

“LOS EXTRAÑOS FAMILIARES: LEGAL ADVOCACY, CARE, AND INTIMACY IN U.S.
FAMILY DETENTION”

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Erin Danielle Routon

August 2020

© 2020 Erin Danielle Routon

“LOS EXTRAÑOS FAMILIARES: LEGAL ADVOCACY, CARE, AND INTIMACY IN U.S. FAMILY DETENTION”

Erin Danielle Routon, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2020

Abstract: In 2014, following a notable influx of primarily Central American asylum-seekers arriving at the Mexico-U.S. border, two migrant detention centers were opened in small towns in South Texas. These facilities—known as the South Texas Family Residential Center and Karnes County Residential Center—functioned to detain a portion of these arrivals, mothers and their children, as they entered into legal proceedings. These so-called family detention centers, one of which is the largest migrant detention facility in the U.S., are visited daily by *pro bono* legal advocates who, among other things, assist the detainees with their asylum cases. My ethnographic research focuses on these advocates and their daily work at these facilities, asking: in what ways can we come to understand these increasingly unexceptional spaces through their unique ‘stranger’ perspective? My dissertation explores how these advocates, through their engagement with what I refer to as ‘legal care’, resist the myriad microlevel forms of punishment that mark administrative incarceration and asylum processes while simultaneously being implicated within such punitive regimes. My work considers the role of care not only in relations between detainees and advocates, but also in the grounded imbrications of humanitarian and administrative efforts. In aiding detainees, legal advocates are involved in the navigation of relationships with facility officials, such as guards, asylum officers, and immigration judges. My research points to the ways that care also marks and conditions these seemingly incidental relationships, weaving them within spatialized flows of care. Positioned from the perspective of these advocates, I argue that exploring the ‘ambivalent terrains’ and irrefutable tensions of care in and of this environment affords both a rich and uncomfortable encounter with the varied material and emotional entanglements involved in the incarceration of migrant families.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erin Danielle Routon is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University. A native Texan, she received her B.A. in English from the University of Hawaii, Hilo in 2006 and her M.A. in Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside in 2013 before arriving at Cornell. Her master's research concentrated on migrant material culture and religious aid and activist organizations in the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, principally in Southern California and Arizona.

Table of Contents

List of Images	vii
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction: A Particular Social Group	1
Background.....	3
The Advocates.....	11
Legal Care	19
Conversations and Contributions	22
The Ethnographic Stranger.....	25
The Dirt.....	28
Chapters	35
Beginnings.....	39
Chapter 1: Orientation to Baby Jail.....	50
Place.....	54
Sense	65
Time.....	75
Disorientation.....	82
End of the Day.....	90
Chapter 2: (Con)testing Narratives.....	99
Preps	103
Challenges	110
Distractions.....	114
Complications.....	117
(Im)balancing Acts.....	123
Reframing Narratives	125
Countering	131
Firsts and Lies	134
Conclusions	141
Chapter 3: Caring Frictions	146
Interruptions and Ruptures.....	150
Interference.....	153
Proximity.....	157

Adjustments.....	161
Interdependency	166
Inner Edges	170
Restraint and Release.....	175
Conclusions	179
Chapter 4: Credible Fears in Muted Zones.....	187
<i>Asilo</i>	192
Fear of the Unknown.....	195
Observing Boundaries.....	201
<i>Corte</i>	207
<i>Amici Curiae</i>	218
Boundaries Breached.....	222
Conclusions	228
Chapter 5: Familiar Intimacies	235
Stickiness.....	239
Humor	250
Burdens	262
Conclusions	267
Chapter 6: <i>La Salida</i>	272
Leaving the Bubble.....	278
Crying at the Crossroads.....	285
Haunting	288
Lost in translation.....	296
Ghosts of Detention	303
Kindred Spirits	313
<i>La Despedida</i>	316
Conclusion: <i>Una Herida Abierta</i>	325
Minding the Gap.....	329
Making Nice	332
Tending Wounds	342
Nomadic Hope.....	346
<i>Sin Fronteras</i>	352

List of Images

1: The entrance to ‘the ranch’	2
2: The entrance to the South Texas Family Residential Center, “Dilley”.....	8
3: The entrance to the Karnes County Residential Center	9
4: Portrait of a legal advocate caring for detained child	11
5: Living room of ‘the ranch’	17
6: Improvisations of conducting research while volunteering	34
7: On the outskirts of Dilley’s downtown.....	54
8: Prisoners tend crops at the state prison located next the Dilley facility.....	55
9: Downtown Karnes City.....	57
10: Elevated rendering of Dilley ‘visitation trailer’ layout.....	60
11: Rendering of entrance to private meeting rooms at Dilley facility.....	62
12: Elevated rendering of Karnes visitation area layout.....	63
13: Rendering of view of part of the inside of the Dilley facility.....	65
14: The Days Inn Dilley.....	90
15: Rendering of a meeting between an advocate and client with her child	103
16: Notepads from interview ‘preps’.....	109
17: Rendering of an advocate meeting with a client and her child during a ‘prep’	123
18: Drawings made by child detainees at Dilley and Karnes.....	155
19: Project staff stress relief at the ranch.....	170
20: Excerpt of notes taken during interview accompaniment.....	210
21: Collection of notes from interview accompaniments	228
22: Volunteer group in Dilley.....	255
23: Informational sheet hung on the wall of the ‘pro bono’ room in Dilley	259
24: The end of author’s first week volunteering in 2015	272
25: A constant glow emanates from the floodlights of the Dilley facility	308
26: Sunset outside of the Karnes facility	316
27: Drawing given to a volunteer advocate from a child client.....	325
28: Note adorning the refrigerator at the ranch	346
29: A weathered ‘End Family Detention’ sign hung on the fence at the ranch.....	352

Acknowledgments

I feel lucky to have been surrounded and supported by many kind and thoughtful individuals throughout my time conducting this research. These people have cared for me and my project, and for that, I feel touched and am forever grateful.

Words cannot properly express my feelings about the legal advocates at the center of this dissertation's story. The individuals who served the projects at these detention facilities were some of the most admirable people I have ever known and had the fortune to work alongside. Family detention legal advocates are tireless, creative, and, in my view, above all, caring individuals engaged in what is objectively heart-breaking work. It was both a pleasure and a pain to observe and assist these caregivers in their work every day in these facilities. I was and continue to be astounded by their interest in and participation with my research. As work with asylum-seekers makes clear, reliving trauma is neither desirable nor easy, and yet, despite that, these advocates consistently and enthusiastically volunteered to recount the entirety of their experiences in family detention in our interviews and conversations, their trauma, joy, anger, and sadness. Unlike asylum-seekers forced to explore these feelings and experiences in interviews, legal advocates didn't have to do this with me, for this project, and yet, the majority that I met did so. I feel lucky to have known them, and I hope that this dissertation serves as an accurate and careful representation of the experiences and sentiments they shared with me.

I want to thank my dissertation committee chair and advisor, Dr. Sofia Villenas, for her constant and unparalleled support throughout my research. Her positive commentary, constructive feedback, and questions were what simultaneously built my confidence in my work while also encouraging me to examine my experiences in detention from different angles. I also wish to thank others who served as committee members and advisors—Drs. Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, Adam Smith, and Chris Garces—for their continued support, flexibility as my research project shifted over the

years of my graduate education, and the critical questions they posed to me. I would also thank my advisor during my Master's degree program at the University of California, Riverside—Dr. Jennifer Schepers-Hughes—for her advice and support in getting my first research project on humanitarian aid work along the Mexico-U.S. border off the ground. Her direction and encouragement led to my continued research on the subjects dealt with in this dissertation. I am grateful to both Cornell University and UC Riverside for their immense support in the research that this dissertation represents.

I want to express special appreciation for my partner and fellow Cornell PhD candidate, John Gorczyk. Over the past few years, he has read, provided feedback on, and edited countless iterations of the following chapters and the various conference papers and articles they became. He also performed an inordinate amount of emotional labor as I struggled with the secondary trauma of my fieldwork, listening supportively and patiently on the many phone calls that followed difficult days in detention, all while working on his own dissertation project abroad in Bulgaria. On one visit back to the States, he joined me in fieldwork as a volunteer legal advocate. He spent his days doing the necessary yet unglamorous work of filing documents, organizing folders, and helping quietly clean up an office chair upon which, during an interview prep, a bored child of a client had dumped an entire carton of chocolate milk. Throughout my work, he did what I witnessed legal advocates doing every day; he both allowed me the space to express my vulnerabilities and reminded me of my own strength. I cannot imagine having done this research in the way that I did without his support.

Lastly, while legal advocates stand at the center of the ensuing chapters, this story is simultaneously about the parents and children imprisoned in these facilities. I am incredibly grateful that they allowed me to play some small part in their lives, doing what I could to help them in their journeys. Memories of their courage, kindness, and resilience remain with me every day, as do their stories of pain and trauma, some of which were written, needlessly, as they crossed the Mexico-U.S.

border. This dissertation is but a small gesture meant to express the realities they faced in making their way to and through family detention, and the indelible mark they leave upon those who attempt to care for them.

Abbreviations

‘A’ number	‘Alien’ identification number assigned to detainees
AIC	American Immigration Council
AILA	American Immigration Lawyers Association
AO	Asylum officer
Artesia	Artesia, New Mexico and the Artesia Family Residential Center
Baby jail	Family detention center
Berks	Berks County Residential Center
CARA	CARA Pro Bono Project, former acronym denoting coalition of organizations involved in Dilley legal project (DPBP)
CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CCA	Corrections Corporation of America, former name for CoreCivic
CFI/RFI	Credible Fear Interview/Reasonable Fear Interview
<i>Charla</i>	Information sharing session led by advocates
CLINIC	Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
Dilley	Dilley, Texas and the South Texas Family Residential Center
DOJ	Department of Justice
DPBP	Dilley Pro Bono Project
DV	Domestic Violence
EOIR	Executive Office of Immigration Review
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
<i>Flores</i>	Flores Settlement Agreement
GEO	GEO Group, Inc.
Hutto	T. Don Hutto Family Detention Center
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IJ	Immigration judge
IJC	Immigrant Justice Corps
IIRIRA	Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
Karnes	Karnes City, Texas and the Karnes County Residential Center
KYRS	Know-your-rights presentations
LOPs	Legal Orientation Programs
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NTA	Notice to Appear, DHS form I-862
OTG	‘On the ground’ legal aid in detention centers
Prep	Conversation between advocate and detainee in preparation for asylum interview
PSG	Legal category for asylum, membership within a ‘particular social group’
RAICES	Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services
RFR	Request for Reconsideration or Reinterview
SIFI	Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
TDCJ	Texas Department of Criminal Justice
TPS	Temporary Protected Status
UN OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

Introduction: A Particular Social Group

The middle of nowhere: that's how just about everyone describes places like this. By that, they usually mean there aren't any big malls, no tall buildings, far too much dirt. It's full of odd sights like wooden fenceposts stringing together limp barbed wire and swaths of open land dotted by fading billboards with vaguely aggressive religious pronouncements. It's too bright during the day, too dark at night, and traffic is determined by loose cattle and wide, unburied farm machinery. I'm from a place like this, and in the late summer of 2015, I find myself making my way through terrain that reminds me of home.

Driving down a dirt road, I lean into the steering wheel and squint to see the silver metal gate past the book in the road. They said to keep an eye out; there wouldn't be a sign. The dust kicks up in cream-colored clouds behind me, and the sun is starting to slip behind the low tree line, turning the sky to its usual vibrant, dusky hues. I don't know where I'm going. Am I on the right road? I wonder. They had told us the road would come right after the detention center, but I never saw the center, just a wide paved path leading off beyond some small hill. I'm already sweating, partially because it's August in South Texas, a formidable force against my car's wimpy air conditioner. I'm also nervous because this is my first day meeting a group of people that I think might be willing to allow me to do research with them. I hope, anyway. The next day will be my first day in family detention, and the same distracting thoughts keep running through my head: What am I doing here? I don't know hardly anything about asylum law. I'm not a lawyer. I don't really know how to help people with their legal cases. Why would they even want me to help? Why would any of the detainees even want my help? I feel the chunky bits of the road knock the floorboards under my feet, kicking my mind back to the material present.

I see a gate, and I hope it's the right one as I get out and drag it open just enough for me pass through. I drive along a narrow dirt road lined with cacti and mesquite trees until I come upon a white, one-story ranch home. There's a row of sparkling clean rental cars parked along the side, so I rumble over the cattle guard at the entrance and park next to the others. I walk past a rusted barbeque to a back door by the covered patio carrying a book bag with my notebook and stacks of orientation paperwork slung over my sweaty shoulder and a case of Shiner beer in hand. The door swings open, and I'm enthusiastically welcomed in by a group of people I will come to know well throughout the course of the coming years. I will also come to know this particular space, known by many who pass through this town as 'the ranch', eventually thinking of it as a kind of home, and the people who pass through it as a kind of family of strangers.





Image 1: The entrance to 'the ranch', where staff of the Dilley Pro Bono Project live. Photo credit: author

What follows is a story of liminal space, of a nowhere place caught somewhere in the middle, and the people within it that find themselves similarly caught. The place is called a 'baby jail' by some, a family detention center by others, and a residential facility by an important few, but it is all the same place. The people are 'legal assistants' on paper and 'warriors' amongst *compañerxs*. To me, they are also caregivers.

In recent years, the United States' detention of migrant families and the often-associated practice of migrant family separation have become increasingly familiar topics to many Americans and others across the globe. Yet, an understanding of the everyday realizations of these policies, practices, and spaces remains, to the greatest extent, elusive. This, of course, is no accident, as migration scholars and public researchers have repeatedly noted the complex productions of isolation and dislocation involved in migrant incarceration (e.g. Mountz 2012).ⁱ This dissertation is concerned with illuminating a particular set of encounters involving a particular group of aid workers within the context of so-called family detention centers in the U.S. My research focuses on

the centrality of care in the labors, experiences, and particular social arrangements involving legal advocates providing *pro bono* aid to asylum-seeking families held in these facilities.

I use the space of the ensuing chapters to demonstrate several critical points. The first and foremost contention is that these legal advocates are not just legal actors but caregivers, and that they should be recognized as such. While their work is not commonly recognized as care work in academic scholarship or even within the public sphere, my research demonstrates the many ways in which this is a fruitful way to frame the totality of their diverse efforts and subjective experiences. I argue that care comes to circulate throughout these spaces in unexpected ways, taking different shape depending upon the particularities of distinct encounters, and it even plays an important role in contentious relationships advocates have with administrative facility actors. I suggest that the care with which advocates participate—what I deem ‘legal care’—is furthermore a form of resistance and contestation of the dehumanizing practices and ideologies which move throughout detention. Despite their efforts and privileges as non-prisoners, however, family detention makes its wounding mark upon voluntary legal advocates as it does on detainees. In the end, these caregivers are engaged in the simultaneous resistance of the myriad microlevel punitive regimes that define administrative incarceration and asylum legal processes, while they are also implicated, and in some ways ‘caught’, within them.

Background

In late 2014, standing against the backdrop of a clear, bright sky and flanked by officers and American flags, then-Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson told the gathered crowd of reporters: “Frankly, we want to send a message that our border is not open to illegal migration, and that if you come here, you should not expect to be simply released,” (Preston 2014). The symbolic manifestation of the administration’s “message” was the facility still under construction behind Johnson: the South Texas Family Residential Center. This detention center is one of three so-called

family detention centers in the United States, along with the Karnes County Residential Center and the Berks County Residential Center.

Earlier that year, tens of thousands of asylum-seekers, mostly from Central America and predominantly mothers with children as well as so-deemed unaccompanied children of minor age, began unexpectedly arriving at the Mexico-U.S. border.ⁱⁱ These facilities were opened as family detention centers during the Obama administration as a response to this perceived surge of migrant families seeking asylum. ‘Families’, in the case of contemporary family detention, has typically meant a single mother with a child or children of minor age, deemed, in legal language, ‘family units’.ⁱⁱⁱ The vast majority of the parents and children held in these centers have come from the ‘Northern Triangle’ countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, but there have been many others who have come from places like Haiti, Romania, various countries in Africa, and additional Latin American countries, among others. As family detention centers, these facilities effectively function as punitive processing centers for asylum-seekers who are placed into ‘expedited removal’ legal proceedings. Created by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), expedited removal is a truncated legal process in which particular immigration officers are given authority to make decisions upon migrants’ legal cases, potentially denying those the opportunity of having a regular immigration court hearing (American Immigration Council 2019). The mothers and children that end up in these facilities, as they arrive at different U.S. border points—either at official ports of entry or at other locations at or near the border—and request asylum, are to all apparent accounts arbitrarily selected for placement in this legal category, which requires them to undergo a part of the asylum process while in detention. This is known as the ‘credible fear’ or ‘reasonable fear’ interview.^{iv} Only by passing, or receiving a ‘positive’ decision, in this interview—one in which they must demonstrate both their credibility as well as how their experiences deem them eligible for asylum—are they allowed release into the interior U.S.,

continuing the rest of the lengthy legal process outside of detention. Otherwise, they are eventually deported from the facility.

The practices and policies which define contemporary family detention have a relatively short history in the United States. In 2001, the facility now known as the Berks County Residential Center began incarcerating, on a very limited scale, asylum-seeking families after detaining so-called unaccompanied migrant minor children for years. Following an influx of new asylum-seeking families at the border in 2005 and with the limited total capacity of the Berks facility to 96 ‘beds’, the Bush administration, and ICE specifically, began contracting with private corporations in order to detain these families. The T. Don Hutto Family Detention Center in Taylor, Texas was the first facility specifically dedicated to the housing of migrant family units, limited to only women with children of minor age. This facility, like many others to come, was privately owned and operated by CoreCivic, formerly Corrections Corporations of America. The facility’s namesake—T. Don Hutto—was one of the founders of this company, which happens to be the nation’s largest and most lucrative private prison company.^v

The facility began its operations as such in 2006, converted originally from an adult prison, and was closed shortly thereafter in 2009 as a family detention center as a result of strong litigation against its practices, which many characterized as abusive and intending to lead to greater deportations, rather than the fair adjudication of asylum claims (Sakuma 2015). Local and national legal advocates and activists played critical roles in both the aid and attention given to detainees in that facility as well as its closure. The ending of the Hutto facility’s incarceration of families was considered to be the end of what was, at the time, “large-scale family detention”.^{vi} Yet the practice of incarcerating asylum-seeking families did not cease with its closure. Some of those held in Hutto during the process of its closure were then transferred to the much smaller scale family detention facility of Berks, which had continued to detain these groups throughout this brief history.

The Obama administration expanded the use of family detention for asylum-seeking parents with minor-age children beginning in 2013. The Artesia Family Residential Center, in Artesia, New Mexico, was considered to be the first ‘large-scale’ family facility since the closure of the Hutto facility. This facility was opened on June 24, 2014, with a capacity for several hundred detainees, as officially the first facility created as a response to the increasing arrivals of asylum-seeking women and children. Legal advocates who volunteered their services to detainees at this center noted in a report they produced, following what would be the quick closure of this facility, that, like the infamous ‘deportation mill’ of Hutto, the Obama administration’s stated purpose with this facility was to serve as a sort of initial claim processing center which, officials believed, would lead to quicker deportations.^{vii} Several federal officials either implied or explicitly stated that they believed the majority of the claimants held in these facilities would eventually be deported, as they were unlikely to have ‘legitimate’ asylum claims. In a press conference in June 2014, then Vice President Joe Biden recognized both the vulnerability of recent migrant families, particularly from the Northern Triangle, and the dangerous realities which they were facing in their home countries that lead them to seek asylum. Yet, he stated that: “Once an individual’s case is fully heard, and if he or she does not qualify for asylum, he or she will be removed from the United States and returned home. Everyone should know that. We expect many of the recent immigrants -- migrants I should say to fall into this category. My guess is a vast majority, and they will be going home,” (Office of the Vice President 2014). Data provided by one of the organizations involved in legal advocacy at Artesia and then later facilities—Innovation Law Lab—demonstrated the substantial drop in the credible fear passing rate during the exact time of the opening of this facility. Coupled with administrative comments like those of Former VP Biden, advocates believed that these facilities, like those that preceded them, functioned primarily as deportation centers and were not truly dedicated to the fair adjudication of detained applicants’ claims. Rather than demonstrating the invalid nature

of applicants' claims, advocates suggested, the drastic statistical drop in those passing fear interviews reflected the government's true aim of increasing deportations.

Claims of poor treatment and health services, excessive punishments, and abuse plagued the Artesia facility, and mere months after its opening, the government announced it would be closing (del Bosque 2014). At the moment of the Artesia facility's closure in December 2014, however, Jeh Johnson stood in front of that sparse audience of reporters in order to usher in the opening of the South Texas Family Residential Center, what would become the largest migrant family detention center in U.S. history. Along with the South Texas facility, the Karnes County Residential Center and the Berks County Residential Center comprise the current landscape of family detention.^{viii}



Image 2: The entrance to the South Texas Family Residential Center, 'Dilley'. Photo credit: author

I conducted my field research on the facilities in Dilley and Karnes City. The South Texas Family Residential Center—known by legal advocates and activists as simply ‘Dilley’—is still not only the largest family detention facility, but also the largest migrant detention center in the country. With a capacity for 2,400 detainees, the facility rivals the population of the town in which it is situated—Dilley, Texas—and eclipses the capacity of the neighboring state prison, the Dolph Briscoe Unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).^{ix} Dilley is contractually owned and managed by CoreCivic, the private corporation which once owned the Hutto facility. The

Karnes County Residential Center—the second family detention facility where I volunteered as a legal advocate while conducting my research—has much in common with the Dilley facility, but it also has a different story. ‘Karnes’, as it is known by advocates, is located in the town of Karnes City, Texas, just over an hour’s drive south of San Antonio and an hour east of Dilley. Like Dilley, Karnes is owned and managed by the nation’s second largest private prison corporation: The GeoGroup Inc.^x Prior to this modern instantiation of family detention, Karnes was an adult-only migrant detention facility. Slightly prior to the Dilley facility’s opening, Karnes was converted to a family facility, though with a far smaller capacity of around 500 beds.



Image 3: The entrance to the Karnes County Residential Center. Photo credit: author

These facilities upon which I conducted my research and within which I worked as a volunteer legal advocate are institutionally complex spaces. While they are officially Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities, some of whose officers are stationed within, they are owned and managed by the aforementioned private prison corporations CoreCivic and GeoGroup. As such, the facility administrator, or ‘warden’, as they are frequently referred to by

detainees, staff of the facility, and legal advocates, is employed by the managing corporation. The various staff are also employed by these corporations. Additionally, because they function as spaces intended to initially adjudicate asylum claims, officers for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and immigration judges have an important presence within them as well. The fact that these facilities are comprised of many different federal and non-federal entities has an important impact on not only the complexities of these spaces and how they are managed amongst sometimes competing interests but also the various roles that legal advocates come to play and the challenges they face in doing their work. This will be elucidated in detail in the coming chapters.

The Advocates



Image 4: Portrait of a legal advocate caring for detained child. Artist credit: Molly McGowan

This dissertation portrays just one image of family detention, and that is one that centers on the legal advocates who migrate within and through these spaces. They are the group of people I was meeting with that early evening for the first time in 2015, mere months after the opening of the South Texas Family Residential Center. Legal advocates—groups of a mix of volunteers and non-profit staff—show up daily to the Dilley and Karnes centers to provide free legal aid to those

detained. At the South Texas Family Residential Center, these advocates are part of a non-profit project now known as the Dilley Pro Bono Project (DPBP) that has provided necessary legal services to the detainees since the center's opening. This project was formerly named the CARA Pro Bono Project, CARA being an acronym of the collective of associated non-profits: the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC); the American Immigration Council (AIC); the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES); and the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). At the Karnes facility, the organization RAICES alone offers the same services and others as well. While the DPBP focuses its efforts on providing direct services to detainees while advocating for the closure of family detention facilities through remote litigation practices, RAICES, as a larger, local organization devoted to a number of different services for immigrants, provides both direct services to detainees as well as services beyond incarceration.

The DPBP was originally born out of a group of individuals, many of those attorneys, who volunteered their services to those incarcerated in the Artesia facility. Legal advocates began travelling to Artesia to aid detainees as a result, in part, of the exceptional dearth of legal resources available to detainees in the small, isolated town. Because detainees were severely limited in their ability to maintain contact with the world beyond the detention center, they were unprepared for asylum interviews and were being denied necessary resources, like interpreters, to properly communicate their claims to an officer. As such, denial rates in detainees' credible fear interviews were unusually high (Schrag 2020). Legal advocates, at first, struggled to gain access to detainees to help them with their cases. Identities of those detained were not made available to them, and without this identifying information, they were incapable of scheduling visitations. Eventually though, as these volunteers began to access detainees, they were able to offer representative assistance, preparing them for interviews and in-detention courtroom defenses. Advocates' 'on-the-ground' work in and around these facilities was aided by remote volunteers and a complex cloud-

based digital platform, created by one of the earliest advocates associated with this work—Stephen Manning—through which cases could be documented and information could be shared with many individuals contributing to efforts. In this way, new ‘client’ data could be stored and passed along within communities of voluntary advocates, rather than a single individual needing to remain in the area of these facilities and represent a single client.

Broadly, these advocates argue that the practice of family detention is an unnecessary, cruel, and unusual form of treatment of asylum-seekers and, knowing the complexities inherent in navigating the asylum process, have committed to serving, on a kind of universal representation model, all of those detained. Thus, unlike in most immigration representative settings, all detained in family detention are afforded the option of assistance from these advocates, regardless of the qualities or so-called merits of their case. This is critical, as most applicants cannot afford legal representation or assistance with their cases. The rural location of these facilities also all but eliminates the option of the kind of free legal help that detained asylum-seekers require in navigating these complex, exclusionary processes and carceral spaces.

The legal project in Dilley was comprised of a small team of paid staff and temporary volunteers. Staff were hired by the project’s organizations on a limited contractual basis, and during the years of my fieldwork, they lived communally in the ‘ranch’ home, mentioned earlier, near the facility where volunteer trainings and meetings took place. Temporary volunteers would travel to the area, residing in one of the few local motels, and offer their skills and services to the project. These volunteers typically served for a week and then were replaced the following week by a completely new group of volunteers. The majority of the work is done by these volunteers, whose experience particularly with asylum law varies greatly. Some are lawyers, others are students, doctors, or social workers, while still others come to perform the critical role of interpreters. During the time of my research, the Karnes project functioned similarly to the Dilley project, in that the work was

dependent upon a combination of paid staff and volunteers. Because RAICES provides many different services, there was a team specifically designated for work with family detainees, and staff members, who lived in and around San Antonio and commuted to Karnes City, would rotate their time at the facility.

Each week in these facilities, clients' cases get passed along to a new group via the same vast online case management system previously used in Artesia.^{xi} This project is deeply dependent on such forms of collective action: Not only do advocates depend on the work of previous volunteers, but in their daily practice, they also depend on one another to manage difficult cases, overcome the myriad bureaucratic or legalistic roadblocks that arise, and share different skills—such as language abilities—to accomplish tasks. While for the most part beneficial to detainees, the work of advocates is significantly strained by the time limits set upon family detention. A 1997 court decision, known as the *Flores Settlement Agreement*, ultimately made the case that children could be held in detention but only for brief periods of time. In 2015, in District Court Judge Dolly Gee's ruling on the agreement's terms, children were to be released "without necessary delay" (Preston 2015). This came to be interpreted as not longer than 20 days.^{xii} While the government officially recognizes this decision, often claiming they do not breach this deadline, many detained parents and children have been held beyond, some well beyond, 20 days. During fieldwork, I encountered some parents and children who had been held for months, while others were detained closer to a year. The Berks facility was known by those with whom I worked to be one in which detainees were sent to be held for longer periods of time than those in Texas, though the reasons for this were often unclear to many advocates. Nonetheless, because of this so-called deadline, processes generally moved at a rapid pace in detention, meaning that advocates had little time to prepare clients for critical moments or respond to processes which attempted to deport detainees quickly. Thus, the rapid,

‘expedited’ pace of the work environment typically resulted in fleeting encounters of care rather than prolonged caregiving engagements.

To clarify, these advocates are not working to help detainees ‘win’ an asylum case. Some volunteers, who are professional lawyers, are capable of continuing legal representation of clients once they are released, and some elect to do so. The primary goal of these advocates is to get their clients out of detention so that they can be reunited with family, friends, services, and have the opportunity to properly prepare their asylum claim or pursue another form of relevant legal status. While advocates perform many different tasks in detention, arguably the most critical is to prepare clients for their fear interview, through an intimate exchange of ‘law talk’ (Sarat and Felstiner 1992), so that they can receive the passing decision that would allow them to be released into the U.S. and continue their case. The majority of advocates’ work revolves around this interview: preparing clients for success and then responding when some clients inevitably don’t pass. Advocates with these projects repeatedly demonstrate the value of these forms of preparation upon interview outcomes. In what is known as the ‘prep’ conversation, an advocate speaks privately with an individual client about their case, helping them shape their legal claims ahead of the interview with the asylum officer, which advocates sometimes attended.

The critical information that advocates provide to detainees in their pre-interview prep conversations is not effectively shared with detainees by the government or facility contractors; few even understand where they are or how they have ended up there, much less what the asylum process entails. Some do not encounter anyone who speaks their language until they meet with these advocates, who use their collective resources to locate remote interpreters. The effort of advocates’ work derives from a need to prepare clients to achieve a sort of legal consciousness (Merry 1990) for their fear interview, in which they are required to articulate their case in terms meaningful to asylum officers, without the aid of legal translators (Cunningham 1992), expert witnesses (Good 2006), or

even proper documentary support. While these legal projects collectively ‘represent’ their detained clients, advocates cannot officially speak on their behalf in interviews or in court proceedings which take place in the facility, thus necessitating quick work that prepares clients to understand the expectations set upon them.

There are different categories for asylum, though the vast majority of applicants at these facilities during the period of my research fell into the category known by persecution based upon ‘membership within a particular social group’ (PSG).^{xiii} The conceptual category is vague, but it is the category where the majority of victims of domestic violence or gang violence would be placed. It is often more difficult for asylum-seekers to prove their belonging in such ‘groups’, so advocates must spend more time discussing with clients many details of their pasts to build a stronger case for their membership, potentially locating aspects of their experiences that applicants might not have considered as playing an important role in their claim. The ill-defined boundaries of the PSG category are discussed and debated repeatedly every day between advocates as they work with clients, trying to make sense of how their experiences can or cannot fit within this category. Thus, just as detainees try to make sense of complex asylum law and its limitations, so do advocates. In this way and others, legal advocates are forced to learn how to care for their detained clients in both collaborative and ever-shifting ways.



“This isn’t a migrant crisis, it’s a refugee crisis,” Jason says, standing at the front of the living room, his PowerPoint presentation lit behind him.^{xiv} Jason is an immigration lawyer from Ohio, and, in this moment, he is the managing attorney for the Dilley project, meaning that he’s the ‘official’ legal representative for those detained at the center during their detention, though the efforts of the project are still done collectively. He’s wearing a faded wrinkled t-shirt and shorts, and though his eyes look slightly tired, he speaks and moves his hands about with a frenetic energy. He’s giving his portion of the ‘orientation’ training to us new volunteers, instructing us all on what we’re about to be doing starting early tomorrow morning, when we enter the ‘legal visitation’ building of the detention center. As I listen and scribble down notes, the plate of half-eaten spaghetti sitting on my lap—a meal kindly made by the project staff for us—is quickly cooling, congealing into some red solid mass. I’m surrounded by a room full of people I just met, all of us staring with quiet attention at Jason.



Image 5: Living room of 'the ranch'. Photo credit: author

When I sat down on the couch moments before, I couldn't take my eyes off Abe's shirt. It's bright blue, tie-dyed, with a colorful butterfly and "Costa Rica" imprinted in the middle, and he's got it tucked into a pair of belted cargo shorts. Abe is an immigration lawyer from Tampa in the process of retiring, he tells me, and he came with his close friend, Lily, a psychotherapist, hoping that her Spanish-speaking skills would help him in working with primarily Spanish-speaking clients. Lily's wearing a pair of rainbow-colored socks with strappy Velcro sandals, and she sits next to Abe on another of the ranch's couches. "I don't know how much help I'm going to be with everything. I don't have any legal experience," she told me in the kitchen earlier as we scooped out our pasta onto paper plates. I tried to reassure her, but in all honesty, I was still struggling with the same worry.

I'm seated on a couch between Millie and Darius. Millie is in her twenties, an immigration lawyer from Charlotte who came on her own to Dilley after her boss in her firm suggested it. She's smartly dressed with an expensive looking bag resting by her feet, and initially comes off as a bit humorless or serious, but, as I'll come to know her better in the coming days, I realize she's quite the opposite. Millie's dryly funny, calm and efficient in her work, and flawless, a native speaker tells me, in her language abilities, despite having learned Spanish only recently as an adult. Darius also came on his own, arriving directly from a Peace Corps mission in Guatemala, where he had been living for nearly a year. He's also in his twenties and, like Lily, doesn't have any previous legal experience but figured his skills as a fluent Spanish-speaker might mean something out here. Months later, I'll reconnect with Darius as he volunteers to remotely help women and children at the facility prepare for their interviews over the phone. I'll be there, in the center, and he'll be back in his home in Colorado, and it'll be nice to hear the voice of an old friend.

Esther and Vera are seated across the room, in wooden chairs situated in front of a tall bookcase containing heavy-looking case law texts and a variety of other books that have been left behind by previous advocates, like The New Jim Crow or Wildflowers of Texas: A Field Guide. They came together, and both work for one of the project's non-profit collaborators: CLINIC. Esther, a Nicaraguan American, recently graduated from college, is in her early twenties, and came intending mostly to serve as an interpreter for Vera. Vera's an attorney, tall and thin with bright red hair, and an immigrant from Russia. In the coming days, Esther, with a calm and pleasant yet reserved demeanor, would connect easily with the women she worked with. Vera would later say that she wondered if perhaps she was not empathetic enough, questioning if she was perhaps too 'cold' with the clients she met. Next to Esther and Vera is Madeleine, actually Sister Madeleine, a nun who lives in Albuquerque but drives out once a month, for a week, to volunteer with the Dilley project. Sister Madeleine grew up in Queens, has short, graying hair and a biting sense of humor. She'll crack her thickly-accented jokes about the rude CoreCivic staff throughout the week and impress me over the coming years with a kind of boundless energy I would expect from someone much younger, and a humor I would expect from someone much less religious.

Ryan, Denise, and Henry walk in late. They're sorry, they say, but their flight was delayed. Ryan and Henry are immigration lawyers and Denise is a paralegal, and they all work out of the same firm in Virginia. Henry and Denise speak Spanish, but Ryan does not. Ryan and Henry both wear full suits each day in detention, with the possibility that they might have to go 'court'—or the mock courtroom with a televised judge on a screen there to listen to appeals on negative fear interview decisions. They would thus need to be dressed appropriately, as they would in any other courtroom appearance. Over a year later, Henry will return to volunteer and discover that the facility had been inadvertently imprisoning an American citizen, a stirring moment which causes incredulous frustration at the incompetence which seemingly marks all areas of family detention operations. Denise is in her early thirties and is a mother herself to a young child. Later in the week, she'll see me try to give a piece of a crayon to a child that's around 3 years old, in an attempt to entertain them, and cautions me that children of that age are too young to play with something like that. They might swallow it, she tells me. I'm embarrassed that I didn't even think of that. It makes me think of what a mom would know about how to care for others in scenarios like these that someone like me, without children of their own, might not.

A group of project staff members, like Jason, and long-term volunteers staying for a few months with the project are seated at the long dining table set off from the living room. Some of them are watching the presentation, but most of them face their open, glowing laptop screens, continuing to work on the legal cases of those detained. There was Amelia, a young, Latinx immigrant attorney staffed by the project; Abbas, a recently-graduated undergraduate who was volunteering with the project through a fellowship with the national organization Immigrant Justice Corps (IJC); Alexa and Daniel, both long-term, non-attorney volunteers from out of state; and Mark, a non-attorney member of the project who would end up being one of the longest serving staff members in its history, and one of its best.

Jason continues his lengthy presentation, spanning everything from the basics of asylum law and legal categories to the decision statistics of the judges to how to speak with women and kids about their cases. Mark then takes over the presentation, explaining how to use the complex, online database of clients' cases, and where and how to upload necessary information. I'll end up spending a fair amount of time that week, and in the years to come, helping older volunteers navigate this system. Mark also describes the ways that we are expected to behave and dress in the facility. While these rules do exist, he explains, as administrators have used them to bar entry to legal advocates, CoreCivic refuses to give them an official statement on behavioral rules or dress codes. "Every week," he explains, "they put up new barriers, like this, to providing counsel to our clients." In the years that follow, I will come to see the full extent of the truth of this remark. Abbas finishes the presentation, emphasizing why we're all there and the conditions facing detainees, the stakes of all their efforts and what sorts of conditions need to be both observed and documented, like denial of medical care, that the larger non-profit organizations could potentially use in litigation efforts. He tells us that every child we'll meet in the facility will be sick, that we'll hear a lot of frustrating things about

the ways in which women and children have been treated at the border and at these facilities, and that the two most common emotions we'll feel this week are anger and sadness. "When you meet these women and children, that will be the first time anyone in the U.S. has truly listened to them," he says seriously. "ICE lies to these people, misleads them every day. It is our job to help them. It's our job to clarify this confusing stuff for them, to correct ICE's lies. And it's our job to treat them with respect, not like criminals. When you drive into the facility tomorrow, you'll notice that there's a big sign at the entrance with the closing stock price for CCA [CoreCivic] printed on it. This is a corporate internment camp. Our real goal is to shut this place down."

Legal Care

Murray (2017) contends that anthropological research on care, despite recently having expanded to studies of everyday encounters 'beyond the clinical', has historically centered on fields of healthcare. This dissertation aims to expand this by applying the practical and theoretical insights of care to legal advocacy. I argue that care is analytically revelatory for understanding legal advocacy and the relationships that define these spaces for multiple reasons. To start, legal assistance is commonly interpreted as a unidirectional, often unsentimental encounter for those providing the assistance; scholars remind us of the ways in which legal education often encourages a 'casting aside' of personal emotions and empathy in favor of 'neutrality' and legal authority (Mertz 2007; Scheingold and Sarat 2004). Yet, what I observed in my research indicated a more expansive form of assistance, attention, and relationality, far exceeding the limitations of 'legal aid'. Advocates were deeply involved in emotion work (Hochschild 1983) and multidirectional affective exchanges that mutually informed intimate subjectivities. Care moved throughout the ways in which they practiced legal advocacy, tended to detainees and each other, managed their relationships with administrators, and even played an important role in tensions and conflicts.

In describing the collaborative history of the Dilley project's approach to such work, their now-defunct website once claimed: "This concept of what some called 'lawyer camp' captured the hearts and minds of willing volunteers. Rather than just taking over a paper file handed to them, they were taking over the legal care of a human being desperately needing their help."^{xv} This phrase, legal care, was rarely if ever invoked on-the-ground, and advocates did not refer to themselves as

caregivers. While I independently came to see their work as akin to care, after encountering this language on their site, I was left to consider what legal care might actually be. My conceptual use of this phrase owes much intellectually to the anthropological and feminist theorizations of care I discuss later in this chapter. By deploying the concept of legal care, my work draws attention to the ways in which legal practitioners perform as caregivers. In this formulation of care work, the law sits in a central position. It is the mechanism which brings about the need for care, as it is used to incarcerate and isolate those seeking a form of protected status in the U.S. However, it is also the mechanism which brings those needing care in detention into contact with those who are positioned in some way to assist with its provision. In these spaces, the law was simultaneously used as a tool in the provision of care and the denial of it. I suggest that, in these settings, the law—as it is practiced and struggled with daily—becomes ‘knowable’ (Mountz 2010) through its relationship to care.

Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) encourages becoming “involved with care as a living terrain that [needs] to be constantly reclaimed from idealized meanings, from the constructed evidence that, for instance, associates care with a form of unmediated work of love accomplished by idealized carers,” (8). As this dissertation will demonstrate, legal advocacy in family detention should by no means be interpreted as an ‘unmediated work of love’, and legal practitioners, especially lawyers, are often far from the ideal of a caregiving subjectivity. This is not to say that loving sentiments do not play a significant role in how these advocates interpret their experiences; they often do. Many spoke about feelings akin to love that they felt for whom they admitted were relative strangers. The intensity of these fleeting encounters irrefutably shaped the production of these sentiments. It is also not to say that many legal practitioners, even lawyers, do not possess or project idealized caregiving qualities. What this research demonstrates, though, is a reclamation of care that is not delimited by either of these. In feeling terms, care is as much characterized by anger and sadness in this environment, as

Abbas noted in our training, as it is by love or joy. Similarly, caregivers negotiate conflicted interests in their daily work and embody seemingly contradictory subjectivities.

The ‘marginalization of care’ (Lawson 2007) speaks to the need for greater attention to the subject in different environments and spheres of relationality. What motivates or influences the need for care to be given? Lawson suggests that individual relations of care involve “understanding how difference is socially constructed...[thus] a critical ethic of care must be coupled with analysis of the structures and institutions that reproduce exclusion, oppression, environmental degradation,” and so on (2007:7). This reminds us of the importance of critically analyzing the need that is created for these advocates’ existence in such spaces. Despite the fact that many advocates experience what they characterize as transformative experiences in their encounters with asylum-seekers, all recognize that legal services should be provided via the government while also strongly contending that asylum-seekers should not be incarcerated. This is particularly true for those who are especially vulnerable in such contexts, like children or those with illness or disabilities—in essence, those requiring care that extends far beyond the caregiving capacities of any carceral spaces.

I argue that legal care, as a concept, embodies significant potential for illuminating practices of care in different sorts of human encounters. Legal advocates in these contexts are not medical professionals, and they are not meant to provide care in the ways that we typically think about or talk about care work.^{xvi} Yet, as ethnographic observation demonstrates, their work is a form of care, one that sometimes overlaps with bodily or health care. As they help detainees and asylum-seekers navigate the processual complexities of asylum and institutional ambiguities of incarceration, legal advocates tend to the metaphorical and literal wounds created by such things. Legal care affords us the ability to disentangle the intricacies of these environments and interpret the work that legal advocates do in them as care work without ignoring the important role that the law plays in their encounters.

Thus, this research, including its questions and contentions, engages with care as both an analytic device—useful not only for understanding the labors of advocates but also of these facilities’ environments and identifications with care—and also as an ethic. Ultimately, this research demonstrates the generativity and, indeed, the imperative of recognizing the contours of legal care work.

Conversations and Contributions

The research that this dissertation presents is situated amongst separate albeit intersecting scholarly conversations. This is in part due to the complex nature of these facilities—as not only carceral spaces but also ones which function explicitly to adjudicate asylum cases—but also because of the fact that it is emphasizing the work and experiences of a historically under-researched, and similarly complex, group: legal advocates. Much cross-disciplinary scholarship has explored legal work with asylum applicants, specifically, and immigrants more generally (e.g. Eagly and Schafer 2015; Good 2006; James and Killick 2012; Ryo 2018; Ticktin 2011), as well as lawyers and paralegals themselves as ethnographic subjects (e.g. Henderson 1987; Pierce 1995, 1999). While researchers have also devoted attention to lawyers and legal practitioners, as advocates and activists (e.g. Abel 1995; Luban 1988; Merry 2006; Sarat and Scheingold 1998, 2004, 2005), this linkage is due greater attention. Even less consideration is afforded to the idea of legal practitioners as caregivers.

U.S. immigration law, and its continuous manipulations, has received and continues to receive necessary attention. The past several years have especially proven the importance of such research. Researchers have written extensively about ‘cimmigration’, the ever-growing criminalization of migrants in the U.S. (e.g. Stumpf 2006; Hernández 2015; Dowling and Inda 2013). Many have also thoroughly examined the use of incarceration and deportation as state strategies to separate and punish those with various forms of immigration status, from youth to adults (e.g. Boehm and Terrio 2019; DeGenova and Peutz 2010). Scholars have further recognized the harm

that these practices have wrought on migrant activist communities (e.g. Gonzales 2013). Still, the continuing rise in the global rate of incarceration (Fassin 2016), specifically in immigrant detention (Sampson and Mitchell 2013), demands greater scholarly attention, and the lives and relations that circulate within these increasingly unexceptional spaces are still largely qualitatively unmapped. The research presented here offers a critical ethnographic contribution in beginning to chart the everyday terrains of a particular area of migrant detention.

In observation of such an environment, this research absolutely affirms the complicated nature of relations between humanitarian actors and state entities which seek to incarcerate or exclude migrants and refugees, while also demonstrating the unique form of ‘penal humanitarianism’ (Bosworth 2017) at work in family detention. As in other contexts, state entities and administrative officials come to express their power through caring, moral, or explicitly humanitarian language and logics (e.g. Feldman and Ticktin 2010; Fassin 2012; Fassin and Brown 2015), particularly when deployed in relation to a real or imagined ‘emergency’ (e.g. Calhoun 2010; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010). This, as the ensuing chapters will demonstrate, is certainly the case with those entities associated with family detention as well, both federal and private. While my research contributes to the expansive literature offering important critique of humanitarian intervention in migration emergencies and collaborations with punitive or otherwise oppressive and exclusionary state entities (e.g. Agier and Fernbach 2011; Rozakou 2012; Ticktin 2011; Tyler et al. 2014), it more principally adds to those discussions around the diverse daily challenges faced by migrant advocates (e.g. Agustín 2007; Mountz 2012) and those compelled to navigate restrictive and problematic asylum processes (e.g. Mountz 2010).

In order to properly treat advocates’ work as care work, though, some conceptual outlines of care must first be sketched. While care often “transcends categorical boundaries” (Alber and Drotbohm 2015), it might be broadly understood as something involving both practical and

sentimental, or affective, elements. Care is simultaneously done, thought, and felt. Starting with Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher's broad definition of care as "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible," (Tronto 1993: 103), my analysis also aligns with scholarly views of care that emphasize its embodied, situated, and contingent qualities (e.g. Hamington 2004; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) and caring practices as characterized, in part, by their relationality and interdependency (e.g. Cooper 2018; Kittay and Feder 2002). Mol's (2010) articulation of care, which involves 'tinkering' on uncertain grounds and living with 'the erratic'—emphasizing unpredictability as well as a commitment to continuous engagement—is instructive for making sense of the emergent and urgent environs of family detention. The inner world of family detention is an erratic one indeed, as this dissertation will repeatedly demonstrate, and legal advocates' efforts to give care require constant flexibility and experimentation. As such, care does not take one solid shape or another in the ensuing chapters, but rather shifts its shape to suit the needs of different moments, different encounters, and desires.

Care is also interpreted in the following chapters as a form of resistance or counter-activity. The troubled or unsettled feelings of care (Murphy 2015) that advocates experience in their daily work inside the facility—as they struggle against administrators, policies, and practices that do harm to detainees and themselves—demonstrates the ways in which care takes what appear to be counterintuitive forms. In the examples that illustrate these struggles, what becomes apparent is the necessity of thinking of care not only as practice, but also as something through which we think (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 2012). Facility administrators' harmful yet care-fully crafted actions align with what Ticktin (2011) calls the 'antipolitics' of care, in which "brutal measures may accompany actions in the name of care and rescue...[and] ultimately work to reinforce an oppressive order," (5). Other scholars have charted how violence may be evoked by acts intended as care, sometimes through expressions of indifference or 'uncare' (Mulla 2014; Gupta 2012). What these incidents will

show is how, in situations where multiple actors participate with care, what counts as care or harm is constructed and contested through everyday practices. In these contexts, care is repeatedly understood as relative to the “ways in which someone comes to matter,” (Stevenson 2014:3).

The Ethnographic Stranger

While social scientific research can provide important, at times essential, insights into the lived experiences within the carceral space, it is important to recognize the challenges in conducting, or attempting to conduct, such research. Rhodes (2001), among others (e.g. Heidbrink 2014), offers a clear consideration of the complicated ethical role engendered by this form of study, particularly with respect to work on prison spaces. She notes that “the academic study of prisons is enmeshed in [a] contradiction: On the one hand, the appearance of ‘objectivity’ contributes to the abstraction that protects these sites from view, while on the other, the intense engagement runs the danger of a compulsive intimacy with the terms provided by the prison itself,” (68). She also notes one of the most significant challenges inherent in conducting ethnographic research that involves captive groups, such as prisoners, arguing that “no outsider/observer can ‘participate’ in the situation of the prisoner,” (76). Yet despite these challenges and others in conducting such research, particularly with respect to work with prisoners themselves, Rhodes still finds hope in anthropology’s ability to illuminate the realities of the prison and, indeed, calls for anthropological engagement as the “carceral archipelago” (Foucault 1977) grows and spreads. If approached and committed in the right way, she argues, anthropology has the capability to confront the “brute facts of domination as they play out in institutions that have become ubiquitous, if partially veiled, features of our cultural and political landscape,” (77).

Partially as a result of some of these problematic elements of conducting such research, there is an unfortunately limited amount of ethnographic and social scientific engagements from within the carceral space, particularly in the American context, despite the existence of numerous

theoretical works on incarceration (Rhodes 2001). Certain authors have directly addressed this dearth, offering a variety of historical explanations for why it has occurred (e.g. Tonry and Petersilia 1999; Wacquant 2002, among others) and calling attention to the ways in which qualitative investigation can be intimately constrained by political actors and policies. Crewe (2009) affirms these claims by noting the lack of information with respect to imprisonment in the UK as well. He argues that despite the rise in imprisonment and the expanded development of carceral punishment, the prison “has retreated from public view and academic scrutiny,” (1). Hall (2012) adds to this discussion by specifically noting the lack of engagements with im/migrant detention facilities, through extensive “occlusion and securitization” of such facilities (4). Despite these historic absences, social scientists (e.g. Comfort 2008; Hall 2012; Heidbrink 2014; Martin 2012; Reed 2003; and Rhodes 2004, among others) have deployed mechanisms to investigate these spaces. In the coming chapters of this dissertation, I aim to offer a necessary contribution to those efforts, demonstrating not only how these spaces are similarly disguised and securitized, but also how administrative actors enact forms of domination on those non-prisoner others, like legal advocates, that move throughout them.

I also believe that it is important to offer an example of some of the potential challenges faced by scholars conducting research in these spaces and with these types of interlocutors. To begin with, my research was shaped by many challenges, including those mentioned by other scholars. Even in choosing to center the narratives of these spaces on legal advocates’ experiences, the nature of the carceral environment of the facility elicited a certain level of wariness amongst my would-be interlocutors. I came to understand this hesitancy better as I observed the relatively tenuous relationship between various administrators of the facility, including staff, asylum officers, and judges, and on-the-ground legal advocates, creating an often hostile and untrusting environment. The wariness that I experienced at different periods from my interlocutors correlates, I would argue,

with a larger point that this dissertation attempts to illustrate, which is that the anxiety around being observed by others that pervades this environment affects all sorts of different encounters.

Detainees are of course wary for a number of reasons, from not being entirely sure who they can trust to help them to fearing that there will be repercussions for what they choose to talk about in their interviews or with advocates in those preparations. As such, advocates work diligently and constantly to establish trusting relationships with detainees. Additionally, advocates themselves, to some extent, fear ‘infiltrators’ to their legal projects—those who might not be associating themselves with the causes of these projects with the same intentions as their own, meaning to help and believe those incarcerated. They are also wary of the possibility of including individuals who, either intentionally or unintentionally, would say or do something to harm the project’s ability to conduct its work or the women and children themselves directly. As one former staff member of these projects cautioned to new volunteers: “Don’t go rogue”. By this, he clarified that the legal projects had struggled for months since their inception to establish working relationships with different facility administrators, allowing them access in the facility in order to help detained parents and children, and there were ways in which volunteers could behave that could endanger those hard-won abilities. Because of these understandable concerns as well as the quality of the environment as one in which most move through rapidly, repeatedly demonstrating my commitment and trustworthiness to others was an integral part in conducting my research.

Showing commitment to these organizations was necessarily related to the fact of their humanitarian nature, which itself posed unique challenges for this research. Fassin (2011) has described the relationship between anthropology and humanitarianism as ‘uncomfortably intimate’, in that while they often share particular sympathetic perceptions of the ‘human condition’, certain claims that serve to cohere humanitarian thoughts and actions tend to evoke discomfort within the discipline of anthropology. While, for instance, the values of empathy and compassion are key to

both anthropology and humanitarian work, and while anthropologists draw on humanitarian tropes when making ethical or political claims for suffering peoples, anthropologists tend to be uncomfortable with stances of endorsement, which are fundamental to the organizing tactics of humanitarians. Anthropologists, he argues, are more comfortable with a critical stance.

Recognizing this ‘uncomfortable intimacy’, I was and remain an advocate devoted to much of the work of legal advocacy projects. The critical stance which I brought to my fieldwork was not diminished by my participation in these aid projects but was shaped over the time of my participation. With this, of course, I mean to make clear that this research project was not an organizational study. My goal was not to assess the organizations with which I worked—the DPBP or RAICES—but rather to engage with those that participated with these organizations, principally in-person at the facility, and to chart the work they did and constraints under which they labored. As mentioned, each of these organizations participated in efforts ‘off-the-ground’—like litigation—in order to effect other changes having to do with the detention facilities, and while some of these will be mentioned in the coming chapters, these are not the focus of this study. In fact, as many project staff and former staff noted to me, the experience ‘on-the-ground’ (OTG) was far different from any kind of remotely engaged work. After my initial week of preliminary research, I felt that there was too much to examine in the OTG work, and that a broader organizational study deserved its own research project. Thus, the focus of this research is the in-person, in-facility work, and the lives and experiences that revolved around it.

The Dirt

My field research spanned the years of 2015 to 2019. I began preliminary fieldwork in Dilley in August 2015 with a brief volunteer visit. I returned again, for another brief visit, in February of 2016. In July of 2016, I moved from New York to South Texas to begin a continuous year of fieldwork, which I completed in July 2017. I returned for follow-up fieldwork in 2018 and, finally, in

the summer of 2019. Throughout this time, I conducted over 150 formal interviews with advocates while also logging hundreds of hours working as a legal advocate inside these facilities. While at work as a volunteer, I had many informal conversations with fellow advocates which also play an important role in the ensuing chapters. My formal interviews were structured by a series of open- and closed-ended questions, inquiring upon, for instance, how and why they became involved in the work and how the experience did, or did not, meet their expectations. I asked them to speak upon memorable encounters or moments, which elements of the work were particularly difficult or joyful, and the sentiments they experienced throughout. Over time, I came to shift or rearticulate certain questions in my research as it became clearer to me what advocates wished to talk about from the experience, and in which ways. One such question that was added as time passed in the field concerned the experience of leaving these spaces and the advocacy work, returning ‘home’, and the effects that that had on them. One quality of the experience that was apparent in nearly all my informal conversations and formal interviews with advocates was their strong desire to talk, often at great length, about their experiences and thoughts on these spaces. I was greatly appreciative of such eagerness and came to better understand the motivations for it the longer I served as a volunteer.

While I did conduct research with advocates involved in work at the Dilley and Karnes facilities, the amount of time spent at each of these centers also differed significantly. Because the Karnes facility had a much smaller population of detainees and a related substantially smaller pool of weekly volunteers and project staff, I spent the majority of my time with the Dilley project, though each week I committed at least one day volunteering with the project at the Karnes center. Participating in both projects at fairly distinct detention facilities simultaneously yielded interesting and fruitful contrast, as the ensuing chapters will show, though ultimately the majority of the data presented here comes from work at the Dilley facility and the DPBP project. Nonetheless, important concluding thoughts can be drawn by considering these facilities and projects together.

It is important to clarify the different ‘types’ of advocates which comprise these projects and thus my research. There were project staff, weekly volunteers, and long-term volunteers, unpaid and sometimes paid interns. Because each of these groups spent different lengths of time at work in the facilities, their experiences of the space and the work differ to significant degrees. My research here reflects these differences. Each chapter will involve both the perspectives of those who spent little time passing through Dilley or Karnes as well as those who remained for extended periods. Because I was able to spend greater lengths of time with staff and long-term volunteers, I am able to provide a deeper level of analysis from our conversations and the experiences we shared. I believe that these contrasts demonstrate not only the diverse concerns of persons differently situated in this environment but also the ways in which intimacy and closeness in these strange worlds is configured in different ways. Formulations of intimacy between advocates and others are established both in the short- and long-term.

The majority of my interlocutors in this research identified as women, and at least a few identified as transgender or non-binary.^{xvii} My observation in field work was that most volunteers and project staff members identified as women, thus likely explaining why I had many women respondents. Most of those volunteers and staff members that identified as men were eager to participate in my research and supportive of its aims. Nonetheless, the significance of the apparent overrepresentation of individuals identifying as women—both in participation in these projects and in my research—should not be quickly dismissed, particularly as it corresponds to the overrepresentation of women in caregiving roles. This is something I hope to explore further in later reflections on my research.^{xviii}

An important element in these environments which does not receive the attention it deserves within the following chapters concerns the racial and ethnic makeup of these volunteers and staff members. Broadly, the racial and ethnic makeup of volunteers was quite diverse. Many

advocates, as will be noted in the coming chapters, had Latinx identities; this was particularly, but not exclusively, true of paralegals and legal assistants travelling with often White lawyers who were not fluent in Spanish, the most commonly spoken language in the centers, in order to interpret for them. There were also many White volunteers and project staff members who, together with those identifying as Latinx, comprised the majority. While the subject of race is touched upon in different ways by my interlocutors' stories and experiences in the coming pages, the racial and ethnic composition of these projects and the divisions of labor raise exceedingly important questions that simply are not addressed in this dissertation. As with a more in-depth consideration of gender in relationship to representation in care work, I hope to deploy further research and writing to thoroughly attend to the important question of race in such work.

A particular political positionality marked the predispositions of these advocates, sketching the boundaries of what constituted being a 'like-minded' individual in this environment. Nonetheless, I would argue that this work drew in actors as a result of different impetuses. Some opposed the incarceration of refugees, while others seemed to be primarily motivated by the injustice of incarcerating children, specifically. Some identified as immigrant rights activists, while others expressed hesitancy with such labels. Project staff expressed unambiguously activist stances towards not only migrant incarceration, but also im/migrant rights, more broadly. Awareness of these positionalities not only helped shape my participation as a volunteer but also my understanding of how these worlds of legal advocacy were constructed and bounded.

Even with those predispositions, however, there were particular ways in which legal advocates were socialized to care for and about detainees, as well as for the aims of these projects, as is implied by the staff member's cautionary comment on 'going rogue'. The following chapters will show the different ways that this takes shape. From the beginning, in trainings, staff members' use of language quickly reflects this socialization. For instance, they suggest that detainees be

referred to as ‘clients’, as a way to express to detainees with whom they work the seriousness and professionalism with which they regard their cases. It is important to communicate to clients that they are believed in the stories that they share with advocates, and that it is not the advocates’ place or responsibility to question the ‘credibility’ of any client. This more caring approach is meant as a kind of counter to the ways in which they are likely to be received by officials adjudicating their claims, such as asylum officers or judges, which was often proven to be the case in my observations. In certain moments, this socialization involves reminding advocates of the delicate balance that must be maintained in non-detainee, administrative relationships; while not made explicit, I contend that this is another element of the care work in which advocates engage. Volunteers are further encouraged to remain actively engaged beyond their experiences at these facilities, suggesting that care for detainees should be thought of as a continuous project, extending beyond ‘direct services’ in these centers to political and activist actions. The boundaries of legal advocates’ care are thus also understood by the constructions of these formal and informal socializations which take shape in and out of these facilities.

“So, is it typical for anthropologists to get down in the dirt and do the same work as the people that you’re studying?” Gabby abruptly asked me. Gabby was a young volunteer attorney, and we were sitting across from one another in the room known by Dilley advocates as the *pro bono* room, or PB room (a double *entendre* initialism recognizing the fact that the room often had several jars of peanut butter left from previous volunteers who brought their snacks into the center). The small office room, when it was made available by facility administrators to the project team, was used primarily for storage and documentation work, like printing and scanning. It was also a space, however, in which advocates rested, replenished themselves with snacks, and workshopped complicated cases with one another. When Gabby asked me this, I had been working with the project for just over 10 months and had received some version of this question

from fellow advocates several times, and yet, I couldn't muster a terribly satisfying answer to her question. Even now, as I write this, I consider the boundaries of ethnographic participation, particularly in research projects that involve the kind of urgent, humanitarian efforts on which I focused. At times I was advised by those close to me outside of my research to 'scale back' on my participation with the projects, primarily because of the emotional and physical strain related to the work. Some questioned why I needed to participate in the volunteer work at all, considering why I could not simply conduct interviews with advocates outside of their work at the facility.

I was resistant to such restrictions for a couple of important reasons. As the only researcher conducting long-term, participant observation research just with the advocates themselves, it was challenging for my interlocutors to make sense of my exact role. I was, despite my best efforts to express commitment to the work and goals of these projects, a sort of stranger, in that I was not there working with the projects for a conventional reason. I was not, for instance, there simply because I cared passionately about helping detainees with their asylum cases or only because I was morally opposed to the detention of refugees or families and wanted to do something to help. These, in all honesty, played an important role in my being there, as any ethnographic project is shaped by personal sentiments, beliefs, and desires, but, like many other advocates, they were not the only reasons that led me there. As such, there was deep meaning in being with advocates in the facility and in their work. This was a way to express my material commitment to the efforts of the projects, and in doing so, I established myself as a non-stranger, a 'like-minded' individual, and, as a later chapter will contend, a 'kindred spirit'.

One reason that I devoted myself to a volunteer role was that the experience, as I came to understand my very first week volunteering, is quite visceral, affective, and emotional. The material experience of the work is important to understanding it, and this is difficult for advocates to translate to others who are not familiar with it. As chapter 6 will illustrate, for many legal

advocates, the experience was almost impossible to translate to others. In order to properly understand the unique experiences and perspectives of project staff members, an extensive period of time must be spent within, and not simply around or in conversation on, these spaces.



Image 6: Improvisations of conducting research while volunteering. Reminders of interview dates/times with interlocutors, constrained by the fact that phones were not allowed in detention. Photo credit: author

Maintaining dual, though intertwined, roles—as both a researcher and advocate—was difficult to navigate, but it was important that the efforts of these projects effectively assume primacy over my research interests. As a researcher, I am dedicated to the practical applications both in producing the product of ethnographic research as well as in conducting that research and thus playing a direct, though not authoritative or instructive, role in advocacy and activist communities. I take seriously various scholars’ calls for researchers to “orient themselves not simply to the study of

advocates as political actors but to work for them, exploring those questions that have not been answered and [aiding] in efforts to effect social change,” (Slack et al. 2018: xv).

I will admit that it was very hard to try to manage my efforts as a volunteer and conduct fieldwork at the same time. There’s simply not enough space in this dissertation to explain how difficult it was at times, and the kinds of long-term impacts it inflicted upon me. But, as a Dilley staff member once said to me, this type of aid work is like an addiction, a drug. It involves losing a kind of control over your life, being swept into the energy—the depressing lows and exuberant highs—making connections with one another as you bond over difficult work and powerful, obfuscating emotional states. It is exhausting, pushing you out while inexplicably attaching itself to you, pulling you in time and time again. While it is indeed challenging to communicate the experience of being a legal advocate in these spaces to those for whom such environments are relatively foreign, to approximate this I have relied heavily on the fortunate wealth of voices of those advocates who willingly, enthusiastically shared their stories with me.

Chapters

Each chapter draws out the many ways in which care takes shape inside these facilities, taking into account the many constraints that affect the manifestations of care. The first chapter begins with a proper introduction to these facilities and the work done by legal advocates therein. It does so, primarily, through playing with an important concept to advocates’ work as well as the experiences of detainees in these spaces: Orientation. I do this many times throughout the dissertation, as I have already done with my use of the ‘particular social group’ concept. Detainees and advocates alike undergo separate but overlapping orientations in preparation for what they will experience inside the center. I discuss this and deploy the concept further to orient the reader to these spaces, including the important affective and emotional elements that define these spaces and advocates’ work. Introducing these surroundings through the concept of ‘embodied spaces’ (Low

2009) initiates an investigation into caregiving practices and experiences in which, as the following chapters demonstrate, materiality plays an important role.

The second and third chapters engage two central elements of my research, respectively: the most critical part of the advocates' work—again, what is known as the 'prep'—and caregiving in relation to conflict. The second chapter considers the ways in which, within this critical encounter between advocates and detainees wherein they are prepared for their asylum interview, advocates express resistance to the exclusionary and traumatic processes of incarceration and asylum law through a careful attention to storytelling and contestations of narratives. Chapter 3 demonstrates the ways in which advocates face resistance—or friction (Tsing 2005)—in their care work as a result of the unpredictable and frequently hostile environment in which they labor. In this environment, caring also involves tending to multiple relationships, recognizing the interdependency at play in the 'borderland moments' (Mattingly 2010) of everyday interactions. Situating these chapters back-to-back intends to demonstrate the kind of emotional 'whiplash' advocates can experience in their diverse efforts, as expressions of power and forms of resistance fluctuate and shift. While Chapter 2 communicates one aspect of resistance that advocates affect, in their caring attention and contestation of harmful narratives, Chapter 3 explores the ways in which advocates experience repercussive punishment, are limited in their ability to control scenarios, and are subjected to compromising positions.

Chapter 4 illustrates another important form of relationship to which advocates commonly tend. In this chapter, I examine advocates' care work in the course of the asylum interview which, in many ways, is constrained by additional limitations placed on their role in such spaces. This chapter also examines advocates' experiences in the in-detention court, where clients who receive negative decisions from asylum officers on their interviews seek to overturn the decision by having their case reviewed by a televised immigration judge. In each of these spaces, advocates are denied the ability

to speak on behalf of their detained clients, unless given permission by authorities in very limited moments. Acting almost solely as observers, witnesses, or, at most, minor participants, then, advocates' care is necessarily reconfigured. Their care becomes most clearly marked by their ability to simply be present with their clients, to bear witness (Farmer 2005)—effectively 'watching the watchers' (Walsh 2013)—and document.

Chapter 5 considers the disruptions experienced by advocates through the often complex and uncomfortable intimacies produced in this environment. I return to a phrase used in the dissertation's title—*los extraños familiares*—to explore how familiarity or intimacy itself, while critical to the work of advocates, is manifested in ways that draw out individual sensitivities or experiences of trauma, disturbing personal boundaries. In these and other ways, intimacy comes to build other worlds (Berlant 1998) within the detention spaces. Like previous chapters, Chapter 6 engages with a concept that I argue is meaningful for both detainees and advocates alike: *la salida*. As detainees cross beyond the carceral border, all advocates also eventually leave their work at the facility. This chapter explores what it means to cope with these experiences after the fact: how some are 'haunted' by their experiences there, how they experience post-hoc emotions (Thornton and Novak 2010), and how self-care is complicated by the ongoing need for aid and traumatic nature of the work. The 'needs' (Malkki 2015) of these humanitarian advocates shift as they cross the threshold of detention, and I unexpectedly find myself, as an ethnographer, playing a new role in offering a kind of care to them.

As mentioned already, all the chapters reflect the different sorts of relationships that were developed throughout this research. I include both the many voices of those with whom I had only brief, albeit intense, weekly encounters as well as those with whom I spent months, sometimes years, getting to know. Chapters will follow, in particular, a few staff members and long-term volunteers with whom I was more acquainted and experienced deeper connections. While their long-term

engagement with these facilities provides crucial insight for the purposes of this research, I do not intend to characterize that experience as more valuable or insightful than those who only spent a brief period of time in these spaces. Their perspectives differed from one another, nonetheless, which I argue speaks to larger questions concerning the constraints and opportunities of caregiving in such environments.

One of the final contentions that this dissertation makes in its concluding chapter—*Una Herida Abierta*—is that, even though I do not use the space of these chapters to explicitly delineate between what I believe to be ‘good’ and ‘bad’ care of detainees, what legal advocates provide to detainees in these spaces is simultaneously necessary and should not be provided as a result of voluntary, humanitarian efforts. Most, if not all, the advocates with whom I worked would agree with this argument. Individuals, like many of my interlocutors, who aren’t formally trained in asylum law should not have to advise asylum-seekers on their cases, and victims and survivors of trauma should not have to discuss those intimate experiences with those who are not trained in trauma care or response. The circumstances which bring the need into contact with this provision should not exist; asylum-seekers and their myriad caregivers deserve better than that. The burden to accept whatever help they can be afforded should not lie with incarcerated migrants, and the burden to try to solve complex, layered problems—some of which do not have a clear answer—or help others without necessarily having professional training or the appropriate tools should similarly not reside with legal advocates, like those whose voices fill the following pages.

And yet, because of their desire to care and their awareness of what would happen were they to stop this care—primarily massive deportations and increases in human rights abuses, as has been proven true in the history of family detention—legal advocates and detainees find themselves caught in this dependent exchange. Advocates are repeatedly made aware of what happens in these spaces and others like them when they are not around to help or observe the actions of administrators and

staff. Detainees are made more vulnerable without the presence of these ‘external’ parties, and yet legal advocates themselves are quite wary to deem themselves ‘saviors’ or protectors of their clients, in any way. Another layer to this, of course, are the ways in which, as they hinder the work of legal advocates, facility administrators—ICE, private prison staff, and others—will frequently claim credit for the work of legal advocates, including them in official statements that point to the existence of ‘free legal services’ for detainees (evidenced in articles like Contreras 2018, but, in the ensuing chapters, I will also offer my own observations of this inside these facilities). This is clearly intended to bolster support for the continuation of these facilities’ existence and a perception of their own work as caring, which creates additional challenges for legal advocates to extricate themselves from this form of aid work. I will expand upon these issues in the concluding chapter, where I consider the wounds created by these kinds of practices and co-optation of labor, the function of hope, the place of thinking “beyond care, beyond help,” (Ticktin 2011) in situations like these, and the future of legal care.

Beginnings

In July 2016, a group of strangers sat in the ranch house’s mismatched and tattered couches and wooden chairs on a Sunday evening, eating messy tacos and sipping beer, before their first day at work in the detention facility next door. After introducing ourselves to one another—where we were from, what kind of work we did, and what got us involved in this project, per usual—Ali stood up in front of an anti-ICE poster and a set of antlers and snakeskins found on the property and began the evening’s training presentation. Ali was a young lawyer originally from South Texas, then named as the managing attorney of the DPBP project, and had moved from her apartment in New York City back to Texas to work for this project. She was clever, absurdly patient, and well-spoken: an easily inspirational woman. “Our job,” she said with a gentle seriousness to the room, “is to help these women and kids be their own advocates. They are strong, and they’ve gone through hell to get

here. We're just going to help them continue to be that strong in this next step they've got to go through. This step is very complicated, and there's info that they need in order to get through this that they just don't have. There are some things that we can do on their behalf in this fight, but the most important thing we can do is to help them advocate for themselves, fight for themselves. This is about *them*, not us."

I heard this often during fieldwork. All of this, advocates would say—what they do and what they go through—is about and for them, the detained women and children, and what they need and deserve. And yet, telling the story of contemporary family detention would not be complete without a serious consideration of the role of legal advocates. As long as Dilley, Karnes, and even the Berks facility have operated as family detention centers—and even with the Artesia and Hutto facilities—legal advocates have been present within, providing consistent, *pro bono* aid to those detained. As the Dilley and Karnes facilities opened to replace the center in Artesia, those same advocates began strategizing and organizing to prepare for a committed ongoing effort. As some who were the original volunteers in those spaces recounted to me, when they first started arriving at Dilley, they would be forced to wait for hours, sometimes the length of the day, in order to even attempt to visit with detainees. Some days they were simply turned away after waiting, denying detainees' rights to legal visitation and their right to give legal counsel to those in need. They persistently returned day after day, eventually being allowed inside to meet with those in need. Each morning, they would cart in boxes of files, printers, intake documents and computers, and each evening, as they were told to leave at 8pm, they would pack it all up. They continued that cycle for weeks, until eventually being allowed to establish a space within to meet with potential clients (which turned out to be all of those detained with exceedingly rare exceptions of those not interested in legal support). At Karnes, legal advocates still cart all of their materials, printers and documents and all, in and out of the meeting spaces with clients every day, and on days where their access is challenged, they sit and wait until

they are allowed in. Family detention facilities have but for only brief periods of time existed without their presence. Legal advocates' efforts and roles in these spaces have long become integral parts to the processes inside.

What the ensuing chapters of this dissertation aim to do is both to recognize advocates' presence in these spaces as significant, and often critical, and to complicate the assumed borders between, as Ali says, 'them' and 'us'. In helping detainees advocate for themselves, as they are essentially forced to do in much of this portion of the legal asylum process and as incarcerated individuals, legal advocates become entangled in the complex, multidirectional circulations of care in these environments. They give care, but they also receive care. They attempt to soothe the diverse pains of detention and asylum while also experiencing, or being reminded of, wounds of their own. While their liminal, 'stranger' status leaves them struggling to navigate the frictions and ambiguities of caregiving in these spaces, their relationships with detained women and children often, ironically, reach significant depths of familiarity and closeness. The story that this dissertation tells of family detention serves as a rejoinder to Ali's motivating claim to a room of strangers on their training night. Understanding these spaces in newer, yet-untold ways—the ways that they feel, how they function on a microscale, the pains and joys they cause, and the actors within them that make them what they are—and making sense of how the impacts of processes like these reach far beyond those most directly affected, requires a consideration of how the story of them is a story of us.



It's late, dark out now, and my head is full to the brim with new information that I haven't exactly found a place for yet. As I walk out of the ranch, all of the colors have been seemingly drained from the sky but with an eerie white glow floating in from somewhere off in the distance. I begin the drive back to the motel, the Dilley Days Inn, where I'm sharing a double room with another volunteer. It's where most volunteers stay. The woman who works the front desk knows us all well, sometimes making food for Sunday night training meetings for the group. This time, as I turn back onto the farm-to-market road leading away from the ranch and back to town, it catches my eye: the detention center. I don't really see it, per se, but rather the large, powerful floodlights towering above it. It was those

that caused a light blanket to stretch across the sky to where I met everyone. They look like the same kind of floodlights that lit the football fields where, as a kid, I spent many a Friday night sitting in creaky metal bleachers, watching a performance I never really understood. Now, I couldn't see the stage, but I knew it was there, somewhere.

Citations

- Abel, Richard L. *Politics by Other Means: Law in the Struggle against Apartheid, 1980-1994*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Agier, Michel, and David Fernbach. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011.
- Agustín, Laura María. *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*. London: Zed, 2007.
- Alber, Erdmute, and Heike Drotbohm, editors. *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*. First edition., Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- American Immigration Council. "A Primer on Expedited Removal." February 3, 2017. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/primer-expedited-removal>.
- Berlant, Lauren (Ed.). "Intimacy: a special issue". *Critical Inquiry*, 24, 281-288, 1998.
- Boehm, Deborah and Susan Terrio. *Illegal Encounters: The Effect of Detention and Deportation on Young People*. NYU Press, 2019.
- Bosworth, Mary. "Penal Humanitarianism? Sovereign Power in an Era of Mass Migration." *New Criminal Law Review: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal* 20, no. 1, February 1, 2017: 39. <https://doi.org/10.1525/nclr.2017.20.1.39>.
- Calhoun, Craig. "The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order". In *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, eds. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi. New York: Zone, 2010.
- Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Contreras, Guillermo. "Inside the country's largest immigrant family detention center". *San Antonio Express News*, August 12, 2018. <https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Inside-the-country-s-largest-immigrant-family-13149672.php>
- Cooper, Jessica. "Trapped: The Limits of Care in California's Mental Health Courts." *Social Justice*, vol. 44, no. 1, p. 121+, 2018.
- Crewe, Ben. *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation, and Social Life in an English Prison*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

- Cunningham, Clark D. "Lawyer as Translator, Representation as Text: Towards an Ethnography of Legal Discourse". *Cornell Law Review* 77: 1298-1387, 1992.
- DeGenova, Nicholas, and Nathalie Mae Peutz. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010.
- del Bosque, Melissa. "As Feds Lock Up More Immigrant Families, Abuse Allegations Grow". *Texas Observer*, November 4, 2014. <https://www.texasobserver.org/growing-number-abuse-cases-immigrant-family-detention-facilities/>
- Dowling, Julie A., and Jonathan Xavier Inda (eds). *Governing Immigration through Crime: A Reader*. Stanford UP, 2013.
- Eagly, Ingrid V. & Steven Shafer. "A National Study of Access to Counsel in Immigration Court," 164 *Univ. of Pennsylvania Law Rev.* 1–91, 2015.
- Farmer, Paul. *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.
- Fassin, Didier. *Prison Worlds: an Ethnography of the Carceral Condition*. Polity, 2016.
- Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. Berkeley: U of California, 2012.
- "Noli Me Tangere: The Moral Untouchability of Humanitarianism". In *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism Between Ethics and Politics*, eds. Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2011.
- and Patrick Brown. *At the Heart of the State: The Moral World of Institutions*. London: Pluto Press, 2015.
- and Mariella Pandolfi. *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. New York: Zone, 2010.
- Feldman, Ilana and Miriam Ticktin, Eds. *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.
- Furman, Rich, Douglas Epps, and Greg Lamphear. *Detaining the Immigrant Other: Global and Transnational Issues*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Gonzales, Alfonso. *Reform without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State*. Oxford UP, 2013.
- Good, Anthony. *Anthropology and Expertise in the British Asylum Courts*. New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2006.

