



evergreen



The Third World Is Here

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Some of these images previously appeared in *Plaza Pública*.

Art by Lionel Cruet

Part 1 of a four-part series.

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I

We saw her roaming the streets of Esquipulas with two little boys trailing behind her.

Her feet, barely covered by worn espadrilles, dragged over the damp

ground. The look on her face could only be described as despondent. Absent, even. She looked tired. How could she not be? Arely Orellana—I came to know her name later on, and it still rings in my head—and her grandchildren had walked nearly 180 miles from San Pedro Sula in less than three days. And the night before, the Guatemalan police had held the caravan for up to three hours under the blazing sun with no access to food or water.

Even if Arely and the boys got to the shelter first, which was unlikely, they probably didn't get to sleep until close to midnight, when the reporters left, the ruckus inside faded, and the people's excitement gave way to stupor. Had Arely and the boys slept indoors? Had they eaten some of the food given by the local church? Did they know that that was simply the beginning of a two-month journey? Six hours later Arely was up on her feet looking for a payphone to call her daughter.

"That one's busted," a man setting up his granizada stand said to Arely and the group of men helping her dial. "Ese no sirve," he repeated, holding two blocks of ice. "Try the one down the street."

"Do you want to talk to her?" Simone, our photographer, said.

504832606487. That was her daughter's phone number, Arely said, showing us her left hand, where she had written it. "She's in Houston," she said. Her eyes were red and misty, her lips thin and devoid of any vigor. The two boys behind her, sus nietos, were having breakfast: a bag of Doritos and a juice box each she had bought using the little money she had left. Before she dropped a coin on the payphone, I offered her mine instead. After figuring out that the first three numbers on her hand were actually Honduras' code number, and that Arely had forgotten to put one number at the end, the call went through. "Aló," she said. "Mija, we're in Guatemala. We're on our way to los Estados. We need money."

She hung up two minutes later.



65-year-old Arely Orellana has her daughter's US phone number written down in her hand. She was trying to call her daughter in hope of getting some money that might help her and her two grandchildren continue their journey.

"I have not seen my daughter in three years. She left Honduras three years ago. She's in the US. She lives in Houston. These are her children," Arely said, not quite looking at me. "They're five years old. Their father got killed. The maras shot him. The truth is I joined the caravan because I can't feed them anymore. I'm too old now. I can't find a job. All I want is to get to Houston to give my daughter her children."

Arely Orellana was 65 years old.

"I have not seen my daughter in three years. She lives in Houston. These are her children. They're five years old. Their father got killed. The maras shot him. The truth is I joined the caravan because I can't feed them anymore. I'm too old now. I can't find a job. All I want is to get to Houston to give my daughter her children."

We had come to Esquipulas a day prior, on Monday, October 15th, at around 4 pm, when just a few young migrants who had walked faster than the rest of the caravan were resting on the steps of the basilica, taking pictures and waiting for the others.

Esquipulas, located in the department of Chiquimula, on the eastern side of the country, and within walking distance of Honduras, is a small town of narrow streets, cobblestone roads, many hotels, and mild weather. During the day its main square gets filled with improvised shops, food stands, and the local mercado—famous for its conserva de coco. All streets seem to take you to the cathedral, the home of the Cristo Negro, the Black Christ of Esquipulas. The legend goes that the sculpture, made in 1594, blackened over the years due to soot from the candles. People come from all over the world to see the Christ. Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa visited the church.

The last time I had been there was in 2015, mere weeks before coming to the United States to do my MFA. My mother had insisted that we should go thank the Christ for the scholarship I had gotten. “It was all gracias a Dios,” she said. On our way out she bought me a scapular with a medal of Saint Christopher, the patron of travelers, travelers like mi tío Oscar who after getting laid off from his ten-year job as welder made good use of his tourist visa and took a flight to California, to start anew. Travelers like mi tía Magda who, after years of poverty, paid a smuggler to take her to Houston and is now living in Washington D.C. Travelers like mi tía Bertha, mi tío Tito, and perhaps, like 18-year-old Brayan Sánchez who left his home in Olancho and was posing next to a Honduran flag, on the steps of the basilica on the afternoon of October 15th, 2018.


