Accompanying the Migrant and Refugee: Reflections on Resilience

Mark Lusk and Perla Chaparro

Abstract: Traditional helping models have concerned themselves with assisting, fixing, and, at best, serving the client. While this may suffice for conventional circumstances, accompanying those whom we serve informs us more deeply of their lived experiences. This opens new perspectives in working with those who experience great adversity. The authors learned this strategy over a decade of work serving migrants and refugees from Mexico and Central America. It can be a useful strategy with a wide variety of client partners.

Keywords: migration, refugees, trauma, resilience

Hundreds of thousands of forced migrants have made the journey from Mexico and Latin America to the U.S.-Mexico border to escape severe hardship, adversity, trauma, and risk to life and limb. To the extent to which this heretofore largely invisible group of people was noticed at all, it has been to highlight their suffering, losses, and trauma. Yet, in a decade of working with this population, we have documented an enormous resiliency as exemplified by hope, faith, deep connections to culture, and social networks that sustained them through hardship. By *accompanying* them rather than "studying" them in a traditional sense, we have come to understand how to transcend models that seek to *fix* rather than *serve* this resilient population. Through the process of accompanying them, we have been able to share their narratives with scholars and the general public, work alongside them to advance their individual and collective causes, and educate the next generation of students about the risks and resiliencies of migrants here and worldwide.

Background

Circumstances during the last decade in Mexico and the Northern Triangle Central American countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have become so severe that a significant portion of the population of each country has internally migrated to another region or emigrated abroad, usually to the United States or Mexico, in search of safety, freedom from persecution, and the hope of an opportunity to raise a family in economic security. These individuals and families are *forced migrants*—they do not have a choice except to leave. To stay is to risk their lives. Moreover, if they are returned or deported to their country of origin, they believe that they will be killed or gravely harmed (Lusk & Galindo, 2017; Phillips, 2018).

Central America is a firestorm from which residents are fleeing. An international medical association has documented "unprecedented levels of violence outside a war zone" and states that: "Citizens are murdered with impunity, [and] kidnappings and extortion are daily occurrences. Non-state actors perpetuate insecurity and forcibly recruit individuals into their ranks, and use sexual violence as a tool of intimidation and control" (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2017, p. 8).

Unlike economic migrants, who travel in search of work, usually with the intent of returning to

their country of origin, the forced migrants from Central America report that they have left to escape threats to themselves or their families or have been victimized by severe crime, including abduction, homicide, forced conscription of family members into organized crime, human trafficking, rape, sexual violence, arson, or other grave threats. (Bermeo, 2018; Lusk & Chavez, 2016; Lusk & Galindo, 2017). These circumstances have led thousands of Mexicans and Central Americans to migrate northward in hopes of accessing entry into the United States. The United Nations reports significant increases in individuals who have fled Central America as refugees; there were 294,000 asylum-seekers and refugees during 2017, up from 18,000 in 2011 (Phillips, 2018). The number of migrants from the Central American triangle increased by 46% from 2007 to 2015 (Cohn, Passel, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2017). As the levels of violence have reached record proportions, so have the total number of migrants apprehended by authorities at the U.S.-Mexico border (Meyer & Pachico, 2018). In addition, the number of asylum requests by individuals fleeing Mesoamerica has grown considerably. Yet, asylum is granted rarely because asylum law is narrowly interpreted to protect only individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular group, but not individuals who are fleeing criminal organizations or extreme violence (Meyer & Pachico, 2018).

In the Central American triangle countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, there has been a growing number of people who have been displaced by the consequences of widespread organized crime, public unrest, and civic insecurity. Part of the problem is that tens of thousands of Central Americans who had been convicted of serious crimes in the United States were deported to their home countries, where they then became part of widespread organized crime, including gangs such as the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-19), which had originally been founded in Los Angeles, CA. There are currently 65,000 active gang members in El Salvador (Martinez, 2018). In addition, decades of civil war have destroyed much of the economic infrastructure, leaving thousands of people without any form of support and minimal access to schooling for boys and girls with the result that thousands of children are forced into gangs or are trafficked (Martinez, 2018). In many cases, there is no viable option for residents of the region to relocate within their own country, as the networks of organized crime are able to track them down and internal relocations can be dangerous (Knox, 2017). With the backdrop of crime and the absence of public safety, the threats to personal integrity are such that when combined with economic austerity, individuals feel compelled or forced to emigrate.

Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the Latin American region, has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Within the country, there are 190,000 internally displaced persons and refugees as a result of violence, extortion, threats, and forced recruitment by urban gangs (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2018). Guatemala, a similarly poor country, has a very high rate of outward emigration due to political instability, civil unrest, and violence. There are 242,000 internally displaced persons as a result of internal conflict in that country (CIA, 2018). El Salvador, a major transshipment country for illegal narcotics, has been troubled by the widespread effects of organized crime. According to the CIA (2018), 71,500 individuals are internally displaced or are domestic refugees. These factors stimulate forced migration abroad to the United States, and failing that, to Mexico as a country of destination rather than solely of transit (Phillips, 2018). Faced with predatory gangs, and in the absence of state protection in

their own country by the local or federal police authorities, migrants seek shelter and sanctuary in the exterior (Knox, 2017).

Even as immigration policy has hardened under the current administration's zero-tolerance policy, the flow of migrants continues unabated. Knowing that they are likely to be turned back at the border, rejected for asylum, and detained and deported, they keep coming because they see no viable alternative. Most asylum cases will be turned down; on average, around 80% of asylum applications from Central America and Mexico are denied, and those who seek asylum are usually imprisoned in immigration detention facilities (Grillo, 2018). Beginning in 2018, many of those who were seeking asylum have been forcibly separated from their children. The current administration has issued a number of executive orders in support of more aggressive immigration enforcement. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which has been authorized to hire 10,000 new officers, is fast-tracking anyone in violation of immigration laws and proceeding to their expedited removal (deportation). The agency is also disregarding any mitigating factors, such as lack of a criminal background, old age, or criminal victimization in deportation proceedings. In addition, state legislatures have enacted bills that empower local law enforcement to cooperate with federal authorities in pursuing unauthorized immigrants. In Texas, Senate Bill 4 authorizes local law enforcement to inquire about immigration status and to detain individuals and release them to federal immigration authorities (Hing, 2017). The purpose of these aggressive enforcement policies is to interdict and to deter immigration from Mexico and Central America. Nonetheless, because of the situation in the region, and despite knowing that children have been separated from their parents, unauthorized immigration from the region has not declined.

Encountering the Forced Migrant

Over the past eight years, a small team of researchers and students have interviewed and assisted forced migrants and refugees. In three waves of research, we have spoken and worked with over a hundred migrants as research participants. In concert with local agencies that serve migrants, we have also responded by volunteering as social workers and students to provide assistance to several hundred migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and other origin countries for forced migrants. El Paso, TX is a transit point for both authorized and unauthorized migration into the United States. During the summer of 2016, for example, several hundred migrants and refugees were released into the community by ICE to a local shelter (Annunciation House) for migrants. These were individuals who had been processed by the border patrol after presenting themselves at the bridge between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez requesting asylum or who had been apprehended in an unauthorized crossing and also requested sanctuary. Under the previous administration, thousands of such migrants were released to reunite with family members and relatives in the United States while being required to report to an immigration hearing at their destination city. Over a period of months, hundreds of individuals were released into the local community. Members of the team and dozens of social work students volunteered to encounter the migrant, provide immediate social assistance by connecting them to their family members in the interior, helping to organize their onward travel plans, and sheltering them temporarily in a variety of churches and shelters around the city. Throughout 2017, as economic migration declined and forced migration increased, the region experienced continuing flows of

forced migrants and refugee applicants. Subsequent surges of migrants continue to be served by students and a host of volunteers from nongovernmental organizations, churches, and advocacy groups. In 2018, as families who had been separated from their children were reunited, El Paso became a focal point for these reunifications, and hundreds more were served by volunteers. The migration continues and there is no reason to expect that it will stop.

