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***La Caminata del Migrante* as a Social Movement:  
The Framing and Making of the October 2018 Migrant Caravan**

by

**Rosario de la Luz Rizzo Lara**

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**European Joint Doctorate MOVES  
Migration and Modernity: Historical and Cultural Challenges**

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Luis Antonio Vila-Henninger, thank you for your support and love, I would not have been able to finish this thesis without you. I also dedicate this work to my parents, Irma Lara and Guillermo Rizzo, my siblings, my sister-in-law, my cousins, nephews, my aunts, and my beloved grandma, Lila, who have been supporting and cheering me on from afar. Also, I want to dedicate this to my friends in Mexico who have encouraged me to keep going and finish the Ph.D. I also thank my friends and colleagues at BSIS: Mario, Michael, Kimberly, Nadja, Daniel, and many others who inspired and helped me throughout this journey. Finally, I want to dedicate this work to all the *caravaneros*, to each and all of you who talked to me; thank you for your time, trust, and kindness. Thank you for adapting, resisting, fighting, and inspiring me with your example. This dissertation is for you!

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## Abstract

In the fall of 2018, large groups of Central American undocumented migrants and asylum seekers arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala border to cross Mexico and arrive in the US. The first group left San Pedro Sula, Honduras on October 13, 2018. The group was called “*La Caminata del Migrante*.” The event attracted attention from the local and international media, organizations, and civil society, given the size and composition of the group. This thesis aims to explore the formation and development of the October 2018 Migrant caravan from Honduras to the US, as previous migration movements from Central America have been characterized by individual or small-group clandestine migration.

This thesis first proposes the use of social movements literature to analyze the features of the caravan and conceptualizes it as a transnational social movement on the move. Seeking to analyze its formation, the thesis also explores the different frames that were employed to mobilize participants and bystanders, as well as to gain public support for the caravan, and the resonance they had on participants to show which frames resonated the most and the least. Finally, looking to understand how the caravan developed and endured from San Pedro Sula (Honduras) to Tijuana (Mexico), I look at the collective identity caravan members created in transit and argue that it was fundamental to achieve, at least, some of its goals.

Based on qualitative data collected during 2021-2022 using in-depth semi-structured interviews, informal talks, social media data, and the examination of secondary sources, I found that the caravan was planned and organized, as information about the movement circulated on social media weeks before its departure. Participants organized to meet at the bus station in San Pedro Sula (Honduras), and from there, they walked jointly to the US. The movement grew while in transit, partially in response to the frames that called participants to leave the country in groups by highlighting the advantages of migrating in a caravan. Social media enabled the emergence and enlargement of the movement, as images of migrants walking together were

seen across the globe. The movement was horizontal and without a formal leader, having guides and coordinators setting the migratory route. The movement established two conflictual relationships at the local and international levels and used an innovative repertoire of contention. Participants constructed a collective identity in and through protest while the caravan was on the move and as they contested the racialized policies of exclusion states of the region had implemented.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Case Study and Research Question

On October 13, 2018, a group of over 500 Hondurans left the bus station in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to walk jointly to the US (Arroyo et al., 2018; Gandini et al., 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021). The day before, October 12, about 160 people had gathered at the bus station in San Pedro Sula to leave their country collectively. People waited some hours and more people arrived during the day and night. At dawn on October 13, they all started to walk. Information about the time and place of departure of the “*Caminata del Migrante*” (“Migrant Walk” also known as the migrant caravan) had been shared through Facebook and WhatsApp weeks earlier. According to the flyer distributed through social media, the day of departure of the Migrant Walk was October 12, 2018, at 8 am (Ahmed et al., 2018; Martínez, 2018).

The name “*La Caminata del Migrante*” refers to the name of the group based on the flyer that was distributed across social media calling people to participate in the group. In what follows, I refer to *La Caminata del Migrante* and the migrant caravan indistinctively, as participants continuously used the term “caravan” to describe the movement.

The caravan grew in size and demographic composition as it crossed towns and international borders. Each day, nationals of Central American countries joined the group (see Figure 1.1). That is to say, thousands of Hondurans, and to a lesser extent, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Nicaraguans took part in the caravan. The caravan crossed into Guatemala days after its departure, on October 15. Upon their arrival in Agua Caliente, Guatemala, they faced the immigration officers. Officers tried to stop them, but caravan members took down the border fence and continued walking and crossing the country (Arroyo et al., 2018).

A few days later, it is said that more than 5,000 people arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala border. There is no consensus about the number of people that arrived, but scholars and journalists stated there were between 5-7,000 people at the Mexico-Guatemala border (Escalón,

2018). Upon their arrival, the caravan requested the Mexican government to let them cross into the country (Ahmed et al., 2018; Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano, 2019; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018).

**Figure 1.1**

*Map of Central American Countries*

This image has been redacted and can be found in the following link:

<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105386>

Source: (US Government Accountability Office, 2022)

\**Note:* the countries in dark brown constitute the Northern Triangle of Central America: Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador

Caravan members tried to enter Mexico as a group (Telemundo, 2018). However, the Mexican government wanted them to enter in small groups and demanded they entered regularly and orderly, showing their passports and visas (EFE, 2018). Then, a group of migrants forcefully took down the metal fence at the Mexico-Guatemala border while other migrants jumped into the Suchiate river to cross into Mexico (Arroyo et al., 2018). In response, police officers shot tear gas at them to disperse the caravan, leaving some members injured. Police officers then encircled the caravan, closed the border gates again, and guarded the border. At that moment, dozens of media outlets had gathered to record the happenings of the caravan, broadcasting the chaotic entrance (Telemundo, 2018; Yañez, 2018). The day after the clashes,

the Mexican government opened the gate for the rest of the caravan to enter, as thousands were still waiting at the international bridge (Arroyo et al., 2018). Members powered through to cross the border, arrived in Tapachula, Chiapas, and continued the journey to reach the US.

Migrants walked in groups along the migratory route (see Figure 1.2). They stopped to rest and reorganize in different towns across Mexico. During the first part of the road, migrants mainly walked or asked for rides. The states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Puebla witnessed the crossing of thousands participating in the caravan. After about three weeks of leaving San Pedro Sula, caravan members arrived in Mexico City. From there, most of the group traveled to Tijuana, aiming to cross into the US, where they could apply for asylum (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018; Pradilla, 2019). Other participants made their way to other border towns, such as Ciudad Juárez (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021). Once caravan members left Mexico City, they stopped in Querétaro and Jalisco. Then, they continued their journey. The governments of Sonora and Sinaloa, a couple of states which were along the route to Tijuana (see Figure 1.2), provided buses to the caravan so that the caravan would not stop in such states (Arroyo et al., 2018; M. Martínez, 2018).

### **Figure 1.2**

*Route of the caravan from Honduras to Tijuana*

This figure has been redacted and can be found in the following link:

<https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2020/01/15/nota/7691958/cientos-migrantes-nueva-caravana-hacia-estados-unidos-pese>

Source:(AFP, 2020)

In November 2018, after trekking for about a month and walking more than 3,000 km, the first caravan members arrived at the US-Mexico border (Arroyo et al., 2018; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018). A group of about 85 people, mostly from the LBGTQ community was welcomed and sheltered by international organizations (Arroyo et al., 2018) on November 11. After that, more groups arrived in Tijuana. Some members stay in shelters that the Mexican government had set up, “*Unidad Deportiva Benito Juárez*” and “*El Barretal*,” and others slept on the streets (Coubés, 2021). Caravan members continued to arrive in Tijuana in the following days, weeks, and months (Arroyo et al., 2018; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018, 2019).

In the weeks that follow the departure of the *Caminata del Migrante*, at least three more caravans were formed in El Salvador and Honduras, which arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala border with the same purpose. It is said that at least four caravans arrived in Mexico in the Fall of 2018 (Arroyo et al., 2018; Suárez, 2018), which also arrived in Tijuana.

The October 2018 caravan, also known as “*La Caminata del Migrante*,” was composed mainly of Hondurans (Coubés, 2021). According to a report by *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, El Colef*, (2018), 80 percent of the caravan was composed of Hondurans, followed by Guatemalans and Salvadorans. Moreover, the report showed that caravan members came predominantly from the most urban departments in Honduras (the country has 12 *departments*), Francisco Morazán and Cortes, where Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, respectively, are located (see pink stars in Figure 1.3) (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018). Members from other departments, such as Ocotepeque, Santa Rosa, Yoro, and Colón, also joined the caravan. It was expected that people from Ocotepeque, Santa Rosa, and Colón would have joined in the movement as the caravan stopped in those towns to rest (see Figure 1.4). The data are consistent with the demographic profile of the people I interviewed, as most of them were from San Pedro Sula, Cortés, followed by Atlántida, Colón, and Ocotepeque.

**Figure 1.3**

*Map of Honduras by department*



Source: (D-maps.com, 2022) modified by the author

Similarly, Central Americans in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala formed more caravans. In January 2019, new groups of thousands of people from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) entered Mexican soil with the same purpose as that of the *Caminata del Migrante* (Animal Político, 2019; Pradilla, 2020). The caravans of 2019 arrived in different cities across the US-Mexico border (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021). Caravans arrived in Piedras Negras, Tamaulipas, and Ciudad Juárez (*Ibid*). In January 2020, following the steps of previous caravans, new groups of Central Americans arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala Border (Pradilla, 2020). However, they were blocked by immigration officers, military personnel, and national guard officials. Amid the coronavirus crisis, in June 2020, people formed new groups in Central America to go to Mexico and the US. They were unsuccessful, as the Honduran and Guatemalan governments stopped them, and the groups could not leave or cross the countries. In 2021, new caravans were formed in Central America (Redacción, 2022) with the same intention, but were stopped in transit. Some members reported that they could not even pass

Guatemala. Likewise, more caravans in 2022 formed in the south of Mexico, aiming to leave Tapachula, Chiapas, and advance to Mexico City (Milenio Digital, 2021).

#### Figure 1.4

*Route of the Caravan from Honduras to Guatemala*



Source: (Google Maps, 2022) modified by the author

Migration in caravans and the caravans themselves are different from the “traditional” undocumented, secret, and clandestine migration from Central America to the US that scholars have largely researched (Blanchard et al., 2011; Guerette & Clarke, 2005; Massey et al., 1993; Menjívar, 2000; París Pombo, 2017; Sorensen, 2013; Spener, 2009). So, instead of soliciting information about why people are leaving their countries, this research focuses on understanding people’s justification for joining the caravan, and with that, their experiences in and interpretations of the movement.

The research question that guides this thesis is: How can we explain and understand a turn in the mode of migration to caravans from Central America to the US when previous migration movements have been characterized by individual or small-group clandestine migration? To answer the question, I draw on social movement literature. Migration literature

has largely focused on studying individual, household, or small-group migration (of 5-10 people), as opposed to migration in multitudes (Díaz de León, 2020; Massey et al., 2002; París Pombo, 2017; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020). Traditional approaches to migration (i.e., Neoclassic, New Economics of Migration, or World Systems) are structuralist or reductively rational and have overlooked migrants' political subjectivity (Casas-Cortés & Cobarrubias, 2020; Massey et al., 1993; Sassen, 1988). Although World Systems Theory is useful to explain the initiation of south-north movements under the logic of an expanding global market, where migration is seen as a natural consequence of the market penetration of capitalist economies into developing countries (Massey et al., 1993, 2002; Sassen, 1988, 2014) the theory uses a macro level of analysis, and it is not concerned with micro or meso levels of analyses. Networks theory uses a meso level of analysis (the household) but these theories, although useful to understand different elements of migration, do not fully address elements of the caravan.

Moreover, extant literature has interpreted the October 2018 caravan of migrants from Central America to the US in various ways. Some scholars have conceptualized it as a new strategy for geographical mobility vis-à-vis the strict immigration policies and border regimes implemented in Mexico and the US (Castro Neira, 2019; Gandini et al., 2020; Salazar Araya, 2019; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020). NGOs called the caravan an exodus of refugees (Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano, 2019) and journalists referred to it as a mobile refugee camp (Ramos, 2018). Other scholars deem it as an "*acuerpamiento en movimiento*" (embodied movement) (Cordero Díaz & Garibo García, 2019; Garibo García & Call, 2020) the gathering of bodies to face risks associated with the violence(s) and obstacles migrants encounter along the journey after the imposition of restrictive immigration policies. Lastly, Amarela Varela and Lisa McLean (2019) understand the caravan as a migrant struggle. They claim the caravan is a

rebellion, an insurgency of the victims of neoliberalism in Central America, and an insurrection against the border regime that the countries of the region have imposed (Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019, p. 166).

Elaborating on these perspectives, I seek to advance a conceptualization of the caravan by synthesizing different perspectives to account for some of its features and processes, such as its composition, the conflictual relationships that are established, the caravan's mobilization and framing strategy, the planning that went into organizing the movement, and movement's temporality and maintenance from its departure until it arrived in Tijuana.

Building on the concept of social movements (Snow et al., 2019) and Varela Huerta & McLean's (2019) definition of the caravan as a migrant struggle, this thesis first proposes the conceptualization of the caravan as a social movement —understanding the different features of the caravan as axes of a social movement. Social movements consist of collective actions composed of purposive actors, with some degree of organization, who use spaces for other purposes from which they are intended, challenge a system of authority, and aim at some sort of transformation (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Snow et al., 2019). I argue *La Caminata del Migrante* is a transnational social movement on the move composed of collectives of migrants from different nationalities, genders, and sexual orientations moving together with some degree of planning and organization aiming to challenge a system of authority at the local and international level, using innovative repertoires of contention.

The findings in this thesis come from semi-structured interview data from 24 participants that I interviewed online in the spring of 2021 and January 2022. Their stories are the backbone of the thesis and constitute the first step in understanding the process of mobilization and how the caravan came to be a collective actor with a common goal. Because the purpose of the thesis was to investigate the process of formation and mobilization of the 2018 migrant caravan, I interviewed people that participated in the movement. Thus, I posted

flyers in Facebook groups (see Chapter Four) to recruit participants. I talked to people from multiple Central American countries, men, women, and elders. When I conducted the interviews, I realized that not all of the respondents had participated in the 2018 caravan, but that they were part of those that follow, either in 2019, 2020, or 2021, and some had participated in more than one caravan.

Further, to understand how the caravan became a fully-fledged social movement, the process of formation and mobilization of the caravan, and how caravan members sustained the mobilization, I elaborate on framing, collective action frames, frame resonance, and collective identity literature (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Ketelaars, 2016; McDonnell et al., 2017; Melucci, 1995, 1996; Park et al., 2021; Snow et al., 2019). Each of these pieces of literature provides a nuanced understanding of multiple aspects of the caravan.

First, I used frame literature to analyze the process of mobilization of the caravan. I elaborate on the concept of frames (Goffman, 1974), which are a schema of interpretation that encode objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action (Snow & Benford, 1992). Frames serve to organize experience and guide action (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1992). Analyzing frames articulated in a social movement is crucial to understanding how social movement actors see and interpret the world and the meaning they give to particular actions and events. The framing perspective offers then tools for analyzing mobilizers, activists' or leaders' discourses. Through the analysis of frames, we can identify how activists label specific situations as unfair, assign blame to the government, create a sense of urgency, and call to action. This is particularly important since I sought to investigate the messages that were articulated that accounted for the mobilization.

Second, I elaborated on frame resonance to see how participants spoke about the movement, how they interpreted and made sense of it, and if they interpreted it in the same

way as the social movement's leaders or primary mobilizers did. Hence, I identified resonance and dissonance. In other words, I identified the frames that resonated with participants and those that did not resonate with participants, further showing how in response, participants articulated their own frames. Here, I contributed to the literature on frame resonance and responded to the need for analyzing nonresonant frames as, according to researchers (Johnston & Noakes, 2005; McDonnell et al., 2017; Park et al., 2021), there are just a few studies that study them (for an exception, see Snow & Corrigal-Brown, 2005). Moreover, by considering precisely what frames resonated with participants, the study fills a gap in the framing literature as, according to Ketelaars (2016), studies have failed to assess what frames specifically resonate with movement participants.

Third, I use collective identity theory as an analytical lens to understand how the caravan came to be a collective actor, how participants interpreted the movement, and the different elements that allowed them to sustain the mobilization. Three elements are needed in the definition of collective identity in a social movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995, 1996; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). First, collective identity is defined as answering the question of "who we are and what we want," which includes a) a common understanding of the goals the actors want to achieve and the means they have to do it; and b) the display of the antagonism or opposition between the challenging and the dominant groups. Second, collective identity is a network of relationships that relate to the organization and models of leadership in the group. Third, collective identity is formed through a bond or emotional investment, that allows participants to feel united or part of the group. Through an analysis of participants' interviews, I identified these elements and showed how the caravan became a transnational social movement on the move. By looking at the collective experiences, I have contributed to our understanding of key elements that sustain a migrant-led social movement over time (given the time frame of the caravan) and that speak about their collective identity.

It is critical to note the role that the internet and social media played in the development of the movement. According to participants' accounts, most of them learned about the movement on Facebook. The fact that Honduras has the highest social media penetration in Central America and that Facebook is the platform with the highest share among social media sites (Statista, 2022) facilitated the distribution of the flyer and the diffusion of information about the caravan. Social media was also fundamental for logistical purposes, as people used it to communicate information about the time and place of departure and other topics related to the movement.

Moreover, Facebook enabled the broadcasting of events as they unfolded. Even if digitally, people on the other side of the screen were able to witness the walk of thousands of Hondurans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and even Mexicans who joined the movement. The images of people walking and struggling on the road were broadcast around the globe generating mixed responses. First, the assistance that civil society and local organizations provided to the caravan (Gandini et al., 2020; Hernández López & Porraz Gómez, 2020). Second, the explosion of information shared about the caravan and the huge coverage it had from news outlets. Third, the outrage of the US and Honduran governments.

Finally, social media enabled the emergence and development of the movement. The mobilization that started online, with the posting of flyers and the like, quickly turned into a mobilization, physical action, that changed (partially) how undocumented migrants move to the US and challenge a restrictive border regime that has rendered them irregular and inadmissible. Participants came out of the shadows visibly and organized, holding banners, crosses, and flags, and with their bodies advanced their claims. They wanted a safe passage through Mexico to go to the US.

## **1.2 Background. From the Caravan of Central American Mothers to the October 2018 Migrant Caravan**

Other caravans, such as the Caravan of Central American Mothers and the “*Viacrucis Migrante*,” precede the October 2018 Migrant Caravan. In 1999, the first Caravan of Mothers left Honduras. Mothers of disappeared migrants gathered in Honduras to embark on a trip to Mexico to look for their disappeared sons, seeking justice and accountability from the Mexican government. In the beginning, the caravans departed from Honduras and Guatemala, entered Mexico, and only covered the South of Mexico, arriving in Mexico City, following part of the migratory route that undocumented migrants would commonly follow. With the time and resources that came from different other organizations in Mexico, such as *Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano*, the caravan of Mothers was able to cover other areas in the Northeast of Mexico that are also part of the migratory route (Sánchez Soler, 2011).

The caravan gathered women from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. With time it was not only the mothers but daughters and wives of disappeared migrants who participated in the caravan. Since then, 16 Caravans of Mothers have been organized with dozens of activists and NGOs in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Castro Neira, 2019; Salazar Araya, 2019; Varela Huerta, 2015a). *Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano* has been one NGO leading the organization of such caravans, organizing and accompanying Central American women (Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano, 2022).

The Caravans of Mothers have received wider support not only from civil society but even from the Mexican government. For instance, in 2011, the caravan was granted authorization to visit jails in Tabasco and Chiapas. In that year, the caravan was allowed to enter the country and the participants were granted temporary permits to participate in the events organized by the caravan. The caravan was often escorted by personnel of the Instituto

Nacional de Migración (National Migration Institute –INM by its Spanish acronym) and other international organizations like Amnesty International accompanied them throughout the route.

Another collective effort that precedes the caravan is the *Viacrucis Migrante*. The *Viacrucis* consisted of “small” caravans (relative to the size of the *Caminata del Migrante*) organized by several NGOs and migrant activists that sought to make visible the atrocities migrants experience in transit and accountability from the Mexican government. With the slogan "Migrants are fed up," the first edition of the *Viacrucis* took place in 2011, in Tecún Umán, Mexico-Guatemala border. There, migrant and human rights activists gathered and invited migrants to join the march. The goal was to arrive in Oaxaca, Mexico, making stops at different points of the migratory route which have been identified as dangerous for migrants (Latin American Studies Association, 2020; Vargas Carrasco, 2018). The first *Viacrucis* started in Chiapas, at the border. Then, in 2015, the *Viacrucis* started in Guatemala and crossed into Mexico via El Ceibo, Tabasco. The organizers changed the location to highlight another point of entry that was gaining relevance.

Since that first *Viacrucis*, there have been at least seven more. They usually take place during the catholic celebration of Holy Week, in March or April, using religious references to the Way of the Cross, the time when Jesus carried the cross on his back to the place of crucifixion. Activists would extrapolate the suffering of Jesus to that of the migrants. During the *Viacruis* they would make claims and demands (Inocente Escamilla, 2018). These *Viacrucis* were relatively small, composed of about 100 people.

In April 2018, activists organizing the *Viacrucis* sought to reach Mexico City and Tijuana. This time, the group was more extensive, with about 1,200 people, and started in Tapachula, Mexico. This group was later named “caravan.” That was the largest caravan at that moment. The NGO, *Pueblo Sin Fronteras*, led the caravan to Tijuana after hundreds of migrants decided to continue to the border instead of staying in Mexico City (Semple, 2018a).

The then-American president, Donald Trump, found out about the caravan and cast its participants as criminals and dangerous, depicting the caravan as a “disgrace.” He urged the Mexican government to stop the advancement of the *caravaneros*, and deploy national guard officers to the Southern border (Semple, 2018b).

The performance carried out during the *Viacrucis* was meant to make visible the struggles migrants experience in transit and denounce the disappearances, robberies, killings, and extortions migrants suffer. Through shout-outs, the members and activists demanded the Mexican government's accountability for such violence. The *Viacrucis* added to a repertoire of contention that NGOs had led, such as strikes, protests, vigils outside government offices, and others to demand accountability from the Mexican government. Moreover, the April 2018 *Viacrucis* received media attention, given the size of the groups and the comments made by President Trump. Finally, the *Viacrucis* relied on calls on social media for people to participate.

The Caravan of Central American Mothers and the *Viacrucis* paved the way for *La Caminata del Migrante* to emerge. For instance, the calls for the October 2018 Migrant caravan were carried out on social media, and the walks were also broadcasted through social media. Second, there was a repertoire of contention from which caravan members draw. Third, the route followed by the *Viacrucis* Migrante was also used by the migrant caravan. Fourth, the experience of organized groups demanding accountability and visibility served to organize or guide new caravans. Thus, these two collective actions were relevant to the migrant caravan.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

The following thesis is organized into eight chapters. This introduction presents the research question that guides this work, the argument, and some historical data on the caravans that preceded the October 2018 “*Caminata del Migrante*.” I also acknowledge my positionality

as a Mexican, migrant, middle-class, educated woman, and how it affects the way I write and approach the research.

In Chapter Two, I delve into the analysis of Central American migration mainly from the perspective of World Systems Theory and to a lesser extent Networks theory. I show the current composition of the Central American immigrant population in the US and the set of migratory policies and actions that the US and Mexico have implemented to curb the entrance of undocumented migrants. Finally, I explain in detail how the caravan differed from past forms of migration, highlighting the need for different approaches to studying it.

Chapter Three, I review the current approaches to the caravan. I synthesize those to account for the caravan features and suggest the use of social movements literature to account for different elements of the caravan. Thus, I operationalize the concept of social movements and introduce a new type of transnational social movement, a transnational social movement on the move.

Chapter Four is devoted to methodology. I first outline my case study. Then, I explain my research design and my rationale for choosing online qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews). I also explain my sampling, recruitment criteria, and recruitment practices. For the last, I show the flyers used to recruit participants. This chapter also covers the validity and generalizability of the study.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven are the empirical backbone of the thesis. In chapters Five and Six, I use framing theory as a lens to study the formation and enlargement of the movement and its mobilization. That is, I look at the frames articulated to call participants to join the movement and the resonance the frames had on the participants. Specifically, in Chapter Five, I analyze the collective action frames that were articulated before and during the movement. To do this, I first provide a literature review of frames and collective action frames. Then, I provide background information to understand Bartolo Fuentes's (one de-facto mobilizer on

Facebook) role in the emergence and enlargement of the caravan. Then, I identify and carry out an analysis of collective action frames articulated that aimed to mobilize participants, bystanders, and civil society, along with the counter-frames that aimed to undermine the movement.

Chapter Six looks at frame resonance. In this chapter, I analyze multiple frames that Bartolo Fuentes articulated, and how these resonated or not with participants of the caravan, showing the ones that resonated the most and the least with participants. Here, I look at the messages conveyed for the mobilization and migrants' justifications for joining the movement. Then, I show how migrants articulated their own frames in response to the frames that did not resonate with them. The chapter includes a literature review on frame resonance and contributions to the literature.

Chapter Seven is the last empirical chapter. Here, I review the literature on collective identity to make sense of the participant's experiences in the movement, how they became a collective actor, and how that contributed to sustaining the mobilization (throughout the country). In other words, I analyze, retrospectively, the construction of the caravan's collective identity in transit by looking at a) the experiences in transit and the form of organization.; b) the brotherhood caravan members created throughout the movement; c) their rituals; d) their expressions of resistance; e) the support they draw from civil society, international organizations, and the Mexican government.; and f) their own interpretations of the movement. The chapter concludes by looking at how participants assessed the movement.

Chapter Eight offers some conclusions and questions for future research. First, it summarizes the contributions of the caravan case to migration and social movements scholarship; then, it provides some empirical conclusions of the case study; then, it discusses the aftermath of *La Caminata del Migrante* concerning the response of the Mexican government. Lastly, it poses questions and directions for future research.

## 1.4 Reflexivity and Positionality

My positionality as a woman from the Global South (Mexico) – middle class, educated, and migrant, currently living in Europe – affects how I write and analyze the conversations held with both men and women in this study and how I carry out and approach the research.

First, I was born and raised in Mexico, but I had the opportunity to study both in the US and Europe. This educational diversity combined with my origin has allowed me to develop a critical approach toward migration policies imposed on third countries that "export" cheap labor, undocumented migrants, and refugees.

Second, I worked as a protection assistant at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Tenosique, Tabasco, Mexico's Southern Border. Working there for almost two years gave me a different perspective on the caravan and the context in which it emerged. While working for the UNHCR, I interviewed thousands of people at shelters, detention centers, and the office about why and how they were in Mexico. I heard countless stories about the poverty, unemployment, corruption, and insecurity that permeate Honduras and Central America. I witnessed the increase in Honduran migration and people's despair when making the trip up north. I saw and heard how undocumented migrants make the trip to Mexico, aspiring to arrive in the US, and the different dangers they encounter along the way. I visited the poorly designed detention centers where undocumented migrants are held when detained and the terrible conditions in which they await the regularization of their status. Thus, I possess previous empirical knowledge about the Central American context. Moreover, this experience has informed my critical approach toward the US and Mexico migration regime and how I think about Central American migrants and asylum seekers.

Third, my nationality was an asset during the recruitment process. Being Mexican allowed me to enter and access caravan groups on Facebook. My nationality and language made it easier for me to be part of the groups and establish conversations with people. Also,

working at the UNHCR helped me familiarize myself with the slang of Hondurans and Guatemalans, so I could understand many of the words and idioms participants used during the interviews. This proved particularly important during the process of transcription and translation.

Fourth, I also acknowledge that working at UNHCR provided me with gatekeepers to understand better the development of the caravan, as I held informal conversations with former colleagues and other contacts. Also, through acquaintances, I was able to contact people to gain an understanding of the mobilization and the caravan.

Fifth, feminist scholars have urged researchers to acknowledge their positionality and subjectivity, particularly when interviewing other women. When interviewing my participants, I made sure I provided a safe space for them to talk, not only by assuring anonymity but by validating their emotions and feelings. Some female participants expressed the fears, sadness, and happiness they experienced in transit and after the caravan. Conducting the interviews online meant that I could only say a few words to help them calm down while providing the space and silence they needed to process their emotions. They thanked me for listening to them and being interested in their stories. While talking to me about their experiences, they seemed like they needed a space to debrief. I thanked them for telling me their stories and sharing them with me. Finally, it was fascinating to see that men also shared stories accompanied by a range of emotions. Men were not indifferent, insecure, or cautious when talking to me as a female researcher; they all shared their fears and emotions. I believe the online medium facilitated the sharing of experiences.

## **Chapter 2. Contemporary Central American Migration: From Clandestine Migration to the Migrant Caravans**

Recent developments in Central American migration to the US challenge traditional wisdom on migration. Some migration studies have looked at rational and structural approaches to respond to questions related to the initiation of migratory movements (Neoclassical, Dual labor market, World Systems Theory) while assessing the role of networks in the perpetuation of migration (Epstein, 2008; Garip & Asad, 2016; Massey et al., 1993; Menjívar, 2000; Sassen, 1988). These approaches have been fruitful in explaining Central American migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, a closer analysis of the October 2018 migrant caravan reveals the need to look beyond these paradigms, as they fall short in explaining some elements of this innovative form of migration.

Over the past 50 years, Central Americans have migrated to the US for economic, social, political, and environmental reasons (Blanchard et al., 2011; Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; López Recinos, 2020; París Pombo, 2017; Rodríguez Chávez, 2016; Rodriguez, 1987; Saul, 2020; Stanley, 1987; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019; Willers, 2019). They have done so mostly in a clandestine manner, individually or in small groups (París Pombo, 2018a; Sorensen, 2013), because of the tightening of migration policies and border enforcement to deter undocumented migration (Álvarez Velasco, 2016; Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Frelick, 1991; Massey et al., 2002; Torre Cantalapiedra & Yee Quintero, 2018; Varela Huerta, 2015b). However, in 2018 a new form of migration –the caravan– emerged (Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano, 2019; Cordero Díaz & Garibo García, 2019; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018; Garibo García & Call, 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020; Varela Huerta, 2018; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). The migrant caravan arriving at the Mexico-Guatemala border in the fall of 2018 displayed features that contrasted with the pattern of undocumented, clandestine migration, that had

characterized Central American migration to the US. Clandestine migration often consisted of undocumented migrants traveling alone or in small groups with family members, acquaintances, or friends to ease the hardships of the trip (Díaz de León, 2020; París Pombo, 2018; Sorensen, 2013). In turn, the caravans consisted of a collective (hundreds of people walking together from different nationalities, genders, ages, and socioeconomic statuses) with some degree of planning and organization; public and announced; with specific claims; and challenging border regimes and migration policies (Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano, 2019; Ruíz-Lagier & Varela-Huerta, 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020; Varela Huerta, 2018).

This new form of migration, the caravans, calls for different approaches to studying migration. Previous migratory movements can be analyzed, for instance, using World Systems Theory (WST), as it is particularly useful to explain the initiation of south-north movements under the logic of an expanding global market, where migration is seen as a natural consequence of the market penetration of capitalist economies into developing countries (Massey et al., 1993, 2002; Sassen, 1988, 2014). The capitalist expansion creates mobile populations in peripheral countries while also producing strong ties between them, resulting in transnational migration (Massey et al., 1993). This theory uses a macro level of analysis, and it is not concerned with micro-level decision processes (*Ibid*). Second, Networks theory helps explain social networks' influence on the perpetuation of migration. The theory uses a micro-level of analysis, locating the decision to migrate at the individual or household level. However, these theories do not address migration in large groups, such as the caravans, nor the organization and planning that went into the movement. In turn, other theories, such as Social Movements Theory (SMT), are suitable to address these and other characteristics of the caravans.

This chapter seeks to provide a historical account of Contemporary Central American migration through the lens of structural approaches, mainly WST and later Network theory, while highlighting their shortcomings in analyzing the new migration trends, such as the caravans. In other words, in what follows, I provide the context to understand how Central Americans have migrated in the past decades and the new form of migration that emerged. This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I offer a literature review on WST and its application to the Central American case. This allows us to understand migratory movements from Central America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly those of the Northern Triangle of Central America. Then, I briefly examine the policies the US and Mexico have implemented to curb undocumented migration and the need for migrants to employ different strategies to cross the borders. Here, the restrictive policies and their effects are understood as a grievance for caravan members. Third, I explain the different features of the caravan to show how it contrasts with other forms of migration and the call for different approaches to analyzing the caravan. This chapter contributes to the dissertation by showing long-standing forms of migration while highlighting how the caravan contrasts with those, and the need for different approaches to account for its features.

## **2.1 Central American Migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Analysis from the Lens of WST and Networks Theory**

Hamilton and Chinchilla (1991) explained that Central American migration was linked to capitalist expansion between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. Structural approaches, such as World Systems Theory (WST), propose that the incursion of capitalist economies into 'non-capitalist' (or pre-capitalist) economies influences migration (Massey et al., 1993, 2002). Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), the leading author of WST, criticized capitalism and its expansion as exploitative, generating new inequalities. According to this approach, since the

sixteenth century, capital accumulation has created a strong dependency and an unequal division of labor between countries. While the periphery has historically been the supplier of raw materials and labor, the core countries have become industrialized centers of production towards which the flow of resources is mobilized, connecting them in different forms (Álvarez Velasco, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Pérez Díaz & García Hernández, 2019). In colonial times, market penetration was enabled by colonial regimes that benefited from the colonized countries; in modern times, this is possible as multinational firms from the core countries enter countries of the periphery in search of resources, land, raw materials, and labor (Massey, 2002; Massey et al., 1993). WST is then helpful in explaining the initial patterns of emigration from Central America. In contrast, Networks theory will be suited to explain the perpetuation of migration.

In the following subsections, I detail how the US intervention in Central America resulted in internal, regional, and extra-regional migration, primarily to the US. The first subsection delves into the US capitalist expansion in Central America and the internal and regional migration that followed. The second looks at the US financial and military intervention and the consequent displacement that took place. The last one looks at the economic adjustment and implementation of the neoliberal policies propelled by the US that also led to mass migration in the 1990s and 2000s.

### ***2.1.1 Internal and Regional Migration as a Result of the Capitalist Penetration and Expansion***

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Central America went through a profound restructuring of the socioeconomic and political system that resulted in internal, regional, and extra-regional migration. Central American migration has undoubtedly been related to the economic models implemented in the region since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which were related to its position in the world structure (relative to the core and periphery countries).

According to WST, capitalism enables the entrance of firms and capital-intensive production methods in pre-capitalist countries, producing social and economic distortions in the local society that result in the displacement of people from usual livelihoods and create a mobile population in search of new sources of income and employment (Massey, 2002; Massey et al., 2002). In other words, migration occurs in the process of “capitalist development,” which stems from the expansion of markets and the incorporation of peripheral areas into the world economy (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991). Here, migration is not the result of wage differentials (neoclassical theory) or employment opportunities (segmented labor migration); it instead “follows the dynamics of the market creation and the structure of the global economy” (Massey et al., 1993, p. 448).

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Central Americans started to migrate to urban areas due to the industrialization and urbanization projects of their countries and the US capitalist expansion (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; Massey et al., 1993). In these years, migration was mostly internal and later regional, whereby populations moved internally and to neighboring countries searching for better living conditions. Rural migrants entered the urban labor markets that their governments created; the banana enclaves absorbed other migrants and coffee companies and further cohorts were pushed to the agricultural margins of their countries.

An enclave refers to a center of activity created by foreign investors in a country (es) who exercise substantial control over production and export, often in the form of a monopoly or oligopoly. An enclave is a direct form of penetration and control from the core economies into the periphery economies that create relations of dependence. Torres Rivas (1971 in Viales Hurtado, 2006, p. 98) argued that the banana enclaves in Central America that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century were created on the basis of multiple aspects: a) foreign US investment, exclusively, when technical conditions made it profitable; b) the decisions about investment in the banana production were made outside the production area, which refers to

the principle of extraterritoriality; c) national laws did not have validity in the area of the enclave, thus, the banana plantation was also a political concession; d) that meant that the state could not exercise its right to sovereignty within its own territory, which generates the idea of a state within another state; e) the enclaves reinforced the export-production through the reinforcement of agricultural production and dependency on world markets; and f) the enclaves promoted the process of proletarianization with the creation of new social groups: *obrerros* who worked in banana plantations, and industrial workers in railways, factories, and ports. The banana enclave in Central America was characterized by the substantial control of foreign capital over other aspects than the production of bananas, such as transportation services – railway concessions and maritime transport– and the spaces for socialization and housing (Cano Sanchiz, 2017).

The creation and expansion of banana enclaves had important effects in Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama, where American multinationals based their companies. Meanwhile, the production of coffee took place predominantly in El Salvador and the Pacific zone of Guatemala.

During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, capital accumulation in Central America took the form of land concentration through dispossession and labor exploitation. Capital accumulation was enabled by the privatization of land, including the expulsion of native populations; foreign investment to produce export products; the introduction of technology to produce goods for the global market; and the build-up of a solid transportation and communication infrastructure between business centers and assembly plants within peripheral countries, and from those to core countries (Harvey, 2005; Massey et al., 1993; Pérez Díaz & García Hernández, 2019).

With the capitalist expansion, indigenous peoples were displaced, as their lands were used for the growth of export products, coffee, and bananas, forcing them to move to the nascent metropolitan areas (Morales Gamboa, 2013). For example, the US banana industry

owned about 1,000 acres of Honduran soil, leaving peasants without access to good soil (Nevins, 2016). Thus, landless peasants were integrated into the manufacturing industries, becoming proletarians, subject to multinationals (Pérez Díaz, 2019).

With the establishment of US-based banana companies in Central America, American companies also built railroads and their banking system (Nevins, 2016). The United Fruit Company (UFCO) was the most prominent American multinational corporation. It was created in the early 1900s and was responsible for exporting tropical and exotic fruits, mainly bananas, to the US and Europe. UFCO was founded in 1899 after Minor Keith merged his company Tropical Trading and Transport Company with the Boston Fruit Company. Its presence expanded throughout Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia, controlling almost 90% of the banana market (Kurtz-Phelan, 2008). The expansion of the corporation was enabled by the exploitation of agricultural workers, absorption of rival companies, land appropriation, bribes to Central American governments, and the cooperation of the American government. By the 1930s, the company owned 3.5 million acres in Central America and the Caribbean; in Guatemala, it was the largest landowner, employer, exporter, and owner of almost all railways in the country (Livingstone, 2013). The UFCO was partly responsible for the coup d'état of 1954 in Guatemala that was orchestrated with the help of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Immerman, 1982; Jones, 2019). The company's decline came in the 1970s when it was merged to become the United Brands Company. In 1984 it changed to Chiquita Brands International, a company that is still operating.

Large land concentrations were used to grow export-oriented products, displacing the production of corn, beans, and rice for subsistence. For example, the introduction of cotton caused significant disruptions to the peasant economy in the Pacific coastal region, particularly in El Salvador, as cotton displaced centers of corn production. The lack of access to land forced peasants, who had heavily relied on corn production for subsistence, into the cash economy

(Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991). At the same time, cotton production became mechanized, resulting in reduced demand for a labor force and leading to both unemployment and further migration.

The capital flow often leads to modernization in the production system in peripheral countries, that in turn causes a reduction in the demand for the labor force as mechanized production is less labor intensive. Citizens are then drawn into plantations and manufacturing areas, generating circular and seasonal migration patterns where production centers are located. Eventually, as the economies become linked to the global economy, fluctuations affect the production cycles, causing regional and extra-regional migration (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991). At the same time, modernization creates a class differentiation and the reconfiguration of social classes: industrial workers who specialize in manufacturing and transportation services, landless peasants that become agricultural proletarians subject to multinationals, and a new bourgeoisie of urban professionals (Pérez Díaz, 2019).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the modernization of the production system resulted in governments seizing lands where new industrial projects had gained value. These events set the conditions for seasonal migration, whereby small landless farmers temporarily migrated to the capitalist areas to harvest coffee, cotton, and bananas (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991). In Honduras, populations from the center migrated to the Coastal regions to crop bananas (Pérez Díaz, 2019). Other landless peasants moved to the outskirts of the metropolitan cities, establishing slums and informal settlements, and Salvadorans moved to Honduras to work in the banana plantations. According to Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes (2018), in 1930, about 25,000 Salvadorans were working in Honduras. By 1960, the number had multiplied more than ten times, reaching a total of 350,000. Later, they also moved to Guatemala and Nicaragua. In turn, Guatemalans started to migrate to Mexico, to the border state of Chiapas, as wages were higher and the cost of living was low (Monteforte Toledo, 1959 in Hamilton & Chinchilla,

1991 p. 84). Moreover, the shift to export agriculture was accompanied by increased livestock production to respond to the needs of the beef market in the US, linked to the growth of fast food chains (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991). Pérez Díaz and García Hernández (2019, p. 175) claim that the demand for raw materials in the US, far from generating benefits in Central America (exhibited in the well-being of the population and good salaries), created an asymmetric relation, whereby the developing nations were not able to achieve productive autonomy and product diversification, instead exacerbated the conditions of dependence to their respective single-crops.

The socioeconomic changes in Central America were enabled by permissive governments that allowed the establishment of multinational companies, by which the administrations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador received financial benefits. The companies received tax exemptions, railway concessions, and the support of the state. In Honduras, the US dominated the mining and banking sectors, reinforcing the weakness of Honduras's weak domestic business sector. Thus, the presence of foreign companies in Central America resulted in strong dependence on the US, as the Central American economies became linked to the fluctuations and demand of the US market.

The capitalist expansion creates tensions between the dispossessed and the states and between the workers subject to poor labor conditions that can ultimately escalate to uprisings or revolutions, which governments often repress. Likewise, these conflicts can lead to migration and refugee movements (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991). In the late 1960s and 1970s, citizens reacted to low wages, dire working conditions, and a lack of benefits (López Recinos, 2020). A series of social movements began, whereby peasant organizations contested land takeovers, labor unions demanded improved working conditions, protested food price increases, and questioned political alliances between the state and the multinationals (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; Pérez Díaz & García Hernández, 2019). The governments, backed up by

multinationals and the US, responded aggressively by violently repressing the movements and protests. The US and American companies financed the hiring of personnel, and training of police, military officers, and squads to repress and stop any attempt at social organization (Pérez Díaz, 2019).

Progressively, the industrialization model started to decline, and the economies contracted, leading to inequality, poverty, unemployment, and increased regional and extra-regional migration. The economic crisis that hit Latin America, accompanied by domestic problems and social agitation because of the poor management of the countries, set the scene for civil wars in the region, leading to high rates of violence and displacement.

Finally, the flow of capital is often accompanied by some political or military intervention. As capitalist economies gain access to peripheral economies, they are more likely to intervene politically or militarily, creating tensions, conflicts, and subsequent migratory and refugee movements. This is true, as the US intervention in Central America displaced thousands of people.

### ***2.1.2 Migration to the US, 1920-1970s***

In the 1940s and 1950s, migration was mainly internal (rural-urban) and intraregional, but gradually, citizens migrated to the US. Hamilton & Chinchilla (1991) detailed that in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of immigrants in the US more than doubled compared to those during the Second World War. One side effect of the establishment of the American multinationals in Central America was migration to the US (Fernández Casanueva et al., 2018; Sorensen, 2013). Hondurans -laid-off plantation workers and seamen- saw labor opportunities in the US ports, New Orleans, Boston, and New York, where Honduran products were shipped (López Recinos, 2020; Nevins, 2016; Sorensen, 2013). Salvadorans and Nicaraguans were recruited to work for the shipping lines in San Francisco (Menjívar, 2000). According to Menjívar (2000), the contacts developed throughout this period established the basis for

settlement for many Salvadorans in the Bay Area in San Francisco. In other words, the US presence in Central America and the roots of the Central American migration are very much linked (Nevins, 2016, para. 6)

Regarding the demographic composition, Morales Gamboa (2013) posits that internal migration was composed of family groups that moved between agricultural zones, whereas regional and extra-regional migration was more selective. Pérez Díaz (2019) argues that under temporary contracts, single men moved between agricultural areas according to the production cycle. However, the international labor market attracted mainly young rural men with limited schooling and low skill levels, aiming at industrial jobs, and some of the heads of families, mainly from lower socioeconomic status (Morales Gamboa, 2013). Others, particularly Hondurans, worked in the banana industry on the ships of the UFC that carried the banana to US ports. In the 1970s, the US demanded unskilled labor in the service and manufacturing industries. In contrast with the Mexican labor market, which was predominantly skewed towards working-age males, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a pronounced feminization of migration (Gutiérrez, ND). Saskia Sassen (1988), in her book, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*, provided a detailed account of the changes in the US labor market and further notes the increased participation of Hispanic women in the service and distributive sectors.

Sassen (1988) explained how during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a growth in low-wage jobs across sectors in the US. The supply of native low-wage labor considerably shrunk due to the end of rural-urban migration in the country and the politicization of low-wage workers, such as Black, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, women, and youth. Immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and Asia (predominantly from the Philippines, South Korea, and China) compensated for the lack of native low-wage workers. Hence, by the 1970s, the service, operative, manufacturing, and distribution sectors were partly occupied by Hispanic

immigrants. Rodriguez (1987) noted the incorporation of Salvadorans in the US and found that there were a significant number of Salvadoran women in Houston, many of whom worked as domestic workers.

Massey et al. (2002) argued that the imbalance between the low-wage labor supply and demand generated the long-run need for immigrants in developed societies. Likewise, Hamilton & Chinchilla (1991, p. 104) posited: “Immigration to the United States followed a pattern of ‘indirect’ labor recruitment as new Central American immigrants were absorbed into low-paying jobs in agriculture, industry, and the rapidly expanding service sectors in the 1970s and early 1980s.” Sassen (1988) observed that most immigrants settled in metropolitan areas such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. That is, global cities attracted a significant number of migrants given the need to employ workers across the service industry (as busboys, gardeners, servers, hotel, and restaurant workers, and in private houses doing repairs, restoration, cleaning, or caring) (Ramirez & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2009). This demography of migration was similar to what Menjivar (2000) observed: a large percentage of the Salvadoran population was located in San Francisco and Los Angeles. She explained that as San Francisco became a financial center, it also became a Mecca for immigrants. Most jobs were unstable, poorly paid, unskilled, and demanded long working hours. Migrants were concentrated in the service (restaurant, retail companies, child care) and construction industries. Rodriguez (1987) also found out that most Hispanic immigrants in Houston were employed in personal (domestic worker), transformative (construction and manufacturing businesses), distributive (retail businesses and transportation), and social services sectors (community worker).

Moreover, the formation of immigrant settlements in the US that occurred after the industrialization and urbanization of Central American countries furthered migration. As noted by Hamilton and Chinchilla (1991), by the 1980s, a large proportion of Central Americans had relatives or friends in the US. That is, social networks increase the likelihood of international

movement because they lower the costs and risks of the movement, provide shelter, access to various forms of employment, comfort, and support, and, most of the time, reduce the stress of relocation (Epstein, 2008; Massey et al., 1993; Menjívar, 2000; Rodriguez, 1987). In other words, Central Americans in the 1970s-1980s capitalized on the networks previously built. Social networks proved critical when choosing the migratory route and destination countries/states. Thus, Central American migration can be analyzed through WST, understanding how the US's intervention in Central America continued to produce displacement, and social networks theory by looking at the routes and destinations of migrants. They complement each other, as both look at different levels of analysis (macro and micro) and explain different elements of the migration process.

### ***2.1.3 Migration Linked to the Economic and Military Intervention of the US in Central America***

In the 1970s and 1980s, migration (and displacement) from Central America largely grew. It went from internal and regional to international migration. The transfer of capital and the political and military intervention of the US produced massive displacements. Migration in these years followed the reverse pattern of the flow of capital, whereby migrants migrated, primarily, to the US and, to a lesser extent, Mexico. That is to say, the links created between the economies facilitated the movement of merchandise, commodities, capital, and information and also promoted migration "by reducing the costs of movement along reverse paths" (Massey et al., 2002, p. 14). In other words, migration followed the direction of capital in the opposite direction (Massey et al., 1993).

The arrival of Central Americans to the US intensified after the escalation of political and economic tensions and the subsequent outbreak of the civil wars in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador in 1960-1996, 1979-1990, and 1980-1992 respectively (Blanchard et al., 2011; Gutiérrez, ND; Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; París Pombo, 2017; Pérez Díaz, 2019; Stanley,

1987; Vogt, 2020; Wade, 2008). In those years, Honduras received thousands of Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and Guatemalan refugees fleeing repression, persecution, and political violence (Sorensen, 2013); most Guatemalans, however, sought refuge in Mexico and, to a lesser extent in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the US. As the wars deepened and spread, Salvadorans and Nicaraguans also fled to Mexico and the US (París Pombo, 2017).

The civil wars in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador (Blanchard et al., 2011; Gutiérrez, ND; Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; París Pombo, 2017; Pérez Díaz, 2019; Stanley, 1987; Vogt, 2020; Wade, 2008) took place in the last phase of the Cold War, “in the midst of a strategy developed by the US to *eradicate* any communist threat in the American continent<sup>1</sup>” (original emphasis) (París Pombo, 2017, p. 46). According to París Pombo (2017), the strategy sought to eliminate *guerrilla* movements and control populations through state terror in the name of national security. Cecilia Menjívar and Nestor Rodríguez (2005), in their book, *When States Kill: Latin America, the US, and Technologies of Terror*, analyze the influence of the US on political violence as a mechanism for control employed by Latin American countries. The authors explain that some countries were eager to receive US support for their campaigns on terror, whereas others were pressured to do so. In their words, “The US did not unilaterally implement a system of terror across the continent but was able to do so with the cooperation and, to a large extent, due to a coincidence of interests and objectives with the local military, and with political and economic elites” (Menjívar & Rodríguez, 2005, p. 3). In terms of how violence was perpetrated, the authors argue, “Latin American countries have practiced direct forms of terror, including torture and punishment, not in a primitive or ‘traditional manner,’ but in a politically rational, calculated, modern fashion” (Menjívar & Rodríguez, 2005, p. 1). State

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<sup>1</sup> “[E]n el marco de la cruzada del gobierno estadounidense para *erradicar* cualquier amenaza comunista en el continente americano” (París Pombo, 2017, p. 46).

terror often included forced disappearances, death squads, prolonged detention, torture, massacres, and psychological and physical trauma.

