

## **POCKETS OF DISPOSABILITY: BORDER CITIES AS OPEN-AIR JAILS FOR ASYLUM-SEEKERS**

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In Latin America, thousands of people flee criminal violence, the environmental devastation caused by development, and political repression. Forced migrants cross international borders in search of international protection in the United States and Canada, but also in traditionally transit countries like Mexico, where they must make a home. In addition, a global network of smuggling and contraband brings people from Africa and Asia to Mexico's southern border and the border cities between Mexico and the United States, through South and Central America, so they can live the "American Dream."<sup>1 2</sup>

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump's war against asylum left about 60,000 persons stranded in Mexico waiting for hearings or decisions about their asylum requests, as well as another 15,000 waiting to be able to apply. While

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<sup>1</sup> Migrant smugglers operating in Bangladesh, Ecuador, and Colombia work together with well-established networks of government officials and commercial airlines that facilitate the cocaine traffic from Colombia to Europe, through Eastern Europe (Bosnia) and Africa (Guinea Bissau, Niger, Zimbabwe, and South Africa). Ecuador has become a transit area for international migrants. For at least the last eight years, people from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East have increasingly come into the country in order to move on to other destinations, mainly the United States to the north and Brazil, Chile, and Argentina to the south (Álvarez Velasco, 2016; Cohen, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Europe has gradually closed its continental borders, forcing migrants to choose routes and destinations not on the basis of their proximity or colonial ties, but on availability. The transatlantic routes are available because of a transnational smuggling ring in which corruption, clandestine distribution channels for illegal products like cocaine, and the web of human smugglers make smuggling and contraband a huge criminal enterprise. These two routes, Europe and North America, are the most important business for the smugglers: 55,000 are smuggled annually from Africa to Europe in business deals worth US\$150 million; and three million people are smuggled from South and Central America and the Caribbean in a US\$6.6-billion market. Overall, contraband is a US\$6.75-billion-a-year business. These routes are available because of the well-established transnational corruption networks and the clandestine channels for cocaine distribution, an enormous criminal market that takes advantage of greater and greater flows of forced migration (UNODC, 2010; Dixon et al., 2018).

these figures are terrifying, the true horror lies in the legal limbo and living limbo that the war on asylum is causing. The waiting lists for asylum hearings get longer and longer, leaving people stranded in border cities like Tijuana, Baja California, where they are forced to live temporarily in shelters without work permits or money, and, in the longer term, on the margins of the city (in drainage systems, on levees, or on the street), where they are vulnerable to organized crime and exposed to the elements and drugs. They can spend months stuck there, locked into a city that becomes an open-aided cell. I have called these precarious spaces “pockets of disposability.”

This chapter describes pockets of disposability empirically and conceptualizes them as the consequence of migratory and asylum policies throughout the world: the fact that Tijuana is host to African and Asian migrants is due in part to the closing of Europe’s continental border, but more specifically to the closing of the United States border. I argue that U.S. actions exacerbate the precarious urban conditions in Tijuana and other border cities in Mexico and the world, creating these pockets of disposability. To develop this argument, first I will describe what I consider Trump’s war against asylum. Then, I will go into the consequences this has had on Tijuana in terms of persons who are stranded and in legal limbo. I will then analyze how this creates pockets of disposability, and, finally, I will comment on other cities that are also pockets of disposability in Europe and South America, in order to generalize this conceptualization.

## **Trump and His War on Asylum**

In early 2017, Trump issued three executive orders that improved border control, increased deportations, and limited asylum and granting of refugee status (Center for Migration Studies, 2020). The first was the Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, which notoriously focused on building a 2,000-mile-long border wall, increasing construction of private detention centers, hiring another 5,000 Border Patrol agents, and expanding swift deportations (White House, 2017a). The second order, Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States, centered on deportation, which is why it banned sanctuary cities and encouraged prison authorities to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE),

under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security, in identifying undocumented migrants in prison so they could be deported. In addition, migrants who had committed a criminal offense could be deported, including for the crime of working without a permit. To carry this out, the order stipulated the hiring of 10,000 new ICE agents (White House, 2017b).

