Article

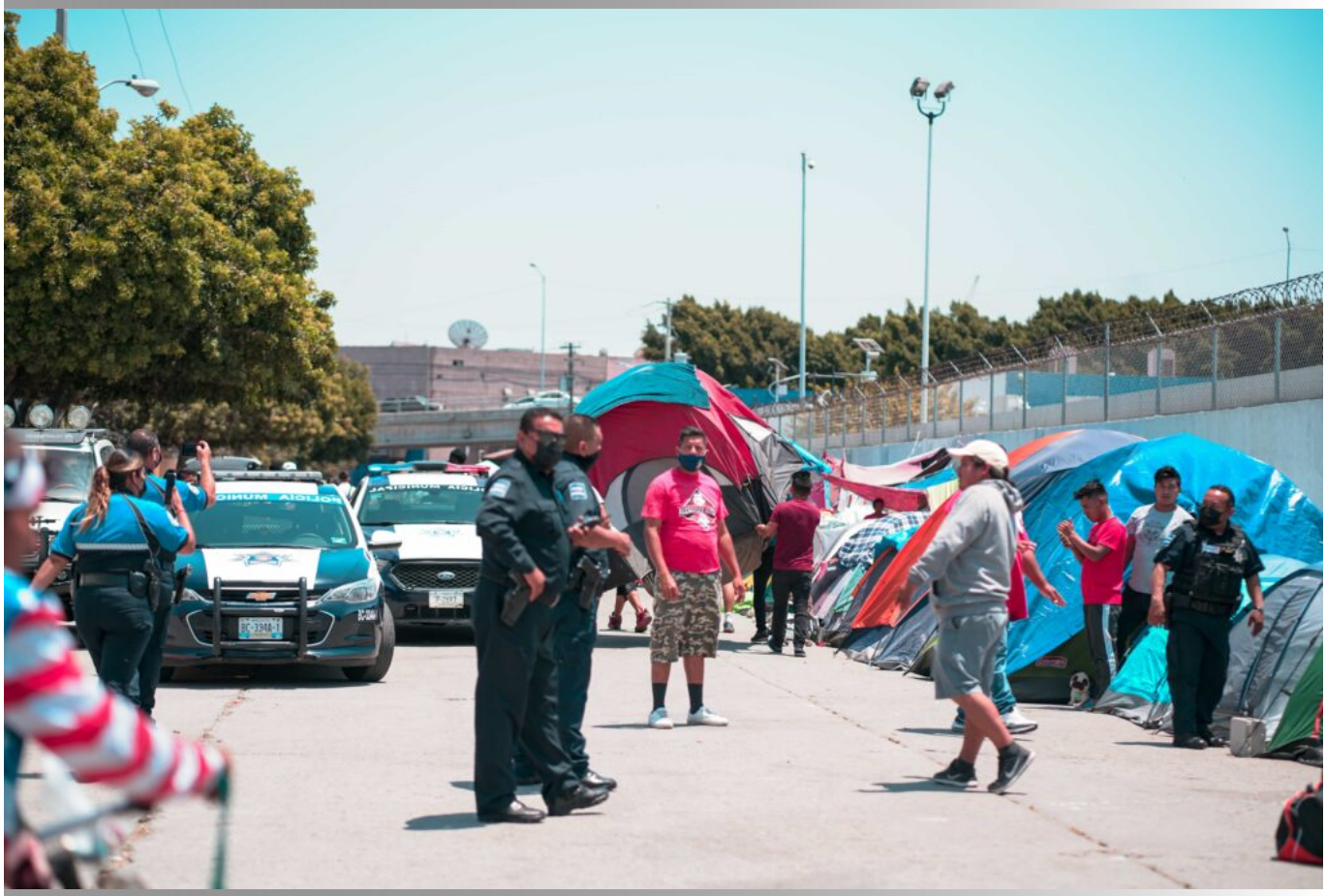
Tijuana: A Migratory Crossroads

January 14, 2024

Understanding security, faith, and humanitarian aid at the US-Mexico border

In a 2018 in *The Guardian* article, Julian Borger aptly writes, "The families in the migrant caravans trudging towards the US border are trying to escape a hell that the US has helped to create." Unfortunately, very little of the mainstream reporting on this issue shares the clarity of Borger's analysis. Today, mainstream media outlets cover the so-called migrant crisis daily, while the struggles of migrants from South and Central America have spanned years, occurring long before the recent sensationalistic headlines. From instigating wars to protect its business interests to decades of obstructing policy responses to global climate change, the United States has been a primary cause of the conditions that prompt migration. News cameras, however, almost always focus on the tension at the US-Mexico border, not on the lives of the people who travel there. Similarly, television news fixates on either on the political drama between