- Gupta, Akhil. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Hall, Alexandra. *Border Watch: Cultures of Immigration, Detention and Control*. London: Pluto Press, 2012.
- Hamington, Maurice. *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics*. University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Heidbrink, Lauren. *Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State: Care and Contested Interests*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2014.
- Henderson, Lynne. "Legality and Empathy". *Michigan Law Review* 85: 7. 1574-1653, 1987.
- Hernández, C.C.G. "Naturalizing Immigration Imprisonment" *California Law Review* 103 (6): 1449-1514, 2015.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California, 1983.
- James, Deborah and Evan Killick. "Empathy and Expertise: Case Workers and Immigration/Asylum Applicants in London". *Law and Social Inquiry* 37 (2): 430-455, 2012.
- Kittay, Eva Feder., and Ellen K. Feder, editors. *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.
- Lawson, Victoria. "Geographies of Care and Responsibility." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97:1, 1-11, 2007.
- Low, Setha M. "Towards an Anthropological Theory of Space and Place." *Semiotica* 2009, no. 175, January 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2009.041>.
- Loyd, Jenna M., Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burrige. *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*. Athens: U of Georgia, 2012.
- Luban, David. *Lawyrs and Justice: An Ethical Study*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988.
- Malkki, Liisa. *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Martin, Lauren. "Governing through the family: struggles over US noncitizen family detention policy". *Environment and Planning*, 44, 866-888, 2012.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. *The Paradox of Hope: Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.
- Merry, Sally Engle. *Getting Justice and Getting Even: Legal Consciousness among Working-class Americans*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1990.

- Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Mertz, Elizabeth. *The Language of Law School: Learning to "think like a Lawyer"*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- Mol, Annemarie, Ingunn Moser, and J Pols. *Care in Practice: On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms*. Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010.
- Mountz, Alison. *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- "Mapping Remote Detention: Dis/location through Isolation". In *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, eds. Jenna M. Loyd, Matt Mitchelson and Andrew Burridge. Athens: U of Georgia, 2012.
- Mulla, Sameena. *The Violence of Care: Rape Victims, Forensic Nurses, and Sexual Assault Intervention*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Murphy, Michelle. "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 45, no. 5, pp. 717–737, 2015.
www.jstor.org/stable/43829053.
- Murray, Marjorie et al. "Care and Relatedness Among Rural Mapuche Women: Issues of Carino and Empathy." *ETHOS*, vol. 45, Issue 3, pp. 367-385, 2017.
- Office of the Vice President. "Remarks to the Press with Q&A by Vice President Joe Biden in Guatemala". June 20, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/20/remarks-press-qa-vice-president-joe-biden-guatemala>
- Pierce, Jennifer. *Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- "Emotional Labor Among Paralegals". *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 561: 127-42, 1999.
- Preston, Julia. "Detention Center Presented as Deterrent to Border Crossings". *NYTimes*, December 15, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/16/us/homeland-security-chief-opens-largest-immigration-detention-center-in-us.html>.
- "Judge Orders Release of Immigrant Children Detained by the U.S.". *NYTimes*, July 25, 2015.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/us/detained-immigrant-children-judge-dolly-gee-ruling.html>
- Puig de la Bellacasa, María. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- " 'Nothing comes without its world': thinking with care". *The Sociological Review*, 60: 197-216, 2012.

- Reed, Adam. *Papua New Guinea's Last Place: Experiences of Constraint in a Postcolonial Prison*. New York: Berghahn, 2003.
- Rhodes, Lorna A. *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*. Berkeley, CA: U of California, 2004.
- "Toward an Anthropology of Prisons". *The Annual Review of Anthropology*. 30:65-83, 2001.
- Rozakou, Katerina. "The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece: Humanitarianism and the Management of Refugees". *American Ethnologist*. 39 (3): 562-577, 2012.
- Ryo, Emily. "Representing Immigrants: The Role of Lawyers in Immigration Bond Hearings". *Law & Society Review*, 52: 503-531, 2018.
- Sakuma, Amanda. "The failed experiment of immigrant family detention". *MSNBC*, August 3, 2015. <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/failed-experiment-immigrant-family-detention>
- Sampson, R.C., Mitchell, G. "Global Trends in Immigration: Detention and Alternatives to Detention: Practical, Political and Symbolic Rationales". New York: *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, Vol 2, No 3, 98-102, 2013.
- Sarat, Austin and William Felstiner. "Enactments of Power: Negotiating Reality and Responsibility in Lawyer-Client Interactions". *Cornell Law Review* 77 (6), 1992.
- Cause Lawyering: Political Commitments and Professional Responsibilities*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- The Worlds Cause Lawyers Make: Structure and Agency in Legal Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Law and Politics, 2005.
- Something to Believe In: Politics, Professionalism, and Cause Lawyering*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Law and Politics, 2004.
- Schrag, Philip G. *Baby Jails: The Fight to End the Incarceration of Refugee Children in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020.
- Slack, Jeremy, Daniel E. Martínez, Scott Whiteford, Josiah Heyman, and Murphy Woodhouse. *The Shadow of the Wall: Violence and Migration on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. University of Arizona Press, 2018.
- Stevenson, Lisa. *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. University of California Press, 2014.
- Stumpf, Juliet. "The crimmigration crisis: immigrants, crime, and sovereign power". *American University Law Review* 56 (2): 367-419, 2006.
- Thornton, Leslie A. and David R. Novak. "Storying the Temporal Nature of Emotion Work: Bearing Witness to the Lived Trauma of Others". *Health Communication*, 25:5, 437-448, 2010.

- Ticktin, Miriam Iris. *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- Tonry, Michael and Joan Petersilia. *Crime and Justice, Volume 26: Prisons*. University of Chicago Press Journals, 1999.
- Tronto, Joan C. *Moral Boundaries: a Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. Routledge, 1993.
- Tyler, Imogen, Nick Gill, Dierdre Conlon, and Ceri Oeppen. "The Business of Child Detention: Charitable Co-option, Migrant Advocacy, and Activist Outrage". *Race & Class* 56 (1): 3-21, 2014.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: an Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Wacquant, Loïc. "The Curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography in the Age of Mass Incarceration". *Ethnography*. 3 (4): 371-397, 2002.
- Walsh, James P. "From Border Control to Border Care: The Political and Ethical Potential of Surveillance". In *Governing Immigration through Crime: A Reader*, eds. Dowling, Julie A., and Jonathan Xavier Inda. Stanford UP, 2013.
- Wexler, L. "The non-legal role of international human rights law in addressing immigration". *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, (2007), 358-404, 2007.

Notes

ⁱ While recognizing distinctions between the concepts of incarceration and detention, I deploy them both throughout the chapters of this dissertation to refer to the same punitive processes and spaces. I agree with scholarship which affirms the euphemistic quality of ‘immigrant detention’ (Furman et al. 2016; Wexler 2007), yet because of its continued dominance in the discourse around these spaces, I use it alongside ‘incarceration’ and ‘carceral’.

ⁱⁱ I qualify the term ‘unaccompanied’ because, as other researchers have shown (e.g. Schrag 2020), those children who are labeled as such by the government are not always without ‘accompaniment’ when they are apprehended by authorities or seek asylum at the border. Some are forcibly separated from family members not recognized as such by officials and are thus placed within an improper category.

ⁱⁱⁱ This has changed in practice, somewhat, over the years of this research. For a limited period of time, single fathers were detained with their children of minor age in the Berks and Karnes facilities.

^{iv} While public discussions of these interviews often simply refer to these interviews as ‘credible fear’ interviews, there are actually two types. Those applicants deemed “subject to administrative removal” or who have had a “prior order of removal” from the U.S. must undergo a reasonable fear interview. Others who do not have this record will undergo a credible fear interview. Unfortunately and also confoundingly, the burden of proof for passing the reasonable fear interview is much higher than for the credible fear interview, putting those who have previous records like these at an unfair disadvantage in their interview. Source:

USCIS. “Affirmative Asylum, Credible Fear, and Reasonable Fear”. March 2019.

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Resources%20for%20Congress/USCIS_OLIA_March_2019_Hill_Conference_Asylum_Overview.pdf

^v “CoreCivic Inc | AFSC Investigate.” Accessed April 21, 2020.

<https://investigate.afsc.org/company/corecivic>.

^{vi} “April Recess Family Detention Background and Talking Points”. Detention Watch Network. Accessed 21, 2020.

<https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/DWN%20Family%20Detention%20Backgrounder%20and%20Talking%20Points.pdf>

^{vii} “The Artesia Report «The Artesia Report.” Accessed April 21, 2020.

<https://perma.cc/4CU6-WBWW>.

^{viii} For the purposes of this dissertation, I’ve included here only a brief account of the history of family detention and its associated facilities in the U.S. Philip G. Schrag, in his recent book *Baby Jails: The Fight to End the Incarceration of Refugee Children in the United States* (2020), offers an extremely thorough and helpful account of this history and the litigation surrounding these facilities and advocates’ resistance to them.

^{ix} “Unit Directory.” Accessed April 21, 2020. https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/unit_directory/db.html.

^x “The GEO Group Inc | AFSC Investigate.” Accessed April 21, 2020.
<https://investigate.afsc.org/company/geo-group>.

^{xi} I use both terms—detainee and client—to refer to the women and children detained in this facility. While ‘resident’ is the term most often used by administrators in detention, I find this euphemistic term not only offensive but misleading, so I only reproduce it in references to what I would deem propagandistic projects deployed by administrators and government officials. ‘Detainee’, I find, is an accurate term for these individuals, though ‘client’ is the term used nearly universally by legal advocates, aside from the more casual, personal language referring to the women and children within these spaces.

^{xii} *Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292 (1993) , United States Supreme Court, 23 March 1993. Accessed April 21, 2020. available at: <https://www.refworld.org/cases,USSCT,4152e0ff24.html>.

^{xiii} LII / Legal Information Institute. “8 U.S. Code § 1158 - Asylum.” Accessed April 21, 2020.
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1158>.

^{xiv} I use pseudonyms for all advocates in the following chapters, with the exception of one. When detainees are mentioned by name, I use a combination of pseudonyms and a mixing of personal narrative details so as to obscure identification of any individual, as they were not the interlocutors of this study.

^{xv} Quoted from website, formerly caraprobano.org

^{xvi} There have been some medical professionals who have volunteered with these organizations, but this rare and not the primary function of these projects, which are to provide legal assistance.

^{xvii} Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$'s of my participants identified as women.

^{xviii} Additional information on my interlocutors: While I did not track their ages, volunteers and staff members ranged broadly in age, from those in their late teens to retirees in their 60s and 70s. Most volunteers, in my estimation, were between 25-45 years of age, while most project staff were in their late 20s-30s. It was clear that the position of staff member was most suited for early career individuals who had more flexibility in their living circumstances and ability to work on a temporary, contractual basis.

Chapter 1: Orientation to Baby Jail

“It was either going to be the heels or the wine....I chose the wine.” I am riding down to Dilley—the site of the South Texas Family Residential Center—with a ‘repeat’ volunteer, or someone who has volunteered on more than one occasion, an immigration lawyer from Chicago named Lucy. Lucy has been to Dilley three times, spanning a year. She is telling me about how she has reduced her luggage load from the first time she came down; now she only brings one blazer and a pair of flats (the elimination of the heels was one of her most recent changes). Since Dilley has a limited selection of alcoholic offerings, a Trader Joe’s bottle of wine was a smart trade. It’s too hard to walk through the rocky, dirt parking lot in heels anyway, she adds.

When Lucy first visited Dilley as a volunteer with the project in February of 2015, the center was not even fully constructed yet. The facility where they were holding detainees was next door to where the center is now, at a former oil-worker housing site. “You could hear the construction going on next door though,” she says. Detainees were being moved from the now-defunct facility in Artesia, after numerous lawsuits and complaints were leveled against it, to both the Dilley and Karnes detention centers. Federal representatives claimed that Artesia was only meant to be temporary, as a response to the ‘crisis’ of many new arrivals of families seeking asylum at the Mexico-U.S. border, and that they were closing it because the numbers of new arrivals had decreased significantly (Redmon 2014). Of course, as Lucy’s experience implies, the government was already planning an even larger facility to house this particular group of asylum-seekers.

Even if she was being somewhat cheeky in her comment about the wine, after several months of having travelled to Dilley to work alongside these legal advocates, I understood the sentiment. Working as a legal advocate in South Texas’s family detention centers, or ‘baby jails’, is a harsh job and at the end of many days, certain days more than others, all some want to do is bury the day with a drink. Others choose listening to music, going for a run, or hanging out with new

friends and complaining about how ridiculous the whole system is. Some prefer to secrete themselves away to their hotel room, not ready yet to rehash the events of the day with others or are too exhausted to move beyond their bed. Not only do many want to forget the horrible things they witnessed and stories they heard that day or week at the facility, but they want to find a way to release the tension that has seemingly built up in their body over the hours upon hours sitting in a hard, plastic chair in a cold, cold office space, or craning their neck closer to hear an interpreter on the phone, or staring at a computer screen while uploading document after document. They want to relieve the embodied stress that comes from trying to maintain emotional composure while listening to horrific stories of abuse and sitting across from a mother who nurses her baby as tears stream down her face. They want to find a way to let go of the things they have seen or heard, even as many concede the near impossibility of doing so.

After having volunteered a couple of times before, Lucy knew the drill. She was prepared. She knew that, in terms of attire, a relative air of professionalism was all that was needed for her time traversing spaces of the detention center, and that a bottle of wine would serve her better than a pair of heels ever could. That kind of knowledge came from being there and having been there, working as an advocate at the detention center, experiencing and embodying the daily work. It comes from being oriented to both the work and space itself.

This chapter will begin this dissertation by focusing on ‘orientation’, a meaningful term with multiple layers for both advocates and detainees. Conceptually, orientation plays a central role in telling the story of this group. As demonstrated in the introductory chapter, even before they enter the facility on Monday morning, advocates volunteering in Dilley experience a kind of orientation. This preparatory training, itself known as ‘orientation’, is comprised of two parts: a training-related, group phone call done a week before volunteers arrive, and an in-person training on Sunday evenings the night before the first day of work. The phone call, led by project staff, is used to

introduce volunteers to the work; to explore the online data management system that is used to store client information and is critical to everyday processes; and to reflect upon the informative documents that volunteers are expected to read before arriving to work. The in-person training, which lasts approximately a few hours, elaborates upon information shared in the remote call, offering greater detail on important aspects of the work, from information about the facility itself to asylum law to expectations of them each day. This training begins in the early evening, at an intimate location in town—often at the shared home for the project staff near the facility, ‘the ranch’—and lasts well into the night. Advocates introduce themselves to one another as they sit on the home’s tattered couches and observe the PowerPoint presentation given by the staff, asking questions about asylum law, how the online data system works, and what sort of clothing they are allowed to wear inside the center. The staff pose their own questions to the volunteers, to test their attention and comprehension of the work and their expectations of them for the work. For the majority who flew into the nearest airport in San Antonio that same day from points across the U.S., Sunday is an exhausting day. By the end of the night, many ultimately feel overwhelmed by the information they have been given about what is to come in the week, as most arrive without much previous experience with immigrant detention or asylum law.

The notion of orientation, however, carries greater significance beyond the advocates’ preparatory training, as this chapter’s opening anecdote implies. Like many concepts which frame the chapters of this dissertation, orientation represents practices of importance for both advocates and detainees. When detainees arrive at the detention center, they also receive what is known as orientation. This amounts to the showing of a relatively brief video to a group of newly arrived detainees that explains aspects of their detention and legal processes for asylum. Likely because most family detainees are Spanish speakers, this video is in Spanish. This, of course, excludes those who are not Spanish-speakers or those who are challenged to hear or read, and it is unclear to advocates

whether these many individuals are ever given this information in other languages or formats. It is, in the most generous reading, a minimally informative video about the legal asylum process and the rights of the detainees. The failure of the government and facility administrators to properly inform detained parents and their children of the meaning of their detention and their rights—merely beginning with the orientation—speaks to, among others, geographer Lauren Martin’s (2015) claim that “detention is more than a fixing of bodies in space; it is a process of isolation, criminalization, and marginalization,” (231).

While these forms of orientation are worthy of critical attention in their own right, this chapter expands beyond these more literal manifestations to examine the other ways in which advocates become oriented to the space of the detention center and the work they do within. I will introduce different elements of this—place, sense, time, and disorientation—considering the diverse ways that advocates become adjusted to this sometimes surreal environment and how the center comes to be felt. Low (2009) asserts that researchers additionally need “theoretical formulations that provide an everyday, material grounding and an experiential, cognitive, and/or emotional understanding of the intersection and interpenetration of body, space, and culture,” which she conceptualizes as “embodied spaces” (10). An engagement with affective experience through the conceptual lens of embodied space is critical to a richer understanding not only of those spaces, however, but of the broader phenomena which have produced them. Sensorial qualities of the experience of family detention have a way of demonstrating the diverse pathways which harm can take as well as the micropolitics of daily exclusionary practices. The apparent arbitrary and contradictory nature of these qualities plays an important role in understanding these places as well. This chapter only begins to talk about the role of emotion and affect in this work, considering the ways in which these affect the initial, as well as the lingering, experiences advocates have. Through an attention to these qualities, the complex care which lies at the center of this dissertation begins to

take shape. Understanding the affective qualities and paradoxes of these spaces will help to situate my contention that while these are harmful spaces, advocates participate in creating within them, as well, as spaces of care (Conradson 2003).

Place



Image 7: On the outskirts of Dilley's downtown. Photo credit: author

The towns in which these detention centers reside—Dilley and Karnes City—share broad commonalities. They are roughly the same size with populations of only a few thousand, mostly Hispanic/Latinx. Each is surrounded by miles upon miles of farmland and oil fields, and both have significantly high rates of poverty (at over twice the national rate).^{xix xx} While it is unclear whether tap water is safe for consumption in Karnes City, it has long been rumored that the water in Dilley has been poisoned by local fracking practices. In my time in both towns, I was cautioned by fellow advocates not to drink the water. Advocates at both centers drink only bottled water, a common practice in each town, while detainees have no other option but to drink the tap water. Advocates

often heard complaints from detainees that it made them sick (Schrag 2020). Those advocates who had at times consumed the tap water, including myself, reported subsequent ill effects like a sore, burning sensation in the throat and digestive issues. While I could never officially verify that the water was contaminated, because of local claims and numerous personal experiences, other advocates and I chose not to consume it. In one of the many cruelties of family detention, not only were detainees given no other choice but to drink the tap water, but administrators did not allow advocates to share bottled water with them.



Image 8: Prisoners tend crops at the state prison located next the Dilley facility. Photo credit: author

The Dilley facility sits adjacent to a large state prison—the Dolph Briscoe Unit—and off a narrow farm-to-market road. The facility itself is not visible at all from the road, unlike its prison neighbor which strikes an imposing image. In driving past the prison to get to the center, advocates often witness a scene that feels to many like a window into a different era: Large groups of jumpsuit-clad prisoners, nearly all Black and Brown, tilling the fields or harvesting the crops on the property of the prison, surrounded by cowboy-hatted, rifle-toting officers astride horses. The crop harvested by the prisoners—watermelons—stands as a source of identity for the town of Dilley, which deems itself the “watermelon capital of the world”. After this is the road which leads to the detention center, which itself is unmarked and thus challenging for some first-time visitors to find. This

confusion led to the creation of a makeshift map for advocates to make sense of the center's location. This situation recalls Mountz's (2012) reflection on the ways in which advocates actively contest the isolations of detention through oppositional cartographic efforts. She argues that such revelatory work, which involves actions like locating relatives as they have been clandestinely moved from one detention facility to another, counters the concealing work of the state which often places immigrant detention facilities in remote locales. Legal advocates in Dilley participate in their own way in this by not only helping to locate families separated, ironically, by the practice of family detention, but also in quite literally mapping the facility in order for incoming volunteers and new staff members of the project to find their way to it. In contrast, while the Karnes County Residential Center is also remotely located, it is much easier for visitors to find. The center itself, while similarly located on a farm-to-market road off the main highway, does have a marking on the road which notes its existence further along. Its large blue and white façade also sits upon a hill making it quite visible from the highway.



Image 9: Downtown Karnes City. Photo credit: author

While serving the same function, the Dilley and Karnes detention centers have markedly different outward-facing images (‘outward-facing’ is used here very loosely, as administrators of these facilities do not encourage public engagement). Of course, these projections are shaped both by their different histories and managing organizations, CoreCivic and GEO Group. As mentioned in the introduction, the Dilley facility was constructed hurriedly in response to the ‘crisis’ which birthed the modern instantiation of family detention, and its appearance reflects this crisis-identity. The center is marked by a sense of impermanence, comprised of a collection of mobile trailers and temporary edifices. As one advocate, Juana, described it after her time in Dilley: “What was weird was that it felt like and looked more like a refugee camp. Everything was temporary, just thrown together like a FEMA camp. It felt very surreal.” Experiences within these centers are marked by and often described by advocates as being, in some way, “surreal”. The physical space of the Karnes center, in contrast, existed long before the Dilley center and was simply converted from an adult detention center to a family center. As a result, the Karnes facility projects a more ordinary image,

composed of a building which, to many, resembles an American elementary school. The building is full of long concrete hallways and tile floors. Unlike the Dilley facility, the Karnes center offers a more permanent visage. As many advocates attest, though, both project surreal images.

Mary, an immigration lawyer from Colorado who visited Dilley around the time of the presidential election said she often found herself at a “loss for words” when trying to explain the facility to those back home. “It’s really hard to describe,” she said, “and that’s the reason why all of this is such a challenge to begin with. I mean, it’s in the middle of Texas, in the middle of nowhere, and it’s there for a reason. It’s because people can’t see it and can’t understand the problem.” Mary’s comments reflect the significance of these facilities’ physical locations in space. Though Dow (2004) illustrates the ways in which some migrant detention facilities remain publicly ‘invisible’ despite being located within cities, deploying Solzhenitsyn’s (1974) concept of the “gulag archipelago”, many migrant detention centers today are located in rural communities, far from even the urban periphery, adding to the layers of invisibility (Noguchi 2019). Some, like students in the University of Texas at Austin’s Architecture Department, have drawn important attention to this connection between Texas detention centers’ locations and barriers to necessary legal resources.^{xxi} Many detainees are consequently consigned to ‘legal deserts’ (Burrige and Gill 2016), denied the availability of assistance with claims more readily afforded to those within or around urban areas (Libal et al. 2012). In more than one respect, this recalls Hayden’s (1995) assessment that the city has a “hinterland” of dependent places.^{xxii} These sorts of constraints are demonstrated by the Dilley and Karnes facilities, both of which are located just over an hour’s drive from the closest city of San Antonio. These facilities are unreachable by public transit, something that I, as someone who grew up in rural Texas, was not surprised by but unfortunately caught many legal advocates who come from a more urban background by surprise. This quality negatively impacts legal advocates and visitors of those detained in these centers who do not themselves own vehicles. Legal advocates

often resolved this issue through carpooling with other advocates, while visitors sometimes must resort to using taxis to drive the distance from urban locales. The distance from predominantly urban-located legal aid is one of the reasons why the project serving the Dilley center employed a team of staff to live within the town of Dilley. This is not so for the advocates serving the Karnes facility, who make the drive from San Antonio, the location of the main RAICES office, on a daily basis.

Within the walls of the facility, legal advocates are only allowed to enter a few spaces: the area where they meet with clients, which is generally off-set from the rest of the center; areas where facility staff allow advocates to lead legal presentations on certain occasions; the mock “court” area; and the area in which interviews take place. They are not allowed beyond these areas, and their knowledge of the rest of the center often rests on the ability of others who can traverse these spaces to share this information. This ability has been offered to NGOs, journalists, ambassadors, and others who visit the center, and yet, despite repeated requests from legal advocates to ‘tour’ other parts of the center, it has only in the rarest of circumstances been permitted to them.

There is a similar barrier with respect to image-taking in and around these facilities. While some have been allowed to capture images within these centers, legal advocates are denied this right and have been threatened with punitive repercussions, potentially being banned from re-entry if they were to do so.^{xxiii} In response, advocates have used other forms of representation, such as maps and drawings, to depict these centers. As such in these chapters, I have frequently deployed artistic renderings of my own, despite my lack of artistic ability, most commonly using the most convenient media available: legal pads. With permission, I have also included those artistic creations of other advocates, and even those of detainees, that represent these spaces. I have used photographs that were taken outside of the facilities prior to a ban that was instituted by the administration that disallowed the taking of photos even in this extended space. Lastly, I have included photographs of

the spaces around the work of these advocates, from the spaces in which they live to the towns in which these facilities reside. Visual representations are important for mapping facilities like these that are hidden, in many different ways, from public scrutiny as well as for contesting that which is “purposefully made invisible” (Kohn 2016:4).

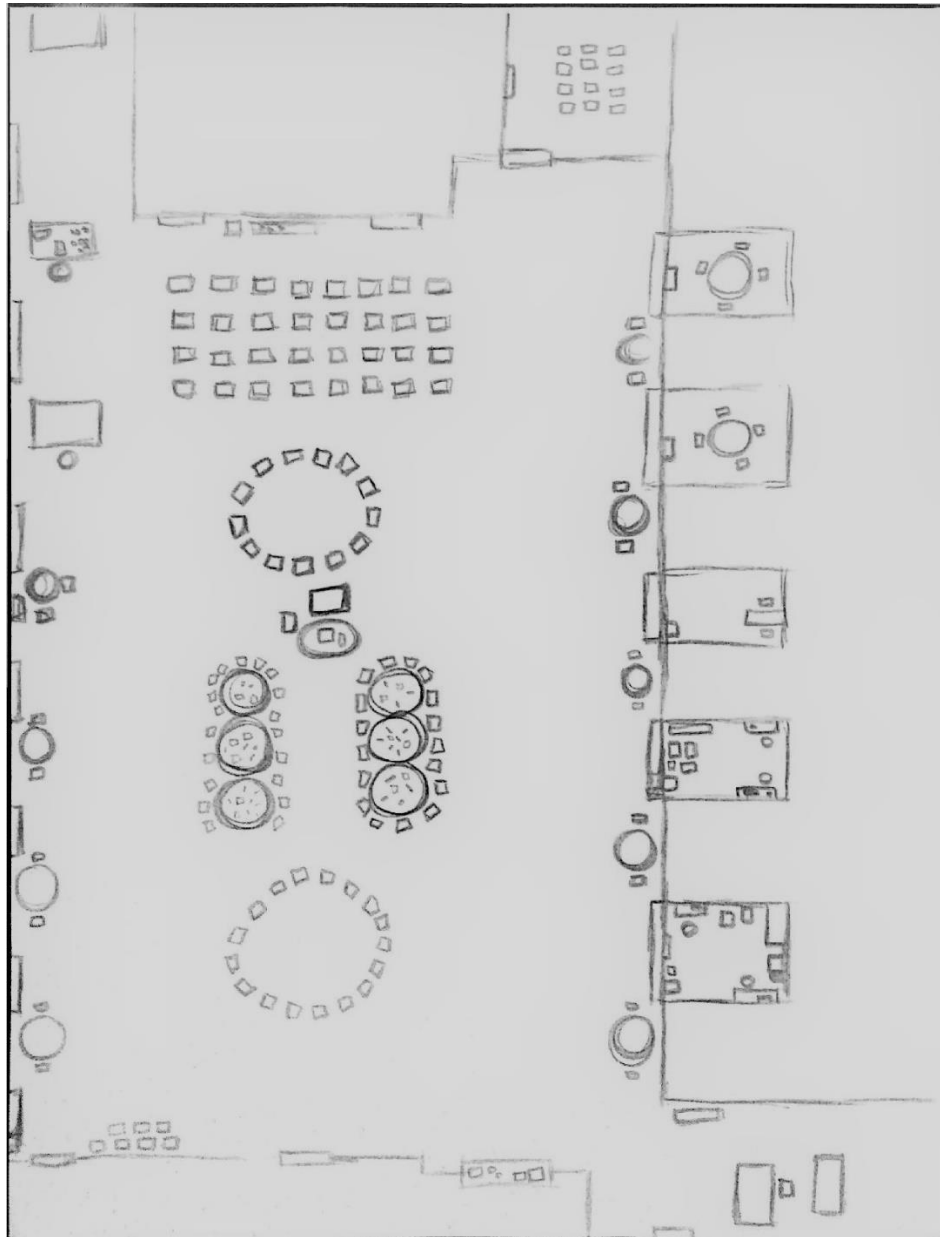


Image 10: Elevated rendering of Dilley ‘visitation trailer’ layout. Meeting rooms line the edges from left to right, while ‘charla’ and intake tables and chairs fill the center. Entrances are at lower right and upper left corner. Artist credit: author

Advocates spend nearly the entirety of their time at the facility within one particular area or building known as the legal visitation area or simply ‘visitation’. The space in which advocates meet with clients at both centers doubles as a space for legal and non-legal visits (for the rare few who have family or friend visitors). The set-up of these spaces at Dilley and Karnes differ significantly, despite having certain broad similarities. At Dilley, the visitation area is in a raised mobile trailer connected to the security trailer and main entrance by a grated metal walkway. This area is essentially one large, rectangular room, with individual private rooms, including a designated office space or spaces for advocates, lining the longest walls. At each end of the building, flanking the exits/entrances, are desks staffed with guards. As clients enter, they sign in, inform the guards of their reason for coming, and offer up their plastic IDs until leaving. As advocates enter, they sign in—for the second time following the security trailer—and inform all guards of their ID numbers. At the back end of the trailer is a ‘play area’ for children who arrive with their mothers. In this essentially unsupervised room are a few coloring books with broken pieces of crayons, plastic toys and blocks scattered about the carpeted floor and low tables, and a tv which plays one or two movies on a loop, sometimes dubbed in Spanish. Within the large room are several round desks and plastic chairs. These are arranged and re-arranged all day to fit the needs of each group gathering. For instance, when a group of women arrive for ‘intake’, they arrange the chairs in a small circle, where the advocate will lead an information session first, then arrange the round tables nearby, at which clients will sit and fill out intake paperwork. Covering the walls are various documents, some which outline the dressing and behavioral rules of the facility, offer information for clients about using phone services and hair salon hours, and display child-like posters meant to inform youth about “inappropriate touching”. Around particular American holidays, these walls are covered in festive décor, from construction paper hearts and fat turkey legs to Mother’s Day streamers and plastic Uncle Sam hats.

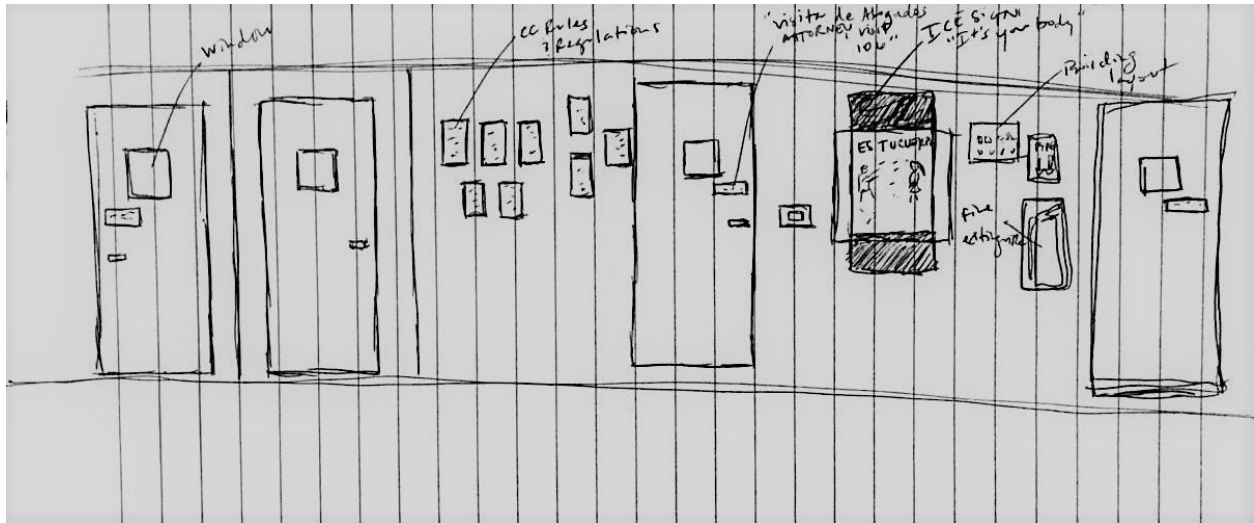


Image 11: Rendering of entrance to private meeting rooms at Dilley facility. Artist credit: author

The visitation area of the Karnes center possesses some of these qualities, though is also quite different. This room is located near the end of a hall within the facility's main entrance building and is considerably smaller than the space at Dilley. The space has one desk at which a GEO guard sits directly in front of a door through which detainees come to meet with advocates. Unlike Dilley, the detainees at Karnes must wait in a smaller, enclosed waiting area before being allowed in to meet with advocates. The configuration of space in this particular way creates certain barriers to providing legal care to the detainees that do not exist in spaces like Dilley. Once the guard has properly vetted the detainee waiting in this area, they allow them entry to the meeting space. At times, if a detainee did not have an appointment with advocates 'scheduled', guards would turn them away, sometimes without first alerting advocates. Guards' rules and everyday practices around this changed frequently, often negatively impacting the ability of advocates to meet with their clients.

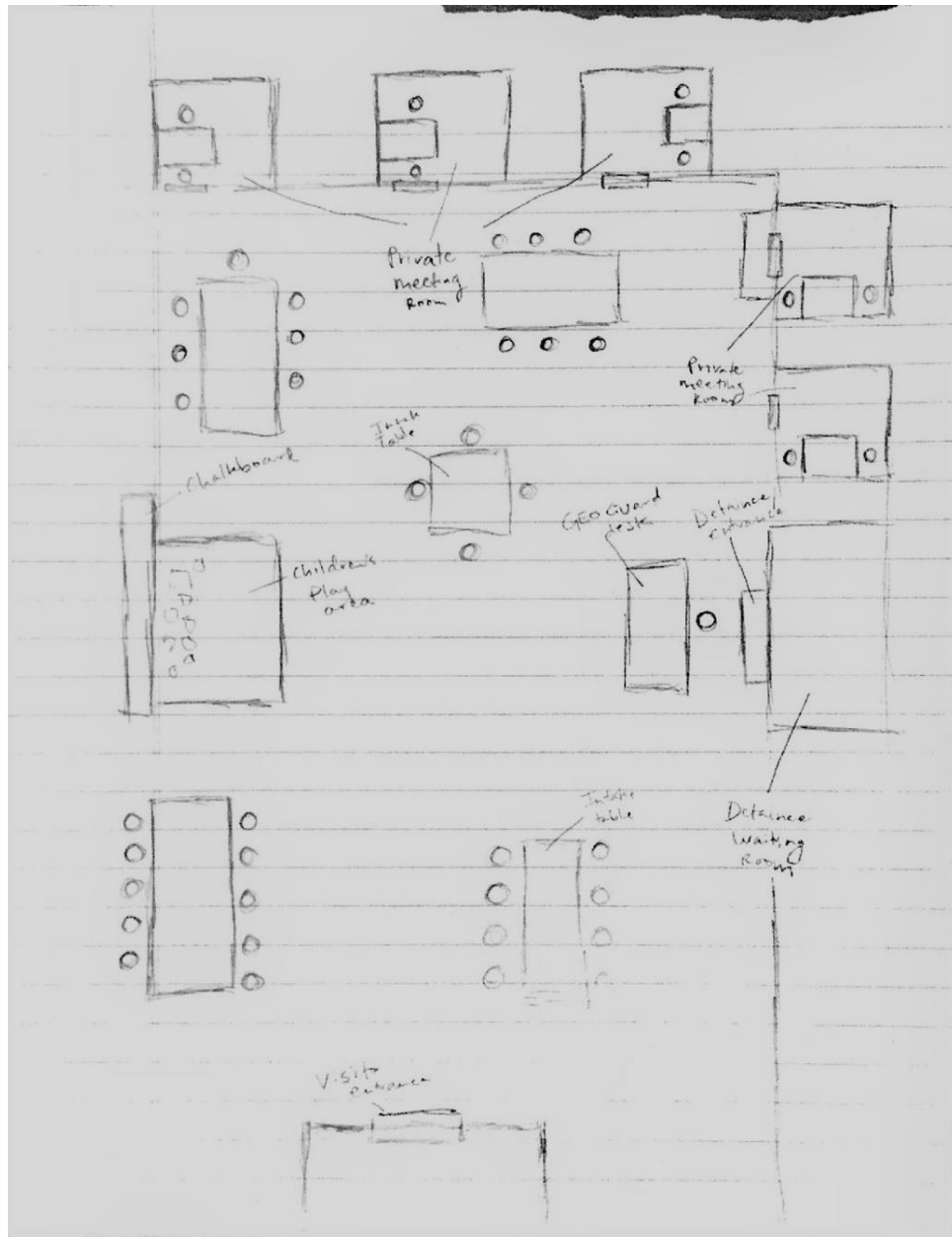


Image 12: Elevated rendering of Karnes visitation area layout. Meeting rooms line the furthest walls from the visitor entrance, while 'charla' and intake tables and chairs fill the center, along with the children's play area and guard's desk. Entrances are at lower and right center. Artist credit: author

This space itself is, like Dilley, long, tiled, rectangular, and entirely cut off from the rest of the facility. Unlike Dilley, the visitation space in Karnes had only one small window to the outside world, which, at times could make the work days feel somewhat nebulous; as one project staff member remarked sarcastically about this: "Time flies when you can't see the sun". Within the space, there is a collection of large and small tables and five private meeting rooms. Each of these

rooms are considerably less private than those in Dilley, however, as they have large glass windows on the outward-facing walls, allowing those passing by or standing outside to easily peer in. This affects the work, as it serves to create an atmosphere more replete with disruptions to the exceedingly intimate conversations that take place between advocates and clients within. Across from the guard's desk is a rectangular cut of green carpet on which sits a collection of children's toys: plastic trucks, a wooden bead-maze, a miniature toy oven with a grocery basket of plastic foods. This is used by the many children who accompany their mothers to meetings with advocates, like in Dilley, and cannot sit through the lengthy periods in which their mothers fill out paperwork or speak privately with advocates. The concrete walls are sparsely decorated with a few informative documents about legal rights; blocky, childish framed artwork; and a large, chalk-less chalkboard which was added to the room halfway through my fieldwork. Above the chalkboard rests a flat screen tv, which the guard uses throughout the day to flip between children's cartoons and news channels.



Image 13: Rendering of view of part of the inside of the Dilley facility, from the perspective of one of the private meeting rooms in the 'visitation' trailer. Artist credit: author

Sense

In addition to considering the physical qualities which make up these environments, Hall's (2012) work draws our attention to the ways that a focus on affect and emotion illuminates our understanding of migrant detention more generally. She advocates the use of affect and emotion as analytical tools for this space, noting the ways in which they "supplement abstract accounts" of the infamously exclusionary Agambenian (1998) "camp" (17). Only through 'moving inside' the detention center are we truly able to make sense of its realities: "While the secure detention centre brings to mind the rationalized, ordered regimes of the disciplinary spaces described by Foucault...the mechanisms of secure detention are always shot through with affective, emotional and symbolic concerns," (21). Emotion and affect, then, are already understood to be integral to the workings of the detention facility, thus readily available for analysis. Ultimately, Hall argues, an

attention to such things “offers a way of going beyond the abject space,” (31). Hall’s comments here also draw attention to the ways in which the carceral space is imagined by publics and, consequently, how an attention to affect and emotion can reform these images. As this chapter shows, my informal conversations and interviews with advocates reflect these spatial reimaginings.

Patricia was a retired commercial lawyer living in Evanston, Illinois when we met during her volunteer stint in Dilley. I asked her to describe what it felt like to be at the center and do this work. “So, I went on a business trip to India a couple of years ago...” she started. “Before I went, a cousin of mine, whose husband is Indian, tried to prepare me for the trip, telling me that going there is like a full-on, 24/7 assault on your senses. It’s the best of what you can imagine and the worst of what you can imagine. It’s the most colorful, the kindest, it smells the best, it’s the most beautiful, and it’s also the meanest, and the poorest...it’s just all there in the same moment. I feel like Dilley is a little like that. It’s like these awesomely wonderful things are happening and at the same time, it’s kind of a nightmare. You see children that can still laugh, which makes your heart sing, but they’re consoling their mothers who are crying, telling you their story. It’s just the juxtaposition of everything, in this very intense encapsulated environment.”

Patricia’s quick response, as simultaneously poignant and hyperbolic as it was, offered contrast to the ways in which many advocates responded. During our conversations, advocates often initially hesitated when I asked them to describe what it was like to be inside the center. When I would ask them what they expected to experience that first day of work on Monday, I would first receive a familiar refrain: “I don’t know what I expected, but it wasn’t that”. Eventually, however, they would come to describe the senses which shaped their experiences and perceptions of the place: the sights, sounds, bodily affects, and even smells which formed some of the most lasting impressions of the centers. This section examines the sensations which come to define these places for advocates.

Advocates' reflections upon the material qualities of the space of the center, particularly initially, generally fall into two opposing categories: those that perceive the center to be 'nicer' than they would expect or expected, and those who are disturbed by the center's environment. In their comments, most share some element of both of these opinions, as if these perceptions lie at opposite ends of the same spectrum. Advocates arrive, surprised that the center is not more 'jail-like'—meaning it resists their imagined perceptions or actual experience of carceral space—but then quickly come to perceive it as punitive, recognizing the harmful connections between these centers and other carceral spaces. Some are even disturbed by the fact that the center has this sort of gentle appearance. As their experiences continue, however, advocates rarely, if ever, maintain the opinion that the functioning of the facility is not particularly harmful to the detainees.

"I wasn't expecting it to look like an elementary school annex," Samantha, an undergraduate from Maryland, tells me. "In terms of the trailer, I definitely expected it to look worse. But standing outside, watching the busses go in and out, seeing the surveillance cameras, it just hit me: this is a jail." Other advocates compared the appearance of the facilities to schools, particularly those who spent time at the Karnes center, which more closely resembles such places. Laura, an intern for the project at the Karnes center, shared Samantha's sentiment in certain respects: "It was a lot better than I expected. With the way that you get prepped to go in, talking about walking through metal detectors and everything, I had this crazy idea of what it was. I honestly thought it would be more chaotic than it was; that it would be this madhouse with everyone running around, you know? But you go in there and it's not a madhouse. There's a play area for the kids. Maybe it's because GEO prides itself on being so clean. Plus, I don't really see the rest of the facility. You go there and go into one room and stay there all day. I don't really know what [the rest of the facility] is like."

Laura's reference to the significance of 'cleanliness' for the corporation which owns and manages the Karnes facility is an important topic that will be returned to in Chapter 3. Her

comment about the apparent ‘order’ within the center is also quite important. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the work of advocates plays a role in the construction of order at these centers, placing advocates in complex positions. While Laura herself does not imply that this order, or rather lack of chaos, is attributable to the advocates and their work, they have played a role in this. Over time, the projects that have organized this aid work have built and rebuilt relationships with facility administrators while also refining their processes around helping these clients. In this way, through the work they have done to create productive relationships and working structures, the environment has become less chaotic than it once was.

Those who have served with these projects over the years reflect back on what legal advocacy in family detention used to look like and how it used to feel. Particularly those advocates who visited the family detention center in Artesia, New Mexico speak this way. They speak of chaos and an even more deeply unwelcoming environment, both for legal advocates and detainees. They tell stories of having to sneak in phones to make legally necessary outside calls because the centers did not allow detainees to make outside calls. They talk about how they had to get names and ‘A’ (for ‘alien’) numbers of detainees clandestinely from others that they met with in order to continue providing services, simply because administrators would not allow them to meet with potential clients without identifying information, which they could not access. For these and other reasons, the Artesia family detention center carries with it a sort of mythic quality amongst advocates involved in family detention advocacy; its very name is carried on by the massive list serv through which all those who have volunteered with these projects communicate about family detention-related issues.^{xxiv} As mentioned in the introduction, those who volunteered in the early days at Dilley lament the fact that they would have to simply show up at the center and wait in the lobby of the security trailer, day after day, until they were finally allowed inside, as it was their legal right to have

access to detained persons but were repeatedly denied. Over time, in part due to the persistence of their physical presence, the relationship between legal advocates and facility administrators shifted.

While it was common to hear this refrain about the ‘niceness’ of the facility, some advocates immediately focused on the exclusionary and controlling qualities of the atmosphere. Angela, an advocate from Juarez who had spent time volunteering in border safehouses, was one of the rare few who expected the opposite: an environment that was more like the safehouses in which she had spent so much time. She, like others, arrived at similar conclusions: “This is the only detention center I’ve ever been to, and I had this completely different idea before of what it was. The safehouses are nothing like this. I thought this would be a more relaxed environment than it is, like I thought we were going to have real access to them. I didn’t know we were going to be stuck in this trailer, that we couldn’t interact with them normally. That’s what killed me the most: how much of a prison it is. It’s not a detention center; it’s just a jail. It’s just a nice name for a jail.” Angela’s expectations regarding having “real access” to their clients references the constraints placed on the relations between clients and advocates and their strictly controlled movement within the facility. These qualities were what quickly differentiated this space from others intending to shelter migrants.

Still others struggled to make this connection between prisons or jails and the centers. Some had done work in jails or prisons in the U.S. previously and were quick to remark on how these spaces differed significantly, particularly in the relative freedom detainees had to move throughout them. Rebecca, an immigration attorney who had a wealth of experience working in immigrant detention, characterized Dilley as “less than a prison”, but that there were certain “prison conditions that served as reminders that you’re still in a detention center, like that they’re not free to go.” Like other advocates, of course, she affirms that while it is indeed a sort of carceral facility, it’s “still a lot better than a lot of other detention centers [she’s] been to. Those,” she says, “functioned more like jails.”

Mia, a young journalist from NYC who stopped in Dilley on her way to do research in Mexico, found this seeming liminality to be just what was so unsettling about the place. “I think the conditions in Dilley are shocking,” she said, “not because it’s like a jail but because it’s really in-between. It’s a little bit too much like an office, at least in the part that we were in, to seem like a jail, and yet people are stuck inside. It doesn’t look as hideous as a jail, but it has that sort of monotony that I think comes with jails. The fact that guards are kind of lounging around with their matching red collared shirts is what makes it just like tolerable enough for the general public. It’s still very horrible, but it’s not at least visibly as detestable as the inside of a prison in a way that would shut it down automatically.”

Mia focuses on a few important ideas about the visual qualities of these spaces that serve the purposes of this dissertation. She recognizes, as some do, that these facilities are situated in a strange position; they are not quite prisons, but they certainly do incarcerate individuals and share many qualities of prisons. They reside somewhere in-between. Dow (2005) examines this common characteristic of immigrant detention when he reflects on how such liminal positioning affects the experiences of those held within, questioning: “What must it mean to be held in a prison for weeks or months, even for a decade or more, and to be told by the administrative agency renting bed space for you that you are not a prisoner?”(17). Recognizing the importance of his question, I explore the ways in which this ambiguous identity—which often and in various ways attempts to align itself with care—challenges the work of legal advocates inside. Mia’s comments also reflect how the staff of these facilities, whom advocates call ‘guards’, consistently draw the gaze of advocates, often serving as sort of figures which embody the facility’s carceral identity.^{xxv} She further draws important attention to this relationship between a visual public palatability and the facilities’, thus family detention’s, continued existence.

Sounds also play an important role in the experience of this work and these spaces. The most prominent and impressionable sounds derived from the children in the center. Children crying, laughing, running, playing with toys or with one another were sounds that consistently filled the air. One of most common refrains from volunteers when speaking about what disturbed them from this experience had to do with listening to the sounds of babies crying. Mothers frequently arrived at the visitation trailer with their children. In Dilley, while a daycare center of sorts exists inside the facility, there are many practical limitations to its proper functioning. There is a strict limitation to the number of children allowed in the daycare at any one time, a number which is far lower than the actual population at the center. If a child displays signs of illness, they are not allowed within, and, of course, the daycare is only open for a limited number of hours during the day. Older children go to classes during certain hours, but even they may remain with their mothers during her legal meetings as they may have their own asylum claims, particularly if they are teenagers or pre-teens.

Because of all this, children, and especially young children, are frequently at their mother's side, even when she needs to meet with legal advocates to speak about her asylum claim. Because these small children are so often with their mothers, often forced to wait for long periods while they fill out paperwork, wait to meet with advocates, or have long conversations with those advocates, the sound of babies crying is not only common but, at times, can be overwhelmingly cacophonous.

The soundscape was shaped dramatically by the population numbers of both advocates and detainees. When the detainee population would dip to a low count—in Dilley, for instance, the population could range from nearly 1,000 one month to half that the next—the dominant sounds of the facility would change. Advocates would rarely hear the sound of crying babies, though they could more clearly hear the whir of the printers, the swish of overflowing copies drifting to the floor, and the squeak of guard's boots pacing across tiles. When the population of detainees would increase, sounds could grow to almost deafening levels. Multiple babies would cry all at once; young

children would laugh and run and play, sometimes falling on the slick floor and screaming out tears. Beneath the crying and laughing, one could hear the looped video playing in the children's playroom. For months, advocates listened to the songs of Disney's *Frozen* sung over and over throughout entire days, sometimes in Spanish, others in English. While at the Karnes facility, the number of individuals in the room on any given day does not nearly reach the amount in Dilley, the volume of sounds could certainly rival those in Dilley. One of the notable additions to the soundscape in Karnes is that of a loudspeaker which projects messages from facility guards directed at other staff, detainees, or to the general populace. The announcer would request that such-and-such person 'report' to such-and-such area of the facility or that such-and-such activity would be starting at such-and-such time. These messages occurred frequently and were projected at such a volume that trying to continue conversation throughout them was strained, at best. Such sudden sounds joined the vast landscape of distractions in the center. Sounds, and their seemingly unpredictable fluctuations in volume, affect both the work and the feelings of volunteers. Often, the increase of the volume of sounds accompanied moments in which the space was meeting its maximum capacity and when the work became particularly frenzied, producing a confluence of strong emotions and noises.



I left the building and stepped out onto the metal bridge that connects the security trailer to the legal visitation trailer. I left because my body was actually hurting from the cold inside the legal trailer. You step out onto the metal bridge and feel the intense heat, which works wonders on a body that feels nearly frozen in place. The heat of the sun (without a single wisp of a cloud in the sky) melts your icy body, loosening the tightened muscles. I've often stood out there to cry, when I needed it. I could've gone to my car for more privacy, but I didn't want to have to go through security yet again. The privacy isn't worth the nuisance of re-entering. You don't have to stand out there too long before you've hit that other extreme, feeling the nascent burn on your shoulders and the suffocating heat that reminds you that your sweater and stockings aren't welcome out here. The brief pause outside did its job; I've defrosted, so I step back inside the trailer and get back to work.



Speaking to advocates about their experiences of the detention center either directly or indirectly involves the topic of the body, including both their own and the bodies of others in the facility. I, myself, produced many fieldnotes—like that above—in which my own bodily sensations seemed to force themselves into a prominent position. In these spaces, advocates experience a reorientation of their bodies in different ways. One of the first ways they experience this involves the security procedures of the center. Advocates learn how to move through this initial trailer: when and how they are allowed to pass through; where to place things and where not to; which documents to give and to whom. Other widely experienced bodily affects involve the extreme temperatures inside the centers and the constant exposure to illness (exacerbated by the temperatures). The temperature of the buildings at both Dilley and Karnes is maintained at an extremely low degree—even during the comfortably cool winter months in South Texas and despite repeated requests to facility staff to change this—requiring advocates to wear multiple layers of clothing to maintain their long hours at work.

When entering the security trailer, one notices the signs posted to the entry door warning of exposure to illnesses inside, like chickenpox. These signs are posted elsewhere throughout the facility and have been unchanged since I began coming as a volunteer in 2015. All children at the centers are given multiple vaccinations when they arrive, forcibly. Many children and even babies are given several shots all at once, causing them pain and for some, substantial pain. Young children who would accompany their mothers to the legal trailer would sometimes cry out from the pain, their mothers then gently lifting up their folds of clothing to show advocates the multiple shot sites along their tiny legs. Even with these seemingly extreme precautions against transmitting illnesses, children and their mothers are frequently sick and the severity of these sicknesses range. Many, we believed, became ill at least in part due to the conditions they experienced at the *hieleras/perreras*. The *hieleras* (ice boxes, for their cold temperatures) and *perreras* (dog pounds, for their gated holding

areas), as they have come to be known by many, are ICE detention facilities where asylum-seekers are held for briefer periods of time before being transferred to longer-term detention facilities, like Dilley and Karnes, for families, or adult centers, for single adults. These facilities were known to have extremely harsh conditions, even potentially leading to deaths of those detained (Gómez 2018). Many mothers and children we met with in Dilley and Karnes had been traumatized after even only 1 or 2 days in these facilities, and they were a frequent point of distressing conversation in our meetings with them. At the mere mention of them, many women would start to cry, while some would toss their hands up in the air, beginning long diatribes about the awfulness they endured there.

Medical professionals employed by the facility, as we were told every day by clients, repeatedly dismissed their health concerns, disregarding unwell children and parents and often suggesting that mothers simply feed sick children honey and water (Costantini 2015) or that their bodies only needed to “adjust to American foods”. These inadequacies in medical care—forms of ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 2005) mimicking, in certain respects, larger trends in the medical care of prisoners in the U.S.—will be returned to in subsequent chapters as it has deeply impacted the work of the advocates and their relationships with facility administrators.

In addition to this, a majority of advocates I met throughout my time there became ill while working in the center. Their illnesses also ranged in severity, with some having to visit hospitals for treatment. I became ill numerous times throughout the year. As a result of the constant need for help at the facility, illness was rarely something that deterred advocates from showing up for work. Because of its ubiquity in both the experiences of the detainees and the advocates, sickness was an omnipresent point of conversation. Often my recorded interviews included the sounds of coughing, sneezing, sniffing. Illness was easy to come by in the facility for several reasons; the fact that the drinking water was likely contaminated; that the work was extremely emotionally and physically

demanding, requiring long hours inside an extremely cold facility on little rest; and that there was constant direct exposure to sick detainees contributed to the easy and repetitive spread of illnesses. This emphasizes the ways in which, again, the experiences of detainees are in certain ways shared with the legal advocates, due in no small part to the intimacy through which they worked together. The visual, aural, and bodily experiences of these facilities—which have been only introduced here—reflect some of the different forms an embodied intimacy with the space itself is made manifest.

Time

In my interviews and informal conversations with legal advocates, I would rarely ask them explicit questions about time or their sense of it in doing this work, and yet it always inevitably played a leading role in their interpretations of their experiences of the work and the space. In this section, I will focus on: the role time plays in how the work is performed; advocates' various, and sometimes conflicting, perceptions of it while doing the work; and the feelings that are evinced alongside these perceptions of time. I will also begin to explore the ways in which these experiences of time represent competing temporalities between different groups—from advocates to detainees to facility administrators—demonstrating how these differences serve to constrain the advocates' daily efforts.

Fassin reminds us that “the world of prison is a space-time existence—a confined space for a specified length of time. It is this dual dimension that demarcates the inmates' world. This is what defines the concrete sense of the punishment. Being a prisoner boils down to this: being confined in a space and being constrained in time,” (2016:108). Much of this dissertation is meant to demonstrate the many ways in which the experiences of the legal advocates run parallel, while being characteristically distinct from, the experiences of the detainees with whom they work while in the facility. While advocates' perceptions and feelings of time can, in certain ways, reflect this shared

experience, this section, perhaps much more so than others, will show the ways in which their feelings and perceptions run counter to those commonly experienced by immigrant detainees. While for the detained prisoner, time can feel as if passing slowly, for the legal advocate, it can often feel as if there is never enough time to do the things they need to do. In this unique way, though, their experience runs parallel to that of the ‘inmate’, in that they are also, as Fassin says, “confined in a space and...constrained in time”.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, one of the reasons time is such a complicated concept with respect to family detention is the *Flores Settlement Agreement*.^{xxvi} This 1997 court decision ultimately made the case that children could not be held in detention but for only brief periods of time—in the agreement’s terms, to be released “without necessary delay”—which, again, came to be interpreted as not longer than 20 days. For the majority of my time at the centers in Texas, the average length of stay for detainees was a month, not including the time they spent detained in ICE facilities at the border.

The *Flores* decision directly affects the ways in which legal advocacy operates at family detention centers. There are many steps to the process of helping clients prepare their cases, know their legal rights, and prepare for the continuation of those cases outside of detention, and there are hundreds of clients to be served each day. In contrast, each week rarely has more than 20 advocates working inside the center, serving all these clients. At the Karnes facility, this is far fewer, both in terms of clients and advocates. Because each of these clients will move quickly through all of the processes of the center, advocates need to work fast to make sure that clients are properly prepared and knowledgeable about their rights, and that their health and well-being are being attended to throughout their time there. Being so attentive to individual clients is challenging when the process moves so quickly and the number of advocates is so vastly overwhelmed by the need. As this

dissertation will demonstrate, this is also deeply affected by the consistent caring ineptitude of the government and facilities' administrators.

As a result of this, time, from the advocates' perspectives, often feels as if moving at light-speed. Carolyn, a lawyer from Colorado, used her experience working on the recent Clinton campaign to describe what time feels like while doing this work. It's like working on a campaign, she tells me, in that it "parallels the constant need for work and the constant need for volunteers. I mean literally, there wasn't a moment where you're like 'oh, I'm just going to check my email or update my status on Facebook', that's ridiculous. You're just like 'no, no, I've got to get this noted as quickly as possible because someone else is waiting to talk to me'. You're just moving constantly." Every minute of the day sees crowds of women and children waiting in the open area to speak with an advocate individually or to sit in on a *charla*—an information sharing session directed by an advocate to a group of clients—or to do paperwork. For those advocates who are especially skilled with language abilities or an immigration legal background, time moves even faster as they are kept consistently busy for hours upon end, rarely taking breaks to even eat or go to the bathroom. Some forget to do these things, preoccupied with the needs of their clients and the tasks that need to be accomplished. Advocates have to run to catch up with their clients at court or in their interviews, hurriedly grabbing laptops or notebooks, while others sit at a desk for the full day speaking to client after client, hearing story after story, until the time comes for all to leave for the day. The whiplash of such experiences of time in the center take their emotional toll, and this often is not felt or understood by advocates until the work has ceased.

It is important to note the different ways in which weekly or temporary volunteers' experiences of time differ from those of project staff. Indeed, the entire experience of the work and the place differs greatly between these two groups, leading to very distinctly interesting reflections on such experiences. Because staff remain in their roles for months or even years and because they

are ultimately responsible for all aspects of the project's daily work, time is considered on both a longer and shorter scale. Project staff work on time-consuming and labor-intensive cases, appeals for negative interview decisions, and work that involves constant communication with facility administrators and off-the-ground members of the project. They document issues and occurrences on-the-ground to share with these other project members in legal work outside of detention, serving the project's other goals of bringing about the end of family detention and making sure those who absolutely should not be in detention (for medical reasons, for instance) will get out. This meant that project staff frequently appeared glued to their laptops, though always responding to confused volunteers' questions and requests for help. Time for staff, then, was broken down into even smaller increments. They needed all they could get to do the great number of things that needed to be accomplished in a single day, which was why they were so rarely seen not hurriedly working, running from one crisis to the next.

One of the most important ways in which time is considered is in relation to the sense of 'emergency' which is conjured through the work. "It seems to me that the whole system in which [the advocates] operate in is like a triage system, it's like an emergency room. Just constantly running from one potential disaster or real disaster to the next," George says. George, a non-immigration lawyer from New York, was far from the only person to characterize the work and space in this way. Advocates used varying language to describe this effect, but many used similar terms. This sense of emergency reflects a confluence of both time and the space itself; while time is sped up, as if in an emergency situation, there are also sensorial elements that reflect this as well, from the crowd of women and children consistently filling up the room, waiting to be helped, to the constant sounds of crying babies.

Scholars have noted the ways in which the work of both humanitarian and carceral entities tends to cohere around crises, or a shared sense of emergency provoking their involvement in

‘managing’ such issues. The perception of emergency or crisis is central to both the instigation and continuation of humanitarian and carceral work. Not only do these two forms of labor effectively operate as responses to perceived emergencies—at times simultaneously to the same crises, such as with substantial refugee migrations—they also both serve to create ‘imaginaries’ around particular events as crises. It is helpful to think about these events through the terms provided by ‘social imaginaries’ which, as Taylor (2002) offers, concern “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations,” (106). Calhoun (2010) demonstrates how specific events become constructed as humanitarian emergencies, calling out for humanitarian responses. This is certainly the case with family detention legal advocacy. For Calhoun, the core features of humanitarian emergencies are that they are sudden, unpredictable, and urgent exceptions to the normal order, and that they are constituted by a sense of neutrality; such action in response to these emergencies is based on a perception of “ethical obligation to a common humanity” (3).

More recently, many scholars have also shown how humanitarian entities often play a role in managing the various crises involving refugee or asylum-seeking groups (e.g. Agier and Fernbach 2011). These scholars have demonstrated how state-manufactured perceptions of crises can be reified by the involvement of humanitarian entities. Comments, like George’s, do liken the work and the space to an emergency; however, they also reflect a more layered understanding of the production of that emergency. For these advocates, this environment, this emergency, is one produced by the state’s very actions. While most affirm the idea that there is a sort of crisis being produced by gang, intimate partner, and political violence that has resulted in large numbers of particularly women and children fleeing these countries, the environment of emergency which so many advocates reflect upon is that which is made by the government through harmful processes of

detention. To start, the large influx of asylum-seeking families arriving at the Mexico-U.S. border in 2014, being deemed by the government as a crisis allowed for the creation of these carceral facilities. Scholars note that framing this event as a crisis “proved a reliable fuel to bolster enforcement-oriented responses in the forms of detention and the off-shoring of asylum (Mountz and Hiemstra 2013)” (Lloyd and Mountz 2018: 220). Furthermore, the manner in which detained individuals are treated, uninformed about their rights or why they are incarcerated in the first place, and the unpredictable nature of processes at the facility manifest a chaotic environment. Those advocates attempting to provide aid bear witness to and are forced to navigate, and thus, in a way manage, this crisis. The emergency is thusly borne not only out of crises abroad but those produced domestically as well.

Geographers of migrant detention have noted the ways in which such spaces are simultaneously, and somewhat paradoxically, marked by their relationships with both mobility and waiting, or a sense of ‘stillness’ (Gill 2009; Mountz et al 2012). This was especially evident in family detention. While time in family detention generally felt strained, as if there was far too little of it to accomplish necessary tasks, waiting was a significant element of the advocate and detainees experience. This sense was particularly pronounced in work at the Karnes facility, as the structure of meetings between advocates and clients was different than at Dilley. At both facilities, there are no ways for advocates to directly reach clients, other than through facility staff or through the detainees themselves. This was a significant barrier between advocates and clients; at Karnes, this often left advocates waiting to see particular clients for hours at a time. Advocates would constantly check in with the facility staff member tasked with locating clients only to receive common refrains: “We don’t know where they are”, they would say, or “we’re looking, but we can’t find them”. The irony of a deeply securitized space being unable to maintain knowledge of the whereabouts of their inmates would have been comical for advocates had it not so negatively impacted their ability to give

care to their clients. Invariably, and for the advocates quite suspiciously, clients would always be “found” by facility staff, though it too frequently meant that they would arrive at the legal area towards the end of the workday, when advocates were forced to leave the center. Not only did this interfere with a productive work-flow—meaning that large groups of clients would arrive all at one time towards the end of the day, all to be helped by only a few advocates—but it also interfered with assisting many clients who needed immediate attention. Some of those clients would have interviews or court hearings scheduled on that same day, and instead of, per their requests, calling up these clients to meet with advocates prior to these appointments, which could mean a world of difference to their cases, facility staff would only locate these clients after these appointments had occurred. Such repetitive actions played a significant role in the emotional work of the advocates, often frustrated by circumstances that were beyond their control and that felt as if punitive, but ultimately unable to truly express that frustration and anger.

The ways in which advocates, including myself, perceived this all-too-common behavior by the guards—forcing both advocates and detainees to wait for services—as an intentional act to delay or disturb encounters between advocates and detainees reflect what Auyero (2012) refers to as “daily lessons of political subordination”. While Auyero focuses on the manner in which disenfranchised or minoritized individuals experience this waiting, in the context of the family detention center, we can see how this seeming punishment spreads to those who wish to aid or associate themselves with those individuals as well. The consistency of the failure to locate individuals for critical meetings with legal advocates implies an intentionality rather than mere ineptitude.

This specific form of encounter between guards and legal advocates—which lies at the intersection between senses of space and time—demonstrates just one of the ways in which the fraught relationship between facility administrators and advocates takes shape. Chapters 3 and 4 will further demonstrate how taking into account the complex nature of this relationship is necessary for

understanding the ways in which power and care are asserted and contested between administrators and advocates on a daily basis.

Care, Cooper (2018) notes, is “intimately bound to temporality”; time, she argues, is “needed to watch relationships unfold,” (126). Time is also, of course, a mechanism for control and punishment (Cooper 2018; Munn 1992), and this is especially evidenced in and around carceral spaces. Caring relationships between advocates and detainees in family detention are not denied by the severe limits placed on their time together, but their relationships, as well as the relationships advocates have with administrative actors, are shaped by the paradoxical constraints of time in such spaces. Thus, understanding how advocates’ care is constructed and moves throughout these facilities requires such temporal orientation. It also, strangely, calls for an understanding of the disorienting effects within.

Disorientation

“Welcome to baby jail!” Mark says loudly, his arms outstretched to showcase the wide room before us. I was sitting at a roundtable in the open area, facing our entrance to the legal trailer, waiting to be informed of just what I should be doing. It was my first week volunteering with the group in 2015, and despite our ‘orientation’ training the night before, I truly had little awareness of what I should actually be doing from minute to minute as I arrived on Monday morning. It was also the first time I had ever been in a detention center, and I felt intimidated by the security processes and constant presence of tall, mostly male, stoic-faced guards. Mark—a member of the advocacy project staff who had been working with the project for nearly a year—had walked into the visitation trailer after all of us first-day volunteers after being held up by guards in the security trailer. He was noticeably upset about this, dropping the boxes he was carrying at his feet and immediately telling us that he was stopped by the guards for an extra ten minutes—which makes quite a difference for project staff at the start of the work-day, as eager clients are already seated and waiting

in the building, waiting for help—while they “inspected” his boxes of fresh printer ink cartridges. They finally allowed him to pass through, but not until after they went through the entire contents of the box.

I heard the sarcastic “welcome to baby jail” or “that’s baby jail” often. When I first heard this from Mark, sitting nervously at the table in the legal trailer, I naively assumed he was simply welcoming us as volunteers to our new ‘workspace’. I have since come to learn, however, that such phrases are not only meant as introductions to the facility, but also as a sort of explanatory comment on the normalized misanthropy or unpredictable qualities of what goes on in the space. When a new advocate witnesses or learns of the atrocious activities which take place at the center, the common response is “welcome to baby jail” or “that’s baby jail”. They serve as what I would describe as orienting comments that reflect on both the space and what happens there.

In certain ways, however, orienting oneself to these spaces is nearly impossible, as while there are consistent qualities to the work and the environment, there is much inconsistency as well—like sudden, unpredictable inspections of printer ink cartridges. This is the sort of thing that having spent an extended period there makes clear, and it explains the deep frustration exhibited by Mark for having to spend a seemingly ‘mere’ extra ten minutes going through security. For most voluntary advocates, this inconsistency is not particularly obvious. Because the majority spend only a week working at the center, all qualities of the environment are new and any changes they observe throughout the week are not placed in contrast to anything. For those who spend extended periods of time at the center, like long-term, return volunteers or project staff, these consistent inconsistencies become a given part of the environment’s landscape. For those who bear witness to this, orientation to the environment necessarily involves becoming oriented to an ever-changing atmosphere. It involves becoming accustomed to, and learning how to quickly cope with,

disorientation. This can take many different forms, but I will highlight how security practices and spatial arrangements effect senses of disorientation.

Like detainees, advocates' bodies, as they move through the detention center, are made docile in certain ways and are always engaged in disciplinary maneuvers (Foucault 1977). One of the first spaces within the center where this is experienced is in the 'security' area, where advocates are vetted before entering by facility staff in order to be allowed entry. In Dilley, this occurs initially in what is known as the security trailer. At Karnes, this occurs at the entry to the building and continues along the hallway towards the legal visitation room. Experiences within each of these contexts is marked by a constant unpredictability and affects both weekly volunteers and project staff alike. The rules which allow or deny entry into each of these facilities play a significant role in manifesting this unpredictability, as they themselves appear to constantly change. These rules involve what constitutes appropriate dress and proper documentation, or whether an advocate has been included on a weekly visitor list given to the facility staff ahead of the visit, among other things. The following fieldnote expresses an experience of this at the Dilley facility towards the end of my fieldwork, demonstrating some of the bodily techniques (Mauss 1973) that become routinized as an advocate.



I walked into the front office, grabbed the plastic bin from the table nearby, and placed it in front of the guard standing next to the x-ray scanner machine. I didn't recognize this guard, so I wasn't surprised by her cold, unfriendly demeanor. I'm familiar with the usual guard who works the security desk, and she's grown quite friendly with me over the months. This guard, like the others, was there to look through my bag for 'forbidden' items—like cellphones, tinfoil, or more than one tube of lipstick—before placing it on the conveyor belt to pass through the small scanner. I've gone through this procedure a hundred times before, so I knew the drill without direction. She looks into my bag, then pulls my laptop computer out and places in the bin next to the bag. She looks up at me and says: "This needs to be pulled out, ma'am. Just remember that for next time." I look back at her, sigh, and say, "Ok. Sure." I walk on through the body scanner, which beeps and requires an additional guard on the other side to use a manual body scanner, who then clears me to pass through.

Memory and security procedures have become funny, confusing concepts for me in the time that I've been coming to this facility. The comment by the guard about my computer yesterday morning was both unfamiliar and

familiar. It was unfamiliar in the sense that in all that time coming through that security process, I had not once been informed that I must remove my computer from my bag so, naturally, I felt surprised by her comments. What's humorous, however, is not such comments' unfamiliarity, but rather their ironic familiarity. Indeed, perhaps the most common procedural characteristic I'm familiar with at this point in passing through this space are comments of this sort: ones in which I am informed that this or that procedure is the way that things have always been and will always be. This type of interaction has become so familiar to me that I no longer attempt to address the discrepancy in any way. It's utterly pointless, and only serves to stress an easily adversarial relationship between guards and visitors.

Months earlier, I walked into the front office, grabbed a plastic bin, placed it with my bag inside in front of the guard at the scanner, and walked through the body scanner. The body scanner inevitably beeped—as it has nearly every day I've passed through it, no matter what I wear—the red lights on the side of the machine flaring as a warning, and the guard on the other side stops me. “You need to take off your watch whenever you go through; that's why it went off,” she tells me. “Really?” I say. “Even when I don't wear my watch it goes off,” I go on, because I'm frustrated and feel compelled to contradict her assessment of the situation. “Well, that's why it's going off now,” she says. “You need to take it off and go through the scanner again.” I sigh, exasperated, and walk back through to the other side of the scanner, remove my watch, place it in a cup on the side of the item scanner, and walk back through. The scanner beeps. She says nothing, and neither do I.

Another day, I walk into the front office, grab a plastic bin, place it with my bag in front of the guard at the scanner and walk through the body scanner. The body scanner inevitably beeps. The guard, a tall woman I recognize well but who has never acted particularly familiar with me, stops me and says: “Hey, next time, you need to take your sweater off before you go through.” When I begin to contest the existence of this ‘rule’, she becomes visibly mad. “You always have to do that, every time you go through there. You always have to take off your sweater.” I sigh, yet again. “Ok”, I say defeatedly. What can I say? I think to myself. Telling this guard that there is clearly no consistency in the ways that they chose to enact some sort of policy will do nothing to improve my situation.

When this first started happening, I simply chalked it up to my own error. I must've forgotten this or that procedure. I must've forgotten that I was supposed to remove my sweater, take off my watch, move my water bottle to a different bin, leave the lipstick at home, wait for them to inspect my bag before I walked through the body scanner. There are so many precise rules and procedures, I must've missed that one. I would feel embarrassed and apologize for my naivete. But after months of being “processed” in this repetitive way, I noticed it: a sort of ‘gaslighting’ pattern. It wasn't simply that there was a new procedure that they wanted to you to take part in; that would imply a certain ordinary interaction between those that establish the policy and those that must be informed of it. This was more akin to gaslighting in that not only does the guard ask you to do something new, they simultaneously inform you that your memory of proper procedure is incorrect; this, they say, is the way that it's always been. In one sense, they are right; it has ‘always been’ that way in the sense that it has always been decidedly unpredictable and arbitrary and will likely continue to be so in the future. Each day, I listened to stories of volunteers who experienced similar comments and expressed familiar frustrations.

In all of this, what many have found most challenging is coming to orient themselves to this sort of behavior. They are aware, from their own experience as well as that of others, of the fact that their memory is being recast by the arbiters of security, but ultimately, they have neither control nor influence over whether or not this pattern continues. In this atypical situation, memory doesn't serve in the way that it typically does. My memory of procedure won't protect me from being accused of making procedural mistakes, because what is official procedure from one day to the next, from one guard to the next is unpredictable. However, memory serves in these situations in that it prepares me for this unpredictability.



The frustration that comes from a sense of constant novelty is an integral element to understanding not only the experiences that occur in being allowed entry into the center, but the experiences of the center as a whole. The processes which occur in the security areas reflect an important attribute of such inconsistencies: that the advocates are rarely informed ahead of, if at all, changes to policies or practices in a manner that would allow them an opportunity to prepare for them. This continues throughout the work at the facility in various forms and with varying degrees of harmful consequences. Sometimes, such changes take forms that, because of this gap in understanding between the actions of facility staff and the information given to legal advocates, appear sort of abstract and potentially ominous but more unclear than anything. Like the day that, after hearing news from clients coming into the legal visitation trailer to speak about their cases, the Dilley team learned that one of the ‘residential wings’ of the facility was being ‘cleared out’. Clients who had been residing in this area had suddenly been informed that they would move to another wing, with the result being that the entire wing was removed of all its inhabitants. Actions like this—some seemingly strange move by the facility staff to change dynamics at the center—provoked questions and concerns: why were they moving all the clients out of this wing? Were they preparing for some large influx of new detainees that they would place in there? Was the population dwindling or growing, and for what reason? Advocates were left, like the detainees, to simply wonder at the reasons for this behavior. They were left to try to find a way to reassure their concerned clients that this wasn’t something to concern themselves with, rather that their impending interview was what needed their attention, while they themselves still wondered, disconcertedly, at the meaning behind such actions.

While such bewildering actions occurred frequently, they did not simply inspire concerned rumblings amongst the advocates. Some of these actions directly impacted their work. In keeping with the pace of the center, these changes would sometimes leave the team to adjust to them at less

than a moment's notice. The same week that all clients in one wing were moved into another, large groups of new clients started arriving at the legal trailer not with documents explaining the date and time of their asylum interview, per usual, but with documents known as Notice[s] to Appear (NTAs). These are the documents they receive at the final stage of the process in their detention, effectively informing detainees that they are to appear in immigration court outside of detention in order to continue their legal case. This was strange, because it meant that they would not be interviewed in detention, essentially meaning they were sent to detention for reasons unknown. They were confused, but no more so than all others who arrive at the center. However, for one of the first times while I was there during fieldwork, the legal team was also at a loss. Why was this happening, and what did it mean for these women? Why was this happening for just some women and not all others at the center? These women were not interviewed and were not going to be interviewed by asylum officers at the center, so how were they being differentiated from the others? While it was important for these questions to be asked, the pressing concern was then how to help them. Because all of the work was structured around preparing clients for interviews, and they made use of the time in between each step of the process to inform clients of rights and prepare them for continuing their cases outside of detention, such changes created an even more chaotic environment. Without a moment's notice, Maggie, a young staff attorney for the project, was forced to immediately stop the critical and time-sensitive work she was already doing on cases to respond to this sudden shift. Within just a few hours, she had devised a plan to reorganize the labor for the volunteers, figured out how to train them, and collectively, the staff reoriented the efforts towards preparing these women for processes outside of detention.

In the subsequent months of my fieldwork, I would witness such things happen again and again, some women being given immediate release documents while others, who seemed no different in terms of their general asylum cases and circumstances, would have to undergo the entire

process. Women who were not availed of such opportunities struggled to understand why that was so. Advocates also struggled to make sense of these inequities, to adjust to the ways in which these changes affected their work to help their clients, and to help those women cope with the painful arbitrariness of such practices.

Another common form of disorienting practices comes with the arrangement of the space inside the visitation area. As the space within the Karnes facility was much more limited and advocates there were not afforded an office space within the visitation area, it did not really allow for much variation of the spatial arrangements. This was not the case in Dilley. In my time there, I saw multiple rearrangements of the space and the advocates' freedom to move throughout that space. Configurations of the desks and chairs, as determined by the guard staff, changed many times. In one week, advocates would be informed that all clients must wait in chairs at one end of the facility, then the next week, it was the opposite. Another week, all desks and chairs would need to be set up in their configurations and then broken down and put away immediately after a meeting, setting them back up for each subsequent meeting. In the following week, the rules would dictate that all desks and chairs remain in fixed positions. Though these seem as if minor changes, the disorienting effect affected both the detainees and the advocates, causing delays in their work and a sort of muddled clarity concerning each week's rules about the space. Such shifts required constant flexibility on the part of the advocates, both in physical space and involving emotion work.

A more egregious manipulation of the advocates' use of this space came when the Dilley facility staff began to shift the rules on the team's designated office spaces. As mentioned in the introduction, at the outset of the project, advocates were not allowed designated office spaces within the center and were forced to bring in and leave with all their documents and necessary tools each day, including large, heavy printers. This was, of course, after lengthy periods of time where advocates were not even allowed entry. Eventually, they were afforded an office space which then

became two office spaces. These were rooms in the visitation area which were otherwise used as private spaces to meet with clients. Over the years, I myself witnessed many changes to the advocates' access to these rooms. They were deprived of one office space, then moved to another office space at the opposite end of the building, then were afforded a second space yet again. At one point, advocates were told that while they had an office space, they would have to remove all documents and office tools from that space each day as they left. Facility staff, over time, made changes to who was allowed within the office space and how many were allowed at a given time. All these rules shifted numerous times, often without warning. Such changes were not only disorienting, they were deeply disruptive.