Brayan was thin, wore capri pants, a blinding smile, and despite the hardship of walking for three days he and his friends looked as fresh as if they had just woken up.



During the third day of their journey, the migrants rest at the Casa del Migrante in Guatemala City.

"In Honduras, you can't find a job. I just graduated from high school, and I can't find a job," Brayan said, and he smiled. "A person like me, fresh out of high school, has no chance of ever getting a decent job in Olancho. We look, we look, and we look; but there aren't any jobs for us young. And even if you find a job, that's not enough to pay for the market basket." At the end of every sentence or pause, he smiled. "Or the gangs take it from you."

"That's true! I worked driving a moto taxi because that's the only thing I could find, but I can barely buy any food for my mother," Brayan's friend, Jesús Gabriel, who was chewing on an apple, said. "If I make it into the US, and God willing I will make it, I'll start sending money to my mother and sisters."



“There were people on the ground, people huddled inside old cars, people under the trees by the roadside, people inside and on top of a camioneta that creaked and swayed like an old ship. There were people as far as the eye could see. Ladinos. Garífunas. Indígenas.”

Before I could talk with the other young man standing beside Brayan and Jesús, another small group got to where we were. They had sweat drops the size of rosary beads rolling down their reddened faces, they had worn backpacks on their backs, they had just barely escaped the police blockade, uphill.

“They’re not letting anyone through,” one of them said, catching his breath.

During the weekend, soon after the people began moving through Honduras, the president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, and the Guatemalan Institute of Migration had announced that they wouldn’t allow people to cross because they might *mess* with our national security. Morales called them a risk. Un riesgo. Pendejo.

Simone, Andrea, our videographer, and I took a mototaxi. It was a three-mile ride. The driver charged us 20 quetzales—a little over two dollars. There, on the top of the hill, were police pickup trucks and around fifty policemen, some in full riot gear, others dressed as though they had just clocked out of their afternoon shift at Pollo Campero. Regardless of their attire, all of them had their eyes fixed south, their hands firmly on their belts. And on the other side of that black and blue wall, there it was, la **caravana**. There were people on the ground, people huddled inside old cars, people under the trees by the roadside, people inside and on top of a camioneta that creaked and swayed like an old ship. There were people as far as the eye could see. Ladinos. Garífunas. Indígenas. Unlike what we’re used to seeing, the caravan was not entirely made of young men wearing tennis shoes and thin backpacks. There were elderly women pushing strollers, and a few unaccompanied minors too. The whistling air of Esquipulas was thick, warm, and moist. We had come too late. By the time we began walking through the group, they were exhausted, thirsty, out of breath, and seemed flattened by the sun. While Brayan and Jesús were ready to run to Zacapa and beyond, those trapped by the police seemed on the brink of collapse. Mothers poured water on top of babies’ heads, babies clung to their mothers’ breasts, men showed their IDs in hopes of being allowed to go through. A few of them asked for food, tortillas, agua,

lo que sea. And the young, the enraged, said to the policemen, “We will stay here until they let us through.” Others tried to convince the officers that they were gente honesta and that they would leave in the morning. There were a bunch of photographers too, elbowing through the crowd. I was the only reporter. The first woman we talked to was 34-year-old Luz Abigail, traveling with her one-year-old boy.



22-year-old Paola González smiles at the camera, alongside her children.

“It’s awful to wake up every morning and hear your son say, ‘Mami, I’m hungry’ only to realize that the only thing you can afford is a juice box,” Luz said. She had a pointy nose and virtually no flesh on her cheeks. “But do you know what’s the saddest thing? When your son is sick, and you go to a local health center only to see that it’s closed because they even don’t have painkillers.”

Another mother appeared by my side. “Life is hard in Honduras. We barely make any money. Sometimes I don’t even have enough money to buy my kids any food. I used to make around 300 dollars working as a cashier. But that’s not enough to buy them food, clothes, to pay for rent. We’re tired of living this way. We’ve been walking for three days straight, but I’m doing it for my kids, to give them a better future.”