Finally, the executive order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States suspended visas for up to ninety days of citizens of countries considered prejudicial to the interests of the United States (Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen) and indefinitely ceased the resettlement of Syrian citizens altogether. It also closed the U.S. refugee program for 120 days, preventing any person requesting asylum from claiming refugee status in the United States for that same period. In addition, it reduced the quota of refugees from 110,000 to 50,000 a year (*New York Times*, 2017; Penn State Law, 2020). Later in 2017, Trump reinforced the anti-Muslim policy that forbade the entry of citizens of Chad, Libya, North Korea, and Somalia, and severely limited the issuance of temporary work visas and green cards, and ordered the gradual dismantlement of the Differed Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).<sup>3</sup> Finally, he decreed the end of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for citizens of Haiti, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

By April 2018, the situation became even worse for undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers who attempted to cross the border. The attorney general issued a zero-tolerance policy that turned undocumented immigration into a crime when previously it had only been an administrative offense. The attorney general's justification was that undocumented immigration had increased 203 percent between March 2017 and March 2018 (United States Department of Justice, 2018). Therefore, the Border Patrol arrested migrants and took them to prison. However, the law bans children from prison, and therefore the authorities sent the migrant children to temporary detention centers. It turned into a scandal. Even Trump's allies criticized the measure as inhumane and pointed out that it could be instrumentalized for sex and human trafficking of children. While only 46 percent of immigrants arrested by Border Patrol agents were actually processed, they did arrest precisely the adults accompanied by children. More than 3,000 children were separated

<sup>3</sup> Legal clinics opposed several of these decisions and finally managed to have DACA recognized in June 2020 (Penn State Law, 2020).

from their parents, which meant that “family separation was therefore not an unintended consequence of the ‘zero-tolerance’ policy but an effort to punish families,” according to a Human Rights Watch’s brief (2018). This policy radicalized the San Diego Operation Streamline that was enforced for the first time in early 2018 and increased the number of undocumented immigrants on trial by 1,200 percent, focusing on parents, as a way to force families to leave the United States (ACLU San Diego, 2018). In June of that year, Trump issued another executive order, *Affording Congress an Opportunity to Address Family Separation*, putting an end to family separation (White House, 2018).

In October 2018, the Honduran caravan arrived at the U.S. border—I will address this in more detail in the next section. The group included entire families, single women with their children, homosexual men and transsexuals who were fleeing homophobia, women running from sexual violence, and those attempting to save their sons from forced induction into gangs. President Trump threatened to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border even further. Local militias were also arming to receive the caravan. Trump’s response was to announce in December the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as *Remain in Mexico* which established that “certain” foreigners who arrived at U.S. points of entry without documentation would be forced to wait in Mexico for their asylum cases to be resolved. The protocols were applied starting in January 2019, mainly to immigrants from Honduras and Central America (DHS, 2019b).

In July 2019, the Departments of Homeland Security and of Justice adopted a *Interim Final Rule*, which stipulated that asylum applicants who had not requested asylum and been denied in a third safe country “were not eligible for asylum” in the United States (DHS, 2019a). For Trump, safe third countries were basically Mexico and Central America. In early September, the U.S. Supreme Court backed the *Remain in Mexico* policy, saying it was legal for asylum applicants to be forced to wait in a safe third country while waiting for their asylum request to be ruled on, despite the fact that these measures openly violate the rights of no return and to due process. In February, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals of the United States blocked the policy, but held its decision, since Trump argued that eliminating the policy on the southwest border would encourage migrants to “run for the border.” In March 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown, the Supreme Court ruled that the policy could stay in place while the litigation was being resolved

(Álvarez, 2020; De Vogue, 2020). By January 2020, Trump had signed safe third country agreements, called Asylum Cooperative Agreements, with El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. A final Homeland Security provisional rule issued in November 2019 allowed Trump to force compliance with those accords, beginning with the one signed with Guatemala (Narea, 2019; DHS, 2019a).

