CHAPTER
1

Etched into Place

Communities of Knowledge, Memory, and History-Making along Migrant Trajectories

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In the backyard of a migrant shelter in Oaxaca, Mexico, where I worked for a year conducting fieldwork with Central American migrants, there was a coffee tree that produced stunning bright red "cherries" to be harvested. The tree was not visible from the street or the front of the shelter where the offices, living room, and kitchen were located, where much of the official business happened, but in the back near the dormitories and outdoor wash basin, where the people who passed through spent most of their time—resting, recovering, planning, preparing, waiting—but also where they spent hours just being there, together. Around the coffee tree and other fruit trees people socialized, sharing information about where they'd been and where they were going. It was where they made connections, in this place, this little orchard of quiet solidarities. It was here also where people shared stories of the abuses they suffered and witnessed and where rumors, suspicions, and deceit also circulated just below the surface. And while at any one time there might only be a dozen or so people staying at the shelter, there were physical traces of migrants, present and past, all around. A colorful array of shirts and pants of all sizes hung on the clotheslines that stretched across the yard. Sprinkled throughout the shelter were art and handicrafts—a mural depicting migrant journeys to the United States, miniature cricket sculptures made from reeds, airplanes made from aluminum soda cans, a crocheted cozy for the teapot in the kitchen—that migrants had made

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while waiting. There were small carvings in the stumps and trunks of trees—someone's initials, a tiny Guatemalan flag. On the washing station were the names of migrants, dates, and various hometowns in Central America, as well as lines from the Lord's prayer, etched directly into the concrete. And right in the middle of the washing station were the words "FOREVER REMEMBER" in all capital letters written in English. As I sat in the yard, I would stare at those words. Who wrote them and who were they written for? What or whom did their author hope would be remembered? At first, I saw them as gifts and messages to future migrants, people they will likely never meet yet are still connected to across the spatiotemporal planes of transit. But more than as words of guidance or material markers of identity and solidarity, I began to see these markings as part of the informal archive of the shelter, a way for migrants to actively document their presence and their existence in these places, to not be disappeared. They become part of that place as that place has become part of them; their absences continue to have presence.

As I meditated on these physical traces, I started thinking about the concept of etchings in relation to the socialities of transit life. In printmaking, etching is a medium of art. The intaglio method of printmaking is when a metal plate is etched or incised with a design or image that is then placed in a chemical solution and removed to reveal the drawn image. It is then filled with ink, so that the ink fills the valleys of the etched lines (this is the opposite of a relief print where the ink touches and makes an image of everything that is not engraved), which is then pressed and transferred to paper, revealing the etching. Like etched art and the physical etchings left in shelters and along train tracks and other spaces of transit, I began to think about etchings as a metaphor for the larger journeys that migrants make across transit landscapes, cutting, carving into social life of places along the way, which are filled not with ink but with social ties, knowledge, and memories. Places like migrant shelters are depots that serve as crucial platforms for knowledge-sharing and solidarity for people on the move, but they also become repositories of accumulated experience and knowledge.

Through a metaphor of etchings, this chapter conceptually explores the linkages between movement, connection, history, and place-making within migrant shelters and other often invisible "along-the-way" places (see the introduction in this volume), as well as places that may be removed from journeys themselves but reflect their ripple effects in the lives and actions of families, activists, and communities. It examines how the places that migrants move through are not only embedded within historical forms of exclusion but are also constantly being remade—or etched—in relation to changing contexts of violence, securitization, humanitarianism, and capitalism. To use the metaphor of etching we might think first and foremost

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of borders themselves, the ways steel and concrete walls and fences have been constructed and etched into the ground dividing nations, peoples, Indigenous lands, and natural ecosystems. This would be an example of how the state enforcement regimes that govern mobility—and their related economies—are etched into place as the physical and symbolic manifestations of deterrence and border spectacle, which have clear consequences on people's lives.

But what if we were to think beyond the semipermanent physical markers that separate nations to the more everyday landscapes of mobility where place-making occurs? What are the etchings made by social actors—migrants, authorities, facilitators, criminals, residents, aid workers, families, and activists—and how, through everyday activities and actions, do they both refigure and are refigured by place, leaving us with a bigger picture, what I have now come to think about as transit landscapes, in both the material and social senses? Can mobility itself be characterized as a sociopolitical movement with its own logics or potentially an act of creative resistance against borders and bordering practices (Walters 2006; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2016)? Or, as Noelle Brigden (2018) argues, is it more productive to think of migrant routes as spaces of refusal, where, through their ever-changing and improvised practices and tactics, migrants generate new ways of seeing, knowing, and being that challenge the legitimacy of the state? Either way, what are the implications of these processes on local places? How do etchings travel across spatial and temporal fields, through emerging social relations and connections, but also back to people's families and communities? I argue that, beyond physical markings, it is the social connections and encounters between and among mobile and immobile actors, and the stories and memories they create and leave behind, that also become etched into particular places as repositories of knowledge. Places like migrant shelters become archives of sorts along migration trajectories, where knowledge may then be harnessed by both migrants and those who profit from them (Brigden 2018), in transformative ways.

The co-constructive processes of place-making and strategies of mobility and survival that emerge across transit landscapes are dynamic, and in some cases unstable, but they may also act as forms of refusal, resistance and beacons for potential futures (McGranahan 2016). Moreover, in contexts of violence, migrant death, and disappearance, place is intimately bound with memory, where absences and losses have continued presence (Lems 2016), where ghosts haunt everyday spaces (Gordon 1997) and where families, activists, and migrants practice radical acts of remembering. In this way we see how memories are central to place-making practices and creating a "sense of place" across migration landscapes (Basso 1996; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Remembering, along with imagining—two practices at

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the very heart of migration—become central to the collective making of migrant journeys as place worlds and, as I argue, sites of history. Migrants are rarely included as actors of history, and in fact are often "imperceptible to history" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). But by tracing the physical and social etchings, communities of knowledge, hauntings, and collective acts of memory that emerge across the temporal and spatial dimensions of migration landscapes, we may develop a deeper understanding of the production and politics of history along migrant journeys and the ways migrants themselves are not victims of history but history-makers.