Twenty-two-year-old Paola González was traveling with her three-year-old son Emil, her nine-month-old daughter Eliany, and her forty-five-year-old mother, Modesta González. Paola, she argued, used her mother’s surname instead of her father’s since she never met him and because he was a desgraciado.

I tried to reach the end. But as I softly placed the tip of my toes in between heads lying on the ground, and torsos and away from hands, I realized it was impossible. I caught a glimpse of an old man on a wheelchair. I introduced myself and asked the man his name and age.

“Sergio. 49.”

“Sergio what?” I said, writing down.

“Just Sergio.”

Compared to Sergio, Brayan and Luz looked obese. He was as thin as a broom.

“I’ve been in this wheelchair for seven years. I can’t pay for my operation,” Sergio said, looking away. “I’m going to the United States to find a doctor who might fix me. I want to walk again.”

“And how did you get here, Sergio?” I said, putting my phone away.

“People help me,” he said, looking at the man beside him.

“Are you two family?”

“No.”

And that’s all he said.



A woman breastfeeds her son as they walk outside of Esquipulas, a day after the Migrant Caravan reached Guatemala.

People from Esquipulas came on moto taxi or by foot, and with bottles of water, cookies, and fresh oranges. “Food and shelter are waiting for you, on the other side, hermanos,” someone said, handing out food to the migrants. “Just hang on a little longer. Un poquito más.”

The children were the first to eat, followed by the elderly. Soon the food ran out.

“We’re hungry, padre,” a man told a policeman.

The cops didn’t move. A member of Esquipulas’s Casa del Migrante came to bargain, but they didn’t move. People, neighbors pleaded, but they didn’t move. Every once in a while, someone shouted, “¡Viva Honduras!” and the crowd roared as though in a fútbol stadium. “¡Viva Honduras!” But still, the cops didn’t move. Los chontes, los chepos no se movieron. No se movieron pero sí se movieron. They didn’t move, but they did.

Eventually, and unexpectedly, at 5:20 pm, as the sun became a copper pebble in the sky, the policemen stepped aside, and the caravan, that mighty flock or survivors, paraded down the highway with renewed strength. Breadmakers offered buns and biscuits to the walkers. Others gave them money. “¡Viva Honduras!” the Esquipultecos happily welcomed the group, clapping. “¡Qué viva!” the Hondurans responded, as people offered them fruit and bottles of water.

Almost as if carried by the wind, or perhaps guided by the locals, the people found their way to the Colegio San Benito—a school the church and local casa migrante had asked to use to house the Hondurans. By the time I got there, there were hundreds lining up to get inside and get some food. One of the padres told us they had cooked 1,400 meals. And as he greeted the people inside, local volunteers served them dinner: rice, beans, a pair of buns, coffee served in Styrofoam cups. This type of meal would become an everyday thing for the migrants for the next couple of months. Always rice. Always beans. If not dried-out bread, then tortillas. And always watered-down coffee served in Styrofoam cups. Sí, always Styrofoam cups. If they were lucky, and sometimes they were, they’d get tamales, or tacos, or fried chicken. And while many stood in line, most dropped on the ground, waiting for the line to shorten, waiting for more food to arrive, or waiting because there was nothing left to do tonight, not until tomorrow.

As Simone and Andrea took pictures, I roamed the area.

The light posts’ light painted the scene mawkish amber. There were women rocking their babies to sleep. Children restored by the cool mountain air began playing on the streets. Men sat on the sidewalks with their heads trapped between their knees and their tattered shoes sitting by their pulsating feet. No tennis shoe, fútbol shoe, or Croc went unharmed by the long walk. I saw a man pouring water over his feet, rubbing his ankles, stretching his toes. I saw a woman massaging her calves, hitting her thighs. I saw a man, on the ground, with his feet on a friend’s waist and his friend shaking the man’s legs, as if he had run after a ball for 180 minutes and was getting ready to kick the penalty that would take Honduras

straight to the World Cup.