In these encounters, advocates were left to cope with these sudden changes and to find a way to continue to help those who were affected most directly and greatly by them. Considering these actions by administrators, as many advocates did, as intentionally disruptive and punitive, however, calls into question the intended target of such actions. They imply that, through constant spatial rearrangements, literal bodies and metaphorical boundaries are being collected and circumscribed. Facility staff use the medium of the body (Douglas 1971) to exercise authority through practices of spatial control.

Such actions further demonstrate one of the most central aspects of the experience of performing this form of advocacy: the variability and resonance of the harm done inside the center. One of the most pronounced manifestations of such harm comes in the form of refusals of entry to the center. Because of the magnitude of this action upon the team and the resonant effects it inflicts on those it implicates, I will return to this in a later chapter to more thoroughly address it.

End of the Day



Image 14: The Days Inn Dilley, where most volunteers stayed during their visit and where bi-weekly 'Big Table' meetings took place. Photo credit: author

“Do any of you have kids?” Tara asks the group of us encircled around her, as her eyes search the exhausted group. It is around eight in the evening, and our group of ten or so volunteers and a few staff are sitting in a small, dimly-lit area in the corner of the Days Inn Dilley. There are maroon couches that line the walls and large plush chairs that we push together to create a circle in that corner for our twice-weekly ‘Big Table’ meetings, where volunteers reflect on their experiences and questions they might have. That night, staff member Ali had just asked the group of us if there was anything that they, as staff, could have done to better prepare us, as volunteers, for what to

expect at the center, both in terms of the work itself and to sort of cushion the shock of being within the space. In response, Tara, an immigration lawyer from Colorado who had six years of experience with asylum work, went on, after a couple of women raised their hands. “Well, I feel like this reminds me of childbirth,” she said. “You know, when you have kids, nobody can prepare you for what childbirth is like. You [the staff] gave us this mountain of paperwork before with lots of info about the work, which was helpful, but there’s nothing you could’ve done to prepare me for this. Doing preps back-to-back, the chaos of the place...nobody can prep you for that. I don’t mean that this is a failure [on the part of the staff], and I don’t mean that it’s painful like childbirth, but more that it’s like childbirth in that it’s just something you have to experience yourself. No one can prepare you.” The couple of women who had raised their hands quietly nodded their heads. The ‘preps’ Tara references, or the private conversations meant to help clients prepare their cases ahead of their asylum interview, serve one of the most critical roles the advocates play and are one of the most difficult emotional elements of the work.

There are two Big Table meetings with the Dilley project during the week, one on Monday, and the other on Thursday. Each meeting occurs directly after the end of the workday and lasts for around two to three hours. Some bring their dinners—which they get from the few local Mexican restaurants, Dairy Queen, or gas stations—and drinks while we reflect on the details of the day. Despite people’s exhaustion, most volunteers have a lot to say, especially after that first day. These meetings tend to exhibit the range of emotions people experience throughout their time at the center. They laugh as they talk about funny things children did or jokes mothers made, cry when recounting clients’ stories, and rage when they reflect on what these places are and what they inflict upon asylum-seekers. The staff often start with some probing questions, leading to a long, winding conversation that takes unexpected turns but often results in a similar set of responses. At Monday’s meeting, people express their immense surprise at the pace of the work and the ‘volume’ of those

that consistently inhabit the legal trailer throughout the day. They share their shell-shocked emotions from unexpected horror stories, their total exhaustion, and their confusion about the processes in which they now participate. While responses shift somewhat as the week moves along, certain sentimental elements remain: sadness, frustration, joy, and confusion.

Tara later told me in a very long and emotional interview that she had actually done quite a lot to prepare before coming. As she sat on the plane from Colorado, she pored over the pages and pages of reading material the project had provided to help prepare advocates for the many elements of the work they need to know. She even spoke with a former project staff member before leaving Colorado to help prepare herself for what to expect. Her comments reflect a recurrent theme with advocates' perceptions of the work and the place and their accompanying experiences: that in order to understand family detention and the work of the legal advocates, one needs to be there.

While advocates do not lose hope that they can influence the greater public to care about this issue and what they perceive to be great injustices by sharing their own experiences with others or by recounting the stories of asylum-seekers, there is an inherent intimacy and collection of sensations that coheres their experiences which, for many advocates, is somewhat untranslatable. This reminds one not only the significance of the 'being there' of material experience in Richardson's (1982) analysis of the Costa Rican market, but also the difficulty in translating experiences and an understanding of places when embodiment plays such a prominent role in those experiences. Low contends, however, that "this tension between 'language' and 'experience' and the subsequent dominance of semiotics over phenomenology is resolved by Paul Ricoeur (1991) in this argument that language is a modality of being-in-the-world, such that language not only represents or refers but 'discloses' our being-in-the-world (Csordas, 1994, p.11)," (2009:15). And yet, this common sense of 'untranslatability' was one of the initial interests in my research. I, like other advocates, endeavor to translate those complex experiences and feelings into a more nuanced

understanding of what something like family detention does to those various bodies it ensnares within its web. As many advocates, activists, and scholars have shown (e.g. Comfort 2008), there are numerous others who ‘do time’ alongside prisoners.

Attention to the affective qualities of these spaces is critical. Cvetkovich (2012) demonstrates how a focus on affective experience contributes much to discussions of the real effects—rather the experiential effects—of often destructive global phenomena, such as war and the spread of neoliberalism. The sensational effects of these things have the potential to challenge “master narratives” of such phenomena and can be reached through an attention to affect. As she argues, “talk of permanent war, states of exception, and new security states, important and useful as it might be, frequently operates at such a high level of abstraction that it fails to address the lived experiences of these systemic transformations,” (12). Affect gets us to the point where we can bridge the experiences of the individual with broader social movements, and, perhaps, complicate the narratives about social life that dismiss the ways that these phenomena are felt.

As noted in the introduction, scholars of incarceration have repeatedly called for greater attention to the inner, daily workings of carceral spaces (Rhodes 2001, 2004, Crewe 2009, Hall 2012). This chapter has attempted to begin this process as it relates to family detention centers by using the lens provided by the concept of embodied space, locating them in physical space and charting their physical and sensorial characteristics as experienced by legal advocates at work inside. As Fassin argues, the carceral environment “is also a sensorial experience...it is made of both lack and excess,” (2016:113). This chapter has moved the discussion inside such spaces, about which, still, relatively little is known. Later chapters will move beyond the spaces introduced in this chapter, though they will still provide only a partial view of the center in its entirety. The facility, as a whole, remains veiled to those who are neither center staff nor prisoners; this illustrates, in just one way, the

micropolitics of exclusivity at play in the center. Partiality and exclusion are characteristic markers of these places, and they will continue to be ever-present as this dissertation continues.

In starting with an affective and material orientation to these spaces, this chapter is also meant to begin an illumination of the ways in which spaces are made within these facilities, specifically spaces of care. Conradson (2003) notes that a “space of care can...be understood as a socio-spatial field disclosed through the practices of care that take place between individuals,” and that “the emergence and endurance of such spaces depends both upon the willingness of some individuals to move towards others and, amongst those being engaged in this way, upon a receptivity to such initiatives. Spaces of care are shared accomplishments and, in reflection of this, may at times be socially fragile,” (508). The continuing chapters will show how advocates create spaces of care within the areas in which they are allowed to inhabit inside these centers, and that in doing so, they resist the constraining affects discussed in this chapter. Advocates, and the willing collaborative participation of detainees, work together to make the legal visitation area of these facilities—as well as the few other areas in which they advocates are allowed—into spaces that evoke a greater sense of care and safety for the detainees.

In the following chapter, I examine the work of the ‘prep’, and how this deeply intimate exchange is shaped through the affective, place-making tactics (de Certeau 1984) of the legal advocates. Subsequent chapters will explore this in other ways as well, illustrating how these creations involve ongoing efforts, as spaces of care are made and un-made through encounters between different actors at the facility.

Citations

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998.

Agier, Michel, and David Fernbach. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011.

Auyero, Javier. *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina*. Durham: Duke UP, 2012.

- Bonds, A. "Discipline and Devolution: Constructions of Poverty, Race, and Criminality in the Politics of Rural Prison Development". *Antipode* 41: 416-38, 2009.
- Burridge, Andrew and Nick Gill. "Conveyer-Belt Justice: Precarity, Access to Justice, and Uneven Geographies of Legal Aid in UK Asylum Appeals". *Antipode*, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp.23-42, 2016.
- Calhoun, Craig. "The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order". In *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions.*, eds. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi. New York: Zone, 2010.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1984.
- Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Conradson, David. "Spaces of care in the city: the place of a community drop-in centre". *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4:4, 507-525, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1464936032000137939>
- Cooper, Jessica. "Trapped: The Limits of Care in California's Mental Health Courts." *Social Justice*, vol. 44, no. 1, 121+, 2018.
- Costantini, Cristina. "'Drink more water': Horror stories from the medical ward of a Texas immigration detention center". *Fusion*, 2015. <https://fusion.tv/story/165837/dilley-detention-center-horror-stories-from-the-medical-ward/>
- Crewe, Ben. *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation, and Social Life in an English Prison*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Csordas, Thomas. *Embodiment and experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012.
- Douglas, Mary. "Do dogs laugh? A cross-cultural approach to body symbolism". *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 15, 387-390, 1971.
- Dow, Mark. *American Gulag: Inside U. S. Immigration Prisons*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2005.
- Farmer, Paul. *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005.
- Fassin, Didier. *Prison Worlds: An Ethnography of the Carceral Condition*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Gill, Nicholas. "Longing for stillness: The forced movement of asylum seekers". *M/C Journal* 12(1),

2009. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/123>
- Gómez, Laura. “Deaths of Migrant Kids Underscore Risks of *Hieleras*”. *AZ Mirror*, December 28, 2018. <https://www.azmirror.com/2018/12/28/deaths-of-migrant-kids-underscore-risks-of-hieleras/>
- Hall, Alexandra. *Border Watch: Cultures of Immigration, Detention and Control*. London: Pluto Press, 2012.
- Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995.
- Kohn, Steffen. *Mediating Mobility: Visual Anthropology in the Age of Migration*. Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Libal, Bob, Lauren Martin and Nicole Porter. “‘A Prison is Not a Home’ Notes from the Campaign to End Immigrant Family Detention”. In *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*. University of Georgia Press, p. 253-265, 2012.
- Low, Setha M. “Towards an Anthropological Theory of Space and Place.” *Semiotica* 2009, no. 175, January 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2009.041>.
- Loyd, Jenna and Alison Mountz. *Boats, Borders, and Bases: Race, the Cold War, and the Rise of Migration Detention in the United States*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018.
- Martin, Lauren. “Noncitizen Detention Spatial Strategies of Migrant Precarity in US Immigration and Border Control”. *Annales de Géographie*. 2015;702-703:231-247, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/staff/geogstaffhidden/?mode=pdetail&id=14662&sid=14662&pdetail=110811>.
- Mauss, Marcel. “Techniques of the body”. *Economy and Society*, 2:1, 70-88, DOI: 10.1080/03085147300000003, 1973.
- Mountz, Alison. “Mapping Remote Detention: Dis/location through Isolation”. In *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, eds. Jenna M. Loyd, Matt Mitchelson and Andrew Burridge. Athens: U of Georgia, 2012.
- and Nancy Hiemstra. “Chaos and crisis: dissecting the spatio-temporal logics of contemporary migrations and state practices”. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104(2): 382-390, 2013.
- Kate Coddington, R. Tina Catania, and Jenna M. Lloyd. “Conceptualizing detention: mobility, containment, bordering, and exclusion”. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37, 522-541, 2012.
- Munn, Nancy. “The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay”. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, 93-123, 1992.
- Noguchi, Yuki. “Unequal Outcomes: Most ICE Detainees Held In Rural Areas Where Deportation

- Risks Soar.” NPR.org, August 15, 2019.
<https://www.npr.org/2019/08/15/748764322/unequal-outcomes-most-ice-detainees-held-in-rural-areas-where-deportation-risks>.
- Redmon, Jeremy. “ICE to close controversial immigration detention center in New Mexico”. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 18, 2014. <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/ice-close-controversial-immigration-detention-center-new-mexico/ixmFHpSxN6hzUw3LAg3KzK/>
- Rhodes, Lorna A. *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*. Berkeley, CA: U of California, 2004.
- “Toward an Anthropology of Prisons”. *The Annual Review of Anthropology*. 30:65-83, 2001.
- Richardson, Miles. “Being-in-the-Plaza versus being-in-the-market: Material culture and the construction of social reality”. *American Ethnologist* 9. 421–436, 1982.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *From text to action: Essays in hermeneutics II*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991.
- Schrag, Philip G. *Baby Jails: The Fight to End the Incarceration of Refugee Children in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020.
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr Isaevich. *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Taylor, Charles. "Modern Social Imaginaries." *Public Culture*, vol. 14 no. 1, pp. 91-124. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/26276, 2002.

Notes

^{xix} “Dilley, TX | Data USA.” Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/dilley-tx/>.

^{xx} “Karnes City, TX | Data USA.” Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/karnes-city-tx/>

^{xxi} “Spatial Stories of Migration and Detention | Texas Architecture | UTSOA.” Accessed April 21, 2020. <https://soa.utexas.edu/work/spatial-stories-migration-and-detention>.

^{xxii} I would also note, however, the scholarship which has drawn attention to constructions of ‘remoteness’ (e.g. Loyd and Mountz 2018; Bonds 2009) which disavow complex dependencies between rural and urban spaces. “Narratives of remoteness,” Loyd and Mountz contend, “often rely on geographical imaginaries that associate isolation with rurality, provincialism, conservatism, and racism (Bonds 2009). Remoteness, thus, is discursively constructed and materially built in opposition to cosmopolitanism, connection, community, rights, and freedom,” (2018:11). We can see such discursive reproductions and misleading associations in certain comments from legal advocates throughout these chapters.

^{xxiii} For instance, DVIDS. “Photos of South Texas Family Residential Center.” Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1919810/photos-south-texas-family-residential-center>. It is unclear how different private and public entities have been allowed to take photos within these centers; nonetheless, legal advocates were not only denied access to other areas but also this ability to collect photographic documentation.

^{xxiv} None of the chapters of this dissertation address one important element of the work of these advocates, and that is the role of digital communication amongst current and former advocates on family detention issues. The functioning of the list serv—often referred to simply as the ‘Artesia list serv’—is complex, and I hope to discuss it at greater length in another forum.

^{xxv} I use the language of ‘guards’ to refer to CoreCivic and GeoGroup staff, in keeping with the language of my interlocutors.

^{xxvi} *Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292 (1993) , United States Supreme Court, 23 March 1993, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/cases,USSCT,4152e0ff24.html> [accessed 21 April 2020].

Chapter 2: (Con)testing Narratives

The rooms are always cold, really cold. So much so that whenever I go into one, I immediately pull up the blinds on the window and open it (in those rooms where that's an option) to let the warm breeze pass in. She sits down on one side of the almost bare office desk, and I sit at the other. We'll spend the next 20 minutes to an hour sitting here like this, facing one another from across the desk.

Her name is Xiomara, and her 9-year-old son Martin is with her. They are indigenous Guatemalans, petite and roughly the same size as one another. Xiomara has long, black hair pulled back into a low ponytail. They both have on the standard-issue brightly-colored t-shirt and blue jeans; hers is bubblegum pink and his is dark blue. She smiles often at the outset of the conversation, particularly when I ask her to speak slowly to help me understand her, as my language skills aren't particularly strong. Although her native language is also not Spanish, her Spanish-speaking skills are strong (and we can rarely find an indigenous interpreter), so we proceed with the conversation in Spanish. I introduce myself again and mention the purpose of the conversation. "My name is Erin," I tell her, "and I'm a volunteer with the organization here that helps women and children with their legal cases. I'm not a lawyer. We are a team of lawyers and volunteers that work together to help prepare detainees for their asylum interviews." She smiles and nods. I ask a few basic biographical questions—how old she and her son are, where she is from, how many children she has—and when her interview is scheduled for. I scribble her notes down on a legal pad, and I remind her of the confidentiality of our conversation before asking her to explain why she left her country, why she's seeking asylum.

Xiomara is the kind of client a legal advocate in family detention hopes for, if one would hope for anything in a place like this. In response to my initial question, she asks: "Do you want me to explain why I left starting from the beginning and then explain what happened later on to get to the point where I left [my country]?" As she says this, the palms of her small hands face one another as she mimics the movement through time by waving her right hand further away, increasing the gap. When a client says something like that, right off-the-bat, you, as the legal advocate, feel a very unique sense of hopeful optimism begin to wash over you, like a warm breeze. This is because one of the consistently challenging elements of these conversations—in which advocates intend to help clients shape their asylum claim—is establishing a "timeline" which explains how a person eventually progressed toward the decision to leave and seek asylum. Understandably, many individuals don't think of their life decision-making in terms of a progressive timeline, so in these sorts of conversations, part of the work involves helping the client to both "see" their experiences in such a way and to come to articulate it in that way for the purposes of their interview. Thus, when Xiomara began her portion of our conversation with this question, it felt like my heart joyfully skipped a beat. "Yes, please," I simply replied.

Xiomara seems like a natural storyteller. She speaks slowly, with great clarity, expressing a clear timeline of events that lead to her and her son leaving Guatemala. She repeats important elements and provides lots of detail to her story, which is also something legal advocates try to encourage as much as possible with clients. "When I first met my husband," she tells me, "things were good. Everything was fun. And then things began to change." Her case, as it seemed was one of domestic violence, in which she had come to be treated as if property of her husband, and she articulated it in just this way. He began to call her his property and wouldn't let her leave the house. He became physically abusive to her and her children, including Martin, even while she was pregnant. She reported him to the police multiple times, another very important element of establishing a strong asylum claim in their interview. While this isn't the case for many clients, as many are simply incapable for numerous reasons of finding protection in law enforcement, when a client does report their abuses to the police, it certainly strengthens their claims. It also means that the advocate doesn't then have to work through how to answer an asylum officer's questions of why an individual didn't, or wouldn't, report crimes to the police.

While I was in awe of both of them throughout the conversation, I was particularly impressed with Martin. I've sat with many mothers and their children in these rooms for long periods of time, going over the minute details of their pasts, listening to the sometimes lengthy stories they share of what has happened to them to cause them to leave home. Eventually, even with 9-year-olds, such children become restless. They'll try to talk to their mothers, as she's speaking to me, asking her questions about when they can go or telling her they're hungry and want to go eat. They'll get up and walk in and out of the room, or play with something in the room that causes a lot of noise. But not Martin. He sat in the chair between us, on the edge of the small round desk, quietly and patiently, looking down and only slightly squirming in his seat every few minutes.

After being raped, abused, and having her other children repeatedly hit by him, Xiomara and her three kids left her husband and moved in with her parents, with her becoming the primary caregiver for all. This answers another question that often needs a ready response in the asylum interview: did they try to escape those who were harming or threatening to harm them? Xiomara answered clearly, without provocation: she had, and eventually, he sought her out again. She would eventually have to leave two of these children behind with her parents, as she could only afford to take one child with her (another painfully common element of many clients' cases). As her story came to demonstrate, she would need to take Martin. One day, her husband arrived at her parents' house, demanding that she feed him, care for him, and give him his eldest son, Martin. She refused, and he began to beat her, in front of Martin. With tears in her tired but focused eyes, she tells me: "My son here, he protected me. He stood in between me and my husband." Martin now has his face downturned completely, not making eye contact with either of us. I glance at him and attempt, unsuccessfully, to push down my own tears welling up. Xiomara then whispers something to Martin and gently lifts the back of his shirt while he's seated between us. She wanted to show me the scars this beating had left marked upon his narrow back. She said to me: "Look, look at these scars. This is what he did to him. He [Martin] always tried to protect me." Martin covered his face with his arms and was silent. Swallowing more tears, I scanned the noticeable ridges melting into the back of his small frame, imagining this tiny body protecting her own tiny body. She had left Guatemala not because her husband had hurt her, but because this abusive man was going to try to take her son from her.

Our conversation after that began to come to a close. I thanked her for sharing her story and told her that I thought she was a strong woman and a good mother. In these moments, I often struggled with what exactly to say but tried to search for encouraging or optimistic words. We talked about what needed to be emphasized in her impending interview with the asylum officer. We covered the "important", or legally pertinent, elements of her asylum claim, and I answered several questions she had about the process after the interview. Martin had lifted his head once again and had clearly begun to reach his limit of sitting quietly without any entertainment in this dull, cold room. He fidgeted in his seat more fervently, rapidly tapping his feet on the ground. When I finally asked Xiomara if she had any other questions for me about anything else, he looked at her wide-eyed and silently shook his head. She laughed and told me no, she didn't have any other questions. She asked if I could go with her to her interview the following day, for support, and I agreed. The three of us walked out of the room together, passing the encircled seated group of 5 or so women all waiting to speak with the next free advocate about their cases.



"Life story elicitation," Mckinley (1997) contends, "is ineluctably coercive in the legal context—it is neither intimate nor dialogic," (70). In this remark, Mckinley is referencing the experience of legal encounters with refugees, particularly those in which applicants are required to

recount personal narratives intended to support their claims. Without disavowing the inherently coercive nature of asylum legal processes, this chapter aims to challenge the suggestion that something like ‘life story elicitation’ is neither intimate nor dialogic. Indeed, such an encounter, as evidenced in my research, can be understood as an intimate, even caring exchange, and can lead to the co-created ‘stories’.

The conversation that took place between Xiomara, Martin, and I is known amongst legal advocates as the ‘prep’. The prep is the private, typically one-to-one conversation between advocates and clients that functions to build an asylum claim and prepare clients for their CFI/RFI (credible/reasonable fear interview); it will be one the principle foci of this chapter. Examination of the prep—that which is considered to be the most critical element of the advocates’ work—offers a look at one of the ways in which the giving of care is complicated not just by detention, but also by the limitations of asylum law. The way in which the prep is conducted and approached is just one extension of how exclusionary practices are contested by the advocates. They do this through what I would call, coming from comments by advocates, “starting from a place of trust”, in the space of the prep conversation. Advocates’ aim is to start from a dialogic position that implicitly assumes that all are worthy of pursuing a claim in court outside of detention and that it is likely that all have experienced some form of valid harm to explain why they have sought asylum in the U.S. This challenges exclusionary politics at play in the interview process within detention, which inherently functions to differentiate the ‘worthy’ asylum-seekers from ‘unworthy’ (Nayak 2015). While the chapter attends in large part to the prep, it also addresses other ways in which narratives and practices of ‘counterstorytelling’ function in relation to the work of advocates. Ultimately, the chapter will begin an argument continuing throughout the dissertation that suggests that in the exceptional liminal space of the family detention center, the stories of two strangers—advocate and

detainee—transect, forging new stories to be told and imagining alternative realities that make room for the complex encounters that occur in these spaces.

I also begin to highlight one of the problems inherent to this form of care work, though not, I would argue, as a result of the advocates themselves. Legal advocacy, by its very nature, requires submission, in certain senses, to unjust legal processes which punish and dehumanize asylum-seekers. From the perspective of many legal advocates, doing this kind of advocacy requires ‘playing’ by certain rules of the state’s asylum and immigration enforcement ‘games’. The portion of the dissertation devoted to this quality of the work and its subsequent problem will highlight both the ways in which advocates resist these rules, both subtly and overly, in their daily work and encounters with authorities. It also elucidates the ways in which, despite their intentions to provide genuine care to these detainees and contest the injustices of detention, their work appears to be nevertheless caught within the regime of injustice that is family detention. This chapter will just begin to examine some of the ways in which this plays out through narrative and storytelling.

The chapter will be divided along two broad themes. The first considers the role of the prep conversations concerning a client’s claim as a way of ‘testing’ the client’s asylum narrative—the meaning of which I will explain further. I will discuss what this portion of the work entails and its significance along with how it simultaneously serves as a backdrop for both reification and contestation of vulnerability, victimhood, and disempowerment. This themed portion will also speak to how conducting the prep is tested, or challenged, by various aspects that affect the functioning of the work. Advocates and clients alike are implicated in these manifold barriers to this portion of the work. The second theme concerns the many ways in which various other narratives and stories that circulate within and through detention are actively contested, through counterstorytelling efforts, by advocates.

Preps

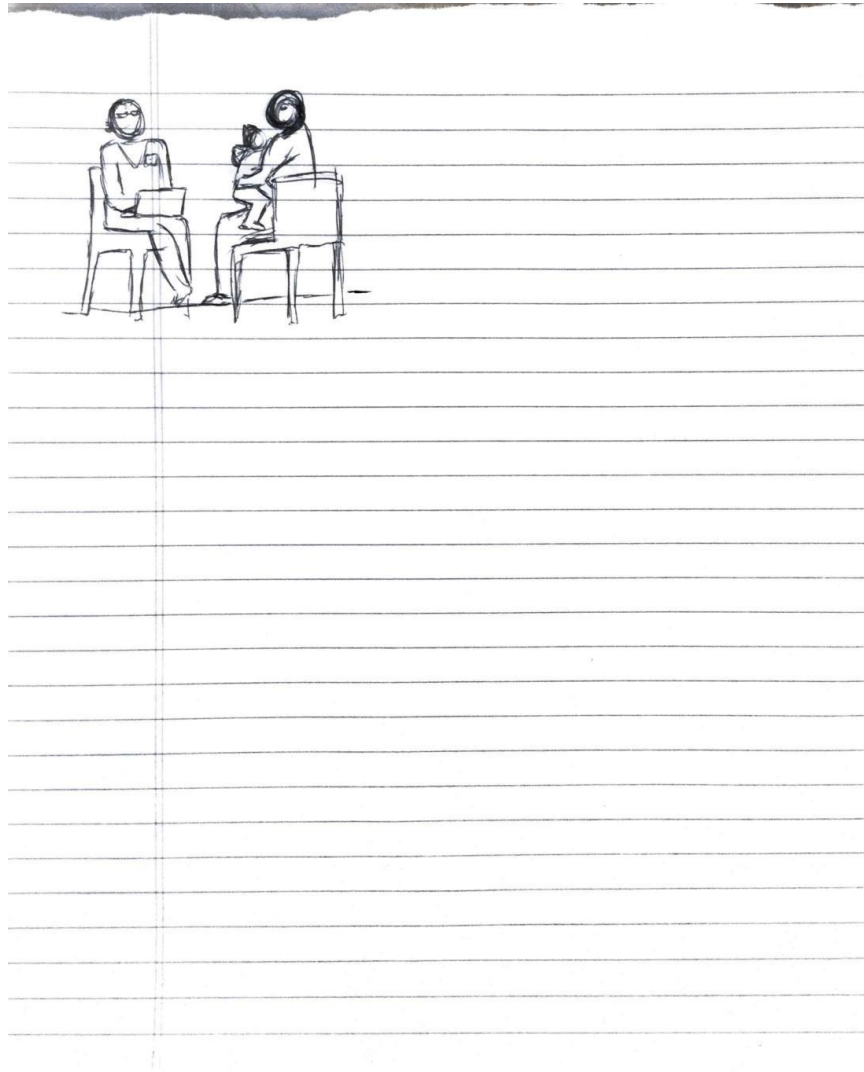


Image 15: Rendering of a meeting between an advocate and client with her child. Artist credit: author

The ‘prep’ is the typically one-to-one conversation between a legal advocate and a client about the reasons they are applying for asylum, or the reasons why they left their home country. In Dilley, this conversation directly follows the second of the *charlas*—which again, as the previous chapter mentioned, refer to ‘chats’ between groups of clients and an advocate in which information is shared—that known as the ‘CFI/RFI *charla*’. This *charla* functions much like the first or ‘intake’ *charla*—wherein advocates initially inform clients of the broad outlines of the legal project and the processes in the facility—in that clients arrive at a given time for a particular grouping and, once the

entire group has arrived, plastic chairs are encircled in a section of the trailer and a volunteer advocate offers to lead it. The information in this *charla* is focused on the interview itself: what it is and is meant to accomplish, what constitutes asylum, how the interview will take place, and how it fits into a larger picture of the asylum process, among other things. This *charla* is where clients will learn of the ‘5 protected grounds’ of asylum law—race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion. These deeply exclusionary ‘boxes’—as they are often spoken of—are those in which applicants’ experiences and thus their cases will need to ‘fit’ in order to pass their interview. They will also learn of the significance of establishing the ‘nexus’ in their interview, or rather the meeting point between the harm they’ve experienced or reasons for having fled and the inability to locate or altogether lack of protection in their home country from this harm. Along with this, they will learn of important critical questions that will be asked by the asylum officer to get to the heart of these concerns. Once this informational *charla* is complete, clients then wait as advocates arrive to take each client individually into the private rooms that line the walls of the visitation area for conversations about their cases. This initiates the prep.

The prep conversation can be configured different ways, depending upon the size of the advocacy team from week-to-week and the needs of a specific client. Sometimes it can be between two legal advocates and a client, an advocate (either a lawyer or non-lawyer) and a child client, an advocate and a mother and child, etc. There is never more than one client family in each prep, as this would be considered a breach of confidentiality and would harm the ways in which a client might feel comfortable to speak about their claim. The advocate may also use a phone interpreter, who is either a volunteer advocate themselves or works for a translation service organization.

While the prep is approached differently by different advocates, generally the conversation proceeds in a more open-ended fashion, in that the advocate allows the client to speak about that which they wish to, initially, then guides the conversation into areas that are needed to be fleshed-

out for the preparation of their interview. The advocate will ask follow-up questions and take notes throughout the conversation. Each prep varies in its qualities, though most have notable shared characteristics: they are emotionally challenging, for both advocates and clients; intimate and traumatic stories are shared; and clients and advocates alike work together to both establish a claim and a sense of preparedness for their asylum interview.

The prep is considered to be the most critical element of the work itself because it is the time where an advocate works with a mother, and potentially her child or children, on shaping their asylum claim and preparing that claim to be shared in their interview. While in the *charla* that takes place prior to the prep, mothers are informed of the necessary elements of an asylum claim, comprehending the complex qualities of asylum law can be challenging for those who are unfamiliar with it or lack a certain degree of formal education. The prep, then, is exceedingly critical work because it helps to connect an individual's past experiences with the legal categories that would potentially afford them asylum.

In the interview portion of the asylum process, asylum-seekers must almost solely rely on their ability to communicate their claim through their words. While some, if they possess certain forms of evidence—be they documents, like police reports or photos, or bodily 'evidence', like the scars on Martin's back that Xiomara displayed to me—can offer to show these in their interview, the asylum officer can state that forms of physical evidence "aren't necessary for this stage", with some even stating that they do not want to examine such things. In my experience, this appears to be discretionary and does not appear to have as significant an impact on decision-making as an asylum-seeker's own narrative. The most important evidence, then, becomes that which is communicated through the asylum-seekers articulation and answers to probing questions. While bodily suffering is still a prominent subject within the asylum process for many asylum-seekers—a point which has been strongly critiqued (Fassin 2005, 2007, Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Ticktin 2011)—in the space

of the CFI/RFI, such suffering is spoken of and not necessarily displayed. This is the reason for the emphasis by legal advocates on preparing clients for this conversation. Joe, a former attorney from Austin and long-term volunteer who returned on a weekly basis to assist the project at the Karnes facility, described the importance of the prep to me over our lunch one day in the small breakroom outside of the client visitation area. Joe always had a neatly-packed lunch—sandwiches, veggie snacks, and cookies, which he politely shared—and frequently muttered hilarious insults about particularly rude guards under his breath. “The interview is like a basketball game,” he told me through a mouthful of cookies he scarfed down before his next meeting that day. “The preps are like practice. You can’t go out onto the court without knowing the rules of the game first, right?”

Joe’s use of the analogy of the asylum interview being like that of a basketball game and the prep as being practice recalls Granfield’s (1997) ‘game orientation’, or the adversarial ideology with which law students are imbued during their training. While this trained orientation certainly affects the ways in which legal advocates, particularly lawyers or law students, imagine the problem and its needs before them, the analogy seems well-suited to this situation. However, what some, especially experienced attorneys, found frustrating about what they witnessed in Dilley and Karnes concerns the fact that this stage of the asylum process is not meant to be adversarial. As attorney Rebecca once explained to me, asylum is supposed to be different than other forms of immigration proceedings: “Removal proceedings and bond hearings, those are supposed to be adversarial. Think more like criminal court, where you’re on the defense, there’s hardly any room for dissent, and there’s no real room for a defense. But with asylum, technically it’s supposed to be helpful. They’re supposed to find a reason [for why the seeker deserves asylum]. They’re supposed to be on your side.” But, as she explained, that was definitely not what it felt like in doing this work in Dilley, and most advocates echoed this sentiment. Thus, the necessity of the prep is made even more evident. The interview is set up as something that is meant to simply help in discerning the asylum claim of

the individual, but it is committed in an adversarial manner, regardless of the intentionality of the officer conducting the interview. This counterintuitive nature can perhaps be better navigated through a game orientation. The government has manufactured a very complex game, involving misdirections and secretly meaningful key words and turns-of-phrases. Some advocates, particularly those with legal experience, use that orientation to the advantage of those who are ill-prepared to play it.

Good (2006) deploys Conley & O'Barr's (1990) 'rule versus relational' frame in order to make sense of important differences between asylum-seekers (relational) and their lawyer's (rule) orientations to their cases. He claims that Conley & O'Barr's orientations approach offers a better way of understanding how asylum-seekers' cases unfold, as the personal narratives of these users of the law are suppressed by the necessity for 'translators' of various sorts. He addresses the ways that such processes reproduce power inequalities within the asylum process by noting that the asylum-seeker is inherently dependent upon these others—such as, I would argue, legal advocates—to navigate them. The prep is just one of the ways in which this argument is made salient by this context (others include assistance in locating separated family, and the subsequent combining or 'linking' of separate asylum cases, and serious medical attention, among other things).

While Good's assessment is instructive, in the case of this particular stage—wherein detainees can rarely have lawyers or other representatives speak or act on their behalf, if at all—these asylum-seekers must come to inhabit, in at least some basic sense, this rule orientation to their own cases. If not, their ability to pass this stage becomes more like a game of chance. An individual asylum-seeker might elect to say those things which are needed to be said, by accident or possibly by prior knowledge of asylum law. They might happen to articulate their case and prior experiences in the terms expected and desired by the officer interviewing them. As many advocates here and elsewhere have argued, however, because of the extremely complex nature of asylum law—which

confounds even experienced immigration attorneys—they are unlikely to do so. Not only this, but detainees are often profoundly unaware of their rights as asylum-seekers, while also often being unable to properly defend those rights (for a range of reasons, including language barriers, mental disabilities, health issues, etc).

The prep is also an important shifting moment in the relationship between advocates and clients. Up until the time of the prep, conversation between the two tends to flow more unidirectionally, from advocate to client. There are exceptions to this, of course, particularly when it comes to a client who has been separated at the border from family and is concerned with locating them, or when a client or their child is ill and not getting the needed medical treatment. Both of these issues occur quite frequently and advocates often assist with them immediately, doing what they can to reconnect with separated family or send assertive emails to facility officials to push for proper medical response to those that require it. But with the prep comes the moment for the advocates to work more intimately with individual clients and to listen to the stories they wish to tell about why they came. From that, they will help to build their asylum narrative and prepare them for their upcoming interview.

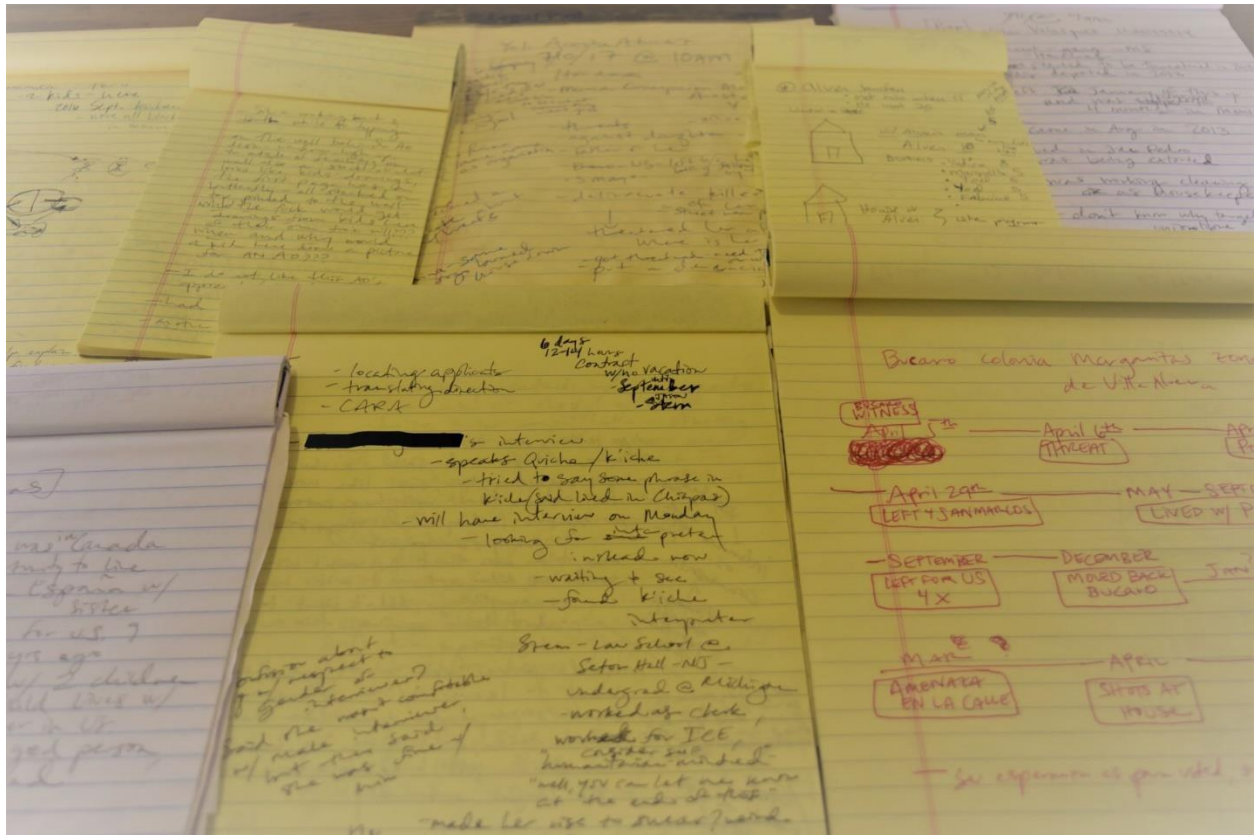


Image 16: Notepads from interview 'preps'. Photo credit: author

While weekly volunteers are advised and trained by staff on how to approach this part of the job, the work is done, as mentioned, privately in individual rooms at the facility and thus is committed with relatively no immediate supervision. Advocates each learn to approach this task in their own way, though often constructing their approach through collaborative efforts with other volunteers and staff. While conducting the prep, they take notes on a client's case, later uploading this information to the online data management system used by the team in tracking the information and processual steps of each of the clients they serve. Recording the important details relative to their asylum cases within this data management system help aid others who will potentially work with that client, be they attorneys who later take on their case or advocates in detention working with that same client. If a client's case requires additional assistance or if she, unfortunately, does not receive a position decision from her interview, this information is crucial.

As clients, both parents and their children, explain their reasons for leaving their country in these preparatory conversations, their reasons, understandably, do not always align with the expectations set for a so-called legitimate asylum claim. While many advocates see their role in their prep differently, all attempt to clarify this connection: to draw out the details that serve an asylum claim, while, without invalidating other reasons or details, trying to shift the client's gaze toward those elements of their pasts that are going to be meaningful to the asylum officer's determination of whether or not they should be allowed to pursue asylum. As they listen to what the client has to say about why they came to the U.S. and requested asylum, they search for the legal claim amongst the details shared with them while also testing the strength—or likelihood of obtaining a positive response in their interview—of that claim.

Merry (1990) attends to this sight, or the ways in which ordinary lay people come to understand and use the law, achieving what she deems “legal consciousness”. We can think of certain comments from advocates, that will follow, as an attempt to aid their clients in reaching this consciousness, in that they attempt to get clients to see, as it is frequently characterized, the outlines of their own cases. This sight is deemed necessary for proper self-representation both within and beyond detention.

As this chapter hopefully illustrates, this consciousness does not only apply to their cases, but also to their senses of selves, their pasts, and their carceral presents. It is intended to contest the euphemizing practices and language of those employed within the facility. It is also intended to affirm certain experiences of injustice, either at the center or prior, most commonly at the ICE processing facilities, *las hieleras* and *perreras* mentioned in the previous chapter. It is, in a sense, a way of not only contesting predominantly harmful narratives, but of imagining others.

Challenges

Noe explains to me what it is like for her, as an immigration attorney, to do a prep. “For attorneys,” she says, “CFI preps are hard. Our minds keep running past [the story] to get to the merits of the claim. We’re thinking ahead, after all of [this stage]...Even though this is a humanitarian emergency; you’re forcing this person to get the facts out in a certain amount of time, it’s really hard. They could’ve repressed it. It’s hard to fish for that. It’s painful and traumatic. I focused on making them comfortable with me at first to get them to open up. If I didn’t feel that person trusted me, I would take 10-15 mins at the beginning to communicate that I was on their side, what happens after, that we will work together on this. Some wanted to know what happens later. It’s really about adjusting to different needs. Some are receptive to humor. I would do that too. You just read the person and figure out what works for them.”

There are many challenges inherent in doing this part of the work, from remaining focused on the singular stage at hand to establishing trust in a brief period of time to language barriers to the many varied interruptions that disturb an already upsetting conversation in which the client recalls the intimate details of past trauma. Such challenges, distractions, and complications serve to test the work of the advocates. Noe’s comments here touch on some of these challenges, such as building trust and potentially pressuring the client to dredge up painful memories for the purposes of building a strong asylum claim.

"It's a crazy thing to ask of a stranger," Molly tells me. Molly is also an immigration attorney from Colorado. She heard about the issue of family detention from some of her friends there and decided to come down to volunteer for a week. “Like hey, tell me about the terrible things that happened to you cause I'm helping you to practice to tell it to somebody else, who has the power to open the door to asylum or slam it in your face. That's a bizarro thing...it just doesn't happen in real life very often.” Other advocates, like Marilyn, a business immigration lawyer from Atlanta, echoed this characterization: “It's a strange situation because you're a total stranger and not

a counselor or a therapist, so it's hard to say what was going through the women's minds. But it's a strange situation.” In fact, many advocates shared this sense of the strangeness of the work at various moments, though this feeling is most pronounced in the moment of the prep. This sort of discomfort felt as a result of the fact that advocates often had to perform as if they were trained in or experienced with a sort of work—like counselling—that they were not is something that will be explored at greater length throughout the dissertation, as, I would argue, it speaks to larger issues having to do with complex manufactured crises like these and the capacities of humanitarian action.

Because something like the prep is irrefutably a strange form of encounter, building trust with clients is of paramount concern. Establishing a dynamic of trust allows for a productive and honest conversation about the details of a client’s past that can be meaningfully used in establishing an asylum claim. Different advocates had different approaches to establishing trust in the prep, though there were specific ways that were encouraged by the staff of the project, such as reminding the client of the confidentiality of the conversation. This proved to be quite important in establishing trust. Some clients were frequently concerned that their abusers or gang members from whom they had fled would somehow be able to find out where they were, at the detention center. They were also afraid that things that they might say against such persons would somehow find their way back to those individuals, possibly incurring further harm. Some clients were afraid to even use the telephones to speak with family or friends on the outside, either at home or in the U.S., out of a fear that such calls would be listened in upon or recorded. Some advocates argued that the nature of the environment, in which both detainees and advocates were surveilled at nearly all times, encouraged this sense of unease, creating barriers to establishing trust with clients. Molly argued that “you can be so good at [building trust], and then be in this weird, artificial prison scenario...I mean, I think it would be my natural instinct not to trust anybody in this

environment.” In frequent response to this, a former staff attorney of the project described how to approach resolving a problem with a client that appears to be reticent or unclear in what they share with the advocate. “If you have the sense that a client is lying or withholding info,” she suggested, “maybe it would be better to remind her who isn't going to hear the story that she's telling. Start from the place of believing her and building up her confidence in the confidentiality of your conversation and see if that gets you anywhere, rather than starting from a place of trying to pick apart the inconsistencies in somebody's story and point out how they're lying to you. Starting from a place of trust helps you build more trust, rather than the other way around.” The “other way around” is meant to refer to way in which the actual interview takes place, wherein, as previous advocates' comments have shown, the seemingly adversarial and untrusting approach to locating an asylum applicant's claim is common.

Another of the perceived barriers to building trust with clients concerned the presence of advocates who present as male. While weekly advocates were advised by project staff to be conscientious of the potential effects a male advocate performing the prep might have on a client—particularly those who suffered heterosexual sexual abuse—being attentive to this issue, considering the wealth of constraints on the work as well as the dearth of resources, often proved challenging. Some advocates who identified or presented as male, like long-term volunteer Chase, were skillfully attuned to this concern, attempting creative solutions when volunteer resources ran particularly thin. “I always felt like it was cavalier of me to go into the room and be like I'm comfortable, but you're probably not, so I would always apologize for everything,” he explained to me. “I would say, ‘I'm so sorry you're here and that you're having to do this’, and I would say to them that the fact that they want to be here is good enough for me, but unfortunately there's going to be an officer who's going to want to hear all this other stuff. I would apologize for having to ask her all of these stories, and I would ask her if she would prefer to talk to a woman. No one

ever suggested that they would. There was this one time though when, it was the only prep I did where I didn't feel like a strong connection [with the client] and it was maybe like my first rougher prep, where she was standoffish with her body posture. She was sitting further away from the table. Actually this was one of the times that I was working with a Spanish speaker but she didn't feel comfortable doing [the prep herself], so one of the tacks that I employed was I was like, I'm gonna keep stepping out now and again to get some water for all of us, and maybe while I'm gone, she'll just be able to talk to the translator. That seemed to work out well. It just felt like she didn't want to say no, and I could just tell, I'm a guy in a room with her talking about really personal things that I myself wouldn't want to talk about with anyone. So I would leave to get water and then when I came back, the interpreter would let me know what they talked about. That actually worked out a little better.”

Chase’s approach to the sense of his client’s unspoken discomfort was subtle but seemingly effective. He offered physical space and more substantive privacy to the client by simply walking out of the room occasionally during the conversation. While the client’s reticence may not have been related to his gender, remaining attuned to this potentiality and possible resolutions is a consistent challenge in the work.

Distractions

Distractions to conducting the prep are varied and often frequent. Preps are often interrupted by guards and daily schedule ‘necessities’ (like enforced mealtimes). One of the most common forms of distraction involves childcare, and in particular, the care of very young children and babies. The previous chapter referenced some of the practical limitations of childcare in the facility, particularly with respect to the daycare center. While there is a ‘school’ for children of school age, the hours for this are limited and, as with the daycare, if a child appears to be ill, they are not allowed within. While there is a sort of relatively unsupervised playroom in the visitation area of the

Dilley facility, where young children may play with toys or watch movies while their mothers work with advocates, these young children frequently exhibit anxiety in being left without their mothers, eventually searching for and joining them within the private rooms used for preps. All of this can and often does have a detrimental effect on the prep. Many clients express their discomfort with sharing intimate and traumatic details of their lives in front of their young and impressionable children, with some mothers emphasizing the importance of not having them in the room in order to ‘shield’ them from such stories. Other mothers either do not have such options, as they have babies, some of whom need to be nursed throughout this time, or they themselves prefer to have their children in the room with them, with some mothers exhibiting anxiety in being without their children. Some children, unfortunately, play a direct role in their mother’s asylum claim, or have their own independent stories for asylum. As a result, they must be included in the prep process as they will be directly involved in the interview with the asylum officer. Frequently, young children become restless, interrupting the conversation and at times, causing the conversation to grind to a halt.



A return volunteer, an older male attorney, frantically poked his head into the pro bono office room and looked around at the few of us typing at our computers or scanning documents. He then looked at me and said, “hey, can you come out here and play with a kid really quick? There’s this mother who is a DV (domestic violence) case. It’s obvious that she doesn’t feel comfortable talking about the issues of her case with her daughter there. Could you get some coloring books and colors?” “Of course,” I told him, following him into the room next door. The mother was seated in a chair, and her young daughter, who quickly told me that she was 6 years old, stood beside her. She had long, ringlet curls that framed a smile seemingly too big for her small body. I asked her if she wanted to color with me and she smiled wider as she nodded. Her mother smiled as well. We sat at a small table outside of the room, and we talked as she colored. I asked her about herself: if she had siblings, where she was from, if she had a pet. Never looking up from the printed pages I gave her to color—all of Batman, in different poses—she responded softly to all of my questions. While talking, she would gingerly pull out one crayon at a time from the box as I held it up to her, draw a small, non-descript shape on the page, and carefully place that crayon back into the box. Each time a crayon went back in, she clapped a single clap with her miniature hands, after which she’d grab the next color.

As we were talking about her family, she unexpectedly began to tell me a story about her mother getting hit by something on the head. With her palm open and flat, she pressed her thumb against her forehead, illustrating where her mother was hit. She said all this matter-of-factly, never breaking eye contact with the coloring page, as if she was just

telling me a story I had never asked about. Later on, I had learned from the attorney who had worked with her mother that there was an incident in which the client had been violently hurt by her ex, the father of her daughter, when, after hitting her, he threw a plate to the ground, shards from which flew to the mother's face and cut her on her forehead. When I recounted the strange story the daughter had told me to the attorney, he looked dismayed. "I guess she did remember," he said. "That was why the mother didn't want her in the room while she talked about what happened with her husband; she knew that her daughter saw the incident happen, but she was hoping she wouldn't be able to remember it. [The mother] had tried to make her forget it."



In this instance, ultimately, the client's child had not been 'shielded' from the memory of this incident through the isolated care and attention of advocates, and yet the importance of this function remains clear. The sudden need to participate in caring for clients' children is a common recurrence with the legal advocates, and this is most important—and needed—during the preps, not least because of the sorts of conversational topics that will be divulged in the space of the prep. Those who are conducting it will need the assistance of other advocates to serve as a distraction, themselves, for the children in these instances. Advocates may play with children outside the room, like I did in this instance, or inside, for those children who feel ill-at-ease with the prospect of leaving their parents. Many advocates, particularly those with limited language skills, relish the opportunity to perform this role. For some, it offers a form of relief from the emotional intensity of speaking with clients in the prep. At one Big Table meeting, one of the male attorney volunteers from the week mused about how disturbed he was by the details of clients' claims, and how, during his breaks between preps, he would watch wistfully as the children near him rolled plastic trucks on the linoleum floor. "I just wanted to stop doing preps and play with the trucks with those kids for the rest of the day," he said, to which one of the project staff replied: "Next time you feel that doing that, go for it. Do you what you gotta do." The volunteer looked exhausted when he said this and was frequently on the verge of tears throughout the week. It was clear that for him, playing with the children served a desire to escape from the brutal realities exposed in the intimate prep conversations.

Complications

One of the challenges for advocates in these preps involved struggling against and eventually coping with the reality of the relatively inflexible asylum law with which their clients would be faced to contend. When an advocate works with a client in a prep who has, as many would describe, a ‘complicated’ claim—meaning the details of her claim don’t fit neatly into a particular asylum box—the ensuing struggle inevitably involves both the client and the advocate. The client will struggle to prove both the validity of her claims as well as her deservingness of refuge in the U.S., while the advocate struggles to help the client shape a complicated story into a claim while also coping with the emotional toll that accompanies this formulation of the work. The work of the prep is already an emotionally challenging endeavor. When a client either struggles to understand the allowances and barriers to asylum or is challenged to identify details from her past that would fit the limited boundaries of asylum, the work is doubly stressful on both advocate and client.

This issue can take many forms. Some of the common ones are when, for instance, a client either implies or states explicitly, in one form or another, in the prep that they are not ‘afraid’ of anything; that they did not flee their country out of fear of something, but that they were leaving out of a lack of economic opportunity. Fear is central to articulating an asylum claim, as it is implicated in the central question involved in seeking asylum. This is known as ‘claiming fear’, that being of returning to one’s home country, upon crossing the border and thus ‘triggering’ the official asylum legal process for an individual. Some will enter the prep claiming what advocates call a ‘generalized fear’, meaning that they describe their reasons for leaving in depersonalized terms. When a client entered a prep making such statements, advocates would likely then have to spend a longer amount of time working with them on helping them to articulate a claim, sometimes requiring multiple preps, hours of time (in certain instances, stretched out over days), the involvement of additional advocate brainstorming, and increased stress. For some advocates, this could make them feel a

unique sort of discomfort with the prep, as if they were ‘pulling out’ a client’s story, rather than helping a client hone their case. This could make an advocate feel as if, in trying to help a client, they were actually harming them.

Some clients, even after spending a great deal of time working with advocates, simply did not seem to have reasonable asylum claims. This appeared to be quite rare, with some chalking it up to the fact that the nature of the carceral environment, the limited amount of time following a traumatic journey, and the stress induced by those circumstances did not allow for individuals to speak openly of the trauma that would help shape a legal case. The existence of such cases placed undue stress on both client and advocate in the prep, as advocates searched frantically to ‘find’ their client’s claim. During immigration lawyer Tara’s week in Dilley, she performed an unusually large number of such preps. “Honestly the thing that was the hardest for me out of the whole time,” Tara explained over the phone from her home in Colorado, “which I was not expecting at all, was meeting with the women who didn't seem to qualify for asylum. If they came to me in Denver, I would say, I'm not going to file this claim. I think I have a different view of it [now], for sure, of the importance of getting through the CFI process to be able to get out of jail, and of course, I wanted to help them through it and get a positive. It wasn't like I was like oh you don't qualify, you should be sent back, but it was very exhausting for me to try to pull out what felt like pulling out something from nothing, you know? Or something from very little. Or something just to fit into that asylum box when really it seemed more like a TPS [Temporary Protected Status claim]. More like a yeah, my country is fucked right now, and it's not a safe place to be. That's TPS, in my mind. It's not specific persecution against an individual, so that was really...I think I said out loud on Thursday [at the Big Table meeting], I was like I'm done. I'm gonna raise the white flag, and I did. On Thursday and Friday, when I got those [sorts of claims], I was like, I can't. I was like, bring it on if you have a horrific story about domestic violence or rape, I can take that. Although, at the time I didn't know

that I would cry about [those] for days after, but I felt prepared for that. I know how to deal with that, and I know how to prepare that woman for her CFI. I don't know what to do with a woman who says, it's just really dangerous or things like that. So that was really exhausting and emotional.”

Like Tara, Andy, an undergraduate student volunteering with the group through a Jesuit missionary project, also spent a great deal of time working with mothers who had such complicated cases. Because of his characteristic ability to connect with clients in ways that would lead to a stronger sense of trust and comfort, and thus a more fruitful conversation with reticent clients, he was often asked for help with these cases. For him, however, these were hard to stop worrying about. “When I'm in a prep,” Andy tells me, “and the woman just explains what happened and you can easily identify why she'll get a positive [on her interview], those almost just go out of my head pretty quickly, like ok, she's good to go, I can go on and start thinking about the next one. But the women who have these stories that are very complicated, or the women who just don't necessarily have the strongest fear stories...I don't want to leave them behind, and I don't think anyone at the project wants to leave them behind, but it's almost like we're fighting a battle that's not gonna be successful in the end. We know that, but we still have to [do it].” Andy and Tara expressed an important common sentiment in having to do these sorts of preps; there is an inherent responsibility on the advocate to locate the claim, and that the burden of the complicated case rests upon them as it does upon the clients themselves.

Other forms that such complications would take involved a client's reticence to share details of their pasts or a client's inability to properly share their stories. Advocates would be encouraged to be attentive to signs of client's reticence or discomfort and to subsequently reach out to other advocates who might be available to speak with them, affording a different dynamic to the conversation. As mentioned previously, this was especially encouraged for male advocates, as many clients had claims that involved violence at the hands of men. Some clients would also express a

reticence to speak their native language, particularly if they were indigenous Central Americans, in lieu of the more commonly spoken Spanish. This could prove challenging when a client would insist on speaking Spanish and yet had limited speaking abilities. They were also encouraged to be attuned to potential mental incapacities that affected their ability to communicate clearly and effectively. This was also particularly important, as it was something rarely considered independently by asylum officers during interviews. If a client was thought to have such disabilities, the team would attempt to locate voluntary medical experts who could do remote assessments via phone of the client. With such ‘expert’ assessments, the team could attempt to delay or defer the fear interview in detention altogether.

In these ways, advocates were not only expected in the prep to help prepare a client for their interview, but were additionally expected to, in certain ways, detect issues concerning a client’s competency to communicate their claim. They would, as a result, need to act as if they were medical experts, which most were not. This, as evidenced in previous comments in this chapter, led to a sort of discomfort with some, in that it was seemingly another expression of authority which they felt they had no right to possess. And yet, what this chapter aims to demonstrate along with the rest of this dissertation, is that the dire nature of the environment necessitates such practices, leading to advocates performing roles and enacting practices despite their misgivings or feelings of discomfort.

Some characterize their uncomfortable sentiments surrounding the prep as a shared feeling of vulnerability. Molly described it like this: “Normal law practice is not as intimate, with so much vulnerability, on both sides, like on the client's side but on our side too. Because even in a general law practice, like when you meet with people, you don't really get right to the abuse that they suffered at the hands of their intimate partner, that's not like the first thing you talk about. Or maybe [the clients] are in my office just because they need a work visa, and then [abuse] is never gonna be something that we talk about. So then to go from zero to the most intimate story you

have to share, I'm sure that's really intense for the client. It's really intense from the lawyer perspective too." Later chapters will further discuss an important element of Molly's comments here, and that is this notion of advocates experiencing vulnerability in their care work with detainees.

Delgado (1989) argues that stories are powerful tools "because they invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story's point, and test it against his or her own version of reality," (2440). For advocates like Molly, one of the painful elements of the work is not having to test clients' stories against their own reality, but having to test it against the reality of asylum law, or rather what asylum law will 'care' about or will take seriously as a legitimate reason for having fled their country. This is painful for advocates who recognize the value of stories that don't fit neatly into asylum considerations and must then not only find a way to communicate that to the client, but must also search for the 'right' past trauma. This is challenging to the advocate because it feels deeply unjust and requires that they pursue conversational topics which are clearly difficult for the client to recount. In this way, they search for a legally acceptable fear.

However, at times, the challenging preps—particularly those where there would not necessarily be an obvious asylum claim at the outset of the conversation—eventually proved, to certain advocates, some especially strong arguments about the law and the necessity of advocacy. For some, like Molly, the ways in which these individuals articulated their experiences and reasons for seeking asylum served to contest predominate popular narratives on migrants who manipulate legal opportunities through falsified stories. "You know," she explains, "there are people who think that immigrants make up stories to come here and are coming here to work and all that rhetoric, but I think it's crazy because if anyone talks to any of these women about their journey to the U.S. and what they have to go through, it would be clear that no one wants to leave their country, just for fun...But one story that stuck with me was a woman who told me [in the prep] that she was not

afraid to go back, that she just wanted a life that was better for her children. So I had talked about this with her a little more, and then I was like, ok, tell me why life isn't good for your children there. She says well, I'm a single mother, and I can't take care of my kids, and then she started breaking down. I say, why are you a single mother, and of course, as the story unfolded, she had been beaten and abused by her spouse, the children's father, and that's why she was a single mother. She had moved into the city to try to be able to make more money without having a partner, and she worked in someone's home as cleaner. She was then raped, and her third child was born out of that rape. She moved out of the house after [that man] raped her, obviously, and she tried to put a home together for her kids in a different city and not have it taken by gang members. Finally, was forced to move back in with her parents, and her father had been severely physically abusive to her and her mother her whole life and was then being abusive to her children. So then, of course, I hear all that, and I told her like, that, to me, sounds like a very clear and obvious fear. Of course you want your life to be better for your children, but the reason you're here is because you're escaping all of the violence you've felt in your life and a strong fear of men who have continuously caused you harm, you know? And so yeah, I guess that story just sticks out to me because it was such a clear example of how people are not lying. If anything, they are often down-playing stories because they have to be really strong, and they have to fight and survive for their kids.”



Image 17: Rendering of an advocate meeting with a client and her child during a prep. Artist credit: author

“You, as the person doing the prep, have an agenda, and that makes it hard too. It’s a hard thing to balance, my agenda versus their need to tell their story, in their words,” Molly explains. With this statement, she makes an important point. For many advocates with whom I worked, a sense of these agendas as incommensurate existed within themselves as well as between themselves and clients. Many advocates felt that one of the more important roles that they served for the clients was this positioning that distinguished their work from that of the asylum officer: that the client deserved to have someone listen to them, hear what they wanted to share, and to not force their conversation into directions that only served creating an asylum narrative.

Yet some advocates did see what they did as forcing clients to speak about things that were traumatic or unpleasant. These advocates felt a more significant discomfort with the role in which they were placed, as individuals who, despite their deep interest in the welfare of the clients, were in

a position of authority over the client. While detained women and children were in no way required to meet with advocates, to share any information with them, or receive assistance with their cases, they were essentially without other options for assistance.

Mia, the student journalist from New York, volunteered the same week as a large group of law students. She expressed this unease as one of personal conflict: “It’s very intense to sit through a CFI prep because people bear their souls to you very quickly, not necessarily out of trust, but out of necessity. They feel obliged to. It’s very one-sided...It’s incredible to hear really difficult stories, to sit through those for hours and piece them together. There’s a certain part of your brain that shuts off so that you don’t try to compute everything that they’re saying...[And] it’s more like confessional...I don’t think people are offering it. It’s like you’re getting it out of them. [I felt] like I was in a position of power over them, but I essentially got a PowerPoint and was telling people what to say about their life. It’s like puzzle-solving. When you recognize that, that’s a very scary thing, that’s bad, that you feel pleased that you structured somebody else’s difficult, painful story. So that was very confusing to me to think through.” Mia’s candor, about her uncomfortable feelings around authority in the work, reflect a valid though very rarely shared sentiment, in certain respects. While many advocates shared this attitude that they, as non-immigration attorneys or even immigration attorneys who were not experienced with this stage of asylum law, were ill-equipped to be helping women prepare for such a critical interview, few expressed a similar sentiment concerning authoritative positioning.

Mia and Molly, though articulating distinct reasons for discomfort relative to the prep, demonstrate an important point: that the questioning and challenging of the legal advocacy work itself, while nearly universally regarded with great esteem, was a consistent reality amongst both weekly volunteer advocates and project staff. Project staff were routinely sincerely receptive to feedback from passing voluntary advocates and were also themselves often critical of elements of

the work, consistently searching for ways to improve upon it and frustrated by the ways in which they felt frequently hamstrung by organizational and official constraints. These sentiments and the conversations that centered around a range of similar sentiments reflect how what has been called the “unquestioned logics” of “humanitarian reason” and humanitarian efforts (Fassin 2012) are challenged by these very things. Advocates and project staff frequently debated the functions of their work and the roles they potentially played in facilitating the very things they contested.

Reframing Narratives

Advocates explained to me what they felt they did for the client in doing these preps, and often they shared sentiments that emphasized elements that were not explicitly legal assistance. The prep does not simply function to prepare clients for their interviews, or to construct an asylum claim from a client’s story. It also does not function solely to ‘pull out’ the pain an individual has experienced. The prep functions to provide a moment of listening and to value an individual’s experiences and feelings, regardless of whether those relate to their asylum claim. It also functions, for many advocates, to reframe narratives of vulnerability (while still, admittedly, valuing vulnerability for the necessities of asylum law), victimhood, and disempowerment. It functions to alleviate anxieties, to inform of what is to come, and to encourage a defensive, prepared stance. It serves to build a relationship of trust between advocate and client.

Jaclyn, long-term volunteer and undergraduate student from Florida, characterized her feelings on what she provided in the preps in the following way: “When I was doing the preps,” she tells me, “especially there at the end [when I felt that I was better at doing them], I was able to provide women with what they wanted or needed individually. Like some women wanted me to explain what the future steps were, all the logistics, and to help them calm down. Others wanted even more emotional support; some women wanted me to sit there and cry with them. Other times, they wanted me to just prep them for their interviews, making them feel prepared. If I

wasn't there prepping them, if no one was there prepping them for their interview, they wouldn't have passed. That happened a few times, where like if I wasn't there, they might not have passed. So you read different needs. I might have been wrong, but I felt like I could like tell what their needs were.”

For Jaelyn, treating the client as a person with individual needs, interests, and desires was of principal importance in both a space and a legal process which did not value or take seriously individual differences. She also makes an important point, reiterated by many advocates in one form or another, that while she admittedly may have misinterpreted what clients' needs or desires were, the fact that she and others attempt to 'read' clients—not only by listening to what they had to say, but attending to their affects, body language, behaviors, and the particularities of language use—proved meaningful to both parties involved.

After reading about family detention on a legal blog, Sara tells me that the primary reasons she decided to volunteer in Dilley were that she had a legal background, spoke Spanish, and is trying to do more things “out of her comfort zone”. We spoke on the phone after her time volunteering had ended. She described her perception of what she contributed the most in helping clients in a different, though equally valuable, way: “The preps: that was the most significant contribution. Just being a person that they could tell their story to. I felt like it mattered to them that they had somebody that would listen to them and believe them. I could just sort of be a witness to what they had gone through and give them a feeling that like there are people here to help you. You're not really on your own. You know, whether I did a good job or not seems almost secondary to the fact that there's somebody there, just listening and guiding them a little bit through what they were going to say in front of the asylum officer.”

Delgado describes the act of storytelling by 'outgroups' as a form of therapy; by telling stories that realize their own histories of oppression and subjugation, they begin to experience a kind

of liberated healing. Many advocates, like Sara, expressed the sentiment that their role in conducting the prep elicited this effect in the clients with whom they worked. Sara's comments also express another effect that Delgado notes about the benefits of such storytelling. He argues that storytelling serves to encourage group solidarity, in that it demonstrates to others that experiences are not isolated to the individual but are shared by many others. One of the functions that the legal advocacy project performs through the preps but also through the environment in which clients come together in a space to speak about their experiences in group settings is to facilitate group solidarity amongst these women and children. In the space of the prep, when clients dismiss their experiences of intimate partner violence as "bad luck with men" or attribute harm done to their children by gangs or ex-partners as faults of their own, advocates attempt to dispel such individualistic notions by noting the commonalities that are shared between many asylum-seekers at the center. Furthermore, Sara's comment on how she served to remind clients that they were "not alone" implies that she and other advocates like her were there to help clients with this process, that they weren't fighting this particular fight on their own, and that there was a solidarity between advocates and clients in this struggle. Of course, the relatively isolated prep is not the only way in which this is encouraged. Simply by bringing groups of women together in close physical proximity with the purpose of speaking about their past experiences—in particular, when groups of clients are first gathered in the *charlas* to learn and speak briefly about the interview—advocates are not only facilitating a space in which solidarity can flourish, but they are imagining such a space within a decidedly different reality.

The important role of language in law can be understood through the lens of the communicative relationship between lawyers and clients: how lawyers speak to their clients; how they work to instruct their client's speech; and how they work to translate the convoluted and exclusionary language of the law to their clients. Parsons (1962) famously argued that the role of the

lawyer within the context of the relationship with the client is to serve as a mechanism for ‘social control’, which is enacted principally through the discursive relationship. He asserted that the lawyer serves to communicate important, necessary things to a client, particularly in what he described as helping them to see the realities of their cases, including the likelihood for their success in court. This communicative role also serves as a sort of ‘tension release’ for the client, wherein the client is able to openly express their emotions and frustrations about their cases to their lawyer. This, in a way, echoes Delgado’s comments on the therapeutic effect of outgroup storytelling.

The role of the lawyer as ‘reality translator’ is emphasized in other works as well. In their work on ‘law talk’, Sarat and Felstiner (1992) investigate the forms of language used between divorce lawyers and clients which serve to instruct clients in the meaning of law in ways that help them relate legal rules to their individual issues. They argue that the “purpose of this rhetorical style is usually to convince the client that the legal process is risky business, that legal justice is different from social justice, and that clients can only achieve reasonable certainty at a reasonable cost, and maintain some control over a divorce, by negotiating a settlement with the other side” (1992: 1463). Good (2006) delineates different forms of law talk, noting that the one identified by Sarat and Felstiner is a form of ‘realist’ law talk. Good argues that realist talk is, in fact, most well-suited to lawyers working on asylum cases. This type of linguistic approach by the lawyer, similar to Sarat and Felstiner’s divorce lawyers, helps to prepare the clients, asylum-seekers, for the sometimes harsh and unsympathetic realities of asylum court decisions. Realist talk between lawyer and client attempts to convey that, in reality, personally-held ideologies may hold more influence over the judges’ (or in this instance, asylum officer’s) decisions on their cases than an expectation to adhere to rules or some sense of justice. Realist talk is meant to prepare clients for the possible failure of their cases and to locate this failure in these sorts of idiosyncrasies and not as a result of an inadequacy of the legal representatives or of the clients themselves.

The prep, however, should not be understood simply as translating realities to clients, but also as a form of encounter that is deeply imaginative. Liisa Malkki (2015) reminds us that “humanitarianism is an object of imagination, and aid projects engage in many imaginative practices” (13). The prep, itself, is perhaps the most imaginative aspect of the work that these advocates do. In it, they try to imagine the asylum claim within the narrative that the client shares with them about their past. Clients, as individuals with complex lives, share many details of their pasts that motivated them to leave and seek asylum in the U.S. As emphasized already, not all these details prove relevant for an asylum claim, though that does not mean that they do not have a legitimate claim to asylum. The work of the advocate is to take their knowledge, and often the collective knowledge of the group, of the law and do the imaginative work that connects it to their experiences. Their work is to draw this thread between the client and the law, and with particularly challenging cases or clients, an advocate’s imaginative capabilities need to be strong.

This is not to imply that these imaginative projects mean that advocates create false narratives. They do not, despite claims sometimes openly leveled or subtly implied by those on the “other side of the desk”, be they asylum officers or other government officials. They do not do this for many reasons, not least because they are aware of how such actions could drastically harm the continuation of such advocacy. They do, nonetheless, work to imagine a client’s asylum claim: to listen to the complex, multifaceted details of clients’ pasts and build, through that, a case that fits within the very narrow boundaries of asylum law.

But this imaginative work is not only manifested in the prep; they also work to imagine alternative realities for the client that do not have direct relevance to their legal cases. They affirm the space in which these clients are held as punitive, carceral spaces, rather than caring ones. They work to imagine a reality, in their conversations with clients, in which they are not simply vulnerable

victims, in need of protection, but as Ali put it to a group of new volunteers, they are strong, powerful, intelligent individuals deserving of admiration and respect.

June was an attorney who after spending some time in Mexico had decided to move back to the U.S. to find a job. She had not done immigration legal work before but had a friend who was an immigration lawyer who invited her to join her in Dilley. June spent two weeks volunteering with the project. Once she was finished and back home in Georgia, she told me over the phone that during her time there, there were more happy moments than she had initially expected. One of her favorites happened during intake, when she was helping a Guatemalan mother and daughter fill out documents. They were indigenous and spoke the language *Mam*. The daughter was helping her mother by translating between *Mam* and Spanish for her. It was common that an indigenous parent would speak little Spanish and their children, who were more fluent in both languages, would translate. Some older children would even write for their parents who had not had enough schooling to be able to write. At one point while they were all working together on filling out the documents, June complimented the daughter on how great it was that she spoke *Mam*, that she had kept her “mother’s tongue”. She told her that she thought it was “good to keep and speak your native language”. The daughter looked at her happily when she heard this, thanking and telling her that people often “look down on” her mother for not speaking Spanish. It was after that exchange that the daughter asked to touch June’s hair and her skin. Both the daughter and her mother had darker skin than many of the clients, and June was Black. June complimented her dark skin, telling her she looked very pretty.

Though it occurred in a fleeting moment, this exchange meant a lot to June and left her with a meaningful encounter in which she helped imagine an alternative reality to those previously experienced by this mother and daughter. The following section will offer a deeper look at some of

the many other ways in which contestation of narratives, through counterstorytelling, coalesces with imagination.

Countering

Carlos is the type of kind, energetic person who appears to have simply immeasurable patience and an unending spool of smiles. He is a member of the project staff team, and by the time we sit down at the staff's long dining room table, it is pitch black outside and he is exhausted by a long, hard week at the center. As staff members often are at this point in the day, he is thin on patience and has a hoarse voice from speaking with clients and volunteers for the 12-hour workday. He speaks frankly when I ask him about how doing the prep feels, from his perspective: "It's not so much that this is like affecting me, it's more like 'this is what you need to know for your CFI because it's so important that you do a good job'. They need to understand that they are the victim here. They aren't the ones that have broken a law; these people are fucking them over. They should not have gone through any of this experience. So that's the thing, my mind isn't in like this mode where I'm listening to her story and thinking oh my god, this is insane; it's more like 'fuck everyone else'. It's like, 'this is what you need to know, do a good job, and I'm so sorry this happened to you'." Carlos's comments here not only reflect the often-conflicting emotions advocates frequently feel within a single encounter; they also reflect a common desire to contest the narratives inherent to clients' detention.

Critical race theorists have often noted the multitude of ways in which power is contested through language. Delgado specifically does this through his attention to acts of counterstorytelling. Offering examples of legal counterstorytelling enacted to reform racist policies, Delgado notes the ways that such a practice contests exertions of power by challenging the dominant discursive constructions—as expressed through law as simply natural—of reality. Beyond the work of the prep, advocates perform daily conducts that serve to contest certain narratives at play in the facility, acting

as counterstorytellers. For some advocates, this means emphasizing clients' undue victimization through punitive incarceration. For others, emphasis on the opposite, in a sense, is what is most important; they instead hope to reiterate and affirm the power and fortitude of those they encounter. For many, both are deeply meaningful.



Carolina was seated on the couch, a strip of early evening sunlight streaming in from the opposite window on her face. She's a young volunteer, an undergraduate student who had come on the trip intending only to serve as an interpreter for the several non-Spanish-speaking law students with whom she traveled from New York. She was excited about the opportunity to go, as the law school paid for her way, though she didn't imagine that she would end up doing legal work on her own (a commonly-expressed preconception of those who thought they would only be interpreting for lawyers or law students. She, as all others do, came to learn one of the fundamental rules of doing this work: everyone does everything).

Carolina had a consistently calm demeanor. She was shy but clever, expressing genuine curiosity about the intricacies of asylum law, and gentle in her interactions with the mothers and children with whom she worked. As she sat on the couch that evening at our Big Table meeting, she told a story of a meaningful encounter with one of her clients. She had prepped this mother for her impending interview, and her story, rather the details of her reason for leaving her country, was, Carolina says, a horrific case of domestic violence. She says, calmly, with her eyes downturned: "After awhile, I told her I needed to go talk to a lawyer [to get feedback on helping her shape her case], but in my head I was thinking, I need to get out of here, I'm going to cry, I need to get out of here." Streaks of tears began to shine down her cheeks, streams running parallel to her long, dark curls. "I was saying to myself, 'don't cry, Carolina, you have to be strong, you're not supposed to cry, you're here to help her.'" Although Carolina was openly crying now during her retelling to all of us encircled around her at our meeting, she continued.

"I told this mom, who was very young," she said, "'you know that you're strong, right?' I mean this mom was a DV victim and had been told these awful things about herself, and so I told her 'you know whatever [your abusers] said isn't true, right? You are a brave, good person. You're a strong, independent woman. You know that, right?' And she said to me, 'well, that's what my mom always tells me...' and I said 'well, it's true'. And that, to me, doesn't have anything to do with legal help, but it's really important."



What was meaningful to Carolina in this exchange, the retelling of which left most of us in that moment at the meeting in tears, was her attempt to reframe a narrative in this client's life by countering it with its seeming opposite. Although Carolina characterizes this effort as not having "anything to do with legal help"—an opinion, shared by several of my informants, that I hope to challenge to some extent—what she does here in this split second with a client reflects impulses and

accompanying acts that play such an integral role in the work of these advocates. This form of counterstorytelling, as I would characterize it, takes many forms, some more explicitly activist than others, but always takes aim at what are perceived to be destructive or disempowering narratives. These are narratives that clients bring with them, as a result of the abuse or trauma they have experienced, but they are also narratives that circulate, in varied formulations, inside the facility itself. Some of these narratives, like those which are produced through the prep and subsequent interview, are integral to the process of seeking asylum itself, but they also exist and circulate in more covert spheres.

Carolina's story expresses one form of narrative contestation at work inside the center. Her story showed the ways in which advocates attempt to affirm empowering narratives surrounding the lives of clients while simultaneously being compelled to deny such framings. As Carolina's story shows, this act is in fact deeply meaningful for advocates themselves. For some, making comments like these are intended to assuage what they perceive to be the multifaceted nature of the injustice experienced by these clients; not only have they suffered abuse, but they, along with the unfortunate help of asylum processes, will continue to suffer, repeatedly residing alongside their harm. For many advocates, listening to these stories while also witnessing new forms of abuse through this process seem to call for efforts of contestation. It is important for them to affirm positive narratives, to offer contrast to that which they have received and will likely continue to receive.