Apart from working alongside migrants as volunteers, we also encountered them in shelters and migration service agencies, where we had Institutional Review Board approval to conduct research on: their well-being; reasons for leaving; conditions and experiences encountered on their journeys; and their adaptation and challenges while in the border region, in detention, and during deportation. These encounters provided the basis for research publications and scholarly presentations, but our intent was always broader (Chavez, Lusk, & Sanchez, 2015; Craft & Lusk, 2017; Lusk, 2014; Lusk & Chavez, 2016; Lusk & Galindo, 2017; Lusk & Rivas, 2018; Lusk & Villalobos, 2012; Torres & Lusk, 2018). In addition to publishing articles in scholarly venues, we reached out to present at professional forums, at civic groups, to church groups, and to the media, including print, public radio, and television (in both Spanish and English). It has been our strong opinion that, given the lesser impact and comparatively low readership of articles published in academic journals, it was imperative that we reach a wider audience to inform them about the migration, the people who were making the move, the reasons for their travels, the adversities and difficulties that they encountered while on the journey, and the hostile treatment that they experienced at the border, coupled with an explication of how strong, tenacious, and resilient they were throughout the process. The general public and practicing professionals need to be exposed to the reality of forced migration. Given the adverse and negative narrative that prevails around migrants, particularly those from Mexico, Central America, and Latin America, our intent was to provide a fact-based counterpoint to what is essentially a racist national narrative by describing the true nature of their journeys and why they left their country and took such great risks and suffered such great losses to get to a border knowing that they might not be able to cross or to gain sanctuary. We also explicitly spoke to their strengths and resiliency, something that other investigators and volunteers had not been communicating widely.

Witnessing Their Testimonies

Conversations with forced migrants revealed common themes and salient topics that were recurrent in many dozens of encounters.

Travelers uniformly said that they had *no choice but to leave*. They often said that financial security also factored into the decision, but it was not the dominant concern. Indeed, they cited the loss of their home, job, close friends, and relatives, all of which were left behind. Many stated that they were nostalgic for their home country and hoped that someday they might return. A young Guatemalan man recounted the moment when he left his Mayan village in the highlands: “When I looked back, I saw my mother standing in the door waving goodbye. I knew then that I would probably never see her again.”

Migrants repeatedly recounted tales of seemingly *unending suffering*. It was as if they went through a series of traumatic events. First were the ordeals at home—the factors that made them

leave. It could have been escalating extortion, gang rape and sexual assault, abduction and torture of journalists for ransom, human trafficking, forced conscription of a son to join a gang, the murder of a partner or spouse, arson of one's business, the massacre of one's employees at a car repair shop, illegal arrest and battery by the police, or the forced disappearance of a daughter.

These are among the stories of why people left. Yet, these hardships continued along the journey, during which time they could have been assaulted, kidnapped, abused by migration authorities, gone hungry, gotten sick, spent time outside without shelter, fallen from the train, or abused by a *pollero* (human smuggler) they had hired to help them on their way. And, finally, there's the hardship that they confront when they present at the border with a high likelihood of being arrested, detained, and deported by federal officers. There is a helplessness in constant victimization in each of these stories, yet at each stage, they coped.

These hardships were surprisingly balanced by the *kindness of strangers* and *informal networks* of fellow travelers who helped along the way. For example, migrants from Central America and southern Mexico often find respite and sanctuary in a network of *Casas del Migrante*—church-affiliated shelters along the route from San Luis Potosí to Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. There they find generous volunteers who provide temporary shelter, food, and supplies. Along the way, some travelers stay in homes of strangers where they might work on a temporary basis. Along the route of the big cargo train, *La Bestia* (the Beast), travelers who have hopped a ride on the train cars headed north find groups of women who have gathered at spots where the train slows to turn a corner and hand them fresh food items and bottled water.

In addition, migrants draw on *deep reservoirs of resiliency*, not only from their own personal and psychological resources of hope, perseverance, forbearance, patience, and fortitude but also drawing on the reservoir of shared values and culture of those with whom they travel. These social supports consist of the collective strength of companion travelers who look out for each other—their countrymen, fellow villagers, and new-found friends—to help them bear the load of risk and to nurture hope along the way.

Consistently, migrants told us of the deep *faith* they had and that they were protected and watched over in their perilous journey. It provided them with *hope*, whether it was framed through a traditional Catholic perspective, another faith tradition, or through a sense of a guiding higher power. Sometimes they stopped along the way to visit a church, or they prayed with other travelers. Time and again migrants said that while they might have been believers at home, they became truly faithful and had religious experiences in the face of enormous and multiple hardships. Prayer was solace and respite. Although they drew on enormous internal resources, they also felt that they were being watched over.