Democratic and Republican politicians or the political dysfunction of nations that the United States helped destabilize. Almost none of that coverage has focused on—or even mentioned—how central climate change has been to migration patterns into the United States.

Source: Chris Leboutillier via Unsplash.



Tijuana police approach makeshift shelters. Source: Barbara Zandoval via Unsplash.

Source: Max Bohme via Unsplash.

The Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) at American University has been a major force in bringing context, clarity, and complexity to the discourse about climate change and migration through its program Religion and Environmentally-Induced Displacement. The participants of this program sought to understand the role of religion in the lives of environmental migrants and the humanitarian responses to migration. Two workshops convened to explore these issues: one in Tijuana, Mexico and one in Brasília, Brazil.

The Workshop in Tijuana, Mexico

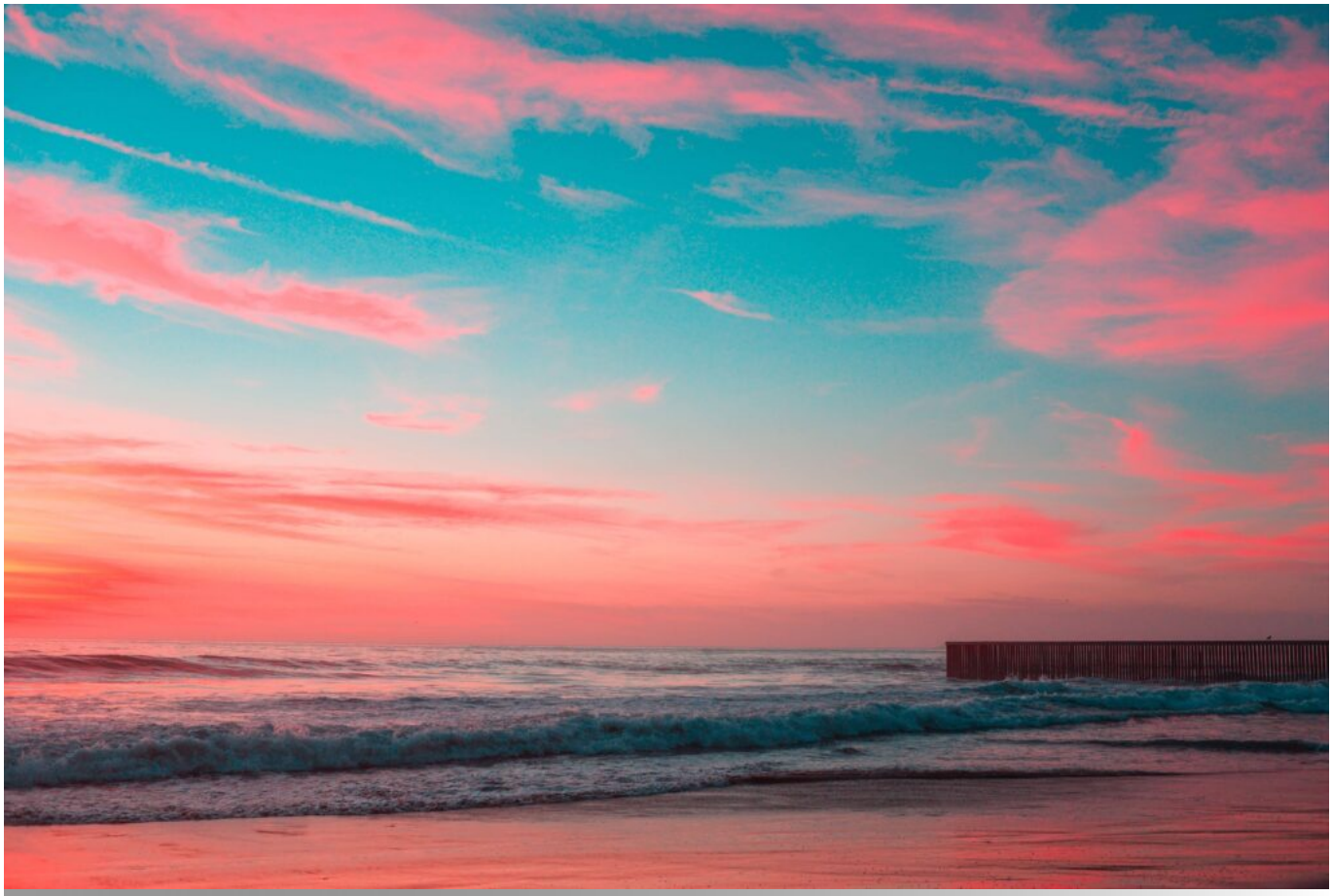
"Migration, Religion, and the Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean" took

