A memorial honoring migrants from Puebla, Mexico, who died while attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. (Arredondo, 2023 for The New York Times)

New York: The Empire City?
A Liberal City 'Goes Imperial' to Govern Migration

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Capstone Project

CEU 1-Year MA in International Relations + Bard College MA in Global Studies

May 3rd, 2024

Word Count: 7,300

This research project was undertaken in relation to my work as an intern for the Institute for Policy Studies. The research informs an article I am writing for the online publication Foreign Policy in Focus to be published in May 2024.

I. Abstract

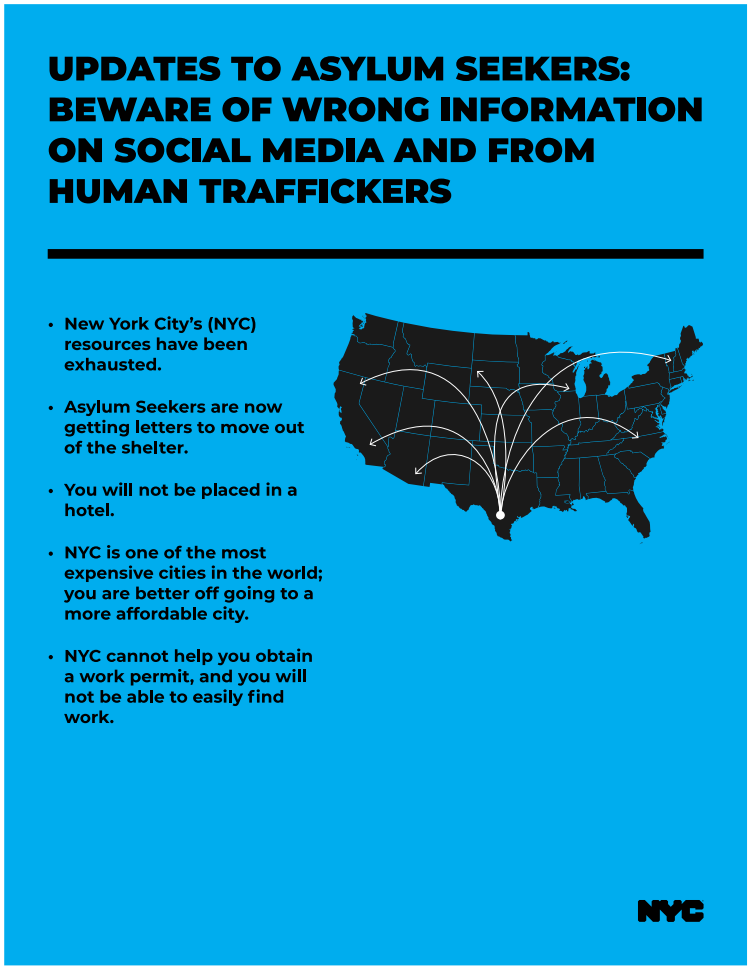
Can a city be an imperial force? This paper investigates that question by taking New York City's Mayor Eric Adams' trip to Latin America in the Fall of 2023 as a case study. This trip was undertaken in the context of the 'migrant crisis,' and the press conferences and media appearances that colored that trip were used to spread the word that New York City was 'at capacity' and no longer capable of taking in any migrants. The Adams administration framed migration as an existential threat to the city, warning that it could end the city as it exists today. Through discourse analysis, this paper operationalizes concepts such as 'care and control' and 'dark travel' taken from postcolonial literature to explore the links between humanitarianism, border imperialism, and liberal city identity.

II. Introduction

Between October 4th and October 8th, 2023, the Mayor of the City of New York, Eric Adams, conducted a tour of Latin America with a critical message in tow: 'New York City is at capacity. Migrants – do not come here' (Florida 2012). The tour brought him to Mexico, Ecuador, and Colombia, and in particular to the Darién Gap, a stretch of land between Colombia and Panama considered especially deadly on the long journey toward the United States. This trip came at a time when the city was stuck in a months-long official State of Emergency owing to the 'migrant crisis.' Despite often praising the city's efforts to manage the influx of illegalized migrants as remarkable, the Mayor made headlines in the month before the trip for saying that the crisis "will destroy New York City" (Fitzsimmons 2023). This rhetoric came as a shock to a media environment used to positioning the city as a progressive thought leader on migration, what with years of Trump-era 'sanctuary city' federal antagonism under its belt (Kight 2020).