In line with its own interests, the US *collaborated* with the elites, local military, and governments of the region, which included the participation of US high-ranking officials from multiple government agencies with extensive military experience (Menjívar & Rodríguez, 2005). Throughout the wars, the US sponsored programs aimed to train military and police forces to carry out counterinsurgency activities, including interrogation, assassination, and torture, often at US facilities or in Latin American countries (particularly in Panama, where the US Army School for the Americas (SOA) was established), and supplied military equipment (M-16 rifles and others).

In El Salvador, 1980 marked the beginning of the Civil War and massive internal and external displacement. Tensions escalated after the announcement of very controversial land reform in 1979 and the siege of rural areas that prompted military and paramilitary sweeps in the countryside (Stanley, 1987). Different marches and public demonstrations attracted thousands to the streets demanding rights, protesting violations, and urging the reform of the social, economic, and political systems (Todd, 2010). The killings of the priest Oscar Romero in 1980 (who was one of the most active opponents of the totalitarian and oppressive regime) and the Jesuits of the Central American University (UCA) in San Salvador in 1989 also caused significant outrage and protests (París Pombo, 2017).

The state's response to its opponents was highly violent, taking the form of death squads, repression, rape, and other acts of violence and terror. According to William Stanley (1987, p. 136), "killings by the military and paramilitary forces have been accompanied by widespread torture, rape, forced 'disappearance,' and the destruction of vital crops and property. Much violence has been random, designed to terrorize the population into submission."

Further, Stanley (1987) analyzed the relationship between apprehensions of migrants in the US, violence, and the economic crisis in El Salvador. He noted that there was a sharp increase in the number of arrivals<sup>2</sup> in the prelude and first years of the war, 1979-1981, related to the economic contraction of 1980 and the increase of death-squad activity in El Salvador (see table 1). He explained that the high number of apprehensions by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)<sup>3</sup> coincided with a decrease in real GDP per capita in El Salvador and a rise in political murder. The violence was also related to later arrivals; he explained, "notably, INS apprehensions declined as the level of political murder dropped off in 1982, and they soared again in 1983 and 1984 when military sweep operations became larger and more frequent in El Salvador" (Stanley, 1987, p. 134).

Massacres and human rights violations continued throughout the war, with *campesinos* the most affected. Molly Todd (2010, p. 53) states that in 1992, more than 95% of the reported cases of violence had occurred in rural areas. In the 1980s decade, it is said that more than three-quarters of a million Salvadorans fled to the US, Mexico, and nearby countries, and thousands were internally displaced. In other words, during the war period, more than a quarter of the total Salvadoran population was internally or externally displaced (Stanley, 1987; Todd, 2010).

Table 2.1 shows that the number of arrivals increased dramatically before and during the bloody civil wars. There seems to be a relationship between increased violence and the number of people leaving the countries. Second, the number of Hondurans arriving in the US is significantly lower than its counterparts; even when Honduras faced poverty and inequality

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<sup>2</sup> Because of its very nature as undocumented, it is difficult to obtain accurate data on undocumented migration; thus, other indicators are used as proxies to measure the arrivals. Apprehensions, in this case, are used to extrapolate the number of arrivals to the US.

<sup>3</sup> The Immigration and Naturalization Service was an agency of the Department of Justice until 2003 when its functions were transferred to the newly created entities: US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security after the restructuring of the government that followed the events of 9/11.

during the 1980s decade, Hondurans only started to migrate on a larger scale in the 1990s after Hurricane Mitch hit the country in 1998 (Sorensen, 2013). Third, El Salvador has the highest number of externally displaced people among the countries compared.

**Table 2.1**

*Apprehensions by the US Customs and Border Patrol, FY 1979-1990*

Fiscal Year	Countries			Total Apprehensions
	Honduras	Guatemala	El Salvador	
1978			5191	862,837
1979			7,109	888,729
1980			9,839	759,420
1981			9,996	825,290
1982			7,398	819,919
1983			9892	1,105,670
1984			11,916	1,138,566
1985				1,262,435
1986				1,692,54
1987	2,606	6,722	9,780	1,158,030
1988	3,943	9246	14,322	969,214
1989	7,133	13,343	20,251	891,147
1990	5,695	9,707	16,963	1,103,353

Source: By the author with information from (the Department of Homeland Security, 2019; Frelick, 1991; Stanley, 1987).

*Note:* The blank spaces suggest that there is no available data for those years.

Guatemalans sought refuge as the war expanded and deepened, particularly in Mexico (París Pombo, 2017). The worst affected were indigenous *campesinos*, the group most often targeted by the government. According to Frelick (1991), between 1981-1984, thousands of people crossed the Mexico-Guatemala border. The immediate reaction of the Mexican government was to deport them *en masse*, resulting in significant national and international outrage. The action was severely criticized by human rights activists, who demanded better treatment and conditions for Guatemalans. Hundreds of shelters, associations and groups urged the government to respect the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers. After the events, the government shifted its policy and, together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), started to build the first refugee camps in Chiapas. By 1984, more

than 92 camps sheltered more than 46,000 people (París Pombo, 2017, p. 56). The closeness to and relative ease of crossing the border allowed Guatemalan paramilitary forces to enter the country and kill refugees in Mexico. In response, the Mexican government relocated more than 18,000 Guatemalans to Quintana Roo and Campeche states, who were ultimately allowed to stay in the country and were assisted by the Mexican Commission for Assistance to Refugees (for its Spanish acronym COMAR) and UNHCR (Frelick, 1991; París Pombo, 2017).

París Pambo (2017, p. 46) details that during the brief government of Guatemalan president Ríos Mont (March 1982- August 1983), indigenous Mayans were particularly affected by the war; they were perceived as the “enemy of the state.” In this period, about 70,000 Mayans were assassinated in the *Altiplano* (highlands), and more than one million people were internally displaced from their communities; out of those, 200 000 sought refuge in nearby countries and many more moved to the outskirts of Guatemala City. In turn, their lands were used by multinational corporations, with the support of military governments, for livestock, mining, and oil production.

The thirty-six years of the Guatemalan civil war caused the murder or forcible disappearance of more than 200,000 people, 93% of them by state forces. It also caused significant displacement to other countries (Konefal & Tandeciarz, 2014, p. 88). In the years that followed the Peace Accords, the United Nations Truth Commission ruled that the Guatemalan government was responsible for “acts of genocide” in parts of the highland regions. However, the government denied all accusations, and the official narrative remained unchanged. Those who opposed the government remained labeled as “terrorists” and “subversives.” After the war ended, Guatemalans denounced criminal state violence and exhumed clandestine graves all over the country (*ibid*).

Honduras did not have a civil war but witnessed significant human rights violations by the State (París Pombo, 2017). The country was the first to transition from military to civil

government in the region; however, the military forces retained power throughout the decade (Sosa, 2015). In the 1980s, the country went through a militarization financed by the US, as Honduras became the military operation center, where the US counterinsurgency activities were designed (targeting El Salvador's *guerrillas* and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua). The US supported the *Contra* movement created in opposition to the Nicaraguan *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN), as it was considered a threat given its left-leaning political alignment and ideology. In 1984 the Reagan administration approved a budget of \$24 million for military aid to the *Contras* (Hernández, 2010, p. 91). The establishment of the US in Honduras included the construction of airports and military bases, training of military and police forces, and deploying US officials. Between 1982 and 1987, the Reagan administration transferred 58 million to Honduras for military aid and about 141 million for economic aid, including funds for military infrastructure on an annual basis (París Pombo, 2017, p. 51). Eugenio Sosa (2015, p. 11) states that during this period, "the Honduran Armed Forces (FAH) were more corrupt than repressive, as they received \$1288 million in aid, 30% of which was strictly military aid." These actions bolstered the militarization of Honduran society (Nevins, 2022).

Like the El Salvadoran and Guatemalan, the Honduran state was responsible for the disappearance, rape, torture, hostile interrogations, illegal detentions, political assassinations, and human rights violations of hundreds of civilians who opposed the state and its repressive policies (Aaronson & Bullard, 2017; Nevins, 2016).

Further, the US government led a secret operation, Iran-Contra, by which the CIA and other government agencies sought funding from third parties in exchange for political concessions. The operation used the money received from the sale of weapons to Iran for the training, funding, and supply of illegal weapons to the *contras*. The *contras* also received funding from drug cartels. Anabel Hernández (2010), in her book *Los señores del narco* (Narco

Lords), explains the details of such an operation. She argues that the “airplanes that left the US with supposedly humanitarian assistance to *La Contra* –medicines and weapons– returned loaded with drugs, mainly, from Colombia<sup>4</sup>” (Hernández, 2010, p. 92). The US allowed drug traffickers from the Pacific and Medellín cartels to carry drugs in exchange for money, weapons, airplanes, pilots, and other services, to finance the *Contra*. The details of such operations were revealed in 1989 after an investigation led by Senator John Kerry (*Ibid*). The operations created long-term problems in Honduras that continue today, such as the proliferation of weapons and drug trafficking (París Pombo, 2017).

In line with its role as a military base for the counterinsurgency in the region, Honduras needed to ensure a peaceful environment. Thus, the state developed a strategy of what Sosa calls "selective repression," whereby leaders and political opponents were forcibly disappeared and killed to avoid the outbreak of insurgent movements throughout the country. That is, the state did not terrorize the general population, as in the case of El Salvador; instead, it exercised "early and effective violence" (Sosa, 2015, p. 11).

In 1982, the passing of a law that prohibited labor unions and *campesino* organizations was accompanied by the use of death squads to eliminate subversive practices (BBC News, 2018a; París Pombo, 2017). In 1994, Human Rights Watch, in collaboration with the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), reviewed the behavior of the Honduran and US governments, particularly the CIA-trained military death squad 3-16 Battalion, accusing the government (and the military) of forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, and other repressive policies (Aaronson & Bullard, 2017). The Honduran government acknowledged the human rights violations but did not hold anyone accountable for the atrocities.

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<sup>4</sup> “Los aviones que despegaban de Estados Unidos con supuesta ayuda humanitaria para los *contras* -consistente en medicinas y armas- regresaban cargados de droga que procedía principalmente de Colombia” (Hernández, 2010, p. 92).

In sum, Torres Rivas (2011, p. 73 in París Pambo, 2017, p. 41) stated that the wars left a toll of more than 400,000 people murdered or forcibly displaced; 300,000 injured or handicapped; 2,000,000 internally displaced, and an even higher number of externally displaced people. After the wars, the countries began processes of reconstruction of their democracies and economies. However, even when there was economic growth, it was clear that “inequality has increased, and with that social exclusion, informality, and power and money accumulation” (Torres Rivas, 2010, p. 53).

#### ***2.1.4 Migration Linked to the Economic Restructuring and the Implementation of the Neoliberal Model, 1990-2020***

One side effect of the civil wars was international migration and displacement. The enactment of the new economic policies in the Northern Triangle of Central America led to profound inequality, poverty, and extra-regional migration. In the years that followed the wars, Guatemalans fled to Mexico and the US, whereas Salvadorans moved primarily to the US. Hondurans migrated mainly at the end of the 1990s to the US.

The economic crisis that hit all of Latin America in the 1980s, the restructuring of the economies, and the subsequent adoption of a neoliberal model, coupled with profound inequalities caused by the civil wars, exacerbated the already precarious condition of the countries. The Peace Accords signed in 1992 and 1996 (El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively) did not provide the peace and economic stability that was much needed. Instead, the right-wing parties that came to power in the 1990s in the three countries of the NTCA enacted neoliberal policies that only contributed to accelerating the socioeconomic crisis and created new challenges for peace (Sorensen, 2013; Wade, 2008).

The capitalist reshuffling of the 1990s was rooted in an expanded mode of profit extraction made possible by (de)regulatory policies, including the privatization, and lifting of tariffs on imports and the transformation of growing areas of the world into zones for extraction

(whether in the form of labor or natural resources). In other words, the capitalist mode allowed the commodification of labor and nature.

The enactment of neoliberal policies caused widespread migration, poverty, inequality, and unemployment in different Latin American countries, such as Mexico<sup>5</sup>, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Anguiano Téllez, 2005; Hernández-León, 2008; Liverman & Vilas, 2006; Nadal, 2000; Sosa, 2015; Wade, 2008) and other parts of the world (Azmanova, 2020; Harvey, 2005; Sassen, 2014). Some of the most significant changes introduced with the model included the reduction of social expenditure, including a decrease in agricultural subsidies and programs, land reforms, privatization of lands, tariff reductions, application of new taxes, and participation in bilateral or trilateral free trade agreements. In other words, the capitalist expansion of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century took new forms. It used new tools to increase extraction and profits, furthering poverty, labor exploitation, and displacement.

The Reagan administration promoted the passing of neoliberal policies in Central America. It pushed for the restructuring of the Honduran economy and the regularization of the global coffee trade, upon which Hondurans heavily depended. These changes brought about disruption in traditional forms of agriculture and worsened the social nets (Nevins, 2016).

In the case of Honduras, migration primarily increased in the 1990s. In conjunction with the oligarchy and elites, the right-wing administrations promoted the first structural adjustment package that affected the most vulnerable populations in the country. The neoliberal model was introduced in 1990 under Rafael Calleja's administration. Under the model, new economic policies were implemented, including the devaluation of the currency (*lempira*), tariff reductions, increased sale taxes, and tax on the production of oil, sugar, beer, matches, and other staples (Sosa, 2015). Calleja promoted the liberalization of the economy through the

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of the effects of the neoliberal policies in Mexico, see (Anguiano Téllez, 2005; Hernández-León, 2008; Nadal, 2000; Rizzo Lara, 2012).

elimination and reduction of import tariffs and protectionist policies. The actions led to an increase in the price of fuels and subsequently in electricity, public transport, and services (*Ibid*). The land reform also caused struggles, as it allowed land accumulation by multinationals and elites. Indigenous groups and *campesinos* were dispossessed of their lands, which were used to grow market-oriented products. In turn, the government promoted direct foreign investment and eased the requirements for foreign land tenure (*Ibid*).

Further, Sosa (2015) explains that the affected populations opposed the reforms through various mobilizations and collective actions across the country that were led by *campesino* organizations, labor unions, and urban settlers. Again, the state responded with violence; it repressed the movements and co-opted social organizations, causing severe damage to social organization efforts and capacities. Other groups also raised their voice against the measures, such as *maquila* and teachers' unions. Large protests led by students, indigenous groups, mainly *Garifona*, and environmental and women's groups also took place.

*Maquiladora (maquila)* is a kind of factory that was installed in Central America by the US to dynamize economies. It originated in 1976 when the Honduran state promoted areas of the free market in Puerto Cortés and then across the country. The factories benefited employers, as they were exempt from taxes and tariff reductions. At the same time, employers paid low salaries and demanded long working hours. The *maquila* industry was largely promoted in the 1990s by the Honduran state and the US. Still, far from generating well-being and progress, it aggravated the situation of poverty and precarity (Pérez Díaz, 2019).

The economic crisis was exacerbated by Hurricane Mitch, which hit Honduras in 1998. According to official figures, the death toll was about 6,000, and more than 8,000 disappearances. The losses were estimated at 81.6% of the total GDP, about \$3,793.6 million; more than 50,000 houses were destroyed, and 35,000 more got damaged (Sosa, 2015). Amid the chaos, Honduras received economic aid from different donors, the foreign debt was

canceled, and the participation of various sectors of the civil society was reactivated. However, the structural problems worsened as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and insecurity increased (Sorensen, 2013). By 2012, more than 60% of the population lived in poverty, and 40% lived in extreme poverty. The economy has been stagnant, and the growth in the years that followed the reconstruction of the country has been relatively small in contrast with the long-standing economic problems and inflation (Sosa, 2015).

Alongside poverty and unemployment, violence grew. The hurricane exposed the structural problems of Honduran society and revealed new ones, such as corruption, the impunity of the state and elites, the growth of the informal sector, and an increase in insecurity and violence (Sorensen, 2013; Sosa, 2015). The expansion of the *Maras* (gangs) in the country also contributed to increased violence, becoming a relevant driver of migration.

The term *Maras* refers to criminal gangs. In 1996, the US started the deportation of immigrants born in Central America that had been convicted of felonies, many of whom were part of the most violent urban gangs in the US (Menjívar & Gómez Cervantes, 2018; Pérez Díaz, 2019). The *Mara Salvatrucha*, MS-13, the biggest gang, was founded in the poor, marginalized neighborhoods of Los Angeles at the end of the 1980s. They grew out of conflicts between them and other gangs that proliferated in the area. Once in Central America, the deportees found the perfect storm that enabled the expansion of the *Maras* throughout the region. In the words of Insight Crime, "the convicts had little chance of integrating into legitimate society, and they often turned to gang life. In this way, the decision to use immigration policy as an anti-gang tool helped spawn the virulent growth of the gang in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala" (InSight Crime, 2019a). In 2012, the US designated the MS-13 as a transnational criminal organization. According to figures, about 20,000 criminals were deported to Central America between 2000-2004 (*Ibid*).

The wave of violence that started in the late 1990s, after the deportation of the *Maras*, has intensified and has spread around the region. In 2016, El Salvador ranked no. 1 in the homicide rate in Latin America, with 81.2 murders per 100,000 inhabitants (Dalby & Carranza, 2019). In the same vein, San Pedro Sula was the most violent city in the world in 2014, with a murder rate of 142 for every 100,000 inhabitants. Although the numbers decreased in the following years, violence is still taking the lives of thousands of people every year. For instance, in the first two weeks of 2019 in Honduras, there were eight massacres, evidencing ongoing gang violence, corruption and impunity for specific sectors of society, and other failures of the rule of law (Dalby & Carranza, 2019). Most of the murders have been associated with gang activity by the *MS-13* and *Barrio 18*.

The *Maras* are present in the NTCA, Mexico, and the US. It is calculated that El Salvador has a total of 62,000 *pandilleros* (Martínez et al., 2020). In Honduras, the story is similar. According to El País, more than 70,000 *pandilleros* are part of the *MS-13*, *Barrio 18*, and other smaller gangs (El País, 2018). Guatemala also has a significant presence of gangs, as it was estimated that in 2012 there were 22,000 members, which has most likely increased (Linde, 2018).

The *Maras* are experts in organized crime. Among the repertoire of illegal activities, they perform robberies, drug, and human trafficking, money laundering, extortion, forced recruitment, and physical violence, often in the form of rape, torture, beatings, and killings (Correa Letelier, 2009; InSight Crime, 2019a). Out of those, extortion has become a lucrative business. El Salvador tops the NTCA countries, as it is estimated that citizens pay out about \$400 million a year (Dalby, 2019), and 70% of businesses pay some extortion (InSight Crime, 2019b). The most affected sectors are small businesses and public transport services, but even street vendors are forced to pay daily amounts. These amounts regularly increase to the point that people cannot pay, forcing them to go out of business, relocate internally or leave the

country, while others less fortunate are killed (InSight Crime, 2019c; A. Torres & Fuentes, 2019). *Maras* use the money to finance other activities, such as gun purchases, narco-trafficking, and infrastructure (InSight Crime, 2019c).

The government's lack of will to address the root causes of insecurity and violence is also reflected in the level of corruption and impunity, as 95% of reported cases of homicide are not prosecuted (Azan Ahmed, 2019). Given this scenario, thousands have left for the US.

In the case of El Salvador, migration grew exponentially after the war. As figures indicate, the 1995-2005 decade displayed the highest out-migration rates in the region (Rodríguez Chávez, 2016; Wilson et al., 2019). Wade (2008) argued that Salvadorans left the country for employment opportunities and quality of life. The neoliberal model failed to develop a productive, self-sufficient economy, which led to migration (particularly to the US) in more significant numbers than during the war. Poverty levels in 1995 went from 52.9 to 58.1 in 1996, and extreme poverty and inequality also increased in impressive numbers throughout the decade (Wade, 2008, p. 24).

The civil war was rooted in structural inequalities, political instability, and repression of those seeking to address existing inequalities. As such, the Peace Accords targeted the state's assumed impunity and its continuing practices of repression through policing, military, and judicial reforms; however, they did not tackle the socioeconomic inequalities that preceded the war nor the possible outcomes of the implementation of the neoliberal model (Wade, 2008). In turn, the liberal administrations that governed El Salvador in the 1990s and through the 2000s deepened the already precarious situation of the country.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the migrant Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations in the US grew the fastest, but in the 1990s, the Honduran population experienced the most rapid growth (Blanchard et al., 2011). After hurricane Mitch in 1999, the US granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Hondurans, a legal instrument that allowed them to stay in the

country and work and relieved them from deportation, but did not lead to permanent legal status (Blanchard et al., 2011; López Recinos, 2020; Sorensen, 2013). In 2009, more than 66,000 Hondurans had TPS (Sorensen, 2013). Moreover, Blanchard et al. (2011, p. 65) found that “the emigration ratio from Honduras quadrupled over the 1990-2009 interval, outpacing growth from other nations” (see table 2.2). In other words, Honduras went from being a country of immigrants – political refugees from Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala – to a country of mass migration during the 1990s and onwards (López Recinos, 2020; Sorensen, 2013).

**Table 2.2**

*US Immigrant Population by country of birth, 1960-2019*

Country	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019
El Salvador	6,310	15,717	94,447	465,433	817,336	1,214,049	1,412,101
Guatemala	5,381	17,356	63,073	225,739	480,665	830,824	1,111,495
Honduras	6,503	19,118	39,154	108,923	282,852	522,581	745,838
Nicaragua	9,474	16,125	44,166	168,659	220,335	247,593	257,343

Source: By the author with information from (Migration Policy Institute, 2019)

The migration growth coincides with the number of migrants in transit through Mexico. Ernesto Rodríguez Chávez (2016) shows how migration intensified in 1999, reaching a peak in 2005; the flows decreased after the 2008 US financial crisis but again increased in 2013 and 2014. The figures are also consistent with the increase in the number of apprehensions by the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in the 1999 and 2000 FY, as there was a record of 1,579,010 and 1,676,438 apprehensions, respectively, in contrast with 1,103,353 apprehensions in 1990 (Department of Homeland Security, 2019). Rodríguez Chávez (2016) states that the migration flows can be explained in terms of the historical relationship between the countries and the US, the social networks built over the years, and the functions of the labor market.

To summarize, migration over this phase (1990-2020) has been greatly influenced by the adoption of neoliberal policies and the different forms of the US intervention in Central

America under the logic of capitalism. The result has been unemployment, poverty, inequality, violence, political instability, and corruption. Due to these, citizens from different social classes and backgrounds have undertaken international movement using social networks.

### ***2.1.5 Current Immigrant Population in the US***

Despite some advances, the NTCA countries still face the same problems as in the 1990s, and some have even been accentuated. They exhibit high levels of emigration, a large presence of cartels and organized crime, and high rates of inequality, poverty, violence, and political instability, driving the countries to protests and collective actions against the political system, particularly in Honduras.

The effects of the US intervention remain and Central Americans have continued to embark on a journey to the US. In the 1990-2016 period, the Salvadoran population in the US nearly tripled, going from 465,000 to 1,387,000, making it the largest Central American immigrant group. According to the Pew Hispanic Center figures, 2.3 million Hispanics of Salvadoran origin were living in the US in 2017, including immigrants and those born in the US to Salvadoran parents (Noe Bustamante et al., 2019a). In other words, since the 2000s, the Salvadoran-origin population has increased by 225 percent, growing from 711,000 to 2.3 million. This diaspora<sup>6</sup> accounted for four percent of the US Hispanic population in 2017.

In the 2000-2017 period, the Honduran foreign-born population grew by 215 percent, from 184,000 in 2000 to 579,000 in 2017 (Noe Bustamante et al., 2019c). Whereas the Honduran diaspora grew 296 percent, from 237,000 to 940,000 over the same period. In the 2000s, immigration rates dropped<sup>7</sup>, but migration from Honduras grew in the second half of the decade (see Blanchard et al., 2011; López Recinos, 2020).

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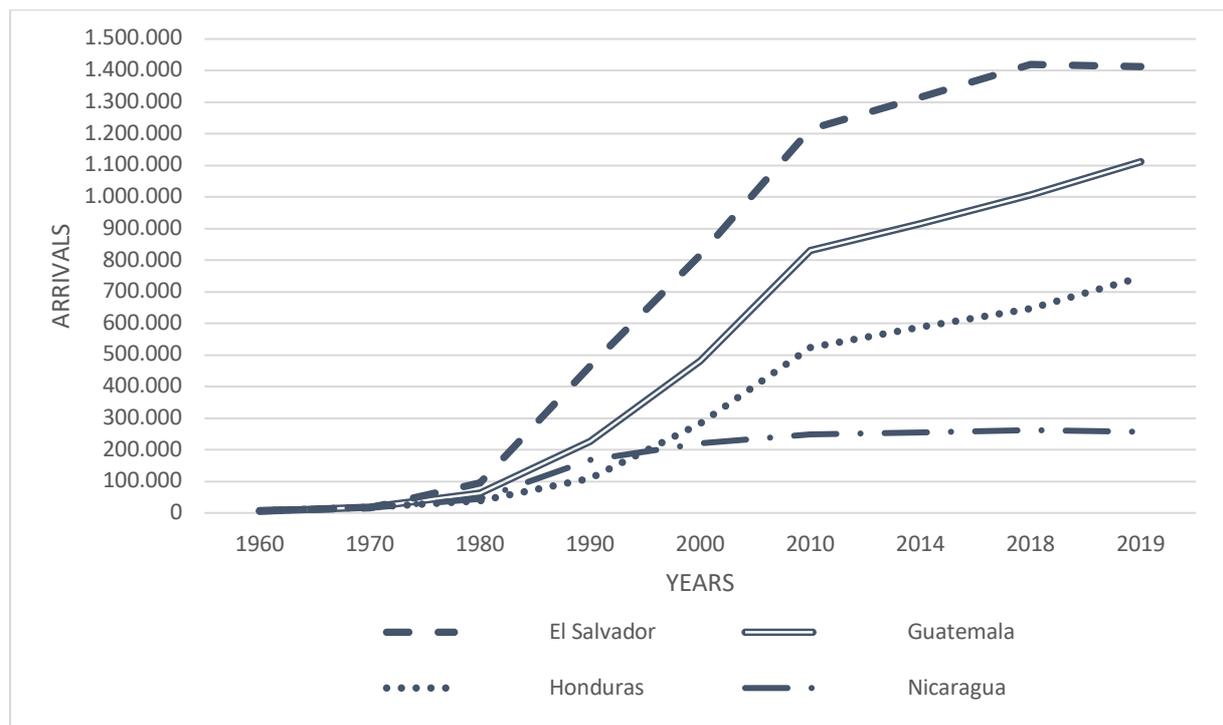
<sup>6</sup> The term diaspora is applied to account for the first, second, or third generation of migrants. Here, the term compiles Salvadoran migrants and those born in the US to Salvadoran parents.

<sup>7</sup> The economic recession of 2007 and 2008 in the US had an important impact on the number of arrivals; the data show that migration from Latin American countries, such as Mexico, largely decreased, whereas migration from the NTCA increased in 2013 and onwards (Durand, 2013; Wilson et al., 2019)

Blanchard et al. (2011) state there were more than 750,000 Guatemalans in the US in 2009; that is, the foreign-born population more than tripled, as in 1990, there were 225,739 Guatemalans (see Figure 2.1). Data from the Migration Policy Institute suggest that in 2010, there were 830,824 people, and in 2019, the population surpassed one million (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). That is, the immigrant population experienced major growth in the 1990-2010 period and has continued to grow, although at a slower pace over the last decade. In 2017, the Guatemalan diaspora was the sixth largest Hispanic group in the US, accounting for 1.4 million and two percent of the Hispanic population (Noe Bustamante et al., 2019b).

**Figure 2.1**

*The immigrant population in the US by country of origin, 1970-2019*



Source: elaborated by the author with information from Migration Policy Institute (2019)

Figure 2.1 is useful to appreciate the trends of the immigrant populations from the NTCA to the US over the 1970-2019 period. There are three patterns to note. First, there has been a dramatic growth in the immigrant population over the last five decades, which coincides with the displacement caused by armed conflicts and the expansion of the neoliberal model in

Latin America. Second, the Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrant populations soared in the 1980s-2010s decades, in contrast with the Honduran immigrant population that boosted in the 1990s. In the 2000-2010 period, the size of the Guatemalan and Honduran populations in the US more than doubled. Third, in the 2010 decade, the immigration rates decreased for all populations, which coincided with the tightening of the border and immigration enforcement policies and programs, and thus with an increase in the number of apprehensions and deportations. According to Blanchard et al. (2011, p. 66), the Border Patrol's budget went from 1 billion in 1990 to 3 billion in 2010; as such, border patrol officers quadrupled from 4,000 in 1992 to more than 16,000 in 2010. The BP's budget has continued to increase, and so has the number of officers. For instance, in 2020, there were almost 20,000 Border Patrol agents nationwide, and about 17,000 of them were in the Southwest border sectors; that is, about 85 percent of the total were located on the US-Mexico border (US Customs and Border Protection, 2021).

In sum, capital penetration causes disruptions in the economic, political, and social organization of the local society, resulting in displacements. Whether attracted by living standards, work opportunities, or to seek refuge due to repression by the state, people are most likely to migrate to developed nations that are familiar to them, given colonial links, proximity, or because of the influence generated by the presence and intervention of core countries in developing nations. WST uses a macro level of analysis, useful to understand past patterns of migration, focusing on structural factors and the expansion of capitalism (and intervention), and Networks theory allows us to understand the perpetuation of migration; however, the latest developments in migration, migration in caravans, are not easily explained by these existing theories. The next section engages in the different characteristics of the caravan and calls for a different approach to analyzing it.

## **2.2 New Form of Migration: Migrant Caravans**

After the arrival of thousands of migrants in Mexico and the US in the 1980s, the US and Mexico started to implement a series of measures to curb the arrival of undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees from Central America. The next section will explain what programs were implemented and their effects. This will shed light on the need to create new forms of migration that would allow migrants to cross the countries as the policies employed restricted their freedom of movement.

### ***2.2.1 Migration Control in Mexico and the US***

This section of the thesis has been redacted as its content appear in the following article:

Rosario de la Luz Rizzo Lara (2022) Managing Irregularized Migration in Mexico: Rhetoric of a Renewed Approach, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/08865655.2022.2115391

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### ***2.2.1 The October 2018 Migrant Caravan***

Central Americans have migrated to the US for decades and the way they had done it had remained relatively the same since at least the 1980s. That is, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers have used routes established throughout the years, social networks, *coyotes*, and the advantages of technology –such as cell phones – (Zijlstra & Van Liempt, 2017) to cross into Mexico and the US. *Coyote*<sup>8</sup> refers to a human smuggler. Alonso Meneses contends that *coyotes* "have facilitated" clandestine crossings from Mexico to the US for decades. Early

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<sup>8</sup> *Pollero* is another term for a smuggler and is used interchangeably. For a more detailed account of migrants' and coyotes' experiences, see Spener (2009).

accounts of their presence at the US- Mexico border go back to the 1920s. He states that coyotes also acted as mediators between employers and migrants (Alonso Meneses, 2010). Wendy Vogt (2020, p. 8) argues that coyotes are often seen as facilitators, guides, and even protectors, and migrants depend on them for their connections, information, and knowledge about the route. The relationship between the migrant and smuggler is unique and complex compared to other illegal transactions because migrants usually entrust their lives and safety to a clandestine actor (Slack & Martínez, 2018). More recently, smugglers have been associated with organized crime that operates in Mexico, particularly in Veracruz and Tamaulipas. Also, it has been argued that organized crime has taken over the routes usually used by migrants while demanding coyotes and migrants for "taxes" to cross the territory (Vogt, 2020). Migrants have reported to be abandoned by their coyotes; been sexually assaulted; or held captive (Hernández Campos & Torre Cantalapiedra, 2022; Slack & Martínez, 2018).

Central American migrants have largely used coyotes to cross Mexico to reach the US; however, the securitization implemented by Mexico and the US has caused a significant increase in the cost of coyotes. For instance, in 2018, the cost to cross Mexico was about 7,000 US dollars per person (Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). Recently, the prices have increased, and coyotes charge up to 15,000 dollars for the trip (Jordan, 2020). The price increase has forced migrants, especially Hondurans, to take on different alternatives for crossing.

For decades, to remain invisible, given their status as irregular and undocumented, migrants have traveled individually or in small groups, taking the less surveilled routes, at dawn or at night, walking or in the back of large vans, through the desert, secretly and making use of the available resources, such as networks, religious organizations, community-based shelters, intermediaries, and coyotes. París Pombo (2018a) and Sorensen (2013) explain that groups were usually formed of family, acquaintances, and friends of three to eight people. Often, migrants find other migrants during the trail and thus create small networks for safety and

communication (Díaz de León, 2020). Nevertheless, there has been an important change in the *form* of how people are migrating. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, a group of around 500 people left the bus station in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to walk jointly to the US (Arroyo et al., 2018; Gandini et al., 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021). As they moved forward, thousands more joined. About a week after the departure, more than 5,000 people arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala border requesting that the Mexican government let them cross into the country (Ahmed et al., 2018; Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano, 2019; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018). This group was labeled the "Migrant Caravan.". Despite the harsh treatment by the Mexican government in Chiapas, where migrants were welcomed with tear gas and military troops, thousands continued to walk together, aiming to reach the US (Prensa, 2018).

Migrants walked in groups along the migratory route. They stopped to rest and reorganize in different cities, mainly in the Southern states of Mexico. Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Veracruz witnessed the crossing of thousands that participated in the caravan. Asking for rides and walking, caravan members arrived in Mexico City after weeks of leaving San Pedro Sula. From there, most of the group traveled to Tijuana, aiming to cross into the US and apply for asylum (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018; Pradilla, 2019).

Following the footsteps of the migrant caravan, more groups in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala were formed in the following months. In January 2019, new groups of thousands of people from the NTCA entered Mexican soil with the same purpose (Animal Político, 2019; Pradilla, 2020). The caravans of 2019 arrived in different cities across the US-Mexico border. Caravans arrived in Piedras Negras, Tamaulipas, and Ciudad Juárez (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021). In January 2020, following the steps of previous caravans, new groups of Central Americans arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala Border (Pradilla, 2020). However, the latter was blocked by immigration officers, and military and national guard officials. Amid the

coronavirus crisis, in June 2020, more groups in Central America formed to go to Mexico and the US, without success, as the Honduran and Guatemalan governments stopped them. In 2021 and 2022, new caravans began in Central America and the south of Mexico, aiming to cross Mexico and leave Chiapas, respectively.

Central Americans, who for years had been victims of torture, rapes, kidnappings, disappearances, arbitrary detention, and denial of access to regularization and asylum procedures, walked together for more than 3,000 kilometers demanding that the Mexican government allow them to cross the country to stay there or reach the US-Mexico border, where they could apply for asylum.

Some of the characteristics the caravans of 2018 displayed were a) large groups of people moving together; b) some degree of planning and organization; c) in general, weak ties between group members; d) public as opposed to clandestine migration; e) a certain degree of inclusiveness, as people from different nationalities, genders and sexual orientations comprised these large groups; f) the use of social media to gather people; and g) the groups had specific political and social claims (Cordero Díaz & Garibo García, 2019; Garibo García & Call, 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020; Varela Huerta, 2018; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019).

These flows do not take the form of the traditional undocumented, secret, and clandestine migration from Central America that has been largely studied (Blanchard et al., 2011; Guerette & Clarke, 2005; Massey et al., 1993; Menjívar, 2000; París Pombo, 2017; Rodriguez, 1987; Sorensen, 2013; Spener, 2009). That is, the groups have changed considerably from the patterns that were observed in the above sections. For decades, Central American migration consisted of individuals or small groups of migrants, in contrast, the caravan comprised groups of 4,000-5,000 people. The demographic composition of the caravan also differed: traditionally, a large share of undocumented migrants was single, young men,

followed by young women, working mainly in the service and manufacturing industries in the US; rather, single men, women, children, elders, and family groups took part in the caravans. When migrating in small groups, migrants usually had strong ties, as groups were often composed of family members or acquaintances. Instead, in the caravans, people had looser ties as not all of them were acquaintances or family members. As previously stated, the restrictive policies the US and Mexico implemented forced migrants to make trips clandestinely. As such, migrants sought to appear invisible and unrecognized, as that would allow them to keep going without being identified, detained, and deported. Thus, they did not make claims or demands to the authorities; they quietly made their way into the wild and followed the dangerous routes that would have the least surveillance (Martínez et al., 2014). Undocumented migrants would ride trains or trucks and would bribe officials to cross Mexico.

Hence, studying the caravans requires that we analyze a new form of migration through new lenses. The existing wisdom on migration does not account for some of the elements one of the caravans. Instead of studying the most common form of undocumented migration – clandestine – or the root causes of the massive displacement from the NTCA (as more than one million people left the region in the 2019 FY<sup>9</sup>), this work focuses on the caravans that represent a small fraction relative to the total population displaced. So, instead of soliciting information about why people were leaving their countries, this research focuses on understanding people’s justification for joining the caravan, and with that, their experiences in and interpretations of the movement.

In other words, focusing on the caravan means looking at one exception to the common features of Central American migration; at the same time, the caravans are the expression of

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<sup>9</sup> As has been addressed, different proxies are used to measure undocumented migration. In this case, I use the number of people apprehended in the US and Mexico to measure arrivals based on data released by the US Customs and Border Protection and the National Migration Institute in Mexico for the 2019 FY (851, 508, and 182,940 apprehensions, respectively) (Department of Homeland Security, 2019; Gramlich & Bustamante, 2019; UPMRIP, 2020).

the “common,” undocumented migrants leaving their countries because of poverty, violence, and political instability. Caravan members formed large groups that made even more visible the migration of thousands of people irregularly from the NTCA. París Pambo (2018b) states that every year, between 200,000 and 400,000 undocumented migrants from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador cross into Mexico; the daily entrances fluctuate between 550-1,1000. She stated about the caravan: “The fact that more than 7000 people gathered in about a week at the Mexico-Guatemala border is not an extraordinary event, but the politicization of a movement that is carried out on daily bases” (París Pombo, 2018b, p. 2). Thus, the politicization of the movement by governments of the region, the claims and demands expressed by caravan members, the organization of such a movement, the media attention, and the assistance granted by the civil society are critical elements of what made this caravan so different from other forms of migration.

The analysis of the caravan offers the possibility to study not only the causes of migration but to go beyond the surface and the known. An in-depth analysis of the caravans would allow us to see the hidden elements of the movement. The study helps us to examine the formation of the group, the messages (frames) that were used to attract citizens to form the groups and to sustain the mobilization, the impact of social media on the overall organization and development of the caravans, the role of the governments in facilitating or repressing the movement, the needs and claims of participants, and their experience in the movement. One approach that allows us to examine these elements is Social Movements Theory. The next chapter will delve into the literature on social movements and examine some of the caravan's features more closely.

## 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to showing how existing theories of migration, particularly WST and Networks theory, are helpful for understanding and making sense of Central American migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For over half of the century, internal and intraregional migration was related to capitalist penetration and market expansion processes. Capitalism's extractive and for-profit logic led to inner, regional, and extra-regional migration. The direct and indirect involvement of the US in the wars caused struggles in the countries and created long-term problems that have remained unsolved, such as the excessive use of police forces, violence, and narco-trafficking, leading to large displacement.

The wars left a vacuum in the social, political, and economic life of the countries. To keep their economies afloat, these countries implemented neoliberal policies that did not solve their structural problems but exacerbated the long-standing conditions. Poverty, inequality, and employment soared while social welfare provisions shrank. Environmental disasters at the beginning of the new millennium added more pressure to the already weak economies. In the last two decades, high rates of insecurity and violence have exhibited the inability of the governments to control criminal groups and procure protection and safety for their citizens. The profound deficiencies of the sociopolitical systems in Central America manifested in corruption and impunity for specific sectors of the societies, and continued failures of the rule of law, have led to significant displacements from the region.

Amid this context, migrants have migrated to nearby countries, Mexico and the US, whether to escape political persecution, forced recruitment, poverty, crop failures, or to reunify with family members. Since the 1980s, migrants have traveled in secrecy, looking to appear invisible vis-a-vis a system that has rendered them irregular and illegal. Migrants crossed clandestinely through the desert and the river by coyotes, in small groups or individually, looking to arrive in the US.

However, the caravans of migrants that have left the NTCA constitute a new migratory phenomenon. The caravans were comprised of large groups of people who walked relatively organized, making claims. The study of the caravans then offers the opportunity to study a new phenomenon and the use of different frameworks to analyze it. A close look at the formation of the caravan will lead to the application of the Social Movements literature, which is better suited to capture the collective and organizational aspects of the movement.

### **Chapter 3: La Caminata del Migrante: A Social Movement**

This section of the thesis has been redacted as its content appear in the following article:

Rosario de la Luz Rizzo Lara (2021) La Caminata del Migrante: a social movement, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:17, 3891-3910, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2021.1940111](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1940111)

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## Chapter 4. Methodology

I designed my research methods to understand the emergence of a new form of migration in caravans from Central America to the US when previous migration movements had been characterized by individual or small-group clandestine migration. I sought to understand the social, political, and cultural factors that contributed to the organization and development of the October 2018 migrant caravan. Mainly, I wanted to uncover the mobilization efforts, and messages conveyed to mobilize people to participate in the caravan, how these resonated with participants, and how participants made sense of the movement.

I selected the case based on its originality and “analytic eclecticism” (Thomas, 2011). I analyze the October 2018 Caravan case that left Honduras for the United States from a collective perspective; I do so through the lenses of social movements literature: framing, frame resonance, and collective identity (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Gamson, 1992, 1996; Melucci, 1995; Snow et al., 1986, 2019). I draw on these approaches because I conceptualize the caravan as a social movement and further operationalize the concept of social movements to apply it to the caravan.

In other words, rather than analyzing individual experiences of (and reasons for) migration (Frank-Vitale & Núñez Chaim, 2020; Garibo García & Call, 2020; Ruíz-Lagier & Varela-Huerta, 2020; Salazar Araya, 2019; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2019; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019), I analyze a) the mobilization and organization efforts of leaders and organizers of the movement, and b) participants' justifications for joining the movement. Specifically, I look at the messages (collective action frames) conveyed to mobilize Hondurans to leave their country collectively; how and why these resonated with Hondurans and other Central Americans; how participants responded by creating their frames; how members became a collective actor and their experience in the movement. Central to this study was the analysis of the context in which the caravan emerged.

This chapter describes in further detail the methods I employed to research the context in which the caravan emerged; the frames conveyed for the mobilization; how these messages resonated with participants and those that did not resonate with them; and how participants created their frames throughout the movement; and how the caravan became a collective actor while showing the evolution of the caravan on transit. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I explain the case study and the rationale for its selection. This includes a description of the object (analytical framework) and the subject of study (case study). Second, I explain my research design, which included a combination of online research methods, such as online semi-structured interviews and social media data analysis. Third, I present my sampling strategy (purposive sampling), recruitment criteria, and practices.

#### **4.1 Case Study**

John Gerring (2004, p. 341) defines a case study as an "in-depth study of a single unit where the scholar aims to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena." Where unit refers to a spatially bounded event –nation, political party, movement, revolution– observed at a particular (period of) time. Similarly, Helen Simons (2009, p. 21) argues that a case study is "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, institution in a 'real-life context.'" She further notes that case studies help understand the context(s) in which the phenomenon occurs, grasp processes and dynamics of change, and study different perspectives and contested points of view. In other words, the purpose of a case study is to understand particular instances of an event (Mabry, 2008).

Case studies are generally flexible and are not constrained to one particular method; instead, a case study can involve mixed methods (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005). For instance, case studies are not synonymous with qualitative methods. As pointed out by Robert E. Stake

(2005), "a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what it is studied...[B]y whatever methods, we choose to study *the case*." In other words, a case study is defined by the interest in the case, its eclecticism, and originality, not by the methods employed to analyze it (Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011).

Case studies have two components: the object and the subject. According to Gary Thomas (2011), the object refers to the analytical or theoretical frame from which the subject is examined. The subject is the phenomenon that is analyzed. In other words, the researcher should identify the field within which the case is to be studied (Starman, 2013). My study subject (phenomenon analyzed) is the October 2018 Caravan from Honduras to the United States. The object, or larger analytic framework, used to analyze the case is social movements, framing, and collective identity.

In other words, I seek to analyze the October 2018 Migrant Caravan from a collective perspective. Rather than treating it as another distinct form of migration, I seek to use social movements literature to understand its formation through the analysis of the messages conveyed to mobilize people, the response of the population to these messages, the context in which these messages were conveyed, and participants experiences on transit.

#### **4.2 Case Selection: the October 2018 Caravan from Honduras to the United States**

My research seeks to understand the social, political, and cultural factors that favor the emergence of a new form of migration, from individual and small-group migration to the caravans, to understand how this caravan was formed. To respond to this question, I selected the October 2018 Caravan from Honduras to the US.

As argued, the "appropriate" theory for the case crystalizes and develops as the research moves forward; it evolves as the inquiry progresses (Thomas, 2011). To analyze the October 2018 Caravan, I started by looking at the caravan's composition and features. The caravan was

composed of multiple actors who were seeking better living conditions, and in doing so, they were defying border regimes and questioning their governments. Given the caravan's characteristics, I turned to social movement literature to analyze different elements of the movement. Social movements provided analytical tools to understand people's justifications for their participation in the social movement, the process of mobilization, participants' responses to collective action frames, and the overall evolution of the movement (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992; Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Snow et al., 1986, 2019). As stated in previous chapters, the Central American caravan that departed from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in October 2018 is anomalous relative to how migration from Central America had been carried out since the 1930s (Blanchard et al., 2011; Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; Stanley, 1987). Given the characteristics of the caravan, I conceptualized it as a transnational social movement on the move (see Chapter Three).

Studying all the caravans that have been formed since 2018 is out of the scope of the present work; instead, I focus on the October 2018 caravan since it set a precedent for the ones that followed. The caravan was a phenomenon that comprised both a new form of migration and a social movement. Its size, visibility, and politicization also made it different from other collective actions (see Chapter One).

With the study of the caravan, I sought to have a deep understanding of a) the context in which the caravan emerged; b) the mobilization efforts to create the caravan and framing of the caravan; and c) people's justifications for participation in the caravan; d) the experiences in transit that account for the formation of a collective actor, and e) how they made sense of the movement. Further, as explained earlier, a case study aims to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena, so with the caravan, I aim to elucidate two features of a phenomenon: first, migration in groups, or caravans; second, transnational social movement on the move.

Case studies are characterized by their depth and breadth (Gerring, 2004; Mabry, 2008). In this case, I provide depth and breadth concerning the detail given to understand the emergence of the caravan, that is, the political, social, and cultural context in which it emerged, along with the messages conveyed to mobilize people. The case is flexible and progressive, as it incorporates new sources and data relevant to the study, such as the study of social media data and semi-structured interviews. This project is qualitative and expansionist since it seeks to expand datasets and gain access to contexts and meanings (Mabry, 2008).

### **4.3 Research Design**

My research design is based on my research question and a series of additional considerations: a) the nature of the research project, b) the population at hand, and c) administrative concerns. So, I used a mixed-methods approach to carry out the research. On the one hand, I used online qualitative research methods, particularly in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted online, and on the other, I analyzed social media data. The data collected was complemented with the revision of secondary data and relevant literature.

First, I argue that the October 2018 migrant caravan from Central America to the US constituted a digital mobilization. A digital mobilization inspires people to take physical and online action (De Gregorio, 2020). A mobilization, according to Paul De Gregorio (2020), is the “action of organizing and encouraging a group of people to take collective action in pursuit of a particular objective” (*Ibid*). The expansion of the internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have allowed people to mobilize against injustices in different parts of the world. Since the early 2000s, people have created websites such as petitionsite.com and, more recently, others like change.org to protest different topics.

Moreover, since the mid-2000s, several movements have originated and evolved through social media. Leading examples are transnational movements like Black Lives Matter,

which was initiated through Twitter (Tillery, 2019); the Arab Spring, which used Facebook as the central platform to mobilize collective action across different countries (Bellin, 2012; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013) and more recently, the #Metoo movement (Xiong et al., 2019). Other local movements have also taken place that used Facebook to mobilize sectors of the population, such as the “No Tyson in Tongie” that took place in Tonganoxie, Kansas, to block the installation of a Tyson chicken processing plant (Nicholls et al., 2020) or the Mexican movement #Yosoy132 that sought the democratization of media, the rights to access information, and freedom of speech (Estrada Saavedra, 2014).

Since its inception, the October 2018 “*Caminata del Migrante*” was made public through social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, and other media, like radio and television. Different political figures posted information about it, boosting the information about the movement. More importantly, the call to participate in the movement was made through social media. People who both led and supported the caravan posted flyers about the movement on Facebook weeks before the movement took place (Cappelli, 2020; Pradilla, 2019). Caravan members mentioned they had heard about the caravan through social media, radio, and television (Gandini et al., 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021). Moreover, news outlets that followed the mobilization posted information about the caravan on Facebook and had real-time coverage in San Pedro Sula as the caravan departed (Frank-Vitale & Núñez Chaim, 2020; HCH Televisión Digital, 2018; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021). Lastly, as the caravan moved forward to the US, members of the movement posted information on different groups on social media platforms. Thus, the nature of the project called for the use of Internet Mediated Research (IMR) to analyze the digital mobilization that sparked through social media.

