

Violence and value in the migratory passage through Central America: The Cadereyta massacre (2012) and the struggle to have the bodies returned

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Abstract

This article shows the relationships laden with violence within the dynamics of cross-border mobility from the history of nine Hondurans and their grieving families. The case occurs in the broader context of the crude contemporary production of the Central America–Mexico migratory corridor, as well as the different forms of conflict that emerge around it. This context is marked by a logic of terror and death that becomes a structuring condition of the contemporary dispute for space, especially in the border areas, among diverse actors that include the state, organized crime, and migratory movements. In this transnational field, the dispute for space, rather than for the control of a perimeter territory, takes place around the control of certain specific circulation dynamics that are vertebral in the regional configuration of the capitalist global model: the movement of people and goods. These complex and dynamic territorialization processes are taking place along with the dynamic configuration of sovereignty, in which the operation of organized crime, migratory mobility, and the processes of formation of the state define a field of power characterized by a logic of war.

Keywords

Central American migration, massacre, organized crime, violence

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Introduction

At first light on 13 May 2012, a desolate stretch of the Monterrey–Reynosa federal highway revealed itself to be the scene of yet another massacre. Forty-nine human torsos lay in a heap upon the tarmac, “shorn of hands and feet” after “a tremendous amount of hacking” and “dumped” on the road like an art installation of bodily remains (Moore, 2012: 67). Meanwhile, nine families from central Honduras had spent several days worrying about their sons, brothers, and husbands, having heard nothing from them during their passage through Mexico. They had started the journey north a month earlier, in search of opportunities to escape from poverty and provide decent housing and education for their children. The mothers, sisters, and wives of the migrants went to the Honduran foreign ministry to report the loss of contact and their suspicions that their relatives might be among the victims of the massacre. Until that point, they had known each other only as neighbors, but they would soon start a process of organization that would unite them in shared pain and struggle.

The massacre, the events that led the nine Hondurans to be counted among its victims, and the process of organization and campaigning undertaken by their relatives before the Honduran and Mexican states are all evidence of the same transnational social situation. The cartography of disappearances in Mexico reveals an overlap with migration routes and the territories of organized crime, manifested by a sparse border security regime managed by the state (Pallitto and Heyman, 2008) and a system for capturing and capitalizing on mobility that is linked to organized crime but that operates with state collusion (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos [CIDH], 2015; Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos [CNDH], 2011; Comité de Familiares de Migrantes Fallecidos y Desaparecidos de El Salvador [COFAMIDE] et al., 2012; Izcara Palacios, 2016b). These complementary forces carve up the space to divert, steer, contain, and secure labor/displacement power from migration flows and to extract value from them.

The joint analysis of the massacre and trajectories of mobility enables us to trace the lines of force involved in the violent, conflict-riven production of migration processes, as well as the contours of the contested territory that emerges from these lines. These forces can be divided into two main categories: *forms of violence* and *forms of value*. These serve as a central thread that demonstrates the continuity, beyond national borders, of the diverse moments in which migration is socially produced, including processes of organization and resistance by subaltern sectors that experience the victimization and social pain that accompany migration processes in the region today.

This *value–violence continuum* (Salazar Araya, 2019) shapes migration experiences. My thesis here is that, in the migration processes analyzed, violence acts as a catalyst in the extraction of diverse forms of social and economic values from the migrant population in transit. There is a fundamental connection between forms of violence and value chains, given that the former are a foundational logic in the social production of migration. These experiences are connected to broader processes of dispute over territory and over the sovereignty of the bodies and goods that circulate within it. My argument is grounded in a conceptual difference between *value* and *values* (or forms of value). The former is more closely related to what David Graeber (2001) calls “the economic sense” of the category of value, which serves in this article to analyze the role of the body and

movement in the migration processes under study. The latter denotes a broad sense of everything that is socially meaningful and desirable, “the way in which actions become meaningful [. . .] by being incorporated in some larger, social totality” (Graeber, 2001: ix, xii).

This case study is focused on the context of the Central America–Mexico migration corridor (Salazar Araya, 2017) and the forms of conflict that emerge around it, marked by logics of terror and death (Mbembe, 2003). This is a structuring condition in the contemporary dispute over space (Haesbaert, 2011)—especially in border areas (Kearney, 2009)—between a range of actors that includes the state, organized crime, and migration flows. In this field of transnational power (Jiménez, 2010), the dispute is about more than the control of a bounded territory; it revolves around the control of dynamics of circulation that are central to the regional configuration of the global capitalist model: those involving people and goods. These dynamics give rise to complex processes of territorialization (Giménez, 2001; Haesbaert, 2011) associated with the dynamic configuration of sovereignty, in which the operation of organized crime, migratory mobility, and processes of state formation define a field of power that is characterized by a logic of war.

This article was produced within the framework of a PhD research project in social anthropology, and the empirical material was generated between 2014 and 2015 during three fieldwork periods of 4 months each: two in Honduras and one in the southwest Mexican border. In Honduras, fieldwork was conducted with three committees for relatives of disappeared migrants I was involved in and helped with supported documentation and search processes. In one case, I accompanied the committee through the process of establishing itself as an organization. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation; the identities of the people involved have been protected, but the names of the organizations have been maintained, at their members’ request.

