

Capital and the Coyote

The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave

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The entrance into *the land of the free* is, naturally, not free of charge. The criteria vary vastly. It would not be far-fetched to claim that, when it comes to some aspirants, fine print materializes from thin air under each condition onto the platitudinous mythology that we've gotten to acknowledge as the American Dream.

Brownsville — a border region rebranded the «*gateway to Mars*» — received Elon Musk's *SpaceX* corporation with open arms. The Rio Grande Valley, whose population lives below the federal poverty level, granted Musk a decade-long county tax break, and more than \$15 million in state and local economic incentives.

Regardless, this generosity is not extended to other non-American citizens who, like Musk, must comply with purchasing their ticket into the nation-state. And the predicaments that emerge from this odyssey.

“To call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie.” — Karl Marx

The air that envelops the eastern border between Mexico and the U.S. is dense and salty. It chases our senses, penetrating the orifices of our noses with a veil of inescapable humidity.

Unlike the conventional depictions of the region — the yellow, desaturated filter that TV shows such as *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* apply to the screen once the characters have crossed the divisor line — the topography at the border is, in fact, vibrantly chromatic.

The horizon line appears eternal to the eye. Groves of palm trees form a zigzag line according to their random heights. Their fronds are moved by the salty breeze the same way shiny hair does in shampoo commercials.

More importantly, however, are the breathtaking cloud formations, strangely always omitted by the culture industry in portrayals. Due to the unconstricted perspective, the skyline receives the (often unfortunate) witness with spectacular oranges, pinks, lavenders, and even lime green hues. This celestial performance varies, never repeating its repertoire, yet always with breathtaking theatricality.

Any jaded soul would claim that is nature mocking us from above. We would recognize that a foolish statement, aware that she conducts her daily painting session independently, functioning separately from the absurd and sanguinary logic of capital.

Oaxaca, Mex. — «Josué migrated to buy a place to live, taking advantage of the fact that the dollar went up,» said Francisco Díaz¹.

«Four days before the tragedy, we spoke with him. We did not know that he would be crossing the border inside the box of a trailer».

¹ Desinformémonos. July 2, 2022. Lo único que queremos es darle una sepultura digna³: familiares de Josué, migrante oaxaqueño que murió en Texas. <https://desinformemonos.org/lo-unico-que-queremos-es-darle-una-sepultura-digna-familiares-de-josue-migrante-oaxaqueño-que-murio-en-texas/>

Mariano and Begai Santiago, both in their early 30s, were frustrated with their jobs as construction workers: an occupation where, on a good week, would provide wages of about \$100. As they were contemplating their predicament, in the same state, meanwhile, a contract for the construction of an LGN (liquified natural gas) plant — with an estimated investment of 6 billion dollars — was being signed by *New Fortress Energy*.

The cloud formations on the US-Mexico border dressed up the landscape with a silver wash. While forecasts announced the Full June Moon to contain a honey-colored tint, the National Weather Service meteorologists declared June 2022 the warmest month recorded in San Antonio, Texas.

In the same locality, fifty-three migrants were found dead in what is referred to as the deadliest trafficking incident in the United States. The witnesses described the trailer's rear door ajar with bodies stacked inside that were hot to the touch.

The Cost of the Coyote

Admission into the land of the free is, of course, not free of charge: conditions vary.

Brownsville — a border region rebranded the «*gateway to Mars*» — received Elon Musk's *SpaceX* corporation with open arms. The Rio Grande Valley, whose population lives below the federal poverty level, granted Musk a decade-long county tax break and more than \$15 million in state and local economic incentives.

Parallel to this warm reception is the one enacted by commissioners from Travis County, Texas, who voted to give Musk's electric carmaker a tax rebate worth at least \$14.7 million.

Regardless, this generosity is not extended to other non-American² citizens who, like Musk, must comply with purchasing their ticket into the nation-state — and the predicaments that emerge from this odyssey.

The United States — the land of the free — is no stranger to the influx of trailers ascending from its southern border. The U.S. total imports of agricultural products from Mexico totaled \$28 billion in 2019. The nation-state commonly called Mexico is, in fact, America's first largest supplier of agricultural imports.

The exchange is commonplace. Fresh vegetables (\$6.3 billion), wine and beer (\$4.0 billion), snack foods (\$2.3 billion), and processed fruit & vegetables (\$1.8 billion) figure among the main commodities sent to the northern neighbor. But capital's freedom and the transit of its commodities *freely* is not extended *quod si magicae* to all. Free trade, yes. But whose freedom? It is not the freedom of one individual to another, but the freedom of capital to crush, to bite, to drink the last drop of blood in its process of accumulation.

The *coyotes* — a colloquial synonym of human traffickers — requested \$13,000 US dollars from Jose Mario and his family to smuggle their entry into Texas; they spent 18 hours in the freezing box on their way to the United States.

