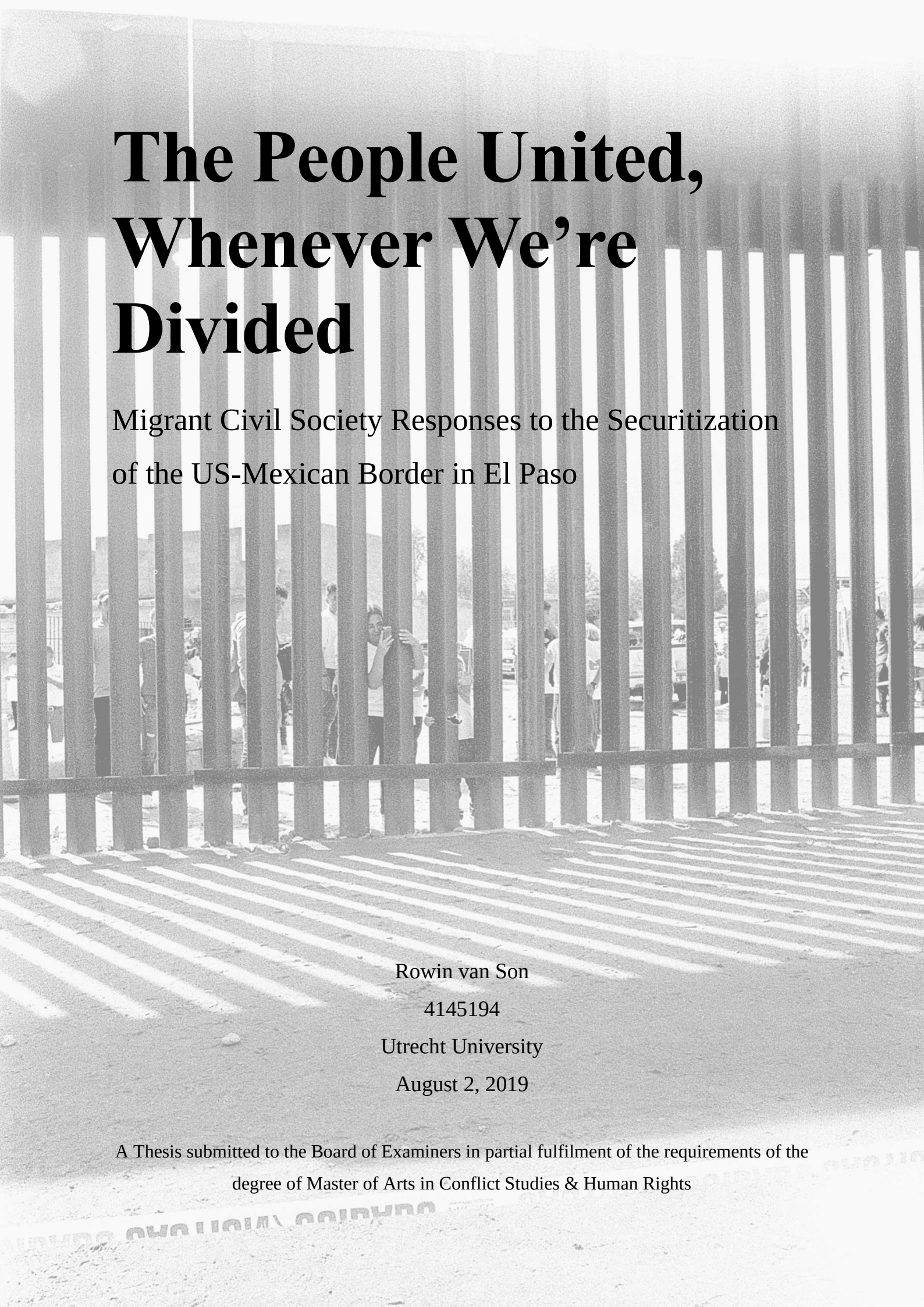

The People United, Whenever We're Divided

Migrant Civil Society Responses to the Securitization of the US-Mexican Border in El Paso

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Abstract

In this thesis I aim to further conceptualize the role of audiences in securitization processes. While audiences are traditionally defined as passive entities concerned with enabling securitizing actors, this thesis shows that this relationship is not so one-dimensional. Audiences are actively influencing and contesting securitization processes, as different definitions and experiences of security clash. In this thesis the concept of migrant civil society, representing audiences, will be used to analyze community-level responses to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. The border, and people crossing it, has increasingly been framed as security threat, as a place that needs to be secured to ensure the continued safety of the US. Migrants arriving at the border have been framed as illegals, criminals and potential terrorists that should be kept out at all costs. In El Paso, these definitions of security and security threats are often not shared, as they oppose community-level experiences of the border, migration and migrants. Several diverse strategies are used to reactively and proactively respond to security discourses that are spread by securitizing actors, and the border enforcement programs that are legitimized by these discourses. From strategies of support to address immediate needs faced by migrants arriving at the border, to strategies of contention to highlight concerns, redefine security narratives, and advocate for comprehensive migration reform. These strategies are useful indicators to consider in this analysis of the contentious and multi-dimensional relationship between securitizing actors and audiences.

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Abbreviations

BNHR	Border Network for Human Rights
CBP	US Customs and Border Protection
CECD	Coalition to End Child Detention
DHS	US Department of Homeland Security
DMRS	Diocese Migrant and Refugee Services
DMSC	Detained Migrant Solidarity Center
HBI	Hope Border Institute
ICE	US Immigration and Customs Enforcement
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
MPP	Migrant Protection Protocols
TRLA	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UTEP	The University of Texas at El Paso

1. Introduction

Border security and enforcement has been on the social and political agenda in the US for decades. Since the 1980s the US-Mexican border has been significantly reinforced on multiple occasions to prevent illegal crossings of people and drugs. Recently, during his presidential campaign in 2016 and since his subsequent inauguration in 2017, Trump has explicitly focused on the need for increased border security, and more concretely a border wall. Trump has effectively taken the security discourse surrounding the US-Mexican border to another level, by repeatedly framing migrant flows to the US as an "invasion of drugs and people" which should be stopped (Trump 2019b). While a border wall, or border barrier, has been present on large parts of the US-Mexican border for decades, Trump wants to extend and reinforce existing structures.

In 2018, the responses to the imminent arrival of several migrant caravans was a clear indicator of this security-oriented frame. The Trump administration specifically called out the threats that these migrant caravans supposedly pose to U.S. national security, claiming that these caravans contain criminals, gang members and unknown Middle Eastern terrorists (Kessler 2018; Rizzo 2018). While the truthfulness of the remarks pronounced by the Trump administration has been largely debunked in media reports, the influence of this discourse on the US population stands. More concretely, this discourse has actual implications on the ground; military troops have been mobilized in border cities and border enforcement programs have been tightened (Clark 2018). In the last few years, several border enforcement programs have sparked nation-wide controversy, such as the detention of unaccompanied children and family separation. While political attention for migrant caravans has simmered down in the last few months, there have been migrant caravans in the past and there will be more in the future (Kinosian & Sieff 2019). Moreover, the focus on border security and (illegal) migration has not dwindled, as illustrated by the 2018-2019 government shutdown and the proclamation of a state of emergency, both events being largely focused around the debate of extending the border barrier (Rodgers and Bailey, 2019). Most recently, the Trump administration has pressured Mexico to deal with the influx of Central American migrants by threatening to impose tariffs on Mexican goods. This was met with large waves of critique on both sides of the border, as it would hurt both US and Mexican economies (Kolenc 2019; Jackson 2019). These tariff threats eventually led to a deal which included the expansion of the Remain in Mexico policy, through which migrants are sent back to Mexico pending their

asylum process in the US, and a promised reinforcement of the southern Mexican border (DOS 2019).

1.1 Empirical Complication

The security discourses surrounding the US-Mexican border, and measures taken to secure it, have generally been received differently by communities living in close proximity to the border. Compared to people from other areas within the US, these communities, defined as border communities, generally have closer ties to the other side of the border and cross the border on a regular basis. Several research projects have been conducted to examine attitudes towards greater border security in the US, with the border barrier being the most explicit point of focus. The Cronkite Institute released a bilingual poll which demonstrated that border residents were generally opposed to a border barrier and further efforts to secure the US-Mexican border, instead favoring easier mobility across the border by shortening wait times and decreasing requirements to enter the US. Moreover, the poll illustrated that border residents often experience a sense of community, along with a certain experienced dependence, between cities on either side of the border (Bilker 2016). More recently, Gravelle has also examined attitudes towards border security in the US. His findings show that support for border security infrastructures, specifically a border barrier, is higher among men, non-educated, and older Americans, while support is significantly lower among women, educated, young Americans, and Hispanics. Furthermore, Republicans are significantly more in favor of building a border barrier than Democrats, and Republican support increased over time, while Democrat support decreased over time. Finally, as the distance to the border increases, support for a border barrier tends to decrease (2018, 8-11). Gravelle's findings partly contradict earlier findings presented by the Cronkite Institute, but they also supplement each other by focusing on different areas. While the Cronkite Institute focuses on cross-border relationships and sense of community, Gravelle discusses political affiliation and demographics.

Building on these findings by the Cronkite Institute and Gravelle, El Paso provides an interesting case study to analyze attitudes towards the border. First of all, it is in close proximity and deeply interconnected with Ciudad Juárez, on the Mexican side of the border. Secondly, it is a Democrat voting city within the predominantly Republican state of Texas, in the 2016 elections almost 70 percent of El Pasoans voted Democrat (NYT 2016). Thirdly, the majority of its population has Hispanic or Latino roots, over 80 percent (USCB, 2019). Additionally, the El Paso City Council has explicitly spoken out against the reinforcement

and extension of the border barrier in El Paso (Perez 2017) and organizations and movements within El Paso are actively portraying migration as a humanitarian issue, while contesting increased border security efforts. Besides that, El Paso has also become somewhat of a testing ground and focal point for border security and enforcement efforts. In the last two years, several border enforcement programs have debuted in El Paso, such as the detention of unaccompanied children in Tornillo and, most recently, Remain in Mexico. Structural and humanitarian concerns with these programs, such as human rights abuses, legal violations, overcrowding and inadequacies in detention facilities, have led to increased attention from international, national and regional media in El Paso. These concerns have predominantly been raised, highlighted, and responded to by community organizations, movements and churches that act in support of migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border.

From these empirical observations, the complication that I define is how the El Paso border community is opposed to increased security measures at the US-Mexican border, despite continuous pressure and narratives spread by federal institutions that migrant influxes at the border are a threat to national security.

1.2 Constructing a Research Question

Using the theoretical framework of securitization, the empirical complication described above will be further explored and concretized. Securitization refers to the process of security-making, in which public issues are classified as security issues. This thesis aims to analyze how securitization processes concerning the US-Mexican border are appropriated, influenced and contested on a community-level. Securitization theory is one of the most prominently used theories for analyzing the politics of security, but it has also been criticized for its under-theorization of 'securitizing actors', or policymakers, and 'audiences', besides a general disregard for local contexts and dynamics in securitization processes. The founders of the theory, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, argue that securitization is a strategic process which involves securitizing actors trying to convince an audience to accept the claim that a specific object is threatening enough to prompt an immediate policy response to alleviate it (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 495). Securitization theory has been developed and extended through the years, but the key idea is that securitizing actors play an active and persuasive role, while audiences play a passive and enabling role. Yet, as I intend to illustrate in this thesis, this one-dimensional relationship is not as clear-cut as it is made out to be. I argue that audiences play an active role in the security-making process as they actively appropriate,

influence and contest definitions of security and security threats that are pronounced by securitizing actors.

To capture the active attitude of audiences, the concept of migrant civil society will be used to signify the diverse variety of organizations, movements and churches that respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. It is the broadness of the category of migrant civil society in which its strength lies, as it encloses multiple groups of organized social actors with diverse organizational structures. These organized social actors cannot be categorized as loose migrant support groups, as they are coordinated in their efforts and employ similar strategies. In this sense migrant civil society is highly diverse in its composition, but also highly united through a shared goal of addressing concerns faced by migrants arriving at the border and within the border community. However, the broadness of migrant civil society is also its weakness; it is hard to define where migrant civil society starts and ends, which organized social actors are part of migrant civil society, and which are not. More research is needed to more explicitly define the rules of membership for migrant civil society. Yet in this thesis, migrant civil society is defined as a collective of organized social groups who are concerned with highlighting and addressing concerns faced by migrants in El Paso. As such, groups within migrant civil society have a shared or similar goal, alleviating the concerns faced by migrants, but use a diverse number of reactive and proactive strategies to try to achieve this goal. Finally, the term migrant is also essential to define. People arriving at the border are classified using different labels, primarily as asylum seekers, refugees and/or (undocumented) immigrants. However, people arriving at the border have different motives and backgrounds. Some individuals have the goal to migrate temporarily, seek asylum or refuge, while others want to migrate indefinitely for social, political or economic reasons. Therefore, the term migrant will be used to refer to this diverse group of individuals, as this definition encompasses anyone who migrates from one place to another, regardless of their motivations, goals or duration of stay.

In this thesis I will focus on the specific strategies used by migrant civil society to respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. Hereby focusing on the period from 2018 until now, a period in which several controversial border enforcement programs have been introduced to further secure the US-Mexican border. Yet it is also a period in which migrant civil society in El Paso has continuously contested the securitization of the US-Mexican border by tapping into increases in media attention and available resources, such as financial donations and volunteers. Taken altogether this leads to the following research question:

What strategies does migrant civil society operating in El Paso employ to respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border from 2018 onwards?

In this thesis I aim to further develop the relationship between securitizing actors and audiences in securitization theory. By analyzing specific strategies used by migrant civil society in relation to securitization processes, I intend to illustrate that audiences are active actors which negotiate and contest definitions of security and security threats in a diverse number of ways, such as the provision of public services and advocacy efforts. Besides that, I aim to document migrant civil society in El Paso, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how diverse organized social actors operate and work towards a shared or similar goal, and the concerns they face during this process.