After working with a Haitian mother extensively on her very complex asylum claim, Joe felt at a loss. Although an experienced attorney in his seventies with a friendly, warm demeanor and always sharply dressed in a full suit, he struggled to get the young client to speak openly with him, to feel as if she could fully trust or feel comfort with him. As this client had failed her interview, she needed to enter into additional processes to maintain her asylum case. This meant she would have to then see a judge, who would appear remotely in a sort of mock courtroom at the center through

video equipment, to decide on the future of her case. Joe had done additional work with her to prepare her for this court appointment, and before their third meeting together, he had sought advice from a fellow volunteer about how to strengthen the comfortability of the relationship between them. Jane, a volunteer from Chicago experienced with working with victims of assault, advised him on how to approach their next meeting. “Affirm her, she told me, affirm her,” he said. “Tell her she’s strong, tell her she’s a good mother, tell her what she’s done is amazing. And as soon as Jane tells me that, I think, of course that’s what I have to do! So I had this realization and was using creole interpreter for that third meeting. I told the interpreter, ‘will you please tell her that I think she is an incredibly strong person, and that I admire and respect her. And I waited for the interpreter to say those words, and the client lost it, and I lost it, and I saw that she understood what I was saying to her: that I respected and admired her.’” He felt as if even by uttering those simple words to her, the dynamic of their relationship had changed. After she returned from court, the client saw Joe, and rushed to embrace him.

Both Carolina and Joe express the ways in which affirming the strength and ‘goodness’ of the clients with whom they worked was seemingly both meaningful for the client as well as themselves. It was important for them to communicate that which they felt the client had not heard enough or perhaps was hearing too frequently the opposite: that they were good parents, that they were not weak.

Firsts and Lies

“We’re the first citizens there to welcome them,” Sue, a repeat and long-term volunteer attorney from Tennessee, tells me one day. “We’re the first group to explain that we want you here, help them try to connect with their families, to tell them that they’re really brave. You’re the first person that’s on their side. You’re trying to help them through the process and trying to undo the negative impressions they’ve had so far. I also offer the women the nicer chair [in the prep room],

ask them if it's ok that I take notes, and tell them that I will be careful with their information. I ask them if they want the door open or closed, if I can go with them to their interview. I'm just trying to give them options when they've had no control at all in this situation previously."

While Sue's comments might appear to some as surely hyperbolic, clients' characterizations of encounters with officials and other authority figures prior to arriving at the detention center, including those officials working within the center, commonly reflect abusive and dismissive encounters. Advocates repeatedly encounter clients crying about the treatment they experienced at the border and at the center, where officials have done little in the way of welcoming their arrival. Thus, many advocates take pride and a sense of responsibility in performing acts of welcoming. In this way, while they cannot undo the harm of the narratives that government officials deploy, they attempt to counteract, or perhaps counterbalance, some of the harm or lack of control they have experienced.

Amber, an immigration attorney, expressed a common sentiment about what was important to get across to the clients: that they had not committed a crime. "The thing I tried to emphasize," she said, "was that they haven't broken any laws, that they have a right to apply for asylum, everyone has that right, they didn't do anything wrong. And we were there to help them." The idea that they had committed some sort of legal infraction was an exceedingly common perception among clients at the center. Some had explicitly been told this by officials at the border upon their entry, though in other moments it was unclear as to why they had believed this to be true. To this point in my interview with Amber, recalling Dow's (2005) comments on the oddness of immigrant incarceration, I responded by noting how strange it is to communicate this to someone who is presently incarcerated. She answered, "Right, they're in jail and you're telling them that they didn't do anything wrong. It's kind of hard [to understand] but I think it carried a lot of weight, from what I noted."

Clients frequently shared with us the many forms of misinformation disseminated to them by officials, often in their encounters that occurred with Border Patrol officers or ICE officials at the border. They would bring these comments up as they desired to confirm their truth, as these lies were often of the sort that caused them concern and distress. Some were told that they would not be able to receive asylum without physical proof of their claims (which many do not have), such as police reports or death certificates. Some were told that, because of the country they were from, they would not be given asylum. It was important for many, like Amber and Carlos, to immediately and strongly refute these claims, as they were not only harmful to clients' ability to defend themselves in the face of such misinformation, they were also harmful in that they served to naturalize punishment through, specifically, incarceration, as a necessary response to those seeking asylum.

Delgado reminds us also that the “dominant group creates its own stories, as well,” and that the “stories or narratives told by the ingroup remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural,” (1989:2412). The ways in which the qualities of the space itself are discussed daily, even in casual, passing moments, lie on deeply contested grounds. Facility staff repeatedly work to affirm the space's identity as a non-carceral facility and their own roles within it as non-carceral as well. This serves to delimit their identity, and the identity of the space, in relation to that of the detainees. Their intention is seemingly to project a ‘caring’ image of the center, and they do this not only through the physical designs of the facility, but also in the language used in everyday encounters. Advocates contest the caring ideologies that are embedded within this obfuscating everyday language.

“We can't make her come here. It's not like this is a prison,” he said. On a frantic afternoon in the facility, one of the male guards said this to a group of us as he looked off in the distance, leaning back comfortably in his desk chair. He was visibly annoyed at our request for him to ‘locate’

a client we needed to speak with on an urgent matter related to her case. Legal advocates are incapable of notifying clients directly, so the advocacy team relies heavily on the guards' cooperation—to locate clients—in this effort. His sentiment expressed here—which implies that he or other guards have notified the client of our interest in speaking with her but she is intentionally choosing not to come to where we were located to meet with us—was commonly expressed by guards, though not always in such explicit terms. Such comments about the nature of the space often were made without prompting, as advocates rarely had the luxury to sit with guards and discuss differing perceptions of the environment in which they worked together. The constant presence of comments like this, usually unprovoked, hints at an intention: to affirm the identity of these particular facilities as non-carceral.

This was, however, like so many other narratives around the facilities, eventually contested by the advocates. Some, like Raquel and Carlos, chose to use the time of the *charla* to make their contesting claim. Raquel, in her work at Dilley, would refer to facility staff as “red shirts” (a reference to one of the staff uniforms, which included a maroon, collared t-shirt) and guards. Carlos would use similar referential language as well and took pleasure in using these references when the *charlas* took place nearby the guards' desks. He, in particular, characterized this as an intentional act of contestation; in his proximity between the clients and guards, he was speaking to the clients—as he informed them of necessary information—but he was also communicating this, indirectly, to the guards.

Oleana, another project staff member, told a story of how in one of what was the project's weekly meetings with ICE officials to discuss important concerns legal advocates had, often about treatment of detainees, she had apparently and unintentionally offended one of them by referring to those in his profession as “*la migra*”. He angrily scolded her for using the term, telling her that she could not use this word because it was a derogatory slur for officials. Oleana's encounter in

this instance, which was repeated in different forms in encounters between advocates and guards, ICE officials, and judges, reflects an additional important point about counterstorytelling. Officials at the center often rejected the language that was in circulation not only with advocates but with detainees themselves, and several advocates experienced encounters with officials in which they forcefully sought to deny such language. In another instance, an interpreter in the courtroom with a client, advocate, and judge had deployed the almost universally used term ‘*grillete*’ to refer to the ankle monitoring device after the judge had wanted this explained to the client. When the judge then asked the interpreter what *grillete* translated to, to which she replied “a shackle”, he flew into a rage, telling the interpreter that she should have used the language deployed by officials: ankle bracelet. The interpreter contested this, arguing that by using the term for a bracelet, the client would be confused, as *grillete* is the term in use by detainees. The device about which they were speaking was a *grillete*, and not a bracelet, to them, she explained. Many instances like this occurred in different forms, often creating conflict between advocates and officials, who frequently sought to use euphemized terminologies of care.



In October 2016, around mid-day, a new group of visitors arrived in the legal trailer. They were members of the UN OHCHR’s (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. I was standing around talking in one of our offices with a few of the volunteers and staff from that week who hadn’t left yet to go for lunch when someone from our group rushed up to the doorway and whispered, “the UN people are here! They’re walking through now.” We had been expecting them, as the project staff had learned that they planned to come on a tour sometime within the week. All of us were excited to see them and hopefully talk to them as they passed through, though we were skeptical that ICE would even allow them to pass through the legal trailer. As the five of us rushed to watch through the doorway, we saw a group of 4 or 5 people wearing large blue vests, covered with deep pockets and UN insignia. We laughed quietly to ourselves at how strange this uniform appeared here, with us in our courtroom appropriate outfits. One of the volunteers, James, joked that it was their “disaster casual”. Alongside the group was an equal number of ICE officers closely escorting them. Most of the group were following the lead ICE officer, as he gave them information about the purpose of the legal trailer and introduced them to the project’s lead attorney. She stood across the hall from us, smiling as she shook hands with the visitors.

One of the group broke away and walked over to us, saying hello. We told him we were volunteers with the project. He asked us about the phones at the facility, how detainees contacted their families. We told him that they have to pay for calls, and that they rarely have money to do so. He asked: “Oh, so if you have to talk to a lawyer, you

would need a lot of money, right? Cause that would be a long call.” Of course, all of us knew the answer to that, but were afraid to share too much in front of the officers: these detainees aren’t calling any lawyers. We are the only legal assistance they have. We spoke to him a bit more, from the doorway, about what we did and how they can contact people “on the outside”. Within five minutes of him speaking to us, an unreasonably tall, blonde ICE officer attired in the seemingly standard Wrangler’s and work boots strode over to the visitor informing him that “he needed to go; the tour was moving on”, waving his arm towards the collected group of visitors and officers across the hall. “Oh,” he replied, and to us, he said “it was nice to meet you. It seems like the women are very happy in here. It seems like you’re doing very good work here.” The officer then escorted him 10 feet away from us and stood at his side. The tour had not moved on, and we stood across the hall and watched. Another UN visitor was speaking with our project’s attorney, asking her questions about the detainees, and an ICE official, this one dressed in a full suit, kept attempting to “clarify” answers to their questions, interrupting the project attorney’s responses. They were in the trailer for less than 10 minutes before moving the tour out of the building.



The intentions of the facility’s officials to control the narratives that these visitors had access to concerning the facility itself was apparent to those of us who were there in that moment. They spent very little time allowing the tour participants to observe the legal trailer and speak to its perpetual inhabitants—in this case, the legal advocacy team—and were in close physical proximity with them at all times. This, and the obviously excessive number of escorts, would likely be argued by the officials to be related to security and/or safety concerns, as they frequently used these justifications for limiting actions. While we attempted to contest certain mischaracterizing perceptions of the functions of the facility, the officials’ intimidating presence affected our comfort with commentary.

Ultimately, power can be seen as exerted or contested through language in daily, grounded invocations, such as these. Richland (2008), in his ethnographic work on Hopi tribal courts, describes these invocations as the ‘discursive microdetails’ of legal practice. His work shows, as others have as well, how contests over power, authority, and adjudicatory legitimacy can only be understood through an attention to the microdetails of discourse in courtroom interactions. While this will be explored further in a later chapter on the asylum interview and subsequent courtroom interactions at the facility, it is important to think about how the discursive microdetails of legal

practice function beyond the courtroom or asylum office. Immigration officials, in this instance, exerted their power through attempts to control the narratives surrounding legal aid and legal rights. When legal advocates insist on referring to the setting in which they meet with clients as a baby jail, prison, or detention center, they are using language to contest both the legal and moral legitimacy of the place. They are challenging the discursive reality in which they work.

Matoesian (2001) also describes certain particularities of language-use in the court, specifically, as the “micro-linguistic dimension of legal reality”. His attention to the “poetic function of language use” within rape trials examines the ways in which language is manipulated by each side of a case to competitively construct their own reality of the event involved. These micro-linguistic contestations become the site for staking claims on reality. While this idea is certainly relevant for the prep and subsequent interview, I would argue that this also relates in an important way to those other linguistic choices and practices in encounters that take place within the legal visitation trailer. Advocates, in the language they choose to use with clients, one another, and facility staff, are staking claims on numerous aspects of the reality of the context. By repeatedly affirming the carceral and punitive nature of the facility, and consequently rejecting the sanitized, caring language in use by the administrators of the center, they are constructing an alternative reality. For advocates, this may be a less comforting reality than that provided by the administrators of the facility, but it is important that this reality be affirmed. Though, as Delgado claims, “complacency—born of comforting stories—is a major stumbling block to racial progress. Counterstories can attack that complacency,” (2438). Affirming these counterstories is an important act for many reasons, but one of the most pressing is that the clients, ultimately, must defend themselves throughout most of the processes at the center. Advocates cannot be with them most of the time, and there is much that they are not allowed to do, physical spaces they are not allowed to go. Clients can be and have been deported in the middle of the night, when advocates are not even allowed inside the center (or when visiting hours have

ended). For advocates, it is crucial to propagate the idea that this is a place that can and will do harm. Ultimately, these are carceral spaces and clients will be treated as harmfully and as with little regard as are prisoners. Understanding and recognizing this is necessary for proper self-defense, and it is encouraged because it serves the broader population as well.

Conclusions

In the space of the prep, advocates are working to frame a client's lived experiences in the law's terms. Rhetorically, they would speak of this as if they were helping clients to 'see' their legal claim. Many advocates would not, however, articulate this as attempting to make the client see themselves as simply victims, as comments throughout this chapter have demonstrated. They would instead attempt to reinforce empowering narratives or narratives that expressed a shared sense of the unfairness of this process and of the law, while also attempting to encourage and enable clients to use the terms that they will need in order to navigate the system themselves. This is what the prep is truly about: preparing clients for self-defense, not only because that is what they will have to do as a consequence of their fear interview in detention, but also in the extra-detention legal world in which they are less-than-likely to find *pro bono* legal assistance.

One of the things this chapter has intended to elucidate is that even though we can critique advocates for reifying, in a sense, the unfair legal boundaries and expectations of asylum, the critique doesn't carry much weight in the face of what they are ultimately attempting to do in their work. Their role is not about standing in for the clients—and thus controlling their speech—it is helping them to defend themselves. This is not to suggest that advocates are not in a position of power in relation to their clients. Legal advocates are unfairly positioned in these spaces to contest certain injustices and obtain pertinent legal information, among other things, while detainees remain severely limited in their abilities. Most advocates recognize these serious inequities, even struggle with their participation in them, as previous comments have implied. Their privilege, as

evidenced in this chapter, is deployed to challenge the terms of the environment in ways that are not allowed to the clients, that clients are either specifically forbidden from challenging or because of their subjugated position, they cannot. Because of their privileged position, advocates can and do challenge facility staff, and they can call into question the language of detention and the treatment of clients. The following chapter will further explore these positions of power. I will consider the meaning of ‘authority’ in this space, and how authority and power, in the context of these figures and their relationships with one another, are not solid objects, but are fluid, constantly shifting.

Advocates’ preps can be critiqued for the ways in which they participate in certain projects of control. In this way, they seemingly align with Parsons (1962) claim that the role of the lawyer within the context of the relationship with the client is to serve as a mechanism for social control, which is enacted principally through the discursive relationship. In this case, the conversation that takes place in the prep is meant to, in a sense, control through guiding the narratives that are to be reproduced in the fear interview. It is, as Mia suggests, meant to apply value to certain parts of an individual’s past while devaluing others. This is the result of the limitations and deeply exclusionary nature of asylum law. While advocates become the conduits for the law’s limitations and valuations, they simultaneously express a respect that gives sincere value to those devalued experiences and the qualities of an individual’s experiences as an individual, and not simply as an asylum-seeker.

I was often struck by the seemingly twinned qualities of the research I was conducting and the work of legal advocates. In certain respects, performing the prep with clients reminded me of ethnographic research. The fear interview itself, importantly, did not. The prep is intended to provide a space in which she who is being interviewed is afforded the opportunity, even encouraged, to speak at much greater length—to, in fact, tell a story—than the interviewer, and it did function in

this way. The prep affords the client's thick description of their own lives and rationalities for leaving home and seeking asylum in the U.S. As later chapters will show, this is rarely afforded in the interview itself, so the prep serves to provide the client with this opportunity. Advocates would listen to the stories to those they worked with, empathized with them, and tried to guide the conversation away from certain areas of their pasts and towards others. They tried not to lead clients to use language that was not of their own, meaning language that would appear strangely out-of-place in that client's interview. They encouraged clients to tell their story in their own way but would, nonetheless, work with them to help shape the final product that was their 'asylum story'. Just as these advocates would sit with clients, listening and taking in the stories that left with them indelible scars, I too would sit and listen to advocates repeat those same stories to me, as they felt as if, in certain ways, those stories and scars became a part of them as well. While in some respect, I did guide them there through my questioning, over time I began to sense that I had initially overestimated my role in directing the conversation towards these stories. As many advocates came to experience in their preps with clients, certain stories appear to, unprovoked, push their way out.

The harm that asylum law enacts upon applicants, through its myriad exclusions and varied invocations of trauma, is repeatedly made evident, and the ensuing chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate its many formulations. This chapter has introduced some of the ways in which the violences of family detention extend beyond the physical to include "assaults on personhood, dignity and the sense of worth and value of a person," (Merry 2007:42; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). What is less visible is how legal advocates, in their everyday work with detainees, contend with this harm. This chapter has demonstrated the way in which this is approached through one encounter, the 'prep', and how care is deployed within that interaction to not only mitigate further harm, but also to make spaces for different kinds of storied relations. Beyond the prep, advocates challenge, through counterstorytelling, dominant narratives which serve to either dehumanize

detainees or mischaracterize, even deny, their experiences. In these ways, legal advocates do much more than simply keep clients from being “ground up in the gears” of the asylum process, as Ali once put it. Through caring stances in intimate conversations, they offer value to experiences that are not valued (and will not be valued) by the law, and they help to affirm lived realities that are experienced by clients and yet seemingly denied by officials. Their work involves changing the conversation, both with asylum-seekers and about asylum-seekers, as well as imagining new stories and realities, together.

Citations

- Conley, John M., and William M. O'Barr. *Rules versus Relationships: The Ethnography of Legal Discourse*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1990.
- Delgado, Richard. “Legal Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative”. 87 Mich. L. Rev. 2411, 1989.
- Dow, Mark. *American Gulag: Inside U. S. Immigration Prisons*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2005.
- Fassin, Didier and Estelle D'Halluin. “Critical Evidence: The Politics of Trauma in French Asylum Policies”. *Ethos*. 35 (3): 300-329, 2007.
- “The Truth From the Body: Medical Certificates as Ultimate Evidence for Asylum Seekers”. *American Anthropologist*. 107 (4), 2005.
- and Rechtman, Richard. *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*. Princeton UP, 2009.
- Good, Anthony. *Anthropology and Expertise in the British Asylum Courts*. New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2006.
- Granfield, Robert. *Making Elite Lawyers: Visions of Law at Harvard and beyond*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Mckinley, Michelle. “Life Stories, Disclosure, and the Law”. *PoLAR*: Vol 20, No 2, November 1997.
- Merry, Sally Engle. *Getting Justice and Getting Even: Legal Consciousness among Working-class Americans*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1990.
- “Introduction”. In Mark Goodale and Sally Engle Merry, eds. *The Practice of Human Rights: Tracking Law Between the Global and the Local*, pp. 41-48. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

- Nayak, Meghana. *Who is Worthy of Protection? Gender-Based Asylum and US Immigration Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Parsons, Talcott. "The Law and Social Control." In *Law and Sociology: Exploratory Essays*, ed. William M. Evan. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.
- Sarat, Austin and William Felstiner. "Enactments of Power: Negotiating Reality and Responsibility in Lawyer-Client Interactions". *Cornell Law Review* 77 (6): 1992.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy, and Philippe Bourgois. "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence." In Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, eds. *Violence in War and Peace*, pp. 1–33. Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004.
- Ticktin, Miriam Iris. *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. Berkeley: U of California, 2011.

Chapter 3: Caring Frictions

On a chilly December day close to Christmas, a child collapsed on the floor of the visitation trailer and stopped breathing. Chase, the advocate who was with the girl when it happened, tells me about it. “On my first day down there,” he starts, “a kid went unresponsive on me in the middle of the room.” They were in one of the small, private offices where he was playing with children while their mothers worked on their cases with other advocates. “I had to pick her up, and I ran into the main area and said to the guards, ‘this child is not breathing, you need to call 9-1-1’. They responded with, ‘oh, we don’t do that, we can’t do that’, and I was like, ‘what are you talking about? This child is not breathing’. One guard said, ‘we don’t make 9-1-1 calls here’, and it seemed like they were trying to imply that it was related to some marketing or publicity issue. One of the project staff, one of the lawyers, ended up trying to make the call to 9-1-1 herself, but the guards cancelled it. Luckily, there was a doctor volunteering with us that week, and she was able to revive the girl.”

This was extremely frightening for Chase, who had volunteered with the project for the first time that visit. He was a law student from Oregon, interested in human rights work. Prior to this unexpected turn of events, he had spent the day mostly playing with the children, sitting for them while their mothers worked on their cases. He didn’t speak Spanish and wasn’t experienced with immigration law, so when he looked for other ways to be helpful to the project, he found it in spending time with the children. Staff of the project began to playfully refer to him as the ‘child whisperer’. They would later regale new volunteers with stories of how he would place the smaller children in the plastic bins used for document collection and push them across the floor while they squealed gleefully. “That first trip,” he tells me, “I was going to the local dollar store and getting all these stickers for the kids. In this facility, we made up one of the private rooms into like a kid playroom. We had all these notepads and pens, and the kids would go around asking each other questions as if they were doing intakes. It was the most adorable thing I’ve ever seen.” His perception of the facility, and the roles of advocates, changed after this incident. The moment in which this young girl suddenly stopped breathing, collapsed on the tile floor in front of him in the mock playroom, was a jarring reminder of the carceral reality in which they presently ‘resided’.



Moments like this, experienced in different forms by so many new advocates, offer the clearest perspective of the potential for harm embedded in this environment. They also demonstrate the ways in which the provision of care crashes into the seemingly immovable object of the carceral administration. The administrative response, which seems to extend beyond a sort of expression of disregard or abandonment (Biehl 2005, 2012) and instead appears as a strategic denial of care, is directly tied to the identity and projected image of these facilities. The actions of administrators—in this particular instance, the guards—shouldn’t necessarily be interpreted as the choices of ‘bad’ actors, who personally wish to do harm or allow harm to take place, but instead reflects the circumstances under which these individuals work. While not made explicit in this encounter, which

is understood only from this volunteer's perspective, the environment shapes administrators' behaviors and judges them as well. This speaks to what one former staff member of the legal project, who had spent several months working there, described as the many ways in which spaces like this make it difficult for compassion to thrive. All of this, of course, is complicated by the fact that administrative messaging around the facility itself, in relation to care, contrasts with everyday practices. As Chase's encounter demonstrates, while officials are interested in projecting a caring image of the center, their practical care often remains purely superficial. Previous chapters have discussed the ways in which everyday physical and mental health care were woefully, and sometimes near-fatally, inadequate. In this instance, administrators, from the perspective of advocates, would not call 9-1-1 because, by the simple fact of needing to call 9-1-1, their caring image would be harmed by being recognized as a place where 'better' care would be required. From the advocate's perspective, caring interests revolve around the facility, rather than its prisoners.

While the explicit reason for the legal advocates' existence at these facilities is to assist detainees with their asylum claims, what they do for them, as well as how they characterize what they do, extends far beyond legal aid. This point has already been demonstrated in the previous two chapters, explaining why I choose to characterize their work as 'legal care', as opposed to simply legal aid or advocacy. This chapter delves more deeply into the ways in which care takes shape in these facilities beyond explicit legal work, with particular attention to the relationship between care and conflict. How do these two conceptual objects—which seem to be naturally at odds—inform one another in these contexts? Murphy (2015) recalls for us the idea that “the exercise of power operates through care in many divergent ways,” (719). The previous chapter explored, primarily, the practices of care which are enabled through the 'prep' encounter. In that exchange, power operated, principally, through narrative contestation. This chapter examines the relationship between apparent expressions of power and conflict over care.

This chapter begins with a simple question: how does conflict appear in the everyday of these facilities? The most common manifestation of conflict is found in contentious encounters, or “borderland moments” (Mattingly 2010), between advocates and administrative actors, particularly guards. This is mostly so because guards are the administrative group with whom advocates share space and certain work responsibilities daily, but also because of the inherent conflict between those tasked with the microdetails of daily control and management and the resistance effected by ‘free’ persons traversing this same terrain (Comfort 2008). As this chapter will demonstrate, ‘frictions’ between these two groups take multiple forms, while also expressing certain shared qualities wherein beliefs about what is good, necessary, or harmful for detainees and their advocates are contested, both directly and indirectly. These frictions play a substantive role in advocates’ perceptions of and feelings about the environment. Simultaneously, the practical movement of advocates’ work with detainees is determined, in many ways, by administrators themselves and the qualities of the relationships between the two groups. In order to give care, in other words, to detained clients, advocates depend upon a certain level of collaboration with administrators. This chapter, then, looks not only at the tensions between advocates and administrators, but also at the distinct care that is given to those relationships considering those tensions. Lastly, I begin to examine elements of the frictions that reside within the advocacy group themselves, considering how these relate to the movement of work, the management of administrative and client relationships, and notions of care of the self. Further chapters will continue to explore questions about advocates, and the communities of advocates, themselves.

Theoretical work on care which emphasizes its ‘contested terrains’, its interdependency (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) as well as the ways in which practicing care involves continuous ‘tinkering’ on uncertain grounds (Mol et al. 2010) offers a window to the multilayered and complicated landscape of legal advocacy in this context, in which the administration’s implicit and explicit identification

with care paradoxically proscribes and delimits much care practice. Additionally, while influenced by Tsing's (2005) use of "friction", I have chosen to deploy it here in more straightforward terms and in concert with Bellacasa's and Mol's approaches to care. I find that the metaphor of friction is particularly suited for understanding the sorts of encounters and relationships that are borne out of legal care work in this environment, and I believe that most of my fellow advocates would agree. The ways in which advocates' work, and advocates themselves, seemingly grate against administrative processes and administrators in these facilities is palpable every day. The use of punishment as an expression of power and control is not simply limited to incarcerated persons, as this chapter will repeatedly demonstrate. Diverging from questions about globalization, I follow Tsing somewhat in my consideration of how the boundaries of care are to be reimagined and perhaps reconstituted in consideration of these frictions.

Each chapter in this dissertation discusses the various frictions which exist in these facilities. This is inevitable, as it is a defining quality of both daily existence within and the experiences of advocates. This chapter engages directly with only some of the ways in which varied ideas and practices of care are made evident through everyday frictions. What care becomes, from one moment, one encounter to the next, is necessarily shaped by both resistance and compromise. What does an attention to these frictions and conflicts lend to our understanding of this work as well as the environment in which it is committed? I argue, and this chapter demonstrates, that frictions often revolve around questions of care—who is giving care and who is denying it, what is good care, and how can care be achieved in light of severe constraints—as well as expressions of power. Focusing on the mundane details and various articulations of these conflicts exposes the conceptual and practical fluidity of care and points to the ways in which necessarily interdependent relationships are formed by 'tinkering' with caring frictions.

Interruptions and Ruptures

“Has she eaten dinner yet? ¿Comiste la cena?” the guard said to the advocate and her client as he suddenly poked his head into the private room. They were in the middle of their ‘prep’ conversation about her case, and the client had just shared her story of how she had been kidnapped by gang members and taken, blindfolded, from Guatemala, her home, across the border to Honduras, where she was held for ransom for a week. She was kept blindfolded during nearly the entire ordeal, was barely fed, and lived in constant fear of rape. As she cried and continued her story, the guard interrupted to loudly ask about her having had dinner or not. Both facilities had particular mealtimes in which detainees had to either go to the cafeteria to eat or they needed to inform staff that they needed to have ‘to-go’ meals prepared and brought to them. The advocate was frustrated by this interruption, not because it was a singular event, but because these sorts of interruptions were constant and affected both the client’s comfort to speak in confidence as well as the flow of the conversation. After the client, appearing disoriented by the unexpected interruption, replied to the guard that she hadn’t yet had dinner, he looked to the advocate. “She needs dinner,” he said curtly.



The fact that the guard in this instance articulated his desire to enforce rules through the detainee’s supposed ‘needs’ is significant. This was not uncommon. While some guards would ask simply if a client needed dinner to be brought to them, others would insist that women needed to go get their meals. Certain guards deployed shaming tactics against mothers when they elected to remain in the visitation trailer during designated mealtimes. “You need to go get dinner,” a male guard once said with irritation to a mother during a conversation with an attorney. After overhearing him quickly rattle off something else in Spanish to her, I asked him what he said. “I told her that she needs to go right now, because it’s not all about her...her kids are hungry too,” he replied as he walked back to his desk. His implication was that by remaining in the visitation trailer and working on her legal case, she was selfishly disserving her own children. Even with the knowledge that detainees could be given to-go meals, I observed different administrators many times attempt to position legal assistance as interruptive to women’s and their children’s care. Legal assistance, from this perspective, was an unnecessary interference. Such approaches regularly excluded mothers from decision-making about their family’s own mealtimes and their interests in obtaining legal aid with their cases. At times, administrators attempted to incorporate advocates into their own controlling mealtime regimes.



A daycare worker came running out of her building after a mother had just left with her two daughters. The mother was taking them with her to her interview, and I was waiting outside to accompany her. “Have you eaten lunch yet? Have your kids had lunch?” the daycare worker frantically asked the mother. She replied sheepishly that they hadn’t. The mother, Ana Maria, was quite nervous about her interview and had spoken with advocates that morning about how she couldn’t sleep at all the night before. Her eyes were reddened and swollen, evidence of how much she been crying. She was anxious to get the interview over with, as many were.

The daycare worker, a tall woman with long hair pulled tightly into a high ponytail, spun towards me. “They haven’t eaten lunch yet!” she shouted. Why is she yelling at me? I wondered. I then explained to her that if they, meaning the facility staff, wanted her to go eat lunch, someone would need to let the asylum officer in charge of her interview know, because it was scheduled for 12:30pm and that time had arrived. The daycare worker rounded on me again. “Well, she needs to go eat lunch. She can’t have this interview at lunch time, and y’all need to stop scheduling these interviews at lunch. They need to eat,” she said. ‘We’ needed to stop scheduling interviews at this time. This ‘we’ stuck in mind. Of course, advocates had nothing to do with the scheduling of interview times, which was wholly up to the asylum office, though it was unclear as to why the daycare worker, who presumably understood the difference between legal advocates and asylum office employees, thought I held any bearing on interview scheduling.

After Ana Maria obtained her to-go lunches from the cafeteria, we returned to the asylum office together and began the check-in process with the guard stationed at the front desk. After giving the guard her name and ID as well as my own, she told the client to go to the waiting room just a few feet away. The guard then stopped me before I walked off with Ana Maria. “Ma’am, you need to know,” she said sternly, “that they get fed before they go to their interview, before they go to their interview. That is very important. CARA [DPBP] needs to understand that,” she emphasized, slowly.



In comments like this, administrative actors attempted to impose responsibility for their own paternalistic care of detainees upon advocates themselves. Administrators’ interest in attending mealtimes appeared often as a sort of fixation, one which had overridden both detainees’ personal choices and the importance of obtaining legal assistance with their cases. This interest expressed itself through a veneer of care: guards and administrative others cared about women and children being nourished, thus their obsessive attention to mealtimes and interruptions of other activities, including asylum interviews. What served as interesting contrast to this, however, was the, at times extreme, lack of attention from administrators regarding health concerns from detainees. Some of these concerns reached such a degree of severity that detainees nearly died in detention, as the opening anecdote of this chapter evidenced. Many mothers and children were frequently ill, and

administrators repeatedly failed to properly care for them or express interest in taking serious care of them. Mental health services, as has previously been noted, were virtually non-existent, a serious concern with respect to this group. Other stories in this chapter and throughout the dissertation will continue to expound on this paradoxical tension between attention and disregard, as it is an integral aspect of the environment of family detention.

“What’s so interesting to me is that I’ll be prepping a woman, and it will be around lunch, and the guards will say stuff like ‘they have the right to eat food! We need to get her to lunch NOW!’” Laura, a summer intern with the Karnes project tells me. Energetic and enthusiastic about the project, Laura did not mince words when it came to her opinions about guards and their ‘concerns’. “I’m always like, are you serious? I’m trying to help this woman, and you’re worried about violations right now? A violation is putting her in jail. I think they think they’re saving these women. Maybe this guard who said that to me the other day thinks she’s saving them by making them eat their lunch.”

Here, Laura references the concern that administrators express over violating certain legal standards for the treatment of incarcerated persons. What her thoughts also draw attention to, however, is the way in which the language of ‘rights’ is co-opted by guards for their own ends. By keeping women and children in the visitation area working with legal advocates on their cases, legal advocates, from this administrative perspective, are denying rights to detainees, rather than, as they say, affirming them. This, of course, is a misleading frame, for the various reasons already discussed. Furthermore, Laura explores a thought here, shared and expressed by some advocates, that rather than harboring an interest to deny care to detained women and children, administrators believe not only that their care is adequate, but that it’s superior to that of the legal advocates. Advocates, from this perspective, impede both the care and security work of administrators who—as Laura characterizes—are instead engaged in salvific efforts by remaining vigilant about detainees’ feeding

schedules and hostile towards the obstructive legal advocates. While a seemingly less likely perspective, in practice, certain incidents which seem to reflect this position might give pause to dismissing the idea entirely. In a case that will be discussed in a following section, an advocate was banned out of so-called administrative concern for a detainee's well-being. With this instance, in particular, we might question the overlap between administrative protection and salvation.

These interactions and comments demonstrate that what might seem to be related to the genuine provision of care or interest in the well-being of detainees—per administrators' concern over 'violations' regarding adequate sustenance—is, from the perspective of advocates, a harmful interruption in their care. It frequently and unnecessarily disturbs intimate conversations between advocates and their clients. In certain mobilizations, it also serves as a disregard for detainees' autonomy in caring for themselves and their children, rupturing independent family dynamics. This is most evident when guards make comments about how these parents should be better caregivers for their children, implying that by ignoring mealtimes, they refuse proper care of their children and/or themselves. This argument then comes into conflict not only with the sort of care advocates are attempting to give clients with legal assistance, as a result of the interruptive nature in which these comments are made, but also with efforts of advocates to reframe the narratives many of these women have repeatedly heard. As the previous chapter demonstrated, many women have experiences in which officials either told them or implied that they are neither autonomous actors nor 'good' parents who care about the welfare of their children. Clearly, this friction, produced between advocates and administrators over something as seemingly simple as the management of mealtimes, demonstrates larger conflicts at play.

Interference

In November 2016, ICE banned crayons at the Karnes facility, but they did not just ban them entirely (Laughland 2016). They banned them from use within the legal visitation area of the

facility, where advocates met with mothers and young children every day, all day long. This was not the first time, in fact, that such items had been banned from a family detention center. In 2014, at the Artesia facility, there was the incident known as “crayon-gate” wherein crayons were banned from visitation areas, where advocates met with clients as well. There were also issues at various times at the Dilley facility with advocates bringing in their own crayons and coloring books for children to use, a ‘rule’ that despite its unpredictable enforcement, consistently disturbed advocates. At Karnes in 2016, ICE claimed that the ban, or ‘punishment’ as it was characterized by some, was the result of “an action resulting from crayons which RAICES staff/volunteers [had] given children which [had] caused property damage to the contractor.” According to advocates, this was the result of a child coloring on a table in the open space of the visitation area. Advocates associated with the Karnes and Dilley projects responded quickly and aggressively, releasing statements to the media about the ban, posting on social media, forming petitions, and some even tweeting about the incident to Crayola, cheekily asking for instructions on how to clean off crayon marks. In a RAICES-associated release statement, advocates argued not only that “such markings are a cost that comes with the detention of children”, but also that “it is extremely disturbing that ICE’s concern for GEO’s property takes precedence over the wellbeing of the children and their mothers’ rights to legal advice.”^{xxvii}

As this statement illustrates, the uproar from advocates was not simply due to the apparent absurdity of the ban. It also implicated advocates’ abilities to give care and mothers’ abilities to obtain legal assistance. Young children needed tools for entertainment and distraction while their mothers worked on their cases, sometimes for hours, discussing intimate details that many did not want their children to be privy to. These conversations took place in private rooms, primarily for purposes of confidentiality and comfort for clients, but also because these were where the phones were located, which were needed frequently for remote interpretation services. In these private

rooms, crayons and paper became critical tools. Without them, children and mothers were left with either being separated from one another—the child playing with the facility’s limited selection of toys, which weren’t allowed in the private rooms, and waiting outside of the room—or remaining together within the private room which, in my own observation, led to many distractions and children listening very attentively to the conversation at hand.



Image 18: Drawings made by child detainees at Dilley and Karnes. Photo credit: author

What advocates do not address in this statement and became evident to me in my research, is the way in which this ‘punishment’ involves, in a very direct way, advocates themselves. This chapter argues that advocates, in fact, are the intended recipients of this punishment and that detainees are harmed, not punished, indirectly. By explicitly naming RAICES as the supposed instigator of the event which supposedly destroyed property, administrators’ intentions are laid bare. Children coloring on tables is not the reason for destroyed property; advocates giving them crayons

is. This incident, and the languages that both use surrounding it, demonstrates a critical argument of this dissertation: that administrators deployed punitive tactics against advocates in both overt and covert ways. The friction between these groups led each to the creation of what might be deemed different alternative strategies for dealing with this ultimately irreparable conflict, yet both deployed care as a central force in those strategies.

A mere few weeks after the crayon ban and its ensuing response, I walked into the visitation area to see that a large chalkboard had been installed in the open area. It was apparent that this was a response to advocates' fierce and ultimately viral responses following the ban. Many of us wondered at the fact that with this addition, facility administrators had still missed the point behind our frustration. The chalkboard, like the facility's toys, remained firmly outside of the private spaces in which parents met with advocates, where things like crayons were useful. Months after this installation of the large chalkboard, I walked with a client into one of the private rooms and saw, newly installed, miniature chalkboards. These were attached to the wall nearest the door, located close to the floor. Neither the large nor the miniature chalkboards ever had chalk pieces with them; those were kept at the guard's station in the open area. Children appeared too nervous to ask for the chalk themselves, leading to perennially blank boards.

Materially, the addition of chalkboards was an expression of 'care' by facility administrators. By placing chalkboards in the visitation area, administrators demonstrated an interest in children's entertainment within the space. This act, though, did not resolve the problem that the ban had created, and it did not assuage the friction between advocates and administrators. The chalkboards were not an equal replacement for crayons and coloring books; they did not meet the needs of children that those objects could. Because of this, advocates believed, as they did in many other scenarios of conflict, that administrative responses after-the-fact were committed in the interest of maintaining a positive self-image and, as I would argue, a caring one at that. Administrators needn't,

officially, offer such materials or access to those materials to detained children, but they did so as a response to advocates' characterizations of them, in the media, as uncaring (or, more specifically in this instance, caring only for the interests of the private administrators' property). The implication made here, by advocates, which is made explicit often in other instances, is that by banning crayons, the administrators did not care about the wellbeing of their prisoners. Clients' well-being, it has implied, was connected to their ability to receive legal assistance, which is functionally impeded by not being able to separate children from their parents, either physically or attentively, for brief periods. Mobile objects, which could be used in open and private spaces, resolved this issue.

This broad point of conflict, in which material objects meant to benefit the work of advocates and especially those useful in entertaining young children, manifested itself various times throughout my research. Advocates would attempt to bring in sheets of stickers, markers, coloring books, and children's books, among other things, and would be repeatedly denied. It is possible to interpret this sort of refusal as a form of punishment for advocates or interference with their work, as many did. In other scenarios as well, administrative punitive measures appeared to overtly correspond with efforts aimed at the interference of advocates' work.

Proximity

Contrary to Foucault's (1977) broad assessment of the historical trajectory of the prison, as by-and-large a shift away from bodily punishment, Fassin (2017) contends that significant degrees of "[punitive] work on bodies has not gone away" in carceral spaces. While not often explicitly considered official elements of punishment, persistently poor healthcare and unmitigated sexual assault are just a couple of the ways in which prisoners are subject to forms of this body-work. With respect to both of these, a disregard of care for the body is bound with imprisoned status. Because care work requires "bodily as well as emotional proximity" (Alber and Drotbohm 2015), giving care to incarcerated individuals becomes complicated by these normative punitive strategies. This is

especially complicated by the nature of the family detention center which, while reproducing punitive strategies familiar within other carceral environments, it nonetheless attempts to maintain a caring identity. Legal advocates also become entwined in these processes; they are not only involved in the counteraction of harmful body-work—at times, through the critical application of non-verbal practices of care (Mol et al. 2010)—but they themselves can be unwittingly subject to these punitive strategies as well.



Maria was seemingly on the verge of a panic attack. Sitting in the plastic chair in the cold, nearly empty room, she began hyperventilating, unable to breathe normally. The stress of recent turns of events with her case was too overwhelming, and her uncertain future was becoming, to many, terrifyingly more certain. Alejandro, a staff member of the Dilley project, was seated on the opposite side of the table, watching her anxiety swirl like a dust storm, growing in strength. He did what he felt was needed, for her, in the moment. He swiftly walked over to her side of the table where they were seated in the private room, sat next to her, and placed his hand on her shoulder while speaking softly to calm her, breathing along with her.

After a brief period, it worked; the dust cleared just enough, and they went along talking about the next steps for her case. Not many days after that, Alejandro walked in as usual on a Monday morning to start work with a group of new volunteers and was casually handed a piece of paper by facility staff in the security trailer. The letter stated, in so many words, that he was now banned from the facility. He couldn't even go in to work for that day. Unlike the group that just walked into the trailer for their first time to work with detainees, he would never enter that space again. All this, because he touched the client he was working with, and someone working in the facility saw it happen. This touch became characterized, by facility administrators, as a threat to detainees, and his ban was a response in the interest for the care of them.



This event demonstrates the unpredictable practical applications of ‘security’ in detention (Hall 2012). It was followed by intense, long-term litigation on behalf of the legal project and attempts to reverse the decision to revoke his access permissions. They weren’t able to reverse his ban, but they were able to reverse the ban on another staff member who had received a similar letter at the same time, instigated by another act of what the facility administrators implied was improper behavior. In total, three members of the legal project were banned at the same time, all for relatively similar reasons, and only one returned to work after months of litigation.

The revocation of Alejandro's access was incredibly difficult for him to process. It was simultaneously abrupt and drawn out, though he didn't feel that initially; he had to wait for at least a month in relative silence from both administrators and his own project team to learn that the challenges to his ban weren't going to be successful. He felt hurt, angry, and guilty for leaving the few remaining members of the project to manage the immense workload inside without him. He did not get to say goodbye to those clients he worked with, and he was sad that he did not get to meet and help new clients that were arriving every day. When we spoke months after receiving the letter, he said he still had not reconciled with the fact that he would not be coming back, but he was slowly starting to process it. It turned out that because of this ban, he was subsequently banned from entering all other detention spaces managed by CoreCivic.

This incident led to what advocates came to call the ban on hugging. This forced change in behavior was difficult for many advocates to accept, as the development of intimate relationships were a constant in interactions between advocates and clients. Many clients, in gratitude or relief, would reach out to hug advocates, and at least for a time, advocates were forced to move their bodies away from this touch. Some advocates thought of this as a hurtful gesture, as difficult to explain to clients, and as denying them their right to a typical yet meaningful human exchange. Some would speak about how they would quickly jerk their own bodies backward if they saw a client reaching out to hug them and they were in an open space, under the watch of security cameras and guards. Others chose to reject the rule; they embraced clients in those moments of intimacy that called for it, awaiting potential repercussions which, inexplicably, never seemed to arrive. Still others would argue that it happened too quickly, that they did not have time to communicate to the other person before they were embraced by them, but that they did not try to stop it from happening.

Angela had a strong connection with many clients, which was why she eventually lashed out at the guard that made one of her clients cry. Angela was an undergraduate music major and gifted

cellist from Juarez, Mexico. Witty with a warm personality, she was a favorite of nearly all clients who come through Dilley. Her warmth and personal closeness with clients produced a natural sense of intimacy, and as might be expected, frequently led to moments where clients attempted to embrace her. Sometimes she let it happen; in others, when in view of the guards, she would try to avoid it. “There was this one mom I worked with...” she told me, “...she had been raped when she was little and was bullied and abused by different people throughout her life because of it. When her husband found out that she had been raped, he beat her and said that she should have told him about it. That he wouldn’t have been with her. When I was prepping her, she seemed really distant with me. So I went with her to her interview, and it was a really hard interview. Afterwards, we walked out together, and she said to me ‘thank you, you’ve been more to me than my own family, you’ve done more than my family has ever done for me. You take care of me.’ Then she just fell into my arms. Like, I know they can’t give us hugs, but when someone falls into your arms, you can’t do shit. They just fall apart in your arms. So I was holding her, and there were so many guards around us. She was just crying on me, and I cried too.”

In a way, Angela’s story speaks sort of poetically to what advocates do, at times, and how they interpret their practices. This is not an ideal caregiving situation. Advocates and detainees are relative strangers, and advocates recognize this. They meet briefly before having to, or attempting to, manifest some sort of immediate intimacy in order to exchange necessary care. Because the trauma detainees experienced which led them to leave their homes is compounded by the harm created by this environment, caregiving sometimes looks less like an intimate embrace and more like someone holding someone else’s body from falling to the ground.

As Alejandro’s upsetting and unfortunate experience illustrates, advocates in this space are subjected to their own punishments. Their care is constrained by the facility’s so-deemed interest in the wellbeing of detainees. Touch and hugging are not permitted because they are framed as a

‘threat’ to the imprisoned body.^{xxviii} These things are important, however, for the care and relationality between advocates and their clients. Denying them these things is part of an extensive punitive strategy aimed at the advocates themselves, which they interpret as not only harming them, but harming detainees as well. And yet, as attention to daily encounters demonstrates, such rules aren’t easily or readily abided by.

The unsettled feelings associated with care (Murphy 2015) that advocates experienced in response to being denied a small but important element of relationality with their clients demonstrates the necessity of not only care as practice, but also how we think care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). What these incidents demonstrate, mapping onto scholarship which concerns the violences of so-called care (Gupta 2012; Mulla 2014; Ticktin 2011), are the ways in which—because the very idea of care in this space is not simple or unidirectional, but rather multidirectional and contested—in situations like this where multiple actors participate with care, such violence can extend beyond expected borders. In other words, advocates, in their counter-caring efforts, become subject to violence and punitive action as well.

Adjustments

Chase’s experience at the beginning of this chapter offered a glimpse at one of the forms that the ‘contested terrains’ of detention can take; specifically, when an advocate recognizes that a detainee requires attention other than their own, and yet they are in a much less powerful position to manifest it. In *Prison Worlds*, Didier Fassin argues that in the correctional system, “power is unevenly distributed and some abuse it. Yet, in the daily life of the facility, compromises constantly occur....These adjustments are deemed to contribute to keeping the peace within the prison for the evident benefit of all,” (2016: xiv). Compromises and peacemaking efforts, within and beyond carceral terrains, are an integral part of the work that advocates do in order to continue to aid detainees. In immigration processes every day, state and non-state actors—like legal advocates—

interact “in collaboration, collusion, conflict, and contradiction” (Mountz 2010: xxiv). In certain ways, then, advocates come to “live with the erratic” (Mol 2010), unpredictable world of the family detention center to do just this, actively recognizing the significance of tending to relationships not only between one another and detainees, but also with administrators.



In keeping with one of the defining qualities of everyday experience inside these facilities, the population of detainees at the Dilley center remained unpredictable. In a month, the facility would shift from being nearly ‘at capacity’ to housing only a few hundred, with virtually no explanation. During a week at the start of the year, the population had boomed again. On a Tuesday, the energy in the visitation trailer was buzzing. Not only was it packed to the gills with women and children waiting to be helped, but apparently there was a new bug going around the facility, so many of the kids were sick and staying sick for a few days. Coughing and sneezing added to the regular cacophony of sounds—papers shuffling, printers churning out documents, chairs being slid back and forth across the tile to form charla circles, children laughing and crying. The trailer felt small and frenzied.

When the activity was at a fever pitch, there was a loud and uncharacteristic thump. Many of the women sitting in one of the charla circles started to stand up and look toward the front of the room. A client was laid out on the floor. Her body rippled with convulsions. One of her stiff arms kept shooting up and down, flailing; her head rolled back and forth, from side to side; her legs bent, then straightened. The guards got up from their desks a few feet away and walked towards her, yelling at the women nearby watching that they needed to move. They slid the chairs away for her, saying that they needed to make room. Before the guards left their desks, however, Alejandro and Cynthia, who both worked for the legal project, went to her. They appeared angry, and Alejandro said something sharply to one of the guards. As the guards sputtered and bleeped across their walkie talkies, the woman’s body stopped jerking and someone from the medical staff arrived. They knelt over her, asked if she spoke Spanish, in Spanish, and then asked where it hurt. She brushed a weak hand over her forehead, saying simply and repeatedly that her head hurt. They helped to stand her up, then took her to “medical”, one of the forbidden territories of the facility untraversed by legal advocates.

Cynthia and Alejandro quietly began to move the chairs back into the charla circle. Cynthia looked very angry. Moments later she would say: “that just happened because of stress, not because of anything else.” She explained that the woman had come in exhausted, not feeling well, not sleeping, and then she had been informed that she had received a negative decision by the judge on the appeal for her case. She became extremely upset and just as she was leaving the trailer, she collapsed.

While Cynthia fumed about the turn of events, Alejandro quickly went over to the guards’ desks. He knelt beside one of them as she sat in her chair, facing him with a cold, silent stare as he spoke softly and calmly. His demeanor had changed entirely. He now appeared apologetic, not necessarily remorseful, but focused on explaining his reaction to a moment of frustration in a calm, gentle way. His physical position—squatting below her as she sat above in her chair—expressed the work that he was now evidently doing: trying to smooth out the potential effect of what just transpired and how he had reacted.



The focus in this exchange is not on what Alejandro said to the guards or how he chose to articulate his apologetic response, but rather how the different moments of this encounter are shot through with complex visions of care. The client who had collapsed had what advocates often described as a more ‘complicated’ case than others: her experiences didn’t fit neatly within the constrictive asylum categories and thus she went through more work than most others in order to attempt to win the opportunity to continue her case, the goal for all. Undergoing rounds of interviews and courtroom appeals, receiving negative decisions multiple times, all within family detention, dealt her a great deal of stress. Volunteers and staff of the project spent tireless hours working on her case, with and without her; in this way, part of her stress was shared with them.

What Alejandro was seemingly doing when he swiftly moved over to the guard indicated another layer of attention. This was an act of both necessary emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) and care for the relationship between himself and the guard. One important lesson even weekly advocates learn immediately in practice is that maintaining relationships with facility administrators is a part of the work, an integral aspect of engaging with this particular world. This is why it was rare to see advocates ‘vent’ their frustrations either directly at facility staff or even simply in the open area of the visitation trailer. Such behaviors could, and had been, used as retaliative fodder in the omnipresent struggles between legal advocates and administrators, who often made their disdain for the legal advocates’ existence within these spaces clear. The perception of the harm that could be done, as a result of so-deemed inappropriate behavior, was considered to be directly linked through the advocate and the project and on to the detainee. The detainee would be the ultimate recipient of retaliatory efforts, as they would be deprived of needed services. In this way, detainees and advocates were linked, similarly though not equally caught in mechanisms which deployed threats in order to conscript behaviors. Thus, while care is extended to the relationship between advocates and

administrators, such compromising care is committed with another in mind: the client. And yet, moments arose when advocates actively refused such compromises.



A few of us are sitting in the project's office room, talking about cases, snacking, resting, when Angela storms into the room with a serious look at her face and shuts the door behind her. "Hey, what's up? Are you ok?" Jaclyn, a student from Florida, asks. "No, I'm pissed!" Angela says. She starts to tell us why. One of her clients had grown particularly close with Angela, meeting with her often just to talk. Her client came back in today to let Angela know that she had received a 'positive' on her interview, and that she would be leaving the next day. She was so happy, and wanted to gift something to Angela for her help, so she used what little money she had in her account—known as a saldo account, where individuals, usually family, outside of detention can send money to a detained person—to buy her just a few food gifts, some soda and some cookies. She came in with these things, handed them to Angela as they spoke, and were both immediately accosted by the guard sitting nearby watching them. "Did she give you that?!" he shouted at Angela. She replied, "Yeah, she wanted to give me those as a gift." "No no no, that's a big no-no," he said, adding, "you cannot be given stuff from them. They cannot give you stuff!" The client was confused, standing meekly and flush against the wall nearby. He said something quickly to her, then continued scolding Angela. The client began to cry. Angela quietly shot back at him: "It's just cookies and a coke." She had received other gifts from clients in the past, and never had she nor any of us, heard of any such 'rule' against this practice, though the sudden appearance of these sorts of unspoken 'rules' was quite common in this environment.

Angela was furious, though she tried to disguise it. The guard had made her client cry, thinking that she was the reason that he was now yelling at Angela. Angela took her into a private room and told her that it was ok, and that she hadn't done anything wrong. Angela even asked one of the project staff members if this was, in fact, a rule, who immediately confirmed that there was no rule against doing this. Nonetheless, the damage had already been done. Walking with her to the exit, saying goodbye, the guard interrupted them again, saying that Angela needed to sign her client out on the sign-in sheet through which all detainees check in and out while passing through the building. He tossed the pen in her direction, and Angela snapped. "I already signed her out." she quipped at him, angrily. As her client left the building, she walked close to him and shouted: "Don't you ever yell at me again!" She then threw the pen across his desk and walked to our office.



A former staff member of the legal project once said that so much of their work on-the-ground is simply "reactionary". They had not the power to control or even predict changes to the environment, and they did not have the authority to outright reject abusive behaviors or false narratives about rules. This was such a source of frustration for those, like Angela, Alejandro, and Cynthia, who spent extended periods of time in the work and longed for making significant changes to the harmful practices they witnessed and dealt with every day. For some, there was still the hope of ending this modern instantiation of family detention altogether. Alejandro himself shared these

more optimistic visions when he first began working in Dilley after having his first experience with family detention at the Karnes facility. Not long after volunteering with RAICES, he met a woman with a baby who was severely sick and not yet one year old. Aware of the rule that ICE was not to detain children less than one year old—mostly because of the dangers of being within spaces where individuals are constantly sick and illness and diseases spread quickly and easily—Alejandro thought he would simply need to notify someone on the outside that administrators were obviously in breach of the rule, and that there was this seemingly egregious practice going on. “I thought, wow, I’ll just tell everyone about this, that they’re doing this, and this place will get shut down immediately,” he told me. “Of course, that was the rude awakening. I realized later that it didn’t matter, and that things like that just happen all the time down there, and nothing changes.”

In responding to practices like this and others, advocates’ work is fraught with heavy emotional labor. Angela was never reprimanded or retaliated against in any way for her explosive encounter with the guard, and, unlike Alejandro, she never apologized to the guard in question. It was, however, exceedingly rare for her to act in the way that she did that day in her interactions with guards. She spent extensive time with the project in Dilley, so she was aware of the interest in maintaining relationships with facility staff. In this moment, though, it appeared as if her interest in both her client’s and her own self-care superseded her concern for potential retribution. She had become so enraged by the fact that the guard not only tried to castigate her and the client but also tried to counterpose them against one another. He implied that the client’s behavior, in buying a gift for Angela, was the cause of Angela’s castigation, eliciting guilt from the client. This unnecessary and abusive reaction pushed Angela to her limits, and she reacted strongly.

Haraway (2016) argues that it is our task to “make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.” (1). Angela’s and Alejandro’s decidedly different roles and experiences informed their divergent approaches, though

both, I would argue, would agree with Haraway's dual calls. At the time, Alejandro was a staff member of the project, while Angela was an unpaid volunteer. Positioning them together draws attention to the frictions produced within the advocacy community, and particularly between these different roles, when responding to administrative conflicts.

Interdependency

They were singing a song loudly, all three of them, some of them drumming on their desks. Most of us heard it, and a couple of us, one in particular, Sue—the repeat volunteer attorney from Georgia—wanted to file a complaint with administrators about it. It was bothersome to the work and inappropriate for the setting, and it made it hard for us to have conversations with the women out in the open area of the trailer. It wasn't just that, though; it's frustrating to listen to such exuberant and expressive playfulness coming from the very people, the guards, who are making your work difficult and the lives of the women uncomfortable on a daily basis. During this time, the administrators had made a new rule—which like many others, didn't stick for too long—where advocates weren't allowed to sit out in the open area unless meeting with a client or clients. If we were waiting for clients to arrive, or had any downtime, we had to either stay in the PB room or leave the building (which meant, of course, going through security again). It was just another temporary, seemingly meaningless rule that disrupted our work and clients' time. At the time, I was sitting in the PB room but with the door open, and I could hear and see the guards singing, drumming, laughing in front of the women waiting quietly to speak with advocates. I felt angry.

The next day, the warden (as he is known, but also officially known as the facility administrator), walked into the trailer. Because I had never seen him in-person, I asked Maggie who he was. "That's the warden, and he's awful, a total asshole," she said. He had come in to speak with Lianne, one of the project's staff attorneys, and Jillian, another staff member, about the incident the previous day with the guards. After speaking with him across the room, Lianne walked into the PB room and asked the few of us in there, "So does anybody remember what time exactly the guys were singing and drumming yesterday?" No one seemed to recall the exact time. Lianne replied that administrators had apparently examined the camera recordings for that day and couldn't find any evidence of it happening, which was why they wanted to know the exact time. Lianne walked out of the PB room frustrated.

She returned after speaking again with the warden, looking even more frustrated. "Ugh, that was so stupid," she said with exasperation, her arm resting against the file cabinet. "Why did we even complain? I can't believe we lodged this complaint." She continued venting about how those who complained should have just asked the guards to stop singing, rather than pursuing an official complaint. "All of those guys are going to be punished now. They're all going to be reprimanded," she said. "This situation was not worth that. I mean, I have to work with these people."



Not only the event itself, but the micro-physics of power (Foucault 1977) play a role in Lianne's frustration. Because there isn't an official rule which denies guards the right to sing or make musical instruments out of their desks, responding to an incident which was essentially mostly insensitive and somewhat disruptive required more involvement and investigation from

administrators who are already resistant to the work of the advocates. Because a complaint was lodged and the guards were to be reprimanded, Lianne knew that all involved, but especially the guards, would be upset, not just with her, as the person responsible for lodging the complaint, but with the project as a whole. Her frustration grew out of the knowledge that ultimately, those reprimanded guards were the ones she and everyone associated with the project would have to work with every day. As has been demonstrated already, individual administrative actors had ways of making the work more difficult for advocates on a daily basis without even breaching official rules, while official rules could be stretched and reshaped to administrators' advantage or as apparent forms of punishment for advocates. While Lianne respected the opinion that the behavior of the guards was offensive and indeed intrusive, she also understood that everyday relationships required deft management and thoughtful considerations of potentially disruptive actions. This encounter exemplifies an issue with which advocates contend on a larger scale. While off-the-ground advocates of these projects are engaged in litigation to attack both everyday practices as well as the very existence of the facilities, these lawsuits demand extensive time. During this time, advocates on-the-ground struggle to maintain the ability to meet and work with clients each day, and disregarding that as a critical element of the work can lead to care being denied.

Of course, not all staff approached their maintenance of these relationships in the same way; some were friendly, engaging them in conversations about their families and weekend plans, while others openly argued with administrators or skirted around talking to them about anything until necessary. Furthermore, as this encounter with the guards implies, peacekeeping efforts are not only confined to the project staff. Weekly volunteers are implicated in these efforts as well, and many also struggle with how to navigate this. This encounter illustrates one of the critical distinctions between the approaches assumed by project staff and weekly or temporary volunteers. Staff are fully, and often painfully, aware of the relationships that must be maintained and skillfully navigated when

approaching critical stances. Weekly or temporary advocates, immediately enraged or disturbed by events and behaviors of facility administrators, are challenged to conceptualize their roles in this way. This is a learning experience for some, while others decidedly reject the need to ‘keep the peace’ which, in turn, challenges staff efforts. Following the complaint regarding the guards’ behavior and after speaking with Lianne and other project staff, the volunteers who requested to lodge the complaint expressed regret. Sue explained how she subsequently came to understand Lianne’s perspective, and that she understood the importance of keeping the peace with these daily actors. Of course, in many ways, keeping the peace practically came to mean ignoring behavior by administrators that was demonstrably objectionable but not significantly harmful to the detainees.



A month before the crayon ban at Karnes, I sat with a mother and her young son, helping her fill out her basic informational intake forms. Often, my role mostly involved answering questions they had about the forms. Some had many questions, while others filled out each form relatively independently. Other times, I had to fill out forms for them, usually because they spoke a language we didn’t have a translated form for or because they couldn’t read or write. Different clients required different degrees of support, and so advocates needed to be attentive during this part of the process.

At the other end of the open area, another advocate, Margaret, paced the floor, looking towards the entrance for clients behind the guard’s desk. She was an attorney from Austin, and long-time, well-known volunteer with the project, and had been waiting most of the day for a client to be ‘called up’ (meaning notified by the guards of her appointment with a legal advocate, since we couldn’t contact any directly in any way). Up until that point in the afternoon, she had only been able to work with one client on her preparations to go to court, putting off working with other clients because of how much time she needed to dedicate to the one ‘complicated’ case that could arrive at any moment. She was visibly frustrated but without options.

As I sat together with the mom and her cute, curly-headed son, he kept looking at me and smiling. His mom informed me that he wanted to play with the toys from the ‘toy area’, a corner of the open room in which sat a rectangular shaped green carpet with various toys. I walked him over to the play area, he tentatively picked up a small truck, and started to follow me back to where we sat with his mother. He didn’t want to play in the toy area, because it was at the complete opposite end of the room from where his mother was working, and he was obviously anxious to be away from her. Before he could reach us, the guard—an older woman with whom many advocates had run-ins—left her desk and stood in his path. She sternly told him that if he wanted to play, he had to play on the carpeted area. As an aside, I heard this same directive shouted at children many times during my time volunteering there, and many times, children, some of whom were very young, responded with confused or fearful expressions. This young boy also appeared confused and slightly nervous, returned the truck to the carpeted area, and sheepishly walked back to his mother and I.

“What is this rule?” Margaret curtly interjected towards the guard at her desk, after having witnessed the exchange from across the room. “Is there a rule that he can’t take his toy over here?” “Yeah, it’s a rule,” the guard replied defensively. “He can’t go over there with it. We all know that. You know that.” Of course, like many administrative ‘rules’ in these facilities, almost none of us knew which truly existed, adding to the fantastical nature of these facilities. None of us in the room knew of this ‘rule’. “This is fucking bullshit,” Margaret whispered under her breath, while looking over at me. She turned away from the guard’s desk, threw her hands up in the air, and stomped back to her desk. “I’m going to DC on this. This is totally ridiculous,” she uttered angrily. With this comment, she meant that she would notify those advocates who were off-the-ground and involved in litigation work against the facilities in Washington. The mother continued her paperwork and her son sat quietly, patiently at her side.



I understood Margaret’s frustration, and I was frustrated as well. Incidents like this happened every day and being engaged in this environment long-term and thus observing the repeated instantiations of seemingly small slights like this took a special toll on those who powerlessly witnessed them. In the moment, however, I wondered: Is something like this incident worth trying to fight against? Will the fight you make do more damage—to the client, the work, or both—than help? The environment itself enabled this kind of thinking, encouraging the measuring of actions of protestation against the potential relationship-damage after-effects. Carlos, the project staff member whose role involved constant management of volunteer groups, once said to me concerning his position as staff: “I don’t know that you get jaded, but your priorities definitely adjust. Volunteers, they will freak out about little things. It’s hard, I know, but what the volunteers don’t understand is the big picture. The big picture of what we’re doing here, or what other things are going on at the time. So they’ll say stuff, they’ll complain. And even I remember freaking out then, when I was a volunteer. Now, on the other end, I feel like some of these things are just not a big deal. They’ll just get so upset, and all I can think is how I don’t need this right now.”

This is just one of the ways in which managing the friction which resides in this environment especially dominates the work of the project staff and implicates that of volunteers. While maintaining a sort of peace with the facility administrators, staff also must maintain a sense of peace between volunteers and administrators. They work to direct the shock, anger, disgust of the

temporary volunteers toward efforts that have demonstrable positive effects on the lives of the clients. They manage the behaviors of the volunteers, in what ways they have the capacity to do so, so that volunteers do not inadvertently negatively impact their continued efforts. Friction, however, should not be perceived as limited to only interactions between advocates and facility administrators, as it also resides within the advocacy group.

Inner Edges

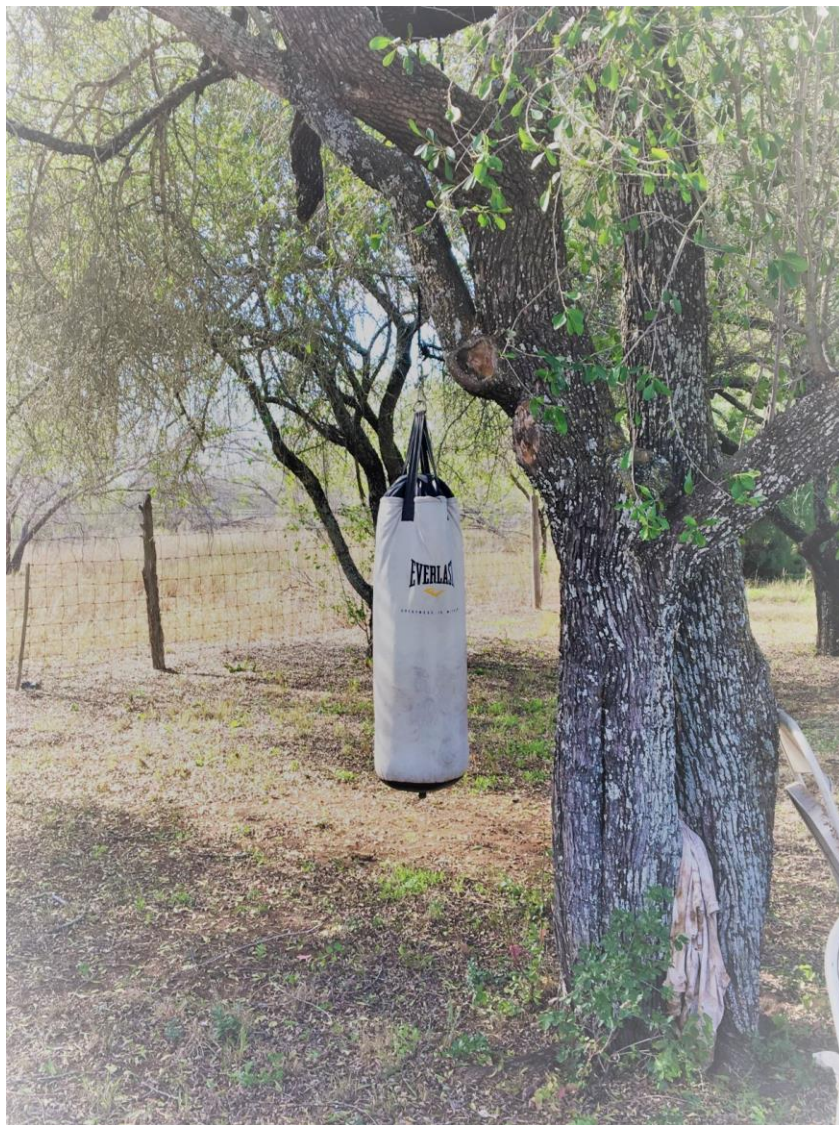


Image 19: Project staff stress relief at the ranch. Photo credit: author

“These people are not reading the emails we send out,” Maggie huffed, angrily. She had just swiftly stood up from her seat on floor where she was working from the laptop resting on her lap and closed the door to the PB room, leaving herself, Ali, and me inside to speak more privately. “They have way too many questions, and they’re not figuring out how to do anything on their own,” she said softly, so as not to be overheard by those working outside the office. This was a complaint by staff that came up numerous times regarding many different volunteer groups. Some groups, they would argue, were more adept than others at conducting their work independently and figuring out how to locate answers to their questions about the work without the consistent aid of project staff. When individuals or groups of volunteers required more ‘hand-holding’ with their roles in the work, staff were deprived of time devoted to their own work, which frequently involved intimate and time-consuming work on various complicated issues with clients or late-stage cases (meaning those who might be closer to the commencement of deportation processes). Those lawyers who worked as staff for the projects, like Maggie and Ali, were often deeply involved in these complicated issues while also trying to aid volunteers with their individual case questions. The nature of the advocates’ working environment—as one in which most of the work is done by a circulatory, temporary workforce—contributes another layer to the perception of this overall environment as one characterized as erratic.

One of difficulties of the job had to do with the very nature of this project: using perennially new, circulatory labor. “You start fresh every week,” Carlos tells me, “and it’s a gamble. Some weeks it’s good and others, not as good. Every single week you gotta do the same thing and answer the same questions.” Carlos’ frustration, as a project staff member essentially charged with ‘managing’ volunteer groups, stems not only from the exhaustion of having to retrain and repeatedly answer the same questions over and over from weekly volunteers, but also from the knowledge that more, and likely better, work could be done if the structure was different. “We couldn’t function without them,

the volunteers; they really are the project. But at the same time, the way that it's set up and the way that it has to be holds it back. We could be doing so much more if we could have people volunteering longer term, where we weren't training everybody every single week. So that gets frustrating, but it's an impossible thing to overcome because there's just no way you could get that many people to volunteer like that. But then it's just so frustrating, with the same questions all the time, the data management system being confusing to people, and nobody knows how to do anything out on the floor, and every week we're just starting over from scratch. Some groups will pick up everything right away, like last week, and run it all by themselves. But then like today, we had 50 CFI [credible fear interview] preps to do, which was very manageable, and we should have been able to do them all but we didn't. And so now, we [the staff] have to go back in tomorrow, Saturday. It's just frustrating. I have no idea how previous staff did this for a year.”

In their frustrations, Maggie and Carlos capture something that serves a critical argument of this dissertation. While it is crucial that these detainees receive the kind of care that advocates can and do give, their care should not be dependent on voluntary caregivers. Though those associated with the projects broadly support the work they do, most agree that better, more standardized care should be provided by the government to those incarcerated in detention (while simultaneously contending that ‘families’ should never be incarcerated). Because it is not, care is given by those who are often objectively underqualified, under-resourced, and in this case, circulatory, temporary labor. From the opening anecdote to this chapter—concerning Chase’s frightening encounter in which a young girl had stopped breathing and collapsed on the floor—many advocates ask: what if a doctor hadn’t been volunteering that week? It appeared that either the medical staff of the facility were not notified by guards of the situation or were not capable of making it to the visitation trailer quickly enough to help their own prisoner. Many advocates argue, of course, that incidents like this occur not simply because of the failings of proper medical attention, but rather as a result of a culmination

of multiple qualities which constitute the unjust and unavoidably harmful incarceration of asylum-seeking parents and their children.

Despite these projects' strong efforts—which in my account were both thoughtful and extensive—in my interviews with advocates, the majority felt that they were 'unprepared' for what the environment and work truly entailed. When volunteers repeatedly though intermittently voiced this to staff, I watched as a small light seemingly left their eyes. Disguising dejection and frustration, they would patiently apologize over and over again. This was just another source of anxiety for project staff, whose lives often existed far beyond acceptably healthy work boundaries. Yet properly preparing individuals for such brief service, many who had no experience with asylum law or detention work, was and is a nearly insurmountable task, which is why advocates who could commit to working with the project, voluntarily, on a longer-term basis were valued highly. The most effective way of learning the environment, many agreed, was to simply spend more time within it. The unstable environs of both family detention and asylum processes could be best understood and navigated through direct, repeated engagement.

Issues related to self-care that result from this type of work and these environments are numerous. These frictions reside within volunteer groups and staff groups themselves as well, as individuals debate concerns like 'commitment' to the work and the setting of personal boundaries. At times, as Carlos' comments imply, staff struggle to foster a sense of shared responsibility with the temporary volunteers, so that all does not ultimately fall to the shoulders of the few staff. Carlos discussed this as being due to the fact that because of the temporary involvement of volunteer groups, a particular imaginary becomes produced about the work that suggests that staff will complete whatever work doesn't get completed by volunteers, so that ultimately they needn't worry about completing unfinished work before leaving at the end of the day or even the week. This

conflict between needing to complete work in helping detainees and setting personal boundaries also gets reproduced within volunteer groups themselves.



“We don’t have time for self-care!” a law student shouted at another from her group in her hotel room at the Dilley Days Inn. It was well into the evening, and Sam—the student who was being yelled at—had reached a sort of breaking point from the emotional and physical exhaustion the day had impressed upon her. She wasn’t prepared for the sorts of upsetting stories she encountered in the work and felt completely drained. Unfortunately, the fight went on for awhile, Sam expressing that she needed time to rest as her colleagues pressed her to keep working on cases, doing research for clients and inputting clients’ information into the online database. “Law students and lawyers especially,” she later told me, “believe that they should be held to a higher standard...that they shouldn’t be vulnerable or express feelings. They were screaming at me about how lawyers needed to do their work, no matter what. They implied that I wouldn’t be a good lawyer, because I couldn’t ‘handle it’.”

The same week hosted another group of volunteers together with the law students: a group of social work students from Chicago. It was they who introduced Sam, through conversations, to the notion of ‘secondary trauma’, the concept of experiencing another’s firsthand trauma secondhand through conversation and interaction. While the project in Dilley informed advocates of this in their training prior to arrival, many advocates I spoke with either disregarded this aspect of the training entirely or disavowed its significance. “They were debriefing about the experience all the time,” Sam said of the social work students. “Their team really supported each other, while my team fell apart.” For Sam, the difference was part-and-parcel of how law students are trained. “In law school, you have to be perfect; there’s no room for error. That’s why there are high suicide and alcoholism rates amongst attorneys.”^{xxix} Sam was well aware, herself, of these statistics as she had co-founded a student wellness coalition while in her second year of law school following a slate of student suicides. “So, then, do you believe it’s important to have the skills offered by both perspectives in this work? Both social workers and legal experts?” I asked her. She initially agreed, then expressed some hesitancy. “Well, maybe you don’t need to work out these sorts of problems [with perspectival conflict] because, really, it’s just a week that you’re there. A week is a week, and you can always see that there’s a light at the end of the tunnel. You don’t need it to be a sustainable work environment because it’s not a sustained endeavor. It would be different if you were staff, though.”



This problem was present, though, with the staff as well. Months after Alejandro was banned from the facility, we spoke about how, despite his care and respect for his fellow staff members, he, at times, harbored resentment for those who would ‘check out’ of the work at the end of the day, or on the weekends. To be in the role as staff member, you become privy to the knowledge that if advocates did not finish work helping clients, those clients would potentially suffer negative consequences. As was mentioned in the first chapter, work helping clients was never really complete; there was always work to be done, care to be given, no matter the day or time of day.

Knowing this, and choosing to ‘walk away’, was for some staff and volunteers a conscious decision, albeit perhaps a difficult one. “I got frustrated seeing other staff practice even a little self-care, disconnecting themselves from the work. At the time, it seemed to me like a lack of commitment,” Alejandro told me as we sat eating tacos at a café in San Antonio. He seemed slightly embarrassed that he felt this way about these sorts of behaviors towards what were his friends and colleagues. “I love those people. Everything just shifts to an unhealthy scale in this work,” he offered. Chapter 6 will continue this discussion on the diverse, reverberative effects of trauma in this environment.

Restraint and Release

Amongst one another, advocates often debated best courses of care for clients, including how they themselves should behave in their interactions with clients. A common point of debate regarded whether advocates should express emotion—which most commonly meant to cry—in front of clients when they were working on their cases together. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the intimate ‘prep’ conversations are fraught with emotions as clients discuss painful details of past experiences. Many, most often lawyers or law students, told me that they felt it was either or both inappropriate and unhelpful to the client to cry in front of them or with them as they divulged their stories.

Noelle was an immigration lawyer from Colorado and volunteered with the project in Dilley over the week of the presidential election. She had a fair amount of pro bono experience and had previously worked with the Canadian Lawyers Without Borders on a project in Guatemala City involving a former president. While that was admittedly a difficult project in many ways—for instance, she described not being allowed out of the office without an armed escort—she spoke repeatedly of the intensity of the admittedly distinct experience in Dilley. From her perspective, though, there were productive and unproductive ways in which to respond to the intensity of the work. “It requires mustering extra selflessness,” she told me. “What I kept thinking when I was

there was that this isn't my story to be sad about. I get to be here to help and to be compassionate and listen. It doesn't do anybody any good if I fall apart because I heard a sad story that didn't happen to me. You need to muster all your emotional intelligence and patience for yourself and for the client in order to be the right kind of compassionate.” Noelle’s attitude, which seemed to be shared by many, reflects this idea of a sort of emotional responsibility as well as belief about ‘right’ and, implicitly, ‘wrong’ behavior. Because they are asking clients to essentially bare themselves, sharing the intimate details of their lives and make themselves vulnerable in sharing their experiences, emotional support is given in response. This can mean different things for different volunteers. For most, like Noelle, this was not crying or expressing sadness in front of the client. For them, suppressing expressions of sadness, in particular, was an expected element of the work, a form of advocacy emotional labor which adhered to particular ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild 1983). For some, though, this meant allowing oneself to express the emotions one felt from hearing the story, to reject the sort of alienation they might feel were they to suppress their emotions, and to demonstrate to the client that they felt something for them. Even with this last group, however, emotional expression is still considered performative (Goffman 1959), as it is meant to convey an empathic response from the advocate to the client.

Some, like Francis, an undergraduate student from NYC, did not seem to recognize any issue with crying in front of clients, as it was simply an honest expression of how their stories affected her. Francis was a sister to one of the staff members at the time she volunteered and was eager to work with as many clients as possible, most often as a translator for other advocates. In conversations with clients, she often made more personal comments—for instance, while one client discussed the abuse she had suffered at the hands of an ex-boyfriend, Francis responded with disgust, calling him an “asshole”, to which the client awkwardly laughed—and expressed a full range of emotions in her interactions. She was enthusiastic to help and seemed deeply hurt when clients

began to cry while telling their stories. She characterized her emotional expressions as simply being herself, being ‘real’ with clients, and that if someone spoke of something upsetting, she had no intention of trying to disguise how that affected her as well. From her and others who shared this perspective, this was a way of connecting with clients.