This being the case, I follow the principles of Wolfsfeld et al. (2013) concerning the study of movements and social media. Gadi Wolfsfeld and his colleagues argue that the role of social media in collective action should be understood considering the political context in

which it operates (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). They contend that social media is relevant because it can provide images and information that motivate people, allow groups to mobilize, and convey messages to the outside world; thus, “social media should be seen as facilitators rather than the cause” (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013, p. 120). Similarly, Eva Bellin (2012) observes that different factors conflated to set the protest in motion in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 during the so-called “Arab Spring:” long-standing grievances, an emotional trigger, a sense of impunity, and access to social media. Finally, Lisa Anderson (2011) argues that the importance of the Arab revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya does not rely on how activists used technology to spread ideas and strategies but on how and why the ambitions and techniques resonated with people. In other words, the call is for scholars to focus on the context and the diverse factors that gave origin to the protests, along with the resonance of the messages conveyed. To address the context, I did a literature review of Honduran migration to the US since the early 1920s; then, to analyze the messages conveyed and their resonance, I used a combination of semi-structured interviews and the analysis of Facebook data. I explain the use of these methods in detail in the next section.

The second consideration for conducting online research has to do with the population concerned: the caravan members. I argue that this population can be included in the definition of “hard to reach” populations (Baltar & Brunet Icart, 2012; Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010; Wilkerson et al., 2014). Wilkerson et al. (2014, p. 561) define hard-to-reach populations as those either excluded from mainstream research due to an ambiguous sampling or due to systemic exclusion from data collection instruments. Maryse Marpsat and Nicolas Razafindratsima (2010), in their introduction to the Special Issue for the *Methodological Innovation Journal*, underscored that the definition of hard-to-reach populations also encompasses persons who do not wish to disclose that they are members of a given group

because their behavior may be illicit, their activities may be socially stigmatized, or because they have no desire to revisit a painful past (Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010, p. 4).

Hence, I argue that caravan members could be deemed a "hard to reach population" as people are not easily identifiable and thus excluded. Undocumented migration is hard to measure and investigate because a) there are no official statistics about the population (Guerette & Clarke, 2005; Rodríguez Chávez, 2016); b) migrants rely on their anonymity to continue their journey, and c) obtaining accurate data in terms of the size and characteristics of the population was particularly difficult because migrants were "on the move."

Thus, to obtain information on the caravan, scholars and journalists met the travelers at some point in their journey and others traveled with them (Garibo García & Call, 2020; Martínez, 2018; Pradilla, 2019; Ruíz-Lagier & Varela-Huerta, 2020; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). Carlos Martínez a journalist from the newspaper *El Faro*, carefully details how the caravan, often, moved faster than what was anticipated by the media. Martínez narrates that on the morning of October 21, 2018, he and other journalists covering the caravan arrived at the place where the caravan had spent the night. However, they found the place empty, as the caravan had already left (Martínez, 2018). In other words, the caravan was hard to reach as its members were undocumented and more so because the caravan kept moving.

Because I was not on the field when it happened, to obtain information about the caravan, I conducted ex-post-facto semi-structured interviews. However, when doing online fieldwork, some participants did not wish to identify as undocumented migrants or as part of the caravans, given the perceived "illegality" of their status. Here, their status put them in a state of deportability (De Genova, 2002), which generates mistrust. For instance, some participants were skeptical of the interview's purpose, saying that I was not a researcher or that the flyer I had posted on the Facebook groups was a scam. Other participants decided to talk to me, but they did not agree to be recorded, changed their names, and avoid identification.

Further, the fact that caravan members were undocumented and many of them were detained or returned to their home countries, also made it difficult to reach this population. The strategy followed to recruit participants for the study is explained in the last section of this chapter.

To mitigate the difficulty of accessing this population, Baltar & Brunet Icart (2012) used snowball sampling through Facebook. Snowball sampling is a technique used to find participants for a study. A participant gives the researcher the name of another person that may be suitable for the study, who then, in turn, provides the name of the third person, and so on. Often, the initiating seeds in snowball sampling are randomly chosen; however, in this research, the initial contacts were selected based on their response to the call for participation in the study. Even when they were randomly selected, the recruitment was targeted. Applying the snowball technique meant that after a person participated, I asked her/him/them for other contacts who would also want to participate. Contrary to what I had anticipated, the snowball sampling in my research did not go as planned. When I asked respondents to provide me with contacts, none of them did, so I decided to post more flyers in different Facebook groups. This response may be related to their status as undocumented and the danger of deportation.

Third, administrative concerns were factored in when using online research methods. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the use of Internet Mediated Research (as in my case). Given the travel restrictions and border closures imposed in most countries, fieldwork and on-site research had to be postponed, canceled, or modified. Meetings, gatherings, and in-person activities were also canceled, driving researchers to adopt different methodologies. Thus, scholars had to adapt their research agenda and methods to gather information using other tools, such as online methods, while considering the appropriateness of such methods in their research. This necessary shift in research practices, in turn, led to the production of texts that tackled ways to conduct research in moments of crisis, rethink the

concept of "fieldwork," and appreciate the value of qualitative methods during a global pandemic (Howlett, 2021; Lobe et al., 2020; Teti et al., 2020). Specifically, the restrictions imposed in the European Union and Mexico made it impossible for me to travel to Mexico to collect data; thus, I adapted my research design and incorporated online methods to carry out the research.

#### **4.4 Semi-structured Interviews**

Interviews are conversations in which a researcher guides a participant in an extended discussion of a topic(s) (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In offline methods, interviews are usually used to understand experiences and reconstruct events; they are suitable for describing social and political processes and personal issues (*Ibid*). Michèle Lamont & Ann Swidler (2014) promote a pragmatic approach to interviewing, where researchers collect data on behaviors, representations, classifications, systems, boundary work, identity, imagined realities, cultural ideas, and emotions (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 10).

Interviews have some virtues: they are relatively inexpensive, and they are an "easy" way to gather primary factual data (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). Interviews can be open-ended, unstructured, or semi-structured (also called focused questions). The latter is more specific and narrower than unstructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Semi-structured interviews can often be in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviews are helpful in gathering different kinds of data. Allison Pugh argues that through in-depth interviewing, the researcher "can access a different level of information about people's motivations, beliefs, meanings, feelings, and practices – the culture they use" (Pugh, 2013, p. 50). She claims that interviewees provide information about emotions, anxieties, the schemas that shape their views, notions of right and wrong, and how they feel about how they feel. Lamont (1992, 2000) uses semi-structured interviews to analyze boundary work, feelings, emotions, social categories, morals, and values. She claims that in-depth

interviews “facilitate access to a more nuanced understanding of the participants’ worldviews” (Lamont, 1992, p. 18).

I used in-depth semi-structured interviews to analyze interviewees’ participation in the October 2018 caravans. I designed an instrument (questionnaire) that included different themes (and sets of questions). I started with demographic questions like age, nationality, and municipality. This information was relevant as I wanted to map out the cities where people lived and where they joined the caravan, along with creating a demographic profile of the participants.

I followed a narrative interviewing style to investigate people’s participation in the caravan. With this technique, I wanted to understand participants’ involvement in the caravan, from when they heard about it to when they joined the movement, and their overall experience. Thus, questions explored the context of the home country and the conditions in transit.

Also, I added questions to grasp participants’ justifications for their participation in the caravan. Pugh (2013) states that although people exhibit different cultural schemas to explain particular problems, they have a sense of what counts as honorable behavior. This is particularly relevant as people seek to mobilize against what they perceive as unjust or threatening (Della Porta, 2013). In other words, I sought to understand how participants justified their membership in the movement.

Moreover, participants usually give ex-post-facto justifications for their previous actions (Pugh, 2013). Instead of eliciting "actual" motives for participation, I sought to understand their justifications for participating in the caravan (Vila-Henninger, 2020). The rationale for this is twofold: a) because the "actual" motives for participating may have changed over time. That is, the justifications given for joining the movement in October 2018 may differ from those of March 2021-22 (the time of the interview); and b) because qualitative methods

are used to explain processes, relations, and criticism rather than causal explanations (Maxwell, 2004).

Other questions examined the participants' experience in transit, their claims, and "*consignas*" (shouts) during the walk. I wanted to gather data on their struggles, challenges, victories, and emotions, and their assessment of the movement. Further, I sought to investigate the frames articulated by the "leaders" of the movement that could have resonated with the participants. Frames were defined by Erving Goffman (1974, p. 21) as "schemata of interpretation" that allows individuals to "locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 464). The study of frames is relevant because I wanted to *unpack* the frames that guided collective action. A more detailed account of the frames that were used in the caravan will be explained in Chapters Five and Six.

Finally, a set of questions was designed to assess the organization of the movement. I aimed to explore how people organized before and during the trek. My goal here was to document the organizational efforts of the participants and leaders of the movement; thus, I elicited information about how they organized to cross the border(s) and to get food, transportation, and shelter. The last couple of questions were designed to grasp the collective identity of the group.

#### ***4.4.1 Online Qualitative Research Methods***

Online qualitative methods are like the traditional face-to-face methods but use internet venues as opposed to physical interaction (Lobe et al., 2020). Online qualitative methods include emails, interviews, surveys, focus groups, and digital ethnography (Hewson, 2016; O'Connor & Madge, 2016). The use of each of them, as in face-to-face methods, depends on the type of research that will be carried out. Wilkerson et al. (2014) reflect on a series of considerations that need to be made when designing an online qualitative study that includes the type of research that is being carried out, the population at hand, the process of data

collection (and security of data), and administrative concerns (i.e., budgetary restrictions). Based on my research design and these considerations, I decided to use online methods.

Online qualitative research methods offer some advantages over face-to-face methods. For instance, they offer flexibility and time in the data collection (Lobe et al., 2020); it is suitable for researching "hard-to-find populations" (Baltar & Brunet Icart, 2012; Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010; Wilkerson et al., 2014); it is cost-and time-efficient; it offers the opportunity to access vast, geographically diverse pools (Wilkerson et al., 2014); and it can be effective in targeting particular populations, as some researchers do not look for generalized results but representative ones (Baltar & Brunet Icart, 2012; Hewson, 2016).

Other advantages of online methods are related to the participant's response to the online environment. That is, the participant may be willing to disclose sensitive information, as there are perceived higher levels of privacy, which can contribute to balancing power relations (Hewson, 2016). For instance, Liliana Rivera Sánchez and Olga Odgers (2021) showed that when using mobile devices to interact with participants and conduct interviews, participants had more control over what they shared with the researchers as they could decide what and when to share. Participants chose to pick up the phone and turn on the microphone or the camera. This way, the authors argued, the power relations between researchers and interviewees are less hierarchical.

In my case, some participants responded positively to the online environment and felt confident about sharing sensitive information. For example, some women described their experiences traveling with the caravan. They laughed and felt free to express other emotions as the interview progressed. Men also felt free to talk about the hardships of the trip.

I concur with Sánchez and Odgers regarding the power relations between the researcher and interviewee as participants had the opportunity to decide when and where to conduct the interview. For instance, once a participant agreed to meet me for the interview, I would text

them (5 mins) ahead of the interview to confirm if they were ready. Some participants would respond that they were prepared; others would not reply but would call me, and others would not reply or show up to the interview. As a researcher conducting online interviews, one needs to be patient, as participants may not be available even if a time and date have been agreed upon. Moreover, participants have more control over what they share if they decide to share. Some participants did not want to be recorded, while others did not disclose their names. Others said a phone call was enough as they did not want to show their faces on a video call. Likewise, researchers have less control over the interview, as the participant can also “disregard” researchers’ messages and change their minds about their participation.

Researchers have also found some disadvantages in the use of IMR. For instance, some scholars question the validity of online research given the biased nature of the Internet User Population (IUP), the sampling errors and size; coverage (i.e., internet accessibility of the target population); non-response patterns/bias; measurement errors (i.e., deviation of respondents’ answers with the population); along with the generalizability of data resulting from such studies (Baltar & Brunet Icart, 2012; Hewson, 2016). The latest research, however, has shown that using technology to gather data has become increasingly recognized as an accepted method for data collection in the social sciences (Gibson, 2020; Lobe et al., 2020).

Furthermore, possible disadvantages may emerge related to the online communication medium (Hewson, 2016). That is, there may be misunderstandings, miscommunication, problems with translation, and reduced control by the researcher over the interaction (Lobe et al., 2020). Some of these may be mitigated using video platforms instead of text-only, chat, and instant messaging platforms, as researchers can see and hear the participants and observe their body language, particularly gesticulations. Following these tips, I asked participants to do video calls so I could create more rapport and see their expressions and body language. Some responded positively, and I was able to conduct a few video calls. However, it was only the

case for some of the interviews. Because of the internet connection, conducting video calls was difficult. Also, some people were in a precarious situation and did not have data on their phones, so video calls were not an option. In those cases, I used Skype to do phone calls with participants. Moreover, I added time stamps in the transcriptions when people showed particular emotions to account for variations during the interview in the absence of video calls.

Online research requires researchers and participants to meet a series of technological and logistic requirements (Lobe et al., 2020). First, they need access to the internet and a digital device (i.e., computer, cellphone, laptops, tablets). The quality of the internet connection also matters; the better the connection, the better the video quality. Second, they need speakers, microphones, and cameras, either external or built-in digital devices. Third, researchers and participants should be in a quiet place, minimizing outside distractors and disturbances to have a smooth interview (*Ibid*). The technological aspect of the research was particularly challenging. Many participants did not have a computer, cameras, or microphones to conduct the interview; thus, they used their phones. The quality of the internet was low, so the phone calls were interrupted occasionally. In a couple of instances, the internet connection was lost completely, so the interviews were shortened.

#### ***4.4.2 Conducting Online Semi-Structured Interviews***

Online interviews can be carried out using asynchronous or synchronous platforms (Hewson, 2016; O'Connor & Madge, 2016). The first refers to interviews that are not conducted in real time. This type includes the use of email to administer surveys (or another instrument) to gather data. For instance, researchers send emails with multiple questions to various people or mail lists. The survey design, with closed or open-ended questions, will depend on the type of research. In recent years, the administration of surveys through email has increased in social science research (Jenkins, 2010). With the pandemic, more studies using online surveys have been carried out (in different fields) (Flanagan et al., 2021).

Synchronous interviews, on the other hand, are carried out in real-time. This type of interview relies on audio, video, and chat/text functions. Real-time interviews have various advantages: a) it allows more spontaneity in participants' responses; b) it enables the understanding of body language, as the researcher and the participants can interact through the cameras; and c) some rapport *could be* built, as there is more contact between the researcher and the participant than in asynchronous interviews. Further, some scholars (Jenkins, 2010) claim that opting for online interviews using the phone, email, or instant messaging functions, allows respondents to express feelings and emotions that otherwise would not be shared using face-to-face methods.

The selection of synchronous and asynchronous interviews depends on the research design and the population at hand. For instance, Suzanne Jenkins (2010), in her study of sex workers and organizers, found that some participants were open to disclosing sensitive information over the telephone and email rather than through personal interaction. While much of the population was interviewed face to face, a significant share of the sample opted for online methods. Thus, she concluded that using online surveys and interviews was crucial for her research. It allowed her access to a "hard-to-reach" population. It enabled her to bring forward the voices of those who work in the industry while proposing new methodologies to investigate the sex work industry.

Further, there are multiple platforms for synchronous interviews. Research has been carried out using Skype and other video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Facebook (Howlett, 2021; A. Jones, 2020; Lobe et al., 2020; Rivera Sánchez & Odgers, 2021). More recently, technological developments have allowed other instant messaging social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, to be used for interviews (Gibson, 2020; Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). Kerry Gibson (2020) used the functions of instant messaging through WhatsApp to interview young people about mental health. She found out that conducting interviews through

WhatsApp was helpful for participants to express themselves more freely, as opposed to face-to-face interviews. Online interviews also proved convenient for the participants, as they could reply from their couches. Katja Kauffman and Corinna Peil (2020) used WhatsApp as an interactive tool to explore young adults' use of media, their role in the individuals' media repertoire, and their meaning in their everyday life. Using the instant messaging functions of the platform allowed them to document the response time after the researcher had prompted a question. Other studies have also used WhatsApp for educational spaces and purposes. However, to my knowledge, there are not yet qualitative studies conducted through WhatsApp using its video-audio functions with migrants and other “hard-to-reach” populations. This way, this research contributes to the growing literature on online interviews and the platforms for synchronous interviews.

Given the advantages of synchronous interviews, I opted for them. First, I posted flyers on different Facebook groups (see next section on recruitment practices). Then, I established communication with participants who replied to my post through Facebook Messenger. Later, we agreed on the interview time and date, and then I called the participants. I used a combination of platforms to conduct phone and video call interviews with participants, such as Messenger, Skype, and WhatsApp. The rationale for selecting these platforms was twofold: a) access to them and b) the participants' previous use and familiarity with them.

In terms of access to the internet and platforms, Honduras, in 2020, had a population of 9.83 million, having 8.20 million mobile connections, which means that 83 percent of the population had access to a connection. The internet penetration, however, is much lower, as only 4.10 million people (42 percent of the population) have access to the internet (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020). Out of those, almost all of them are active social media users. According to Statista (2021b), in 2017, there were 3 million active Facebook users in Honduras, which jumped to 3.7 and 3.8 million in 2018 and 2019, respectively. WhatsApp is the social

media platform with the most users in Honduras, followed by Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter (Statista, 2021a).

The majority of members who participated in the October 2018 caravan, who were mostly from Honduras, found out about the movement through Facebook and WhatsApp (Cappelli, 2020; Frank-Vitale & Núñez Chaim, 2020; Garibo García & Call, 2020; HCH Televisión Digital, 2018; Pradilla, 2019; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). This implies that they had access to the internet and social media. Thus, it could be argued that participants had adequate knowledge of the platforms, as they actively participated in Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Choosing these platforms was a way to facilitate the interview process, as I wanted to minimize any stress caused by using unfamiliar or inaccessible platforms.

Further, it was essential to use a platform that would be economically available and accessible. Facebook, for instance, offers a free service for using the platform. Some interviewees were unemployed and in a precarious situation; they expressed (before the interview) that they wanted to participate in the study but did not have data (credit) on their phones; thus, they could not talk to me. They asserted they would communicate with me once they had a job and could afford data on their phones. To overcome this barrier, I opened a Skype account and bought “credit.” That would allow me to call people in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico so that the participants would not be economically affected by our conversation. I contacted a few participants again and asked if they felt comfortable sharing their phone numbers and if they were ok with me calling them. With their approval, I called their phones. Those who had data and wanted to do video calls were interviewed using Facebook Messenger.

#### **4.5 Facebook Data**

Along with collecting data through in-depth semi-structured interviews, I collected Facebook data. I manually collected the data generated by Bartolo Fuentes, a primary mobilizer

on Facebook. I collected information from 187 posts, which included texts, videos, recordings, songs, and flyers. I transcribed all the videos and translated many of the posts and extracts of the videos. The period covered went from September 27, 2018, to December 23, 2018. The period includes the first post about the caravan and until the members arrived in Tijuana.

The rationale for collecting this data was twofold: a) I wanted to identify and analyze the different frames, including injustice and collective action frames, that were articulated by Bartolo Fuentes, seeking to identify and analyze mobilizing messages. With that, I would be able to compare his frames and those of the participants; that is, I wanted to account for frame resonance (see section “Participants’ justifications as frame resonance”). The data collected is primarily analyzed in Chapters Five and Six.

#### **4.6 Participants' justifications and frame resonance**

Participant justifications were also used to understand frame resonance. In other words, I wanted to identify which of the frames that were articulated by a primary mobilizer on Facebook resonated with the participants and which of them did not resonate. I wanted to see how people justified their participation in the caravan and if these justifications were similar to the reasoning expressed by one primary mobilizer on Facebook. In terms of the methods used to identify frame resonance, some researchers look to see if the content of a frame articulated by a social actor is similar to the words used by the audience and/or reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of the audience (Park et al., 2021). If the frame's content was found in the words or attitudes, then there was some form of resonance (*Ibid*). However, as framing is about meaning and interpretations of reality, other researchers compare the correspondence and logic of such content instead of just comparing the exact use of the words (Ketelaars, 2016). In this case, frame resonance is identified when movement participants expressed and used the same or similar arguments and referred to the same actors in their responses to the semi-structured

interviews as the activist or organizer did across social media. Specifically, I identified resonance when caravan members used the same or a similar logic in their arguments for movement participation as Bartolo Fuentes did in his Facebook posts. I operationalized resonance and considered a frame to resonate with participants when I coded a logic (themes) as present in both Bartolo Fuentes's Facebook posts and participants' interviews.

A qualitative approach to frame resonance allows for a nuanced analysis of resonance because a) it goes beyond identifying words or phrases; b) synonyms might not be identified using a spotting method (such as the one used in quantitative methods), as participants might have expressed ideas differently; or c) in the search for words, researchers may get false positives. A qualitative approach then allows the analysis of the logic and arguments that participants give during the interview to identify resonance, reducing the limitations presented by doing word/phrase spotting. Additionally, using a qualitative approach allows me to theorize what frames from Fuentes resonated with participants or could have resonated with them.

#### **4.7 Purposive Sampling**

I carried out non-probability sampling. Sampling is the selection of given units of analysis of a population of interest, aiming at reproducing, on a small scale, the characteristics of the entire population (Trobia, 2008). In social research, non-probability sampling is more common, whereas probability (random) sampling is usually applied in quantitative research. The concern in qualitative methods is related to the replication of the findings in the study in other settings or conditions (Brannen, 1992); that is, it is about how far the findings can be extrapolated to the theory being used or developed. In quantitative studies, the emphasis is on testing a hypothesis to support and generalize a theory.

In qualitative methods, sampling is often purposive or theory-driven (theoretical) (Brannen, 1992; Trobia, 2008). The main objective of the purposive sample is to have a sample that can be representative of the population researched (Battaglia, 2011). This can be achieved

by applying expert knowledge to select non-random elements representing a cross-section of the population. That is, participants are selected following the criteria the researcher believes satisfy the typological representativeness (Trobia, 2008). Purposive sampling is most appropriate for small samples, often from a limited geographic area or a "hard-to-reach" population (Battaglia, 2011). Because I am doing a qualitative study of the October 2018 migrant caravan, I decided to do a purposive sample. Thus, I sought to interview respondents who participated in the October 2018 Caravan from Honduras to the United States. The recruitment criteria are as follows.

#### ***4.7.1 Recruitment criteria***

I conducted interviews with people that participated in the October 2018 migrant caravan from Honduras to the US, as well as with people that participated in the 2019, 2020, and 2021 migrant caravans. Because the participation and experience were different, I created two data sets. The first comprised the participants of the October 2018 caravan, and the second was formed of participants of subsequent caravans, 2019, 2020, and 2021.

The recruitment criteria were based on my research question. First, instead of talking to undocumented migrants in general, I purposely selected caravan members to understand people's participation in the movement. Second, I recruited respondents who participated in the caravans that had mobile phones. The rationale was twofold: a) the nature of the project called for the study and analysis of the messages conveyed through social media, and b) the cellphone was needed to contact participants, conduct interviews, and learn about their experience in the mobilization. Third, I included respondents who participated in caravans other than the October 2018 movement. However, for this thesis, I only work with the first data set, corresponding to participants of the October 2018 caravan. This allowed me to have a comparative angle of later groups for context and future study. Fourth, because I wanted to include a variety of perspectives and bring forward the voice of those who are often

underrepresented, I decided to have a broad demographic profile. I included participants of different genders, men, women, heads of families, single mothers, single men, and elders. I also included people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, occupations, and nationalities.

#### **4.7.2 Recruitment practices**

I recruited participants using Facebook posts and referrals. First, I read that people created Facebook and WhatsApp groups to organize collectively to go to the US. In March 2021, using a search engine on Facebook, I searched for the word "caravan," and I found several groups. The names, number of participants, and nationalities of the groups varied. For instance, there were at least five groups that had the word "Caravan" in the title of the group: "*Caravana Migrante 12 de Octubre de 2018*," "*Caravana de Migrantes de Honduras*;" "*Caravana de Inmigrantes Hondureños 504 Honduras*;" "*Caravana de Migrantes Guatemaltecos 2020*;" "*Caravana de Migrantes Centroamericanos 2018*;" "*Próxima Caravana Marzo 2021*;" "*Caravana de Inmigrantes 2021*;" and "*Próxima Caravana NH 2021*." Since I aimed to interview people who participated in the October 2018 caravan, I joined the group "*Caravana Migrate October 12, 2018*," with more than 3,500 members. Then, I contacted the group administrator and asked permission to post a flyer to recruit participants within the group. He did not reply to my request to post a flyer in the group.

I became a member of three other groups that have been active and had thousands of participants. I am a member of "*Caravana de Inmigrantes 2021*," "*Próxima Caravana marzo 2021*," and "*Próxima Caravana NH 2021*." I wrote to the three administrators to ask permission to post about the caravan; I was granted access to post in the first group and later to "*Próxima Caravana marzo 2021*."

On March 19, 2021, I posted a flyer in the group "*Caravana de Inmigrantes 2021*" inviting people to participate in the research (see Figure 4.1). I added the necessary information,

such as the purpose of the research, my name, the institution, and the consortium supporting the research. I mentioned that the information was confidential and that all data would be anonymized. My post got 12 likes, and 53 comments and was shared once.

### Figure 4.1

*Flyer #1 used to recruit participants*

**moves**  
Migration and Modernity  
Historical and Cultural Challenges

Freie Universität Berlin

University of Kent

## ¿PARTICIPASTE EN LA CARAVANA DE OCTUBRE DE 2018?

Si tu respuesta es SI, te invito a participar en un estudio y realizar una entrevista de 35-40 minutos.  
Soy Rosario Rizzo, mexicana y estudiante

**¡Quiero conocer tus experiencias en la caravana y contar tu historia!**

¡La información recabada será confidencial!  
¡El estudio no tiene fines políticos ni electorales!

Si estás interesado en participar por favor mándame un mensaje por Facebook Messenger o al correo

 Rosario Rizzo Lara  rdr9@kent.ac.uk

## ¡PARTICIPA!

 This project has received funding from the European Union, Horizon 2020. Research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 812764.

Source: by the author

As the research progressed, people started to reach out to me to participate in the study. Some people asked me for money to do the interview and I replied that I did not have the means to pay for their participation. Other people commented on my post by saying that I was a scammer and that the group members should not trust me. Others sent me direct messages on Facebook and agreed to talk to me, and others replied to my posts saying they wanted to participate. To these, I sent direct messages on Facebook Messenger to follow up.

Many people who replied to my post and to whom I replied never saw my messages on Facebook Messenger; thus, I never got a reply from them. Since we were not “friends on Facebook”, the direct messages go to spam, so it is hard for people to see the messages. For those who said they wanted to participate, I went back to my posts and tagged them, so they could see my messages. Still, many never replied.

I saw a non-response bias in my sample, as most respondents were males. Non-response bias means that a percentage of a sample is underrepresented due to the lack of response from that segment of the population (Berg, 2005). Non-responsive behavior is usually linked to different variables, such as education or occupational variables (Rüdig, 2010). In my research, this meant that women accounted for a small percentage of my sample. There are ways to reduce this bias. For instance, Luis Vila-Henninger (2020) successfully dealt with non-response bias among low-income respondents by compensating them. As for my research, compensation was not offered to the participants. I attempted to do it at some point during the research, but the funds were unavailable. In the case of my research, I argue that non-responsive behavior was linked to occupational variables since women usually have an extra burden as they work outside and inside the household and could hardly find time to do the interview.

Aiming to get more female participants, and without the means to compensate them, I designed a flyer (see Figure 4.2) that targeted women and posted it on the Facebook group “*Próxima Caravana HN 2022.*” The flyer sought to appeal to women by adding different

pictures of women and children. At the time of posting, group members were looking to organize themselves to create another caravan to go to the US. This group is no longer active. Most likely, it was deleted, I tried to locate it, but I no longer have access to it.

**Figure 4.2**

*Flyer #2 used to recruit female participants*

Freie Universität Berlin

University of Kent

moves  
Migration and Modernity  
Historical and Cultural Challenges

**¿Participaste en la Caminata del Migrante de octubre de 2018?**

Si tu respuesta es SI, te invito a participar en un estudio y realizar una entrevista de 35-40 minutos.

**SOY ROSARIO RIZZO, MEXICANA Y ESTUDIANTE  
¡QUIERO CONOCER TUS EXPERIENCIAS EN LA CARAVANA Y CONTAR TU HISTORIA!**

Si estás interesad@ en participar por favor mándame un mensaje por Facebook Messenger o al correo

Rosario Rizzo Lara  
 [rdr9@kent.ac.uk](mailto:rdr9@kent.ac.uk)

**¡La información recabada será confidencial!  
¡El estudio no tiene fines políticos ni electorales!  
¡Participa!**

This project has received funding from the European Union, Horizon 2020. Research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 812764.

Source: by the author

The technique of creating a flyer that portrayed women worked since I got more responses from women. They sent me direct messages on Facebook Messenger, and I reached out to those who commented on my post and said they wanted to be part of the project. However, I only conducted five interviews with women. Women argued that they were busy working and did not have time to do the interview; a couple more wanted compensation, but as I mentioned, I did not have the resources to do it. One woman eager to participate could not do it because her father had died, and she had to take care of the burial. When I later contacted her again, she did not reply. In other words, this dissertation has a gender imbalance, as men accounted for most of the respondents.

Finally, in the early stages of the research, I contacted gatekeepers who provided general information about the development of the caravan, as they were on the ground when the movement happened. These were informal conversations that were not recorded. These talks were fundamental as gatekeepers pointed out different aspects of the caravan. Gatekeepers included journalists that covered the caravan and workers from international organizations.

#### **4.8 The interview**

I conducted 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews from March 2021 to February 2022. The more intense period of fieldwork went from March to May 2021, when I conducted most of the interviews. Another person saw the ad that I posted in one of the Facebook groups back in March 2021 and contacted me. I followed up with him and conducted the last interview in February 2022.

Some interviews were tape-recorded, and others were not, depending on the participant's desire. For all interviews, I asked for consent. Everyone that was interviewed granted verbal consent, however not all consented to be tape-recorded. The names of the participants were changed to protect their identities, that is to say, I anonymized all data.

The interviews were manually transcribed and later coded using the qualitative software NVivo. I created a codebook to code all the data (Facebook and semi-structured data). Some extracts of the interviews and Facebook data that are shown in the following chapters were translated into English since all the interviews were carried out in Spanish.

I used my phone to record the interviews, as interviews were conducted using my Skype account on my phone or my Messenger account. I used the record app on my phone to record them. Then, I transferred all the files to my laptop and a hard drive where they are secure and confidential. The interviews lasted from 30 to 90 mins.

Regarding the demographic composition, I interviewed 19 men and five women. The ages ranged from 19 to 66 years old. Participants were from different municipalities and countries in Central America: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Although, at the time of the interview, some participants were in Mexico and the US.

This study was conducted following ethical principles established by the MOVES project and with the approval of the Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent.

#### **4.9 Coding and Analysis**

I used a combination of deduction (theory-driven) and induction (data-driven) methods to code and analyze the data collected. I started by reviewing a set of theories that I used to generate deductive codes. I reviewed the literature on frames, advanced by Goffman (1974) and later developed by other scholars (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019; Snow & Benford, 1992). The literature review was supplemented with findings of the caravan. Then, for theoretically or empirically important themes that were not present in my deductive codebook, I created inductive codes while coding my data.

Both my deductive and inductive codes are examples of Thematic Codes, which are used to “make instances of themes in a set of data” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 76.). Thematic codes are important because they "show where the themes we've identified actually occur in a text" (*Ibid*). In my codebook, for each thematic code, I created a brief description that indicates the general idea of the theme, along with keywords that helped me to operationalize the code in my data. For deductive codes, descriptions were based on the literature. For inductive codes, the description was based on the data. All of these codes and their descriptions together made up my codebook. For each code, then, I also frequently included an example, which also helped to operationalize the code.

#### **4.10 Representativeness, Validity, and Generalizability**

As it has been observed, online research has excellent benefits, particularly when researching "hard-to-reach" populations. However, limiting the research to those with access to a mobile phone, the internet, and social media means that I chose to exclude those who did not have access to them. The research in this sense is limited to this segment of the population; nevertheless, since this was a digital mobilization, a large percentage of the movement's participants had access to mobile phones and the internet. In other words, the research does not comprise the entire population that participated in the caravan nor does it propose to explain every single aspect of the caravan movement; instead, the findings uncover some new and crucial aspects of the migratory experience and the mobilization, and the resonance of particular messages.

In terms of generalizability, it should be observed that in qualitative research, the findings aim to be extrapolated to other cases, as opposed to quantitative studies, where the goal is to test a hypothesis to verify or support a generalizable theory (Brannen, 1992). Thus, I seek to contribute to the literature on migration and social movements by expanding the

literature by using rather different frameworks to understand new phenomena rather than generalizing my research findings to a larger population or even to the entire caravan population. In other words, I aim to provide alternative frameworks to study collective migration and different types of social movements. The findings could be used to analyze similar movements in different geographic contexts.

Lastly, I have sought validation through triangulation (Mabry, 2008; Stake, 2005). Because in qualitative research, the findings are analyzed by the researcher and interpreted with his/her values and views of the world, triangulation is vital to give validity to the research. Here, “validity refers to the accuracy of the data and the reasonableness and warrantedness of data-based interpretations” (Mabry, 2008, p. 221). Triangulation includes the triangulation of data sources, methods, time, observer, and theory. Here, I did the triangulation of data sources and methods; that is, I collected data from different people through different methods.

## Chapter 5: “Migrantes, es mejor irse en grupos para evitar riesgos:” The Framing of the October 2018 Migrant Caravan

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, I conceptualized the caravan as a transnational social movement on the move. The caravan can be understood as collective action that had some level of organization and planning; it grew out of a conflict with a system of authority at the local and international levels, and some temporality, given that more caravans have been formed since the one in October 2018. It scaled from a local to a transnational movement as it crossed borders and welcomed the participation of people from different nationalities.

Building on the concept of the caravan as a social movement and drawing on literature on frames, the present chapter analyzes the different frames articulated before and during the first days of the movement to understand the mobilization of the movement. Frames are "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974) that allow individuals to locate, perceive, identify, or label events. By deeming events as meaningful, frames serve to organize experiences and guide action (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1992).

A few actors informed and put forward messages about the caravan. For instance, Bartolo Fuentes, a migrant and refugee activist, whom I cast as one de facto mobilizer and coordinator at the beginning of the movement; Irineo Mujica, an activist, and leader of the NGO called "*Pueblo Sin Fronteras*" (People without Borders), who had led caravans to Tapachula (see Chapter 1); Milton Benitez, a journalist, and anchor of "*El Perro Amarillo*," a television program that criticized the government of Juan Orlando Hernández; and politicians, such as Luis Rolando Redondo Guifarro, a former congressman of the "*Innovación y Unidad*" (PINU) Party. Fuentes and Redondo specifically shared the flyer that stated the place and time of departure of the caravan on October 5, 2018 (Ahmed et al., 2018; Fuentes, 2018b; Redondo Guifarro, 2018).

The activists and journalists, except Redondo (to my knowledge), were threatened and penalized because of their involvement with the caravan. For instance, Irineo Mujica was detained by the migration officers in Tapachula, Chiapas on October 19, 2018, right after the caravan reached Mexican territory (Notimex, 2018a). Milton Benitez followed and accompanied the caravan but was also threatened and returned to Honduras in November 2018 (El Perro Amarillo, 2018b). Finally, as will be shown in the chapter, Fuentes was persecuted and detained upon his arrival in Guatemala. Despite his arrest, he continued to denounce the government of Juan Orlando Hernández and the injustices committed against migrants.

Although Fuentes, Mujica, and Benitez followed, accompanied, and shared messages about the caravan, I focus on the role of Fuentes in framing the movement. The rationale is twofold: a) Fuentes's posts, messages, and videos reached a broad audience, as they were shared and liked thousands of times (in contrast to posts from other actors); and b) his involvement before, during, and in the first days that followed the departure of the caravan. Fuentes informed people about the caravan weeks before it left San Pedro Sula. He followed and accompanied the caravan from the eve of the departure until it reached Guatemala. The Honduran government accused him of human trafficking and stated he was the caravan leader. Governments of the region and media outlets also referred to him as the organizer, suggesting he had a relevant role in the movement.

The goal of this chapter is to show how the messages that Fuentes articulated can be deemed as frames and then how these frames can be analyzed as collective action frames. By doing so, I show how he interpreted particular events as unjust and provided a diagnosis and a solution for the Honduran migrant population. Identifying and analyzing the collective action frames is central to understanding the messages conveyed to gain sympathizers, influence, mobilize bystanders and participants, and increase the visibility of the movement. The analysis contributes to the development of a theory of mobilization in migratory contexts by analyzing

the framing strategy and collective frames put forward to carry out collective action by undocumented migrants and asylum seekers.

The following chapter is composed of four sections. The first is a literature review on framing and collective action frames (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing). Then, I explore Bartolo Fuentes's role and significance in the movement. The third section looks at the frames that Fuentes articulated while exhibiting fragments and passages of the posts and videos recorded. The last section discusses the frames put forward, the alignment between the components of collective action frames, and the implications of the frames.

## **5.2 Literature Review: Frames**

Building on the conceptualization of the caravan as a social movement, I investigate what frames were articulated before and during the move. To do so, I draw on framing literature, particularly on frames, advanced by Erving Goffman (1974) and later developed by other scholars ([Benford, 1997](#); [Benford & Snow, 2000](#); [Bonikowski, 2017](#); [Ferree, 2003](#); [Goh & Pang, 2016](#); [McDonnell et al., 2017](#); [Snow et al., 2019](#); [Snow & Benford, 1992](#)).

The study of frames has gained traction in the last 30 years, as there has been an increasing focus on the cultural realm of social movements. In the 1980s, structuralist and rationalist frameworks –i.e., resource mobilization and rational choice models (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) were dominant. After critical reviews of such approaches, scholars focusing on reality construction and interpretation processes, symbolization, meaning, and meaning-making started to have more space compared to the other frameworks that had dominated the field (Benford, 1997; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). David Snow and other scholars ([Gamson, 1992](#); [Snow et al., 1986](#); [Snow & Benford, 1992](#)) started to push forward the framing perspective.

From a framing perspective, meaning is crucial (Benford, 1997). Meaning is socially constructed through interaction and thus articulated, modified, contested, negotiated, and

mediated by culture (Snow et al., 2019). As stated by Robert Benford (1997, p. 410), “meaning is fundamental to the issue of grievance construction and interpretation, attributions of blame, causality, movement participation, the mobilization of popular support, resource acquisition, strategic interaction, and the selection of strategies and tactics.” Shared meaning and understanding of grievances and solutions between the social movement organizations and between leaders and constituents are critical to formulating collective action frames and advancing claims and support.

Social actors, Benford argues, seek to affect the interpretations of reality since they assume that “meaning is prefatory to action” (Benford, 1997, p. 410). That is because humans will act based on the meaning things have for them (Blumer, 1969 in Benford 1997, p. 410). Alternatively, individuals will mobilize against what they think is worthy, unjust, or threatening. Meaning also has different interpretations, and it is socially constructed and contested. In other words, social movement actors are signifying agents who are actively engaged in articulating and elaborating meaning for the constituents, antagonists, and bystanders (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000). Social actors act upon the world and frame the world in which they do so (Snow et al., 1986).

Drawing on these assumptions and based on the work of Erving Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis*, scholars began to analyze “reality construction,” rhetorical processes, and the verbal discursive expression of meaning (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019). Applying the framing perspective to social movements allows the analysis of meanings associated with particular events, activities, and actors, suggesting that those can be contested, negotiated, and open to interpretation (Snow et al., 2019).

Frames are “an interpretative schema that simplifies and condenses the “world out” thereby selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one's present or past environment” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137).

In Goffman's (1974, p. 21) words, frames are "schemata of interpretation" that allow individuals to locate, perceive, identify, or label events. By deeming given events as meaningful, frames serve to organize experience and guide action (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1992).

Analyzing frames elaborated and articulated in a social movement is crucial to understanding how social movement actors see and interpret the world and the meaning they give to particular actions and events. The framing perspective offers then tools for analyzing Fuentes's discourses. Through the messages Bartolo Fuentes positioned, he identified and labeled specific situations in Honduras as unfair, assigned blame to the government, created a sense of urgency, and called to action. In other words, by analyzing the frames he articulated, we can observe what grievances he accentuated and mobilized. For Snow et al. (2019, p. 393), mobilizing grievances "are seen neither as naturally occurring sentiments nor as arising automatically from specifiable material conditions, but as the result of interactively-based interpretation or signifying work." This signifying work is conceptualized by framing, one of the activities that multiple actors do.

In this vein, collective action frames are a "set of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that legitimize and inspire social movement campaigns and activities" (Snow et al., 2019, p. 395). They encourage mobilization and support (Melo, 2016). Collective action frames seek a) to mobilize participants from the balcony to the streets (action mobilization), b) to encourage the participation of bystanders to enlarge the movements' base (consensus mobilization), and c) to demobilize antagonists (consensus mobilization) (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019). To put it simply, framing is about presenting ideas and interpretations of events to an audience and convincing them about such interpretations (Olesen, 2007, p. 23). Collective action frames help to do so by accentuating a situation, assigning blame, and offering corrective measures.

### *5.2.1 Core Framing Tasks*

Collective action frames have three particular tasks: punctuation, attribution, and articulation (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019). Scholars have referred to these tasks as diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Melo, 2016; Snow et al., 2019). Diagnostic framing entails two aspects, the definition of a situation that needs change and fault attribution. It punctuates some existing social condition or part of life, underscores the seriousness of the situation, and defines it as unjust, unbearable, immoral, and deserving of corrective action. Because defining a situation as unbearable or immoral is not enough for collective action to occur, some attributable blame or causality is needed, along with a sense of accountability (Snow & Benford, 1992). Thus, activists or social actors seek to attribute blame by identifying the guilty agent (person or system) for the already defined unbearable or unjust situation. According to Snow et al. (2019, p. 396), diagnostic framing usually answers the question: "what is or what went wrong?" And "Who is it to blame?"

Literature suggests that diagnostic framing often defines a situation or event as an "injustice," leading to the articulation of "injustice frames" and often to collective action (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992; Snow et al., 2019). Injustice, as William Gamson (1992, p. 36) states, refers to the "belief that individuals and organizations are operating in a way that warrants righteous indignation" and relates to the "anger over the hardships they experience in their daily lives." It goes beyond what is equitable, not merely an intellectual judgment, but what is called "hot cognition," the kind that puts "fire in the belly and iron in the soul" (Gamson, 1996, pp. 90–91). In other words, social movement actors seek to frame and accentuate a particular situation as unjust precisely to generate a sense of injustice that it is worth mobilizing for. This accentuation creates a sense of urgency and the need for change.

Prognostic framing involves articulating some sort of remedy or possible solution to the defined problem, including the strategies or tactics to be used and the refutation of the opponent's current or proposed answer (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019). Prognostic framing responds to the question "What is to be done" (Benford & Snow, 2000). There is usually some alignment between the diagnostic and prognostic framing, but it also varies across movements (Snow et al., 2019). For instance, Daniela Melo (2016) analyzes the diagnostic and prognostic frames used by three women's organizations in Portugal during the revolution (1974-1976). Melo shows how some organizations displayed "injustice frames" in their communications, adding political inclinations with the Left political party. Then, she demonstrated how the diagnostic framing constrained the prognostic framing that the Social Movements Organizations (SMOs) had done.

Motivational framing, the last framing task, relates to elaborating a "call to arms" or some sort of rationale for collective action that goes beyond the diagnosis and prognosis (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019). This is understood, according to scholars, as the "agency" in social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1996; Snow et al., 2019). Gamson (1996) states that agency refers to the "consciousness" that is possible to change the *status quo* of the situation through collective action; it entails people's empowerment as agents who can create their history, and a shift from "something can be done" to "we can do something" (Gamson, 1996, p. 90). From this vantage point, motivational framing also involves the elaboration of "vocabularies of motives" that provide prompts to action by underscoring the severity of the problem, a sense of urgency to take action now rather than later, the efficacy of adding supporters, among others (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019).

To sum up, collective action frames are built in a way that they seek to create a shared understanding of a situation and define it as unbearable, worth mobilizing for; they charge

blame on a person, system, or process; articulate possible solutions; and encourage others to engage in action to achieve the desired change (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Emotions are linked to motivational frames and are also a central feature of motivational framing (Snow et al., 2019). Emotions had been neglected in the study of movements (Benford, 1997) after the Resource Mobilization paradigm hit momentum, and social movement actors were cast as rationalistic (Jasper, 2011; Nepstad & Smith, 2001; Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). Also, emotions were dismissed as they were seen as unimportant, irrelevant, invariable, and providing little explanatory power (Goodwin et al., 2004). In the 1990s, authors critiqued Resource Mobilization's approach to emotions, stating that different grounds exist for participation other than the rationalist (Jasper, 2011). Feminist scholars contributed to bringing back the study of emotions, understanding them not as "irrational forms of behavior, but as an essential component of all human action, collective as individual" (Eyerman, 2005, p. 41). Since then, dozens of articles and books have studied emotions and explored the link between emotions and social movements (Goodwin et al., 2004; Goodwin & Jasper, 2004; Jasper, 2011; Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019).

Emotions are present in social movements in multiple ways. James Jasper (2011, p. 286) argues that emotions motivate people; they are present in the crowds, "are expressed rhetorically, and shape stated and unstated goals of social movements." They are means and ends and can facilitate and hinder a movement, strategies, resources, and overall success (Jasper, 2011; Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). That is, emotions encourage the participation of people as the actions of a system are cast as immoral, unbearable, and wrong, creating moral outrage and even frustration and desperation that seek a change.

Just like what happens with the discourses that leaders articulate, organizers try to awaken emotions to attract new participants, sustain the commitment of those already taking part in the movement, and persuade outsiders (Jasper, 2011). One way activists use to gather

participants is by creating or taking advantage of moral shocks (Jasper, 2011). Moral shocks can motivate people's participation in a movement, given the sense of outrage following an unexpected event (Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). Jasper defined moral shocks as "an unexpected event or piece of information that raises such a sense of outrage in a person that becomes inclined toward political action" (Jasper, 1998, p. 409). Nepstad and Smith (2001), in their study of the Central American peace movement in the US, found that the movement was greatly motivated by moral shocks and moral outrage. The movement's activists, missionaries, and other religious people were exposed to the atrocities that Central Americans were experiencing before and during the Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan civil wars. The outrage caused by the awareness of massacres, torture, kidnappings, forced disappearances, gang rapes, the killings of civilians and religious leaders in Central America, and knowledge about the financing of the Contras in Nicaragua led people to condemn the US involvement in the region. Missionaries, who had been in the region, provided diagnostic and prognostic frames that evidenced fault attribution to the US government, along with a potential solution to the problem. Here, the outrage was informed by the availability of information that the movement's members possessed, or "cognitive accessibility" (Nepstad & Smith, 2001, p. 160).

Emotions are also important to sustain participation in collective action. To endure, participation needs to provide some kind of satisfaction along the way (Jasper, 2011). Some of these include collective solidarity, interaction rituals, and other group dynamics (*Ibid*). The collective identity is often reinforced through emotions (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Jasper, 2011). That is to say, groups strengthen when they share reflex emotions (i.e., quick, automatic responses such as anger, joy, surprise, shocks, or disgust) in response to happenings. Even when events are adverse and people experience feelings like fear or anxiety, the experience "can be a strong force in creating a sense of collectivity and be an attractive force in collective actions" (Eyerman, 2005, p. 43).

Emotions and a sense of injustice were invoked at different times in the caravan movement. As we will see in the next section, social movement activists cast events as unjust and unfair to draw attention and interest to the caravan. The frames charged with emotions might have also influenced the participation or reinforced the commitment of NGOs and civil society across Mexico and the US, similar to those described by Nepstad & Smith (2001).

### **5.3 Context: Who Is Bartolo Fuentes?**

To identify the frames articulated before and during the caravan, I analyzed 187 posts composed of videos, photos, flyers, newspaper articles, songs, and statements Bartolo Fuentes posted on his Facebook account from September 27, 2018, to December 21, 2018. The period covers the prelude of the caravan to the time when the last caravan members arrived in Tijuana. In this section, I examine Fuentes's experience in previous caravans and leadership as the rationale for analyzing his messages.

Bartolo Fuentes, Honduran, is a former congressman, migrant and refugee activist, and journalist. In 2013, he served as a congressman for the “*Libertad y Refundación*” Party led by former president Manuel Zelaya (La Nación, 2018). He identifies as a journalist, human rights and migrant activist. In 1999, he co-founded a Honduran grassroots organization that helps migrant mothers to locate their disappeared sons in Mexico, the Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Migrants (Comité de Familiares Desaparecidos –COFAMIPRO), which served as an example for the organization of similar Committees in El Salvador and other countries (Front Line Defenders, 2019). During his time in this NGO, he and others organized, in the early 2000s, the first Caravan of Mothers that left Honduras. Mothers of disappeared migrants were looking for their disappeared sons and seeking justice and accountability from the Mexican government (see Chapter 1) (Castro Neira, 2019; Salazar Araya, 2019; Varela Huerta, 2015a).

Fuentes had long denounced the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez (President of Honduras 2014-2022) for the corruption, insecurity, violence, and poverty that flooded the country. Fuentes accused Hernandez of drug trafficking and blamed him for the emigration of thousands of Hondurans; he called out the government after the electoral fraud in 2013 and 2017 and the repression that followed when thousands protested the frauds. He also criticized the government's education, health, and labor approach and participated in protests against the government and the reforms it passed. He has worked with and supported migrants and asylum seekers and has advised them on their rights for over two decades.