As this paper describes in further detail, the Mayor and his administration were conscious about protecting New York City's liberal identity, taking care to weave the praises

of immigration into ‘honest’ reflection about the city’s diminishing resources. Nestled in the background politics of this trip was the existence of contentious public space conflict happening in the streets of New York City, with many city residents responding negatively to the sight of illegalized migrants crowding behind barricades near Grand Central Station, the proposal to shelter illegalized migrants in public schools, and the existence of a ‘tent city’ amongst recreational sports fields on Randall’s Island (Barkan 2023). The Mayor’s stated objective of the trip, to dissuade would-be migrants from embarking on their travels, was grounded in the narrative that ‘misinformation’ and ‘propaganda’ were driving people to make risky decisions. Throughout the trip, the Mayor discussed setting the record straight on shelter, on access to jobs, and on the city’s resources generally. Of course, this language likely did not speak to the precise concerns of people who labor to enter the United States and who set their sights on New York City for diverse, complex reasons. The image below is the graphic flyer distributed to the public by Mayor Adams and his administration while in Latin America.



From the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York ("Asylum Seekers Update," 2023)

This paper combines insights from international relations, urban studies, migration studies and postcolonial studies to explore the optimistic literature on city participation in global migration governance and liberal city identity in relation to migration policy. Taking Mayor Adams' tour of Latin America as a case study of a city engaging in migration governance at the global level, it will investigate this literature's applicability. This study finds that while cities, especially global cities, do have a unique relationship to migration which distinguishes their voices in a world order dominated by states, they are also capable of operating in the imperialist modes historically pursued by states. In this case, 'imperialism' is engaged discursively. This paper argues that rather than challenging imperialist modes of conceptualizing migration, liberal city identities can form the scaffolding of an imperialist worldview, perhaps also providing cover for some of its rhetorical inner workings.

III. Methodology

This paper employed discourse analysis to investigate the meaning-making embedded in the source texts. These source texts include all official statements and public speaking engagements on migration released by the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York between September 28th and October 16th, 2023. These dates correspond with the two weeks surrounding Mayor Eric Adams' tour of Mexico, Ecuador, and Colombia, which took place from October 4th to October 8th, 2023. The sources include media availability sessions, press briefings, and segments on both English- and Spanish-language radio shows and television programs that Mayor Adams and other senior members of his administration took part in. Nvivo was used to assist in coding these texts and categorizing the content to identify key themes and takeaways.

This paper applies Walia's concept of 'border imperialism' to the speech acts undertaken by the Adams administration at the time of their trip to Latin America. Explored in greater detail in *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Walia 2013), border imperialism refers to the regime (practices, institutions, discourses, and systems) that drives the global capitalist economy and the colonial projects it is sustained by. Border imperialism is upheld by "four overlapping structurings" (Walia 2013, 18) with the first being the displacement and migration of vulnerable populations "as a result of the coercive extractions of capitalism and colonialism, and the simultaneous fortification of the border—often by those very same Western powers that are complicit in these displacements—which renders the migration of displaced people as perilous" (Walia 2013, 20). This displacement and migration is thus conceived as manufactured (Walia 2013, 21). It follows that the second structuring of border imperialism is "the criminalization of migration and the deliberate construction of migrants as illegals and aliens" (Walia 2013, 24). This paper refers to this structuring as 'illegalization.'

Walia also describes the "entrenchment and re-entrenchment of controls against migrants," positing that a key imposition of border imperialism is not just physical borders, but also psychological borders. Some of these borders are facilitated through the colonial logics embedded in "hierarchies of oppression" along the lines of race, class, and gender (Walia, 2013, 27). Walia notes that in contemporary politics, Western governments attempt to conceal their investment in these hierarchies of oppression by celebrating multiculturalism, often parading an elite multicultural diaspora as its representatives (Walia 2013, 24). The fourth structure upholding border imperialism is the creeping "universalization of Western influence," authority, and control far beyond its physical borders (Walia 2013, 6). These forces of Western control help configure the positioning of border death as a "kind of passive capital punishment," in which "immigrants have been effectively blamed for their own deaths" (Brady 2008, 1).

The discourse analysis will investigate whether this conceptualization of border imperialism can be relevant to municipal governments' actions. This analysis is supplemented by a critique of humanitarian logics and practices, liberal city identity in relation to migration, and the concept of 'dark travel,' all explored in further detail later in this paper.

IV. Cities in the Field of Migration Governance

The scholarship at the intersection of urban studies. international relations, and migration studies form a niche body of research concerning migration policy and the role of municipal governments in such policy. The increasing primacy of municipalities in global mobility governance has been studied as a hopeful alternative to the historic domination of states in our world order. One can trace three distinct but highly interconnected 'lanes' in the scholarship looking at cities and migration. The first lane is international relations-dominated and revolves around the idea of cities gaining primacy as global actors, developing foreign

policy actorhood, and becoming relevant, often progressive voices on migration governance. The second lane is more at home in urban studies: It looks at the rise of 'right to the city' discourse, with its accompanying theme of local or urban citizenship and a rights and services-based relationship between municipal governments and city residents. This second lane has had a hand in shaping liberal city ideals in which all residents, regardless of federal legal status, have the right to claim local citizenship. The third lane is heavily intermingled with the first two. It is the field of scholarship on so-called "sanctuary cities," municipal governments who have labeled themselves as sanctuaries for illegalized migrants, an ambiguous concept which often centers around policies of non-cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Many of the ideals and policies enacted by sanctuary cities have some roots in 'right to the city' ideas. In addition, sanctuary cities, especially in the United States, have histories of contentious relationships with the federal level and of seeking relationships with international organizations that are also explored by the literature on cities as global and foreign policy actors. It is striking that the literature in all three of these lanes is largely optimistic about what cities can accomplish with both global and local actorhood in the field of migration. This section of the paper outlines this literature, its chief arguments, and the criticism it has received.

