

LAS PATRONAS, CLIENTELISM, AND CARE

by

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Introduction

In La Patrona you learn by sound which direction the train is traveling—but not in the obvious way. The trains’ oatmealy engine noise gets easily confused with the far-off bounce and clatter of sugarcane trucks wending through newly-cut fields. Train whistles echo off green hills, and the rumbles of a train churlishly moving south and one exhaustedly rumbling north may both suggest movement in the same direction. Sometimes the trains surprise you, and sometimes you think you hear them coming but they never appear. There is talk that clouds; or winter; or whether the Pico de Orizaba is visible can tell you how distant you might hear the trains. Women are said to be worse than men at knowing the direction of travel, and all teenagers especially inattentive, but anyone can learn to hear.

The difference is in tone, pitch, timbre. If the train’s whorling movement sounds crisp, almost acidic, the train is going south. If you can barely sense the sound, if it is like the softest and lowest tinnitus imaginable, the train is coming north. If it sounds like it might be in the sky somewhere, if it confounds the faculties of triangulation so much that your mind makes sense of the sound as non-directional, from nowhere, from within you: moving south. If it feels bound to the earth, or if it winds through the mango and avocado and tlanepa trees like a boa constrictor: coming north.



Figure 1. The Pico de Orizaba seen from Avenida 14 in La Patrona.

La Patrona occasions other sounds. The rain tings tin roofs and plastic bottles littered on the ground. Pickup loudspeakers solicit old iron beds and building materials with scratchy announcements or play jingles advertising cooking gas. Dogs chase each other through the trees. The ARS buses to Córdoba teeter on their shocks and racket over speedbumps. Roosters crow at any time of the day. Everyone knows the sound of the old, blue Volkswagen Beetle that the tortilleria uses for deliveries.

Your footsteps find the still-wet mud at the bottom of a rut in the road. The train's rumble is a heartbeat, is the sound that announces the circles of circulation: in, out, around, through. In, out, around, through La Patrona; in, out, around, through the state of Veracruz; in, out, around, through Mexico. Migrants come into town, unsure where they are, unsure whom to trust; they sit on top of boxcars or inside the gondola cars or in the wells behind the hoppers. The residents of La Patrona give them food; the food goes out in plastic grocery bags, rice and beans and pan dulce, sometimes eggs or carrots or expired cakes. Children wander around to watch, kick at the dirt, then go back inside. Visitors come, stay for a while, then move on.

Perhaps it's not the trains that make the circulations, but the residents. La Patrona, its rails clanging and clapping as the train goes by, its cane fields rustling with wind and sheets of rain, shelters a collective of women who call themselves Las Patronas. The Patronas have been giving food, water, and clothing to migrants nearly every day since February, 1995—in the rain, the mud, the dark, in the smoke of trash fires and of controlled burns of sugarcane stubs.

But the Patronas say it's the train, not them, that brings people here. The arrival of the trains taps out the rhythm of days in La Patrona, even though the trains are not regular, do not follow a schedule. The Patronas are today part of a greater ensemble of activist projects around migration, and their voice is one of the more prominent in the Mexican media. But over the past 17 years, they have repeatedly chosen to keep their distance from politicians

and local power brokers, have chosen to stay small, or tight, or local. Media come to them, but their audience is the same as it has ever been: migrants with little, with nothing, migrants traveling north.

But for the most part, the Patronas do not meet the people who receive their aid, because they give it while the trains are moving. The Patronas cannot give their names, their birthdays, their brothers or sisters or cousins; cannot say whether they are mean or kind, quick to anger or cool and collected, whether they tend to remember birthdays, whether they have gotten in trouble back home. The Patronas do not know where their homes are, or why they have left. Some on the trains are not labor migrants at all. Sometimes the trains carry wealthier people, Mexican and foreign, looking to have an adventure. Then there are the *drogaditos*,¹ a word spoken locally not only to refer to addicts but others, too: sex workers, effeminate gay men, the homeless, runaways, the transgendered. These are not exclusive categories.

They all get food. Every day the Patronas wait for the sound of the train, the tickle and whisper at their ears, to go out to the train tracks. When the train comes they are ready: plastic bags of comida first, bags of pan dulce after; water passed from a wheelbarrow at the crossing with the dirt road.

La Patrona is not a rich town: Here you will not hear not hear French or English, will not hear American indie rock, will not hear the tony hush of a guarded fraccionamiento. The sounds of everyday life are indistinguishable in La Patrona not only from the neighboring pueblos—Coetzala, Cuichapa, Naranjal—but from much of rural and peri-urban Mexico. It's the train, and the Patronas, that distinguish La Patrona.

When you give, the migrants hanging off the trains shout at you: the young ones joyfully, the older ones more directly but still grateful. *Dios te bendiga*, they tell you. *Gracias, amigo*, they say. *Güero-güero-güero*, *thank you*.

¹ In proper Spanish the word would be “drogadictos,” but I have never heard anyone from La Patrona use the c.

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I lived in La Patrona for six weeks during the summer of 2011 and made a return visit for two weeks in January of 2012. During these research trips I both participated in the Patronas' action and came to know them personally. When I came to La Patrona, I imagined that I would study how the Patronas' action has altered subjectivities, both their own and those of other residents of the town who do not participate. In Mexico, political relations around Central Americans and Central American migration has long been fraught (García 2006), and I was curious whether and how the Patronas' longstanding action had significantly altered these dynamics in a place far from either border. I imagined the Patronas' project to be something "normal" in the pueblo—while not static, perhaps settled locally. I expected to further think about, and ask, whether the train was a member of the community, both theoretically and observationally.

I arrived at a different set of questions. Political relations in La Patrona were anything but static. These included not just relations within the Patronas' neighborhood but with media, with NGOs, with bureaucrats, with politicians. To my chagrin, political contestation was everywhere. Appropriate questions were not how things *have* changed, but about changes happening in front of me. My return visit allowed me to interview actors who I had not been able, or had not thought, to interview during my initial time in La Patrona. While the early drafts of the chapters here were based more extensively on my notes, in later versions the words and experiences of my interview respondents grew greatly in prominence. While the product—and the mistakes—are my own, I hope that my process has been successful at rooting out both misunderstandings and unearthing processes that are important and ongoing.

With both the Patronas and other respondents, I was as straightforward as possible about my research. But ethnographic fieldwork is fugitive, slippery. The "popular" models for fieldwork—journalism, NGO reports and such—expect that on-the-ground work sim-

ply adds voices, in counterpoint or in harmony, or that it superposes known variations on a theme in new ways. But ethnographic work can also be like going into the jungle to listen to birdsongs—and, while you're there, hearing the shake of leaves, the rhythms of dripping water, the brushes of fabric against bark, the chips and chirps of gray squirrels as well. When asked about the purposes of my research, my responses sounded out a moment in a long process, sounded out not a finalized product but what I was thinking of at the time. I could have better articulated that. Questions about the Patronas' dealings with local politicians only emerged while I was living in La Patrona, and similarly academic discussion around care is both uncommon and parochial enough to not be readily legible to many local people. As I began to think more deeply about the Patronas' action as a praxis of care, this framing helped them understand why I was in La Patrona and how my research was qualitatively different from, for example, a media account. Still, this type of research is a speculative endeavor, without either the ready accessibility of either a radio program or a symphony.

Juanita Sundberg has written that “one of the most challenging aspects of fieldwork is negotiating unequal power relations that not only shape the collection and interpretation of knowledge, but also constitute the very conditions that enable research” (2003, 181). When I arrived in La Patrona, my arrival was loaded with both class symbolism and class performance. Simply being affiliated with a university—or having a Bachelor's degree—implies a class affiliation apart from holding an American passport. Moreover, my introduction to the Patronas was through an acquaintance from Puebla who is an instructor at the Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla. My acquaintance comes from a family of moderate-to-significant privilege, and the Ibero is a private Jesuit university that mostly serves young Mexicans from likewise privileged families. My class identification was thus solidified and compounded.

I was also perpetually performing my class. Not only did I know how to use a computer fluidly, for instance, but I worked on one that I owned. In contrast, while some of the

children in town take computing classes, these are mostly rudimentary, and for many local adults—including the Patronas—computers are more like toys than tools. I tended to write my notes by hand while with the Patronas, as this read to them more like “working.” Yet this class distinction did not always distance me from them; at times it also allowed me to act as an informant into much more privileged spaces than they were familiar with. During my initial stay, I spent a night at a hotel in Córdoba and afterward received a small amount of ribbing, as is common. I teased back, making ever more outlandish claims about the room—that it was the size of the house, that it had four televisions, a glass wall, and a jacuzzi in the bathroom—and these were immediately taken as true. Because I was assumed to be rich, and because most of the people I interacted with in La Patrona had never been inside a hotel room, anything they might have seen on television was within reasonable possibility. It took me the better part of a week to convince the Patronas that my initial claims about the room were fibs. They were deeply interested, however, in hearing how the privileged perceive hotel rooms differently: far from being an exciting adventure, this is to talk of hotels as emotionally sterile, stuffy, confining, often boring.

Tied to my class privilege was a strong degree of race privilege. Race and class position are intertwined in Mexico, and while I was familiar with this from my upbringing in California, the racialized discourses and racial descriptors were more pervasive than I expected. I could not go anywhere in La Patrona without being called “güero”; only children used “americano” or “gringo” to my face. “Güero” contrasts with terms such as “moreno,” “negro,” or “indio”—terms at once physical descriptors of coloring or complexion and deeply racialized. Yet although Amatlán, the cabecera (head town) of La Patrona’s municipio, was founded for the Indian servants of the rich families of Córdoba, I did not meet a single person in La Patrona who considered herself “Indian” whatsoever. Compounded with my class privilege, as a white person I was expected to have extensive knowledge of “high” culture, whether or

not it had reached outside of Mexico—I was asked about both Princess Diana and Mexican indie rock in ways that invited me to discourse about both. I also repeatedly surprised people in La Patrona when I displayed knowledge outside of racialized expectation.

Finally, life in La Patrona is deeply gendered. The Patronas are all women and this is intentional. Yet my own gender position, even as a cisman, was oddly mixed. It was assumed that I would perform some “male” tasks—lifting heavy objects, passing the bottles of water—and refrain from certain “female” tasks, like doing laundry by hand or washing dishes. It was also assumed that I had never learned other “male” tasks: many of the Patronas refused to believe that I knew how to drive a car. While practices of safety in La Patrona are deeply gendered, I was subjected to a safety regime that appeared unique to me: far from the “male” “freedom” of movement, but also not recognizable as that of either a boy or a woman. At times I was told I was only “allowed” to go certain places by car—a restriction typically freighted on women—or that I should not go out of the house’s yard at night—a restriction usually for children. It was also expected that I would come and go from town without anyone asking questions or checking up on me—typical of adult men.

My race, class, and gender privilege made research easier in innumerable ways. During informal conversations, officials and NGO workers were much more open than I would have expected, and in particular my respondent from the Rotary Club was deeply accommodating. He was so obliging, in fact, that I felt conflicted about subjecting his words to critical scrutiny (see “Politics of the Purifier”) even while conducting the interview I recognized his words and thoughts as crucial information. I have tried to manage this situation by not passing judgment on Rotary’s programs more generally in Córdoba and Veracruz, and restricting my analyses to how Rotary’s gift is meant to operate in La Patrona. That analysis hopes to show political contention rather than “villains” and “heroes”; while I certainly undertake my

scholarly pursuits from a deeply normative worldview, I have endeavored here to present politics recognizably, fairly, and in all of its complexity.