The massacre: Sovereignty and necropolitics

“They didn’t find the head,” they told me. “They’re incomplete. They didn’t find the hands. They didn’t find the feet.” What is there then? (Blanca Coto, aunt of one of the victims of the Cadereyta massacre, 18 June 2014)

[Did they ask for a ransom?] J: No. B: No, they never called. [But then, why did they take them?] J: I don’t know . . . B: That’s the question . . . J: Because nobody asked for a ransom. When they asked [for money], they were still settled in the [safe] house. [. . .] That’s what I ask myself. . . . Why did they kill them? (Juana López and Blanca Coto, wife and aunt of two of the victims, 18 June 2014)

On 22 May, federal authorities arrested Daniel de Jesús Elizondo Ramírez, “*El Loco*” [The Madman], as the author of the Cadereyta massacre. He stated that the killing had been ordered by Heriberto Lazcano, “*El Lazca*,” Miguel Ángel Treviño, “*El Z40*,” and “*El Morro*” [The Kid], then leader of the Los Zetas cartel in Nuevo León. What had initially been attributed to a settling of scores between Los Zetas and the Cartel del Golfo was some days later found to be a tactical action by Los Zetas intended to incriminate rival criminal organizations. The victims were therefore not narco foot soldiers but migrants.¹

When the massacre occurred, the relatives were still not sure whether their sons and brothers were among the victims. It would be toward the end of 2013, over a year and a half later, that they would receive official notification of their deaths. During this period, their family members were considered disappeared, although rumors of their deaths were already circulating. The first contacts and exchanges between the relatives laid the foundation for the process of recognizing their shared pain and understanding the circumstances in which their victimization had occurred. That was the starting point of a more arduous political process that was driven, in large part, by the mothers, wives, sisters, and brothers of those who had been massacred:

[This] is a small town. [. . .] Carmen and I would see each other and we'd talk about what happened. We started to come together and we'd ask each other questions . . . In that time from May 2012 through August 2013, we were misled. [. . .] The state didn't dare [give us any information] for political reasons, because 2012 was a year of primary elections and 2013 was a general-election year [. . .], so they were hiding information. [. . .] They were afraid of a crisis, because one person dying is not the same as forty-nine dying and being mutilated, and in the circumstances in which they died, well, it wasn't convenient for the state to bring us our relatives, and we started to join together, not as a result of organization but out of a kinship formed through pain. That led us to start to organize, which is how COFAMICENH² came to be. (Memo Santos, brother of one of the victims, 20 June 2014)

At the current point in the Mexican social conflict, the device of the massacre has been used as a technology of violence in a wide range of contexts and situations, showing itself to be one of the most effective technologies for weakening the enemy and generating conditions of terror that enable a strategic display to be made or tactical objectives to be met (Moore, 2012).³ It is a mechanism of spatial control operating within the framework of an economy of violence (Baczko et al., 2017),⁴ which is a condition that structures the transnational conflictuality associated with migration processes. Specifically, the area bordering the United States has emerged as a space of contention and administration of flows through biopolitics and necropolitics that range from the control/monitoring of bodies in movement (González Herrera, 2008; Heyman, 2008) to their direct (Kovic, 2013; Magaña, 2014; Reineke and Martínez, 2014; Reynolds, 2014) or indirect (De León, 2015) extermination.

The scene of the Cadereyta massacre was complex, both in the message it communicated and in how it was produced, from the hookup with the *coyote*⁵ and the capture of the bodies, through their torture and dismemberment, to the arrangement of the torsos on the highway. It became a geosymbol (Giménez, 2001) of territorialization and control of the border area and of the movement of bodies and goods, marking both the body and the territory. For Elsa Blair (2004), “the messages left behind after the massacre are not limited to the codes written upon the body [but] extend to the geographical physical space where it occurs” (pp. 172–173).⁶ Meanwhile, Allen Feldman (1999) has shown that the sites used for perpetrating massacres, as well as the places in which the bodies are left, carry and produce meaning.

The removal of the hands and feet pointed to control over mobility/immobility, which, together with the arrangement of the mound of bodies on the road, resulted in a violent codification of the body and a declamatory usage thereof, which could be captured by the

phrase “no money, no passage.” Actions such as these have a twofold objective: controlling/diverting the border-crossing routes to escape the attention of the authorities, and sending a message to *polleros* and migrants that use of the space must be paid for (Martínez, 2012).⁷ This reflects a rationality that seeks to guarantee the free circulation of criminal capital through a normative imposition aimed at securing control of the cross-border territory. The configuration of this border involves a dispute that demonstrates the lawmaking effect of violence (Benjamin, 2007: 113–138), as part of the dynamic and contingent formation of sovereignty (Agnew, 2005; Stepputat, 2012, 2015).

Elsa Blair (2004) has posited that the massacre expresses a form of “total destruction” and “theatricalization of excess” (p. 168), which provides a means for exploring the strategic role it plays within a wider economy of violence, as a factual and discursive mechanism of territorial control. For Blair (2004),

the massacre is the bearer of a greater—that is, excessive—degree of violence [. . .]. The aggressors turn the victim’s body into a place, a scene of the execution of ritual violence. [. . .] We are presented with a form of violence written on bodies. (p. 172; original emphasis)

In geopolitical terms, these forms of violence operate on scales that range from the body to the state, but always within the framework of a process of producing borders and sovereignty and of control over patterns of circulation and mobility. The situation displays elements of what Achille Mbembe terms military operations in “the age of global mobility,” in which the “exercise of the right to kill” is no longer the monopoly of states nor the function of the “regular army” alone; instead, the opposing actors make up a “patchwork” of “overlapping and incomplete rights to rule” (2003: 31; see also Stepputat, 2012, 2015).