1.3 Research Design

Ontologically I will take a stance of structurationism, drawing on Giddens work on the duality of structure (Giddens in Demmers 2017, 128). Hereby I acknowledge the presence of structural securitization processes, while I also realize that local actors, or audiences, are not just passively accepting these discourses, policies and practices. Community-level actors are both inherently limited by securitization processes, but also actively try to influence, contest and redefine these processes based on the social, spatial, political and historical contexts they reside in. As such, I will take an epistemological stance of interpretivism, aimed at gaining an understanding on how groups of people experience and respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border, based on the aforementioned contexts. Based on these ontological and epistemological stances, a qualitative research strategy is most appropriate. This strategy will allow me to dive deeper into community-level experiences of the US-Mexican border and security measures taken to secure it, and strategies used by migrant civil society to respond to these securitization processes, while taking contextual factors of El Paso into account.

Being primarily interested in responses to securitization processes launched by migrant civil society, I have approached a wide variety of organized social actors that are actively involved with addressing concerns faced by migrants. These organized social actors include members of advocacy organizations, community organizations, legal organizations, social movements and faith-based organizations. As such, non-probability sampling was used to approach this targeted population. I started off by contacting and interviewing several professors at UTEP which were highly knowledgeable about the border situation and migrant

civil society in El Paso, while at the same time also locating organizations online and through conversations with border residents. From there on out I started contacting different organizations, movements and churches. Most members of migrant civil society were very open to talk to me about the border situation in El Paso. However, due to time constraints and increased workloads of members of migrant civil society, I was not able to talk to some of the targeted organizations, movements and churches within migrant civil society. Nevertheless, I was able to get representative data on migrant civil society in El Paso and the strategies they use to respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border.

1.3.1 Research Method

For this thesis a variety of data collection techniques have been employed. The primary data collection technique was interviewing, conducting both formal/in-depth as informal interviews. Interviews provide a useful tool to gain understanding of complex processes, dynamics and contexts and are hereby appropriate for this research design. In-depth interviews were used to interview members of migrant civil society, because of time constraints due to increased workloads, many members of migrant civil society were only available for one in-depth interview. I followed up with informal interviews with some members of migrant civil society during rallies, conferences or other events. However, in most cases an initial in-depth interview provided sufficient insight and understanding into the organizational structure, motivations, goals and strategies employed by different organizations, movements, and churches within migrant civil society.

As for my typical process of formal interviewing, most informants preferred to meet in public spaces, such as bars, cafés or lunchrooms, or familiar spaces, such as personal offices. This resulted in a more spontaneous and trustworthy environment for informants and made them more open to talk about diverse topics, but at the same time, meeting in public areas also made it harder to record interviews because of significant background noise. Consequentially, for most interviews I wrote down key points, along with interesting quotes, in notebooks and worked them out more extensively afterwards. Before every interview, I wrote down specific, short topic lists, making most of the interviews I conducted semi-structured. These lists provided me with a guideline of topics to discuss during interviews, while giving informants enough freedom to talk freely about their experiences, observations, motivations and history. The core of these topic lists was always a combination of inquiries into personal backgrounds, experiences of the US-Mexican border, specific characteristics of migrant civil society organizations, and specific strategies used in response to the

securitization of the US-Mexican border. Along the way, topic lists were expanded or slightly altered as a result of new insights, developments and directions. This structural approach to topic lists resulted in representative and comparable data on organizational structures, cooperation efforts and strategies used within migrant civil society.

Next to that, a combination of formal and informal interviews was used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of community-level dynamics in El Paso, such as community history, demographics, inter-group relationships, and social and political polarization on border and migration issues. Besides that, these interviews also provided a lot of valuable data regarding experiences and views on the US-Mexican border, migration and migrants. Collecting life histories was also part of this process, which provided valuable insights into the personal backgrounds of informants, of life in El Paso, and as a member of the border community. Some informants opted to stay anonymous, and as such, to provide absolute anonymity these informants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Other informants will be referred to using their full names.

Participant observation is another data collection technique that was used. This technique was useful to gain insight in people's behavior, people might say one thing but do another. Besides that, it was also a way to build trust within the community, by attending rallies, conferences and marches I was visibly present and approachable. After attending several events, there was a mutual recognition which often led to new informants and interesting data. While I aimed to do more participant observation at events and during voluntary work, this was problematic as many events were cancelled and shelters were overcrowded with volunteers. That being said, I still managed to do participant observation at several events, within shelters and along the border. This helped me to gather additional data on strategies that were employed by migrant civil society that were often not mentioned in interviews, such as specific ways in which awareness is created, or through which narratives surrounding migrants and the border are redefined.

Finally, I used document analysis as an additional data collection technique. Initially I thought that this technique would only be used to gain insight into security discourses, policies and practices pronounced and executed by federal institutions, but eventually it also included analyzing reports that were released by migrant civil society. These reports document human rights abuses, legal violations and discuss policy recommendations. Hence, these reports were essential categories of data to include in this thesis as they provided comprehensive data on the mismatch between policy and practice within border enforcement programs, and about immediate and structural concerns with the securitization of the US-

Mexican border. Furthermore, these policy reports provided starting points for further analysis in interviews and through participant observation.

Altogether, I triangulated my the data that I gathered through the use of different data collection techniques, hereby filling up empirical gaps and cross-checking the data that was collected to provide a comprehensive and well-founded representation of the strategies that are employed by migrant civil society in El Paso to respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border.

1.4 Outline

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter two will discuss the analytical framework around the securitization of the US-Mexican border. This chapter will first discuss the formation and development of securitization theory, define the concept of migrant civil society, and explicate strategies used by migrant civil society to address immediate concerns faced by migrants. Afterwards these components will be specifically linked through the introduction of strategies of support and contention. These strategies provide a framework to analyze migrant civil society responses to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. Chapter three provides a contextual introduction to El Paso. The history of the US-Mexican border will be discussed, along with the history of El Paso. In this chapter there will be a specific focus on several border enforcement programs and practices that have defined the current migration system in El Paso. In chapter four the securitization discourses as pronounced by federal institutions and its reception by the El Paso border community is described. This is then linked to an analysis of migrant civil society in El Paso, focusing explicitly on strategies of support that are employed to reactively respond to the withdrawal of public services for migrants. Chapter five will in turn focus on strategies of contention that are employed by migrant civil society to proactively contest the securitization of the US-Mexican border and people crossing it; increasing awareness, changing narratives, and providing alternative solutions. Together, chapter four and five provide a comprehensive analysis on the specific strategies that migrant civil society employs to respond to the securitization of the border. In the conclusion these findings will be explicitly linked to the analytical framework and the research question will be answered.

2. Building a Framework around the Securitization of the US-Mexican Border

As will be discussed more concretely in the next chapter, the US-Mexican border has been increasingly hardened over time. Several security and safety measures have been undertaken at the border to prevent illegal crossings, cross-border smuggling and to exert control over US territory. Over the years, border enforcement practices have been extended beyond the US-Mexican border and land inwards. Border enforcement agencies, such as CBP and ICE, are no longer solely concerned with traversals at the border but also with processing, detaining and deporting immigrants residing on US territory. Migration to the US has been increasingly framed as a national security issue which must be controlled and dealt with. However, security is a dynamic concept which means different things for different people. What might be considered a security threat by some people, might not be considered as such by others. As such, the definition of a security threat and how best to respond to it is a dynamic process involving multiple actors. Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka propose the framework of securitization "to explain the politics through which (1) the security character of public problems is established, (2) the social commitments resulting from the collective acceptance that a phenomenon is a threat are fixed and (3) the possibility of a particular policy is created" (2016, 494).

Securitization theory provides a comprehensive understanding on the politics of security, but, as will discussed in the following sub-chapters, it paints security-making as essentially a top-down process. In El Paso, many community organizations, social movements and churches actively contest and respond to definitions of security and security threats. As such, in this context securitization theory alone is insufficient to understand the dynamics between top-down and bottom-up experiences and definitions of security. The securitization of the US-Mexican border cannot be understood as a policy-making process that is solely constructed by securitizing actors and accepted by audiences. Some efforts to further define this relationship have been conducted elsewhere. Huysmans (2000; 2006) and Ibrahim (2005) – analyzing the securitization of migration in Europe and Canada – acknowledge the importance of contexts and micro-level processes, but don't extend their focus beyond macro-level understandings of securitization processes. Biehl (2009) – analyzing the impact of securitization processes on asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey – and more recently, Ahmed et al. (2018) – analyzing the impacts of securitization processes on

local dynamics in the Sahel – define this relationship more successfully, but this specific focus within securitization theory should be further explored in different contexts.

Securitization processes are constantly renegotiated by a plethora of actors and influenced by complex and dynamic local networks. On a local level these actors are often organized into broader entities that share the same or similar goals and strategies. As such, next to securitization theory, the concept of migrant civil society will be used to analyze the various discursive and performative strategies that are employed to respond to securitization processes on a community-level in El Paso. Altogether, these concepts will be used to build a comprehensive, community-oriented framework around the securitization of the US-Mexican border.

2.1 Securitization

Blazacq, Léonard and Ruzicka define securitization as "an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilised by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions) about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customised policy must be immediately undertaken to block it" (2016: 495). As such, it is a process that involves multiple components. First off, they define securitizing actors, "actors who securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 36). Secondly, referent objects, which are categorized as "things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 36). Thirdly, the audience, which they interpret as "those the securitizing act attempts to convince to accept exceptional procedures because of the specific security nature of some issue" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 41). And finally, there are referent subjects, things that are threatening the referent object (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 495).

As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde argue, "securitization is intersubjective and socially constructed" (1998, 31). Whether the process of securitization is successful depends on the audiences' acceptance of the perceived threat that is framed by securitization actors. This is where the 'speech act' comes in, defined by Emmers as "the discursive representation of a certain issue as an existential threat to security" (2007, 112). Securitization through the

speech act has a performative character, it does not only describe the world but can also transform social reality (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 495). As such, securitization is not about acknowledging objective material threats, but about the intersubjective definition of any issue as a threat. Situated in structuralism and social constructivism, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde argue that this is very much a top-down process, with securitizing actors trying to convince the audience of what is posing an existential threat and what is not (1998, 33-35).

While Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde underline the importance of the speech act in securitization processes, Bigo argues that processes of securitization are not just about actors framing security issues through the speech act. These processes are also about struggles within and between institutions for what is to be considered as the legitimate truth. To focus solely on the power of the political discourse concerning security is too limited and underestimates the plethora of actors negotiating within this process (2002, 73-4). Therefore, the incorporation of different practices, actors, audiences and contexts provides a meaningful contribution to the politics of security. As McDonald states, it is important to consider the "social, political and historical contexts in which particular discourses of security … become possible" (2008, 573). Whether issues are successfully securitized is largely dependent on local contexts, networks and the degree to which groups, in this case migrant civil society, organize strategic efforts to accept, influence and/or contest these definitions of security and security threats.

2.1.1 Securitization of Migration

In recent years, migration and securitization have been explicitly linked. Migration is increasingly interpreted as a security threat which should be dealt with using exceptional measures (Bigo 2002, 63-4). Bigo defines the securitization of migration as "a transversal political technology, used as a mode of governmentality by diverse institutions to play with the unease, or to encourage it if it does not yet exist, so as to affirm their role as providers of protection and security and to mask some of their failures" (2002, 65). Migration is not framed as a security threat because it is one objectively, but as a technique of governmentality to play with feelings of unease and re-assert control. It "relies on the fear of a loss of sovereignty, the fear of crime, and the fear of the weakening of border controls" (Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002, 25), all discursively linked to (illegal) migration. By securitizing migration, an environment of continuous unease and uncertainty is created which specifically targets migrants:

“migrants, who were welcomed after World War II as a useful labor force, are now presented in political discourses as criminals, troublemakers, economic and social defrauders, terrorists, drug traffickers, unassimilable persons, and so forth. They are demonized as being increasingly associated with organized crime. They are accused of taking jobs away from nationals, taking advantage of social services, and harming the identity of host countries” (2002, 22).

Within the securitization of migration, migrants are categorized as an undesirable group that is potentially threatening to national security and therefore shouldn’t be included into society. This is very much an exclusionist definition of security, based on keeping people out that are threatening the existing status quo. However, as stated before, security means different things for different people.

Booth introduces a conception of security that is more inclusive: “the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do” (1991, 319). Which illustrates that state security doesn’t necessarily encompass security for its people (C.A.S.E. Collective 2006, 473). Booth argues for an approach that puts the emancipation of individuals at its core. He states the importance of community-building and the reciprocity of rights in the emancipation process, referring to the process of removing boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and not stopping until everyone is ‘free’ (Booth 1991, 322-24). As such, this school of thought is very much in line with the concept of human security introduced by UNDP, which focuses on “legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives” (UNDP 1994, 22). Human security is “first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life - whether in homes, in jobs or in communities” (UNDP 1994, 23).

The discontinuity between national security and human security is a useful distinction to make, as this is a debate that also becomes apparent in the El Paso border community. Securitization discourses that are pronounced on a national level often don’t resonate with people from the border community. As will be discussed in chapter four and five, highly intertwined cross-border relationships that are present in the border community often clash with national discourses which paint migrants as potential security threats that are invading the US. This creates a space of contention which links back to one of the underdeveloped aspects on securitization theory, the importance of understanding community-level dynamics and strategies used to influence and contest securitization processes. The concept of migrant

civil society provides a useful framework to categorize the abundance of organized actors that are concerned with addressing migration concerns in El Paso, mostly through a human security lens. This collection of organizations, while not homogenous in its composition, works towards shared or similar goals, using diverse strategies.

2.2 Migrant Civil Society

As will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter, El Paso is highly intertwined with Ciudad Juárez. The everlasting relation with migration on the US-Mexican border has shaped everyday experiences and lives of residents living in the community, while these migration flows have also defined the composition of the community. The border community, or transnational community, is typified by dense networks that connect the sister cities socially, economically and culturally across national borders. These networks are constantly being maintained through migration flows, transportation systems, cross-border exchanges of business and education, and a multitude of organized social actors operating within this transnational space (Theodore and Martin 2007, 274-75).