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The 12 or so Patronas—the exact number varies as members join, split off, or drop out—work within the home, in petty commerce, or as domestic help. While they are secure in their cinder-block homes and, for the landholders, their property, only three hold title themselves.² However, their stability belies the economic diversity among them. At one end of the spectrum is a Patrona who has not been able to hold a stable job, and vends empanadas in La Patrona or Córdoba when she needs money for electricity, food, or sundries. She lives in a two-room building, with a shared exterior bathroom and no hot water, on a relative's property. She does not pay rent. At the other end of the spectrum, another Patrona owns three hectares of sugarcane and two local properties, a house with hot water and satellite television, as well as an old truck for her and a new car for her son to use.

In other ways, the Patronas are less heterogenous. None have university degrees, and until the fall of 2011 none had ever left Mexico nor possessed a passport. Even within Mexico they have travelled little and have lived the vast majority or all of their lives in La Patrona. Two of the Patronas are in preparatoria—the Mexican equivalent of high school—and expecting to continue studying (in Córdoba) and living in La Patrona when they graduate. As a general rule, the older the Patrona, the less functionally literate she will be, including within generations. For the generation in their late 30s to early 50s, the oldest typically have trouble reading, enough so that the youngest Patronas will read newspaper articles aloud when the Patronas are featured.

Days in La Patrona are full of work. Mornings in the open-air kitchen, the thin plastic bags of leftovers are opened and the food checked for spoilage. Still-good bags are knot-

² Seven have land tenure through a spouse or other family member, and in two cases I was told conflicting information.

ted, put inside a tall pot lined with a woven plastic-burlap sack, and steamed. On the wood stove—just a slab of concrete with a metal chimney—there are fresh rice and beans to cook. Water bottles to be washed and filled wait in more sacks behind the building. Bread has to be sorted for mold and put in plastic grocery bags. There are flies, chickens, and escaped goats that get into everything and have to be shooed away.

The action carries still further into the Patronas' everyday lives. Some donations require pickup, typically in Córdoba; some of the bread and pastries comes via a work-exchange scheme with the bakery of a Chedraui department store in the city. The Patronas also attend community meetings, host and visit government officials, do interviews with journalists, and receive donations from corporations and NGOs. In many ways the Patronas' lives are scheduled with both their income-generating activities; their familial commitments taking care of children, parents, husbands, and households; and the commitments of their action.

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During my time in La Patrona, I assisted in nearly all aspects of the Patronas' action. This extended beyond the visible acts of passing food and water to migrants—mostly water, as this was gendered male. I helped cook and clean; helped prepare food, water, and clothing; bought supplies (such as plastic bags) with the Patronas; participated in the Patronas' work-exchange with the bakery; attended community meetings; when asked, gave advice on dealing with corporate donations and NGOs; attended meetings with government officials; read newspaper articles about migration and the Patronas aloud; and passed food and other bundles to migrants on trains. I took extensive field notes, written nearly every day and with multiple entries for most days; these notes comprise approximately 75,000 words for both trips for both trips combined. I used the Patronas' book of visitors, with their permission,

to contact supporting organizations. I also counted the number of migrants passing on the trains.

The notable exception to my participation was decision-making. While I was asked my opinion on a few occasions, I neither volunteered it nor was asked to participate. As a relatively short-termer, and as an outsider in myriad ways, I perceived that it was better to observe, and to make suggestions only when invited. In certain situations, such as during politicians' visits, it was generally expected that I would not know enough of the deep political context to be able to help. In others, such as trainings facilitated by other NGOs, I served as a quasi-local informant for the NGO staff, although they often disregarded basic information I contributed, such as how much the Patronas paid for food during a given week.

I conducted 11 formal, semi-structured interviews for this project. Formal interviewees included members of the Patronas, community members, and members of NGOs that support the Patronas. Outside of these, I chatted with every member of the Patronas informally. I also spoke with a much greater population of neighbors, pueblo residents, students, NGO workers, and other involved parties. With individual Patronas, I used these moments to check in, asking how a very recent event made them feel or what they thought of an article in the newspaper. With others, I was able to verify—or sometimes not—information others had told me. As a tourist, I also spoke with some migrants, both those heading north—the train is sometimes put on a nearby siding, which allows the Patronas to pass food and have quick conversations with the migrants—as well as those who failed to cross the U.S. border and were traveling south again.

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The chapters of this thesis look at the Patronas ethnographically. One of the strengths of participant observation is that it allows a richer analysis, one not just through interviews or

survey categories but also through careful observation of the practices of everyday life. It relies not just on what people say—whether the subjects of research or other researchers—but what they do, how they interact with each other and with the world. Questions about social activism, subjectivities, and even political relations deeply benefit from such research methods, because social relations are always-already intertwined with the local concerns, institutional forms of power, and naturalized social constructions that comprise specific places. The chapters here aim to spur dialogues about activist practice around migration in current Mexico, economic subjectivities, and clientelism; and between geography and recent formulations of the ethics of care.

La Patrona is a stage well-suited for geographical research: Issues of migration, social movements and space, bordering, the construction of national identities and subjectivities, the politics of affects, and local performances of geopolitics all present themselves here. Geographers, however, have listened for different parts. The closest work to this one looks to the northern region of Totonacapan and the effects that migration by local residents has had on local environmental and economic landscapes, as well as on subjectivities (Popke and Torres 2012). Other work within the discipline has focused on peasant economy and economic landscapes (e.g. Hausermann and Hallie Eakin 2008; Hausermann 2012); rural vulnerability (e.g. Hallie Eakin and Wehbe 2009; Tucker, H. Eakin, and Castellanos 2010); and environmental history (Sluyter 1999, 2009). Outside the discipline, scholars have investigated the rapid changes that occurring as Veracruz became a donor community of migrants (Pérez Monterosas 2003; Córdova Plaza 2007), Veracruz's history as a center for social movements (e.g. Ducey 1999; Rashkin 2012), and local land tenure regimes (Córdova Plaza 2000). A final longstanding debate is the extent to which Veracruz is culturally "Caribbean," in part resulting from the state's place as home to one of the few African slave-descended populations

in Mexico (Carroll 2001; Vaughn 2001; Castañeda 2004; González 2004; Nutini 2005; Sue 2010; see also Castillo 2008, 266).

Regarding migration and the movement of population, in addition to numerous studies on the U.S.–Mexico border as a region (Ackleson 1999, 2005; Heyman 1999; McIntyre and Weeks 2002; Doty 2006, 2011; Sundberg and Kaserman 2007; Sundberg 2008), scholars have begun to examine how migration affects local spaces far from the border. One important strand has investigated the respatialization of borders both within the U.S. and within Mexico (Sparke 2006; Coleman 2007, 2012; Winders 2007; Hiemstra 2010; Conlon 2011; Mountz 2011; Galemba 2012). Closer to the heart of this project have been many studies that have documented the local effects of migration through remittances, neoliberal geographies of labor and work, and economic landscapes (Richard C. Jones 1998; Martin 2005; Klooster 2005; Reece C. Jones 2009, 2012; Perramond 2008; Raghuram 2009; Bailey 2010; Davis and Lopez-Carr 2010), in addition to works on cross- or transnational identity-making as constitutive of the migration experience (Mountz and Wright 1996; Menjívar 2000, 2012; Bailey, Wright, Mountz, and Miyares 2002; Stodolska and Santos 2006; Dunn 2010; Hagan 2012). Yet both inside and outside geography, academic studies on Latin American migration and bordering have focused almost exclusively on the areas adjacent to the border (e.g. Sundberg and Kaserman 2007; Sundberg 2008; Burridge 2009; Doty 2011). Almost no academic work has focused on Central American migration through Mexico after the conclusion of Guatemala's civil war in 1996, and what little work exists at present foregrounds migrant vulnerability, especially to cartels or corrupt state agents, often as a violation of human rights (Bustamante 2011; Casillas 2011; Cruz Forthcoming).

The two chapters that follow this introduction look to very different aspects of the Patronas' action, both from this previous work and from one another. The first chapter, "Las Patronas, Material Clientelismo, and the Politics of the Purifier," examines the intersection

between formal politics and informal action around migration. Activists in Mexico have worked to politicize migration to and through the country, and migrants' rights has become newly figured as an electoral issue. The Patronas receive visits and gifts from a variety of politicians and political actors, and these visits come to contain meaning only within the wider context of Mexican politics and, especially, the persistence of clientelism. The bulk of this chapter describes the politics of one gift, a water purifier meant for use in the Patronas' action, and especially the ways that the purifier connects to political and political-economic regimes. This chapter was written with the intent to submit it to the *Journal of Latin American Geography*.

The second chapter, "Care, Spatial Ethics, and Las Patronas of Veracruz," endeavors to describe the ethical praxis of the Patronas in the context of the ethics of care. Geographers looked to the ethics of care, especially in works from the last 15 years, for insights into ethical practice. This chapter considers the ethics of care by looking to a broader range of theorists from outside the discipline than geographers have deployed, and works with ethnographic accounts of the Patronas' action to argue that the thinkers thus far neglected by geographers provide strong accounts of what care ethics looks like in practice. This chapter was written with the intent to submit it to *Antipode*, where several recent interventions on the ethics of care have been published (Lawson 2009; Smith 2009; Carmalt 2011).

Both chapters have been guided by the principles of feminist ethnographic research, and especially the intersection of that work with geography (Rose 1997; Bondi 2002; Sharp 2005). Feminist methods both recognize the deep importance of the researcher's identity and positionality to the research, as well as the power differentials between the researcher and her research subjects. The cleavages I point out here are necessarily those that I perceived as important to the research; it is likely that there were and are more of which I remain unaware.

For a long time I remained uneasy, and unclear, about doing research that felt more engaged with the concerns of academics than the Patronas. One great benefit of my return trip was that I could simply ask the Patronas what they thought of the work I was doing and that which I still had to do. I asked some of the Patronas how they felt to be used as examples—whether by politicians, news commentators, or academics. Uniformly they told me that such work was fine, that it didn't matter to them. They wanted something different. "Everyone wants to talk, talk, talk," one Patrona said. "What's important is that you do. Here or wherever you are from."

There are many other papers to be written on, and with, the Patronas. The papers here are intended not as a comprehensive account but as two of the many ways of making sense of my time in La Patrona. They are not, or not yet, the type of action the Patronas want, but they are not meant to be. Their audience is different, and they are necessarily incomplete. They are partial, in both senses of the word—but life, as feminist theorists remind us, exists no other way.

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Las Patronas, Material Clientelismo, and the Politics of the Purifier¹

For the past 17 years,² a collective of women in the rural Veracruz community of La Patrona has passed out food, water, and clothing to migrants headed north on freight trains. They call themselves “Las Patronas.”³ When the Patronas hear the whistle and rumble of the trains, they rush into action, loading food into plastic crates and wheelbarrowing the crates to the tracks. Out along the tracks where they give, the air smells hot oil and axle grease, even at night. The tracks themselves are steel-grey on the top and rust-orange on the sides, and when the trains pass the tracks wobble and flex under the weight, enough that the boxcars and hoppers and gondola cars bounce as they go by. The trains flash their headlights as they come around the bend, and that is when the Patronas get ready to pass out their bundles.