To explore these themes, this chapter brings together ethnographic insights from research conducted across multiple migration landscapes in the Americas—primarily from my long-term work in migrant shelters along Central American transit routes in southern Mexico, but also with families of missing migrants (Vogt 2018). Rather than focusing on one case study, I hope that the multisitedness of these examples illuminates the divergent yet interconnected forms of place-making between and across borders and spaces of transit. In doing so, I highlight the visible and less visible markings that migrants leave in local places, the metaphorical valleys they leave behind, and perhaps more interestingly the residual effects of these valleys, these etchings in social spaces and relations well beyond their trajectories. And while much of this is focused on traces, material or otherwise, it will also consider the absences and silences of place, of the ways peoples and histories become effaced from landscapes, and yet how they may even still have presence in a more metaphysical sense, through various forms of haunting and memory-work.

As such, this chapter examines several dimensions of place-making along and beyond migrant trajectories through a lens of etchings. It begins with a discussion on place-making and the production of knowledge and history in migration studies. It then examines the relations between place and transit, presence and absence, displacement/emplacement through observations at migrant shelters. Just as the places we have lived or passed through can have "inescapable presence" and importance in people's lives in an existential sense (Lems 2016), the people who pass through places may also have continued presence once they leave. That is, migrants do not travel in a void but leave traces and thus transform the places they move through (Brigden 2018; Drotbohm and Winters 2021). Moreover, as I discuss in the final sections of the chapter, their presence may even be felt not just through their physical absence but through their total absence, their disappearance. The ghostly presence of disappeared migrants along migrant trajectories is not just a residual reminder of human life and loss but one actively cultivated and made visible through the place-making strategies of local actors and families of the missing in places beyond the journey itself. Finally, the chap-

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ter considers the ethical dimensions of the ways we, as migration scholars, may also create etchings through our work as we witness and accompany migrants, produce and reproduce certain types of knowledge, and commit to embodied forms of solidarity.

Movements, Socialities, and Place

In much of the migration literature on transit journeys there is a push to destabilize and complicate the idea of migrant trajectories as neat, rational, linear, progressive. Instead, scholars have worked to show how migrant trajectories and journeys are multidirectional and dynamic, that they can be serendipitous, improvised, and chaotic (Collyer et al. 2014; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016; Phillips and Missbach 2017; Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2020; Drotbohm and Winters 2021). They do not always end in arrival to a predetermined location, and migrants may spend indeterminate amounts of time in the often liminal spaces between home and destination. This work is important to demonstrate the multiple encounters, entanglements, decisions, and unexpected realities that make up individual journeys, allowing us to have a more nuanced and complex understanding of migrant trajectories and transit lives.

At the same time, when we move beyond the scale of the individual, we begin to see a more complex system made up of places, patterns of movement, daily rhythms, shared experiences, and collective forms of knowledge and solidarity. To return to the metaphor of etchings, if we think about each migrant's trajectory as a scratch or a line on the same plate of metal, what happens when these lines intersect? When we zoom out—what is the image or design that is revealed? As Drotbohm and Winters ask in their introduction, how do the repeated movements and social encounters that occur along migrant journeys become embedded, or etched into place, even when the conditions around them are in constant flux?

I conceptualize the journey as both the physical and material landscapes people move through, made up of roads, train lines, transit sites, shelters, hospitals, deserts, urban neighborhoods, and borderlands, as well as the more abstract and social landscapes that imbue migrant journeys, which are equally critical to strategies of mobility and the making of place. Geographers and anthropologists have analyzed place not as something bounded or static but as something dynamic. For Doreen Massey, places are "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus"; they are "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings"; "places are processes, too" (Massey 1991). Inherently social, and thus historical, Massey de-

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scribed space "like a pincushion with a million stories in it" (Massey 2013). Like Massey, Tim Ingold sees place as composed of "knots of stories" created by the intersecting paths of people, whom he calls wayfarers in an ever-dynamic social "meshwork" (Ingold 2011). His description destabilizes the dichotomy that is so common in migration literature between mobile and immobile subjects or migrants and locals/residents. Rather than positioning migrants as moving and locals as place-bound, Ingold's description allows us to see all people as wayfarers moving between and across places, shaping one another's lives and co-constructing place, albeit in unequal ways within the regimes of mobility. Moreover, these movements produce knowledge, not derived from locations but "forged in movement," "in the passage from place to place and the changing horizons along the way" (Ingold 2011). Such an approach works to de-exceptionalize both mobility and sedentarism in transit and migration studies (Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2020) and, as Schapendonk and Davids do through their concept of "place acrobatics," instead interrogate the complex relationships between movement and place and the multiple meanings that emerge from them (Schapendonk and Davids in this volume). Moreover, as I discuss later in the chapter, the idea of a transit meshwork is useful for understanding the ways multiple actors—migrants, residents, shelter workers, security forces, activists—co-produce place and knowledge, but also the ways memories and ghosts, the absences of social life, may still have presence through place-making processes.