A. Foreign Policy

Saskia Sassen's seminal 'global city' thesis posits that cities are critical nodes in global networks of capital, information, and people (Sassen 2001, 19). Since then, a growing body of literature now investigates municipal governments as foreign policy actors (Nijman 2016), framed as a relatively novel development in a field where foreign policy has been considered the exclusive domain of the state. Municipal governments have been conceptualized as actors quickly gaining confidence within the Kantian "international society," often engaging in

diplomacy in response to perceived transgressions by their national governments (Leffel 2021, 180).

Cities' rise in global affairs has coincided with the recognition of several noteworthy trends that legitimized cities as actors. Contemporary to Sassen's 'global city' thesis was Roland Robertson's concept of 'glocalization,' which looked at how global trends interact with local contexts in a globalizing world (Robertson 2018). In this new world, cities were 'glocalized' hubs, able to represent the intermingled global and local all at once. Another legitimizing feature of global city actorhood is the presence in these cities of 'superdiversity,' conceptualized by Vertovec to describe the transformative 'diversification of diversity' driven by global and internal migration (Vertovec 2023). This diversity is along the lines of ethnicity, socio-legal status, socio-cultural factors, and economic status. Cities, with their superdiverse populations, are practiced navigators of social complexity, making them natural candidates for inclusion in global politics (Zisakou and Figgou 2023) (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has identified urbanization, globalization, and government decentralization as global forces placing cities at the frontline of migration governance (IOM 2015). Despite this recognition, cities continue to face access challenges when it comes to co-shaping global policy-making on migration (Sturner-Siovitz 2023). Although cities are increasingly at the vanguard of global migration governance, they often find themselves caught in governance limbo: while they are directly impacted by global migration, they have limited ability to influence the international discussions that shape migration policies (Stürner-Siovitz 2023, 1331). Because of this, cities have often relied on innovative approaches, in particular transnational networks, to engage in global migration governance.

Scholars such as Thouez and Leffel have chronicled the growing relevance of these city networks (Thouez 2020) (Thouez 2022) (Leffel 2021) . With front-row seats during the negotiations over the UN Global Compact for Migration and Global Compact on Refugees, cities left their impressions on these instruments, emphasizing their expertise in providing basic services to migrants. Importantly, in global fora, cities have often presented "themselves as "problem-solvers in an increasingly complex 'international society' in which the static and territorially constrained nation-state is no longer king" (Thouez 2020, 1). This perspective was reflected by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, when, on the eve of the signing of the Paris Agreement, he boasted, "While nations talk, cities act" (Florida 2012).

The history of global migration governance is marked by cities in several ways. In December 2017, when the United States, under then-President Trump, withdrew from the negotiations around the Global Compacts, American cities stood up to carry the banner. This network, led by the City of New York, impacted the final draft of the Global Compact on Migration by successfully campaigning for the inclusion of language that highlighted the importance of multilevel governance and the relevance of cities as 'frontline responders' (Thouez 2020).

B. Liberal City Ideals

The sociologist Henri Lefebvre is credited with originating the concept of 'Right to the city, 'which refers to an ideal relationship between cities and residents in which the city is organized to prioritize the interests of all who live there (Lefebvre 1996). For Lefebvre and those who expanded on this field of thought, the city is proposed to offer an alternative form of citizenship status to that associated with the nation-state (Harvey 2008). It is a more inclusive citizenship, an urban citizenship (Kaufmann 2019), and it is made more substantive

by the fact that the city is a more relevant polity than any other in the lives of most people (Holston and Appadurai 1999). Domaradzka has documented the urban social movements that have carried the 'right to the city' banner in their locales over the past several decades and noted that despite local tethering, these movements have always trafficked in the global and/or 'glocal' (Domaradzka 2018, 610).

Central to the concept's relevance to recent urban social movements is its framing of the municipal government as a service provider. 'Right to the city' gained prominence when many cities, including New York City, felt the repercussions of neoliberal economic policy. Such policies are responsible for structuring cities for the purpose of courtship by corporations while hollowing out public services and goods (Harvey 2005). For urban movements, 'right to the city' meant that residents should be catered to by municipal policy and planning, not business, industry, or foreign capital. However, Domaradzka (2018, 612) explains that these transnational movements, while impressive in their "ability to exercise a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization," argued in favor of inclusion in the current system, rather than a vision of an alternative development model. According to Domaradzka (2018, 611), "service-oriented urban movements… contributed to the improvement of the quality of life of residents, but also increased the legitimacy of local authorities."