The Patronas have cooked their rice and beans nearby, in an open kitchen behind a small, cinder-block building. The front of the building is a small papeleria, a paper-goods shop. The air often smells of trash being burned for potash, cut branches, cane husks, old leather boots, and plastic



Figure 1. The papeleria.

¹ The data for this chapter comes from eight weeks of participant observation, a first trip in the summer of 2011, and a two-week return trip in January 2012. During this time I lived in La Patrona with one of the Patronas, participated in the Patronas' actions, and attended community gatherings, meetings with NGOs, and workshops for the Patronas. In addition to numerous informal conversations, I conducted 11 formal, semi-structured interviews with members of the Patronas, migrant workers working in La Patrona or nearby, and workers for NGOs supporting the Patronas. All quotes come from these interviews.

² The Patronas report that the first gave food to migrants on February 4th, 1995.

³ For clarity, I use “the Patronas” to refer to the collective of women or its members, “a/the Patrona” to refer to a single member of the collective, and “La Patrona” to the town where they live.

bags alike. Most of the Patronas live nearby, and some will have rushed to the papeleria from their chores.

When the train arrives at the crossing of Avenida 14, the Patronas pass out what they have. The migrants are hanging off the sides of the trains, and the Patronas give *while the trains are moving*. Even when the trains move slowly, at a jogging pace, tens or hundreds of migrants can pass in two minutes. The Patronas only meet the migrants occasionally, when the northbound trains are sidetracked waiting for a southbound to pass, and from the migrants they ask for nothing in return for their gifts.



Originally settled as a hacienda community, the pueblo of La Patrona remains a mostly agrarian, though newly peri-urban, community near the small city of Córdoba. It sits far from either national border, approximately 800 kilometers north of the crossing into Mexico at Tapachula, Chiapas, and 1100 kilometers south of the crossing into the United States at Matamoros, Tamaulipas. From southern Mexico trains lead Tierra Blanca, 90 kilometers to the southeast of La Patrona. There some continue due north, toward Texas. All others pass through La Patrona. The tracks that pass through La Patrona link not only to Córdoba, but to the major cities in the heart of Mexico. For migrants on the train intending to cross into New Mexico or Arizona or California, or searching out work in the interior of Mexico, the route runs through La Patrona.

Composed of an extended family, their neighbors, and a few friends, the Patronas have become somewhat famous within Mexico for their giving—first in the mid-2000s documentary *De Nadie* (Dirdamal 2007), and then as a source of human-interest stories for newspapers, Mexican network television, and international Spanish-language media (e.g. Argüello 2007; Molina Ramirez 2007; García 2008; Jiménez 2008; Lozano 2008; Alcántara 2010; Ruiz Condori 2011b, 2011a). Among many other awards, in 2010 the Mexico City daily *El Universal* named Norma Romero Vasquez, the Patronas’ unofficial *vocera* (spokeswoman), as one of “25 Reasons to Believe in Mexico” (Alcántara 2010).

Concomitant with media coverage has been the attention of local and regional politicians. Similarly to many parts of Mexico, in La Patrona politics are deeply personal (Lomnitz 1999; Nuijten 2003, 187ff.; Nutini 2005, 36; Shefner 2008), and formal politics are performed materially, through local and everyday interactions. Migration has long been connected to formal politics within Mexico (Smith and Bakker 2008), and in La Patrona transnational migration—migration through Mexico by (mostly) Central American migrants—is becoming linked to formal politics of a national scope. For the Patronas, these local political performances include not-uncommon visits by relatively minor bureaucrats and legislators.⁴ Such political actors wish to be seen as pro-migrant, and tend to come not just with a media retinue, but bearing gifts. They often ask what they can “make happen” for the Patronas, or what more they, or others, can bring.

This paper examines the politics of a single gift, that of a water purifier donated by the Córdoba Rotary Club and “facilitated” (*facilitado por*) by the local legislative Deputy. The purifier is entangled within a variety of relations. It used by the Patronas in the undeniably political act of assisting migrants on the train. It is the “gift” of a politician to a private entity,

⁴ During my eight weeks of fieldwork, I personally met executive officials from the state offices for Human Rights (CEDH-Veracruz), Development and Families (DIF), and Migration (Atención a Migrantes); one federal legislative deputy; one state legislative deputy; and emissaries from the office of the governor of neighboring Puebla state.

a collective of women. It costs a great deal, in local terms. Most of all, it asks the Patronas to be different subjects, different people, as this chapter will endeavor to explain.

The purifier's politicalities are fluid,⁵ but in this paper find their shores at three locales. First, the purifier is deeply implicated in patron-client relations. Clientelist politics derive from material provision of resources, but also from a discursive relation. That discursive relation—how the purifier is read—involves not only the patron-client dyad, but a multiplicity of other parties: neighbors, virtual clients, and other patrons, as well as bureaucrats, engineers, union officials, journalists. Thus the Deputy makes efforts that others know that she is involved with the purifier and with the Patronas, and she does so cannily. The clientelist meaning-making occurs at the inextricable intersection of the material provision and the visibility of the provision.

Second, the purifier touches the politics of migration and especially the politics of the provision of migrant aid. The carnival of state attention on the Patronas enacts a performance of “national” discourse around migration, yet it does so in a marginal political location. This “national” performance intersects with local, often neighborly, politics—which can make problems for the Patronas that politicians and bureaucrats can evade.

Finally, the paper argues for a crucial disjuncture between the gifts that the Patronas give to migrants passing through and the gift—or perhaps “gift”—of the purifier. Here I draw on gift theory, but even more deeply on questions of economic subjectivity. The purifier, in the end, has little to do with migrant health. Instead, it implicates migrants as objects of governmental attention, but also the Patronas themselves as both objects and subjects-to-be-produced. The goal, this paper argues, is to produce specifically neoliberal clients. This work's contribution, then, is to examine an activist practice around migration in an era when politicians wish to associate themselves with such activism, and in a location in which clientelism continues robustly. It gives a contextualized account of attempts at, and resistance

⁵ Pun after de Laet and Mol (2000).

to, patron-client relationships, but also looks at a crucial third party, the Rotary Club. From these vantage points, it argues that such practice can create a “gift” that concerns less products or objects than subjects. Clientelist practice can create a “gift,” that is, whose purpose is radically disconnected from its normally-understood teleology.

II. Local performances of clientelism

La Patrona is both the site of seasonal agricultural work in sugarcane, including for Central American s, as well as a donor community to Mexico’s industrial cities and to the United States.⁶ This position as simultaneously a recipient of migrant labor and a donor community of migrants reflects Mexico’s place in the wider capitalist economic system of North America (Shefner 2008). Veracruz on the whole is one of the poorest states in Mexico, “leading” only Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas by government measures of poverty (CONAPO 2005, table A.1, 2010, table A.1). At the time of this research, the summer of 2011, agricultural seasonal work in the cane fields or on a pepper farm close to La Patrona paid \$100 MXN per day, less than \$8 USD.

Partly as a consequence of this widespread impoverishment, clientelism in Veracruz continues to be robust (Nutini 2005; Benitez Iturbe 2008; cf. Fox 2008; Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet 2010). Politically, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has long used material and infrastructure provision to secure its electoral base, especially in poor and rural areas. Mauricio Benitez Iturbe describes Veracruz as “a paradigmatic example of PRI rule in Mexico” (2008, 74). Hugo Nutini, in a study on Córdoba, describes a cluster of local clientelist relationships characterized by widespread “graft” (2005, 58ff.). This situation contrasts with the 20-year reduction in clientelism across Mexico that other scholars have observed

⁶ At the time of fieldwork, residents reported working, or relatives working, in the cities of Veracruz and Puebla, the states of Nuevo León and México, and the Federal District of Mexico City; as well as in Florida, Maryland, Michigan, and North Carolina.

(e.g. Domínguez and C. H. Lawson 2004, 67–68; Schedler and Manríquez 2004; Shefner 2008; Shefner and Stewart 2011). Yet the PRI's hold on local politics is tenuous, which may be one additional reason for the persistence of clientelism: while at the time of this writing the PRI held all the major offices in Córdoba, the *alcaldes*⁷ of both the municipio of Amatlán (in which La Patrona is situated) and neighboring municipio of Cuichapa were held by the rightist Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN).

Long-term party discipline to the PRI is low, as respondents and Benitez Iturbe both report (2008, 137). Instead of party discipline, political loyalty is manufactured by and for individuals, whether inside or outside formal politics. For many of the impoverished or otherwise marginal, this manufactured loyalty takes the shape of a patron-client relation. In clientelistic regimes, academics have argued, parties have unequal power, and their interactions are marked by not just norms of respect and obligation, but often even elements of friendship and affection. These relationships are dyadic, they are participatory, and they are long-term. (Scott 1972; Landé 1973; Roniger 1990; Auyero 1999; Gay 1999; Audelo 2004; Hilgers 2009; Ansell and Mitchell 2011). Tina Hilgers writes that the *gestión*⁸—contextually, “the arrangements politicians and their operators make to fulfill citizens’ needs for electricity, sewage control, gutters, legal advice, social events, health care, and so on” (2008, 137)—is the key grounding of Mexican politics, and it is the patron’s ability to manage *gestiones* that mark her as someone who can effect local change.

Yet clientelistic relations are far from simple and unidirectional. The patron has power both over and, crucially, through the clients (Gonzalez and Gonzalez 2011; Selee 2011). The patron’s power to command resources rests in some part on her ability to mobilize the publics that she “represents.” From the bottom-up, a patron’s power derives precisely from her abili-

⁷ In local usage there is no distinction made between “*alcalde*” and “*presidente municipal*,” a practice I follow here. Both roughly translate as “mayor.”

⁸ Alternatively defined as “administrative process,” “formalities,” or, when plural, “negotiations.”

ties to “get things done” (Auyero 1999, 315-16). This is not only limited to “negative” effects of resource extraction from local communities and economies, but from her “positive” power to bring in new resources to the community as well (Auyero 1999, 305).

Academic interventions on clientelism have tended to examine these power relations as structural and systematic relationships, especially among political parties (Fox 1994, 2008; Piattoni 2001; Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Holzner 2004; Hilgers 2008; Shefner 2008; Hernandez and Hernandez 2011). Few have treated localizations of clientelism as political apart from a hierarchical imaginary of governance. Likewise, although clientelism’s affective aspects have been noted at least since Luis Roniger’s germinal work (1990, 2ff.), it is only very recently that interventions have attended to what Roseanne Rutten calls “the habitus of clientelism” (2006, 370; cf. Landini 2012). Javier Auyero and colleagues assert that “the everyday workings of clientelist problem-solving networks produce a set of dispositions among those who receive the daily favors from patrons and brokers” (2009, 3), but investigations thus far have mostly looked to the promotion of nationalism against habitus, rather than to the affective dimensions within clientelist relations.

Patrons and clients are clearly “playing” in a dynamic and affective field. Just as the subject positions of the Patronas as participants in migration circuits or as the relatives of migrants have deeply informed their understandings of labor and family (cf. V. Lawson 2000), so too does entering a clientelistic relationship alter not only political subjectivities but phenomenological subjectivities as well. Patronage might be done in exchange-based terms, but it also mobilizes dispositions. Crucially, however, affective management happens in both directions of a clientelist relationship; for as much as the Deputy attempts to corral the Patronas, the Patronas work to manage the Deputy.