As we think about both the literal and metaphorical nature of place, scholars have also worked to de-essentialize ideas of displacement and emplacement with physical space. As Heath Cabot and Georgina Ramsay argue, displacement is not solely about wars or poverty or the physical act of migration but also about the alienating effects and existential crises wrought by global capitalism that transcend categories of uprooted/rooted, mobile/immobile, migrant/citizen (Cabot and Ramsay 2021). Displacement can be experienced by migrants and refugees just as it can be experienced by war veterans, homeless populations, and other groups that live precarious lives where they are deemed disposable and dehumanized within the "capitalist order of things" (Ramsay 2021). Similarly, scholars have worked to dispel ideas of emplacement as solely connected to physical space, and instead examine the political, economic, social, and existential dimensions of emplacement as a sense of belonging and meaning derived from value in social worlds—to be seen and heard (Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016; Lems 2016; Cabot and Ramsay 2021), and as I argue, to be remembered.

The concept of etchings thus builds on these multiple understandings of place and displacement, seeing it both in a tangible and material sense that people move through, as well as a more abstract and social sense, through

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the relations, stories, memories, and knowledge that accumulate in place and may be central to place-making strategies along and beyond migrant trajectories. Both the phenomenological and the tangible dimensions of place are crucial in the lives of displaced people, be it in existential ways or connections to the past, but also as they move (Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Schapendonk and Davids in this volume). As Annika Lems writes, people on the move "do not move through an indifferent space. Rather, they move through places—and in moving through shape them and are in turn shaped by them" (Lems 2016: 320). Displacement and emplacement coexist in the contemporary world and in people's lived experiences, and place-making and emplacement may involve both feelings of existential disconnect and connection.

They Are the Center: Migrants as History-Makers

One of my closest interlocuters during fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2013 was Padre Alejandro Solalinde, arguably the most well-known (and controversial) migrant rights defender in Mexico, whose efforts were so influential in changing Mexico's outdated immigration law that it was dubbed "La Ley Solalinde/The Solalinde Law" in 2011. In one of my later interviews with him, we talked about his own trajectory in founding a migrant shelter and the fact that he and several other priests had started to garner attention and praise due to their work with migrants. During our conversation, Padre Solalinde resisted this hero narrative. He said, "If it weren't for the migrants, we would be nothing. We would be anonymous people, without all the pain and the glory . . . we would have no recognizable merit, they have given us all this. They are the protagonists; they are the center. They are the ones that people must understand are changing history. They changed my history."

I found Solalinde's characterization striking in a context where Central American migrants were so dehumanized and treated as disposable, *los migrantes que no importan* (the migrants that don't matter), as Salvadoran journalist Oscar Martínez poignantly characterized them (Martínez 2010). Yet for Solalinde, migrants were not the disposable surplus of humanity but rather the protagonists in a larger story of global inequality and social change. Not only were they protagonists, but they were also making history. Solalinde's centering of migrants as history-makers resonates with this volume's goal of cultivating a "peripheral vision" in understanding the often-overlooked actors, places, and processes in migration studies.

In much of the migration literature, including my own work, history is most commonly invoked to talk about processes and contexts that propel

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people's mobility—the root causes of migration, may it be political or interpersonal violence, economic uncertainty/opportunity, or climate change. History is explanatory and structural; it is seen as external, often originating from states or other dominant powers—it is something that happens to migrants, not something they themselves create. In his classic work, *Europe and the People without History*, anthropologist Eric Wolf encourages scholars to "search out the causes of the present in the past" (Wolf 1982: xv). But more than this, he encourages scholars to challenge the way history is conceived of and written, and especially the ways everyday people are often treated as victims or silent witnesses to the powerful and victorious (see also Trouillot 1997). Instead, Wolf urges us to consider the active histories of those "without history"—peasants, laborers, immigrants, and other marginalized groups. As Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein wrote in a critique of the social sciences, "Do not think only in the short term. Do not believe that only those actors who make noise are the most authentic. There are others who matter but who are silent" (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009: 187). The world's migrants not only have history but, as I argue, actively produce history through their movements, their connections, and their traces. Such a perspective adds a new dimension to calls to historicize migration studies; not only must we place mobilities into historical context to understand why people move, but we may also begin to see migrants as historical actors who are not simply responding to state and structural crises and processes but, through their movements—in multiple senses of the words (El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019)—reshaping translocal and global landscapes. They do so in coordination with other local actors to produce and share forms of knowledge, infrastructure, economies, and communities in spaces of transit that facilitate the actual movement of people, what scholars have called the "mobile commons" in autonomy of migration literature (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). Such a perspective reconceptualizes the relationship between migration, history, and place as dynamic, multiscalar, and actively produced from the bottom up.

In this way, the concept of etchings is inspired by a rethinking of migrant journeys and the temporalities of history—the ways we understand the logics, systems, and social processes of transit—not as exceptional crises or as events frozen in the ethnographic present with the timeless other (Fabian 1983) but as accumulations within spatial and social spaces over the longue durée. Braudel and Wallerstein wrote of understanding the slower temporalities, the almost imperceptible changes in social life to truly understand history (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009: 181). They also stressed the importance of paying attention to everyday people. How can ethnographers, whose greatest asset is "being there" in the seemingly mundane everyday of social life, capture the deep historicity that comes with place-making over

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the longue durée? A historically attuned ethnographic perspective provides insight into the ways migrant movements and stays, which may be short and frantic, or prolonged and immersive, contribute to place-making along migrant trajectories. It is with such focus and archiving of repeated acts of mobility, of arrivals and departures, of staying awhile, that we may grasp the significance of place along migrant trajectories and migrants and others as history-makers.

Shelters as Archives

Migrant shelters are unique locales along trajectories to examine the ways displacement, place-making, and emplacement coexist. One of the methodological challenges of conducting ethnographic research in migrant shelters and other spaces of transit is that the researcher may only have a few days, or even hours, with their interlocutors. Shelters are, by nature, meant to be temporary spaces of dwelling, marked by a continual cycle of comings and goings through what I have previously characterized as depots (Vogt 2012). And yet, they are also spaces of accumulation, archives if you will, of migrant lives and journeys, of strategies of survival and mobility, of care and comfort, and sometimes of deception and exploitation.