“Vamos mi león,” I heard Simone singing next to a group of men wearing Olimpia’s red shirt—Simone had traveled to Honduras earlier that year to get to know the fans of the biggest clubs in the country: Olimpia and Motagua. After only a few days talking with the barras bravas, he declared he was a fan of only two fútbol teams: Football Club Internazionale Milano and Club Deportivo Olimpia. “Queremos la copa, te quiero ver campeón,” he went on.

The men smiled and asked Simone for photos.

“Huecos,” a man, surely a Motagua fan, went by the group.

“Excuse me,” another man, with his four children, said touching my shoulder. “Do you know how much is a hotel room around here?”

Soon after, Andrea and I got inside San Benito. Even if the sun had just set, people were getting ready to go to sleep. The line to the bathroom was as long as the line to get inside the school.

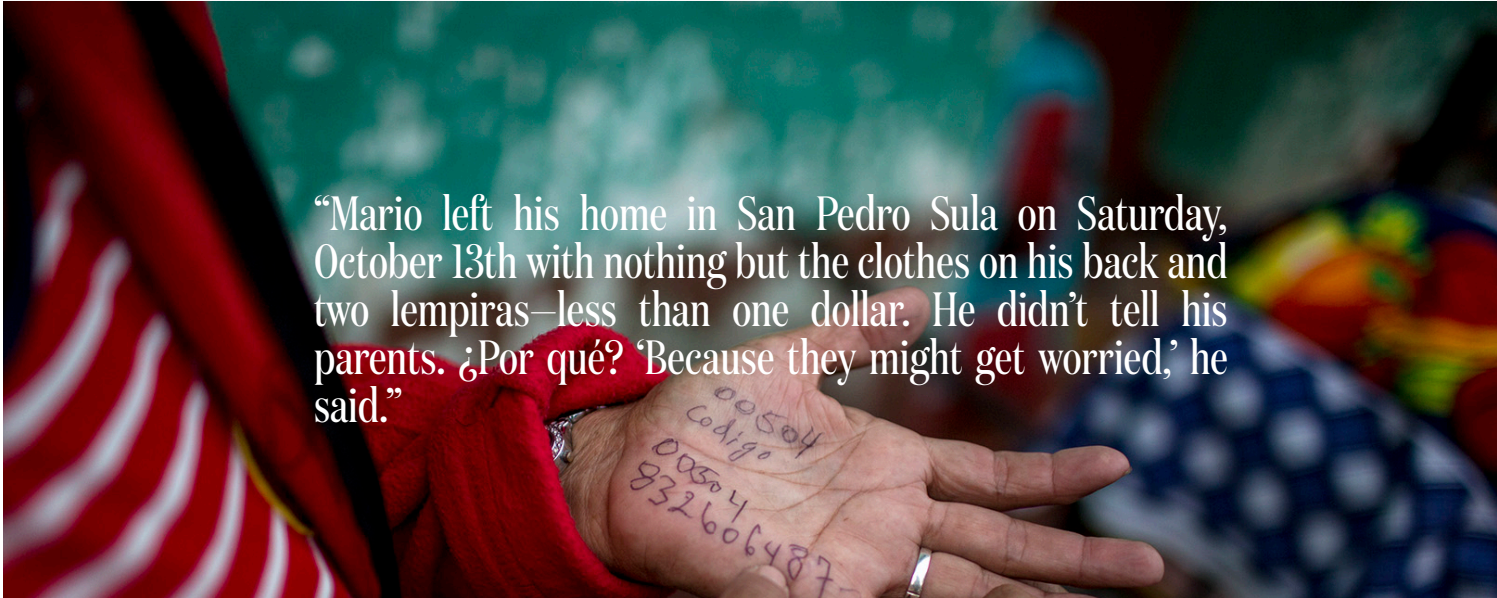
II

The caravan spent the night at Colegio San Benito and on the streets. Inside San Benito, we met Mario and his beaming smile for the first time. Mario was twelve years old. He was one of the many unaccompanied minors walking toward the US.



Lionel Cruet, Animated gif from Mirage (Espejismo), 2013.

