or spend 8 hours doing administrative work?" It's something that needs to be done, so I'm happy to do it.

The leadership is also joined by a long-term staff member who helps run the border awareness program. Although not a former volunteer, this individual has been with the organization for four consecutive years and explains the reasons for staying with Annunciation House by the following:

In my thirties at 35, I sort of felt like I was in the wrong place. Even though I could perform all the external requirements, there was the interior side of me that was unsatisfied, specifically with Corporate America and also learning about the global situation. So I left Corporate America and came to work on the border.

Originally I stumbled on Annunciation House on the Internet. I was attracted to faith communities, Christian-based communities, where people would use scripture and liberation theology toward being players in a community... living in society and trying to seek justice.

When I think of leaving and going back, there's a lot of confusion for me... And I find myself at a point sort of like I'm not. I don't see other paths.

This individual has since recommitted two additional years to the organization.

Marked by a combination of personal agenda and a sense of global mission, these individuals are in alignment with the actual organization and carry out specialized functions within the institutional structure of Annunciation House. The insights of these individuals vary in the work of advocacy and activism to represent the organization as an important entity that challenges some of the global rhetoric on migration. The leadership of Annunciation House is also joined by various board members who reside all over the country. They too are former volunteers from the 1980s and 1990s who have chosen to

continue playing a part by taking on a greater role as advocates and activists in affiliation with Annunciation House.

Discussions in this chapter also include the efforts and the work of the greater El Paso grassroots community. Many of these individuals portray both parallels and deviations from the Annunciation House staff, providing unique insights to ways in which Annunciation House is distinct from the rest of the community. Nonetheless, they are similarly marked by their own personal convictions and reasons for being on the border in addition to their global stance on migration that is deeply engrained in their activism and advocacy work.

### **Migration as Indicators of Global Trends**

Even though their roles do change as they step into permanent positions, I believe the leadership of Annunciation House has been able to facilitate global awareness and activism through their work, because they have continued to allow those in migration to teach them about the global trends shaping world economy and the socio-political structure of nations in development. One of the leaders explains, “What still feeds me personally, spiritually, intellectually, politically, and emotionally is my accompaniment of the guests.” No longer residing in the houses with the migrants, this individual still considers the main part of the work to be on the guests and continues, “I do it in a different way than the volunteers do now... [but] my passion is still with people.”

The staff of Annunciation House will undoubtedly mention migration as one of the major forces on the border that is caused by and is indicative of the nature of the globalization process. In many ways, migration points to the global patterns and helps

exemplify the impact that globalization brings to ground zero. Through this, people witness what globalization is and what it looks like first-hand. This furthermore helps us observe what globalization does and how it impacts the migrant community and in turn, those organizations assisting this population.

According to the leadership of Annunciation House, many of the global trends and influences on migration have directly impacted their work and their clients. The arrival of these migrants serves as a strong indicator of different factors situating themselves abroad that have pushed people to migrate north, explained by one of the leaders:

The border is a microcosm of what's even happening globally, because it's one of the fewest places where the first and third developing worlds touch. Between 1998 and 2005, we saw a tremendous shift in the population we were serving. And that was pointing to larger patterns in immigration driven by larger political and social trends and economic and social trends.

Even just with our little microcosm, the little sampling of the population that we were serving, they were pointing to the bigger trends that were going on. Before, people could move across Mexico and look to cross the border by themselves. The shift has been more to these extensive organized networks of human smugglers that has driven the cost of crossing up. People could pay anywhere, depending on where they're coming from, from \$1,000-2,000 to cross the border.

One thing I noticed with respect to migration is that there were more women and children who were looking to cross the border to unite with family members who were working in the United States. As it started to get more difficult, more costly in terms of people's well-being to cross the border, folks stayed.

For example, men who were working seasonally weren't returning home, because it would be too difficult to try cross the border and come back. So after a period time, these families started saying "In order for us to be together is for the women and children to come cross the border and reunite with our husbands in the U.S." So that was a big switch – a big change in the trends.

When asked to further reflect on the globalization process as it affects the border and the work of Annunciation House, many of the respondents mentioned issues of

political economy, capitalism, and foreign policies as affecting the lives on the border. This section thus examines these three factors that have been observed by the leadership, the volunteer staff, and outside community members. The discussion will help set the context for later discussions that specifically address the scope of work the leadership of the organization engages in and the political risks that increase with their involvement.

### ***Political Economy***

One of the major concerns that accompany the globalization process is the resulting political economy of the nations. With the increasing gap between wealthy and poor nations, many citizens of the South are finding no alternative options than migrating north in search of work. This in turn causes major migratory flows to industrialized nations in search of basic economic survival. In many ways, this migration is inevitable, as the conditions of wealth in certain parts of the world have direct links to the causes of economic disparities elsewhere. Members of the leadership express the following:

If I was a poor country and saw the United States has everything, and I have nothing, and all that work goes to feed America, I would be really disillusioned. I'd immigrate to the United States to get a piece of the fruit of my labors. But then again, the United States doesn't want me even though I'm working for them.

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When you look at opinion polls, people are generally opposed to immigration, especially those doing it without papers. And people are very critical of Mexico for not taking care of its people. But at the same time, the maquiladoras for the most part are U.S.-owned corporations that are making products for us very cheaply, but we kind of want it both ways. We want people to stay in their countries, and we want them to make things for us cheaply. That's something that needs to be dealt with.

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Their poverty is not an accident. Their poverty stems from an inability to affect, impact, and change global structures that divide the world's resources in sinfully disproportionate ways. A system that pays individuals \$20 for a six-day work week so as to make \$12 jeans available to families with an annual medium income of \$30,000 is sinful and unjust.

Why is it so acceptable for a 15-year-old to work six days a week for \$20, making jeans so that people in the U.S. can buy these jeans at K-Mart, Wal-Mart, Target, etc. for as little as \$12 per pair? And when this 15-year-old comes to realize that he cannot survive on such low wages, that he can no longer bear the pain of watching his family struggle in such great poverty and goes to the U.S., what exactly is it about this 15-year-old that then makes him such a threat or danger to our security? (Garcia, 2005, n.p.)

This is complemented by other members of the community who state the following:

You've got issues where you have countries that had more money when they went into [global capitalism] are doing better or are able to take [more] advantages than countries that weren't doing well [in the first place], which has affected immigration throughout the world. This isn't the only place we're seeing these issues. It's happening all over the world. And my concern is—where is the accountability? Who is accountable in this process? Who are the owners? Right now it appears to be massive corporations more so than particular governments. The systems that have been set up for accountability are still run by either by these corporations or countries that have most power, and that's the problem.

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I think of the language people are using throughout the whole world about immigrants, and all this immigration is caused by [globalization], because smaller countries can't hold on anymore. They can't hold jobs for people. It's a lot of hate going on. And it's going to explode sometime. I don't know when.

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We know for sure, globalization is something that affects immigration. How do you protect the cultures of each country little by little? How do you take culture off the countries and destroy them?

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We know who's leading [globalization]. Our concern is the limit. Honestly who's being affected by it, and how can we protect who's being affected by it? Mostly here on the border, it's the immigrant community unfortunately.

Garcia believes that these disparities have caused “a symbiotic relationship between peoples in which one side simultaneously employs and persecutes the other side.” The same individuals who are under the scorn of U.S. immigration policy are the seven to nine million undocumented people who are “hard at work helping to sustain the U.S. economy through their mostly low-paid labor” (Garcia, 2003, n.p.). We see through the globalization process that economies as powerful as the U.S. have become addicted to the fruits of the cheap labor of the same people they have denounced through their legal system, as very much demonstrated on the U.S.-Mexico border (Garcia, 2003).

Within this system, migrants, especially from Latin America must still make attempts to counter this strong global rhetoric to enjoy part of the wealth that seems to be available to them in the United States. In many ways, these imbalanced, distorted economic policies have been and continue to affect Latin Americans, forcing them to “come and beg crumbs from a country they often already help feed” (Hope, 2005, n.p.). Their only remaining option is resorting to hunger and sickness.

So many individuals as a result have been made invisible by these macro structures of the global capitalist society. Especially for those from the South, their perspectives are rarely represented in literature or included in research samples. Their voices are not taken into consideration not because they do not have experiences to share but because they are rarely given the platforms. And in unique places such as Annunciation House, where these migrants are given the space to share their personal stories and observations of the political economy of their nations, powerful learning occurs. A member on the leadership team explains:

It happens all the time. We'll have guests from El Salvador who come and say, "I'm coming to look for work... I'm working for this jeans factory in San Salvador." "Oh, tell me about the maquila. How much are you earning? What are the working conditions like?" You begin to understand the basics of his experiences. "Now the company's owned by an Asian company. Before, it was this U.S. company, and the conditions were such when they were operators... and this is what happened to us."

So through people's experiences, you start to learn all of a sudden about global trade, working conditions, and all the things that changed over time. And you start to ask a little bit more. "Oh, that happened shortly after the Peace Accords were assigned?" And folks will start telling you about the political history and the political economy of their countries.

You start to learn a little more about the civil war in El Salvador and the place this person once had in that conflict on either side and how the family survived. And you start to understand. "When I was walking in my field, I found this bombshell and had the United States printed on the shell." "Really? Tell me about the United States being involved."

So here we are, all of a sudden, getting a pretty wide window into the history over the lifetime of this person in their country of origin. We're also getting a sense of how countries have experienced the consequences of [actions of different states and economic structures]. That's a unique experience, because what we see is for the most part in mainstream press is what our government or the multi-media corporations propagate... friendly toward the perspective of our government.

So we actually have people coming from these countries who can tell us about the consequences of our economic policy in global economics that shapes up our world. So whether it's Julio from El Salvador or Geraldo from Honduras that talks to us about his experience with the gangs and how that relates to economics and immigration flow... or whether it's our friend from Cuba who can tell us about the effects of the embargo and Cuba's global relationships on his life... or whether it's one of our friends now from one of the Central African nations who can talk to us at some lengths about the reality of the genocide and the political upheaval in which our country has been very involved over the years... All of a sudden, why do I need to read the newspaper? I'm getting a first-hand account not only of the policies and practices but about how they affect the lives of people and not just the rich and the powerful of those countries but the vast majority.

## ***Capitalism***

As is evident, the political economy of nations is closely linked to the global capitalist structures that have placed many on the outskirts of global wealth and prosperity. The guests of Annunciation House could attest to the reality that these disparities across nations and class systems are largely driven by the capitalist nature of our economic system that has forced them to join these massive internal and cross-border migratory flows. Ironically, while globalization has facilitated the flow of goods and capital across borders, the movement of people has not been as nearly of a smooth transaction. Members of the leadership staff explain:

When you mention globalization, there needs to be stipulations made, or we need to define what that word means. On the surface level, I would think of it as sharing of everything – culture, experience, people, money, goods, traditions, and all these sorts of sharing across the border – which is not what’s really happening. People speak more of economic globalization or corporate-driven globalization, those types of things.

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The issue that needs to be raised is that people are leaving. This economic situation we have, the capitalist system causes an unequal development, and sometimes it’s not very efficient. So you have a country, like Mexico, and people are living in communities where they have basic services and schools and all that kind of stuff. But because there’s no work, they have to leave those places and move to cities where those services aren’t existing.

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We talk so much. There’s so much time and energy given to the way money moves internationally. But the movement of people, I think, is as an important part as is movement of money, goods, and information.

This has also been observed by some of the volunteers, who state the following:

What I see at the border... goods and money can move easily, but people can’t. I think that’s very ridiculous. Maquilas are export-processing zones where they process when they come in. It’s much easier for them.



All the drugs that come across the border, the money... all the things that go on with commercial, it makes all these things much easier. But it's illegal for people... people who make all [these products].

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It's almost something. I almost can't see how it can be turned positive because of human weaknesses, the human frailties, selfishness, greedy egoistic things. If you're in businesses, if you have money, if you have power, I can't imagine what would get a powerful CEO of a powerful company to somehow say, "OK guys, let's lower our profits so these people can live well." I don't see how that can ever happen in America. That basically would have to touch the hearts of the great corporations. You have to say, "OK, let's not make economics our main focus." I honestly don't see how that can ever happen. I know it's a bad view. I know I'm not being very hopeful or anything like that, but I don't see how you can change something like that. Honestly, I don't see a way out of it.

What the borderland activists have observed by working with those directly affected by global capitalism is that, too often, people must take matters into their own hands to meet their economic needs. Many of the migrants who come across the borders do not migrate to become part of the Western culture but because they are left with no other alternatives. Their severe economic realities have forced them to the point where migration is their only chance at survival. A leadership staff explains:

You see a lot of poor people living in very poor conditions, and you think to yourself, "Well, things must've been worse where they came from," which in ways they were. But many times, what you have is that people have to leave their hometowns, which are fairly decent places where they have houses, services, and decent infrastructure. But there's no work. So they have to come to Juarez and live under substandard conditions. But they have work.

As someone who's worked for migrants for a while, I come to the realization that people do not migrate to another country just kind of on a whim. It's a hard decision, and it's made out of necessity. I think if people could make enough to provide for their families, they would stay in their own countries.

Community members agree with the Annunciation House leadership they many migrants simply do not have the choice but to head north, as described below:

If someone had a job in their own country and was able to pay for food to put on the table, they'd stay there. Who would want to go to some place that's going to exploit them and treat them like crap and keep them in the shadows? Well, no one. But even companies are at fault. The game of workers just becomes an economic issue. They're no longer [treated as] people but something to be traded for in the larger economic scheme.

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They have all the qualities any human culture is given. It's just that they were dealt a very, very bad situation. They were dropped, they were put in a place where they can't even provide food for their families, and the jobs aren't there. And so they have to make a choice to stay there and all starve together or come to the United States. So there really isn't a choice.

That's one of the main reasons people come to the U.S. because they're seeking to find a better place for themselves and their family. And it's usually their economies of their hometowns that can't sustain anymore.

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Things should change. This economic model, the conditions of exclusion, discrimination of pushing the workers and other sectors of society to incredible levels of poverty has to change. But we believe that we are not the ones who should make those changes. That requires profound changes [coming from policy makers].

The following are also observed by the volunteer staff:

From the stories I've heard... People say, "There's no work. There's no work." They're literally forced to come here to make money and send it back home. Few days ago, I heard a story from a man who'd rather be in jail here in the United States than to go back home. He's like, "I don't care if they catch me and throw me in jail. Fine. I'd rather be in jail than go home." Wow, that was shocking. Nothing to go back to.