The way in which the Cadereyta massacre was located distinguishes it from those perpetrated in the context of Central American civil wars in the 1970s and 1980s (Binford, 1997; Equipo de Antropología Forense de Guatemala [EAFG], 1997; Falla, 1983, 2011; Hale, 1997; Manz, 2004) or in southern Mexico more recently (Melenotte, 2014). The latter had the tactical objective of weakening the enemy by exterminating its support bases and spreading terror among the population, meaning that their scenes tended to be specifically oriented toward these communities, depending on the cartography of the conflict in question. However, in the Cadereyta massacre, more than mere control over territorial perimeters to fence in the enemy, the relocation of the violent act enabled the perpetrators to build sovereignty in a field of power vying for the control of space and the circulation of bodies/goods, along with associated forms of value.

Therefore, Juana’s question “why did they kill them?” is reformulated by Blanca as “there were no hands, feet, or head . . . What could Los Zetas have done with those parts?” (18 June 2014), demonstrating how, through the corporal, the massacre is connected with the economy of violence associated with migration processes and is territorialized in arrangements of sovereignty that go beyond those delimited by the nation state. All such arrangements involve violent processes of value-generation⁸ on the basis of the mobility of bodies and their displacement power, in a double sense. On the one hand, they are connected to criminal networks’ circuits of capitalization, which control the circulation of people and goods. On the other hand, they are linked to the constitution

of spaces that are appropriated for territorialization by criminal actors looking to establish, albeit temporarily, forms of sovereignty over border areas.

Violence and value on the borders

They left on Friday, 13 April 2012. None of them had told anyone; they decided to keep their plans secret, and would only contact their families when they reached Mexico. They wanted to prevent their families from holding them back or trying to dissuade them. Carla Flores, mother of Jorge Armando, one of the nine, recalls how the news spread quickly between relatives and neighbors on the day they left:

I said to myself that he was working, because people told me they had seen him, then when they told me . . . I didn't . . . [her voice quivers] I didn't believe he had gone. I said—he would have told me, he would have said goodbye to me—but he didn't tell anyone. (19 June 2014)

Like other mothers of the victims, Carla described her son's situation as desperate, that is, how she believes Jorge experienced the combination of privations and needs to which many of the nine victims' relatives allude. "What you didn't provide for your children, they wanted to provide for theirs. That's what makes them leave, they feel helpless" (19 June 2014). Rather than resulting from a situation of direct violence or extortion, Jorge's exit was akin to an escape toward a place where he could meet his needs. After all, people are not only expelled from Central America by necessity, precarity, violence, and dispossession (Sandoval García, 2016); they are also guided by their own will, facing up to the conditions that oblige them to leave and creating strategies to do so.⁹ Luís Santos Castillo was another member of the nine. He had spent time in the United States between 2006 and 2010 after several unsuccessful migration attempts. While he was a barber in Honduras, he worked in construction in the United States. Since returning in 2010, he had talked about going back, but Juana López—his wife and the mother of his youngest child—shot down the idea: "Don't even bring that up," she would say. For Memo, his brother, precarity and hope went hand in hand and were at the root of Luís' decision:

Everyone has their dream, right? I think he held onto some kind of dream. [. . .] Sometimes circumstances make you migrate, and I believe he had circumstances that he needed to deal with and that's why he went. [. . .] Building a house is difficult and everyone dreams about having a house. [. . .] He didn't have a house, he didn't have anywhere to set up a house, and to have a family, you need a house that's your own. Can you imagine renting? It's too much! [. . .] And besides, there's no work because the industry here is foreign . . . You're producing for others and all you're left with are your needs; that's what makes us migrate. So that's what Luís is, Luís is a need. (Memo Santos, 18 June 2014)

The picture of privations and needs painted by Memo is clear, as are the circumstances that makes "dealing with them" unfeasible. Luís is a need, and the answer to need is work. Nevertheless, the story of Luís and his companions is very different from that of the thousands of "economic" migrants who join one of the labor markets in the "North" each year. The forms of exploitation and value-extraction that marked the journey of the

nine were of a very distinct nature, while being no less central to the production of the migratory phenomena under study. The first types of work encountered by those who travel by “irregular” means are linked to the production of their own mobility. Their labor power is initially realized as *displacement power*, putting migrants into circulation as living work and constituting them as objects of their labor: upon engaging in mobility, they put their bodies to work, transforming them into a condition suitable for value-generation. It is precisely upon the bodily condition and its displacement power that violent mechanisms of value-extraction are applied. These are the mechanisms that operate along a significant proportion of the migration route and which were exercised in such a brutal manner upon Luís, Jorge, and the others.