Similarly, their hope and resilience derived from their *children*. When asked what kept them going in the face of adversity, a question we asked everyone we spoke with, the most consistent answer was: "Faith, my children, and hope. I am doing this for my children so that they will have the opportunity for a better life than me, where they can live in safety. It is for them that I take this risk and make this great sacrifice."

Leaving Home

Leaving home is the last resort. It is through these individual narratives and perspectives that we can truly reflect on the root causes of forced migration and sources of resilience in migrants. What circumstances motivate a person to leave their home and "willingly" start a journey frequently faced with adversity and uncertainty? In many conversations with migrants, we identified motivating factors based on a sense of survival, family, hope, and faith. For example, 18-year-old Mariel from Honduras held her one-year-old son as she stood on the shelter's patio talking to her husband, 19-year-old Diego. The couple fled Honduras after she and her son were threatened. "I left because of my child; he is so little. I want to see him grow up, so I came here because they threatened me," she said. "They were offering ten thousand pesos for my child's head and mine." The reason is that her husband was blamed for the death of his traveling companion, who fell and was killed by *La Bestia* (The Beast). Diego explained, "The first journey was because there were no jobs, she was pregnant, and we did not have anything to eat. That is when I started thinking, 'I have to find a solution.' So I left, and things happened . . . and everything became more complicated." However, the couple highlighted their strength to leave to secure a better future for their son. Now they hope to find a job and a way to cross to the US.

We also encountered 40-year-old Martin, who had just been deported from El Paso a few hours earlier. During the interview, he reminisced about his past life, living in the same house for over 20 years. "I never wanted to leave because I had a steady job," he said. But he saw no other choice. His wife's brothers and sister had been kidnapped. One body had been found and the rest were still missing, prompting the family to seek asylum in a U.S.-Mexico port of entry after receiving multiple threats. "My family was scared. My wife was nervous, restless. She was not eating, not sleeping. I saw how desperate she was that day, and that was when I said, 'Let's go, we'll figure it out.'" His responses also reflected disappointment toward his government and justice system, which were incapable or unwilling to protect them. "Who can help? I'll be honest with you; we know that justice here can ignore you sometimes," he stated. Now he remains separated from his wife and three children, who will continue their asylum petition process in the US.

Similarly, there are other testimonies of people who left their homes after being threatened and forced to work for criminal organizations. One of these testimonies is Jose, a 45-year-old man from Mexico, who says the level of corruption within his government is one of the factors pushing him to leave. "How do you know which authority you can trust? I know there is no protection for people like me," he said. Beyond the physical threats and family separation, the man relied on faith to begin his journey. He explained, "I believe that faith ends when life ends. Even though it is difficult, one always has to fight and to have hope. I think it is the last thing that one can lose, no matter how dark it is."

Peregrinations

After saying farewell, a challenging journey remains ahead for many. In their narratives, interviewees recounted circumstances of extreme hardship, yet they also described their faith as a resource that contributes to their resilience. When we met Elena, she and her 7-year-old

daughter were recovering from multiple injuries suffered in a car accident. She was part of a group from Honduras that hired a *coyote* to drive them the last length of their journey to the U.S.-Mexico border. She would remain in a *casa del migrante* (migrant shelter) for almost three months while waiting for her daughter to recover from her broken legs. "I have faith—although one can lose it sometimes—still. God knows why he does things, and everything he does is right," she said. She told us that during her journey, a female companion carried a Bible with her. She added, "We would read it, and I would walk and pray." She shared with us her regrets for not being able to protect her daughter in the accident. According to the reports, the coyote was driving under the influence and had escaped the scene. This particular shelter in Ciudad Juárez, Casa del Migrante, has a long partnership with a doctor who volunteers her time every week checking migrants' health. Still, more resources were needed with this case. It took two weeks for the shelter staff to find a medical specialist and donations to cover other costs. After recovery, the family will head to the port of entry and request asylum.