“I left (Honduras) by myself because we don’t have any money. There’s too much violence. The gangs steal from us the little money we have,” Mario said. “What I want to do, in the name of God, is get to Mexico, and then the United States. I’d like to go to school and work. I’d study anything, as long as I can make a good buck and help my mother.” He smiled.



“Mario left his home in San Pedro Sula on Saturday, October 13th with nothing but the clothes on his back and two lempiras—less than one dollar. He didn’t tell his parents. ¿Por qué? ‘Because they might get worried,’ he said.”

Standing five feet tall, Mario is a chubby kid with restless feet and a knack for getting people’s attention. He’s not afraid of speaking out, of asking for some food. He left his home in San Pedro Sula on Saturday, October 13th with nothing but the clothes on his back and two lempiras—less than one dollar. He didn’t tell his parents. ¿Por qué? “Because they might get worried,” he said. When Andrea and I talked to him he was sitting at the middle of San Benito’s basketball court simply looking around and smiling at the people passing by. No other media had talked to him. And after that he became the face of the caravan. People from all over the world wanted to talk to him. Andrea got calls from CNN, NBC, and media across the globe. They wanted to get to know his story, which isn’t different from any of his countrymen and women who traveled with him. And he wasn’t the only unaccompanied minor traveling with the caravan. I guess it was his charisma and dramatic story that enthralled them. Soon after we interviewed him, Mario called his parents. “I’m in Guatemala,” he said, “with the caravan, and I’m on my way to the US.” He said he wasn’t hungry. Not anymore. He was tired and sleepy. His mother had epilepsy. “Le dan ataques,” he said.



A group of Honduran men show their ID cards, as they wait to gain entrance to Guatemala.

At 7:05 am the next day, sometime after Simone, Andrea and I helped Arely call her daughter in Houston, there came *the* tweet. Donald J. Trump said he had *strongly* informed the president of Honduras that if he didn't stop the caravan from reaching the US, "no more money or aid will be given to Honduras, effective immediately!" Five minutes later San Benito was empty and the caravan, crossing in front of the Basilica, was ready to resume its journey. The group looked well rested and excited. They had, after all, opened the first border that had announced it wouldn't budge, and even if some people limped across the Main Square, they were ready to continue.

While many walked towards the highway, those who spent the night on the streets of Esquipulas crowded near a public faucet, to wash their teeth and faces. Others stayed behind, on the church, praying, taking pictures. One of Simone's Olimpia friends, a young man whom we began calling Oli, took a selfie on the basilica's steps.

"This león is going to los USA," he declared. He was still wearing his red jersey.

There was Mario as well, chewing on some chips. He waved at us.

There was a family giving out mangoes.

Andrea and I hopped on the pickup at the front of the caravan, as Simone went to the back. We agreed to follow the group for a few miles, get some footage, and head back to the city. I took the wheel while Andrea, camera in hand, sat in the bed, recording. It was a cold morning and we were driving downhill, and people asked us to let women and children on the truck. "They're tired, papa," a man said. Before I could say a word ten mothers, with their children, sat by Andrea's side. "See if you can get any

comments,” I texted her.

“They don’t want to talk,” she replied.

As I put my phone back on the dash, I got another message from an unknown US number.

“Buenos días. Can you please tell Arely that we have sent her the money? 580 810 4700. That’s the password. We sent her \$150. Thanks a lot. Can you please tell her to buy a phone? We’re awfully worried.” It was Arely’s daughter, writing from Houston.

“I will if I see her,” I texted back. “I’m a reporter from Guatemala. I’m not with her right now. I’ll tell her if I see her.”

“Please, it’s an emergency. She said she ran out of money. Please find her.”

I tried to remain calm. I looked in the rearview mirror, to the river of people, not really looking for Arely, but more like a reminder. I had to be realistic. No census or loudspeaker, no private eye would have been able to find Arely Orellana. “Hay muchísima gente,” I texted. “If I do see her, I will tell her. Otherwise, I imagined she’ll call you by the time she’s at the next city.”

“Ok. Thank you. Que Dios lo bendiga.”