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Poorest of the poor, the unwanted... In the U.S., the undocumented are the unwanted, which I can't understand. They do so much work for the American economy. You know, it doesn't make sense any way you look at it... why people would be anti-immigrant.

Likewise, borderlands, having seen the direct impact of globalization first-hand, display a heightened level of consciousness-raising and awareness of their own

contributions to the game of global economics and systems reproduction. A leadership member explains that in addition to assisting this population in search of economic survival, consumers in the West must also make conscious decisions to help alleviate the disparaging economic system:

This is one of those things everyone's blaming everybody else. You blame the Mexican government, and they say it's the corporations, and the corporations blame the government. I think the ultimate responsibility has to be with the consumers. Us consumers, we are the ones who could freely spend our money. As an educated consumer, you can try to promote more social justice.

Furthermore, social justice cannot be advocated until we are in-tune with our own hypocrisies in the work that we do. A university professor adds:

Higher education is designed to reproduce the system, particular to serve the capitalist market and keep feeding the problem. My job is to teach very powerful critical learning skills so they can go out and reproduce the capitalist system. That's my job description. That's what I do. And it's killing us, literally. And for me, it's unethical. And nobody, nobody wants to have that discussion. Nobody. But the system here on the local level reproduces itself in that large system of globalization. How does that work? That's what I want the student thinking about. And the border perspective is thinking of as the border and border dynamics – culturally, politically, socially, academically.

### ***Foreign Policy and International Affairs***

When discussing possible remedies to the situation of economic disparities the borderlanders have been exposed to, as evidenced by the life situations and choices of migrants, improving U.S. foreign policy and making better provisions for developing nations comes up as one of the main themes in this study. In these discussions, many borderlanders point to the North American Free Trade Agreement, especially, as one of the major causes of economic depression in Mexico and the affected Central American nations. A leadership staff explains:

Migration isn't something they like to do. It's something they're forced to do. And I think these free trade agreements like NAFTA don't have any components to help countries like Mexico develop their [economies]. In NAFTA, that doesn't exist. And I don't think it's due to the lack of money, because I think the U.S. could easily afford to assist Mexico.

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The constant waves of migration towards the U.S. from Mexico and Central America are now seen as the direct consequences of U.S. foreign and economic policy. Whether it be the one million Salvadorans who came to the U.S. as a result of the U.S. government's support for an oppressive government during the 1980s or the millions of Mexicans who are losing their jobs in the agriculture sector as a result of free trade policies. These decisions have had and will continue to have very real repercussions for U.S. society.

How hard would it have been to have included in NAFTA a component to allow Mexico to develop its economy and bring about some kind of economic stability? How hard would it have been to provide support to a Mexican agricultural system that is at the point of collapse and could see millions of people leaving the land in the next few years? (Chandler, 2003, n.p.)

Other community members also express their discontent with NAFTA:

Unfortunately, I don't think [globalization] has been a good thing... We have the NAFTA and the horrible consequences NAFTA had on Mexican farmers and in turn how that contributed to the need for these displaced farmers to migrate to the U.S. as undocumented immigrants. So unfortunately, it has not been a good thing. Globalization has not been a good thing for El Paso or Juarez.

NAFTA, they threw [provision for labor] out. They left that out. It's money and resources back and forth but not the labor force. For some reason, people get xenophobic about that issue... Part of it, there's got to be some policies.

Volunteers similarly express the need for policy changes:

I think the most effective policy things we could change that would affect immigration issues are generally foreign policy issues, because a lot of trouble is economic disparities. If countries were economically better off, there would be fewer people who'd want to come to the United States. I think that's not really a big debate.

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The U.S. has a ripple effect influence over the whole world. If American foreign policies change toward immigrants and things like that, that will affect the world... If America changes even a little bit, hopefully that will affect other countries and things like that.

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You have issues with immigration, and now your foreign policy's really coming to bite you. And how are you gonna deal with it as its responsibility, because it is its responsibility. The government has created these conditions for people to immigrate.

Yet these victims of NAFTA and other U.S. foreign policy are the very individuals society is labeling as terrorists and conspirators against the U.S. economy. Despite this discrimination, hostility toward their presence, and unfriendly legal structures over their legalization processes, these individuals would still rather be in the U.S. than to be forced back home. It makes one wonder how horrible their home situations would have been for them to find contentment and gratitude under such demeaning circumstances, as I am still in awe of remembering the facial expressions of guests light up when donated food and clothing items came in. Living in a space infested with cockroaches and food items that have been discarded by others as garbage, these individuals still gleam at the mere fact that they are in the U.S., able to take part in its wealth someday.

In the sections that follow, I probe into the lives of the leadership staff of the Annunciation House staff who have made long-term commitments in not only assisting these victims of global disparities but who utilize strategies of education to advocate on behalf of the migrant population. Through strategies of education, community dialogue, and public events, these individuals aim to challenge the economic and political factors that have increasingly made the poor even worse off. Their continual transformation

process as leadership staff will be explored along with the comparative analysis of their work and resulting political risk with that of other grassroots activists and organizations.

### **Political Activism against the Global Challenge**

In examining the leadership structure of Annunciation House and the character of those who make long-term commitments to the organization and to the border community, these individuals first undergo an extensive self-reflection process that leads them to establish deeper roots in the border region. As they step up to leadership, their political risks increase, and they must prepare with a different degree of reflection and transformation to accept and prepare for potential consequences. And even having moved on with their lives and education after their first year of service, they find themselves back on the border region, making further commitments to the migrant community.

The majority of such staff members are clearly more grounded and personally invested in the border region than the volunteer community. They are generally joined by spouses and children who must also immerse themselves in the border region. Their stake is much higher than those who commit for a certain amount of time and then return home. These individuals have established El Paso as their permanent place of residency. For some, they see no other paths than to immerse themselves with the borderlands.

Having made the decision of uprooting their previous lives and relocating to the border is not an easy task. This is added by the greater political risks, as they return to the organization to fulfill leadership and other permanent positions that are much more visible to the public. The political risks are something the leadership must think about a

lot. One explains, “Certainly as we see that happening in other places, it brings home to us that the risk of being singled out or targeted continues to rise.” This was especially so at the end of 2005 when the House went to go vote on a legislation that would specifically make their work illegal. This heightened their concern in the sense that it would make being targeted, arrested, and prosecuted seem more imminent.

These staff members must and continue to do a lot of personal reflections on the risks of being with the organization. One explains, “We’re present to the fact that there’s a risk. Again, not that what we do has changed at all, but the climate has changed.”

When asked about their reactions when the Sensenbrenner Bill, H.R. 4437 did not go through the Senate, one explains:

Certainly after the Senate came up with a very different kind of law than the House did, I naïvely let out a sigh of relief. But intellectually, I know the law has to be reconciled, and there’s still a chance of criminalizing what we do. I’m very aware the risk is there, keep up on what’s happening in the news, and keep talking about it with my [spouse] and family. I keep praying about it.

The staff explain that not knowing what the exact threat is and how they might be seen under the eyes of the law makes their work even more tricky, as explained below:

Not knowing what the threat is and how we might be prosecuted, it makes it a little bit difficult to wrestle with. I’ve done some civil disobedience in the past, and it’s one thing to commit a certain act and know I’m risking six months of jail time for trespassing. I’ve made that choice before.

But this is a very different thing, because I’m not really sure what it is the crime that I’m committing. And certainly in my eyes, I’m not committing a crime. But not only am I not clear on what the crime is, but we really have no idea what the punishment could be. It makes personal decisions more difficult to make. And certainly it’s different now that I have [children].

It is clear that the leadership remains vigilant of the changing political risks and must constantly reflect on what their reactions would be should the immigration laws

become more hostile towards humanitarian workers. This is reflected in the following responses:

The legal cost of [the anti-immigrant sentiment] could be up, and that might force some of us to make decisions about what we can do and how we can do it. I don't know. I would have to say for myself, if this work became criminalized, I mean exclusively criminalized, that would kind of move me into a different kind of discernment. I'm not sure personally. Personally, I'm not at a place to be able to go to prison for a number of years right now.

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When you come down as a young person, as a single young person, you don't necessarily worry about things or really think about them. But as an older person who's married and with kids, it has bigger implications. But at the same time, once you've made the decision, it makes the decision more meaningful, I think. As a family and as an individual, I'm very aware of the risks. But at the same time, as a person who's always trying to live life with integrity, we don't really have a choice.

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How our country attracts, by our standard of living, how we attract people to come to our country... It's almost like we're playing a game of cat and mouse or something. I'm gonna dangle this economic carrot, but when you jump for it, I'm gonna slap you back down. So part of my own decision-making, the process of justification for what I do, is we attract these people. Somebody needs to be welcoming or caring for them when they decide to take these great journeys to come here. To turn people away after you attract them, it's [insane]. I think in certain political contexts, [legal implications] strengthen the controversy of what we do. There are times when I'm a little bit more worried or concerned about things.

Furthermore, having family members brings the additional financial burden that these individuals must consider when professionally committing to an all-volunteer organization. One explains:

There are times when things can be hard. The kids might want something you can't afford and stuff like that... So obviously for our kids, you have to be very careful, because if kids feel like they've grown up in poverty, then when they're adults, they'll seek the comfort of wealth. You're gonna have to make sure they don't feel too deprived. I know this is always a challenge.



We've lived in poor areas and stuff and always explained to the kids what we're doing and why we're doing this. I think it's a bit early to say whether it's worked out or not. It's worked out so far, but you know, we'll see when the kids are all grown up. That would be when to ask... It's definitely a challenge.

And due to the nature of their work, the number of volunteers outnumbers those who serve the organization on a more permanent basis. This places a major strain on the leadership as they must constantly adjust their work according to the number of volunteers available at the given time. This means taking on shifts in the houses when volunteers are not available, at the cost of abandoning their administrative duties and adjusting their office hours whenever needed. One explains:

By the nature of the organization, we have real limitations. We're always at the mercy of the number of volunteers that we have, and that affects what we do and what can do. We always look at, in the near or far future, the risk of doing what we do will become so great that the number of volunteers that we have will be significantly impacted. I don't want to foresee that, but I see that as reality and something that we would have to deal with.

Another leadership staff observes:

The greatest challenge we have and always had is fluctuation in the volunteer community. So, not only do we presently have a shortage of volunteers, but what always happens is volunteers generally only stay for a year, maybe a year and a half. And so, just when somebody is starting to put in and feel comfortable in which they do things, they're almost leaving. So there's constant training and a constant influx of the volunteer community.

As a result, the organization is not able to conduct strategic long-term planning, because the donations are in-kind and volunteers spontaneous. When asked what changes they would like to see within this structure, the leadership almost unanimously states that they would like to see people continue to commit long-term to the organization to give stability. The section examine the work and the challenges of the leadership staff, as they discuss their increased political risks, their personal evolution as global advocates

and activists, and how they facilitate education through their work of advocacy and activism.

### *Scope of Work*

As already discussed, those in leadership are placed in roles that are much more intensified than volunteers working on the ground level and also carry greater political risks within their functions. When these individuals are furthermore asked about their work, their responses are much more representing of Annunciation House as an organization. The members of the permanent staff bear more of the institutional responsibility when conducting their work on the border and unquestionably see their efforts beyond humanitarian work. They understand this to be a labor of advocacy and activism and accept the intensified nature of their positions, describing their endeavors by the following:

I supposed you would say we're more of an advocacy organization than activist because of our lifestyles. And from our philosophy, it's a little bit activist as well. But I think it's unusual to find an organization that combines the service type with advocacy work.

Well, it has a bit of everything. It has the classic Christian charity work, you could say, and the service type of work. But it also does activist work and also does advocacy work. So I think it's a combination of different ways of working.

As an organization or for someone who works for the organization that's kind of an activist organization, there are certain times when you might consider intensifying the work. And when you intensify the work, you weigh up what are the risks, pros and cons.

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I don't think Annunciation House would ever accept being told, "You can't do what you're doing. That's wrong." And so I think we, in a very calm and thoughtful way, decide that we're going to continue doing what we're doing.

Their cognizance of the organization and its deeper magnitude is not surprising as these individuals are given much more focused and specialized roles within the organization. Also being embedded in leadership roles of a cross-border organization, their acknowledgement of binational issues is extensive. While the political commentaries of volunteers are largely limited to domestic issues of immigration and border enforcement, the viewpoints of the leadership lend themselves to be broadened by more global perspectives.

This group is distinguished in that, in one way or another, they have already experienced the earlier stages of learning as volunteers do when they first arrive on the border. Their already-acquired political training leads them to view their work in broader, global ways and to incorporate the cross-border element into their work and advocacy. These individuals have expanded their work to view both sides of the border instead of meeting the demands of the U.S. side of the politics. Many are well-versed in issues of maquiladora workers and the on-going land disputes in the Mexican colonias.

The leadership staff also attests that the present global economic trends continue to change and shape the work of Annunciation House. One of its members explains:

You know, the reality of the border was very different in 1998 than it is now. When I arrived in Casa Peregrina [in Mexico], our house was full of women. In fact, we had women sleeping on the couches and on the floors every night. Then we stopped accepting women when we ran out of couches. And a lot of that had to do with the fact that corresponded with the maquiladoras.

At that time, there were several hundred maquilas in Juarez. People were flocking to the border and cities like Juarez. It was a concentration of labor sources. So certainly there were children there for a variety of reasons. You know, some looking to immigrate to the U.S. to reunite with family, some homeless, some issues of domestic abuse and violence. But really at that time, it was the population of women coming to work in the maquilas. Those were women as young as 15 all the way up to 35, because the preference for the maquilas was always for young single women.

At that time, the requirements for working in the maquilas were a lot less. [Teenage girls] could simply lie about their age or documents, and the maquila owners would look the other way. There were so many jobs to be filled that they really wanted the workers. People were flocking to the city and looking for work. It was also interesting, because there was also a lot of movement between the maquilas. For as bad as the work conditions were in the maquilas, there were a lot of other jobs available, so women would easily leave a maquila and work for another.

Due to the high demand for workers in the maquiladoras, Casa Peregrina, the house of hospitality in Ciudad Juarez, was in full operation in the 1990s. This overflow of people in search of employment was parallel to the flood of people searching for temporary places to stay.