They set off as a group, guided by their *coyote*, determined to take on a route plagued with risks and obstacles. In addition to payments to the *coyote* and the costs inherent to the route, as soon as they reached the first border crossings, the group had to deal with attempts by multiple actors to capitalize upon their journey, whether by directly siphoning off their scarce resources (rent-seeking) or by generating value from their vulnerability and defenselessness through violent intervention upon their bodies.¹⁰ They crossed through Agua Caliente, in the west of the country, very close to the border with El Salvador. On the Honduran side, there is a patchwork of businesses, from food sellers to short-stay hostels, clothes stores, convenience stores, and telephone booths for making international calls. Despite the Central America-4 (CA-4) agreement,¹¹ a range of value-generation and rent-seeking mechanisms operate along the border between Honduras and Guatemala, fueled by irregular border crossings, and these are not only performed by criminal actors. According to Martín Hipólito Euseba, the migration official responsible for Agua Caliente, although

they aren't authorized to detain anyone for not having a Mexican visa [because] that is not stipulated by the law [. . .] the recent guidelines from our superiors are that if someone says they are going to Mexico and don't have a visa, you block their passage. (14 April 2015)

A kind of “official prejudice” based on physiognomic, aesthetic, and class-based stereotypes (Heyman, 2008) is established as an implicit protocol for regulating crossings, operating as an extralegal mechanism of securitization.¹² These official yet informal measures also generate favorable conditions for local criminal networks to effectively deploy forms of value-extraction.

After crossing the border with Guatemala, the group made the journey toward the capital and from there to the Mexican border, which involves extortionate payments, especially for transport and accommodation (Picture 1). Once they had reached Tecún Umán—the Guatemalan city separated from the Mexican city of Ciudad Hidalgo by the Suchiate River—the group had to tackle another border crossing. Most of the migration flow crossing this border does so via one of the two rivers that run along a significant proportion of its length: the Suchiate and the Usumacinta. The former is used in what is called the “Pacific route,” while the latter marks the beginning of the “Gulf route” (Casillas, 2008; Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México [ITAM], 2014). In Tecún Umán, there is a hectic, unrelenting atmosphere: tricycle taxis, migrants, traders, and shoppers cross the border on a daily basis, forming dynamics of circulation and exchange



Picture 1. Cross-border bridge 1, Guatemala–Mexico.
Author's own photograph, April 2014.

that have been in place for years. In the middle of these flows stands the first of the three cross-border bridges that officially connect the two countries. Its geometric straightness and solid appearance are in stark contrast with the turbulent circulation that occurs every day under its shadow.

The accommodation between security and value-extraction mechanisms is more complex in this border area than at the Honduras–Guatemala border. The dynamics of irregular river crossings are normalized; one might even call them institutionalized. In the words of an agent from Ciudad Hidalgo's *Fiscalía Especializada en Delitos Cometidos contra Migrantes* (Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Committed against Migrants), Conrado Espinoza, “we’re awash with irregular crossings here. [. . .] Nobody has any intention of controlling it; the municipal government itself built them ramps to facilitate it all. [. . .] It suits the [municipality of] Suchiate.” This “illegally legal” dynamic, as the official himself described it, is connected to various transnational markets of people and goods that are controlled by local associations of traders, transportation companies, hoteliers, and warehouse owners. As María del Carmen García Aguilar and María Tarrío García (2008) have pointed out, “a long and porous border such as that in the south of Mexico has enabled the expansion of an economy that revolves around the phenomenon of irregular migration” (p. 139).

Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that what initially appears to be a failure of border control is actually how regulation is performed in the area: a set of informal rules rooted in everyday practice, concerning the forms, costs, and contents of regular, irregular, and illegal border crossings (Picture 2). The *border effect*, as a marker of nation states’ sovereignty, is produced in a disaggregated manner (Anguiano and Trejo Peña, 2007; Castillo, 2005; Fernández, 2010; González Herrera, 2008; Hernández, 2008; Kearney, 2009; Pallitto and Heyman, 2008; Sandoval, 2004). And so border control requires uncontrolled areas, because the value-generation, value-extraction, and



Picture 2. Crossing of people and goods next to the border control.
Author's own photograph, April 2014.

rent-seeking mechanisms connected to migratory and commercial dynamics (Rojas Pérez, 2014) are important enough for state control to recede, establishing itself further back within the territory. This allows border regulation to become the product of collusion between a wider and more diverse group of actors, all of whom are central to the social production of migratory mobility.

After the crossing, the group had to navigate this border securitization regime, which operates through control and surveillance mechanisms that are not tethered to the line dividing the two countries (Kron, 2011). In the words of agent Espinoza, for the “irregular” migrant, “the problem is not the border, the problem is the checkpoint” (7 May 2015).¹³ According to their relatives, once the migrants managed to get through the zone of checkpoints and control posts in Chiapas, the journey—probably by bus—was smoother. Most of the nine migrants’ mothers and wives received only a couple of calls: first from the Mexican southern border, a few days after their departure, and then in early May, when they were about to cross the northern border. That was the last time they spoke to their sons and husbands, who called from Tamaulipas asking their relatives to send them money; they were hidden in a house along with fifty other people. Carla recalls that Jorge had been calling her “every two or three days.” The last time was on 5 May, “a Saturday at 11 am, and he said to me—mom, I haven’t been calling you because I’m in a very dangerous place.” She asked him if he had “*pistillo*” (money), and his reply was “I don’t have a cent,” “but don’t worry,” before adding, “I’ll call you on Monday for you to send me some.” “Well, I kept waiting . . .” she remembered with a far-off look, “in the end, that call never came” (19 June 2014).

