

The integration of migrants in civil society organizations in Tijuana, as part of a re-definition of migration projects

Olga Odgers-Ortiz, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte
Ietza Bojórquez Chapela, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte
Olga Lidia Olivas Hernández, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

Abstract

Based on extensive fieldwork conducted in shelters located in Tijuana, Baja California, since 2019, we identify a growing tension arising between, on one hand, NGOs oriented to the attention of migrant populations, and on the other, a State that seeks to limit migrants' mobility. This tension is aggravated by structural aspects, such as migration policies, corruption, discrimination, violation of migrants' human rights, and diverse forms of violence. Added to this, the current administration in Mexico has repeatedly shown its distrust of NGOs. Among the consequences of this challenging relationship between the State and NGOs is the growing criminalization of migrants and activists advocating their defense (FrontLine Defenders, 2019).

In this paper, we want to show that, far from being a passive population receiving services from local and binational organizations, migrants and asylum seekers have increasingly become organized. They became part of NGOs and are at the origin of innovative initiatives fully managed by them.

We focus on people whose migration project was interrupted and find themselves "frozen in movement" (Odgers & Campos, 2014) or "stuck in mobility" (Hess, 2012) in the border region. Due to current migration policies, this condition demands long waiting periods in Mexico, while their asylum applications are processed. This situation was aggravated with the pandemic's arrival, used as an alibi to stop receiving new applications, and delay processing those already filed.

Specifically, we analyze involvement trajectories of two groups stranded in Tijuana:

- a. Asylum seekers waiting in Mexico for their court processes; these groups have a *Pending Migration Project*.
- b. International migrants that are redefining their migration project, and are currently asking for humanitarian visas, asylum, or refuge in Mexico; this group is reconsidering either stay in Mexico or continue to the US. Now they have a *Shifting Migration Project*.

Both groups include persons from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, as well as migrants coming from Africa (mainly Cameroon). We suggest that this increasing involvement is one of the various unexpected consequences of the policies forcing large groups of people from diverse origins to stay stranded in mobility while in Tijuana. This involvement may be seen as part of a social integration process to this border area.

Biographies of Authors

Ietza Bojórquez Chapela MD, MSc, PhD, Department of Population Studies, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Mexico). Dr. Bojorquez holds a Ph.D. in Epidemiology, and a MSc in Public Health. Her main research interest is on the social determinants of health, in the areas of mental health, health-related practices (diet, physical activity) and migrant health. After graduating from medical school, she worked in health promotion in rural areas in Mexico. From 2007 to 2010 she was Deputy Director of Operations Research in Mexico's Ministry of Health. From 2010 on, she has been a professor-researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Mexico, where she is currently in charge of the Surveys of Migration in Mexico's Borders (EMIF). She is a member of the board of the Lancet Commission on Migration and Health-Latin America Node.

Olga Lidia Olivas Hernández PhD, Cátedras Conacyt Programme and Social Studies Department, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Mexico). Dr. Olga Olivas is an anthropologist with particular research expertise on new spiritualities, mental health and migration, substance use/abuse, and healing systems in the cultural context. She has a Ph.D. in Social Sciences with an emphasis in Social Anthropology from CIESAS Occidente. From 2014 to 2016, Dr. Olivas was a postdoctoral fellow at El Colef and the University of California, San Diego, with special training in Psychological Anthropology. Currently, she is a Cátedra-Conacyt Research Fellow at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at UCSD. Recent research collaborations include Embodiment and Subjectivity in Religious Treatments for drug abuse; Life trajectories, and substance abuse among Mexican Migrants in the U.S.-Mexico Border. She is currently researching Health and Migration Trajectories among asylum seekers stranded in mobility in Northern Mexico.

Olga Odgers-Ortiz PhD, Professor of Sociology, Social Studies Department, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Mexico). Dr. Olga Odgers holds a PhD in Sociology from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris, Francia). Her main research interests are in the crossroads of migration, religion, and health, focusing on the experience of migrants trapped in mobility in the US-Mx Border, subjectivity, and alternative healing. She directed *Migraciones Internacionales* journal (ISSN 2594-0279) from 2009 to 2014. She is a member of the Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI III) and the Mexican Academy of Sciences. Currently is Co-PI for Tracing Mobility and Care Trajectories: Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Experiences in the US-Mx Border (PIMSA). ORCID 0000-0002-9656-8877