## **Mexico's Subordinate Role**

A couple of months after the MPP were applied for the first time, in August 2019, the waiting list for asylum in Tijuana, which had existed for years, had swollen to 10,000. Only thirty-four persons a day could cross the border, a system controlled by the Border Patrol called “metering,” and the wait time was from six to nine months. In early 2019, only Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras, and Nuevo Laredo had more than 100 people on waiting lists, for a total of 4,800 people. By August, Mexicali, San Luis Colorado, Agua Prieta, Ciudad Acuña, Reynosa, and Matamoros also had waiting lists. In all, these cities are processing more than 26,000 names on the asylum waiting lists, and the courts have returned 32,000 people whose applications are being processed. A total of 58,000 asylum-seekers have been stranded along the Mexican border in sixteen cities. Tijuana has the longest waiting list, while Ciudad Juárez has received the most returnees (13,100) (Kao and Lu, 2019). The shelters in other cities (Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo) are overpopulated and cannot admit anymore migrants, forcing them to sleep on the streets. About 6,400 returned to their home countries, aided by the Mexican government (Kao and Lu, 2019).

In September 2019, court began to be held in tents in Laredo and Brownsville, Texas, to process the large number of asylum requests under the MPP (Álvarez, 2019). The government did not open the tent-courts to journalists until January 2020, which is when they were able to report that the trials were terrible. The asylum applicants could not see the judge in person because the hearings were carried out via teleconference even before the COVID-19 quarantine. Since the tents are on the border, the applicants had trouble finding legal council for the trials, already a difficult process even before the measures. Once the hearing is over, the applicants have to wait on the Mexican

side until their next hearing, which could take months to happen. They sleep outside, next to the tents that, according to *Forbes*, are built and maintained by the Deployed Resources corporation, based in New York, a company that normally builds the tents used at mass rock concerts like Lollapalooza. The Department of Homeland Security paid Deployed Resources US\$48.9 million to build these “tent courts” (Çam, 2019: 333).

As if the United States weren't earning enough money with its war against asylum, in February 2020, it announced a hike in the price of an immigration application. In that same month, Trump also announced his intention of ratcheting up the rates for appealing in these cases to almost US\$1,000. The cost of an immigration judge's decision and the request for reconsideration or reopening a case is US\$110, but if Trump's proposal were successful, it would soar to US\$975 and US\$895 (Swales, 2020).

According to a Refugees International report, since the MPPs were issued, Trump had left about 60,000 asylum applicants on Mexican soil waiting for hearings or the resolution of their cases, and another 15,000 are waiting to be able to actually apply. This, together with the fear sparked by COVID-19 and the May 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, discouraged asylum applicants, especially those from Africa and Haiti who had traveled to Mexico to seek asylum. However, in line with Ortega Velázquez's thinking (2017), Mexico's asylum system is not much better than that of the United States, despite the fact that asylum is established in the Constitution as a right, and constitutional rights are for everyone, including foreigners. This is due to the fact that the Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum has broken down the category of refuge into that given to political exiles, refugees, and persons with complementary protection. Individuals have thirty days to present a claim, and they are then informed about the decision within up to ninety days. If asylum or refugee status is denied them, they can appeal within the following fifteen days. However, the very same asylum officials who reject an application in the first place are those who review the appeals. Most of the time, their argument for denying asylum is, as in the United States, the possibility of taking a domestic flight to a safe place, which is not really a possibility. In addition, immigration officials do not inform migrants that they have the right to request asylum when they enter the country, and when individuals do know about this right, the authorities convince them not to apply (Ortega Velázquez, 2017). Just like in the United

States, in Mexico, asylum law and procedures are designed to prevent people from achieving refugee status.