The topic is closely connected to the history of migration governance in two significant ways. Firstly, 'right to the city' invoked the rights of all residents within a municipality, not just those with national citizenship. This connects to literature on cities and migration that emphasizes cities' pursuit of 'de-facto' citizenship for illegalized migrants, premised on the *domicile* rule of belonging (Varsanyi 2007). In this mode of thinking, the dominant framework in New York City and many other cities, illegalized migrants' presence in the city entitles them to municipal service provision (Bauder 2017).

Secondly, the discussion of local citizenship sparked by 'right to the city' discourses is channeled by scholarship on denationalized forms of citizenship (Bauder 2017), the more 'glocal' concept of cosmopolitan citizenship (Caraus 2018), and 'citizenship from below' (Nyers and Rygiel 2012). 'Citizenship from below' is especially cutting-edge in this field as it gestures towards a citizenship that resists being place-based. Within migration studies, this conceptualization falls in line with what has been called the 'mobility turn' in this field. The field has turned toward analysis of mobility in and of itself, making a distinction between the sedentary place or territory, and the "idea that place and space are created through social relations, processes, and movement" (Nyers and Rygiel 2012, 6). Importantly, migration studies have largely moved beyond problematizing 'movement' as such, instead recognizing that stasis in a semi-permanent location should not be positioned as normality (Nyers and Rygiel 2012, 6). 'Mobility' is a fact of life to which all humanity is party, and it is organized as a hierarchy along lines of gender, race, class, age, and sexuality (Hyndman 2004). With mobility, there is also im/mobility.

C. City as Sanctuary

Sanctuary cities are a topic of debate among scholars. Some argue that these cities act as a form of resistance against populist and securitized states (Ridgley 2010) (Georgiou, Hall, and Dajani 2022) (Kwon and Roy 2018) (Lenard and Madokoro 2021). They have been lauded in some contexts as "abolitionist pioneers," radically extending themselves to do the moral good in relation to illegalized migrants (Jeffries and Ridgley 2021) (Paik 2017). A growing niche of the literature is much less optimistic, seeing sanctuary cities as mostly symbolic, guilty of providing "false hope" to people on the move, or of providing reactive media fodder for the populist right-wing (Houston and Morse 2017) (Kagan 2018). Sanctuary cities have been a growing phenomenon in the United States for several decades but have

become the subject of heightened media exposure ever since the Trump administration declared 'war' on sanctuary cities (Kight 2020).

Literature by Harald Bauder (2017) offers a scholarly overview of sanctuary cities – as they are conceived rhetorically and what they are in practice. The history of sanctuary cities is a rich one, but for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the gap between rhetoric and practice that several scholars have problematized (Buff 2019) (Kagan 2018) (Motomura 2018) (Villazor 2008). While 'sanctuary' is always locally interpreted wherever it is incorporated into politics, Bauder (2017, 174) generally finds that urban sanctuary practices and policies "serve the purpose of accommodating illegalized migrants and refugees in urban communities." Sanctuary' is almost always fraught at the local level – city policies do not, perhaps cannot, eliminate 'illegalization,' they only make this condition less difficult. Less difficult how? Sanctuary designations are invoked to project a condition of illegalization less strenuous for those illegalized migrants residing in the city. This is likely true. However, sanctuary policies and practices also make illegalization less difficult, more manageable from the perspective of municipal government. Landmark sanctuary city policies – such as local bureaucratic membership and municipal IDs – and the mainstay sanctuary city position in favor of work authorization and regularization for illegalized migrants can also be understood as policies that assist local governments in governing a 'shadow population' (Radoff 2011) by making them more visible (Bauder 2017).

Criticism of sanctuary city policies and practices have included the idea that the welcoming 'sanctuary' rhetoric "regularizes and depoliticizes a violent temporality of waiting" (Bagelman 2013, 50) by somehow normalizing precarity. It has also included that they often discursively invoke a distinction between 'guest' and 'host,' conjuring "notions of gratitude and indebtedness" that position 'hosts' as morally "good" and guests as "deserving" (Squire and Darling 2013, 194). In this way, illegalized migrants can be targets of liberal city

condescension. Bauder (2017, 177) also contends that "the term 'sanctuary city' may evoke a false sense of security among illegalized urban population."

Surveying the initiation of sanctuary city policies in Sheffield, England, Darling describes the city's desire to project a proud "vision of the city, its identity as a 'welcoming place," (Darling 2010, 129). Sanctuary policies and practices were a way for Sheffield to communicate its image of itself "as a cosmopolitan and inclusive city" (Squire and Darlin, 2013, 195)." Villazor's (2010) research on the adoption of the 'sanctuary city' moniker and agenda in San Francisco describes the same phenomenon. "Sanctuary Cities and Local Citizenship," through discourse analysis of local media and public statements by the San Francisco city Supervisors, demonstrates how the city's identity as a liberal enclave was a chief engine for political advancements on the issue of immigration (Villazor 2010). In "Sanctuary City as Mobilizing Metaphor: How Sanctuary Articulates Urban Governance," Rachel Humphris (2023, 3586) takes this question of liberal city identity a step further, asking, "who is sanctuary for?"