III. The political logics of migration

Migration to the U.S. from Central American countries has grown rapidly in recent years (Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker 2011), even as U.S. media (e.g. Preston 2012; Semple 2012) has tended to focus on the decline of Mexican migration to the United States to net-zero (Passel and Cohn 2011). Increasingly, then, Mexico is the site of transnational migration. While the numbers traveling through Mexico are incomplete at best, the magnitude is in the hundreds of thousands.⁹

In response, institutional forms of migrant services have proliferated in Mexico, both state-based and non-. Projects in media activism (Silver and García Bernal 2010; Guillermprieto 2011) and direct action (such as Father Alejandro Solalinde's annual "Paso a Paso Hacia la Paz" caravan) have shamed government officials for allowing mistreatment of migrants to occur. The Catholic Church directs a network of migrant albergues (shelters) from Tapachula to Tijuana that provide safety and temporary lodging along the routes of migration. Federally within Mexico, the National Institute of Migration (INM) oversees Grupo Beta, whose field agents are charged with protecting migrants regardless of legal status or nationality, and the National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH) produces materials for migrants whose rights have been violated, mostly targeted at non-citizens. Perhaps more significantly, in 2011 the Mexican legislature passed a new *Ley de Migración*, supported by both the rightist PAN and two major leftist parties, the PRI and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). The *Ley de Migración* explicitly recognizes that migrants are caught up in a global labor market, and it has been understood to functionally decriminalize undocumented migration by Central Americans, though it does not decriminalize working without

⁹ The U.S. government, for instance, estimates that there were at minimum 140,000 successfully completed unlawful entries in 2010 by migrants from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, though the methods and route are unspecified (Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker 2011). Its estimates give a minimum of 90,000 successful unlawful entries by these same groups in 2011 (Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker 2012).

a valid work visa nor grant the benefits of permanent legal residency (Alba and Castillo 2012; Morales Vega 2012; Cruz Forthcoming). Nonetheless abuse of irregular migrants certainly continues—and targeted cartel kidnappings have effected new vulnerabilities for migrants of any nationality in Mexico (Casillas 2011).

Politicians and political parties view migrant issues as conferring electoral benefits for differing reasons. Migrant services within Mexico may be understood as both morally and practically connected to migrant remittances from without—remittances which can be manipulated to arrive unevenly across localities (Smith 2003; Hernandez and Hernandez 2011; Aparicio and Meseguer 2012). For others, the vulnerabilities of migrants may be an issue of public safety (Bustamante 2010; Casillas 2011). Yet another strain finds the rights of irregular migrants within Mexico connected to the country's geopolitical standing, especially vis-à-vis the United States (Alba and Castillo 2012). Finally, the provision of migrant services domestically may be a direct electoral issue.

This standpoint necessarily implies an audience of voters. In La Patrona, politician visits have been staged for the benefit of state media sources: the local Deputy supported the Paso a Paso caravan by arranging for firefighters to provide approximately 300 sleeping mats, all red;¹⁰ and another state official announced that the government would be supporting the Patrona by building an albergue for migrants on the Patronas' property—without appropriating money for the project or informing the Patronas. However, the media narrative that politicians spend great energy to shape (Holzner 2004, 234) can obscure other political dynamics. Political “support,” and its acceptance or non-acceptance, recruits and trains local politics that exist in divergent niches: material benefit and deprivation, as well as poverty; neighbor and neighborhood relations; and the production of economic ways-of-being. The political field that such “support” both grows from and flowers within overlaps not just locali-

¹⁰ Mexican political parties associate themselves with colors. The PRI is red; the PAN, blue; the PRD, yellow.

ties and, on occasion, the everyday lives of local people, but also implicates political affinities for parties and as subjects.

IV. The gift of purification

In early spring 2011, a few members from one Córdoba chapter of Rotary International—there are four—came to visit the Patronas. The Rotarians had read about the Patronas, and now, behind an unnumbered cinderblock house on Avenida 14, they found themselves among clucking chickens, flies, the burning smoke of roasting hot chills, the clank of mangoes hitting corrugated tin roofs, and the odd goat that would escape its pen to feed on garbage. They had read valorizations of the Patronas in local newspapers, had seen them on the television, but they wanted to see for themselves what the Patronas do.

The Patronas received the Rotarians in the same manner that they receive the many visitors who show up each month: They showed them the kitchen, explained how to prepare the food and bottles for delivery, and invited the Rotarians to participate if a train happened to pass during the visit. The Patronas recall the Rotarians asking an unusual number of questions about accounting—where the food comes from, what happens to excess, how monetary donations are recorded, and so forth. As one Patrona put it, “They saw our work, [and] they satisfied themselves that we don’t steal anything” (Personal Interview, 1/15/12).

At the end of the visit, the Rotarians offered to donate an expensive, multi-stage water purifier to replace the well water the Patronas were using. The Patronas could prevent disease to the migrants with the purifier, the Rotarians suggested. The purifier would make everything more sanitary. To the Patronas, the filter “seemed like a good idea” (Personal Interview, 8/14/2011), even though they rarely get sick from drinking the water themselves.

A few weeks later, at the end of March, the Rotarians came back with the purifier, a professional to install it—and the Deputy. The Deputy “didn’t stay long and we didn’t ask her for anything,” as one Patrona said (Personal Interview, 1/15/12). The Deputy or a staffer took a series of photos, as is common. While the Patronas did not expect the Deputy, the presence of someone like her was, if not “normal,” certainly within the typical for their life-worlds, especially as the group has become more well-known. At this time the Deputy presented the sign that announced her “facilitation” as well. After a drawn-out and ceremonious process of goodbyes and well-wishes, the Deputy and the Rotarians departed.

Shortly after, one Patrona went to a meeting in Córdoba with an official from CEDH-Veracruz. The official casually mentioned that the Patronas were in an exhibit at the municipal building. She describes her surprise:

You know, they [the politicians] need [*ocupan*] us to do something that could help support them. And a lot of times we don’t know [that we’re supporting them]. Like once, unless I knew to go to Córdoba. . . He says to me—the man from Human Rights—he says to me, ‘Oh I saw you in the photo.’

‘The photo?’

‘The photo that she sent out of you all.’

‘Oh? How come I’ve never seen it?’

‘It’s in the corridor of the library of city hall there, you and the Deputy.’ . . .

Everything goes this way. There were a few big photos, really big, this big [gestures] of all the work that she’d done, that *she’d* done, and to the right of those projects was the purifier. What do you think of that? She uses who/what she wants [*usa (a) los que quiera*]. It’s unfortunate, but you can’t do anything. But what’s important is to know the things that they’re going to say to you. (Personal Interview, 1/15/12)

The exhibit, it turned out, contained photographs of the Deputy’s accomplishments. For the Patronas, this was more than an annoyance. It invoked a set of questions and problems. The Patronas’ milieu is one in which clientelism and corruption are common and expected; the

accounting, in which the Rotarians took such interest, is one symptom of this environment. The photograph advertises the Patronas as recipients of clientelistic benefits, yet within everyday practice the Patronas need to assuage concerns of their immediate neighbors that the visiting politicians are enriching them personally. Further, many residents in town still consider migrants to be “criminals” (as one resident told me outright). The Patronas’ difficulty is exacerbated by the physical and infrastructural improvements that *do* accrue around them: CEDH-Veracruz, for instance, had recently put seven streetlights along the tracks where the Patronas give, while Avenida 14—the dirt road that crosses the tracks—has two for its entire length. When another Veracruz politician announced the (unfunded) albergue, this caused a two-week rift between the Patronas and other residents of their barrio, Palma Sola, who assumed that the Patronas were simultaneously enriching themselves and endangering the neighborhood.

The ambiguity of the photograph works on behalf of the Deputy. By all accounts the Deputy is a very shrewd political actor, and the photograph’s multiple meanings speak to distinct audiences. In the exhibit, the purifier becomes associated with the Deputy, even as it leaves unclear what the Deputy herself has actually *done*. With the photograph, she does not claim credit for the Patronas’ action; likewise with the sign next to the purifier, she makes only the claim of “facilitation.” At the same time, the photograph certainly implies that the Deputy has a relationship, and most likely an intimate personal relationship, with the Patronas.

On one hand, the photograph is aimed at those we might consider the Deputy’s “virtual clients,” the potential voters to whom the Deputy is using the photograph to demonstrate her competence and who might want her to do something for them in the future. Patronas must show both their “good” intentions and their proficiency at accomplishing projects, and the photograph of the purifier works on behalf of both: it serves as testament that the Deputy

wants to help local people in particular ways by showing that she already has. The photograph both validates and attests to the Deputy's abilities to manage *gestiones* successfully.

On the other hand, the Deputy is making claims about her relationship with the Patronas to other power brokers, other patrons. Both the Deputy's stature and her capacity to act on behalf of others are enhanced, however slightly, by claiming the Patronas as intimates. Even more, politicians within the same party compete for clients, and thus with the photograph the Deputy is staking a claim to the Patronas as "hers." The Deputy's best interests are served by fudging her relationship with the Patronas such that those expecting her to have a patronage relationship with them will see one. The *gestión* here occurs not as direct provision to clients but through the negotiations of the provision of resources between multiple power brokers, and the Deputy's position in such negotiations is partially premised on her understood strength as constituted by the number and importance of the clients she has.

The gift of the purifier is thus deeply drawn into local politics. But it is also implicated in a political scope that extends discursively beyond the Córdoba area. The Deputy formerly held a multiyear appointment as the head of the Córdoba municipal DIF program, and the exhibit of photographs included accomplishments from that period as well. In this context, her presence with the Patronas links extant and established DIF welfare programs to new programs for promoting migrant safety, health, and well-being. Moreover, the Deputy herself links older, clientelistic networks in the particularist provision of material resources to new opportunities along a separate electoral issue. As Victoria Rodríguez has noted, "the DIF increasingly appears to be as concerned with maintaining the political popularity of the party in power as it is with creating tangible advancements for women" (2003, 129). By acting as a link between DIF and migration, the Deputy both broadens the sites for clientelism and herself connects local distributive regimes to national and geopolitical discourses.

Far from passive or subaltern, the Patronas also exploit the ambiguities of the wider clientelistic environment. Indeed, to the state's legal apparatus, "the Patronas" do not exist. Over the past 17 years, the women have repeatedly declined to incorporate as an *Asociación Civil* (A.C.), that is, as a formal nonprofit. While such a position creates some tricky legalities, such as accepting donations, it makes it difficult for the normal patronage channels of party politics to manage them (cf. Selee 2011). Even more, so long as the Patronas are no one's client, in the virtuality of their position—the possibility of becoming a client—they retain a strong level of agency in their dealings with any individual politician. But such space only obtains, however, so long as multiple politicians understand the Patronas to be "free"; once other power brokers recognize a relationship between the Patronas and the Deputy—whether one exists—the Patronas' options become curtailed.

