

Research Proposal

I. Introduction of Research Topic

On September 26, 2014, approximately 100 student teachers from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers College of Ayotzinapa traveled to Iguala, Mexico attempting to raise enough money to fund upcoming protests against what they described as “unjust” hiring practices that overwhelmingly favor urban student teachers over rural ones.¹ According to an article published in *Mother Jones*, this teacher training university was founded with the purpose of “raising living standards for impoverished Mexicans by teaching poor farmers to read and write” and purportedly produces “leftist” and zealous activists.² After raising the necessary funds, the student teachers decided it would be safer to “commandeer” three local buses from a nearby terminal instead of walking back to their town at night. As they took off, local police suddenly and “without warning” began shooting at the buses filled with unarmed students.³ Instead of driving off, the students stopped the buses in an attempt to converse with the police. By the time police stopped firing, three bystanders and three students had been killed. Yet, rather than attend to those shot or explaining why they began firing, the police arrested and detained the students “for holding”.⁴ The next day, forty-three of these student teachers had cryptically disappeared from their jail cells. They were formally declared missing twenty-four hours later.

As both investigative journalists, and later the chief prosecutor of the state would soon disclose, dozens of these police officers that fired at the buses were also simultaneously members of the region’s most notorious drug cartel, *Guerreros Unidos* [United Fighters].⁵ Moreover, it was discovered that the mayor of the city of Iguala had ordered police to capture and incarcerate the students.⁶ Facing daily national protests and international scrutiny, the president of Mexico, Mr. Peña Nieto, forced both police

¹ “Cartels, Corruption, and the Case of 43 Missing Mexican Students,” accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cartelscorruption-and-the-case-of-43-missing-mexican-students/>.

² AJ Vicens, “43 Mexican College Student Disappeared Weeks Ago. What Happened to Them?,” *Mother Jones*, October 16, 2014, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/10/mexican-students-disappeared-guerrero-mass-graves>.

³ Natalie Roterman, “10 Things To Understand The Ayotzinapa Students Conflict In Mexico,” accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.latintimes.com/10-things-understand-ayotzinapa-students-conflict-mexico-274486>.

⁴ “43 Mexican College Students Disappeared Weeks Ago. What Happened to Them?,” *Mother Jones*, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/10/mexican-students-disappeared-guerrero-mass-graves>.

⁵ “Guerreros Unidos, The New Face of Mexico Organized Crime?,” accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/student-massacre-highlights-role-of-mexico-guerreros-unidos>.

⁶ “Mexico’s 43 Missing Students: Who Are They? - CNN.com,” accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/14/world/americas/mexico-missing-students-vignettes/>.

members affiliated with the gang as well as the governor of Iguala to step down. He then instituted a full-fledged investigation and search for these 43 missing students. On November 7, 2014, following confessions from the leaders of *Guerreros Unidos* and DNA from the remains of one of the disappeared students, the case was declared solved by the state.⁷ Mexico's Attorney General, Murrillo Caram, explained that there was "legal certainty" that all forty-three students were abducted, murdered, burned, and then dumped in a nearby town by members of *Guerreros Unidos*.⁸

The families of the forty-three students, however, claimed that the government conducted a rushed and corrupt investigation and refused to accept their explanation. They argued that the Mexican government cannot use DNA from one student to represent all 43 students and accused the government of continuing their tradition of using torture to draw out fake confessions and construct fictitious narratives.⁹ In an effort to add legitimacy to their claim, the families hired an independent Argentinean forensics team to conduct an investigation. Surprisingly, the team found the evidence to be at odds with the testimony offered by Mexican authorities. With this information, the families and classmates of the abducted students traveled throughout Mexico during the months of November and December in an effort to mobilize the population to demand a reinvestigation. Yet, because of the government's clear and supported position, their efforts to rally and protest within Mexico were limited.