Neither the families nor the Mexican investigation agencies have been able to shed light on the events that occurred between their stay in the “safe house” in Tamaulipas and the arrangement of their remains on the highway to Reynosa. There are only a few scraps

of information, obtained from third parties by two of the mothers. Irma Hernández, mother of Edgar Manuel Ojeda Hernández, another of the victim, recalled that during the passage through Mexico her son was in contact with one of his sisters, who was in the United States. Shortly before the massacre, Irma received a phone call: “Mom, listen, Edgar called me saying he needed money to pay Los Zetas” to cross. The next week she received another call, but the message was very different: “She said—Mom, listen, we have some bad news—‘Uh-huh,’ I said, ‘What happened?’—Edgar, they . . . they kidnapped him. An armed group came and they put them in a car and took them away” (19 June 2014).

The opacity of the events shows how the lines between trafficking networks, *coyote* services, and the actions of organized crime are very blurred in border areas (Izcara Palacios, 2016). The other piece of information was obtained by Juana López, the wife of Luís, via “Tito,” one of the relatives of the *coyote* who was also traveling with the intention of crossing to the United States and who survived the killing in circumstances that remain unclear. In a casual encounter with Tito during a visit to a neighboring town, Juana bombarded him with questions, and he gave her more details about how her husband and the others died:

He told me that first he heard shouting [in the safe house], and after that . . . he didn't hear anything . . . it was all quiet and you could see traces of blood. [So, they didn't take them away from there?] Some they did, because they told them to “get in, get in.” I think they killed some of them there, and they went far away to kill the others and dump the remains. (18 June 2014)

According to reports on migrant kidnappings, the most common modes of operation used by people traffickers are taking the groups to safe houses or handing them straight over to groups like Los Zetas (Calleros Alarcón, 2013: 324). The relatives' version of events was just that: “The *coyote* handed them over.” Blame was assigned by virtue of his survival; for them, this was the only explanation for his not having been killed along with the rest. Carmen cannot forget the moment she found out about the death of her son:

My daughter delivered the news; they fell apart, all of them . . . but in that instant, I could feel God's strength and I said to them, “No, no, no, I don't want any crying, I don't believe this news. Let's wait.” (18 June 2014)

But, at the same time,

overcome by the sadness, she prayed and fasted for three days, begging God to bring her boy to her, healthy and whole. [. . .] On one of those nights, she had a dream about him in which he had no arms. [. . .] Giving in, she changed her prayer: Lord, bring him to me as he is.¹⁴

Society against the state: The disappearance and return of the bodies

Sometimes when I look at Marina, the teacher, I say, “The way I'm suffering, she's suffering too” [between sobs]. And not just her; we are all suffering . . . That is the consolation you feel. [. . .] We at least have the hope that they're going to bring them to us, even if not how we would

have liked. [. . .] We've spent two years, but other people have spent fifteen, twenty, as many as thirty years . . . without ever finding out about their children. [. . .] That is the consolation; that it's not just one person going through that pain—there are many. (Carla Flores, mother of one of the victims of the Cadereyta massacre, 19 June 2014)

In Mexico, people do not disappear solely because of the action or negligence of the state; they also disappear because of its indifference. A person's disappearance is not usually registered, and when the state does register it, the process is performed poorly (Amnesty International, 2010; Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña de Tlachinollan et al., 2019; CNDH, 2014; COFAMIDE et al., 2012; Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho [FJEDD], 2014; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [IACHR], 2015, 2018, 2019). This was the first dispute in which the group of relatives found themselves when they put their campaigning strategies into action: the first step was to bring visibility to the victims' absence. They had to deal with mechanisms of meta-disappearance, those that obscure the statistical expression of criminal erasure technologies and thereby disappear the disappeared.¹⁵ In this sense, searching for a disappeared individual implies, before locating their biological material, recovering their person, along with the social, community, and kinship network that knows them, cares for them, and remembers them so as to position oneself discursively and politically (Blair, 2002) in opposition to those who would cover up their absence.

Search efforts are also a way of appropriating space, an effort of visibilization that shines a light on the bleakest corners of the migrant territory: its graves, its ranches, its brothels, its garbage dumps, and so on. The production of this space of visibility is not purely discursive or symbolic but involves the materialization of bodily remains and genetic profiles and, through these, identities and people. As Roberto González Villarreal (2012) has argued, "a disappeared person is someone who has gained the recognition of an uncertain destiny, [. . .] the result of a battle [. . .] between the politics of memory and techniques of obfuscation" (p. 31). Why is it a consolation that the victims of disappearance are "many," as Carla said in the epigraph? It is not due to comfort in shared misery or a senseless piling up of social pain. Rather, it is because this machine of broken bodies and obscured identities generates its opposite: a force of vitality and visibility that returns to the migrant territory to reappropriate its sites and to materially and discursively reconstruct the disappeared person, as the touchstone of their struggle and their subjective self-constitution.

This is the battle in which the relatives found themselves when, ignored by the Mexican and Honduran states, they placed the memory of the victims in the public space, as a means of bringing visibility to their disappeared relatives (Blair, 2002). Using these remembrance strategies (Da Silva Catela, 1998) in their public discourse socially reconstructs the identity of the disappeared and generates the conditions of possibility for their return.¹⁶ According to Carla, "When they told me to go to the foreign ministry, I said no [. . .] but there came a day when I felt so desperate that I said to Hilda, 'What shall we do?'" The mother and daughter-in-law came to a decision and went there together, but

I saw that it didn't matter to them at the foreign ministry, they didn't give us any hope, they just said—the doctor is away on a trip; if she wants to, she will do them [the DNA tests] for you, but this is a long process. (19 June 2014)

The first way in which the relatives interacted with the Honduran state was through its absence. As one of the mothers said, in outrage, “We haven’t had any response from the [government] here . . . They haven’t helped us. If they had played their part, we might have gotten through this misery some time ago” (Irma Hernández, 19 June 2014).