From 1998 to 2000, Ciudad Juarez was flooded with an influx of people. Even at that time, it was relatively easy for people to find work and cheap places to live, so guests did not stay in Casa Peregrina too long. Many maquila workers found others to room with and moved out to the colonias when they had saved enough money since people were still squatting at that point. As the leadership explains, “They would get a plot of land and start to use their money to build a *casa de carton* [house made of cartons]. Even if so small and insufficient, they brought their families with them.”

However, with the downturn of the U.S. economy in 2000, many maquiladoras had to shut down along the U.S.-Mexico border and relocate to other parts of the world.

Staff members of Annunciation House recount:

[The state of the maquiladoras] contrasted when I returned in 2003 and so many of the maquilas had closed and relocated to other parts of the world where there was cheaper labor.

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When you talk about maquiladoras, you need to talk about the year 2000, which was the recession in the U.S., which affected the whole world. Prior to 2000, there was an excess of maquiladoras and not enough employees. So people could just say, “I don’t like lunch today. I’m gonna quit and work somewhere else.”

After the recession hit, there was a core of maquiladoras, like 100,000 people out of work... And so the employers had the upper hand.

Having seen the impact of the maquiladora industry on the migrant population first-hand, the leadership has professionally and personally engaged in cross-border politics as well as educating others on the reality of the migrant life. As the number of available jobs decreased, migrant workers continued to be taken advantage of by their employers. This, added to the poor infrastructure of the city, created horrible living conditions in Ciudad Juarez, representative of those seeking shelter in Casa Peregrina.

The leadership staff members comment:

Maquiladoras are controversial, because they don't pay. Let's say for example, they paid 50 cents an hour. If people strike and fight and want higher wages, then there's the risk that the company may pull out and just go to Indonesia or some place where they could pay less. So there's that risk. If these companies decide to pay more, that would raise the cost of the item. The goods might cost more in the United States, and maybe they're not gonna buy as much.

As far as some of the experiences people have had has been ranging. I've heard some horrible stories from women, but I've also heard people continue to work and be attracted to maquiladoras, because it's more socialized. They'll bus you into work, they have daycare, they have nurses and doctors on staff, two free meals per shift, so it's almost like there's all these benefits, nicer than you get in the U.S. some ways. But the kicker is that they're 50 cents an hour. You sort of get sucked in when you don't have a choice to go somewhere else and make other decisions.

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The maquiladora program leads to a mushrooming of the populations of the border cities, most of which are located in fragile desert environments with very limited water resources. The exponential increase in the population has also put an enormous strain on the cities' infrastructure. There have not been the resources to cope with such a rapid influx of people. Many people see the conditions that the workers live in and wonder what life must have been like in the places that they migrated from. They are surprised to learn that people have left communities where they have had their own houses with all the services, and with adequate schools, clinics, and parks. People have migrated from places such as Veracruz where they have everything but employment to places like Juarez where they have nothing but a job. (Chandler, 2003, n.p.)

Their awareness and continual engagement resonates in existing nature of their social justice work, as one of the leaders indicates:

However, for those of us concerned with social justice, the questions raised about just wages, labor conditions, and our role as consumers of the products of the maquiladoras continue to go unanswered. As the global economy changes and develops we must also continue to move forward and adapt our critique as we search for ways to make our planet a more just and equitable place for all. (Chandler, 2005, n.p.)

With the downturn of the economy and with less people seeking jobs in Ciudad Juarez, the types of people seeking shelter in Casa Peregrina changed as well. The staff began seeing more chronic homelessness on the part of women and children due to the scarcity of work. At the same time, due in part to the femicides that were occurring, Ciudad Juarez was gaining a lot of notoriety. It got so much attention nationally and internationally that there were concerted efforts in Ciudad Juarez to raise awareness about violence against women. By around 2003, the organization received more women and children seeking shelter fleeing abusive partners.

When the leadership decided to temporarily close Casa Peregrina in 2005, the organization wanted to reassess its function in Ciudad Juarez and its mission of assisting the migrant community. What the leadership continued to see was that much fewer women and children were migrating. Instead, it was more women who were coming to seek shelter for the reasons of chronic homelessness, mental illnesses, and domestic abuse. “And it’s not that it’s not a worthy cause to serve folks with these needs,” explains a leadership staff, “but that’s not necessarily what we were set up to do.”

The building, the infrastructure, the resources, and even the way the leadership runs the houses with volunteers did not necessarily reflect what and how the organization was a good fit with those they were serving in Casa Peregrina. Therefore, the leadership

wanted a chance to take a pause and look at all the shifts in migratory flows they were witnessing. They wanted to try to understand what was happening and make choices that might better reflect the need that existed in the community. “Because after all, we were founded, Annunciation House as an organization and certainly Casa Peregrina, were opened with the idea of providing hospitality for the migrants,” explains a leadership staff.

Despite closing the door of Casa Peregrina, the awareness and community engagement of the leadership, unlike the volunteer staff, has continued to focus on both sides of the border. This is especially so with the attention given to the on-going land dispute that is occurring between the residents of Anapra and a Mexican conglomerate family based in Ciudad Juarez. Anapra is a colonias district in the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez where people started settling down in the early 1970s with the permission from the Mexican federal government.<sup>126</sup> Beginning in early 1990s, however, the Zaragoza family has been making repeated attempts to take ownership of the land and have become notorious for using fear, intimidation, and threats to force the residents to sign their property over to them.<sup>127</sup>

In response, the members of the Annunciation House leadership have engaged in direct and indirect community efforts to educate community members of their constitutional rights and advocating for their right to the land. By publishing information on its website and working closely with individuals and groups who assist the Anapra

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<sup>126</sup> Residents assumed their property under the Mexican Code of Federal Civil Law, Article 1152 that states “Property is acquired in five years when it is held with the intention of ownership, in good faith, peacefully, continually and publicly.” In other words, those peacefully occupying the land under these conditions would become the legal owner (Annunciation House, 2006)

<sup>127</sup> The outcome of the battle does not seem favorable toward the residents, as the Zaragoza family has strong influence in the government.

residents who continue to resist the pressures to vacate the property they have called home for over twenty years, the leadership of Annunciation House continues to advocate on behalf of borderlanders on both sides of the border although it has temporarily ceased its work of hospitality in Mexico.

### ***Institutional Representation***

Through their intensified involvement with the organization and cross-border issues at large, the leadership engages in specialized roles within the organization. One explains, “Certainly, I see myself representing Annunciation House. Obviously not in the way Ruben does as director, but certainly, I’m a representative of the organization.” The activities of these individuals specifically engage in activities that reach the general public through education, advocacy, and activism. In many ways, the leadership is able to take on these broader and more publicized roles that represent the organization since the bulk of the hospitality work and the daily operations of the houses are fulfilled by the volunteer community.

Given the fact that the permanent leadership has been with the organization for an extended length of time, one of their primary roles is interfacing with different individuals and groups in the border community. This aspect of developing relationships and collaboration with the community help them sustain their justice-based work. Various members on the leadership meet with area human rights organizations and collaborate on community events. The leadership also maintains contacts in Ciudad Juarez, such as maquilas and labor rights groups, to stay informed of the binational dynamics and to use their networks to educate participants of the border awareness and educational programs.



Another aspect of the leadership is collaborating with different groups and agencies to particularly advocate on behalf of the migrant population. As such, a big part of their work is building and continuing relationships with other organizations and groups, such as the county hospital and legal aid agencies, in order to direct guests to additional resources beyond the services rendered at Annunciation House. Furthermore, the leadership is able to advocate their work and act on behalf of the migrant community and further publicize their work by meeting with different organizations and partaking in community-based initiatives and coalitions.

The way these tasks are delegated depends on the number of individuals on the leadership team at the given time. “Because we’re volunteer organization, when someone leaves, we don’t have a vacant position. The work is like a pie. We divide it among us. Before we came back, Ruben was doing all that,” describes one of the leadership staff. Another explains, “We’re under the model of ‘So we have the person. How do we redistribute some of the responsibilities?’”

### ***Advocacy through Education***

Through this study, I observed different avenues in which the leadership assumes tasks to better educate the public about the border and migrant situation. By utilizing strategies of structured and unstructured learning, the leadership strategically engages the public in the continual personal and global politics of Annunciation House and the migrant community. Largely operating on the belief that incidental learning can create powerful transformation processes in individual lives, the organization has created diverse venues for the general public to learn in social contexts. This aligns with the general philosophy of “Come and see” at Annunciation House.

One of the key ways in which the leadership engages in educating the public about the work of the organization and the migrant life on the border is through its border awareness programs. Each year, approximately fifteen university groups arrive at Annunciation House to partake in the Border Awareness Experience (BAE), which is the formal education component of the organization. This is in addition to over thirty groups who want to visit the houses and various individuals – such as religious leaders, community activists, and journalists – who visit the facilities along the course of the year.

The intention of BAE is to orient the outside community to the borderlands and expose them to various issues surrounding the border region. This effort attracted various university groups across the country. While some groups have specific requests, others come down and ask the organization to set up the agenda. The typical group stays for approximately five to seven days, and the time is spent in both El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

BAE sessions are divided by a number of issues and can be summarized by the following statement:

The main idea of it is, there are a couple of issues we want them to look at. One is the immigration, just to understand what it means. And then we also want to look at how the global economy works and for us. Juarez is a city that really was the forerun of globalization, because it had these factories established in the 1960s. So when people say, “What are the effects of globalization?” in Juarez, you can see some of the effects of globalization.

BAE discussions generally begin with border issues in the U.S., as participants visit the Border Patrol and sit in on immigration hearings. They are given time to speak with immigration lawyers and to be educated on the particulars of the immigration law and reform. They also have opportunities to speak with individuals working with farm workers, human rights groups, and sometimes even drug enforcement agencies. While

on the U.S. side, participants reside in the facilities of Casa Vides and Annunciation House.

When participants cross to the Mexico side, they spend the time out in Emaus House, the community center in Anapra. While residing in Anapra, the individuals engage in intense conversations with various members of the colonias district. Because economics is a major component of the BAE curriculum, BAE personnel take participants to the maquiladoras and have them speak with labor groups that are trying to organize unions in the maquilas. Due to the increasing topic of the disappearances of women, participants also visit groups that work on the issues of femicides.

Asked about the ultimate goal of the program, a leadership staff responds:

I think for us, it's educating these people who come on these trips and hoping they'll educate themselves. It's not necessarily we tell them what to think. We just want to open up... have them start to think about these issues and then also start talking to their friends and family about it to slowly create social change. I think there have been a lot of examples that have been successful in the past.

In many ways, BAE models after the delegation work and awareness that was raised during the Central American wars of the 1980s, as explained:

If you look at the 1980s, wars in Central America, there were a lot of delegation type of work. And I think the education of the American public and the raising consciousness probably ended up stopping the U.S. from invading those countries. People were being told that this and that was going on, but they weren't being given the whole truth. And I think through educational work, it had a big impact.

Similar to the current state of border politics, the leadership believes that the American public is often given the impression from the media that the U.S. is being invaded by criminals migrating from the south. Annunciation House thus makes it a point to educate the public on the true nature of migration and to misspell the myths placed on

immigrants. “So I think the educational work is very important,” explains a member on the leadership staff, who further notes the following:

I think it’s very important for people who come on these trips to be able to understand a little bit about the situation of undocumented workers, where they come from, where they work, because I get the feeling that the undocumented is a very invisible group within our society. So we go to restaurants, we get our cars washed, we get lawns cut, but people aren’t paying too much attention to who these people are. I think it’s important for people to put a face, a human connection with the migrants. And I think that really has a big impact on the people.

Through hands-on exposure and education, participants get to decide for themselves on the issues revolving border politics. The leadership recalls that from the inception of the organization, people have always been interested in their work. “So when people have interest in the work that we do, we are called to education,” explains a leadership staff. Thus, BAE exposes these individuals to the topics of economics, international economies, NAFTA, globalization, political oppression, the Sanctuary Movement, and the U.S. involvement in supplying arms to Central American countries in the name of eradicating communism. “So they hear one story from the government, and you hear another from our guests as to what reality was in their countries,” and through this experience, participants receive a comprehensive educational experience along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The organization generally does not market BAE. Instead, schools that are familiar with the program or have already brought groups in the past continue to bring students each year. One of the program instructors explains that these groups generally come out of faith-based or social justice-based organizations or departments from various college campuses that seek Annunciation House out. Participating schools have ranged

from all across the country, such as campuses in DC and the Midwest. When asked about the impact of the BAE program, a former participant explains:

We had a lot of powerful things. We had this girl who was from East Los Angeles and had parents who are undocumented. During our last reflection, she was tearing up, “You know, this is something I didn’t want to talk about... seeing these people who are like my parents, my family, a part of myself I had hidden but now can come face it.” I think a lot of us were crying when she was talking about it. It was really intense.

Then there’s this kid, white Oklahoman, pre-medical student who was [indifferent in the beginning]. At Vides we were playing with [the children], and he said, “You know, before I had used the word *illegal*, but playing with kids at Vides, they’re not illegal. I won’t use that word anymore.” People were really affected.

Interestingly, it is through educational efforts of BAE that keeps the Annunciation House leadership closely connected with the advocacy circles on both sides of the border.

A leadership staff explains:

We want [BAE participants] to see both sides of the border. I think for Annunciation House, there are certain initiatives that we do where it’s beneficial for us to be in touch with groups on both sides of the border. So I might meet with [an organization in Mexico] and try to see what we’re doing is helpful to what they’re doing to compare trends. With human rights organizations, if we come across migrants who have suffered abuse in Mexico, then we need to collaborate with them.

The leadership continues to believe it is important to keep to date with different things that are going on both sides of the border. Accordingly, the implementation of the BAE program has helped facilitate continual their cross-border engagement despite its temporary break from operating its hospitality work in Mexico.

The leadership of Annunciation House also engages in other educational and advocacy events throughout the year that are more short-term and reaches out to a general public. Annually, the organization invites Carlos Mauricio, a survivor of torture in Central America, to speak at Casa Vides, which generates a high turnout each year. The

Annunciation House facilities have also served as frequent sites for press conferences and town meetings. When Juan Patricio Quijada was killed by the Border Patrol in 2003, Annunciation House collaborated with other community organizers and held a press conference condemning the Border Patrol and the agents involved in the shooting. The leadership has also coordinated series of talks in the past that have attracted hundreds of community members and college students in the region.