Others admitted that while they attempted to restrain their emotional expression, for the benefit of the client or for other related professional expectations, there were nonetheless times when this simply wasn’t possible; that there were moments when they ‘lost control’ of their emotions and began to cry. Certain individuals shared how when they felt they were about to cry, they would excuse themselves briefly from the private rooms where they met with clients. The bathroom and PB room were often spaces to which advocates would retreat in order to express their emotions more privately or discuss them with other advocates. Others found that leaving the physical boundaries of the facility created the conditions which allowed for the safe release of restrained emotional tensions, assured that they could no longer inadvertently harm the tenuous and dependent relationships within.



Each day, I walk the stretch of parking lot to my car, immediately removing the sweater or cardigan I wear in the center to keep me warm. The heat envelopes me as soon as I exit the center, as if reviving me from the deadening cold sensations my body experiences inside. I’m exhausted, hungry, my body aching from sitting tensely in uncomfortable chairs during the numerous stressful moments throughout the day. I begin to feel the release of leaving, and I start to feel flooded with the emotions that I’ve stifled all day. Depending upon the events of the day, I immediately feel joy upon leaving or mutter curses as I stomp my way to my car. I climb into the sauna that is inside, letting my body feel the warmth, sweat a little, before blasting the AC at some point on the long drive home. I turn on the cellphone I’ve stored away in the glove compartment and try to quickly catch up with the lives of family and friends who appear to live in completely different worlds than I. I turn out onto the highway, set up my handheld recording device in my lap, and open the floodgates. I not only recount all that I can remember from the day—from conversations with co-workers and guards and clients to stories and interactions. I also, initially in this process unwittingly, use this time to release and explore the emotions that I felt throughout the day but, for whatever reason at the time, either couldn’t express at all or couldn’t express fully. I cry, a lot. I laugh. And, probably more than any other emotional expression, I rage. I curse the guards for the ways they acted that day, for their rules and protocols. I complain about the Border Patrol officers I’ve never met and their treatment of these women and children before they arrived at the detention center, about whom I hear horrible stories every day. I rail against the government for making these people think they’ve done something wrong, or that there’s justification in being where they are, ideas I find myself contesting

every day. More than a few times, the rage is mingled with sadness and utter frustration. In one moment, I'm crying as I recount the story of abuse a mother shared with me, and in the next I'm shouting about the absurdity of her detention and her treatment within. My little Hyundai and the open, roadkill-littered highways of South Texas become like a safe bubble for expressing that which was, often necessarily, repressed within the center. I pass the green and white Border Patrol SUV which is often parked in the same spot along the highway amongst tall weeds in a field, as if trying to hide.



Sue always made jokes to lighten the tension, despite the fact that she also often found herself infuriated by the behavior of officials at the Dilley facility, particularly guards and asylum officers. “Sometimes you’re laughing out of rage, just to get that energy out,” she says, “though my emotions were more managed this time than the last I was here. You start to see things more in perspective. Even though the guards acted like bigger jerks than when I was here the last time, I felt more of a responsibility to try to let things roll off my back. If you don’t, it can either hurt the project and their access to people, which in turn hurts the women. So no matter how you’re feeling, you tell yourself, ‘ok, I will cuss all the way out to my car rather than do it in here.’” Sue’s thoughts reflect the interplay between emotional labor and peacekeeping efforts. A semblance of peace, in her characterization, is maintained through emotional control, through the repression of seemingly harmful emotional expressions. “It’s all about the women,” she went on, “and I would continue to say that to myself. It’s all about them. It’s not about how I feel or what such-and-such guard said to me. How are you an advocate if you fight them?” This recalls Noelle’s comments on the importance of embodying a sort of ‘selflessness’ or avoidance of emotional expression within the bounds of the facility. Both seem to value acts of self-control with respect to emotions. For Noelle, this mattered most in interactions between advocates and clients, while Sue emphasizes these restrained behaviors in relations with administrative actors. They contend that these performances lead them to better, more effective care of clients, while others imply that without restraint, their care might not be allowed at all. Still others refuse to become alienated from their own emotional needs or effectively

ignore abusive or obstructive behavior. Here, the ‘small picture’—including the minutiae of everyday frictions and emotional reactions—conflicts with the ‘big picture’—securing and maintaining the provision, or flow, of critical care through the management of working relationships amongst interdependent actors. The question Sue poses—“how are you an advocate if you fight [administrators]?”—seems to capture this conflict in simple terms.

As this chapter has illustrated, though, these seemingly distinct pictures often overlap. This inevitably leads to larger questions concerning paradoxes of humanitarian resistance and the role of care as an organizing force. Considering critiques of humanitarians for expressing ‘functional solidarity’ (Agier and Fernbach 2011) with punitive state actors, what is the relationship between peacekeeping or compromising efforts and contributing to the ‘management’ of detainees? In other words, do peacekeeping efforts reflect a more deeply ingrained relationship between legal advocates and facility administrators in ways that do harm to their efforts of resistance? Care is, in each of these relationships, the central organizing force. If not for an interest in the continued provision of care for detainees, advocates likely would not concern themselves with caring for administrative relationships. Interest in providing care for detainees also shapes how advocates conceive of care for themselves and how they respond to others’ comportment. Starting with the question, as this chapter did—how does conflict appear in the everyday life inside these facilities—has led to another question: how does resistance appear in the everyday life of these facilities? This chapter has only begun a discussion of the relationship between care, conflict, and resistance, but it has demonstrated some of the frictions between practical constitutions of this relationship and the ways in which it is differently imagined by advocates.

Conclusions

Volunteers were frustrated, some were outright pissed off. It was yet another week where administrators in Dilley changed the rules about where volunteers and staff could be within the visitation space at any one time throughout the day. The new rule deemed that volunteers couldn't be in the open area of the visitation trailer unless

they were meeting with clients, but there was also a new limitation to the number of people allowed to wait in the PB room. That week, there were many volunteers. Because of these simultaneous changes, it practically meant that advocates, if they wanted to remain in the building, had to meet with clients continuously, without break, until they left for the day. One of the staff, Cynthia, knew the disruption that would result from having to wait while advocates moved in and out through security all day and thus pushed back on the new rule about waiting in the PB room. “You can’t tell us how many people are allowed in here,” she said curtly to the two guards standing in the doorway. “They’ve all been cleared to be here, and they can’t be doing something every single minute.” The guards relented, but one returned later to speak with one of the project’s attorneys, Maggie. Late in the afternoon, he softly yet sternly told her that he was sorry, but that what happened today couldn’t happen again, that they were breaking the rules by keeping so many advocates inside. Maggie, sitting on the floor of the PB room with her computer on her lap, apologized and consented. “I get it...they’re under pressure too,” she exhaled exhaustedly after he walked away. “There are cameras all over, and they’re being watched all the time.” Alejandro had previously shared that the guards’ supervisors could, in fact, pull up any video feed from those cameras, even remotely, at any point during the day and watch them. If guards happened to be doing something that they weren’t supposed to, they would be reprimanded. If they were caught allowing something to take place that shouldn’t be, according to whatever new or old ‘rules’, they could be held responsible. “I can’t imagine how edgy that would make a person feel,” Maggie said. And this was the same for administrative staff at Karnes where, as a project staff member once cautioned: “Somebody’s always watching.”



In considering conflicts and frictions amongst advocates and administrators in these contexts, specifically guards, it is important to recognize that such encounters should not be misconstrued as simple indictments of individual administrators or administrative groups. Scholars have demonstrated the ways in which the “project of immigrant detention dehumanizes not only immigrants but workers in the system as well,” (Furman et al. 2016: 9, referencing Bosworth and Fili 2016). Advocates, when going through their orientation before entering the facility, are informed, if only briefly, of the fact that there are cameras placed throughout the facility, with the exception of certain spaces, and that there are administrators who observe these recordings on a daily basis. This was why one of the tools for pursuing the validity of advocates’ claims about guards making noises in the open space was security camera footage. While project staff emphasize the existence of these cameras in order to prepare advocates for an environment in which they, and their work, is under constant surveillance, the simultaneous surveillance of administrators themselves is recognized less frequently as playing a role in conflicts between the two groups. Constant and omnipresent surveillance of guards, advocates, and detainees alike, like Bentham’s Panopticon, are part of the all-

encompassing ‘disciplinary mechanism’ of the facilities. The effect is to induce in those being observed “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power,” (Foucault 1977: 201). Together these groups share, in very different ways, in the position of the ‘inmate’, and through this observation (and awareness of observation), the watched individual inevitably “becomes the principle of [their] own subjection” (203). Yet, surveillance is only one of the ways in which administrators appear to experience friction while bringing it about. Tensions and anxieties resound in such ‘unstable places’ (Greenhouse et al. 2002), seemingly affecting all in distinct ways.



As she waited for her client to drop off her young daughter in the daycare before heading into her interview, an advocate struck up a conversation with her guard ‘escort’. Although only a short distance away from the visitation trailer, walking to the asylum office, with or without their client, required an escort (but only for advocates). She and this particular guard had become somewhat familiar after an extended period of time in the facility and had passing yet friendly conversations. “I just want CARA [DPBP] people to know that we’re not the bad guys,” she said to her. “This is just a job for me, and it sucks for us too sometimes.” She was surprised when he said this, as she hadn’t accused him of anything or even mentioned the idea. “We get scolded all the time. Our bosses will say you did such-and-such, we saw you on the videotape. It sucks.” As they continued talking, he suddenly appeared distracted by a group of men wearing white collared t-shirts walking behind them, pointing at things and chatting inaudibly from the distance. He interrupted her speaking to apologize. “I’m sorry, I’m so distracted by those guys over there. I want to know who those guys are,” he said. “It’s like that all the time, like who is that, is something about to happen, why are they here...they never let us know if changes are about to happen.” During my fieldwork, there was an incident in which, within a very brief span of time, certain external administrators had arrived at the facility and informed the staff that they would be experiencing severe pay cuts. Talking with guards at the time about this made clear the frustration and anxiety they faced as a result of these constant uncertainties. As the client reappeared, ready to walk into the asylum office trailer, the guard repeated his comment from before. “I just want y’all to know we’re not the bad guys. We’re not trying to mess up your work or anything.”



This advocate subsequently questioned why the guard felt the need or desire to apparently explain himself in this way. The advocate had not instigated such a conversation; there was no trial, no consideration of the ‘banality’ of his participation in the harmful machinations of migrant incarceration (Arendt 2006). And yet, this was something that advocates often mused upon themselves amongst one another, because despite this guard’s claim or intentions, administrators of

all sorts objectively disrupted the care, every day, that advocates worked to provide detainees. Legal advocates, both volunteers and staff, debated questions about administrators' responsibilities, expectations, and choices amongst themselves often, with no particular attitude clearly winning out. In what ways were administrators, especially guards, responsible for their role in enabling harm to both advocates and detainees? While expressing a legal right to have access in aiding detained persons with their legal cases, advocates are in practice, in many instances, treated as if guests within these spaces. Ultimately, it is made apparent every day, in practical applications, that from the perspective of administrators, advocates, generally, are unwelcome guests. When administrators participate in the obstruction of the caregiving efforts of advocates, does it matter the motivation, or influencing factors? Within a single conversation, Alejandro elicited first empathy for guards—who “may have no other options and need this job”—and then, later, a sort of disdainful rejection of that very idea. “I’m sick of this liberal idea that we should have empathy for everyone, no matter what they participate in,” he told me. “Those people have a choice, and they’re choosing to lock up kids and mothers.” The empathetic conflict he faced clearly had not been resolved.

Ultimately, many different elements affected the relationships between administrators of the facility, in different positions, and advocates, and there was much information that was inaccessible to me, both because of time and research constraints. It was also true, however, that this was simply an integral part of the facility’s environment itself: knowledge about inner workings, rules, and the distributions of power were always and only ever partial. These gaps in knowledge and understanding led to unquelled anxieties that affected all relationships and circulated continuously. At a particularly stressful time at the Dilley facility, in which advocates were being banned and changes in rules were occurring at breakneck pace, a new group of student volunteers arrived on a Monday. Once in the visitation trailer at the very beginning of work on a Monday, a high-level administrative official walked in and informed both staff and volunteers that they were to line up

with their backs along the wall. They did so, and he proceeded to inform them of the ‘new’ rules (of course, all rules were new to the volunteers, for whom this was their first day). He stood close to their faces, walked along the line of their bodies, and shouted at them about how he was in charge, and that if they wanted to be in the facility, they had to abide by his rules. Some found his extreme aggression almost comical, particularly because they had never met or been in the space at all, as they were new volunteers. Others were disturbed by the ways in which they felt as if they were prisoners, or ‘quasi inmates’ (Comfort 2008), themselves. It was a bizarre experience for many, and oddly, did not happen again. In considering the event, some felt it was more of a sort of theatrical expression of disciplinary power, an aggressive yet awkward attempt to display authority, than anything else.

“Friction reminds us,” Tsing claims, “that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (2005:5). What new configurations of power and relational care are borne out of the frictions within family detention? Advocates’ responses to the frictions with which they are presented in the work simultaneously serve to create traction for the work to continue as well as create barriers for its continuation. “Our project struggles at times because it has these two kinds of contradictory functions,” Carlos said as he sat on the floor of the PB room, leaned against the wall one Fall evening. He was talking to Peter, a law student from Utah who spoke fluent Spanish after having spent his missionary years working with Latinx communities in the U.S. “These functions conflict in that one, we have established this working relationship with ICE and CCA [CoreCivic] so that we can get the women the help they need so they don’t get steamrolled, forgotten, deported, etc. But then too, we have this other work that is all about ending family detention. It seems paradoxical because the one sort of hurts the ends of the other.” While trying to effect the collapse of the facility’s operation, advocates on-the-ground must manage, in multiple senses, the very mechanisms of the operation. The following chapter moves on to

operations and frictions in other spaces: those which exist within the fear interview and its subsequent decision.

Citations

- Agier, Michel, and David Fernbach. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011.
- Alber, Erdmute and Heike Drotbohm, editors. *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*. First edition., Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (Penguin Classics)*. Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Biehl, João Guilherme. "Care and Disregard". *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*. Edited by Didier Fassin, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkeley: U of California, 2005.
- Bosworth, Mary and Andriani Fili. "Immigration Detention in Greece and the UK". In *Detaining the Immigrant Other: Global and Transnational Issues*, eds. Rich Furman, Douglas Epps, and Greg Lamphear. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Fassin, Didier. *Prison Worlds: an Ethnography of the Carceral Condition*. Polity, 2016.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.
- Furman, Rich, Douglas Epps, and Greg Lamphear. *Detaining the Immigrant Other: Global and Transnational Issues*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Greenhouse, Carol J., Elizabeth Mertz, and Kay B. Warren. *Ethnography in Unstable Places: Everyday Lives in Contexts of Dramatic Political Change*. Duke University Press, 2002.
- Gupta, Akhil. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Hall, Alexandra. *Border Watch: Cultures of Immigration, Detention and Control*. London: Pluto Press, 2012.
- Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2016.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California, 1983.

- Laughland, Oliver. "US detention facility restricts use of crayons for migrant children". *The Guardian*, November 17, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/17/migrant-children-crayons-banned-karnes-detention>.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. *The Paradox of Hope: Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Mol, Annemarie, Ingunn Moser, and J Pols. *Care in Practice: On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms*. Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010.
- Mountz, Alison. *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2010.
- Mulla, Sameena. *The Violence of Care: Rape Victims, Forensic Nurses, and Sexual Assault Intervention*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Murphy, Michelle. "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2015, pp. 717–737., www.jstor.org/stable/43829053.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, María. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- Ticktin, Miriam Iris. *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. Berkeley: U of California, 2011.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: an Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

Notes

^{xxvii} Mijente. “End the Crayon Ban at Karnes Family Detention Center.” Accessed April 21, 2020. <https://action.mijente.net/petitions/end-the-crayon-ban-at-karnes>.

^{xxviii} Though not necessarily made explicit by administrative entities or these legal projects, the source of this punitive action likely relates to one of the regulations concerning physical abuse in migrant carceral spaces. In 2014, the Department of Homeland Security released a regulation—known as the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)—which, coupled with ICE’s policy known as the Sexual Assault and Abuse Prevention and Intervention, was meant to expand oversight of physical abuse concerns in migrant detention facilities. While my research did not render evidence that this was indeed the justification administrative officials used to not only ban Alejandro but also to then justify new practices which denied advocates and detainees the right to hug one another, I suggest that it is possible that this was the legal case they used. Despite the policies and regulations, evidence has shown that claims of sexual assault in carceral spaces are rarely adjudicated in favor of the prisoner. Of course, sexual assault claims are widespread across migrant detention facilities in the U.S., including in family detention facilities. This concern was one of the reasons why the Artesia facilities was ultimately shuttered, advocates claim, and has continued to plague detainees in other family facilities. Sources:

Haag, Matthew. “Thousands of Immigrant Children Said They Were Sexually Abused in U.S. Detention Centers, Report Says.” *The New York Times*, February 27, 2019, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/us/immigrant-children-sexual-abuse.html>.

Immigration Impact. “Berks Detention Center Employee Convicted of Sexual Assault of Young Honduran Mother,” April 15, 2016. <https://immigrationimpact.com/2016/04/15/berks-detention-center-employee-convicted-sexual-assault-young-honduran-mother/>.

Speri, Alice. “Detained, Then Violated: 1,224 Complaints Reveal a Staggering Pattern of Sexual Abuse in Immigration Detention. Half of Those Accused Worked for ICE.” *The Intercept* (blog), April 11, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2018/04/11/immigration-detention-sexual-abuse-ice-dhs/>.

“PREA.” Accessed April 21, 2020. <https://www.ice.gov/prea>.

Press, Elaine Thompson/Associated. “Prison Rape Allegations Are on the Rise.” *The Marshall Project*, July 25, 2018. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/07/25/prison-rape-allegations-are-on-the-rise>.

^{xxix} This claim is supported by many studies, e.g. Journal, A. B. A. “Attorney Suicide: What Every Lawyer Needs to Know.” *ABA Journal*. Accessed April 21, 2020. https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/attorney_suicide_what_every_lawyer_needs_to_know.

Chapter 4: Credible Fears in Muted Zones

Today I went with Elena to her credible fear interview. It was conducted by a new AO (asylum officer), AO Moreau. I was nervous, as I always am, because I knew how anxious Elena was. Jillian, one of the staff of the project, asked me to accompany her, to help her feel more comfortable in the interview but also to make sure that the interviewer didn't misunderstand her when she shared her story. Elena didn't have but a few years of formal education and seemed to struggle, for whatever reason or reasons, in communicating her experiences in a clear way. I was also nervous because apparently the team had already lodged complaints about this new AO. Frankly, I was taken aback by her conduct in the interview. It didn't go well at all and was quite tough to watch.

As I walked in with Elena, a middle-aged Guatemalan mother with silver-capped teeth and an exceedingly demure presence, AO Moreau instructed her in simple Spanish to sit in the seat directly across from her own, closing the door behind us. The AO quickly informed me that I was to sit in the chair situated in the corner of the room near the door, several feet away from both of them. Why do I have to sit over here? I thought. There was an empty chair next to Elena, after all. I stepped out for a moment to use the bathroom, and when I returned, AO Moreau had already begun her questioning with the usual phone interpreter service. She didn't acknowledge my re-entry in the room, which made me wonder if she had intentionally begun the interview while I was away.

AO Moreau asked her questions of Elena quickly and aggressively. She moved erratically through different topics, asking one question about the rape Elena had experienced by a gang member, then jumping immediately to a question about family members. She would ask Elena where her other children were living currently, then ask about her own childhood experiences of abuse, then immediately to questions about what kind of work she did. I even felt the whiplash from the way she flitted through lines of questioning. As they spoke about her rape, Elena looked solemnly at her lap. Her questioning appeared to have no natural trajectory, and it felt as if the swift shifts between topics was challenging for Elena to respond to. I watched silently from the corner taking notes; recording questions and answers, tones and behaviors. I listened intently for errors I might pick up in the phone interpreter's translations. I glared from time to time at AO Moreau when she posed sensitive questions indelicately or spoke harshly, even though she never even glanced in my direction. Elena sat far back in her plastic seat, her small feet dangling above the linoleum. She held the manila packet which contained her important documents in her lap, nervously tugging at its corners. She was confused several times by the questions AO Moreau asked, looking over to me, seemingly for clarity. The interpreter had to repeat many of these questions, and the AO was visibly frustrated.

At a certain point, AO Moreau decided that she wanted to speak with Elena's son, Marcos, to ask him questions. Marcos was waiting outside of the office in the waiting room full of toys for much younger children. He had his own asylum claims independent of his mother's. As Elena quietly left the room, Marcos walked in. He was only 13 years old, but he was rather tall, much taller than his mom, and broad. He's quite shy, but when he walked in, he had this sweet smile on his face. "Wow, you're really big, how old are you?" AO Moreau exclaimed with a smile. He responded softly, shyly and sat in his mother's seat. She spoke more friendly with him. She leaned back in her chair, staring at him with her bright blue eyes. "Do you know where you are?" she asked. He smiled widely, but was silent, staring headlong at her with a squint, like he was trying to think. She continued to smile and asked the same question again, this time more forcefully. "Do you know where you are?" He remained silent, smiling, searching for the answer, when he looked over at me in the corner. "Que es..." he said softly to me, but before he could finish his thought, AO Moreau interrupted. "No, no, no, don't look over there," she said sternly. It caught me off-guard, and it appeared to rattle him as well. He looked back at her, not smiling. He seemed embarrassed now, and still didn't know how to answer her. "Ok," the AO says, "do you know what country you're in?" He bursts out, enthusiastically. "Oh, Texas, Texas!" AO Moreau laughs. "Ok, Texas is the state, but you are in the United States of America," slowly exaggerating the last few words, which the phone interpreter repeats in the same way. He nods shyly.

Marcos tells his story in small pieces for the AO, struggling to offer the sort of details AOs are looking for, just like Elena. He talked about how gangs at his school were trying to recruit him; he was now of the right age to be recruited and his stature lent additional desirability for the gangs. His classmates constantly told him they were coming for him. His answers to her questions are short and he looks down at his feet which are layered on top of one another. His large frame is crumpled into the small space between the AO's desk and his chair and his hands fidget in his lap. He starts sniffing but is obviously trying not to cry. His brief answers appear to frustrate the AO, who speaks to him in a way more appropriate for someone much older than him. She starts to end the interview, asking him if he has anything else he'd like to say. "I don't want to end up dead from these gangs," Marcos says softly with tears rolling down his face. "Just like, buried in the ground... where no one will ever find me." Though I was just a few feet away from him, it felt like 100, and I resented the AO for making this boy feel this way, virtually alone. He started to silently cry, and AO Moreau stopped typing, crossed her arms, and looked at him. "You don't need to cry," she told him flatly.

He did need to cry, though. He was frightened, in part by possibly saying the wrong thing to the AO in this interview. At one point during his questioning, Marcos awkwardly commented how gangs "come after kids of single mothers". The AO responded suspiciously. "Explain to me what a single mother is," she said sternly. He seemed confused. "Tell me where you got this word—'single mother'—from," she continued. He nervously said he didn't know. It was clear that AO Moreau suspected that someone, potentially the legal advocacy team, had informed him that he should say such a thing in his interview. This was a repeated point of conflict between asylum officers and the legal team. Marcos was also frightened of being sent back to his home, frightened of being murdered and buried in the ground where no one would ever find him. His two older brothers had had to leave the town in which they lived previously because of gang recruitment efforts, and a cousin had been killed by the gangs, his body found buried in the dirt. He had good reason to believe these weren't empty threats. The AO asked him—a 13 year-old boy who looked like an 18 year-old boy—to talk about these things, reliving these experiences and feelings, alone. Marcos had reason to cry and reason to be afraid.

In the end, AO Moreau didn't offer a summary of Elena and Marcos' case to them, nor did she allow me to add anything at the end. AOs are typically expected to give the detainee a summary of the main elements of their claim. Some AOs allow the advocate to offer a 'final statement' of sorts, to draw the officer's attention to the claim using the language of the law and thus, presumably, helping the officer make sense of the legal claim from the stories being shared. Sometimes, like this time, neither of these happen. This time, after she finished her questioning of Elena and Marcos, AO Moreau smiled again at them and dismissed us, never looking at me. I walked out of the building with Elena and Marcos and told them that they did a wonderful job before my guard 'escort' directed me to walk back to the visitation trailer.



The credible or reasonable fear interview, as its name implies, centers on the detainee's fear of harm or persecution in their home country, thus justifying asylum protection. While the focus in the interview is defining the specific narrative around this fear, the interview itself is a fearful experience. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which, like detainees, feelings of fear and impotence play a role in the experiences and activities of legal advocates in critical yet differently

configured spaces of the facility: the asylum office and the courtroom. Whereas the previous chapter focused on caregiving in its relationship to frictions produced through administrative encounters, this chapter examines such caring frictions in encounters with asylum officers in interviews and judges who preside over the relatively few courtroom proceedings. The most significant struggle advocates face in the interview ‘accompaniments’—as they are referred to—and in courtroom proceedings concerns how to give care in settings where their actions and participation are severely limited. As my experience with Elena, Marcos, and officer Moreau shows, the role of advocates in these contexts differs greatly from those discussed in previous chapters.

Many advocates find the interview and courtroom to be particularly frustrating spaces of encounter, primarily as a result of the fact that they are often forced to remain almost entirely silent observers of that which takes place in these different spatial encounters. In the client’s interview, advocates are ‘legal representatives’ while in courtroom proceedings, their role is delimited by the concept of ‘friends-of-the-court’. In each setting, they are not meant to speak on the client’s behalf, to direct the officer or judge’s questioning, or to instruct the clients’ answers. They are generally confined to mostly—though not entirely—non-participatory roles. What is care, then, when, either by official rule or ruling custom, an advocate is essentially muted? When they are relegated to simple observation? Is care even present in such scenarios, and if so, how is it configured? Farmer (2005) recognizes the, albeit fair, wealth of critiques of overuse of the concept of ‘bearing witness’ in ethnographic works discussing the ‘observation’ of atrocities. But, in appropriating the concept for his own book, he also calls for its rehabilitation because of its undeniable usefulness in encompassing different ‘ways of knowing’ (2005: 26-28). This chapter locates similar usefulness for the concept in making sense of certain aspects of advocacy in family detention, while also asking: in what ways does the practice of bearing witness contribute to our understanding of ‘ways of caring’? What is the relationship between witnessing and caring or, asked another way: is witnessing caring?

In different ways, we can think of spaces like those of the asylum interview or the court as border zones. Asylum officers and judges are decision-makers and adjudicators that make determinations for detainees in relation to many boundaries: membership in legal categories, ‘credibility’, and legal status, among others. Officers and judges determine where a detainee will be released, either into the country to continue their case, transferred to another facility, or deported. In this way, they serve alongside other federal and local officials as additional border gatekeepers, and the spaces over which they preside are border zones. Relating to the border zone of the clinic, Mattingly notes that in such spaces “actors find themselves uncertain about what others are up to and struggle to be understood by their interlocutors. While much of life may be fraught with ongoing misunderstandings, interpretive trouble is particularly pernicious in clinical spaces where a great deal is at stake,” (2010: 11). In the clinic, misunderstandings occur as different languages—from doctors to patients to their caregivers—come into contact. Such ‘interpretive trouble’ is certainly a central characteristic of the spaces with which this chapter engages. A great deal is also at stake—in fact, as many advocates would affirm, life or death is at stake—in asylum interviews and courtroom proceedings. This chapter makes evident, unsurprisingly, the ways in which this applies directly to the experience of the detainee in their interview, and for some, in court, as constantly misunderstood and misinterpreted.

With that in mind, what are the positions of legal advocates in these border zones? Do they affirm or challenge the borders detainees face in these spaces, or play some other role? A continuous theme in previous chapters of this dissertation has been that of disruption or interruption. These chapters explored the ways in which such acts contributed to the stoppage or slowing down of advocates’ care work. While the experiences and performances of advocates in the spaces of the interview and court are marked primarily by non-verbal formulations of care (Mol et al 2010), interruptive behaviors on their part also serve as vehicles for care. They are actors who participate in

these encounters, troubling the often-dehumanizing processes of asylum adjudication through the apparently limited mechanisms availed to them. While care is reconfigured yet again in these constrained, high-stakes spaces, it is nonetheless present.

Fear is a defining element of both the interview and the court. Not only is it a central part of these moments in the detainees' legal process, fear is also a defining sentiment for them in these encounters. Advocates share in this fear, particularly because it would appear that, in comparison with other contexts in which this dissertation has presented, so little is within or under their control or influence in the interview and court encounters. When they meet with clients in the visitation area, when they help them connect with family or friends on the outside, when they assist them with childcare or medical issues, they bear some, and often significant, influence or control. In these contexts, I've argued, their practices of care are clearly recognizable as such. In the interview and court encounters—where, as this chapter will demonstrate, advocates are effectively 'silenced' and their potential avenues for care are limited—what happens to their role as caregivers? If care remains, as I argue it does, what does it come to look like considering these significant constraints?

This chapter examines these constraints and their various formulations as well as how advocates respond to them. With that, I suggest that advocates' care in these settings can be understood as falling within broad practical configurations: presence, witnessing, and documentation. The acts of witnessing, or observing, and documentation in these spaces are kinds of care strategies, ones that might be better understood as forms of 'counter-surveillance' (Walsh 2013). Walsh illustrates the many ways that im/migrant rights activists and advocates engage in different forms of counter-surveillance in order to "promote transparency and democratic accountability by 'watching the watchers' and turning the gaze of authority against itself," (2013:286; Walsh also cites Huey et al. 2006). An examination of these kinds of practices, as they take shape in these contexts, provides important insight into how advocates navigate shifting roles and resist

constraints along new borders residing deeper within the interior of these facilities in order to create avenues for the flow of care to detainees.

This chapter diverges significantly from the previous chapters in its almost total exclusion of advocates' experiences in interviews and court at the Karnes facility. As mentioned previously, there were always less advocates volunteering with the Karnes project, RAICES. As this chapter explains, advocates at the Dilley facility attended interviews and court appointments with clients because of their capacity to do so. If there was a small number of advocates during a particular week or at a particular time of the year—which was the case for both facilities, as volunteer availabilities fluctuated throughout the year—there would more likely be few to no interview accompaniments. Interview and court accompaniments with the legal team at Karnes were exceedingly rare, primarily because the team simply couldn't spare the work an advocate could provide to the many passing through the visitation area for the one to two hours these appointments might take. As a result, my research on advocates' work and experiences of these spaces is limited almost entirely to the Dilley facility.

Asilo

Beyond the security area, the asylum office and courtroom are virtually the only other spaces in which advocates are allowed to spend time, though their movement is more strictly monitored than in the visitation area. In Dilley, the asylum office was in a separate trailer and advocates accompanying clients to their interviews were required to have a guard escort them there, something that was not required for detainees themselves. Inside the trailer, known by detainees as the '*asilo*', or asylum, building, advocates would sit with clients in the designated waiting room as they both waited to be retrieved by the assigned asylum officer, who would then escort them to a private interview room. The waiting room also doubled as the space in which new arrivals to the facility would watch a brief, minimally informative video about asylum processes and their detention.

Each interview room was slightly different, though most of them were exceedingly cramped. They were sparsely furnished with a large office desk on which sat the AO's largest desktop computer, two to three chairs for clients and advocates, a plastic landline for interpreter services, and an almost always empty bookshelf in one corner. Some rooms had high windows looking out upon the inner landscape of the facility, while others did not, feeling more like large closets. The offices, like much of the facility, were kept at a very low temperature, and a box of tissues sat on the desks near the clients' seats. Familiar sounds resonated throughout each interview. Harsh florescent lights buzzed along with feedback from interpreter phone calls. The walls of each office were especially thin, allowing various sounds to permeate. From one room, one could hear the innocuous hold music that preceded an interpreter call playing in another room. One could also often hear the usually intrusive sounds of the guards situated at the check-in desk. On more than one occasion, I sat next to clients as they cried telling their stories to officers over the raucous sounds of laughter from the guards on the other side of the wall. The incongruity of different emotion sounds was disturbing, so much so that on occasion, the asylum officer would interrupt the interview to tell the guards they needed quieting.

Throughout my fieldwork, advocates' abilities to attend interviews with clients varied widely. This was a source of frustration for them, as it was difficult for both advocates and clients to cope with the fact that only some clients could have an advocate accompany them to their interview. The most commonly observed rule was that advocates would attend interviews for which there was 'concern' for a particular client. This was affected by numerous factors. If a client appeared to be especially emotionally fragile in their interactions with advocates or if they struggled to recall or articulate details or events in a significant way, the team would often send an advocate with them to their interview. At times when there were large amounts of volunteers and a smaller population of detainees at the facility, advocates accompanied many to their

interviews. Other times, when the team was stretched particularly thin, they would reserve accompaniments for the direst situations. The reason for this was that accompanying an interview could take an advocate away from the visitation area work for anywhere from an hour to a few hours. A loss of even a single advocate in overwhelmed moments like that had a noticeable impact.

Accompaniments were not simply meant as support for those clients who needed another supportive presence in the room, but they were also meant to observe how asylum officers conducted these interviews. Specifically, advocates documented the sorts of questions that were asked, the ways that they were asked, and the responses delivered by clients. Throughout my time working with these projects, detainees often shared that there were issues in their interviews. Asylum officers would misinform them—telling them that they could only respond to questions with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. There would be translation or interpretation issues, wherein, for instance, the phone interpreter was speaking an indiscernible dialect of the client’s language, or the interpreter would speak in a confusing way, perhaps cutting them off before they could respond appropriately. Advocates would thus take extensive notes as they mostly silently observed the interview. As time passed in my fieldwork, advocates began to prepare a statement about the client’s case which, when allowed, they would share at the end of each interview. They would be prepared, with their final comments, to refer to the officer’s missed conversational opportunities to draw out important case details or mistranslations before they would be submitted to the client’s record by the officer.

Previous chapters discussed certain aspects of what advocates attempt to do in order to prepare clients for the complexities of the interview, mainly learning how to articulate their experiences in terms of a story—which, for many, isn’t necessarily a ‘natural’ skill (Fobear 2015)—and drawing connections to ‘important’ or rather necessary details of their cases, among

other things. It also discussed some of the struggles which the client may encounter in the interview (Chrisolm 2001) for which the advocate attempts to prepare them. Several weekly volunteers I spoke with who had attended interviews mentioned that they wished they had been able to know more about how the interview practically functioned, and how it felt, before they had met with clients to prepare them. Karla, a graduate student originally from Honduras, was fortunate to accompany a mother to her interview early in the week. “I really think volunteers should go with a client to the interview so they can see how intimidating it is and see how the process functions,” she told me. “That helped me in prepping women for their interview. It helped me to know that they weren’t going to get someone in their interview who was friendly. Someone who may not be expressive with their body. They may seem cold. If I hadn’t seen that, my approach to the prep might have been different, possibly not as effective.” While advocates are provided with a view of the broad outlines of the interview by project staff, as Karla notes, it’s important to prepare clients for the feelings experienced in it, which are difficult to understand fully without having witnessed it. Delving into the discursive microdetails (Richland 2008) of interview encounters helps to illustrate why detainees are prepared by advocates in the way that they are, while also demonstrating how the interview environment, like so much else in the facility, can be wildly unpredictable, both for detainees and their advocates.

Fear of the Unknown

Fear lies at the center of the asylum interview, but I would also argue that it is a central figure in advocates’ sentiments and expressions. As Chapter 2 clarified, the fear interview functions to determine the existence of a potential asylum claim and the credibility of the applicant; explicating their fear in relation to their experiences, and thus their claim, is critical. Fear is the crux of the interview because it demonstrates both credibility—in that it is the expected emotional response to experiencing horrific events—as well as a need for protection,

through asylum. In the interview, fear becomes expressed through language, their narrative of their experiences, and the body. Like detainees, fear is also felt and expressed by advocates in relation to the interview, even though its stakes affect each in very different ways.

The interview inspired much anxiety and fear in both clients and advocates, and one of the primary reasons for this had to do with its relatively unknown nature. Clients were frequently confused about who it was even with, many thinking they would be interviewed by a judge. Part of advocates' jobs was to dispel particular fears about the interview by illuminating this metaphorically dark space; they would describe what would happen in it, who would be speaking with them, about what topics, for how long, and, in general, what to expect afterwards. For many, this bore an important impact, while for others, the fear of the eventual unknown—what would actually come of the interview—was seemingly too powerful to dispel.

That fear, of what may come in the interview, resided in advocates as well. Like clients, advocates were fearful of many things: how their client would 'perform'—meaning, principally, how well they would be able to communicate their narrative and respond to questions in ways helpful to their case; how they would be treated by their asylum officer; and how the asylum officer would translate that interaction into a decision about their case. Advocates also feared that they had failed the clients with whom they worked, by, for instance, underpreparing them for their interview or giving them incorrect or improper information. Their fear was based upon the idea that, despite their interest in helping, they either had not sufficiently helped clients or actually hurt them. For most weekly advocates, the interview and court experience were similarly unknown spaces. While advocates were informed generally of these in their trainings, many noted surprise at how these played out in reality after attending one or the other.

As a consequence of the environment—as one in which changes occurred swiftly and information was passed often indirectly—advocates were frequently forced to engage with

chismes, or rumors, at the facility. One particularly disturbing *chisme* that circulated amongst the detainees multiple times had to do with a story about a mother having committed suicide in the facility after her child was eaten by an alligator while they crossed the river at the border. There was not any evidence to support that this event had ever occurred, but it proved to be a potent rumor in its ongoing circulation. There were more commonly *chismes* about the interview itself. One that circulated concerned the idea that if detainees cried in the interview or the courtroom, they might be given negatives or denials of their appeals, or even be yelled at by the adjudicator in charge. With *chismes* about these encounters, there was usually some blurring between the true and false. Advocates had certainly observed asylum officers and judges become aggressive and use abusive language or tones in their encounters, and it was possible that these outbursts coincided with moments where clients were upset. This information may have then been passed along between clients as a form of *consejo*, or advice, about the consequences of certain behaviors within the context of specific encounters. Generally, rumors reflected fears that clients had about these unknown, intimidating spaces, and while advocates worked to dispel unnecessarily and incorrect falsehoods, in turn dispelling certain unwarranted fears, they themselves struggled with their own fears of the unknown.

Daphne was a student in Maryland, volunteering at a time when her skills were especially needed. She came down with her friend Raquel at one of the times in which Dilley received a large and unexpected influx of Haitian asylum-seekers. She was Haitian-American and spoke Haitian Creole, the first volunteer I had met on-the-ground who spoke the language. Over time in Dilley, a substantial reserve of voluntary remote interpreters for Haitian Creole had been established, but none in my experience had visited the facility in-person yet. Her presence there, if only brief, was incredibly meaningful in establishing trusting relationships with this already isolated community at the facility. As has been mentioned, everything in the facility—from

languages to foods to religious opportunities—catered to individuals from Latin America, especially Spanish-speakers.

While all advocates experienced some form of performance pressure, Daphne felt special pressure to connect with Haitian clients and prepare them for the critical moment of the interview. “Personally, I was very nervous imagining a woman that I had prepped going in and sitting in front of an asylum officer. It felt like a responsibility that was resting on my shoulders. Knowing that even though I believe she has ‘credible fear’, that that may not come across to an officer, it feels like it falls back on me. It took a bit of communication with the CARA staff to understand that a *negativo* is not the end of the world. It took some encouragement to cope with that.” Raquel herself echoed this anxiety, saying that she was constantly worried on that first trip about whether she was doing a good enough job preparing clients for their interviews. “One of my friends who was volunteering with me and I were checking the online database what felt like every five minutes to see if any negatives had come in. All of the women that you work with come in saying can you help me, can you help me. You try so hard to help, but in the end, it’s not my decision to make.”

There was the fear associated with not knowing what would take place in the interview, how the client would be treated, or how they would respond. It caused anxiety in advocates like Daphne to know that with most of their clients, they simply would not get answers to these questions. They were afraid of what was to happen, but they were also afraid that they had not done what they needed to in order to help prepare them. While staff tried to assure advocates that, ultimately, they were not responsible for what occurred in the interview; that, in the end, they were only volunteers doing the best they could with the resources they had. This, I found with both staff and volunteers, was a narrative that played an important role in continuing to do this work. Advocates, especially staff or long-term volunteers, needed such narratives to negate

the persistent, unwanted thought that they were, at least in part, responsible for if the client's interview went poorly, or if the client didn't understand something they needed to about the law or their case. Many, even in reminding others that they weren't ultimately responsible for negative outcomes of a client's case, struggled to hold fast to this idea when it was their client who had received a negative in their interview or had their appeal denied in court. There was also, however, the fear associated with *knowing* what takes place in the interview.

"I felt like I was in a circus. I thought to myself, this is crazy, this is absolutely crazy," Chase told me, on the edge of laughter. Chase was the long-term volunteer in Dilley who spent so much time with children. Because he was again volunteering with the project over the summer, when volunteer capacity was high, he was also able to accompany many clients to their interviews. On this particular day that he accompanied a mother, the officer was talking to the client about her own kidnapping, which had been perpetrated by a gang. She explained that her brother had started seeing this married woman, and that woman was affiliated with the gang.

"The AO [asylum officer], though, kept misunderstanding what she was saying. It wasn't a mistranslation, just a misinterpretation. The client and the interpreter didn't notice the mistake. The AO kept repeating that it was her brother that was a gang member, and that it was him that kidnapped her," Chase said. He leaned forward from his seat in the room and tried to interrupt the interview, interjecting that the AO was misunderstanding this. Her brother didn't kidnap her, he told the officer. "But this AO would just scoff at me, saying 'whatever, it doesn't matter, he kidnapped someone.' So I kept having to jump into the interview to try and correct this. I told her that I wanted to put it in the record that neither she nor her family was involved in her own kidnapping. She kept telling me that it's fine, that she didn't need to change it, and I kept telling her no, it's not fine, you need to correct that. I told her that while I understood that it might not be relevant to her interview at the moment, it should be on the record for, like, credibility

purposes and possibly establishing a humanitarian case. Her family wasn't a family of kidnappers, they didn't do this."

Chase was incredulous at the fact that the AO neither understood nor respected the need to maintain accuracy and clarity for this client's record. Advocates made clear to clients that an important thing to remember when going into the fear interview was that what was said in the interview could follow them throughout the length of their asylum case, were they to continue it outside of detention. Accidental or unintended discrepancies, like this, were truly important, potentially crucial, for later, more nuanced stages of their asylum claim. "It was at that moment," Chase said, "that I thought about saying to the AO: you really do see these details as irrelevant. You just see these people as numbers, and you're just trying to get this over with. At that point, I put myself in our client's position, and I thought, this is scary as fuck. I couldn't even mentally handle what was happening there. I literally looked around the room and thought: is this all that this boils down to? Literally one extra human on the other side of the desk trying to convince this person of her story? I don't know, man...it was a weird, weird feeling."

Chase was frightened, both by the lack of concern or accountability in the asylum officer as well as by the fact that he, who simply happened to be there that day with that client and happened to catch this 'small' mistake. The phone interpreter, the asylum officer, and, of course, the client had not noticed this. What is even more concerning is that when Chase tried to correct it, the asylum officer exhibited resistance to spending further time trying to make sense of the apparent disconnect. It was disarming for many, myself included, to be made aware of the major implications of these small, crucial details. A client's case, her future success in establishing an asylum claim, could depend upon these little moments of misunderstanding, and an advocate's presence to recognize these issues was critical, frightening, and unnerving. Laurie, a business immigration lawyer, was similarly disturbed by the precariousness of the client's situation in the

interview. “I just realized how quickly it all could blow up for them,” she said. “It seems like if things don’t go well or if the officer doesn’t understand the client in the interview, they’re subject to this uphill battle from then on.”

Observing Boundaries

Chase’s experience demonstrates how advocates’ position in the interview was configured in sometimes contradictory ways. From his perspective, he was simultaneously figured as an irritant or interruption to the quick completion of an interview as well as an individual knowledgeable enough about the asylum process to know that errors as such could make a critical difference in a case. Advocates were variously interpreted by officers as knowledgeable, productive ‘helpers’—sometimes even experts—in the process of the interview, others as silent observers offered the privilege of being present, and still others as intrusive presences.



“I see you as my helper,” AO Hart said with a smile to me as I walked into his office with Saïdy, a Cuban mother who had previously worked as an economist. Saïdy and her husband were both political activists and had been labeled ‘gusanos’ (literally, worms and metaphorically, traitors) and had to flee as a result of severe persecution. This was my first time meeting AO Hart, a young man with wrinkled clothes and a booming voice. In this interview with Saïdy, who was generally calm and well-spoken, AO Hart was the one who struggled, which made clear why he had made the surprising comment about me being his helper as I entered. Although Saïdy’s claim was quite clear, from my perspective, and as a highly-educated individual, she rarely misunderstood his questions. He, however, frequently looked to me, when asking his questions and after receiving answers. “Am I doing this right? Should I ask more questions on this?” he would ask. He’d also ask questions directed at me as if, for some reason, he needed to defer to me. “Is it alright if I ask this? I don’t want to get in trouble,” he’d say. In moments where he was directing these statements toward me, Saïdy would turn to me, confused, then look back at him. I helped in leading him through his questioning, confused at this sudden, highly participatory role I was afforded. Other advocates attested to similar experiences with him. This first encounter with AO Hart was exceptional from the others, though the strangeness of his behavior would be repeated.

On another day, Esmý, an indigenous mother from Guatemala, began talking about how her father was recently murdered by one of her cousins, a gang member, when AO Hart leaned back into his office chair, yawning loudly. Esmý seemed confused but kept trying to speak over the sound. She had only a year of formal schooling and seem to struggle to understand many of his questions. It was possible that there were language barriers in the interview, as while she identified as being part of an indigenous community, she didn’t want to proceed in the interview with an indigenous language interpreter. Navigating conversations with clients about which language they should choose to do their interview in was a complex endeavor, at times. Some clients believed or were told by

officials that if they were to ask for an interpreter in their native language—especially if that language was considered ‘rare’, like indigenous languages—they would likely have to wait days or even weeks to reschedule their interview. It was true that some indigenous language interpreters were so rare that scheduling their services required sometimes a significant length of time, though some advocates believed this to be a tactic of officials to convince detainees to forward with the interview in order to ‘process’ them more quickly. This happened an unfortunate number of times with Roma clients who passed through Dilley or Karnes, sometimes with disastrous interpretation issues.

There were multiple issues with interpretation in Esmey’s interview, including very loud feedback sounds on the interpreter’s end of the call. Several times I intervened, trying to clarify the errors being misinterpreted. Esmey continued to be confused by the phrasing of questions, and AO Hart appeared to swing between frustration and boredom. “I’ll ask this question one more time,” he said looking at me, in reference to a line of questioning about her father’s death which she was quite confused about, “and then I’m done. They said all I had to ask was three times, that’s it.” I understood what sort of answer he was looking for, and the ways in which either he or the interpreter phrased it weren’t eliciting the expected response. I was worried that he would abandon this important set of questions simply because of this, so I suggested an alternative approach. Advocates, even when they weren’t welcomed to speak during the interview, interjected at moments in which often small yet critical errors were being made. With AO Hart, the burden to obtain pertinent information for a client’s case, beyond what they themselves could provide, was more heavily placed upon the advocate.

The interview between AO Hart and Esmey was overall distressing, but the most upsetting moment, from my perspective, occurred near the end. Esmey began to talk about her repeated rape at the hands of a domestic partner, a topic she was very clearly ill-at-ease discussing. Tears began to stream down her cheeks as she spoke slowly, deliberately about the details. She described the man, what had happened, and how long the abuse had been going on. The interpreter repeated all of this, and then, silence. AO Hart, whose face was mostly obscured to her by his computer, wasn’t typing, as he normally would, to record her responses. We sat, the three of us, in an uncomfortable silence for a few minutes. Then, in a loud voice, shook his head and turned to us and said, “Sorry! I was checking my email, I just got an email from my supervisor. Could you repeat what you said? How many times did he rape you?” It was a deeply unsettling moment, as Esmey was clearly upset by having to repeat this story even once. She was confused, and he grew frustrated with having to repeat his question again. “How many times? You have to tell me,” he’d say, louder and louder with each repetition. Unfortunately, this distracted incident would happen twice more in Esmey’s interview. A long, emotional response followed by a long silence. “I’m still reading this email,” he’d finally reply casually. “What was your answer? What did he beat you with again?” Each time it happened felt infuriating and ultimately completely unnecessary. I splashed curses across my notebook as he continued.



My position in the interviews conducted by AO Hart was interpreted in terms of a sort of dependency or assistantship. At times, he openly recognized this type of relationality—by referring to me and other legal advocates as his helpers—and others when his ineptitude in his

role seemingly called out, itself, for assistance. In other contexts, I experienced a completely different figuration of my role, one which positioned me and other legal advocates as subversive elements in these spaces.



Raquel rushed up to me and placed her hand on my forearm. “Can you go to my client’s interview, Erin?” she whispered to me. The woman, Bessy, was sitting at the front of the visitation trailer, waiting to walk over to the asylum office. Raquel, who had prepped her, had promised her that she would go with her to interview, as Bessy was very anxious. Raquel, unfortunately, was in the middle of prepping another woman and couldn’t leave at the moment. Of course, I told her. She spoke with me briefly about Bessy’s claim, preparing me to be aware of the claim ahead of the interview. This is done in the rare but possible case that the interview completely derails or the client completely freezes, unable to talk about their experiences without specific direction. Raquel then introduced me to Bessy, we walked over to the asylum office trailer together with our guard escort, and we sat together in the waiting room for her officer to arrive.

When I saw that it was AO Jones walking up to us, I felt my body start to tense. AO Jones was a short woman who had an intimidating presence. I had accompanied an interview with her last week, and it did not go well. In that accompaniment, she barely acknowledged my existence with the exception of, strangely, mocking my poor handwriting after she asked for me to write down my last name for her, and repeatedly cut off the client while she responded to answers. She, like other AOs, wasn’t generally friendly towards advocates and often expressed coldness and impatience with detainees in their interviews. Other advocates in recent weeks had upsetting run-ins with her, one in which she told an advocate that they weren’t allowed to take notes in the interview—which they were, but because temporary volunteers aren’t necessarily aware of their own rights, they didn’t protest—and another in which AO Jones informed an advocate of how they needed to act in order to be a “good advocate”. Her moods were, however, unpredictable; sometimes she appeared to be in a better mood, playfully joking with detainees, attempting to build rapport. Sometimes these “jokes” veered sharply into uncomfortable terrain, like when she “joked” to a young child during an interview that they should behave or she would have to call the “police” (guards, standing outside the room) in to take her away. The advocate who observed this exchange came back to the visitation trailer furious, complaining about her astounding obtuseness. “How could she think that would be funny?” he said incredulously. “To a little girl who only knows the police to be bad people?” The endurance of detestable or uncomfortable “jokes” made by officials at the facility—either asylum officers or guards—wasn’t an uncommon experience for advocates. At the end of another client’s interview, an officer joked to a mother that maybe she’d rather leave her child behind at the detention center. He laughed, saying that some parents would rather ditch their kids. I stared at him in shock, appalled at his insensitivity. She awkwardly smiled and contested the idea. “My son is my life,” she said.

The interview was difficult, primarily in that Bessy’s experiences were quite traumatic, and she was very emotional. Her boyfriend had been murdered, after which she had been pursued relentlessly by a man interested in her, and she had been raped multiple times. The most recent assault she had tried to report to a police officer who then forced her to have sex with him in order to file the report. AO Jones appears very sympathetic to Bessy’s story,

and the interview doesn't last longer than an hour. As Bessy and I get up to leave the room, AO Jones stops me. "Ms. Routon, can you hang back for a minute?" she asks. I was confused and nervous, but I said goodbye to Bessy and sat back in my chair. 'Stay strong', I tell myself, 'don't argue with whatever she says. Just listen, say thank you and leave.' I learned to repeat such mantras before having particular encounters with officials that I expected might be upsetting, generally as a rule in order to avoid saying something regretful that might, in some way, be used to harm the project.

I had an idea of what AO Jones might be wanting to speak about. Earlier in the interview, Bessy had used legal language to discuss a part of the framework of her case. Legal advocates, in preparing clients for their interviews and as was discussed in earlier chapters, present clients with the legal categories for asylum. In prepping clients for their individual cases, advocates discuss the relevant categories for a particular case with the individual client to whom it relates. For Bessy's case, Raquel discussed the significance of the concept of a 'anti-gang political opinion' in asylum law. She explained to Bessy the meaning of this concept and how she believed it related to Bessy's case, and as such, Bessy chose to use the phrase when discussing her case in her interview. At the time, AO Jones appeared surprised. I thought that this might be what AO Jones had intended to discuss, as previous advocates who attended interviews with her expressed that she had accused the advocacy team of 'coaching' clients on what to say in their interviews.

As it turned out, that was what AO Jones intended to speak with me about. "This isn't official, or anything," she said with a slight smile, leaning forward from her side of the desk, "but I just wanted to give you some advice. I can see that this 'anti-gang political opinion' thing has come up a few times in different interviews. This is related to what I call 'CARA coaching'. I just wanted to say that I don't think this 'anti-gang political opinion' thing is going to work later down the line [with individual's cases], I don't even think there's any case law out there for that sort of thing." I nodded along and thanked her for her advice before returning back to the visitation trailer. This time, my guard escort told me that he would just watch me walk back to the other trailer, rather than walk along with me the 50-foot distance.



It is important to consider not only the salience of AO Jones' critique, but also what this critique has to say about officers' considerations of asylum-seekers. The implication of a 'coaching' claim is that the individual being questioned has been told what to say and perhaps precisely how to say it. This would lend the officer to question both the credibility of the detainee and the ethics of the legal advocacy team (and thus, in turn, their continued interaction with detainees). This, then, begs the question: what does it mean when a client uses certain language that the AO then finds suspicious? Why is a detainee's use of legal language suspect, what does this say about how officers think about asylum-seekers, and what does it say about how officers

think about legal advocates? One of the obvious implications of this accusation is that the officer questions the capacity of a detainee to deploy complex legal constructs for their own ends, using specific legal language. Another problematic assumption of this accusation is that advocates are simply telling clients what to say rather than allowing them to communicate their experiences in their own words. Detainees' use of legal language, and advocates' involvement in the knowledge-sharing of these terms, challenges the interpretive authority of the officer creating friction between the three actors participating in the encounter. In this case, the officer responded to this friction by leveling accusations that implied subversive behavior on the part of advocates.

In moments where advocates are severely restricted, they record and observe what occurs between the interviewee and interviewer. They can note failures to pursue relevant lines of questioning; discomfort in the client in the interaction; mistakes or misinterpretations made. This form of attention to details in the interview is an articulation of care. These details can be used to contest negative decisions potentially made later by the officer, but they can also be deployed, in serious cases, as fodder for lodging complaints about particular AOs and their behavior toward clients. In instances where advocates were given some participatory leeway, they could make more critical interventions. As Chase's story shows, advocates can intervene in moments that are indeed important for a client's future case, even when they are unrecognized by the officer. In these moments in the interview, advocates' care is displayed through their attentiveness and observation, but also their presence. Clients asked advocates in their preps if they could attend their interview with them, even when they knew that advocates might not be able to say anything at all, much less speak on their behalf. Many said that they understood that, and that they just wanted someone to go with them. Ari, an undergraduate student who was studying in Florence when they read about the situation in Dilley, said that they could sense the impact their presence had. "I felt their energy in that way that like, if I'm there, they're more confident. The way that

they talked to me, their body language...it was less tense than I think it would be if I wasn't there. I think they were also a little more relaxed than a native Spanish speaker was there with them, to make sure everything was going smoothly." In this articulation, advocates' mere presence is also a form of care.

Other asylum officers exhibited much greater care in their conduct in the interviews. One, an older gentleman who consistently wore a puffy, vintage Phillies jacket and sat hunched over his keyboard, was a certified translator who was able to conduct interviews in Spanish without the aid of a phone interpreter. This made a difference in the interview, as different experiences have shown the ways in which phone interpretation led to many different issues, primarily misinterpretations. This AO also spoke softly, more in keeping with the way in which the women spoke, slowly, and intentionally. In my observation, he rarely interrupted clients while they spoke. He was encouraging in goading clients to provide greater detail where needed in their case, rather than, like other AOs, simply reporting clients' sometimes brief and confusing responses to questions without appropriate follow-up questioning. He also maintained eye contact often, choosing to sit slightly away from his computer screen. Another AO exhibited similar caring qualities in her interviews. While she was not a Spanish speaker, she spoke deliberately and softly, frequently maintaining eye contact with clients. She similarly gently encouraged clients to elaborate upon elements of their claim that needed further bolstering. At the end of multiple interviews, this AO would use her computer to research legal and sometimes mental health resources in the states where clients were going to live upon release from the facility and print these documents out to give to them. Margie, a volunteer lawyer from California, and I both witnessed this in our accompaniments. "At the end of the interview," Margie told me, "she told my client that she was strong and courageous for doing what she did,

leaving her country. I had to turn my head and look out the window in her office because I started to cry.” I told Margie that just the week before, I had to do the same.

These AOs’ approaches mirrored that of the advocate; they were supportive and attentive rather than defensive or disinterested. The experience of witnessing such behavior was simultaneously heartening and upsetting, considering its relative rarity in the observations of advocates in these interviews. While such experiences of interviews were far outweighed by those that were problematic or destructive, it was important for many advocates to observe care in other actors involved in these processes.

In orienting new volunteers to the work, project staff will mention how most detainees who are prepped before their interview receive a positive decision, known as a “*positivo*”. Meeting and speaking with a detainee ahead of their interview has been proven to make a substantial difference in their likelihood of passing it, and because of the legal team’s commitment to universal representation of all detainees who desired assistance, most returned to the visitation trailer with positive decisions. A client’s positive decision arrives to them in the form of the Notice To Appear (NTA) documentation, which again, is essentially a directive to the detainee to appear in court, outside of detention, to continue their asylum case. There are those, nonetheless, who receive the alternative, a “*negativo*”. The next section will discuss the processes for those who receive *negativos* and advocates’ involvement in the critical next step in appealing their decision in order to avoid deportation.

Corte

Upon returning from the field, I wrote a poem about my experience of attending interviews with asylum applicants, which was eventually published in a chapbook alongside other Cornell graduate researchers (Author 2018). It went as follows:

“*Where did you meet him?*” thing asks
from the other side of the desk

thing has arms
torso
hands like mine
tapping at the keyboard
but head is flat
gray
plastic
square
chords running out below

She answers, "*outside my house*"

thing stops typing
"*She didn't understand. Tell her to listen to me carefully,*" thing says to stuff
stuff is all black
plastic
a box
is little but loud
and sits on the edge of the desk
stuff crackles "*escucha con cuidado*"
thing and stuff repeat question

She answers
again
thing sighs
lifting hands from keyboard
says "*forget it. let's move on*"

thing and stuff ask many questions
She is very patient
answers every one
even though so many are
demeaning
racist
confusing
implying that She's
a bad mother
a liar
a fool

they're looking for the nexus
for a reason why
She should be allowed to stay
they're looking for Her fear
to see if it's real

i know it's real
cause i can see it

i see Her tired red eyes
and matted eyelashes
i see Her legs shake
Her fingers pull
at the edges of Her documents
like a tic
tears and snot streaking
down Her face
wiped on the back
of Her government-issue sweater sleeve
Her narrow half-moon back grazing
the sloped edge of the chair
elbows resting
on sweatpanted knees
and the scars he left
on Her body

but how could they know?
how would they ever know?
thing and stuff meet
at person and machine
but they can't see
cause they don't have eyes
and they hear Her
but don't listen
they just record and repeat
thing types
stuff crackles
their jugulars are chords
and part human isn't enough

I titled the poem “Nexus” for the term that is often heard in conversation with these advocates as they search for the connection between a client’s fears and their lack of, and thus need for, protection, in the form of asylum. The title was a play on this term, however. In many of the interviews I attended, and as has been noted in this chapter, I was repeatedly disturbed by the fact that the officer’s face—sitting at a desk in a small room, directly across from the detainee—was obscured most of the time by their large desktop computer screens. Effectually, it meant that an officer asked detailed questions of a deeply intimate nature, usually eliciting at least some small measure of retraumatization of clients, all the while rarely meeting their often-searching gaze. They appeared, from the perspective of my side of the desk, the client’s side of

the desk, to be more like creatures: a visible human body, with arms and hands clacking away responses on their keyboards, but with digital craniums, black and square, with cords spilling below. The cyborgian appearance matched what often felt like a very cold, unsentimental, and inhuman encounter.

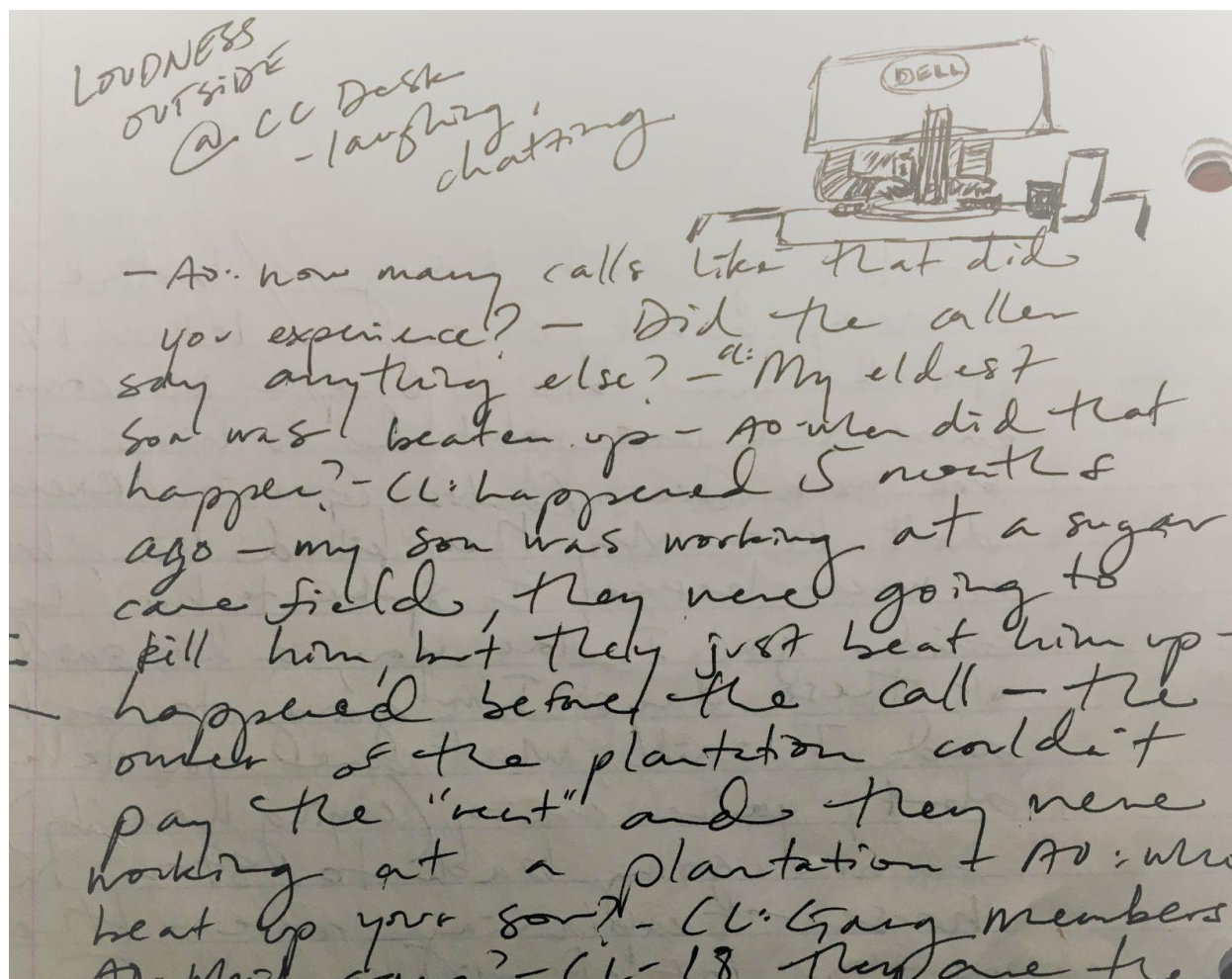


Image 20: Excerpt of notes taken during interview accompaniment, with rendering of asylum officer (upper right) from advocate/client perspective. Notes/ Artist credit: author

The experience of the courtroom, or *corte*, was like this, but in a reversal of sorts. The court, like the asylum office, was constructed in a separate trailer within the detention facility, but without its principle signifier: the judge. The judges that presided over cases that had received negative decisions—and during most of my fieldwork, there were two, a man and a woman—were made available via television screens. Judges for the Dilley facility were based out of another

state, so there was not even the possibility for in-person appointments. Such physical absences contributed to feelings that advocates often expressed about both asylum officers and judges: that they were not attentive to or present for the person in front of them whose fate they were deciding.

Many detainees in these facilities, as previous chapters noted, never needed to attend court within the facility, as they received positive decisions on their cases during their interviews. Nonetheless, most weeks saw at least a couple negative decisions, which meant those clients had to appeal those decisions and go to court in order to continue with their case. Judges, in responding to clients' appeals of their interview decisions, would elect to either uphold it or reject it. These options were characterized as either 'affirming' or 'vacating' the decision of the asylum officer on the interview. They were meant to base this decision off of their consideration of an appeal document or series of supportive documentation and questions posed to clients directly in court concerning perhaps why they had received a negative decision from the officer and why they deserved to have that decision overturned. There were typically specific days reserved for court cases, and each judge's 'docket' or schedule for that day would be shared with the legal team. It was typically, though not exclusively, the legal advocates who were lawyers that would attend these court appointments with clients. Volunteers would sometimes spend the greater part of their day sitting through the processing of different client cases in court, returning to the visitation area later on to share with others on the team what had occurred in court with each case. Sometimes, those who had worked with clients to prepare their appeal documentation for court or even those who had worked with clients prior to their interviews weren't those that attended court with them; they, especially, anxiously awaited news on how judges had treated and responded to specific clients' appeals.

Going to court was an opportunity for detainees to demonstrate what might have been lacking or misunderstood in their asylum interview. It is an opportunity for advocates to go into greater depth on a client's case, to express nuance or additional experiences that might never come out in an interview, to explain issues with asylum officers, to clarify misunderstandings. Advocates would pour over the transcript of the asylum interview of their denied client, searching for misunderstandings or missed opportunities by the officer to get into relevant details of a claim. As the previous section suggested, the interview is a passing moment in which much can be misinterpreted or go unsaid. Other things, like asylum officers' language or behavior, can disturb the conversation or elicit inhibitive reactions. Many things affected why a client could have received a negative decision from the officer, and it was the work of the advocate to work with the denied client to create strong explanations and support for overturning this decision. The stakes naturally increased in the courtroom. As a result, the characteristic unpredictability and arbitrariness which permeated much of the inner workings of the facility effected a new level of anxiety in those who participated in courtroom encounters.

"I love it, I love it, I love it," Charlotte said to me, enthusiastically. Charlotte, an immigration lawyer from Kansas City, was not talking about her experience with Dilley's court, but about how happy she was that she finally got to work in a job helping immigrants on a regular basis. As a newly minted lawyer, she still had a background image on her laptop of Sylvester the cat sitting at desk with bloodshot eyes, drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette. She told me that was what it felt like when she was studying for the LSAT. She actually worked in the same office from which one of the project staff, Carlos, came when he started in Dilley. That is how she knew about the project and decided to volunteer. Her work in Kansas involved family-based and humanitarian petitions, primarily, and she had a diverse caseload of asylum clients. Prior to this, she had worked in both ESL education and policy with the

Department of Education. She characterized her work now as more of a calling than that previous work, especially policy, which felt “too far removed from people”. She, like many other immigration lawyers with whom I worked, described their interest as related to the complexity of immigration law. For her, like others, the complexity was a pull; its dynamism was, in a way, exciting and deeply engaging.

Charlotte went with clients to court on 2 of the 5 days that she was volunteering with the project. “It was kind of like a bootcamp for me,” she explained. “The first day, all of the women I went with got their decisions vacated, but it seemed like it was completely just luck-of-the-draw.” Before she went to court, she was extremely nervous. She was expected to attend the court of a judge who was known by a particularly harsh and unkind reputation. “The day before I went to court,” she said, “another volunteer went to his court and he affirmed every single case. But when I went just the next day, the same judge told one of the women that he vacated her decision because it happened to be her birthday. That one I was excited about, but I was also quietly very angry about. When I went back to the visitation trailer and told the project staff about it, they were astounded. It’s ridiculous, and so arbitrary.” In this case, as Charlotte rightfully points out, even positive feelings for the outcome of a case could be tempered by the fact that decisions like this were not made even remotely fairly, a point which disturbed many lawyers who worked in Dilley.

Others’ experiences drew attention to the upsetting ways in which not only the law was deployed, but also how clients were treated in courtroom encounters. Most of my conversations with Max were about his experiences and feelings about court in Dilley. He was an immigration lawyer who had a degree in international human rights and had written his thesis on Central American gangs. Max was exceedingly familiar not only with legal categories for asylum and asylum-seekers’ various legal rights, but also with the contexts from which these cases were being

formed. As such, he thought he knew what to expect coming to Dilley. As previous chapters have argued, however, expectations of advocates rarely met on-the-ground experiences. “I didn’t get sad as much as angry,” Max said frankly. “What was most surprising to me was the misapplication of the law. In one day, I watched a judge deny 4 cases without merit to do so, one which I thought would’ve won all the way through, would’ve gotten asylum. That day, that judge just awful, and I told the project staff about how he was incredibly condescending to clients. It was so frustrating to have to not interrupt or saying anything back to him. The legal standard is just so low, so I couldn’t even fathom all of those women’s appeals being denied. I mean, gosh, it was sickening. I know the law is discretionary, but that was just beyond what I had braced myself for.”

Max noted that the arbitrariness of judge’s denials was most clearly evidenced by the obvious variations between the male and female judge. “It wasn’t the clients’ cases, the clients themselves, or the legal advocates...all the women across the hall with the other judge had their decision vacated that day. They got to go back to their rooms and rest. And their cases were so similar to the others. But this other judge said that what these clients’ cases were about were just ‘generalized violence’, he said that over and over. There was this one mother who told her story perfectly, explained herself perfectly, she said everything that she needed to say. Another woman had a strange case where her guardian was seriously physically and mentally abusive to her, and the judge just wasn’t having any of it. He didn’t believe her or believe that the way her guardian had treated her was unreasonable. His first question for her was, ‘do you think it’s abuse to expect to do chores when you’re living somewhere for free?’ She looked over at me, confused, and said ‘yes?’ and he just moved on. For another woman, he simply dismissed her case, telling her that what happened to her family wasn’t worthy of asylum, that it was just ‘undesirable to live in her country’ and that he ‘wished her well’. That was it. To be fair, there was one mother who

just couldn't articulate her claim clearly. He could've worked around that, however, but it was obvious that he chose not to. He never even interviewed any of the children, despite the fact that at least a few of the mothers' claims were based entirely on their daughters' persecution."

For Max, it was not simply the fact that claims were denied—though that was surprising, considering that these cases had at least reasonable merits—but the qualities of the encounter that were upsetting. "It was horrible. The whole concept of having to tell some White man all of the abuse you've suffered, that's bad enough, but his tone was so incredibly condescending. I've never heard someone be that disrespectful to people that have gone through that much trauma."

As he points out, one of the things which advocates witness in court has to do with what occurs 'on the ground' with asylum legal practice and adjudication, what asylum law practically looks like and does. For those experienced with or knowledgeable of asylum law, like law students, lawyers, or advocates who are self-educated, witnessing the ways in which the practice of law unfolds at the credible fear interview stage is often unsettling. Laura, the summer intern with the Karnes project, described it this way: "In a weird way I felt that I've been lied to my whole life. We have asylum law, but the judge has this complete discretion to just deny her claim and to ignore the laws. That's just crazy to me. That's what I learned when I first showed up. I always thought well, there's the law, can't we fight this? I mean this or that woman has a perfect case and still, they just can't win." Like Laura, others came to question their own knowledge of the law following experiences with judges in these courtrooms.



Anita walked slowly into the PB office with a spacey look in her eyes. She was a volunteer attorney from Human Rights Watch, and she had just returned from court in Dilley. Unlike so many others upon returning from court, she wasn't bursting into the room with either anger or a relieved energy. In fact, she said nothing at first. As I sat at one of the corner desks scanning and uploading intake documents, I asked her how it went. "I don't...even...know...what the law is...anymore," she drawled without meeting my gaze. "Like, what is credible fear?" Anita hadn't had experience with this particular stage of the asylum process, but she was quite familiar with refugee law, having also previously worked for Amnesty International. Her court experience that day was with

the female judge, and after trying to casually chat with her some, she felt as if she had built a certain rapport. “That was the only reason she asked me for my input,” she said. She explained that the judge, after examining her client’s case, frustratedly claimed that she couldn’t “find credible fear” in her case. “‘Could you tell me what it is here?’ she asked me, and I was shocked. I wasn’t expecting to get her own input on what constituted credible fear with this case, and I could tell that a legal argument wasn’t going to win right then,” Anita explained. “So I just went with it and tried to make a case for my client without a legal argument. She didn’t have a strong claim to begin with, and there were potentially other parts of her story that would’ve helped her out, but not the parts she was articulating. I made this case for her about why she was legitimately afraid to return to her country. It worked, but it felt so weird, so uncomfortable for me. How can I be in the courtroom and be making something that’s not a legal argument?”



Recalling Charlotte’s experience of the ‘birthday decision’, Anita’s interaction illustrates the ways in which the vagaries of adjudicating asylum law frequently lead to awkward and confusing encounters between decision-makers of various sorts and asylum-seekers, as well as their advocates. Her final question, as well, is a pointed one which I am unable to answer: what does it mean when advocates or representatives are pressed to use something other than a legal argument in a court of law? This naturally connects to the deficiencies of asylum law, its inability to account for complex, lived experiences that warrant legal protection but do not clearly fit within bounded categories. It demonstrates how, in daily practice, many struggle in different ways with laws that express significant flaws.

At a certain point during my fieldwork, changes were made to the courtrooms in both Dilley and Karnes. The judges who presided previously were switched with others, and some began to do some in-person appointments. In Dilley, one of the judges worked out of Pearsall, the larger neighboring town which boasts of once having grown the world’s largest peanut. It was also home to an adult-only detention facility which incarcerated some of the separated family members of those held in Dilley and Karnes.



Around noon on a hot, summer Monday, Maggie walked into the visitation trailer and went straight into the PB room. Her face was downturned, and she looked like she was on the edge of crying. Her expression and black blazer told me she had been to court that morning, though I wasn't aware of for which cases. The new judge out of Pearsall had a full docket of cases in his regular court and couldn't drive over to Dilley today, so he video-conferenced in for his appointments. Jillian, who had been to court with him on previous occasions, had said that while he allows you to speak, it doesn't seem to really make a difference in his decision. I asked Maggie how it went today and if she was alright. "No. No, I'm not," she said seriously as she opened her laptop screen. "He affirmed the negative. This mama from Guatemala, she even filed a police report against what happened to her." The judge argued that a copy of a police report didn't seem like enough evidence to support her claim. "So I argued that it was enough evidence, and I said to him, 'well, with all due respect, sir, I think that's really unfair,'" Maggie said.

Cynthia, who was listening intently as she sat at the desk in the corner of the room, interjected hotly: "well, did you ask him how he sleeps at night?!" Maggie had expressed her frustrations with judges through anger many times before, as most did, but surprisingly didn't appear angry this time. Now, she seemed weaker, perhaps more depressed in her response. She had, after all, been working continuously with the on-the-ground team for nearly 10 months at that point and had, consequently, been exposed to an unreasonable amount of frustration and upsetting events. "Yeab," she replied with a somewhat resigned tone, "it was just really sad. I just need to get out of here. I need to leave." By this, she meant leave Dilley, leave the project and its work.

She continued staring at her computer and didn't say much for the rest of the day, with the exception of answering new volunteers' many legal questions about individual cases. "Hopefully he won't be our judge for long," Jillian said after Maggie left the room to help another client. "Because man, if that woman filed a police report and he affirmed the negative, we're never going to get these decisions vacated." Jillian was referring to the fact that so few clients actually filed police reports concerning their incidences, a natural consequence of believing, with good reason, that officials are either involved in eliciting activities or are incapable of providing protection. Additionally, many who sought asylum fled quickly after experiencing severe threats or violence and wouldn't have had time to wait to even see if protection could be provided. Police reports were thus rare and had previously been considered to be excellent supporting evidence for an individual's claim. Further pressure was then put on doing whatever possible to ensure that clients didn't receive negatives to begin with, to stay away from court. Unfortunately, its unpredictabilities had become frighteningly more predictable.



I began this section on the experience of *corte* with reference to the ways in which the disembodied presence of judges mimicked certain qualities in the interview experience. The lack of judges' physical presence in the courtroom lends an additional barrier to the encounter between themselves and clients. Their lack of presence, of course, also speaks to the immense caseloads with which immigration judges are forced to contend. The amount of time that they

are expected to process cases does not allow for reasonably thoughtful consideration of each individual case, much less to be physically present for all. The specter is the shadow of a person, and thus, it is perhaps no surprise that others, like advocates, struggle to see judges, even the ‘good ones’, as empathetic beings, or perhaps as fully human, as they are. Yet the figuration of advocates in courtroom encounters, especially concerning how they act as caregivers in what is clearly another deeply constrained environment, has yet to be fully fleshed out.

Amici Curiae

Anita spoke of the special delicacy with which she approached her interactions with judges. “It’s about learning where the boundaries are,” she said. “Then you want to behave in a way that shows them that you respect them and those boundaries. If I were to go to the court and tried to defend the client or offer feedback to the judge, he or she would just tell me that I couldn’t talk at all. You don’t have the luxury of arguing for the client because, in this scenario, they’re not really your client. The point is that you want to appease them and placate them, the judges, because you want to keep the conversation going.” Efforts aimed at ‘keeping the conversation going’ is seemingly another articulation of what advocates do with guards, officers, and other administrators in their management of relationships. Management supports the flow of care.