In addition to the legal barriers to the right to asylum, Mexico has recently become the United States' guard dog along its extraterritorial borders with Guatemala. Although the Mexican government had a moderate, humanitarian policy toward Central American migrants when President Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office in late 2018, in June 2019 this tolerant attitude changed when Trump threatened Mexico's government with a 5-percent tariff on Mexican products if the government did not stop migration through the Mexican-Guatemalan government in forty-five days, using at least 6,000 militarized National Guard troops. Mexico complied by sending 2,400 troops (Pradilla, 2019a). In August, migrants from Africa and Haiti detained at the Siglo XXI detention center in Tapachula, Chiapas, began a series of protests against the Mexican government, demanding that they be allowed to continue their journey toward the United States. The demonstrators stated that immigration officials had demanded US\$1,500 from each of them for safe conduct. In October 2019, the National Guard and the Federal Police repressed the protest and prevented them from continuing northward. In October, the Africans continued their protests (Recamier, 2019: 338).

### **Getting Rid of the Migrants: The Pockets of Disposability**

As I wrote in *Guerras necropolíticas y biopolítica de asilo en América del Norte* (Necropolitical Wars and the Biopolitics of Asylum in North America) (2018), the U.S. asylum system was already difficult for asylum-seekers to navigate. However, from the time he took office in 2017, Donald Trump went to war openly against asylum through his "unorthodox" use of his executive power, using it to unilaterally legislate on issues of asylum and migration (Waslin, 2020). Michele Waslin argued that, historically speaking, U.S. presidents have issued executive orders and proclamations for political ends, but Trump issued them to implement a de facto immigration policy and ignore Congress in the process. According to Waslin's quantitative analysis of executive orders and proclamations since 1945, Trump issued ten of the fifty-six executive orders related to immigration, and nine of the sixty-four proclamations. In

addition, 8 percent of Trump's executive orders deal with immigration. These were issued to establish policy, to reinterpret current laws, or to instruct the institutions of the administration of justice. Trump produced up to 20 percent of these political instruments, with which he de facto implemented his country's immigration policy without consulting the legislative branch at all, which is the most racially diverse in U.S. history. Twenty-two percent of the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are from ethnic minorities, that is, 116 members. These minorities include members of the Afro-American, Native-American, Asian-American, and of course, Latino communities (Pew Research Center, 2019). It is possible that Trump's very peculiar use of his executive power is due to his authoritarian personality, because he "often exercises his executive authority without much process, circumventing the well-established procedures for consultation and securing input from Congress, federal agencies, White House staff, and the public" (Waslin 2020: 64). It is true that he issued the majority of his immigration-related executive orders at a time when the Republican Party had a majority in Congress. However, it is also true that he used his executive power to stop migration and asylum requests, which reaffirm his colonial power in the region, making Mexico the United States' extraterritorial border where it could *throw away* refugees and deportees, that is, all the people that it deemed undesirable, who simply have the door shut in their faces, leaving them stranded in cities that become jails, like Tijuana.

With no jobs, no money, and no certainty about their future, the migrants find temporary refuge along the riverbanks in Tijuana, under bridges, and even in drain pipes. These spaces are a legal and social limbo that lead to precarious conditions, which in turn lead to death or disease. I call these open-air jails for asylum-seekers and other displaced persons "disposal foci." Tijuana's geographical location has made it a refuge for all manner of migrants, asylum-seekers, irregular migrants, and deportees stranded there. When they arrive, migrants go to permanent or even temporary shelters, but cannot stay for extended periods of time; this means that if their circumstances do not improve, they have to leave anyway. This is the case of the thousands of Mexican deportees who have lived in the United States all their lives and no longer have any family in Mexico.

In February 2017, I visited the migrant shelters to document this humanitarian crisis as it unfolded; there I met Mexican women who had escaped



the cartels and gender violence, as well as Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans fleeing from the ceaseless gang violence in Central America.