### *Activism through Education*

Given the intense political climate that surrounds the border region and the fact that Annunciation House works with undocumented migrants, one may wonder how the organization is able to stay very public with its work. This seems unexplainable especially since the organization maintains a website elaborating on its work with electronic access to its biannual newsletters that have generated to almost 10,000 individuals and organizations. But according to the leadership, this act of publicly making themselves known is part of their activism work. The leadership is of the firm stance that the only way they can respond to injustice is through publicity. Garcia explains, “Annunciation House is not just about work of charity but of social justice. With social justice, someone has to pay the bills. Being in your face is not being flippant.”

In fact, the decision to become public was made early in the 1980s when the organization was first raided by the Border Patrol, followed by repeated intimidation tactics and threats. Garcia recalls:

The conscious decision to be very public about it came after we were raided in 1984. At that point, it was realizing that there's nothing Border Patrol doesn't know about us. So it's in our interest to be very, very public and raise the visibility.

Garcia also spends several weeks each year traveling to numerous agencies and universities to educate the public about Annunciation House and the undocumented population. "I think that's primarily because we have been around for so many years... just the track record, the fact that we do a considerable amount of education," explains Garcia. Because the borders are such prominent issues right now, it is not uncommon for people to start making phone calls where Annunciation House eventually gets surfaced.

Garcia also receives frequent calls from media outlets from Europe, Asia, and all over the U.S. wanting reactions, responses, comments on various legislations and events that are occurring in relation to the immigrant issue. He is also intentional about the types of invitations to engagements he accepts. "Obviously it has a lot to do with who the group is and what's their agenda and their reasons." At the present moment, he believes the priority is to speak at venues where it is possible to address ordinary U.S. citizens, because it is at that level he believes misconceptions and myths about immigrants thrive and get passed on. "Are they not human beings? Do they not have the right to their daily bread?" he asks.

In its effort in activism, the Annunciation House leadership has instituted two major venues that have radically raised awareness and community effort in seeking justice for the migrant population. One is the establishment of the Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in 1987 that to this day serves as the only agency in El Paso providing free legal aid to unaccompanied minors and political asylum applicants. Las

Americas is one of the only three accredited organizations in El Paso that are authorized by the U.S. Department of Justice to provide such services to immigrants.

The idea of Las Americas came about during the time of civil wars in Central America. Beginning in the late 1970s, as large numbers of Central American refugees fled to the U.S., many immigration service providers began establishing themselves across the country. As many of the refugees were crossing through the Ciudad Juarez / El Paso region, Annunciation House began providing shelter to these individuals and helping them apply for political asylum.

During this time, however, Annunciation House made the decision not to formally declare itself sanctuary during the Sanctuary Movement. Garcia explains the reasons:

Being right on smack on the border, with huge numbers of people passing through our house... we [already] had the bodies. We were not a church looking to take in a family. We were an entity that had 50 families at any given time. And so we were concerned that if we declared sanctuary formally because of the numbers of Central Americans that were passing through the house, we would then be perceived as affronting the government, and that would tempt them to close us down. And the people arriving had a very concrete need for a place like Annunciation House right on the border.

As the staff became overwhelmed with the amount of asylum applications they were assisting during this time, Garcia sought the help of civic leaders and legal aid agencies that eventually formed into an advisory board that conceived the organization, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center. Originally housed in Annunciation House, Garcia served as the first president of the board, and Delia Gomez, another co-founder of Annunciation House, became the executive director. The efforts of Las Americas expanded exponentially and soon branched out as an independent agency. This organization continues to thrive in its work and has now expanded services to helping battered women file for residency under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of



1995. At present, it is the only non-profit legal service for those seeking asylum and detained minors in El Paso (Las Americas, 2006).

The second major venue of activism Annunciation House engages in is its annual Voice of the Voiceless Awards (VoV). The idea of VoV was conceived in 2003 during its twenty-fifth year anniversary where the board of directors decided to honor an individual each year who has demonstrated incredible courage advocating for the migrant poor even at their own personal risk and cost. This in turn would become a vehicle in which the organization continues to affirm and encourage human rights workers and to advocate on behalf of this global oppressed group of individuals (Doyle, 2005). Garcia further explains:

We instituted the award as a vehicle of advocacy on behalf of the poor in migration. That, by honoring individuals who had witnessed on behalf of the poor in migration even to the point of planning themselves at risk of doing so, that it helps to raise the profile of the immigrant, that there are very credible people out there that are willing to place their own person, whether in the form of [attempted] assassination... rape and torture... or prison. They do so because of their belief that they must be a witness on behalf of the poor in migration.

In 2003, the first Voice of the Voiceless Award was given to Samuel Ruiz, Bishop Emeritus of San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico for assisting almost a quarter of a million Guatemalan refugees fleeing to Chiapas, Mexico in the 1980s and his fight in the 1990s to defend the rights of the indigenous people.<sup>128</sup> Ruiz survived two documented assassination attempts and tremendous pressures coming from both the political and the religious structures to resign (Doyle, 2005). The Guatemalan wars were later officially

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<sup>128</sup> He has not only worked with Guatemalan refugees fleeing to Chiapas but also the indigenous people of Chiapas, which happens to be the birthplace of the Zapatistas movement. When the Zapatista movement revolted at the beginning of NAFTA, Ruiz was the only person the Zapatistas would accept as the mediator between them and the government. Ruiz was later nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

declared a genocide of the indigenous people to take their land by the government.

Garcia explains:

The government of course said they did this because they were communist sympathizers. Well, they weren't communist. They were indigenous people whose land they wanted and massacred numbers of them. Huge villages were killed and destroyed.

Then in 2005, the second award was given to another individual who had worked intensely with the Guatemalan population, Dianna Ortiz. Ortiz, a survivor of torture, activist, and author of *The Blindfold's Eyes; My Journey from Torture to Truth* was abducted by security forces and savagely raped and tortured while working as a missionary to Guatemala in 1989. Ortiz was chosen for this award not only for her advocacy on behalf of torture victims but for giving voice to the experiences of numerous torture victims who have come through the doors of Annunciation House. A former member on the Annunciation House leadership explains in one of the newsletters:

Her international witness to this torture has stood in the face of the brutal policies of the Guatemalan and United States government and individuals from both countries that supported this torture. Her story tells of attempts to silence and discredit her testimony on every level, both in Guatemala and here in the United States. It also speaks to the profound physical, spiritual and psychological distress that haunts survivors of torture. (Doyle, 2005)

Annunciation House most recently honored Reverend John Fife as the third recipient of the Voice of the Voiceless Awards in 2006 for his courageous work during the Sanctuary Movement and for his continual efforts as he leads the Arizona-based activist organization, No More Deaths. This is the same organization whose two college students, Shanti Sellz and Daniel Strauss, were arrested and charged. The Annunciation House leadership and board, at the time of this study, had recently decided to give the fourth award to Cardinal Archbishop Roger Mahony, who made the public stance that he

would instruct the priests of his archdiocese to disobey H.R. 4437 should it ever become law. By stating that “denying aid to a fellow human being violates a law with a higher authority than Congress – the law of God,” he spurred many immigrants and activists around the country to stand against H.R. 4437 (Annunciation House, 2007).

In honoring truly heroic individuals who have devoted their lives to assisting the migrant poor, the Annunciation House staff has been able to educate the public on the situations of migrants abroad and in the U.S. by instituting the awards to world renowned human activists. This in itself becomes a strategic space in which the organization actively creates consciousness-raising of the attendees and the members of the media who cover this city-wide event. The first awards ceremony attracted close to 1,600 people, which included a silent march to the border and a celebration dinner at the El Paso Convention Center.

The findings of this study show strategic intentionality of the leadership to gather the general public in honoring internationally acclaimed individuals and using the space to further generate awareness of the organization and the migrant community. By inviting different migrants to share their stories during the celebration dinner, attendees engage in first-hand dialogue with the migrants that Annunciation House has served in near thirty years of its existence. The celebration dinner – also referred to as solidarity dinner – reflects the daily diet of beans of rice of the countless poor of Latin America and their lives.

Through such work of advocacy and activism, an incredible amount of learning occurs to those who become exposed to the work of Annunciation House. As the personal awareness and transformations critically challenge the volunteer staff to engage

in an active fight for the migrant poor, similar strategy is placed on the general public through means such as the Border Awareness Experience and the Voice of the Voiceless Awards. By giving first-hand exposure to the migrant community and lending them glimpses of the migrant account and personal struggles to sustain their livelihood, incredible amount of informal learning occurs through these individuals. This in turn becomes the vehicle in which awareness and advocacy is further filtered to the greater border region and the nation at large.

This combination of education and activism is what has attracted the leadership to remain with the organization, as one explains:

I think for me, what I like about Annunciation House is that combination. There are some groups that do purely charity work, and other groups do purely activist work. But to me, if you're doing the charity work, you're responding to the need, but you're not changing the structures that create that need. I think if you do the activist work, you focus so much on the structure that you're not responding to the immediate needs.

I like Annunciation House in that it combines activism with the charity type of work. For me as an individual, part of what's important to me is if you work as a full-time activist, you're trying to change the structure to create a better future. But for me, it's really important to try to live from day one. You try to live the ideals that you'd like the society to be while changing the structures. Annunciation House is a nice combination of that.

As an organization that both implicitly and explicitly engages in activism through education and humanitarian work, the leadership is committed to continuing its work “until an immigration reform that puts us out of business... although that's probably not going to happen.” Meanwhile, the migrant poor will continue to pass through Annunciation House and shape its work of hospitality and advocacy. The fact that it has been the migrant poor shaping the mission and the work of Annunciation House from the beginning continues to be true for the ongoing efforts of the current staff and leadership.

## **Engagement in Grassroots Activism**

As the members of the Annunciation House leadership engage in activism and expose themselves to possible criminalization through their work, it is worth examining other organizations in its direct and indirect coalitions to compare and contrast their work with that of Annunciation House. The city of El Paso is a unique place in which people of different global realities and agendas meet. And as many are driven by global forces to seek shelter through crossing the border, many community activists have responded in their individual ways to assist these people in migration. By examining the different forces that link and separate Annunciation House and the El Paso community, insights will be given to factors that distinguish Annunciation House from the rest of the grassroots community.

### ***Overview of Organizations Observed***

In this effort, staff from ten NGOs and community agencies were interviewed in this study. They are divided into the categories of legal assistance; shelter and rehabilitation; community activism; and education/research. These organizations are in one way or another linked to Annunciation House and the border politics, as the majority serve people in migration.

#### ***Legal Assistance***

Directors of three organizations providing legal assistance to the migrant population were interviewed. These individuals explain that their establishments arose out of the tremendous need in the community. “We have such a large immigrant population as in any border town. And it was matter of serving a need, a great need, very

obvious need,” explains one of the directors. Other organizations echoed the reasons of starting their organizations due to the growing need, as one explains, “There were one or two organizations that helped immigrants [with legal work], but we thought this really wasn’t enough.”

These organizations target the unique needs within the migrant population. They provide programs that specialize in various aspects of immigration law, such as family-based immigration, removal proceedings, refugee resettlement, immigrant victims of crime, immigrant victims of domestic violence, and unaccompanied refugee minors. These three organizations were chosen, because they provide legal services for a nominal fee or many times, free of charge. “The people who come to us, they are people who cannot afford to pay fees,” one explains.

### ***Shelter and Rehabilitation***

Directors of two organizations providing shelter and rehabilitation were interviewed. Both are independent, private organizations that are widely known in the city. One is a cooperative organization that specifically assists pregnant women considering abortion or single mothers who have been abused by their partners. The organization assists them with free housing, food, prenatal care, education, employment, and other long-term plans. The second provides rehabilitation services to the homeless, as it is explained, “We are trying to establish the homeless firmly on their feet and get them in the right direction.” This shelter also operates a furniture-making factory that only employs the homeless. The finished products are sold across the country.

### ***Community Activism***

Two organizations were identified as engaging marginalized communities in learning about and demanding their rights as documented and undocumented migrants.

One of the organizations works in the colonias of Texas and New Mexico, as explained:

Our purpose is to facilitate the education and the organization and participation of marginalized communities to promote and defend our human rights... We train, education people so they can understand what their rights are, but they are the ones who actually have to defend it. They have to get involved.

The other agency was established to assist agricultural workers to become organized.

This came out of the philosophy that once unified, farm workers would be able to change the problems they faced on a daily basis. These problems include issues related to wages, working conditions, living conditions, and abuses of their most basic rights. “These abuses are not only committed by employers, labor contractors, and private individuals but also from the public sector and the government,” its director explains. This organization also engages in law suits and lobbying for policy changes.

### ***Education and Research***

Leaders from three organizations engaging in education and research were interviewed. One is an independent, private organization that provides citizenship classes as well as courses in English, computer skills, and health promotion. The remaining two are university-affiliated entities that engage in research projects and facilitate visitations from groups and individuals across the country to the border region. One of these organizations is affiliated with a university in the Midwest region that brings a group of students every fall semester to conduct their own ethnographic study while working directly with grassroots organizations in Ciudad Juarez and El Paso.

The third organization is locally affiliated and offers academic and teaching programs. It also hosts community outreach programs and events geared towards the El Paso population as well as outside communities. It also offers border institutes where students from other parts of the country are invited to the borderlands from a few days to a semester. It also works with the university community to better improve their Latin American and Mexico border awareness programs.

### ***Similarities***

Similarities are many between the community organizations observed and Annunciation House. Many of these grassroots organizations and agencies are predominantly service-oriented and provide aid to particular populations in need. Such organizations serve the purposes of providing shelter, medical care, and legal assistance. Some others help deliver community empowerment and popular education models.

### ***Personal Mission***

El Paso is a unique city in which the grassroots community is active and high in number with their individual mission and purpose to provide appropriate services to the El Paso community. One major finding in this study is the great amount of personal mission and conviction that shapes their advocacy and purpose, similar to that of Annunciation House. All too often, these individuals are personally touched by those they serve, further driving their personal mission to assist their population in need. This is detected in the voices of many interviewed in this study:

I had my own law firm. I basically had the thought, “Why don’t you stop suing people and do something productive with your life?” That was in 1997. I made that decision in September of 1997 and then started here [as director of homeless shelter] in November.



The image of the homeless, we have is the guy on the street with his hand out. I want to show the world that these people they have discarded are actually creations of God with immeasurable amount of talent. And the way to do that is put them to work, create jobs for them, show them to work, then show the world what the homeless workforce can do.