V. Politics of Care, or "We Love You. But Do Not Come Here."

Analyzing critically the transcripts of various press conferences, official statements, and press appearances conducted by New York City Mayor Adams and other senior officials of the administration, the communication strategy undertaken by these officials prioritizes a defensive vision of the city as tolerant and welcoming to the illegalized migrants residing there. Over the three weeks analyzed for this paper, the city's "dedication to solving the global asylum seeker crisis" is invoked consistently. Government officials are generous with noting that this dedication is shared by both municipal employees and 'everyday' New Yorkers, who are described as empathetic and sacrificial. The city's service provision to illegalized migrants is framed as a great achievement and worthy of federal and global praise ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023).

Discursively hand-in-hand with the city's will to care is its identity as a diverse and international city. Even as the Mayor distinguishes between "established New Yorkers" and "recent arrivals," histories and family trees of immigration to the United States are commonly enlisted to provide evidence for the city's authority on migration and closeness to migration histories ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023), reflecting the legitimizing force of superdiversity. On this trip, Mayor Adams enlists the support of Commissioner Manuel Castro, who experienced illegalization as a child when he journeyed to the United States along the same corridor to the Southern border. Mayor Adams also references his roots in Africa during the trip, reflecting the legitimizing effect of multicultural representation on border imperialism.

It should be noted that the conception of "New Yorker" is rather inclusive – there is a distinction made between those who are "established" and those who are "recent," but the administration is careful not to position "New Yorker" as an identity inaccessible to illegalized migrants. The city's favored term for this population, asylum-seekers, underscores a conceptualization of illegalized migrants as needing protection. During these three weeks, New York City officials remind both local and foreign press on several occasions: "We are an immigrant city" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears on Univision New York" 2023).

The Statue of Liberty is a symbol often enlisted during this time to signify New York City's relation to the American Dream. The city is conceptualized as the heart of the American Dream. The image of people coming from all corners of the world to bravely start a new life and work hard is carefully instrumentalized in the furtherance of the message that these original 'dreamers' benefitted from dignified living conditions which are today unavailable to the new 'dreamers.' The Mayor and his administration argue on many occasions that, because the city is 'at capacity,' the American Dream has become the 'American Nightmare:'

> We said give us your tired... What we also said is that your American dream should not turn into American nightmare. Sleeping on the streets, sleeping on cots, having your children in an environment that is not conducive to the full development of their mental and physical personhood is not giving someone that dream. That's a nightmare. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears on Televisa's En Punto" 2023)

> There's the Statue of Liberty, folks, sits in our harbor. I don't care if you came from Irish ancestry, if you came from Italian, came from Greece or Caribbean or Africa, all of us wanted an opportunity to pursue the American dream. And I said I'm not going to treat people in an undignified way. When early groups came here, they had the right to work and to participate in the American dream. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears Live on 77 WABC's Sid in the Morning" 2023)

> Whoever comes to this city, I must ensure that they treated with the dignity and respect that our ancestors were treated with… Our hearts are big, but our resources are not in this. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears Live on 77 WABC's Sid in the Morning" 2023)

This is a somewhat tricky logic to follow. It is not historically accurate to depict previous generations of immigrants as having arrived in the United States under comfortable or even comparatively comfortable conditions to those of the illegalized migrants that are the subject of this rhetoric. The 'at capacity' and 'American Nightmare' narratives seem to serve the function of keeping the city's liberal identity intact while blaming outside forces, namely the federal government and global trends, for the situation:

> New York City is an international city, so we're on the international stage to make sure that everyone hears that this is a humanitarian crisis that is impacting New York City but many other places in the country, in the world. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Hosts 'Hear From the Mayor' Radio Show" 2023)

New York City imagines itself as a city that 'cares,' and this image is central to the municipality's framing of its role in migration governance. After seeing the infamous Darién Gap firsthand, Mayor Adams expressed compassion, saying, "Human beings should not live this way anywhere on our planet" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Participates in Gaggle with Local Colombian Press" 2023). However many scholars have established that 'care,' and especially how it is operationalized as a "politics of compassion" is the public-facing arm of a system still entrenched in colonial and imperial logics (Fassin 2012, 3–9). Fassin describes how compassion works in political symbiosis with domination, wherein a minoritized 'other' is the subject of policies and practices that "oscillat[e] between sentiments of sympathy on the one hand and concern for order on the other hand, between politics of pity and policies of control" (Fassin 2005, 366). A politics of compassion does not discuss justice, equality, or

rights; Rather, it is concerned with pity. Claudia Aradau (2004) has written about the juncture of "politics of pity" and "politics of risk," expanded upon by Gray and Frank (2019), who describe the pervasive imaginaries embedded in colonial modernity that allow refugees to be conceived as both "at risk" and "as risk." Ultimately, these narratives are co-dependent. This was the interpretation by Pallister-Wilkins (2015) when discussing the logic of "care and control" that governs so-called migration 'hotspots,' such as refugee camps and high-traffic corridors of human mobility.