Fuentes participated in the *Viacrucis Migrante* organized in April 2018 by *Pueblo Sin Fronteras*, an NGO working with and for migrants. He joined the caravan in Mexico City and followed the group until it arrived in Tijuana. He stated his goal was to document migrants' experiences in transit and create a television program about it (Front Line Defenders, 2019). The program would help make a census to determine the number of disappeared migrants. During the month he followed the caravan, he broadcasted different events in the *Viacrucis*. He said his videos had good coverage, as some got more than 200,000 views, making him a point of reference for people who wanted information about their relatives who were part of the caravan and other people interested in migration matters (*Ibid*).

Based on that experience, Fuentes participated in the October 2018 migrant caravan that left San Pedro Sula on October 13, 2018. According to him (Front Line Defenders, 2019), his participation consisted of giving information about the caravan, explaining its rationale, and advising migrants on their rights. As he did previously, he broadcasted several instances of the October 2018 caravan. Some videos posted on his Facebook account had more than 257,000 views, reaching a broad audience (Fuentes, 2018). In other words, his relevance lies, among others, in his "ability" to reach wide audiences.

Because he participated in this latter caravan, he claims, he was criminalized by the governments of Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and especially the US. The last, Fuentes argued, has persecuted him and other activists, stating that the activities they carry out in defense of migrants are deemed "human trafficking." This perception led to his arrest in Guatemala in October 2018, after the caravan entered the country, and he was later deported to Honduras. In his capture, he argued, not only the Guatemalan police participated, but US officers.

### ***5.3.1 Fuentes's Leadership***

Fuentes's leadership can be evidenced, first, by the echo his messages on Facebook had about leaving Honduras in large groups, as demonstrated by the formation of WhatsApp and Facebook groups. Fuentes's experience and knowledge about the migratory routes to Mexico, the risks and dangers along the journey, and his understanding of migrant and refugee rights gave him a voice among the migrant community. His messages and advice about leaving Honduras in groups first resonated with some migrants who already had the intention to leave. In an interview with journalist Alberto Pradilla (2019), Fuentes stated that he posted on Facebook the suggestion of leaving Honduras in large groups for security and protection. One post related to the caravan was posted on September 27, 2018, where Fuentes stressed that groups of people were getting ready to leave Honduras (Fuentes, 2018a). People commented on such a post and asked him about the date of departure; he replied, saying that the caravan would leave on October 12, 2018. Fuentes argued that after the post, his job was limited to talking to people who already had decided to migrate and explaining to them that after making such a decision, they should speak with other migrants, that together they would mitigate risks (Pradilla, 2019, p. 45).

Second, his influence can be discerned in instances when the caravan was in transit, as he acted as one *de facto* coordinator of the movement. In the videos he recorded, people

constantly asked him for advice on how to solve disagreements between caravan members. He would instruct them on what to do and how to solve different issues. For instance, people asked him what to do when people gave them water or money:

Woman: Mr. Bartolo, if someone gives us a water bottle, can we take it? [...]  
Fuentes: If someone gives you money, define a treasurer  
Woman: But if you say that [to the people], Mr. Bartolo  
Fuentes: Pick a person to collect the money and keep a record  
Woman: Can we ask for money?  
Fuentes: Yes, you can, give the money to the treasurer and keep a record of it<sup>10</sup>(Fuentes, 2018k)

The above example shows how people asked Fuentes for advice and how they saw him as an authority. By saying, "but if you tell them that," people gave him some power and believed that his presence and words would be heard and followed.

Third, Fuentes would instruct caravan members on how to conduct themselves during the walk. Fuentes repeatedly told caravan members that they needed to slowly walk behind the Honduran flag and that people should walk together as one group. When they first started walking, migrants were organized geographically, that is, by *departamento* (states). They would hold the department's name on a banner and walk behind it. In the early videos of the caravan, Fuentes asked one caravan member who acted like a "handyman" to tell other members to walk together as a single group without leaving spaces between the groups. Fuentes adverted that those who would not follow the instructions would be expelled from the caravan:

Do not leave those blank spots [...] *Compañero*, please go behind the flag, behind the flag, mate. [...] Help me to check those people who do not follow the instructions; we are going to expel those people from the *Caminata* [...] We're going to expel the people who do not follow the instructions; we do not need to complicate our lives, no one goes ahead of the flag [...] Let's not leave this [blank] space, and walk slowly<sup>11</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k).

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<sup>10</sup> Mujer: Don Bartolo, ¿si alguien nos da una bolsa de agua, la agarramos? [...]  
Fuentes: si alguien les da dinero, definan a alguien que va a ir de tesorero  
Mujer: Pero si usted lo dice, Don Bartolo  
Fuentes: Definan a un compañero que vaya recogiendo y lleven la cuenta" [...]  
Mujer: ¿Podemos pedir entonces?

Bartolo: pueden y entregan al coordinador y llevan la cuenta<sup>10</sup>

<sup>11</sup> No deje espacios vacíos [...] Compañero, por favor vaya atrás de la bandera, atrás de la bandera compañero. [...] Ayuden a chequear a esa gente que no hace caso, a esa gente la vamos a ir sacando de la caminata [...] La

In the video, Fuentes is at the front of the caravan, recording, and broadcasting what is happening. He observes that people are not following the rules of walking behind the Honduran flag and he gets out of the truck to talk to them. At his point, he exercises his authority by telling people how to behave and warns them that they will be expelled from the caravan if they do not obey the instructions. Additionally, it was clear that other people worked with him in coordinating the group, signaling the planning and organization efforts behind the caravan. Bartolo Fuentes shows his authority, influence, and leadership with these actions.

Fourth, in November 2018, when the caravan was in Mexico City, Fuentes interviewed some caravan members who confirmed the importance of his leadership. In one of the interviews, a woman expressed happiness after seeing him. She then said: “now that you are here, we feel happy because we know that if you stay with us, the caravan will be a little better; there will be more respect, will be more order; they [caravan members] no longer pay attention to the coordinators<sup>12</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018q). With her words, she attributed him some power and leadership that would help organize and conduct the caravan in a better way, signaling that the caravan faced some problems concerning the organization. Her words also expressed some relief, as Fuentes’s presence would make the caravan more organized, and people would follow directions. Her words also implied that other caravan coordinators were not heard. Lastly, her words spoke about the structure and character of the movement, suggesting a rather loose organization and a horizontal movement.

Fuentes consistently denied being an organizer or leader of the caravan. In multiple interviews, Fuentes stated that he did not organize the caravan (Carrasco, 2018; CNN en

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gente que no hace caso la vamos a sacar, no tenemos por qué estarnos complicando la vida, nadie adelante de la bandera [...] No dejemos este espacio, este espacio no, este espacio no, caminen despacio.

<sup>12</sup> Ahora que está usted presente aquí nos sentimos contentos porque sabemos que, si usted se queda con nosotros, pues la caravana va a ir un poquito mejor, más respeto, ordenada, a los coordinadores ya no les quieren hacer caso.

Español, 2018); he said he did not know who was organizing the caravan but mentioned that the organization was carried out through WhatsApp groups (Pradilla, 2019).

When Alberto Pradilla, a journalist who closely followed the caravan, inquired of him about his role in the caravan, he replied he was an “*acompañante y orientador*” (a companion and advisor) and that he had done his job (Pradilla, 2019, p. 46). In another interview, Fuentes stressed, “I decided that I could accompany the group as a journalist— why not – assess people in topics like what is asylum, refuge, humanitarian visa, the risks along the way<sup>13</sup>” (Carrasco, 2018, para. 13).

In late October 2018, he wrote a post on his Facebook account emphasizing that he was not a smuggler, had not committed any crime, and stood by his words, saying that Hondurans should not travel clandestinely; instead, they should leave in large groups or caravans, publicly, and seek asylum in Mexico (Fuentes, 2018p). He also acknowledged his role in advising migrants on their rights but stated he was not the organizer.

Many who protest and stand against the government in Honduras are persecuted, detained, and killed. Environmental and human rights activists and journalists have been highly repressed or assassinated in recent times in Honduras. For instance, in 2017, Global Witness reported that since 2010 more than 120 people have been killed. The victims took a stand against the construction of water dams, mines, logging, or agriculture, and countless more have been threatened or attacked (Global Witness, 2017). In 2020, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that human rights groups continued to be repressed and the target of lethal force and other excessive use of force by security forces during protests (Human Rights Watch, 2020, p. 259). HRW stated that as of November 2019, 82 journalists had been killed since 2001, and most of the perpetrators remain unpunished. Also, the report detailed that a local human rights

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<sup>13</sup> Decidí que podía acompañar al grupo como periodista y -por qué no- orientar a las personas en temas como qué es un asilo, que es un refugio, qué es una visa humanitaria, los riesgos que se corren en el camino.

organization informed that between March and July 2020, six people were killed, and 80 were wounded. In addition, there were 48 arbitrary detentions in the aftermath of the demonstrations that followed the restructuring of the health and education systems in 2020 (*Ibid*). In this context, it was no surprise that Fuentes, a migrant and human rights activist, denied being the movement's leader.

Thus, the red flyer (see Figure 3.1) disseminated on social media, calling for participants to join the caravans, did not have an author or an organization. The flyer said "*Autoconvocamos*" (*We call for*) in a way to maintain confidentiality about the identity of the designer and creator of the flyer, who was possibly a leader or supporter of the movement. The flyer mentioned the date, place, and time of departure. According to Pradilla, the person that created the flyer knew that he/she could have been identified and later persecuted; that is why he/she used the linguistic term "*autoconvocamos*." The "We" in the flyer then does not allow one person's identification and serves to protect the author (Pradilla, 2019, p. 47). Pradilla claimed that having Fuentes present himself as an instigator or leader of the caravan could have led to an accusation of human trafficking (Pradilla, 2019).

Fuentes posted the flyer (see Figure 3.1) on his Facebook wall on October 5, 2018. It was shared 241 times, creating a buzz on social media about the movement. As mentioned earlier, Fuente's previous posts suggested the ongoing organization of large groups to leave Honduras, as the information about the caravan was spread even before the flyer was posted. The news about the caravan reached the local television outlets, who also commented on the caravan and were present at the bus station on the departure day (HCH Televisión Digital, 2018). In other words, social media facilitated the creation of a fully-fledged social movement.

Even after denying the accusations of organizing the caravan, Fuentes was detained based on his participation and leadership in the movement. Fuentes was surveilled, imprisoned, and later deported to Honduras four days after the caravan departed from San Pedro Sula. As

the caravan entered Guatemala, the Guatemalan National Civil Police intercepted Fuentes and detained him on the grounds of irregular stay on October 16, 2018, in Esquipulas (Federación Internacional por los Derechos Humanos, 2018; Telesur, 2018). However, in an interview, a Guatemalan migration officer stated that Fuentes was arrested because of his “leadership” of the movement (Pradilla, 2019, p. 55). Fuentes was later deported to Honduras on October 19, 2018. Once in Honduras and with access to social media, Fuentes wrote on his Facebook wall:

THANK YOU ALL for your support, words of encouragement, and prayers. I was unjustly imprisoned for more than four days, but that is nothing compared to the suffering of those who go on the migrant caravan fleeing the tragedy we are living in Honduras. It seems that the threats continue, and some people from the government seek to accuse me at the Prosecutor's Office. I hope to always count on your support if needed. Let us continue to support our nationals; I stand by my decision to fight for migrants' rights and people in general. And those of us who remain here, let's keep up the fight to change this terrible situation; so that no one has to flee. THANK YOU. Bartolo Antonio Fuentes<sup>14</sup> (Fuentes, 2018m).

Bartolo's apprehension and deportation followed Donald Trump's threats on Twitter to cut all financial aid to Honduras had the caravan arrived in the US. Later, the threat was extended to El Salvador and Guatemala (BBC News, 2018b). At the moment of his deportation, the caravan crossed Guatemala and was in Tecún Umán, at the Mexico-Guatemala border.

#### **5.4 Fuentes' Messages as Diagnostic, Prognostic, and Motivational Framing**

In the following section, I analyze Fuentes's messages and classify them as diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational framing. I analyze Fuentes's messages because he was instrumental in the publicizing and galvanizing of the caravan. He was prolific on Facebook and aware of his exposure, he used the platform to reach his base and even a wider audience. Given his

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<sup>14</sup> MUCHAS GRACIAS A TODOS Y TODAS por su apoyo, sus frases de aliento y sus oraciones. Estuve más de cuatro días preso injustamente; pero eso no es nada comparado con el sufrimiento de quienes van en la caminata de los migrantes huyendo de la tragedia que vivimos en Honduras. Según parece las amenazas siguen y hay algunos del Gobierno con intenciones de acusarme con la Fiscalía. Espero contar siempre con su respaldo, si se da el caso. Sigamos apoyando a nuestros compatriotas, yo por mi parte mantengo mi decisión de luchar por los derechos de los migrantes y del pueblo en general. Y los que quedamos aquí mantengamos la lucha por cambiar esta terrible situación; para que nadie tenga que salir huyendo. GRACIAS. Bartolo Antonio Fuentes.

profile, experience, knowledge of migrant struggles, and influence, he was an important figure in the enlargement of the caravan, making him one leading mobilizer on Facebook and a *de facto* leader at the beginning of the movement

#### **5.4.1 Diagnostic Framing**

Diagnostic framing has two functions: first, the definition of a situation that needs to change, thus defining it as unjust, unbearable, immoral, and deserving of corrective action; and second, the attribution of blame or causality (Snow & Benford, 1992). Thus, activists or social actors seek to attribute blame by identifying the guilty agent (person or system) for the already defined unbearable or unjust situation.

Fuentes's frames offered two diagnoses, one of the Honduran migrations to the US and another of the complex scenario in Honduras. Fuentes explained what was wrong and what needed to change. First, he elucidated the conditions under which migrants make the trip to the US, defining the situation as unbearable and unfair, suggesting that the situation needed to change. Second, he explained the reasons why people leave the country. As for the attribution, he first targeted the US government for the imposition of restrictive policies that bring about harm and death; and second, he blamed the Honduran government for the emigration of thousands of people. Hence, he targeted and blamed two systems of authority at the local and international levels.

The following post exemplifies the diagnosis. Fuentes posted the following text on Sunday, October 7, 2018, just five days before the caravan was to depart. In it, he explains what was wrong and who was to blame. The post had 88 likes and seven comments, and it was shared 133 times:

**WE CAN HELP AVOID MORE DEATH AND SUFFERING ON THE ROUTE OF HONDURAN MIGRANTS**

According to data from government agencies, more than 300 people leave Honduras for the United States every day. Additionally, other unregistered people travel with coyotes and pay up to 8,000 dollars. The poorest add up to almost 10,000 in the month.

They go with few resources; they walk along dangerous routes, sometimes on foot, they pay for the bus when they can, or they use the trains. There are about 40 shelters that support them by giving them a place to sleep for up to two days and something to eat. Not few dare to beg, that is to say, to ask for money in the streets of cities for food or to continue the trip. But thousands of Honduran men and women have lost their lives on these dangerous routes at the hands of criminals or in train or car accidents. Sometimes, the migration police themselves extort them or even the municipal police, federal police, and even train guards [...]. In 2018, almost 200 migrant bodies were repatriated. Since 2013, there have been nearly 1,600 bodies brought through the Foreign Ministry. But many more remain in morgues in Mexico or were buried in mass graves after no one claimed them [...]. In other words, police persecution and immigration restrictions are causing thousands of deaths. Migrants will continue to leave Honduras for the United States because the reality of the lack of opportunities, poverty, and violence they live in is much stronger and more dangerous than the terrible risks awaiting them [...] <sup>15</sup> (Fuentes, 2018c).

A video and two photos complemented the post. The video showed migrants, men, women, and children, getting on the top of a freight train, possibly, the Beast (see Figure 5.1), getting more than 10,000 views. The Beast is the name of the freight train that goes from the south to the north of Mexico. There are two main routes, leaving from Chiapas and Tenosique, arriving at Tamaulipas, Sonora y Baja California (Expansión Política, 2022). Migrants who cannot afford a bus ticket or a smuggler and want to avoid migratory checkpoints use it to get to the US border. The journey on the Beast is perilous, as migrants can fall out of the train, be raped, assaulted, or be kidnapped (Diaz, 2020). There are shelters along the train route that assist migrants in transit.

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<sup>15</sup> **PODEMOS AYUDAR A EVITAR MAS MUERTE Y SUFRIMIENTO EN LA RUTA DE LOS MIGRANTES HONDUREÑOS**

Cada día salen del país mas de 300 personas desde Honduras con rumbo a los Estados Unidos, según datos de organismos gubernamentales. Aparte hay otros no registrados que viajan con coyotes y pagan hasta 8 mil dólares. Los mas pobres suman casi 10 mil en el mes. Van con pocos recursos, caminan por rutas peligrosas, a veces a pie, pagan bus cuando pueden o usan el ferrocarril. Hay unos 40 albergues que los apoyand ándoles donde dormir hasta por dos días y algo de comer. No pocos se atreven a “charolear”, es decir pedir en las calles de las ciudades para comer o continuar el viaje. Pero son miles de hondureños y hondureñas los que en esas rutas peligrosas han perdido la vida a manos de delincuentes o en accidentes en el tren o automovil. A veces es la misma policía de migración la que los extorsiona o incluso las policías municipales, policías federales y hasta guardias del ferrocarril. En el 2018 se han repatriado casi 200 cuerpos de migrantes y desde 2013 suman casi mil 600 los cuerpos traídos a través de la Cancillería. Pero muchos mas siguen en las morgues en México o fueron enterrados en fosas comunes después que nadie los reclamó [...] En otras palabras, la persecución de la policía y las restricciones migratorias están produciendo miles de muertos. Los migrantes seguirán marchándose desde Honduras hacia los Estados Unidos porque la realidad en que viven de falta de oportunidades, pobreza y violencia es mucho mas fuerte y peligrosa que los terribles riesgos que les esperan en el camino.

## Figure 5.1

*Migrants riding the freight train, also known as “La Bestia”*

This figure has been redacted. The image can be found in the following link:

<https://www.travelreport.mx/destinos/nacionales/recorrido-de-la-ruta-de-la-bestia/>

Source: ([Redacción, 2019](#))

Moreover, the first photo that accompanied the post consisted of a group of migrants holding a banner that read, “*Basta de repression, secuestros, violaciones y asaltos*” (Enough of repression, kidnappings, violations, and robberies). The last picture showed lighted candles in a heart shape in front of photos, presumably of disappeared or dead migrants.

In the above post, Fuentes listed the many perils undocumented migrants experience in their transit to the US. He argued that migrants get robbed, assaulted, kidnapped, extorted by police or migration officers, and even killed, adding the number of bodies repatriated in the last years and claiming that the figure is most likely higher. Then, he explained the conditions in which migrants make the trip to the US. He argued migrants usually come from a lower socioeconomic status and thus lack the funds to afford the trip. Because of it, they walk through dangerous routes, often under the control of organized crime, beg for food, or use freight trains, leading them to experience even more violence. He also pointed out that the border regime implemented in the region was responsible for the tragedies that migrants experience in transit. With these comments, Fuentes informed people about the situation that needed correction and then pointed out who was responsible for it.

In later posts, he would target specifically the US government, suggesting that it was implementing restrictive policies to curb undocumented migration. For instance, in a video recorded on Saturday, October 13, while the caravan was on the move, he expressed, "Trump wants to stop this" [referring to the caravan] (Fuentes, 2018g). The video had 920 likes, 326 comments, and 79,000 views, and was shared 1,300 times. He also said: "Donald Trump does not want migrants there," prompting reactions from participants. In a video also recorded by Fuentes, migrants expressed, "See you there, Donald Trump" (Fuentes, 2018f), challenging the US president and his policies and suggesting that the mechanisms and restrictive policies in place would not deter them. The video had 32,000 views, 409 likes, and 186 comments and was shared 599 times.

The above messages served to construct an image of Trump and the US as an enemy, as Trump did not want undocumented migrants in the US. With the apportioning of blame, Fuentes identified the US and Trump as "them," leading to the development of an oppositional "us," the caravan and migrants' activists, and a narrative of "us vs. them." That is, Fuentes framed the caravan in opposition to the US government and its policies (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Gamson, 1996; Robinson, 2001).

The first passage shown above is also an example of an injustice frame. An injustice frame defines an authority's actions or system of authority (or government) as unjust and simultaneously legitimates noncompliance. Such actions create moral indignation, which is loaded with emotion. This frame requires an actor or authority to carry the responsibility for bringing about harm and suffering, constituting the concrete target of moral outrage (Gamson, 1996; Snow et al., 1986). I referred to injustice frames when there was talk of restrictive immigration laws that criminalize migration and bring about suffering; and when there was a reference to depictions of the Honduran Government as "bad government," corrupt, illegal, unjust, responsible for sorrow, harm, poverty, and migration from the country (Human Rights

Watch, 2021; InSight Crime, 2021; López Recinos, 2020; Sosa, 2014, 2015, 2018; United States Department of Justice, 2017; Vommaro & Briceño Cerrato, 2018). In other words, Fuentes blamed the US government for implementing restrictive policies to restrict the movement of people.

Throughout the walk, Fuentes posted pictures of migrants in transit and broadcasted the caravan. With that, he was seeking empathy by using injustice symbols. Injustice symbols are based on “events and situations, or conditions that entail some element of human suffering and unjust behavior towards others” (Olesen, 2015, p. 9). For instance, the images of migrants riding the "the Beast" or the videos of the migrant walk where thousands of people were walking in precarious ways. Injustice symbols are usually motivated by moral shocks (*Ibid*). Moral shocks are "an unexpected event or piece of information that raises such a sense of outrage in a person that becomes inclined toward political action” (Jasper, 1998, p. 409). These shocks are never automatic but *created* and *amplified* by highlighting and exposing the injustice (original emphasis) (Olesen, 2015, p. 10). With the images of migrants in freight trains and others, Fuentes was trying to generate a moral shock in the audience by displaying a rhetorical and performative work (Jasper, 2011), further amplifying the image of the suffering migrant.

Social actors use dramatic and emotional elements to maximize visibility and resonance and back up political intervention and ameliorative action (Olesen, 2015). With the display of the "suffering migrant," Fuentes sought to maximize visibility and awareness of both the risks in transit and the reasons for migration and with that broader support for the movement. With the images and discourses, he also strived for political attention and policy action.

Additionally, Fuentes provided a diagnosis of the Honduran context, stating that the then-Honduran president was responsible for the emigration of people. On several occasions, Fuentes articulated injustice frames that blamed Hernandez for bringing about poverty, unemployment, and insecurity in the country. Some examples are the following:

Mr. Trump, you support a corrupt government, you support a government that steals the money that was for medicines, people are in misery [...] <sup>16</sup> (Fuentes, 2018e)

Gentlemen of the OAS, realize what you have caused by supporting a corrupt government, a thief government, a murderous government that is causing people to leave; you continue to support corrupt people, your criminal [JOH], and migration is going to continue happening <sup>17</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k)

In Honduras, they do not have opportunities, so they have to go to another country [...]. These people want security, employment, and security for their communities <sup>18</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k)

In these passages, Fuentes first stated the causes of the emigration of Hondurans: insecurity, poverty, and violence. He then argued that both Trump and the Organization of American States (OAS) supported a corrupt government that was leaving people in misery.

In response to the allegations that Fuentes made about the Honduran president and in the middle of the visibility the caravan was generating, the Honduran government accused Fuentes of organizing the caravan and instigating the movement. It stated Fuentes was benefiting from the movement, referring to him as a smuggler and a liar, further increasing the antagonism between the two.

The statements made by both sides, the Honduran government and Fuentes, only exacerbated the tension between them and increased the antagonism and the narrative of "us vs. them." What the Honduran government did was articulate counter-frames to reduce Fuentes's credibility and undermine the caravan. Benford and Snow (2000) state that opponents often challenge the movement's diagnostic and prognostic framing in an attempt to rebut, or undermine a person's reality or myth, referring to this as counter-framing. Likewise, the square-

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<sup>16</sup> Señor Trump, usted apoya un gobierno corrupto, apoya a un gobierno que se roba el dinero que era para las medicinas, la gente está en la lipidia [...].

<sup>17</sup> Dense cuenta señores de la OEA lo que han provocado, sostener un gobierno corrupto, un gobierno ladrón, un gobierno asesino, está provocando que la gente se vaya, siguen sosteniendo a sus corruptos, a su criminal ahí y la migración se va a seguir dando.

<sup>18</sup> En Honduras no tienen posibilidades, entonces tiene que ir a otro país [...] esta gente quiere seguridad, negocios, seguridad para sus comunidades.

off between the advocates and detractors of a movement has been referred to as "framing contests" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626).

The Honduras Chancellor, María Dolores Agüero, argued that Fuentes had organized the campaign to destabilize the country, asserting that the caravan had been created for political purposes by the same actors who in the past have tried to bring about instability and ungovernability. Agüero claimed that the groups that organized the caravan would have deceived people with fake promises and lies to join the caravan (Redacción, 2018a). Alden Rivera Morales, Ambassador of Honduras in Mexico, stated that Fuentes had orchestrated the caravan and drawn people to it with fake promises such as that Mexico would grant humanitarian visas or asylum (Villa y Caña, 2018, para. 5). Rivera Morales stressed that the caravan was a political movement and that Fuentes had political motives. The Honduran president, Hernandez, stated that different political groups were trying to destabilize the government:

"Hondurans should not be part of this political game that is inhumane and reprehensible [...] Hondurans that are part of that irregular movement, using lies and fake promises, should cease. Do not endanger your life or your children's life [...] The irregular mobilization was organized with political purposes to affect the governability, the image, the good name, the stability, and peace in Honduras and the countries on the route to the US<sup>19</sup>" (Rivera, 2018, paras. 1, 11, 13).

Hernández also addressed the Honduran population, saying that the caravan was an irregular movement and that people were in great danger. He did so to undermine Fuentes's credibility about the caravan and to avoid people's participation in and support of the movement.

Along with Hernandez's statements, the US Embassy in Honduras released a statement urging Hondurans not to go to the US "illegally." The statement remarked the US concern about the caravan stating that people were told false promises of entering the US by others

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<sup>19</sup> Los hondureños no deben prestarse a ese juego político que es inhumano y condenable. [...] Los hondureños que se sumaron a ese movimiento irregular, bajo engaños y falsas promesas, deben desistir. No pongan en peligro su vida y la vida de sus niños [...] La movilización irregular fue organizada con fines políticos para afectar la gobernabilidad, la imagen, el buen nombre, la estabilidad y la paz de Honduras y de los países en la ruta hacia los Estados Unidos.

seeking to exploit their nationals (US Embassy Tegucigalpa, 2018), following the rhetoric of the Honduran government.

After the counterarguments, Fuentes lashed out again against the Honduran government (Carrasco, 2018; CNN en Español, 2018; Fuentes, 2018p; Pradilla, 2019). First, he referred to the accusations made by Aguero as lies (Fuentes, 2018n). Second, he said that the government was persecuting him to be in good stead with Trump, that he had not organized the caravan and it was the poverty and violence that were driving people away:

JOH wants to put me in prison to please Trump. I am in Honduras, but I am not at peace. The threats from the government against me continue. Juan Orlando Hernández announced that they would accuse those supposedly responsible for the mass exodus of Hondurans who are fleeing misery and violence generated by the government. They speak of a "criminal structure," but they have only mentioned Bartolo Fuentes, so it is logical to assume they want to imprison me [...] <sup>20</sup> (Fuentes, 2018p).

I want to clarify the accusations the Honduran government has made against me. First, I do not accept that I am the organizer of that caravan, not because it is a crime, if I had organized it, I would say so here. I do not want to take credit for something I did not do; organizing people to flee from the country's reality is not a crime; if I had done it or if someone else had done it, I would not have to hide it. [...] The government is so cynical that it acknowledges that its concern is not that the mothers leave, it is not that they endure the sun, it is not that they endure the rain and sleep outdoors; that is not what bothers the government of Honduras; what bothers it is that they (caravan members) leave visibly and that the world is seeing the tragedy in which we live <sup>21</sup> (Fuentes, 2018r).

In the second passage shown above, Fuentes argued that the source of anger and frustration of the Honduran government was that the caravan exposed the ongoing Honduran crisis while

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<sup>20</sup>JOH ME QUIERE METER PRESO PARA AGRADAR A TRUMP. Estoy en Honduras, pero no estoy tranquilo. Las amenazas de parte del gobierno en mi contra continúan. Juan Orlando Hernández anunció que pasarán a acusar a quienes supuestamente son responsables del éxodo masivo de hondureños que huyen de la miseria y la violencia generada desde el gobierno. Hablan de una "estructura criminal", pero sólo ha mencionado a Bartolo Fuentes, es lógico entonces suponer que es a mí a quien quieren tener preso.

<sup>21</sup> Yo sí quiero aclarar las acusaciones que ha hecho el gobierno de Honduras en mi contra. Primero, yo no acepto que soy organizador de esa caravana, no porque sea delito, si yo la hubiera organizado, yo lo diría acá, no quiero atribuirme un mérito que no tengo, organizar a la gente para huir de la realidad del país no es un delito, si lo hubiera hecho yo o si lo hubiera hecho otra persona no tendría que ocultarlo. [...] El gobierno es tan sínico que acepta que la preocupación de ellos no es que se vayan las madres, no es que aguatén sol, no es que aguanten lluvias y duerman a la intemperie, eso no es lo que le molesta al gobierno de Honduras, lo que le molesta es que se vayan visibles y que el mundo esté viendo la tragedia en la cual nosotros vivimos.

casting the Honduran government as “inhumane” and “inconsiderate,” as it did not care about the migrants. Finally, he emphasized the figure of the suffering migrant.

#### **5.4.2 Prognostic Framing**

##### **5.4.2.1 First Solution to Migrant’s Experiences in Transit: The Caravan.**

Prognostic framing entails offering a solution to a problem that has been diagnosed. In this case, Fuentes identified two problems: the perils migrants experience in transit and the root causes of migration. Thus, he offered two solutions. For the first problem, he stated that large groups of people should leave together to protect each other in transit. He stated:

Groups of up to 80 migrants have gathered in previous months, but most have been detained and deported upon entering Mexico [...] The best thing would be to leave together and organized from Honduras, showing your faces, without hiding, shouting to the world that you are leaving because it [the government] has robbed you of all opportunities, and those who should protect you instead become threats to your lives. If you go together, you can support each other, defend yourselves from threats and demand respect for your rights, as people do in whatever country they find themselves in<sup>22</sup> (Fuentes, 2018a).

People should not go secretly and clandestinely like more than four hundred people have done daily in recent years. Leaving in large groups or caravans allows them to avoid police extortion, assaults, rapes, kidnappings, murders, and other types of aggression<sup>23</sup> (Fuentes, 2018p).

The caravan was the solution to the first problem. By going in large groups, people would avoid paying extortion and bribes. It would also reduce travel costs, as people would not have to pay for coyotes. The size of the groups needed to be considerable, larger than 80, as smaller groups had failed in their attempts to arrive in the US. Fuentes argued that together, migrants could claim their rights and demand respect for their rights. In other words, he was encouraging

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<sup>22</sup> Se ha juntado grupos de hasta 80 migrantes en meses anteriores, pero la mayoría han sido detenidos y deportados al internarse a México [...] Lo mejor sería salir juntos y organizados desde Honduras, dando la cara, sin esconderse. Salir gritándole al mundo que se van porque aquí les han robado las oportunidades y porque quienes deberían protegerlos más bien se convierten en amenazas para sus vidas. Si se van juntos, pueden apoyarse mutuamente, protegerse de amenazas y demandar respeto a sus derechos como personas en cualquier país en que se encuentren.

<sup>23</sup> La gente no debe irse a escondidas y clandestinos como lo han hecho más de cuatrocientas personas cada día en los últimos años. Irse en grupos grandes o caravanas permite que eviten las extorsiones de las policías, asaltos, violaciones, secuestros, asesinatos y otro tipo de agresiones.

people to do a contentious action, a collective action, a protest vis-à-vis the crisis in Honduras and the constraints in the migratory route. Additionally, Fuentes encouraged people to leave massively and publicly.

In multiple videos, Fuentes interviewed people about why they joined the caravan (Fuentes, 2018g). Most of them pointed out the lack of opportunities in the country, the violence, and the government's poor performance. In doing so, he afforded members a platform for them to express their discontent with the government. Thus, the caravan served as a space to express grievances, condemn injustices, and demand rights. By going out of the shadows, migrants challenged migration policies and called out the Honduran government.

In Hirschman's model (Hirschman, 1970), leaving the country was people's way of denouncing the government. Hondurans were fed up with the situation in their country; they had protested the coup of 2009, the fraud in the 2013 election, health, and reforms to education and health systems (Sosa, 2014, 2015, 2018; Vommaro & Briceño Cerrato, 2018). They used the democratic way to create a change in their country, voting for a different president in 2017, but the government committed fraud in the elections. At the time, the OAS advised a new election based on irregularities that occurred. The results favored the National Party, and Hernández was reelected. Hondurans then went to the streets to protest again; the government responded by repressing them. So, many left the country (Agren, 2020).

**5.4.2.1.1 Destination of the Caravan.** The framing of the caravan as a solution to the problem of the violence migrants experience in transit had a second component: the destination of the caravan. Bartolo Fuentes claimed on numerous occasions that the primary destination and goal of the caravan were to arrive safely in Mexico and seek asylum there:

This tragedy of our comrades, which is hardly mentioned in the media, can be avoided mainly if migrants are allowed to cross Mexico in a controlled manner and by safe transportation and routes<sup>24</sup> (Fuentes, 2018c).

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<sup>24</sup> Esa tragedia de nuestros compatriotas, que apenas se menciona en los medios, puede ser evitada en gran medida si se permite a los migrantes cruzar México de forma controlada y por transportes y rutas seguras.

In the passage, Fuentes conveyed that the hardships migrants experience in transit could be avoided if only Mexico would allow them to cross the border safely, which would entail letting them cross through authorized points of entry. This suggests that many of the problems migrants face are because they take the less surveilled routes, which are not the authorized points of entry, often controlled by organized crime and highly insecure. When Fuentes talked about safe means of transportation, he referred to using buses, or vans, in contrast to using freight trains, La Bestia, or large trucks undocumented migrants ride on to cross the country. Thus, the offered solution was to ask Mexico to let undocumented migrants cross the country using regular buses or vans through authorized points of entry.

In the same vein, during the walk, Fuentes stressed that Mexico should protect those fleeing violence by granting them humanitarian visas, temporary permits, or asylum.

Mexico can grant permits or humanitarian visas to people fleeing Honduras and other countries to remain in its territory [Mexico]. That is legal, and it [Mexico] has done so to many people. It is like saving their lives<sup>25</sup> (Fuentes, 2018c).

We hope that the Mexican government is conscious that it cannot treat people who are fleeing to save their lives and those of their families as criminals; Mexico should allow them to refuge in Mexican territory and be safe. Several of those here [in the caravan] are at imminent risk of losing their lives, and the others cannot work due to discrimination<sup>26</sup> (Fuentes, 2018f).

In the extracts, Fuentes argued that Mexico should treat migrants differently. Not only should Mexico allow undocumented migrants to cross the country safely through authorized points of entry, but once in Mexican territory, the government should protect them by granting temporary or permanent statuses, like humanitarian visas and asylum. Likewise, Fuentes stressed how he was hopeful that Mexico was conscious of the situation Hondurans faced and that it would treat them as such and not as criminals. Fuentes expressed that in reference to the statements Trump

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<sup>25</sup>México puede dar permisos o Visas Humanitarias a la gente que va huyendo de Honduras y otros países para que permanezcan en su territorio. Eso es legal y lo ha hecho con mucha gente. Es como salvarles la vida.

<sup>26</sup>Esperamos que el gobierno de México tome conciencia de que no puede tratar como delincuentes a personas que van huyendo para salvar sus vidas y las de su familia, que les den la oportunidad de refugiarse en territorio mexicano y ponerse a salvo, varios de los que van aquí corren riesgo inminente de perder su vida y los otros que no pueden trabajar por ser discriminados.

had made, stating that migrants were criminals. With these statements, Fuentes offered solutions to migrants while making moralizing frames about what Mexico should do.

Finally, Bartolo Fuentes spoke about migrants' intentions concerning the destination of the caravan. In the first passage, Fuentes claimed that migrants were gathering to walk together to seek asylum in Mexico. He stated:

The Migrant Walk of Honduran men and women rest at the big Terminal in San Pedro Sula, awaiting their departure to Mexico. Hundreds of men, women, and children will file for asylum with the Mexican government. A journey of almost one thousand kilometers awaits them to Tapachula<sup>27</sup> (Fuentes, 2018d).

People go [in the caravan] to arrive in Mexico and seek asylum in Mexican territory. Some people want to go to the United States, but if conditions were created for them in Mexico, people would not go<sup>28</sup> (Fuentes, 2018g).

The second paragraph is an extract of a video he recorded in transit. During the video, in the background, people said they wanted to get to the United States. While broadcasting, Fuentes continued to stress that people's destination was Mexico, especially if Mexico was to grant them permits to stay regularly in the country, work, and lodging. At that point, migrants shouted the opposite; they said that there were people in the caravan that wanted to go to the US, thus shedding light on the different goals that Fuentes and caravan members had and the different prognoses in the movement.

#### **5.4.2.2 Second Solution: Actions to Be Carried Out by the Honduran Government.**

After criticizing the poor performance of the Honduran government, Bartolo Fuentes also gave solutions to avoid migration altogether. First, he said that the government needed to create employment opportunities:

Supposedly, the so-called president of the Republic says that people should not leave. Oh, I wish he had a solution so people would not leave. I am going to give you an idea, easily. Let's combine two needs: 22,000 educational centers in Honduras are falling, and the ceilings, the walls, those 22,000 educational centers need to be repaired; well,

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<sup>27</sup> Caminata de los migrantes hondureños y hondureñas descansan en la Gran Terminal de San Pedro Sula a la espera de su salida hacia México. Cientos de hombres, mujeres y niños huyen y pedirán refugio al gobierno mexicano. Les espera un trayecto de casi mil kilómetros hasta Tapachula.

<sup>28</sup> La gente va con el propósito de llegar hasta México y pedir refugio en territorio mexicano. Hay también gente que quiere llegar a Estados Unidos, pero si acaso en México se dieran condiciones para ellos, la gente no iría.

allocate a portion of the budget to repair all those educational centers and give all these people jobs, tell them that they will have a good job for the next three years, pay them a fair salary and guarantee all their labor rights. I assure you that these people will not leave. Why would they go to another country if they can work here? [...] [The government] does not want people to leave, they do not want them to leave Honduras, well, then they create the conditions so that people do not leave<sup>29</sup> (Fuentes, 2018e).

In the above passage, Fuentes expressed that having a good, secure job would result in people staying in Honduras. He suggested the government create opportunities for people where they benefit from having a fair salary and labor rights. Also, Fuentes insinuated that the main reason for migration was the lack of employment.

Second, Fuentes kept stressing that people needed well-paid jobs and security. He asked the government to listen to its people and demanded a response to their claims:

An answer, gentlemen of the government [out JOH, out JOH, corrupt]; these people want to work [...], these people want safety [...], we want answers, not press releases from the Foreign Ministry saying that they can't go [...]. Listen, people want to work. Still, there is no work here. If they give you a job, they want a guard standing there all day and pay him 5,000 lempiras a month<sup>30</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k).

While walking, people stated the government was corrupt and urged for jobs, safety, and a different government. With the chant "Out JOH," Hondurans also expressed their demands; they wanted JOH out of the government. They first chanted "out JOH" after the 2017 election fraud (Sosa, 2018). Hondurans protested, marched, and voted for someone else. Caravan members expressed their discontent with the government stating that JOH was not a legitimate president (Fuentes, 2018i). Fuentes echoed the chant numerous times throughout the walk and once stated, "Out JOH, so that our people do not leave" (Fuentes, 2018o).

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<sup>29</sup> Según que por ahí que el disque presidente de la República dice que no, que la gente no se vaya, ah ojalá que el tuviera una solución para que la gente no se vaya. Le voy a regalar una idea, facilito, vamos a combinar dos necesidades, hay 22,000 centros educativos en Honduras que están cayéndose, los techos, las paredes, hay que reparar esos 22,000 centros educativos, bueno, destinen una partida para reparar todos esos centros educativos y denles trabajo a toda esta gente, díganles, bueno tienen trabajo los próximos tres años, les van a pagar lo que corresponde, y van a garantizar todos sus derechos laborales, yo les aseguro que esta gente no se va, para que se va a ir a otro país si aquí puede trabajar [...] no quieren que la gente se vaya de acá, no quieren que se vayan de Honduras, bueno entonces generen las condiciones para que la gente no se vaya.

<sup>30</sup> Una respuesta pues, señores del gobierno [fuera JOH, fuera JOH, corrupto] esta gente quiere trabajar, [...] esta gente quiere seguridad [...] respuestas queremos, no comunicados de la cancillería diciendo que si no se pueden ir [...] escuchen, la gente quiere trabajar, pero aquí no hay trabajo y si le den trabajo quieren que esté aquí ahí parado todo el día un guardia y pagarle 5000 lempiras al mes.

### 5.4.3 Motivational Framing

Fuentes deployed numerous motivational frames. Motivational framing entails the elaboration of “vocabularies of motives” that provide prompts to action (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 2019). To underscore that sense of urgency and need for action, Fuentes informed people about the difficult situation in Honduras. To that effect, Fuentes first informed the population about what was happening and then asked people to share his videos and posts, which ultimately demonstrated the severity of the problem. Fuentes said: “We will ask our colleagues to share; let’s share so that more people in Honduras and the world realize that this is the reality of Honduras, this is what is happening”<sup>31</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k).

On Sunday, October 14, the day after the caravan departed, Fuentes went live on Facebook, recording the development of the caravan. As more people found out and the caravan advanced, more people joined the movement. On that day, he said, “We always ask you to share; after finishing broadcasting, you can continue sharing so that other people know about this; so that this terrible reality is not hidden<sup>32</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018h). With these statements, Fuentes aimed to gain sympathy and empathy after exposing the difficulties caravan members were enduring in transit. The rhetorical and performative work of bringing their hardships into the open would motivate people’s participation in a movement (Jasper, 2011), whether in the form of direct involvement in the movement (i.e., from the balcony to the streets), increasing bystanders, or broad support from civil society.

Further, motivational framing is understood as the “agency” in social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1996; Snow et al., 2019). Gamson (1996) states that agency refers to the “consciousness” that is possible to change the *status quo* of the situation through collective action; it entails people’s empowerment as agents who can create their history, and

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<sup>31</sup> Vamos a pedirle a las compañeros y compañeros que compartamos, compartamos para que más gente se dé cuenta en Honduras y en el mundo, esta es la realidad de Honduras, esto es lo que está pasando.

<sup>32</sup> Siempre les pedimos que compartan, después de cerrar la transmisión en vivo ustedes pueden seguir compartiendo para que otras personas se enteren de esto, para que esta realidad tan terrible no se oculte.

a shift from “something can be done” to “we can do something” (Gamson, 1996, p. 90). Fuentes argued that leaving in large groups, the caravans, would change the situation Hondurans faced and that together, they could achieve numerous things:

The best thing would be to leave together and organized from Honduras, showing your faces, without hiding, shouting to the world that you are leaving because it [the government] has robbed you of all opportunities, and those who should protect you instead become threats to your lives. If you go together, you can support each other, protect yourselves from threats, and demand respect for your rights, as people do in whatever country they find themselves in [...] If you have plans to leave, do not go alone. Do not feel ashamed. Migrating is not a crime<sup>33</sup> (Fuentes, 2018a).

With the statement, Fuentes is motivating people to join the movement, framing the collective agency in reference to their ability to evoke the change they have wanted and needed. Together, they would support and protect each other, defend themselves from external threats, and demand respect for their human rights, such as the right to freedom of movement and asylum. Being united would be their strength.

Moreover, Fuentes motivated people to have their heads held high, to shout to the world the reason they are leaving, as they walked together in large groups. With this, he provides prompts to action. With his words, he accentuated the severity of the problems migrants face and the need to take action to stop what was happening.

Decriminalizing undocumented migration was also a way to persuade people to join. By saying “migrating is not a crime” he attempted to remove the stigma of criminality from (undocumented) migration, further stating that Hondurans should not feel ashamed of leaving their country; instead, he uplifted them, validating their reasons for leaving.

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<sup>33</sup> Lo mejor sería salir juntos y organizados desde Honduras, dando la cara, sin esconderse, salir gritándole al mundo que se van porque aquí les han robado las oportunidades y porque quienes deberían protegerlos mas bien se convierten en amenazas para sus vidas. Si se van juntos, pueden apoyarse mutuamente, protegerse de amenazas y demandar respeto a sus derechos como personas en cualquier país en que se encuentren... Si tiene planes de irse, no se vaya solo o sola. No sienta vergüenza, que MIGRAR NO ES DELITO.

**5.4.3.1 Emotions at play.** Fuentes's discourses were loaded with emotion. While talking, he was angry, frustrated, and outraged. Not only did the tone of his voice change when he spoke of the government, but the choice of his words reflected his desperation about what migrants experience in transit and the situation of poverty and violence that consumed and continues to do so in Honduras. For example, Fuentes expressed, "Gentlemen of the US, come to your senses, use your minds a little, your repressive actions, and your threats are not going to stop the people because the reasons why they leave are more powerful than all the risks"<sup>34</sup> (Fuentes, 2018e). In the passage, Fuentes was sarcastic and confrontational.

Looking to create compassion and empathy, Fuentes said: "You have to be awfully hard of heart not to open your eyes, not to understand that people are experiencing a situation of misery, terrible poverty, of lack of opportunities that force them to leave the country"<sup>35</sup> (Fuentes, 2018i). His statement was charged with emotional and moral judgment. He implied that people should be understanding of Hondurans and criticized those who do not understand.

Fuentes lashed out against international organizations and the local and international media for not covering the caravan. For instance, he condemned HCH, a local news outlet, for the lack of coverage while the caravan was crossing Honduras. He stated:

The mobile unit should be here broadcasting live, but they are not [HCH network]; I told Eduardo Maldonado to come here, to talk to people, to stop inventing, to stop blaming me for things [...] This is unprecedented, it is historical, you should be covering it in person, we do not see any national television networks here, that is, they do not care about the suffering of our Honduran brothers<sup>36</sup> (Fuentes, 2018l).

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<sup>34</sup> Señores del gobierno, señores de Estados Unidos, entren en razón, usen un poco la cabeza, sus acciones represivas, sus amenazas no van a detener a la gente porque las causas por las cuales se van son más poderosas, son más fuertes que todos los riesgos.

<sup>35</sup> Hay que ser bastante duro de corazón para no abrir los ojos para no entender que hay una situación de miseria, de pobreza terrible que está viviendo la gente, de falta de oportunidades que los obligan a marcharse del país.

<sup>36</sup> Aquí debería estar la unidad móvil de ellos transmitiendo en vivo, pero no están (canal HCH), yo le dije a Eduardo Maldonado que se viniera para acá, que hable con la gente, que deje de inventar, que dejen de achacarme a mí cosas que no son [...] Esto que es inédito, que es histórico, usted lo debería de estar cubriendo en persona, no vemos ninguna cadena de televisión nacional aquí, o sea, no les importa el sufrimiento de nuestros hermanos hondureños.

In the statement, Fuentes demanded more media attention to the caravan while saying that the network did not care about Hondurans. He continued to frame Hondurans as suffering people to get people's empathy and compassion for the "suffering migrants."

Fuentes laughed about the government's statements against him, finding them absurd, also stating that those were just made-up stories about him. He expressly referred to the accusations of him being the organizer of the caravan and a smuggler.

During the walk, Fuentes was interviewing migrants, asking them multiple questions, and making statements about Trump to get reactions from them. One time, he interviewed a single mother with her kid: "Donald Trump says that you do not move; why would you move? Anyway, they will not let you in. Doesn't that make you give up?" She replied: "No, no, we are going forward<sup>37</sup>" (Fuentes, 2018j). She was surprised when he asked that question but firmly responded that she would continue moving forward. With these questions, Fuentes was prompting participants' reactions and perhaps also reaffirmation and commitment to the goal. Participant responses to different questions about why they were leaving served to legitimize Fuentes's diagnostic frames.

Emotions in the form of injustice frames were invoked at different times in the caravan, particularly when Fuentes cast the Honduran government as corrupt, thieving, inhumane, repressive, and unfair. The messages that blamed the Honduran government for the poverty, unemployment, insecurity, political instability, and moral shocks were charged with emotions. This might have influenced the participation of NGOs and civil society in Mexico and the US.

In other words, Fuentes and the participants displayed a wide range of emotions throughout the walk, appealing to bystanders, and the local and international media, the local

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<sup>37</sup> Dice Donald Trump que no se muevan, que para que se mueven, que de todas maneras no los van a dejar entrar, ¿no los hace desistir a ustedes eso? Ella contesta: No, no, vamos con todo pa' delante.

and international civil society, and creating antagonism between them and the Honduran and US governments.

## **5.5 Discussion**

This chapter has examined the framing strategy employed by one de facto organizer to inform people about the formation of a caravan and mobilize participants to join it. I looked at the content posted on social media by one de-facto organizer, Bartolo Fuentes, to identify and analyze the collective action frames he put forward, which aimed at drawing attention to the precarity in Honduras, the issues undocumented Honduran migrants face in transit to the US, and how this could be prevented and changed.

Findings show the existence of different collective action frames posted throughout the period analyzed. Concerning collective action frames' core framing tasks, Fuentes provided diagnostic framings, whereby he invoked injustice frames to criticize the government of Juan Orlando Hernández. In doing so, he found a target of moral outrage, a person and system that is responsible for bringing about suffering to the Honduran people. These findings confirm the existence of injustice frames in this migrant social movement, as in other social movements (Goh & Pang, 2016; Melo, 2016; Robinson, 2001). The articulation of injustice frames put Honduran people in the spotlight, casting them as victims, accentuating the extent of their harm and suffering, and highlighting the perpetrator of such injustice (Snow & Corrigal-Brown, 2005). The alignment between these two components of the injustice frame, and the victims and perpetrators, was endorsed by the Honduran people, migrants, civil society, and NGOs, who also blamed Juan Orlando Hernandez and his government for the situation in Honduras and the emigration of thousands of people.