Julio, professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio who worked for Cesar Chavez under National Farm Workers Association in the 1960's, recognized the limited success the parents and peers of the missing students were having in Mexico. Confident that bringing the group of parents and student peers to the US would place the event in the limelight once again and eventually pressure the Mexican government into reopening the investigation, he contacted the group and presented them with an international solidarity project that came to be known as "Caravana 43". This proposed movement consisted of having the families and peers of the 43 disappeared students travel across the US on a caravan and stop at major cities every weekend to hold marches, rallies, and informational panels. The parents and student peers almost immediately agreed, being

⁷"Mexico: All 43 Missing Students Are Dead," accessed September 23, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/27/mexico-missing-students-dead_n_6559812.html.

⁸Alanna Nunez, "What You Need to Know About Mexico's Missing Students," *Cosmopolitan*, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a33164/ya-me-canse-mexico-missing-students/>.

⁹"Caravana 43," *Caravana 43*, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://caravana43.com/about.html>.

that they themselves were in the process of thinking of ways to spread their message to their “Latin@ brothers and sisters across the border”. Julio and his three other co-directors almost immediately began building coalitions with ally organizations all around the nation that would be in charge of organizing the events that would occur in their particular city then the Caravan visited. Although they initially only reached out to about 30 different groups around the nation-- made up of university student groups, Latino community/rights organizations and groups that originated solely to show solidarity with Ayotzinapa—word quickly spread. In a mere two months, 400 more organizations had expressed interest in joining the movement and, thus originated the idea of splitting up into three separate caravans designated to travel throughout the Pacific, Central and Atlantic regions of the United States.¹⁰ Their two-month began on March 15th, 2015 and collectively reached more than forty-five major US cities and engaged thousands of people throughout the United States.

II. Research Question

Considering that the issue this movement sought to highlight was one that happened in and affected a country abroad, it is notable that it was developed, organized, and executed solely in the US. Importantly, however, this movement was not directed at the entire US population but rather at the Latin@ communities residing in the United States. As the movement’s own website explains, this movement relied “on the support from the Latin@ community to keep the movement alive even at a distance”. Indeed, Enrique, one of the national coordinators of Caravana 43, explained to me in a recent interview that this movement was successful because it called upon a united community; “a people without borders”.

These claims quite strongly imply that the immigrants from Mexico, and Latin America in general, living in the US still have ties with their home country/region and continue to identify with that part of their background. The manner in which this implied transnational allegiance and identity mobilized people to participate in the movement is of most academic interest to me and will be the focus of my final research paper. Using Boston as a case study, the role transnational identity played in the participants’ decision

¹⁰ Ibid.

to join the movement. Accordingly, the research question my paper will seek to answer is:

How did both Boston organizers and participants decide to join the movement and what role did their Latin@ identity play in this decision, if any?

III. Empirical and Theoretical Importance of Research Question

We live in an age where people are increasingly crossing borders. The United States Census Bureau estimates that there are about 54 million Hispanics living in US today, representing about 17% of the total U.S. population.¹¹ Moreover, social movements have also become transnational in their outreach and scope. Certainly, the fact that Caravana 43 was able to mobilize thousands of people in support of an event that occurred on the other side of the border speaks to the growing importance of this interconnectedness/globalization. While numerous factors may have compelled individuals to participate in this movement, it of utmost importance and interest to investigate the role transnational identity plays in the realization and success of social movements advocating for issues affecting a foreign nation. Given both the aforementioned increase in immigration from Latin Americas as well as Caravana's emphasis on Latino identity in the US, the importance of transnational identity in the mobilization process of these social movements merits investigation.

In addition to being an empirically important research question, this inquiry is theoretically relevant as it intersects with the literature on transnational migration/panethnic identity and the role of identity as a mobilizing structure (on an individual level) in social movements.