At a surface level, migrants leave physical traces of their presence. At the entrance of the shelter where I worked in Oaxaca there are hundreds of colorfully painted handprints, the unique markings left by migrants symbolizing their shared humanity as they pass through the shelter and the journey. As you go deeper into the shelter, you discover other visual traces, like a mural of a bird in flight carrying a long rope that is threaded through the flags of Central American countries with the question, "Who created borders?" along with more mundane objects like scribbled drawings, used clothing, empty shampoo bottles, and trash.

These accumulations come in physical form through artwork, artifacts, letters, photographs, and engravings left behind in shelters, but also through less tangible forms of knowledge. Through their expertise, experience, and relationships, migrants, shelter workers, and community members make imprints on shelters and collectively constitute them as places (Eichner in this volume). In her work with domestic workers in Hong Kong, Nicole Constable argues that enduring forms of socialities, place-making and solidarities form not through the permanent settlement of workers, but through their continual arrival and claims to collective rights across the longue durée. It is despite the "revolving door of arrival and departure" that domestic workers—and I argue migrants through migrant shelters—create meaningful ties and alliances that have coalesced into enduring social

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institutions and organizations over decades. Indeed, it is only through the temporary presences and ever-evolving nature of shelters that knowledge accumulates into a living repository. As such, ethnographic encounters with temporary populations in places like migrant shelters can be conceptualized as samples taken from historical stratum upon which multiple layers of emplacement and sociality are built (Constable 2022: 237). Part of the residual effects of these accumulations is the creation of a sense of place within spaces of transit, including migrant shelters. Sense of place comes from the culling of experience, of what has accrued of lives spent sensing place (Basso 1996: 144). In this way, we may see place-making along journeys not as temporary or ephemeral moments and encounters but as deeper historical processes.

In Mexico, a loosely connected network of nearly one hundred migrant shelters and *comedores* (kitchens) (Ng 2020), most of them operated independently by a mix of religious personnel, local residents, and volunteers, dot the landscape between Mexico's southern and northern borders. Shelters provide humanitarian aid to migrants in need, where migrants receive food, shelter, and medical attention. At the same time, the increasingly securitized architecture of shelters and institutional rules and protocols intended to impose a sense of order also create new forms of control and confinement (Balaguera 2018), insecurity, and exploitation (Vogt 2018). Nevertheless, there are many other social dynamics that further shape people's journeys in tandem with (or sometimes despite) these complex material and institutional structures. Inside shelters people collect and share knowledge, connect with potential guides, and learn strategies of mobility—how to make phone calls or money orders, how to access healthcare, which routes are the safest, which places to avoid, how to pay off criminals, what local customs they must observe, and what norms and language to use to try to avoid detection. Since 2014, shelters have become more permanent spaces of dwelling for asylum seekers filing claims to stay in Mexico, where they receive legal support and guidance. Rather than seeing these tips, strategies, and forms of collective care as natural or inherent, they are in fact based on the accumulation of experiences of people past and present who continuously carve valleys of knowledge into social space. This knowledge is embodied in material objects, messages, and physical traces left by migrants, but also in more ephemeral moments of joy and connection—playing a game of *fútbol*, watching a movie, preparing a favorite hometown dish—such forms of solidarity may appear simple, but they provide sustenance for people as they navigate larger landscapes of risk and violence. Migrants who pass through established shelters, which are often located in some of the most dangerous stretches, know that their presence will, at the very least, be understood, if not welcomed wholeheartedly. The tempo-

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ral spaces of waiting are reworked into strategies of survival as individuals assert their agency even within circumstances of violence, constraint, and uncertainty (Hage 2009; Khosravi 2014).

The idea of knowing along-the-way thus resonates deeply with the empirical realities of movement and survival within transit landscapes. Knowledge does not exist in a place a priori; rather, it exists as the sum of the many emerging movements, connections, and knots (Ingold 2011). Through continued arrivals and accumulated knowledge, shelters become archives of experience and connection. Shared knowledge came both from the experience of people who worked in the shelters and through the relations between migrants and shelter workers. Part of my job as a shelter worker was to interview and document the dangers, forms of violence, and risks that newly arrived migrants had recently experienced and pass that information on to other shelters and future groups of migrants, just as they did with us, creating a cycle of shared knowledge among the shelter network. This knowledge helped create mental maps of risk and care along migration trajectories, forming a living archive of knowledge to adapt to changing circumstances.

Beyond this living archive, shelter volunteers also contribute to the sense of place and socialities of migrant shelters in more existential ways. One shelter worker stated:

> The challenge for the *casa*, for the migrant shelter, is to have everything it needs to be able to attend humanely to migrants. Not just a place where they are given a plate of food or a roof, but to give them a place where they can feel heard, where they are heard. A place to be heard on a psychological level, on their loneliness, on the mistreatment they have experienced. Attend to the whole human, not just physically or medically, but also spiritually and morally.