These organized social actors are what Theodore and Martin define as migrant civil society; "community organizations, social movements, hometown associations, churches and faith-based organizations, social clubs, and other organized groups that represent the interests of migrants and operate between markets, households, and the state" (2007, 271). According to them, organized social actors who are part of migrant civil society share several unifying characteristics; they are concerned with addressing social, economic and political concerns that are crucial for the well-being of migrants, they engage in a range of activities and the majority of their targeted audience are migrants (2007, 271, 275-83). These activities range from community efforts to increase awareness on local situations to providing social services and orchestrating legal challenges and protests to resist exclusionary policies. Moreover, providing alternative narratives and experiences of migrants is an important strategy employed by social actors operating within migrant civil society. Rather than potential security threats, migrants are framed as hard-working and responsible laborers, economic and social contributors to local and national communities, and worthy of inclusion into society because of the fact they are human (Leitner and Strunk 2014, 349-52), hereby actively de-securitizing the conceived threat of migrants. As such, migrant civil society is a collective of diverse organizations, institutions and movements that work towards a shared goal, either by cooperating or working next to each other, constantly trying to fill the void left by the withdrawal of public services for migrants. It is in this void that contentious politics (Tarrow

2011) emerge or, as Leitner and Strunk discuss, acts of insurgent citizenship are mobilized to "challenge existing laws, policies, and institutions; promote alternative criteria for membership in a polity; and lay claims to and enact new forms of citizenship and rights" (2014, 350).

As Theodore and Martin argue, collectively, organizations and social movements generally have more legitimacy, as well as capacity, to make claims on the state than (undocumented) migrants. Furthermore, their active presence in the border community gives them more credibility in framing concrete and effective policy options on local, regional and national levels (2007, 271-72, 284). Hereby, migrant civil society plays a central role in providing a powerful platform for political and social mobilization and an "political force that frames policy choices, articulates political demands, and carries out a variety of forms of political action. At the same time … it is involved in social service delivery, community organizing, and the construction of collective consciousness among diverse populations" (2007, 283). Focusing on migrant civil society makes sense as it brings to focus the broader urban and social concerns that are faced by the border community as a result of an increased influx of migrants, while at the same time analyzing the concrete strategies that organized social actors undertake to respond to these concerns. These strategies can be categorized into two groups, which will be discussed below.

2.3 Strategies of Support and Contention

As described previously, migrant civil society consists of a wide variety of organizations, movements and institutions working towards shared or similar goals, primarily aimed at highlighting and addressing concerns faced by migrants. Public advocacy is an integral tool to influence public policy concerning migration; "advocacy organizations make public interest claims either promoting or resisting social change that, if implemented, would conflict with the social, cultural, political, or economic interests or values of other constituencies and groups" (Andrews and Edwards 2004, 481). Advocacy efforts are often attributed to organizations whose sole goal is advocacy. However, as Almog-Bar and Schmid note, these specialized organizations only represent a small percentage of the public advocacy space. Most advocacy efforts are "undertaken by organizations that combine advocacy with the provision of services, usually their primary goal" (2014, 12). As such, Andrews and Edwards provide a definition of advocacy organizations which include interest groups, social movements, and non-profit organizations (2004, 481-86). This links back to the diverse

composition of migrant civil society, as most organizations and movements operating within migrant civil society engage in public advocacy to a certain extend.

Two distinct advocacy tactics, are employed by advocacy organizations, insider and outsider tactics; "Insider tactics are intended to change policy by working directly with policy-makers and other institutional elites that emphasize working 'inside the system.' Outsider tactics … refer to extra-institutional tactics that emphasize working outside the system, such as public education; mass media; protests, boycotts, and demonstrations." (Almog-Bar and Schmid 2014, 12). Migrant civil society operating in El Paso uses both tactics, but within this thesis the focus lies on the use of outsider tactics. These tactics are more apparent on a community-level. Framing is a very important component of outsider tactics. A frame is defined as an "interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (Snow and Benford in Demmers 2017, 100). Frames are used to sway public opinions concerning migration and migrants to indirectly promote change in public policy, and to mobilize people against specific policies.

Within outsider tactics, I define two concrete strategies that are employed by migrant civil society in El Paso: 'strategies of support' and 'strategies of contention'. Strategies of support are linked to the extra-institutional provision of services and basic needs, while strategies of contention are about the use of frames, amplified through protests, reports and interviews, to contend existing policies and sway public opinion. Social actors operating within migrant civil society make prominent use of strategic framing processes: "processes that are deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed. Frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose" (Benford, and Snow 2000, 624). In the case of migrant civil society, the purpose is to bring about social and political change to address concerns faced by migrants.

2.4 Securitization of the US-Mexican Border

As described above, securitization and migrant civil society are two very distinct concepts. Securitization theory is concerned with the definition of security and security-related policy making, while migrant civil society is about how organized social actors respond to concerns faced by migrants. As discussed previously, securitization theory is very much a top-down conception of security- and policymaking. As a result, the relationship between securitizing actors and audiences is underdeveloped. This relationship is painted as one-dimensional and

there is little regard for the local contexts and dynamics in which security-making does or does not take place. The definition of security is socially constructed, yet there is little attention paid to how processes of securitization are appropriated, contested and responded to in different contexts. In a complex community such as El Paso, these contexts and dynamics are very important to understand, as audiences are not just passively accepting discourses formulated by securitization actors. Instead, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the level of acceptance is contested; the acceptance of something as a security issue is constantly negotiated and reformulated based on local events, contexts and dynamics. Successful or not, community organizations, social movements and, in the context of El Paso, churches play an explicit role in negotiating the definition of security and the border security, or enforcement, policies that are orchestrated as a result of this. Therefore, by analyzing strategies used by migrant civil society in response to securitization processes, a useful framework can be provided to discuss the organized and active attitude of what securitization theory defines as audiences. Not only are securitization processes contested, organized social actors within migrant civil society also have different perceptions of what should happen to address migration concerns in El Paso, based on different perceptions of security and inclusion. Through strategies of support and contention, migrant civil society reactively and proactively responds to securitization processes that affect migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border and in the border community of El Paso. Reactively, by filling up void that is left by the withdrawal of public services for migrants, and proactively, by using strategic framing to increase awareness, change narratives, pronounce concerns and potential solutions concerning migration and the border.

Securitization is the central focus of this thesis but approached from a bottom-up, localized, angle, specifically analyzing community-level responses to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. The securitization of the border, executed through border enforcement practices, such as the reinforcement of the wall, migrant detention, family separation, and turn backs, is still a broad analytical framework as it includes many components. Therefore, the central points of analysis will be the active role of audiences in addressing concerns and the often-contentious relationships between securitizing actors and audiences within securitization processes. In the following chapters I will specifically discuss how securitization processes related to the US-Mexican border are appropriated by the border community and the concrete strategies of support and contention that are employed by migrant civil society in El Paso in response to these processes.

3. Contextualizing the US-Mexican Border in El Paso

El Paso cannot be understood without also looking at its Mexican counterpart, Ciudad Juárez. These two cities, affectionately called the Sister Cities, span across two different countries but are at the same time deeply intertwined in social, spatial, economic and historical relations. While the cities are now separated by a hard border, this used to be a softer, more dynamic border which was easily crossed. As such, to understand the connection El Pasoans have to the border and to Ciudad Juárez today, it is important to dive deeper in the underlying conditions that have shaped this environment over the years. In the following sub-chapter, I will discuss the history of the borderlands, focused on El Paso and Ciudad Juárez and the corresponding relationship between the US and Mexico. After that, I will discuss the hardening of the border by looking at several developments in border enforcement policies that typify the current migration system. Positioned within these contexts, migrant civil society responses to the securitization of the US-Mexican border in El Paso will be further explored in chapter four and five.

3.1 History of the Borderlands

Before discussing the history of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, it is important to understand that the borderlands used to be very different.

Figure 1: A map illustrating the shift of the US-Mexican border through the years.[1]

[1] From the book Voices from Colonial America: California, 1542-1850, published by National Geographic Society © 2006; https://www.nationalgeographic.org/photo/land-lost-mexico/

As can be seen on the map, after the Mexican independence from the Spaniards in 1821, many of the southern states that are currently part of the US, were part of Mexico. It is during this time that relations between the US and Mexico sprung up. Mexico was trying to build up its newly found nation, while the US was in an economic crisis. Trade connections were made, initially in New Mexico and later in other areas along the border. Furthermore, rich Mexicans started marrying Americans which increased the interconnectedness of the population living in the borderlands.[2]

Texas, at that time, was sparsely populated Mexican territory, as "violent conflicts between Mexicans and independent Indian groups like the Apaches and the Navajos increased throughout the 1830s and 1840s, and Indian raids discouraged economic growth in Mexico's northern states" (Keller 2016, 1). As such, the Mexican government invited Americans to come live there. Land in Mexico was cheaper and easier to obtain than land in the US and some twenty thousand Americans moved to Mexican-owned Texas in the 1820s. Soon the American population outnumbered the Mexican population in Texas ten to one. In 1836, as a result of the Texas Revolution, Texas unofficially seceded from Mexico. Following the US annexation of Texas in 1845, tensions erupted between the US and Mexico which led to the US-Mexican War which lasted from 1846 to 1848. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was drafted which transferred almost half of the total Mexican territory over to the US for a meagre 15 million dollars. In Texas, the border between the US and Mexico was defined as the Rio Grande (Keller 2016, 2-4). Hereby effectively splitting what was called Paso del Norte into two; El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

3.1.1 El Paso and Ciudad Juárez

While there was now a national border dividing a formerly united Paso del Norte, the sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez were still deeply intertwined. The El Paso County was formed shortly after the war in 1850 and at this time there was a fluent border. People and businesses were freely flowing from one side of the border to the other and relations between the cities were tight. However, the national relations between the US and Mexico were not great. After the path of the Rio Grande shifted in 1864 after heavy rainfall, the border was moved south, and Texas gained 700 acres of land. It wasn't until 1964 that the US finally gave part of the 700 acres back to Mexico (NPR 2014).

[2] Interview with Dr. Yolanda C. Leyva. May 7, 2019.

Photo 1: Mural in downtown El Paso depicting the sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

When the Mexican Revolution started in 1910, the first period of mass migration to the US began. The revolution caused about a million Mexicans to flee to the US and, not for the first time since the US-Mexican War, the relationship between the two countries deteriorated as US investors were kicked out of Mexico.[3] Many refugees and revolutionaries, including Pancho Villa, took shelter in El Paso as it became a haven from which parts of the revolution in northern Mexico was organized. Books and newspapers were published, and weapons and ammunition were stashed in storage houses in El Paso (Harp 2010).

[3] This is a simplified version of some of the events that occurred during the Mexican Revolution. A more comprehensive outline of the revolution is out of the scope of this thesis.

As David Romo notes, the revolution became almost like a spectacle. The Battle of Juárez in 1911 was a major battle between federal forces loyal to president Porfirio Díaz and revolutionary forces led by Francisco Madero. After a month of fighting, federal forces surrendered, which led to the Treaty of Ciudad Juárez. This concluded the initial phase of the Mexican Revolution and Madero became the new president of Mexico. This battle was highly anticipated as people came from all over to watch the spectacle that was the Battle of Juárez in 1911 (2005, 76-106). Describing the extend of anticipation for this battle in El Paso, David Romo notes:

"If you look carefully at the southern wall of the old El Paso Laundry Building at 901 Santa Fe Street—across from the tourist parking lot near the International Bridge—you can still see the bulletholes from the Battle of Juárez. In May 1911, this building's rooftop provided one of the best seats to watch the battle south of the river. El Pasoans bought tickets to climb to the roof and get as close to the battle as possible." (2005, 81)

During the revolution, many Mexican migrants settled in El Paso or travelled further inwards into the US. Mexican migrants provided cheap labor which the US sorely needed at that time. Ironically, it was also around this time that the US began to slowly deter migrant crossings when the Mounted Guards, and from 1924 onwards the Border Patrol, started patrolling the US-Mexican border (CBP 2018).

3.2 A Hardening Border: Border Enforcement

As illustrated in the previous sub-chapter, the border between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez is an integral place for social, economic and historical exchange between the US and Mexico. While the Border Patrol was formed in 1924, it wasn't until the late 1970's that the US-Mexican border became more hardened. The border hardened physically, as fences and barriers were built to combat illegal migration and cross-border drug smuggling, but also socially, as the US took an increasingly harder stance against migrants crossing the border (Arreola 2010:340).

El Paso has been a sort of testing ground for border enforcement policies in the US for decades. Policies are tested in El Paso and, if successful, they are implemented on a broader scale. Operation Hold the Line is the primary example of such a policy test conducted in El Paso, as this operation most specifically typified the shift towards a harder border between the US and Mexico. More recently, extending the border barrier, the Tornillo child detention

facility, and the 'Remain in Mexico' policy have made El Paso a focal point for border enforcement policies and border security. This sub-chapter will detail these concrete changes in border enforcement policies, their impact on the migration system in the US, and on El Paso.

3.2.1 Operation Hold the Line

Operation Hold the Line, which was initiated in 1993, marked a profound shift in border enforcement policies by the US. The operation, originally called Operation Blockade, was an aggressive plan aimed at cutting down illegal migration on the US-Mexican border in El Paso. Four hundred Border Patrol officers and vehicles, no more than a quarter of a mile apart, formed a blockade along a 20 mile stretch on the border (Garcia 2014; KVIA 2014). Blockades at the border had been tried before, Operation Intercept in 1969 initiated the War on Drugs by inspecting 4.5 million individuals and their belongings on the US-Mexican border (Craig 1980, 565). However, Operation Hold the Line was the first major successful shift to current border enforcement efforts, the deterrence of illegal entry, and it premiered in El Paso.

The operation was met with large protests coming from both El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, but nationally it was deemed as a success claiming that crime rates went down, apprehensions of undocumented migrants dropped by 70 percent and illegal crossings decreased (KVIA 2014). As a result, Operation Gatekeeper was launched a year later in San Diego, designed along the same principles as the El Paso operation. El Pasoans had mixed feelings about the blockade. While individuals were asked about their migration status on the street less frequently as border enforcement efforts focused more on apprehending people at the border, it also severely impacted mobility across the border. Individuals could no longer cross the border through the bridges or Rio Grande relatively unhindered, moving them to the desert and into the hands of smugglers instead (Garcia 2014; KVIA 2014).