The growing field of transnational migration studies, on the one hand, focuses on how social life and communities do not solely exist within the nation-state framework. In "The Transnational Villagers", Peggy Levitt explains that many immigrants are loyal to and integrated into both the countries that receive them and the countries they leave behind.¹² Their identity, therefore, is shaped by both societies and cultures. In fact, some

¹¹ CDC's Office of Minority Health & Health Equity (OMHHE), "CDC - Hispanic - Latino - Populations - Racial - Ethnic - Minorities - Minority Health," accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/REMP/hispanic.html>.
¹² Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

transnational scholars have argued that the connection of Mexicans living in the US is especially strong because of the proximity and history of socioeconomic relations between the two nations (Jones-Correa, 1998). Yet, this movement notably sought to appeal not only to Mexicans living in the US, but also to people from across Latin America. Many scholars have recognized the unifying power of the panethnic Latino/Hispanic identity among Latinos in the United States. Palgrave MacMillian notes that although the encompassing label of “Latino” can blur the particularities of each Latin American country, the countries and their corresponding cultures have a lot more similarities than differences. She has found that these immigrants, once in the US, find comfort in the similarities they share with other Latin Americans.¹³ Moreover, through her studies of Latino populations in the US, Dr. Flores-Gonzales finds that even the second and third generations are “increasingly self-identifying as *Hispanic* and/or *Latinos*”.¹⁴

On the other hand, the general role of identity in mobilizing individuals to participate in a movement has also been thoroughly studied by social movement scholars. While studying the role social ties played in the recruitment of participants in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, McAdam and Paulsen concluded that a “strong subjective identification with a particular identity” was especially likely to “encourage participation”.¹⁵ They found that it wasn’t networks or social ties that mobilized people but rather the concurrence and linking of one’s identity to the perceived goals of the movement. Jocelyn Viterna, through her focus on why women joined the Salvadoran Guerrilla army (FMLM), expands on this idea and describes movement mobilization as a “two-sided, identity-driven dynamic process”.¹⁶ According to her, the movement itself strategically extends an identity and corresponding narrative that they believe will most successfully mobilize their target population. She found that if the identity of the movement matched the identity of individuals in the population, they were more compelled to join the movement.

¹³ Kevin Concannon, Francisco A. Lomelí, and Marc Prieue, *Imagined Transnationalism : U.S. Latino/a Literature, Culture, and Identity*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁴ Nilda Flores - Gonzalez, “The Racialization of Latinos: The Meaning of Latino Identity for the Second generation.(Statistical Data Included),” *Latino Studies Journal* 10, no. 3 (1999): 3.

¹⁵ Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, “Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 3 (November 1993): 640, doi:10.1086/230319.

¹⁶ Jocelyn Viterna, *Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador* (OUP USA, 2013), 115.

Thus, my research question is situated between the intersection of how identity mobilizes individuals to participate in movements and the specific importance of transnational Latin@ identity. It combines both literatures in asking how Latino identity mobilized individuals to participate in Caravana 43.

IV. Design and Methodology of Data Analysis

Being that this question focuses on the individual participants' subjective motivations in joining the movement, conducting interviews is the most fitting and promising method of data collection. This method gives me the opportunity to interact one-on-one with the participants, ask them detailed and personalized questions, and understand the subjective process of how each and every participant decided to join Caravana 43. Because it would be unrealistic to attempt to interview organizers from all 400 ally groups and participants from all 45 cities in a mere even weeks, I will focus on the participants here in Boston that formed part of the movement when the caravan visited the city from April 17th-April 20th, 2015. In accordance with the two groups I have proposed to investigate in my question, I will organize my subjects into two clusters: 1) those that are part of the two Boston ally groups and helped organized the events that occurred that weekend and 2) those that solely attended the events. I am making this distinction between my subjects from the onset of my data collection process because I recognize that organizers and participants are involved with movements in different degrees and I want to ensure that the two different perspectives emanating from both experiences are noted. Still, it could very well be that the role their Latin@ identity played (or did not play) in their decision to participate in the movement is very similar.