Anita draws attention to an important quality of advocates’ existence within the court encounter. Advocates, in attending court concerning client’s appeals to the asylum office’s decision on their fear interview, were not official representatives of the client. Like in the interview itself, advocates attended court as a sort of supportive observer. They were there to potentially clarify questions the adjudicator might have, catch possible ‘mistakes’—for instance, in interpretation—and to serve as support with their presence for clients. “Remember,” staff member Ali would tell volunteers in their orientation training, “when you go to court with a

client, you are going as a ‘friend of the court’, not as their representative.” This was an important clarification, especially for those attorneys who attended court with clients who perhaps weren’t used to this particular form of engagement in the courtroom, wherein, again like the interview, the advocate isn’t meant to speak on behalf of the client and may perhaps be given no opportunities to speak at all. The advocate sits in a sort of vulnerable position in which achieving their aim—to, as Anita says, keep the conversation going—depends on their ability to express awareness of and adherence to expectations around boundaries. Their relational status—as a ‘friend’—shapes this vulnerability.

“There was a very stark contrast between the judges, and the women knew it too. They all talked about this stuff together, shared solidarity. They’d refer to the ‘good judge’ and the ‘bad judge,’” Lillian said. The ‘good judge’, from many detainees’ and advocates’ perspectives, was the female judge, while the male judge was ‘bad’. Not all advocates agreed on these characterizations, and differences usually fell upon gendered lines. Women-identified advocates generally preferred the female judge’s approach to their clients, while some man-identified advocates appreciated the male judge’s approach, in certain respects. Both, however, when speaking about the judges in a positive way, chose to characterize their appreciation in relation to the judge’s fairness in decision-making, standing in contrast to the other’s unfairness or misapplication of the law.

Generally and broadly, advocates believed that the judges misunderstood or intentionally misinterpreted asylum law. But as has already been made evident, when they spoke negatively of their encounters with judges, it wasn’t simply their relationship to, knowledge of, or interpretation of the law that bothered advocates, but also their behavior towards clients and themselves. Advocates’ vulnerable positions as friends of the court shaped these uneven and uncomfortable encounters. “I believe he was misapplying the law,” Lillian said of the male judge, “but I was also just frustrated with him. One day in court, I tried to ask him a question about the

case I was there working on, and I waited until we were ‘off-the-record’ to ask it, just to be safe. I didn’t want to insult him or hurt the outcome of the case in any way,” she said. Advocates often spoke, yet again similarly to the interview experience, about the ways in which they tried to tread delicately in their interactions with judges, so as not to offend or anger in some way that might result in whichever official—either asylum officer or judge—making some decision about a case that was influenced by that upset. And yet, despite advocates’ best efforts to manage relationships with these officials, responses remained steadfastly unpredictable. “All of the sudden, he just snapped at me,” she continued, “saying that he wasn’t going to answer my question, and that it was a privilege that he even let me in his courtroom. So, of course, I immediately apologized and thanked him for that privilege. It was nothing like the interactions I had with the female judge. She’d allow me to help answer questions, we’d have conversations about case law. She was a really interesting person. And she was really fair in her decisions.”

“Maybe it was really naïve of me to expect otherwise, but just to see what little time the judge spent deciding on someone’s case and possibly their life, was gross and sincerely wasteful,” Max said with frustration. “There was this case I was working on where the judge only spent 10 minutes making a decision. The affidavit that we put together was 30 pages long, and he even commented on the length of it. But still, he only picked out certain bullet points that he wanted to talk about. And his tone, that was the other thing. So the facts of her case were that her partner had been targeted by gangs, they tried to kill him, and he left in order to protect her and the kids. It was kind of unclear whether or not her partner actually left to protect the family or if he just left, but to her, it was about protection. The judge’s tone, however, and the way that he spoke to her about what happened was ‘well, when he left you, blah blah blah’. As soon as he said that the first time, I could just tell, she froze up. Already before that, she wasn’t able to talk about a lot of what happened, but when he made that

comment, she looked at me and was like that's it, I can't do this anymore." Max was angry. "By the end of it, I was shaking with anger," he said. However, he was also not in a position to contest the judge's behavior. "You know, if this were to take place in a real trial setting, I could have redirected the judge's comments, asked questions. All I could do here was just take notes, writing down every bad thing he said."

Max brings up an important distinction. What advocates do in the prep is meant to prepare a client for the interview, but it is not, as many staff are quick to remind advocates in their orientation, a mock interview. This is the same for when advocates work to prepare clients for their courtroom proceedings after receiving their negative. These advocates work with clients extensively to prepare for the questions they will potentially receive from the judge, though the exact questions are obviously unpredictable. While there are clear similarities between the prep and the interview and courtroom—like the simple fact that they are all intended to interpret complex life experiences into a valid asylum claim—there are particularly sharp distinctions. Staff of the project rightfully drew attention to this in orienting new volunteers in order to emphasize that there are multiple ways of not only communicating with clients but also with eliciting necessary information to establish a claim. Chapter 2 focused on how care was manifested in the space of the prep and the shape it took in the interactions between advocates and clients. There, advocates worked to establish comfort and trust ahead of their interview and throughout conversations about their case. They expressly assigned value to client's experiences and choices and took seriously the need for care in bringing out discussions of trauma. This chapter, in engaging with specific instances of interviews and courtroom encounters, draws out these distinctions between the approaches of asylum officers, judges, and advocates in obtaining information with which to build or envision an asylum narrative. Advocates' caring approaches are made clearer by their contrast with those of officers and judges, or what could be. The

boundary which defined one way of approaching from another correlates with different roles—sometimes as ‘friends’, others as gatekeepers.

Boundaries Breached

There are moments in which the boundaries set for advocates in the space of the interview or courtroom are breached. These are sometimes goaded by advocates’ desire for intervention, others by adjudicators’ allowances, and still others by what appear to be the needs of particularly exceptional circumstances. Like in their relationships with guards and other administrators, advocates sometimes found themselves in encounters with asylum officers or judges in which they, intentionally or unintentionally, transgressed certain borders.



Adriana, her young son, and I were walking over to her interview when she stops mid-way on the path. “Abogada,” she says to me as she puts her hand on my shoulder, “I need to tell you something that I remembered.” Clients frequently referred to advocates, despite their professional status and repeated attempts at clarification, by the title of ‘abogada’ or lawyer. Calvin, the guard who is our escort, hasn’t yet realized we’ve stopped so he’s still walking slowly ahead. Adriana looks as if she’s become sick, with a hand resting on her forehead. She then immediately whispers to me that she was raped by a close family member, and she begins to cry leaning on my shoulder. “These memories have come flooding back to me. I don’t want to think about them. I have so much shame with them,” she says through her tears. Calvin realizes we’ve stopped, so he turns back and stares at us. Calvin has always been especially kind to the legal advocates and the detainees, though he doesn’t like to bend the rules too often, even when he openly recognizes their absurdity. She’s crying heavily now, and I look at Calvin worried that at any moment he’s going to scold us for pausing on the path while I try to console her. “It’s ok if you don’t want to talk about this with the asylum officer,” I tell her. While advocates usually try to encourage clients to share all that they can that might be relevant to some sort of claim in the interview, the case that she had discussed in her prep with other advocates didn’t include this information, and I felt that there was no need to bring it up if it was too traumatic to discuss right now. I become worried that she’s too distraught and that we won’t have enough time to decompress about this before her interview in a few minutes. I’m worried that this will affect how well she’s able to communicate in her interview.

After we check in at the front desk in the office, the guard informs me that I cannot wait with her in the waiting room. The rule had changed yet again. “You have to sit in that chair outside of the room,” she tells me while pointing impatiently towards a single plastic chair just outside of the entryway to the small room. This particular guard is consistently rude with advocates, and I’ve personally never liked her. Today she’s wearing her favorite oversized maroon hairbow, which always seems at odds with her persistent scowl. I realize, then, that Adriana and I will have no time to discuss her revelations. As I sat on the edge of the room worrying about how

Adriana was feeling, I could hear the looped orientation video being played for a new group of arrivals at the facility.

The interviewer, a tall man who I had never met before, asked each of his questions in a very robotic way, never meeting Adriana's eyes as they spoke to one another. She seemed to be feeling ok and doing well with her responses, speaking in detail about the gang threats and her experiences of domestic violence. She teared up at times but tried hard to maintain her composure. Then, despite the fact that she'd demonstrated a clear claim already, the AO asked another, seemingly unrelated question. "How did your family treat you?" Adriana thought he was referring to her ex-partner's family. "No," the AO clarified, "how did your family treat you?" As he said this in English, I cringed, waiting for the translation to hit Adriana. As she heard the translation, she sighed, turned away from the AO to look me deep in the eyes with a tired smile. She looks at him with tears welling, and says, "The thing I'm about to tell you is something for which I have great shame." She then drops her head to the edge of the desk in front of her, sobbing. Minutes go by, her head resting on her arm on the desk as she cries deeply without a response. I start inching my chair closer to her, pained by the fact that I know I'm not allowed to touch her. The AO finally looks away from his computer screen. "I can see that you're upset by this," he says rote. "I just want to be clear that I'm not here to upset you with my questions." It felt particularly cold.

After just crying a bit longer, she finally looks up at him and begins to talk about her experience with the family member. She tries to maintain her composure but struggles, breaking into sobbing fits. The AO tried numerous times to continue, despite her obvious aversion to this line of questioning. I'm frustrated with his seemingly ignorant callousness and sad for her. Finally, I slide my chair next to hers and begin rubbing gentle circles on her back with my hand. The AO sits in confused silence; it's clear he doesn't know how to proceed and that she's in no state at the moment to continue the conversation about this topic. I know that he's watching me touch her, and that he could report me to staff of the facility and that, like Alejandro, I could be banned. In the moment, though, I didn't care about that. Adriana was alone, physically and psychically, and I believed that she needed a caring closeness. It was a bizarre moment with the officer simply watching us, at a loss for how to behave. He awkwardly ended the interview briefly after that, abandoning the line of questioning he'd begun.

After hanging up the call with the interpreter, Adriana had additional questions for the officer, which was rare to observe with clients. When would she find out her response? What does she need to do with her case after this? Was this conversation really confidential? She asked. The officer, unable to speak to her, asked me interpret his answers. While this was a more normal conversation, because he wasn't entering their conversation as 'data' into her record, at times his responses were cold, so I tried to translate those in more comforting terms. Though it was clearly abnormal for him to be speaking with a detainee in this way, it was obvious that the officer was experiencing different emotions than before. He was looking her in the eye, and I could tell from his responses to her questions that he wanted to locate some comfort for her. "Tell her that her trauma is normal," he said leaning over his desk, now looking at me, "and that she shouldn't feel ashamed." I tell her what he says, in my own words.



The obvious limit breached in my encounter with Adriana had to do with the physical constraints placed upon advocates by facility administrators. The legal team was particularly conscious of these following the banning of one of the staff members for comforting a client in just the same way as I with Adriana. Yet the needs of the client and the moment seemed to call out for closeness, for contact. Adriana mentioned to the officer that she had only ever told one other person about her familial abuse. For nearly her entire life, as the abuse began when she very young, she had been alone with the memory and feelings of these experiences. In many experiences within the facility, as previous chapters have demonstrated, what might be considered predictable human responses for advocates had to sometimes be avoided or disguised, reinterpreted for the strange environment that the facility produced. Advocates had to negotiate their physical, verbal, and emotional expressions considering how such things potentially impacted others. The sometimes-awkward navigation of feelings and behaviors led some to express that they felt as if they could not be fully ‘human’ with others, most often in the ways that they felt clients deserved or even needed.

In Adriana’s interview, her emotions demanded the attention of the officer. Her deep, loud sobs filled the room with a thick, visceral sadness. She did not continue with the questions; she either could not or chose to cry instead. While my initial, typical role—as a mostly silent, observational supporter—was minimal with respect to caregiving, my subsequent physical comfort seemed important in that it was a way to validate her feelings and needs to the exclusion of the requirements of the interview. Other advocates, in challenging those boundaries, sometimes found themselves in a sort of liminal mental space afterwards with respect to whether their transgressions hurt or harmed.



Sherry was worried that she had overstepped her bounds; that she might have contributed to some negative impact on the legal team's work with clients. Sherry was an anthropology professor who, along with another professor friend, Susan, was volunteering in Dilley for a summer week. They had many questions for legal project staff and were both knowledgeable about the experiences of migrant asylum-seekers, especially children. Sherry had attended a couple of interviews during her first few days in which she'd ended up arguing with the interviewing asylum officer. The first argument had to do with a Roma client. "I told the officer that because she was Roma, she spoke a native Roma language, that her native language was not Romanian," she explained after she came back from the interview. She was heated and wanted to complain about what she thought was an unreasonable expectation for the client. "The AO just told me, 'well, she said she's willing to do the interview in Romanian', and I said, 'I know she said that, but my understanding is that it's her right to do the interview in the language she's most comfortable with.' Then the AO told me that there wasn't a statute for that." Other legal team members confirmed that absolutely there was; that a client has the right to do the interview in whatever language they feel most comfortable with, and that the AO was either misinformed, ignorant, or intentionally misleading with this.

Because Sherry was somewhat unfamiliar with this specific step in asylum adjudication, however, she couldn't be entirely sure that the officer wasn't right in this argument in the moment. The interview with the Roma client did end up taking place in the Romanian language, as the AO informed the client during this exchange that if she wanted to wait for an actual Roma interpreter, possibly days or a week, they could reschedule. The client, of course, declined to wait, saying that she would prefer to do it as scheduled. As mentioned, this appeared to advocates to be a sort of strategy by some officers to keep interviews from being delayed, despite the potentially serious consequences for detainees who were attempting to communicate complex details in a non-native language.

After Sherry argued with the AO and the interview was completed, the AO asked her to stay behind after the client where she then lectured her on the rights of detainees in the interview. Another Roma client that same week, after being advised by her advocate, Rebecca, on the potential consequences of doing the interview in a non-native language, had refused to move forward in the interview without a proper Roma interpreter. A mere couple of days later, the asylum office sent that client her release paperwork, without an interview, as a result of the fact that they weren't able to secure the needed interpreter. When that client showed up to the visitation trailer, confused with her English-language release documents, Rebecca was thrilled that she was able to tell her that she was getting released without an interview. While Sherry was happy for Rebecca's client, she was hurt that she felt she couldn't do what needed to be done to get that same opportunity for her own client.

At her second interview accompaniment, Sherry encountered the same asylum officer, and they found themselves in another, this time more heated, debate. The AO asked Sherry's client a standard question that's asked in all interviews, which concerns the race with which the client identifies. The client was confused and wasn't sure how to characterize her race. As a result of the fact that most detainees came from countries where race did not play a significant role in their self-identification, the advocacy team, in their 'charlas' prior to the interview, would prepare clients for this question, trying to explain its meaning to detainees. Of course, to comprehend the concept of race, one might presume to need more than a brief mention of the idea, so many stumbled with this question in their interviews. Sherry interjected during this question, trying to explain the meaning of this gap in understanding between her Latinx client and the officer. The officer disagreed with her

assessment after a substantial argument, but saying that perhaps they “both needed to do some homework”. At the end of the interview, the officer offered additional ‘unsolicited feedback’ to Sherry. “She told me that my advocacy was something closer to being ‘intrusive,’” Sherry said.

As she explained this to us in the PB room, frustrated and fuming, Lianne, one of the project staff stood nearby, looking serious. She then responded that while she understood where Sherry was coming from, and that we all know and agree that what the AO was talking about was absolutely off-base, all she could think about is how difficult the road had been as of late trying to get negative interview decisions overturned by the new judge presiding over their court. Lianne was afraid of upsetting the person in charge of making those crucial decisions about whether or not a client would be going to court. Sherry’s demeanor changed, immediately expressing worry and remorse for her actions in these interviews. Despite reassurances, for the rest of her time in Dilley, she expressed concern about how these encounters might have possibly impacted these clients or the relationships advocates had tried to navigate with the asylum officers.



The AO’s comment to Sherry recalls others’ experiences of being accused of ‘coaching’ clients in preparation for their interview. Both accusations imply that the accused—and in the case of the coaching remark, possibly the entire legal project—has behaved in such a way that demonstrates a breach of boundaries. Essentially, these are implicitly framed as care boundaries as well. The AO suggests that in arguing the merits of a particular question or in a client’s use of legal language, the advocate is actually doing a disservice to the client. Not only that, but in arguing with or questioning an official, like advocates did both with judges and officers, they were attempting to push the edges of their status boundaries in those contexts.

Some advocates intentionally transgressed, like Sherry, while others stumbled past an invisible line. By the end of a long day in court, Max found himself on the verge of being ejected by the security guard stationed in the courtroom. “It was the last case of the day, and I started trying to prompt the client to say something,” he explained. “The security guard stopped me, and I got lectured by him afterward. He said that gesturing, interrupting the conversation, trying to communicate or talk or explain something to the client would get me kicked out of the courtroom, and I would not be allowed back. But I mean, when the client does not understand

something the judge is saying, and I know this, why can't I say to the client, 'tell him that you don't understand?'" Max laughed incredulously.

In court, advocates would sometimes take advantage of the fact that the televised judge was not fully capable of seeing what occurred in all places of the courtroom. If, for instance, they were positioned in such a way toward the client but not entirely visible to the judge, they could assist with interpretation errors or encourage, as Max did, their client to speak more or ask questions when needed by mouthing or quietly saying something. While as friends of the court they were not allowed to speak on behalf of or represent the clients whom they accompanied, it seemed absurd to many not to be allowed to support detainees in these small yet sometimes critical ways. Like the interview, so many simple misunderstandings could take place in court. Many could not comprehend why they, as knowledgeable about the law and/or as multilingual individuals, would not be allowed to deploy skills beneficial to all. This obvious abrogation of care for the client expressed itself as administrators and officials being more invested in the care of maintaining boundaries.

Conclusions

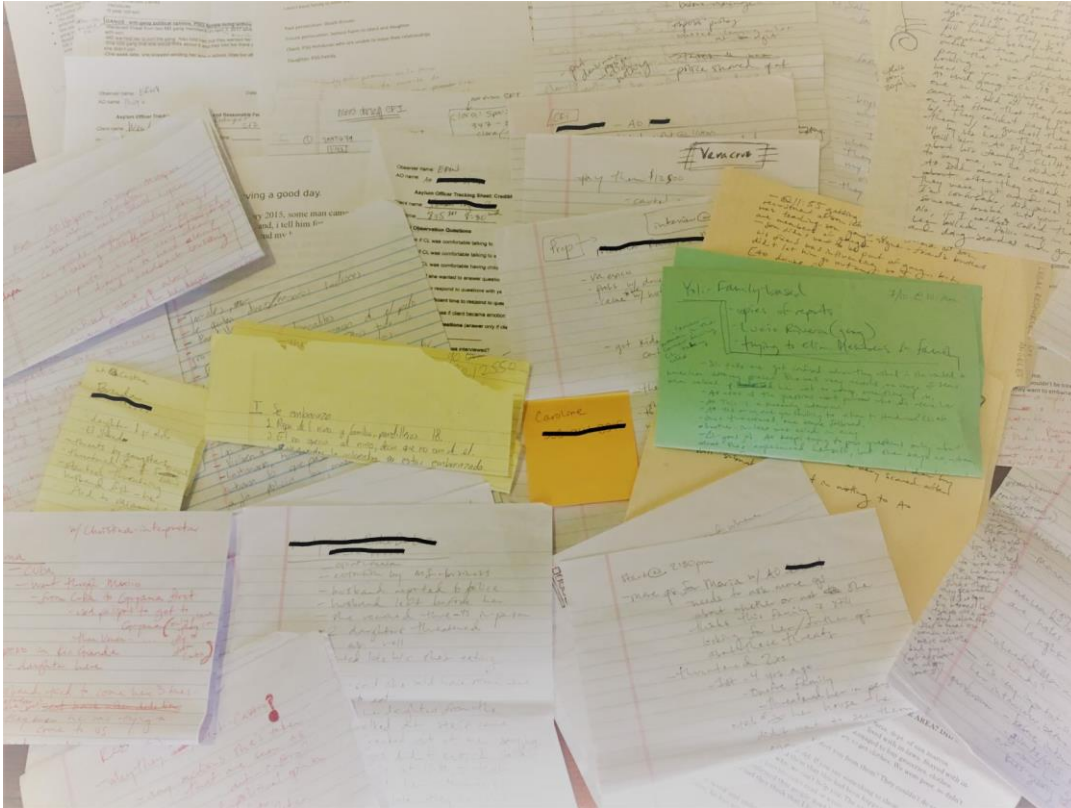


Image 21: Collection of notes from interview accompaniments. Photo credit: author

“I loved going to the interviews,” Chase told me. He was one of the few advocates I knew who used such effusive language to talk about his feelings of the interview, though his reasoning matched others’ perspectives. “Some people actually complain, saying it’s long, it’s boring, and your role is pretty minimal, but I really feel like there’s nothing more ‘advocacy’ than to literally sit on the same side as your client. You sit on that side of the table and outnumber the asylum officer, so at least it’s two against one. It feels like real advocacy when you’re sitting right next to them and they look at you and you’re able to help them with that a little bit. You know, my Spanish is weak, but I was still able to raise questions to the AO in the end. I was able to speak up as much as they allowed me to, to make some closing statements.

Selfishly, it just felt good to have the client working right next to me, you know? It feels like I'm saying, I'm here for you. I liked that a lot.”

In giving care, advocates are entangled in the narratives and lived experiences of detainees. As a result, they fear for the things that may befall them that are ultimately beyond their ability to control. Yet, as Chase points out, an advocates' mere presence alongside, and quite literally on the same side of, the detainee makes an impact. He moves through and beyond the boundaries set within this space in order to continue caring for his client. While previous chapters have explored the ways in which their work is constrained by friction in everyday administrative encounters, this chapter illustrated the ways in which their care and influence is particularly constrained in the spaces of the interview and court. Advocates attempt to prepare detainees for what may come with the interview, but they are incapable of determining how a client will be treated, regarded by the officer, or their outcomes or decisions. As affirmed in other scholarship (Schoenholtz et al. 2014), the adjudication which takes place in the space of the fear interview is unpredictable, inconsistent, and marked by sometimes widely varying degrees of expertise and professionalism.

Like the interview, fear and unpredictability also punctuated advocates' experiences of court. Max talked repeatedly of being disturbed, even frightened by the precarity of clients' legal outcomes, especially after witnessing courtroom encounters. “After they got their negatives from the interview or the judge denied their appeal, the women would say things like ‘oh, my story wasn't enough’. But it wasn't that at all. I couldn't tell them how sickening it was that it had nothing to do with their experience. It was scarily just luck of the draw. That's what scared me the most.”

For some, discussions of these fearful environments triggered thoughts of the fear that seemed to permeate the entire landscape of immigration law. “It's been weird to be in

immigration law after the election,” Charlotte tells me over the phone. She just got home from work and keeps getting distracted by her cat, who is begging to be let out into the backyard. I can hear it meowing loudly in the background. “It’s been hard,” she continues, “and people are scared. We’re getting a lot of new calls to our office. We’re getting new clients all the time. It’s really hard to listen to their fears and not be somewhat rattled yourself.” In the few months after the election, advocates who worked in jobs that supported immigrants in various ways frequently brought up how their offices had become overwhelmed by a fearful uncertainty. Increasing numbers of individuals were calling them and showing up at their offices with questions and concerns about legal futures. “In our office,” Charlotte said, “we’re emphasizing that most changes would have to occur with an act of Congress, and we don’t think that Congress would take such a hard line as the president has. We have a presentation that we show to people that explains what Congress does, what the President does, what the courts do. You know, we’re trying to stay positive, but we’re just as scared.”

One of the barriers, of sorts, to advocates’ coping with these fears has a connection to the conceptual group in which I have placed advocates in this dissertation, a group of familiar strangers. Intimacy is created in the ‘stranger sociality’ (Povinelli 2006) of encounters between advocates and detainees, though it is not initially manifested out of a sense of comfort but rather from a need. The detainee needs the information and access to certain capabilities that the advocate or advocacy team invariably possesses. While many establish intimacies that seemingly extend beyond stranger relations—for some, even, establishing a relation that more closely resembles a sort of kinship—there are also many situations in which temporary advocates, especially, may never learn of the outcomes of interviews or court. Others who have more long-term engagement have experiences where they can learn about those outcomes, experiencing the joys of positive decisions or losses of denied appeals with and alongside those clients. For those

advocates who pass through too quickly to encounter those for whom they care again before either of them leaves the facility, their fears lack a kind of resolution.

Such is the fleeting nature of encounters in an inherently liminal space in which nearly all pass through relatively briefly. Mattingly (2010) speaks of the lobby of a hospital as a liminal space, a ‘travel space’ where people meet and pass through, making “families (or at least travel companions) out of strangers,” (8). A point I have reiterated many times throughout these chapters is that these spaces and the work of legal advocates share much with medical environments and their accompanying experiences, sentiments, and frameworks. In the legal advocacy encounters of family detention, much is shaped by this ‘passing through’, including fears, worries, joys, and sadness.

This chapter has also demonstrated that while, in different ways, fear is considered the central emotion in the encounters in the interview and the courtroom, hope is also a central figure. Indeed, hope is a driving sentiment in much of the goings-on at these facilities. While clients hope that the asylum officer and/or judge is sympathetic to their stories, advocates hope for the same. They also hope that they have prepared clients enough, or in the right way, to articulate their claims before an adjudicator. They hope that those adjudicators are fair to their clients, but they also hope that they are kind.

One of the questions this chapter ultimately begs must be: why are advocates needed in these spaces to begin with? Why should an advocate be present for an interview conducted by an officer trained to help determine an applicant’s case by asking questions? Similarly, why would an advocate need to be present for a judge’s consideration of the fairness of a negative fear interview decision? As one advocate frustratedly remarked to me after having spent time in Dilley’s court, these processes are not meant to be adversarial to the asylum-seeker. In everyday practice in family detention—both in interviews and in courtroom proceedings—however, they

often appear to be so. This not only justifies but also calls out for the presence of an additional party, one who, I would argue, exhibits care for the detainee. Care in these spaces is configured quite differently from others, and yet advocates navigate their conflicted roles and ill-defined boundaries with as great a care as they do in other contexts within the facility.

Legal care, in the spaces of *el corte* and *el asilo*, does not disappear, but it is transformed as a consequence of the limitations placed upon their participation. Advocates are effectively muted in these spaces unless given express, and often rare, opportunities to comment on their client's behalf or to perform even helpful or clarifying actions. In trying to resist this constraint, they sometimes risk upsetting tenuous relationships, the outcomes of which have the potential to harm either the continuation of legal assistance or decisions on the detainees' cases directly. Advocates, in individual contexts, weigh those risks against others, sometimes with just a split second to decide upon their actions. Such experiences can be seen running across different fields of care work that depend upon voluntary labor. In the context of volunteers working at a rape crisis center, Thornton and Novak (2010) demonstrate how such participants are forced to manage their own, and others', emotions in unexpected ways. Their interlocutors were effectively forced to navigate the "delicate balance of displaying one emotion (in this case, anger) to influence a service provider (and, in doing so, showing support to the client), while tempering one's affect with another, more favorable emotion (e.g. empathy, remorse) directed to the client. Interestingly, advocates often found themselves performing the role of shock absorber when paid service providers failed to engage in emotion work. Volunteers absorbed the shock of inappropriate comments made by nurses and law enforcement officers, apologized to survivors on behalf of paid providers, and tried to protect survivors from harmful effects that emerged from the actions (or lack thereof) of paid providers," (443). The parallels between advocates at

this crisis center and the legal advocates are many, further illustrating the diverse expectations placed upon those voluntary laborers who effectively become multifaceted caregivers.

Ultimately, in the spaces of the interview and court, it is primarily their co-presence alongside their client, sometimes on the literal ‘same side’, and their ability to observe, to witness, and to record that marks their care. Furthermore, this reformulation of care serves as a mode of resistance for advocates in these spaces; their witnessing and documentary efforts—effectively, efforts to surveil—demonstrate the importance of examining “surveillance as a dynamic and interactive process in which the boundaries between watcher and watched are often indeterminate and where, despite inequalities of power, subordinates are able to contest and challenge gatekeepers, order enforcers, and other formal authorities,” (Walsh 2013:299). The most significant challenge in this case, I contend, is making what is often a space of ‘uncare’ (Gupta 2012) into a space of care, even if all it means is to be sitting on the same side, watching.

Citations

- Author. “Nexus”. *Whispers From the Field: Ethnographic Poetry and Creative Prose*, ed. Annie Sheng. Cornell Council for the Arts, 2018.
- Chrisholm, BJ. “Credible Definitions: A Critique of US Asylum Law's Treatment of Gender-Related Claims.” *Howard Law Journal* 44:427-441, 2001.
- Farmer, Paul. *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.
- Fobear, Katherine. “‘I Thought We Had No Rights’-Challenges in Listening, Storytelling, and Representation of LGBT Refugees.” *Studies in Social Justice* 9 (1):102-117, 2015.
- Gupta, Akhil. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Huey, Laura, Kevin Walby, and Aaron Doyle. “Cop Watching in the Downtown Eastside”. In *Surveillance and Security*, ed. Torin Monahan. 149-166. Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. *The Paradox of Hope: Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.
- Mol, Annemarie, Ingunn Moser, and J Pols. *Care in Practice: On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms*.

- Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010.
- Mulla, Sameena. *The Violence of Care: Rape Victims, Forensic Nurses, and Sexual Assault Intervention*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Schoenholtz, Andrew I., Philip G. Schrag, and Jaya Ramji-Nogales. *In Lives in the Balance: Asylum Adjudication by the Department of Homeland Security*. NYU Press, 2014.
- Thornton, Leslie A. and David R. Novak. "Storying the Temporal Nature of Emotion Work: Bearing Witness to the Lived Trauma of Others". *Health Communication*, 25:5, 437-448. 2010.
- Walsh, James P. "From Border Control to Border Care: The Political and Ethical Potential of Surveillance". In *Governing Immigration through Crime: A Reader*, eds. Dowling, Julie A., and Jonathan Xavier Inda. Stanford UP, 2013.

Chapter 5: Familiar Intimacies

“Today is the first day I’ve been able to talk about the women without crying, and I’m not a big crier,” Amber tells me a week after she left Dilley. “Part of the reason for that is that I miss them. It felt like I was there with them for much more time than I was. I know it sounds ridiculous to say that I feel attached to them, because I was only there for 5 days, but I am.” Amber was a former corrections officer from Washington, and now, a law student. She was, in fact, the only advocate I met who had spent time working on the ‘other side’ of incarceration. She was only four years away from retirement, with full benefits, when she decided to leave it for law school. Maybe the decision had something to do with her cancer diagnosis, she explains. It was definitely related to the micro- and macro-aggressions she experienced throughout her career as a result of being gay and a White woman married to a Black woman twenty years her senior. “With all of that, and then trying to teach mostly White male law enforcement about their biases, about how we end up with so many Black and Brown people in custody...it just took too much out of me,” she explains. “I was like, I need to go somewhere where people actually care about other people.” Either way, the dramatic career change was not an easy decision, and as much as she hated it, she was still grieving for the loss, since it had played such a major role in her working life.

Amber’s perspective, then, as a former long-term corrections officer, on Dilley and family detention was unlike most other advocates, and while her time there was brief, her reflections and comparisons with her previous work experience were incredibly insightful. She would describe the ways in which she saw parallels between how the young, mostly Latinx children reacted to guards in the facility and how children of color growing up the states are essentially prepared at a young age for the constant policing and control of their bodies. “This place, you put kids in a place like this and it makes them think they’re criminals,” she said. “They’re teaching them that, normalizing that idea. You know, when these young men are in prison or jail and they get out, there are certain

things they've become accustomed to. When my godson got out of prison, he moved in with me, and he wanted to eat ramen with cheese whiz all the time. That's normal jail food. But I told him that he was never gonna eat that again. He was gonna to eat vegetables, fresh fruit, steak. I told him that that's not who he is, what they said he was when he was in there, or what they made him eat. To me, it's the same with these kids in the facility; they're just normalizing these patterns of being in prison, of being observed, and they're gonna have to unlearn that."

Amber's experience of familiarity within these environments, however, extended beyond these discomfiting personal parallels. She described her attachment with the clients with whom she worked through a kind of intimacy. "It's like, when you volunteer with a domestic violence shelter, there's intimacy there, or when my best friend died and I was with her, that was intimate. Having a baby, that's intimate. All of those things involve different levels of intimacy. This experience was pretty intimate to me because the clients had to share all of these things they had gone through, and on top of that, you're the only person who they can really trust. They latch onto you in this really strong and intimate way also."

The dissertation has already explored some of the state's 'intimate exclusions' in detention, rather the "mundane, the banal, the performative, and the prosaic [administrative practices] that lead to the exclusion of migrants," (Mountz 2010: xxxii). This chapter moves beyond this, while staying within the sphere of the intimate. Berlant (1998) reminds us that "intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation," (282). This is true of the intimacy created between advocates and those with whom they work in the detention center. To be fair, the detention center is, in different ways, a space which fosters both intimacy and distance, drawing attention to the ways in which intimacy is a thing of politics, a domain of power (Olund and Oswin 2010; Robinson 2011; Stoler 2006), and that it also used as a vehicle for harm, which for some, distinguishes it from care (Zelizer 2010). Detainees, in order to be afforded the

opportunity to be released and continue their cases, are effectively forced into divulging intimate elements of their experiences and identities, per the usual processes of asylum adjudication (Kobelinsky 2015). They are treated as prisoners, in the different intimate ways prisoners are controlled, such as by being told what they must wear, what they must eat, how they are to move throughout spaces, things which, as Amber points out, might be construed as preparing them for how bodies like theirs are continuously criminalized, and subsequently more intimately controlled, in the U.S. Yet even in these intimacies, there is also distance. Detainees are misinformed, uninformed, disregarded, sometimes to dangerous degrees. As previous chapters have noted, some administrators see this distance as a sort of professional necessity of their job. Even some advocates see some level of emotional distance as necessary in order to properly help the client in front of them, and, more specifically, to be able to continue to help others without the emotional burden created through constant empathizing.

In these ways, intimacy and distance are both wrapped up in the family detention center. What this chapter focuses on are the ways in which the intimacies that flourish, primarily between advocates and detainees, build a kind of world within the facilities. The places in which these intimacies occur are seemingly meant for more distant relations; thus, through these intimacies, new worlds are constructed, some of which move far beyond the facility. Previous chapters explored what advocates did, how they behaved or things they said, in order to establish the ever-important trust that would afford a level of intimacy that, in turn, would allow advocates to properly help their clients. Intimacy between advocates and clients has been shown to be dependent on varying degrees of trust (Zelizer 2010). This chapter does not describe the observable existence of intimacy between advocates and detainees or advocates and facility administrators, but rather the often sentimental and affective experience of intimacy from the perspective of advocates.

Previous chapters also touched on the ways in which intimacy is constrained or denied within these spaces. While detainees are forced to share intimacies that are then judged by administrative officials, advocates are constrained in their ability to express intimacy with their clients, as the ban on hugging demonstrated. As a result, then, when advocates talked explicitly about intimacy, they were most often referring to it in the context of the prep conversation, as Amber does here. The exchange was intimate because it was private, usually involving only two people, and because of the content of the discussion. This chapter moves beyond this, exploring those varied intimacies in the relations amongst advocates, detainees, and sometimes administrators. I examine how intimacies are created or flourish within these spaces, the contours of intimacy in their relationships, and how they are perceived and felt by advocates. Like the uncomfortable intimacy (Fassin 2011) between the ethnographer and humanitarian, sometimes the intimacy advocates' experienced with clients was unsettlingly familiar. Other times, this intimacy evoked personal questions of an existential nature. In still others, intimacy was found in surprising moments of joy, even when it involved reveling in absurdity. In most advocates' reflections, intimacies were revealed as scholars contend, as things both deeply private and interpersonal (Mendelsohn 1982).

Legal advocates' work in these environments is arguably one of an 'intimate labor' (Boris and Parrenas 2010), involving emotional and often bodily closeness. As previous chapters illustrated, this physical proximity, while committed out of a desire to comfort or care for detained clients—either in distressed or joyful moments—had the potential to put advocates' continued work with clients in a precarious position. Even without physical touch, however, bodies between advocates and clients remained close in many of their regular encounters, from sitting next to one another in a credible fear interview, to sitting across from one another at a desk in the visitation trailer's private rooms, to sitting on the floor, coloring alongside a client's child. Such labors are

deeply interpersonal, serving to “promote the physical, intellectual, affective, and other emotional needs of strangers, friends, family,” (Boris and Parrenas 2010: 2).

Intimacy between advocates, clients, and various other actors present in this space was often borne out of empathetic expressions. In her investigation of the Mapuche notion of *cariño*, Murray (2017) reminds us that “empathy consists of a dialogic process (Hollan 2008; Throop 2012) in which something akin ‘to understand[ing] another’s experience through feeling or thinking something similar to oneself’ (Kirmayer 2008, 458) takes place,” (381). This chapter looks at intimacy as created through an empathetic, dialogic process in which clients represent particular familiarities for advocates, thus creating encounters which ‘stick’, primarily as a result of their personal relevance. In working with clients, advocates reflect on and incorporate their own subjective identities, experiences, and histories, and in doing so, express another form of care for those with whom they work. It furthermore considers the ways in which particular mechanisms of familiarity, like humor, manifest unexpected, yet meaningful, intimacy. Finally, I examine how certain familiarities, particularly with administrative staff, lead to confusing and often uncomfortable subjective positions, and how intimacies can sometimes resonate as burdens.

Stickiness

One of the first realizations I had in fieldwork was that for most advocates, there were detained individuals with whom they worked or had an encounter that ‘remained’ with them. By this, I mean that certain clients made a deep impression upon them, and their stories or the encounter they had with them lingered meaningfully, sometimes even upsettingly, within their memories. Each person I worked with had a sort of ‘familiar’ person like this, whether it was a mother or child, and some had more than one. They could recall minute, intimate details of the person and their stories, sometimes without even immediately recognizing that the particular

individual had had such an impression upon them. This led me to ask about all advocates about the clients that ‘stuck’ with them.

When I asked Andy, the Jesuit missionary student volunteer, who stuck with him, his answer was “many”. Andy was biracial; his mother was Peruvian and his father was a White man from Oklahoma. “This work, it’s a very personal thing for me, for a number of reasons,” he told me. “Part of that is because I grew up in a place, Oklahoma, where I saw and felt the differences of being seen as Brown or being seen as White, depending on if I went out to the store with my mom or with my dad. I think that part of why I’m good at doing this kind of work is because of my family, my experiences. Each one of the faces of the women I meet is just another reminder of my mom, essentially. She looks physically similar to a lot of them. She’s a short, Brown woman, and she came to the United States not wanting to, but just as a safety measure. I know that each of them is just struggling to make sense of so many things, learning English, trying to understand what the fuck is going on here. They have so many questions. To me, sitting there and letting them talk, just listening to them, sometimes, is a first step.”

Like Andy, there were many advocates that had Latinx identities, and many came from first- or second-generation immigrant or refugee families. These advocates, especially, repeatedly spoke about how the appearances or behaviors of different clients reminded them of family members or friends. Many made comparisons to their mothers, aunts, nephews, describing how a mother’s nose or eyes or a young boy’s laugh recalled these close familiars. Some advocates had had strikingly similar, if not nearly the same, experiences themselves as those with whom they worked. Many, like Andy, characterized this as a motivating aspect of their involvement in such work. Their interest in the work stemmed from personal experiences or witnessing experiences of those close to them. For some, this close familiarity brought painful memories or experiences to the fore, while others experienced new intimacies with their own identities.

Betty, a first-year undergraduate student from San Francisco, was not meant to be in Dilley at all. What became a deeply meaningful experience volunteering with the project, for several reasons, actually began with a sudden, unexpected change of plans from a summer meant to be spent volunteering with another aid project across the Mexican border. Shortly after finishing her freshman year at college and starting her volunteership with a migrant shelter in Mexico, it was abruptly suggested that she return to the U.S., and quickly. Betty had started to be followed by local gang members where she worked and the areas she travelled within. People in her volunteer community were concerned that she had been ‘targeted’ by these men, and she could very well be kidnapped at some point. This was believed to be due, in large part, to her physical appearance. Betty was also biracial, with one Mexican parent, and appeared light-skinned. As she described it, she had often struggled with her dual identities, White and Mexican. “I’ve always felt like I never fit into either category,” she explained to me. “My White friends think that being Mexican is just a perk that I use to get into college and get scholarships, while all my Mexican friends say that I don’t know what it’s like to be Mexican because I don’t look the part. I’d really been struggling with that my freshman year, trying to figure out where I belong. Some of my Mexican family members, you know, they have this dark sense of humor. They like to pick on my Spanish. They want to make it better, I know that, but still, it’s tough. I had this huge doubt about going to Mexico for this project, and then when I had to leave it, partially because I was singled out because I looked White, it was hard. I thought, wow, I really don’t belong here either. I felt really shitty coming out that. I just didn’t fit in there. I didn’t blend in enough.”

After leaving Mexico dejected and somewhat pessimistic, someone helped set her up with the project in Dilley, as an alternative to the failed experience in Mexico. “When I got to Dilley, I thought, well, here we go again. All of these women are going to think I’m just another White face telling them what to do. Maybe they won’t understand me, or I won’t understand them. By the

end of the very first day, though, I realized that it was just way too busy and there was too much to do to worry about stuff like that. I realized that really all any of us had were the words shared between us and that was enough. The women didn't care that I was White, blue, purple, whatever. They were just like, I need all the help you can give me, and you're willing to give it to me, so thank you."

There were pointed moments and encounters that made this particularly evident for Betty, and one of those came on the second to last day of her time there. That day, she was serving as a translator during a prep with a new weekly volunteer, a White lawyer who Betty described as being a rather "pain in the ass" to work with, including that day. In moments like this, while Betty was capable and experienced with doing a prep herself, she instead offered to translate for the lawyer who then directed the flow and questioning of the conversation. Many advocates who were proficient or fluent with Spanish spoke of how they sometimes preferred this role, as it allowed them to simply speak with the client, rather than simultaneously process the details of their asylum claim. "So I was working with one of the oldest women I had ever worked with there," she told me. "She was like 50 or maybe even 60. She was kind of a baller. She would answer every question I asked with a question for me," she said, laughing. "So I asked where she was from, and I was expecting some normal response like, 'oh, I'm from Guatemala or El Salvador,' and that's it, but she responded with 'well, I'm from El Salvador, and you? Are you White? *Y tu eres gringita también?*' She was referencing the White lawyer there with us, asking if I was also White. So I explained to her, 'yes, I'm White, but I'm also Mexican.' And she replied, '*abbbbb, es explica todo.*'" Betty laughs, and continues. "I thought to myself, this is so sweet. Within just a few seconds of meeting me, this woman understands where I'm coming from, when I feel like I've been so misunderstood for such a long time. This place, it's an easy place to belong to, in this prison of outcasts where everyone feels like they don't belong. You find a sense of belonging to a group of people that feel like they

don't belong. I wasn't expecting to have that. Working with the women really taught me a lot about my identity in a way that I could've really only learned from them.”

Betty's experience speaks of the worlds made through intimacies and of closeness to others through vulnerable engagements with the self. In her study of Finnish humanitarian aid workers, Malkki (2015) considers the questions: through their work, what kinds of self-to-self relations they did form? How did the self, engaged in work that is often characterized as 'selfless', undergo certain transformations? She contends that this has to do “with the imagination in terms of which this humanitarian subject, or self, framed both the world and her place in it,” (3). Betty undeniably felt 'seen' in this encounter with her client, framing her experiences of identity through the intimate encounters of the detention center.

Many advocates, including Betty and Amber, describe their experience working with these mothers and children in family detention as 'transformative' in some way. What was particularly interesting about this transformation, though, were the ways in which this, for some, could take place on a deeply personal level. For Betty, this meant experiencing a kind of unqualified acceptance, even an embrace, of the multiple identities which had previously left her feeling somewhere beyond the boundaries of belonging. In seeing themselves or their own families through those they worked with, others were struck by an uncomfortable sense of belonging as arbitrary. This sentiment was particularly poignant for those advocates with more intimate connections to detainees and their experiences.

I had been conducting my year of field research with the legal projects for less than a week when I was asked by a staff member, who knew I felt unsure about my Spanish speaking abilities, to work with an Albanian mother and her two teenage daughters at the Dilley facility, using a phone interpreter. The mother was deeply upset and confused about where they were and how they had ended up there. They, along with her husband, had arrived on a travel visa at the Boston

Logan airport just a few days earlier. At the airport, they were detained by immigration officials, separated from the father, and were sent promptly to Dilley. They had no idea why; no one had informed them of what was happening with them or why they had been detained when they had legal documentation. As the four of us sat huddled around the telephone in the small interview room, in order to hear and speak with the muffled phone interpreter, I struggled to ask basic intake questions as the mother, frustrated and tearful, wanted to understand what had happened and what was happening. When I had volunteered briefly with the project in years prior, I had only ever met women and children from Latin America and Haiti that had attempted to cross at the Mexico-U.S. border., and I was still naïve about the many complex roads that led to migrant incarceration. Desperate to find the answers to her questions, I stopped the intake, asked the interpreter to ask her to wait for a moment, and ran out of the room in hopes of finding someone more knowledgeable to help. Jahid, an immigration lawyer from Virginia, was standing in the open area of the trailer, answering questions for the seated Central American mothers filling out their intake forms. I quickly briefed him on the basic details of the situation, and he agreed to come and speak with the family. As I sat nervously next to the mother and daughters, hoping that he could help answer their questions and assuage their anxieties better than I had, Jahid came to realize what had happened. Because the family, who had intended to apply for asylum after being in the U.S. for some time, had brought with them items from home—in this case, some personal documents and photo albums—the officers at the airport had determined that they were individuals who had intended to remain, rather than simply visit and then return home. Upon determining this, at the airport, they separated the women family members from the husband and father, who was subsequently detained, and released, elsewhere in the country. Jahid, from his 15 years of experience as an immigration lawyer, knew this, and helped them, and me, to understand what had happened and what was going to happen next, in detention.

In speaking after his time in Dilley, Jahid told me that his own family, his parents, were refugees themselves, Muslims who were part of the forced migration in Pakistan. Jahid was the first of what would be many advocates I met during fieldwork who had an intimate, family connection to refugee or asylum law. Some of those who were lawyers, or were to become lawyers, described this as a motivation for getting directly involved with legal practice, particularly immigration law. Jahid himself learned Spanish while working as a lawyer in Virginia simply because of the many clients he received with whom he could not communicate otherwise. Someone with such valuable skills was highly desired in the environment of family detention.

Jahid's 'sticky' moment in Dilley, though, arrived as those many others' did: through seeing family in those they worked with. Whereas, however, some advocates saw a sort of personal mirror with the experiences of detained clients, Jahid saw a kind of flipped reflection. He was working with a client and her son on their RFR forms, or Request for Reconsideration or Reinterview. These are materials that are collected together and submitted to a judge after a client receives a negative decision during their credible/reasonable fear interview as a way to attempt to appeal or argue against that decision. As previous chapters have mentioned, this involves more extensive research that might bolster a client's claims and longer, more detailed conversations with clients. Jahid had been speaking with a mother and her two sons for a while, and had gotten the feeling that maybe one of her sons might have something to add to the case, but wasn't comfortable talking about it in front of his mother. Advocates often were encouraged by staff members in training to be attentive to the ways in which clients, be they parents or children, might express, through behaviors, discomfort in speaking openly or freely with various others around. Parents might exhibit this when having their children in the same room, while, for instance, they talked about moments of intimate partner violence, or female clients might express this when

speaking with male advocates. This attentiveness, and the subsequent environmental reconfigurations, were an important, sometimes critical, part of advocates' care for clients.

“I thought he didn't want to talk about something in front of his mom,” Jahid tells me. “So I asked if I could speak with him alone. He was 10 years old, and I have a 10-year-old son, so I kept thinking about my own son when we were talking. This kid was just sobbing, talking about how kids at his school would talk every day about which gang they were joining and all he wanted to do was just keep going to school. His mom had to pull him out of school, to avoid getting recruited, and all he wanted was to be there, to just live a normal life. I kept getting choked up listening to him, and I couldn't stop thinking about my own son. My kid complains about going to school, says he doesn't like it, and here, this is what this kid has to deal with and all he wants is to be there, in school.” When Jahid returned home after his time in Dilley, he started to share what he witnessed, the kinds of stories he heard with his family, including his children. “My wife actually told me to stop,” he said. “It was upsetting our kids to hear these things, these stories. She told me that it was too early, that they were too young. I'm just trying to get them to have some perspective on what their life is like. My son hasn't seen what a lot of people in the world go through. He doesn't know how lucky he is.”

Sofia, a volunteer originally from Colombia, and a mother of a 3-year-old son, also reflected on their fortunes considering what she observed. “It's pure luck that I'm here on this side of the trailer and they, the women, are on the other side,” Sofia tells me. Seeing children the same age as her son in the facility, she explained, was what affected her the most. “I tended to gravitate to the women with small children, just because I know how hard it is to keep their attention and how quickly they can turn to needing all their mother's attention. I wanted to get them out of there quickly,” she explained. By ‘there’, Sofia meant not just the detention, but the visitation trailer, more specifically; she wanted to help those mothers, in particular, to move more

swiftly through the project's aid work, before their children would demand their absolute attention.

There was one such boy, one of the two children of a client with whom she worked, that especially reminded her of her own son. "The mother was just a few years older than me, but she looked many, many years older. She had nine children and could only bring the youngest two with her. I was helping her with her intake forms, and she was playing with her young boy, who was my son's age. He was so cute. She'd play with him and he'd smile these big perfect white teeth, and so I commented on them, telling her what beautiful teeth he had. She got kind of serious and said, 'oh, thank you, but my daughter, she has struggled with this'. Her daughter, who was slightly older, was also there at the table, and she looked at me and smiled." Sofia took a deep sigh as she continued telling me her story. "Her daughter's teeth were completely rotten. The mother told me that her daughter cried often from the pain, that she had been through a lot with this issue and was still in constant pain from her rotted teeth. Then she asked me if I had children. I told her that I did. She asked me if I had ever been unable to feed my children. I told her no, I hadn't ever gone through something like that. She told me that she hoped I never would. It was one of those moments where I sincerely hoped that whoever was going to work with her next, to prepare her for her interview, could find something really strong to support her case."

As each of these expressions illustrate, there were more than a few advocates that articulated their sticky encounters as if they were sorts of mirrors to their own lives and families, in some way. Advocates, like Sofia or Jahid, who were parents, described the ways in which they saw their own children in the children they encountered in the facility. They also reflected on what appeared to be a sort of discomfoting alternative reflection.

For others, like Paula, what stuck was the discomfort of seeing a mirrored reflection of painful, and deeply personal, experiences. Paula was a paralegal for an office in San Francisco that

mostly worked on business immigration cases. She had had experience with *pro bono* asylum work before and had volunteered with some legal clinics, most often as a Spanish interpreter. When she was asked by a partner in her firm that did not speak the language to go volunteer in Dilley, she did not even know these facilities existed. Paula's personal connection to what she encountered in Dilley was profound. She had crossed the border, without legal documents, with her mother when she was nine. "When they were telling me their stories, I knew what they had gone through," she says. "Crossing is hard. I was lucky enough that I had an uncle in Mexico, and we were able to stay with him during the process. Some of these women don't have support like that, so in that way their experience is really different. They would come from Central America just on their own. But I could still put myself in their shoes. I said to myself, that could be me, or that could be my mom or my brother. A lot of the women I worked with were from El Salvador, which is where I'm from. I remember the whole experience well. There are certain things, certain details that never leave you. They stick with you."

While Paula connected with the women she worked with over their shared experiences of crossing, ultimately, the most meaningful connection between them had to do with a common experience across many detainees' lives: having to leave children behind. Many detained mothers, particularly those who had asylum claims related to the children that they had brought with them on the journey—whether their child or children were being recruited by gangs or had suffered abuse or were the subject of death threats as a way to pressure the mother to do something—were capable of only bringing one or some of their children. This was often a very painful point of discussion with them, both in preparations for and during their interviews. In working with clients who had been forced to leave children, Paula felt that pain, albeit from a different perspective. "I cried a lot with the women that I worked with, but that last day that I was there in Dilley, one story from one of the women just hit me kind of hard," she tells me. "I thought about when I left

El Salvador. You see, I grew up with my grandmother there because my mom was here, in the U.S. I understand that when mothers leave their kids behind, they make a decision to do that, come here either on their own or with just one child. So my mother left me and my brother, and we grew up with our grandmother. She became the only mom I knew. I called her mom. So when my mom would come to visit, I didn't even know her because I didn't grow up with her. She would say to me, 'I'm your mom', but to me, she was a stranger, you know? I didn't feel that she was my mom. So when she came back to take us to the U.S., it was like I was coming to a new country, with a new everything else, and with a stranger. They were our parents, but they were strangers. I left my grandmother behind, and I never saw her again because she passed away. So one of the women I was working with that last day, she told me that she had to leave her *viejitos*, and it just reminded me of that. She said that they were crying and told her not to leave, and it just reminded me of my grandmother, my *viejita*, saying the same thing. Probably because she knew we were never going to see her again. So that was really hard for me."

Paula not only understood what it felt like to have to leave, possibly never seeing close family again, but also how it felt to be the one that was left. She was deeply empathetic of her client's positions, while still reflecting on her own intimate pain. "In their preps, I would ask the women how many kids they had, and they would say three or four, but they could only bring one because of the costs, or could only bring the youngest because they were breastfeeding, or whatever. I didn't really press them on that. I'd say to them, you know, 'you're really strong, that's a really hard thing to do, as a mother, leave someone behind'. But I think, from the perspective of the child that's left, it's hard to understand any of that. Does that make sense? Because when you're a kid, you just feel like you're being abandoned. I was a baby when my mom left, so I don't really remember it happening, but as I grew up, learning that my parents just weren't there, it affected me. You think, they just decided to leave. You don't know all of the reasons why it

happened, and you can't really even comprehend them when you're a child. So I understand that it was hard for them, but I'm also looking at it from the perspective of the child left. I really don't know which is harder: having been left as a baby, when you don't understand, or being older and understanding. When you become a parent, you come to understand the kind of decisions parents have to make, but it still doesn't take away the things you experience when you're a kid. I look at other people now, people who got to grow up with their parents, and I think they're very lucky. I didn't get to have that."

Paula eloquently demonstrates the ways in which "intimacy forges distances and proximities as well as bonds and attachments and creates new meanings (Stoler 2008)" (Sehlikoglu and Zengin 2015: 20). In working with mothers who had left children behind, she was reminded of feelings of abandonment, confusion, and pain at having to leave behind others whom she cared for. The exclusionary practices of immigration law and enforcement served to create the kinds of situations Paula, her mother, and her grandmother were forced into. While Paula recognized this, and recognized that, since becoming a parent, she understood the complexities with which parents were faced in making difficult decisions, she also actively engaged with what those feelings meant for her, as a child who only understood that her parents weren't there, and that when they were there, they were essentially strangers taking her away from her home.

Humor

After Jahid spoke with the mother and her daughters from Albania, explaining what had happened, in legal terms, when they were detained at the airport, he left as I continued with helping them fill out their intake forms. The room felt heavy. While they had received clarity on what had happened, they had not necessarily been comforted. The mother, with her brow constantly furrowed and eyes wet with tears, looked tired, frustrated. Her daughters seated on either side of her stared blankly into the space of the floor as again, we sat huddled around the

telephone. Again, I felt nearly helpless to comfort them, but we proceeded through the basic questionnaire of the forms. There was a pause in the moment after the interpreter translated and as I wrote down their response. In that quiet, a sudden, loud fart was released from the youngest daughter, sitting closest to me. Trying to pretend I had heard nothing, out of respect, I kept my eyes glued to the papers on my lap. As I pathetically attempted to stifle a laugh, I looked up only to find that the two daughters had begun laughing already. The youngest, whose face had turned bright red, was giggling and her older sister was as well. The mother, who moments later looked as sad as anyone could, was smiling and laughing as well. We all laughed together, even as the mother apologized for her daughter. She explained that the facility's poor food options had seemingly irritated her daughter's stomach. Minutes later, we attempted to return to filling out the questionnaire, the four of us constantly breaking to laugh again. The room felt lighter, warmer, and unexpectedly, it felt as if suddenly we were closer to one another. As they left, the mother asked for my name after thanking me profusely, which she scribbled largely on the corner of her document folder. I would see her and her daughters again as they rushed to me after receiving their positive interview decisions, the mother waving at me from across the trailer as soon as we locked eyes and embracing me in a tight hug and a kiss on my neck as she shared the good news.

The moment in the room, in which we all burst into laughter following a sudden, surprising turn-of-events, felt as if it was a turning point in our brief relationship. The tension, quite literally, had been released as it simultaneously drew attention to that very tension, the emotions which seemed to trace every curve of the bubble in which we sat together. We could not speak directly to one another without the crackling, muffled phone interpreter, and yet with this moment and our shared laughter, there was this sense of togetherness, of understanding. It was uncontrollable, and there was a feeling that none of us actually wanted to control it.

Humor is a central component of advocates' experiences and, often, interactions with their clients. In this encounter between this particular family and I, a humorous moment seemingly made space for intimacy. Advocates would go on to describe many moments in which humor played an important, sometimes uncomfortable role, in expressing or experiencing intimacies. While humor sometimes served this function, to cohere groups of advocates and detainees through expressions of joy or happiness, it sometimes played a more complex role. Advocates described many moments where they found themselves finding humor in things that, if they were to describe to others who were not within that environment, wouldn't be considered humorous. Yet within this environment, it was clear that often these moments of 'dark' humor were related to a desire or need for levity. At times, humor itself appeared to be a form of recognition of the kind of absurdities that punctuated everyday experiences. In these ways, humor served to cohere advocates' shared experiences and sentiments that were nonetheless difficult to articulate or cope with.

"There was a moment of realization for me," Nita says, "where I realized how these insane experiences here in Dilley affect you in this crazy way." Nita was a professor of Latin American History in New York and had come at the translating behest of her friend, Nancy, a lawyer who did not speak Spanish. Nancy had invited another friend to join them, and the three of them would return to Dilley together more than once to volunteer. Nita had had lots of varied experience over the past several years working as an interpreter, volunteer, and expert witness for immigration and asylum cases, but always wanted to be more involved. This, however, as it was for so many that I met, was different, and often more disturbing, than they expected. "Hearing women's stories, having them tell them in front of you like that...I teach on violence in Latin America, but experiencing this was something completely different. The moment of realization, though, about how this affected me, and the rest of us, was when Nancy was telling me and our

other friend, Taira, about this case she was working on with this mother. In part of the story, the mother had described how she found her husband's bloody t-shirt. Nancy couldn't remember the client's name, so in talking about the case, she referred to her as the 'bloody t-shirt woman'. When she said that and every time after that she said that, the 'bloody t-shirt woman', the three of us just burst into laughter."

Nita explained that even now, she could not articulate why this, something so dark and disturbing, was so funny to them. It was not because they did not respect the horrors this client or others had experienced. This was not the first time someone had explained an experience of humor like this to me, nor was it the first time I had observed it or participated in something like it myself. On one occasion, a staff member, Oleana, who was specifically tasked with helping clients who had medical concerns that weren't being met in the facility, which was often, to get either released or proper treatment, was working with a client who had a baby with an unknown medical issue related to a growth on the baby's head. The growth looked and felt like a large bump, and Oleana, in conversations with other staff and volunteers about proper steps for getting released and treatment, began to refer jokingly to the client's child as the 'big bump baby'. Taken out of context, or observed by those unfamiliar with this sort of environment and its emotional constraints, such dark humor might appear as anything but humorous, rather being offensive, dismissive of the seriousness of such situations and experiences, or at the very least callous in the face of others' pain.

Yet, these are not interpretations I would support as accurate reflections of these, or other, advocates' sensibilities or sentiments about their clients. Instead, these responses recall other scholars' work on what appear to be 'out of place' behaviors or reactions (Goldstein 2014; Scheper-Hughes 1993). Goldstein illustrates the role of dark or ironic humor in 'perverse circumstances', particularly those having to do with the everyday lives and livelihoods of those

who inhabit Brazilian favelas. She argues, like Scheper-Hughes, that “the cruel and unusual context of the lives of these characters must be considered in both the narration and the reading of these humorous stories, because at times they jolt our own particular moral visions and sense of moral reasoning, one that we often mistake as universal,” (2014: 45).

At times, humorous moments were very clearly connected to the shared awareness of absurdity in the rules or processes of detention. In general, while these were recognized as harmful, intrusive, and, most importantly, pointlessly absurd, and would infuriate advocates for the ways in which it disturbed not only detainees’ lives but also advocates’ ability to give care, sometimes that very absurdity evoked a humorous response. One of my first encounters with this was with an immigration lawyer from North Carolina, Janie, who volunteered the same week as my first visit in late 2015. As was mentioned in a previous chapter, detainees are separated into different housing units which are characterized by a distinct pair of animals and colors, and one of those is known as the ‘brown bear’ unit. On that first visit, it wasn’t uncommon for facility officials to refer to detainees by the housing unit in which they ‘resided’, and this was particularly true of the ‘brown bear’ group, which was, for a period, a unit which was considered to be a ‘quarantine’ unit. Although what exactly this implied was somewhat vague to advocates, it was understood that detainees in this unit might have some sort of illness or communicable disease or virus, such as chickenpox. Because of this, guards stationed in the legal trailer insisted that while these detainees remain ‘isolated’ from others, specifically in that they must be seated within the private rooms while meeting with legal advocates, rather than in the open area of the trailer, and that they use separate bathrooms from those of the other detainees. As previous chapters have illustrated, guards would involve advocates in the maintenance of these boundaries, and because of advocates’ vulnerable positions within these spaces, they were often forced to participate in regimes and practices with which they did not agree or find particular meaning.

Late on a Thursday and after a long day of work, the Dilley volunteers sat at a picnic table outside of the Days Inn, drinking bottles of Shiner. The mosquitoes were out in full force as we huddled together sharing stories of the day. This was one of the first times I realized that lawyers enjoyed talking, a lot. Janie, in a deadpan voice, told the group, “I lost a couple of brown bears today.” Some of us could not help but laugh at the sound of it. She proceeded to tell us how two so-called brown bears, after meeting with legal advocates, tried to use the regular bathrooms that other detainees used. Upon realizing that two such individual had left the private visitation room to go the bathroom, she ran to catch them before they disappeared behind the door. The dark absurdity of both having to refer to incarcerated adults, and their children, by a ‘cute’ designation as well as having to chase after them for possibly using a shared bathroom, despite its obvious problematic seriousness, inspired laughter in the moment.



Image 22: Volunteer group in Dilley. Photo credit: author

In these moments, a kind of dark humor served to cohere advocates' sentiments that were borne out of the stressors and absurdities of the facilities' environments. Advocates found themselves laughing at things usually found humorous, as I did in a surprising release of tension with a family, and at others, which were unfamiliarly humorous, like stories involving violence or illness. Unlike Goldstein's or Scheper-Hughes' research participants, advocates typically had not themselves experienced the upsetting types of events at which they found themselves sometimes laughing at, in some limited respect, later on. They were, however, also experiencing trauma, secondhand, from listening to such horrors repeatedly in the work, and they were similarly subjected to the pains of administrative absurdities. As previous chapters have illustrated, advocates were affected by the harm which took place in detention, and this in turn, I would argue, affected their use of humor as a kind of mechanism for release. And yet, still there were moments in which humor felt purer, moments in which humor accompanied joy, rather than just tension or absurdity.

At one point in Dilley, the release *charlas* were held in a separate mobile trailer building, off to the side at the back entrance of the visitation trailer. The space was a large open room with a couple of desks situated at the back and a miniature plastic playset with a slide and stairs set up across from the entrance door. This was for those mothers who could not leave their children in the daycare or in school, for reasons already discussed in previous chapters. Most of the space was taken up by church pews, three rows of them, in which the women sat as they listened to the advocate give their presentation. The point of the release *charla* was give clients information about what comes next in this asylum saga: what they needed to prepare for as they left the facility; what they needed to understand about the law and their rights, even before they left; and where they could potentially go to get help when they finally ended up wherever they planned on staying for the time immediately afterwards. After anywhere from one to three hours, women would leave the

trailer would stack papers in their arms, documents which explained which legal services provided pro bono or low bono support for immigrants in Virginia, New York, Utah. They would have sample copies of important files they needed to submit upon leaving. In Karnes, women were given a booklet which outlined the most important aspects of this information, and usually one advocate would sit with a small group discussing each of these in detail.

These *charlas*, however, were not quiet moments of seriousness, but, in fact, were often some of the most joyous moments in the entire ordeal of family detention. Some advocates would spend the majority of their time in Dilley or Karnes conducting *charlas*, and several described doing the release *charlas* as their absolute favorite thing to do. During her time in Dilley, Betty conducted many of these *charlas*. She spoke about how often she found herself laughing with the women, making jokes about the government, or laughing at their own jokes. “There were so many hilarious women,” she said. “For instance, when I would show them pictures of the ankle monitor, just so they knew what it looked like, some of them would laugh and throw their hands up, pretend like they were walking out of the room, being really dramatic.” Women would joke about how they had to charge the monitor, plugging themselves into the wall, and laughed at the idea of how they would bathe if, perhaps, they could not get it wet. Once, when Betty described the necessity of filing paperwork if they were to ever change addresses at any point, so that the government would know where to send important legal materials, a mother surprised her and the group by jokingly musing upon whether that was necessary for one-night stands. “There were so many funny things that happened in the release *charlas*, and because I was doing it for so long, I got to see a lot of that.”

These were moments in which usually the majority of those sitting in the *charla* were those who had already received their positive decisions on their interviews. They knew they were getting released, and while many didn’t know when exactly—as like other things, they were kept nearly

entirely unaware of the processes which directly affected them—they knew that their *positivo* meant that this part of the journey was nearly over. Because the release *charlas* were scheduled in such a way as to have groups of individuals attend them based upon the particular amount of time they had spent in the facility, there would be some who, for whatever unknown reason, the asylum office had delayed sending them their interview decision. For those women, the sense of hopefulness felt by others in the *charla* had yet to be realized.

“I had this *K'iche* client, and I think she really hated me because I was constantly calling her up to come back to the visitation trailer,” Betty tells me. “She was pretty confused. It was a really tough case. Her case was based on the fact that her step-mother was threatening to do harm to her through witchcraft.” This was a not entirely uncommon element of some detainees’ claims, and advocates often struggled to find a way to articulate to clients how this argument was likely to be received by an asylum officer. Most advocates were mindful of trying to respect individual client’s beliefs, particularly about witchcraft or what might be deemed the occult, while ultimately conveying to them that this would likely not be understood by an officer as an allowable form of persecution. Some, like Betty, chose to frame this articulation as more closely related to an officer’s ignorance. “I don’t think asylum officers really understand what witchcraft means to these people,” she says. “It might not sound like a threat to them, but it would definitely be a threat to this person. Anyways, I was determined to see if I could do something to make this mother like me better, because she really didn’t like me. So I learned to say ten words in *K'iche*. I learned how to say ‘hello’, ‘goodbye’, ‘thank you’, just the basics. So she came to see me again, and she had this really cute daughter, and when I opened with these words I had learned, her daughter just started laughing hysterically. She was literally rolling on the floor laughing at me. I don’t think they ever imagined that these sounds could come out of a White person’s mouth. They were from this really small indigenous community, and I don’t

think they had ever even seen a White person before coming here. They were constantly staring at my skin. In the end, they ended up leaving with an RL NTA (Rare Language Notice to Appear).”

QUICHÉ

Greetings		
English	Quiché	Español
1. Good morning.	1. Jae, sakiric.	1. Buenos días.
a. Good morning (to a woman).	a. Sakiric, nan.	a. Buenos días, señora.
b. Good morning (to a man).	b. Sakiric, tat.	b. Buenos días, señor.
c. Good afternoon (to a woman).	c. Xekij, nan.	c. Buenas tardes, señor.
d. Good night (to a man).	d. Xoc akab, tat.	d. Buenas noches, señor.
2. How are you?	2. ¿A utz a wach?	2. ¿Qué tal está, usted?
a. How are you? (formal)	a. ¿A utz a wach, la?	
3. Im doing well, thank you. And how are you?	3. Utz ya, maltiox chawe. E ri awe, ¿a utz a wach? (formal = ¿a utz a wach la?)	3. Bien, gracias. Y usted, ¿cómo está?
4. Good, thanks.	4. Utz, maltiox.	4. Bien, gracias.
a. Very good, thanks.	a. Sibalaj utz.	a. Muy bien, gracias.
5. Where did you go? (or, Where are you coming from?)	5. ¿Jawije xatpe wi?	5. ¿A dónde fue?
a. I went to run an errand.	a. Xinpe pa jun nu tajquil.	a. Fui a hacer un mandado

Goodbye Ke mená Adiós
 Ke man kwen que le vaya bien

Image 23: Informational sheet hung on the wall of the pro bono (PB) room in Dilley, helping advocates communicate with Quiche speakers.

For many of the indigenous mothers and children, because their native languages were those spoken by much fewer individuals than Spanish or even Haitian Creole, asylum officers were rarely able to locate even remote interpreters. Even when they would locate these interpreters through the usual services they used, sometimes the interpreter would speak a

different dialect of *Mam* or *Q'eqchi*, and the client would not be able to understand them. Primarily because of this, indigenous clients would frequently receive release documentation without having to undergo the fear interview. This, of course, was often difficult for advocates to explain to indigenous clients, not only because advocates themselves struggled to find proper interpreters, but also because the legal phenomenon was simply odd. Mothers would become confused or express concern at why they, unlike other women, were not being given the opportunity to have an interview. While advocates tried to communicate the benefit of this, which some clients happily understood, it would sometimes take a longer conversation to explain how this was beneficial. "I tried explaining what that meant to them in my horrible *K'iche*," Betty continued. "Eventually the mom understood me. So you know, there was this barrier, but instead of the usual barrier of just not being able to understand one another, this time it was because they couldn't stop laughing long enough for me to speak," Betty says, chuckling. "You know, there's so much sadness in that place, but it can also be this really human place. There's so much love and happiness. There wasn't a day that didn't go by in which I didn't laugh, and I'm sure you can say the same. It's a weird contrast."

Ali, the project staff member, implicitly referred to that contrast when discussing how sometimes they end up laughing, seemingly hysterically, to things that would not necessarily warrant it. "When something funny happens, we all explode," she said, "it's like something that's not normally funny or *that* funny suddenly becomes hilarious. It's like we're craving that, that happiness, that joy. We all want that light back in our lives." It was a Wednesday night, and for one of the only times in my fieldwork, just the staff had gathered after work to talk about their own secondary or vicarious trauma from the work. Such a thing was always a concern for weekly volunteers, those, staff implied, who might be properly prepared for the sorts of trauma that inherent to doing such work repeatedly. And yet while they mostly

recognized that trauma was a part of the experience for many, if not all, to some degree, staff seemed to only be engaged in dealing with their own trauma individually. Volunteers would be encouraged to listen to a podcast about vicarious trauma before arriving and would furthermore be encouraged to take breaks, rest, talk about traumatic moments with other advocates. Many did not do these things regularly, as the nature of the environment itself encouraged non-stop work, offering little time for rest or recuperation. Staff, as could be imagined, were under much greater stressors. Not only did they have to manage the volunteers, manage relationships with administrators, and manage relationships with the administrators of the legal projects which funded their work, they also carried burdens in doing the work that weekly and usually temporary volunteers did not experience. They remained in the space, while others left, usually at the end of the week. They were on-call when a client was about to be deported and needed last minute work to issue a reprieve. They were on-call when administrators would change their minds about scheduling fear interviews and would have to show up at the facility immediately in order to prepare clients. Thus, in Dilley, their living arrangements being just a few minutes' drive from the facility kept them physically and psychically 'close' to the work. Project staff member Carlos described this as sometimes feeling like he was a prisoner of the facility as well. "We end up spending more time at that facility than most of the detainees," he said with an incredulous laugh. And while he didn't mean to imply that they experienced imprisonment like the detainees, which none, of course, would ever claim, their extended stay within this environment bore a significant impact. They were intimately familiar with this controlling, upsetting, and frustrating work environment, and this effected its own trauma. Ultimately, they carried very specific burdens as a result of their unique positionality in this environment.

Burdens

On her last day as a staff member for the project in Dilley, a typical Friday, Oleana wore her crisp white “#EndFamilyDetention” t-shirt under her black blazer. It was her last rebellious act before she left the job. She seemed simultaneously sad yet utterly relieved to be leaving.

As I drove with her to San Antonio for her *despedida* dinner with other staff at a popular local ramen restaurant, she spoke frankly about her experiences doing this work. She talked about being frustrated by the fact that she never got to do the sort of work she had come in wanting to do, never getting to effect the sort of changes inside that she had hoped she could. She felt that her advocacy work, and ‘true’ advocacy work, was constantly constrained by what were essentially data gathering processes for the organizations with which she was associated as a staff member of the legal project. Her ability to help detainees felt limited, often, to simply dealing with, or ‘reacting to’ as Jay, another staff member, put it, the everyday struggles of trying to get basic care to women and children and fighting with administrators. In a sense, she was happy to be done with it all, happy to return home to Queens, to her husband and, hopefully, a more predictable life once again.

After eating a rare good meal, we all left the dinner and walked down the sidewalk lit by the bright pink and blue neon lights of cafes and restaurants, a warm breeze offering its familiar presence. In contrast to the constantly frenzied nature of our encounters with one another in the work at the facility, all of us ambled slowly down the sidewalk, reticent to accept that it was time to say goodbye to Oleana. As we stood encircled next to the road, beginning this process, I handed her a farewell card that I had secretly gotten everyone to sign. Earlier in the day at the facility, all of us had sneakily passed it along, hiding it in our laptops when she walked nearby, or disguising it through a client’s file folder. As I walked into the center in the morning with the blank card, I ran into two of the guards at the center who Oleana had become friends with, Juan

and Marcos. She had spoken several times of how much she respected and appreciated them, because of how respectfully and kindly they treated the detainees. I knew it would mean something to her to have them sign her card, so I asked them as I passed through the security trailer, and they each quickly wrote a thoughtful note to her, in Spanish, and signed it. They said they were sad to see her go, but I also assumed they were used to seeing advocates move in and out of these spaces.

When I handed her the card as we stood on the sidewalk, and she noticed their notes, her eyes began to well with tears. She looked up to us standing encircled closely around her, then over to Ali and said, “you know, it’s true what you’ve said about this work, Ali...you really don’t know who the enemy is.” While the sort of closeness Oleana experienced with the guards with whom she effectively worked alongside every day was mostly positively valued, her comments also evinced conflicted sentiments. Such conflicts were exclusive burdens of those who spent longer periods of time in these spaces, like staff and long-term volunteers. While weekly or short-term volunteers glimpsed some degree of the more complicated elements of this environment, staff were deeply embedded in these complications. Their intimacies were not simply limited to their interactions with clients or other volunteers, but rather with other actors that make up the detention center as well as with the larger institutional processes at play.

Months before Oleana left Dilley, I had just begun volunteering with RAICES, and because of my anxieties about getting in and out of the facility, I chose to carpool with staff and volunteers from San Antonio, rather than drive myself. It was around eight in the evening, and we were making our way back to San Antonio from Karnes. The sky, per usual, was awash in the sorts of vibrant hues one often sees in desert paintings, though these landscapes were, of course, also uniquely pocked with slowly churning oil rigs. There were five of us crammed into one of the project staff member’s cars: two temporary volunteers, two project staff members, and I. We were

all starting to talk about the day when one of the staff, Jasmine, suggested we play an icebreaking game in which we would each share something nice or pleasant from the day and then, something that was upsetting or bothersome. One of the volunteers shared how difficult it was to learn how to write a declaration for a client's appeal. He had not written one before, and in fact, like many volunteers without prior legal experience, had not expected to be doing actual legal work.

Composing a declaration for a mother's appeal meant, of course, that she had received a negative decision on her interview. As he spoke about working with this client, I realized that she was the same client I had prepped for her interview. Immediately, I felt upset, disappointed in myself for possibly not preparing her properly for her interview. My mind returned to my meeting with her before her interview, running through what I had perhaps said to her or failed to say, what I should have said or done. As I would come to understand, this was a common reaction by newer advocates, either staff or volunteers, to when they would receive word that a client they had worked with received a negative interview decision. Even though most advocates did not personally possess expertise in asylum law and despite reassurances from project staff, nearly all expressed feelings of guilt or shame, in different degrees, when 'their' clients received such decisions. What could they have done differently, in the prep? They wondered. Should they have spent more time working with a particular client? For me, this feeling diminished over time, though it never truly went away.

Feeling as if you had somehow 'failed' the women and children with whom you worked was a painful, yet seemingly inevitable aspect of the experiences of legal advocates, both volunteers and staff, in their work. This aspect was connected to their senses of responsibility to clients; they, and they alone, shouldered the responsibility of communicating legal expectations and preparing clients for what was to come. And yet, another aspect of their work also involved bearing the responsibility of communicating decisions made by administrators. Judges and asylum

officers did not communicate decisions about clients' cases directly to clients themselves. Clients were given legal documents after these encounters, which concerned the decisions of their interviews and appeals, that were, at best, minimally informative to the client. It was typical that clients would bring this stack of papers to legal advocates looking for explanation and clarification. Certain documents, advocates would learn, indicated that a client had received a positive decision, while others indicated the opposite. It took time for even advocates to learn the different appearances of these decisions in the documents. When decisions had been made by judges on clients' appeals, this would be communicated to the advocate, who would bear the responsibility of passing this information to the client. Ultimately, this meant that not only did advocates shoulder responsibility for helping clients with their preparations and appeals, but also with translating the decisions of others.