There were also Haitians who had arrived in Mexico from Brazil; they had received refugee status in Brazil after the 2010 earthquake in their country, but were forced to leave due to Brazil's deep economic and political crisis, which has drastically reduced job opportunities. The Haitians were not necessarily typical "economic migrants": many are engineers, doctors, and architects between the ages of twenty and thirty. In fact, this little-known group made up most of the migrants stranded in Tijuana. According to Tijuana-based migrant activist Soraya Vázquez, of the Tijuana Humanitarian Aid Strategic Committee, six Haitians arrived in Tijuana on May 23, 2016. The next day there were 100. In early 2017, about 18,000 Haitians had entered Mexico, but by the end of 2018, only 3,500 remained, distributed in Tijuana and the state capital, Mexicali. They attempted to get asylum in the United States, but, when they failed, they tried to stay in Mexico. The shelters managed by the Catholic Church helped them get jobs and build homes (*El Herald de México*, 2018). By mid-2019, about 4,000 Haitians living in Baja California were claiming regular migratory status. Asylum-seekers cannot legally work and do not have permanent residency; and, if they are Haitian, they often do not speak Spanish. However, they must support themselves and their families while they wait for U.S. immigration officials to decide if their asylum applications can be approved or not.

The Haitians were living in Tijuana's open-air garbage dumps, in the drainage system, and in the area around improvised shelters. Many were looking for informal market manual labor, cleaning houses and offices, working in maquila plants, or delivering pizzas for only US\$1.30 a day. When they arrived to Tijuana in 2016, they lived in precarious houses in the El Bordo area, a dried canal of the Tijuana River, right next to the U.S. border, which was already inhabited by Mexican homeless and drug addicts (Aviña Cerecer, 2020). They lived in houses made of aluminum foil, cloth, and plastic waste products, called "ñongos" (40.9 percent); deep underground holes (2.2 percent); the drainage system (19.2 percent); bridges (18 percent); and hillsides (13 percent). The local authorities evicted them in 2016 and finally they settled in a community of 3,000. The middle-class educated Haitians have opened small businesses such as restaurants; they have married Mexicans and signed up in university programs, melting into Tijuana's cosmopolitan environment.

The Hondurans have not been as lucky. When the 7,000- to 15,000-person caravan arrived in Tijuana in December 2018, they found the border closed. One hundred of them tried to cross the border forcibly but were driven back (*BBC Mundo*, 2018). They have been the target of xenophobic attacks since they arrived, probably because they do not have the same cultural and economic capital as the Haitians, or because they arrived at a moment when the asylum crisis broke out. In addition, the “Mara” stereotype of gang members hangs over the heads of Honduran males. More than 6,000 Hondurans are currently in Tijuana, added to an even larger group of people seeking asylum, because from the time the Remain in Mexico policy came into effect, the city has acquired more and more migrants.

In April 2020, 10,000 persons were on waiting lists, and 6,400 were sent back to wait for their next hearing (Kao and Lu, 2019). Trump called these people “invaders” and sent the army to prevent them from crossing the border. By the end of 2018, the United States had deported 28,218 Hondurans (Pradilla, 2019b). By January 2019, more than 2,500 Hondurans were living in precarious conditions in shelters or on the streets, without access to food and ill from the climate conditions that they are unaccustomed to—they are from a tropical climate and are vulnerable to diseases common in extreme climates like the desert. They are also exposed to organized and “normal” crime (*Proceso Digital*, 2019). For example, on December 15, 2018, drug traffickers robbed and killed two Honduran teenagers who refused to buy drugs.

As we can see, thousands of Hondurans, Africans, and even Mexicans are facing terrible conditions and remain in a limbo of time and space confined to the outskirts of the city, making them invisible and disposable. In their comparative study of Tijuana and two other Mexican cities, Puebla and Monterrey, Marchand and Ortega Ramírez (2019) examine the impact of migration in urban transformation, using the concept of “cities of the world,” which refers to the growing insertion of third cities of the world in the global political economy through low-skilled migrations. They analyze different types of populations in these cities, including the Haitians in Tijuana, and conclude that they produce and reproduce these cities with their economic activities and integration into the economy. However, the authors do not take into account the role of precarious work, homelessness, illness, and exploitation in these migratory groups. Although their study states that it provides a bottom-up vision of migration’s urban spatialization in Tijuana,

they neglect those places where illegal commerce takes place, that is, the marginalized areas where drugs are sold and prostitution and other informal services are provided (Marchand and Ortega Ramírez, 2019).