The first step of my data collection process will be establishing contact and recruiting interviewees from the two groups. To recruit interviewees from the ally organizations- Boston X Ayotzinapa and Harvard RAZA-, I will start by sending a message to both organizations through their official page on Facebook. I will then go on their websites and send messages to the emails listed under "contact information". I will also send a message over the Harvard RAZA email list. Finally, of course, I will contact acquaintances that are part of either group directly via email. The message I will be sending through all these channels will be fairly brief and include three parts: 1)

introduction of who I am, 2) a description of the research project I am conducting and 3) a brief statement proposing an 45-minute interview to be held at their earliest convenience. To recruit those that solely participated in the Boston events, I will first begin sending messages to peers and acquaintances that personally told me they were going to the Caravana 43 events in Boston. Being that Boston X Ayotzinapa and Harvard RAZA were in charge of outreach, I also plan to ask the members of these organization whom agree to an interview if they have the contact information of people who attended (and feel comfortable sharing it with me). Only pursuing these two methods, however, ignores those people that did not hear about the event directly from a Boston organizer or have a prior connection with another participants. In order to include as many voices as possible, I will also go on the event Facebook page set up for that weekend and send messages to the people that clicked on “going”. Finally, I will search for “#BostonXAyotzinapa” on the Facebook search bar as this was the hashtag that all participants in Boston were encouraged to use when they posted pictures and statuses of the event. I anticipate being able to talk to a good number of participants and almost all members of the two ally organizations as they are based here in Boston and are easily contactable via media.

The first thing I will do during the interview is go through my oral consent script, which I will elaborate on below. Once I have their verbal consent, the questions I will specifically go on to ask will be open-ended questions ones touch on: how they first heard of the student disappearances in Ayotzinapa and then Caravana 43, how they decided to join the movement/what motivated, and finally the role their ethnic background played in their decision to get involved. I think these questions are unbiased and position themselves to explore the subjective motivations of each participant in joining the movement. After I conduct all the interviews, I will present the results through what seems to be the clearest approach: a coding schema. The categories I will end up using will of course depend on the When it comes time to present the results, the clearest and most effective option seems to be the use of a coding schema. Although I will be naturally paying attention to the use of phrases like “As a Latin@”, “living in Guatemala for eight years” or “having family in Mexico”, the categories used in this schema will develop as I conduct the interviews.

V. Hypothesis

Although I have only conducted three interviews and am in no position to make a qualified argument, I hypothesize that Latin@ transnational identity plays a important role in the participants' decision to join the Caravana 43 movement. The available literature on the unifying power of the panethnic Latin@/Hispanic identity coupled with the literature on how identity salience plays a big role in mobilizing individuals to join a movement makes it very likely that their Latin@ identity did play an important role in their motivation to participate. However, it's unlikely that the findings will be this black and white. The few interviews I have conducted, for example, have brought to my attention the possibility that this identity and its salience differ along class and generational lines. Moreover, it could very well be that most participants are Hispanic and identify with a Latin@ identity, but decided to join the movement independent of this identity. That is, just because most participants end up being Hispanic does not necessarily mean that their Latin@ identity mobilized them to join the movement. It could very well be, for example, their affinity for activism or their belief in student rights that motivated them to join. Furthermore, I could find that ties and networks played a much bigger role in the mobilization process than identity in general. Finally, it's important to consider the participants that aren't Hispanic--- what is to be said of these people?

VI. Research Ethics

Because the groups I am interviewing are composed of mature adults that are not living in Mexico amid the actual crisis, I don't think participating in my project will pose any kind of danger or threat to the interviewee or their community at large. Still, I am aware of the possibility that the participants could feel weary of disclosing personal information because of family ties/acquaintances in Mexico, the fact that they themselves visit Mexico quite frequently, or even simply because it is a topic they are not comfortable talking about. After all, it is not my place to judge or assume whether the participation of the individual puts them at some type and level of risk. Therefore, in order to ensure that all interviewees feel safe and comfortable during the interview, I will start off each interview by reintroducing my research project/purpose and how the data will be used. I will then proceed to remind them that their participation is completely

voluntary and that I honestly don't anticipate asking any questions that will upset or offend them. Finally, I will end with informing them that they will be assigned a random number in order to protect their confidentiality. If they are unhappy with this, I will agree to use their first name if referring to one of their specific quotations in my report. Although I don't believe confidentiality to be necessary in this case, I think it's important to ensure all interviewees feel like their participation won't put them in any kind of danger. Furthermore, including the identities of participants won't make my paper any stronger. Ultimately, I will not start an interview until I am positive that the interviewee understands what they are getting themselves into and has given me oral consent.