These questions and problems are embodied as much as they are textual and discursive. To the extent that the photograph is successful for the Deputy, it threatens the Patronas' capacities to exist informally, in marginal social spaces. The Patronas cannot be entirely certain that the Deputy does not perceive a clientelistic relationship between them, and this potential necessitates that the Patronas tread delicately in interpersonal interactions with her. Dealing with her becomes emotionally trying—regardless of whether she is present (as exemplified below)—and otherwise-normal interactions with neighbors can become emotionally charged (cf. Rutten 2006). That is, the virtuality of a clientelistic relation alters the Patronas' behaviors around their neighbors as much as the reverse. It requires that they measure their words so that no one gets the wrong idea; it requires that they adjust their comportment; it requires that they strategize. While these are not nearly as difficult as they might seem, they are intentional tactics the Patronas employ. The freight of these might be termed, collectively, an affect of clientelism—the ways in which it becomes a part of their precognitive lives and embodied actions. Expanding from both Rutten's (2006) and Fernando Landini's (2012)

explorations of habitus, in La Patrona the very potential of clientelism acts dynamically even in interactions that do not involve the Deputy and are not obviously about electoral politics. Clientelism becomes part of the fabric of the Patronas' lives.

V. A visit from the Deputy

While both visits by the Rotarians took place in the spring of 2011, the Deputy returned in July 2011, during my fieldwork period. During the preceding few days, the Patronas had been obliquely informed that the Deputy might show up, but they knew neither the potential date nor the likelihood of a visit. At 11 am, when the Deputy drove up, bringing a photographer and a pair of staffers along, only a few of the Patronas were present.

While other Patronas were collected, the Deputy made a brief inspection of the papeleria, the back storage room, and the kitchen. The corrugated metal roof over the kitchen was sagging, and the staffers, both young, looked at it dubiously. The photographer took a few one-handed candids but never bothered with the light meter in his other hand. The staffers took notes at first, then quickly got bored and sat on the rickety purple sofa in the kitchen to doodle.

Once enough of the Patronas were present, the Deputy made a quick, platitudinous speech, suggested that the Patronas incorporate legally as an A.C., and then invited the women to dialogue with her. She was most interested, the Deputy said, in how she might further "support" (*dar apoyo*) the Patronas. She suggested that perhaps the Patronas could use a pickup truck since they had so much to carry back and forth.

The Patronas declined the Deputy's offer. They had been given a pickup from a student group in the state of Mexico a some months earlier, and this had led to complaints by neighbors that the Patronas were profiting personally; at least one neighbor had charged

that the Patronas *only* gave so that they would receive donations for themselves. Instead, one Patrona brought up her son's trouble getting a driver license. The Deputy listened intently; the staffers perked up and moved closer. But after a moment, another Patrona interrupted, changing the subject to the Patronas' expenses (*gastos*), and especially the electricity bill. The Deputy's aspect changed; she dodged the issue of the electricity and declared that she had another appointment. After a few photographs and elaborate goodbyes with everyone present, the Deputy and her party departed.

A few days later the Patronas had a serious argument over the visit, involving some Patronas who were not present to meet with the Deputy. While the argument was complex and played out over a few hours, it boiled down to three questions: First, what the Patronas ought to ask for—or “ask for”—when politicians show up wanting to know how to “help.” In other words, what should they say? Second, what is the appropriateness of asking for things that benefit only one Patrona, like the driver license or the electricity bill? Third, how can and how should the Patronas protect themselves from politicians? In other words, is there a way to treat gifts from politicians differently?

These issues loomed not only on account of the Deputy's visit. Within the preceding two weeks, the Patronas had received unannounced visits from a bureaucrat from Atención a Migrantes—who came attended by four members of the media—as well as from emissaries who implied that they represented the head of one of the most powerful unions in eastern-central Mexico.¹¹ These emissaries, like earlier emissaries from Puebla and CEDH-Veracruz, had come with token donations of food for the Patronas, and some also bought small containers of the salsa macha that a few Patronas make to augment their incomes.

¹¹ The PRI has long used social organizations of varying types, including unions, as part of a vast network of clientelist relationships by which political power is navigated personally (see Selee 2011, 42–43 for a general contemporary account; Plankey-Videla 2012, 43ff. for a historical account; and Nuijten 2003, 198–99 for an ethnographic account).

What became clear during this argument was that the Patronas understood well and weighed the benefits of patronage, even as they argued about it. Opinions differed as to the amount of “assistance” the Patronas could receive and continue to be, at heart, left alone. Thus while the Patronas were upset and arguing with each other, they were also talking about tactics and strategies. The first series of questions, about what to ask for, initially derailed into a discussion about whether it was possible to divide up “requests” by need; while all participate in a variety of non-monetized economic relationships, the Patronas vary greatly in economic stability, from a landowner of three hectares of sugarcane to a woman who vends empanadas on the street when she needs money for food or her electricity bill. One strategy suggested during the argument was that the Patronas could prepare a list of requests that they were unlikely to get, and assert to politicians that anything else was not very useful to them. That is, the strategy suggested was explicitly for *not* getting gifts from politicians, to the best of the Patronas’ ability. Indeed, the Patrona who owns the papeleria claimed that the request for help with the electricity bill was partially to protect all the Patronas—some who were upset that if “assistance” came, it would benefit her alone.

Gifts like the purifier are qualitatively different from requests. With the purifier and gifts like it, Patronas understand that they are in a very difficult spot with the Deputy: While they cannot say no to her—and risk angering her, with much material clout in the balance—they also cannot say yes without falling into a clientelist relationship. The presence of actually-existing gifts requires another calculus on the Patronas’ part, because their strategies of avoidance do not work, and because such gifts are obligations. In other words, the Deputy’s gifts are not, it seems, gifts at all.

There is a rich literature on the gift and gift economies across the social sciences and humanities, from Marcel Mauss (1966) to Jacques Derrida (1992, 1996) to Lewis Hyde (2007) to, most recently, David Graeber (2011). Mauss and Graeber both describe a variety

of forms of reciprocal exchange, and they repeatedly touch on the ways that gifts create social interaction because of the “demands” of the gift—namely, the mutual obligation that gifts produce (e.g. Graeber 2011, 90ff.). Derrida argues that this renders the gift as an *aporeia*, since the creation of obligation and social ties, even on the level of the “thank you” (1992, 112), makes incoherent any true sense of altruism and therefore negates the gift as such. Yet humans strive to make present gifts, despite this impossibility. Anthropologists and others working on gift theory have thus distinguished between Maussian gifts, intended to foster social obligation, and “free” gifts, which are not (Laidlaw 2000; Silk 2004; Venkatesan 2011). There is, then, a distinct difference between the gifts the Patronas give—to migrants they do not know and will likely never meet again—and the gifts the Patronas receive, which often come freighted with obligation. At the same time, it is important to note, however, that obligation is not identical to accounting, and that these obligations remain imprecise.

For the Patronas, then, the goal of avoiding the Deputy’s gifts is explicitly to *evade* the debt ties that Mauss and Graeber describe. In addition to the initial legal rationales the Patronas gave for not incorporating—i.e., that it inhibited state agents from prosecuting the Patronas when their action was taboo—the Patronas’ informal structure also impedes, though does not prevent, the regularization of particularistic resource distribution from politicians to the Patronas. “Failing” to incorporate allows the Patronas a strong degree of control over the terms by which they involve themselves, individually and collectively, in relationships of obligation. This is exactly the type of strategic foot-dragging that Scott (1985) had in mind in describing the “weapons of the weak”—how the politically “weak” can leverage their situations and legal regimes to maximum advantage. As Monique Nuijten notes, in Mexico “organising through informal personal networks is often the most ‘rational’ way to operate” (2003, 187), and the Patronas exploit their informality.

At the same time, the question of whether the Patronas can and should treat gifts from politicians differently is both an issue of practicality and of practical ethics. Whether to ask for things that would make their lives materially easier—like the driver license—is especially piquant in a state and country marked by enormous wealth disparity. While some of the Patronas are adequately well-off, most participate in the combined labor circuits of agricultural production and urban wage labor described in the literature on livelihoods in Mexico generally (e.g. Córdova Plaza 2000; Barkin 2002; Eakin 2006; Fitting 2011; Hamilton and Villarreal 2011).¹² The negotiations around the gifts of politicians, while understood as slippery and less-than-ideal by the Patronas, also served to facilitate and encourage the imagining of potential benefits that connected individuals could bring to the Patronas' lives. Such predisposition to the fantastical should also be understood as part of the affect of clientelism; that is, that clientelism contains and fundamentally utilizes a virtuality of rewards—not just entitlements—in the individuals at stake. Because provision tends to be, as Hilgers (2008) has noted, along the lines of what are considered “goods” (see Castro 2007; see also Schneider and Zúniga-Hamlin 2005), there is often an affective sense of justice or fairness (though the affect exceeds the terms). While many Patronas had strong feelings against engagement with the Deputy or with the other political figures, they also toyed with the idea that any aid given to them was their deserts for giving to migrants for years without expectation of reward. Their neighbors were not altogether incorrect to accuse the Patronas of self-interestedness in negotiating with politicians, then, even if the normative rules in play are unlikely to condemn the Patronas.

¹² One salient difference here between the Patronas and many other communities—such as those described by Eakin (2006) or Fitting (2011)—is that agriculture here is not for subsistence, but is instead sugarcane production for cash. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork, only one Patrona was deriving the entirety of her livelihood from agriculture.

VI. The politics of the purifier

The purifier's purpose is not circumscribed within a transactional calculus of reciprocal obligation—or at least, not solely in the ways described above. The purifier both represents and itself performs (Barad 2003) a more material politics. The request—or “request”—to the Deputy to help with the electricity bill was directly related to the purifier: since installation, the electricity bills at the papeleria have nearly tripled, as the purifier uses an ultraviolet filter as the final stage of purification. If we take as reliable the Patronas' claims that the purifier replaced well water, water that used to be free—the “cost” of the work of lifting it—now costs money, about \$350 MXN per 2-month cycle.¹³ In context, the most comprehensive single month of expenses—and what appear to be if not the single highest month, then significantly more than normal—entered in the Patronas' account books between June 2008 and January 2010 listed total expenditures of \$691 MXN.

The purifier thus has effected an economic alteration as well as a social one, as a gift economic practice of giving to migrants becomes embedded in a network of capitalist relations. Residents of La Patrona—Patronas and otherwise—report that bypassing electric meters is a bad idea. That is, the main method of appropriating electricity non-capitalistically—*theft*—is not understood as feasible. But even if the Patronas' claims about the well are not reliable, structural economic change is indeed part of the “gift” of the purifier.

And this economic shift is anything but an accident. A respondent with the Rotarians reports that the purifier cost between \$10,000–12,000 MXN and an additional \$3,000 for installation (Personal Interview, 1/16/12).¹⁴ The total cost, \$13,000–15,000 MXN, is a

¹³ In other words, the typical utility bill at the papeleria was about \$250 MXN per two-month cycle before the purifier, and \$600 per cycle after. These figures do not include the substantial government electricity subsidy.