Grateful not to have suffered the fate of the remaining 53 travelers, from a shelter in Ciudad Juárez, José Mario expressed:

² Elon Musk became a US Citizen in 2002 after Zip2 investors realized he did not have a green card. They aided Musk to obtain an EB-5 investor green card in 1997. Musk was born in a segregated suburb of apartheid South Africa. His mother was born in Saskatchewan, a settler nation-state known frequently as Canada. His father is a white South African, half-owner of a Zambian emerald mine near Lake Tanganyika.

«When you make the deal, the first thing you ask them is not to be put in a container, but on the journey, they do what they want...»

While interviewed from border shelters, some displaced persons reported that the journeys last at least two days; passengers, they described, are «crowded together like animals» since a vehicle can hold up to 400 people. Each square centimeter could increase the profit margin for the coyotes.

Due to the extreme heat, many passengers faint or take off their clothes; others desperately open holes in the cabins; travelers do not receive food and avoid drinking water to prevent having to urinate.

If the containers are refrigerated, they describe «it is like being inside a freezer» for the entire trajectory; despite the amenities, the average cost per person for the gelid international voyage is between \$8,000 to \$10,000.

In migrant smuggling – unlike human trafficking – the commodity is completely neglected; in the event of an accident, the coyotes do not lose the money collected. Should their merchandise die in the process of circulation, as in the case of San Antonio’s truck, no one is there to address complaints.

Freedom!

On June 28, in San Antonio, Texas, a worker heard a cry for help and went to investigate: a truck had been left parked next to railroad tracks. The temperature reported was 103 Fahrenheit (39.4 Celsius). No signs of water or visible means of air-conditioning were reported.

Sixteen people were rescued; none of them capable to stand up and get out of the box of the cargo truck on their own feet due to the physical conditions in which they were found. The box’s refrigeration mode was not activated.

Yenifer Yulisa Cardona reported³ that the coyotes confiscated their cellphones while covering the trailer’s floor with what she believed was powdered chicken bouillon to distract the law enforcement dogs at checkpoints. The powder stung her skin.

«I told a friend that we shouldn’t go to the back and stay near the entrance, in the same place, without moving», she added.

After the tragedy unfolded, the governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, said on his personal Twitter account that these deaths «are the result of the destructive open border policies» maintained by U.S. president Joe Brandon.

It is interesting to read Abbot describe president Brandon’s open border policies. This pre-supposed freedom of movement, inferred by the Texan bureaucrat, obfuscates the tragedy. Had restrictions at the border been lifted by the ruling party⁴, then entry into the U.S. from within the interior of a concealed refrigeration box arises as a puzzling decision; one not dissimilar

³ Perez, Sonia D. Associated Press. A survivor of the migrant trailer: ‘They couldn’t breathe’.

⁴ The Brandon administration sustained Trump’s policy of declining expatriates a chance to seek asylum, attributing this a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The U.S. grants some exemptions, but the decree harbors uneven implementation by nationality, with single adults and families from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador most affected.

from the rise in popularity of escape rooms amidst the highly alienated youth. Except that, despite national wage disparity, the coyotes's expenditure stands ten thousand dollars higher than the mall's attraction.

Since 2020, 270 claims of abuse against migrants by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Border Patrol agents have been registered, listing excessive use of force⁵, denial of medical care, and family separation. These are, naturally, merely those that leave behind a paperwork trail, and do not account for those occurring daily under the marvelous clouds of the region.

15,000 Haitian expats had crossed into the U.S. and were concentrated in an encampment underneath the international bridge in 2021. In what they described as a 'confrontation' with weaponless refugees, armed border bureaucrats on horseback employed an «unnecessary⁶ use of force» against the Haitian expatriates. However, a U.S. federal investigation reports that the police didn't whip any with their reins «intentionally or otherwise.»

Vice president Kamala Harris, who has been «tasked with exploring the root causes of immigration across Latin America⁷», hosted Andrés Manuel López Obrador for a Tuesday breakfast yesterday. There, the head of the Mexican nation-state consented to spend \$1.5 billion to enhance “smart” border technology on Tuesday, in collaboration with president Joe Brandon.

The press release of their joint statement announced:

The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement enhances the free flow of goods without barriers, which promotes innovation that boosts productivity and increases resilience, helping *both* countries fight inflation and supporting families.

As part of joint efforts to improve food security, Mexico plans to purchase up to 20,000 tons of milk powder from the United States to assist Mexican families in rural and urban communities.

In addition, Mexico will buy up to one million tons of fertilizer (ammonium sulfate) from the United States to distribute to subsistence farmers and continue to buy animal feed to assist small producers.