Additionally, Fuentes talked about the hardships and violence migrants experience in transit. For that, he blamed the US government, as it has imposed restrictive laws that criminalize undocumented migration and has led migrants to take dangerous routes that put

them at risk. Throughout the walk, Fuentes deployed moralizing frames, casting the actions of the Honduran and the US governments as wrong, unjust, and unfair.

As part of the collective action frames, Fuentes put forward solutions to the people's grievances. Concerning the situation in Honduras, he stated that the government should provide jobs and security while condemning JOH for the fraud in the 2017 elections, thus demanding a political change. Relating to the situation in transit, Fuentes' prognosis consisted in leaving the country in large groups and an organized manner, caravans, and then having caravan members seek asylum in Mexico.

Fuentes's arguments relate to his goal for the caravan: to arrive safely in Mexico. However, he does not seem to acknowledge or read constituents' desires and claims. He demands policy action from the Mexican government, whether in the form of humanitarian visas, permits, or asylum. However, constituents demanded something else, a free pass-through Mexico to arrive in the US. This suggests a mismatch between the solutions offered by the de-facto organizer of the movement and its members and the existence of multiple prognoses.

The majority of the constituents did not share the prognosis offered by Fuentes. Instead, people were able to articulate their prognosis and followed it. Even with the existence of multiple prognoses, the movement continued and evolved. The fact that Fuentes was detained in Guatemala before the caravan even arrived in Mexico may have influenced how the mobilization developed. After he was detained, migrants continued to claim a safe passage through Mexico, asserting their desire to arrive in the US. About a month after the caravan departed, thousands of Central American migrants arrived at Tijuana, Mexico-US border, signaling that the movement had achieved at least partially its goals.

The third element of collective action frames, motivational framing, was articulated throughout the movement. Whether creating a sense of urgency and need for the caravan through moral shocks, motivating people to share what was happening, or denouncing the

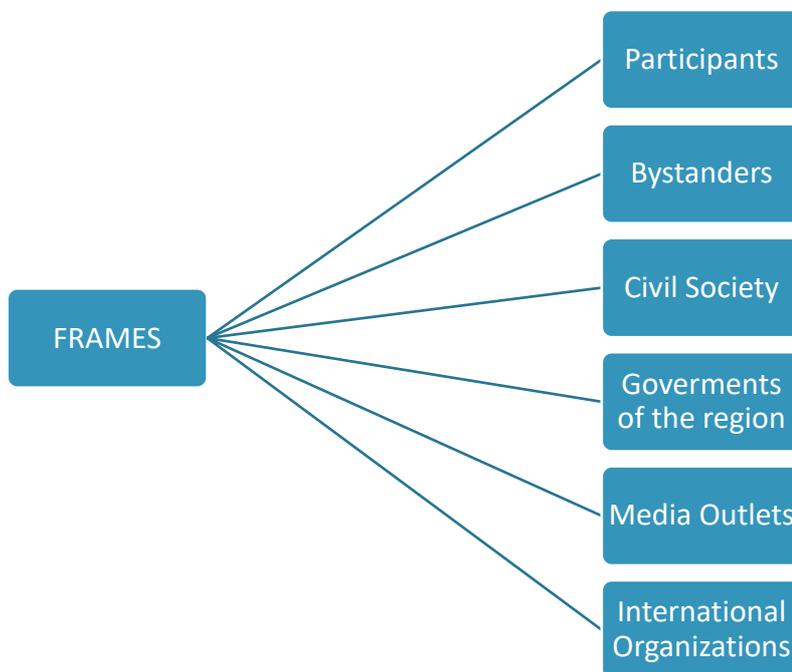
region's governments, Fuentes articulated motivational framings that were loaded with emotions. This case contributes to the literature by empirically showing the link between emotions and motivational framing.

The collective action frames were accompanied by "symbols of injustice" (Olesen, 2015) aiming to make visible the movement and create and increase support from bystanders and the larger civil society. The photos and videos depicted migrants in transit, walking, and asking for rides, sleeping in tents, on the top of freight trains, or in the back of trucks. The images spoke about the difficult journey undocumented migrants undertake to arrive in Mexico and the US.

In terms of the audience, the posts targeted different actors. The following figure (Figure 5.2) sums up the multiple actors that Fuentes targeted with his messages.

**Figure 5.2**

*Actors targeted by Bartolo Fuentes's frames*



Source: by the author

The posts before the departure aimed to inform people about the movement's formation, explain the reasons behind the movement and seek support from bystanders and the larger civil population. Others aimed to promote the caravan, call people to participate and share specific information about the location and time of the gathering. Other posts targeted international organizations and local and international media. Finally, messages were geared toward the governments of the region, either to denounce acts or to seek support.

Further, findings showed that social media was crucial for the emergence and development of the movement. Having a Facebook account allowed Fuentes to reach a broad audience. The caravan was an online mobilization that created protests online and offline, where people were able to denounce their governments and demand changes. The messages posted on social media and shared by thousands of people increased the visibility of the movement, attracting, on the one hand, attention and support from a wide range of actors, and on the other, discontent and disapproval of the movement by governments of the region.

An analysis of posts on social media indicates that the likes and shares of Bartolo Fuentes's posts and videos about the caravan increased the day the caravan departed and continued to grow as the caravan advanced to Guatemala and Mexico, suggesting that the buzz about the departure of the caravan was fairly weak in the weeks before the departure, and boosted on the day of departure and after the departure.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has contributed to the literature on collective action frames by a) identifying and analyzing collective action frames deployed in a social movement created in a migratory context; b) showing evidence of multiple prognoses in a social movement by looking at how the prognostic framing put forward by one de-facto leader is not necessarily aligned with participants' demands and solutions for their claims, thus showing participants' prognostic framing; c) showing the alignment between diagnosis, prognosis and motivational framing

from the organizers' perspective; d) by showing the framing strategy created through social media.

Literature has shown how the relative success of collective action frames is contingent on the extent to which they attend to diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing (Snow et al., 2019). In other words, all these tasks are needed for participant mobilization, and at least a firm diagnosis and prognosis are required to maintain the movement (Goh & Pang, 2016). Empirically, this chapter shows how Fuentes aligned the diagnosis, prognosis, and motivational framing. More relevant, however, is that the prognosis put forward by participants was more critical for developing a movement. Participants wanted to arrive in the US and pursued that goal, despite Fuentes's aim. This sheds light on the dialogue and shared understanding of grievances, claims, and demands between movement leaders and constituents needed for a movement to thrive.

This research contributed to the collective action frames literature by showing how even when the diagnosis offered by a leader is accurate, the prognosis may not be aligned with participants' demands, prompting the emergence of bottom-up prognoses that move the movement forward. Thus, it may be the case that total alignment between the three is not needed, contrary to what the literature has postulated. What may be required for a movement to thrive is a solid prognosis shared by constituents.

Identifying and analyzing the collective action frames is central to understanding what specific messages and symbols were displayed to gain sympathizers, influence and mobilize bystanders and participants, and increase the visibility of the movement. By identifying such messages and symbols, I have shown the framing strategy used. The next chapter will continue this line of research by showing different frames put forward by Bartolo Fuentes and how these resonated or did not resonate with the participants through the analysis of processes of frame resonance.

## **Chapter 6. Frame Resonance and Mobilization: Participants' Perspectives on the October 2018 Migrant Caravan**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Five, I reviewed the different collective action frames that Bartolo Fuentes articulated to mobilize participants, bystanders, and supporters of the caravan movement. This chapter then focuses on identifying and analyzing other frames that were articulated before and during the movement and if these resonated with participants. What were frames articulated before and during the October 2018 caravan that left from Honduras to the United States? How did these resonate with the participants of the movement? The following chapter seeks to analyze frame resonance. To do so, I compare Bartolo Fuentes's messages with participants' responses on particular themes.

To identify what frames Fuentes articulated, I analyzed 187 posts on Facebook. To identify how these resonated or failed to resonate, with participants, I draw on the first data set composed of 14 interviews with participants of the October 2018 migrant caravan.

This chapter uncovers what and how frames resonated with participants of the movement, and which were nonresonant frames, shedding light on the frames that resonated the most and the least with participants. The chapter is divided into three sections: the first is a brief literature review on resonance; the second identifies the resonance of Fuentes's messages; the third section explains the codes found in Bartolo Fuentes's discourses that had no resonance, that is, that were not present in the respondents' testimonies. Findings show that the multiple frames resonated with the participants; however, the framing of the caravan as a humanitarian crisis and the proposed solution for their claims did not resonate with participants. Instead, caravan members argued they wanted to pursue the American Dream and spoke about the caravan phenomenon in different terms (e.g., as an adventure).

This chapter contributes first to the literature on framing by analyzing frames in relation to a migration phenomenon studied as a social movement; second, by showing evidence of “conflicting” frames by observing how the framing put forward by one de-facto leader was not entirely aligned with participants’ demands and solutions for their claims, thus showing participants’ own framing. That is, participants became frame articulators, putting forward their claims and frames. Third, literature on frame resonance has established an almost direct relationship between resonance and the success of the movement, arguing that a movement was successful because frames were resonant or if a movement dissolved it was because a particular framing was faulty (E.g., (Bloemraad et al., 2016; McDonnell et al., 2017; Park et al., 2021). The present case study, however, contributes to the literature on frame resonance by showing how movements grow and achieve some of their primary goals despite some lack of resonance in crucial frames, further shedding light on the not-so-clear-cut relationship between frames and movements' success and how participants have articulated their own frames.

## **6.2 Literature Review: Frame Resonance**

Snow and Benford (1988) introduced the term resonance to understand the ability of a collective action frame to resonate or appeal to a targeted audience (McCammon, 2013). The authors were investigating the conditions that affect or constrain mobilization efforts (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198), that is, under what circumstances frames resonate more than others. Resonance was first defined as “an alignment between the content of the message and pre-existing values or beliefs of its audience” (Park et al., 2021). In Johnston and Noakes’s (2005, p. 11) words, “a frame is said to be resonant when prospective constituents find its interpretation and expression of grievances compelling.” Frames appear to be compelling when social actors’ systems of beliefs or cultural views align. In other words, resonance has been described as an alignment or a relationship (McDonnell, 2014).

Other scholars (McDonnell et al., 2017) have observed that resonance is not static and instead should be understood as an “emergent process wherein the fit between a cultural message and its audience shifts overtime”; thus, they argue that resonance “emerges in the relations among object, person, and situation” (McDonnell et al., 2017, p. 2). Focusing on social interactions between people and frames (cultural objects) that create resonance allows identifying and theorizing when and how resonance occurs and its effects. They suggested that resonance occurs when the interaction with an object (frame) leads people to solve an ongoing challenge (McDonnell et al., 2017, p. 9). The authors’ (McDonnell et al., 2017) seminal work added theoretical insights about when resonance occurs while calling for more empirical analysis on the subject. This work responds to that need by showing that the frames that offer an immediate solution for an existing problem resonated the most, thus showing that frames resonate better when they solve problems.

Benford and Snow (2000) identify factors that affect resonance: the credibility of the frame, which is composed of a) empirical credibility (the fit between the events of the world and framing); b) consistency (congruency between beliefs, values, diagnosis, prognosis, etc.); and c) credibility of the frame makers (credible, knowledgeable, and persuasive speakers); d) salience of the frame, composed of narrative fidelity (the way that frames synchronize with the dominant culture); e) experiential commensurability (frames fit with the targets’ everyday experiences), and f) centrality (how true values and beliefs are to the lives of the target). Recent scholarship has added that resonance needs to consider the context in which the frames are elaborated (Bonikowski, 2017; McDonnell et al., 2017; Oselin & Corrigan-Brown, 2010).

In terms of the methods used to identify resonance, some researchers point out whether the content of a frame articulated by a social actor is similar to the words used by its audience and/or reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of the audience (Park et al., 2021). If the frame’s content was found in the words or attitudes, then there was some form of resonance (*Ibid*).

However, as framing is about meaning and interpretations of reality, other researchers compare the correspondence of the content instead of just comparing the exact use of the words (Ketelaars, 2016). In this case, frame resonance is identified when movement participants express and use the same or similar arguments and refer to the same actors and authorities in their responses to the semi-structured interviews as the activists or organizers did across social media. Specifically, I identify resonance when caravan members used the same or a similar logic in their arguments for movement participation as Bartolo Fuentes did in his Facebook posts. That is to say, I operationalize resonance and consider a frame to resonate with participants when I coded a logic or argument (themes) as present in both Bartolo Fuentes's Facebook posts and participants' interviews.

Much of the work on framing and frame resonance has been quantitative, carrying out analysis of newspapers, surveys, and experiments (Bloemraad et al., 2016; Ketelaars, 2016; Shuster & Campos-Castillo, 2017; Simonsen & Bonikowski, 2022) or social media data, such as Twitter (Moscato, 2016), or using mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative (Ferree, 2003; Park et al., 2021). Some of these studies follow the technique of spotting words or phrases in newspaper articles or archives that are later coded and analyzed. However, my work is purely qualitative. A qualitative approach allows for a nuanced analysis of resonance because a) it goes beyond identifying words or phrases; b) synonyms might not be identified using such a method of mere word or phrase repetition, as participants might have expressed ideas differently; or c) in the search for words, researchers may get false positives. A qualitative approach then allows for the analysis of the logic and arguments that participants give during the interview to identify resonance, reducing the limitations presented by doing word/phrase spotting. Additionally, using a qualitative approach allows me to theorize what frames from Fuentes resonated with participants and could resonate with them, by investigating how participants of the 2018 Caravan spoke and interpreted the frames.

Further, most studies on frame resonance have emphasized the sender of the message rather than the subjective interpretations of the message from participants (Ketelaars, 2016; Park et al., 2021). However, more recently, studies have sought to identify participants' interpretations of the frames they are exposed to. For instance, Park et al. (2021) examine the way people react to messages that they have been exposed to in eight different events in France in 2015. Ketelaars (2016) studies frame resonance by analyzing survey responses of protesters about their reasons for participating in events in Brussels, Amsterdam, and the UK in the 2009-2012 period. I contribute to this growing literature by exploring how participants of the 2018 Caravan spoke about the frames put forward by Bartolo Fuentes and the different meanings assigned to those frames. By examining how participants responded to the different frames, we can analyze the diverging subjective interpretations and utilizations of the messages heard.

Resonance allows us to see how participants spoke about the movement, how they interpreted and made sense of it, and if they interpreted it in the same way as the social movement's leaders or primary mobilizers did. Hence, in this chapter, I identify resonance and dissonance. On the one hand, the chapter shows the frames that resonated with participants; on the other hand, it reveals those that did not resonate with participants, further showing how in response, participants articulated their frames. This chapter contributes to the literature on frame resonance and responds to the need for analyzing nonresonant frames as, according to researchers (Johnston & Noakes, 2005; McDonnell et al., 2017; Park et al., 2021), there are just a few studies that study them (for an exception, see Snow & Corrigan-Brown, 2005). Moreover, by considering precisely what frames resonated with participants, the study fills a gap in the framing literature as, according to (Ketelaars, 2016), studies have failed to assess what frames specifically resonate with movement participants.

Lastly, literature on frame resonance has often proposed that the success of a movement was related to frame resonance, establishing more or less a direct link between them. Studies

on frame resonance have often assumed that a movement's eventual success would indicate that frames were resonant or, if a movement dissolved, a particular framing was faulty (Bloemraad et al., 2016; Ferree, 2003; McDonnell et al., 2017; Park et al., 2021). This is because "cultural resonance and the success of the movement were seen as outcomes" (Ferree, 2003, p. 305). However, with the intention of not falling into circular reasoning concerning resonance, I am not claiming causality. I do not seek to prove whether the movement was "successful" because the frames resonated with participants. Instead, this is a first step in identifying not only which frames the prime mobilizer articulated, but also which frames resonated the most and the least with participants, investigating the individual side of the linkage between the individual and the social movement interpretation of an issue. Then, I identify frames that are nonresonant whilst showing how participants also articulated their own frames in response to the frames articulated by other actors. With this body of evidence, I can study the receivers of the frames' justifications for joining the movement and showcase them also as frame makers. Analyzing frames that generate the most and least resonance leads to identifying a different type of relationship between success and resonance, as it appears that all movement's crucial frames do not necessarily need to resonate with the movement's participants, for movements still to evolve and be "successful."

### **6.3 Identifying Resonance: Bartolo Fuentes's Frames and their Resonance with the Participants of the October 2018 Caravan**

In this section, I analyze frame resonance. On the one hand, I review frames Bartolo Fuentes articulated before and during the movement, and on the other, how participants spoke about each of them. For each code (frame), I add a definition, an example of a statement articulated by Fuentes to explain how that passage is an example of the code, followed by at least two more comments from participants to assess the resonance of each frame. Most of

Fuentes's passages come from videos he recorded at various moments of the movement. For each of those, I add the number of views, shares, likes, and comments to appreciate the probable impact and scope of the messages. The purpose of showing statistics about these indicators is to reflect on these publications' impact on the targeted audience. The number of likes, comments, shares, and views fluctuated throughout the covered period. However, it is possible to say that most of the indicators grew exponentially after the caravan departed, as on the day that the caravan gathered at the bus station in San Pedro Sula, one video had 10,000 views, and one video of the caravan after it departed reached more than 254,000 views.

Moreover, since all the data collected was in Spanish, I have provided both the original passage and the corresponding translation. The passages in Spanish are included in the document as footnotes to give nuance and value to participants' own words, which provide evidence about their educational attainment, socioeconomic background, beliefs, and interpretations of the movement.

The following table shows the different frames that Bartolo Fuentes put forward and which of these frames resonated with participants. Resonance is identified when I coded for the same logic on particular themes as present in Bartolo Fuentes's posts and the participants' responses.

**Table 6.1***Frequency of frame resonance*

Frame	Bartolo Fuentes	Participants
1. Calls to leave the country in groups	√	√ (N=14)
2. Claims of forced migration	√	√ (N=13)
3. Social media mobilization strategy	√	√ (N=10)
3. Decriminalization of migration	√	√ (N=6)
4. Honduran government	√	√ (N=4)
5. Human rights frames	√	√ (N=3)
6. The caravan as a humanitarian crisis	√	X (N=0)
7. Destination: Mexico	√	X (N=0)
8. Caravan as other than a humanitarian crisis American dream	X	√ (N=14)
9. American Dream	X	√ (N=14)

Source: by the author

**6.3.1 Social Media Mobilization Strategy**

I coded for social media mobilization strategy when there was a reference to the messages migrants viewed/received on social media about the caravan. This includes messages posted on Facebook and spread through Facebook too and WhatsApp. Ten participants spoke about the information and the message they received when they first heard about the caravan. The information spread had two different purposes: on the one hand, the information spread on social media was meant to inform the population about the movement's existence. On the other, the messages transmitted had logistical purposes. That is, they served to organize the caravan, providing information about the time and place of departure. In different Facebook and WhatsApp groups, information was posted about the time and place of departure. The platforms were fundamental for the development of the caravan, as members used those to share information about the trip.

Fuentes distributed the flyer about the caravan (see Figure 3.1) on October 5, 2018, which indicated the time and place of departure. The post had 215 likes, 56 comments and was shared 246 times. Before that, on September 27 he mentioned that people were organizing groups to leave the country and argued: "The best thing would be to leave together and organized from Honduras [...]. If you go together, you can support each other, and defend yourselves from threats [...]. If you have plans to leave, do not go alone<sup>38</sup>" (Fuentes, 2018a). With this, Fuentes informed people about the caravan and provided the rationale for it.

Ignacio<sup>39</sup>, a 23-year-old Honduran, talked about the message he heard and the purpose of the caravan:

The announcement said that if we wanted to leave the country, there was an opportunity [to leave] in a caravan that was being organized in the municipality of San Pedro Sula; That was going to be the meeting point to depart on [October], I don't remember the date, but it was in October, so there [in the link] they [the people] were informed. Then, as the link contained all the information, people from all the departments began to organize, for example, Choluteca had an organizer, Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Paz, all had organizers, and all the departments of Honduras had organizers [...] the caravan was organized<sup>40</sup> (Ignacio, personal communication, April 04, 2021).

In the passage, Ignacio explains the framing used to convey messages about the caravan. According to him, the message targeted those who wanted to leave Honduras, offering them an opportunity of doing so in a large group, in a caravan, and in an organized manner. That is, the message seemed to appeal to those with a pre-existing thought of leaving the country. The message also provided information about the place and date of departure. Interestingly, Ignacio claims the caravan was organized. He then refers to the fact that there were organizers in each municipality (or departments as they are known locally). Honduras has 12 *departamentos* (see

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<sup>38</sup> Lo mejor sería salir juntos y organizados desde Honduras [...]. Si se van juntos, pueden apoyarse mutuamente, protegerse de amenazas...Si tiene planes de irse, no se vaya solo o sola.

<sup>39</sup> All the names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

<sup>40</sup> El anuncio decía de que si queríamos salir del país había una oportunidad de una caravana que se estaba organizando en el departamento de San Pedro Sula, que ahí iba a ser el punto de reunión para salir el día, no me recuerdo, pero fue en Octubre; entonces ahí se informaron, entonces como en el link decía todo, entonces ahí se empezaron a organizar gentes de todos los departamentos, por ejemplo de Choluteca tenía un organizador, tenía organizadores Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, la Paz, todos los departamentos de Honduras tenían organizadores [...] era organizada la caravana.

Figure 1.3), and there were groups of people from all of them at the bus station in San Pedro Sula the day the caravan departed. This type of organization was most likely done so that people could have more contact with a local organizer and facilitate the management of the movement.

Ignacio also explained how he found out about the caravan and the process to be part of the groups on social media:

That information was identified on Facebook, there was a page with a link to a WhatsApp number, you could click the WhatsApp link and there was information about the organizers of that caravan. It was [organized through] Facebook [...] I clicked the link and there it was the information [about the date and place of departure]<sup>41</sup> (Ignacio, personal communication, April 04, 2021).

Ignacio explains there were groups on Facebook linked to WhatsApp groups through which caravan organizers were giving information about the time and place of departure of the caravan. It is worth noting how this strategy allowed more extensive participation in the groups, as it was easy to access them. People did not have to request access to the groups, as most of them were public, nor needed a special invitation, further allowing the participation of a variety of people. The above excerpts are examples of the code "Social media mobilization strategy" that speaks to the purposes of the strategy, that is, to inform people about the organization and framing of the movement.

Bernardo, a 20-year-old Honduran man, also found out about the movement on social media, adding that local media outlets were talking about the caravan:

Social media spread the word that a caravan was leaving; then, they sent notifications on Facebook. The news about the caravan was spread through social media and media outlets, and different places. People became aware that a caravan was leaving; then, San Pedro Sula, the bus station, was the departure point, the meeting point from where the movement was going to depart<sup>42</sup> (Bernardo, March 21, 2021).

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<sup>41</sup> Esa información se identificó en el Facebook, había una página con un link de WhatsApp que usted podía ingresar al link de WhatsApp y ahí estaba la información de los organizadores de esa caravana fue [organizada por] Facebook... ingresé al link del WhatsApp y ahí vi esa información [la fecha y lugar de salida].

<sup>42</sup> Primero se dio por las redes sociales de que salía una caravana, entonces comenzaron a mandar notificaciones ahí a Facebook y eso se dio por no solo por las redes sociales, si no que se dio por todas las noticias, por diferentes lugares, la gente se comenzó a alarmar que al dar cuenta que salía una caravana, entonces en San Pedro Sula, en la terminal de buses ahí era el punto de salida, el punto de reunión de donde iba a salir la caravana.

In this passage, the code “social media mobilization strategy” is present when Bernardo says that the announcement about the caravan was made on social media, particularly on Facebook. It included information about the place and date of the parting. Thus, the passage is an example of the code, given that the information was meant to inform about the caravan's formation and participation. The statement confirms what Ignacio mentioned earlier. Bernardo also explained that different media outlets disseminated information about the caravan. This is consistent with what other participants reported. For example, Antonio, Guatemalan, found out about the caravan in local and international media outlets, signaling that the news about the caravan was not limited to Honduras, rather, it was spread throughout Central America.

Lastly, another participant described how the message conveyed about the caravan cited the destination and advantages of the timing of the caravan. Yahir, a 40-year-old Guatemalan, stated that the announcement about the caravan said:

The caravan was going to the US, seeking a better life; they [participants] were going to fight to get there, and it was difficult, but at that time, they were giving opportunities to people with children so that was an opportunity to go in a caravan<sup>43</sup> (Yahir, personal communication, February 07, 2022).

Yahir's comments signal the diversity of messages conveyed about the caravan. The announcement stated the destination of the caravan, appealing particularly to families with children who wanted to go to the US. The ad suggested that traveling with minors would provide some advantages, in addition to the advantages of traveling on a caravan. Another participant, Olga, a 30-year-old Honduran woman, stated that she had heard that crossing into the US through Tijuana was better, as people only needed to turn themselves in to immigration officers. If the person was traveling with kids, the person would receive a lot of help (Olga, personal communication, May 02, 2021). The comments above also reflect the information being circulated on Facebook, about the advantages for parents traveling with kids.

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<sup>43</sup> Que [la caravana] iba a Estados Unidos, pues, y por una vida mejor y que iban a luchar para llegar, que estaba difícil, pero, en ese tiempo estaban dando oportunidad para menores, que era una oportunidad de irse en caravana.

These accounts exhibit the multiple messages circulated on social media and among participants about the caravan. To summarize, the information that was spread about the caravan contained logistical information, the destination of the caravan, and the advantages of traveling with the caravan (safety). However, there is no accurate information about why the caravans were precisely organized to depart on October 12, 2018. Finding out exactly what was said in the media and on Facebook about the caravan is beyond the scope of the dissertation because it is not feasible to track all the Facebook posts published around that date, as many of these groups and accounts have been closed, changed their names, or the posts were deleted. Instead, I show how participants spoke about the framing of the caravan.

Here it is critical to note the role that the internet and social media played in the development of the movement. According to participants' accounts, most of them learned about the movement on Facebook. The fact that Honduras has the highest social media penetration in Central America and that Facebook is the platform with the highest share among social media sites (Statista, 2022) facilitated the distribution of the flyer and the diffusion of information about the caravan. Social media was also fundamental for logistical purposes, as people used it to communicate information about the time and place of departure and other topics related to the movement.

Moreover, Facebook enabled the broadcasting of events as they unfolded. Even if digitally, people on the other side of the screen were able to witness the walk of thousands of Hondurans and other nationals of neighboring countries. The images of people walking and struggling on the road were broadcast around the globe generating mixed responses. First, the assistance that civil society and local organizations provided to the caravan (Hernández López & Porraz Gómez, 2020). Second, the explosion of information shared about the caravan and the huge coverage it had from news outlets. Third, the outrage of the US government.

### 6.3.2 Calls to Leave the Country in Groups

For this work, I define “Calls to leave the country in groups” as direct or indirect calls (written, verbal, or graphic) to mobilize, organize and leave the country (Honduras) in large groups, including the construction of motives for engaging in the mobilization (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992, 1996; Nepstad & Smith, 2001; Snow et al., 2019). It is what is known as the "call to arms" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617) that provides the rationale for action (Buechler, 2011). Bartolo Fuentes posted the following lines on Facebook on September 27, 2018. The post had 130 likes, 71 comments, and 82 shares.

#### MIGRANTS: IT IS BETTER TO LEAVE TOGETHER TO AVOID RISKS

People keep leaving Honduras because of the difficult economic situation or the violence. They are exposed to risks of all kinds on the way to avoid immigration [controls] in Mexico and the United States: accidents, assaults, scams, extortion, kidnapping, and even murder. Groups of up to 80 migrants have gathered in previous months, but most have been detained and deported upon entering Mexico. Since they leave secretly, it is dangerous as they might fall victim to charlatans who hand them over to extortionists or sell women for prostitution. The best thing would be to leave together and organized from Honduras, showing your faces, without hiding, shouting to the world that you are going because it [the government] has robbed you of all opportunities, and those who should protect you instead become threats to your lives. If you go together, you can support each other, defend yourselves from threats and demand respect for your rights, as people do in whatever country they find themselves in [...]. If you have plans to leave, do not go alone<sup>44</sup> (Fuentes, 2018a).

This passage is an example of the code “call to leave the country in groups” that Fuentes first articulated in the preamble to the caravan. In this frame, he mobilizes people to leave Honduras in large groups and be organized. He gives the rationale for action when mentioning that leaving in groups would be better than leaving alone to avoid risks and violence in transit, such as kidnappings, extortion, rapes, bribes, etc. because the group would provide safety to the

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<sup>44</sup>MIGRANTES: ES MEJOR IRSE JUNTOS PARA EVITAR RIESGOS. La gente se sigue yendo de Honduras por la grave situación económica o por la violencia. Se exponen a riesgos de todo tipo en el camino por huir de la migración en México y Estados Unidos: accidentes, asaltos, estafas, extorsiones, secuestros y hasta asesinato. Se ha juntado grupos de hasta 80 migrantes en meses anteriores, pero la mayoría han sido detenidos y deportados al internarse a México. Como se van a escondidas es peligroso que sean víctimas de embaucadores que los entreguen a extorsionadores o vendan las mujeres para prostitución. Lo mejor sería salir juntos y organizados desde Honduras, dando la cara, sin esconderse, salir gritándole al mundo que se van porque aquí les han robado las oportunidades y porque quienes deberían protegerlos más bien se convierten en amenazas para sus vidas. Si se van juntos, pueden apoyarse mutuamente, protegerse de amenazas y demandar respeto a sus derechos como personas en cualquier país en que se encuentren... Si tiene planes de irse, no se vaya solo o sola.

members so that they would cross into Mexico risk-free. What is more, he implies that the group should be larger than 80 people, as such groups have previously failed in their attempts to cross into Mexico, emphasizing the need for a larger collective effort and mobilization. Inciting people to travel publicly during daylight would put migrants at risk of identification and possible deportation; however, migrating in large groups would potentially diminish that risk, as migration officers would not be able to detain such a large group of people. In other words, leaving in a large group, he stated, would increase their chances of arriving in Mexico.

Fuentes encouraged participants to migrate publicly and freely. In doing so, he was urging participants to challenge the immigration policies of the countries of the region that have criminalized undocumented migration. Central Americans have long migrated to the US and Mexico clandestinely (see Chapter 2); thus, inciting migrants to migrate openly, challenged a migratory system that has forced migrants into irregularity and secrecy.

Further, Fuentes urged migrants to cry out loud and disclose why they were migrating, denouncing the lack of opportunities in their country and the repression they experience in Honduras, adding to the vocabulary of motives for engaging in collective action. In doing so, migrants would be allowed to make public their grievances and claims.

During the interviews, all the participants talked about the “calls to leave the country in groups” they heard or saw, and how it made sense to them. Migrants expressed their rationale for mobilizing and leaving their countries in large groups. Nestor, a 66-year-old Honduran man joined the caravan with his wife at the beginning of the movement at the bus station in San Pedro Sula. When asked about people's justifications for joining the caravan, he said:

Look, it is safer in the caravan because they [migrants] are united. If you go alone, the road is dangerous; they are going to assault you and kidnap you. There are a lot of good things about the caravan. As I say, we go together, we go in a group, and when they organize a group, they go as brothers. If one [person] gets a *tortilla*, they will share it with others. The road is dangerous when one goes alone. People think that one carries money, that you have money to travel, and that's why people fail; people kidnap them, people assault them, and that's why it's better to go in the caravan because you go in a

group. Do you understand me? It is the security that is in the caravan that is why people go in a caravan<sup>45</sup> (Nestor, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Nestor argued that the caravan provided security, safety, and support. The caravan became a kind of support network that allowed people to protect each other from different threats along the way. He explained the dangers of migrating alone, stating that migrants are more vulnerable and prone to be victims of assaults, robberies, or extortions. So, the advantage of the caravan is that it helps to prevent those misfortunes from happening. Nestor also asserted that a kind of brotherhood was created when a group is formed, implying that they would protect each other. His commentary is an example of a "Call to leave the country in groups" as he gives a rationale for the collective mobilization while using the same vocabulary of motive as Fuentes. Thus, it could be argued that Fuentes's frame resonated with him.

Another participant, Yahir, also expressed his justifications for joining the caravan. He joined the caravan in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico. Some family members were in the US; he had spent some time living there and was aiming to go back. When asked about his rationale for joining the caravan, he said:

[I saw] there was an opportunity to go in a caravan because [supposedly] there are many robberies, scams, and extortions when one leaves alone. In a caravan, well, there is not that much danger [...]. It is more complicated [to go alone]; sometimes, people take your money, and those you encounter when you ask for help may assault you because you are alone. It is more dangerous to travel alone because smugglers do not treat you well, authorities also extort you and everything, so it is very risky<sup>46</sup> (Yahir, personal communication, February 07, 2022).

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<sup>45</sup> Mire, en la caravana es más seguro porque van unidos. Mientras que uno va solo por el camino es peligroso, lo vayan a asaltar, lo vayan a secuestrar. Hay un montón de requisitos buenos en la caravana. Uno va junto, cómo le digo, uno va en grupo y cuando ya ponen un grupo van como hermanos; si consigue una tortilla uno, pues va a compartir con el otro. Si va uno solo es peligroso el camino, la gente cree que uno lleva dinero, la gente cree que uno tiene dinero para viajar, y por eso la gente fracasa, la gente los secuestra, la gente los asalta, y por eso es mejor ir en la caravana, porque uno va un grupo. ¿Sí, me entiende? Esa es la seguridad que hay, la caravana, esa es la seguridad, por eso que la gente se va en la caravana.

<sup>46</sup> [Vi que] era una oportunidad de irse en caravana porque irse uno solo mucho según que mucho robo, mucha estafa, mucha extorsión, y en caravana, pues no, no hay este tanto peligro [...] es complicado, es más complicado, que luego te quitan dinero y las personas que encuentran [cuando] pides ayuda, corres peligro que te asalten porque vas solo, y es más peligroso viajar solo porque los coyotes de a veces no te tratan bien, las autoridades también te quitan el dinero y todo, entonces es muy arriesgado.

Yahir's statements coincided with Nestor's by asserting how making the trip is a lot more complicated when migrants do it alone. He explained the variety of risks during the journey while bringing to light even more negative incidents that occur on the road caused by smugglers and migration authorities (e.g., being treated poorly and extorted). Yahir's and Nestor's statements endorse what has been said elsewhere about the dangers and risks undocumented migrants face when making the trip to *El Norte* and how different authorities, such as the police or immigration officers, continuously extort and bribe migrants (Castillo, 2019; Gandini et al., 2020; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019; Vogt, 2020).

What is more, Yahir addressed these dangers as reasons for collective migration. Yahir's statements exemplify "Calls to leave the country in groups," adding vocabularies of motives for engaging in collective action. The comments are alike to the framing Fuentes used, suggesting resonance.

It is crucial to observe that Fuentes's message had resonance outside Honduras. Citizens from neighboring countries, such as Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Salvadorans, found Fuentes's message compelling, further motivating their participation in the caravan. Here is important to stress that even when Fuentes's possible targeted audience was the Honduran population, nationals of other countries found the calls to leave the country in groups compelling, reaching a wider audience. This also signals the complicated situation of the countries of Central America. Yahir was one of many Guatemalans that joined the caravan.

Ignacio, a 23-year-old Honduran man who was persecuted given his political affiliation, also joined the caravan in San Pedro Sula. He was among those who departed with the caravan on October 13, 2018. When asked about his justification for joining the caravan, he said:

I wanted to flee; I did it to save my life, to live longer because I was in danger in my country; I was in quite a threat, it was pretty dangerous; so, I used the caravan for protection, to leave, because as you know, many people engage in human trafficking, make much money, and perhaps there were no means to pay someone to go; thus, I

looked at it [the caravan] as an advantage, to flee and seek asylum<sup>47</sup> (Ignacio, personal communication, April 04, 2021).

Ignacio agrees with Yahir and Nestor, further explaining how the caravan was seen as a means of protection. In Ignacio's case, he was afraid of falling victim to human traffickers had he traveled alone. He states that he did not have the money to pay a *coyote*, so joining the caravan was a way to mitigate the costs associated with the move and increase security and safety. His statements can also be deemed as examples of the code. Although more limited, he also provides the same vocabulary of motive as Fuentes, stating that he is in the caravan for protection. As in the cases of Nestor and Yahir, the frames articulated by Fuentes resonated with him.

After hearing about the caravan from Irineo Mujica, a human rights activist and leader of the NGO *Pueblo Sin Fronteras*, Luis, a 32 years old Nicaraguan, also joined the caravan. He argued, concerning his participation in the caravan:

Why does one join the caravans? First, some people do not have the means to pay about 12,000, 8,000, or 10,000 dollars for a coyote. Some people do not have the means to pay for it, which does not guarantee that the caravan will arrive precisely safely [...], but it was the opportunity for those people to go to the United States. At least I did not have how to pay for a coyote; it was my chance to get to the United States together with that group of people; it was all about not separating from the group of people that were going<sup>48</sup> (Luis, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Luis explained that many people do not have the resources to pay smugglers to take them to the US. As it has been analyzed elsewhere (American Immigration Council, 2021; Torre Cantalapedra, 2021; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019; Vogt, 2020), the costs of smugglers have risen in the last years as a result of the strict immigration policies and

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<sup>47</sup> Yo lo que quería huir, yo lo hice solo por cuidar de mi vida, por vivir más porque sí en mi país estaba en peligro, estaba en bastante peligro, si estaba bastante peligroso, la caravana la usé como para protección, para irme, por que como usted sabe que ahora hay bastantes personas que se dedican al tráfico de personas, pero ganan mucho y tal vez no había los medios de pagar a alguien para salir, entonces la miré como una ventaja ahí, yo huir y pedir asilo.

<sup>48</sup> ¿Por qué se une uno a las caravanas? Primero porque hay personas que no tiene cómo pagar a un coyote, 12,000, 8,000 o 10,000 dólares, hay personas que no tienen cómo pagarlo, eso no te garantiza que la caravana va a llegar precisamente segura [...] esa fue la oportunidad para esas personas y llegar a Estados Unidos; yo por lo menos no tengo cómo pagar un coyote, esta fue mi oportunidad de llegar a Estados Unidos junto con ese grupo de personas, todo era no separarse del grupo de personas que iba.

immigration enforcement programs. Thousands of Central Americans cannot afford to pay 8,000 or 10,000 dollars to a coyote as they have low wages and millions live in poverty. According to the World Bank, 66 percent of the Honduran population lived in poverty in 2016; one in five people lived in extreme poverty or with less than 1.90 US dollars a day (World Bank, 2022). The caravan was an umbrella organization that welcomed people from different nationalities, backgrounds, genders, and socioeconomic statuses, allowing people in very precarious situations to move. A survey conducted with caravan members by *El Colef* in Tijuana showed that about 20 percent of the caravan members worked in construction, another 20 percent in the agricultural sector, about 15 percent worked in skilled jobs, and other people were unemployed (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018). The information is consistent with the data I collected, as most participants reported being from a lower socioeconomic status with precarious or no jobs. These data then confirm that the caravan welcomed a variety of socioeconomic profiles, including people in very precarious situations, further revealing that underprivileged people also migrated and benefited from this movement. Finally, Luis's comments can also be deemed as examples of the code, as he also provided the same vocabulary of motive as Fuentes, stating that the caravan was cost-effective.

### **6.3.3 Claims of (Forced) Migration**

I used this code when there was a reference to claims about extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunities, insecurity, family reunification, violence, and political repression or political persecution as a pressing reason to leave the country of origin (Alberto & Chilton, 2019; Castillo, 2019; Cordero Díaz & Garibo García, 2019; García Aguilar & Villafuerte Solís, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2021; París Pombo, 2017; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). I added the adjective "forced" to the code because of the literature on the caravan and contemporary Central American migration, and even migrants themselves kept stressing that most caravan members were *forced* to rather than *wanted* to leave their home

country (Frank-Vitale & Núñez Chaim, 2020; Garibo García & Call, 2020; Salazar Araya, 2019; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). Even the flyer that called people to join the caravan stated, "We are not leaving because we want to; we are expelled by violence and poverty" (see Figure 3.1), further framing the migration of Hondurans as forced.

In this context, Saskia Sassen (2014) asserts that we are living in an era of *expulsion*. Sassen explains that the past decades have seen a sharp growth in the number of people, enterprises, and places *expelled* from the socioeconomic order, enabled by today's global capitalism, which has reinvented mechanisms for primitive accumulation. She argues that expulsions are made possible through policies, institutions, financial instruments, and sophisticated techniques that require specialized knowledge and which ultimately have led to the acute concentration of the world's wealth at the expense of the well-being of millions. The capitalist reshuffling of the 1990s that has produced widespread inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, and displacement is rooted in an expanded mode of profit extraction made possible by (de)regulatory policies – privatization and lifting of tariffs on imports, and the transformation of growing areas of the world into zones for extraction (whether in the form of labor or natural resources). Honduras is one country that has experienced the effects of capitalist reshuffling in the last decades, further creating conditions that have and continue to expel citizens (see Chapter Two). Arguing that migrants move voluntarily would dismiss the current conditions that have generated their *expulsion*.

The code "Claims of (forced) migration" emerged numerous times in both data sets (Fuentes and participants). For instance, Bartolo Fuentes stated that Hondurans were forced to leave their country, given the existing pressing situations. The following passage is an excerpt from a video he recorded when people gathered at the bus station in San Pedro Sula on October 13, 2018. The video had more than 18,000 views, 268 likes, 118 comments, and was shared

326 times: “People are not leaving because they want to; people are going out of necessity<sup>49</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018e). In a later video, he stressed: “People do not leave for pleasure, people do not leave as tourists, people leave because of the immense need<sup>50</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018k). The last extract had 2,400 likes, 1,100 comments, 2,900 shares, and 230,000 views.

In these passages, Fuentes stresses that Hondurans are *forced* to leave their country; they are not doing it for fun or pleasure, but because they are pressured to do so. The passage exemplifies the code “claims of (forced) migration” as Fuentes frames the migration of Hondurans as forced.

Almost all participants spoke about how they were “forced” to leave Central America. One of the participants, Joaquin, Honduran, noted that all emigrants have their stories and reasons to leave their country, but they do not do it for pleasure but because of pressing circumstances. He argued, “No one wants to leave his land, family, leave everything behind and go<sup>51</sup>” (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021). During the interview, Joaquin recalled when the caravan was in Tijuana, in mid-November 2018, after traveling for about a month. Different media outlets interviewed him in a state-run shelter about his experience. This is the account of what he said, “No one knows why we are here, no one wants to be here, we all have stories, some are more tragic than others, but no one comes here because they want<sup>52</sup>” (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021). In both statements, Joaquin asserted that neither he nor other caravan members wanted to leave their country. He implied that whatever the reasons might have been, no one wanted to leave their homelands, families, friends, and everything they owned and knew. The above comments are examples of the code “claims of forced migration” as migrants claimed they felt forced to leave the country.

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<sup>49</sup> La gente no se va por gusto, la gente se va por necesidad.

<sup>50</sup> La gente no se va de gusto, la gente no se va de turista, la gente se va por la inmensa necesidad.

<sup>51</sup> Nadie quiere dejar su tierra, su familia y dejar todo pues, e irte.

<sup>52</sup> Nadie sabe por qué estamos aquí, nadie quiere estar aquí, cada quien tiene su historia, unas más pesadas, pero nadie se viene por que quiere.

Hilario is a 19-year-old Honduran man from Atlántida. He joined the caravan along with four friends. In relation to his justification for joining the caravan, he argued that the situation in his country was very complicated, as it was tough to save money, and have jobs or opportunities: "There are no opportunities for anything here, there are no opportunities for anything, for anything, even if one wants to find a way to get ahead, nothing, nothing comes up here, there are no jobs here, they do not support young people here, anything<sup>53</sup>" (Hilario, personal communication, April 03, 2021).

Hilario's comments signal desperation and frustration. Hilario repeatedly mentioned how there was nothing left in Honduras, that there were no jobs, opportunities, or support for young people, and that is why people have to move. The passage exemplifies the code "claims of forced migration" since he explains that he does not leave for pleasure but because the circumstances coerced him into leaving. It can be observed that Fuentes's message resonated with Hilario and Joaquin as both offer a similar framing of migration.

#### ***6.3.4 Decriminalization of Migration***

I applied this code when there was a reference or talk about migration as an action that was not a criminal offense and when claims were made about migrants being criminalized or persecuted. Bartolo Fuentes's message on Facebook was loud and clear. On September 27, 2018, while the organization of the caravan was ongoing, he said: "If you have plans to leave, do not leave alone. Do not feel ashamed; Migrating is not a crime<sup>54</sup>" (Fuentes, 2018a). Likewise, the day after the caravan departed, while people were walking towards the Guatemala-Honduras border, Fuentes argued: "The only crime these people have committed is being poor, they have been denied all opportunities [...]"<sup>55</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k). The second

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<sup>53</sup>Aquí no hay oportunidades de nada aquí, usted, no hay oportunidades de nada, de nada, aunque uno quiera buscar la manera de salir adelante, no nada, no sale nada aquí, aquí no hay trabajo, aquí no apoyan a los jóvenes, nada.

<sup>54</sup>Si tiene planes de irse, no se vaya solo o sola. No sienta vergüenza, que MIGRAR NO ES DELITO.

<sup>55</sup> El único delito que tiene esta gente es ser pobres, se les han negado todas las oportunidades.

passage is an excerpt from a video recorded on October 14, 2018, with 230,000 views, 2,400 likes, and 1,100 comments. It was shared 2,900 times.

On multiple occasions, Fuentes aimed to decriminalize (undocumented) migration. According to him, migrating after the conditions that permeate Central America should not be punishable. Fuentes insisted that people should not be treated as criminals; instead, they should be supported and provided with asylum and other kinds of assistance.

In the second statement above, Fuentes claimed that poverty was migrants' only crime, suggesting that undocumented Honduran migrants, most likely to be from a lower class, are persecuted, criminalized, and discriminated against based on their legal and economic status.

Here, it should be observed that the number of likes, views, comments, and shares had skyrocketed, reaching more than 230,000 views, and postings were shared almost 3,000 times. This figure could also indicate that the frames were reaching a wider audience as people continued to spread the message of the caravan and join the movement. Moreover, the figures suggest a growing interest in the caravan. For instance, one of the videos broadcasted on the eve of the departure had 18,000 views (Fuentes, 2018d); as the caravan moved forward, the likes, views, comments, and shares continued to increase, reaching 257,000 views and 4,100 shares on October 15, 2018 (Fuentes, 2018l). The coverage also increased in the US mainstream media as the caravan advanced and crossed into Mexico (Fabregat et al., 2019).

In interviews, six out of 14 participants addressed the perceived image of the migrants and their take on undocumented migration. For instance, Patricia stated:

I do not hurt anyone; I do not hurt anyone, [I do] nothing [...]; the only crime I commit, which is perhaps working, is the only crime I have committed in this country. I am not bothering anyone, nothing, for what? I have not come here to this country to hurt or harm anyone<sup>56</sup> (Patricia, personal communication, May 02, 2021).

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<sup>56</sup> Yo no le hago daño a nadie, yo no le hago daño a nadie, nada, nada, yo solo me centro, el único delito que hago, que quizás es trabajar, es el único delito que yo hago en este país, de ahí yo no, ni ando molestando a nada, a nada, es que para que, yo no he venido aquí a este país a hacerle daño a nadie ni hacerle maldad a nadie.

In the above passage, Patricia argued that working is the only crime she committed. During the interview, Patricia explained that she was working in a restaurant without a work permit but was hopeful that she would get it one day. Her words suggested that she was aware that she might have committed an unlawful action by working without proper authorization; however, she did not see it as a criminal offense. Moreover, Patricia stressed that she was only focused on working and had no intention to hurt anyone, responding to those who see migrants as criminals and "bad people" (Vogt, 2020). The statement exemplifies the code "decriminalization of migration." Finally, Patricia echoes Fuentes' statements, thus suggesting the resonance of the message.

Miguel, a Salvadoran man who joined the caravan in Guatemala, explained that the Mexican immigration officers had confrontations with the caravan in Tapachula, Mexico, and how the police and military officers also were there to detain undocumented migrants. He said:

I know that the Mexican army has rights over us, but it can't arrest us because we have rights, even though we are not in our country we have rights, I know; I am aware that the authority that can detain us [immigrants] in Mexico is the National Immigration Police and the Transit Federal Police; they are the only ones that can apprehend us in Mexico. One commits a crime by being here illegally. However, one does not commit a crime for the soldiers to catch us [...]. I am illegal, nothing more. I have committed no crime<sup>57</sup> (Miguel, personal communication, April 24, 2021).

In this extract, Miguel showed knowledge of immigration policies and procedures in Mexico. First, he referred to the authorities that have the legal capacity to detain undocumented migrants in Mexico. The military and the police do not have the legal authorization to do so; only the National Migration Institute has the authority to do it. Miguel statements' are consistent with the provisions of the *Ley de Migración* [Mexican Migration Law], as in article 2, it states: "*En ningún caso una situación migratoria irregular preconfigurará por sí misma la comisión de*

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<sup>57</sup>Yo sé que el ejército mexicano tiene derechos sobre nosotros, pero no tiene obligación de detenernos porque tenemos derechos, aunque no estemos en nuestro país tenemos derechos nosotros, porque yo sé, yo tengo conocimiento de que, en México, la única autoridad que nos pueden detener como inmigrantes que somos es la Policía Nacional de Migración y Policía Federal de Camino, son los únicos que nos pueden detener en México. Uno comete el delito por andar ilegalmente, pero no comete delito para que los soldados lo quieran agarrar a uno [...] yo soy ilegal nada más, no he cometido ningún delito.