¹⁴ In total, this is between \$980–1140 USD.

substantial sum locally: a well-built house with a small yard costs around \$40,000 MXN. While the purifier was funded as part of an existing Rotary program that donates and installs purifiers in schools, senior centers, local universities, parks, and other places where the public gathers, these gifts come with expectations. The respondent from the Córdoba Rotary Club makes this clear:

We, as a Club, sign an agreement with the schools and all those institutions—universities, Homes, places like the Patronas—in which our obligation is to provide the purifier. The obligation of each institution is to do the necessary maintenance, that which follows from proper use. That’s the function of the club. . . . It would be impossible that the club had to provision [the filters and lamp bulbs]—and besides which, it would not be just [*justo*]. We do our part and the school does the other part—for the children, for the students, for the old people in a retirement home. This equation doesn’t work if there’s not *responsibility*; it wouldn’t be functional. (Personal Interview, 1/16/12, emphasis in original)

The respondent speaks to another sort of work that the purifier is very explicitly meant to perform or facilitate. The discourse used here, and throughout the interview—*obligación*, *responsibilidad*, *justo*, *ecuación*, even *función*—depicts particular notions of the subject, and in particular neoliberal economic subjects and social life (Trudeau and Cope 2003). Such terms imply a rational metaphysics and the calculability of the social on one hand (*ecuación*, *función*) and on the other an individualist comportment through which one’s duties are given as, fundamentally, products of reason (e.g., the signing of an agreement, or “the obligation to do necessary maintenance”). In such an equation, success or failure deeply concerns—if not reduces to—one’s bearing and demeanor, an equation where failure occurs when “there’s not *responsibility*.” Combined, these two branches discursively implicate—and model—a liberal metaphysics of self-interested parties maximizing utility, for whom goods are more-or-less apportioned in relation to the value of one’s work. Individuals are rightly (*justamente*) obliged to work in particular ways, even though the project of giving purifiers is simultaneously produced as an altruistic endeavor on behalf of those for whom the basic access to liberal markets has not been made present or possible.

Such discourse does not comport with the Patronas' action. Is it the responsibility of the migrants to take food? Is there an equation to their gifts? I contend here instead that the economic change—again, gift economy to capitalist economy—is essentially *assumed*. The filter does work, economically, and that work alters social relations of production. Thus in the politics of the purifier the economy is a site of contestation—not in a capitalist story about winners and losers or haves and have-nots, but contestation at the interface of social and economic life (Polanyi 1968; Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006; Wright 2010). As about the relation of work to labor, the economic is not reducible to representation, even if representation is clearly requisite for ideas of (e.g.) money and even if labor is socially constructed itself.

J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) have argued for a deep intertwining of subjectivity and subject-formation with capitalism, and that understanding capitalism as all-encompassing and ahistorical is both essentialist and mistaken. Instead, capitalism is an economic performance, one type of economic relation practiced simultaneously with many others. At the same time, discourses of capitalism are key technologies in maintaining relationships of power, since “it is partly our own subjection—successful or failed, accommodating or oppositional—that constructs a ‘capitalist society’” (1996, xvi). Broad-scale transformation of practices of labor and production are not here possibilities without resubjectification.

The Rotary position is not solely about explaining an action they perform through one of many ideologies of social life, but is in fact (re)producing a specific type of liberal sociality. It is explicitly the goal of the Rotary that the Patronas' “responsibility” to migrants means that they should have to pay in order to provide services. This in turn suggests a particular corporate structure, one which the Patronas lack. Even more, it suggests that the Patronas ought to conduct themselves in accordance with liberal notions of individuality—and that the purifier is, in part, a means to this end. The purifier ties subjectivity to economic practice.

Insofar as Gibson-Graham are correct in the centrality of the production of economic subjects to economic practice, the purifier is doubly political. It is at once an attempt to produce a clientelist subject—one subject to a particularistic regime of resource distribution—within a background of capitalist subjectivity. Such attempts are being effected within a greater Mexican political context wherein migrants and the practices of migration are produced as market-based activities—wherein migrants are conceived of as actors seeking to avoid unfavorable labor markets or to seek more favorable working conditions (Morales Vega 2012; for an overview of rationalist theories of migration, see Belton and Morales 2009) including in the *Ley de Migración*. Not only is the purifier implicated in interpersonal political relationships, but via economic subjectivities and processes of international migration to the prevailing political order.

VII. The purifier, migration, and object politics

Thus, in the arrival of the Rotarians and the Deputy in La Patrona we have both a symbolic and an embodied coming-together of neoliberalism and clientelism. Yet there is one last twist here, perhaps the most ironic one: the purifier does not much improve the health of the migrants on the Ferrosur freight trains. In other words, its formal-politics teleology does not hold together the politics that surround the object, and that the object participates in.

This is not to say that the purifier is mechanically deficient. On the contrary, it functions quite well. The engineering is marvelous. That does not mean, however, that the purifier is a good tool for reducing epidemiological risk. Epidemiological risk cannot be looked at in isolation, but must be understood in the complexity of the social relation of water provision. Recall that the Patronas report that before receiving the purifier, the water they gave to the migrants came from their private wells rather than from the municipal water supply that the

purifier filters. If accurate, the point-source exposure risk has decreased only very slightly: the wells are deep—the three closest to the papeleria are all more than 30 feet—and bored in porous colluvium and alluvium, which act as natural filters. The ultimate change in epidemiological risk to migrants between the two sources is low.

Indeed, the change in overall epidemiological risk across such a journey is minimal outside a larger program by which clean water is provisioned. While Mexico's National Institute of Migration claims that the average journey from Mexico's southern border to its northern border takes no more than a month, and that fully one-third of migrants make the journey within a single week (Rodríguez Chávez, Berumen Sandoval, and Ramos Martínez 2011, 5), respondents reported something quite different. These accounts—by NGO workers, priests, advocates, the Patronas, and migrants—describe a journey of three weeks as “fast,” and a more typical journey as six to eight weeks. This six to eight weeks, as Sonia Nazario has reported, is often characterized by migrants drinking from puddles (2006, xxii), from troughs (2006, 164), from rivers carrying raw sewage (2006, 140). Nazario's journalistic account comports with informal accounts from my fieldwork, including informal conversations with southbound migrants and with a resident of La Patrona originally from El Salvador who had taken the train north with his wife. The resident reported that it took him 10 days to travel the 800 kilometers between La Patrona and Tapachula, and that during his journey water was so scarce that he drank out of irrigation ditches (Personal Interview, 8/11/2011).

In La Patrona, the purifier is an attempt to “settle” (Winner 1992) politics along both clientelistic and neoliberal lines. It is caught up in what is inescapably a political act of giving aid to irregular migrants through Mexico, but its politics are quite distinct. The Patronas' repeated encounters with the Deputy have illustrated not just how a politician might attempt to interlace a client into plaits of mutual obligation, but also how a clientelist relationship might manifest both affectively and bi-directionally. The Deputy, well-known as part of DIF,

places a photograph of the water purifier alongside her other accomplishments, connecting these as dual distributive regimes. The Patronas scrupulously manage their relationship with the Deputy, from her placement in their public-facing websites to the colors of goods they tell her they are willing to receive to intentionally cross-scheduling certain Patronas when they suspect that she might call.

The purifier is also a tool of neoliberal subject formation. The respondent from the Rotary club explains the club's expectations for their gifts, and the terms employed presuppose a world of liberal subjects. While the club presupposes properties or virtues of (e.g.) responsibility, in fact the very narrow and liberal "responsibility" that the Club wants is only produced via the purifier. It does not exist prior to its instantiation in relation to an object. The artefactual politics at work here is fundamentally productive, meant not to restrict subjects from certain courses of action but to shape what kinds of subjects interact with the objects themselves.

Drawing attention to both the affective and emotional ties of clientelism as well as the material technologies by which neoliberal subjectivities are catalyzed can enrich studies of clientelism and of Mexican politics more broadly. This ethnography suggests that particularistic politics link closely to national political priorities, as well as to intersections with subject formation. What the study of the water filter brings is the explicit recognition that affective politics plays out in experience even while affect is irresolvably, and indissolubly, material. At the same time, prevailing political regimes are spatialized and localized within communities; this includes not just the provision of resources, but the contestations over migrant "criminality," particularism, and what kind of subjects the Patronas—and the Deputy, and their neighbors—choose to be and become.

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Care, Spatial Ethics, and Las Patronas of Veracruz

I. Introduction

Two recent interventions in *Antipode* have asked geographers to engage more deeply with the ethics of care. Victoria Lawson argues the ethics of care should be taken up in order to “move beyond critique to think through how we are implicated in uncaring relations and to engage in radically open, democratic and transformative practices for change” (2009, 212). Susan Smith asks for a radical geography that “can (and should) more readily recognise and engage with the normative ideas that are already embedded in, negotiated through, and practiced as, the moral geographies of everyday life” (2009, 206). Smith calls for “a situational ethic of care” which will facilitate better and more reflective research, as well as broad social change.

These interventions come as geographers have grown increasingly interested in care. Especially over the past decade, geographers have presented strong analyses that connect the practices of caregiving with the organization and workings of power. Some have pushed further, linking the implicit normative project therein to the ethics of care, such as David Smith (1998), Chris Haylett (2003), Linda McDowell (2004), Susan Smith (2005), Benedikt Korf (2007), Victoria Lawson (2007), Parvati Raghuram (2009, 2012; Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009), Rosie Cox (2010), Kim England (2010), Cheryl McEwan and Michael Goodman (2010), Jean Carmalt (2011), and Karen Till (2012). Yet the geographic literature on the ethics of care draws from a restricted range of the literature outside the discipline, and consequently this geographic work risks losing touch with developments outside the field.

This chapter aims to spur a dialogue between geography and more recent formulations of the ethics of care. It uses as a case study the political action a group of women known

as Las Patronas, who have for the past 17 years given food, water, and clothing to migrants passing through their rural community in Veracruz, Mexico. Although the scope is by necessity brief, this is intended to be a sort of the “critical moral ethnography” that care ethicist Fiona Robinson has called for (2011a, 135, 2011b, 115, 182ff.) by which the doing of political, social, and economic theory are inextricable from moral theory.

This chapter develops such a dialogue across five sections. The second section investigates the legacy of the germinal work of Joan Tronto (1993, 1995; Fisher and Tronto 1990) and its influence on geographers’ engagements with the ethic of care. Geographic investigations have largely relied on Tronto’s work for their theoretical foundations (e.g. Korf 2007; Lawson 2007; Cox 2010; Carmalt 2011; Till 2012); likewise, even in works that take up less theoretical questions from within the wider ethics-of-care literature, the framing of questions of care is a direct descendent of Tronto’s interventions (e.g. McDowell 2004; S. J. Smith 2005; Raghuram 2009; England 2010). Geographers have largely adopted Tronto’s framings of the ethics of care, including its political scope, a specific spatial imaginary of care, and Tronto’s readings of the limitations of other theorists.

The third section looks to three theorists who geographers have yet to engage deeply with: Nel Noddings, Virginia Held, and Daniel Engster. I argue that Noddings and Held deserve close attention from geographers, both as giving rigorous accounts of the ethics of care and as starting points for additional geographic work on the ethics of care. Noddings and Held both offer a series of clarifications and departures from Tronto—and the geographic literature on care—in the spatial imaginary; in distinguishing between care, caring, and caregiving; in articulating political locations of care; and in complexifying and broadening understandings about the capabilities of non-universalistic social and moral theories. I use a third theorist, Daniel Engster—also a theoretical descendant of Tronto—as a representative of a

series of formulations of the ethics of care that do away with its relational ontology, which radical geographers interested in a praxis of care should be concerned about.