Following similar narrative patterns, 28-year-old Jareth described that his hope relied on a supreme being, who accompanied and protected him throughout the journey. "I believe in God and I leave everything in his hands. He is the one who gives me the faith to continue and be able to carry this burden," he stated. Jareth from Honduras fled north after gang members had threatened to kill him if he did not join their organization. In Mexico, he was kidnapped by people who had offered him a place to stay for a few days. At first, he thought he had found a shelter, but things changed quickly. "They did not let me go. Those people were armed and everything. There were beatings, abuses, and I was drugged," he said. Jareth was able to escape but said he was afraid to press charges. "The American dream is a dream that motivates you to keep going, but it is a dream that is also very sad," he added.

In a different way, many responses also described the generosity of strangers along their journey as a protective factor in their path. "When we were walking, we would always meet people in the streets and they would give us some water, a ride, and some change to buy food—they were good to us," said Mariel from Honduras. Another example is 28-year-old Luis from Honduras, who received twenty dollars from a stranger to buy food and clothes. "I keep [people who help me] in my mind, and I will never forget them, wherever they are. That's my Mexico, doing good and loving good people from Central America," he shared. In his journey from Honduras, he had been kidnapped on his way to the border and was released when his sister in the US paid for his ransom.

A Hard Landing

For better or worse, "landing" is part of a migrant's journey. There were testimonies of those who had reached the southern side of the U.S.-Mexico border and who were now deciding how to continue northward on the next part of the journey. In contrast, there were those who had just been deported to Mexico from the United States and were now contemplating where to go next. Either way, both groups confront doubt and uncertainty in their plans. "I am fortunate to be alive—lots of things happened on the way. Emigrating is not easy," said 28-year-old Josue.

For many, the "landing" in the United States consisted of arrest, interrogation, detention, family

separation, and deportation. Most Central Americans and Mexicans who present for asylum are denied and are charged with illegal entry, a criminal offense, even though they have a well-founded fear of victimization if they return to their country (Meyer & Pachico, 2018). The hardships they endured in their country of origin are compounded by adversity and trauma during their journeys, and upon arrival, they face a continuation of misfortune and suffering. For example, Josue had already been deported back to his native Honduras once, yet he decided to try one more time. He told us he was tired but still hopes the situation will work out for him, either in Mexico or in the United States. He said:

> If things changed and this bad man, Trump . . . I have nothing against him, but he has a black heart. He does not know what hunger looks like in our country. He does not know the needs that make us leave our country. He does not know if there are children dying of hunger in our country. He knows nothing. He just knows how to deport you. He does not know what we suffer here to arrive: assaults, . . . discrimination because we are from Central America, being robbed, and being kidnapped.

For now, having been deported from the US and unwilling to face possible death in Honduras, he is looking for a job in Mexico, his only option.

In the case of Eddie, it was a story of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. While attending a party, he got into an altercation. He was threatened and shot days later but survived. According to his testimony, the man who tried to kill him works as a hitman in Honduras. For him, returning was an unsettling idea, but he also shared his determination and hope: "I am going to fight for my [asylum] case; I know I can do it and I know I can win it."

Back at the shelter in Ciudad Juárez, deportation and family separation were frequent themes of discussion and reflection. As he contemplated the idea of not knowing whether he would see his wife and children again, Martin spoke about his strength to face adversity after his deportation. "It is hard to be separated," he said. As he detailed his story, he recalled how his daughter would hold on to him every time he got home from work. "My wife says that she cried a lot the first few days, and now she wants to see me and asks where I am," he said. Now, he told us, his wife just tells the daughter that her father will be there later. His grief was palpable as he spoke about his concerns for his family.

Accompanying the Migrant

There is a living tradition within Latin American cultures of passing on stories or *cuentos* through the *testimonio* (testimony). Oral histories are the means by which the disempowered have been able to record their discourse as an authentic narrative told from the perspective of the participants and witnesses (Lusk & Galindo, 2017). Absent the ability to shape the narrative about migration from the perspective of the power elites who typically frame migration as a threat, the migrants themselves do not frame their experience as part of an international crisis, but as an individual journey of hope, faith, and perseverance. Therefore, the first step of accompanying the migrant is to contest the dominant narrative of migrants as hazards to the status quo by recognizing that this narrative serves only to stoke fears, distract, and redirect

animosity by scapegoating innocent travelers and refugees. Instead, this false narrative is replaced by the true testimonials of the emigrants themselves. Their narratives recount the reality and living history of a decades-long march northward of people seeking sanctuary, opportunity, and justice. Accompanying the migrant provides us with a witness to the times, which leads to a testimonial of consciousness-raising (*concientización*) in the tradition of Brazilian sociologist Paulo Freire (Yúdice, 1992; Freire, 1968).