Their awareness of the state’s indifference led to them gradually consolidating a critical stance that materialized in complaints, demands, and the intention to “set precedents.” The families circulated the first information on the case, demonstrating more efficient coordination and communication than the Honduran state seemed to be exercising in its relations with the Mexican state. According to Memo Santos, the first rumors began with the news of the massacre and continued with the timid testimonies of the three survivors (the *coyote* and two of his relatives), who, a few weeks after the events, had already returned to Honduras. The investigative work fell to the relatives: “We were the ones pulling everything together”:

They didn’t give us an official notification; it all started on the grapevine. The news appeared on an international TV channel that there had been a massacre in Cadereyta and that some Hondurans may have been involved. Then an identity photo appeared somewhere and things started to get connected together. But the government seems very incompetent when it comes to looking for information. [. . .] [It was] some people who were close by, who knew people or had contacts there who gave us information. [. . .] In other words, we knew before the Honduran state informed us. (20 June 2014)

In the end, it was the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF, the Argentinian Forensic Anthropology Team)¹⁷ that collected the DNA samples that led to the identification of the genetic profiles. When the families were finally notified that their sons, brothers, and husbands were among the deceased, almost a year after the massacre, they started to receive support from COFAMIPRO.¹⁸ The first task was to locate the remains because, ironically, in spite of the notifications, nobody knew where they were: “First they told us that they were in the forensic morgue, and later we realized that they had buried them. [. . .] We had to ask permission for their exhumation” (María Guadalupe Castillo, 15 June 2014). Leti, Luís Santos’ sister, recalled that:

in the [Honduran] foreign ministry, they always said that they were in the morgue, that we shouldn’t worry because they were going to bring them. [. . .] It’s very tough when [later] they tell you that they’re in a common, mass grave. (15 June 2014)

The process involved both organizing internally and struggling with the Honduran and Mexican states in an administrative, legal, and political journey that brought them before medical examiners, diplomats, politicians, lawyers, and bureaucrats. What began as a collective formed almost intuitively in response to pain gradually evolved until it crystallized in a social organization that was becoming increasingly aware of the circumstances in which the events had taken place and increasingly willing to hold the authorities to account. We can examine the group’s relationship with the Honduran government by looking at its dealings with the authority with which it had the most contact: the foreign ministry. For the group, the state seemed strangely close (even personalized) and also violently indifferent. Memo Santos identified the primary obstacles as “time and the

indifference of one state official” (15 June 2014): Ivonne Bonilla, director of consular affairs and ex-wife of then-president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández¹⁹:

We didn't meet the famous consular director because she was away on a trip; her assistant met us, but was on the defensive, saying—ah, but we'd already made this request. We replied—yes, but there has been no response. They gave us the story we're all familiar with: this procedure here and that procedure there. [. . .] I challenged the assistant, saying that we wanted a response in writing. [. . .] I was really happy about the people who came with me. I've gone alone before and it's very difficult, but this time I felt strong. (Memo Santos, 18 May 2014)

It is precisely before this personal, everyday face of the state (Abrams, 2015) that the power relations that feed into the mechanisms of covering up disappearances are revealed. While Hilda Gómez highlighted the role of those who had gone to represent the group, “because they speak for all of us,” Marina Murcia celebrated the fact that by “making demands [. . .] little by little they started paying attention and giving us responses.” In their visits to the foreign ministry, as well as introducing themselves as an organization rather than a group of relatives or individuals, their discourse became increasingly clear, critical, and assertive regarding what they considered their rights. At the same time, the collective started to better understand the state's codified language and to appropriate its bureaucratic procedures and statements.

As an organization, the collective was located in an ambiguous space, between critique of and dialogue with the state. After months of putting pressure on the foreign ministry, the group published the letter they had presented to Ms. Bonilla in a national newspaper and gave statements on one of the most watched television programs in Honduras. “That report was a bombshell; that was when they woke up” (Marina Murcia, 17 June 2014). In that letter, the group requested specific support for the repatriation: for the foreign ministry to cover the costs of transporting the bodies, to pay for the burials and funerals, to give medical and psychological assistance to the families, and to treat the bodies with dignity and respect throughout the event. Bearing in mind what happened during the repatriation of the Hondurans killed in the San Fernando massacre in 2010,²⁰ when politicians and civil servants gave speeches at the reception event, the group of relatives demanded that such an “invented and routinized public ritual of feigned remorse and forced forgiveness” (Scheper-Hughes, 1998: 127) must not take place:

I think that what our politicians like is to put on a show. We don't want them to put on a show with our relatives. [. . .] If none of them come that day, all the better. We don't want them, because they haven't helped us. [. . .] Suddenly, in this massacre they couldn't gain anything or draw attention to themselves politically, so that's why they haven't been there. [. . .] What we want is for them to understand what happened [some of the women start to cry silently]. We want our relatives to be honored, because they are people and they are worth so much. (Leti Santos, 19 June 2014)

Ensuring that the repatriation was performed with dignity was part of the struggle at the root of the group's political self-constitution. This was also evident in the complex spatial and symbolic movement for the return of the bodies: getting the remains in the mass grave onto the exhumation lists; managing to get them to the EAAF laboratories to

be codified as DNA and undergo tests; converting the genetic profile back into bureaucratic data and circulating it through administrative channels, diplomatic protocols, consular offices, and forensic examinations, all for the disappeared to emerge reconverted into identities and notifications. The final stage was to transfer the remains to Honduras, where they would socially regain their condition as a *person* through the ritual processes that would finally put an end to their liminal status.