The fourth section moves away from theory to look at the ethics of care in practice. For care ethicists relations of care—both caring and caregiving—are of great political import in that contextual relations of power necessarily inhere in them. In many ways the Patronas are “inventing” their own ethics of care, and the academic analyses can be enlivened and enriched from their action. To give both a better understanding of, and to situate, the ethics of care in La Patrona, I use ethnographic data from 8 weeks of participant observation with the Patronas, a first trip in July and August of 2011, and a two-week return trip in January 2012. In the Patronas’ own accounts, I call particular attention to the moral intersubjectivity that abounds in these descriptions. Likewise I emphasize the deeply emotional valence with which the Patronas describe their actions, the terms by which they describe or imply their motivations. Finally, I analyze the ways in which the Patronas’ discourse reproduces many gendered divisions and implies the gendering of certain domains. I argue that these accounts comport broadly with the ethics described by Noddings and Held, and suggest that geographers could find further use in Noddings’s and Held’s theorizations. The final section concludes with some areas of overlap between geography and this broader field of the ethics of care.

One contribution of this work is to look at care ethics in practice among women in a rural community in the global south. The relations that define subjects within the relational ontology of the ethics of care are neither “natural” nor predetermined (Robinson 2011b, 113), and thus come intertwined with the social relations, institutional forms of power, and naturalized social constructions that comprise specific places. Noddings has noted that due to her positionality, what she describes is very much a “middle-class ethic of care” (Noddings 2002, 240), and while Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 262–66) cites an “ethic of caring” as a feature of black social life in the United States—reflecting Noddings’s original phrasing

(1984)—little in the ethics of care literature has looked to this as a source of anthropological insight for deepening and, perhaps, decolonializing (Narayan 1995; Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009; Raghuram 2012) the ethics of care. Both bell hooks (2000, 139f.) and Mignon Duffy (2005) have criticized the white and middle-class assumptions that underlie many versions of the ethics of care. Such critiques as offered by hooks and Duffy are important, and they generalize to work on care ethics as a whole—as Peta Bowden laments (1997, 10–11, 19–20; though see e.g. Li 1994 for work crossing Confucian ethics with the ethics of care)—insofar as it has heretofore been most concerned with an internal coherence above an empirical and embedded theorizations. Looking outside of these class, English-language, and racial positions¹ can refresh the ethics of care and, potentially, invigorate it as well.

II. Ethical Geographies of Care

Tronto's analysis has permeated geographic thought on the ethics of care in three key ways. First, for Tronto the abjection of care relations—and especially care labor—points to how questions of “who receives care from whom?” (1993, 112) are simultaneously moral and political, and then lead further, asking how, and how far, the moral and the political are co-constructed. In Tronto's typology of aspects of the *practice* of caring—i.e. attentiveness, of responsibility, of competence, and responsiveness (1993, 127–136, 172, 1995, 145ff., 2011, 165; cf. Fisher and Tronto 1990, 41ff.)—geographers have seen a way to connect the social practice of caregiving with the latent normativities that structure the social world. Geographers have followed through on Tronto's connections, in work on how lifeworlds—especially the places of institutional care (e.g. Brown 2003; Conradson 2003; Healy 2008; Milligan and Power 2010)—are gendered, but most notably in investigations of the subjectivities under-

¹ I note here my own positionality as a white American cisman of privilege.

pinning neoliberalism and the feminization of care labor. Thus for Haylett in her investigations on state welfare provision the ethics of care provide an “oppositional register of meaning and value. . . against rationalist and economistic notions of welfare” (2003, 810–11), and McDowell (2004) similarly connects the individualistic ethos of neoliberalism to changing relations of state livelihood provision. More broadly, Susan Smith (2005) uses the ethics of care to reimagine the place, and practices, of markets in a “care-full” economy.²

Second, Tronto has bequeathed geographers a specific spatial imaginary of care. Raghuram has argued persuasively that “the global” has become the “(implicit) spatial referent” at which care is analyzed (2012, 159), a referent Tronto both shares and reinscribes. Such an imaginary comes forth, for instance, in Susan Smith’s claim that “for feminist ethicists the emphasis . . . is on the caring ethos that should infuse social policy and be nurtured by states” (2005, 11), in Korf’s argument that aid programs should be seen as entitlements within a structural relationship of “global responsibility” (2007, 373), in Raghuram’s (2009) argument that “caring about” brain drain likely requires reparations to post-colonies, in Cox’s investigation of how “care can reach beyond intimate relations and out to unknown and non-human others” (2010, 126–27), and in Carmalt’s (2011) call for an international human rights law that is more deeply informed by the ethics of care. Within geography, McEwan and Goodman (2010, 103) historicize these debates on care with broader geographical debates about the scale and scope of moral responsibility (cf. Silk 1998, 2004; D. M. Smith 1998, 1999, 2000; Massey 2004, 2006; Barnett 2005; Barnett and Land 2007). Barnett and Land, for instance, have asked geographers to “reject the imaginary geography that associates the genuine value of care with place-based relations, and therefore sees distance as a barrier to care” (2007, 167), preferring a more expansive view of both caring and the responsibility to

² Importantly, for Tronto the problem of care is fundamentally and intimately connected with the problem of scarcity, both in its discursive formation and as the political issue of resource distribution (White and Tronto 2004, 429; Tronto 2005, 135ff., 2012, cf. 1993, 112). Geographers have yet to engage with Tronto on this relationship.

care. However, as Raghuram herself has recently noted (2012), because different genealogies of care influence both questions of “who cares for whom?” and what the goals of care are, care becomes spatially differentiated. Yet little or no work to date looks at these sorts of spatial differentiations in relation to the ethics of care.

This spatial imaginary has led to the ethics of care being taken up in geography largely in the context of institutional arrangements for care provision. These works have enriched understandings of the emotional and affective dimensions of institutional and state practice, as well as contesting the production of neoliberal subjectivities broadly across the Anglophone world. Haylett (2003), McDowell (2004) and Susan Smith (2005) are all explicitly concerned with state arrangements for care, while Korf’s (2007) work concerns the international provision of care, though expanded from caring labor to a larger field of material goods. Lawson (2007) connects the withdrawal of state social services, wider social discourses on personal responsibility, and the creep of market relations with questions about how the ethic of care might problematize all three. Raghuram asks about transnational caring, from policies that lead to post-colony brain-drain (2009) and how the migration of care laborers themselves geographically informs and situates wider social discourses on care (2012).

Third, geographers have generally followed Tronto’s readings of the wider ethics of care. Tronto’s major works (1993; Fisher and Tronto 1990) arrived at a moment when philosophers were debating the integration, or lack thereof, between care and justice (e.g. Gilligan 1982; Flanagan and Jackson 1987; Held 1993, 1995; Baier 1994; Bubeck 1995; Clement 1996), and this history has been reflected in geographers’ own concerns about the spatiality of both. David Smith (2000, 102ff.), for instance, concerns himself deeply with whether care, as particularistic, requires an ethic of justice to speak to concerns of (e.g.) inequality outside localized communities. Similarly Barnett and Land (2007) take from the care-justice debates that responsibility must be figured much more broadly than in local communities, since any

moral system that gives interpersonal relationships as a preferred form will be fatalist about the plights of distant others. Korf (2007) argues that any relations based on care in settings of entitlement claims must be grounded in an ethic of justice. And Susan Smith writes simply that without a translation of interpersonal ethics of care into institutional frameworks, the ethics of care are “far too limited” (2005, 14).

More importantly, however, geographers have largely followed Tronto’s readings of the deficiencies of the wider ethics of care literature. This uptake is especially odd because *Moral Boundaries* is skeptical that any sort of “postmodernist” theory can speak to political struggles (e.g. 1993, 19), and because in it Tronto is uncertain about the relational ontology that geographers have deployed in their own work—lines that geographers have refrained from following. On the other hand, Tronto has generally asserted that any particularistic moral theory is necessarily fatalist about broader social concerns, and has repeatedly made this charge repeatedly against Noddings (Tronto 1993, 160, 2005, 130; Fisher and Tronto 1990, 37f.; White and Tronto 2004, 427ff.), whose work, for instance, Fisher and Tronto disparage as merely “quasi-feminist” (1990, 37). Geographic accounts have largely left out the responses within the ethics of care that have come since Tronto wrote *Moral Boundaries*, not only from Noddings but also in the work of Virginia Held and, to a lesser extent, Eva Feder Kittay. Not a single article from a geography journal cited here has itself cited any work of Noddings’s other than *Caring* (1984)—again following Tronto, who so far as I know has only cited Noddings’ *Starting at Home* in passing (Tronto 2005, 130)—even though Noddings has responded to criticisms in myriad ways over the years. Geographers have likewise barely engaged with Virginia Held’s *The Ethics of Care* (2006), a major text, and likewise with Held’s other works over the years.

These are in fact serious concerns, because the ethics of care within geography looks very different from the ethics of care without. Older formulations of Tronto’s aspects to

caring as a practice have appeared (Cox 2010; Till 2012)—versions that Tronto herself has complexified (Tronto 1993, 127–36, 1995, 145ff., 2011, 165). Till, for instance, asserts that she “add[s] to Tronto and Fisher’s [1990: 41ff.] work by including practices of attending to, caring for, and making place, what I call a ‘place-based ethics of care’” (Till 2012, 8), even though Tronto herself already added “attending to” and “caring for” to this formulation 20 years earlier. Even more, there are a staggering number of tenuous claims in geography articles regarding the ethics of care. Thus we find, to give but four examples, claims such as Korf’s that “Care ethics is inspired by an Aristotelian notion that we should not go beyond the social ties of family love and affections in our moral care” (2007, 372); Raghuram’s that “care ethics is concerned with caring about rather than caring for (i.e. care-giving or care-receiving)” (2009, 26); Carmalt’s that “care ethics *requires* that one share one’s food with a hungry family member” (2011, 303, emphasis mine); Green and Lawson’s that “Kittay’s concept of caring as ‘dependency work’ . . . reveals the roots of this theorization within bourgeois gendered divisions of labor, and also continues to normalize those very divisions. . . . [and likewise helps] perpetuate a particular ontological engagement which situates care within a domain of gendered domesticity and/or a subordinate relation to economy” (2011, 642). Simply put, such claims range from the unlikely and un(der)substantiated to the factually incorrect.³

Geographers have begun to recognize the affinities that the ethics of care has with more recent poststructuralist, Spinozist, Deleuzian, and postcolonial accounts (Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009; McEwan and Goodman 2010; Raghuram 2012; Shields 2012). Tronto’s work has been productive and should continue to inform geographic work on care; however, meaningful engagement with a broader range of thinkers in the ethics of care can be deeply productive for geography. Noddings’s “bottom-up” theorizing can help geographers

³ See, for instance, Noddings 1984, 1ff., 5–6, 27ff. 32, 63ff. 85–86; 2002, 1, 2, 17 18, 29ff., 109; 2010, 17–18, 35ff. 70–71, 97–98; Tronto 1993, 27–28, 127, 137, 154 55, 206n. 25; Held 1995, 131–32; 2006, 21, 37, 39, 72ff., 102–04, 133 34, 161, 176; 2010, 117; 2011, 18; Bowden 1997, 4–5, 183–84; Sevenhuijsen 1998, 40ff.; Kittay 1999, 53–54; 2001, 570; 2011, 54ff.; Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005, 445; Williams 2001, 487; Hankivsky 2006, 98–99; Robinson 2010, 137; 2011b, 4–5.

think through a differently spatialization of geographies of care, one localized in individual practice, and her distinction between caring and caregiving can clarify care relations more broadly. Held's work, in many ways complementary with Noddings's, presents challenges to the division between productive and reproductive labor, a division which is sometimes reinscribed in geographical accounts on care.