What does it mean to witness with the migrant? Dylan Corbett, a human rights advocate and leader of the Hope Border Institute, articulates its meaning:

> Our humanity is never realized except in the risk of communion with others, in the reality of their everyday, concrete existence. The vulnerable person challenges us to recast the center of our lives in terms of encounter, accompaniment, and bearing witness to the truth of the human condition. (D. Corbett, personal communication, August 2, 2018)

To accompany the migrant, or for that matter, anyone whom one is encountering as an ally, is to get beyond the transactional and functional aspects of professional relationships and into a partnership of mutual critical engagement. As a volunteer, social worker, student, healthcare provider, or paraprofessional, the immediate and sometimes overwhelming needs of migrants for shelter and food can force the relationship into one of crisis management. Amelia Furrow, a social worker and immigration paralegal who works with migrants notes:

> There is very little space to pay attention to people's lived experiences or to be fully present with people when you're dealing with their immediate and pressing needs in a crisis situation, but in time I purposely go into depth about their lives, their worldview, and the uniqueness of their lived experiences, recognizing their resiliency, their capacities and abilities. And I have learned much from them, and have been impressed always by their forbearance, perseverance, and ability to just be able to figure things out. It is always moving for me what my clients will do for their children—their deep love for their families and parents for whom they sacrifice continuously. (A. Furrow, personal communication, July 24, 2018)

Being present with and recognizing the lived experiences of migrants inverts the dominant racialized narrative about international migration and refugees. Engaging them with authenticity and cultural humility empowers them to narrate the authoritative and legitimate story of their experience.

Praxis is the process of turning knowledge and consciousness into action. It is not enough to have one's own awareness raised without acting upon it. Witnesses to the hardships that migrants have experienced in their countries of origin, along the way, and at the border are compelled to serve as messengers, to inform others, to push back against the pernicious narrative and engage in the public arena. As Dylan Corbett has observed:

> We can approach public policy one of two ways. Through ideology, good or bad, born of the head, of rhetoric, of disconnected reflection, prejudices, the lens of partisan politics,

> primal instincts, and a desire to preserve what one has. Or we can take the risk of encountering the other in their real needs, which opens up a whole new vista of knowledge, a totalizing perspective that challenges and changes one's life, and offers us the possibility of living from the heart. (D. Corbett, personal communication, August 2, 2018)

To have an impact on policy, the public needs to comprehend the lived experiences of migrants. Putting this into praxis, we have gone beyond publication in academic journals and presentations at symposia to reach wider audiences in multiple settings. While it's helpful to publish in the social science journals and to present to academics and professionals, a significant impact can be found in the public arena by conveying the message to the media—television, public radio, print, and online in both Spanish and English. The research team, faculty, and students have engaged multiple audiences regionally, nationally, and abroad. These efforts have included trainings for volunteers, community teach-ins at the local public library, workshops with youth leadership groups, seminars with young professionals, discussions at faith groups, and, even though the reception might not always be a warm one, presentations at local civic organizations and clubs.

Praxis also may include efforts to engage the political arena through direct action such as rallies, marches, and demonstrations in support of the rights of immigrants, especially when they themselves take the podium. It may involve the publication of professional position statements on immigration reform, the separation of migrant children from their parents, and the prolonged detention of migrants, such as those published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and other professional groups (AAP, 2018; NASW, 2018). It's important to ask the obvious and troubling questions such as, why are we putting people in cages for trying to save their lives? And, why are we imprisoning migrant children as pawns in the immigration debate?