Del Monte Madrigal (2018) is more realistic about Tijuana and its conditions' possible spread to similar locations, calling them "vortices of precariousness." Using the results of an ethnographic study in Tijuana, he defines a vortex of precariousness as "an enveloping series of spatial-temporal processes, composed of violent and socio-culturally exclusive forces that recursively structure the gradual and exponential degradation of material, social, and subjective conditions of subsistence (Del Monte Madrigal, 2018: 13). The author observed different types of "constellations of precariousness" that display interrelated processes: the experiences and background of subjects linked together on a macro-, meso-, and micro-level through the lack of housing and structural processes in the border space. These constellations include "critical moments" such as deportation, family breakup, the border limbo, and drug use, but he also sees deportation and migration as structural factors. According to Del Monte Madrigal, "Each one of these precarious constellations begins in a precarious context and goes through a process of transnational mobility across the border several times . . . and in that back-and-forth, precariousness progressively accumulates due to the coming together of structural and subjective processes like the reinforcement of the border, the toughening up of immigration policies, clandestine conditions, drug use, and the processes of being jailed" (Del Monte Madrigal, 2018: 41).

While I think that Del Monte Madrigal's conceptualization of the vortices of precariousness is powerful because it is based on profound ethnographic observation and an understanding of life in extremely precarious spaces, I also think that it lacks a vision of the role of the law and immigration policy, such as Trump's unilateral anti-asylum legislation, in the creation of these spaces. While the vortices of precariousness clearly describe the centripetal structural forces that gradually lead migrants to live in precarious urban spaces, such as migratory processes, violence, and discrimination, the concept lacks an examination of the role of laws and immigration and asylum policies in the construction of these spaces in the way that I have described until now, particularly the managerial vision of asylum justice and Trump's presidential executive actions.

Analyzing the role of anti-asylum measures in the definition of spaces of precariousness allows us to identify what Edward Soja calls "the political

organization of space.” Soja’s idea of spatial (in)justice maintains that wealth and poverty are geographically distributed along the lines of class, race, and gender. These forces determine what he calls “spatial injustice,” which is “created through the biases imposed on certain populations because of their geographical location” (2009: 3). For him, this phenomenon is the “discrimination of location,” which “is fundamental in the production of spatial injustice and the creation of lasting spatial structures of privilege and advantage” (3). While Soja’s examples go from the use of the law for urban apartheid and residential segregation to militarization, I think that national borders and the laws that define mobility, such as asylum, deportation, visas, etc., are key for creating spaces of injustice. The war against asylum is creating a local discrimination against asylum-seekers, deportees, and global migrants in border cities like Tijuana.

In the same way, the discrimination based on location is insufficient for describing this situation because the radicalization of poverty in and of itself is not enough to illustrate the restrictions to subjects’ possibilities for action. In the context of global forced migration, agency is defined with what Alice Elliot (2016) calls “forceful hope.” The laws use a series of legal categories that simultaneously include some forced migrants while excluding most of them: labels like “asylum-seeker,” “convention refugee,” and “persons who require protection.” On a subjective level, these labels are never clear for the subjects. In a very brief but powerful article, anthropologist Alice Elliot (2016) questioned the legitimacy of distinguishing among these different kinds of forced migrants, and between them and the notion of economic migrant. She points out that young white Europeans travel without anyone supposing they are economic immigrants. However, the reasons behind the journey of racialized individuals from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are always questioned. She states that while forces such as “hope,” “war,” or “a desire to travel” are not the same, they create “paradoxical hierarchies and artificial distinctions” because these forces are generally superimposed on the narratives of migration (Elliot, 2016).