Pallister-Wilkins' critical reading of hotspot governance and compassion-centered humanitarianism builds off Reid-Henry's (2014)concept of "humanitarianism as liberal diagnostic." It is centered on the role of states, who operationalize hotspots "to capture the *will-to-care* present in modern liberal politics and the modern state with its security focus, and put *care to work* in the most efficient and effective way for processes of control" (Pallister-Wilkins 2020, 1004). In this sense, 'care' becomes a management tool, "co-constitutive parts of a process of rationalization" (Pallister-Wilkins 2020, 996). Humanitarianism has been the "civilizing laws of conflict" (Pallister-Wilkins 2020, 996). Pallister-Wilkins' argument is centered on the concept of "distant-while-proximate," the humanitarian practice of keeping 'strangers' distant, via

> geographical containment within semi-carceral spaces of the camp through the presence of security forces and carceral architectures; economically distant through the denial of the right to work and a reliance on humanitarianism for the provision of basic needs; and politically distant through the use of a combination of spatial containment, reliance on outside assistance and their legal status as refugees (Pallister-Wilkins 2020, 998).

In this sense, 'distance' is conceptualized as multiscalar – variably geographic, economic, social, or political; it tends towards the extremes. This literature describes the designation of 'migration crisis' as a discursive device establishing the illegalized migrant as a threat to the liberal order, which is predicated first and foremost on security and control (Huysmans 2000).

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note where this literature falls within the scope of municipal migration governance and where it may not. New York City, as a municipal government, has no direct influence over the regime governing the United States' border. However, while New York City does not currently administer a 'refugee camp,' it does administer "Asylum Seeker Sanctuary and Respite Centers," including a field of tents isolated among sports fields on Randall's Island (Zraick 2022). It is not within the scope of this paper to investigate whether and how the city's internal migration governance schemes mirror the humanitarian logics of "care and control" or "distant-while-proximate." This paper is limited to how these logics discursively inform the rhetoric and actions taken by senior members of the New York City municipal government, including Mayor Adams, at the time of the trip to Latin America in the Fall of 2023.

Gray and Frank (2019) describe how the duality of care and control is informed by an imaginary of two intertwined forces: a racialized, feminized vulnerability and a racialized, masculinized threat. In postcolonial scholarship, this 'imaginary' is theorized as pervasive in modern society, ready to be socially operationalized at any moment, and intelligible to all who are party to modernity. Gray and Frank (2019, 280) home in on 'womenandchildren,' the discursive fixation on certain bodies who become "symbols of vulnerability" in need of "saving by the heroic Western subject." Racialized, feminized vulnerability forms the scaffolding of the Adams administration's 'concern' for the plight of illegalized migrants throughout their travels, especially at the Darién Gap.

A. Into the Jungle

> I want to set the stage. You know, the Darién Gap is where hundreds of thousands of people come through and walk through this jungle-like atmosphere. Extremely dangerous, many people exploited, women are sexually assaulted. You know, it's dangerous with children. Many people don't make it out. They're preyed upon by smugglers. To sort of get through, it's trauma, you know, you have to deal with that very real trauma. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Hosts 'Hear From the Mayor' Radio Show" 2023)

In the weeks' press conferences, Mayor Adams and Commissioner Castro frame the U.S. border and the Darién Gap first and foremost as places where children are "being harmed" and where women are facing "sexual abuse" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023).

> The Darién Gap is a dangerous reflection of how the migrant crisis is impacting our region. And this crisis isn't properly defined, in my opinion. This should be defined as children, what are we doing for our children?... It breaks my heart that in New York City we have reached full capacity and we are placing children in conditions that I would not want to place my child in. And at the Darién Gap, I saw children placed in conditions that no one here would want to place their child. And so my goal is to use this information and use what the people of Colombia and New York have been doing to have a more humane response to a crisis that's impacting children. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Participates in Gaggle with Local Colombian Press" 2023)

Given the tour's stated purpose of informing potential life-seekers traveling North of the 'realities' of that journey, the many statements callously referencing abuse seem aimed at dissuading this population from embarking on those travels. These are attempts at mobility control by fear, reflecting the border imperialism concept of psychological control. They also mobilize notions of 'good parenting' to suggest that no parent would want to subject their children to the conditions of the journey. Mayor Adams warns that families headed to New York City will have to raise their children from a hotel room, spend nights on buses, and could experience homelessness. These circumstances are summarized by the Mayor's use of the term "American Nightmare." Between the lines, the Mayor seems to suggest in the above quote that no *good* parent would want to place their child in the conditions of the Darién Gap. This worldview makes little space for any concept of migration as a choice, or perhaps a worthy option, among others, available to parents experiencing difficult circumstances. He describes illegalized migrants as "desperate" in several instances, but he does not suggest any context within which to rationalize their decisions ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023). In this way, the Adams' administration's rhetoric also reflects border imperialism's framing of border deaths as the responsibility of illegalized migrants who embark on those dangerous journeys knowingly.

