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**“The Militarization of Everyday Urban Life: An Urban Ethnographic Study in Southern Mexico”**

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In the past fifteen years, the U.S. homeland security apparatus has spurred a number of multilateral agreements and initiatives with Mexico and the violence-wracked “Northern Triangle” of Central America (i.e. Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador). Under the aegis of wars against drugs, terrorism, and unauthorized immigration, notable agreements like the Mérida Initiative (2008), the Central America Regional Security Initiative (2010), and the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America (2014) have helped facilitate a southbound transfer of billions of dollars’ worth of U.S. military equipment, intelligence systems, and personnel training—arguably transforming strategic and vulnerable geographies (e.g. border regions and dense urban districts) into sites of increasing (re)militarization.

In this presentation, a critical interdisciplinary framework based in human geography and urban and ethnic studies is used to examine recent trends in the southern Mexican border city of Tapachula, Chiapas—a prominent transit hub for U.S.-bound refugees, and site of the largest migrant detention facility in Latin America. Using a combination of evidence gathered from participant observation, interviews, and archival research over the last two years, this preliminary research presentation will highlight the continued relevance of what geographer Stephen Graham (2010) calls the “new military urbanism”—what is, in other words, a way of understanding how the militarization and securitization of everyday urban life continually inform one another through surveillance, biometric tracking, and technophilic fantasies of sociospatial control.

This year, the Tinker Field Research Grant allowed me to deepen my investigation of the militarization of urban, and rapidly urbanizing, municipalities in the southern Mexican borderlands of Chiapas. Between August 16th and September 10th, 2016, I initiated a new phase of my ethnographic project—interviews with civil society organizations working with various marginalized communities in and around the border city of Tapachula, the undeclared capital of the coastal Soconusco section of Chiapas. As before, I worked closely with researchers at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR) with the expressed aim of understanding how processes of militarization and securitization—or, in other words, the widespread use of military ideas, weapons, and institutions in the everyday execution of urban administration—have shaped everyday city habits and practices, particularly in light of recent geopolitical trends related to the war on drugs and recent trans-border migration flows.

Building upon the connections I made last year while working with the Tapachula-based Fray Matías Center for Human Rights, I conducted interviews primarily with individuals with professionalized posts at non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The list of participating third sector organizations includes a migrant shelter (the Scalabrini mission’s Casa del Migrante); the local chapter of the International Organization for Migration (IOM); a news media organization (Soconusco News Network); in addition to the Fray Matías

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Center for Human Rights, ECOSUR, and a number of smaller youth- and migrant-centered organizations. My participant observation during meetings and events held by some of these organizations also gave me a deeper understanding of local challenges and concerns, the impact of larger migration trends as well as the magnitude of the refugee crises Mexico currently faces. Just two years after the Peña Nieto Administration's launch of *Plan Frontera Sur* ("Southern Border Program," announced in the summer of 2014 during the height of the undocumented Central American refugee crisis), many of my informants related their current assessment of the changes currently underway in Mexico, with some acknowledging a persisting—if not worsening—humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale. Some of the salient changes over the past two years include: an increase in security forces barring unauthorized migrants from boarding U.S.-bound cargo ("*Bestia*") trains; changes in gang- and drug-related security activity in urban neighborhoods; and changes in the demographic profile of the migrant communities that are both transiting through, and permanently settling in, Tapachula.

I also used my time in the region to build connections with organizations and individuals working in urban districts surrounding Tapachula, including smaller cities, towns, and ejidos along the old train line trajectory that once provided a vital link with Central America (this extended the geographical reach of my research beyond Tapachula proper). Through an immersive field site analysis, I also documented what I witnessed in those smaller Chiapaneco towns and cities (e.g. Huixtla, Ciudad Hidalgo, Escuintla) that, while having largely escaped news media attention, have nevertheless also been subject to ostensible spatial changes related to migratory flows and an increased state security presence.