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Knowing that we are impacting real people, we're impacting their lives. You know, it's funny but it's the smallest things that make us happy with what we're doing. We had a refugee client this morning who showed up, who none of our refugees pay for any of the services they receive. He was so grateful for the help we were able to give him. He didn't know how to repay us, so he showed up with a huge watermelon he grew in the garden. Even though of course we can go to the grocery store and buy a watermelon for a few dollar or whatever, but just the fact he went out of his way to try to bring that to us just to thank us to helping him. Little things like that really make you happy and realize you are affecting people.

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You worry about your cases. You worry about that person. Once you get to know them, you don't worry about them as clients. You worry about them... This individual, she's been abused by individuals. Now she's going to get abused by the system... In that court room, you are the only person that might be trying to help her. So how do you deal with that? The whole day carries with you.

Others are driven to their work, because they are personally impacted by their own personal and family experiences as immigrants and as those deeply impacted by the migrant community. This can be summarized by the following:

I started getting involved with [this organization] myself as undocumented immigrant... I realized I lived all of my life through a culture of abuse, and being awakened by some of the things the model [my organization] had and to educate the community. Not only that but facilitating the space for them to do something about it. Not talk about it but do something about it. Something to change those policies, and mostly right now, because I do believe that today is the time to do social change, a movement, a human right movement. And if anybody has to have direct role on some of the changes, it has to be in the immigrant community. That's why I'm still here, because I believe that movement has to continue.

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I have family members that are either here or crossed. My parents are from Mexico. [My motive is] to help communities actually be able to express themselves and get them involved and look for changes and hopefully end these types of discriminatory practices and abuses happening right here at the border.

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When I look at these people, I see my grandmother in them. I see my family in them. And this gives me compassion toward my clients.

A farm worker once turned to me and said, “If you were a farm worker like me, what good would you be doing me? As a lawyer you can help protect my rights, you can help me, but if you were a farm worker like I am, what would make you any different from me than somebody else who’s working next to me as well?” It’s to use your skills and knowledge in your own bag of tricks to try help somebody. You don’t have to be standing in their shoes, but as long as you’re trying to help them stand by them, I think that’s important. And that helps.

And despite having to operate under low funds and other challenges that largely come with grassroots work, many persevere because they simply like the work and the border region, as explained:

It’s grassroots, and it’s a worthwhile endeavor. You get a sense of you’ve done something good because of the population that you serve... It’s a different atmosphere... if it’s in your heart, it’s something you enjoy. It’s something I enjoy.

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We have a lot of staff who have stayed for a long time, because they are happy with what their doing even though we are non-profit. We can’t provide huge salaries or huge benefits or things like that. But I think that’s a testament to how our staff really loves what they do and keep doing what they do.

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I like it. It’s difficult, but I like it. I have a passion too help the poor... I’m in love with serving. I’m in love with doing this... I like to help and give opportunities for those who are on the streets.

Even for those who are not in mainstream grassroots work, their efforts carry a significant element of personal mission and passion for the borderlands, as reflected by the responses:

As an academic, I have been here since 1980... What keeps me at the border is that I like it. This kind of work, actually.

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It definitely carries over. Your heart is softened. You allow it to always humble you and say where you did you come from and where did you move, how did you grow up, what did you do.

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This is my life. This is what I'm going to do.

***Personal Journey Revisited***

Many of these individuals also explain that similar to the Annunciation House volunteer staff, they are using their time on the border to figure out the next steps of their lives. They explain;

It's a laboratory, you can say. Things are always happening. The border's a lot different from a lot of the interior parts of the country. People are always learning and people want to think more for themselves and have more future goals, and they can. We all want stuff for ourselves also, but we can't leave. At the end, we'll somehow be connected still here, helping out some way or another.

I mean of course personally there's a lot of self research on what I want to do and pursue... For me, I see myself continually being here of course trying to better myself because if I better myself, I'm bettering my communities and just be able to be here. I do see myself being here long-term, but again, you never know.

Ultimately I'll always be involved. If I leave, in one way or another, I'll be involved, catching up, and helping in whatever way I can. Personally— it's still searching.

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I do believe I have more time here to stay with [my organization]. Yes, I do have different goals for long-term— continue education wherever life takes you. I may end up in a different organization, a different city. Right now, what I'm focusing now is staying here and working.

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I'm still trying to figure out my own place since I'm not from the communities and recognizing what's happening here and trying to filter that out to the communities in Boston, for example, where the discussion never takes place. The fact that there's an actual wall or fence on parts of the border is something people don't know. So I definitely see myself continuing working in issues of human right, but I guess I'm trying to figure out where I fit into that.

### ***Local and Grassroots in Nature***

Not only have these individuals embarked on personal journeys, but the nature of the organizations in which they serve are very particular to the El Paso region. Being local and tailoring to the needs that are unique to the El Paso community, the majority of the individuals show little interest in branching their work outside of El Paso. Their responses are similar to that of an Annunciation House board member who states, "I tend to be more interested in sticking to something that's more local. I don't see us starting a chain along the border... I don't see it as our mission." This community voice is similarly summarized by the following response:

We are a small organization in El Paso. We are not a national organization. We don't have other offices anywhere. It's only El Paso. No, [we have no intentions of branching out], because the needs are different in different cities.

### ***Collaboration***

Given the diversity of organizations and agencies in the El Paso region, I set out to explore the magnitude of collaboration that may or may not occur within these circles. The findings indicate that while there is some collaboration in the El Paso grassroots community, most organizations tend to form networks with other agencies doing similar work in other parts of the country. When asked about collaboration with other grassroots agencies, they referred to their networks and similar coalitions outside of the El Paso region more so than the local community.

One explains that while his shelter is locally based and operated, he works closely with a federation of locally owned and operated shelters across the country. His collaboration comes primarily working with the 290 entities within the federation. This is similarly reflected in the voices of other organizations, as they explain:

[Our organization] has an alliance across the whole border. We work with [organizations] in San Diego and Tucson. We have affiliates in New Jersey, Houston, San Jose... plus what's happening in terms of immigration right now [different campaigns] have brought together grassroots organizations throughout the country. So there's a lot of work that happens with networks that connect people on the national level given the salience of the issue right now.

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We have three offices. One in Odessa, one on Montana [Street] which is right next to the immigration building, and this one which is right across from the courts. [Our networks] are in Chicago... and American Immigrant Lawyer Association, which over the years has become my primary resource, other attorneys and the resources there.

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We belong to different networks, like the Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services. We are part of them... [Other networks are in San Diego and Arizona]... And we are friends. We work together... We are different. We are not the same organization, but we work like the same organization because of the network base.

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I think it's a natural thing. For example, we have contacts with organizations doing similar things in other parts of the country, because it's helpful to see what they're experiencing, and sometimes we have to make referrals.

When asked specifically about the El Paso community, collaboration seems less prevalent. The following responses summarize the findings:

[Collaboration is] pretty informal. One of the things you're going to discover about most of the organizations [in El Paso] is that contrary to the U.S government, which has what appears to be unlimited amounts of money... all these organizations are always struggling to simply survive.

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Not good in terms of communication. Flat out. We don't communicate with them as we should. Personal level and professional level, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't, and I'm hopeful in terms of communication and working together, it'll get more. [But] I don't want to step on anybody's toes.

You tend to operate in a vacuum... I think that there could be more coordination of services. There could be more [collaboration]... Just point to the fact that did Linda know this office existed? Did she know that I know she was working at [that organization]? I mean I know Paul, but how long has it been since I've seen him? And so it took a particular case for there to be a connection, which is fine. That's how many connections take place. But after how many years?

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We have a relationship in that we try not to provide overlapping services... And so we refer those cases to them, and they pretty much refer all other cases to us. So we try not to duplicate services.

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We work [with other organizations in El Paso], and we don't work... Our clients are clients that [other organizations] are not taking, because they cannot afford to.

Community members indicate one of the major challenges in collaborating in El Paso is the diverse philosophies and mission that guide their individual work. Especially from the small number of organizations that are non-service-oriented, members of these organizations find it very difficult to identify other organizations that operate with the models of popular education and community empowerment. They explain:

There's friction between groups because of different philosophies and histories between organizations, and that can sometimes be a disadvantage.

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A couple of organizations do [community empowerment work], but the majority are service-oriented. They help, but they have to provide the services. But now that's changing. Now we're trying to empower [the migrant community] so they can be the agents that change that... We have community members that come out there and talk to officials, and they'd be out there talking to officials. And that's what we're changing now. That's kind of filtering now, transitioning where we're involved because of that.

What we have seen is not a lot of organizations see the community not as victims but agents of change. That's what we're bringing differently right now. We're trying to find other grassroots organizations that actually have the same philosophy. We see that, and that's what we're changing right now. You know what? We have these families. They're not victims. They're not there to ask for services. They're there to help defend for themselves.

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It is very hard to organize... We try to collaborate as much as possible with other organizations... People even on our alliance have very different idea... So that makes it hard to come up with a strategy or tactics as a group when people are coming from very different mindsets as well. That's probably true for any whatever issue you take, whether it's immigration or something else. That's what makes it challenge, a good challenge.

At other times, the fluctuating nature of the NGO staff makes their work and collaboration difficult, as explained below:

One of the challenges to all these organizations is funding, the turn-over of staff.

My experience, I thought I was being loyal to certain organizations, but those organizations also have to move on, or they had to do whatever. But you have to say, "Thank you for your time. I wish you could stay with us for 10 years, but if you have to move on, you know, we wish you the best." I think that's true especially in this line of work. People either move on to another opportunity or move on, because they need a break.

Many times I'll lose people to [for-profit agencies] due to the fact that we have limited resources. I mean I'm not paying slave wages, but once somebody gets trained here, well, they can market those skills.

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I think one challenge is, everyone is extremely busy with their own things. Also, everyone's under-funded and understaffed, and so that's why sometimes there's not as much collaboration. But I don't feel there's much negativity around it. I think it's a natural phenomenon.

The times organizations collaborate with one another are often when major events or incidents occur. Those are moments when the grassroots community stands side-by-side in support for one another. Community members explain:

[Collaboration is] having events together. We just organized a hearing with some elected officials, and the response from the organizations was really good. They were there and represented and knew what was going on in terms of immigration and all that.

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In terms of organizations, we come together on certain points, but in other ways, our work is quite separate. Like Para Mujeres, they're working with for the most part Spanish-speaking U.S. residents in the textile industry, which has nothing to do with the groups we're working with, but we collaborate with them on certain things when they have certain events. They invite us, and we'll do the same thing or when we need support.

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Right with what's going on with immigration policy, I think organizations here in El Paso, they have collaborated well together, and they are also interested in that. Every organization has its own way of working, their own communities they focus on and different issues.

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For me, the time I've been here, the time I've seen the collaboration between organizations and local religious groups has been after the H.R. 4437 where different sectors from El Paso and the communities got together and said we have to do something about 4437. There were actually three different mobilizations in El Paso for the 4437. And I would say the 8th or the 10th, the National Day of Action, was one of the most where all sectors were together. We had academics, local unions, we had community members, we had elected officials from different levels of government. I would say that's the one where we've seen most collaboration. I would say sometimes unfortunately, things like that get things together in unity.

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There's a lot of different organizations, but a lot of work, these events happen when you [intentionally] put them together.

As there is difficulty unifying causes and philosophy on the same side of the border, the El Paso grassroots community similarly finds difficulty in collaborating with organizations on the other side of the border. One explains:

Right now, because our work is based on the Constitution and negotiating immigrant rights, it's hard. It's hard to push policies in those areas [outside of U.S.]. Here, we have the U.S. Constitution. You can use as a means to say this is what happens and what's being violated.



Years ago [our organization] was trying to work with Juarez in immigration, but something happened there. There's not a strong, big organization right now in Juarez that deal with issues of immigration. That's why there hasn't been the opportunity to collaborate between Juarez and El Paso.

Even in the cases of universities, cross-border collaboration becomes difficult. A

professor explains:

You have all the standard problems between universities in the United States, but it's multiplied one hundred times when you go to another country. Of course transfers are complicated. We have relatively similar academic structures but deceptively so. You think something's going to work, but you run into the problem where things don't match up, and it goes on and on.

And at times, cross-border collaboration is not beneficial, as observed by an

Annunciation House leadership staff:

There are certain things that are very separated, because oftentimes you meet people who are here for the first time and they want everything to be together and have more cooperation. But there are certain things that are not helpful to have cooperation, because it's not very beneficial. An example is when I went to the Social Forum in Juarez. I went to a workshop that talked about fair minimum wages, and to me, it makes sense when it's on a local level. We had someone from Rhode Island talking about how low the minimum wage is, and his thing was we should set a minimum wage for the whole American continent, which would be nice. But I know if people in Juarez had the minimum wage the U.S. had, there would be big improvement in their lives.

In all, the importance is recognizing when cross-border collaboration is necessary and when it is not needed. It is nevertheless helpful to keep in mind the binational context of

the border region, as summarized by the Annunciation House staff:

I don't see how binational consensus would be helpful, but in other cases, I see it as very helpful. An example is in certain instances in labor when factories are leaving the U.S. and moving into Mexico and other places, it's important for labor organizations to find the common ground... I think it's important to understand that the border is a whole entity.

*Financial Constraints*

Another challenge the organizations share with Annunciation House is their state of financial stability. As organizations that survive on grants and donations, community members express their difficulty of sustaining the work through the limited funds:

I think the biggest challenge of course, as with any nonprofit, is funding, continuing to receiving funding and getting funding, especially for a large program. We are a large immigration provider. So maintaining the funding, I think, is the most difficult thing.

And of course because [organizations are] run by people, you have issues of who's doing what, and that's my funding, and that's my territory, this and that. And who ends up getting hurt? It's the clients, the people who need our services.

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But when we started this organization, I didn't start here right away. I needed to make money. Actually I was working somewhere else making a salary to pay the salary of the people we had hired.

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A lot of what we do, funding is the real problem, and so a lot of what we do is influenced by what we're funded to do... We have to look constantly for sources of funding for projects.

When you write a proposal for a grant, you can't write that [emotional impact on clientele]. People don't understand. Most of the time they don't understand they have that deeper need.

Most of our state grants are continuing, so they're continuous grants. We still have to apply for them every year, apply for renewal every year. Thankfully, we've been able to renew every year. The private grants, very rarely are they continuous. It's usually a one-time grant. And then you know maybe several years later will they allow us to apply again. Foundation grants are not continuous.