As we wound along the country roads in Jasmine's sedan, Maddie, who had volunteered the entire summer with RAICES' Karnes team, tried to reassure me yet still empathized with the disappointment I expressed at having potentially underprepared the mother who was now in appeals for her interview. "It's so hard when we've exhausted all of our resources and know that they're just going to get deported," she said, turning back to face us from her passenger seat. "It's tough to have to tell them that there are no more options." In that moment, I had not yet realized that advocates were also responsible for communicating such 'bad news' to clients. Such things are, of course, to be expected in legal relationships. Yet, in these settings, where advocates, legal expert or not, were already heavily burdened with the many forms of care they provided to detainees, such a responsibility seemed like a particularly painful aspect of the work expected of them. Amidst everything, they are left responsible to explain how things still go wrong despite all their efforts. The degree to which this was experienced as painful for advocates differentiated project staff from more transient advocates.

As is clear with how project staff are made responsible for communicating important case decisions to detainees, detainees are dependent upon advocates for much, from legal advocacy to interpretation to using their slight leverages of power to correct more serious injustices. This corresponds to the ‘burdens of care’ which “families and communities must shoulder in the context of poverty and institutional neglect,” (Garcia 2010:10; Biehl 2005). In many different configurations, advocates are burdened with the care of detainees as a result of the dependencies created by deep institutional neglect. Malkki (2015) considers an alternative way of conceptualizing dependent relations, or ‘immanent dependencies’, referring back to Povinelli’s (2006) ‘stranger socialities’. “There are forms of dependency and intimacy that we lose track of too easily if we try to reduce to a family-intimacy-versus-individual-autonomy binary scheme...The voluntary friends of the Friendship Service, like the fleeting stranger socialities of the yarn shop, might be understood neither as faux friendships nor as compensations for an inexplicably absent family but instead as fragile forms of real intimacy in the midst of a wider environment of abject loneliness and need,” (153). While Malkki is focused on relations amongst volunteers, there is applicability to the case of advocates’ experiences of intimacy with detained clients.

While advocates frequently had the opportunity to share positive news with their clients, often as a result of, among other things, their own dedicated labor, having to bear the burden of communicating negative news resonated with advocates on a more deeply intimate level. Not only was it extremely painful, it often made them question their own practice, their abilities to help, even their existence in spaces in which many were, undeniably, non-experts. Staff experiences and sentiments made clear that intimacy involves both “positively valued feelings like affection but also problematic feelings like fear and disgust” (Wilson 2012: 32). Staff members would talk about how the work had never made them feel more important, more useful, and more meaningful in their lives. They would, however, sometimes in the next breath, talk about how frustrated, how

hamstrung, how angry they felt in the work. They spoke of the joys and the wounds that they carried with them. Their roles would be defined by these contrasts. Their intimate awareness of these spaces—both the joys and the indignities—created unique worlds in which they alone resided.

Conclusions

There is much to be said about intimacy in these centers; far more than what the space of a single chapter in this dissertation would allow. Before concluding with a summary of the different forms in which intimacy was expressed and experienced in this chapter, however, I will offer two final vignettes.

Audrey, an immigration attorney from Phoenix, and Mary, a Puerto Rican mother originally from the east coast, were strangers. Neighbors, in Arizona, but still strangers. That was until one day, long before I met them together in Dilley, when Mary unexpectedly showed up on Audrey's doorstep. Audrey had just given birth to her first child and after bringing the baby home, could not get her to nurse. The baby would cry and cry. Eventually Audrey went back to the hospital only to be told to, instead, give her formula. She returned home, exhausted, and still could not get her to nurse. Mary, her neighbor, had heard the baby crying from her own home nearby. It was clear that Audrey was struggling, so Mary walked over to Audrey's house and introduced herself. Audrey explained what she was going through, with her baby refusing to eat, and Mary, who clearly wasn't the shy type, walked in and told her: 'Alright, we're going to do this. It's going to happen.' Mary laughs as the story is recounted. As Audrey tells it, Mary sat Audrey down in a chair, swaddled her baby in a certain "magical" way, and the child latched onto her breast immediately. Audrey, of course, immediately fell asleep, followed shortly by her baby.

They told me this story as we shared a table in one of the private rooms in Dilley's visitation trailer, eating our lunches. Mary had invited me to join them. Because Audrey was still nursing,

though she was away from her child while volunteering for the project, she needed a private space to use her breast pump. The three of us sat in the space eating our Subway sandwiches, Audrey's pump machine whirring loudly. They talked about how after that brief meeting, they became more acquainted with one another as Mary volunteered to serve as an interpreter for Audrey's asylum clients. Mary was invited by Audrey to join her on her volunteer trip to Dilley, and she happily accepted.

Later in the day, a staff member had asked if I would not mind facilitating an intake paperwork session with a group of indigenous women from Guatemala who spoke only *Mam*. As mentioned already, for this, the team would use, or attempt to find, remote interpreters to facilitate conversations with individuals who spoke more rarely spoken languages. Often, these women and their children were quite isolated. While many indigenous women would cycle in and out through the facility, it was less common for groups who all spoke the same language to be moving throughout the processes at the same time. In many cases, this meant that women might have only their children to properly speak with. This day, this was not the case. The women in this group did not previously know one another but had all happened to be in the same stage of the process at the same time. Because USCIS had yet to find any *Mam* interpreters to use during the fear interview, and thus were releasing these families without needing an interview, I essentially needed to collect basic information from them, for the completions of their intake forms, and communicate to them that they weren't going to be having an interview. I relished these opportunities to share such good news with clients, as all advocates did. To see the relief and excitement flash across their faces was something deeply touching to witness, a kind of salve for all the other, sadder exchanges. As they arrived in the trailer, I ushered them into the private room where the interpreter—who spoke Spanish and *Mam*—was waiting on the phone's speaker. Because he was difficult to hear, the five of us sat huddled closely together around the phone on the desk while each of their young children

played behind us. One mother held her sleeping baby close to her chest. The interpreter began by introducing himself, then asked each of them which city or *municipio* they were from in Guatemala: San Marcos, Antigua, etc. He stopped after a moment, explaining to me that he had asked this because different regions spoke in different dialects, and he wanted to be able to communicate properly with all of them. As I spoke to him in Spanish and he translated, the women grew increasingly comfortable, laughing as the interpreter made little jokes, smiling as they helped one another fill out forms, all while inching closer and closer to one another and me. By the end of the call, our little huddle—me, the women, their children edged around us—and the interpreter nestled between, felt warm and familiar. Even though I was clearly the odd woman out, I had been included in this intimate space.

Murray (2017) contends that “additional attention to empathy in the ethnographic study of care may result not only in illuminating insights for an understanding of various features and practices of care, as it also necessarily involves further understanding of the notions of personhood, relatedness, and modes of sensory engagement present in the catalyzing and demarking of social relations,” (381). These and other intimate moments expressed in this chapter demonstrate the complications and unique contours of empathetic caregiving. For some, such care involved reconsiderations of their own subjective identities and experiences that shaped them. In these ways, they not only experienced intimacy with another person, commonly detainees, but with themselves as well. In certain moments, humor effected intimacy, while in others, the opposite appeared to be the case, sometimes as a result of discomfort. For project staff, and at times, long-term volunteers, intimacy could sometimes resonate as a kind of burden; because they were held so deeply responsible for the care of detainees and volunteers, particularly in a strange place where the borders between ‘enemies’ and ‘allies’ were unclear, staff were intimately familiar with the everyday life of the facility in ways that inflicted upon them a unique sort of trauma.

Family detention was not just one world; the facilities that comprised this form of incarceration of asylum-seekers were made up of many worlds. The facilities, of course, are complex spaces, and, as this dissertation has illustrated, are made up of a variety of often competing interests. There are the worlds of ICE, USCIS, and the private corporate owners, to start. One of the inner worlds, however, that often goes unrecognized is that which is created, through empathetic intimacies, by the work of the legal advocates, both staff and volunteers, and just as they effect intimacy, they are also affected by it. The following chapter approaches what those affectations mean as advocates, like detainees, leave family detention.

Citations

- Berlant, Lauren (ed.). "Intimacy: a special issue". *Critical Inquiry*, 24, 281-288, 1998.
- Biehl, João Guilherme. *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkeley: U of California, 2005.
- Boris, Eileen and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (eds). *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*. Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Fassin, Didier. "Noli Me Tangere: The Moral Untouchability of Humanitarianism". In *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism Between Ethics and Politics*, eds. Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2011.
- Garcia, Angela. *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande*. University of California Press, 2010.
- Goldstein, Donna. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. University of California Press, 2013.
- Hollan, Douglas. "Being There: On the Imaginative Aspects of Understanding Others and Being Understood." *Ethos* 36 (4): 475–89, 2008.
- Kirmayer, Laurence J. "Empathy and Alterity in Cultural Psychiatry." *Ethos* 36 (4): 457–74, 2008.
- Malkki, Liisa. *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Mendelsohn, R. "Intimacy in Psychoanalysis". In *Intimacy* (eds) M. Fisher & G. Stricker, 39–51. New York: Springer, 1982.
- Mountz, Alison. *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border*. University of Minnesota

- Press, 2010.
- Murray, Marjorie et al. "Care and Relatedness Among Rural Mapuche Women: Issues of Carino and Empathy." *Ethos* 45 (3): 367-385, 2017.
- Olund, Eric and Natalie Oswin. "Governing Intimacy". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28: 60-67, 2010.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Robinson, Fiona. *The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security*. Temple University Press, 2011.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. University of California Press, 1993.
- Sehlikoglu, Sertaç and Aslı Zengin. "Introduction: Why Revisit Intimacy?" *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33 (2), Autumn: 20-25, 2015.
- Stoler Ann. "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination". *Cultural Anthropology* 23(2): 191–219, 2008.
- Stoler Ann. *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Duke University Press: Durham, NC, 2006.
- Throop, Jason C. "On the Varieties of Empathic Experience: Tactility, Mental Opacity, and Pain in Yap." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 26 (3): 408–30, 2012.
- Wilson, Ara. "Intimacy: A Useful Category of Transnational Analysis". In *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time* (eds) G. Pratt & V. Rosner, 31–56. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Zelizer, Viviana. "Caring Everywhere". In *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, eds. Eileen Boris & Rhacel Salazar Parrenas. Stanford University Press, 2010.

Chapter 6: *La Salida*



Image 24: The end of author's first week volunteering in 2015, in front of the Dilley facility. Photo credit: Maddie

It was Friday, August 28, 2015, around 6pm, and I was walking out of the facility in Dilley, the end of the first week I had ever spent in a detention center, working as a legal advocate. It had simultaneously felt like one of the longest weeks of my life and one of the shortest; my body was weary and drained, but it was somehow still buzzing with energy, like some long-distance runner mid-marathon. I was minutes away from driving away from this place with two released clients who I had never met. Earlier that afternoon, as I sat at a computer in the pro bono office, still trying to figure out how to properly name the documents I had just uploaded, Matt, a project staff member, rushed in. “Can anyone take a family to San Antonio tonight?” he asked loudly and happily. A mother and her daughter had received their release papers, and while they had acquired bus tickets to take them to their new home, they had not the means to get from Dilley to the bus station in the city. Legal advocates frequently helped arrange

travel for detainees as they left the remote detention center, sometimes driving them themselves to new places and other times offering to board them in their local homes while they awaited their trips. I had already planned to drive to Austin to stay with my sister that night, to avoid paying for yet another night in the overpriced hotel, and had also already offered a ride to San Antonio to Maddie, another weekly volunteer, so I volunteered to take them. Maddie was the first advocate I met when I started my research in Dilley in 2015. Over that summer, I had made the contact with folks from the project and was invited to volunteer for a week. Because I knew I would have to stay in a motel for a week and did not have much money, I reached out to the other volunteers to see if any would be interested in sharing a room. Maddie was the one who responded.

Maddie was an impressive individual, even somewhat intimidating. She was in her mid-twenties when we met and already had a notable resume. She was working in a legal fellowship after having finished her undergraduate studies at a prestigious university, had interned with the UN, and was fluent in multiple languages, including Arabic. She was a former professional figure skater and was looking forward to possibly pursuing a law degree. She latched onto the work in Dilley smoothly and, by my account, very swiftly. While I initially struggled to find my way around the complex case management system the project used to keep track of client data, Maddie moved throughout different aspects of the work as if she had been doing it for weeks, speaking to clients one minute about their cases and uploading intake documents to the system the next.

I stood beside my rental sedan as the beige dust swirled up from the rocky, unpaved parking lot, licking the edges of the heels I had borrowed from my sister the weekend before. I faced the metal door of the initial security building, waiting for it to swing open. I saw them: a mother and her daughter of 7 years old walk out with plastic bags full of clothes, shoes, their belongings that were

confiscated upon entering this facility. They were accompanied by Maddie and together, the four of us, virtual strangers to each other, would drive to San Antonio. On the way out of town, I stopped to gas up. As I latched and locked the pump, I walked inside to look for some snacks. Esther, the mother, and Tatiana, her daughter, were not given any food as they left, only a few bottles of water, so I hoped to find them something else to eat. I quickly grabbed a few fried pies and some icy jelly pastries made by the local bakery, Mabely's, and a couple more bottles of water. On the drive, Tatiana snacked on the pastries while Esther, Maddie, and I chatted about Esther's hometown of San Marcos, Guatemala. Tatiana was quiet but smiled through her snacking. Though it was early evening, Texas' omnipresent sun was still beaming on the horizon. I reached for the plastic neon-green sunglasses I had gotten for free at the Austin Bat Fest the weekend prior and realized that I had been given an extra pair. I grabbed them and offered them to Tatiana. She seemed incredulous at first, and after I explained that I did not need them, that I already had a pair, she tentatively took them and placed them on her lap, smiling. Esther thanked me.

Esther and Tatiana were to leave for their trip to North Carolina the following morning, and so we were meant to take them to what advocates referred to as the "Mennonite House", a kind of shelter for migrants that the legal projects worked with in helping released detainees in transition. It was a large house situated in the laid-back, artistic King William district of the city. As soon as we drove up, we could see a few kids and adults playing basketball at the side of the house, and a woman walked out of the back door to greet us; she was expecting us. The four of us followed her in through the back to the kitchen, where we were flooded with many sights and sounds. The house was full of people, sitting and talking in different rooms, laughing and eating. There were pots cooking on the broad stove, and the comforting, earthy smell of rice and beans filled the room. Kids ran all around us, in and out of the back door. Not too many people seem to take notice of us; I imagined that were used to seeing many people move throughout the space, usually strangers. After

making sure they were situated, Maddie and I began to say our goodbyes to Esther and Tatiana. Esther embraced Maddie, and I knelt down to tell Tatiana goodbye. She quickly wrapped her small arm around my neck and squeezed me close, holding onto me more tightly and for longer than I would have ever expected. I was surprised. She had barely said a word to me before this, and even now, she did not say a word and neither did I. Tears welled in my eyes as if the strength of her embrace had squeezed them out, and I felt the thump in my throat that would come to be a constant companion throughout fieldwork. She eventually let go, we left, and after dropping Maddie off at her hotel, I made my way to Austin late into the evening. Sailing through the small towns and farmland that connect the two cities, awash in the glow of 24-hour gas stations and lustrous starlight, I realized that *I* could not let go of that hug. I still have not.

So ended my first week volunteering in family detention. Almost exactly two years later, I was leaving again. This time, it was at the end of a long, hard, continuous year of fieldwork with the projects at Dilley and Karnes. I had delayed the end of my time there until it simply could not be delayed any further. I was set to get married in two weeks and needed to travel with my partner to my hometown in North Texas in order to start preparations. I was feeling many things as I left; the most overwhelming sentiment was one of grief. While I was excited to return to my life with my partner—a life beyond the utterly exhausting and constraining ‘bubble’ in which I had existed for my research—I was distraught at the notion of leaving my volunteer role with these projects, my friends and colleagues, and, importantly, all of the women and children who were still detained and those who were still to come that I would never meet. The loss felt great, and the full effects of the vicarious or secondary trauma I had experienced after such a length of time in the work were yet to be understood. At the time, all I knew was that I was leaving, and it hurt. I was confused about why it hurt it so much.

This chapter does not really answer the question of why it hurts to leave this work and these detention facilities. What it does, rather, is simply explore that experience for legal advocates and its accompanying sentiments, as all previous chapters have attempted to do. The focus of this chapter is *la salida*. *La salida* was the term used in discussions, particularly in the ‘release *charla*’ presentations, with detainees concerning, generally, their exit from the detention center. As mentioned in previous chapters, in this interactive presentation, advocates would address detainees’ questions about how they would be able to leave, after receiving their positive interview decisions, explaining the differences between leaving via parole (*por palabra*), bond (*la fianza*), or with an ankle monitoring device (*la grillete*). In the release *charla*, advocates would explain much of what would come next in the progression of their legal case, once they exited the facility, what they were expected by law to do and what their rights as an asylum-seeker were. As previous chapters demonstrated, this was often a joyous, humorous moment in the centers. The women and children expressed relief and joy that they were soon to leave their confinements, most to move on to greater comfort and security with family and friends. This, of course, was not the case for those who left under more unfortunate circumstances, being deported directly from the facility or transferred to other detention centers. Nonetheless, the vast majority of detainees were released to continue their cases and thus, *la salida* carried it with these more positive connotations.

In most ways, this chapter differs from the others in that it does not exactly constitute a part of the work. Nonetheless, this chapter focuses on an important moment in the story of these advocates: the leaving. For the advocates, as this chapter will show, *la salida* was tinged with different emotions resulting from their unique experiences of leaving, demonstrating the ways in which “emotion[s] temporally [extend] beyond the immediacy of the scene, [revealing] a post hoc element to the emotional landscape of volunteer advocacy,” (Thornton and Novak 2010: 444). In this case, *la salida* is from the work that they do—rather, as I have argued, the care that they

provide—in these facilities. This chapter explores how advocates left, why they left in the ways that they did, and, consequently, what leaving meant to them. I examine how they were haunted by their experiences and the different shapes these hauntings took.

I also explore what came next for advocates once they left: what they weren't expecting; how their experience of leaving hurt them or otherwise affected them; and what they carried from the experience, as well as what they chose to leave. I examine the challenges advocates faced in communicating their experiences to others beyond the world of family detention, the different ways in which they thought about sharing this experience with others to begin with, and how my role as an ethnographer afforded an unexpected form of comfort to some. Ultimately, this chapter engages with the interplay between the material and the immaterial, between the experience and the memory of *la salida*, and how crossing the threshold of family detention again, in order to leave it, leaves sometimes imperceptible imprints upon advocates, shaping what they do with what they've seen, heard, and felt: in sum, the resonant effects of legal care work.

Migrant, or 'administrative', detention, of course, meets the definition of a liminal space in many ways. These facilities are paradoxical spaces, lying at the "conceptual and material crossroads between the domestic and foreign, the intimate and geopolitical, the detention center and the prison," (Mountz et al. 2012: 536). Family detention, or so-called residential, centers are especially so, in that their status not only as carceral spaces but also even detention facilities is contested. As such, these spaces have an even deeper paradoxical relationship with intimacy, as administrators and authoritative figures struggle to distance the facilities from punitive others. Detainees and advocates experience and respond to the repercussions of these forms of conflicted identifications and liminality while within these spaces. This position of liminality for detainees is quickly and easily recognized; in detention, they await determinations on their future, whether they will be given the opportunity to pursue legal status. Yet, what I

have attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapters are the ways in which positions of liminality extend to legal advocates as well, in their work and roles within these spaces. What they do—the parameters afforded their care and the ways in which they resist—and how they are perceived by other actors—as friends, foes, even family: these things are fluid, existing in-between rather than firmly settled in one position.

As the detained parents and children leave these facilities, they shift out of the liminal space of the detention center and yet, arguably, move into a new sort of liminal position as an asylum-seeker who has not yet been awarded permanent status. Legal advocates cross this same literal threshold as they leave their work at the center, and while their privilege as individuals with legal status remains unchanged, the act of leaving has its own repercussions for them. This chapter examines not only what happens as they leave and how they come to interpret this, but also how crossing the family detention threshold positions them within new, sometimes haunting, states of liminality as well.

Leaving the Bubble

“I hope I never see you again,” Matt said to me with a slight laugh, towards the end of our call. I was surprised to hear it, but he explained. “That’s something I would say to my clients at the end of their cases,” he said, “and that’s kind of how I think about Dilley.” Matt had been a public defender for 25 years and was now retired, exploring what might come next with this newfound time. He had come to volunteer with his wife, Billie, and a friend of theirs, Tina. As a volunteer in Dilley, Matt drew many parallels with his previous work. “It’s like what I used to do every day, just on steroids,” he said. “The thinking on your feet, the non-stop action. Talking to people about their situations and stories and trying to shape those things, with integrity, to meet certain legal standards or requirements. It was like when I would prep people for court. I would go to the jail with 20 folders of different cases and would have to

prep all those people for court. But it's also very much a short game; we're just trying to get people through the first step of the process. In that sense, it's like trying to get someone out of jail on bail. These are things I'm familiar with."

Matt's comments at the end of our long chat about never wanting to see me again was the first of many similar remarks, though most would qualify it with a comment about wanting to meet me again somewhere other than those facilities. Advocates would frequently express conflicted desires to return to Dilley or Karnes, to be there to help and support the detainees and legal projects, as well as to learn tomorrow of the facilities' closure. This speaks to one of the central conflicts that resonated in advocates' minds as they left: despite their desires and the projects' legal efforts, these centers remained resolutely open for business. Thus, they were walking away from incarcerated people who desperately needed their help. This, as previous chapters have discussed, of course, was the model designed to keep the volunteer efforts of these project afloat. The few staff would remain on for limited, contracted periods of time—so as to avoid 'burnout', among other traumatic effects—and volunteers would primarily offer their services on a limited rotational basis. By having volunteers offer such small amounts of time, it would be easier to guarantee continuous involvement.

Matt understood, or rather had trained himself to believe, that moving on or letting go was an important part of work like this. "As a public defender," he said, "you need to develop a very short-term memory, because someone else needs your help. That mode of thought really stays with you. You have to let go of the stories. And if you experience a big defeat, you can't dwell on it. This is the public defender mentality." Some advocates that I encountered had embodied this way of thinking and being in their work, particularly those who had similar career experiences as Matt. Experienced immigration lawyers, especially, seemed accustomed to

this. Most others, though, struggled with this idea of ‘letting go’, for a number of different reasons.

On a Wednesday evening, I sat in the small living room of one of the project staff members’ apartments in Dilley. That night was unlike most others, in that it was one of the very few times in which I observed staff members dedicating their time to discussing their own experiences of secondary trauma. Nearly the entire time I did fieldwork, the mention of secondary or vicarious trauma was reserved for temporary, particularly weekly, volunteers as part of their preparatory training. One of the elements of this involved project staff asking volunteers to have listened to a podcast about secondary trauma before arriving in Dilley, which, in my conversations with volunteers, very rarely occurred. It appeared that this was in part due to the fact that volunteers weren’t expecting to have a traumatic experience of their own, but rather potentially simply observe or listen to others’ trauma (though the degree of the trauma they would observe and listen to was equally surprising for them). This, of course, as my dissertation suggests, is not the case. Advocates, both project staff and volunteers, were imbricated in the experience of trauma through detention and in-detention asylum processes. For staff, as they would tell me and as I would observe, this experience of trauma was particularly pronounced, only in part due to the fact of their extended stay within such an environment. Staff’s intimacies with family detention, facility administrators, and associated legal processes were greater and undeniably more impactful than those of individuals like weekly volunteers who passed through more quickly. I myself, as an ethnographic participant-observer, felt caught between two experiences, in many ways, but also experienced the effects of secondary trauma as a result of my long-term engagement with these spaces and in this work.

The informal meeting that Wednesday night was attended by staff of the project, myself, and a remotely-televised psychologist who had offered her services to help staff respond to the trauma they were undeniably experiencing in their work. Staff member Ali shared that one of the difficulties she found was with how to cope with the idea that the life that she was able to live existed, essentially, in the same reality as that of the clients with whom she worked. “There’s the world that these women and children exist in, and then there’s this other world that I get to exist in, and go back to, and my family gets to live in,” she explained. “I can’t reconcile with the fact that these two divergent worlds exist simultaneously.” Ali, and some others who came from markedly different backgrounds from those of the detainees, would choose to describe not only family detention in this way, but also the disparity between the detainees’ life experiences and their own, as different worlds. Some staff, however, had had experiences similar to their clients, having been undocumented Americans previously or had intimate family experiences with similar legal processes, and yet even they agreed to an extent with Ali’s sentiments.

As we sat in the apartment, encircling the TV screen displaying the zoomed-in face of the psychologist, she suggested to Ali, and to others who felt this way, that perhaps they try not to reconcile those two worlds, but rather to just let them be discrete. While you are in the ‘bubble’ that is Dilley, she explained, let that simply be your life. By ‘bubble’, she and others who used this term meant that the world of these family facilities and the associated work of legal advocacy was so cut off, both spatially, as they were not only remotely-located but also working in a difficult to access carceral space, and in terms of the uniqueness of the work itself, from others. It felt isolating for most, as if trapped within a bubble. Staff would especially reference this sentiment of feeling disconnected when they would struggle to get proper support from the funding organizations of the project. Staff member Maggie immediately

connected with this idea, arguing that she agreed wholeheartedly. She had put all her other relationships outside of this bubble on hold, she said. This, meaning family detention legal advocacy, was plainly who she *was* right now. There was no identity and there were no more important commitments beyond this. Not all staff shared this perspective or desire. Some had very serious relationships or partnerships that they had to try to maintain long-distance while they did this work, which more often than not, seemed to demand a complete, unyielding dedication. Some staff truly struggled with the idea of keeping these worlds separate, and for certain individuals, this was made most disconcerting when it came time to leave the bubble.

“I am terrified of leaving,” Ali said as we all sat in her apartment, discussing the effects of and ways of coping with vicarious trauma. “I am terrified of returning back to the life I was living before all of this.” At the time, I did not understand why she had said this. What was she terrified of? I wondered. Later, I would come to understand the psychological grip this work and these spaces held on staff and others who had spent longer periods of time in their roles, especially. Even though Ali and I became close friends during her time in Dilley, and she was supportive of my research, I would not be able to settle on an interview time and date with her for months afterward. It was surprising, confusing for someone who had so adamantly wanted to participate in my project. We would schedule tentatively, then reschedule, then there would be long gaps where I would not hear from her. I knew that she was hesitant to talk to me, to revisit her time in Dilley, but I was not prepared for such resistance. Eventually we did our interview, as I sat in my car in the facility’s parking lot before running back in to continue working with clients.

Leaving the bubble itself seemed to have this kind of strange emotional impact on many advocates, for staff and long-term volunteers who had stayed on for months as well as short-term volunteers who had only remained for a week or two. This manifested differently in

different persons and came with separate interpretations as well. Implicit in many advocates' comments, and explicitly stated in some, was a sense of guilt for leaving, despite the awareness that their time in this work was intended to be temporary. Staff were often encouraged to stay on past their contract's limitations, as it was apparently difficult to find adequate replacements and then, of course, the existing staff team would have to wait as a new team member learned the myriad 'ropes' of the work. Volunteers, of course, remained for shorter periods. Advocates were well-aware of this structure before going there, and yet, for many this anxiety around leaving manifested as a kind of guilt that they were 'abandoning' those in need. The very structure of the work affected this, as volunteers rarely got to see a client's entire case work its way through to the end. They usually left before knowing the outcome of a case or seeing their client released. Instead, they would meet clients, work with them on a particular stage of the process, then leave before they were completed. Many times, they wouldn't have the opportunity say goodbye to those they worked with, which for many, was a kind of upsetting effect of the kind of carceral environment which intentionally limited interactions between those imprisoned and 'visitors', as advocates were. In this and other ways, in their departure, advocates often described unresolved feelings. For even some weekly volunteers, the initial act of leaving was itself traumatic.

The experience that June had with a particular case she had been asked to work on with another volunteer—her partner, Francisco, a policy specialist from Mexico—ultimately led to her early departure from the facility on a Friday afternoon. June was a weekly volunteer and came to Dilley with a wealth of international refugee work experience. That day had already been difficult, one full of preps and painful stories, but what would be the last encounter was too hard for her to endure any more. It was a typical bad situation that this woman she and her partner were working with had fled from, but then, it took an even worse turn. As it turned out, six days prior to this

woman's arrival in Dilley, her husband and two children had been kidnapped while in route to the border through Mexico, which wasn't an uncommon experience, but she and her one child had made it to Texas, she still had no idea where this family was. She let June and Francisco know about this, asking if they could help her in any way. As previous chapters have discussed, these sorts of requests for support not necessarily related to the primary purpose of their asylum preps were common in advocates' interactions. Relatively unprepared for the diverse set of issues they could encounter with these requests, advocates would have to navigate these terrains quickly and frequently collaboratively. Together, they made calls to the Mexican embassy, through Francisco's previous contacts, then to the Honduran embassy, as they were Honduran. Francisco even called his sister in Mexico to try and get some information that could help.

Through their digging and calling, they discovered the whereabouts of the husband and one of their children, but their teenage daughter was still missing. They learned, together in the small room in Dilley, that the gang that had kidnapped her daughter had made their intentions clear to the father that she was either to be a 'gang girlfriend', a common threat made against teen and pre-teen girls who ended up at Dilley or Karnes, or they were to pay a ransom for her return. All this information came to them, including the mother, as they placed these calls. "I had just read something earlier that day, when I was on my lunch break," June says. "It was an article about this girl being made into a sex slave while travelling through that very area that we were all talking about with this mother. And then this happened. You know, all the others that I had prepped that day had been talking about things had happened to them in the past. Listening to and watching someone who is finding out, at that very moment, that this is what's happening to their family...that's when it became too real for me. That's why I had to leave early, after that conversation. All the other women and stories I encountered, I wanted to remember them, because I work in policy now, and hearing these stories firsthand really makes you see the effects of policy in a different way. But what was

happening to this woman that day...I wanted to forget it. I wanted to forget that story. So I just left. I didn't really say goodbye to anyone that I was working with. I needed to leave."

While they were passionate about the work and were ultimately incredibly confident that they had made the right choice to get involved in these projects, some, like June, wanted to forget about experiences that had left them feeling uncomfortable or even traumatized. Leaving, for her, in this way, was a kind of break; it was a break with the work and with the retention of certain experiences. Many others wanted desperately to remember what they had encountered in these places, even those experiences that involved trauma, and this was particularly so for those who worked in immigration or asylum law.

Regardless of how advocates left or what they eventually chose to do with those memories, once they did leave, many experienced familiar repercussions from the kind of work that often requires them to repress their own emotional states in order to continue serving others. These responses were surprising for many, manifesting similarly, and most poignantly, in moments in which advocates seemed to find themselves in new liminal spaces.

Crying at the Crossroads

"I was looking at all of these people going about their daily lives, being free to do their shit, and I had this moment where I thought, 'I might cry on this train,'" Madison tells me. "I just kept looking at all these people, thinking that they're totally oblivious to what's happening out there." Madison was a graduate student just beginning her tenure in Chicago when she took a week off to come to Dilley. She, like many others, described being suddenly overcome with emotions as they left or were returning home. Also, as many others did, she described this emotional reaction as if stepping out of one seemingly discrete world and into another. As she did so, she happened to be in a physical space which reinforced a sense of in-betweenness, and this was not an uncommon experience for advocates.

After sharing a portion of what is now this section at an academic conference—which I titled “Crying at the Airport”—an audience member suggested I listen to a particular episode of the podcast *This American Life*. In the episode, there is an ‘act’ called “Contrails of My Tears” which Ira Glass, the host, opens. “When you’re on an airplane,” he says, “you’re definitely stuck in the middle, between the place that you left, and the place that you are going,” (“Stuck” 2015). The act goes on to be a humorous discussion of how the narrator, Brett Martin, and, as it turns out, many others, cry while watching movies, shows, even commercials on their flights that would, otherwise, not make those viewers cry. The narrator considers why airplanes seem to have this affect that other modes of travel or other mobile contexts, in general, do not. In the end, after somewhat dismissing arguments that might suggest reasons like a fear of flying, exhaustion, or dehydration, he contends: “Something else happens up there, in that weird hanging state between where you’re going and where you’ve left, where there’s no phone calls to take, nowhere to go, nothing to do...and some strange overhead compartment of the heart opens up, your critical judgment grabs its flotation seat cushion, and follows the lighted pathway to the big yellow slide.” Putting the excessively cheesy analogies aside, there does seem to be some correlation between the emotional responses advocates I spoke with had while travelling back to their homes and this episode’s implications around the significance of other seemingly disconnected, liminal spaces.

Now back at home, Carolyn, an immigration attorney who had volunteered the week of the presidential election, explains how this played out for her. “I didn't even necessarily realize what I was going to be feeling, you know...I got to the airport on Friday night and just started sobbing. I think it was a combination of everything I saw all week and just working these long hours and seeing what these women had to go through. But it was also about, of course, the election and what that meant and whether or not we could continue to offer asylum to people coming to border.” Another volunteer attorney from Colorado, Tara, expressed her interpretation of her unexpected emotional

response upon leaving as akin to, like Carolyn, a kind of ‘stockpiling’ (Thornton and Novak 2010) of emotions during the work: “I think that taking in all that trauma so quickly and not having any time to process it, all I can figure out is that as soon as I got out of there, it all came pouring out of me...I cried for days. I couldn't even talk about it...I just...was a mess. And I feel like...it's the only way that I can make sense of why I was so emotional when I came back. It's just taking it in, taking it in, taking it in, don't cry, don't process it, just move on to the next one, keep going, keep going, hear another traumatic story and then crash out at night, then wake up, do it again, and then finally just...Woah. As soon as I was driving away, just tears, you know? It all came out after.”

Paula, a legal assistant originally from El Salvador, found herself in similar circumstances. “It hit me sooner than I thought,” she explains, “when I was at the airport. I felt kind of weird, like I was really disconnected from everything and everyone, being at the airport. Then I got on the plane and there were these women who were just being so obnoxious. They were just being so loud and so disrespectful, and I just...I couldn't deal with it. I wanted to cry so bad, because I felt like I needed to go back to Dilley. I was thinking ‘I can't leave, there's so much more stuff to do’, and it was really hard for me to kind of let go a little bit. I felt like...like I had been in a place where nobody would really understand what I'd been through.”

For each of these advocates, feelings of discomfort and sadness manifested immediately. For them, crying or the desire to cry seemingly just happened, without a clear connection to the exact impetus, though they all considered different reasons. A common refrain in my interviews was that volunteers often tried to stifle emotional reactions, such as crying, in their work with the detainees. As previous chapters have noted, many considered this to be either an act of self-preservation or, more commonly, an act in support of their client. They saw themselves as doing a ‘disservice’ to those who needed both their emotional and professional support; something they considered less possible were they to allow themselves to cry alongside their clients. Much of this speaks to the ways

in which volunteer advocates experienced ‘post hoc emotions’ (Thornton and Novak 2010) as they left work, having previously denied themselves the opportunity to express their own emotions in the sorts of heightened exchanges common in the work. And yet, because of the sudden, unexpected nature of these emotional reactions, when many found themselves crying on the drive to the airport, sitting in terminals or stations, or even on the plane, it was seemingly an affect of estrangement from themselves. This was particularly pronounced for Paula, as she described feeling “disconnected” and that others wouldn’t understand “what she had been through”. Each of these affects, differently articulated but existing along the same continuum, were instigated by the act of leaving: leaving those for whom they still wished to provide care and abandoning a self-invoked practice of emotional restraint. It was upon crossing the threshold that the repercussions of the work began to take new forms. For some, this was interpreted as sort of emotional displacement, while others found themselves being pursued, in a sense, by what they imagined to have left behind.

Haunting

In *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History* by Linda Rabben (2016), a refugee formerly detained in Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre, England, speaks of their recollections of detention: “...when I left detention, Yarl’s Wood followed me to Manchester. Sometimes I feel like I’m in a trance, I feel I hear the footsteps of the officers, I hear the banging of the doors and the sound of their keys. Even though I’m out of detention, I’m not really out—I still have those dreams. I wish the politicians could understand what they are doing to women by detaining us like this when we have already been through so much,” (14). Advocates, both legal and medical professionals, have repeatedly made this case to politicians and other incarcerating authorities on a global scale. Refugees are particularly vulnerable to traumatization in detention (von Werthern et al. 2018). They, advocates argue, by the simple nature of their arrival in the receiving country, have experienced trauma, some greatly so. By locking them up, keeping them away from

critical health services, including psychological services, keeping them away from family and friends, and for those in family detention, causing them to have to parent while incarcerated inflicts unnecessary and utterly avoidable repercussions. It is thus unsurprising that refugees, in particular, are haunted by their time in detention.

What this section of the chapter does is demonstrate that this experience of ‘haunting’ is not just isolated to the direct recipients of the harm reproduced in and by detention. Volunteers and staff of these legal projects, as their reflections show here, are themselves haunted, sometimes by the stories clients tell them or especially upsetting cases—experiences not uncommon for aid workers (Malkki 2015)—sometimes by the pressures or immediacies of the work, and sometimes by the simple fact of having left the work and the people, both detainees and other advocates, inside. In this way, then, it is not just the detainees that are haunted by detention, but their advocates as well.

“The anthropologist working in prisons,” Fassin (2016) reminds us, “is affected by what he sees and what he hears, by the suffering and the violence he witnesses, by the individuals who confide in him and the fragments of life they offer him. To take up the neologism proposed by Jacques Derrida [1994], we could say that all ethnography of the carceral world is a hauntology,” (300). I was often struck by the overlap in what I was doing, in my research as an ethnographer, and what legal advocates were doing, and experiencing, in their work. Listening attentively to others, learning to pose generative questions, observing and taking notes on not only detainees’ responses in their intimate conversations but also on the qualities of the interactions and spaces: these were all things that the vast majority of advocates did in their roles on a regular basis. They conducted ‘interviews’—in their ‘preps’—observed the various goings on around them, sometimes for critical care-related ends, and while neither they nor I could truly participate in the experience of detainees, they typically conducted their work with great empathy. Thus, I would argue, Fassin’s contention

about the hauntological repercussive aspects of ethnographic research in carceral spaces could extend to these communities of advocates as well.

June had worked with survivors and refugees in Uganda and Guatemala, among other places, and she made a comment to me one day that, considering her experience, was surprising. “This feels like frontline work in war,” she tells me. “Working with refugees, you hear some really bad stories and then some that aren’t so bad, kinda similar to the different types of stories you encounter in Dilley. In that way, it’s similar. It’s also similar in that this more like humanitarian work, because of the sense of emergency. When I was working in Jordan, at the Syrian border, other aid workers would talk about how they had people coming through in like hordes like this, but in the past. People doing that kind of work would burn out after three months, just ‘cause it was so exhausting and intense.” For June, it was the differences between her prior work with refugees and her experience of Dilley that disturbed her and that, in a sense, haunted her. “This feels different, though, because everything’s different when it’s happening because of war. When there’s a war, eventually the rebels will leave, and those who have fled can go back to some kind of normal life, like the families I worked with in Uganda. War is meant to end, and when it’s over, there can be peace, even if it’s not until the next generation. But this, what we see in Dilley, isn’t the result of war. It’s harder to cope with the problems we see in the women’s stories from Guatemala and El Salvador, because most of these problems are the result just of how their societies are now. This isn’t an event with a beginning and an end. I’ve worked with women in Latin America, but in the context of war, and I’m telling you, these DV [domestic violence] cases were harder than anything I’ve ever had to work on. War, and what happens to people in the context of war...it fits an already existing narrative that we have. But with this kind of violence in Central America, there isn’t a narrative like this. It feels like there’s no hope, no end. It feels very bleak.”

Not all advocates interpreted their experiences in this way, of course, with this same sense of hopelessness—a point I’ll return to in the concluding chapter—but many advocates interpellated what they observed, the stories they listened to, and what they experienced in the work through language that either explicitly or implicitly pointed toward a sense of haunting. In articulating how experiences or stories followed them beyond detention, advocates would speak of nightmares, flashbacks, suddenly feeling awash with memories or stories of trauma. Often these hauntings would be located in their past, sometimes very recent past, experiences in these facilities, while other hauntings intimately involved considerations or concerns for the future, of what may come for their clients, or what Derrida (1994) conceptualized as the ‘arrivant’ (Chiovenda and Chiovenda 2018; Blanco and Preen 2013).

Molly^{xxx} was a volunteer from Oregon who, as an artist, ended up drawing some of the poignant moments she witnessed and individuals she met and worked with. She shared these drawings with me, one of which I have deployed many times in presentations and papers as a result of its thoughtful depiction of a caring exchange between a client’s child and an advocate. “I felt 100 percent certain that I would remember, and occasionally be haunted by, the sorrows of that place,” she explained to me. “But I wanted to make sure I didn't forget the moments where I stood in awe at the compassion, vibrance, and resiliency of the human spirit.” Molly, though quick to note the central figures of ‘resiliency’ and ‘compassion’ that so often punctuated advocates comments in moments like the ‘big table’ meetings after long days of work, also draws attention to the ways in which emotional figures, like sorrow, play an equally important role in their experience of leaving, explicitly using the language of haunting.

Others located their experience in this framework as well, though specifically what remained with them differed. Jo was a business immigration lawyer who worked out of a small firm. The firm did not have the resources to send her and another attorney who was interested to

help with the project when they initially heard about what was happening with family detention. After Trump was elected, though, they opened a ‘Gofundme’ account to support their trip and raised the funds within a day. Jo’s frustration with being unable to overcome the many challenges of helping clients in these facilities became the specter that remained after she left. “I was just so frustrated because I really wanted to help, and I just didn’t have the resources available that I needed to do that. There was such a tremendous amount of women that needed this help, and we just couldn’t really meet that in the way that they deserved. Even while I was there, I had this feeling that this frustration would stay with me, this inability, and kind of haunt me. You know, when you’re actually able to help somebody, you feel like you really did something, but when you can’t, that lingers with you.”

For some advocates, other emotions which were stirred in detention while speaking with clients about their experiences, like fear, followed them in unexpected ways. When Betty and I spoke again outside of detention, she and I had both left Dilley, having returned to our ‘other’ lives. I was back in New York, and she in California. “I’ve had a lot of trouble lately feeling safe in new environments,” she said. After she left Dilley, she went on a brief vacation with her family to Hawai’i. “Even at the hotel in Hawai’i, or walking alone on a street, I didn’t feel safe. Now that I’m home, though, I’m ok.” She talked then about how this feeling of insecurity, a lack of safety was something that she struggled with while she lived and worked in Dilley. “I had a lot of sleepless nights,” she explained. “I would think that MS-13 was out to get me in Dilley, Texas.” She laughed sheepishly. “I have no idea why. I think the work can just become pretty haunting.” Betty also described, despite now feeling safer that she was back home with her family in California, other ways in which Dilley haunted her. “It has been hard to sleep at night, though, here at home, knowing that I’m not there anymore. There are so many women that need help, and with some of the stories I heard there, it’s been hard to come back here and live a normal 19-

year-old life.” Similar to what Paula and Carolyn referenced in their comments about their sudden emotional reactions upon leaving Dilley, Betty’s complete experience of haunting involved a fear of what was to come for those detainees she’d ‘left behind’. They all worried about both the future of those who with whom they worked, clients and advocates, and about the future of those who were still to come seeking asylum. While not explicitly describing these lingering worries as a kind of haunting, they certainly seem to fit the parameters.

Some advocates, as hinted in Betty’s comments, found these hauntings in less predictable, more immaterial realms of existence: in particular, within their dreams. Jaclyn was an undergraduate student from Florida who had previously worked on different refugee aid projects. She was hoping to go to law school after her summer volunteership in Dilley. She and a few other undergraduate students had offered to volunteer the entire summer in Dilley and ended up sharing a small rental apartment in town. After that first week of work, leaving the facility at the end of the day became less a relief and more of a different form of stress. “There were always moments where I felt like I just couldn’t do it anymore,” she explains, “but at one point, it felt like the weight of everything started to be too heavy. The things they [the clients] were talking about every day were things that I had never experienced in my life, and I wasn’t used to hearing about. I would get back to the place we were staying, and I would hear the stories replaying over and over again. I would have nightmares about them. I felt like I was experiencing what they were experiencing because, like, I was trying to empathize with them. When you empathize with someone, you put yourself in their situation, you know? You think, ‘how would I react in their situation?’ Then you picturing those things happening to your own friends and your own family, and that is what kind of messes with your mind. It made me break down and cry sometimes. I just kept picturing what I would do in their situation. It was really emotionally draining.” Jaclyn relates her experience of haunting through nightmares in

which she is playing a central role in the stories of trauma she listened to throughout the work. In her mind, this was a result of a sort of relating empathetically to her clients. In order to better understand them and perhaps to make them feel respected and comfortable in sharing their stories with her, as she helped them prepare for their interviews, she imagined herself, repeatedly, in their positions. This, for her, is what led to her nightmares in which she no longer determined the boundaries of this imaginative work. In her nightmares, she did not control her existence in these narratives, and thus, ironically, they were frighteningly more real.

Jaclyn certainly was not the only advocate afflicted with nightmares about the work. Others did have dreams about living through clients' experiences, details emerging from their conversations. Evan, a volunteer attorney who came to Dilley with a group of thirteen from his law firm was not unfamiliar with trauma-centered conversations. When he was an undergraduate psychology major, he worked for a crisis hotline. "When I did that job," he explains, "I learned that you have to be dispassionate in order to really help them. You can't be overly emotional, and it's really hard to be empathetic, but you can show them that you care." He also was not entirely unfamiliar with family detention, as he had worked on putting together bond requests for detainees in Artesia. Dilley, however, was different. He had not yet worked directly with detained mothers and children as they discussed and honed their asylum claims. "Their stories...they were very upsetting. Some women would talk about being raped while her children were sitting in the same room. One woman I spoke with had to prostitute herself just to have food for her children. It was just impossible to be dispassionate there." Despite Evan's previous work experience and opinions on empathetic positioning towards clients, like Jaclyn, the unexpected trauma of these conversations followed him to unexpected places. "After I would leave, at the end of the day, I would have these dreams about the women. That continued even after I left Dilley and went

home. I would recreate these scenarios from their stories in my dreams, horrible things we had talked about during the day. I was really surprised at how that persisted for so long afterwards.”

Hilary, a first-year undergraduate student at Florida State University, had similar experiences with Jaclyn and Evan. She had offered to volunteer for two weeks, and while she was unsure during the first week of her ability to do the preps independently, in part because of her still growing language abilities, she took on more work as a result of the team’s needs in the second week. “That week got to me more than the first, I’d say,” Hilary tells me, whispering over the phone so as not to wake up her sleeping dormmate, as she was now back at school. “That second week, the team was delegating more to me, so I talked to a lot more people. Everything from that week was more memorable, even though the first week was more emotional. In the second, when I felt emotional, I tried to lock myself in one of the offices to do data entry, to get away from it, but they were just too busy. I knew I had figure out some way to deal with the feelings; they were really getting to me. Once, I was helping another volunteer, this attorney Jim, do this prep, and while he was talking to the mom, I was playing with her four-year-old son in the corner, to distract him. I asked him to draw me something, and he drew a bunch of these little circles, and then more and more circles. I thought they were stars, so I asked him about them. He told me they were bullets. That was upsetting.”

Eventually, as Hilary left, the stories and feelings that she had pushed back in order to continue the work manifested as others did. “At the end of the trip, I started to have these nightmares about the stories. I had them for awhile. I don’t have them anymore, now, but it was difficult to have them so often. I really don’t think there’s a way around having these feelings or these nightmares or whatever. You have to find a way to use what you’ve got to try to fix this problem, to help these women. So, in my opinion, you have to find a way to bury these things.” Yet, again, in attempting to ‘bury’ such experiences, advocates like Hilary and others would instead

find them returning from the dead in spaces, like dreams, where they lacked a kind of narrative control and where their memories, and the memories of others recounted to them, replayed beyond their will. In experiencing these hauntings, advocates realized the different ways in which what they encountered in these spaces could move beyond the walls of the facility, and yet, in moving into new or old spaces—those of old homes or new ones—they simultaneously struggled to communicate the significance of those hauntings to others.

Lost in translation

When advocates leave ‘the field’, they return to their lives at home or begin to forge new paths, changing careers or, for retired staff, taking breaks to reflect, regroup, or simply ‘do nothing for awhile’ following their rather arduous experience. In moving beyond these spaces, advocates re-encounter their communities, their friends, family, acquaintances, and colleagues. To those unfamiliar with this experience, this might not seem to result in any effect worth noting, but it is precisely that unfamiliarity with the goings-on inside the ‘bubble’ that inspired a repeated type of frustrated refrain amongst my interlocutors.

“Everyone who wasn’t there doesn’t get it,” Hilary tells me, with a slight irritation in her voice. “I’ve told my parents and other people all about it, and they just don’t understand. You try talking to people about the terrible things you hear and see there, and all you get is, ‘the world is a sucky place’. I don’t know what I was expecting. I didn’t really want any empathy for me though. It’s not my trauma, it’s theirs, the women. I don’t know...I just can’t brush over the experience.” Betty framed her frustration in another way. “It’s been tough to answer the question I keep getting: ‘oh, how was your summer?’” she said. “A lot of my friends are asking me this, of course, out of love, but it’s hard to answer that in the three-sentence response that I know they’re expecting.”

Advocates generally seemed to be of different minds when it came to talking about the experience with others who had not been there or done this type of work. Some described it as their responsibility to talk about this place as much as possible: the legal work itself, the contexts of the asylum-seekers' situations—i.e. what they were fleeing and what they went through in order to get here—and the qualities of their detention. Those advocates believed that this responsibility was tied to their commitment to change these conditions for the detainees, believing that if U.S. citizens beyond this world, like their friends and family, only knew of what these detainees had been through, the kinds of stories they expressed, and the kinds of conditions they were subject to in detention and in these legal processes, they would 'care' to do something to change it. The common assumption in their comments was that to care—meaning to have an interest in another's well-being—translated to some sort of practical action to change. Some, like Hilary, expressed a desire to talk about these things with others they were close to, though not necessarily out of a sense of responsibility. Certain advocates would express that while they wished to talk about it, they would do so only with those they were close to, as especially for some, the intimacy and trauma they experienced in their encounters made the act of sharing difficult. Still others felt quite uncomfortable talking about the experience, and especially details which involved their client's stories, as they felt it led to a sort of devaluation.

Many advocates I spoke with, regardless of how they felt at any point about sharing this experience after-the-fact, attempted to talk about it with others. They shared a desire to communicate what had happened to them and what was happening to the detainees with others. Many, also, were disappointed by the kinds of responses they received, which they felt were inadequate, inappropriate, or even offensive. This led to a common, shared sentiment that people who had not 'been there', to these facilities, and had not done this sort of work, were essentially

incapable of truly understanding. This also unexpectedly led to another affect, which directly implicated my role as a researcher. I will discuss that further in the next section.

Jody was an attorney that was deeply involved in these projects from the beginning, in Artesia. Though she had not worked as an on-the-ground staff member, she had worked in a leading role with one of the funding organizations of the projects, and as a result, she frequently took trips to Dilley to check in on how things were changing and how the on-the-ground staff team was dealing. She was tall, always sharply dressed, had a wry humor, and spoke very directly. She explained to me how, after all this time having been associated with this work and having witnessed so much, she had come to approach talking out these places with ‘outsiders’. “I’m always very cautious about talking about the experience to others, just because I’m concerned about ‘cheapening’ the women’s stories,” she said. “It’s not cocktail party conversation for me. It’s too painful, and it really feels like a violation to recount the details of individual stories. I mean, I shared some of my experience on the Diane Rehm show once, and I’ve presented about the work to an undergrad class before. I do want others to know that these women have viable claims.”

Jody’s articulation of why she shared at all, and why she felt uncomfortable to share certain details, speaks to the struggle in sharing that many felt. Talking about the experience was not seen as something that should be simply ‘self-serving’ in any way but should point to a larger purpose. Sharing is meant to do something. Otherwise, as Jody opines, it ‘cheapens’ both her experience, as someone who also felt pain or trauma in this work, as well as that of the women and children who have entrusted them with those deeply personal narratives.

Sue, the repeat volunteer attorney from Tennessee, also felt conflicted about sharing the experience with others, especially her more conservative relatives, but certainly fell within the camp that believed doing so was an obligation they needed to fulfill. “I talked about it with a couple of really close friends. My parents live in the Fox ‘spin zone’, so I made a joke with them

about how I met a bunch of ISIS women there. Just to tease them. But then, of course, I explained to them that all of these people have a right to be here. You know, with people who are only tangentially interested in this, it feels like whenever I try to bring it up around them, it's like I'm dwelling on a funeral or something. My family is just like, 'can't you just let this go already?' The experience, for me, becomes so precious that I don't want to share it with you if you can't value it. But then, part of the bargain in going there is that you have to talk about it when you come back home."

In part, Sue's attitude toward sharing the experience and what she witnessed as an obligation of being involved in these projects is constituted by the projects themselves. One aspect of the work that staff do is to encourage advocates to share their experiences, following the same assumption that if people beyond this world were only to know of its injustices, they would be more likely to support campaigns, like those of the legal projects, which aim to have the practice of family detention ended. During the majority of my time in fieldwork, this would be articulated in different ways, from asking volunteers to write blogs or op-eds about the experience to engaging in fundraising or presenting their experiences to other communities, be they university students, law firms, or religious groups. The organizations which funded these projects engaged in many awareness-raising campaigns; the central assumption—being that if others knew about what was happening here, that asylum-seeking families were being treated in these ways, they would care to do something—was clearly important, in their view, to achieving the larger goal of closing these facilities. At the final Big Table meeting, which took place on Thursday evenings, staff of the project would use a portion of the time to discuss these various engagements, actively encouraging volunteers to spread awareness, encourage others to get involved in the volunteer work, and to remain engaged with these projects 'off-the-ground', which often implied remote volunteer work, like interpreting or entering data.

What Sue's comments about attempting to discuss this work and these places with her family demonstrate, however, is that what is a very personal, sensitive, and emotionally-tinged experience for advocates is not only inherently difficult to communicate to others who have not been through this kind of experience, but also that they could receive kinds of feedback that would seemingly exacerbate the pain they felt. Rebecca, an immigration lawyer in Texas, affirmed these frustrations with the kinds of opinions she would hear from those unfamiliar with these spaces and their inhabitants: "It's really hard to bite my tongue when I heard the sort of rhetoric out there, on the 'outside', from people who don't know anything about these detainees or what they're going through."

Back on that Wednesday evening when all of the staff had gathered in an apartment in Dilley to discuss how to deal with secondary trauma from the work, the conversation turned towards what it felt like to talk about this world to others beyond the bubble. "So, I went home to Kansas City, just for a weekend, for a friend's wedding," Carlos started. At the wedding, friends kept coming up to him, asking him questions about what he was doing in Dilley, what it was like being there. "I couldn't talk about," he said. "I couldn't enjoy myself when I was there. I felt like I was outside of it all, and I couldn't get into it. I was just blank." Others in the room connected with his sentiments, reiterating that reconnecting with modes of being outside of Dilley was difficult. Many suggested that what was really hard was talking to others about it. Many times, they felt like people they spoke with simply did not care about what was happening to these women and children, and that apparent lack of care bothered them to an unshakeable degree. Many also expressed how others simply did not understand what they had been through or what these detainees were going through, and that they, the advocates, did not desire to spend their time trying to explain it to them. "If people who I know are conservative or whatever, I don't want to have to listen to their bullshit opinions or non-care for these

people,” Carlos argued. Oleana agreed. “I don’t want to listen to why some people don’t care about these women or have to explain why I care so much,” she said.

For still others, their frustration was not necessarily a result of others’ lack of care, but rather concerned their own desire not to place the burdens of this work upon others. They recognized that the sort of trauma to which they were subjected in this work—the upsetting stories and the frustrations of working in a carceral space within the confounding boundaries of asylum law—were not the kind of things they wanted to get into with their friends and families. For them, getting into the weeds, so to speak, of these places and the kinds of trauma that accompanies them would spread the pain that they cause. Again, most agreed that others who had not been in this environment wouldn’t understand anyways, so such conversations would ultimately remain fruitless in terms of enacting a kind of careful motivation to change these circumstances.

All advocates, as they discussed their struggles and conflicted feelings about talking about the experience of these places with others, seemed to face what was a central dilemma in this pursuit: How should one talk about this experience? The conflict seemed to flow from the problem of how to bridge the gap between two simultaneous yet sometimes counterintuitive concerns once they are home: One, the need to share stories of the realities of asylum-seekers lives’, as well as the unnecessary and cruel legal realities they face here, and two, the desire to value another person’s painful, and private, life stories by not sharing the details with others. Speaking implicitly to this last concern, one of my interlocutors opined that it simply “wasn’t her story to tell.” This reiterates a point made earlier by Hilary, that it was not “her trauma” to talk about. Yet, as this chapter and previous chapters have shown in contrast, their trauma, as advocates, absolutely was and is an integral part of the story of these places. Recognizing that is an important intervention that these chapters have tried to make in the telling of traumatic reproduction in spaces such as these.

And yet, their quandary in speaking to others about their experiences raises a nonetheless critical question: How do we, as advocates and caregivers, inspire the sentiments of others with the sort of details of encounters that moved us in having these experiences firsthand while also not exploiting, or cheapening, those deeply personal stories and intimate encounters? This can lead to broader, sometimes more existential questions: What is my place, as someone who has borne witness to things that are not widely visible, once I return home? What responsibilities do I have to those I left behind, both other advocates struggling through constrained care work and detainees quietly being abused through legal and carceral means? What kinds of stories should I tell if my goal is to get others, who can presumably affect the lives that reside within these spaces, to care?

As this section has shown, these questions were answered in practice differently by different advocates, and there were a rare few that seemed unburdened by these questions. Some found deeply empathetic responses from family and friends, and others did not question whether or not to share intimate details of others' stories (without those identifying markers of detainees, of course). Even if it took some time to cope with the experience, there was a desire amongst advocates to dwell amongst these memories in tellings that recounted them. Thus, there are these seemingly paradoxical desires bound with the haunting effects of legal advocacy in family detention: one, the desire to be rid of painful memories, representing a more traditional connection to the experience of being haunted, and two, the desire to have a continuous connection with the work that is so very affecting, and thus, ultimately, haunting. In these ways, advocates seem to want neither to live with nor be entirely rid of the specter of family detention.

I argue that part of the struggle of communicating this experience to others beyond the family detention bubble has to do with a central contention of this dissertation: That legal advocacy is rarely, if ever, considered care work. If framed through care, efforts that legal advocates enact in these environments would not only be given a more adequate language—thus making the details of

their experiences more translatable to outsider audiences—but it would also help to create an assumption concerning the need for legal care of incarcerated individuals. In these contexts, the inadequacies of asylum law and constraints inherent in incarceration, particularly of migrants and asylum-seekers who aren't guaranteed legal representation, effect serious consequences, and yet, because of the naturalization of these sorts of 'crimmigration' (Stumpf 2006) practices, it's difficult for others outside of these worlds to imagine the threat that such things pose to those forced to reside within. Thus, in speaking with those who are not personally familiar with these environments, advocates desire to have, and yet ultimately lack, the kinds of pre-existing narratives that bolster something closer to an 'emic' comprehension. As such, they are often met with a kind of solitary experience upon returning home or leaving this work, and yet, even in this, they are also pursued by other reminders, sometimes haunting but others more pleasurable, of their time on other side of the threshold.

Ghosts of Detention

On a Wednesday in April in Dilley, a grieving mother handed me photos of her dead child. I had been asked by another advocate to make copies of the documents this mother had brought with her on her journey to support her asylum claim. Usually, in the rare, best case scenarios, these were police reports, death certificates, medical records, news reports; things that were considered to be 'attesting to' their claims. For obvious reasons, we helped clients make copies of these critical documents. She pulled out a big stack of papers from a manila folder, curled up in a way that I could not see what they were initially. Before handing them to me, she tells me, quietly and somberly, pressing the pages against her chest: "*Estas son...como se dice...*". She was struggling to find the words, turning her eyes away from me. "*Difícil?*" I offered. "*Si,*" she nodded with tearful eyes. I unfurl the stack, and I see him immediately.

He was a teenager when he was shot only weeks ago by gang members on a street in Honduras, which was why she and her other teen son, the second target who was now incarcerated separately in Pearsall, had left. The first photo, taken by police or the coroner at night, was of his naked and bloody body sprawled on the gravelly ground, facedown, covered partially by a sheet. The second photo was a close-up image of his hands, also splattered with blood. The third was of his young face, eyes closed, his bruised skin a blueish-gray. I held the photos flat in my hands, temporarily forgetting what I was supposed to do with them.

As I walked into the PB room to make copies of these photos and hide my shock, I considered the fact that she had warned *me* before showing them to me. This mother, someone who had travelled for weeks from Honduras with the images of her child's violent end in her pocket, in part, because she knew that this sort of thing translated to 'evidence' in this process, was concerned with preparing me for seeing them as well. Truly, I could not have been prepared, but then, being unprepared for the new and old traumas that circulated throughout these facilities was one of the few certainties of daily experience.

Asylum-seekers are, in a way, forced to repeatedly reside with their ghosts: the moments—with its sights and sounds, smells and feelings—and the various people, both loved ones and those others who they do not love, that haunt them. In recounting and recounting again the different configurations of trauma, discomfort, or pain that led them to resort to this convoluted and distrusting process, far away from their homes or what is left of them, such things live on with them. Calling up and repeatedly having to defend such experiences, attesting to the 'credibility' or legitimacy of their fear through those entities, certainly isn't therapeutic; it can and has caused what advocates and mental health professionals would refer to as retraumatization (Ryan et al. 2009). A mother having to literally carry with her graphic evidence of her child's murder certainly has the potential to cause this. These processes themselves, which essentially require her to

experience this retraumatization, help produce the ghosts of detention: trauma which pursues them beyond the fences.

Are there ghosts that follow advocates as a result of their time in these spaces? In the chapters that precede this, I have often exchanged notions of the work of legal advocacy and the space, or spaces, of family detention with one another. The advocates' work itself is deeply entwined with the particularities of the physical space, and the space cannot be adequately understood, I would argue, without an understanding of this particular legal work that shapes so much of how daily practices and processes are managed *and* contested. In these ways, the work and the space overlap, and one cannot be talked about without the other. This, I argue, also plays an important role in the haunting effects experienced by advocates, especially staff members of the project. Again, June's experience working with similarly affected communities points to this relationship. "Working with those people, like in Uganda for example," she explained, "there were stories I heard that were worse, stuff that people were made to do in those situations. But this here is a different environment. It's harder. In Uganda, when we'd have these similar types of conversations with people, talking about the violence they experienced, it would be in someone's home, or sitting under a tree. That's, of course, not what's happening here. The environment in which you're meeting someone and talking about this kind of stuff, it matters." Most advocates would agree with this sentiment, as indeed, it was one of the central arguments of these legal projects: that proper care, whether it be health or legal assistance, could not be adequately offered to refugees while they were incarcerated as such. The space, and everything that went with the space, mattered, and this was true not only for the ways in which it impacted detainees' abilities to defend their cases, but also for the ways in which it impacted the work of advocates and the subsequent traumas they experienced in trying to do so in such an environment.

One illustration of how this dramatically affected advocates, of course, comes from a previous chapter's discussion of one staff member's—Alejandro's—banning from the space. He was not banned from all aspects of the work, as there were advocates who worked for these projects remotely, serving those working on the inside in different ways. These were interpreters, individuals who entered data, and other staff who managed different elements of such complex projects. He was banned, rather, from entering the detention space, and this spatial refusal is what haunted him. He could not do the kind of work that he'd become accustomed to, familiar with, and exceedingly good at. This work was inside, and he was pushed outside; thus, the space and the work entwined were what haunted him.

Months before his ban, when those working for the Dilley project offered Alejandro the job, he had to consider the consequences of actually living in Dilley. He had volunteered in Karnes previously, where we first met, but with that project, of course, staff advocates did not live near the detention center. The offer in Dilley, at the time, was for him to live in the communal staff house—again, 'the ranch'—near the center. For him, neither Dilley nor the ranch was a particularly exciting offer; both were extremely isolated, quiet, with few options for activities beyond the work, among other things. There were wild things like scorpions and snakes at the ranch, being out in the country, and because it was essentially a communal space, open for many who passed through briefly, privacy was in relatively short supply. It was, as the introduction mentioned, also the space where trainings and meeting with volunteers would take place, which made it even less private. But, for him, one of the benefits of being in such a place, he knew from extensive travel, was access to the sort of breathtaking night sky visible in these quiet, rural areas. Texas's 'big sky' and many of its small towns afforded these views. "I told myself," he explained, "I could live out there, at the ranch, if I could just get to see all of those stars at night."

As he would quickly come to learn, however, Alejandro was only able to see a limited view of that which enticed him to this place. At the end of their long work days, he and other staff would drive back to the ranch, begin their ‘second shifts’ sitting at the long dining table to the side of the living room, facing the glowing blue light of their laptops, continuing to work on clients’ cases, inputting data and communicating with others working on these projects beyond the bubble. When the sun had set on the day and that big sky had lost its bright hues, staff would sit outside or on the roof of the house, accessed by a ladder propped against the overhang covering the entryway. Instead of the glow from millions of stars, staff saw half of the sky awash in the light of the detention facility’s floodlights, which remained lit throughout the night. “It really bothered me, seeing those every night,” Alejandro explained. “I hated thinking that the kids there never got to see the stars at night.” Many staff and volunteers commented on these floodlights. Their effects were, and continue to be, striking. Excessively tall and bright, the posts which hold multiple lights cast an overwhelming glow, which extends far beyond the facility. During fieldwork, they reminded me of the kind of lights used at football stadiums; those which aimed to better display the spectacle of the state’s most beloved sport. This, of course, was seemingly at odds with other qualities of these facilities, which were, in many ways, intentionally disguised from public view. Most advocates expressed their frustration with the lights through the experience that was denied to the families detained under the glow, especially the children.

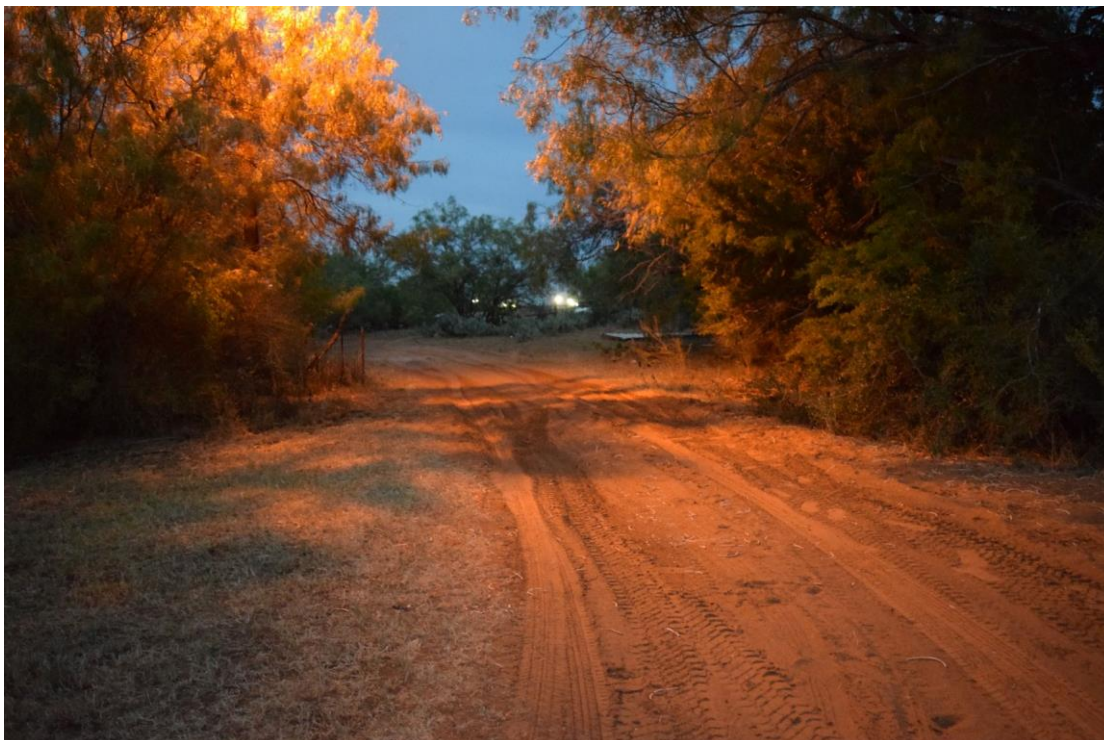


Image 25: A constant glow emanates from the floodlights of the Dilley facility. Photo credit: author

Alejandro's initial comment, which was the first of its kind I heard from staff, drew out another effect of the omnipresent glow from these white lights. While he was also frustrated by the fact that this denied children the opportunity to see the night sky, he was similarly denied this right. Staff struggled with not only the final *salida*, the day when they would leave this work and move on to something else; there was also the daily *salida*, the weekly *salida*. For staff of these projects, especially, there truly was no end to the work: no end to the cases which hung by a thread; no end to the clients who needed more attention and more pushback against authorities who were denying them proper care in the facility. There was no end to the amount of client data that needed entering into their tracking system and no end to the amount of email communications they needed to send or follow up on, with volunteers, one another, ICE officials, or asylum officers. More than that, though, they struggled with 'letting go' of things that had already occurred with clients in the facility, awful things that were effectively beyond their control and yet were forced to bear witness to, like

deportations or desperately ill clients being denied necessary, life-saving care. In this way, in my view, the lights took on another meaning. The ghostly glow was less a figurative haunting. It was a material reminder both of the work and of the pain it inflicted on both detainees and those who tried to help them. This ghost reached across the sky, linking the detention center, and all the thoughts and worries that it conjured, with ‘home’, unsettling spaces meant for relief.

In other ways, of course, these ghosts or echoes of detention had a far different affect. One of those was when advocates encountered, sometimes unexpectedly, those with whom they worked, the women and children that were once their clients, outside the barriers of detention. I consider myself lucky to have experienced this at the end of my first week of volunteering, when I, along with Maddie, was offered the opportunity to drive Esther and Tatiana to their next, albeit temporary, destination. Others who also had these encounters expressed the joy of getting to experience this new but familiar form of relationality beyond the confines.

Staff of the project rarely took time off, and even when they did, it was difficult, as I have shown, to take their minds off the work. Even when the population of the facility dipped, there was always an imbalance between the need and the capacity of the team to get everything done. This left a sort of inescapable mental burden on those most familiar with this world. They knew what even their brief absence meant to the functioning of the team. Nonetheless, they all found some time to get away. One weekend, Alejandro decided to take a quick trip home to visit friends and family. “I took just 36 hours to go to Boston and then come back to Dilley,” he says, laughing. “And in the airport, on the way out, I ran into three families [from Dilley] who all recognized me and were like ‘oh, *muchacho!*’” Certain male staff members of the legal project who appeared particularly young were often called ‘*muchacho*’ by the detained mothers, in an obviously endearing way. “We all had connecting flights through Charlotte. So I went up, talked to them for a bit, but then I thought that maybe they wanted some space from me. I wondered if right after leaving Dilley, they maybe

wouldn't want to immediately have someone from there talking a lot to them, you know, someone who reminded them of detention, so I backed away pretty quickly." They all got on the plane and sat in different areas, with the women occasionally waving to Alejandro throughout the flight. They arrived in Charlotte, and he gathered his things, preparing to go on his way. "Then as I was getting off the plane, I walk into the terminal and all three of the families are standing there waiting for me." He laughs again more loudly, with an incredulous smirk. "I was like, 'hey, guys, what's going on?' And they were like, 'what do we do next?' So I said, 'well, where are you going?' And they told me about their connecting flights. So I brought them over to the big board, trying to figure out where their flights were. It just turned out that their gates were right next to mine, and they only had 15 minutes to make their connecting flights, so we had to run across the whole airport, together. It was crazy."

One of the important elements of Alejandro's encounter involves the relationship he had developed with those detainees who recognized him in the airport. While my field research initially focused just on the experiences in the detention center, care, as evidenced in this instance, is truly formed along a continuum. While Alejandro initially felt out of his role as a caregiver, vacationing briefly from his contract work in Dilley, his assumption that the families would not necessarily want to speak with him just after leaving the facility was challenged. He was concerned that he would be interpreted as someone associated with their misfortunate experiences as detainees—in a certain sense, as someone associated with their 'past'—rather than their actual perception of him as a caregiver from whom they continued to seek help. He is seen as someone who they trust, they know, in a way, and who they believe will help them. Perhaps, to phrase it differently, he experiences recognition as a caregiver. This demonstrates how the advocate-client relationship is intimately marked by care, but in relatively ambiguous terms. He is not a doctor; he is not even a lawyer. Nonetheless, he is someone who can and will help, through whatever means; someone who has

valuable knowledge that he is willing to share, even when that knowledge is simply how to navigate an American airport.

Jaclyn considered herself fortunate in that she was also able to see her relationship with clients exist, even in a limited encounter, beyond detention. “There were certain women that I ended up getting really close to,” Jaclyn tells me. “Like I worked with them for hours and hours, prepping them like 3 or 4 times. Sometimes we would have to delay their interviews because they needed more prep, sometimes I’d have to bring in other staff members to help, and there were some that we’d just work with continuously for days. So I was leaving Dilley finally, going to Phoenix to visit my boyfriend before going back to Florida, and one of those women that I got really close to happened to be seated right next to me on my flight. It was amazing. I had worked with her on a Saturday, and I hadn’t heard back on how her interview went because I had to leave for my flight. When I saw her, I realized that she had gotten her positive and was released, and I just started crying. We worked together for so, so long, me and her and her daughter. I got to know them so well. I was so emotional. After we arrived in Phoenix, I got to walk them through the airport and actually welcome them.”

Jaclyn appreciated not only the fact that she was able to see the results of their hard work together come to its hoped-for conclusion, the shift in spatial context also meant something, as it did for Alejandro. “It was such a cool way to wrap up my experience there,” she explained. “Leaving Dilley and then seeing her again in a setting that wasn’t a detention center was so great because I felt like we were actually able to interact just like normal humans, like friends.” Leaving together, in a sense, afforded the kind of ‘closure’ she and so many other advocates desire in this work. She was not just privy to the knowledge that those she cared for and about had been freed; she was able to experience a relationship that was desired but was naturally constrained by their very distinct statuses in detention. Some advocates described having moments like this in detention—where despite

having been brought together under these constrained conditions, which highlighted the contrasts between positions of power and vulnerability, there were nonetheless encounters or moments which seemed to breach this. In general, though, the environment deeply constrained advocates abilities to have these ‘real’ moments with their clients, not least because so many encounters were defined, as a result of the need, as being one in which care was primarily unidirectional.

Many other advocates with whom I worked experienced similar sorts of caring continuities in the relationships they established while in detention. Some would stay in contact via Facebook; others would text or call one another, especially in times of need throughout their legal process. One day, a staff member of the project came in looking rather dejected, and he explained that a former detained client had very suddenly stopped messaging him. He was worried that the client might have been detained again, something which was not uncommon, or deported, but had no way of knowing what exactly had happened. Another weekly advocate also had this experience while working with a young client, and her concern over what might have happened to him remained in her thoughts often. She tried to track him down, but without certain rights or privileges as a family member or official legal representative, it was difficult, and she was ultimately unsuccessful. Care as worry or troubled thoughts is present here as well, as advocates and clients co-create this invested relationship. Advocates are aware of the vulnerabilities their clients experience as immigrants and asylum-seekers, and know, sometimes intimately, the difficulties that lie ahead with legal asylum processes. Yet, they also do not know everything about their circumstances, because of their liminal status as unofficial caregivers. Ultimately, while their care is not necessarily delimited by the ‘unnatural’ nature of their encounter in detention, it is undeniably shaped by it.

The relationship between continuity and care is layered, and sometimes continuities in caregiving practice serves to reconstitute harmful forms of relationality (Kehr 2018). Yet, as scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, while care is critical for the maintenance of life, thinking with

continuity is similarly integral to the giving of care. Care involves practicing in such a way that does not seek finality, a necessary ‘cure’, or the cessation of care, but rather continuous engagement. This is at the heart of thinking interdependently and relationally, and much of what I observed with legal advocates aligns with these practical and ontological qualities. Care is thus also like a ghost itself, refusing to move into unreachable realms.

Kindred Spirits

While I struggled with my own experiences of *la salida*, I also found, in my very research, an unexpected form of relief for others as they left and I remained. Some advocates made explicit comparisons with therapy as we talked, which for me, at first, felt surprisingly uncomfortable. I was, of course, in no way qualified to offer therapeutic care to those with whom I spoke for my research, and yet, many would come to tell me that I was the only person or the first person that they had either spoken at length with or at all about their experience. Whenever this happened, I was reminded of the many times I was told something similar by clients as they began to divulge traumatic incidences in their past. As the previous sections demonstrated, talking about the work and experience was, for many though not all, a fraught exercise. Some felt guilty talking about the experience in the ways that they believed others expected, making them feel, as I did at times, like they were somehow exploiting those with whom they worked or cheapening their stories. Others did not even know how to articulate it. Some refused to believe that others would understand, so they chose to either limit what they shared and did not share much at all. Some experienced a kind of trauma in trying to revisit the stories they heard or things they witnessed and thus did not actively choose to speak about them with others, though most recognized that this wasn’t helping to deal with the kind of accumulated pain they carried from the experience.

“They needed to talk,” Malkki (2015) notes of her aid worker interlocutors, “just as the genocide survivors in Tanzania had needed to talk. Many aid workers said it was worth talking with

someone who had lived and worked in the general region, and with genocide survivors specifically. There was some shared understanding,” (6). Legal advocates, as this chapter has shown, struggled to find what they considered to be a shared understanding of what they experienced and of the kinds of experiences the detainees had had and were continuing to have as incarcerated individuals in the United States. The experience was meaningful, even transformative, for some, and shocking and disturbing for most. They expressed this desire, or ‘need’, to talk about all of this, and yet rarely found it in the places that they expected.