B. There Will Be Order

Reflecting the intertwined logics of 'care and control,' the Mayor's humanitarian message is paired with indirect criticism of the federal government and the international community for the lack of control over migration. During a segment on the Spanish-language American news channel, Univision, on October 6th, 2023, the Mayor explained that,

> When you coordinate and carry out immigration correctly in a very systematic way with collaboration of all of these countries and cities and governments, it could be a win-win… But when we're watching one of the largest humanitarian crises playing out on the stage of our immediate area in the globe we cannot sit back and do it in a disorganized way. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears on Univision New York" 2023)

The Mayor campaigns during the trip for what the administration calls a "decompression strategy," a systematic plan, perhaps international, which could "stabilize the situation" and "deter dangerous, non-legal migration" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023). Whatever the framing of the administration's "values as a city of immigrants" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023), this language invokes the imperative to control and securitize central to border imperialism. To add political gas to the flames, the Mayor, in the same interview, also puts forward that the 'crisis' will "take away from the needs and services of those who are struggling in our city" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears on Univision New York" 2023). Having established the "American Nightmare" illegalized migrants are facing in New York City, the Mayor adds, "we don't want everyday New Yorkers and Americans to experience that nightmarish reality as well" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Appears on Univision New York" 2023). The Mayor is careful not to suggest that illegalized migrants are themselves a threat to 'established' New Yorkers, but his entire argument depends on a conception of *migration* itself/per se as a threat to the system upon which the city runs. He doubles down on this during the virtual briefing on October 7th, describing both 'established' New Yorkers and 'new arrivals' as in need of "protection" from the current situation. One could conceive that the threat the Mayor

describes is mostly fiscal, as many of the administration's talking points describe the city as being in hot waters financially due to the 'migrant crisis,' but that would be too generous:

> What I don't want is what I saw on the beach area [of the Darién Gap] in Colombia to play out on the streets of New York City. That is where we are right now. And for some reason, I'm not sure if everyone is understanding that we're dealing with a global crisis. This is not the time for us to play politically correct word games and continue to attempt to nitpick on small parts of this. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023)

The message here is clear: The humanitarian crisis at the Darién Gap is a threat to New York City. The message is clear, yet the message also veers unintelligible. Reflecting the spatial warp at the heart of the concept of 'distant-while-proximate,' this rhetoric collapses space and time, by relating the beaches of the Darién Gap with the streets of New York City, and by suggesting that this scene is the city's future and also its present reality. The 'othered' migrant is both already here and on the way. The crisis is everywhere and all at once. This emotional rhetoric is meant to paralyze with fear, to stunt mobility, to exact control. What we see is that politics of care are not only central to the city's urban, liberal identity but also to its vision of migration control, expressed in this case study as an attempt at migration suppression through a fear-based information campaign.

VI. Dark Travel to the Borderlands

"Shadow zones: Dark Travel and Postcolonial Cultures" is the introduction to a journal of scholarship investigating 'dark travel,' a "set of cultural practices pertaining to the experience, and importantly, the discourse of travel in sites that are marked as 'dark' (i.e. traumatizing, disturbing, unsettling) either by dint of their history or their present commodification" (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 221). Postcolonial contexts are marked by their cooptation for the purposes of dark travel, as the authors remind us: "Travel and violence are two central themes of imperial and colonial history" (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 222).

This conceptualization of dark travel grew out of the literature on dark tourism, the present commodification of sights that carry a violent, traumatic, or otherwise troubling

history (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 224). In contrast, dark travel is more encompassing, not necessarily touristic in nature, and does not exclude sights whose 'dark'-ness is firmly in the past. Dark travel emphasizes the relationship between mobility and violence, and goes beyond space-based analysis, examining the journey as well as place.

To understand dark travel, we must foreground the existence of a social hierarchy of mobility which mirrors the hierarchies of oppression defined by border imperialism. Clarke et al. distinguish between two types of traveling subjects, the metropolitan and the subaltern. The metropolitan traveler traverses land via the "infrastructures of empire" (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 222). Their mobility, privileged, offers opportunities to visit upon "shadow zones," and bear witness to the traumas of colonialism. In these experiences, the metropolitan travelers' "individual subjectivity is privileged over place," making the practice of visiting upon shadow zones "a performance," (Adler 1989), in which the traveler tends to "cultivate a sensibility that is always looking for risk." However, the metropolitan traveler must often settle for exploitative voyeurism, which privileges the traveler's experience of 'trauma' as a witness (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 229). Clarke et al. continue, "dark travel as a performance therefore implies a certain narrativization of violence and loss…" (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 229).