I kept on driving at 10 miles per hour, behind a police car. People leading the caravan seemed as strong and excited as Olimpistas reaching the final; they waved flags, they clapped, they sang the national anthem. Though rage, hunger, and indignation still moved their feet, they looked unmistakably happy to resume their journey. Hope and the promise of prosperity weighed as much as the death threats that had gotten them out of San Pedro, and Tegus, and Olancho. Fear made them leave Honduras while hope made them walk the length of Guatemala. I wondered how Sergio and his wheelchair would find their way to the next city. I thought endlessly about Sergio and his wheelchair, because while those leading the caravan seemed as stable as athletes, as durable as luchadores, many of those at the back could barely stand up. Shoes were still torn. Blisters hadn’t healed. Ankles were still swollen. Simone confirmed that the elderly walked a few feet, sat on the grass, and remained there indefinitely. Soon it was clear that the people would not be able to walk all the way to the United States. Some started hopping on cars or grabbing on the sides of eighteen-wheelers; drivers were rarely informed. Every few minutes, men precariously gripping onto the insides of trucks, men with nothing but their toes on top of railings and fingers pinching on whatever was at hand came by my window, cheering, smiling, waving. Viva Honduras. I saw the tails of countless pickup trucks grazing the ground by the weight of a dozen people on top. I saw men racing to hop on the back of cars and trucks. I saw, on my rearview mirror, even the strongest men opting to hitch a ride.

At 10 am Simone called me. He said he had all he needed. I texted Andrea, saying I was going to park the car and that we had to ask people to jump out. “I have a problem,” she wrote. “A mother left me her baby.”

Mierda.

I parked the car. I let the women out and saw Andrea, with a bewildered look on her face, her camera in her right hand, a six-month-old baby and a

small bag filled with diapers in her left.

“Andrea, ¿qué vamos a—?” I muttered.

“These are all victims of domestic violence. All of them,” she said. “His mother too. One told me that on Friday she cooked her husband breakfast, saw him leave for work, waited an hour, packed some clothes for her children, and left to join the caravan. This guy’s name is Jayden,” she said, looking at the baby. “His mother said she needed to find her mother. She had trouble walking and remained at the back of the group.” I told her we needed to find Simone. “Let’s go, then. We will find her too.”

Andrea began fixing Jayden a bottle. She said goodbye to the other mothers. Told them to be strong, que sigan adelante. I offered my deodorant and toothpaste to a father who had walked the whole way behind us and was now back with his kids. We turned the car around. “She’s got a green shirt,” she said. Jayden seemed happy. He liked playing with Andrea’s hair, with her camera strap. Andrea smiled and giggled. I did not. There were too many people uphill. “Pay attention. See if you can spot her,” I said, swallowing hard, thinking we wouldn’t be able to find Jayden’s mother. Did she bail out on her son? Did she abandon him? Leave him with Andrea, away from Honduran danger, thinking he’d be safer in Guatemala with us? Fear gave way to panic. I drove slower. The crowd moved as slow as lava. No one looked at us. They only cared for cars moving north. It would take people another day to start considering going back. In the meantime they walked looking down. Slowly, they moved. But even if they meandered, even if they seemed uninspired, the caravan, on top of the CA10 highway, gained seismic proportions. Colegio San Benito had prepared 1,400 meals, but there were early reports of up to 4,000 people marching. I freaked out. I thought we wouldn’t be able to find Jayden’s mother, Heidy. I imagined going back to the office, telling our editors what had happened, and trying to figure out what we would do with the little boy. It wasn’t an option to call the police. Would we get in touch with the Honduran embassy? With NGOs? Had Andrea asked for Heidy’s full name? Did she have a city of origin or neighborhood? Carajo. ¿Qué hacemos? I imagined Jayden growing up at a church, with a different name, not knowing his story or true identity, like thousands of Guatemalan kids who were sold during the Civil War to American and European couples. Will one of the nuns in Jayden’s church tell him, as he reaches adulthood, the truth? That he isn’t a Guatemalan orphan but a Honduran boy, left by his mother on her way to the US? That a group of reporters left him at a church? Will he find Andrea? Will he find me? Will Jayden ask us, right when we thought he had disappeared from our lives, what had happened to him? Will Jayden ask us to help him find his mother?