As I discovered, I gave them this opportunity. I not only asked them to talk about it all with me, in addition to the questions I wanted answered, I let them talk about whatever else they wanted. I directed our conversations typically very little, for there was usually this outpouring of interest to talk. Some, nonetheless, were guarded in talking about particularly sensitive experiences, and because they were not asylum-seekers needing to prepare to establish a claim for an asylum officer, I didn’t goad them to revisit those unless they wanted to. When I asked Alejandro if there were particular women with whom he’d had encounters in the facility that remained with him more than others, a question I asked of all my interlocutors, he first replied in brief. “There is one woman that overshadows everyone else,” he said. “I’m not ready to talk about her yet. That whole situation will be the reason why I go to therapy. It was really just connected to my ability to be more present with her, be more human. At times, this work really felt more like a ‘numbers’ game. It was about a choice I was forced to make, and that choice was: I can either help you right now, or I can help the next wave of people who need help. It made me feel less human. There were other moments that really stuck with me, but that one...I’m not ready.” And I left it at that.

For some asylum-seekers in family detention, there were moments from their pasts that, even under the pressures effected by asylum law, they were unwilling or unable to revisit. Who the listener was and how that listener sought or responded to a particular narration of an experience

always seemed to matter, but in some instances, it didn't change the fact that the speaker wasn't ready to share that experience with others. Unlike in detention, the care that I was able to give to advocates in this situation was to let that ambiguity remain, rather than to continue projects which aim to "make others vulnerable" (Behar 1996). I came to think of this as a kind of 'ethnographic comfort'. It was not simply that I was a kind, empathetic listener to their experiences, though I tried to be. Rather, what became clear to me, was that my role as an ethnographer, using the long-term participant-observation methods of ethnography, played a critical part in offering what many seemed to appreciate, and for some, even need. They appreciated or needed someone to talk to that *knew*, intimately, this work in the way that they did. As I argued in the first chapter, this knowing singularly came from being there in these spaces and doing this work, day after day. This became a shared experience for advocates who then, after leaving, seemed to seek recognition of that experience to affirm its existence once again. I met and worked with hundreds of advocates throughout my fieldwork, and though it was apparent that this was not the case for all that I interviewed, it did seem important for most. Care continued to circulate amongst advocates, well beyond the borders of the detention center, even finding a place within the methods of my research. I could use my position as an ethnographer to provide them the kind of release they were searching for but may not have been able to find in worlds beyond the family detention bubble.

Leticia, a volunteer lawyer who worked primarily with asylum-seekers, sat with me in the pro bono office one afternoon, each of us working across from one another at the desktop computers. Breaking and chatting, we started to talk about the project and how we were both affected by this kind of volunteer work. "This project really changed me. I feel addicted to it," I told her, unconsciously recalling staff's comments from before, which I came to feel rang true for me as well. It became clear that as legal advocates working together in these environments, we shared a unique

experience, and a kind of intimacy as a result of that experience. “Yeah, that’s what happens when you do this kind of work,” she replied, smiling. “You find other kindred spirits.”

La Despedida



Image 26: Sunset outside of the Karnes facility. Photo credit: author

On the day before she was to end her work with the project at the Karnes facility, Maddie was kicked out. She had been working with RAICES continuously for 3 months and was familiar with many of the facility’s staff members, which were just a couple of the reasons that made this abrupt move seem so absurd. As she sat with a mother at a small table, softly answering questions as she helped her fill out forms, six ICE officers walked into the room. As one of them called out her last name and she looked up, he informed her that the letter, written by RAICES staff, which had allowed her access to work as a representative of their organization inside the facility, had ‘expired’. Both the Dilley and Karnes facility required

advocates to have such letters, which indicated that they were there to work with detainees as staff or volunteers with the legal projects, though while administrators in Dilley rarely asked to see this letter, those at the Karnes facility inspected the letter upon every entry, retaining a copy, along with the advocate's photo ID, until they left at the end of the day. As a result of this so-called expiration, this officer clarified, she would need to be immediately 'removed'. Surprised and confused, considering the fact that she was still working with RAICES and had used the same letter to access the facility for the past three months—a letter which specified that she was allowed entry with the organization until her 'term of service' with them was complete—Maddie gathered her things and left the office space. She was escorted by all six of the officers to the waiting area beyond the security desk where she then sat for three hours as RAICES staff in San Antonio drafted a new letter of permission that explicitly extended her dates of association with the project, which they then faxed to administrators.

In one sense, Maddie's experience of being escorted out of the workspace where she had sat day after day for three months, by six ICE officers, on her second-to-last day of work was a fitting final event. It was in keeping with the sort of trials advocates experienced in trying to give simple and legally justified care to detainees. As previous chapters have illustrated, advocates were often treated with hostility and mistrust by various administrators, and the continuation of their work in aiding detainees faced constantly shifting barriers. The number of officers that had been tasked to 'remove' one young advocate, whose removal had been based upon a so-called expired permissions letter and not as a result of some form of abuse or threat, seemed both ludicrously excessive as well as significant to others who had been there to witness it. "It was for show," Jasmine, a staff member of the project, would say the next day at work in the center. ICE officers especially, she would explain, seemed to enjoy performing in these threatening ways towards advocates. For advocates, it was clear that it wasn't necessary

for officers to show up in such numbers for such an event, and it was also obvious that there wasn't a particular protocol for this, as when the very same thing happened to me only a few days later, only one officer was tasked with my removal. These unpredictable events, changes in rules, and threatening expressions by administrators served as reminders of the broad attitudes toward advocates' existence in these spaces. While being unexpectedly barred from the facility was a frustrating, distracting, and sometimes painful experience for those subjected to it, such as Maddie and Alejandro, others were also deeply impacted by the act of voluntarily leaving the facility, as this chapter has demonstrated.

A couple of months after I left the work, moving from San Antonio back to New York to begin writing my dissertation, my partner and I attended the wedding of a friend. The event was beautiful, with rich food and opulent décor, staged in an old, restored barn in the countryside. As we sat in the dim glow of the fairy lights hung from the ceiling, a friend of my partner asked me about my work. I, like previous advocates had repeatedly told me throughout the past year, struggled to find adequate words to articulate what I had done and seen, what those I worked with had been through and what I had gone through. After a few minutes of awkwardly dancing around the topic, I quickly excused myself from the table under the guise of getting a drink and walked out into the cool early evening air, tears streaming down my cheeks. I was confused at what had happened, why I had become so upset so suddenly, despite the fact that this kind of reaction had already occurred a few times since I had left 'the field'.

At the heart of the emotions I was experiencing, I felt like a fraud. Like Ali, I felt repeatedly compelled to consider: Why should I, and not others, be given the opportunity to live a life of attending graduate school, putting off having children until I felt financially prepared, travelling and buying new things that I desired, spending my evenings in comfort and joy at a friend's extravagant celebration? I compared my life beyond the bubble not only to the detained clients with whom I

worked, but also to the advocates whom I felt I had left behind, those who continued to exist within the work's realms of exhaustion and isolation. My class, racial, and other embodied privileges afforded me access to migrate through these worlds, to drop into the work of legal advocacy and family detention to volunteer and conduct research, and I had chosen to leave it for the other that preceded it. This choice took shape as a sort of haunting for me, and it played a role in my own 'need' after fieldwork—following Malkki's (2015) indication of the "neediness" of aid workers—to remain as engaged with that world as much as possible, often to an utterly exhausting and emotionally counterproductive degree. I made multiple additional trips to the field, engaged in remote volunteer work, and constantly worried over my obligations to these projects. I tried to convince myself that I was remaining so engaged, visiting time and again and getting involved in new forms of remote volunteer work with incarcerated migrants, simply because I wanted to, or because I missed my friends and collaborators in these projects. While this was not untrue, I did miss project staff or others that remained in these places, I knew that my feelings of guilt, as a result of leaving, played a major role in those behaviors, and I'm still unravelling the spools of trauma from not only being there but leaving it as well.

Speaking to the blurred boundaries explored in the 'new hauntological' literature, including between metaphorical and non-metaphorical ghosts, Hollan (2019) suggests an attention to the significance of emotion, and specifically the emotions of those who experience hauntings. "The relational and interpersonal aspects of haunting," he argues, "the fact that some people experience ghosts and hauntings while others in the same conditions do not, suggest that our analyses of the dynamic forces contributing to the emergence and disappearance of ghosts must always include a concern with the complex emotional lives of the haunted," (452). Not all advocates I met and interviewed were 'haunted' in the ways that I and the others presented here were, though it was exceedingly rare that any of these people were emotionally unfazed by their experiences in detention.

I would argue that the fact that so many were disturbed or haunted by what they experienced there demonstrates several things. It shows the degree to which encounters were intimately tinged with emotion. It also shows that the work effectively required some expression of empathy or emotional intelligence in order to properly care in this environment. It also demonstrates the ways in which, because so few were prepared for what they would encounter in this work and with the stories of clients as well as because there were so few resources, in general, to handle their immense responsibilities, advocates remained at least somewhat vulnerable to traumatic repercussions. The specters produced through these things not only followed advocates as they left, but also drew a kind of psychic tether between them and these places. Both these experiences and this often confusing, unsettling connective tissue which led to hauntings of various sorts were themselves exceedingly difficult to express in adequate terms to others.

After fieldwork, I was reminded of some of the comments staff of these projects had made over time and the stories they had told of their own leaving. Mindy, a former staff member who had also returned to Dilley an untold number of times after having worked for nearly a year on-the-ground, was sprawled out on one of the weathered, mismatched couches in the middle of the ranch's living room, on a dark winter evening. It was late, long past when anyone should still be up after a long day in detention, and she and other staff were sipping watery beer, talking about why people keep coming back to this work, back to this little blip of a burg near the border. "It's all like a drug," she said, as she stared blankly at the ceiling. "I mean, it's like you become an addict, and this place is the drug. You just can't leave it." Many staff repeatedly expressed this sentiment using the same, or similar, metaphorical associations. Alejandro repeated this without any goading, as we sat at a picnic table months later, steadily boiling in the summer heat. "The work is definitely like a drug, it's addictive. I think that's because everything always feels so high stakes. It's really exciting, really enjoyable when it turns out well, but then it's really, really hard when it doesn't. There were these

experiences of catharsis that you'd have after really tough moments. Then for the others, you'd have your people to forget about it all with.”

By ‘your people’, Alejandro meant other staff, in particular; those other ‘addicts’ who just could not leave, who could not stop doing the work, despite its consequences. Those kindred spirits who struggled to cross over, who were, like Ali, ‘terrified’ of leaving. Even when the drug of the work had taken a clear toll that needed to be addressed, either on their bodies or their emotional states, they felt compelled to continue on, hence the painful ‘withdrawals’ experienced with those like Alejandro who were unexpectedly stripped of that which seemingly fueled them. Another staff member, Mark, finally agreed to leave the work, after serving the project in Dilley for over a year, far longer than most staff. On one of his final days, he walked into the visitation building to meet with clients and saw one of the heavy, framed CoreCivic posters hanging crookedly on the wall. He walked over to it, snatched it off the wall, and slammed it onto the ground. “Why is this hanging like this?” He shouted indirectly at the guards. “It could’ve fallen on a kid’s head! It could’ve hurt someone!” One of the older male guards, having worked effectively alongside him for many months, instead of making a complaint about Mark or trying to eject him, simply said, “Oh, yeah, I think you’re done here.” What he meant by that, Mark explained, was clear: Mark could no longer constrain his emotions as a result of the myriad frustrations over poor care in this place, and because, in his view, this wouldn’t be changing any time soon, it really was time for him to make his exit. “Yeah,” he replied to the guard with a dejected sigh, “I am done with this.” It wasn’t that he desired to leave; it was that the circumstances of the work in this environment had pushed him beyond his threshold.

Ultimately, *la salida* takes different shape for different advocates, from staff to volunteers to researching advocates like myself. Yet all, as they leave, experience reverberations of ever having stepped foot inside these family detention centers, trying to give legal care to incarcerated, asylum-

seeking parents and children, navigating the myriad constraints in doing so, and coping with the accompanying pains and pleasures, excitements and traumas, and the moments that will simply always cling to them.

Citations

- Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.
- Blanco, Maria del Pilar, and Esther Preen, eds. *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.
- Chiovenda, Andrea and Melissa Chiovenda. "The specter of the 'arrivant': hauntology of an interethnic conflict in Afghanistan". *Asian Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3. 2018.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Fassin, Didier. *Prison Worlds: an Ethnography of the Carceral Condition*. Polity, 2016.
- Hollan, Douglass. "Who is Haunted by Whom? Steps to an Ecology of Haunting". *ETHOS*, Vol. 47, Issue 4, 2019.
- Kehr, Janina. "Colonial Hauntings: Migrant Care in a French Hospital". *Medical Anthropology*, Vol. 37, No. 8. 2018.
- Malkki, Liisa. *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Mountz, Alison, Kate Coddington, R. Tina Catania, and Jenna M. Lloyd. "Conceptualizing detention: Mobility, containment, bordering, and exclusion". *Progress in Human Geography*, 37, 522-541, 2012.
- Rabben, Linda. *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History*. University of Washington Press, 2016.
- Ryan, Dermot A., Fiona E. Kelly, and Brendan D. Kelly. "Mental Health Among Persons Awaiting an Asylum Outcome in Western Countries: A Literature Review". *International Journal of Mental Health*, Vol. 38, No. 3. Fall 2009.
- "Stuck in the Middle". *This American Life* from WBEZ Chicago, April 3, 2015, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/553/stuck-in-the-middle-2015>.
- Stumpf, Juliet. "The crimmigration crisis: immigrants, crime, and sovereign power". *American University Law Review* 56 (2): 367-419, 2006.

Thornton, Leslie A. and David R. Novak. "Storying the Temporal Nature of Emotion Work: Bearing Witness to the Lived Trauma of Others". *Health Communication*, 25:5, 437-448. 2010.

von Werthern, M., K. Robjant, Z. Chui, R. Schon, L. Ottisova, C. Mason, and C. Katona. "The impact of immigration detention on mental health: a systematic review". *BMC Psychiatry*, 2018.

Notes

^{xxx} I use this advocate's real name, with her permission, as I credit her with artwork provided in this dissertation.

Conclusion: *Una Herida Abierta*



Image 27: Drawing given to a volunteer advocate from a child client, who told her that he wanted to become a lawyer. Artist credit: Angel, photo courtesy of Liv

In 2017, a former U.S. immigration attorney published an article online entitled, “Why I Left Immigration Law”. In it, she explains how after four years of practicing as an immigration lawyer in San Francisco, she no longer felt as if she was serving the sort of justice she had desired in her role as an attorney. She was deeply discomfited by the ways in which the U.S. immigration system, as she puts it, “demands penance”, among other things, from immigrants who hope to remain in this country (Zaman 2017). She argues that it was challenging for her to continue to participate in such a

repugnant system that, through its many arbiters, often blames and performatively shames immigrants or asylum-seekers for their status, reifying positions of vulnerability and abjectivity, and expecting inordinate professions of fealty—not only from immigrants themselves but their families, friends, and sponsors as well—to their new home country. Playing a role within this system was something that made her “feel sick” as she, for instance, trained clients on how to perform as victims for those sitting in judgment of their worth. Ultimately, she argues that “as lawyers, we are often locked in a fast-paced process whose daily urgency inhibits our thinking critically about the complexity of lived realities, the global structures that lead so many people to come to this country in the first place, and the insidiousness of a legal system that looks upon immigrants with suspicion or pity.”

Many of this attorney’s points have been mirrored throughout the previous chapters, as advocates witness the various ways that detainees are forced into positions of abjection while detained and throughout the processing of their asylum cases. However, this research has also reflected the daily work that is done to challenge these processes. For many advocates, repeating and affirming narratives which emphasized the resilience and empowerment of detained clients was a critical aspect of the role they felt they played as legal advocates. In conversations with clients, they would challenge narratives of ‘deservingness’ and the inadequacies and cruelties of asylum law in the U.S. while also preparing them to enter into this fray.

The article’s author quite fairly critiques the urgency produced by a deeply flawed, amorphous and unpredictable legal system that functions with far too few resources and shockingly little oversight. Yet the implication that this then leads to legal actors’ inability to think critically about the complex conditions which have led to their clients’ circumstances has, I hope, been contested by the preceding chapters. Being critical and participating within these legal structures are not mutually exclusive activities. Advocates earnestly discussed this dilemma and frequently reflected

upon their own role in these processes and how to respond to systemic injustices, either through direct legal service work or through other modes as well.

While I argue that what we can observe in these advocates challenges some of the ideas implicated and explicated in Zaman's article, these legal advocates—some more than others, as the previous chapters have demonstrated—do struggle with their roles and identities in this work, and their involvement, in any form, in such oppressive processes. *Who am I*, some advocates would ask, *to be giving advice to these women and kids? I am not an expert*, they would say. They would articulate their discomfort in the privileges they possessed, both in these spaces and beyond, in the face of their clients' vulnerabilities. "Like anthropologists," Malkki (2015) reminds us, "aid workers are sometimes left feeling ambivalent, inadequate, and even impure about the work that they have done, despite their best efforts to fulfill the standards of their profession and their personal ethical commitments," (53).

What the preceding chapters have also demonstrated, particularly to those more familiar with legal practice, is the exceptionality of these spaces and the kinds of work that engage legal advocates. The practice of offering universal legal assistance to clients, regardless of the merits of their claims, was one such marker. I encountered many advocates who worked in immigration law that noted the disparity of care in Dilley or Karnes and the legal world beyond their walls. Many would note that if certain clients they met in Dilley and Karnes had come to their office or firm with their particular case, asking for assistance, they would likely have to turn them away. In some situations, this would be a result of the weakness of the 'merits' or un-winnability of a claim. Many would lamentably say that limited *pro bono* resources needed to be reserved for cases that had stronger merits. Additionally, as many who worked in immigration law would tell me, depending upon where a client was headed after detention—meaning, essentially, to which court they would be pursuing the rest of their case—many would

not have a strong chance of actually winning their cases. This is part of what comes to the define the pain and the pleasure of the work in these spaces for those experienced with the legal world beyond. They are aware of what additional pains and disappointments await asylum-seekers outside of detention, but they also, themselves, get to experience a moment in which success is the norm, where no clients are denied the opportunity for care as a result of arbitrary merits or an ability to pay. Legal advocacy in family detention, in a way, offers a moment that breathes life into hope.

The work is also exceptional within the landscape of typical legal practice, because many of the people engaged in it are not experts in immigration law or even legal professionals. Though a critique arises from this fact, which I'll touch on in this chapter, there is also a kind of unique benefit, in that a variety of different skills, and personal and professional perspectives are brought to bear on the work. The collaborations between different knowledges, experiences, and sensitivities lead to what I interpret as caring exchanges as a result of legal needs. Though not impossible within other legal contexts (e.g. the law firm), the unpredictability of family detention and the resultant organizational responses have come together to form a uniquely collaborative environment in which the problems of caring for incarcerated asylum-seekers are approached and contested from a variety of angles.

This research has shown the different ways in which the care that these advocates invoke takes shape in these particular embodied spaces. They explored contestations, frictions, and mutations in care, as well as how advocates themselves are entwined within, and subject to, punitive action. The preceding chapters examined the unexpected and unpredictable intimacies which mark advocates' experiences and, in the end, my research challenged the solidity of experiential and sentimental boundaries. This chapter speaks to how what Malkki terms the ambivalences, inadequacies, and impurities felt in legal advocates' care is informed by the broad implications of

their presence in these spaces. I examine how their labors are co-opted for aims that run seemingly counter to theirs. I look at how hope, rather a hope not fixated on ending family detention but one that is not located in a specific future end-point, plays an important even if paradoxical role amongst advocates, particularly those familiar with the world of asylum beyond incarceration. I consider what their continuing presence in these spaces means for their care and the achievement of their goals, and how the desire and commitment to care seems to leave them, for good or bad, caught in a world *sin fronteras*. First, however, I will return to the concept of legal care and consider its implications amongst the broader landscape of legal aid to im/migrant detainees.

Minding the Gap

The past few decades have seen many projects aimed at providing various forms of legal services to im/migrant detainees, primarily as a result of the gap which separates im/migrants from guaranteed legal assistance with their cases, unlike other incarcerated individuals. This is obviously critical. As Stenken (2012) notes, “the absence of a system of public legal defense in immigration court may affect someone in more drastic ways than a criminal sentence. If people lose their removal hearing, or lose their residency status for minor legal infractions, they may be returned to a country where they face persecution or torture,” (212). The stakes for the legal cases of asylum-seekers and refugees are especially high. Stenken draws attention to the Florence Project, a legal assistance program established in 1989 intending to prepare detainees for *pro se* representation (or self-representation) mostly through know-your-rights (KYR) presentations and basic legal orientations and advice for detainees.^{xxxii} The government, Stenken notes, has replicated this project’s efforts, to some degree, through their Legal Orientation Programs (LOPs), funded by the Department of Justice’s Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR), which provide not legal advice, but rather basic information to detainees about legal processes. In other contexts, scholars have shown

how these programs are used by legal advocates to serve underrepresented migrant detainees (Macías-Rojas 2016).

Such LOPs existed in the Dilley and Karnes facilities during my fieldwork, and their role in these centers was somewhat mysterious. Their representatives did not use the same spaces as the legal advocacy teams, and they seemingly had little cross-contact. Various, representatives for these programs would provide Dilley and Karnes advocates with lists of detainees, including their necessary 'A' (alien) identification numbers, to help the DPBP and RAICES projects establish contact with them for legal assistance. Their sharing of these lists appeared inconsistent, and it also was unclear how they were able to collect this sort of information at the facility, whereas the legal advocacy projects struggled to do so. Another curious affect of this was that, invariably, when clients met with the legal teams at the center of my research, they expressed little to no understanding of the legal process in which they found themselves, which made me question the role of these LOP representatives. It is an unfortunate fact that I was not able to get more information about these representatives during my research, but their relative invisibility in these spaces essentially effected this. I would not make claims about their effectiveness or collaborations with these facility administrators based on these limited encounters and observations, yet it is important to note that their presence in these particular spaces was both confounding and, apparently, relatively ineffective at communicating pertinent legal information.

There are many other pro bono representation and assistance programs across the country, and this has expanded as has the incarceration rate of migrants and asylum-seekers/refugees. One program, with which I also volunteered remotely during and after my field research, is the Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative (SIFI), a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).^{xxxii} There are many others akin to and different from these projects, and while these projects offer varying degrees of aid dependent upon a number of factors, they bond over a common aim: to

provide necessary legal assistance or information to those in migrant detention. Despite the growth of national projects and coalitions like these and others, recent studies continue to show the significant underrepresentation of im/migrants (Eagly and Shafer 2015; TRAC 2017), both in and out of detention, and serious negative impacts it has on these communities.

This dissertation has argued that care for migrant detainees should not be dependent upon voluntary, unpaid labor, and furthermore I argue that im/migrant detainees deserve federally funded and mandated *pro bono* legal representation independent of case merits, residency status, or other barriers. I have also contended that legal advocates providing the kinds of services I observed in my research attend to their clients in meaningful, intimate, and seemingly boundless ways; as such, I argue that such actors should be considered a unique group of caregivers. The work with which I engaged in my research, I strongly believe, should be included within the realm of care work and that, in fact, it is analytically limiting to consider it simply ‘legal assistance’ or the more general, ‘legal aid’. In response, I have suggested the concept of ‘legal care’ as a way to value their unique position within caring labors, recognizing the significance of the fact that these are legal encounters.

I have not meant for this concept to be particularly theoretically groundbreaking, though I do mean for it to be a tool which allows what I consider to be proper recognition of legal actors’ work and participation with marginalized groups. As has been noted already, the legal advocates with whom I worked rarely if ever used the language of care to describe their roles or participation. Rather they talked around care, using caring analogies, and describing sentiments, activities, and commitments that align with the conceptual outlines of care elucidated by so many scholars across various disciplines. And, as other scholars have shown, proper recognition of labors as care work is critical, not only in obtaining appropriate, often necessary support for those caregivers, but also in better understanding intimate dependencies and complexities of caring economies. I have shown that in the context of family detention, recognition of the contours of care is especially important,

because of the exceptional way in which these centers take up and attempt to maintain caring identities. Thus, separating care from ‘uncare’ is just as important; this cannot be done without first recognizing those caregivers in the room. Legal care, I argue, simply offers a way to name these complex encounters, recognizing these efforts and the unique relationships they construct for what they truly are.

Making Nice

“I love what the Dilley project is doing down there, don’t get me wrong,” Patricia tells me. “I’m glad that they’re there. I’m also annoyed that they’re there. They’re doing too damn good of a job, and you know, these prison companies have these long contracts now to keep these places open. Maybe if things there were worse, things didn’t look so great, these companies wouldn’t have been able to get these contracts extended, because people wouldn’t have seen them as being successful, like many do now. But I don’t know if that’s true.”

When Patricia said this to me, I didn’t know if by ‘too good of job’, she was referring to the organizations behind these legal projects or the workers, like herself and on-the-ground staff, doing the daily labor of direct client services in the centers. I have not used any of the chapters to assess or critique the organizations at the center of these legal projects, and that is intentional. I wanted my research to focus on the everyday, grounded experiences of those who come to do the work organized and funded by disparate groups. The echo of depersonalized, careful, non-profit messaging reverberated throughout trainings, ‘big table’ meetings, and emails, to be sure. For this study, however, I was only interested in looking behind that curtain, at the messy, unpredictable, and visceral terrain.

In order to consider the potential entrenchments or captivity of this form of care work in these environments requires, in at least some small way, broadening the scope. It requires some form of examining these caregivers and the work that they do as representative of larger issues

having to do with the increasing institutionalization of a relationship defined by unpaid care work. The situations examined in the preceding chapters do not simply illustrate yet another example of the growing overreliance on the volunteer sector, or ‘shadow state’ (Wolch 1990) in the United States, or to fulfill what have historically been state or federal responsibilities relative to the care of its citizens and non-citizens (Wacquant 2009). Nor is it simply an illustration of the extenuation of the ‘velvet glove’ of non-profit collaborations with the ‘iron fist’ of punitive entities, or the problematic associations between the carceral sector and the ‘non-profit industrial complex’ (INCITE! 2007). These critiques are, of course, relevant to discussions of these forms of aid work. What I focus on in my examination is the way in which this is also a reflection of the underrepresentation of caring labors. Scholars of care, particularly feminist researchers, have long supported the idea that care work, especially that done by marginalized or migrant women, is undervalued and often unrecognized as work. I argue not only that legal advocates are caregivers and should be recognized as such, which they are almost categorically not, but also that it is in part because of this lack of recognition that their work becomes both co-opted by facility administrators as well as increasingly entrenched within the constitution of these facilities’ processes.

When Patricia comments on the worry she has for the ‘good job’ that these projects are doing, she expresses a concern for this relationship between the caregivers and the administrators. The question of how advocates’ work benefits detainees has hopefully been illustrated to some degree in the preceding chapters. But how do administrators—private facility staff, asylum officers, ICE officials, etc.—benefit from the work of these legal advocates? Much of the reflections presented throughout my fieldwork emphasize the antagonism, the unwelcoming, the punitive measures that characterize the relationship between administrators and advocates. But are there benefits that administrators reap from their work, and if so, how does that complicate this story of caregivers? Are advocates doing ‘too damn good of a job’ in these spaces contributing to something

that runs counter to their goals? Or is this another manifestation, directed at another kind of vulnerable recipient, of institutionalized abuse? While I intend to make a case for the latter, legal advocates, regardless, aimed to improve the experiences and lives of their clients for whom they cared, and because of that, their work involved an improvement of these facilities.



“Gracias a dios, por este lugar, por ustedes,” she told us. I keep thinking about this.

Yesterday in Dilley, Angela and I spoke with a mother, Adriana, and daughter, Carolina, from Cuba. Carolina had met with Angela days before, to prep for their interview, and she had told her that she wanted to become an immigration lawyer when she got out. She actually showed up in the visitation trailer and asked us if there was anything she could help us with in our work. This wasn't uncommon; many detained mothers and their older children especially offered their services to the group, from helping others filling out their intake forms to translating for those who didn't speak Spanish or English to helping clean up the desks, messy with scattered papers and pens. When the daughter asked if she could help us with anything, we didn't have much in terms of simple tasks like that. I asked Cynthia, a project staff member, if we might want to ask them to draw us a map, of sorts, of the rest of the facility. Our team was always interested to know the layout of the rest of the facility—what their rooms and other spaces looked like—in order to better understand how they were being treated. It had been a rare occasion when legal advocates had been allowed to see spaces in the facility beyond this trailer, the asylum interview trailer, and the courtroom trailer, so we thought this might be a good opportunity, especially as Carolina was eager to help us. Cynthia was very eager to know more about these spaces and other pertinent details, and asked Carolina to come back later, when the work had slowed, with her mother.

Carolina came back to the trailer in the early evening with Adriana. As Angela and I sat with them in a private room, Carolina started to sketch out for us a layout of the facility, showing us the size of their rooms, how they were separated from others, and other facility spaces. We asked them questions about all of this. They both spoke about how ‘nice’ this place was. They talked about other facilities they had been to before this, comparing their experiences there with here. They were much worse. They had spent some time in a detention facility in Tapachua, Mexico, and spoke of the horrible conditions there. They said that the only thing that was better there was that there were family visits available at any time, for however long, with people on the outside. Other than that, though, everything there was worse than here. They describe how the only seating they had were made of concrete; how there was a pregnant woman held there with them. They had to use toilets with no privacy at all. Here, in Dilley, they have kind of private room. We asked if they were forced to share a room with other families. Carolina and Adriana responded that they did have to, but then they both gushed enthusiastically about how they loved sharing a room with all these people from other places around the world. They loved the sort of conversations they would have with one another, that they got to have because of the circumstances. Carolina talked about have a conversation with a girl from Brazil, how she was learning Portuguese from her, and how they loved to dance and sing together. They were happy here, they said. They were grateful. They thanked god for this place, they said to Angela and I, thankful for us.

After talking for awhile, they got up to leave for the dinner service. Carolina thanked us, in English, Adriana explaining that she had learned some words while being here. Angela and I walked out of the room with them and over to Cynthia, who was working at a small table in the open area. We explained to her what Adriana and Carolina had told us, including that they were sharing a room with three other families. Cynthia immediately

started to get upset, angered by the fact that multiple families were being seemingly crammed together in small places with little privacy. I tried to explain that while they said they shared a space, each sleeping quarter was separated with a kind of accordion-like barrier. Cynthia had also asked that we speak to them about whether or not they had experienced guards coming into their rooms in the middle of the night to perform “night checks”, wherein these staff would turn on lights and make sure all detainees were accounted for. Adriana and Carolina dismissed this fairly quickly, saying that no guard ever entered their room while they were in there without knocking, and that the only reason they did, was if they themselves had asked for some kind of appointment with them. Rather than relieved, Cynthia seemed frustrated.



That day, I knew that Cynthia was not disappointed that these things had not happened to Adriana and Carolina, but I could also see a kind of reticence on her face, a frustrated reluctance to fully accept the reality that they were describing. Cynthia cared deeply about the clients we were serving; she was the definition of a tireless, selfless advocate for im/migrant rights. She also expressed her emotions, at times, vividly. I watched many times as she argued with guards about mistreatments or meaningless bureaucratic processes. She would sit on the phone for hours, both in the facility and back at the ‘ranch’ home, passionately and repeatedly explaining to various journalists, all writing essentially the same stories, why these women and children should not be detained. She laughed and cried often, and I wondered how someone so sensitive, so concerned with the care of migrants could stand to do such heartbreaking work for so many years.

As a volunteer with these projects, I heard of and witnessed many mistreatments of those detained. I also encountered, like other advocates, many detainees who would say that they were treated well in these centers. They would say, like Adriana and Carolina, that they were grateful, and that they felt safe there. However, as with Adriana and Carolina, the conversations in which these comments were made often involved a comparison. Many detainees viewed their time spent at Dilley or Karnes with fresh memories of the places they were prior to family detention: *las hieleras* and *perreras*, again, the temporary ICE detention facilities at the border. Conversations about those experiences in particular often involved much crying as women and children reflected on great and

unexpected trauma. When they would describe feeling ‘safe’ in the family facility, it would also frequently accompany a discussion of the lack of safety they were experiencing in their lives prior to coming to the U.S. or during their dangerous journeys across countries. At least in detention, they were safe from being killed or kidnapped, safe from starvation or dehydration. To this end, scholars of migrant detention have drawn attention to the ways in which “viewing detention of any sort in a favorable light is perhaps more suggestive of oppressive and depriving environments outside of the walls of detention centers than a glowing endorsement of said centers,” (Furman et al. 2016:9).

This was not the case for the many other detainees that did not feel safe or secure. Many could not get access to proper medical care in detention, while others experienced new forms of maltreatment. Nonetheless, this was a reality for some, and it was not the place of legal advocates to reject their clients’ interpretations or sentiments around their unjust incarceration. This speaks, oddly enough, to a sentiment that was expressed by advocates themselves, which has been touched on in previous chapters: that they expected the facility to be ‘worse’ than it appeared to be. Here women and children are not kept in ‘cages’ as they are elsewhere. They are free to move about the facility throughout the day. There is a school for children of a certain age and a daycare facility for those younger (though Chapter 1 elucidated some of the barriers children experience in accessing these spaces).

What are we to make of a place that not only was made to respond to a manufactured problem, but also is one which at least some of those trapped within its grasp characterize in good terms? This, I knew, was Cynthia’s frustration. It was not that she wanted Adriana and Carolina to have had a worse experience. She was frustrated by the fact that their comments, which did not reflect the horrific experiences of many other detainees, seemingly aligned with the kinds of ways in which facility administrators wanted to portray these centers. A significant part of the battle that advocates fight in order to be rid of these places involves contesting the legitimacy of their very

existence. McCulloch and Pickering (2009) note that when the state perpetrates violence on particular recipients, that violence also “amounts to an attack on the body politic which turns away or even embraces as necessary and normal the harm committed. The violence of incarceration depends substantially on discourses that mitigate its practice in the public imagination,” (236). While advocates and detainees certainly do not embrace detention as necessary or normal, certain comments about these facilities, by implication, lean towards normalcy, even decency. It would seem that some of those who, perhaps unwittingly, undermine the struggle against legitimizing these manufactured places are the detainees and advocates themselves.

It is important for the purposes of this dissertation to draw attention to the fact that both of these undermining arguments hinge on care. It is the perception of good or decent care which frames these detainees’ positive comments, and it is the lack of deplorable care—through particular material expressions—that frames some advocates’ perceptions. This unfortunately supports the detrimental fallacy that harm is the only, or perhaps the most, significant register for rejecting unjust incarceration. The goodness of care, in other words, whatever that may mean for different parties, supersedes justice.

“*Gracias a dios, por este lugar, por ustedes,*” Adriana said to us. This was a common refrain. When detained clients comment on the gratitude they feel in their encounters with advocates, as Adriana does, they sometimes use language that overlaps the place with those advocates. In these and other ways, advocates’ work becomes synonymous with the facility, which not only inaccurately represents advocates’ relationships with administrators and their role as volunteers, but it also functionally impedes their ability to support a case for closing the centers. The work that advocates do is not just recognized by detainees and others as being a part of what makes the space reasonably livable for many, it is also actively co-opted by administrative officials. In this co-optation, advocates’ legal care work comes to help produce the kinds of conditions that support administrative aims to keep these

facilities not only afloat but seen as something different than what they objectively are: something normal, even caring.

The blurred boundaries between the work of legal advocates and that of facility administrators expressed itself in overt and more covert ways. In the asylum office trailer in Dilley one afternoon, I walked up to the desk where detainees, and their legal representatives, must check in ahead of their fear interview. As I stood next to the mother whom I was accompanying for her interview as she leaned over to sign in, I glanced over to the wall behind the desk, my eye catching a familiar acronym: CARA, the name for the legal project at the time, which is now the DPBP. It was a greeting card, splayed open and stapled to the panel, signed and written by a group of asylum officers that had once rotated through the facility. It thanked CoreCivic staff for all their help to them and to the women (meaning the detainees). Last, but certainly not least in my mind, it thanked them for CARA. As my client finished signing in and I was quickly and impatiently ushered off by the desk guard to the waiting room, I sat down, stunned, trying to reset my attention to my nervous client. How was it possible that asylum officers were thanking CoreCivic staff for us? Facility staff deserved no credit for legal advocates having been there to help detainees; to the contrary, they were often the first barrier to providing legal services to detainees, both logistically long-term and at the microlevel, on a daily basis. I felt a surge of anger that not only had the asylum officers clearly misunderstood the reality of the relationship between legal advocates and facility staff, but also that those staff had the nerve to post this ridiculous tribute in clear view of advocates as they passed through the space in order to support their clients.

This was ultimately a small, covert way in which the boundaries between legal advocates and administrators was challenged. There were many other instances in which facility administrators, from CoreCivic and GEO staff to ICE officials, actively tried to co-opt the efforts of the legal

advocacy teams, to either claim credit for the work of advocates as their own or to deploy language in such a way that intentionally misrepresented the role of advocates in these spaces.

Lots of ‘tour groups’ made their way through these facilities, from politicians to UNHCR representatives (as was noted in a previous chapter) to various Latin American emissaries or ambassadors. Some of those groups and representatives passed through the legal visitation area, though not all. These appeared to be very orchestrated events, as many advocates believed and was made evident by the encounter with representatives from the UNHCR. On one occasion in late 2016, one such group passed through the Dilley facility, led by a CoreCivic staff member. It was a committee comprised of different religious representatives. I did not quite understand what they were doing there, so I asked Jason, one of the attorneys of the project. “It’s a group of people who want to make sure that only those of their faith are taken care of,” he said wryly. “Like the Christians want to make sure the Christian refugees are ok.” I wondered if Jason’s dark sense of humor existed before his work in Dilley. Later in the day, as the group passed back through our trailer, Jason and Amelia, another attorney, were giving a minutes-long presentation to them, trying to present the kinds of aid that our group offered. As Jason and Amelia finished their brief talk, the staff officer led the group away toward the exit. Before they walked out, they stood near the PB office, and the group of us seated inside listened as the officer continued to enlighten the group as to the nature of the work done in this trailer. The staff officer, surprisingly, spoke very positively of our group. He argued that the legal services were just one of the services their facility offered to detainees.

This was one of the first times I had heard a facility staff member frame our relationship in such a muddled way, but it certainly was not the last. I later asked Jason about this, recounting what I had heard the staff officer say to this group. “Here, they always try to use us,” he said flatly, as he worked at his laptop. “They try to take credit for our work all the time. It makes them look better, or that they are somehow involved in our presence here in a positive way.”

Advocates, of course, aimed to shape public perceptions of the facilities in ways that reflected the realities they observed at work within. This was challenged by many elements, from the physically obscured existence of these centers and their daily goings-on to the carefully constructed language deployed by administrators in both describing these centers and consistently denouncing more critical interpretations. One of the barriers advocates faced in trying to shift perception, I would argue, involved their very role. One reason that administrators were able to lay claim to the efforts of advocates, in certain respects, had to do with advocates' 'stranger', liminal positioning in these spaces. The individuals who come to work as representatives of these projects not official legal representatives of any individual client within. Detainees are supported, given legal assistance, through the *pro bono* project itself. This was why, on the exceedingly rare occasion that a client had obtained legal representation prior to meeting with either the Dilley or Karnes team, that person's legal case could not be assisted by them. As was illustrated briefly during an encounter in Chapter 4, many advocates struggled to communicate this somewhat confusing identity to their clients. I, like other volunteers who were not lawyers or legal professionals, was frequently referred to as "*abogada*", or lawyer, by clients with whom I worked. Advocates, in their *charlas*, would explain that we were not all lawyers, and yet there was not a more decent term for our role in our encounters with clients. Even when I would clarify to women that I was not a lawyer, the term seemed to find a way to stick.

For a time, there were many ethnic Roma/Romani clients moving throughout the facilities in Dilley and Karnes, and for whatever reason, some chain of events led me to be one of those the teams would repeatedly ask to work with them. Working with these clients generally required a different approach that working with clients from Central America, not least because of the difficulties in finding a proper interpreter. When I met the first Roma client I worked with in Dilley, Dora, she mentioned to me that she had been told by an officer at the facility that she was going to have a lawyer that would help her with her case, a "public defender". Dora and I subsequently had a

long, winding, and confusing conversation in which I tried to explain that she was not afforded a public defender. I muddled my way through communicating that while the ‘lawyers’ to which that staff member referred were us, the legal advocates, we were not public defenders but rather provide free legal services. Later that same day, I mused on this supposed difference. Are we, effectively, public defenders? Can CoreCivic, ICE, GEO, asylum officers not guarantee to detainees that legal advocates and their services will be available to them, in a similar way that the government does with public defenders for those others incarcerated? We were humanitarian aid workers, providing services *pro bono* through these organizations for years. What does it mean that our labor was considered so integral to the functioning of the facilities’ claim processing, effectively, to the care of detainees?

The blurring of boundaries between advocate and administrator naturally leads one to consider more deeply this conflicted relationship. In many other scenarios, this relationship has been described by some (e.g. Agier and Fernbach 2011) as one of ‘functional solidarity’ between the ‘hand that cares’, meaning humanitarian aid work, and the ‘hand that strikes’, which includes military and policing processes, as was discussed in Chapter 3. We can perhaps best think of this functional solidarity through Agier and Fernbach’s discussion of humanitarian government, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) come to manage the populations confined (essentially meaning incarcerated) within various forms of encampments. NGOs, then, develop a sort of solidaristic relationship with the state in that their work becomes the localized form of governance, reproducing some of the functional roles of the state—‘care’, management, and control—on behalf of the state. Since in many instances the state retreats from some of the more intimate forms of care and management of these depoliticized subjects, like refugees, humanitarian aid work comes to fill that role, but often in either terms that are provided by the state or in ways that are in some form of alignment with the state’s interests.

In the case of family detention, these chapters have attempted to make quite clear the ways in which legal advocates and governmental/private entities are directly at odds with one another, challenging the care work of advocates at both the micro- and macro-scale. While one could aptly argue that legal advocates have established a relationship of functionality with facility administrators, it is necessary to recognize their differences in aims and perceptions of care as well as how administrators use their ultimate authority and advocates' precarious positions to co-opt their labor. This is a relationship not of solidarity, but one of functional yet competitive co-existence. The boundaries which divide them from each other are blurred as a result of this complicated, ever-shifting relationship. The co-optation of their efforts inflicts a kind of wound, inhibiting their abilities to achieve their ultimate goals while also serving as a reminder of the diverse ways in which detainees can be hurt, even when they're being 'treated well'.

Tending Wounds

Hurting goes with the territory of family detention; the many stories presented in the previous chapters make this evident. In my conversations with volunteers and staff of these projects about their experiences of spaces and their work, some would use the language of wounds: of having been wounded by different encounters or stories, of having borne witness to creation of new wounds for those in detention, or sometimes feeling as if they had played a role in manifesting others' wounds.

In July of 2015, before making my way to Dilley for the first time, I met Luisa in downtown El Paso at a storage container that was converted into a hip coffee shop. I did not know what she would look like; a friend of a friend set up our meeting. I arrived, quickly ordered a drink and sat near the door, watching for some other person with a searching gaze. "Erin?" a woman in her twenties with a short, angular haircut wearing a fitted blazer and a large colorful necklace asked, stopping at my table. Luisa was a paralegal working with an organization in El Paso to help detainees

and undocumented migrants in the area, and she had very quickly and enthusiastically responded to my request to meet for an informal interview about her work.

We talked easily about what she did in her role and how she got involved in the work before the conversation turned to family detention, the topic I was interested in learning more about and the field in which she hoped to get more involved. “I will *never* forgive Obama for doing this,” she said, suddenly switching her tone to one that was serious, stern. While fully aware of the former administration’s reputation amongst im/migrants rights advocates—specifically of President Obama as the ‘deporter-in-chief’ for having enabled a massive expansion of deportation efforts (“Obama Leaves Office” 2017)—I was not expecting to hear such a resolute comment, one teeming with much emotion. Yet, this kind of strongly emotive remark would be the first of many that reflect the kinds of pains that accompany advocates in their work with migrants and asylum-seekers. I would suggest that these are articulations of the ways in which legal advocates are wounded by the policies and practices that make up the treatment of those for whom they work.

Legal advocates were rarely entirely comfortable in their work in the facility, and this was made repeatedly evident in my encounters with both project staff and volunteers. Comments in previous chapters both explicitly and implicitly demonstrate this. These were not spaces and this wasn’t a form of work that left you, as an advocate, ever feeling entirely sure or entirely good about what happened within. All was bittersweet, in the end, even the victories, partially because of the inevitable pain that came with them. The ‘prep’ that advocates performed, in preparation for clients’ interviews, was always a moment which advocates seemed to wrestle with, in particular, as a result of the very nature of the exchange. While a necessity, and while, as I have hopefully demonstrated in the previous chapters, committed with thoughtful and empathetic approaches, it could often feel, ironically, like something that caused unnecessary pain, as was discussed in Chapter 2.

As I walked out of the facility with Ali one early Friday evening, we vented some frustrations from the day, the week. I told her about how I had been working with a client earlier in the week, and how I was so discouraged by the fact that she seemed to be without any particularly strong claim. The woman herself appeared quite strong; she did not cry at all initially, which was rare. As our conversation went on, I grew increasingly worried about her case, so I searched for something else in her past that could help bolster her case. I asked her question after question, pursued avenue after still another avenue, looking for something in her experiences that might support her case. Eventually, the client started to cry. I was not sure if she was crying because she was trying to avoid talking about something painful, or perhaps because she realized that through my persistence, I was concerned about the success of her case. Both scenarios played out on many occasions. Either way, I felt awful. I was the one who made her cry, not some asylum officer who asked an insensitive question or a judge who made some off-hand racist remark. I was not a Border Patrol officer that had told her that she was bad mother for bringing her child cross-country, nor was I an ICE officer who told her that she was lying about everything. Still, I made her cry when she was not before.

Ali and I commiserated over that fact, how painful it feels to know that you are the one causing a kind of pain, you are the one eliciting tears, either because you are asking them to dredge up memories that they might rather never speak of or because you are effectively pushing them to look at their lives in a way that they would rather not. It can feel like you are picking at someone else's wounds, some that are very old, and you are doing it because you believe it is what you must do to care for them. Their future as free persons hinges on their ability to explain those wounds to others, and yet, the work can leave you wondering if you have any right to participate in that. While it is ultimately the legal process and its administrators that are forcing asylum-seeking applicants to expose their wounds in a potential exchange for legal status, legal advocates are inherently participatory.

This discomfiting experience speaks to what some critical scholars of humanitarianism have noted about the often-inevitable reification of difference built into humanitarian labor. As Fassin (2012) has noted, this imbalanced relationship “always presupposes a relation of inequality” (4), a positioning other advocates mentioned wrestling with. Yet because in these environments, the humanitarian aid worker—the legal advocate—is exposed to vulnerabilities in different ways, despite the unequal positions between giver and recipient, the exchange can unexpectedly hurt them as well. On another day in the center, Max, a volunteer immigration lawyer, walked back from court and sat at a computer in the PB room in order to upload his notes. “I’ve heard so many bad stories at this point,” he said to us in the room, “I’m just so numb to it. I don’t feel anything anymore when I hear about rape or murder.” Other people in the room nodded, agreed. “I feel like it’s a scab or like a wound,” he continued. “If I want to, I can pick at it and make it hurt, but I just choose not to. It’s not like it goes away. I can still access it if I want to.” This echoed the sort of emotional dissociation practices others who worked in asylum law spoke of. In that way, those experienced with the kinds of cases asylum-seekers had were better prepared than others who entered this work, though the extreme amount of cases they had to hear, in brief periods of time, and forms of oppression that constituted those stories were still quite disturbing to most.

So many others, as shown in the preceding chapters, spoke of wounding encounters or experiences. While some, like Alejandro, felt bruised by the work itself, what it demanded and what it refused, others, like Paula, had experiences that were more intimately painful, as she was reminded by a client of the *viejita* she had long left behind as a child migrant herself. I thus feel compelled to ask, in the end: where does the border lie between the wounds of others and our own in such intimate, vulnerable encounters? In these exchanges, one, the imprisoned asylum-seeker, is clearly more vulnerable than the other, the legal advocate caregiver, and yet, the latter’s experience of vulnerability and wounding cannot be denied. Those who had personal experiences which mirrored

those they helped—be it through experiences of intimate abuse, precarious legal statuses, or, simply, traumatic loss—seemed to express a kind of binding to those individuals through shared wounds. This connection muddies the boundaries one might expect divide a caregiver from the care recipient, and because their roles as caregivers are not clearly defined to begin with, understanding the significance, and subsequent effects, of that blurring proves challenging. Still, despite the wounds the work in this environment inflicted on most, a strange hope was ever-present as well.

Nomadic Hope

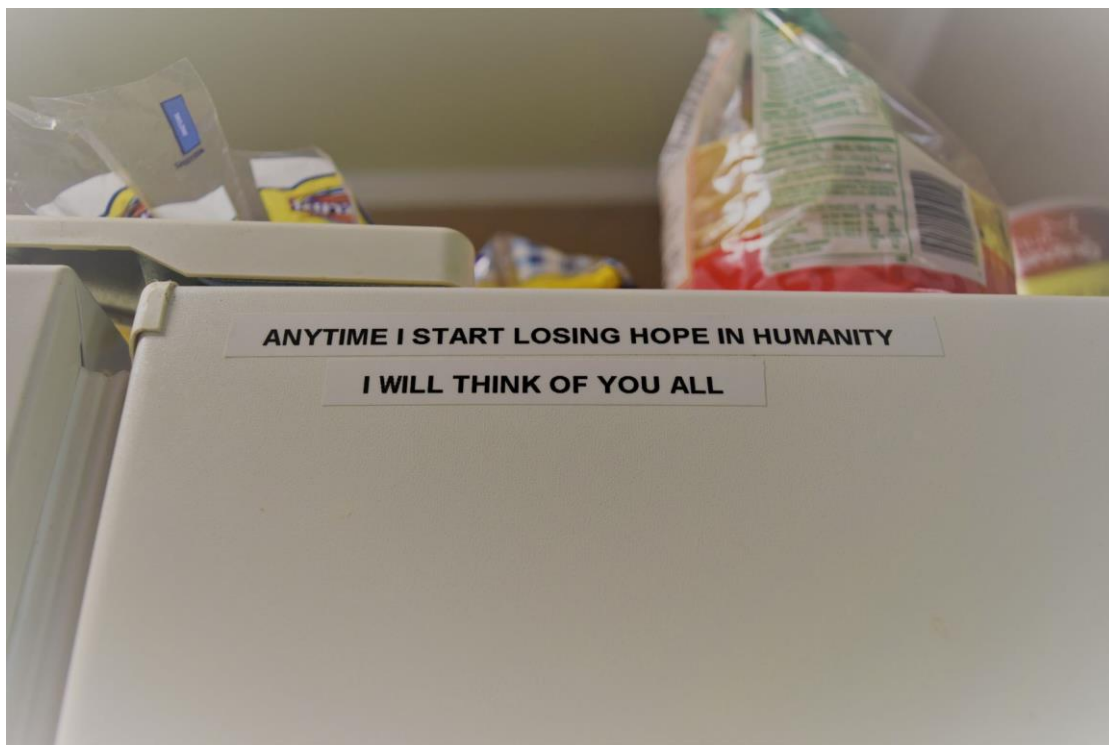


Image 28: Note adorning the refrigerator at the ranch. Photo credit: author

In many ways, family detention feels as if it exists along a frontier, a ‘contact zone’ (Clifford 1997) bringing together disparate peoples, needs, and interests. “A frontier is an edge of space and time,” Tsing (2005) reminds us, “a zone of not yet—not yet mapped and not yet regulated,” (28). This characterization might seem contradictory to what much of my research has presented to this point. As spaces of incarceration, family detention spaces are regulated and controlled, forcibly

shaped and determined by multiple, sometimes competing forces. Legal advocates themselves played a role in that, both in challenging that control and, in other ways, affirming it. In another sense, though, these spaces and what went on inside them felt as if they were always in a state of becoming, unmapped and unpredictable. Things changed so rapidly, and we, as advocates, discussed often how it routinely felt as if the environment was on the cusp of something new. Were they the first of many like them to come? Would they all close down within a week? Would they be converted to some other kind of carceral facility? These questions circulated throughout the legal advocacy community, sometimes encouraged by the *chismes* travelling amongst both detainees and facility staff. While facility staff would worry about a sudden loss of their job, advocates would worry that these centers were just the beginning, perched at the precipice of a cowardly new world in which imprisoning children and their parents was the norm. This fear of the unmapped, unknown of family detention's future echoed throughout advocates' comments. But amongst that fear and uncertainty, there was also unique kind of hope.

“Hope has never trickled down,” oral historian and author Studs Terkel once noted; “It has always sprung up,” (2003). For some legal advocates, their experiences of these projects served as a strange sort of wellspring of hope. Amal, an attorney who regularly did *pro bono* work with refugees in Atlanta, rather than being wounded like others from the work, reflected on Dilley as a place and experience she wanted to actively remember. There were other experiences she had had helping refugees that she preferred to try to forget, stories she had heard that were so horrifying and cases with judges so indiscriminately unfair that she would rather not immediately recall them. In fact, in her everyday work, it had become normal to forget. “I’ve been doing asylum law for 4 years,” she explained. “In Georgia, we’re completely jaded.^{xxxiii} Women will pass their CFIs [credible fear interviews], get out of detention, and then will get deported within 2 months. Judges won’t even let them present their claims. They need immediate help when they get out of detention, but they don’t

have any money. Don't even have access to transportation to get to court." In recent years, she and her colleagues have experienced bouts of extreme stress with their case denials, and she had learned to compartmentalize the emotions she experienced with her cases. "I will be in an interview or a meeting with a client, and I will have tears in my eyes listening to their stories. Then I'll leave, and it's like I'll completely forget. I'll forget the details of their stories, what just happened in front of me. It's like it's gone." Other lawyers, especially those working on immigration or asylum cases, shared Amal's opinion. "As an immigration lawyer, I usually give more bad news than good news," Rebecca says. "And it's tough. So, in a personal way, going to Dilley is a more uplifting experience. But it's draining in another way, in that you have to listen to these really horrific stories all at once. That's really hard to do."

For non-lawyer advocates, the liminality of family detention rarely conjured a sense of hopefulness. For those advocates, hope was found in release from detention, the achievement of that first aim of the projects. For many of them, release symbolized progressive movement towards justice, towards reunification with families and loved ones. Advocates coming from legal professions, however, typically expressed difficulties in sharing this view. Louis was still a law student when he went to Dilley, though he had already had much experience working with different organizations in the U.S. that served the legal needs of detained refugees. It was clear to him that for detainees in Dilley, hope still sat in a central position. "At the stage of detention I was working at with detainees before, they know what their chances of actually winning asylum are. They're more hardened, more realistic even. But in Dilley, they are still really hopeful. And I think that was hard for me, in a way. I know their chances. I know that there's not really any way out. The government doesn't care about them, and there's so little that we can do to change that." Few advocates expressed this same sort of explicit pessimism. His perspective, at times, led him to speak more frankly with clients about the chances of their case's success, both within the space of the fear

interview, in detention, and beyond detention. Few advocates spoke in such a way with detainees, even when they questioned the success of a client's case, and Louis's actions were challenged by other advocates and ultimately discouraged by project staff. Some staff would argue that it simply was not productive or helpful to share doubts about the future success of a client's case with them at this stage, and few advocates shared the view that such frank discussions were helpful. Liv, an undergraduate student from New York who had previously volunteered with legal organizations serving detained youth, openly expressed her frustrations with attitudes and behaviors like Louis's. "I feel like it's our job to give them hope for the future," she argued. "They don't need our pity or for someone to tell them that they've got no hope with their cases. They just need someone to respect them."

For Noelle, also an immigration lawyer, it was all about "one step at a time. Being in a detention center is not tenable," she said; "it's not a solution to anything. Nobody can withstand that for long, so getting past this issue [of being detained] is how you get to whatever the next possible steps are. If it means that they do find the right advocate on the outside who can't win an asylum claim but can reunite them with their families and can keep them in the U.S. on a work authorization for 2 or 3 years, I think that's a great solution. And then maybe something changes with their case or their circumstances in the meantime." While Noelle uses the language of 'solutions' in her remarks, the temporary nature of her proposition seems incongruous with how one typically thinks about solutions, as more like resolutions, especially when speaking about immigration processes. Mary, who was volunteering the same week, shared a similar sentiment: "If all this work does is only to give these women a few years of security and opportunity, it's worth it. The majority may not win their asylum cases, but they may have other opportunities that could really make a difference."

Already, many immigration lawyers, like each of these volunteers, know the slim chances of actually winning their cases, being afforded a legal status in order to remain in the U.S. Depending upon the courts in which a claim is pursued, especially those which constitute the “asylum-free zones”^{xxxiv}, like Amal’s Atlanta court, this can be functionally impossible to achieve. The vision, then, as these advocates demonstrate, is rearticulated, shifted from a future sustained by the concrete legal status asylum or citizenship provides to an unknown future. Maybe the asylum-seeker remains in the U.S. for only a few years, and maybe those few years of working and earning money while remaining safe, as their case processes, afford a different sort of future, even if they are ultimately deported. Maybe, as other immigration lawyers have pointed out, different legal pathways from asylum might be pursued. Perhaps, some argued, they could get out of detention and just live without legal status. There were many possible futures being considered. Hope is in this unknown, because already the known—here meaning the narrow likelihood of winning asylum—fails to provide a path to sustained security.

In *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders*, Peter Redfield challenges the argument that humanitarian action must involve a sense of optimism about future end-goals. Using the example of Doctors Without Borders, Redfield demonstrates the ways in which the nomadic organization’s very nature—of attending primarily to the immediate needs of survival—emphasizes the importance of activity, engagement, a ‘presence in the field’, and, importantly, mobility. As a result of the fact of unpredictable future outcomes, something like hope, Redfield argues, “becomes embodied and realized in specific individuals and actual lives,” (Redfield 2018: 240). I argue that a mobile or nomadic approach to humanitarian engagement also helps us to imagine a formulation of hope that is not predicated on problem-ending solutions. What I am calling a ‘nomadic hope’ does not require a firm emplacement in time, space, and legal statuses. While it is “embodied in individual lives”, it also resides within and moves throughout indeterminate space and unforeseeable futures,

because it is exactly the indeterminate and unforeseeable that in certain ways, hope can thrive. The ‘nomad’, as several scholars have recently pointed out, is a particularly relevant symbol of our times today, with some, like archaeologist Yannis Hamilakis, claiming that we have entered a “new nomadic age” (Hamilakis 2018). I would argue that while we think about this figure in terms of its embodiment in those fleeing the violence, wars, and climate change affecting their home countries or states, we should also consider those that leave their homes to provide aid to those displaced or detained, like the legal advocates at the center of this story, as part of this nomadic group. And while the literal nomad seems a figure emblematic of our present moment in many ways, I think the conceptual nomadic can be deployed generatively as well to the ways in which we think about the imaginative engineering work of hope. Hope, for legal advocates and especially for those working in immigration law in this particularly tumultuous time, is not merely a sentiment, but a method (Miyazaki 2004) in their continuing work with those, like asylum-seekers, who exist, and wait, within multiple spheres of precarity.

“In a way, Dilley itself is the middle of nowhere,” Cora tells me. Though she was not a lawyer, Cora was used to working with those living under precarious circumstances in her role supporting victims of human trafficking in the D.C. area, and she often compared her experience in Dilley with that work. One of the ways was simply the stark contrast between the two worlds, with the implication that Dilley was ‘nowhere’ while a place like Washington, D.C. was ‘somewhere’. For her, Dilley, rather the detention center, elicited this sense of hope precisely because of its liminality, its ‘nowhereness’. “Dilley is also ‘nowhere’, to me, in the sense that it sort of sits between the violence and trauma of these women’s pasts and their hope for the future. It is like, they are all on the cusp of something better. It is very different in that way than, for instance, the issue of human trafficking in D.C. When I started working with the organization that helps these victims, I didn’t know that this happened all around me. I learned that the neighborhoods

that I live in, that I spend a lot of time in are these same places of fear and harm for these other people. For them, they are living in their trauma, in those areas, trying to escape it while still being there. In Dilley, though, the women have, for the most part, left the scary things behind. They're safe for the time being, and you feel this hope that there's something better on the horizon."

For many, that horizon seems to be moving further and further away, testing the hopeful limits of both asylum-seekers and their advocates. This calls for a mobile or nomadic formulation of hope, one that moves with the horizon, rather than remaining fixed on a particular end or achievement. Mattingly (2010) contends that hope, in fact, "most centrally involves the practice of creating, or trying to create, lives worth living even in the midst of suffering, even with no happy ending in sight. It also involves the struggle to forge new communities of care," (6).

Sin Fronteras



Image 29: A weathered 'End Family Detention' sign hung on the fence at the ranch. Photo credit: author

When I began preliminary fieldwork in 2015, the fervor to end the practice of family detention was high, as was the optimism to accomplish this goal. Even when I returned to begin my continuous year of fieldwork in 2016, that energy was seemingly only slightly dampened. Many still believed that with the right kind of litigation and oversight of the practices that went on inside these centers exposed to public attention, the facilities would be closed.

At a ‘town hall’-style interview hosted by MSNBC in April 2016, then presidential candidate Hillary Clinton sat on a stage with host Rachel Maddow. In between questions, an audience member shouted towards the stage, asking what Clinton planned to do about family detention and if she was going to stop the practice, specifically naming the Berks facility. Clinton responded quickly, looking directly out into the audience: “Yes, I’m against that,” she said firmly, unequivocally. “Absolutely. I’m against it. I’ve been against it for a long time. I’ve said we should end family detention, we should end private prisons, and private detention centers. They are wrong. We should end raids and roundups, and when I am president, we are going to get comprehensive immigration reform when they pass their citizenship. So we will end all of these problems at the time [the campaign is] successful,” (“MSNBC town hall” 2016). This and other comments from candidate Clinton helped fuel the hopeful excitement many seemed to have about future turns in family detention.

In my time working with these projects, advocates articulated different imagined endings of family detention. Many times, changes would occur to the environment, or judges would make certain rulings, or legal teams would experience successes with broader litigation efforts. Along with those changes, many believed that the end was inevitably nigh. The end, as an idea, had a constant presence in this way, and yet, the longer I worked with these projects and spoke with those who had also spent an even longer amount of time with them, I came to see the end as less likely to become a reality. “I don’t think anyone is even working on that anymore,” Meg said to me with a slight laugh, as we sat on the floor of her apartment in San Antonio eating take-out and drinking beer during the

summer of 2019. Meg was a staff member of the Dilley project and had been with the project for just over two years. I had asked her what people on the team were thinking these days about the prospect of ending family detention, as it had always been the goal alongside direct legal services. I was not expecting such a blunt answer, but I was not entirely surprised by it either.

Meg's role with the project had recently changed, as had many others. Over the years, new organizations had taken over the work of the Dilley project, while RAICES still remained in charge of the efforts at Karnes. In Dilley, few staff remained living at the ranch house, while most others spread out to apartments in Dilley or San Antonio. It felt strange, that staff were now shifting away from not only the communal living structure they had for so long, but also that they were moving physically further away from the facility, because despite this, it felt like their role in the center was becoming more entrenched. It was clear that the organizations which had been involved in this aid work had begun to think more seriously about long-term engagement; thinking about family detention as something temporary was clearly diminishing.

Meg seemed relieved by some of the changes. Living in San Antonio, as opposed to Dilley, had obvious benefits. She was an avid rock-climber and now lived just around the corner from a gym with a climbing wall. She was also a very social person and being in San Antonio afforded her a different, more typical, lifestyle—going out to eat with friends, participating in non-detention related activities. She could go to the detention center to work for some portion of the week but did not have to be there every day, available all hours of the day and night. Her role in the work had morphed into something very different than what staff did as I observed them throughout most of my fieldwork. It had become something much more sustainable, realistically livable. Previously, as has been illustrated, staff rarely lived lives that balanced their work with other activities. The work for them was all-consuming, never-ending, stressful and emotionally draining. They socialized with one another and found time to get away, sometimes involving themselves in other activities, but the

burden of carrying a project that involved a massive amount of labor and mental and emotional bandwidth made it effectively impossible to live balanced lives while in those direct service roles. For many, the notion of ‘self-care’ was either laughable or a distraction from what ‘really mattered’: the care of the detained moms and kids inside those facilities.

Part of this, what led to this to experience for many staff members and inevitably for long-term volunteers, was undoubtedly related to the perception of these facilities, and thus the work to aid detainees, as temporary. When these projects began and as they moved along throughout those early years, the commitment to this idea was strong. These facilities would be closed. This is why they could come up with a project that depended almost entirely on unpaid labor. As the years went by, it was astounding to many that they were still able to find new groups of unpaid volunteers every week, groups that would fly to Texas, rent hotel rooms, pay their own meals and gas and everything else. And yet, as the years went on, while this was an encouraging fact—that they could continue to get such enthusiastic support for *pro bono* aid—the simultaneous reminder that this was still needed was increasingly discouraging. Why have they not been able to effectively shut these facilities down? Why have they not garnered the support of the public in such a way that would pressure the government to close them?

As someone who is not a litigation expert, I do not have answers to this. I can, however, imagine a couple of reasons which bolster the continued existence of these facilities. When the practice of detaining families was beginning to see its expansion with the T. Don Hutto facility in 2005, a refrain familiar to contemporary times was deployed to very different ends. As Schrag (2020) notes about the time: “Because some of the female immigrants were arriving with their children, ICE arranged for the detention of those children along with their mothers. It contracted with the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) [now CoreCivic] to convert one of its private prisons for convicted adult criminals into a detention center for the immigrant families. The institution, in

Taylor, Texas, thirty-four miles from Austin, was renamed the T. Don Hutto Family Detention Center, in honor of [CoreCivic's] co-founder, T. Don Hutto. DHS would later tell the immigrants' advocates that it had created the family jail in response to those advocates' complaints about separating families, and that they were very proud to have been able to keep families together," (87).

In light of all that has occurred in the past few years as a result of the Trump administration's border policies and new practices, the idea of keeping families together has taken on new significance. It is a phrase that has been emblazoned on t-shirts and protest signs, deployed as the conceptual framework for activist campaigns both within and beyond the advocacy communities of which I have been a part. "Keep families together" has become a rallying cry that responds to the massive separations of family members from one another as they attempted to cross the Mexico-U.S. border, spurred in part by the graphic stories and photographic depictions of very young children and babies being taken from the arms of their predominantly-depicted female caretakers.

When legal advocates began working on these projects, I do not believe that they, or most of us residing in the U.S., imagined that such harmful and drastic practices would emerge. Often when I had conversations with advocates about what they felt might come to pass if these facilities remained open, they typically imagined the worst to be that family detention would be further expanded. I do not believe that any of those advocates would have imagined that the practice might come to be seen as a better alternative. I certainly do not believe that advocates would come to see their positions potentially aligning with the comments by DHS officials in 2005, that keeping families together, even if in detention, was better than the new alternative. Many have now seen the heart-wrenching videos and read of the stories of young children crying as they are reunited with their mothers after months, sometimes years, unable to recognize their face (Jordan et al 2018). While most legal advocates remain devoted to ending the practice of family detention, the many upsetting changes to legal policies and practices surrounding asylum-seeking families, like the

expansion of family separation practices, has complicated the aims of these projects and others like them, dividing attention in order to respond to new problems and complicating the language surrounding their efforts.

Yet, there are other elements at play in the continuing existence of these facilities that directly implicate legal advocates. The co-optation of legal labor as performed by various facility administrators is used to effect a more positive portrayal of both the relationship between administration and legal advocates as well as what the facility ‘provides’ to detainees. Of course, facility administration does not provide legal services to detainees. As this dissertation has shown, these extensive care services are provided not only through a combination of voluntary and non-profit efforts, they are also provided in an environment that is intentionally produced as hostile to them and their efforts. Legal advocates are neither welcome nor supported in these environments by administration. In reality, there are individual staff within these spaces, working on behalf of the private prison corporations or other associated organizations that do support the presence of these advocates. This is clearly illustrated in Oleana’s emotional response while musing on the idea of not knowing ‘who the enemy is’ in family detention. Those facility staff members help detainees meet with legal advocates, and they are kind and supportive towards those caregivers. Some of those, from healthcare professionals to guards to asylum officers, expressed their respect for legal assistance and the advocates who provided it. Others, as previous chapters have demonstrated, appeared to feel the need to deflect responsibility for their role within this system, contending that this was ‘just a job’ for them, and that they bore no ill will towards detainees or advocates. These individuals, however, as I and other advocates experienced, are not the norm across the spectrum of administrative actors. Broadly, legal advocates faced constant, ever-changing barriers to conducting their work. They were treated with hostility by various administrative figures and experienced

retribution for their work and the challenges they levelled at the administration. Their care was both a form of resistance and a threat.

Ultimately, their legal care effectively improves the processing functions of these facilities, which is where the troubling nature of their presence lies. Their work contributes to when detainees comment that they are ‘grateful’ for what they are provided in these spaces, and that they are ‘treated well’. With the help of legal advocates, most detainees are released into the U.S., after typically brief periods of time, to continue their asylum cases, prepared with the right information to move forward. Advocates’ work contributes significantly to all of this, from being successful in their interviews and negative decision appeals, to advocating for their timely release, to providing them with necessary information about legal processes after detention. But they also contribute to much beyond strictly asylum operations. They advocate for the enforcement of other rules, like appropriate medical and child care. They attempt to ensure that clients have appropriate interpretation services. They do things, like these, that good legal representatives might be expected to do for their clients, to ensure that their rights are enforced and respected. Their work, in-and-of itself, does not make these places ‘good’; I would argue that sites of unjust and arbitrary incarceration cannot be made good because they will always run counter to human rights and dignity, no matter the quality of their management. What advocates do in their work, however, is make these places more ‘livable’, as carers are meant to do, recalling Tronto and Fisher’s characterization of care as “everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible,” (Tronto 1993: 103). The problem seems to be that making this little world more just and livable is what helps that world to continue to exist precisely because of the opportunities it affords others to view it as good. When you have the goal, as legal advocates do, to end the existence of that world, making it more livable seemingly, even if only a bit, subverts that goal. And yet, precisely because they are caregivers, as I contend, they cannot extricate

themselves from this work. Like medical professionals who swear themselves to the Hippocratic oath to “do no harm”, these advocates also implicitly follow this as a result of their awareness of the harm that would happen, in so many diverse ways, if they were not there. Not only detainees but administrators of all sorts within the facility rely on their care, sometimes using that care towards ends at odds with these projects.

In “‘A Prison Is Not a Home’: Notes from the Campaign to End Immigrant Family Detention” (Libal et al. 2012), the editors pose the simple question: what is the alternative [to family detention]? While this question seemingly baffles some—usually the kind of conservative-minded politicians that quickly affirm the inevitability of incarceration as a solution—legal advocates associated with these projects are typically ready with their answer, usually citing “Alternatives to Detention” (ATD) strategies, like case management programs or even ankle monitoring devices, as both more reasonable for the care of migrants as well as exceedingly more cost effective than either public or private incarceration. Advocates are quick to contend, rightfully so, that detention is not only entirely unnecessary, but it is also unavoidably harmful, and it is especially so for those whose lives are more precarious, like children, those who are ill, or those suffering from trauma.

Along this same vein of questioning, and considering the thrust of this dissertation, I would pose another question: what is the alternative to legal advocates giving care in this way in these spaces? This is effectively the ‘sticky’ question for these projects. They are aware, from the data provided before their existence in these spaces, of what would come to be, what harm would befall detainees were they not there, and not just entirely, but nearly every single day. The machinery at work inside the facilities, from deprivations of healthcare to denials of legal rights in asylum interviews, can be frighteningly effective at, as Ali once said, “grinding people up in their gears”. Without being observed or challenged, these abuses can sometimes take place without any recognition as such. Administrative actors prove the ease with which they deport im/migrants who

have either little to no understanding of or little to no recourse to change the complex legal processes in which they have entered. The stakes for legal care are substantial, and advocates know this, intimately. This was why some slept with their cell phones on their pillow at night, waiting for a call that their appeal-denied client might be in the process of being put on a bus to be deported at 2am, when advocates were not allowed to be in the facility, just so that they could hurriedly contact the administration to try to stop them. It was why advocates who attended interviews as representatives were asked to take extensive notes on things that were said and done in that space, and why volunteers were cautioned not to say or do things that might anger those critical decision-makers, who sometimes had the power to disallow our precarious presence.

All of this—knowing the critical difference that their care makes and what their absence could set into motion—leaves advocates caught within a system that simultaneously does not value their work as necessary care while also taking credit for the benefits that their presence affords. Of course, their entrapped position is, as they themselves would be especially quick to note, incomparable to that of those for whom they care. In speaking of the worlds of caregiving and reception beyond incarceration, Cooper (2018) reminds us of the importance in recognizing, however, the undeniable borders which separate these positions and the ways in which difference is bridged by these experiences. “Being frustrated by the political climate in which one works is hardly the same thing as being routinely incarcerated and indefinitely accountable to the terms and conditions of probation. There are significant material differences between these two positions that cannot be overlooked. And yet the experience of frustration with bureaucracy and with the paucity of services available to clients outside of the carceral sphere that clients and bureaucrats share constructs an affective bridge on which clients and professionals communicate and express care,” (130).

For the moment, legal advocates' work seems to continue to unfold upon borderless terrain. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) spoke poignantly of the terrain, rather the wound, along which these facilities exist. The long, open wound of the Mexico-U.S. border, she contended, is a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary,” (25). She reminded us that before a scab can form upon that or any wound, it will hemorrhage. Sometimes these detention centers feel like wounds that will never really close; the predictable frictions between unpredictable administrative changes, looming private interests, and constant, albeit fluctuating flows of peoples seeking safety and security would almost guarantee to keep them fresh and painful. Yet, despite that, it is nevertheless apparent that, even if only in a fleeting encounter between familiar strangers, it means something to have someone there, tending to them.

Citations

- Agier, Michel, and David Fernbach. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.
- Clifford, James. “Museums as Contact Zones”. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: *Harvard University Press*, p. 188–219. 1997.
- Cooper, Jessica. “Trapped: The Limits of Care in California's Mental Health Courts.” *Social Justice*, vol. 44, no. 1, p. 121+, 2018.
- Eagly, I.V., and S. Shafer. “A National Study of Access to Counsel in Immigration Court”. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 164 (1):1-91, 2015.
- Furman, Rich, Douglas Epps, and Greg Lamphear. *Detaining the Immigrant Other: Global and Transnational Issues*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Hamilakis, Yannis. *The New Nomadic Age: Archaeologies of Forced and Undocumented Migration*. Equinox Publishing, 2018.
- INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: beyond the non-profit industrial complex*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007.
- Jordan, Miriam, Katie Benner, Ron Nixon, and Caitlin Dickerson. “As Migrant Families Are

- Reunited, Some Children Don't Recognize Their Mothers". *NYTimes*, July 10, 2018.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/10/us/politics/trump-administration-catch-and-release-migrants.html>
- Libal, Bob, Lauren Martin and Nicole Porter. " 'A Prison is Not a Home' Notes from the Campaign to End Immigrant Family Detention". In *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*. University of Georgia Press, p. 253-265, 2012.
- Macías-Rojas, Patrisia. *From Deportation to Prison: The Politics of Immigration Enforcement in Post-Civil Rights America*. New York University Press, 2016.
- Malkki, Liisa. *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. *The Paradox of Hope: Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- McCulloch, Jude and Sharon Pickering. "The Violence of Refugee Incarceration". In *The Violence of Incarceration*, eds. Phil Scraton and Jude McCulloch. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford University Press, 2006.
- "MSNBC town hall participant yells question out of turn to Hillary Clinton". *Youtube*, April 25, 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=Nh8MzdG0AcM&feature=emb_logo
- "Obama Leaves Office As 'Deporter-In-Chief'". *NPR.org*. Accessed April 20, 2020.
<https://www.npr.org/2017/01/20/510799842/obama-leaves-office-as-deporter-in-chief>.
- Redfield, Peter. *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors without Borders*. Berkeley: University of California, 2013.
- Stenken, Christopher. "Detention and Access to Justice: A Florence Project Case Study". In *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, eds. Jenna M. Loyd, Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burrige. Athens: U of Georgia, 2012.
- Terkel, Studs. *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Difficult Times*. New York: The New Press, 2003.
- TRAC. "Who Is Represented in Immigration Court?" October 16, 2017. Accessed April 23, 2020.
<https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/485/>.
- Tronto, Joan C. *Moral Boundaries: a Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. Routledge, 1993.
- Wacquant, Loïc. *Prisons of Poverty*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2009.
- Wolch, Jennifer. *The Shadow State: Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition*. Foundation Center,

1990.

Zaman, Jawziya F. "Why I Left Immigration Law". *Dissent Magazine*, July 12, 2017.
https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/left-immigration-law.

Notes

^{xxxii} “Our History.” *The Florence Project* (blog). Accessed April 23, 2020. <https://firrp.org/who/history/>.

^{xxxiii} “Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative (SIFI) | Southern Poverty Law Center.” Accessed April 23, 2020. <https://www.splcenter.org/our-issues/immigrant-justice/southeast-immigrant-freedom-initiative-en>.

^{xxxiii} Georgia, and Atlanta in particular, are notorious amongst legal advocates for their extremely high rates of asylum denials (see <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/judge2018/denialrates.html>)

^{xxxiv} “Impact-2018.Pdf.” Accessed April 21, 2020. <https://innovationlawlab.org/reports/Impact-2018.pdf>.