The metropolitan travelers' privileged mobility is contrasted by the experiences of "dispersal, displacement, re-deployment, and forced removal," which frequently characterize the movements of subaltern travelers, the illegalized migrant (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 222). The dark travel experienced by subaltern travelers is often involuntary, with suffering catalyzing the journey and defining the travels themselves. Clarke et al. situate 'dark travel' in the greater history of mobility:

> The historic, involuntary movements of people through space remind us of the travail—the labour—at the heart of much travel. Etymologically, in English, travel and travail originally share the same meaning. Dark travel reminds us that the Oxford English Dictionary definition of travail—bodily or mental labour or toil, especially of a painful or oppressive nature; exertion; trouble; hardship; suffering— continues to haunt our contemporary

> linguistic use of travel terminology. Insofar as the metropolitan traveller is a representative of imperial culture (as in the explorer's journal, the governor's diary, the visitor's itinerary, and so on) or the subaltern traveller a representative of the colonized (as in the slave or emancipist narrative), stories of journeys through colonial spaces are inevitably conditioned by the fact of violence: the memory of violence and violence that is a real and present danger. (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 223)

Whereas for the subaltern traveler, mobility is characterized by labor, the metropolitan traveler has typically found in travel a "motor" for progress and development (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 228). We see this perspective represented in the Adams administration's official reason for the trip to Latin America. It was billed as a fact-finding mission, embarked upon by public servants eager to "roll up their sleeves," "see for themselves firsthand," and presumably return to New York with new knowledge that would assist in managing the crisis ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Hosts 'Hear From the Mayor' Radio Show" 2023). At the last virtual briefing of the trip, the Mayor expressed, "This trip has been an eye-opener for me" ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds Virtual Briefing" 2023), centering his individual subjectivity.

Discussion of the Adams' administration's tour of Latin America would be incomplete without recognition of their positionality as metropolitan travelers. In the various media engagements undertaken during that week, Mayor Adams and Commissioner Castro emphasize their eagerness to bear witness to the suffering of people traveling through the treacherous Darién Gap. It is clear they are disappointed when security forces limit their ability to travel freely through this shadow zone for reasons of their personal safety:

> It was our desire to go in and walk along with each area and interact with the asylum seekers that were there. We had two briefings prior, and the National Police did not want us to go to Darién Gap at all on the ground. They only wanted us to fly over. And as a commitment and promise, they stated, if will allow you to go in, much of your personnel is going to have to remain in the car. You must go in, do a quick observation, but you have to get out of the area for security reasons.
>
> They were our hosts. They were responsible for ensuring the safety of my delegation. I was not going to go against what they asked. Commission Castro was able to speak to a family that was there, but we were not permitted to stay any longer. When they told us we had to leave, we had to leave. I was not going to violate the trust that they gave me of going to the scene. ("Transcript: Mayor Adams Participates in Gaggle with Local Colombian Press" 2023)

Their comments reflect the attraction to risk described by Clarke et al. It is an attraction to risk seemingly for the sake of bearing witness, emphasizing their individual subjectivities and

privileging their desires to be impacted by the morbidity of that place. Migrants journeying through Central America, and particularly through the Darien Gap, are well-described by Clarke et al's 'subaltern traveler' whose mobility is "marked by fear, surveillance, and physical threat" (Clarke, Dutton, and Johnston 2014, 222), all well-documented realities. In the context of this visit, the shadow zone of the Darién Gap, a space traversed by subaltern travelers on a journey for a better life, provides 'experience' to the metropolitan traveler. The people the administration witnessed on the move rank below them in the mobility hierarchy, clearly exemplified by the administration's ability to drop into the hot spot and later comfortably fly home via the "technology of empire."

VII. Conclusion

This paper has shown how border imperialism as a conceptual framework need not rely on the management of physical borders to be discursively operationalized by municipal governments. The Adams administration, during their trip to Latin America, framed migration as an existential threat to New York City and its citizens and utilized emotional rhetoric to emphasize the danger posed. Positioning 'migration' as the threat, rather than 'migrants,' gave the administration the ability to appear in coherence with New York City's established liberal city ideals and sanctuary city identity. What postcolonial research on humanitarianism and border imperialism helped to uncover is the way that this liberal city identity can actually structure and enhance the colonial and imperialist logics at play in the push to keep illegalized migrants distant geographically, socially, economically, and so forth. The literature on 'dark travel' complemented these findings by situating our analysis in the politics of mobility and what it means for an imperial force to visit and bear witness to the traumas inflicted by border imperialism. Within this context, the trip to Latin America exemplifies New York City's involvement in border imperialism at the Southern border.

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