Traditional helping models have concerned themselves with assisting, fixing, and, at best, serving the client. While this may suffice for conventional circumstances, accompanying those whom we serve informs us more deeply of their lived experiences. This opens new perspectives in working with those who experience great adversity. We learned this strategy over a decade of work serving migrants and refugees from Central America and Mexico. It can be a useful strategy with a wide variety of client partners.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018, March 1). [Letter to Kirstjen M. Nielsen, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security]. Retrieved from https://downloads.aap.org/DOFA/AAP%20Letter%20to%20DHS%20Secretary%2003-01-18.pdf

Bermeo, S. (2018, June 26). Violence drives immigration from Central America [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/26/violence-drives-immigration-from-central-america/

Central Intelligence Agency. (2018). *The World factbook* (Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador & Mexico). Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2018.html

Chavez, S., Lusk, M., & Sanchez, S. (2015). Secuelas en la Salud Mental: el Rol de la Cultura y la Resiliencia en Migrantes y Refugiados Mexicanos en la Región de El Paso del Norte. In P. Barraza, L. Torres, S. Sanchez, & H. Diaz (Eds.), *Tácticas y Estrategias Contra la Violencia de Genero: Antología* (pp. 219-237). Mexico, D.F.: FONCA, EON Sociales.

Cohn, D., Passel, J. S., & Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2017, December 7). Rise in US immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras outpaces growth from elsewhere. *Pew Research Center.* Retrieved from http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/

Craft, A., & Lusk, M. (2017). A very dangerous journey: Fleeing extreme violence in Central America. *Horizons, 30*(6), 20-26.

Freire, P. (1968). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.

Grillo, J. (2018, June 21). 'There is no way we can turn back.' Why thousands of refugees will keep coming to America despite Trump's crackdown. *Time.* Retrieved from http://time.com/5318718/central-american-refugees-crisis/

Hing, J. (2017, June 1). Texas's SB 4 is the most dramatic state crackdown yet on sanctuary cities. *The Nation.* Retrieved from https://www.thenation.com/article/texass-sb-4-dramatic-state-crackdown-yet-sanctuary-cities

Knox, V. (2017). Factors influencing decision-making by people fleeing Central America. *Forced Migration Review, 56,* 18-20.

Lusk, M. (2014). Hope and resiliency in a Mexican refugee. In E. Hoffler (Ed.), *Hope matters: The power of social work* (pp. 177-183). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Lusk, M., & Chavez, S. (2016). Mental health and the role of culture and resilience in refugees fleeing violence. *Environment and Social Psychology, 2*(1) 1-13.

Lusk, M., & Galindo, F. (2017). Strength and adversity: Testimonies of the migration. *Social Development Issues, 39*(1), 11-28.

Lusk, M., & Rivas, L. (2018). Service learning with refugees as a high impact educational practice. In G. Nunez-Mchiri & A. Gonzalez (Eds.), *Community engagement & high impact practices in higher education* (pp. 213-222). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Lusk, M., & Villalobos, G. (2012). Testimonio de Eva: A Mexican refugee in El Paso. *Journal*

of Borderland Studies, 27(1), 17-25.

Martinez, S. (2018, June 26). Today's migrant flow is different. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/central-america-border-immigration/563744/

Medecins Sans Frontieres. (2017). *Forced to flee Central America's northern triangle: A neglected humanitarian crisis.* Retrieved from https://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf_forced-to-flee-central-americas-northern-triangle_e.pdf

Meyer, M., & Pachico, E. (2018, February 1). *Fact sheet: US immigration and Central American asylum-seekers.* Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America.

National Association of Social Workers. (2018, May 30). NASW says plan to separate undocumented immigrant children from their parents is malicious and unconscionable [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.socialworkers.org/News/News-Releases/ID/1654/NASW-says-plan-to-separate-undocumented-immigrant-children-from-their-parents-is-malicious-and-unconscionable

Phillips, T. (2018, May 22). Central Americans flee homes in record numbers: The level of violence is brutal. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/22/central-americans-refugees-asylum-seekers-violence

Torres, M., & Lusk, M. (2018). Factors promoting resilience among Mexican migrant women in the United States: Applying a positive deviance approach. *Estudios Fronterizos, 19,* 1-20.

Yúdice, G. (1992). Testimonio y concientización [Testimony and consciousness raising]. *Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana, 18*(36), 211-232.

This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Texas at El Paso (1148367-1).

About the Author(s): Mark Lusk, EdD, LMSW is Professor and Provost's Faculty Fellow, Department of Social Work, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX (915-747-8588; mwlusk@utep.edu); Perla Chaparro, BA is Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Social Work, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX (915-747-5095; pmchaparro@miners.utep.edu).