She then defends a different approach to forced migration, one that does not take into consideration desperation, but rather hope for the future, based on these narratives that tell stories of war, violence, but also of hope, a desperate “forced hope.” I think that Elliot’s “forced hope” summarizes very well the interaction among the subjective and structural causes of forced migration. However, its importance goes beyond explaining the push and pull factors

involved in conventional migration studies. Forced hope is the subjective basis for the precarious spaces' continuing to exist. As explained above, it is a kind of painful, desperate optimism produced amidst desperation, suffering, and disappointment. Forced hope is what motivates migrants onward on their journey. Those who remain trapped on the deportation and asylum waiting lists are caught in the centripetal forces of the vortex of precariousness, but in the context of the interruption of their migratory project, they enter the vortex as waste, as disposable subjects, whose death is no longer productive. This is why "pockets of disposability" describes these spaces better in the context of global forced migration.

The pockets of disposability are receptacles for persons rejected in the migratory administration, a surplus of the world's population, you could say, a specialization that Henry A. Giroux calls the "machinery of disposability." He writes, "What has emerged in this new historical conjuncture is an intensification of the practice of disposability in which more and more individuals and groups are now considered excess, consigned to zones of abandonment, surveillance, and incarceration" (2014). Deportees, persons forced to flee from natural disasters like the Haitians, and from unimaginable violence in their countries of origin, like the Central Americans, but also the Mexicans, become disposable. They are human waste on Mexico's trash heaps and in its drainage systems, at the port of entry of one of the richest nations in the world.

## **Conclusions and Epilogue: Open-Air Jails in Mexico and the World**

The pockets of disposability are, then, areas of spatial injustice where vulnerable populations defined by their nationality, class, race, and gender are forced to live in inhuman living conditions and work in illegal labor markets. It is a radicalized version of what sociologists call poverty pockets, that is, neighborhoods where the extremely poor tend to be herded into ghettos even as prosperity around them grows (Mohda et al., 2016). They are part of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Card, 2019) calls "geographies of racial capitalism," that is the creation of mass imprisonment for the exploitation of blacks and other ethnic minorities for the reproduction of an economic system that

permanently favors whites and subordinate minorities (Giroux, 2014). Pockets of disposability are, in fact, open-air jails for disposable forced migrants.

However, Tijuana is not the only place in Mexico where pockets of disposability are being created. Other border cities along the Rio Grande are becoming spaces where the United States disposes of asylum-seekers (Kao and Lu, 2019). Mexicali, San Luis Colorado, Nogales, Agua Prieta, Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Acuña, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Miguel Alemán, Matamoros, and Reynosa: the majority of these cities are on the Mexico Travel Advisory list (Department of State, 2020). Therefore, in addition to privation, asylum-seekers are constantly subjected to crime (kidnapping, smuggling, forced labor for criminal organizations, and murder) and disease, due to the lack of sanitary measures, as well as the lack of access to social services and health care in general. These places are also occupied by homeless people (Aviña Cerecer, 2020). Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, one of the country's deadliest cities, especially for women, has received 11,500 migrants, including deported Mexicans (Gallegos, 2018), Honduran asylum-seekers, and Cubans. Only 850 of them are living in shelters.

Nor are the pockets of disposability exclusive to the border between the United States and Mexico. These places where the rich dispose of asylum-seekers, deportees, and migrants in general can be found the world over. They exist in places where desperation meets up with hope, such as Venezuela's borders with Colombia and Brazil, as well as in cities where rich countries export their migratory borders, cities like Athens. With regard to the Venezuelan crisis, 95 percent of its 1.2 million migrants go through Cúcuta, Colombia. They set up on river banks and hills, in small cardboard houses or improvised tents without any kind of sanitation services. They work in the informal sector, and, if they were women or girls, in prostitution. Venezuelans also migrate to Brazil through Roraima, where 40,000 have crossed and have been victims of xenophobic attacks.

Finally, thousands of migrants are trapped in Athens because the European Union's asylum and migratory directives force Greece to receive their visa and asylum applications. Many of them have settled in the anarchist neighborhood of Exarchia. Locals and migrants share spaces peacefully, but drug traffickers have recently taken over the area, and the government blames the migrants.

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