3.2.2 Funding the Barrier

Fences have been present between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez since before Operation Hold the Line. Initially these fences were mainly built on private property to stop human trespassing or to contain livestock. However, the idea of building fences to deter illegal crossings and cross-border drugs smuggling gained political momentum in the 1970s. In 1964 the Bracero guest worker program was shut down, which previously had provided Mexican workers with short-term labor contracts for low-income jobs primarily in the agricultural

sector in the US.[4] While in 1965, INA was implemented, which replaced the national-quota system, which was favorable to Mexican workers, with a preference system based on pre-existing social ties with the US and worker's skills (Chrishti, Hipsman, and Ball 2015). Mexico was subjected to a quota of no more than 20.000 legal resident visas per year and no temporary work visas at all. However, the economic relationships between US employers and Mexican workers did not change. Both groups were heavily dependent on each other and Mexican workers were still coming to the US in huge numbers. However, they were now crossing the border illegally (Massey et al. 2016, 1559-60). This led to a large increase of undocumented migrants residing in the US. In 1978, officials claimed that three to five million undocumented migrants were living in the US at that time (Martinez 2008, 269).

In 1979 the construction of a collection of fences across the US-Mexican border, including El Paso, was initiated, aiming: "(1) to replace dilapidated fences that were full of holes, some big enough to allow cars through, and (2) to force undocumented immigrants away from the urban areas and into the open desert where they could be caught more easily" (Martinez 2008, 270). This project, referred to as the Tortilla Curtain, faced a lot of backlash as it was orchestrated without input from the border community. Furthermore, major concerns for the safety of migrants crossing the border were raised by the press, political leaders and merchants in both the US and Mexico. Members of the border communities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez generally identified this wall as unnecessary and they were afraid that it would negatively impact cross-border relations between the sister cities. In 1979, when the construction of the Tortilla Curtain was initiated, the design of the curtain was significantly altered. The hazardous barbed wire and razors were removed from the fences and its length was reduced in El Paso (Martinez 2008, 270-75).

In the decades after the construction of the Tortilla Curtain the border fences would be further extended and reinforced. During Operation Hold the Line, parts of the border fences in El Paso were repaired and extended, and the border fence in its current form started being constructed in 2008 (Shjarback and Manjarrez 2019). Called the border barrier, the new plan replaced much of the existing loose fencing with a more extensive design. The old fencing that was present between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez was essentially demolished and largely replaced with corrugated metal structures of up to 21 foot tall (Duara 2017). To further increase the effectiveness of border enforcement efforts, the Bush administration also

[4] The Bracero guest worker program ran from 1942-1964 as a response to labor shortages after World War II. It was designed with multiple safeguards to protect the rights of Mexican workers, but in reality, these workers were often exploited; http://www.braceroarchive.org/about

authorized increases in vehicle barriers, checkpoints, lighting, and the use of advanced surveillance techniques, such as cameras, satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles (White House 2006). The redesign of border structures was preceded by a restructuration of border enforcement efforts in the aftermath of 9/11. In 2003, CBP was relocated under DHS and ICE was formed (CBP 2018), which marked a big step towards the securitization of the US-Mexican border, as it introduced migration control and border enforcement as issues of national security. Furthermore, the war on terror increasingly painted the border as a place where terrorist enter the US which led to increased security checks and scrutiny, hereby further securitizing the US-Mexican border. Since then funding for ICE and CBP has grown enormously, from a combined annual budget of 9.5 billion dollars in 2003 to 25 billion dollars in 2019.[5]

3.3 El Paso as a Focal Point: Tornillo and Remain in Mexico

As described above, situated directly on the border with Mexico, El Paso increasingly became a testing ground for border enforcement strategies. Besides the fact that migration control and border security is an explicit focus of the Trump administration, the current administration cannot be considered solely responsible for securitizing the US-Mexican border. This is a process that has been slowly been accelerated from the 1970's onwards and is still ongoing. Border enforcement policies such as family separation, detention, and turnbacks – turning asylum seekers away to prevent asylum claims – have been present for decades. The impact of and responses to these policies will be discussed in more depth in the following chapters, but in this sub-chapter there will be a short introduction into two concrete border enforcement programs that have been prominently employed in El Paso in 2018 and 2019. One, the Tornillo child detention facility, has been shut down partly because of extensive community protesting in El Paso and nation-wide media attention, while the other, 'Remain in Mexico', remains in action and was recently extended. These two programs have severely impacted community involvement in El Paso and brought a notable increase in media attention for El Paso. In the last few years El Paso has, along with being a testing ground for border enforcement programs, increasingly become a focal point for migration issues, overtaking other border cities and areas.

[5] As listed in DHS Budget-in-Brief of 2004 and 2019; https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget

Photo 2: Military-style tents in the Tornillo child detention facility.

Tornillo was a military-style tent city in an isolated desert area 40 miles east of El Paso. It was employed as a detention facility for unaccompanied migrant children. Over 6.000 unaccompanied children were detained at the Tornillo detention facility since it opened in June 2018. Children detained at Tornillo reported "evident vulnerabilities and anxieties related to the uncertain process of being placed with sponsors, combined with the lingering effects of their experiences in transit and in their home communities" (HBI 2019a, 16). The Flores settlement agreement of 1987 states that unaccompanied children must be released within 20 days and that certain conditions must be met while being detained, such as basic needs, medical care and education. However, the children detained in Tornillo were being denied adequate access to mental health services and were constantly being put under delays and detained for periods that exceeded the Flores settlement agreement (HBI 2019a, 16-17). The Tornillo detention facility opened up at the height of the national debate surrounding the separation of migrant families and was met with a lot of outrage in the form of protests, rallies, marches, and strikes organized by the border community in El Paso and across the country. It was eventually closed down in January 2019, after continued protests and negative media attention, and its shutdown was seen as a slight victory by the border community. Moreover, the increased media attention for the border and border enforcement programs in

El Paso remained, which brought increased resources to migrant civil society in the form of funding, donations and volunteers from all over the country.

After Tornillo, the Remain in Mexico program was introduced. Officially known as MPP, it is a border enforcement strategy "whereby certain foreign individuals entering or seeking admission to the U.S. from Mexico – illegally or without proper documentation – may be returned to Mexico and wait outside of the U.S. for the duration of their migration proceedings, where Mexico will provide them with all appropriate humanitarian protections for the duration of their stay" (DHS 2019b). Remain in Mexico was implemented in January 2019, and as of June 2019 more than 10.000 asylum seekers have been returned to Mexico. Remain in Mexico, initially implemented in three border cities including El Paso, is set to be expanded to more cities along the border. On June 7, as a result of a deal that pauses US import tariffs which were previously placed on goods coming from Mexico, the US and Mexico released a joint agreement stating the following:

"The United States will immediately expand the implementation of the existing Migrant Protection Protocols across its entire Southern Border. This means that those crossing the U.S. Southern Border to seek asylum will be rapidly returned to Mexico where they may await the adjudication of their asylum claims. In response, Mexico will authorize the entrance of all of those individuals for humanitarian reasons, in compliance with its international obligations, while they await the adjudication of their asylum claims. Mexico will also offer jobs, healthcare and education according to its principles. The United States commits to work to accelerate the adjudication of asylum claims and to conclude removal proceedings as expeditiously as possible" (DOS 2019).

Just like the Tornillo detention facility, Remain in Mexico has been heavily criticized and is threatened with litigation since its inception, as it puts the life of migrants at risk (Montoya-Galvez and Canales, 2019). Officially, a system is in place which determines if it's safe to return migrants to Mexico. However, while large numbers of migrants express a fear of returning to Mexico, DHS continues to return vulnerable or endangered migrant groups, such as families with special needs, pregnant women and victims of violence. In El Paso, migrants are returned to Ciudad Juárez, where migrants "continue to face kidnappings, theft, extortion, and threats" (HBI 2019b).

4. Diving the Borderlands: Migration Concerns in El Paso

As described in previous chapters, El Pasoans have a different relationship to migration and the US-Mexican border than people in other regions of the US. El Paso and its Mexican counterpart, Ciudad Juárez, are deeply interconnected on social and economic levels. It is a place of constant movement, with large amounts of people and diverse variety of goods crossing the border every day. The border, once soft and fluid and now increasingly hardened, is a central part of life in El Paso. Understandably so, as by foot it is only 15 minutes from the San Jacinto Plaza in downtown El Paso to the Paso del Norte bridge, also known as the Santa Fe bridge.

Being a worker's city in the middle of the desert, the vast streets in El Paso are surprisingly empty as transiting cars typify the landscape. However, once you start strolling down the streets that lead to the US-Mexican border, the city is vitalized. Grocery shops, clothing stores and restaurants get smaller, as the distance between buildings decreases. Especially in the weekends, Mexican music fills the hot, dry desert air. The noise increases as people crowd the sidewalks, sit outside and engage in passionate conversations, mostly in Spanish. Because of a combination of goods, people and trash, the streets aren't as clean and organized anymore. As the border comes closer the city gets messier, but it feels so much more alive.[6]

Fieldnotes, March 9, 2019

Crossing the border is a part of everyday life in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. By foot, bike, bus or car, people and goods are crossing the US-Mexican border all day long. People in the sister cities cross the border to see family, to attend social activities, to work, to do shopping or to take advantage of cheap health- and dentalcare services in Mexico.[7] As such, the sister cities are dependent on each other economically, but also socially. The interconnectedness of the cities can clearly be seen in the demographics of El Paso, the city of El Paso has almost 700.000 residents, of which over 80 percent is Hispanic or Latino. As such, a majority of the residents of El Paso are bilingual. Around 60 percent of El Pasoans speak both English and Spanish (USCB 2019).

[6] First impressions of downtown El Paso and the US-Mexican border.
[7] Interviews with multiple informants and participant observation along the border and in the sister cities.

There are four points where the border between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez can be crossed and all are bridges, from west to east: Paso del Norte, Stanton – Lerdo, Bridge of the Americas, and Ysleta – Zaragoza. The Paso del Norte entry point is by far the busiest as it ends up in both downtown El Paso and downtown Ciudad Juárez. While crossing the border to Mexico is easy, by paying 50 cents you can freely cross the border, coming back is harder. This year, especially from March 2019 onwards, the queue of people waiting to enter the US started filling up the entire Santa Fe bridge as a result of further increases in migrant influxes, subsequently leading to increased wait times of up to several hours.[8] By car it takes even longer to cross, as vehicles are generally checked extensively. Along with increased wait times, an identity check is performed in the middle of the bridge, at the point where US territory starts, and once more at the customs office at the end of the bridge. The wait times and scrutiny at the border have increased through the years and have led to a reluctance or inability to cross. As one informant stated: "I stopped going to Juárez for a while because of the long wait times … it depends on the day, sometimes its 25 minutes, sometimes six hours."[9] Similar sentiments were shared by several other informants. Some chose to cross the border less frequently, while others, especially people working on one side of the border and living on the other, adapted to the situation by reserving more time to cross the border or by finding (temporary) accommodation on the US side of the border. Furthermore, informants voiced their frustrations with the increased wait times and scrutiny at the border, claiming that increased security measures taken at the border have primarily led to inconveniences and have severely limited cross-border mobility.[10]

4.1 Migration Discourses in El Paso

As described in the previous chapter, several measures have been taken over the years to reinforce and securitize the US-Mexican border. However, it is important to note that the composition of migration flows has also changed in recent years. The flow of Mexicans has dropped significantly in the last few years, while the flow from the northern part of Central America has increased since 2014 (Jordan and Romero 2019). This area, also called the Northern Triangle, is comprised of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Countries that have long struggled with poverty, violence, corruption and social, political, and economic instability (Labrador and Renwick 2018). In El Paso specifically, migration flows have

[8] Personal experience while crossing the border, interviews and conversations with informants.
[9] Interview with Carlos. April 25, 2019
[10] Interviews with multiple informants that cross the border on a regular basis.

significantly increased since late 2018 when large migrant caravans started arriving from the Northern Triangle. Currently, these 'new migration' flows consist mainly of families and unaccompanied children trying to apply for asylum or refuge in the US, while historically these flows were typified by Mexican men looking for work in the US (DHS 2019c).

4.1.1 Securitizing Migration Discourses

CBP pronounced to be struggling with the composition of these new migration flows, as Kevin McAleenan, Secretary of Homeland Security and CBP commissioner, stated during a news briefing in El Paso in March 2019:

"The arriving flows are made up primarily of Central American families and unaccompanied children … The last time we had crossings near this level, they were almost all single adults from Mexico who could be swiftly repatriated … This stark and increasing shift to more vulnerable populations, combined with overwhelming numbers and inadequate capacity to detain families and children at ICE and helping human services respectively, is creating a humanitarian crisis." (McAleenan 2019)

McAleenan is hereby explicitly focusing on the humanitarian challenges of increased migration flows and the changing composition of these flows. He claims that it takes longer to process families and children than single Mexican adults. More specifically, he claims that detention facilities are not properly equipped to deal with whole families and children. However, later in the same briefing, McAleenan also dives deeper into the security concerns that CBP states to be simultaneously facing at the US-Mexican border:

"This humanitarian missions, which we're committed to, is undermining our border security effort. While 65% of crossings are families and children who most often present themselves to border patrol agents, 35% are still single adults who try to evade apprehension at our border. And within that flow are 1.000's of criminals, smugglers, gang members and public safety threats. With up to 40% or more of our personnel in key sectors like El Paso, working to care for, transport, provide medical and hospital watch for families and children, that means our security posture at the border is negatively impacted. The same criminal organizations that are smuggling migrants, profiting from them, abusing them on the journey, are benefitting from our reduced security presence. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing adults who try to avoid capture by hiding behind those families." (McAleenan 2019)

In the excerpt above McAleenan clearly securitizes the US-Mexican border. He paints the border as a place where large numbers of lawbreakers, criminals and safety threats try to get into the US, framing only families and children as legitimate asylum seekers. Moreover, frames of humanitarian concerns and security threats are often intertwined, as clearly stated in the beginning of his briefing; "CBP is facing an unprecedented humanitarian and border security crisis" (McAleenan 2019).