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I write a newsletter once a month. We have a mailing list where we mail out the newsletter. We'll send this out with an envelope people can fill out and send their contributions. Maybe that's \$5, \$25, \$100. That's our primary source of support. Government is 5% of our revenues. Everything else comes from contributions from the people.

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We don't have money. We're at zero funds. We sustain ourselves with bread for food and donations from different churches and organizations. Right now we have a water bill of \$150 and \$300 for food. We are always looking for help to continue the organization. You know, I don't know. Maybe I'll find somebody to lend me the money...  
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I think money is an issue. I think a lot of groups, not so much on our level because we function differently than most organizations, there's a lot of competitions between social service agencies and grassroots organizations for limited funding. And that's really a big problem. It causes rifts in communities.

Many of these organizations wish to expand their work to engage their target population in more educational training, but the resources are very limited. They explain:

We're trying to obtain funding right now to start an employment and education training programs for our clients where we can have a little computer lab, having somebody teach to work on Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, how to prepare their resumes, have mock interviews, have a schedule for different employment fairs, and things like that. We hope to be able to do that within the next year or so. We've also applied for a couple of grants. Hopefully those will work out.

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Our long-term goal is to establish some kind of foundation or endowment that would guarantee funding for the services we provide. Or at least establish a base of donors that we could consistently depend on.

I would like to have the resources to be able to respond to the need for not just information about but real understanding of the border in a more agile comprehensive way.  
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Right now, what we're hoping to do is continue to provide services to this region and continue to provide legal services. Some time down the road, we'd like to try to develop educational services for children and parents, immigrant children and immigrant parents, develop educational programs for computers, know your rights for things of that nature.  
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This [current operations of the organization] is my small dream. My large dream is to buy two or more houses. And my big dream is to buy more houses to grow more. Schools, daycare, shops, you know, like a flower shop, a Mexican food market, to sell clothes... the women know how to do a lot.

### *Differences*

Many of grassroots organizations and agencies are driven by the similar elements of personal mission found in the work of Annunciation House. These community members and personnel engage in their own personal politics and agenda when promoting their work on the border and are faced with similar financial constraints and limited collaboration with one another. However, there are major deviations that mark these organizations from Annunciation House. This section explores these differences.

### *Target Population*

Survey of grassroots organizations in this study has found Annunciation House as one of the only organizations on the border that openly publicizes its mission of assisting the undocumented migrant population. Although others agencies certainly work with the undocumented, their target population is much more general in which the undocumented community becomes part of the larger target audience. Therefore, not many of these organizations solely exist to serve the undocumented, whereas Annunciation House, from its inception, has focused on this vulnerable population.

Even after a thorough survey of homeless shelters in the region, I find Annunciation House to be the sole organization that specifically provides both short-term and long-term assistance to the undocumented migrant community. Other El Paso shelters have limited resources for this particular population, as indicated below:

Now, I'd love to be able to help. There's limited amount of help I can give. If someone gets this far and is in need of food, clothing, and shelter, I'll provide it. If you're in need, we'll give you help. But going back our policy that we're in rehabilitation business and we want to help you get on your feet permanently, ok I have an illegal alien coming for a few nights, and we give them food, clothing, and shelter. Then down to the bottom line, you need to sit with the counselor and formulate a plan of recovery. Well, if you're not able to go to work legally, how can we help you? Yeah, we'll provide temporary place to stay, but that's where we hit the sticking point. If we can't put you through our job search work, there's limited capacity we have.

You know, a very small percentage you get might be eligible to get a green card. And you've got the capacity, you've got more people that are experts in immigration and go through what that might be. But for other folks, so they made it over, you can shelter them, but what do you do? What do you tell them? The government knows you're there. What are we doing long-term?

Furthermore, some community members seem oblivious and even ignorant to the reality of the migrant population in El Paso, as demonstrated by the responses below:

I had to pick up some materials, and I stopped for lunch in Phoenix. I had my truck and trailer, and I rolled into this restaurant, but it was the same parking lot as Home Depot. It looked like I was pulling into Home Depot with my trailer. And about twelve guys jumped out from this building. They were hiding back there, and from the looks of us, these were illegal aliens desperate for work. They thought I was a contractor. They came up to me waving their arms, "Can we have work?" Now, we don't have that in El Paso.

I think some of them return to their point of origin whether it be, whatever their home country. They just give up and don't want to. But more than likely, if they really want to be in the States, they'll find a way to survive.

It's so easy to come over the border. You know, all they have to do is walk over, get a green card, or have a relative or whatever they do to get here.

### ***Political Risks and Relationship with Authorities***

The second major difference between Annunciation House and the rest of the grassroots community is the magnitude in which the staff faces political implications and possible threat to their work. Especially since most other organizations are legal aid agencies or organizations that do not specifically target the undocumented community,

they are better able to maintain professional relationships with the authorities, such as the Border Patrol. When asked about their relations with authorities, they explain:

We have a good relationship with the Border Patrol. We try to tell them we're not anti-enforcement. We know you have the right to protect the borders, but you have to do it in a way that respects people's rights, and that's what we're trying to say. Their agents have to be trained right also. You have to respect people's rights, their Constitutional rights, and we'll help try to push for policies that help people cross legally or not allow the sheriff to enforce federal laws. We're not anti-enforcement. We're trying to make it better here with more dignity and having peoples rights respected.

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We have good relationships with the police department, some of the women police especially.

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We work with them on a variety of things. We have a very good relationship with them. Our mission is education. We do programs for a variety of people who we bring to understand the border, and the Border Patrol has been very good with us in terms of doing programs for students, faculty, and others that we bring in. The center itself doesn't do [advocacy], so that frees us to work with people who seek to work jointly with the people who see their own interest as antagonistic.

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Years ago, our Congressman was the chief of Border Patrol. He's the one who initiated Hold the Line. We had quite a few debates over that, but I picked up a phone and said I got a call from this teacher. They're going on a field trip. They'll be going through a few check points, and they need to know whether or not they'll be able to pass. And he says "Sure, tell them not to worry. Tell me the date, more or less the time, and they'll let them through." And they did without any kind of problems.

Community members furthermore believe that their good working relationship with the Border Patrol and other government authorities help enhance their work, as explained below:

I think it's very important to maintain a good relationship not only with the court but also the government. I'm very much of the philosophy that the government and the court are much likely to help or be sympathetic with our clients if we have a relationship with them. So even though of course being in court is an adversarial process, I definitely think that it's important to maintain a professional relationship with the judges and the clerks and the court staff and with the attorneys. So we have a good relationship with the court and the government.

As matter of fact, government attorneys regularly refer cases to us when there is something that can be done. Usually the contexts of they're doing an investigation against someone, and they know their family's undocumented, and there are benefits available to them. They want to help the family, so they'll contact us. The judges, same thing. If they come across cases and the person has potential eligibility for relief, I've had judges, particularly the judge at the detention facility, call me and see if we'll go see the client.

The judges have faith in us. They have the confidence that we will provide good services, services in the manner that won't be committing fraud or lying to them... I owe it to the program, and I owe it to the respect they give us to say, "Ok, this is the truth. We're presenting you what we believe to be the truth or we're being told is the truth, not fabricated so that our case is a little easier."

Judges refer cases to me maybe on a weekly basis. And so what does that do? It means the cases they give me they'll probably give me a little bit of extra time, because they know I'm just stepping into the case. It means that when I go in with another case and I ask for a little bit more time, they'll probably give me a little more consideration than they will if I were someone coming out and representing cases every now and then.

The fact that I knew a couple of people at the bridge helped me get a permit for someone to come temporarily to attend a hearing. Technically they could've said, "No." But one of the officers knew me, and we were able to get that done. Not because he did anything illegal, but the fact is, he knew me, paid attention to the documents, paid attention to what I had to say, and eventually after four hours gave him a permit to cross. And that person now has a fighting chance to file the paperwork to get residency in the U.S. instead of waiting out there with her U.S. citizen child in Mexico for the pass to kick in, working through the Consulate.

What you want is people to respect you, but you have to work with people. You don't want to antagonize the heck out of them so that they see you coming and just want to avoid you, because you're going to treat them disrespectfully or not give them the time or the day... You want to develop a good working relationship without compromising what you have to do.

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So this was my biggest work, to open the doors to everybody who'd like to help [our organization], whatever is their political belonging, whatever is their belief, whoever wants to help... whatever is their religion. There is no discrimination for anybody. This is how I was able to rebuild [relationships in the community].

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We don't have that problem, thank God. Immigration knows we want to help women that sometimes apply for VAWA. If they need help due to violence, we contact immigration...

For example, the police, other shelters, psychiatric hospital, sheriff's department, firefighters, they all know about the organization. Immigration came when we had a girl from Brazil. She was pregnant, and they brought her here. They once brought a girl from Guatemala in New York who was hit by a car, and the coyote had taken \$10,000 from her. They brought her here for political asylum, because she was a victim of abuse.

These responses are visibly different from the daily threats and struggles the Annunciation House staff experience for working directly with the undocumented community. In my view, this intensifies the political risk even more for the staff, as Annunciation House as an organization could be easily targeted for working with the undocumented population. Despite it all, the leadership expresses its intent to continue its work until they have to shut down. One explains:

I have lived with these human beings, and there's something inside of me bigger than me telling me the right thing to do to live with and work with them. There's no law or economic measure that somehow makes them more or less the human being they are. I think that's the really important voice we are to continue to provide. There's something beyond the politics and economics here. They're all connected. We'll argue with you on the political level. We'll argue with you on the economic level. We can do that. But we also want to say, "You know what? There's something about that humanness that has just as much weight in the dialogue here."

The leadership believes there will always be people in migration as long as there are gross disparities between the rich and the poor. "People will continue to move to be able to find their daily bread," one explains. Not seeing a foreseeable resolution to the



gross economic disparities that exist between the U.S. and its southern neighbors, the staff of Annunciation House believes people will continue migrating north, and the organization will continue taking political and legal risks in assisting these individuals.

They explain:

I don't see that the number of people migrating north will change or diminish any time soon. Where our politicians will take us with the immigration policy, I don't know. I don't know how long we can manage talking so anti-immigrant yet continue to depend everyday on their economic participation in our country... I'm sure people will continue to move as they continue to figure out how to survive.

Unless there's a radical change with immigration, I don't foresee that changing. So what that would mean for us, like over the years, depending on the global, political, and social reality, the kinds of people in migration we serve change? We will always be serving people in migration.

### **Discussion**

By examining how the work of Annunciation House correlates with the global trends impacting the U.S.-Mexico border, this chapter explored ways in which the organization uses the platform of humanitarian assistance to raise awareness and activism for the migrant poor. With migration being indicative of the global trends, I examined the scope of the work in which the leadership engages with the migrant community as well as the implications for their long-term commitment to the organization. Findings also reveal similar levels of commitment of other community leaders to the border region while setting Annunciation House aside as the sole organization that tailors specifically to the undocumented migrant community.

As the leadership staff of Annunciation House become more involved with the undocumented community and thus face greater political risks, they utilize strategies of education and publicity to further advocate their work and to fight for the rights of the

migrant community. Through avenues such as the Voice of the Voiceless Awards and the Border Awareness Experience, they give voice to the migrant community and expose the greater public to the realities surrounding migrant lives. In this, the leadership utilizes its work as a platform for addressing the greater global forces and trends that have subjected many to unequal distribution of goods and capital.

The acknowledgement of the migrant population as teachers and facilitators of their social learning and political processes is very much alive in the work of Annunciation House. The staff has long recognized the importance of being educated themselves before attempting to educate the outside community. This model fits well with the transformation processes of the volunteer community that must first unlearn and learn from the guest community. Without this first-hand exposure and experience with migrants, they cannot transmit their work and learning to the greater public. In this, informal learning becomes the vehicle and the great catalyst that further advances and sustains its work.

In my view, the El Paso region is a dynamic place with many young and established NGOs and agencies that reveal individual mission and agenda in assisting marginalized communities. Many of the organizations are promoting human rights through their work, be it through community engagement, advocacy, or legal aid. In one way or another, these individuals engage in efforts to address concerns and issues that have personally affected them and continue to mold them as individual professionals.

Despite their limitations and challenges, it does not seem the El Paso grassroots community will disappear any time soon. The personal and professional struggles will keep many of these individuals closely tied to the border. Many will persist in their fight

for human rights in whatever form they feel is necessary and feasible. Their work on the border will never be without antagonism, but in the name of human rights and dignity, many of these individuals will continue to devote their lives on the border.

Depending on their political opinion as to what should or should not be legal, organizations will either continue their current efforts or for some, take greater risks to serve their population of interest. The types of individuals and groups they assist will depend on their own personal politics, background, experiences, and the issues that tug at their heart. Working for or against the political and global forces are playing out on the border, their work will continue to impact and alter border politics and reality.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION**

### **Impact of Globalization Revisited**

The overarching theme of this study has been on the impact of globalization as it affects cross-border migration and humanitarian assistance on the U.S.-Mexico border. Throughout field observations and personal interviews, I found migration to reveal the extent to which the political economy of nations, global capitalism, and U.S. foreign policies of the past and the present have impacted communities abroad. The presence of the migrant population and the establishment of work such as Annunciation House has also become testament to which the U.S.-Mexico border serves a vital training ground for social and global activism.

Examining the migratory flows of the Annunciation House clients clearly points to the consequences and outcomes of global politics and world economy that have placed endless number of individuals on the U.S.-Mexico border in search of economic, political, and social stability. Factors of political, social, and even environmental volatility have combined with economic factors to cause reactive and proactive migration to surface (Richmond, 2002). The push and pull factors of migration have unquestionably come to define cross-border migration as an unavoidable social phenomenon in the borderlands.

Personal journeys of the migrants clearly support the argument by Richmond (2002) that poverty and economic deprivation are not the only major factors causing migration. Issues of political instability, domestic violence, lack of parental guardianship, and death threats have all pushed these individuals to seek shelter in the

U.S. and on the steps of Annunciation House. The sample of migrants in this study has revealed the diversity that exists within the categories of documented and undocumented migration. While some have come to the U.S. as undocumented because there are no other options, many others have arrived and lived as undocumented individuals not even knowing they may be eligible for asylum or residency hearings. This once again demonstrates the different needs of the migrant community and the varying factors that have caused their migration in the first place.