While some of this work is done by priests and spiritual leaders, I found that much of the everyday care work that is grounded in shelters is performed by migrants who are stalled in their own journeys, what Frank-Vitale (2020) has called "stuck in motion," and by local residents with knowledge of the migrant experience. As one priest explained to me, "With the volunteers we have here, the majority have been migrants, who have had that experience and who in some way feel the need to help a little, so it is those people who are helping in this, in this reality that we see." Here the priest is talking not about Central American migrants (though as I discuss later, many migrants do end up staying to work in shelters) but local community members whose lives have in some way been touched by migration, typically as migrants themselves to the United States, or as parents with children who have migrated. For example, during my fieldwork I stayed in the home of a local woman who lived alone because all her children had migrated to the

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United States. She spent her time volunteering at the shelter with her church group. One afternoon she hosted a Bible study with about twenty community members, several of whom also volunteered at the shelter. During the closing prayer, we went around in a circle giving each person an opportunity to ask God for help in something. Every single person asked God to protect their loved ones who were in the United States. Through their shared experience and understanding of migration and its tolls on families left behind, these community members had empathy and understanding of what the migrants in transit were experiencing, and could provide expertise and guidance not necessarily on the local tactics and strategies of mobility but on some of the more affective and intimate dimensions of migration, to be away from home and from family. These local residents, along with migrant volunteers, priests, foreign volunteers, and migrants themselves make up the meshwork of migrant shelters, whose stories, knowledge, and presence intertwine and collectively make place.

And while shelter volunteers are often important conduits of knowledge between departed and newly arrived migrants, migrants also developed strategies for communicating with one another. For example, inside one of the shelters where I worked there is a large message board for migrants staying at the shelter to write notes, affirmations, and messages to people they will likely never meet. The board is filled with hand-drawn pictures—a migrant boat off the coast of Honduras, a heart with a bullet hole through it wrapped with a banner that says El Salvador, a drawing of Jesus looking over "La Bestia," the infamous cargo train carrying migrants on top, and the Statue of Liberty in the distance. Some of the messages give practical advice, like recommendations to visit the Doctors without Borders clinic and the psychologist, but most are words of encouragement and statements of faith for future migrants. One states, "We all have the same mission, Central American brothers, keep going and remember that you are never alone." And another, signed by a migrant from Guatemala: "It is hard to leave home because you leave all that you love the most, for example your family. But never forget about God because without his company you will never reach your objective. Don't turn back, have faith and fight for your dreams."

While shelters are critical sites of accumulated knowledge and expertise for migrants in transit, they do not exist in a vacuum (Drotbohm and Winters 2021; Drotbohm and Winters in this volume). On the contrary, shelters are significant and often highly contested places within local communities. Around the world, scholars examine the contested politics of citizen aid and everyday humanitarianism around migrants and refugees (Rozakou 2012; 2017; Sandri 2018; Vogt 2018; Fechter and Schwittay 2019, Guevara González 2022). In Mexico, the presence of shelters is not universally welcomed but fraught within local politics of embrace, distrust, and resistance. On one hand, they are locales where residents may enact forms of care work

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and solidarity through hospitality, medical attention, accompaniment, and human rights work. However, they may also be rife with internal tensions (Balaguera 2018), and external ones as they negotiate their practical, legal, and political roles within both humanitarian and repressive state regimes (Galemba et al. 2019). Over more than a decade, I have documented shelters shut down by community protests, shelter workers threatened and intimidated by both state and criminal entities, and a general unease around their presence. I observed one shelter in Oaxaca transform from a dirt lot with an open-fire cooking pit and a few plastic folding tables to a fortified compound replete with barbed-wire fences and CCTV cameras due to external security concerns. Shelters are not only sites of emplacement for transient populations but may also be understood as sites of emplacement for shelter workers and local populations as they grapple with the contested presence of outsiders in their communities.

Beyond these local dynamics, we can also trace the historical development of shelters as sites primarily centered around humanitarian aid to nodes within a broader and transnational movement of solidarity and migrant rights. Much of Mexico's migrant rights movement, which echoes earlier movements, most notably, liberation theology in Central America and the sanctuary movement in the southwestern United States during the civil wars of the 1980s, emerged from the day-to-day work, encounters, and relations formed within shelters. The most well-known public figures in the movement are priests who founded shelters and work closely with everyday people who through their quiet labor keep them running (Brigden 2018; Vogt 2018; Guevara González 2022). Shelters and the activism that has emerged from them have also become critical nodes in the movement of caravans through Mexico, which are both a strategy of mobility and survival as well as a form of resistance against the violence of securitization and border enforcement (Wurtz 2020; Frank-Vitale 2023). In these ways, I see shelters as spaces of both place-making and emplacement, their meaning and significance in the production of history becoming legible through the embodied realities, socialities, and work of the people who pass through them.

One of the shelter workers I came to know quite well was a woman named Mayra (pseudonym), a single mother from Guatemala who left her home and an abusive partner in search of a better life for her children. On the day I first met her, she told me about her "accident" on the train and how she lost her foot. In a rural stretch of railway in southern Mexico she was pushed from the top of a train by another migrant, sucked underneath where her foot was crushed and mangled so badly she needed to have it amputated. She was found in a hospital by a local priest who offered the shelter as a place for her to recover. Her entry to the shelter was through her bodily injury, leading us to perhaps think about the ways processes of mo-

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bility become inscribed or etched onto people's bodies in both temporary and permanent ways. People arrive to shelters without having slept or eaten for days, often after grueling journeys through sweltering jungles or gritty urban locales on trains, buses or by foot. Exhaustion and hunger compound more severe bodily experiences like illness, infection, or injury—intestinal parasites, urinary tract infections, open blisters, miscarriages. Beyond these calamities, we may also trace the ways people's bodies become inscribed by more intentional forms of violence—for Mayra this meant a dismembered limb, but what about an ear being partially bitten off during a fight or an unwanted pregnancy as the result of a rape? I argue that even in these cases, which we may initially see as the result of bad people doing bad things, we must also see them as embodiments of structural, political, and symbolic forms of violence. Through scars, injury, and trauma, migrants embody the histories that both propel and circumscribe their movements. Their bodies are in themselves sites of violence, but also of resilience and resistance.