This narrative is not only pronounced by McAleenan, but also by other federal institutions on multiple occasions. As noted in the introduction, Trump defined migrant influxes at the US-Mexican border as invasions, while stressing the effectiveness of border security efforts: "It's an invasion of drugs and criminals and people. We have no idea who they are, but we capture them because border security is so good" (Trump 2019b). Furthermore, in February, Trump painted the wall as the most effective solution to address concerns at the border, such as the smuggling of drugs, illegal entry, human trafficking, and violence. He specifically named El Paso as a means of legitimizing the border wall:

"I asked the people – many of whom were from El Paso, but they came from all over Texas. And I asked them. I said, 'Let me ask you, as a crowd: When the wall went up, was it better?' … It was not only better; it was like 100 percent better … In El Paso, they have close to 2,000 murders right on the other side of the wall. And they had 23 murders." (Trump 2019a)

Moreover, former Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen specifically blamed activist groups, congressional inaction and criminals for creating a "full-fledged emergency", while noting how migrant children and families are helpless victims "exploited by traffickers, human smugglers, gangs, and other nefarious actors seeking to profit at their expense" (DHS 2019a).

4.1.2 Discourse Implications

The aggregation of the humanitarian and security frames is quite interesting, as the same group is painted as being a potential security threat, as well as being in need of humanitarian help. In fact, the humanitarian frame is used almost as an excuse for issues that occur within the current migration system, as detention centers are overcrowded because of the need for extensive humanitarian aid for families and children, and border security efforts are being undermined because efforts need to be redirected towards the provision of humanitarian aid.

In essence, framing migration concerns in El Paso and other parts of the US-Mexican border as both a humanitarian and border security crisis, legitimizes the allocation of extra resources to border enforcement efforts. McAleenan specifically requests extra funding for DHS, CBP and ICE, and reforms to asylum laws to be able to repatriate children coming from Central America, stating that "we're asking this today on behalf of us and the migrants in our custody" (McAleenan 2019).

In 2019, several discursive and performative approaches have been taken to contain and try to deal with the 'threat of the border', hereby further securitizing it. In February 2019 the Trump administration declared a state of emergency to obtain extra funding for the wall (Rodgers and Bailey 2019), followed by threats to close down the US-Mexican border in April (Collins, Fritze, and Jackson 2019) and threats of imposing trade tariffs on Mexico at the end of May (Kolenc 2019; Jackson 2019). Next to these discursive approaches, many performative actions have been undertaken in El Paso as a result of this projected migration crisis. These actions include the relocation of many CBP officers from less crowded bridges and checkpoints to more populated areas, the deployment of the US Coast Guard to support border enforcement efforts at the bridges, the temporary closure of certain cargo lanes, and the construction of several detention and processing centers (Martinez 2019). These explicit discursive and performative approaches, along with changes in border enforcement efforts, have had an immediate impact on the El Paso border community.

4.1.3 Communal Appropriations

As stressed by the majority of my informants, El Paso is generally a positive, open and welcoming community. However, the border community in El Paso cannot be regarded as a homogenous unit. It is a collection of individuals who share a lot of similarities and backgrounds, yet, within this community individuals have distinct and diverse beliefs and views, especially on the topic of migration and border security. My informants in El Paso presented often similar, but sometimes hugely varying and adversarial, opinions. The formulation of these opinions is deeply related to the appropriation and experience of security discourses pronounced by federal institutions and repeated by national and regional media. It is in these formulations that the dynamics between securitization processes, and community-level experiences and definitions of the US-Mexican border, migration and migrants become apparent.

Some informants sympathize with the discourses pronounced by federal institutions and repeated by national and regional media. Informants express concerns of safety, fearing

an increased influx of criminals, human smugglers and even terrorists. Besides that, informants also express fears that are not specifically pronounced by federal institutions. Several informants claim that migrants are stealing jobs from US citizens and are overcrowding social, educational and health services. A narrative that is often pronounced is that "some people live in terrible conditions but we, as the US, cannot take too many migrants, because we will get overloaded."[11] Furthermore, the motivation behind migration is questioned, several informants frame migrants arriving at the border as economic refugees looking to exploit the US economy by taking money out of the country, while giving nothing in return. The same informants who sympathize with these discourses, often emphasize the need for a border wall. One informant argued that "the wall protects US citizens from the influx of drugs, criminals and illegals. Humanitarian concerns will be resolved with increased security."[12] This specific informant essentially repeats the discourse that is spread by Trump and federal institutions in the US, and others do as well. Several informants claim that Trump is misunderstood and is in fact effectively tackling unemployment, migration and border security concerns despite being constantly undermined by Democrats who ignore the 'crisis' at the US-Mexican border.[13] These formulations signify that these informants have essentially accepted the security discourses that are presented to them. Securitizing actors, in this case several federal institutions, play with feelings of unease and fear, about an increase in crime or about a loss of sovereignty, that are attributed to migration flows arriving at the border. As Bigo (2002) would argue, it is a technique of governmentality that is used to achieve a specific goal, in this case the reinforcement of the US-Mexican border.

Having said that, the majority of the people I interviewed over the course of three months feel a certain disconnect between these securitization discourses and local migration concerns in El Paso. As one informant said:

"Politicians don't understand the situation in El Paso, because they don't live here … People in El Paso have been dealing with migration for 100's of years, while people in the north have no idea what they're talking about."[14]

[11] Interview with Gloria. March 12, 2019.
[12] Interview with Gloria. March 25, 2019.
[13] Interview with multiple informants in El Paso.
[14] Interview with Pedro. March 3, 2019.

Informants state that they experience a certain disconnect between border enforcement efforts that further securitize the US-Mexican border, and community-level experiences, dynamics and concerns regarding the border and migration in El Paso. Several informants argue that the crisis at the border, as pronounced by federal institutions in the US, is fabricated, stating that it is framed as a crisis to achieve certain goals or to divert attention from other topics. As one informant states: "They're creating a problem where there is none. They're playing with fear, creating fear and framing a crisis. With the government being 'the good Samaritan' who will resolve this issue"[15]. Other informants point to the responsibility of the US in creating this portrayed crisis. They argue that the US has destabilized the Northern Triangle for decades through ineffective and selfish foreign policy, weapon and drug trade, while simultaneously criminalizing migrants and militarizing the US-Mexican border; more people have legitimate reasons to migrate, but less people are accepted into the US. The border crisis, if it can be classified as a crisis at all, is a humanitarian one, they argue.[16] As one informant argues:

"It's difficult because in the end we're all humans. There is a lot of generalization going on. They're talking about how these people are drug dealers, human smugglers and criminals. The majority of the people coming to the US are hard workers trying to provide for their families".[17]

By taking away the frame of national security, informants are explicitly identifying and contesting the security discourse surrounding the US-Mexican border that is presented by securitizing actors. Instead, informants frame the border as a place of humanitarian concern, hereby promoting an alternative security discourse that is more in line with the concept of human security, addressing legitimate concerns faced by ordinary people arriving at the border.

It is in this environment that migrant civil society operates. It provides a comprehensive and organized platform to react to border enforcement efforts by providing support of those who are affected most, migrants, but it also tries to change the tide, by proactively contesting the securitization of the US-Mexican border.

[15] Interview with Eduardo. March 18, 2019.
[16] Interviews with multiple informants operating in migrant civil society.
[17] Interview with Bruce. April 4, 2019.

4.2 Migrant Civil Society in El Paso

Being situated at the border, many El Pasoans have a history of, or relation to, migration and have experienced, or heard stories about, how hard it can be to leave your home and possessions behind and move to a different country in which you don't speak the language. Furthermore, crossing the border is experienced as a necessary and regularly performed activity as people on both sides of the border in El Paso cross to visit family, to go shopping, or to attend school or work. Besides that, Dr. Yolanda Leyva[18], historian and active member of the border community, argues that El Paso is a relatively poor city which helps people to be more aware of what it is like to have needs. As such, she argues that the majority of people living in the border community are traditionally very helpful and giving.

Combining these contextual factors, it is not surprising that many El Pasoans have shown considerable solidarity with migrants crossing the US-Mexican border. Members of the border community have mobilized themselves into community organizations, social movements, legal advocacy organizations, churches and other faith-based organizations in support of migrants arriving at the border in El Paso. Together, the collection of these diverse organizations, movements and churches forms represents migrant civil society in El Paso. These entities work towards the same goals through different means; alleviating some of the social, political, economic and legal concerns that migrants face when arriving to the US-Mexican border and in the El Paso border community. Migrant civil society in El Paso employs a diverse number of strategies to address concerns faced by migrants. These strategies can be categorized into the groups of strategies of support and contention. Strategies of support are employed to fill the void left by the withdrawal of public services for migrants. In the following sub-chapters, two major strategies of support employed by migrant civil society in El Paso will be discussed; providing social services and basic needs and providing legal and educational services. Strategies of contention, categorized as increasing awareness, changing narratives and providing alternative solutions, will be discussed in the next chapter.

[18] Interview with Dr. Yolanda Leyva. May 7, 2019.

4.2.1 Providing Social Services and Basic Needs

First and foremost, a large part of migrant civil society operating in El Paso is concerned with providing social services and basic needs to migrants being released in El Paso by CBP and ICE or migrants arriving in El Paso illegally. These services and needs include the provision of shelter, food, a shower or bath, clothes, transportation, toys and creative outlets, such as drawing and painting equipment, but also social contact, basic medical help and psychological help. Migrants would previously be hosted by ICE up until the point of transfer to their sponsors elsewhere in the US but starting from November 2018 ICE and CBP started releasing migrants on the street without support or shelter.[19]

Annunciation House is the most prominent provider of shelter and basic needs within El Paso. It was originally a faith-based initiative founded in 1978 to experience and spread the gospel, while aiming to provide services to those who are most in need and could not already be assisted by existing programs or agencies. Soon enough it evolved to become a permanent shelter for homeless people and (undocumented) migrants. As a result of the increased number of migrants being released in El Paso, several migrant shelters have been opened in El Paso. Released migrants are spread out over the shelters across the city. Annunciation House has two paid employees, while the rest of its staff are volunteers. As such, it is completely dependent on donations. Donations are used to maintain and extend the shelter network in El Paso, and for the purchase of clothes, food, medicine, transportation and other basic needs. CBP and ICE call Ruben Garcia, the director of Annunciation House, every day to inform him how many migrants will be released that day. Afterwards migrants will then be dropped off and spread out over the shelters in El Paso. Before this arrangement with Annunciation House, migrants were dropped off at a bus station in downtown El Paso. Sometimes migrants are released unannounced and shelters become overcrowded or more temporary shelters are established. Shelters are typically run by a team of six volunteers, while migrants are tasked with certain chores, such as making dinner or cleaning the facilities, and contacting sponsors so they can move out of the shelter. The process of contacting a sponsor, one or more individuals who are socially and financially responsible for the migrant(s) in question, might take a single day to several years. However, the goal is to connect migrants with their sponsors in three days.[20]

[19] Interview with Dr. Josiah Heyman. March 13, 2019.
[20] Interviews with several volunteers working at Annunciation House. May 7, 2019.

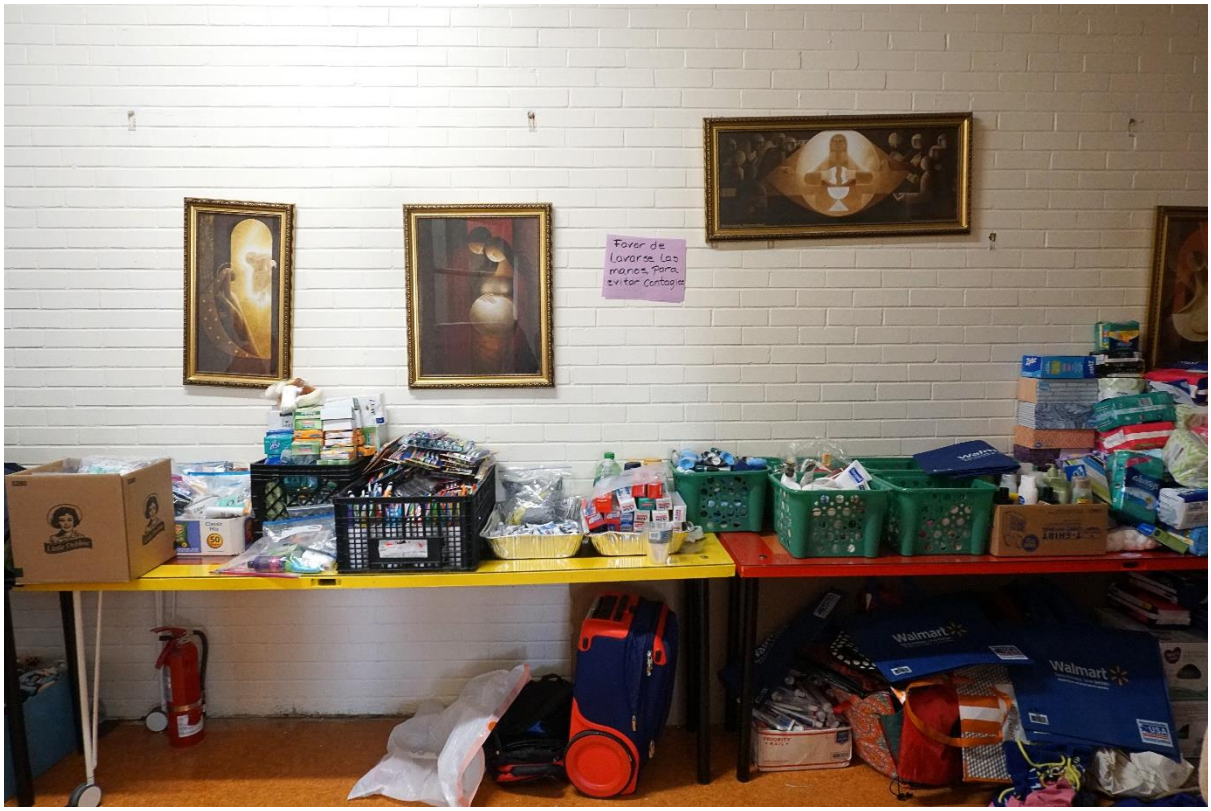

Photo 3: Donated items at Annunciation House shelter in downtown El Paso.