*un delito ni se prejuzgará la comisión de ilícitos por parte de un migrante por el hecho de encontrarse en condición no documentada*” [In no case an irregular migratory status will preconfigure the commission of a crime by itself, nor shall the commission of illicit acts by a migrant be prejudged by the fact of being in an undocumented condition] (*Ley de Migración*, 2011, p. 3). In other words, when migrants enter Mexico without proper documentation (i.e., irregular stay), the act itself is not a crime but an administrative charge; thus, migrants should not be apprehended nor they should experience violence and arbitrary detentions at the hands of the army or police forces. As a last resource, undocumented migrants could be taken into migration facilities by migration officers to wait for regularization or adjudication, as detention was supposed to be an extraordinary measure (Noticias ONU, 2018b). However, incarceration has become customary, and migrants are constantly identified in transit, detained, and deported. Research has shown that Mexico has adopted a policy of mass apprehension and deportation since the 1990s to curb undocumented migration, primarily from Central America (See Chapter Two) (Anguiano Téllez & Lucero Vargas, 2020; Faret et al., 2021; París Pombo, 2017; Torre Cantalapiedra & Yee Quintero, 2018).

Further, Miguel’s statements exposed how the Mexican army and the police conducted immigration enforcement activities, violating the Migration Law and migrants’ and refugees’ rights, providing evidence of how immigration enforcement activities have expanded to other agencies in the country.

Lastly, Miguel's statements also echo Fuentes's decriminalization of migration frames. He argued that migrants are not criminals; they are not committing a crime by migrating or being in Mexico on an irregular stay, further seeking to decriminalize migration. Although Miguel and Patricia know that their actions are unlawful, they do not think of themselves as felons.

### 6.3.5 Honduran Government

For this case, I coded a “Honduran Government” when there was a reference to depictions of the Honduran Government as “bad government,” corrupt, illegal, unjust, responsible for suffering, harm, poverty, and migration from the country (Human Rights Watch, 2021; InSight Crime, 2021; López Recinos, 2020; Sosa, 2014, 2015, 2017; Sosa & Irías, 2018; Vommaro & Briceño Cerrato, 2018). The Honduran government was often depicted as the authority that brought poverty, insecurity, and political instability.

Bartolo Fuentes repeatedly called out the Honduran government during the multiple videos and messages on Facebook (see Chapter Five). The following passage is an excerpt from a video that Fuentes recorded on October 14, 2018, on Facebook while the caravan was moving toward Guatemala. The video had 230,000 views, 2,400 likes, 1,100 people commented on the post, and it was shared 2,900 times:

Thousands of Hondurans, men, women, children, and young people are going through a situation that if you tell them now, “let’s go anywhere to look for an opportunity,” they do not think twice [...]. They cannot live in Honduras; they do not have opportunities in Honduras, so they have to leave for another country [...]. We are asking people to share [the video of the Migrant Caravan] so that more people in Honduras and the world realize that this is the reality of Honduras; this is what is happening<sup>58</sup> (Fuentes, 2018k).

The excerpt is an example of the code, as Fuentes first, blamed the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez for the emigration of thousands of people. In doing so, he assigned Hernandez the responsibility for bringing about harm and suffering in Honduras and pointing him as the target of moral outrage, deploying moralizing frames (Simonsen & Bonikowski, 2022). Here, Fuentes showed frustration and desperation, and outrage. Throughout the videos and posts, he

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<sup>58</sup>Hondureños, hondureñas, hombres, mujeres, niños, jóvenes, miles de personas están pasando una situación que si les dicen ahora "vámonos a donde sea a buscar una oportunidad" no lo piensan dos veces [...] En Honduras no puede vivir, en Honduras no tiene posibilidades, entonces tiene que ir a otro país [...] Vamos a pedirle a las compañeros y compañeros que compartamos [el vídeo de la caminata], compartamos para que más gente se dé cuenta en Honduras y en el mundo, esta es la realidad de Honduras, esto es lo que está pasando. Donald Trump no quiere migrantes allá, pero sostiene a un gobierno que hace que la gente se vaya.

expressed his discontent with Hernandez and the way he performed. In other videos, he would call Hernandez corrupt, a thief, and a criminal.

In the same vein, four participants candidly expressed their outrage and discontent with the Honduran Government. For instance, Joaquin is a Honduran man who joined the caravan from the beginning. He served some time in the military and then quit to work as a bodyguard. His new job took a toll, so Joaquin, his colleagues, and his boss were persecuted by organized crime. When he was explaining his reasons for leaving Honduras, he expressed:

The president is a dictator; he is bloodthirsty; he [the president] has founded a drug cartel [...]. He is the boss; many things were done to do a coup, to make him quit; still, it was not possible because he bribed the military. So many deaths, there have been so many deaths in the country, now no one strikes, no one does any of that; yes, they [migrants] say "out JOH," as the president's name is Juan Orlando Hernández<sup>59</sup> (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021).

Joaquin's statements reflected his outrage against the Honduran government and then-president Juan Orlando Hernández. In his account, he described Hernández as a very powerful person in control of the country and its institutions, such as the military and the police, and illegal activities like narco-trafficking. Joaquin's accounts suggested that Hernández's power was exercised in different ways, including state repression, as Joaquin said that there were no strikes or protests and that the attempts to bring him down failed. In that vein, Joaquin saw the Honduran government as bloodthirsty and responsible for the killings of many people. Likewise, when he said that the president was a dictator, he was condemning the government for the frauds in the 2013 and 2017 presidential elections, by which JOH was first elected president and then reelected (see (OAS, 2017; Sosa, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018; Sosa & Irías, 2018; Vommaro & Briceño Cerrato, 2018). Moreover, Joaquin's words expressed frustration

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<sup>59</sup> El gobierno es un dictador, es un sanguinario, pues él pertenece, él tiene fundado un cártel de drogas... él es el que manda, pues, entonces se dieron tantas cosas de quererle dar el golpe de estado, de que renunciara y nunca se pudo porque él compró a los militares, entonces muchas muertes, en el país han habido tantas muertes, ahora ya nadie hace huelgas, nadie hace de todo eso, y sí dicen "fuera JOH" es como él se llama Juan Orlando Hernández, el presidente.

after the failed attempts to bring down JOH, showing some sense of hopelessness, as all the democratic ways to overthrow him had been exhausted.

This is an example of the code Honduran Government as there is moral outrage against the Honduran state's acts. Joaquin blamed and accused the government of atrocities, making it responsible for bringing about suffering to the Honduran people. Finally, it could be argued that the framing of the government that Fuentes articulated had resonance with Joaquin, who had experienced some of its effects firsthand.

Nestor also reflected on the performance of the government and directly blamed it for the poverty and emigration from the country:

There is nothing in our country; there is no work here, I live in misery; governments do not help people. I am a grown-up, but many young people commit crimes because they do not have other options. After all, there are no sources of income, and they have to look for something to survive [...]. The president does not care, or the people who work with the president, or the people whose job is to serve others, they do not; they do not think about that; they only think about their gain. They do not care if one eats or does not eat; if one gets sick or does not get sick, they do not care about that; they only care about themselves<sup>60</sup> (Nestor, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Nestor faulted the Hernandez government for the country's poverty, misery, and lack of jobs and opportunities. He coincided with Joaquin's reading of the government because both see it as selfish, only doing things in their personal best interest. Nestor clearly said that the government does not help its citizens and cares little about the population's well-being. His words signaled sadness, outrage, and desperation by telling how young people are forced to do all kinds of things, even engage in criminal activities, to survive due to the lack of opportunities in the country. His statements took the form of injustice frames as they point to an authority or system of authority responsible for the suffering of people while deeming the acts of the

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<sup>60</sup> Aquí en nuestro país, aquí no hay nada, aquí no hay trabajo, aquí vivo en la miseria. Los gobiernos no ayudan a la gente. Yo que estoy ya un señor y hay muchachos jóvenes que por eso es que ellos andan delinquiendo porque no, no tiene otra opción, no tienen otra opción porque no hay fuentes de trabajo, y ellos tienen que buscar la vida... Al presidente no le interesa, o a la gente que rodea al presidente, o las persona que, a las personas que queque le compite esa función de servir a los demás, ellos no, no piensan en eso, ellos solo piensan por el, por el lucro personal. A ellos no le interesa si uno come o no come, si uno se enferma o no se enferma, a ellos no le interesa eso, sólo les interesan ellos.

Honduran government as unfair. The Honduran Government frame articulated by Fuentes is alike to Nestor's and Joaquin's accounts of the government.

### ***6.3.6 Human Rights Frames***

I used this code in instances when there was a reference to migrants' and refugees' rights to move freely to pursue better living conditions in another country, to seek asylum, and to work (Beltrán, 2009; Contreras Delgado et al., 2021; París Pombo, 2019; Sandoval Palacios, 2007; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019).

I used the code "human rights frames" instead of "rights frames" as the human rights frames are different from other, more generic "rights frames." Bloemraad et al. (2016) argued that the "rights frame" has been historically associated with the civil rights movement in the US. The movement, which is embedded in a set of American institutions and a narrative of US citizenship (Bloemraad et al., 2016), articulated a master frame around "equal rights regardless of ascribed characteristics" (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 146). In contrast, "human rights frames" are "moral and philosophical claims to values based on human dignity and equality" (Bloemraad et al., 2016, p. 1653) regardless of nationality, citizenship, or country of birth. Thus, human rights pleas can provide a discursive and legal framework to advance immigrant rights (Bloemraad et al., 2016). Saskia Sassen (2006) discusses the institutionalization of the human rights regime by highlighting the marches and rallies in 2006 led by undocumented workers in the US. Sassen argued the claims made were more about the "rights to have rights" than to become Americans per se (see (Beltrán, 2009; Dikeç, 2013); a claim made for a "sort of denationalized citizenship" (Sassen, 2006, para. 10). In Fuentes's case, he articulated human rights frames looking to advance immigrant and refugee rights that were not dependent upon granting citizenship but on respecting migrants' and asylum seekers' human dignity and equality.

Fuentes articulated this frame on several occasions before, during, and after the movement. He had long advocated for migrants' rights and had been outspoken about their right to move freely, find jobs, and seek asylum. For instance, on September 27, 2018, Fuentes urged migrants to leave the country in a better-organized fashion than before to have their rights respected: "If you leave together, you can [...] demand respect to your rights as any other citizen in whichever country you are<sup>61</sup>" (Fuentes, 2018a). The post received 130 likes, 71 comments and was shared 82 times. In the passage, Fuentes saw the caravan as a collective action that had the potential of achieving different goals, in this case, the right to seek asylum, implying that such a right is not always guaranteed or respected.

Moreover, on the eve of the caravan's departure, on October 12, 2018, he went live on Facebook from the bus station in San Pedro Sula, showing images of the groups of people that gathered there. During the transmission, he said: "We will be accompanying these people in this fight for the respect of a right that every human being has, and that is to seek asylum in another country when they feel that their life is threatened<sup>62</sup>" (Fuentes, 2018d). The video had more than 10,000 views, 235 likes, 98 people commented on the post, and was shared 237 times. Throughout the walk, Fuentes continued to argue that caravan members were going to seek asylum in Mexico and that Mexico should respect people's right to seek asylum, a right that is guaranteed by International Law (Fuentes, 2018i). The comments mentioned above exemplify a human rights frame. They directly refer to people's right to seek asylum when their lives are at risk regardless of their nationality, origin, or migration status.

Three out of 14 participants also spoke about their right to move freely and freedom from arbitrary detention. For instance, Miguel, a Salvadoran man who joined the caravan in Guatemala, said this about his rights: "I know that the Mexican army has rights over us

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<sup>61</sup>Si se van juntos, pueden .... demandar respeto a sus derechos como personas en cualquier país en que se encuentren.

<sup>62</sup>Vamos a estarle acompañando a esta gente, en esta lucha por que se respete un derecho que tiene todo ser humano y es a pedir refugio en otro país cuando siente que su vida está amenazada.

[migrants]. Still, it has no obligation to detain us because we have rights; even though we are not in our country, we have rights<sup>63</sup>” (Miguel, personal communication, April 24, 2021). In this passage, Miguel showed knowledge of his rights as an immigrant. First, he refers to the authorities authorized to detain undocumented migrants in Mexico (see above code “decriminalization of migration”). Second, Miguel’s statements expose how the Mexican army conducts immigration enforcement activities, violating the law and migrants’ and refugees’ rights. Lastly, Miguel’s statements also echo Fuentes’s human rights frames, as he argues that migrants have rights even when they are not in their home country, and those should be respected, regardless of their nationality and the country where they are, and migratory status.

Patricia, a 28-year-old woman from Ocotopeque, Honduras, who joined the caravan a few days after it departed from San Pedro Sula, also said: “Still, one can migrate anywhere<sup>64</sup>” (Patricia, personal communication May 02, 2021). Her words also describe migrants’ right to mobility and freedom to choose where to go. This observation is also an example of the code “human rights frame,” which implies the right to move freely.

#### **6.4 Nonresonant Frames: Bartolo Fuentes’s Frames that Did Not Resonate with Participants**

In the following section, I analyze the different codes (frames) that Bartolo Fuentes articulated that did not resonate with the participants. I follow the same process as in the above section. I first define each code, then add a passage from Bartolo Fuentes, and lastly, the participants’ responses to each code/frame. By looking at how migrants respond to the frames Fuentes articulated, I show that migrants are also frame makers and not only frame recipients. Here, we see that migrants become active participants in the framing of their movement.

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<sup>63</sup> Yo sé que el ejército mexicano tiene derechos sobre nosotros, pero no tiene obligación de detenernos porque tenemos derechos, aunque no estemos en nuestro país tenemos derechos nosotros.

<sup>64</sup> Igual uno puede migrar para donde sea.

### ***6.4.1 Framing the Caravan as a Humanitarian Crisis***

I used this code when there was an explanation or description of the caravan as a humanitarian crisis. For instance, Bartolo Fuentes, the day after the caravan departed, argued: “This is Migrant Walk leaving Santa Rosa de Copán. Explain it to me. How do you explain that this multitude has gathered in less than 24 hours? If this is not a humanitarian crisis, how can it be called?<sup>65</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018k). The passage is an excerpt from a video that had more than 230,000 views, 2,400 likes, 1,100 comments, and it was shared 2,900 times. The video was recorded on Sunday, October 14, 2018. Santa Rosa de Copán was the first stop on the route to Mexico after departing from San Pedro Sula (see Figure 1.2).

Fuentes framed the caravan as a humanitarian crisis on numerous occasions. He would argue that the term "humanitarian crisis" had been used in other contexts to describe the phenomenon of hundreds of people walking together to leave their country and thus it should also be applied to the caravan. He said: “Well, those are the ones who have invented those terms, and in another country that has had the normal flow at the border, they have called it a humanitarian crisis, and what is this, what is this?<sup>66</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018k). He urged the United Nations (UN) to go to Honduras to observe what was happening while also condemning the role of the Organization of American States (OAS) in supporting the Hernandez government. While talking, Fuentes exhibited anger, desperation, and frustration. Fuentes urged international organizations and media outlets to pay attention to the injustices committed in Honduras, which drove them to leave the country. Hence, Fuentes framed the phenomenon, the caravan, as a crisis, worthy of moral outrage, given the motives by which it is created. Eventually, the caravan would get far more media attention than Fuentes expected.

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<sup>65</sup> Esta es la caminata de los migrantes saliendo de Santa Rosa de Copán. Que den una explicación ¿cómo se explican que en menos de 24 horas se ha juntado esta multitud, si esto no es crisis humanitaria, entonces qué cosa puede llamársele así?

<sup>66</sup>Bueno, los que han inventado los términos esos son ellos mismos, y en otro país que se ha dado el flujo normal en frontera le han llamada crisis humanitaria, y ¿esto? ¿qué es, qué es esto?

In other words, by framing the caravan as a "humanitarian crisis," Fuentes deployed a moral frame (Simonsen & Bonikowski, 2022), seeking to induce moral judgment. That is, the moral and right thing to do would be to support the movement, as it would be "inhumane" not to do so. Representing the caravan as a humanitarian crisis served to draw attention and support from different organizations and civil society. Moreover, framing the caravan as a humanitarian crisis created a sense of urgency for a situation that needed to be resolved and addressed.

Framing the caravan in such a fashion targeted a different audience, such as the region's governments and international organizations. Even when the video was viewed and shared thousands of times, the framing of the caravan as a humanitarian crisis did not resonate with participants. None of the participants spoke of the caravan as a humanitarian crisis in the interviews. No evidence of this frame was found among them. They all referred to the caravan in multiple ways, either as a multitude of people pursuing the American dream, as a brotherhood, as an adventure, or as a multitude of people, and one of the participants referred to it as an exodus (see Chapter Seven). However, no reference was ever made to a humanitarian crisis. Even when referring to the situation they were facing in Honduras, no one referred to it as a humanitarian crisis.

#### ***6.4.2 Destination: Mexico***

I used this code when a reference was made about the country migrants were heading to with the caravan, their leading destination. Fuentes mentioned on numerous occasions that the primary destination and goal of the caravan were to arrive safely in Mexico and seek asylum. On the eve of the departure, Fuentes stated: "The Migrant Walk of Honduran men and women rest at the Big Terminal in San Pedro Sula, awaiting their departure to Mexico. Hundreds of men, women, and children will seek asylum from the Mexican government. A

journey of almost one thousand kilometers awaits them to Tapachula<sup>67</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018d). After the caravan departed, he continued to stress the goal and destination of the caravan: "People go to arrive and seek asylum in Mexican territory<sup>68</sup>” (Fuentes, 2018g). The extracts are examples of the code. Fuentes clearly stated that the caravan’s leading destination is Mexico, where caravan members would seek asylum.

However, during the interviews, I found no evidence of this code. Migrants repeatedly argued that their main goal was to arrive in the US. That is, there was no resonance of that frame among the participants. In other words, they did not see Fuentes’s solution as theirs. Most participants clearly expressed their wish to go to the US and achieve the "American dream." For instance, Luis, a 32-year-old Nicaraguan man, said that he had no intentions of staying in Mexico despite the positive experience he had in such a country:

During my time in that country [Mexico], no one hurt me, and I did not harm anyone. For what? Instead, they helped me there, gave me everything, and helped me, but my intention was not to stay in Mexico. I intended to get to the United States<sup>69</sup> (Luis, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Luis had joined the caravan in Tecún Umán, Guatemala (see Figure 6.1), while the caravan was waiting to cross the “*Rodolfo Robles*” bridge to enter Mexico. He traveled with the caravan up to Mexico City; then, he left the caravan, arrived in Tijuana by his own means, and crossed into the US. In the passage, Luis expressed that despite having had a good experience, support, and assistance in Mexico, he refused to stay in the country and instead took the necessary steps to go to the US. He would argue that his goal was always to go to the US.

Other participants also expressed that all the people in the caravan wanted to go to the US. Patricia, a Honduran woman who was living in the US at the time of the interview, stated:

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<sup>67</sup>Caminata de los migrantes hondureños y hondureñas descansan en la Gran Terminal de San Pedro Sula a la espera de su salida hacia México. Cientos de hombres, mujeres y niños huyen y pedirán refugio al gobierno mexicano. Les espera un trayecto de casi mil kilómetros hasta Tapachula.

<sup>68</sup>La gente va con el propósito de llegar hasta México y pedir refugio en territorio mexicano.

<sup>69</sup>Yo durante estuve en ese país [México], a mí ninguna persona me hizo daño y yo a ninguna persona le hice mal, para qué, ahí más bien me ayudaron, me dieron de todo, me echaron la mano, pero mi intención no era quedarme en México, mi intención era llegar a Estados Unidos.

“Everyone's *anhelo* (desire) is to be in the United States. All the people *anhela* (long for) that; although they don't know what the situation is like here, everybody wants to be here<sup>70</sup>” (Patricia, personal communication, May 02, 2021). Patricia's words suggested that people dream of going to the US, even when they do not know the problems that migrants face once on US soil. For decades, research has shown migrants' difficulties when arriving in the US, ranging from discrimination in the workplace, and labor exploitation, to a lack of access to services (Asakura, 2016). Still, Patricia asserts that migrants long for the US, supporting the idea that a collective imaginary exists about the US.

### Figure 6.1

*Map of border cities at the Guatemala-Mexico border*



Source: Google Maps (2022b), modified by the author

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<sup>70</sup>El anhelo de todo el mundo es estar en Estados Unidos. Toda la gente anhela eso, aunque no saben cómo es la situación aquí, pero todo mundo quiere estar aquí.

Alberto, a 23-year-old Honduran man, also expressed: “The whole group was pursuing the American Dream<sup>71</sup>” (Alberto, personal communication, May 08, 2021). Miguel, from El Salvador, also expressed that Salvadorans pursued the dream of arriving in the US (Miguel, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

In the same vein, Hilario expressed that he wanted to pursue the American Dream. When asked about what it meant for him, he said: “Well, go there (to the US), be able to work, be able to help my family, help my mother, my grandmother, be able to work, save my money, be able to buy them a house because here in Honduras you cannot do that, it is a lie that you will be able to get ahead<sup>72</sup>” (Hilario, personal communication, April 03, 2021). In their words, participants expressed their wish to go to the US, signaling a shared meaning and understanding, a “collective imaginary,” about what it means to live and work in such a country. In that imaginary, it was clear that the US still is being seen as the land of opportunity and prosperity, where Hondurans could work, save money, and eventually send remittances back home. This imaginary is widely present in communities in Mexico and Central America (Massey, 1987; Massey et al., 1990; Sertzen & Torres, 2016). Children and adolescents learn about the US from their parents, siblings, or community members, imagining it as an urban space with factories, roads, and community dwellings, where people work, make money, and send remittances. Other studies have highlighted how families gifted young men with money to go to the US (Alonso Meneses, 2010) and how in Mexico migration was seen as a rite of passage into manhood (Massey et al., 1990). In other words, the statements above reflect how migrants can articulate their own frames, generating an "American dream" frame, as opposed to being only recipients of organizers' and leaders' goals and agendas.

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<sup>71</sup>Iba todo el grupo buscando el sueño americano.

<sup>72</sup>No pues irse allá, poder trabajar, poderle ayudar a mi familia, sacarla adelante, a mi mamá, a mi abuela, poder trabajar, ahorrar mi dinero, poder hacerles su casa por que aquí en Honduras no se puede hacer eso usted, aquí es mentira que va a poder salir adelante.

## 6.5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I first explored frame resonance. I analyzed Bartolo Fuentes's frames before and during the movement to show the frames that resonated with participants. The frames aimed to mobilize participants to leave the country in large groups while framing various actions of the Honduran government as unjust, thus creating moral outrage among the participants and in the broader audience (particularly members of the social society who also assisted the caravan at various moments and places). Fuentes claimed the injustices committed against Hondurans have caused them to leave the country as they did not have opportunities, jobs, security, or political stability. Moreover, he argued, the government was corrupt, and the president was in power after the fraudulent 2013 and 2017 presidential elections. Thus, Fuentes framed the migration of Hondurans as forced. This argument helps him request the Mexican government to provide asylum to the thousands of people fleeing the country and treat them well. Migrants have the right to move freely to pursue better living conditions or seek asylum, further offering frames that decriminalize undocumented migration.

The frames put forward by Bartolo Fuentes did not resonate equally with participants; that is to say, some of them resonated more than others. Table 6.1 (above) showed the frequency of frame resonance among participants, those that resonated the most and the least. First, the calls to leave the country in groups resonated with all of the participants. Recall that this frame provided the vocabulary of motives for engaging in collective action while precisely articulating the benefits of migrating together. Participants found Fuentes's argument compelling, and they expressed their justifications for joining the caravan similarly to him. About the factors that affect frame resonance, Benford and Snow (2000) argued that frame resonance is affected by its empirical credibility or how the frame fits with the events of the world. In this case, the call to leave the country in groups was empirically credible, as it fitted the participants' view of the world. That is to say, Fuentes's claims resonated with the

participants' experiences and views of current events. In terms of how resonance occurs, resonance emerged because it is about the act of making a frame resonant with what a person goes through and works through a situation (McDonnell et al., 2017). Participants spoke about the difficult conditions they face because of clandestine crossings. When they heard a caravan was being formed and were informed of its benefits, their accounts suggest that they felt drawn to participate. Thus, resonance emerged as the participants found out about the option of leaving the country collectively, potentially organized, and safely.

McDonnell et al. (2017, p. 4) argue that “resonance helps identify lines of action toward ‘ends in view,’ potentially revising people’s desires and imagining what is possible.” In the framing that Fuentes put forward, participants saw in the caravan a new solution to their existing problems, a solution that had not been possible or imagined but that was needed. Fuentes made that solution available to them by spreading information about these large groups of people and then by broadcasting how the caravan was, in fact, on the move.

The framing of the caravan as a solution provided a new approach to a problem Central Americans have encountered for decades. Hence, the idea of leaving together, in daylight, denouncing the actions of the Honduran government, resonated with them. The more caravan members joined the movement, the stronger they got. They found in their union the key to advancing their claims.

The second frame that resonated the most was “claims of forced migration,” which referred to the lack of opportunities, employment, poverty, and violence as factors that force migrants to leave the country. This frame refers to the environment in which Hondurans live. According to Ketelaars (2016), frames have more resonance when they appeal to everyday people's experiences; that is, when joining a protest, people are motivated by the frames that talk about familiar matters, often referred to as experiential commensurability (similar to empirical credibility). As Gamson stated, frames resonate because they are familiar (Gamson,

1992). In other words, the context in which the frames are articulated matters. In the case of the caravan, Fuentes's frames are not articulated in a vacuum but within particular conditions in Honduras that were known by caravan participants.

The social media mobilization strategy ranked third. The internet and social media played a huge role in the development of the movement. According to participants' accounts, most of them learned about the movement on social media, further showing the effects of posting and distributing information about the caravan on Facebook. Honduras has the highest social media penetration in Central America and Facebook is the platform with the highest share among social media sites (Statista, 2022). The access and use of social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, facilitated the distribution of the flyer and the diffusion of information about the caravan. Social media was also fundamental for logistical purposes, as people used it to communicate information about the time and place of departure and other topics related to the movement. For instance, it also served to coordinate and let people know where the next meeting points were. In the Facebook groups that were created for and after the caravan, members posted data related to food or medicines needed and advised about the presence of immigration officials on the migratory route.

The mobilization strategy on social media whereby the organizers invited people to join the caravan resonated with participants. They described how, when, and what they heard about the movement. In other words, the mobilization strategy consisted in spreading logistical and practical information about the caravan, and the benefits or advantages associated with it. The responses of the *caravaneros* suggest that even if they did not hear directly from Bartolo Fuentes, the frames he articulated and were spread on social media indeed resonated with them.

Decriminalization of migration ranked fourth in frame resonance. Fuentes articulated the frame by saying that migrating was not a crime and that Mexico and the US should stop criminalizing and persecuting undocumented migrants, suggesting that the restrictive migration

policies implemented were leading migrants to experience violence in transit. When articulating the frame, Fuentes targeted the US and Mexican governments. The frame resonated with a subset of the population, as less than half of the participants spoke about the frame.

The Honduran government frame, also an injustice frame, ranked fifth. Participants spoke about being forced to leave Honduras, but only a handful directly attributed fault to the Honduran government. Ketelaars (2016) argues that fault attribution is an important element in frame resonance. When a cause holds responsible a concrete person, organization, or authority, frames are more convincing. Fuentes attributed blame to the Honduran government, and some participants directly blamed the Honduran government for the situation in Honduras. During the interviews, I did not ask questions about people's opinions on the government; instead, the questions sought to understand their justifications for participating in the caravan, how they first learned about the movement, and their further involvement in it. That may explain the lower frequency of this code.

The frame that resonated the least was the “human rights frame.” Fuentes articulated "human rights frames" that informed migrants about their rights whilst targeting the Mexican government. He asserted that people had the right to seek asylum in Mexico when their life was at risk and that Mexico had granted asylum to other populations in the past. Targeting the Mexican government, migrants hardly identified with the frame.

In the second part of this chapter, I reviewed the frames that did not resonate with participants. First, I offered evidence about Bartolo Fuentes's framing of the caravan as a humanitarian crisis. When Fuentes deployed it, he stated that international organizations (the UN and the OAS) had used such a term to describe a similar situation in other geographies, arguing it should be applied to the caravan as well. His claims also targeted the national and international media, demanding their presence on the field to witness and broadcast the

development of the caravan movement. Fuentes sought policy action and political attention at the local and international levels.

Further, Fuentes used moral framing to influence a broad audience and advance migrants' rights and claims. Literature on moral frames has shown that "being exposed to political rhetoric that uses moral language increases the likelihood that respondents will perceive immigration as a moral topic" (Simonsen & Bonikowski, 2022, p. 15). By framing the caravan as a humanitarian crisis, Fuentes sought the support of local and international organizations and the larger civil society, as supporting people in crisis would be the morally right thing to do.

Nevertheless, the frame of "caravan as a humanitarian crisis" did not resonate with the participants. None of them referred to the caravan as such. Even when the frame was used repeatedly, participants spoke about the caravan in different terms. It is important to remember that participants interpret the frames differently, known as the subjective interpretation and cognitive processing of frames (Park et al., 2021). For them, the caravan meant something different from a humanitarian crisis. They did not describe the situation in Honduras as such, neither they subscribe to the definition of the caravan as a humanitarian crisis. Instead, participants referred to the caravan as an adventure, an exodus, and a successful event worth repeating. Thus, caravan members articulated their frames, becoming frame makers and actors whereby they not only replicated what they heard but were able to generate their own frames and interpretations.

Lastly, Bartolo Fuentes's solution for migrants' grievances, whereby Mexico was the ultimate destination, and caravan members would seek asylum there, had no resonance with participants. None of the participants interviewed stated that. Instead, caravan members detailed that they wanted to pursue the American dream, and none of them manifested any intention of staying in Mexico. They all argued that their goal was to arrive in the US. Fuentes

would say that was the goal of the few members at the beginning of the movement (Pradilla, 2019); however, as the caravan evolved, new voices and solutions emerged.

The dissonance in the last two frames reinforces what has been said earlier about participants having a more active role in articulating and interpreting their own frames, even when these contrast with those of the organizers or mobilizers of a social movement.

Moreover, the fact that migrants said they wanted to pursue the American dream is one indication of the long-standing tradition of emigration from Central America to the US. Such a tradition has created a collective imagery whereby the US is still seen as the land of opportunity, wealth, and prosperity. The idea of the American dream was prominent and hegemonic. So, despite Fuentes's framing efforts about the destination of the caravan, members rejected the framing, generating their own. Thus, the frame of the American dream contested the destination frame leading to a framing contest, which was eventually dominated by the "American dream" frame.

Given that frame resonance is often conflated with the success of a movement (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bloemraad et al., 2016; Bonikowski, 2017; Chakravarty & Chaudhuri, 2012, 2012; Ferree, 2003; Shuster & Campos-Castillo, 2017) whereby the success of a movement is linked to frame resonance, this case contributes to the literature on frame resonance by showing how despite the lack of resonance in relevant frames, movements still evolve and achieve some of their primary goals. That is, the lack of resonance does not necessarily lead to the failure of the movement. Instead, it is the articulation of the frames and their re-interpretation by participants that lead to the development of the movement. Notably, the meaning and interpretation frames articulated by participants are shared among the group. This finding then sheds light on the not-so-clear-cut relationship between the resonance and success, suggesting a different type of link between them and the integration of other elements into the equation, such as the articulation of bottom-up frames, to account for the "success" of the movement.

There are some limitations in the case study. Because I conducted semi-structured interviews, I cannot prove causality. In other words, it is not possible to know to what extent the frames mobilized participants. However, it is possible to say that frames resonated with respondents or could have resonated based on the codes. It would be possible to theorize that under the existing conditions, after being exposed to particular messages, respondents felt drawn to participate in the caravan or disseminate information about it. Here, the interviews allow us to observe what frames resonated the most and the least while understanding the logic behind them, allowing a nuanced analysis of frame resonance. By addressing specifically resonant and nonresonant frames and the arguments behind them, we can further theorize ways in which mobilizers can gain purchase in mobilizing participants. Experimental studies can then test this.

Furthermore, we can theorize based on these findings that Fuentes facilitated a path for members to express their discontent and join the movement. Throughout the movement, participants continued to articulate reasons for leaving Honduras through the caravan.

Moreover, the analysis of frame resonance allows us to theorize possible paths of action. That is, by looking at people's responses to the messages distributed on social media, it would be possible to build a theory of how people respond to the experience of resonance and the actions that followed (McDonnell et al., 2017). For instance, if they shared the information.

While these caravan members' perspectives do not apply to the entire universe of caravan members, their testimony offers insight into members' experiences and interpretations of the movement. In other words, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population. However, they constitute a first step in understanding how and what frames resonated with some participants; participants' responses to Bartolo Fuentes's frames and the articulation of their own frames, which in turn inspired the development of further movements (i.e., subsequent caravans).

## **Chapter 7. The Construction of Collective Identity in the October 2018 Migrant**

### **Caravan**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, Chapter Six, I did a literature review on frame resonance to understand how messages articulated by leaders or de facto organizers resonate or do not resonate with constituents, and which messages are most likely to resonate with them. Empirically, the chapter uncovered how and what frames resonated with caravan participants, those that did not resonate with them, and new frames that participants articulated, making them not only recipients of frames but frame articulators. This chapter continues in the same vein, as it delves into the inductive themes that emerged among the participants and were not present in Fuentes's discourses.

Specifically, this chapter investigates the experiences of caravan members (migrants with precarious legal status and asylum seekers) and the formation of collective identity “on the move.” With this, I seek to understand how loose members became a united group and voice which allowed them to cross international borders. In other words, I investigate how the caravan became a collective actor and how they constructed a collective identity in transit. I do so through the analysis of different codes, such as experiences in transit, leaders and guides, brotherhood, expressions of resistance, faith, and solidarity, and their interpretation of the movement. By looking at these codes, we can pin down the processes of mobilization, organizational forms, models of leadership, religious beliefs, and forms of communication, which are relevant to the reconstruction and constitution of a collective actor (Melucci, 1996).

The chapter is structured as follows. It starts with a literature review on collective identity. Then, I identify the themes that emerged during the interviews, followed by a discussion and conclusion. Findings show that participants achieved some of their goals through the power of collective mobilization. With cohesiveness and brotherhood that grew

among them, migrants resisted the imposition of restrictive racialized immigration policies, the harsh weather conditions, and the hardships of the trip itself. In other words, the collective identity and agency developed throughout the movement, reflected in the brotherhood that grew in the movement, were instrumental in the “success” of the movement. This chapter expands the literature in three ways by showing a) the formation of a collective identity in a migrant social movement led by undocumented migrants and asylum seekers from different nationalities; b) the formation of a collective identity “on the move” c) showing the specific components of the collective identity in the 2018 October migrant caravan.

## **7.2 Theoretical Framework: Collective Identity**

Alberto Melucci (1995, 1996) developed a comprehensive theory of collective identity that is still very influential. The work of Gamson (1991) and Flesher Fominaya (2010, 2019), and other scholars (Eyerman, 2005; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Snow, 2001) have also contributed to the vast literature on collective identity. Collective identity has been regarded as a central feature of social movements as it is said to have an important role in movements' emergence, development, and outcomes (Polletta & Jasper, 2001), and has the potential to allow collective action, overcome the free-rider problem, and afford a sense of belonging (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Saunders, 2008). Alberto Melucci (1996, p. 71) defined collective identity as a “process of active relationships between actors who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate and make decisions.” Other scholars argued that collective identity is a product (Saunders, 2008; Snow, 2001) and others argued that it can be seen as both a process and a product (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Snow argued that the essence of collective identity lies in a “shared and interactive sense of ‘we-ness’ and ‘collective agency’” (Snow, 2001, p. 1).

Three elements are needed in the definition of collective identity in a social movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995, 1996; Taylor & Whittier, 1992): a), the definition of

“who we are and we want,” which includes a common understanding of the goals the actors want to achieve and the means they have to do it while highlighting the antagonism or opposition between the challenging and the dominant groups; b) a network of relationships that relate to the organization and models of leadership in the group; and c) a bond or emotional investment, that allows participants feel united or part of the group.

First, the relational dimension of collective identity is linked to the distinction of the collective self in relation to the other. Through reflexivity, a group becomes aware of “we” that are recognized by the “others.” Often, the formation of a “we” grows as a result of opposition. That is to say “a collective actor cannot construct its identity independently of its recognition by other social or political actors” (Melucci, 1995, pp. 47–48). For instance, it was discussed in Chapter Five how the counter-frames that arose between Fuentes and the Honduran government led to the development of an oppositional relationship of “us vs. them,” strengthening the collective identity of the caravan, where the “us” referred to the caravan and activists in favor of it, and “them” referred to those who, openly, were against it. Shouting slogans, singing, or creating banners were some of the means employed to draw the boundaries between “us and them” (Eyerman, 2005). In other words, it is through distinction that groups recognize themselves from the other, those who are inside and outside the movement (Eyerman, 2005). This distinction requires some boundary work, a type of behavior that people display when describing who they are alike to or different from (Lamont, 2000; Lamont & Swidler, 2014). A process that defines who we are, who we are not, and “what we are against” (Eyerman, 2005, p. 44). That is, the collective actor should be recognized by the “other” (Melucci, 1996). This social recognition needs to be reciprocal between actors (authorities, governments, movements), even if in the form of denial, challenge, or opposition (*Ibid*).

Further, Gamson (1991, p. 41) argued that the “locus of collective identity is not the individual but at the sociocultural level.” It is expressed through symbols, rituals, practices,

and other cultural artifacts publicly exhibited in the form of dress, language, demeanor, discourse, and religion (Gamson, 1991; Melucci, 1995). For instance, Ron Eyerman (2005) details how activists and leaders of the various phases of the American civil rights movement in the 1950s chose to wear particular clothes to express their movement. He stated that in the Black Power phase, “the black leather jacket and beret became prominent and expressive of a younger, an urban generation’s striving for autonomy and distinction” (Eyerman, 2005, p. 49).

In terms of the opposition between the dominant and challenger group, Melucci (1995) argued that conflict provided the basis for cohesion, group identity, and solidarity. Social actors enter a conflict to demand what their opponent has denied to them, “to reappropriate something that belongs to them because they are able to recognize it as their own” (Melucci, 1995, p. 48). The conflict reinforces the solidarity and bonds in the group, as they need it to make sense of what they are making. Participants also gather and reorganize to claim what they recognize as theirs. Here, conflict is what binds people together, acting as a united front against a “common enemy.”

Second, Melucci (1995, 1996) argued that collective identity does not imply that all members of a group share the same or are in complete agreement on beliefs, interests, and goals to come together; while other scholars agreed that at least some shared goals are needed for collective action to occur (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Collective identity then entails a network of active relationships that negotiates and makes decisions. These relationships relate to the organization of the group, setting goals, leadership or hierarchy, resources, and so on. Here, the collective identity is produced by shared repeated interaction, whereby actors negotiate, understand their actions, and make decisions (Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

Third, creating a bond is part of creating a collective identity (Eyerman, 2005). Social movements bond “desperate” individuals who may already have some sort of affiliation or kinship (*Ibid*). Demonstrations, marches, and other forms of contention (Della Porta, 2013;

Tilly, 1986) provide the possibilities to create this bond (Eyerman, 2005). Groups strengthen when they share reflex emotions (i.e., quick, automatic responses such as anger, joy, surprise, shocks, or disgust) in response to happenings. Even when events are adverse, and people experience feelings like fear or anxiety, the experience "can be a strong force in creating a sense of collectivity and be an attractive force in collective actions" (Eyerman, 2005, p. 43).

Emotions play an important role in collective identities, as positive emotions can lead to cohesion, and negative emotions can undermine such cohesion (Flesher Fominaya, 2019). What is more, emotionally charged happenings, such as political repression or immigrant criminalization, that participants experience together can lead to the assertion of their collective identity, increased solidarity, and their likelihood of engaging in high-risk activism (*Ibid*). This shows the link between emotions and social movements (Jasper, 1998, 2011; Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). Finally, the creation of a collective identity is crucial for a movement to last (Gamson, 1991).

Finally, authors have researched the formation of collective identity in diverse movements and contexts, for instance, the American pro-choice (Trumpy, 2016) and the lesbian feminist movements in the US (Taylor & Whittier, 1992), autonomous movements, such as the 15-M/Indignados in Spain (Flesher Fominaya, 2015), labor movements in the UK (Petrini & Wettergren, 2022) and "refugee" movements in Germany (Perolini, 2022). These studies analyzed a collective identity that was built over time in a specific place/country, whether in the US, Spain, the UK, or Germany, and within institutional spaces, such as labor unions (Petrini & Wettergren, 2022), communities outside formal social movement organizations (Taylor & Whittier, 1992) or grassroots organizations (Perolini, 2022). The case of the caravan differs from the above in that the collective identity is constructed in and through protest, while the caravan was on the move, crossed countries, and traversed latitudes in Central America and Mexico. That is, the collective identity is created when caravan members

performed acts of defiance in public squares, parks, international bridges, and highways. Thus, this chapter expands the literature in three ways: a) by showing the formation of a collective identity in a migrant social movement led by undocumented migrants and asylum seekers from different nationalities, and b) by exhibiting the formation of a collective identity “on the move”, attending at the spaces where the collective identity is created; and c) by identifying the specific elements that account for the construction of the collective identity in transit of “*La Caminata del Migrante*.”

### **7.3 Constructing a Collective Identity on the Move**

The following section delves into the analysis of the inductive codes that emerged after the coding of the interviews with participants. The codes are related to the organization of the movement, participants' experiences in transit, the brotherhood created, the different forms in which they resisted the difficulties of the road and policies of exclusion, and how they talked about the caravan. The codes are organized chronologically to provide a narrative of how the movement emerged and evolved. The last codes reflect how participants interpreted the overall movement and their experience. Following the structure for the identification and analysis of the codes in Chapter Six, I define each code, followed by at least two comments from caravan members, and a discussion of each code. I add the statements in the original language, Spanish, to provide nuance to each passage. Table 7.1 shows the codes that emerged in the interviews along with the frequency of each of them.

Methodologically, to analyze the collective identity, I draw on individuals and analyze their collective experience. I do so by looking at instances when people referred to shared experiences, particularly when they use the pronoun “we.” I see the collective in the codes shown in the table below. Here, I do not analyze individual reasons for participation in the movement but the collective experience in transit.

**Table 7.1**

*Frequency of the codes*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Organization of the caravan before departure and in transit	14 participants
Conditions in transit: the weather, road, and body	14 participants
Hermandad (brotherhood)	11 participants
Faith (spirituality)	7 participants
Expressions of resistance	8 participants
Solidarity given by the Mexican and Guatemalan civil society and local and international organizations, and Institutional solidarity	10 participants
Interpretations of the caravan as “a success, an adventure, and a good collective experience”	12 participants

Source: by the author

### ***7.3.1 Organization of the Caravan Before Departure and in Transit***

I coded "organization of the caravan" when there was a reference to the logistical aspect of the caravan, including the planning of the trip and the mobilization itself. Mainly, I analyzed actions participants performed before the departure, the organization of group(s) while on the move, forms of leadership, and the transportation modes they used. To this end, I distinguish between three different stages of the movement in which there was some planning and organization: the preparation of the trip, the departure, and the organization in transit. I also look at the hierarchies and leadership using the code: guides and leaders. All the participants spoke about one or more of these aspects.

**a) The preparation for the trip.** In this rubric, participants can be distinguished into two categories, those who found out about the movement before the departure and those that learned about the movement when the caravan had already departed. For the first category, participants spoke about the moment they learned about the caravan and their planning to join

the movement. Luis, Nicaraguan, found out about the movement about two weeks before its departure, and in preparation for his participation, he did a few things:

I realized 15 days before; I knew that it would leave, I knew that the caravan would leave. 15 days before the caravan left, I was checking, I was checking, and I started preparing. I put some things in order and paid what I owed to avoid debts. Well, I finished paying what I owed, and when the day came for me to leave Nicaragua, I did it [ ...]. I decided to prepare by buying medication. There is one medicine here in Nicaragua that we call "Cepodem," which is similar to Vick VapoRub; it is to relieve pain so that at some point, a person who has the flu can put it on. [I bought] pills for the pain, medicines for fever, pills for the flu, and I was preparing. I was preparing and then I left [Nicaragua] alone, with the little money I had saved, and well, I went by myself, joined the excursion, and left. I took my backpack, and I told my wife, "I'm going on a trip," she was the only person I told. They saw me on television when I was already in the caravan<sup>73</sup> (Luis, personal communication, April 20, 2021).

Luis found out about the trip on Facebook and started to get ready to leave Nicaragua two weeks before the day of departure. He also found out about the movement through his friend Irineo Mujica, the leader of *Pueblo sin Fronteras*, who according to Luis, posted information about the caravan on Facebook. Luis did not join the caravan in San Pedro Sula; he waited until the caravan arrived at the Mexico-Guatemala border. His account suggested that he had time to prepare for the trip, pay some debts, and buy medicines that he might need in case of sickness. This indicates he had a higher socioeconomic status than many of his counterparts, as many other people in the caravan did not have money for the trip or to buy medicines. Also, he was constantly checking for updates, signaling that there was information spread about it in the days prior to the parting. Moreover, his comments suggested he thought that he would be gone for a long time, as he did not want to leave debts behind. This is an example of the code

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<sup>73</sup> Yo me vine dando cuenta como 15 días antes, yo sabía que iba a salir, sabía que iba a salir la caravana. A los 15 días antes de esa caravana yo estuve pendiente, estuve pendiente y me fui preparando, iba poniendo unas cosas en orden, iba pagando unas cosas que debía para no tener deudas y pues sí, terminé de pagar lo que debía y cuando ya se me llegó el día de salir de Nicaragua, pues lo hice [...] Yo nada más decidí prepararme con medicamento; hay uno que aquí le decimos "cepodem" en Nicaragua que es parecido al Vick VapoRub, eso es para aliviar los dolores para poder ponerse en algún momento que una persona que traiga gripe, pastilla para el dolor, pastilla para la calentura, pastilla para la gripe, así, si, pastilla para la gripe y yo me fui preparando, si, yo me fui preparando y luego salí yo solo, yo salí solo con un dinerito que tenía ahorrado y pues salí yo solo y agarré la excursión y me fui, agarré mi mochila y le dije a mi esposa "voy de viaje", fue a la única persona que yo le dije. Allá me vieron en la televisión cuando ya estaba en la caravana.

"organization of the caravan before departure and in transit," as Luis provided detailed information about the organization of the caravan.

During the interview, another participant, Nestor, stated that he found out about the caravan two months before it left, as people posted about it on social media (Nestor, personal communication, April 29, 2021). Like Nestor, Carlos, another participant, became aware of the caravan two months before the departure. He said that people from different municipalities in Honduras created WhatsApp groups and the coordinators of the groups communicated about the trip's logistics. When the day of departure arrived, they left (Carlos, personal communication, March 24, 2021). Furthermore, Bernardo said he learned about the caravan about a month and a half before the caravan departed (Bernardo, personal communication, March 21, 2021). These accounts underscore the planning and organization that was behind the caravan, as participants recall finding out about the movement months before it departed.

While some participants learned about the movement ahead of time, some only had a few days or hours to prepare, just enough to bring a backpack with their belongings. For instance, Karla learned about the movement when her kids saw it on television and urged her to join the movement (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

**b) Departure.** Participants talked about the moment of departure from San Pedro Sula and the way they were organized. Bernardo stated: "People who come from different departments meet at the center of the station [...] they meet there to depart [...] the people that come from different departments arrive about three days before<sup>74</sup>" (Bernardo, March 21, 2021). In the same vein, Carlos observed: "Actually, we gather there [the bus station], people from all the 18 departments, people from the 18 departments were leaving [in the caravan], people from

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<sup>74</sup> Las personas que se vienen de diferentes departamentos se reúnen en el centro de la terminal [...] ahí se reúnen para poder salir de ahí [...] los que vienen de diferentes departamentos, unos tres días antes de salir de la Gran Terminal.

San Pedro, Ceiba, all of them. We carried banners and there was even a flag of the United States and Honduras<sup>75</sup>” (Carlos, personal communication, March 24, 2021).

When the caravan departed, people at the front of the group were holding the Honduran flag, followed by people with banners that indicated the name of the municipality they were coming from. For example, one person would hold a banner with the name "San Pedro," and another one that read “Colón.” The people coming from that *departamento*, San Pedro or Colón, would walk behind the banner. All 18 departments follow this pattern of organization. As the caravan moved forward, hundreds of Hondurans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and to a lesser degree Nicaraguans participated in the movement. For instance, Bernardo said "Guatemalans were joining the group, wherever people came from [joined] because Hondurans different departments of Honduras and Guatemala were mixed are not selfish, we allowed the entrance of all the Guatemalans that wanted [to join], so people from<sup>76</sup>” (Bernardo, March 21, 2021).

The group's organization by *departamento* at the beginning of the caravan changed after the affiliation of thousands of people, merging the groups into one large group. As nationals from other countries joined the caravan, flags from other countries were visible in the caravan. The above accounts suggest that the caravan did not emerge spontaneously but was planned and organized. However, the organization also had to be adjusted on the move, as no one foresaw the number of people that were going to join the movement.

**c) Organization in transit.** Different participants described that the group departed together, and as they advanced, they asked for rides to go to the next place they would meet.

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<sup>75</sup> Realmente ahí nos reunimos de todos los 18 departamentos que íbamos, los 18 departamentos íbamos, de San Pedro, de Ceiba, todos, y llevábamos los rótulos y todo eso y hasta había una bandera de Estados Unidos y la de Honduras.

<sup>76</sup> Ahí se iban uniendo guatemaltecos, de lo que viniera, y como los hondureños no son egoístas, permitían que entraran los guatemaltecos que quisieran, y entonces iban revueltos de diferentes departamentos de Honduras, de Guatemala.