Mayra's injury was permanently etched onto her physical body, but its significance took on a life of its own as a cautionary tale, and also became a story of recovery and hope that circulated through the walls of the shelter. After her accident, Mayra worked as the main cook at the shelter for several months, a coveted position in the social hierarchy of shelter life, and she came to see it as her mission to help other migrants, and especially to provide support and counsel to female migrants passing through. She used her own experience and example as a point of caution, but also resilience. I remember watching her say goodbye to two female migrants who had been staying at the shelter for about a week and the way they embraced and cried when it was time for them to go. Mayra was more than a cook, she was more than a victim of a train accident. She was a trusted figure in a place that was often steeped in distrust and her presence crucial to the experience of other migrants passing through. Her life was transformed by her journey experiences, but she was also a force of transformation for countless others. Eventually Mayra was able to procure a prosthetic leg and continue on her way to the United States, so while there was no material trace of her presence beyond a few photographs, her story, repeated by the volunteers that remained, and the connections she made became etched into the social memory of the shelter even after she was gone.

Transit Landscapes

Places are made up of stories, of lives intertwined, even if the people who crossed through them are no longer there. I see this as complementary to the idea of etchings as the products of interconnected socialities between

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people through and across transit landscapes. I use the term "landscapes" to refer not just to the natural world but to socially produced spaces embedded within historical and geographic formations of power, capital, and community (Harvey 1989; Soja 1989). Migration journeys, as landscapes, can be understood both as produced by the inequalities and contradictions of global capitalism and as points of struggle against those very forces in translocal settings. They are prismatic, refracting multiple social forces, economies, and politics within and across space and time, and observable in places like migrant shelters. As such, we may trace and conceptualize migration landscapes thematically—landscapes of violence, landscapes of solidarity—within the broader umbrella term of migrant trajectories. It is the nexus between the physical landscapes of mobility (crossing oceans, deserts, urban centers) and the human landscapes of mobility (encounters and entanglements with state security forces, facilitators, humanitarian actors, researchers) that shape people's experiences, and through their accumulation, produce knowledge and histories.

I now want to turn to some of the landscapes that are both "along-the-way" and "out-of-the-way" (see introduction in this volume). Here, I am talking about the roads, train routes, footpaths, rural transit towns, and staging areas that migrants pass through, but also the spaces where they may dwell upon "arrival," which may only be temporary—in urban centers, immigrant neighborhoods, and tourist zones. The surveillance of (im)migrant bodies does not stop or begin once people cross national borders, or receive legal documents as asylum seekers, those with protected status, or even residents. If anything, the policing of their bodies may be amplified within the "arterial" (Vogt 2017) borders of transit or the "thickened" (Rosas 2006) borders of arrival, again allowing us to reconceptualize migrant trajectories as encompassing more than borders or even the journey itself (Schapendonk and Davids in this volume). For example, throughout Mexico, there are specific passages that are off the beaten path of the typical routes migrants take that have become epicenters of racial profiling and extortion. State agents, often working in concert with bus drivers, track and identify suspected migrants, pull over buses, extract migrants from the bus, and demand payoffs or they will be turned over to immigration authorities to be deported (Morante Aguirre and Araiza 2016; Megchún Rivera and Guevara González 2023). There are places along the coastal route in Chiapas, where migrants attempt to circumvent state checkpoints, that are known to be fraught for travel—migrants have been stripped naked, robbed, and sexually assaulted. Further along in Veracruz, in the towns that line the train tracks, migrants are known to be targeted by drug cartels to be kidnapped or forcibly recruited to work for them. The lines between migrant/smuggler, victim/criminal, protector/protected also become blurred

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as individuals both move between these categories and circulate through the physical landscapes of Mexico, often as means of survival (Frank-Vitale 2020).

While much of the journey is marked by landscapes of violence, it is also marked by landscapes of care and solidarity. In addition to the sense of place and solidarity that forms between residents and volunteers at the shelters, migrants encounter serendipitous acts of care and solidarity along the way—a bottle of water, a floor to sleep on, a word of encouragement. Here, a migrant from El Salvador explains the importance of these encounters in his journey:

> As I told you, it is a difficult road, but not impossible, it is hard, we are going to suffer, and although they rob us, I tell you, of our belongings, our money, they are not going to rob us of the good intentions that we have, the projects we have in mind, our value. No criminal can steal that from you. There are bad people in Mexico, but there are good people. Even when we are shaken, people from the houses come out to the train and say "Hey, God bless you!" They make you want to keep going, they make you feel more encouraged, because despite everything, there are good people here, and that gives you more encouragement to keep going.

Through these words we see how diverse actors and random encounters along migrant trajectories in some of the most remote locations can be important markers in how people remember their crossings. Once people's journeys are over and people have left the physical places behind, the meanings and power of places along the journey continue to have presence, to shape the lives, memories, and imaginings of migrants and those around them. What emerges, through a constant stream of experience, knowledge sharing, and documentation are patterns that are mapped onto place that cumulatively constitute a larger racialized geography of risk, violence, and care, which are central to both transnational and intimate economies of mobility. At times, these maps take material form in the scribblings, jottings, and hand-drawn renderings of places and pathways that are passed between migrants, guides, and shelter workers. These relics are significant in the everyday tactics of mobility, but also within broader imaginaries of what it means to migrate, to cross Mexico. These artifacts, and ultimately the memories created through the crossing experience, resonate with the longue durée approach in understanding the slow and enduring impacts of movement, space, and place in people's lives. Likewise, as I turn to next, communities of memory form around the places and landscapes of transit. Such etchings demonstrate the ways migrant trajectories transcend the spatial, temporal, and material realities of movement.