While Annunciation House runs most of the migrant shelters in El Paso, several other temporary shelters are, or were, provided by churches and other faith-based organizations in El Paso, such as the Caminos de Vida church (Borunda 2019), Catholic Diocese of El Paso and the Columban Mission Center. The Colbumban Mission Center is a faith-based organization that opens up their facility to serve migrants, while also engaging in advocacy activities to address migration concerns, as will be discussed in the next chapter.[21] Churches and faith-based organizations in El Paso play a central role in providing food, clothes, medicine and other supplies to shelters, by transferring donations to the church to shelters, purchasing new supplies, preparing food, and employing narratives of solidarity to increase community donations to shelters directly. Next to regularly donating money, clothes, food and other supplies, the border community itself also plays an essential role. El Pasoans offer to support shelters and migrants in a number of ways; from volunteering at shelters and the transportation of migrants, to making shoelaces and belts which are confiscated when migrants enter the US.[22] People also come from other parts of the US, and even other

[21] Interviews with Ilka Vega and Rev. Robert Mosher. March 14 and May 15, 2019.
[22] Interviews with Rev. Robert Mosher, Dr. Yolanda Leyva and several volunteers at Annunciation House. May 15 and May 7, 2019.

countries, to (temporarily) support migrants and volunteer at Annunciation House or other shelters in El Paso. Annunciation House shelters are locations that, like the US-Mexican border, are in constant movement. Migrants, volunteers and goods are continuously moved in and out of shelters. Next to providing shelter and basic needs, migrant civil society operating in El Paso is also concerned with the provision of legal assistance for migrants arriving at the border and within the El Paso border community and educating them about their rights and possibilities.

4.2.2 Providing Legal and Educational Services

As described before, migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border are currently primarily from the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. The long trip to the US is often filled with perils, such as financial exploitation, (threats of) mental or physical abuse, extortion and/or exhaustion. As such, migrants entering the US in El Paso often arrive without a lot of financial means or other possessions. Besides that, migrants often have little knowledge of the human and legal rights they possess and therefore have trouble navigating the complex migration and legal systems in the US. While certain legal organizations in El Paso seek to further exploit migrants by accepting to take on clearly unwinnable cases, charging exorbitant fees, or handing out bogus bonds that will most likely get migrants deported when presented to CBP or ICE, several organizations in El Paso have sprung up to support migrants navigate these complicated systems.[23]

Organizations such as Las Americas and DMRS aim to provide high-quality, free, or low-cost, legal representation and counsel to migrants arriving at the border and within the border community. Services provided by these organizations include legal representation for detainees, victims of crime, and asylum seekers and refugees in El Paso. Next to that, general migration relief is offered, focused on changing legal status, naturalization, acquiring citizenship, and family reunion. For example, As Melissa Lopez illustrated, DMRS provides several programs in detention centers;

"We have our legal orientation program, which is focused on educating individuals in detention and helping them understand the process they're going through and what their options are … we have our Deportation Defense Team, it's a group of attorneys that are

[23] Interview with Luis Hinojos. April 8, 2019.

licensed to go into the detention centers and represent people for the court and then we have our unaccompanied children program."[24]

As illustrated in the quote above, legal representation is often accompanied by educational services. DMRS provides free English classes to assist individuals learning to speak, read and write in English, as most migrants arriving in the US don't possess these skills. Next to that, DMRS provides civic classes to prepare individuals for their US Naturalization exam.

There are several other migrant civil society organizations in El Paso that are focused on providing educational service. There are well-established organizations like BNHR, which is a prominent migration reform and human rights advocacy organization in El Paso, and DMSC, which is an activist collective that stands in solidarity with detained migrants. While there are also startups, such as The Immigration Initiative. These organizations predominantly focus on educating migrants and residents of the border community about their rights and options. Besides this, these organizations inform migrants about the most effective way to navigate the US legal and migration systems. BNHR organizes community programs that aim to educate the border community about human rights, and to mobilize them to act in case of human rights violations. The organization hosts public forums with the border community and local law enforcement agencies in which hosted parties engage and learn from each other. It is thereby beneficial for both the border community and law enforcement agencies, as individuals are educated about their rights and law enforcement agencies learn about concerns faced by the border community. BNHR also employs several strategies of contention to advocate for social and political change, as will be discussed in the next chapter.[25] Furthermore, connected to legal and educational services, DMSC engages in a wide range of activities. DMSC initially focused its efforts on providing translation services for migrants speaking languages other than English or Spanish. Currently it is concerned with supporting detained migrants by helping them navigate the tricky legal landscape of the migration system by educating them about their rights and possibilities. Besides that, the organization also reacts to deficits and miscoordinations in efforts by border enforcements agencies, such as transferring migrants to the correct places, locating detained migrants who are lost in 'the system' and making sure their documents are properly transferred between CBP and ICE. Members of DMSC also set up the Fronterizo Fianza Fund, a fund that has

[24] Interview with Melissa Lopez. April 1, 2019.
[25] Interviews with Robert Heyman and Luis Hinojos. March 19 and April 8, 2019.

been founded to pay bonds that are necessary for the release of detained individuals and families.[26]

4.3 Strategies of Support

The strategies of support discussed above are primarily employed by migrant civil society to react to several immediate needs and concerns experienced by migrants arriving in El Paso. These strategies are very much a direct reaction to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. They try to fill the communal void that has erupted as a result of these securitization processes. When migrants are being released on the street, shelters are raised to house them, legal and educational services are provided to help migrants navigate the complex legal and migration systems and deficits in communications between ICE and CBP are corrected as much as possible. However, these strategies are only a community-level reaction to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. Strategies of support try to address some of the immediate needs and concerns faced by migrants, but these strategies don't address the structural deficits and concerns that are responsible for the creation of this void. As such, these strategies alone are insufficient to influence securitization processes and need to be employed in tandem with strategies of contention, longer-term, proactive strategies that contend the securitization of the US-Mexican border. As will be discussed in the next chapter, several strategies of contention are used by migrant civil society in El Paso; increasing awareness of the situation in El Paso, changing narratives of the border, migration and migrants, and providing alternative solutions to address migration concerns.

[26] Interview with Alan Dicker. April 21, 2019.

5. Contesting the Securitization of the US-Mexican border in El Paso

As described in the previous chapter, migrant civil society employs several strategies to fill the void left by the absence or withdrawal of public services for migrants. These strategies are orchestrated to address some of the immediate concerns that migrants and the border community face in El Paso. As such, these strategies are a direct response to border enforcement policies executed in El Paso. In the words of one informant: "we are basically cleaning up the mess that DHS, ICE and CBP leave behind. It comes with a lot of stress, trauma and exhaustion."[27] Hereby referring to efforts to address the deficits and miscoordinations between ICE and CBP, the response to the initial release of migrants on the streets of El Paso, and the lack of educational, legal services and basic needs for migrants, as described in the previous chapter. Only responding to border enforcement policies by providing public services is not sustainable, nor sufficient in addressing migration concerns present in El Paso. Therefore, migrant civil society employs several other strategies of contention to respond to border enforcement programs is El Paso. This is very much a proactive attitude, as organizations and movements within migrant civil society try to achieve social and political change by highlighting structural concerns within the migration system, and by redefining experiences and narratives of the border, migration and migrants

As described in chapter three, El Paso has increasingly become a focal point for border enforcement programs since 2018. Trump's focus on extending the US-Mexican border barrier, the Tornillo child detention facility and, more recently, the Remain in Mexico policy has brought a large amount of (media) attention and, with that, more resources for migrant civil society in El Paso to utilize. Subsequently, several distinct, but interlinked, strategies of contention have been drafted and employed to contest the securitization of the US-Mexican border; increasing awareness of migration concerns in El Paso, changing narratives of the US-Mexican border, migration and migrants, and providing alternative solutions to achieve a comprehensive reform of the migration system.

5.1 Increasing Awareness

Increasing awareness of migrations concerns at the US-Mexican border, and specifically in El Paso, is a continuous process. Especially because the influx of migrants, border enforcement programs and community-level experiences of migration and the border are dynamic and

[27] Interview with Alan Dicker. April 21, 2019.

constantly evolving. Several events are organized by migrant civil society on specific topics of concern to increase awareness on a community-level and broader regional and national levels. Manifestations, demonstrations, rallies and marches are organized to protest against, or raise awareness on, specific topics, such as the militarization of the border, family separation and the detention of unaccompanied children. Additionally, vigils are organized to remember migrant deaths and disappeared individuals. These events are mostly recognized on a community-level, to increase awareness and to mobilize the border community to act against border enforcement programs. Some protestive events have gathered nation-wide attention and support, such as the rallies, marches and strikes against the Tornillo child detention facilities. However, most protestive events are not very crowded and are only visited by the same groups of people in the border community. These events, ever peaceful, are mostly performative and symbolic in nature. People hold crosses to signify migrant deaths, local or regional speakers are invited to share their experiences and/or expertise and sometimes people play music or pray collectively. Gabrielle Lubliner, a French photographer documenting life at the US-Mexican border in El Paso provides the following recollection of a march against the militarization of the border that was organized by BNHR:

Photo 4: November 2018, BNHR march against the militarization of the border in downtown El Paso.

Winter had just begun in El Paso, not much people were walking around downtown, and the city was slowly becoming more quiet than usual. But on this Saturday morning there were about two hundred El Pasoans on the street to partake in this particular event. BNHR organized a march against the militarization of the border. These types of events were organized more frequently in El Paso since the Trump administration renewed its focus on border security.

Mostly women, children and retired people gathered at nine in the morning to show their solidarity with migrants crossing the border. Together they chanted: "Aqui es la frontera, no es zona de guerra" (Here is the borderland, not a war zone). People were holding crosses in memory of those who died trying to cross the border to the US, it was almost like a funeral walk. The few people I talked to shared different but similar stories. They were mostly Mexican Americans from the first, second or third generation whose parents or grandparents took the chance to leave their life in Mexico behind to come to the US. Yet, even after a few generations passed this feeling of solidarity remained. During this march the mixed heritage of two distinct cultures was clearly displayed by the use of Spanish language, along with proudly waving American flags. It was a march led by immigrants, American citizens, and war veterans. People came from different backgrounds, but at the end of the day it didn't really matter, as they shared the same message: "Stop militarizing the border, El Paso is a welcoming land".

Gabrielle Lubliner, November 2018

Educative events are also organized by organizations like Annunciation House and the Columban Mission Center. In a cooperative effort they organize the Border Awareness Experience (BAE) to "facilitate face-to-face encounters between participants and people and groups on both sides of the border. It intends to raise consciousness about the issues facing the border such as immigration, economic development, human rights, and social justice. The BAE also educates North Americans about our roles and responsibilities in today's globalized world" (Annunciation House 2019; Columban Center 2019). BAE is predominantly designed to educate people about the US-Mexican border, about migration concerns present in El Paso, and on the dynamics of living in a border region.

Next to orchestrating events, migrant civil society in El Paso also regularly publishes reports on migration concerns in El Paso to increase awareness. BNHR publishes annual reports on the state of human rights at the US-Mexico border. Herein human right violations and abuses against migrants are documented, along with testimonials by victims, while policy

recommendations are also provided (BNHR 2019). Abuses range from physical and verbal abuse, to harassment, racism, deprivation of basic needs and procedural violations, such as wrongful detention and bodily searches (BNHR 2019, 14). Moreover, HBI publishes regular reports on the problematic state of border enforcement programs and practices in El Paso, hereby trying to increase awareness about migration concerns in El Paso and on the treatment of migrants arriving from the US-Mexican border. Their latest reports discuss several recent developments in border enforcement practices and their impact on the border community and migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border. Next to that, legal violations and abuses to human rights and dignity are documented and policy recommendations are provided, which will be discussed later (HBI 2018; 2019). Besides publishing these reports, HBI also organizes public conferences to share their findings, in which they invite guest speakers and local, regional media. At one of these conferences they specifically pronounced the need to collectively mobilize against the "attacks on our border community", referring to the continued criminalization of migrants and militarization of the US-Mexican border.[28] The use of the word 'attacks' is strategic, as it brings a sense of urgency and illustrates the severity of the migration concerns that are present in El Paso, hereby advocating for the immediate need for social and political change.

Furthermore, members of migrant civil society regularly utilize the increased media attention for migration concerns in El Paso and along the US-Mexican border, as leading members of migrant civil society organizations regularly give interviews to both local and regional media to provide updates and/or share concerns. Moreover, individuals take advantage of social media to call attention to concerns, developments and events regarding the US-Mexican border and border enforcement practices. At the end of March, CBP started detaining groups of migrants under a bridge in El Paso and enclosing them with fences, supposedly due to overcrowded detention facilities. As a result, there was a huge (social) media response in El Paso and other parts of the US which actively condemned this move, and the temporary facility in question was shut down shortly afterwards. As such, public outrage can be a very effective means to enforce policy change. Adding to that, as Robert Heyman of BNHR argues, Trump's explicit focus on migration and border security actually leads to more attention, reflection and awareness on migration concerns in the US and to more resources for migrant civil society in El Paso to tap into.[29]

[28] Hope and Resistance at the Border Report Release. May 6, 2019.
[29] Interview with Robert Heyman. March 19, 2019.

Finally, exhibitions are organized to and highlight, and educate people about, US-Mexican history, US-Mexican relations and border enforcement programs employed in El Paso and across the border. Uncaged Art, an exhibition that ran for several weeks in several places in El Paso, highlighted practices of child detention in the US. In this exhibition, paintings and drawings from children detained at the Tornillo child detention facility were displayed.[30] Increasing awareness is an important strategy of contention employed by migrant civil society, as there is a large disconnect between national policies, the execution of these policies and experiences in El Paso. It is a process that is valuable in addressing misunderstanding and ignorance about the US-Mexican border and migration, and in highlighting ineffective, illegal and/or inhumane border enforcement programs and practices on national, regional, community levels.

5.2 Changing Narratives

Uncaged Art pronounced a distinct narrative about migration and specifically migrants from the Northern Triangle arriving in El Paso, as the work displayed in Uncaged Art "reflects the resiliency, talent, and creativity of young men and women who trekked 2000 miles from their homes in Central America to reach the United States."[31] Being closely interlinked with strategies to increase awareness, changing narratives is an important strategy of contention employed by migrant civil society in El Paso to influence public opinion on migration, the US-Mexican border, border enforcement agencies and their programs. Hereby it is an essential step in the process towards addressing migration concerns in El Paso and along the US-Mexican border.