Some people did so, as they did not have money to pay for bus fares. For instance, Karla, who was traveling with her children, stated:

I came without money. We would stop at the stations where the trucks stopped, the trailers. We would go there and ask for rides. That is how I reached the caravan that was about to arrive at the Mexico-Guatemala border<sup>77</sup> (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

Karla was one of many participants that asked for rides to first reach the caravan and then move ahead. She explained that the caravan would split into small groups, ask for rides (see Figure 7.1), and then the caravan would reunite at a given place. Another participant, Yahir, confirmed what was said by Karla, stating that people who had money took buses, but those who did not have money begged to pay the bus fare or asked for rides (Yahir, personal communication February 07, 2022).

### **Figure 7.1**

*Caravan members asking for rides from truck drivers*

This image has been redacted. The image is available in this link:

<https://www.economiahoy.mx/nacional-eAm-mx/noticias/9487484/10/18/Caravana-migrante-ignora-amenazas-de-Trump-y-sigue-su-camino-por-territorio-mexicano.html>

Source:([Notimex, 2018](#))

Participants were aware of the immediate meeting points as guides would communicate the next stopping and meeting points ahead of time. For instance, Antonio commented:

At night, around 8 or 9 pm, every night, every night wherever we arrived there was always a meeting, everyone; they informed us of the time we were going to leave, where

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<sup>77</sup> Me vine sin dinero, nos paramos en las estaciones donde, donde se detenían las rastras, que le decimos nosotros, como *trailer*. Nos parábamos ahí, les pedíamos jalón, así, yo pude alcanzar a la caravana que estaba allá por llegar a la frontera de México.

we were going to arrive, and then the next day again another there was another meeting<sup>78</sup> (Antonio, personal communication, March 21, 2021).

The accounts emphasized the argument that the caravan had some level of organization and planning. What is more, the statements underscored members' ability to organize themselves in transit and be resourceful. Here, the experiences of those who had traveled before were crucial to providing information about the route the caravan was going to follow.

**d) Guides and leaders.** There was different information among the participants concerning leaders or guides of the movement. On the one hand, some participants argued that there were no guides or leaders in the caravan, as members would decide the route they were going to follow. Participants stated that some caravan members who had previous migratory experience would advise on the places where the caravan would stop to rest and the routes they would take. For instance, Olga stated: "the people, the same people that participate in the caravan are guiding the caravan, there are no guides here<sup>79</sup>" (Olga, personal communication, May 02, 2021). Olga suggested that there were no leaders in the caravan but that the members were self-organized and decided how and where to go. Karla spoke in the same terms:

That [the route] was decided by all the people because many people who knew [the road] were part of the caravan, everyone decided it. There was no leader, the ones that participated in the caravan would say, "let's go to this place," we assessed what route was better, and what places to avoid, and then we all decided. We were united<sup>80</sup> (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

Karla's and Olga's passages spoke about the group's capacity to make decisions and their decision-making process. Karla explained that caravan members were active participants, capable of making their own decisions and assessing the routes they would take and places

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<sup>78</sup> En la noche, a las 8 o 9 de la noche, cada noche, cada noche a donde quiera que llegáramos siempre había reunión, todos, se informaba la hora que íbamos a salir, a donde íbamos a llegar, y ya pues al día siguiente, igual, reunión.

<sup>79</sup> Las personas, las mismas personas que van, como quien dice van guiando la caravana, ahí no hay un guía.

<sup>80</sup> Eso, eso [la ruta] lo decidía entre toda la gente, porque como ahí venía bastante gente que conocía, eh, lo decidía todo, todo el mundo; ahí no venía, no venía quien dirigía ni nada, sino que los mismos que veníamos ahí decíamos por este lugar, veníamos viendo que, porque el lugar era mejor, por donde no, entonces ahí era entre todos, veníamos unidos.

where they would rest. Their statements are crucial to grasping the agency of caravan members and their ability to self-organize. Moreover, their remarks suggested there was some sort of consensus among them.

On the other hand, participants expressed that some leaders or coordinators guided the movement. Guides would have an essential role in setting the routes, departing times, places to eat and rest, managing the communication between them and caravan members, and giving instructions on how to go about the movement. Luis explained some of the activities that coordinators carried out:

Before entering Mexican territory, some [coordinators] gave all the instructions on how caravan members would gather and how they would pass [to Mexico]. Well, the whole group met before entering. The rule was made that no one was going to separate [from the group]; they would enter with all the people they were taking care of. They all went to the international bridge that connects to Ciudad Hidalgo; there, everyone wanted to enter, they all wanted to enter, and we all went together<sup>81</sup> (Luis, personal communication, April 24, 2021).

Luis's comments described the organization of the caravan before departure and in transit. He explained how people received instructions about how to conduct themselves at the time of crossing, which spoke about a strategy designed to enter Mexico. The strategy was then to stay together, united, to cross together.

In the same logic, Yahir stressed the presence of coordinators who set the migratory route. He referred to a guide who was not the coordinator of the caravan but that would set and communicate the route and destination for the day to the caravan members. He argued:

The leader said, well, there were no leaders there. However, there was one person who would announce to us, "tomorrow we are going to the city of Puebla, we are going to Mexico City, to the city of Querétaro" [...]. He took us, that is, he took us to where it was [the destination], and he would tell us the address where the lodging was<sup>82</sup> (Yahir, personal communication, February 07, 2022).

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<sup>81</sup> Antes de ingresar a territorio mexicano, hubo unos que estaban ahí dando todas las indicaciones cómo iban a reunirse, cómo iban a pasar; y pues se reunió todo el grupo antes de ingresar y se hizo la regla que nadie iba a separarse, iban a ingresar con todos los que iban cuidando también y todos se dirigieron al puente internacional que conduce a Ciudad Hidalgo, ahí todos quisieron entrar, quisieron entrar todos y todos íbamos juntos.

<sup>82</sup> El dirigente decía, bueno, ahí no había dirigentes, pero había uno que hablaba que decía que, nos anunciaba "mañana vamos a la ciudad de Puebla, vamos a la Ciudad de México, a la ciudad de Querétaro" [...] él nos llevaba, o sea ya nos llevaba a donde era, nos decía la dirección donde era el hospedaje.

Yahir and Luis claimed that some guides or coordinators would instruct the caravan's next meeting point. Earlier, Antonio had mentioned that there were meetings every night where coordinators would communicate different matters, indicating that the caravan had some type of organization, planning, and leadership. Further, Yahir, Olga, and Karla agreed that the caravan did not, in fact, have any official leader, which suggests that the caravan was more bottom-up than a top-down organization.

Yahir elaborated on the guide's profile, saying that the guide had speakers through which he would announce different matters and be identifiable by his *color*. Yahir did not elaborate on whether he meant his skin color or if he was wearing some kind of clothes with a particular color. Whatever the case may be, such color served to identify the person so that the rest would follow him/her. When asked about the color, Yahir said he could not disclose that information. More importantly, the fact that he did not want to disclose identifiable information speaks about some kind of secrecy inside the caravan that was meant to protect the person's identity. That is crucial, as different public characters, who also identified as migrant activists linked to the caravan were detained in transit, such as Bartolo Fuentes and Irineo Mujica (see Chapter Five). In other words, there seemed to be an arrangement among participants to protect the guides' identity.

Lastly, Bernardo elaborated on the activities that coordinators carried out and how they were selected for the role:

They were like guides; they were coordinating the groups; they were not coyotes or anything; they were coordinating the group ahead. They bought Mexican telephone chips; that is how they were in contact about where they were going to meet. [...]. They [coordinators] are selected as leaders and given the task of leading the way [...]. If they [the group] see that the person is active and cares about the group, they put him as a leader to guide [the caravan]. Because the group is enormous, there are up to 8 leaders; some go in front of the group, others in the middle, and others at the end of the caravan<sup>83</sup> (Bernardo, personal communication, March 21, 2021).

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<sup>83</sup>Eran como guías pues, iban coordinando los grupos, no eran coyotes ni nada, iban coordinando el grupo que iba siempre adelante, entonces ellos compraron chips mexicanos y ahí iban contactándose que donde se iban a ver y entonces por medio de eso se iban comunicando [...] A ellos los seleccionan como líderes y les dan el cargo de

Bernardo first clarified who the coordinators were. He stated that coordinators were part of the group, and their task was to lead the way and set the route the caravan would follow. He made clear that coordinators were caravan members. Second, Bernardo detailed the way coordinators were selected. Participants selected coordinators based on their attitudes and skills. People who demonstrated genuine interest and cared about the group, and were active were chosen as coordinators. The last statement also indicated how the caravan members organized themselves and provides evidence of a bottom-up organization. Migrants were active decision-makers, coordinators, and agents of change. Slowly and throughout the route, they developed a system that allowed them to communicate between themselves (i.e., whether with speakers or through sending messages on Facebook or WhatsApp), set the route, and identify shelters and spaces to rest and recharge and organize and advance their claims. Third, his account is consistent with those of Yahir, Olga, and Karla concerning the existence of one single leader. In other words, all of them acknowledged the presence of coordinators of small groups (i.e., by *departamento*) or guides; however, none recognized or acknowledged the authority of one single leader or head of the movement.

How participants and coordinators organized themselves to go about the trip speaks about the process of construction of their collective identity. That is the network of relationships between multiple actors, members, guides, and coordinators, in which they negotiate, talk, make decisions, and influence each other. As mentioned by Melucci (1995), the different models of organization, communication channels, and communication technologies are part of the network of relationships. Thus, the form of organization, the use of technology

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que vayan guiando el camino [...] si a la persona se le mira que es movido, que es preocupado por el grupo lo dejan como de líder para que vaya guiando y como es de tanta cantidad no solo es de dos sino que es hasta 8 líderes por que como es un solo grupo, entonces unos van adelante, otros van en medio de la caravana, otros van atrás en las últimas.

and platforms, such as cell phones, Facebook, and WhatsApp, and the use of speakers to address the members, are all part of this network of relationships.

When discussing the presence of coordinators and leaders of the movement, participants did not legitimize the authority or existence of one single leader or head of the movement. Instead, different participants detailed the presence of coordinators in the group and their roles, suggesting that the caravan was largely a bottom-up, grassroots organization. That is to say, the accounts signaled that the caravan followed a horizontal form of organization, without a visible hierarchy, where members made decisions, with the advice of people who had expertise in the migratory route. As Pradilla (2019, p. 167) pointed out: “the walkers do not accept hierarchies or leadership. They accept some companions because they solve logistical issues related to shelter or food, but they do not welcome suggestions even if they are well-intended.<sup>84</sup>” Thus, the presence of the guides was limited to setting up the routes and meeting points along the journey, as coordinators were there to accompany the caravan not to command it.

### ***7.3.2 Conditions in Transit: The Weather, Road, and Body***

I coded “Conditions in transit: the weather, road and body” when referring to migrants' physical condition, weather constraints, feelings, and emotions they had when they were trekking. All the participants spoke about these aspects. First, they talked about the long walks they undertook, and how they felt physically and emotionally during the transit. For instance, Karla commented: “We began to walk, we suffered on the walks, our feet were aching and sore, and my children sometimes would tell me: 'mom, I can't take it anymore’<sup>85</sup>” (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

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<sup>84</sup> Los caminantes no toleran jerarquías ni liderazgos. Aceptan a algunos acompañantes porque resuelven cuestiones logísticas, como unas raciones de comida o un lugar para dormir. Pero que un par de ellos haga recomendaciones, por muy bienintencionado que sea, eso sí que no cuela.

<sup>85</sup> Empezamos a caminar, sufrimos en caminadas, se nos llagaban los pies, y mis hijos a veces me decían: ‘mami, ya no aguanto’.

Children accounted for a significant share of the migrant caravan. Many of them traveled as unaccompanied minors, and many did so with their parents. Nonetheless, the trip was arduous for all of them. In the passage above, Karla stated the long walks caused sores on their feet. She also said there were times when they were exhausted, fatigued, and thirsty. She also expressed emotions, she suffered and was in pain.

Luis shared Karla's experience in transit, he said: "We arrived in Juchitán and made a stop again to rest because the people had sores on their feet, with blisters, other people had damaged their shoes<sup>86</sup>" (Luis, personal communication, April 29, 2021). Luis's comments implied that caravan members walked for long periods before they arrived in safe places to rest (see Figure 7.2 about the route migrants followed and the distance between San Pedro Sula and Mexico City). He said that people had blisters on their feet and that their shoes got ruined as they continued to walk. Karla and Luis's comments exposed one of the walk's many hardships, fatigue, and long walking hours.

Second, Patricia spoke about the weather conditions and how that affected them:

I remember that when we arrived at that place [southern Mexico], the sun was bearing down on us, it was very hot, and there was no water and no food, and there were a ton of people [in the caravan]; it was impressive. A lot of people came in that caravan. Then, we kept walking and walking. All we did was walk and ask for rides. I had never climbed on one of those gas trucks, I had never climbed on trucks, and when I participated in that caravan, I experienced everything<sup>87</sup> (Patricia, personal communication, May 02, 2021).

Patricia's statements confirmed what Luis and Karla reported about the many hours that caravan members spent walking. Patricia said that, at one point, they only walked and at times they asked for rides. As was shown earlier, rides were essential for caravan members to advance.

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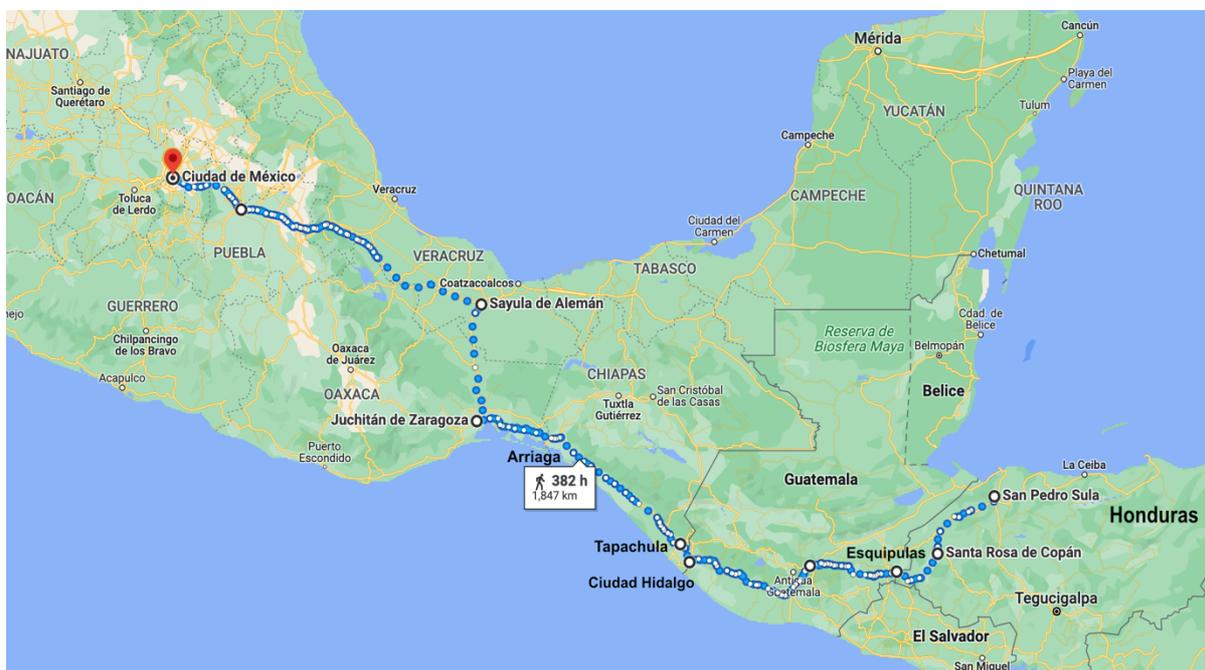
<sup>86</sup> Llegamos a Juchitán e hicimos nuevamente una estación para poder descansar porque ya las personas íbamos con llagas en los pies, con ampollas, a otras personas se les habían dañado los zapatos.

<sup>87</sup> Me acuerdo que cuando llegamos a ese lugar, un sol que había, un calor y sin agua y sin comida y aquí aquella barbaridad de gente, también usted, que eso fue impresionante. Mucha gente se vino en esa en esa caravana. Después seguimos caminando y caminando y caminando. Ya ahora en nuestra vida era caminar y caminar y caminar, jalones. Yo nunca me había subido a una de esas pipas que traen combustible, creo yo, nunca me había subido a unas pipas y cuando me viene esa caravana experimenté de todo.

The harsh weather conditions made the walk more complicated, but migrants continued. They faced the heat and the rain. At different parts of the walk, the heat affected migrants to the point of almost fainting: "There was no food in some parts of the walk; we would be highly thirsty; there were times that we fainted, and I felt that I could not take it anymore<sup>88</sup>" (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

**Figure 7.2**

*Route of the Migrant Caravan from San Pedro Sula to Mexico City*



Source: Google Maps (2022a), modified by the author

Migrants proved to be resilient and resourceful. Caravan members faced different risks but seized the opportunities ahead of them. The above accounts are examples of the code "experience in transit" because the participant described her physical and emotional experiences during their walk.

Migrants agreed that the experience in transit was challenging. They all spoke about the trip's hardships and how exhausted they were. They also spoke about how they bonded over

<sup>88</sup> A veces había partes donde caminábamos que no había comida, que no aguantábamos la sed, había veces que nos desvanecíamos y yo sentía que ya no podía más.

the extreme weather conditions and the exhaustion after walking hundreds of kilometers together in a very precarious way.

### 7.3.3 *Hermandad (Brotherhood)*<sup>89</sup>

I coded for "*hermandad*" when there was a reference to unity in the group, a sense of community, a special bond between caravan members, or kinship that grew up organically while migrants traveled together. During the interviews, 11 participants spoke about the bond and unity they created and the different forms that the brotherhood took. Olga, a 30-year-old Honduran woman, spoke about the camaraderie that Honduran migrants created with each other. She traveled with her children from Tecún Umán until the caravan arrived in Tijuana:

Being Honduran makes it so that we trust people [other Hondurans], we ask our names, what our names are, whether people are accompanied if they come as a family or not, and so on. We start to make friends [...]. We create harmony, like a family, do you understand me? The problems of one person are shared among all [...]. Everyone gets along; [in the caravans] there are no fights, there is no selfishness, there is nothing; if one eats and the other person does not have anything to eat, everyone gives you something; and if you don't have, the others help you. It is peaceful as a brotherhood, the caravans are like a brotherhood, everyone helps each other, and if they let one person pass, they let everyone pass. If they do not let one person pass, no one enters. Everyone advocates for everyone; that is how caravans are<sup>90</sup> (Olga, personal communication, May 02, 2021).

Olga explained that nationality helped to create a bond between Hondurans and allowed the building of friendships and trust. She argued that the shared nationality (Honduran) was enough to trust a person. She illustrated the dynamic of the group as very positive, as Hondurans created a community on the move in which they share food and drinks, and supported each other; the

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<sup>89</sup> In Spanish the word used was *hermandad*. The closest word in English was brotherhood. In Spanish, it is a gender-neutral word, it refers to male and female communities. I use it for translation purposes without the intention of assigning any gender preference.

<sup>90</sup> Por solo ser el hecho de ser hondureños ya uno ya se toma confianza con las personas, ya se preguntan sus nombres, cómo se llaman, que cuantas personas vienen acompañadas, si vienen en familia o no y así, uno mismo va haciendo amistad [...] se va estableciendo como una armonía, o sea como una familia, ¿me entiende?, el mal que sea de uno, que sea de todos [...] Todo mundo ya llevándose bien, [en las caravanas] no hay peleas, no hay egoísmo, no hay nada, si uno come y el otro no tiene, entre todos le dan, y así, aunque usted no tenga, como sea los demás integrantes ellos mismos le van ayudando a uno, y tranquilo como una hermandad, las caravanas son como una hermandad, todo el mundo se ayuda, y si dejan pasar a uno, dejan pasar a todos, y si no lo dejan pasar, nadie pasa y así, todo mundo va abogando por todos, así son las caravanas.

kind of support that goes beyond words of encouragement, to the point of risking their lives and dreams for each other. For example, Olga stated that people advocated for everyone so that all of them could cross the border. In other words, they formed a united front to challenge the restrictive immigration policies and actions Mexico and the US have implemented to stop the entrance of undocumented migrants for decades. The unity created among them served to make claims and demand a "free pass" through Mexico. The unity of the group was their strength. Olga's statements exemplify the "brotherhood" code as she describes the unity and sense of unity in the group.

Honduran participants reported the group was united and nationality was the basis of the unity, as Olga had stated. Additionally, other Central American participants also spoke about the unity in the group. Antonio, a 27-year-old Guatemalan, explained that the caravan was a very united group and that they would take care of and protect each other. He stated that they were united regardless of nationality, race, or country (Antonio, personal communication, March 23, 2021). Likewise, he explained how he helped women carry their kids since the walk was strenuous. Bernardo, a young Honduran man, confirmed what Antonio stated by saying, "Guatemalans were joining the group [...] we allowed the entrance of all the Guatemalans that wanted [to join], so people from different departments of Honduras and Guatemala were mixed<sup>91</sup>" (Bernardo, March 21, 2021).

Joaquin also spoke about the unity and brotherhood in the group:

There is a saying, and it is very accurate: "united people will never be defeated." The mass gives you positive energy, seeing that much positivism, all the adrenaline goes up [...]. You say, everything is positive, everything will turn out well, and well, we lifted each other with strength as human beings, as compatriots, as countrymen, as companions, as brothers; if someone had a cup of water, we shared it among all, a brotherhood<sup>92</sup> (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021).

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<sup>91</sup> Ahí se iban uniendo guatemaltecos [...] permitíamos que entraran los guatemaltecos que quisieran, y entonces iban revueltos de diferentes departamentos de Honduras, de Guatemala.

<sup>92</sup> Hay un refrán que dice y es muy cierto que "un pueblo unido jamás será vencido" y entre muchas personas que te dan energía positiva, al ver tanto, tanto positivismo, se te sube toda la adrenalina [...] y dices, todo es positivo, que todo va a salir bien, y pues nos llenábamos de fuerza unos a otros como unos seres humanos, como

Joaquin reflected on the energy and vibe group members created while they were on the move. He spoke about the positive energy among the group that encourages people to do things and trust that everything is going to be okay and that they will be able to achieve their goals. He talked about the brotherhood, the community that shares food and drinks, lifts each other, and provides courage to keep moving forward. His accounts are like Olga's in that both see the caravan as a brotherhood. Moreover, Joaquin realized that their strength rested upon their unity. He said that if they are united, they will not be defeated. That unity allowed caravan members to cross Guatemala, Mexico, and arrive in Tijuana despite the many obstacles they would face, including the clashes with the Mexican migration and police officers, brutal weather conditions, and hardships on the road. The chant "*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*" (the people united will not be defeated) was one of the multiple mottos the caravan articulated since they left San Pedro Sula that accounted both for the unity of the group and the contestation to the border regime. The mottos served to guide action and motivate participants. Finally, Joaquin's passage is an example of the code "brotherhood" as his words express unity and camaraderie among the caravan participants.

The caravan also provided security and safety to participants. Karla, who was traveling with her two children and partner, talked about the safety that the caravan provided: "I felt protected because so many people came [in the caravan], and I knew that whatever bad thing [happened], whatever they wanted to do to us, there were many of us, and we are going to protect each other"<sup>93</sup> (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

Antonio also spoke about the organization of the caravan and how it afforded them safety and security: "Well, yes, sometimes you felt protected at night because they said, 'we

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compatriotas, como paisanos, como compañeros, como hermanos, que si alguien tenía un trago de agua lo compartíamos entre todos, de hermandad pues.

<sup>93</sup> Yo me sentía protegida de que veníamos tanta gente, y sabía yo de que de que cualquier cosa digo yo mala, que nos quieran hacer, somos muchos y nos vamos a proteger unos con otros.

are going to put 40 people.’ They are there; if anything happens, they will tell you, and if they come you run”<sup>94</sup> (Antonio, personal communication, March 23, 2021).

The collective identity manifested in the bond and brotherhood members created in transit. Members underscored the importance of unity among the group, stating it was their *forte*. This union was central to understanding the caravan as a brotherhood and community they belonged to in which goods were shared and protection and encouragement were ensured.

#### ***7.3.4 Expressions of Resistance***

I coded “expressions of resistance” members’ acts of defiance, particularly actions that caravan members performed to resist the control and violence of the immigration policies and authorities and how they protested and denounced their governments. The development of the caravan evidenced two conflictual relationships. On the one hand, migrants gathered and walked together to undermine the effects of the immigration policies in Mexico and avoid the risks associated with the clandestine journey to Mexico and the US. On the other hand, there were signs of how migrants from the different countries of the Central American region continued to denounce the poor performance of their governments, poverty, and violence. Eight participants talked about the actions they carried out.

First, caravan members carried out actions to defy the control and restrictions of the Guatemalan and Mexican immigration policies. One of the actions was to organize themselves vis-a-vis the deployment of thousands of military and migration officers to the Mexico-Guatemala border (see Figure 7.3). Bernardo explained what happened when the caravan encountered police officers in Guatemala:

When we entered Guatemala, the police officers opposed it; then, police officers began to tear gas us, then emigrants started a revolution, and they began to revolve. In Guatemala, the police officers formed a chain/ shield [to stop us], so emigrants backed away, and then ran to the front and broke the shield of police officers; then they

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<sup>94</sup> Pues si, a veces uno se sentía protegido en la noche porque decían vamos a poner 40 personas; están ahí más o menos, cualquier cosa te avisan y si vienen corres.

[migrants] all ran out. So, when the police formed shields, that is how we did it; people walked a little backward to propel and run to the front, they defeated the few police officers left, and the emigrants passed<sup>95</sup> (Bernardo, personal communication, March 21, 2021).

### Figure 7.3

*Caravan members encounter the Guatemalan National Police on their route to Mexico*

This image has been redacted. The image is available in the following link:

<https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2018/10/19/la-caravana-migrante-irrumpe-en-territorio-mexicano-tras-derribar-una-de-las-verjas-de-la-frontera-con-guatemala/>

Source: ([Infobae, 2018](#))

Bernardo's accounts depicted migrants as fearless, courageous, and brave, willing to do what it takes to pursue their goals. They created a strategy to overcome the presence of police officers that sought to stop them from crossing the country. The image of migrants as victims and recipients of humanitarian aid is transformed into migrants as agents of change and political actors, capable of organizing and creating strategies to confront the state's power and policies. Their actions create a political subjectivity whereby migrants' struggles for survival become politicized, demanding policy action and political attention. Migrants have the agency

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<sup>95</sup> Cuando uno entra a Guatemala, los policías se oponían, entonces los policías nos comenzaron a gasear, entonces ya los emigrantes se pusieron revolución, entonces comenzaron a revolver y como ahí en Guatemala se hizo una cadena de policías, entonces ya los emigrantes se retrocedieron para atrás y se fueron a correr pal frente y rompieron la cadena de policías, entonces salieron corriendo todos y así por partes, entonces cuando se ponían policías así se hacía, caminaba poquito para atrás para agarrar impulso y salir corriendo pal frente, botaban aquel poco policía y los emigrantes pasaban.

and freedom to contest openly the actions of the states. Their organization is key to overcoming all sorts of obstacles. Participants' actions, knowledge, strategies, and tactics speak about their capacity to self-organize politically and subjectively (Salazar Araya, 2019, p. 125). Bernardo's remarks are an example of the code "cultural expressions of resistance" as he shows how migrants collectively challenged migration policies in Guatemala and Mexico.

Another action was to sing the national anthem. Caravan members sang the Honduras national anthem when they crossed into Mexico and in some other stressful moments. For instance, Patricia revealed that they sang the national anthem when the police and migration officers did not want to let them cross into Mexico and go forward. She stated: "we sang the national anthem when we gathered, like when the police did not want to let us in"<sup>96</sup> (Patricia, personal communication, May 02, 2021). Nestor further explained:

When there are migration and police checkpoints, and they catch you, you sing your country's national anthem because the signs are respected; I respect the anthem of Mexico, Guatemala, of all countries. Then, the authorities, as they are respectful of the law, they have to respect me [...]. Because the national anthem, the anthem of your country, is what motivates you [...] when we were there, in Chiapas, on the bridge, the first time, we sang the national anthem; we wanted to enter. Then we revolted, well, I included myself, we revolted everything, we entered by force<sup>97</sup> (Nestor, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Nestor indicated how the Honduran national anthem encouraged caravan members to continue fighting and defying immigration authorities. Singing the national anthem served two purposes. First, they sang to get some kind of leeway or respect. Second, singing the anthem before crossing the international bridge afforded caravan members the strength to fight and revolt, sort of a dictum before going to war. Migrants fought for the right to cross into Mexico, while the

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<sup>96</sup> Nosotros cantamos el himno nacional cuando nos reuníamos, así como dónde, cómo cuando la policía no nos quería dejar pasar.

<sup>97</sup> Cuando hay retenes de los de la inmigración y de policía y lo agarran a uno, uno canta el himno nacional de su país, porque los signos se respetan, yo respeto el himno de México, respeto el de, el de Guatemala, de todo los países, entonces la autoridad, como ser respetuoso de la ley, tienen que respetarme a mi [...] porque el himno nacional, el himno de su país, es el que lo motiva a uno [...] nosotros cuando estuvimos allá en Chiapas, en el puente, la primera vez, cantamos del himno nacional que queríamos pasar, y entonces, nos revoltimos, bueno, me incluyo lo revoltimos todo, pasamos a la fuerza.

Mexican police and migration officers denied them entrance *en masse*. This account also shows the fierce drive of caravan members that contrasts with views of migrants as passive actors.

Moreover, Karla stated that Hondurans sang the anthem because:

[In my case] I liked to sing the anthem because it reminded us, it gave us more encouragement, reminded us where we come from, who we are, it was like a representation [...] We did it [sing the anthem] when we got to a village or small towns<sup>98</sup> (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

Karla revealed that the anthem served as a symbol of identity. She stated the anthem reminded them where they were from and who they were, thus giving them a sense of belonging and identity. It also served to motivate them to continue their journey. Singing the anthem showed that migrants often used different artifacts to maintain their roots even when they move/want to leave their countries. Nestor and Karla's accounts are examples of the code "expressions of resistance" as caravan members used the Honduran national anthem also as a mobilizing force that kept them going and reminded them of their goal.

Singing the national anthem was a very powerful symbolic act. By singing their anthem, Hondurans showed pride, they felt proud of their country, their roots, and their land. It was a reminder of where they were coming from, and it was also an act of nationalism, identity, and belonging. Hondurans were singing it in a foreign territory, they had left their land, but they were still very proud of it.

Second, concerning the denouncement of their governments, Hondurans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans carried their flags, exposing the nationalities that composed the caravan and making known the need to leave their countries. In front of the caravan, members of multiple nationalities carried the flags of their countries (see Figure 7.4). For example, Karla carried the Honduran flag while the caravan was trekking (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

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<sup>98</sup> En mi caso yo me gustaba cantar el himno porque el que nos recordaba, el que nos daba más aliento, saber de dónde venimos, quiénes somos, si entonces como una representación [...] eso hacíamos [cantar el himno] cuando llegamos a como una aldea o a un caserío.

## Figure 7.4

*Caravan of Migrants after crossing Ciudad Hidalgo, Chiapas (21 October 2018) holding their country flags*

This image has been redacted. The image is available in the following link:

<https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/293231-claves-entender-caravana-migrante-eeuu>

Source: (Victorio, 2018)

Luis waved the Nicaraguan flag at the top of the fence that divides Mexico and Guatemala after crossing the international bridge, Rodolfo Robles.

The caravan was already in Tecun Uman, and it was close to entering Mexican territory [...]. I was in that caravan with a Nicaraguan flag, I climbed on top of a metal fence that divided Guatemala and Mexico, and at that moment I decided to take out my flag so that they could see that there were not only people from Honduras but also people from Nicaragua and other countries as well [...] I had my flag so that they could see that not only Hondurans needed to emigrate, but there were also Nicaraguans, we Nicaraguans did not emigrate *en masse*, we emigrated in small groups, but I did it so that the whole country could see that not only Hondurans were in that caravan, there were people from many countries who also needed to migrate and get where they wanted to go. I wanted to feel proud of the country where I was from even though I was leaving it, I was leaving it, but I always carried it in my heart<sup>99</sup> (Luis, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

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<sup>99</sup> La caravana ya estaba en Tecún Umán y ya estaba próxima para poder ingresar a territorio mexicano [...] en esa caravana estuve yo con una bandera de Nicaragua, me subí arriba de una valla metálica que dividía Guatemala y México, pero en ese momento yo decidí sacar mi bandera para que viera que no solo había gente de Honduras, sino que había gente también de Nicaragua y de otros países también [...] Yo llevaba mi bandera para que vieran que no solo Honduras tenía necesidad de emigrar, también estaba Nicaragua, los nicaragüenses no emigramos así en masa, emigramos de poquitas personas, pero lo hice para que todo el país viera que no solo Honduras iban en esa caravana, había personas de muchos países que también tenían necesidad de migrar y llegar a donde querían llegar, quería sentirme orgulloso del país donde estaba aunque lo estaba dejando, lo estaba dejando, pero yo lo llevaba en mi corazón siempre.

## Figure 7.5

*Migrant holds the Honduran and Guatemalan flags at the top of the fence at the Mexico-Guatemala border*

This image has been redacted. This image is available in the following link:

<https://www.dw.com/es/caravana-de-migrantes-rompe-cord%C3%B3n-policial-en-guatemala-y-entra-a-m%C3%A9xico/a-45964093>

Source: (DW, 2018)

Luis explained that people from across the Central American region composed the caravan. Although the caravan was mostly composed of Hondurans, nationals of neighboring countries were also present, testifying to the region's poverty levels, insecurity, and political instability. Luis wanted to make visible the emigration of Nicaraguans, further emphasizing the situation of his country. His actions were powerful and symbolic, exhibiting the dichotomy that migrants face when leaving their countries. On the one hand, he demonstrated his love and pride for his country as he waves the Nicaraguan flag. Just like Hondurans signing the national anthem, they both show, with different symbols, their identity and belonging. On the other, Luis held the Nicaraguan flag at the top of the fence between two other countries, Mexico and Guatemala, calling out the Nicaraguan government, demanding international attention and acknowledgment for the problems they face, while seeking a better life.

Climbing the fence could be interpreted as a symbol of how migrants are also trying to be on top of the migratory policies that keep them from crossing from one country to another

(see figure 7.5). Being visible, on top of the fence, members were contesting the policies that have kept undocumented migrants “invisible and irregular.”

Further, Hondurans vocalized and condemned their president. They continuously said their president had performed badly, and they did not want Juan Orlando Hernandez to continue as president. One chant became popular among the Honduran caravan members: "*Fuera JOH, Fuera JOH*" [Out Juan Orlando Hernandez, Out JOH]. Hondurans chant it aloud throughout the trip. Joaquin was very critical of the president, and his performance, and accused him of narco-trafficking and being a dictator. He chanted "Out JOH, Out JOH"<sup>100</sup> (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021). Joaquin explained that Hernandez was the reason why he left the country. When asked if he chanted throughout the walk he said: “of course [I sang] of course, I am here it is because of him, had he been a neat president, I would not be here<sup>101</sup>” (*Ibid*). Joaquin's comments expressed aversion to and hatred against the Honduran government and the president, arguing that the Honduran people wanted him out of office. Other participants also stated that Hondurans chanted and sang together, as one voice, with the same rhythm: “Out JOH.” Joaquin’s excerpt is an example of the code “Expressions of resistance” as it shows how migrants denounced their governments and authorities through songs.

Finally, caravan members were chanting slogans to counter the stigma about undocumented migrants. Luis added that some people were looking down on migrants, stating migrants were criminals, bad people, and going to hurt Mexicans. Thus, caravan members chanted loudly, "*los migrantes no somos criminales, somos trabajadores*" [we, the migrants, are not criminals, we are workers] (Luis, personal communication, April 19, 2021). The passage is an example of the code "expressions of resistance" because it was meant to counter and resist the stigma and discrimination migrants faced.

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<sup>100</sup> “Fuera JOH, fuera JOH”

<sup>101</sup> Claro [que canté], claro como que no, si por él estoy aquí yo, si hubiese sido un presidente limpio no estuviera aquí.

Here, the songs and chants were ways to strengthen their collective identity. Through songs, chants, and the like, they created a bond that would allow them to pursue their goals as one voice. What is more, the chants served to strengthen group boundaries, and the idea of "who we are and whom we are not," thus reinforcing their collective identity.

The multiple expressions of resistance allowed us to observe the opposition between the dominant and the subordinated group. Here, caravan members sought to overcome the state(s) power by a) forming large groups to advance their claims; b) using their bodies as a shield and a "weapon" to undermine the operationalization of the restrictive policies of migration, i.e., the deployment of officers to the border to stop the caravan; and c) employing banners, chants, songs, and slogans to counter the narrative of migrants as criminals.

In other words, caravan members resisted local and international politics. They called out their local government and showed resistance at the transnational level by contesting the power structures and the set of racialized policies of exclusion that have been implemented in the US-Central American corridor. Together, they countered the policies of exclusion and actions that states of the region had long enacted to control the borders and curb the entrance of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers (see Chapter 2), such as the actions of containment in Guatemala and Mexico, where hundreds of military and migration officers denied them entrance to Guatemalan and Mexican territories. The chant "*el pueblo unido, jamás será vencido*" exemplified the caravan's vision and end, in that together, they would continue fighting. They all hung together and made sure to cross into the countries as one single group and voice and continued to advance their claims and demands. That is to say, their strength rested upon their number and unity. Finally, the ways of expressing opposition relate to one of the interrelated processes of collective identity, the actions to resist and restructure existing systems of domination (Taylor & Whittier, 1995), and opposition to the dominant order (Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

### 7.3.5 Faith

I used the code “faith” when there was a reference to God as a force that kept migrants going on the caravan despite the trip's hardships. First, half of the participants talked about how they asked God for help and guidance throughout the trip. They did not identify with a specific religion but kept referring to God as a force that helped to continue. Karla was one of them:

There was no food in some parts of the walk; we were highly thirsty; there were times that we fainted, and I felt that I could not take it anymore. Then, I asked God to help me, if it were his will for me to be here, he would help me, give me strength, give my sons strength, we would not get sick, and well, we arrived, we arrived at the border<sup>102</sup> (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

In the above passage, Karla described the hardships of the trek, hunger, and thirst, and how she claimed God for help and strength. She was among those who arrived in Tijuana with the caravan, so she had a long journey, she traveled more than 3,000 km. Karla explained she put her fate in God's hands; if it was God's will, she and her children would continue in the movement, safe and healthy. Her belief and trust in God were rewarded as she arrived at the border. This passage is an example of the code “faith” as it shows how God is seen as a force that keeps migrants going despite the difficulties they encountered.

Olga, another fervent believer, seconded Karla's comments, stating that migrants put their trust in God. Olga remarked how caravan members asked God for strength and protection along the journey:

Every time we went to a place to rest, we prayed; every time we left for a place, we also prayed, asking God to guide and keep us on this pathway; every time we arrived and left, we always put God first<sup>103</sup> (Olga, personal communication, May 2, 2021).

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<sup>102</sup> A veces había partes donde caminábamos que no había comida, que no aguantábamos la sed, había veces que nos desvanecíamos y yo sentía que ya no podía más, y entonces, pero yo, yo le pedí a Dios que siempre que me ayudara, qué si era de la voluntad de el que iba a estar aquí, que me ayudara, pues, que me diera fuerzas, que le diera fuerzas a mis hijos, que no nos fuéramos a enfermar, y pues ya llegamos, llegamos a la frontera.

<sup>103</sup> Cada vez que íbamos a un lugar a descansar orábamos, cada vez que salíamos orábamos también, pidiéndole a Dios que nos guiara y nos guardara en este camino, cada vez que llegábamos y salíamos siempre poníamos a Dios por delante”

Praying and worship became central in the caravan. Olga argued that caravan members would pray every time they arrived at a place to rest and that they put God first, signaling the importance of God in their lives and their movement. Hilario seconded Olga, commenting that caravan participants would also gather every morning and pray before departing (Hilario, personal communication, April 03, 2021). Yahir commented that praying in the morning was one of the rules of the group and was the first thing they would do in the morning:

Yes, [praying] was the first thing because one of the rules was that we needed to pray before leaving; those that did not pray would not go with us; they would go apart. The group that was traveling together had to pray before departing<sup>104</sup> (Yahir, personal communication, February 07, 2022).

Yahir's accounts evidenced that praying was the group's priority, to the point that it became a rule; everyone needed to pray. Notably, praying was also used to create some boundaries between members, as those who did not do it would be in a separate group. Not praying was seen as a sign of “non-belonging” to the main group. Thus, praying was a morning ritual, a rule, and a boundary. Following, I asked Yahir if they had a special prayer, and he replied:

[No] we asked God to take care of us and protect us from everything; we fought for something. If we crossed, it was God's will; if we did not, well [...] I mean, it was God's will if one crossed or not; but we were all fighting for a better life; we asked God for guidance to protect us on the road from all the bad people, and from all that; they prayed beautifully<sup>105</sup> (Yahir, personal communication, February 07, 2022).

Yahir states that they did not have a special prayer, that it was about praying and asking for God's favor to cross the borders. Patricia spoke in the same terms, putting her trust and faith in God. She also mentioned she was grateful to God when she arrived in the US:

God is so great that he put a person in my path, and that person paid money so that they could help me cross [into the US]. Immigration officers caught me but released me, thank God<sup>106</sup> (Patricia, personal communication, May 2, 2021).

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<sup>104</sup> Sí, [orar] era lo primero, porque eran las reglas que teníamos que orar antes de salir porque el que no, pongamos las personas que no oran siempre no iban con nosotros, pues, siempre se apartaban, pero el grupo que íbamos juntos este teníamos que orar antes de salir.

<sup>105</sup>[No] nomás pidiendo a Dios que nos cuidara y nos protegiera de todo, luchamos por algo, que si pasábamos era la voluntad de Dios, él que no pues ni modo [...] o sea que el que iba a pasar era voluntad de Dios y el que no, pero todos estábamos luchando por una vida mejor, le pedíamos la dirección a Dios, de que nos guardara en el camino de todas las personas malas, de todo eso, oran bonito.

<sup>106</sup> Dios es tan grande que puso una persona en mi camino, puso una persona en mi camino y esa persona pagó un dinero para que a mí me pudieran cruzar. Y me agarró migración y migración me soltó, gracias a Dios.

Patricia repeatedly mentioned that she asked God for help and strength as she made her way into the US, stating that God had designed that for her: “my trip was already [covered], as God had already destined it for me<sup>107</sup>” (*Ibid*). She also praised God when she got a humanitarian visa in Mexico and immigration officers let her go after being caught, showing how in her vision, aspects of the Mexican and US migration policy were also God's matters and will. Patricia and her comrades saw God as a force in control of their fates and immigration policies.

### **Figure 7.6**

*Caravan members holding a cross on their way to the US*

This image has been redacted. The image is available in the following link:

<https://www.france24.com/es/20181105-honduras-mexico-caravana-migrantes-centroamerica>

Source: ([Garcia, 2018](#)).

Figure 7.6 shows migrants holding the cross along with the Honduran flag. They exhibit their faith in God with the symbol of the cross while waving their flag as a symbol of identity. The image shows the syncretism of caravan members, people on the move who trust God to guide them to the “land of opportunities” while showing where they come from.

Faith played an important role in sustaining the caravan from its departure until its arrival. Collective identity is manifested in a series of practices, rituals, and artifacts. Religion is grounded in rituals (Taylor & Whittier, 1995). Rituals “generally have been thought of as intensely emotional and dramatic symbols that are distinguishable from purely instrumental

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<sup>107</sup> Mi viaje ya estaba ya [cubierto], pues ya Dios lo tenía destinado para mí.

kinds of actions” (Taylor & Whittier, 1995, p. 176). In the case of the caravan, praying served to reinforce the solidarity of the group, as it was done collectively. Caravan members prayed in the morning, before departing, and at night, upon their arrival to shelters, stadiums, or the like. They organized worship assemblies and collective prayers (i.e., (El Perro Amarillo, 2018a), whereby they expressed their hope and sought protection. These served to increase the bonds between them while creating a boundary with those who did not follow the rituals.

Moreover, I argue that their faith served as a vehicle to maintain and advance the caravan because caravan members participated in the movement hoping that God would guide and protect them. Through these prayers, participants asked God to help them achieve their goals. Collectively, they worshiped God and cried out for the miracle of crossing Mexico and arriving in the US, the miracle of the American dream. In a way, it could be said that participants “*worshipped*” the American dream.

### ***7.3.6 Solidarity Given by the Mexican and Guatemalan Civil Society and Local and International Organizations***

I coded for “Solidarity given by the Mexican and Guatemalan civil society and local and international organizations” when there was a reference to assistance, help, or support to caravan members given by the civil society, particularly in Mexico and Guatemala, local and international NGOs, and academic institutions. Caravan members received food, clothing, shelter, medicines, medical attention, shoes, toiletries, and legal orientation throughout the route. 10 out of the 14 participants spoke about such solidarity and the resources they received from several associations, churches, local organizations, and civil society in Mexico and Guatemala. Olga talked about the caravan's reception in Ciudad Hidalgo, after crossing into Mexico:

We crossed into Ciudad Hidalgo, we arrived at the shelter, they gave us food, and lodging, and the more we were, the more people joined [...]. We looked for vacant places where there were no people, such as soccer fields; we would arrive there and

camp. People would go there to give us food, clothes, and blankets<sup>108</sup> (Olga, personal communication, May 02, 2021).

Olga explained that people in Mexico were very supportive. She described the reception in Chiapas. The shelters in Ciudad Hidalgo got filled as the number of caravan members grew daily. The shelters provided food, clothing, and clothes to the people arriving. As the caravan advanced and more people joined, the caravan looked for larger places to stay overnight. They used sports center facilities, parks, and large fields to set up camps to rest, recharge, and reorganize. The word spread about the places where they were staying so members of civil society associations and other organizations would arrive to deliver goods, including blankets, clothes, and food.

Joaquin expressed how people welcomed them as they crossed into Mexico and how international organizations were ready to assist migrants. The welcoming was very positive, generating emotions among participants.

[When we entered Mexico], many institutions and organizations welcomed us, hugged, and treated us well [...]. I felt emotional when I saw that everyone was crossing into [Mexico], and how they greeted us “Welcome to Mexico, Welcome to Mexico.” There were doctors; [they told us] whoever gets sick go here. [They said] here is the Red Cross, food, water, serum [for hydration]. It was so lovely to see how Mexico was treating us, and where we were. We had the support of the Human Rights [Commission]; everyone was there, the journalists; that is, we were very motivated, and we felt very welcomed in other lands<sup>109</sup> (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021).

Joaquin spoke about the assistance that different local and international organizations offered to caravan members. In the span of a week, after the caravan's departure, representatives of

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<sup>108</sup> Cruzamos para Ciudad Hidalgo, llegamos al albergue, nos dieron comida, dormida, y entre más íbamos, se iba uniendo más gente, más gente [...] lo que hacíamos era que buscábamos así como lugares baldíos donde no hubiera gente, por decirlo canchas de fútbol ahí llegábamos y acampábamos. La verdad que la gente ahí llegaba a dejarnos comida, nos llegaban a dejar ropa, cobijas.

<sup>109</sup> [Entrando a México] había muchas instituciones, muchas organizaciones que nos abrazaban, bienvenidos, nos atendieron bien [...] cuando ya mirabas de que todos iban pasando se sentía una emoción y al ver que te recibían “Bienvenido a México, Bienvenido a México” aquí están los médicos, el que se enferme vaya acá, aquí está la Cruz Roja, aquí hay comida, aquí hay agua, o sea, aquí hay suero, era algo tan lindo al saber cómo nos estaba tratando México, a donde estábamos y teníamos el apoyo de que estaba Derechos Humanos, estaba todo, todo ahí pues, los periodistas, o sea había algo muy motivado, todo mundo pues, y pues te sentías muy bien recibido en otras tierras.

many organizations traveled to Ciudad Hidalgo and Tapachula, Chiapas to assist migrants, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Red Cross, Doctors without Borders (MSF), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other international organizations. The civil society at the Mexico-Guatemala border organized brigades to deliver goods, food, drinks, and clothes, and welcome the caravan.

Moreover, caravan members often received assistance from the local population when they arrived in a new town. The locals would provide staples, such as rice, beans, water, and more. Luis commented:

The people supported the caravan; they received us with just rice and beans, water, they gave us water because they knew that many people were going [in the caravan] really needed to have a better life [...]. The backpack I was carrying had been damaged, and I had to put my clothes in a bag until other people arrived who were giving away small backpacks; then, I was able to get one and put my belongings back in that backpack<sup>110</sup> (Luis, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Luis's accounts showed the generosity migrants received in transit. Migrants were given rice and beans, some of the basic staples in the Mexican diet, and water, lots of water, as migrants walked for days and were dehydrated. According to Luis, the hospitality resulted from recognizing the needs caravan members had, both to leave their countries and during the transit, suggesting that Mexican civil society was conscious of their struggle and citizens were doing their best to support their cause. The assistance was crucial as it allowed the caravan to continue. Luis and Joaquin's comments are examples of the code "Solidarity" as they showed the assistance given by civil society in Mexico and Guatemala.