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Radical Remembering: Absences, Ghosts, and Reclaiming Place

While the examples above help us think about the ways landscapes are etched by economies of violence and care, the traces and residues they leave behind and how they inform social memory, we must also consider the absences within these same landscapes and what they tell us about place-making along and beyond migrant journeys. Here I am inspired by the work of archaeologists like Alfredo González-Ruibal and Paul Mullins who study the absences in contemporary landscapes to understand spaces that "pass without reflection in everyday life" (Mullins 2015), that are "beyond social remembrance, where memory is erased" (González-Ruibal 2008) yet may still lurk near the surface. The study of absence in contemporary landscapes resonates with more recent literature on ghosts, haunting, and social memory that may be useful for our understandings of place-making along migration trajectories. Following the work of social theorists Jacques Derrida and Avery Gordon (Gordon 1997), anthropologists have increasingly turned attention to ghosts and haunting as analytical frameworks to understand the ways histories of violence and injustice—slavery, settler colonialism, war, global inequality—continue to haunt the present and the communities we work with (Good, Chiovenda, and Rahimi 2022). Migrants are often haunted by the legacies of violence in their home communities—war, precarity, ongoing social and political violence—and through their mobility, their comings and goings, and their absences, they may also come to haunt local communities and spaces along migrant journeys. Sometimes this takes the form of tragedy, like massacres or mass kidnappings along train routes, but also in the more subtle and everyday disappearances of individual migrants who go missing along the way and the unsettling presence of ghosts in more acute ways, like within the walls of migrant shelters.

During a 2022 visit to the Oaxacan shelter after a long hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I noted a new mural on the wall surrounding the garden. This mural was composed of a grid of simple white crosses on a rust-colored background. Each cross was adorned with the name of a migrant who had gone missing and the word *desaparecido* (disappeared) below it. The priest at the shelter explained to me that each name represented a person that had passed through or was known to the shelter. Like the painted handprints I mentioned earlier, the crosses are also markers of a shared humanity, reminders of the violence of migration and memorials to those lost, whose ghostly presence is captured in the everyday architecture of shelter life. Their presence is not anonymous but identifiable and connected to social worlds that go well beyond the space of the shelter.

Indeed, through my work with the families of missing migrants, I learned about the ways migrant journeys continue to have ripple effects in the ma-

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terial and everyday lives of peoples and communities well beyond migrant trajectories. For example, the material traces of missing loved ones become etched into people's homes—through an old shirt hanging on a rusty nail, a makeshift altar to hold candles lit in their memory, a bedroom left untouched. The materiality of migration journeys are also evident as objects discarded along the way, as Jason De León (2015) has documented in his analysis of the material culture of the US-Mexico border crossing.

For many families of the missing, etchings come in the form of absences, the uncertainty and unknowingness like weights on their hearts. "Every time I hear a key in the lock, I hope it is my son that walks through the door," a mother whose child went missing while attempting to cross the US-Mexico border told me. "I can never change the locks, because then how will he get in?" Migrants are not anonymous, but they are known ghosts who continue to haunt spaces like migrant shelters or through missing-persons posters pinned on the walls of bus stations, and increasingly through virtual spaces. Indeed, there are entire Facebook groups dedicated to sharing information on missing persons—migrants and citizens alike—in Mexico. One group called Migrants Missing at the Border is flooded with almost daily posts of loved ones who disappeared while crossing the US-Mexico border. The ghosts that haunt the journey must also be understood within sociospatial contexts of disappearance in Mexico more broadly. In 2022 Mexico had over one hundred thousand records of disappeared and missing persons, 80 percent of whom have disappeared since the most recent phase of Mexico's drug war began in 2006 (Brewer 2022).

The legacies of these absences became apparent in the years following the Tamaulipas massacre in August 2010, when fifty-eight men and fourteen women, one of whom was pregnant, were kidnapped, tied up, and shot execution style in an abandoned ranch in the northern state of Tamaulipas about 150 kilometers from the US-Mexico border. The victims of the massacre were mostly Central Americans from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, but there were also migrants from Ecuador, Brazil, and India. In the aftermath of the massacre, the gruesome images that circulated showed the victims slumped over one another with their hands bound, as well as aerial and roadside images of the abandoned structure where their bodies were found. If you drove past the unremarkable structure, you would likely not know that this was the site of one of the most deadly and politically significant massacres of migrants in Mexican history.

In Tamaulipas there is an absence of remembrance in the physical space where the violence occurred, but at the same time a host of other actors—the families of the victims, families of other disappeared migrants, religious figures, and migrant rights activists—have continued to make visible, to remember, and to honor the victims in public and political ways. In the south-

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ern Mexican city of Tenosique, which is hundreds of kilometers away but has become a crucial transit point near Mexico's southern border, a shelter called La 72 was opened to honor the victims of Tamaulipas (Guevara González 2022). The dedication of La 72 to the fallen migrants speaks to the ways otherwise invisible or "peripheral" actors and events may become central to the place-making strategies and practices in places far removed.

Another poignant example of this occurred on the tenth anniversary of the massacre when activists and families of missing migrants erected what they called an anti-monument directly in front of the embassy of the United States in Mexico City. The imposing 10 ft. high iron sculpture, symbolically placed in front of the embassy on the famous *Paseo de la Reforma* avenue features a large 72 with a red plus sign to symbolize other migrants who have been killed or disappeared, and the words "*nadie es illegal en el mundo* (no one in the world is illegal)" and "*migrar es un derecho humano* (migration is a human right)". The monument has become a permanent feature of the city's landscape and a place where families and activists gather to speak out against violence and impunity, build altars, and place photographs of other missing migrants to put their faces and stories into public view and make sure their lives are not forgotten. The +72 anti-monument is one of several anti-monuments across the city dedicated to victims of other national shames, such as the missing forty-three students of Ayotzinapa and the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. These anti-monuments, in addition to murals, political posters, and graffiti, are akin to anti-colonial archives as ways of reclaiming public space and memory through historical counternarratives. The intentional and public act of erecting the sculpture and ongoing protests are repeated performances of visibility, remembrance, and solidarity. Through this repetition, these collective acts of radical unforgetting become significant etchings in the social space of the journey and in the physical space of political power where the anxieties and spectacle of Central American migration coalesce.