place from March 16 to March 17, 2023. It was co-organized by CLALS and the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM). The workshop was made up of six panel discussions.

The first panel gave experts in migration and border issues the opportunity to frame the event's conversation. The second panel "Where We Are and Why: Tijuana and the Border Zone" included an overview of Tijuana as "an emergent nodal point for diverse migratory flows" by Juan Antonio del Monte Madrigal and an analysis of the city as a key global migration corridor by Bruno Miranda. After the first two panels, workshop participants engaged with faith-based nonprofit leaders on their efforts to serve Tijuana's migrant communities.

Tijuana welcome sign. Source: Gautam Krishnan via Unsplash.

Pedestrians in the streets of Tijuana. Source: Barbara Zandoval via Unsplash.



Tijuana at sunset. Source: Barbara Zandoval via Unsplash.

The second day of events began with a presentation on the relationship between migration and religion by Olga Odgers Ortiz, Alberto Hernandez (both of El Colegio de la Frontera Norte), and Liliana Rivera (Colegio de Mexico). Following these presentations was the third panel of the workshop “Migrants in Transit and the Role of Humanitarian FBOs.” Alejandro Olayo-Mendez (Boston College), Barbara Sostaita (University of Illinois-Circle), Rebecca Bartel (San Diego University), and Luciana Gandini made up the panel. Panel 4, “Policy, Security, Detention, and Spaces of Control” included Alethia Ferandez de la Reguera (UNAM), Melissa Guzman-Garcia

(San Francisco State University), Megan Ward (Univ. of Washington), and Robert Albro (American University).

The fifth panel, “Sacred Space, the Environment, and the New Sanctuary,” included discussions of service to displaced peoples in Laredo, Texas as sacred and devotional work; Pentecostalism and religious change among Oaxacan labor migrants; and migrant shelters run by faith-based actors. The conversants were Elaine Pena (George Washington University), Daniel Ramirez (Claremont Graduate University), Alexandro Delano (The New School), and Juan Antonio del Monte Madrigal (COLEF). The final panel, “Emergent Considerations and Final Considerations,” included experts from throughout the workshop and was moderated by Albro, Gandini, and Eric Hershberg. Following the workshop’s closing panel, participants visited the Valle de Guadalupe, which is home to a diverse mixture of Spiritual Christian communities.

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Three documentaries were produced as a part of this project: *Broken Land* by Jessica Mary and Amelia Tyson, *I Am the Land* by Josee Molavi, and *Escaping Atlantis* by Fanny Ahman.

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