Flows of goods and capital may have enjoyed stability within the global market, but the arena of human migration and livelihood has been anything but stable. The rising social disparities, wage differentials, and political threat have exploded across the globe and somehow made the different paths cross along the U.S.-Mexico border. The working poor and those seeking refuge have resorted to cross-border migration as their only option for survival. But instead of examining its part in causing such disparities and offering remedies to this population, the U.S. has repeatedly discarded these economic and political refugees as communists, guerrilla insurgents, and terrorists.

In many ways, there is nothing new about the strict border security measures that have been put in place, as the rhetoric has simply shifted from combating communists to terrorists. What has changed, however, is the growing hostility towards humanitarian aid workers assisting these displaced persons. The U.S. now operates under the political climate of possibly criminalizing aid workers, as clearly demonstrated by the arrest of two volunteers of the Arizona-based, No More Deaths organization, whose 15-month legal battle alarmed activists across the country.

This whirlwind of anti-immigrant sentiment and national response to migration has deepened the arbitrary nature of how humanitarian aid is defined. Humanitarian assistance has increasingly become a politically contested term where there is no general consensus on what it is and who the recipients of aid should be. Many migrants are being forced to validate their human worth and their right to survival on the basis of residency. Those unable to produce appropriate documentation are subjected to further exploitation in society.

However, this exploitation of the migrant poor has helped strengthen the commitment of humanitarian aid workers who are willing to risk their own political stability on behalf of the migrant community. This is demonstrated by the staff members of Annunciation House who transition their roles as aid workers into positions of advocates, educators, and activists. The personal engagement of their work and encounter with migrant experiences place them at the forefront of the global struggle for migrant rights and rightful place of being.

This struggle and resulting commitment has been through the volunteer staff realizing that humanitarian assistance is not a given but something that must be struggled for. This has striking similarities to Foley's (2001) study on New South Wales where environmental protection was something the activists had to fight for. Any initial faith in the system was exchanged by the complex arena of power struggles and conflicting social interests. Those who participated in the work of Annunciation House have thus become witnesses to the resulting social and political chaos behind simple humanitarian aid.

In some ways, I see this ongoing struggle for humanitarian aid as a continuation of the Sanctuary Movement, as individuals continue to get denied access to security and

refuge even though goods and capital from their homelands have minimal problems crossing the border. As the NAACP and the Urban League have been observed by Wilson (1995) to continue the work of the civil rights movement, the work of Annunciation House too signifies carrying out the mission of providing refuge and justice to those who are being denied it even to this day. As long as social inequalities persist, the efforts of these movements and organizations will continue to challenge the systems that are creating the disparities in the first place.

As globalization has benefited from the improved information systems and other sophisticated means of communication as explained by Pieterse (1995) and Carnoy (2000), grassroots organizations such as Annunciation House have also used these means of communication to challenge the global structures that have caused the social inequalities. Through its newsletters and the website, the visibility of Annunciation House and its activist stance have permeated to other parts of the country and the world. In many ways, this organization has become publicized by the same technological structures that have facilitated globalization, aligning with the argument that the trends of the global era have enabled the local struggle to become infiltrated to the global audience through means of new communication and information exchange (Walter, 2000; Hickling-Hudson, 2000).

In tracing global trends through the lens of migration, the personal stories of the migrants attest to the fact that powerful industrial structures continue to dominate the global economy. Many migrants seeking refuge in the facilities of Annunciation House have demonstrated the fact that despite the plurality of cultures, new ideas, and people within global society, many groups have become subject to a new form of colonialism

that is under the power of Western dominance and control (Hoppers, 2000). However, efforts of the grassroots community can play varied roles in targeting global issues and creating visibility on the global level, as demonstrated by the work of Annunciation House (Mundy and Murphy, 2001).

### **Personal and Political Transformation**

Annunciation House, one that openly welcomes the undocumented migrant community, facilitates the personal and political transformations of humanitarian aid workers currently under scrutiny and attack. Initially attracted to the idea of gaining a Latin American experience and providing aid to the poor, many volunteers come to the doors of Annunciation House expecting fulfillment of this personal agenda. But as they are immediately thrown into the game of border politics, they must readjust their personal motives of being part of a humanitarian aid community.

As Wilson (1995) has elaborated, solidary or personal incentives come with associating with a certain group of people or an organization. I have observed that many of the volunteers begin with the personal incentive of coming to Annunciation House out of their desire to find solidarity with the migrant poor and to be part of a community that provides humanitarian assistance. This comes with the added benefit of receiving a cross-cultural and linguistic experience while working on the border.

After a critical reflection on the changing political climate and engagement with the migrant community, however, their motivations start becoming more purposive in nature. No longer looking to solely fulfill personal desires of giving aid to the poor, they head toward the intangible rewards of challenging the immigration laws by refusing to



stop giving assistance to the undocumented. These individuals begin working for the benefit of the greater migrant community and not for the sole benefit of their personal desires. Their initial goal of language and cultural exposure is still met, but the magnitude of goal attainment and satisfaction clearly extends to advocating for the migrant community.

This transformation only becomes possible after critically analyzing their context and raising their own consciousness on what humanitarian assistance is and what it means to be criminalized for their work. Through conscientization, their deep reflection on themselves in relation to their immediate context of the intensifying political climate, they come to acknowledge the political aspects surrounding their personal experiences as volunteers (Freire, 1970). Many of these individuals respond in action by remaining with the organization and accepting the possible political risks. In arriving at the decision to make a stance for the migrant community, the volunteers come to the acknowledgment that their personal struggles are undeniably a political fight (Foley, 1999).

Wilson (1995) is comprehensive in delineating the material, personal, and purposive incentives of becoming part of an organization and lends insight to organizations such as Annunciation House where staff members first arrive with different motivations. However, there is no mention by Wilson on the process through which individuals shift from one incentive to another. In my view, this transition from personal to purposive incentives is facilitated by fundamental changes in personal consciousness levels, as explained by Freire (1970). As Annunciation House volunteers enter into deeper reflection on themselves and learn to depict their own privileges in relation to the migrant poor, they feel the urgent call to engage in political action. This critical analysis

that comes out of the democratic ideology that gives importance to the personal experience, the sense of unity, and the need to fight on behalf of the oppressed becomes the vehicle in which they begin to transform into advocates and activists for the migrant community (Evans, 1980).

### **Global Awareness and Activism**

Unsurprisingly, many young individuals who pass through Annunciation House continue their work in border politics through diverse career and educational tracks. Several return to the organization and commit to be part of the permanent staff, board, and other decision-making entities within the organization. These individuals have undergone the critical self-awareness stage and have made the conscious decision to help facilitate a similar process for others. With this, their degree of commitment to the migrant community and potential political risks increase.

Further exposing themselves to possible criminalization, they expand their efforts through education and public awareness. By advocating for the migrant poor and engaging in activism through means of education, the leadership is able to transform its basic mission into engaging the public in awareness-raising and activism. Within this context, the leadership completely transitions into the purposive nature of the organization. The fact that they have knowingly taken greater political risks and acknowledged the possibility of becoming criminalized for their work is an indicator of their purpose-driven commitment (Wilson, 1995).

The continual engagement of the Annunciation House staff with the migrant community is a testament to the importance of learning and reflection that tends to be

more bottom-up. Instead of the organization dictating its own agenda, the leadership remains vigilant to migrant accounts and allows those in migration to teach them about the global trends shaping the world economy and nation-states. In this, the Annunciation House personnel capture the essence of learning in social action and maintaining the cycle of learning and unlearning (Foley, 1999).

The permanent staff members also continue to engage in the emotional politics of building solidarity with one another and with the migrant community. They have remained grounded with the migrant accounts, and through struggling together, they have valued the emotions that have been a critical component in engaging in action (Aminzade and McAdam, 2001). They align with Staudt and Coronado's (2002) claim that many activists on the border are generally motivated by their work with being in solidarity with the marginalized.

What precisely distinguishes the leadership from the volunteer staff is not only do they experience this emotional politics, but the leadership members choose to remain with the organization that provides the space to continue their critical learning process (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polleta, 2001). Their scope of work naturally deepens along with the increased political risks they are taking. Their personal experiences have not only become political, but their local struggles have also become global (Olonka-Onyango and Tamale, 1995).

### **Global Training Ground and Site for Learning**

The uniqueness of Annunciation House is the use of its aid recipients as educators and vehicles for learning and transformation. For year-long volunteers, the guests help

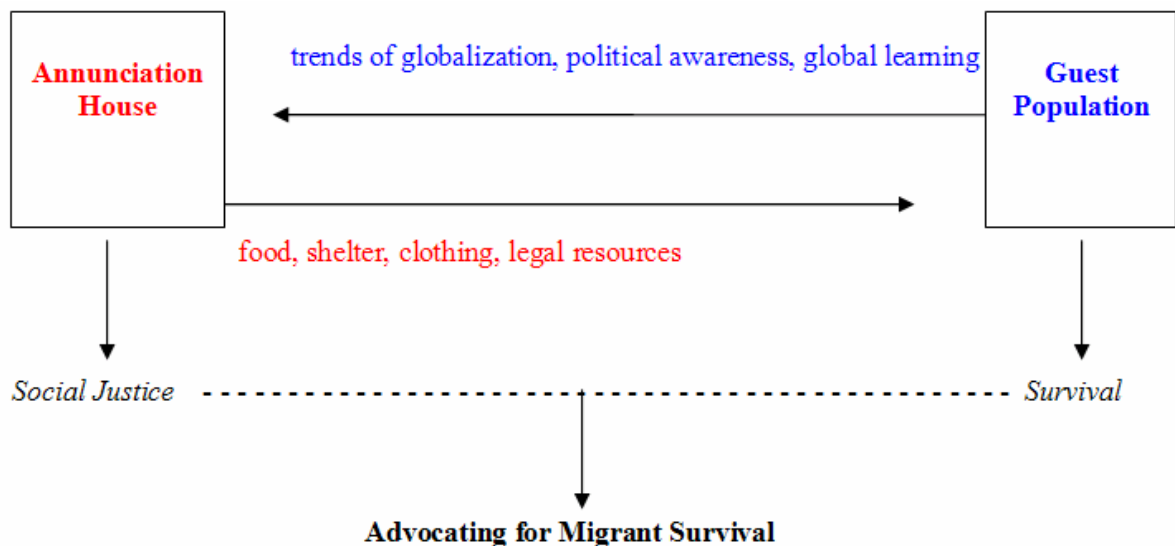
bring personal elements into their politics. Guests also serve as living laboratories and training ground for all who engage in politics of transnational migration. These individuals symbolize the different indicators of global trends that are occurring in the U.S. and abroad. This reality is very much acknowledged in the work of Annunciation House, as the leadership utilizes the migrant community not only as its platform but as its vehicle for education and activism.

When activists first become disgusted with their own privileged surroundings, they search for a new community and enter into the world of activism and liberation (Evans, 1980). This too resonates with the Annunciation House leadership who have permanently given up the comforts of their own wealth and privilege to enter into the space of border politics. Through this, they are able to help sustain the organization that in turn provides the space for temporary staff members to also engage in this training experience.

As Foley (1999) indicates, learning in social movement sites and action generally occurs in incidental, informal settings in which individuals learn while they struggle with their own realities and the world around them. What many volunteers learn and realize are very much embedded in their daily tasks of volunteer work that are not necessarily articulated or recognized as learning. This transformation helps one move from a personal level into the broader sphere of social change and action. As Foley (2001) argues that the critique of capitalism must be at the heart of emancipatory education, their exposure to the migrants who have been susceptible to inequalities caused by capitalism becomes their instrument in realizing and creating their platform for activism.

What Annunciation House offers the guest population is simple (See Figure 18). It is giving food, shelter, clothing, and legal resources to the community. In turn, guests offer the organization the lessons in globalization, political activism, and global learning and awareness. While the organization has intentionally placed itself amongst the migrant community in the name of social justice, the migrants have simply placed themselves in the premises of Annunciation House for mere survival. Therefore, part of the social justice platform of the organization means fighting for the basic survival of the migrant population.

**Figure 18: Summary of Annunciation House Advocacy Work**



This raises an interesting question of what survival really means to the migrant community. This could range from economic prosperity to political stability. But this could also extend to family reunification, improved situations at home, and eradication of factors causing uprootedness and displacement in the first place. One of the most

obvious ways of facilitating survival is improving U.S. foreign policies and making provisions within free trade agreements for the poor working class.

It typically has been the role of non-state actors to lobby for policy changes and advocate for the marginalized, and there is hope that the grassroots community will continue this fight, joined by the growing effort of faith-based communities such as the Annunciation House. As there are obstacles of lacking resources, competition, insufficient staffing, and fragmentation of goals surrounding the grassroots community, organizations such as Annunciation House are further clouded by ambiguity in law and the political consequences for their work. Yet, Annunciation House has made a definitive stance on not becoming an underground organization and the determination that it will not hide its link to the undocumented community, as one explains:

We will not hide [the fact] that we work with the undocumented, because in the hiding, there is an admittance that we are doing something wrong, which I can say with the few absolutes I know to be true, we are not.

The leadership of Annunciation House plans to continue publicizing its work and raising awareness until it has to forcibly shut down someday. I am reminded by a story told by a community activist I interviewed who shared his ten-year struggle to open a center for migrant workers. He explains:

Let me tell you something that happened prior. This center was open in February of 1995, but it took us more than ten years to materialize, because the money to build the center came from the government... federal money given to the city of El Paso's community development projects.

For us, [building a community center for migrant workers] is community development. For the city, "community" means like a tennis court or something like that. So we have two different conceptions of what social community is.

So it took us ten years to materialize. Finally in 1993, we were able to pressure for the decision... It was a fight. We had to protest. We had to take over the city council on many occasions. For ten years we had to block the international bridge. We had to do a lot to materialize the center. So finally in 1993, they decided they needed to make a political decision, and we became like a small rock, a small stone in their shoes... so they finally made the decision to fund the center in 1993. So we decided to prepare an agreement to provide funds to build this center.

And suddenly, all the political forces moved to block the center, specifically the Border Patrol. The chief of Border Patrol told the mayor, "Look, you are supporting a magnet for illegal aliens." So the city and the mayor came up with the idea to include a clause in the agreement... as a condition for providing all the money to build the center that we would cooperate with the Border Patrol.