Appendices

[1] Oral Consent Script

“ Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to meet with me. Before we start, I just want to go over a few things to make sure we're on the same page. Building off of what I briefly stated in my email to you, my goal in this project is to attempt to understand how the people involved in the Caravana 43 movement here in Boston came to become part of the movement. I think that the fact that this movement was able to mobilize so many people for an issue that affected the other side of the border is very interesting and I hope to be able to understand the participants' personal motivations. The data I collect through these interviews will be used to write my final research project, which will only be seen by my teacher and classmates. Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary and you may change your mind at any point in and after the interview. Moreover, although I don't anticipate asking you questions that would upset or offend you, feel free to suspend the interview if at some point you feel that I have. Finally, know that in order to protect your confidentiality, you will be assigned a random number that will be used to identify your responses. Do you have any questions? Do you agree with these terms?

[2] Timetable/Workplan

Week	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
11/2 – 11/9	Interviews with 1, 2, 3. (Organizers) and 4 (participant)	Continue to reach out to participants via Facebook and contacts that 2 gave me	Read: “Latinos Studies” by Ilan Stavans
11/9 – 11/16	Read: The Transnational Studies Reader, By Peggy Levitt	Skype Interview with 5 and any new interviews scheduled the previous week	Continue recruiting interviewees
11/16 – 11/23	Delve deeper into the role identity plays in a participants’ decision to join a movement	Continue recruiting interviewees and having interviews	Keep up with any new developments of Caravana 43/ missing students via the news!
11/23 – 11/30	Start honing in on how the different literatures intersect/where my research question falls	Finish up recruiting/ interviews	
11/30 – 12/7	Read the books/articles I have decided to use as secondary literature in depth	Last minute interviews	Begin writing paper
12/7- 12/14	Code interview results	Continue to write paper	Finish
12/14-12/16	Finish writing final paper!!!		

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Proposal Feedback, Alison Denton Jones, Nov. 2015

Research Question:

- Your proposal is to investigate how Boston organizers and regular participants decided to join the Caravana 43 movement, with particular focus on the role(s) that Latin@ identity may play.
- Generally, this is very clearly focused and represents an appropriate scope for a semester project. We discussed possibly shifting to a broader, more process-oriented question ("became involved with") versus the more causal, conscious decision-oriented wording above.

Significance/ Placement in Literature:

- This section demonstrates a wide-ranging literature review mainly focusing on transnational migration studies and social movements work on mobilization and identity. These frameworks do seem like promising conceptual models to work with for this piece. As you read more in the first area, you will probably be able to add to this and discuss more clearly how you envision the contribution of our research (joining two disparate literatures? Filling a gap? Etc)
- We discussed using some of Viterna's concepts in our analysis, particularly skills & resources, social ties & commitments, and sacred identities/ narratives. What are the relevant sacred identities in this case? Is that an appropriate way to think about what you are seeing and hearing?

Research Design/ Plan:

- The research design is reasonable given the question. You will want to include some more details about the interviewee selection in the final paper. If you weren't able to interview all organizers from both Boston groups, do you have any sense of what perspectives you are missing and if that would change the picture? As for participants, that is obviously somewhat more haphazard selection, but we discussed whether it would be helpful to get some more diversity of perspectives (ie, non-student/ educators, non-Latin@s). You'll want to discuss these issues whether or not you actually chose to/ were able to interview the different types.
- Your discussion about ethical concerns is solid, though I raised the possibility of illegal immigrant status. I also asked you to address the issue of your own researcher positionality and how you think you were viewed by the interviewees in the paper.

Paper Components, Structure, and Clarity

- The paper is well-organized and clearly structured; all components of the assignment including the timeline and revision memo are complete.
- In the final paper, I'd encourage you to find a way to introduce your research question earlier than page 4. You can probably move that to a brief

introduction and address how the incident lead to the movement in a later section.

- Good job on citation and bibliography, though I think something went wrong when you changed the citation style. There were several places where the author seems to instead be the publisher (for ex see bottom page 5 “Palgrave MacMillian), or the entry is missing from the bibliography (Jones-Correa 1998 on page 5).