Passive victims in need of help, economic refugees, criminals, drug dealers, illegals, rapists, poor people are all classifications that have been used to describe migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border by both my informants in El Paso and public media in the US. As described in chapter four, several informants pronounced that they are weary of accepting (groups of) migrants arriving at the border into US society. According to them, migrants are overcrowding social services, stealing jobs from US citizens, depleting US tax dollars, and/or bringing violence and criminality across the border.[32] Several organizations and movements operating within migrant civil society in El Paso try to change this negative connotation of

[30] Uncaged Art presents the work of youth, ages 13-17, who were detained at the Tornillo detention center in West Texas. Comprised of paintings, drawings, and handicrafts made of found materials; https://events.utep.edu/event/uncaged_art_opening_reception
[31] Ibid.
[32] Interviews with several informants, participant observation during manifestations, public media.

migrants arriving at the border, by framing them as hard-working people who have sacrificed a lot to come to the US. To illustrate this, a recurring slogan during a rally to end family separation and child detention was "we don't know what it takes to leave home"[33]. During this rally, the difficultly of leaving home and the hardship of the trip was continuously pronounced, stressing that it is not easy to leave most family, friends and possessions behind, to make a dangerous and often months-long trip to the US and to build a living in a completely disparate environment with a different language.

By focusing on sacrifices and hardships that migrants underwent, migrants are also humanized in an environment where they are increasingly projected as criminals, exploiters or unwanted aliens. A phrase that is often used in protests, on social media and by migration civil society operating in El Paso is "no human is illegal", referring to the humanity of migrants. Migrants are worthy of inclusion into society purely because of the fact that they are human, like the rest of US citizens. Ilka Vega of HBI stresses that the current border enforcement programs and security measures employed at the US-Mexican border create an environment wherein the criminalization of migrants is normalized.[34] Through different programs focused on deterrence at the border, during detention and in migration courts, migrants are placed in situations where they are subjected to distinct practices of abuse. In these difficult situations they are forced to make a choice between deportation or prolonged detention (HBI 2018 1-2, 11-25). These programs focused on deterrence will be discussed more in-depth in the next sub-chapter. Furthermore, as Melissa Lopez of DMRS argues, border enforcement agencies fail to treat migrants in a dignified and humane way.[35] The majority of my informants argue that the migration concerns currently faced in El Paso are primarily humanitarian ones, doing away the frame of security that is so clearly pronounced within securitization processes concerning the US-Mexican border. Again, this is linked to conflicting definitions of security, migrant civil society often employs the concept of human security, while securitizing actors employ a definition of security that is based on the alleviation of threats.

As several informants note, this security frame is very problematic. Alan Dicker, a former member of DMSC and TRLA, notes that the frame of security is all powerful. By framing something as a matter of national security, every action to address this matter is

[33] Mother's Day Rally to End Family Separation and Child Detention, organized by CECD in cooperation with HBI. May 12, 2019.
[34] Interview with Ilka Vega. March 14, 2019.
[35] Interview with Melissa Lopez. April 1, 2019.

legitimized.[36] Other informants note that the security frame should be relocated to tackling drug problems. Hereby separating the influx of drugs and the influx of migrants, drug trafficking should be tackled without simultaneously classifying migrants arriving as potential drug dealers.[37] Rev. Robert Mosher of the Columban Mission Center argues, along with other informants, that the definition of security needs to be changed, noting that security is not achieved by increased military presence, but through narratives of social peace and truth. He states that the current treatment of migrants is founded upon expressions of fear, with the Obama and Trump government explicitly feeding these feelings of fear. As such, the border community in El Paso, along with the faith-community, plays an important role in spreading the truth concerning migration, migrants and the border. More specifically, attitudes towards migration and migrants must change, solutions must be found for long-standing migration concerns, such as the treatment of dreamers, undocumented migrants who arrived to the US as children and were given a temporary status to live, study and work inside the country, and family separation.[38] As well as addressing the mismatch between national discourse and local situations. Robert Heyman of BNHR states that border enforcement programs and the legal system connected to migration should be more representative of local situations. He notes that current policies are not based on increasing national security or preventing drugs or criminals from entering the country. They are designed to disrupt migration, to keep migrants out of the country, which is not a fruitful system to have. As such, the security terminology is a problem. Border security is useless if it doesn't improve the safety of migrants or the American population.[39] Security discourses and measures orchestrated as a result of the securitization of the US-Mexican border aim to divide, and migrant civil society in El Paso aims to unite and mobilize through a narrative of inclusion and solidarity. As fittingly pronounced during a rally for Beto O'Rourke's presidential campaign, migrant civil society is united in its response against the securitization of the US-Mexican border: "the people united, whenever we're divided"[40]. Building different visions of the border is integral and new border narratives should be developed based on community-level experiences, rather than national discourses.[41] As such, solutions to migration concerns should be designed based on community-level knowledge about the border, hence migrant

[36] Interview with Alan Dicker. April 21, 2019.
[37] Interviews with multiple informants in El Paso.
[38] Interview with Rev. Robert Mosher. May 15, 2019.
[39] Interview with Robert Heyman. March 19, 2019.
[40] As chanted during a rally for Beto O'Rourke's presidential campaign in El Paso. March 30, 2019.
[41] Interview with Robert Heyman. March 19, 2019.

civil society is actively advocating for social and political change and alternative solutions to address migration concerns.

5.3 Providing Alternative Solutions

As discussed in chapter four, securitization discourses that are pronounced by federal institutions are accepted by some groups in El Paso, while other groups actively contest these discourses. However, there is a gap between discourse and implementation. Every single informant I have spoken to during a three months period states that (a part of) the current migration system is ineffective, inhumane or unnecessary. As such, they all argue that the current migration system should be changed in one way or another. Several solutions are envisioned by different groups of informants. Some informants promote economic solutions, such as a guest worker program similar to the Bracero initiative that was active before. While other informants call for a more extensive overhaul of the migration system, including the asylum process. Migrant civil society in El Paso plays an important role in spreading these alternative solutions through reports, interviews, protests and advocacy efforts. These efforts are thus deeply interlinked and overlapping with the previously discussed strategies of contention; increasing awareness and changing narratives. These strategies of contention reinforce and legitimate each other and together they represent a comprehensive framework for the community-level contention of the securitization of the US-Mexican border, which is both constructed and employed by migrant civil society to influence and contest securitization processes concerning the border.

Sometimes this framework for contention is picked up by political actors native to El Paso and the broader region. Beto O'Rourke, who is running for the Democratic nomination for president in 2020, and Veronica Escobar, US Representative for Texas' 16th congressional district, are both El Paso natives and play important roles in increasing awareness and changing narratives surrounding the US-Mexican border, migration and the El Paso border community. Adding to that, they often partake in events organized by migrant civil society in El Paso, along with being potentially powerful actors that can influence policy and bring about social and political change. In his campaign, Beto O'Rourke has called for extensive migration reform, which includes the reduction of deportation and detention, ending family separation and Remain in Mexico, and increasing the capacity of the asylum system (O'Rourke 2019). While Veronica Escobar is also campaigning for migration reform, focused on policy reform concerning undocumented migrants and dreamers and the education of

enforcement agencies (Escobar 2019). She also was a member of the Border Rights Coalition, the predecessor of BNHR and still holds close ties to the organization.[42]

This sub-chapter will discuss how migrant civil society operating in El Paso actively proposes alternative solutions to the securitization of the US-Mexican border, focused on addressing concerns that are faced by migrants arriving at the border. Several solutions are proposed by different parties operating within migrant civil society, to highlight, contend and redesign specific policies in different areas; the border barrier, the asylum system, and root causes for migration.

5.3.1 Rethinking the Border Barrier

As described in chapter three and four, the border barrier and its subsequent extension was met with mixed reactions from the border community. While some informants state that they have experienced a sharp decrease in criminality and violence after the construction of the border barrier, repeating the securitization discourse spread by Trump, other informants argue that El Paso has always been one of the safest cities in the US. Analyzing the data provides no definite conclusion, because crime rates only started extensively being reported from 1995 onwards, two years after Operation Hold the Line started, as discussed in chapter three. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program reports that crime rates in El Paso have been declining since the start of UCR in 1995, with slight and temporary increases between 1999-2000, and 2006-2008, recording no significant change in the period after the start of the construction of the current border barrier. Since 2004, El Paso has consistently ranked among the top five safest cities, signifying low levels of violent crime, of a population of more than 500.000, and in the top 10 since 1995 (Shjarback and Manjarrez 2019). While the data is partly incomplete as it focuses specifically on violent crime, the data does conclude that recent efforts to reinforce the border in 2008 has had no significant relation to the reduction of violent crime in El Paso.

Most informants operating within migrant civil society in El Paso repeat these facts and argue that the situation concerning (violent) crime in El Paso has been significantly dramatized by the Trump administration, and by national and regional media. They argue that El Paso has always been one of the safest cities in the US, and that the reinforcement and extension of the border barrier and stricter migration requirements are not only unnecessary, but also ineffective. Informants note that he increased reinforcement and securitization of the

[42] Ibid.

US-Mexican border drives migrants to cross illegally in more remote places in the dessert, leading to more risks for migrants trying to cross the border, while at the same time also nurturing human trafficking networks. Furthermore, several informants argue that the systematic increase in funding and security measures taken to combat (illegal) migration is unfounded and diverting attention from more structural problems on the US-Mexican border. HBI notes that while DHS budgets attributed to CBP and ICE are increasing on a yearly basis, border apprehensions have been significantly decreasing since 2005 until 2018 (HBI 2019a, 33-35). Robert Heyman of BNHR argues that the current situation is a direct result of the policies that the government has enforced over the years. The only reason for people to cross the border illegally is because the legal infrastructure is ill-equipped and unfair.[43]

Several alternatives are provided to the (planned) extension and reinforcement of the border barrier in El Paso and further along the US-Mexican border. Robert Heyman argues that there should be a more explicit focus on the legal migration system. He argues that the border barrier is not a solution to migration and security concerns at the US-Mexican border, it merely reroutes migrant flows and criminal networks to other areas on the border. As such, the money spent on extending and reinforcing the border barrier could be used more effectively to reinforce the systems that are in place at entry points. As discussed before, 65 percent of migrants that are arriving at the border are families and children who want to be apprehended so that they can apply for asylum. By redesigning infrastructure and increasing staffing, migrants arriving at the border can be processed more efficiently, and more humanely. This also reduces the problem of illegal migration, as migrants are more inclined to take the legal route if the migration system was fairer and better-equipped, Robert argues.[44] Other informants propose more rigorous solutions. Rev. Robert Mosher of the Columban Mission Center advocates an approach which is based on close cooperation between the US and Mexico. He argues that managing migration flows and the border should be a mutual effort based on cooperation, not enforced by a border barrier.[45] While Alan Dicker of DMSC and TRLA argues that the hard border should be abolished all together and restrictions that make life impossible for poor people crossing the border should be decreased, noting that the border barrier is a physical representation of the militarization and securitization of the US since the 1980s; “the current system leaves migrants vulnerable and abuses them, but we

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Interview with Rev. Robert Mosher. May 15, 2019.

can't do anything about it because the US has become too militarized."[46] The values and norms surrounding the border should change, the border should not be a place where migrants are painted as potential security threats or invaders, but as people with needs who should be supported and treated humanely as they also give back to US society.

5.3.2 Reforming the Asylum System

While rethinking the border barrier is very much linked with ideological values and experiences of the border, advocating asylum reform is a strategy of contention that is linked to concrete concerns and practical violations. As described previously, several programs are employed to deter migrants from crossing the border, before even being able to apply for asylum. Border enforcement practices like metering and turnbacks have been widely used in El Paso since May 2018. The practice of metering limits the number of migrants who are allowed to enter the US each day, while turnbacks signifies the practice of returning migrants to the Mexican side of the border, effectively withholding their right to apply for asylum. These practices are legitimized by capacity constraints formulated by CBP. Not only do metering and turnbacks increase wait times at the US-Mexican border by increasing migration backlog and thus forcing people to wait on the bridges of entry. These practices are in fact violations of US and international law, people have the right to seek asylum and other forms of protection at the US-Mexican border, as mandated by INA in 1952 (HBI 2019a, 9-10; Cheng 2019). More recently, Remain in Mexico has been met with severe critique as it puts migrants in unnecessary danger awaiting their asylum claim procedure, as discussed in chapter three. Several other practices are used to deter migrants from pushing through with their asylum claims, such as threats of family separation, needless inspections, verbal abuse and degradation at entry points (BNHR 2019; HBI 2018, 11-14). The majority of my informants argue that these specific border enforcement programs and practices should be banished and replaced with more humane, effective and legal alternatives.

5.3.2.1 Detention Facilities

Detention is another component of the asylum system that has been described as highly problematic by several informants as there often is a mismatch between policy and practice. Informants describe how migrants are often detained for prolonged periods, sometimes longer than legally allowed, while living in harsh conditions without proper access to food, basic

[46] Interview with Alan Dicker. April 21, 2019.

needs, legal counsel and medical attention.[47] Moreover, several other tactics are used to dissuade migrants from continuing their asylum procedure, such as verbal and physical abuse, lack of access to bathing or hygiene products, denying parole for pregnant women, and unexplained transfers between different detention facilities (BNHR 2019; HBI 2018, 15-19). Parts of the concerns faced by migrants in detention facilities can be attributed to overcrowding. However, abuses and other policy violations during detention are also widely reported. These abuses are often attributed to systematic problems that are present within border enforcement agencies. Informants claim that decades of racism, violence and harassment towards migrants has created an environment where the inhumane treatment of migrants has been normalized. According to several informants a complete restructure of border enforcement agencies is required to address this poisonous environment. As stated in a report released by HBI: "the massive growth in immigration enforcement agencies must be matched by a corresponding commitment to accountability, transparency and human rights" (2019a, 39). More specifically, the restructuration should be focused on decreasing human rights violations by CBP, addressing the gap between policy and execution concerning the period of detention, migrant transfers, along with their documents, and access to food, healthcare, legal counsel and basic needs. Next to that a redefinition of ICE, or abolishment as some informants argue, is integral. ICE is often described as a brutal organization that systematically criminalizes migrants and employs backhanded strategies to keep migrants out of the US, such as locating and deporting family sponsors to prevent migrants from being accepted to the US.[48]

5.3.2.2 Migration Courts

Finally, the last major component of the asylum system are migration courts. Informants operating within migrant civil society note that the current shape of the migration court system is problematic and significantly lowers the chances of migrants to be granted asylum. While an in-depth analysis of the migration court system and its legal pathways is out of the scope of this thesis, a few concerns connected to this system will be analyzed. As reported by HBI (2018), legal representation is often integral in winning asylum cases. However, over 20 percent of migrants are unable to access legal counsel. Adding to that, the denial rate for asylum cases in El Paso is consistently high. El Paso has five migration court judges and four

[47] Interviews with Ilka Vega, Robert Heyman, and Melissa Lopez. March 14, April 1, and March 19, 2019.
[48] Interviews with Alan Dicker, Josiah Heyman and Rev. Robert Mosher. April 21, March 13, and May 15, 2019.

of them have a denial rate of over 93% percent (TRAC Immigration 2018). Finally, the backlog of asylum cases has drastically increased in the last few years, prolonging detention and increasing costs. Most migrants have to wait months, if not years to have their cases tried. Furthermore, next to language barriers in courts, attorneys often lack key information regarding a client's hearing, documents are lost in court and before, and judges grant bonds which are of disproportionate amounts (HBI 2018).