Moreover, a caravan of journalists walked alongside the migrant caravan (Parra García, 2021; Pradilla, 2019; Varela Huerta, 2018). International and local media outlets broadcasted

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<sup>110</sup> La gente apoyaba la caravana, nos recibieron con tan siquiera con arroz y frijoles, agua, nos regalaron agua, porque sabían que iba mucha gente que en verdad necesitaba tener una vida mejor [...]. La mochila que yo llevaba se me había dañado, me tocó llevar la ropa en una bolsa, hasta que llegó otras personas que estaban regalando pues llevaban mochilas pequeñas y pues ahí pude obtener una y poder volver a meter mis pertenencias que llevaba en esa mochila.

the caravan's entrance into Mexican territory and closely followed their struggles. The information was rapidly spread on Twitter generating trending topics and reactions across the world, ranging from supportive to xenophobic (Parra García, 2021; Pérez Díaz & Aguilar Pérez, 2021). The diffusion of information about the caravan allowed people to be informed and thus support them in whatever form they could.

**7.3.6.1 Institutional Support.** The support also came from the Mexican government and its institutions. First, the Mexican government deployed INM and COMAR officers down to Tapachula when the caravan crossed into Mexico, as a way to assist people who wanted to apply for asylum or to regularize their stay. Second, authorities customized public spaces, such as sports facilities and stadiums, to be used as shelters where people were able to stay for weeks. For instance, in early November 2018, the government installed a shelter in the stadium “Jesus Martinez, Palillo” in Mexico City. In the stadium, it was notable the presence of numerous NGOs, local and international, such as UNICEF and others. The UN estimated that about 5,000 people arrived at the stadium, but the total number was higher, as people continued to arrive throughout the following weeks (Noticias ONU, 2018a).

Third, the National Commission on Human Rights, Mexico City Commission on Human Rights, the federal and local governments from the outgoing and incoming administrations, Mexican police, military personnel, immigration officers, UNHCR, UNICEF, United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (UNHCHR), and local NGOs met and established a special program to assist people traveling with the caravan. The program was called "*Puente Humanitario*" [humanitarian bridge]. The program outlined the deployment of brigades down to the Southern Border to provide caravan members with food, clothing, water, and legal, medical, and psychological assistance (Redacción, 2018b). The brigades would also trek with migrants to assist them in transit. The purpose was to guarantee their safety and security across Mexico and take them to a shelter, that was a stadium, in Mexico City where

caravan members could stay and regularize their status (Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Ciudad de México, 2018).

Several participants spoke about the presence of the police while they trek. The perception of the presence of the police was divided, as some participants saw it as positive and others as negative. First, Karla commented: "The police helped us in Mexico a lot. They were with us; the patrols were alongside us; the Red Cross, the firefighters, and many doctors came; they helped us<sup>111</sup>" (Karla, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Karla's statements suggested that the presence of the police, rather than scaring people, gave them a sense of security and support. Figure 7.7 shows how the police were escorting the caravan. This remark is an example of the code "Institutional support" as it shows the assistance given to migrants by the Mexican government. Second, some caravan members had negative views toward the police, as they had stopped migrants from entering the country in Ciudad Hidalgo and continued to do so on other parts of the route, acting as an immigration enforcement agency.

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<sup>111</sup> La policía nos ayudó en México bastante. Ellos venían con nosotros, ahí venían las patrullas a la par, venía la Cruz Roja, venían los bomberos, venían bastantes médicos, nos ayudaban.

**Figure 7.7.**

*Caravan members walk escorted by the Mexican Police*

This image has been redacted. The image is available in the following link:

<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20181120/crisis-humanitaria-migrantes-adquiere-proporciones-desconocidas/1841101.shtml>

Source: (Efe, 2018)

In some instances, the police provided safety against the possible presence of drug cartels and criminals. Patricia commented:

The policemen rather cared for us when we were with the caravan [...]. The policemen got us rides with the people, so the policemen would come, and, for example, when they filled a van with people, the patrols would be in the back and the front of the car. I suppose they were taking care of us because of the many bad things they say that happens in Mexico<sup>112</sup> (Patricia, personal communication, May 2, 2021).

Patricia recognized the efforts of the police officers who cared for caravan members in transit and ensured they were protected. For example, officers would escort trucks that gave migrants rides. Moreover, the police also helped members to get rides, something never seen before. The same authorities stopping migrants and throwing tear gas at them days earlier were now protecting and helping them cross the country quickly. For instance, on the outskirts of Mexico

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<sup>112</sup> Cuando nosotros vinimos los policías más bien nos cuidó [...]. Los policías nos conseguían *rides* con la gente, entonces venían los policías y por ejemplo si llenaban un furgón de gente, la policía uno venía atrás y el otro venía adelante. Yo supongo que cuidándonos era porque como tantas cosas malas que dicen que hay en México.

City, in early November, police officers would stop large trucks and ask them to take caravan members, so they could get to the next meeting point, Queretaro. The Mexico City Commission on Human Rights was also present supervising the actions of the police.

After implementing the program “Humanitarian Bridge,” the police were alongside the caravan to perform their core function, to protect people. Thus, the caravan's presence meant that the non-Mexican citizens, who had been criminalized and persecuted in Mexico by both immigration and police officers, received “better” treatment. Under the framework of the program, migrants' status and nationality were not the priority, but their safety and well-being.

Finally, federal and state governments provided large buses to take caravan members to the Northern Border. Caravan members explained that in Mexico City, the authorities gave them 20 buses to go to Tijuana, Reynosa, and other border cities. Others added that the government of Guadalajara provided buses to go to Tijuana. A third participant stated buses were running from Puebla to Mexico City, so they arrived in Mexico City for free.

These accounts confirmed the diverse roles the police and other institutions played in developing the caravan. More importantly, this evidence showed the multiple responses of the Mexican government toward the caravan. On the one hand, it was helping caravan affiliates to cross the country to arrive at the US-Mexico border; on the other, the government programs to contain the caravan. For instance, it designed a program “*Estás en tu casa*” (You are at home) (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2018) to prevent migrants from crossing the country. Such a program demanded migrants remain in the southern states of Mexico, Oaxaca, and/ or Chiapas; register before the INM; and seek asylum (Anguiano Téllez & Lucero Vargas, 2020; Secretaría de Gobernación, 2018). The program would provide medical assistance, education, access to a temporary job, and provisional identification. Members voted in an assembly and refused the offer made by the government because they did not want to be confined to the south of Mexico but wanted to continue their journey to the US (Martín Pérez, 2018; Redacción AN, 2018).

The multiple forms in which groups organized themselves also speak to their collective identity and this network of relationships in which caravan members negotiated and made decisions. For instance, when holding assemblies to vote on the program "*Estás en tu casa.*" Further, the resources and solidarity that the group received from civil society and multiple organizations speak about the attention they were able to draw based on their number and claims.

### ***7.3.7 Interpretations of the Caravan as “a Success, an Adventure, and a Good Collective Experience”***

I coded for “interpretations of the caravan as “a success, an adventure, and a good collective experience” when there were references to the caravan as a success or positive experience, such as people having a good time while in the caravan, achieving some goals or dreams, and arriving at their destination. Most participants spoke positively about the October 2018 migrant caravan.

**A) Success.** Olga joined the caravan in Guatemala with her daughters. They were part of the movement until it arrived in Tijuana. She explained her perceptions about it and the positive experience she had:

The first caravan was a complete success, a complete success; nobody stopped us, and there were no police officials in Guatemala. Instead, they opened the gate for us to enter, in Mexico too [...]. For me, it was a lovely experience, everything was excellent since I left with the caravan from Tecún Umán, and we reached our final stop, Tijuana. We were not hungry; we did not suffer, we did not experience danger, we did not experience anything, and we took care of each other. All the men edged, whereas women and children were in the middle. The men flanked the women for protection, like a shield; everyone else was in the middle, women, and children in the middle, and men were flanking, until the end. If someone wanted to go too far with one of them, they just came, spoke, and told them they would put him down and take them out of the caravan, they would not let them enter, they said that those things were not allowed, that the caravan was there to protect and help people, that is what it was about. It was a lovely experience for me; believe me, if those conditions were to be the same this last time I traveled, it would have been perfect<sup>113</sup> (Olga, personal communication, May 2, 2021).

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<sup>113</sup>La primera caravana que esa caravana fue todo un éxito, todo un éxito, nadie lo detuvo a uno, no había policías en Guatemala, más bien nos abrieron el portón para poder entrar, en México también [...] para mí fue una

Olga stated the caravan was a success and numbered a few factors that made it so. This relates to the question of what makes a movement successful (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). First, Olga talked about the caravan as being successful in that members were able to cross into Guatemala and Mexico and the governments did not stop the caravan; on the contrary, she said the countries opened their gates and fences and let them cross into the countries. That being the case, Olga reached the final stop and destination, Tijuana, at the US-Mexico Border.

Second, Olga said they were not hungry and did not suffer. As reviewed earlier, caravan members spoke about the positive reception in Mexico and the assistance given by civil society, churches, and local and international organizations. They provided caravan members with food, water, and clothing, medical and legal assistance. In Olga's view, migrants did not suffer. Thus, another element for the success of the movement relies upon the support caravan members was able to draw from the local population, community-based shelters, churches, and international organizations.

Third, she talked about the security and safety inside the caravan. According to Olga, participants, particularly men, organized themselves and took on the responsibility to protect women and children, whereby men would be on the edges of the movement as they all walked. Women, children, and elders would be in the middle. Additionally, Olga mentioned that men protected caravan members, as they would expel whoever was acting incorrectly from the movement. Patricia also spoke about how some men provided her with security and safety throughout the journey. She mentioned that a group of five or six men were always around her,

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experiencia muy bonita porque desde que salí con que salí con la caravana de Tecún Umán y llegamos a nuestro punto final que fue en Tijuana todo fue excelente. No pasamos hambre, no pasamos sufrimiento, no pasamos peligro, no pasamos nada, todo mundo se cuidaba, todos los hombres iban a la orilla, las mujeres y los niños en medio y los hombres afuera como una protección, como un escudo, todo mundo en medio, mujeres y niños en medio, hombres a la orilla, o sea hasta el final. Si alguien se quería propasar con uno, solo venía, hablaba y les decía, ya lo ponían quieto y los sacaban de la caravana, no los dejaban ingresar, decían que esas cosas no iban con ellos, que la caravana estaba para proteger y ayudar a la gente, que de eso se trataba, esa para mí fue una experiencia muy bonita, créame que si todavía estuviera eso de esa primera vez a ahorita que yo viajé créame que hubiera sido lo más perfecto.

protecting her (Patricia, personal communication, May 02, 2021). This type of organization, whereby men were in charge of protecting women, signals a gender component while the caravan was on the move. In the caravan, there was a reproduction of the socially constructed gender roles, where men had the role of taking care of the women, and women were "in need" of protection (Ramirez & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2009). Another instance where this was visible was when women took on the chores of cleaning the spaces where caravan members rested. Olga asserted that women took on the job of cleaning the shelters that welcomed them, despite that there was personnel assigned to do so in the shelters where they stayed (Olga, personal communication, May 2, 2021). Further research should address this gender dynamic in the caravan.

Fourth, Olga spoke about the brotherhood in the caravan and how they would protect each other. This sense of brotherhood is another element in the success of the movement. At the end of the passage, Olga refers to a second caravan in which she participated, where things did not go as smoothly as in the first one; that is why she stressed that "the first caravan was a success." After reaching Tijuana, Olga had to go back to Honduras for personal reasons; motivated by her first experience in the caravan, she joined a new one in January 2021. The passage is an example of the code "success," referring to the caravan as a successful migratory enterprise and a beautiful experience.

Another participant, Nestor, spoke about the success of the caravan in terms of the percentage of people that crossed the border and how immigration and police officers did not stop them: "Perhaps 20 percent [of the people] went back, but we passed, 70 and 80 percent of us passed. In the end, the soldiers did nothing, they let us pass, they just looked at us, then they became aware [of our struggle]<sup>114</sup>" (Nestor, personal communication, April 29, 2021). Nestor

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<sup>114</sup> Tal vez el 20% se regresó, pero pasamos, pasamos el 70 y el 80% pasamos, ya por último los soldados no hicieron nada, nos dejaron pasar, solo nos voltearon a ver, entonces ellos se concientizaron.

explained how the officers became aware of what the participants were going through and let them cross; they were compassionate. When he talked about the percentage of people who crossed the border, he also alluded to other caravans that did not accomplish the same percentage of successful crossings. Both participants, Olga and Nestor, measured success in relation to border crossings.

Nestor also mentioned that the caravans are effective because people go together, united, as one voice. He said the caravan was good, and people took advantage of traveling in the caravan because there were no smugglers. He argued: “*Todos jalamos para un solo lado*” (we all pulled to the same side) (Nestor, personal communication, April 29, 2021). The unity then is another critical element in the “success” of the caravan; caravan members had the same goal and constitute one single voice.

**B) An adventure.** Joaquin, a Honduran man who traveled alone, arrived in Tijuana, applied for, and received asylum in the US. After waiting for almost two years in Tijuana, as a result of the implementation of the Migrant Protection Protocols (Center for Migration Studies, 2021; DHS, 2019) whereby asylum seekers had to wait in Mexico for the duration of the process and adjudication, Joaquin entered the US. He lives and works there now (at the time of the interview). When interviewed about his experience in the caravan and what it meant for him, Joaquin stated:

It was an unforgettable experience; it was an adventure. If I had a regular status here to be able to have an adventure, I would do it again. It was like an adventure where you discover distant lands; you do not know what you will go through. It is beautiful in that sense because migrating is not beautiful, but living something like that is something that I think I will never forget. Seeing the brotherhood, and the many things that we went through, God tests you. Suppose you carry a piece of bread and share it with your neighbor. It is lovely to help children and women, you support the elderly because all kinds of people were in the caravan, disabled people, and all<sup>115</sup> (Joaquin, personal communication, April 27, 2021).

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<sup>115</sup> Fue una experiencia que es inolvidable, es una aventura, si yo estuviera como bien migratoriamente, así como para vivir una aventura fijate que lo haría de nuevo, pero cómo te puedo decir, como una aventura pues, vas a conocer tierras lejanas, no sabes a lo que te atienes. Es algo bonito por esa parte, porque migrar no es bonito, pero vivir algo así es algo que yo me voy a morir y creo que nunca lo voy a olvidar, al ver tanta hermandad, ver tantas cosas que pasamos, que Dios te prueba; que, si andas un pedazo de pan y lo compartas con el prójimo, es algo

For Joaquin, the caravan was an unforgettable adventure. He described being in the caravan as an adventure through which participants traveled to unknown places without certainty about the trip or the risks associated with it. In the end, an adventure is precise that, going into the unknown. In his view, the adventure is worth it, it is beautiful, and he would do it again. His positive experience speaks to the brotherhood and empathy generated among members, the shared pieces of bread, and how members came together as brothers. Joaquin may have an especially positive view of the caravan because he was able to achieve his goal of arriving in the US.

Bernardo had the same reaction as Joaquin, describing the caravan as unforgettable and worth repeating. Bernardo was 18 years old when he first joined the caravan. He did not arrive in Tijuana; instead, he was detained near Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico, and later deported to Honduras by plane. He described his experience this way:

For me, it is something unforgettable and beautiful, and if I had the opportunity, I think I would do it again [...]. It is beautiful. When you least expect to be somewhere, it is when you are there the most because I long for going to another place. When I was a child, it crossed my mind to travel by plane. Even if once, I achieved the dream that I had one day of traveling to different countries; since I am from a lower economic class, I did not have [the means] to go to other places. Thus, at least, I had the opportunity to go to Guatemala, Mexico, and to travel by plane when I never imagined that I would be on one of those<sup>116</sup> (Bernardo, March 21, 2021).

Bernardo observed that the caravan was good because it allowed him to go to other countries and travel by plane. The irony is that he was on a plane when he was deported to Honduras. He explained that he was brought to a detention facility where hundreds of Hondurans were and was later put on an airplane to send him back to his country. Bernardo did not achieve the

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muy lindo que ayudas a los niños, ayudas a las mujeres, ayudas a los ancianos, porque ahí venía de todo, tantas personas discapacitadas y todo eso.

<sup>116</sup> Para mí es algo inolvidable, es algo bonito, y si me tocara la oportunidad otra vez yo diría que lo haría [...] Es bonito; si, cuando menos piensa estar a un lugar es cuando más está, porque, uno dice cómo quisiera ir a otro lado; entonces si cuando yo era niño me pasaba por la mente ir en avión, aunque sea una vez logré el sueño que un día lo pensé, viajar a diferentes países, porque uno como es de bajos recursos no tiene para ir a diferentes lugares, entonces por lo menos tuve la oportunidad de ir a Guatemala, México y también tuve la oportunidad de viajar en avión cuando nunca me imaginé que nunca iba a andar en uno de esos.

American dream he was after; he did not even make it to Mexico City; nevertheless, he still appreciated the opportunity to travel and get to know some distant lands, as Joaquin referred to them. His story is compelling, juxtaposing the socioeconomic background of many of the participants and their dreams. The accounts are examples of the code "success" that underscores the greatness of the caravan.

Other participants agreed with Joaquin and Bernardo, describing the caravan as a beautiful experience. Yahir said:

Traveling is a beautiful thing; you get to know places. [It is] a beautiful experience where you can walk; that is, we as Hondurans, Guatemalans feel like traveling in a caravan is as if we were in the ports of the country because nobody prevents us from anything<sup>117</sup> (Yahir, personal communication, February 07, 2022).

Yahir talked about the caravan in three ways. First, as a vehicle that allowed him to know different places; second, as a beautiful experience; and third, he spoke about the freedom he felt when he was in the caravan. He meant the freedom of movement whereby undocumented migrants are not constrained by the imposition of restrictive migration policies (see Chapter Two). As was mentioned by other participants, the caravan (to some extent) enabled its members to cross countries without being detained or deported. So, Yahir spoke about that ability to travel freely. Yahir would travel with the caravan from Guatemala to Tijuana. He would arrive in New Mexico, but would ultimately be apprehended by the US Border Patrol and deported to Guatemala. Although he was not able to reunite with his family in the US, he still described the caravan as a beautiful experience.

#### **7.4 Discussion**

The above section showed the different codes that I identified in the interviews held with participants of the October 2018 Caravan. The codes exposed how migrants spoke, lived,

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<sup>117</sup> Viajar es lo bonito, así que de que vas conociendo lugares, ajá una experiencia bonita pues, donde puedes caminar, o sea, nosotros como hondureños, guatemaltecos nos sentimos como viajar en una caravana como si estuvieras en los puertos del país porque nadie nos impide nada.

and experienced the caravan, the external and internal forces that kept them going, and how they made sense of and interpreted the movement. These codes were ordered chronologically to provide an account of the participant's experiences and how they partook in the mobilization. To make sense of their experiences and to account for the process of formation of the collective, the caravan, I drew on collective identity theory. I use collective identity as an analytical lens to understand how the caravan came to be a collective actor and the different elements that allowed them to sustain the mobilization. Table 7.1 summarized the codes reviewed and how many participants talked about them.

The codes above speak to one or more factors of collective identity. Three elements are needed in the definition of collective identity in a social movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995, 1996; Taylor & Whittier, 1992): the definition of "who we are and we want", which includes a common understanding of the goals the actors want to achieve and the means they have to do it while highlighting the antagonism or opposition between the challenging and the dominant groups; a network of relationships that relate to the organization and models of leadership in the group; and a bond or emotional investment, that allows participants feel united or part of a group.

The codes then can be grouped into three sets. The first set of codes relates to the definition of the caravan as a movement that opposes the restrictive immigration policies in Mexico and the US. For instance, the code "collective expressions of resistance" exhibited the different symbols members used to show both their opposition to Mexico and the US and their identity. The chants, songs, banners, flags, mottos, and activities served to evidence "who they were and who they were not." They displayed powerful symbols of nationalism and identity along the way. Migrants were united and together opposed, challenged, and resisted governments' policies in different ways. The various expressions of resistance speak about the multiple ways in which migrants sought to demonstrate their presence and their struggles. They

chanted against the narratives of exclusion and marginalization that cast them as criminals; and climbed the top of the fence that separates Mexico and Guatemala, waving their flags, proud of their identities but denouncing their governments. They vocalized their anger toward their presidents, singing, exposing the electoral frauds that have been committed and the need for new governments. These expressions of resistance to the systems of domination were powerful, prompting all kinds of reactions from bystanders, civil society, and the governments of the region. What is more, the performance of these acts became politicized. Through them, the caravan demanded policy action and attention as they confronted the power of the state(s).

Moreover, the code “Solidarity given by the Mexican and Guatemalan civil society and local and international organizations” spoke about the means and resources members were able to draw, given their claims, presence, and number. The solidarity that was shown by the local and international civil society and organizations, along with the aid from the municipal, state, and federal governments was fundamental for the caravan to reach its goals. This form of solidarity can be related to the resources and structure of political opportunities (McAdam, 1999; Meyer, 2004) the caravan was able to mobilize, and how they used those resources to advance their claims. Migrants were sheltered by at least a dozen of organizations, which ultimately provided them with food and clothes to continue their journey. Moreover, the aid received spoke to the capacity of outreach that the caravan achieved. The images and echoes of migrants walking for hours, with the sun bearing down on them, burning them, thirsty, hungry, and homeless, mobilized civil society and local and international organizations.

The second set of codes exemplified the network of relationships and organizations they created in transit. For example, the code “organization before and in transit” allows for the analysis of the caravan’s organizational type, coordinators, and modes of communication that the caravan created as they moved across Central America and Mexico.

The logistical and organizational factors suggest that this was a horizontal movement (Hardt & Negri, 2017; Liang & Lee, 2021), without a formal leader or head of the movement that was unanimously recognized or legitimized as such. Thus, I argue that the presence of Fuentes at the beginning was a catalyst for the movement, but with him detained and deported, the caravan took on its own form and dynamic. Participants decided what to do and how to do it. In the words of Pradilla, “the caravan is a living being because it mutates, amends, and contradicts itself”<sup>118</sup> (Pradilla, 2019, p. 166). This also led us to rethink the role and presence of leaders in social movements. For instance, one type of social movement where leaders or *de facto* leaders may be only present at the beginning of the movement and serve as a catalyst for movements to emerge, rather than to conduct the movement. As observed in Chapter Six, caravan members were able to create their own frames, articulating their solutions to their problems and pursuing their goals, despite the opinion or what was said by Bartolo Fuentes.

The third set of codes related to the bond created and the emotional investment of caravan members. The codes “Experience in transit and brotherhood” speak about the empirical unity that resulted from the interaction between members after going through the same hardships. In the “battleground,” the caravan displayed different emotions: anger, disappointment, disgust, joy, and happiness. The extreme situations they went through together (i.e., the repression of the military in Ciudad Hidalgo, the closure of the gate at the Mexico-Guatemala border, the many hours walking together with the sun bearing down on them; the times without food, water, or shelter) strengthened their unity and so their collective identity

In demonstrations, a comrade will rush to help the fallen or injured when they have widened their zone of empathy (Eyerman, 2005). This was true for the caravan. Members spoke about how they helped single women to carry their babies or shared food and drinks with those

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<sup>118</sup> La Caravana es un ser vivo porque muta, se enmienda y contradice.

who did not have them. They created empathy for one another. In the manner of “*todos jalamos pal mismo lado*” they also reinforced their belonging.

The code “faith” served also to create unity in the group and as a motivating force. Religion played an important role in sustaining the caravan. They organized worship assemblies and collective prayers (i.e., (El Perro Amarillo, 2018a), whereby they expressed their hope, fears, anger, frustration, and desperation. These activities served to increase the bonds between them while creating a boundary with those who did not follow the rituals.

Scholars of religion and religious movement have studied the role of religion, or some aspect of it when investigating religious movements (often when religion, faith, or beliefs constitute the source of dispute or claims) while often setting aside literature on social movements (Snow & Beyerlein, 2019). Social movements scholars, however, have yet to study the role of religion in secular social movements and spiritual beliefs as a resource for mobilization (Hutchison, 2012; Poonamallee, 2011). The caravan was a secular movement, where religion, faith, or beliefs were not at the core of their claims nor was it the source of disputes. Instead, caravan members' faith was a vehicle to continue fighting, a resource for mobilization. The testimonies spoke about God as a force that kept migrants going despite the weather conditions or the presence of migration officers that on more than one occasion would try to stop the caravan from advancing. Their spirituality and faith also served to create a bond between them, as it was a collective activity where they expressed their fears and hopes. From this vantage point, the caravan calls us to rethink the role of spirituality in secular social movements (Hutchison, 2012), understanding it as a mobilizing force, and its role in the development of the movement. Thus, this finding also led us to consider the role of spirituality as a resource for mobilization, which has been often neglected, as resource-based literature has focused on other types of resources (material, moral, cultural, human, and social-

organizational) (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Poonamallee, 2011). More research is necessary to fully grasp the role of spirituality and religion in secular social movements.

Finally, some caravan members defined the caravan as a successful venture, an adventure, and a beautiful experience. This relates to the question of what makes a movement successful and how we assess a movement's success; their responses also allude to how a movement can sustain itself over time. Participants established different indicators by which the movement could be deemed successful, such as border crossing, safety, well-being, and material resources. Based on participants' accounts, arriving in the US was not the only factor by which to consider the movement successful. Other elements were required. This evidence helps us to contribute to understanding success in migrant-led social movements by evaluating how participants assessed the success of a movement. That is, it is crucial to understand that success was in this case constructed from a bottom-up perspective, in contrast with top-down perspectives.

Likewise, it is worth noting how some participants described the caravan as an adventure. Often the depiction of (undocumented) migrants is that of suffering people, victims of systems of exploitation and displacement, and in need of humanitarian assistance (Mezzadra, 2020). Their migration could be associated with “instrumental or means-to-an-end migration,” whereby their mobility is associated with achieving some economic or living standard goals (De Haas, 2021); however, migrants also have intrinsic life aspirations. These refer to the value that people attach to the migration experience itself, the joy or pleasure derived from exploring new places and societies (*Ibid*). Caravan migrants showed how they valued the experience of migration in and of itself. For instance, Bernardo said, “I long for going to another place. When I was a child, it crossed my mind to travel by plane. Even if once, I achieved the dream that I had one day, traveling to different countries.” His account revealed that he valued the

experience of migration for what it was. Despite not being able to arrive in the US, he appreciated the experience of being in distant lands.

The above account sheds light on the different experiences that migrants had while they were on the caravan. While many depictions of caravan members were about the “suffering migrant” (see Chapters Five and Six), these accounts add a different perspective about them. It calls us to re-think and re-conceptualize them, to see them as human beings, with dreams and desires, with aspirations that go above and beyond the instrumental ones.

Retrospectively, it could be argued that the caravan created a collective identity in transit, or on the move, in and through protests. As the codes show, migrants formed a collective that was in opposition to the dominant order. Their collective identity was linked to their purpose in that they were undocumented migrants and asylum seekers seeking to arrive in the US.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

By looking at the collective experiences and practices and underscoring the importance of affective ties, bonds, and other elements (spirituality) in the formation of collective identity, this chapter has contributed to our understanding of the key elements that sustain a movement over time (given the time frame of the caravan) and make a movement "successful" and has added to the scholarship on collective identity and different literature focusing on cultural and emotional dynamics of mobilization, and the construction of collective identity on the move.

The construction of the collective actor and their collective identity happened in transit. Authors have researched the formation of collective identity in diverse movements and contexts, for instance, the American pro-choice (Trumpy, 2016) and the lesbian feminist movements in the US (Taylor & Whittier, 1992), autonomous movements, such as the 15-M/Indignados in Spain (Flesher Fominaya, 2015), labor movements in the UK (Petrini & Wettergren, 2022) and "refugee" movements in Germany (Perolini, 2022). These studies

analyzed a collective identity that was built over time in a specific place/country, whether in the US, Spain, the UK, or Germany, and within institutional spaces, such as labor unions (Petrini & Wettergren, 2022), communities outside formal social movement organizations (Taylor & Whittier, 1992) or grassroots organizations (Perolini, 2022). The caravan case is rather different. As observed from the testimonies, at the beginning of the movement, there were no tight ties between most caravan members, rather, people had loose ties and weak bonds between them. The caravan was not an institutionalized movement and, there were no formal Social Movement Organizations within the movement; rather, it grew outside the institutional spaces in the Central American region. Also, the case of the caravan differs from those above in that the collective identity was constructed on the move and across countries while caravan members traversed latitudes in Central America and Mexico. In other words, the collective identity or the sense of “we-ness” (Eyerman, 2005; Simiti, 2015; Snow, 2001) was developed in and through protest, as caravan members encountered immigration and police officers, walked for days, spent countless hours together, and shared experiences and goods; while taking public squares, parks, churches, international bridges, and doing encampments (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Simiti, 2015). This finding then contributes to the literature on collective identity by adding the spaces in which it is developed and activities through which it was fostered.

In terms of movement outcomes and looking at how a movement sustains over time (Flesher Fominaya, 2010), I argue that the collective identity allowed migrants to become one united front, overcoming different obstacles along the way, related to the weather conditions, the presence of the immigration officers, and the road itself. One scope condition applies to the temporality of the movement. When referring to sustenance or maintenance of the movement over time, I refer to how the caravan sustained itself from its departure from San Pedro Sula

until it arrived in Tijuana. Subsequent research should put it in a larger context of analysis looking at the caravans that preceded it and those that succeeded it.

By looking at these codes, we can pin down the processes of mobilization, organizational forms, models of leadership, religious beliefs, and forms of communication, which were relevant to the reconstruction and constitution of a collective actor (Melucci, 1996). Collective identity does not entail that all members of a group share the same beliefs or values; instead, members create networks of relationships and come together because they have a common goal. As was shown by the testimonies throughout this thesis, caravan members had different justifications for joining the movement, were from different genders, and socioeconomic statuses, and had different values and beliefs, but they came together for one common goal, to cross international borders and arrive in the US.

While these caravan members' perspectives do not apply to the entire universe of caravan members, their testimony offers insight into members' experiences during their participation and their interpretation of the movement's meanings. In other words, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population; however, they constitute a first step in understanding how members made sense of and contributed to articulating this transnational social movement on the move.

## Chapter 8. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have explored the formation and development of the October 2018 Migrant caravan, also known as *La Caminata del Migrante*, that left Honduras for the US. I was interested in understanding the shift in the mode of migration to caravans from Central America to the US when previous migration movements were characterized by individual or small-group clandestine migration. Drawing on the literature on migration and social movements, and based on the data collection, I sought to advance a conceptualization of the caravan that synthesized different perspectives to account for some of its features, such as its composition; the conflictual relationships that are established; the caravan's mobilization and framing strategy; and the planning that went into organizing the movement; the collective identity constructed, participants' experiences in transit, and their interpretation of the movement. In what follows, I provide some concluding remarks, the theoretical and empirical contributions of this case to the study of migration and social movements, the role of the state in the development of the movement, and directions for future research.

### 8.1 Contributions of the case study to social movements and migration literature

The reviewed case study, the October 2018 Migrant Caravan from Honduras to the US, has made several contributions theoretically, empirically, and methodologically. My contributions can be summed up in the following: 1) the conceptualization of the migrant caravan as a social movement and the building of a theory of a new type of transnational movement, a transnational social movement on the move; 2) the identification of collective action frames and the existence of different prognoses which shows that alignment between the frames is not a necessary condition for a movement to be "successful;" 3) a nuanced understanding of frame resonance and its relationship to the success of a movement; 4) the identification of frames that resonate the most and the least; 5) the multiple elements that are

present in the formation of a collective identity in a migrant-led social movement; 6) showing the spaces in which collective identity is constructed, on the move.

First, in Chapters Two and Three, I provided a historical review of Contemporary Central American migration and the theories that have explained it. However, the October 2018 caravan differed from the patterns observed in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Hence, this thesis proposed using different theories for accounting for some of the characteristics of the caravan, which existing migration scholarship, particularly structural approaches, such as World System Theory (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; Massey et al., 1993; Wallerstein, 1974) are not fully equipped to account for. Thus, I have suggested using social movements scholarship to explain variations in the form of migration, the demographic composition, and the claims made by caravan members. Also, I synthesized different definitions put forward by migration scholars and conceptualized the caravan as a social movement. Thus, this case contributed empirically to the literature on social movements literature (Buechler, 2011; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Snow et al., 2019) by analyzing a migration phenomenon, a migrant caravan, as a social movement. I then contributed by building a theory of a new type of transnational movement, a transnational social movement on the move, which shows innovation in the space in which protest occurs, the repertoire of contention, and diffusion.

In Chapter Five, in line with using social movement scholarship to analyze the caravan, I draw on Frame theory (Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992, 1996; Goffman, 1974; Johnston, 1995; Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Snow et al., 2019; Snow & Benford, 1992) to look at the different collective action frames that the 2018 caravan's de facto leader Bartolo Fuentes deployed to seek support for the caravan. Here, I made three contributions to the literature. First, the collective action frames literature (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992; Robinson, 2001; Snow et al., 2019; Snow & Benford, 1992) presumes

that in successful movements, there is an alignment between diagnostic and prognostic frames. The case of the 2018 Caravan sheds light on a movement that reached some level of “success” even when the prognosis given by one *de facto* mobilizer differed from the prognosis articulated by participants. This finding suggested that alignment between the frames is not a necessary condition for a movement to be “successful,” instead showing that participants’ goals and claims are essential for a movement to thrive.

Second, literature on collective action frames (Benford & Snow, 2000) has placed great emphasis on the role of social movement leaders and activists in articulating collective action frames; however, the caravan case shows that the emphasis should be on the groups’ frames, as they are also articulators of their claims and solutions. That is to say, participants are also frame makers and not only recipients of frames (Ketelaars, 2016). They have the agency and capacity to elaborate their own prognosis.

Third, the case stressed the need for a dialogue between the mobilizer(s) and activists and members of social movements where there is a common and shared understanding of grievances, claims, and demands that will be put forward. Fuentes articulated collective action frames, offering a diagnosis of the Honduran migratory context, both in Honduras and in transit, and a prognosis for the violence that Honduran migrants experience in transit whereby Mexico should provide asylum to caravan members. Fuentes displayed a wide range of emotions that went from anger, sadness, and disgust to empathy. I provided evidence that Fuentes' diagnosis resonated or could have resonated with participants in the 2018 caravan that I interviewed. However, often participants rejected the prognosis of applying for asylum in Mexico while proposing and following their own solutions, such as going to the US. Thus, this case reveals that leaders and participants need to establish a dialogue to generate a shared understanding of the ends, means, and fields of action. The emphasis is not on what the leaders want or think that people need but on what the people really want and need.

In Chapter Six, I analyzed how respondents justified their participation in the caravan and the “resonance” the collective action and other frames had on them, so I draw on frame resonance. There are two main takeaways from my analysis of the frame resonance. First, frame resonance is often conflated with the success of a movement (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bloemraad et al., 2016; Bonikowski, 2017; Chakravarty & Chaudhuri, 2012, 2012; Ferree, 2003; Shuster & Campos-Castillo, 2017). Thus, according to the literature, the success of a movement is linked to frame resonance. My findings contribute to the literature on frame resonance by showing how despite the lack of resonance in relevant frames (i.e., destination and interpretation of the movement), movements still evolve and achieve some of their primary goals. That is, the lack of resonance does not necessarily lead to the movement's failure. Instead, it is the articulation of the frames and their re-interpretation by participants that lead to the development and “success” of the movement. This finding shed light on the not-so-clear-cut relationship between frame resonance and success, suggesting a different link between them and the inclusion of other elements in the relation, such as the articulation of bottom-up frames, to account for the “success” of the movement.

The second takeaway of my analysis of frame resonance in Chapter Six is the identification of the frames that resonated the most and the least with participants. Knowing what frames resonate the most allows us to theorize the frames that mobilizers could deploy in (migrant) social movement and ways in which mobilizers can gain purchase in mobilizing participants. Likewise, we can begin to theorize and test the effect of frame resonance, whether in the form of dissemination, participation, or both.

In Chapter Seven, I elaborated on collective identity to make sense of participants' experiences and understand how the caravan became a collective actor and sustained the mobilization from San Pedro Sula to Tijuana. The contributions of the chapter are as follows: First, the codes I analyzed signaled that sporadic (loose-tied) members became united and

formed a “brotherhood” as they walked together, encountered, and faced immigration and police officers, and took the streets, and public squares, and international bridges. In other words, they constructed a collective identity in and through protest. The space in which this collective identity is constructed, on the move, constitutes a contribution to the scholarship on collective identity (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Perolini, 2022; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Trumpy, 2016). Second, the organizational structure that the caravan followed, shown in Chapter Seven, suggested that this was a horizontal, non-institutionalized, decentralized, and bottom-up movement (Hardt & Negri, 2017; Liang & Lee, 2021). According to respondents’ testimonies, there was no formal leader or head of the movement. They did not unanimously recognize or legitimize anyone as such. Instead, caravan members highlighted the presence of coordinators or guides who would decide the route and places to rest. The organization was horizontal, without a defined hierarchy. Some decisions were made in consensus, and others were made based on the experience of the members’ experience. Thus, I argue that the presence of the *de facto* leader Bartolo Fuentes at the beginning of the movement was a catalyst for it to emerge, but with him detained and deported, the caravan took on its own form and dynamic. This finding led us to rethink the role and presence of leaders in social movements and the agency of participants. For instance, one type of social movement where leaders or *de facto* leaders, activists, or mobilizers serve as a catalyst for movements to emerge rather than to conduct them. This shift entails a departure from traditional social movements where activists take the lead in organizing, decision-making, and mobilizing resources and grievances (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004).

The third contribution of this chapter is the role of spirituality in secular social movements, as it calls for more studies that analyze the role of religion and spirituality as resources for the formation of collective identity and movement continuity, particularly in non-

religious social movements. The testimonies presented underscored how respondents saw God as a mobilizing force as they felt like fainting along the migratory route.

Fifth, methodologically, I collected social media data and data from semi-structured interviews conducted online. This study contributed to the growing literature (Hewson, 2016; Howlett, 2021; Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010; O'Connor & Madge, 2016; Rasmussen, 2016) on online research methods, carrying out interviews with hard-to-reach populations on social media, particularly on WhatsApp. In doing so, I provided some pointers to reduce the limitations posed by online fieldwork.

Finally, to analyze frame resonance, I have integrated and analyzed social media data and semi-structured interviews conducted online. This allowed for a comparison of the organizers' and participants' frames. Most of the cases that use big data, social media data, are quantitative, focusing on Twitter; instead, this study analyzed the posts and videos of one Facebook account in a given period to understand frames qualitatively. Qualitative analysis of social media and interview data allowed a more nuanced understanding of the meaning of the frames, as opposed to quantitative methods that spot words. The qualitative analysis then helped to identify the logic behind frame resonance to understand how and why frames resonate the most and the least.

## **8.2 Conclusions about the 2018 Migrant Caravan**

Over the last five decades, migrants have traveled either individually or in small groups to the US – by foot, riding on the top of freight trains or by bus, often hiring coyotes – repeatedly risking their lives, as a large percentage of migrants are robbed, killed, kidnapped, raped, and forcibly disappeared at the hands of organized crime and Mexican officials during the transit (Castillo, 2019; Vogt, 2020). They do so because the US and Mexico have taken different actions to crack down on undocumented migration from Central America. However,

the caravan of 2018 constituted a new form of migration, as large groups of people from the NTCA were walking together up north, in daylight, with specific demands, and in a seemingly organized manner (Garibo García & Call, 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020; Varela Huerta, 2018). Through these actions, migrants challenged migration policies and border regimes (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Varela Huerta, 2015b) that had forced them into invisibility and irregularity.

This type of migration, in caravans, is different from the traditional undocumented, secret, and clandestine migration from Central America that scholars have largely researched (Blanchard et al., 2011; Guerette & Clarke, 2005; Massey et al., 1993; Menjívar, 2000; París Pombo, 2017; Sorensen, 2013; Spener, 2009). First, the size of the groups changed. Traditionally, migrants traveled individually or in small groups (Díaz de León, 2020; París Pombo, 2018a; Sorensen, 2013), taking the less surveilled routes at dawn or night, walking or in the back of large vans, through the desert, secretly and making use of the available resources, such as social networks, religious organizations, community-based shelters, intermediaries and coyotes. In contrast, the October 2018 caravan comprised a large group of about 4-5,000 people moving together.

Second, the demographic composition of the group changed. Historically, a large share of Central American undocumented migrants were single young men, followed by young women, working mainly in the service and manufacturing industries in the US. In contrast, the make-up of the caravans was different. Single men, women, children, elders, and families were part of the group (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021). Also, a large percentage of the caravan's population was Honduran, in contrast with a higher share of Salvadoran or Guatemalan migration at the beginning of the millennium.

Third, when migrating in small groups, migrants usually had strong ties, as groups were often composed of family members or acquaintances (Díaz de León, 2020; París Pombo,

2018a; Sorensen, 2013). Instead, I found that the 2018 caravan was composed of large groups of people from different nationalities, genders, and sexual orientations, without the same degree of kinship. In other words, they had weaker ties at the beginning of the movement.

Fourth, the caravans were visible. Restrictive policies of exclusions that the US and Mexico have implemented since at least the 1990s (see Chapter Two) have forced migrants to make trips clandestinely (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021; París Pombo, 2017; Torre Cantalapiedra & Mariscal Nava, 2020; Varela Huerta & McLean, 2019). As such, migrants sought to appear invisible and unrecognized because that would allow them to keep going without being identified, detained, and deported (De Leon, 2015; D. E. Martínez et al., 2014). In contrast, the October 2018 caravan was a large group of people protesting together, in daylight, in public spaces, such as parks, public squares, and international bridges. Their visibility was a distinct element of the group.

Fifth, caravan members had a set of claims and demands. They made use of multiple symbols to show their resistance against the racialized policies of exclusion that have rendered them illegal and invisible. In the past, undocumented migrants *quietly* made their way into the wild and followed the dangerous routes that would have the least surveillance without making particular claims (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021; Martínez et al., 2014).

Six, in the past, many people from the Northern Triangle of Central America migrated to the US for economic reasons and to seek asylum (Blanchard et al., 2011; Hamilton & Chinchilla, 1991; Menjívar, 2000; Rodriguez, 1987; Stanley, 1987). The caravans were composed of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers traveling through Mexico to arrive or seek refuge in the US. In 2019, the US recorded 233, 779 asylum claims (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021). As shown in this thesis, all the respondents were seeking to arrive in the US, and many of them intended to seek asylum.

Hence, studying the caravans required us to analyze a new form of migration through a new lens. The existing wisdom on migration has not accounted for some of the elements of the caravans. Thus, instead of studying the most common form of undocumented migration or the root causes of the massive displacement from the NTCA, this work has focused on the caravans, which are a small fraction relative to the total population displaced (París Pombo, 2018b). In other words, focusing on the caravan meant looking at one exception to the common features of Central American migration; however, the caravans were the expression of the “common” undocumented migrants who kept moving because of poverty, violence, and political instability.

Studying the caravan also entailed looking at the mobilization and organization efforts of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers and their mobilizing force. Throughout the walk, members continued to denounce the government, join the movement, and draw attention to their struggles and claims, which contributes to understanding new forms of contestation led by undocumented migrants (Beltrán, 2009; Dikeç, 2013; Escudero & Pallares, 2020).

The October 2018 migrant caravan meant a shift in the way in which its members were seen and perceived, evidenced by the considerable assistance given by civil society and local and international organizations (Hernández López & Porraz Gómez, 2020). However, the perception of the *caravaneros* was not necessarily always positive. The narratives by some media outlets prompted negative reactions that were shared by some locals in Tijuana and the US government. Overall, the caravan’s presence changed narratives about undocumented migrants and their struggles, as they were seen *en masse*. The visibility brought to light the struggles of undocumented migration and the resilience capacities of migrants in transit.

All of the above elements made the caravan a different phenomenon. What is more, the politicization of the movement by governments of the region, the claims and demands expressed by caravan members, the organization of such a movement, the media attention, and

the assistance granted by the civil society were key elements of what made this caravan so different from other forms of migration.

Further, the caravan was an online and offline mobilization, which allowed us to rethink different aspects of (migrant) social movements and social media. The caravan used the expansion of the internet and social media to organize the move from Honduras to the US. Social media afforded visibility. In particular, Facebook and WhatsApp platforms provided affordances for discourse and performance (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). These platforms a) enabled the emergence and enlargement of the movement; b) allowed people to follow the movement as it occurred; c) helped spread the word about the movement, thereby gaining participants, bystanders, and opponents; d) gave the movement visibility and with that, exposed the hardships and violence that undocumented migrants and asylum seekers experience in the migratory route; and e) provided a space for people to express their discontent with their governments and organize contentious actions.

Last, but not least, the case of the caravan invites us to reflect on the character and agency of the migrants. Often the depiction of (undocumented) migrants is that of suffering people, victims of systems of exploitation and displacement, and in need of humanitarian assistance (Mezzadra, 2020). However, as has been shown, migrants are also active decision-makers and agents of change. They are also political actors that demanded policy action and attention. *Caravaneros* who had never left their communities embarked on an “adventure” that took them more than 3,000 km away from their home. Their faith and brotherhood were their strength and power.

Likewise, the respondents’ testimonies allowed us to see the human side of the migrants. Often, migration is associated with “instrumental or means-to-an-end migration,” whereby mobility is associated with achieving some economic or living standard goals (De Haas, 2021); however, migrants also have intrinsic life aspirations. Retrospectively,

respondents showed they valued the experience of migration in and of itself, describing the caravan as an adventure and a good experience, worth repeating. This led us to see the participants of migration and social movements phenomena with different eyes, as human beings, with aspirations, dreams, and goals, full of complexities and nuances, as opposed to just seeing them as rational actors. Additionally, it enables us to perceive the social and human aspects of these phenomena. Members were, on the one hand, part of a collective effort to change their reality, and on the other, human beings who draw from different resources to cope with the hardships of the trip. In other words, the caravan was composed of purpose actors, seeking change at the local and international levels, who were hungry, thirsty, suffered on the road, and it was also composed of human beings who laughed, were joyful, hopeful, and made the best of it.

### **8.3 The Response of the Mexican Government**

The overall response to the arrival of the 2018 caravans was mixed. First, the Mexican state, headed by president Enrique Peña Nieto, sought to control the southern border, deploying migration and police officers to stop the caravan's entrance. They sprayed tear gas at members and some people were injured. After, authorities let the caravan pass, but then again deployed officers along the migratory route (Pradilla, 2019).

Second, the government fashioned the program “*Estas en tu casa*” that would allow migrants and asylum seekers to stay in the south of Mexico, under particular circumstances. However, this was an *ad hoc* measure to contain undocumented migration and keep caravan members from moving up north, rather than a permanent solution for caravan members.

Third, the support from the Mexican government, in the form of the Humanitarian Bridge, enabled the crossing of thousands of people through the country, in a safer way. The actions the government implemented were a glimpse of what a migration policy focused on

human security as opposed to migration management could look like. Instead of being criminalized, a substantial portion of the caravan members of the October 2018 caravan received assistance from the Mexican government. Central Americans that were part of the caravan were treated differently from other migrants. The identification with the caravan allowed undocumented migrants to be treated with more “respect.” While in Mexico City, migration authorities provided them with regularization options, such as temporary permits for them to stay up to one year in the country. Authorities also customized public spaces, such as sports facilities and stadiums, to be used as shelters where people were able to stay for weeks.

The support given represented a shift from how Mexico has approached undocumented migration for decades. However, the implementation of such a program was temporary and only limited to the caravans. The actions of “support” to the mobile population in the caravan could be seen as measures that the government needs to implement permanently. It is their responsibility to act accordingly, as the policies that Mexico and the US have implemented have resulted in human rights violations, death, forced disappearances, extortion, and rape.

Finally, the response of the Mexican state shifted in January 2019. Andres Manuel López Obrador took office on December 1, 2018. He gave the caravans of January 2019 a different treatment. Since then, immigration policies have continued to change, going from being permissive to repressive (Calva Sánchez & Torre Cantalapiedra, 2020; Rizzo Lara, 2022). Analyzing the role of the state would be critical to understanding to what extent it facilitated or repressed subsequent movements.

#### **8.4 Beyond the *Caminata del Migrante*: Directions for Future Research**

The October 2018 migrant caravan set a precedent. After the protests (the caravan) that took place in October 2018, many other caravans have been formed. In January 2019, new groups arrived in Mexico following the footsteps of the *Caminata del Migrante*. In January

2021, new groups formed in Central America to arrive in the US; however, the externalization of borders and the signing of treaties between the US and Central American countries enhanced the securitization along the borders, prompting the disarticulation of the caravans. In 2022, new groups of migrants organized in the south of Mexico to arrive in Mexico City.

First, how can we assess the success of migrant-led social movements? Was the caravan successful? More research should look into what success means for migrant-led social movements and their members and what are the goals of such movements, as extant research has yet to account for this (Beltrán, 2009; Dikeç, 2013; Escudero & Pallares, 2020).

In that line, future research could analyze the experiences of those who participated in subsequent caravans and provide a comparative analysis of the 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 migrant caravans. How is members' experience different or similar to those who participated in the October 2018 caravan? What frames did they articulate? Were these caravans "successful"? What do the caravans have in common? How are they different? What was the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the emergence and development of these movements? This could contribute to the growing literature on migrant caravans (Contreras Delgado et al., 2021; Gandini et al., 2020; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021) which has found that subsequent caravans were not able to arrive in Mexico or were disarticulated in the south of the country.

The third line of inquiry could look into the role of the state, what was the role of the state(s) in facilitating or repressing these movements? How has the Mexican government responded to the caravans? More research should address the multiple ways in which the governments of the Central American-US corridor have responded to the caravans which could contribute to analyzing more closely how states facilitate or repress movements, and the unintended consequences of the caravan, such as the increase of border enforcement in Mexico and the US.

Finally, there is a gap in the literature concerning a comparative analysis of the multiple caravans that have taken place in or have passed through Mexico: Caravan of Central American Mothers, Viacruces Migrante, Migrant Caravans (2019, 2019, 2020, 2021) that started in Central America and or Mexico. Continuing work could do a comparative analysis by looking at the context, purpose, goals repertoire of contention, and achievements. This would contribute to the literature by looking at the different forms of contestation organized by vulnerable groups and non-citizens in origin and transit countries.

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