They list 2022 as a pivotal year, marking

“200 years of formal diplomatic relations. As neighbors, friends, and family, we are united as two nations that share one future”.

May fertilizer and milk bedeck this harmonious international rapport⁸.

A Corona by the water

Two teenagers, 16 and 19 years old, were identified as part of the 53 victims: Yovani and Jair, from Naolinco, Veracruz, traveling with their cousin Misael, confirmed as one of the dead.

⁵ What is the appropriate amount of force tolerated?, we ponder.

⁶ As opposed to the necessary mythical violence tolerated.

⁷ Best of luck. May you find the answers you're seeking arduously, queen.

⁸ July 13, 2022. The White House Briefing Room. President Brandon and Lopez Obrador Joint Statement. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/12/president-biden-and-president-lopez-obrador-joint-statement/>

Yovani and Jair worked in the manufacturing field of leather footwear in Naolinco, a municipality of Veracruz. Until 2021, the minimum wage amounted to 141.70 pesos (\$6.99).

In Naolinco, the most spoken indigenous languages are Nahuatl, Totonac, and Mixteco. Nevertheless, other foreign languages aside from Mexican-Castilian are spoken. English, certainly, if accounting that from January to March 2022, foreign direct investment in Veracruz reached \$572M, distributed in reinvestment of profits of \$273M.

The arrival of a particular Fortune 500 company in Veracruz was unexpected.

Constellation Brands, whose face in the North American market is concealed by the mask of *Corona* and *Modelo* beers, canceled a \$1.4bn factory being built in the northern city of Mexicali after the Mexican State revoked its construction permit.

Although the company representatives claimed only 0.16% of the aquifer's resources would be exploited, a study by the National Science and Technology Council⁹ found the brewery would take over 44% of local water resources.

The company has since agreed to build a facility in Veracruz, the home state of the deceased Yovani and Jair. On April 21 of the present year, the representatives revealed the US\$1.3bn investment plan to an eager president Andrés Manuel López Obrador¹⁰.

In Veracruz, the polity from where the two dead teenagers originate, *Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex)* signed Friday letters of intent with *New Fortress Energy* to develop a gas project. Octavio Romero Oropeza, CEO of Pemex, informed that this oil company would resume the project to exploit a non-associated gas field in the Lakach, off the coast of Veracruz.

Equally in Veracruz, Antonio Ruiz, the teenagers' uncle, expressed in an interview¹¹:

But when you make shoes for a living the pay is bad, the opportunities are few, and the body deteriorates from long hours of bad posture sitting at the sewing machine or standing cutting leather figures.

When the schools closed due to health protocols, Misael could not continue his life as a student; at home, there was no internet to take online classes.

His work days, which he used to combine with school, became longer, and the wages scarce; shoe sales in Naolinco fell sharply.

Land of the Free, Topsy-Turvy World

Only in a topsy-turvy world does a commodity enjoys free transit amidst the social relation we perceive as borders while the human restricted to a box. Fetishism of commodities originates in the peculiar social character surrounding the labor that produces them, and the society that reproduces its absurd circuit in the name of free trade, of freedom.

What is free trade under the present condition of society? It is freedom of capital.

⁹ Conacyt.

¹⁰ As of May 31, 2022, in Veracruz, *Constellation Brands*' cash equivalent is appraised at around \$101.8 million, with long-term debt of \$10,278.2 million.

¹¹ Mantzo, Diana. «No sabíamos que José Luis iba en ese tráiler»: familiares del migrante oaxaqueño sobreviviente en Texas. *Pie de Página*. July, 2022. <https://piedepagina.mx/no-sabiamos-que-jose-luis-iba-en-ese-trailer-familiares-del-migrante-oaxaqueño-sobreviviente-en-texas/>

Only in a topsy-turvy world would two commodities parting from Veracruz follow mirrored, yet insidiously distinct destinies.

Upon production, the glass bottle proudly dressed with the label of *Corona* would enter a similar refrigeration box within a truck not dissimilar from the one Yovani and Jair last entered: except the commodity made out of glass would be protected, its surroundings guarded carefully for the safe arrival at its international destination.

Of the two commodities – the undocumented labor power embodied in Misael and the pale lager *Corona* – only the expenses of one would be covered, negotiated for, allowing a smooth and free transit across the Río Bravo.

Despite Veracruz being their place of origin, only one of the commodities would get arrested, harassed; and, if not shot, luckily deported for this geographic link as precedent.

If we proceed to assess slowly, and if we are capable of connecting the single moments to grasp their unity, we should not be surprised with the outcome: history never fails to remind us that, if needed to ensure its conservation throughout the international route, out of the glass beer bottle or the teenage shoemaker, only one of the commodities would merit the activation of the cooling mode upon entering the box inside that truck.

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