So we immediately rejected that clause. In fact, in a meeting, we were with the mayor and city counsels and federal authorities. We said we would rather not have a center than have a center that works with Border Patrol or any organization that from our point of view is every day violating the civil and human rights of people. So it was not easy. We had to fight.

We had to involve the Mexican Council to get rid of that clause, because the city, the mayor, and the council were under heavy pressure. The fight was so intense that a group suddenly came out of nowhere, mainly composed of ex-members of the Border Patrol. They started campaigning for the removal of the Mexican Council.

And we immediately responded. We campaigned to ask for signatures for the removal of the chief of the Border Patrol. In two hours, near Plaza de Armas, we collected close to a thousand signatures against the chief of the Border Patrol. "Do you know the name of the chief of Border Patrol?" "No, I have no idea." "Would you like to sign to remove the chief of the Border Patrol?" "Sure! Anything related to immigration."

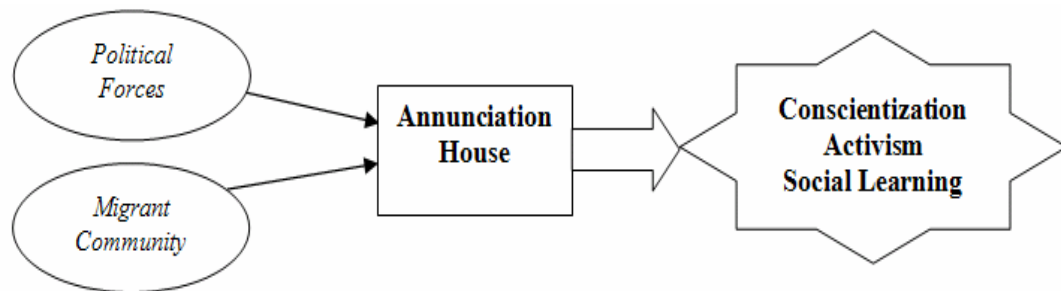
So that was the intensity of it. And the conclusion is, they finally backed down with the clause. The Mexican Council moved to Vancouver, and the chief of Border Patrol was changed to another district. It was a big fight. Suddenly the city was really afraid that it would become a racial fight. We've been fighting for a center for years. We are across from the Border Patrol and we're in the area of Homeland Security. So we continue to fight.

Now, we don't know how long we will resist here. I imagine someday some bulldozer will come, but we're going to resist here... [The center] is only an instrument. The center is not the end.

This story has remained with me throughout field research, as it has taught me what survival means to community activists. To the individuals who have dedicated their lives to the migrant community, it is persisting day to day with its limitations until either a comprehensive immigration reform or harsher interpretations of law shut them out of business.

When examining organizations such as the one above and Annunciation House, it is interesting to me that the two opposing forces of migration and political animosity toward immigrants have become the very forces driving the efforts of these organizations. In the specific case of Annunciation House, the two antagonistic forces of political atmosphere and migrant community combine to drive the work of Annunciation House that results in conscientization, activism, and social learning (Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Conscientization, Activism, and Social Learning of Annunciation House**



In one way or another, the leadership of activist organizations will persist and will count on the rest of us who are called to fight and to become a voice for the voiceless. The extent to which we are personally impacted will largely dictate the degree of involvement we engage in as a community of advocates and educators.



## **Annunciation House as an Organization**

Annunciation House is undoubtedly a unique organization where migrants and humanitarian aid workers cross paths and where powerful learning and consciousness-raising occurs. However, as I reflect on the institutional structure of this organization, I also find underutilized, untapped potential of this organization and its leadership to further push the critical learning of its volunteers and the empowerment of the guest community. While the organization emphasizes humanitarian aid and social services in defining much of its work, the conscientization and critical learning process of the volunteers and guests are often left out.

This is evidenced by the volunteer community that, for the most part, feels distant from the organizational structure, administrative operations, and the leadership of Annunciation House. They are largely left detached from the organization and focusing their energy on the guests. Their cognizance of the organization is cut short before they can even explore ways in which the leadership can help facilitate their learning process. In many ways, they are left to their own devices when it comes to learning and are pushed toward migrant accounts as their sole source of guidance.

As I have argued in the previous sections, powerful learning occurs when volunteers come face-to-face with migrant accounts and the political climate that surround their work, and I hold steadfast to the belief that tremendous learning occurs within this context. However, the volunteers would benefit greatly with additional tools to further their critical awareness and to better empower themselves as activists. This is where I believe the leadership has the potential to provide additional support to help volunteers better engage in their learning processes.

There is power in individual learning and conscientization, but there is also tremendous power in exploring the role of collective action and reflection in social settings. Collective learning may occur among different circles of volunteers at Annunciation House, but these are volunteer-initiated and are without structural guidance from the organization. In this aspect, the leadership of Annunciation House may be too hands-off with the volunteer community. Interviews have revealed that there are no other tools given to volunteers to critically examine border politics beyond their individual experiences with the guests. Volunteers have expressed that while they understand the busy schedules of the leadership staff, they desire a closer encounter with the leadership and to gain more hands-on skills from them.

Guests are also left to their own devices when it comes to social empowerment and conscientization. Although these migrants teach the organization about global inequalities through their lived experiences, the organization does not reciprocate this learning process by helping guests find tools to empower themselves and to demand their rights. The guests of Annunciation House may be recipients of aid and indicators of global trends, but they are minimally recognized as agents of change.

This is even reflected in the language used within this organization. While there is something positive about the term *guest*, limitations also come with the role of being a visitor. While migrants are welcome to receive food, shelter, and clothing, they are not necessarily seen as agents of change within their social structure. Guests are to enjoy the hospitality presented to them but must eventually move on with their lives.

There seems to be a clear delineation between the dual role of being a service provider and an advocacy institution when viewing the organizational structure of

Annunciation House. Observing the leadership of the organization, their responsibilities and activities are very much advocacy- and activist-oriented. However, this does not infiltrate down to the volunteer community, as the volunteers are primarily given the role of providing the social services.

In my view, advocacy and activism are at the heart of Annunciation House, but this is almost exclusively maintained by the leadership. This in itself may reflect the patriarchal aspects of a religiously-based organization where different roles are given to certain individuals according to their place within the hierarchy of the organization and a premium is placed on values of service and charity. While there is value in self-guided awareness and learning, Annunciation House as an organization could strengthen and better utilize its volunteer staff and its clientele to become greater agents of change and social activists.

As the role of faith-based communities such as Annunciation House proliferates in grassroots work, different philosophies and social platforms of each faith will come to interweave with one another. While certain belief systems will keep their organizations from tackling certain social issues (such as the Catholic Church and the issue of women's reproductive rights), faith-based systems will also become a protective shield for their work. As a Catholic-based, charity organization, Annunciation House has been shielded at times by communities of faith and social service sectors in protecting itself from further attack from the Border Patrol, as it generally is a policy of the Border Patrol not to raid social service organizations. Given the changing political climate on the border, however, we wait to see how the new climate will affect the work of faith-based communities in delivering services and advocacy work in the near future.

## Researcher Reflections

I will never forget my conversation with Carolina as I prepared to leave the organization at the end of my internship. Carolina was one of the guests I served as a contact volunteer to while working in Casa Vides. She was a beautiful woman inside and out who struggled most of her life for the mere survival of her livelihood and that of her children. As a repeated victim of sexual abuse for more than half of her life, she has always been caught in turmoil of insecurities, fear, and incoherent direction for her life.

As her contact volunteer, we had spent the bulk of the summer preparing for her VAWA court hearing. She was undocumented and had six children with her, of which only two are legal residents. She knew this would be one of her only chances of getting residency and had spent months in preparations and in anxiety. The day before her highly anticipated court date, the city of El Paso flooded, and the downtown area evacuated to the Convention Center. Our plans of rehearsing for the court vanished, as we found ourselves sleeping amongst hundreds of other displaced El Pasoans.

The hearing was very emotional, as Carolina was asked to recall her horrific experiences for the court. At the end of closing arguments, the prosecuting government representative stated that the government would have no problems with Carolina staying in the country. My burst of joy was only momentary, as the judge ruled against her anyway.<sup>129</sup> As Carolina walked down from the bench, she weakly smiled and said, “I didn’t lose anything today, because I had nothing to begin with.” This was six days before my departure from the organization.

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<sup>129</sup> The prosecutor later told us that if it had been any other El Paso immigration judge, Carolina would have won the case, but this judge had a track record for extreme conservatism towards women’s issues.

The night before leaving Casa Vides, Carolina and I decided to have our last guest-to-volunteer session. She must have known I was having a hard time saying goodbye, because she said, “It’s ok. I’ve seen volunteers come and go.” She also added, “Don’t feel bad about leaving. You are leaving, because you need to. I’m staying behind, but this is where I want to be.” She also reminded me that I had been a good example to her and that my mere presence in her life was a sign of God’s love and interest in her life.

I had a similar conversation with Tony, the other guest I was responsible for. Tony is a surgeon from Cuba who came to the U.S. a year ago in search of political asylum. As I wished him well and expressed my hopes of him finding new life and family in the U.S., he broke down in uncontrollable tears. He revealed to me for the first time that thirteen years ago, his wife and son had been taken and that he has never seen them since. He had no known family members left and was not sure what he would do if he did not win the asylum case.

As he gathered himself, Tony thanked me for being a good friend and for bearing with his loss of temper all summer long. He was grateful to have met a friend to lean on. He too said that my presence in his life was an indication of God’s love for him. I had never seen more beautiful tears than those Tony let out that day. His tears were full of joy and sadness, hope and doubt, and excitement and fear.

Last I heard, Tony had won his asylum case and was working in a nursing care facility. Carolina is still awaiting the verdict of her appeals. She has temporarily released her two youngest children to foster care until she is able to better establish

herself. Tony has moved on to his own place, and Carolina is still in the facilities of Annunciation House with her four other children.

As I reflect on my experiences at Casa Vides and my time spent with Carolina and Tony, I am able to trace my own personal transformation that took place during the field research. I too initially entered the facilities of Annunciation House with the naïve notion that I was there simply to conduct research and not to get emotionally involved within the process. I was pretty successful the first few days, but as I encountered the guests on a daily basis and struggled with voluntary poverty, I found myself becoming more vulnerable and open to emotional impact.

Although my primary incentive was conducting field research, I too struggled with the summer cohort on the political risks before us. I continually battled in my head whether I was doing the right thing by staying with Annunciation House. I reflected on the potential impact my involvement could have on my future. I was also inundated with my personal reactions to living in voluntary poverty where my own meals consisted of rice and beans on a daily basis. I shamefully pondered why I had been reduced to this living standard and questioned my time with the organization.

As the volunteer staff begins to accept the political risks, I too began to ease up on my anxieties and to commit to the organization. The great impetus for this decision was my direct contact with the guests of Annunciation House. As men and women, young and old began pouring out their personal stories to me, I felt a deep sense of connection with the community. I knew I had done the right thing staying with the organization, and my sense of commitment for the justice of the migrant poor intensified everyday.

When the field research had finally come to an end, I did not know if I wanted to proceed with the degree or not. What I had experienced as a volunteer of Annunciation House was great enough of an experience for me that I would be perfectly satisfied just knowing I had been part of something great. What convinced me to continue this journey was a conversation with a university professor in El Paso who I had become acquainted with. After sharing with her that I would be fully content without having finished the dissertation, she looked at me right in the eye and said, “No, you *will* write this dissertation. You need to take all the stories you heard and tell it through your writing.”

Like many, I came to Annunciation House not expecting much beyond my own personal goals, which in my case was a straightforward research experience. But my time at Annunciation House was more than a dissertation journey. It was a life journey that has continued to transform me and engage me in critical reflection of my own life as a researcher, scholar, and advocate. Through this experience, I finally know exactly what side of the fence to sit on. I will never be the same as result of this experience, and I know this will become the platform for my own personal politics and activism for those in search of shelter and safety.

**Field Notes: Day 69**

Here I am on one of my last days as a volunteer. I’m sitting out in the porch in one of the calmest and therapeutic neighborhoods I’ve ever been in. I feel secure, familiar, calm, and at ease. When I first saw this neighborhood in April, I remember feeling unsafe and patronizing of this place. But now, I’ve really grown to love this place.

At the *despedida* [farewell gathering for summer volunteers] today, Ruben said something that really stuck with me. He said something to the effect of “Your presence to the guests was a sign of God in their lives.” What a tremendous blessing it has been to be part of the lives of these people. It has truly been an honor to know these people and walk the journey with them. I will never forget Annunciation House.

**APPENDIX A: MAP OF U.S.-MEXICO BORDER CITIES**



*Source: BusinessWeek (1997)*



## APPENDIX B: MAP OF U.S.-MEXICO BORDER STATES



*Source: Texas Department of Agriculture Border Governors' Conference (2005)*

## APPENDIX C: DEVELOPING COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN FREE TRADE

	<b>Signed</b>	<b>Under Negotiation</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	<p>NAFTA (Mexico, Canada)</p> <p>DR-CAFTA (Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua)</p> <p>Jordan, Singapore, Chile, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, Peru, Colombia</p>	<p>Panama, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand</p>
<b>E.U.</b>	<p>Mexico, Chile, South Africa, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon</p>	<p>ECOWAS (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo)</p> <p>SADC (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania)</p> <p>CARIFORUM (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago)</p> <p>CEMAC (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic republic of Congo, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe)</p> <p>Pacific (Cook Islands, Fed. States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Rep of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua new guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu)</p> <p>Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama)</p> <p>MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay)</p> <p>Andean Countries (Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru)</p>

		<p>Algeria, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Malta, Syria, Tunisia, Palestine</p> <p>ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam)</p> <p>Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates)</p>
<b>Japan</b>	Singapore, Mexico, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines	<p>ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam)</p> <p>Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates)</p> <p>Brunei, Chile, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam</p>
<b>Australia</b>		<p>ANSEAN-New Zealand (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, New Zealand)</p> <p>China, Malaysia</p> <p>Exploring FTAs with Chile, Mexico, South Korea and Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates)</p>
<b>Canada</b>	Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico	<p>Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela)</p> <p>CARICOM (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago)</p> <p>Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua)</p> <p>Dominican Republic, South Korea, Singapore</p>
<b>New Zealand</b>	Singapore, Thailand, Trans-Pacific (ratified by New Zealand, Brunei, Singapore but not yet Chiles)	<p>ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam)</p> <p>China, Malaysia</p>

Source: Oxfam International, 2007c

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