By way of conclusion

Around migrant journeys is woven a transnational web of actors linked to organized crime, local delinquency, state offices and agencies, and a range of economic actors and business groups who contest and capitalize on the control and management of migratory mobility and extract value through the exploitation of migrants' displacement power or through violent inscription on their bodies. But the migrants respond with practices of discourse and mobility that shed light on the essential inequality of the field and the forms of violence through which it is constructed, while continuously contesting the way in which migration can be used to secure territorialization and social value-generation. Between the massacre and the organization of victims' families lies a continuum of forms of violence and value that are constructed through the migration experience itself.

The Cadereyta massacre can be understood as an act connected to a wider political economy of violence in which actors struggle for control of a border area associated with a security regime (Pallitto and Heyman, 2008) that is the basis of the dynamic configuration of sovereignty (Agnew, 2005; Stepputat, 2012, 2015). Two forms of violence stand out: one is of a direct, corporal nature and is associated with rent-seeking and value-extraction mechanisms. The other is of a symbolic nature, expressed as a form of representation and performative articulation of war and intended to generate a climate of terror (Di Méo, 1998: 47, cited in Haesbaert, 2011: 37) that feeds into mechanisms of classification and valuation (Kearney, 2004) and their forms of discrimination in border crossings (Heyman, 2008). Both are performed through the operations of, and even collusion between, state and criminal actors, who define an order based on "the generalized instrumentation of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations," through which people are selectively allowed to live or made to die (Mbembe, 2003: 14).

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, we could think of migration as a "dispositioning" that produces social corporalities cut across by forms of violence created by bodies disposed to flexible exploitation. The same economy of violence that has been built around the Central American population's circumstances of expulsion and flight extends along the migration route and is woven into a complex network of mobility management in which there is a paradoxical link between the capitalization and value-extraction operations of transnational organized crime and initiatives for the support, assistance, and defense of the migrant population. However, the latter are often overpowered by the dispositioning forces that configure this machinery of exploitation, which disgorges the remains of evermore exhausted, deceased, mutilated, and disappeared humans. This demonstrates the rich analytical potential of connecting the notions of field (Bourdieu, 2000) and territory (Haesbaert, 2011; Massey, 2009) within the framework of processes of transnational mobility that are marked by logics of violence, value, and sovereignty.

These processes have economic effects but also political ones, as, along with the “moment of disposition to and appropriation of work, [comes] the undermining of politic-ity” (Roux, 2002: 249). Corporalities that are produced struggle to restore their political status: they are aggravated subjects who are willing to exercise their agency to reappropriate space and their corporal condition. The relatives’ process of organization and campaigning is an example of the politicization and subjectivization that can result from social pain. A correlate of their kinship in pain is their awareness that the circumstances in which the massacre occurred were not coincidental, but had a structural dimension. That was when they pointed to the role of the state and of organized crime, recognizing these actors’ place in a field inhabited by forces that seek to gain control of their sons’ bodies and to control and silence the relatives. This demonstrates the importance of conceptualizing processes of territorialization beyond mobility “on the ground,” incorporating the symbolic dimension of the dispute over space and its representation. The committees’ discourse and their search and advocacy practices are themselves a process of territorialization, as well as their own process of political and subjective constitution.

In mid-July 2014, the bodies of the nine Hondurans were finally repatriated, against a backdrop of demands from the collective of families for the return to be performed in a dignified manner, and the cold conduct of the state bureaucracy.²¹ Months after the return and burial of the bodies, the group began working on documenting cases of migrant disappearances in their communities, and today it is one of the most active committees in Central America.

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Notes

1. I use the category of “victim” in line with the organizations’ decision to employ this term to refer to the murdered individuals and their relatives, as self-recognition of the pain caused by the crimes, and as the moral and political grounding for their demands and calls for reparation from the Mexican and Honduran states. For more on this issue, see Honneth (1996), Wieviorka (2003), Lefranc and Mathieu (2009), Fassin and Rechtman (2009), and Chaumont (2010).
2. Comité de Familiares de Migrantes Desaparecidos del Centro de Honduras (Central Honduras Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Migrants).