Several measures are proposed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of migration courts in El Paso and along the US-Mexican border, such as increased staffing, both attorneys, judges and translators, better coordination of information between attorneys, border enforcement agencies and courts and ensuring that migrants know how to navigate the legal system by providing educational programs.[49] Along with ensuring that the asylum case process is streamlined, and asylum decisions are provided in a timely and fair matter (O'Rourke 2019).

5.3.3 Addressing Root Causes

The border barrier and asylum system, consisting of entry points, detention facilities and migration courts, are important areas on which migration reform advocacy efforts are focused on. However, informants also note the importance of addressing root causes that drive migrants to the US, as migration flows will only reduce if structural concerns in departing countries are addressed. Faith-based organizations in particular call for a need to increase feelings of global solidarity and addressing structural inequality; "the acceleration of interdependence between persons and peoples needs to be accompanied by equally intense efforts on the ethical-social plane, in order to avoid the dangerous consequences of perpetrating injustice on a global scale" (HBI 2019a, 27). As discussed before, several informants point to the responsibility of the US in creating the environments in which these root causes could develop, such as destabilizing foreign policy and the trade of weapons and drugs, while simultaneously securitizing and reinforcing the US-Mexican border. In the last decades the US has launched multiple military and economic interventions in the Northern Triangle and has attributed to creating and/or sustaining an environment of instability. The Northern Triangle countries are now among the most violent and poorest countries in Latin America and corrupt, weak institutions have been unable to address widespread gang

[49] Interviews with Melissa Lopez, Alan Dicker, and as pronounced by Beto O'Rourke during a rally for his presidential campaign in El Paso. April 1, April 21, and March 30, 2019.

violence and extortion in the countries. Next to that, crimes often go unpunished (Labrador and Renwick 2018).

Several solutions are proposed by migrant civil society in El Paso. Drugs is seen as one of the main root causes for instability in the Northern Triangle. As such, several informants advocate for different drug policies. They argue that drugs should either be completely legalized, or drug consumption in the US should be significantly reduced through prevention and treatment efforts. The former would take the drug trade out of the hands of criminal, often violent, networks, while the latter would significantly decrease the demand for drugs, meaning that drug networks would no longer disrupt the region. This is very much a long-term, and somewhat idealistic, plan to stabilize the region. Other efforts are focused on short-term solutions to root causes of migration from the Northern Triangle. Several organizations emphasize the need to send humanitarian aid packages to these countries to help address the most pressing issues, while other informants propose the need to integrate migrants economically and socially into the US. In the words of one informant: "the US basically screwed up Honduras by supporting and helping an alternative government to power. Honduras has been unstable ever since. The US has done this in the past, also with El Salvador and Guatemala, so I don't understand why people are opposed to these people coming here. The US basically helped destroy people's way of living, the houses they could build on, and I think it's only fair that they can come here to rebuild it by sending back remittances while working in the US."[50] More concretely, Luis Hinojos of the Immigration Initiative suggests reinstating temporary guest-worker permits, much alike the Bracero program which ran from 1942-1964. He argues that the majority of migrants coming to the US want to work there, so they can get enough money to build, or rebuild, a living in their home country. By allowing people to work here as guests, people can get a fair pay, contribute to the US economy while gathering enough money to build their livelihood in their own country, hereby addressing some of the economic root causes for migration.[51] Not everyone agrees with this approach though, Alan Dicker of DMSC and TRLA notes that a guest-worker program essentially reinforces the border as an environment is created wherein people are essentially forced to stay temporarily.[52] Moreover, the jobs that were offered through guest-worker programs have traditionally been low paid, agricultural jobs which

[50] Interview with Tom. April 13, 2019.
[51] Interview with Luis Hinojos. April 8, 2019.
[52] Interview with Alan Dicker. April 21, 2019.

reinforces inequality between groups in US society and, as such, this would not be a good start for comprehensive migration reform.

5.4 Strategies of Contention

The strategies of contention as discussed above are deeply interlinked. Increasing awareness, changing narratives and providing alternative solutions are all steps in a process towards a comprehensive framework of contention. Organizations and movements that operate within migrant civil society in El Paso employ diverse strategies of contention to influence opinion, highlight concerns and advocate for change. The part of migrant civil society that employ strategies of contention are most likely involved in a variety of activities, such as publishing reports, orchestrating protestive events and advocating for policy change on local, regional and national levels. Increasing awareness is an important first step as it creates an environment in which migration concerns can be discussed, while the strategy of changing narratives is employed to contest security discourses that are spread by federal institutions and national, regional media. In this case this strategy is concerned with de-securitization of the US-Mexican border by changing the frames surrounding migrants and changing attitudes towards migration and border security. Finally, the last strategy is focused on providing alternative solutions to address migration concerns. While these alternative solutions are not necessarily always implemented, this strategy contends measures taken to securitize the US-Mexican border by highlighting concerns, and areas to improve upon. Ideally this leads to the reformulation, redesign or shutdown of specific policies, practices and agencies.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis I aimed to further develop the role of audiences in securitization processes. The relationship between securitizing actors and audiences has traditionally been described as one-dimensional, with securitizing actors holding the power to construct and pronounce definitions of security and security threats, while audiences are described as enabling, passive entities whose only job is to accept these definitions. However, I have argued that this relationship is not as one-dimensional as described, audiences are influenced and limited by definitions of security and security threats that are pronounced by securitizing actors, but also actively influence, contest and respond to the discourses and policies designed by securitizing actors. As such, audiences should not be seen as passive consumers of security discourses, but as dynamic and essential actors in securitization processes. This doesn't contradict the rest of the securitization process, but audiences and local contexts should be examined more concretely and be given a more important role in the process. Migrant civil society provides a useful framework to conceptualize the role of audiences in the securitization of the US-Mexican border. As I have described previously, migrant civil society employs a distinct number of strategies that can be categorized under strategies of support and strategies of contention. Strategies of support are used to address immediate concerns faced by migrants, from providing basic needs, shelter and transport, to legal and educational services. Many organizations and movements have emerged in El Paso to provide these services, and to alleviate some of the concerns faced by migrants. Migrant civil society employs strategies of support to react to the withdrawal and absence of public services for migrants. Through the provision of public services, migrant civil society is filling the void that the state leaves behind, hereby preventing the disruption of the border community, but also signifying that migrants are worthy of inclusion and deserve to be helped. This is very much in line with acts of insurgent citizenship as described by Leitner and Strunk (2014). Services are provided to non-citizens, in this case (undocumented) migrants awaiting their asylum case, to "challenge existing laws, policies, and institutions; promote alternative criteria for membership in a polity; and lay claims to and enact new forms of citizenship and right." (2014, 350). The notion of citizenship is expanded to include migrants, as they are equally worthy of access to public service. In absence of state support, these services are provided by migrant civil society. Meanwhile, the narrative surrounding migrants is changed, many within migrant civil

society declare that El Paso is facing a humanitarian issue that needs to be resolved, doing away with security discourses that is prominently spread by federal institutions.

These security discourses, and the security measures taken resulting from them, explicitly paints the border as a place where criminals, terrorists and drugs crosses into the US. Migration flows arriving at the border have been classified as invasions and several border enforcement programs have been designed to further secure the border and address the national security threat it poses. While some El Pasoans (partly) accept these security discourses and measures, the majority of my informants that are part of migrant civil society actively contest them. As McDonalds (2008) states, it is important to take into account the contexts in which security discourses become possible (2008, 573). El Paso is a city which is heavily integrated with the border and which has a deep connection with migration. It is a city in which many of its residents cross the border regularly, if not daily. People cross the border to visit family, go shopping, and attend school or work. Besides that, El Pasoans often have a history of migration and generally show considerable solidarity with migrants. As such, in this context, the securitization of the US-Mexican border does not resonate with the majority of my informants. It is through strategies of contention that migrant civil society proactively responds to the securitization of the US-Mexican border. Efforts to increase awareness, such as protests, reports and media releases, are employed to highlight concerns and inadequacies within border enforcement programs, while strategic framing processes are employed to eliminate negative associations with the border, migration, and migrants. This specific strategy of changing narratives is focused on promoting frames of inclusion by taking away the security frame that defines the border and people crossing it and promoting narratives of solidarity and humanity. The last strategy of contention, providing alternative solutions involves advocacy efforts to bring about social and political change on local, regional and national levels to address immediate and long-term concerns. This is largely focused on extensive reform of the migration system; the border barrier, the asylum system, and going beyond border enforcement efforts to address root causes. These strategies combined create a comprehensive framework of contention which provides a powerful political platform for social and political mobilization, involving political actors, national and regional media, and organizations and movements across the US. Sometimes these strategies lead to immediate policy changes, such as the shutdown of the Tornillo detention center and increased attention for humanitarian concerns in border enforcement programs, but most of the times these strategies are employed to promote meaningful change in the long-term.

To sum up and specifically answer my research question: What strategies does migrant civil society operating in El Paso employ to respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border from 2018 onwards? Diverse strategies are used to respond to the securitization of the US-Mexican border, some of these strategies are designed to alleviate immediate concerns faced by migrants that cross the border, while some are designed to contest the discourses, programs and practices surrounding the border and to propose meaningful change. The expression that was so explicitly used during a rally for Beto O'Rourke's presidential campaign in El Paso is perfectly applicable to this situation; "the people united, whenever we're divided."[53] The securitization of the US-Mexican border is seen as a process of division, and as such migrant civil society in El Paso responds in unity to alleviate concerns faced by the border community and migrants arriving at the border.

This research is nowhere near a definitive examination of the role of audiences in securitization processes. I have primarily focused on how audiences respond to securitization processes on a community-level and further research needs to be done to further define the relationship between securitizing actors and audiences on an institutional level. The relationship between organizations within migrant civil society, CBP and ICE in El Paso would be an interesting complication, as they have a dichotomous, but sometimes also cooperative relationship. Furthermore, further research should be conducted to more explicitly specify the rules of membership of migrant civil society to more comprehensively demarcate the space that they occupy. Finally, more research should be conducted on responses to securitization process in different contexts, as these responses might largely vary in other places. In this thesis I have specifically focused on responses to securitization processes employed by migrant civil society in El Paso, and as such I cannot and do not aim to magnify the findings which are specific to El Paso to other contexts.

As of now, El Paso as a community is heavily strained by ineffective and inhumane border enforcement efforts, and as such, meaningful change is necessary for the sake of both migrants and the border community. Migration flows have significantly increased in the last decades and solutions should be found that deal with these flows efficiently, effectively and humanely. As I have intended to illustrate in the thesis the securitization of the US-Mexican border does not address migration flows, it merely deflects them. Comprehensive change is needed to reform the environment which sustains the securitization of the border, as it is deeply rooted in exclusionist thinking which is not sustainable in a period where further

[53] A chant used during a rally for Beto O'Rourke's presidential campaign in El Paso. March 30, 2019

migration flows are inevitable. Furthermore, more efforts should be orchestrated to address root causes of migration, such as destabilizing foreign policy, the free trade of weapons, drug trade and consumption, and forced migration because of climate change.

Appendix 1: List of Interviews

This list contains the details of all the in-depth interviews I conducted during a period of three months of research in El Paso. Some interviews were not referred to in this thesis, as they were mainly used to gather background information. The interviews took place in different places in El Paso, such as cafés, bar and offices. Some informants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

- Pedro. Several interviews with a member of the El Paso border community during a period of three months.
- Gloria. Several interviews with a member of the El Paso border community during a period of three months.
- Dr. Jeremy Slack, Assistant Professor of Geography in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at UTEP. March 06, 2019.
- Dr. Josiah Heyman, Professor of Anthropology, Endowed Professor of Border Trade Issues, and Director of UTEP's Center for Interamerican and Border Studies. March 13, 2019.
- Ilka Vega, Community Engagement and Administrative Specialist at HBI. March 14, 2019.
- Robert Heyman, Policy Coordinator at BNHR. March 19, 2019.
- Eduardo. Interview with a member of the El Paso border community. March 18, 2019.
- Jaden. Interview with a member of a border enforcement agency in El Paso. March 26, 2019.
- Melissa Lopez, Executive Director at DMRS. April 1, 2019.
- Bruce: Military member. Interview with a member of the US military. April 4, 2019.
- Luis Hinojos, President of El Paso Young Republicans and Program Director of The Immigration Initiative. April 8, 2019
- Tom. Interview with a Republican politician in El Paso. April 13, 2019
- Alan Dicker, member of DMSC, co-founder of the Fronterizo Fianza Fund and paralegal at TRLA. April 21, 2019.
- Carlos. Interview with a member of the El Paso border community. April 25, 2019.
- Elizabeth. Interview with a member of the El Paso Police Department. May 3, 2019.
- Dr. Yolanda Leyva, Associate Professor at the Department of History at UTEP and Director of the Borderlands Public History Lab & The Institute of Oral History. May 7, 2019.
- Annunciation House. Interviews with several volunteers working in the main shelter in downtown El Paso. May 7, 2019.
- Rev. Robert Mosher, Director of the Columban Mission Center. May 15, 2019

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