Building on the work of Judith Butler (2009) on the differential distribution of grievability among certain groups in contexts of war and racism, Karina Horsti (2019) argues that the silent ungrievability and invisibility of migrant deaths stems from the perception that the lives of migrants are already perceived as lost, thus making their deaths naturalized and unremarkable. This politics of indifference has in recent years been contested through the work of activist, community, and family-led efforts to remember the dead and the disappeared, making them some of the most important sites of political contestation, resistance, and solidarity with migrant struggles (Rygiel 2016; Stierl 2016). Such "grief-activism" (Stierl 2016) may take place in both physical spaces as collective gatherings and protest and in transnational social media spaces, and work to challenge conditions of

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ungrievability (Butler 2009) created by colonial and racist structures of difference.

This radical remembering is apparent in the caravan of mothers who make an annual trek following in the footsteps of their children who went missing while crossing Mexico, and in the more recent caravans of migrants and asylum seekers that have emerged whose collective mobility is seen as a central strategy of survival in an increasingly perilous and militarized Mexico. The families traveling in these caravans know that they will not likely find their children, and the migrants and asylum seekers know that Mexico, under the pressure of the United States, will not grant them free transit. Nevertheless, they persist—they are part of a collective movement for a future where such outcomes may be within reach. It is precisely through their movements—which are highly visible and unapologetic—that they emplace new meanings and forge new social connections within and across journey landscapes. The caravans, like migrant shelters, are fraught with political tensions, yet through their very presence they exemplify a new type of etching in that they seek to reimagine the possibilities of mobility, and in turn the legitimacy of the state. Through a politics of refusal, these collective movements not only transform place but also make visible the violence and impunity that have defined the journey for so long. In this way, we see how these collective etchings span time—the participants move on behalf of those who have moved before them and those who come after them, seeking to make their movements, in both senses of the word, meaningful.

Etchings create possibilities for the future. Individual movements are primarily motivated by individual and family needs, but they are purposeful and rarely just about the people who are doing the moving. While migrants embark on their journeys primarily for their families, through the accumulation of movement, connection, and knowledge in places, their movements have impacts that go beyond their individual journeys. As such, individual movements become part of something larger, creating both new possibilities and challenges for people they know and people they will never know but will nonetheless be connected to in the paths, the valleys, and journeys they have made. And so it is with etchings, which tell us about the social relations, experiences, and residues that become marked in places, on bodies, in families, and within communities between and across borders.

Ethics and Engaged Research

If we are to think of places as pincushions with a million stories in them then we, as scholars who dwell in these places, have the privilege of recording some of these stories, to reconceptualize mobility through a lens of pro-

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ductivity, to see the history-makers as they are. We may also work to create archives that capture some of the counternarratives of migration journeys. For example, a collective of journalists created a digital archive dedicated to the memory of the seventy-two migrants who died in the massacre. The archive features video of a grandmother holding the photograph of her fifteen-year-old granddaughter, Yeimi Castro, who died on her way to reunite with her mother in New York, and a mother from Honduras whose son disappeared in Tamaulipas in August 2010, and she still does not know if he was one of the victims. There is also the story of a woman who, while watching the news of Tamaulipas two weeks after the massacre, recognized her nephew and his clothing—black t-shirt, jeans, white tennis shoes—through the photographs that were displayed on TV. The archive is a profound example of the ways scholars, journalists, and activists alongside migrants, volunteers, and family members may create their own histories through radical acts of remembering. The making and unmaking of places of memory through assemblages of objects, practices, and imaginaries not only recall and/or contest narratives of the past—in this case, the invisibilization of migrant deaths—but may also be considered historical processes in themselves through which memoryscapes are produced (Rose-Redwood et al. 2022).

For us as scholars, our work, too, then, becomes etchings that both reflect and shape the places we go, forged by the connections we make. Over a decade after I first entered the migrant shelter that I began this chapter with, I returned to it with my published book in hand. The book cover features the mural that greets you upon entering, now chipped and faded, and due to pandemic-related restrictions the inside of the shelter was eerily empty, except for a few volunteers and the priest I had worked alongside years before, still wearing his signature leather jacket. After we embraced and shared updates on families and other happenings, I presented him with my book, which he promised to proudly display. In that moment I saw the book, my life's work for so many years, leave my hands to return to the place that it was born from. It is now an imperfect ethnographic artifact, a collection of experiences and encounters from a moment in history, yet still an etching in its own right. Even as I am absent from that place, like most of the others who fill the pages, passed through and dwelled for a time, we have left a small mark in the shelter archive. It is here, through our collective efforts and work as scholars, that I believe we have incredible opportunity, to not only document and analyze but also to contribute to history-making through thoughtful and ethical scholarship that emerges from our collaborations. To produce knowledge that minimizes harm and seeks to honor the people we work with, the people who share their lives with us, and who, through their presence and collaboration, make their own etchings on our work and our lives. Through our collective embodied movements we can ac-

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company migrants and asylum seekers at shelters and in caravans, in detention centers and inside court rooms. We, too, are wayfarers, inhabitants, interconnected in the knots of countless journeys, who can use our privilege to help create new possibilities for justice, a new meshwork for the future.

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