3. In Mexico, as in other countries in Latin America, massacres are not the exclusive practice of organized crime. The state has also been responsible for similar acts, despite having officially presented them as the result of confrontations. The incidents in Tlatlaya on 30 June 2014 and in Apatzingán on 6 January 2015 show how the confusion and opacity of the events, the control of the accounts by the political power, and conditions of impunity come together in events that provide evidence of the authorities' use of this technology.
4. Understood as "the relatively stable interactions (competition, cooperation, delegation) between actors capable of using violence or threatening it [. . .] around social, economic, and political stakes" (Baczko et al., 2017: 12).
5. "*Coyote*" and "*pollero*" are the names commonly given to those who offer the service of taking migrants to the United States. The quantity and quality of the services provided depend on the guide's background and fee. Recently, the background of the typical *coyote* has changed, with more direct links to organized crime becoming increasingly common. For further discussion, see Izcara Palacios (2015, 2016, 2017).
6. *Translator's note*: Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign-language material in this article are our own.
7. "They mutilated their bodies to turn them into a message." (<http://enelcamino.periodistas-deapie.org.mx/historia/masacre-de-cadereyta-cuando-el-dolor-es-impronunciable/>) For Federico Mastrogiovanni (2015), "The disappeared are usually used as messages. [. . .] If a cartel needs to resolve a problem with its rivals [. . .] someone will take those poor young people out of the safe houses and nobody will see them again until the next morning when they're found hanging from a bridge, or wrapped in a serape by the side of a road with a cardboard sign stuck to their chest with a knife." (p. 106)
8. *Value-generation* refers to mechanisms involving labor performed by the migrants, whether voluntary or forced, as part of the strategies and conditions used in negotiating their journey across the border (local labor markets or forced labor).
9. Migration flows are created by a wide range of factors, which, in the case of Central America, we can categorize as *historical baseline conditions* (precarity, dispossession, unemployment, state negligence) and *trigger conditions*, which have recently increased the intensity and volume of the flow (social violence, criminality, security policies).
10. *Rent-capture* operates directly upon a monetary value that has already been generated and that the migrants or their relatives have, as a resource for securing their journey across the border (theft and robbery, extortion of payments).
11. An area comprising the four countries in northern Central America that are parties to a freedom of movement agreement. The governments of these countries have been running a communications campaign for several years to draw attention to the freedom of movement agreement, in an attempt to contain the illegal payment mechanisms in operation at these points, particularly those run by *pasamojados*: locals who charge to take migrants through unofficial migration routes called *puntos ciegos* (literally, blind spots). According to migration official Martin Hipólito Euseba, the *pasamojados*' method is as follows: "When a person gets off the bus, they tell that person they don't need to go through immigration. They convince them and cart them off through *puntos ciegos* with the aim of demanding an illegal payment, between 100 and 200 lempiras. But it's . . . it's really just going sightseeing in the mountains! [He gives a farcical smile.] Because they drag them up there and they come out in Honduran territory—they don't even go to Guatemala!" (14 April 2015)
12. The notion of securitization is based on Buzan et al. (1998), Taureck (2006), and Šulovic (2010). It refers to discourses and policies aimed at tackling risks and threats (both external and internal) to protect the integrity of certain social values. Surveillance technologies are based on physical-cultural criteria for distinguishing between members of the population.

These enable classification–valuation mechanisms to be applied that differentially assign risk to each person (Pallitto and Heyman, 2008), allocating them a distinct place in the social field based on their racial and class status (Bourdieu, 2000; Pallitto and Heyman, 2008: 327–328). Octavio Guevara, head of migration officers on the Guatemalan side, gave this description regarding the profile of irregular migrants: “The simplest folk . . . I don’t want to put it this way, but . . . the poorest people . . . I’m not going to say it, but that’s how we identify people, when they arrive with their backpack . . .” (14 April 2015). As Robert Pallitto and Josiah Heyman (2008) have observed, “As rights affect the mobility of persons within and across national boundaries, risk categories similarly impact upon individuals’ ability to move. [. . .] These differentiations are often the product of discretionary judgments by humans, which are then operationalized in a particular form of security technology.” (p. 319)

13. As Pallitto and Heyman (2008) have noted, “the monitoring of movement, including specific techniques of identification, inspection, clearance, and surveillance, are diffusing from existing national borders to a more widely ‘distributed’ network of control points” (p. 316). The need to bypass the checkpoint involves a double payment for transportation (which already includes extortionate payments) and exposure to possible attacks on the diverted routes.
14. See: <https://enelcamino.piedepagina.mx/historia/masacre-de-cadereyta-cuando-el-dolor-es-impronunciable/>
15. These mechanisms operate through the absence or ineffectiveness of practices for pursuing justice, this being achieved through several techniques: (1) the generation of conditions that make reporting crimes difficult or impossible; (2) the generation of conditions that impede systematic registration and the creation of integrated and effective databases; and (3) the generation of an official media discourse that downplays the importance of the social circumstances surrounding the cases (Gibler, 2017; González Villarreal, 2012).
16. It was the mothers, sisters, and wives of the nine migrants who initiated the search and advocacy process. It is frequently the case that searches for disappeared individuals are led by women. For more on this point, see Bejarano (2002) and Varela Huerta (2012).
17. Founded in 1984 after the end of the Argentinian dictatorship (1976–1983) with the objective of performing searches for disappeared people. Today, they run projects across the world, including in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. See: <http://www.eaaf.org/>
18. The Comité de Familiares de Migrantes Desaparecidos de El Progreso (COFAMIPRO; El Progreso Committee for Relatives of Disappeared Migrants) is the first of its type in Central America. The support was psychosocial—helping improve conditions for the relatives’ mourning process and their personal and collective resilience—as well as legal and administrative—helping locate and repatriate the bodies.
19. See: <http://criterio.hn/nepotismo-impera-en-gobierno-de-juan-hernandez/>
20. This was one of the first migrant massacres in Mexico that entered public knowledge, exposing the extent of the violence that migrants experience. For further information, see Moore (2012), Varela Huerta (2017), and Aguayo (2017).
21. See also: <https://enelcamino.piedepagina.mx/historia/masacre-de-cadereyta-cuando-el-dolor-es-impronunciable/>

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