Suddenly, a small girl wearing a green shirt ran to the middle of the road and began waving at us. “That’s her!” Andrea shouted. “Heidy.”

I sighed and parked the car.

Heidy Bonilla was a short, brown-skinned girl with orange highlights in her hair. She introduced us to her limping mother, Mayra Orellana. Heidy’s mother was walking barefoot; someone had bandaged her right foot using a piece of cloth. They thanked us. Absentmindedly I said hello to them, and let them back in the car. Heidy had plenty of smiles to spare.

“I told you we’d find her,” Andrea said, as blood began filling my face again.

“Gracias, joven,” Heidy’s mother said and reached for my shoulder.

We found Simone minutes later.



Lionel Cruet, Animated gif from *Mirage* (Espejismo), 2013.

We let the women out in Chiquimula. We had heard that the caravan had plans of regrouping there to see if the local mayor would give them buses to take them to the next city: Zacapa. Simone, Andrea, and I got to **Guatemala City** at 2 pm, in time to see the first Honduran family walking down Puente Belice.

The Casa Migrante in Guatemala City and Colegio Santa María—across the street from the Casa—housed part of the caravan Tuesday night. As in Esquipulas, there wasn’t room for everyone. Though some managed to find a place and an inflatable mattress to sleep on, others were forced to sleep on the patio, in the school’s hallways, or on the streets. Tuesday night, Simone, Andrea and I, and now dozens of other reporters and photographers, walked inside the school where thousands of Hondurans were regrouping before heading to the Tecún Umán – Ciudad Hidalgo border crossing. I walked the two buildings, hoping to find Heidy and her family, or Mario, Sergio, perhaps, or Arely and her grandchildren. “Here’s the password,” I’d tell her, showing her the message I had gotten from her daughter in Houston. “There’s an Elektra down the street where you can get the money,” I’d tell her. “Are you okay?” I’d tell her.

First I went to the Casa Migrante. Built to welcome no more than fifty people, the Casa had hundreds in its rooms, its hallways, in the washing room, the kitchen, the garage; everywhere but the offices that were occupied by physicians patching blisters and gently testing the limits of the migrant’s tired and sprained feet. The shoes on the floor had lost all of their vigor; looking more like socks with laces going through its flaccid

bodies. The smell of beans, scrambled eggs, and coffee filled the air. Though the Casa couldn't welcome everyone, aware that there were thousands of migrants coming to the city, people worked non-stop to feed as many as they could.

I went to the school next, but before I found any familiar faces, 24-year-old Mayra Ayala from Ocotepeque reached for my arm. She needed a phone call. Her 2-year-old daughter Emily needed someone to acknowledge her Dora la Exploradora shirt.



Lionel Cruet, Animated gif from Mirage (Espejismo), 2013.

“Hola, papi. I’m calling to tell you that I left Honduras. I’m with the caravan. I’ll try calling you tomorrow,” she said into the phone and hung up.

“You didn’t tell him?” I asked.

“No, he lives in the US,” she said. “Me, my daughter and my aunt—who must be somewhere—left Lempa on Monday, when the caravan was already in Guatemala. We got on a bus. I couldn’t get a job in my hometown. Sometimes I didn’t even have enough money to buy food for my daughter. I sometimes worked cleaning houses. But I barely made a living. My aunt and I heard about the caravan on Friday. La pensamos mucho. I was afraid of going hungry. Imagine if my Emily gets sick. But we made up our minds. And the Guatemalans have treated us wonderfully. But I’m afraid of Mexico. I’m afraid of the desert. Emily has been asking me, ‘When are we going back home, mami?’”

I spent the rest of the afternoon talking with some of the **mothers** inside. While many were already sleep, there were kids jumping and playing on the mats, men smoking, women taking out bed sheets and sweaters. I saw an elderly woman reading the bible.

“I don’t want my son to go through what his father went through. People wonder why we’re traveling this far, why are we putting ourselves at risk. But this is nothing compared to what we were living in Colón. Gang members, extortionists, killers. I’ve never been in Guatemala before. It’s been hard. But people have been kind to us. I’m sure Mexicans will treat us similarly.’ She took a bite off a piece of bread, almost as if saying, The interview is over, joven.”

“Can I sit here?” I said to a woman with bright brown eyes and long hair. She who couldn’t have been much older than me and she was sitting next to a young girl leaning on a mat and talking with some boys.

“Sure,” she said, touching her hair. Her name was Lidia Orellana, and she was 34.

“Can I ask you a few questions?” I said, and she nodded. “Why are you traveling, miss?”

“I lived in Mexico for a while, six years ago. I lived in Tierra Blanca, Veracruz and I had to sell all my things in Honduras to pay for the trip,” she said. I stayed there for two years, working. Money was tight, so I decided to go back to live with my three daughters.”

“That’s your daughter?” I said.

“I look young, don’t I,” she said, and she laughed. “Yes, she’s my daughter. I have three, but she’s my oldest, Anyi. All of us heard about the caravan on the news. We thought about it a lot. But she convinced me,” she said, looking at her daughter. Anyi smiled back at me. “‘Let’s go, mama. Many are leaving,’ she said. We left Sunday morning. Anyi has always been like this, aventada. She used to work selling eggs, making 200 lempiras a week (a little over \$8). She used that money to pay for her textbooks. But it wasn’t enough. She says she wants to work in the US, but she’s only 15. I don’t want her to work just yet. She’s my responsibility.”

“And where are Anyi’s sisters?”

“With friends. They’re much younger.”

Only a few feet from Lidia and Anyi I ran into Carmen Echeverría, a 51-year-old black woman from Colón. She was traveling with her son, her half-sister, and her nephews.

“You’re not going to use this for a bad thing, are you?” she said.

“No, señora.”

She nodded, and then began to talk as if we were childhood friends catching up with each other. “Me and my half-sister, Griselda, we heard about the caravan last week, on the news, and we talked about it. She had already made up her mind. Not me. We have another half-sister in Houston. Her name is Ana Williams. She left Honduras last year. She works as a waitress, and she sends us photos of her apartment, the malls, the well-lit streets, and the beaches. We want that too. So I asked my son Luis. ‘Madre, I want to be someone, and there’s no way here in Honduras,’ he said. ‘Let’s go to see your aunt then,’ I told him.” Luis was already asleep by Carmen’s feet. “He wants to be an architect. ¡Imagínese! An architect. Luis, the architect. He says he wants to work to help me out. Griselda brought all her kids too: Carmen, Dickson, Jorge and Alberto. I used to work doing housework. I started working after the gangs killed my husband.” There was a pause. Carmen had the practiced and unbending posture of a veteran dancer. “I don’t want my son to go through what his father went through.” She took a blanket and put it on top of her son’s back. “People wonder why we’re traveling this far, why are we putting ourselves at risk. But this is nothing compared to what we were living in Colón. Gang members, extortionists, killers.” Carmen wiped the tears off her face. “I’ve never been in Guatemala before,” she said and she smiled. “It’s been hard. But people have been kind to us. I’m sure Mexicans will treat us similarly.” She took a bite off a piece of bread, almost as if saying, The interview is over, joven.



Lionel Cruet, *Mirage (Espejismo)*, 2013. Single channel video installation (3 minutes) , dimensions variable.

Before stepping out of the school, I ran into Arely. She was taking her grandkids to the bathroom. She had arrived in the morning on top of a pickup truck. She had talked with her daughter in Houston. She had collected the money. She smiled, faintly. Relief softened my face, quickened my gait.

I ran into Mario as he was jumping out of a pickup truck. “Is Andrea here?” he said.

“She is,” I said.

There was no sign of Sergio and his wheelchair.

I couldn’t find Heidi either.

I found Oli, though. Despite his feeble frame he was as firm as ever, and still wearing his Olimpia jersey. “Tomorrow we take Mexico,” he said, and people cheered.

Viva Honduras. Vamos leones.

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