Haylett has argued that "the potential of an ethic of care to speak as a radical anticapitalist notion might be appreciated once we ask what social and economic relations, institutions, and moral cultures are necessary to it" (2003, 805). Likewise, Raghuram asks geographers to go beyond empirical description of local care practices, to "take on board what these different localities can contribute to questioning and expanding our conceptualizations and theorizations" (2012, 160). Expanding the field of the ethics of care for geographers, I argue, can assist with both.

III. The Care Ethicists: Noddings, Held, Engster

A. Noddings

Carol Gilligan (1982), Sara Ruddick (1980), and Nel Noddings (1984) all made crucial early interventions at the intersection of gender studies and normative theory. All three criticized the ways that formulations of ethical action marginalized women—often with an imaginary of a vaguely defined, "softer," and more "feminine" reasoning on one hand and a better, "masculine" ethical reasoning based on "hard" rationality on the other. Gilligan's largest contribution was empirical: her research described a gendered division in how men and women actually went about ethical decision-making. She reported that across a variety of studies, while nearly all her male subjects referred to moral theories and extrapolated

outward, a significant proportion of her female research subjects made ethical decisions by attending to relationships.

Noddings's *Caring* (1984) wed Gilligan's empirical approach to normative moral theory. This work remains of major importance to the ethics of care, and Noddings has expanded on it in her subsequent writings (1990, 2002, 2010).⁴ Like many thinkers, across her oeuvre Noddings works within a relational ontology where "people"—Noddings tends not to use the term "subjects"—are always-already formed in relationship to other people (1984, 4–5, 1990, 123–24, 2002, 109, 116–17, 2010, 110). Thus the central practice and question in Noddings's ethics of care concerns "how to meet the other morally" (1984, 3). For Noddings, "caring" is a characteristic or quality of relationships, contrasted with other types of relationships, such as hierarchy, submissiveness, and authority (2010, 133–34, 143–45, cf. 1984, 5–6). Caring is implicated both in approaches to the other—Noddings calls this a "quality of disposability" (1984, 19), in the sense of being available—and in a receptiveness to the other's needs. For Noddings, disposability and receptiveness are simultaneous and always mutually implicated rather than temporal; neither precedes the other. This idealization is grounded in interpersonal interaction or, as Noddings puts it, the encounter.

A key difference between Noddings and other thinkers in the ethics of care literature is Noddings's commitment to "bottom-up" moral theorizing. In *Starting at Home*, she writes that

The custom, since Plato, has been to describe an ideal or best state and then to discuss the role of homes and families as supporters of that state. What might we learn if, instead, we start with a description of best homes and then move outward to the larger society? (2002, 1, cf. 61ff.)

Again, interpersonal relations and the encounter are central. Noddings's questions are not about what society "looks like," but rather continually return to the ethics of direct relation-

⁴ Noddings's work has been very responsive to developments in the ethic of care literature; *Starting at Home* is in many ways a response to the mid-90s explosion of work on the ethic of care (e.g. Bubeck 1995; Clement 1996; Bowden 1997), and *The Maternal Instinct* to work starting a bit later, such as Nussbaum (1999), Fineman (2004), and Held (2006).

ships. She makes two distinctions along these lines. First, Noddings distinguishes “ethical caring” and “natural caring.” While ethical caring occurs when subjects must force themselves into caring practices, Noddings argues that natural caring actually forms the necessary foundation for the existence of ethical caring (2010, 169). She valorizes natural caring (1984, 27ff., 2002, 2, 29ff., 2010, 17–18, 35ff.)—that is, caring approaches that are transparent to the subject, and that come about in their situations without conscious effort to be “moral”—as what might be called an ethical comportment. Noddings makes a related distinction between “caring-for” and “caring-about.” Caring-for is necessarily intimate, the relation in which openness to the other is possible; caring-about, in contrast, characterizes caring at a distance, and is thus the type of caring used in (e.g.) policy decisions. Caring-for is the preferred relation, while caring-about “must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can occur” (2002, 23). Thus when Noddings writes in *Caring* that

in a deep sense, no institution or nation can be ethical. . . . Law, manifestos, and proclamations are not, on this account, either empty or useless; but they are limited. . . . Everything depends, then, upon the will to be good, to remain in caring relation to the other (1984, 103, cf. 2002, 48–49)

these distinctions are twinned, both because even beneficial state actions are resultant only from ethical caring and because states and institutions cannot ontologically care-for. When Tronto and others have criticized Noddings’s “quietism” and “quasi-feminism,” they have signaled these distinctions, and their implications, as key evidence that Noddings steps aside from either policy concerns (Tronto 1993; Engster 2007) or concerns about justice and inequality (Bubeck 1995; Hankivsky 2004; Sander-Staudt 2008).

Yet Noddings explicitly disavows political fatalism (1984, 85–86). When she writes that “our own ethicality is not entirely up to us” (1984, 102, cf. 2002, 48–49), for instance, this is not a fatalist statement about the futility of action, but a recognition of the *politicality of relation*. Similarly, some theorists have (mis)read Noddings’s turn to caring policies in the

third section of *Starting at Home* (2002, 227ff.) as validation of early criticisms (e.g. Engster 2007). Yet Noddings does not turn to policy for its own sake or because it is the appropriate domain for action. Instead, she is providing strategies and tactics by which more caring, and more-caring, encounters can come into being (cf. 2002, 212, 2010, 190–91). This is of a piece with her criticism of the state in her first book: states are contemporary constraints on the ethical ideal of caring.⁵

Noddings’s “bottom-up” theorizing presents a distinctive spatial imaginary. Top-down theories rely on one of two myths: that social life exists outside the relations that constitute it, or that the “builder” of the top-down theory is able to stand outside the social unity being described. The former move allows alternate—some would argue subaltern—subjectivities to be rendered unimportant to the constitution of political and social life. The latter presumes an autonomous subject who can look down from nowhere on social conflicts and impartially—that is, completely—judge how they are to be resolved. In either case, the imaginary is a thing with both an outside and a teleology: an automobile, a date, and a nation-state are all conceived similarly. “Bottom-up” theorizations are not only better attuned to questions of difference, but give an imaginary of a field in which relations are constantly emerging and emergent, being made and severed and altered. The imaginary rejects the totalizing move by which it is asserted that cars, friendships, and nation-states all reduce to a shared, commensurable unit of measure. This is an immanentist spatial imaginary insofar as the relations between things constitute the field (cf. Haraway 2003, 7), where the relation is ontologically basic—not the object.

A second key difference between Noddings and many other thinkers (e.g. Tronto 1993; Hochschild 1995; Bubeck 1995; Daly 2002; Levy and Palley 2010) is Noddings’s strong distinction between caring and caregiving. Indeed, Noddings has criticized Tronto for

⁵ Some of the most vibrant contemporary work at the intersection of political science and the ethics of care follows up on this—without always agreeing—notably that of Hankivsky (2011, 160) and of Robinson (2010, 2011a, 2011b).

not being sensitive enough to the difference between the two (Noddings 2010, 181). Noddings argues that caregiving is responsiveness or attending to the *needs* of another whereas caring *precedes* needs (2010, 181) even while it is not extricable from attending to them (1984, 11). Again for Noddings dispositions and actions are mutually implicated, as in her understanding of natural caring earlier. Because “needs” are not others but reifications, one cannot “care-for” them; one can only “care-about” them (1984, 16ff, 96–97, 2002, 26–27, 62–63, 71ff., 2010, 80–81, 164, 181ff.). This differentiation is sensitive to a world in which the articulation of needs can often construct their very existence (Hollway 2006). Caring—as opposed to caregiving—is for Noddings a fundamental availability to the suite of pre-articulated capacities and capabilities by which the other might be altered in an encounter (cf. 2002, 12). Where Tronto writes that care “always involves thinking about who is responsible for what caring, and about what that responsibility means” (2005, 145, cf. 2011, 166–67), Noddings sees “the essential elements of caring . . . located in *the relation between* the one-caring and the cared-for” (1984, 10, emphasis mine).

Within these understandings, “who is responsible for what caring” takes on a moral valence distinct from the policy-centered colloquy that Tronto imagines. Ethical receptivity and the embodied response are not constituted apart from one another. Yet, neither can responsibility be easily figured within a regime of “caring-about,” because receptivity demands a disposability that is ontologically unavailable to policy registers. However, such receptivity and responsiveness are not limited to interpersonal encounters because, for Noddings, relations persist even when people are not face-to-face. Thus Noddings writes that “our obligation rarely ends with a justified decision or act” (2010, 82) and that care theory “demands to know whether relations of care have in fact been established, maintained, or enhanced, and by extension it counsels us to consider effects on the whole web or network of care” (2002, 30). Because care is an ethic focused on ways of being-in-the-world, institutional arrange-

ments for care labor seem to be by necessity *less* than fully caring; they come about after the reification of needs. The politicality of care labor is always-already present, outside of questions of who care for whom and how.

Likewise, the politicality of caring is always-already present. Noddings consistently links caring and “growth” (2002, 32, 43 and *passim*, cf. 2010, 192–93), the positive production of possibilities. She sees an “awesome power” in her epitome of the caring role, that of a teacher whose facilitative role helps define the possibilities and capabilities that a student can choose to or choose not to develop (1984, 176). Noddings does not give prescription for how such power should be utilized—that would be contradictory with her project—but she is richly attentive to the political questions that inhere in the production of subjects (2002, 83ff.). This conception uses care to highlight the politicality inherent in the makings of subjects, in ways that Tronto—and those that follow her—do not as closely attend to, as discussed below.

B. Held

Virginia Held (1993, 1995, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011) has focused the philosophical development of the ethics of care on a different range of questions. Across her oeuvre, Held finds broad agreement with Noddings in the relational ontology of the ethics of care, as well as in understanding that the ethics of care is a challenge to deontological, utilitarian, and aretaic moral theorizing.⁶ Held has made deep articulation of these differences with analytic ethical theory a repeated part of her body of work (e.g. 2004, 143ff., 2006, 19ff., 46, 52, 72ff, 133, 2008b, 1, 2011, 183). She finds immediate import in this project, because how subjects think about the morality of a behavior influences the agent’s

⁶ Also similar to Noddings, Held has modified her articulations of the ethics of care as the tradition has developed and grown. Here I look to similarities across her thought, with emphasis placed on her important work *The Ethics of Care* (2006) and her subsequent work on the intersection of the ethics of care and global-scope politics (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011).

social and moral status, and thus its power (2002, 25–26, 2004, 141, 2006, 14). One such distinguishing feature of the ethics of care, Held argues, is that it “often calls on us to take responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone” (2006, 14–15). Thus understanding and guiding connectedness feature heavily into the frameworks by which the ethics of care evaluate practices (Held 2008a, 164; cf. Lawson 2007).

Held argues for a strong political program—perhaps even a political theory—of care (2006, 107ff., 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011). In so doing, she is working alongside not only Tronto, but Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2003), Olena Hankivsky (2004, 2006, 2011), Elizabeth Porter (2006), Fiona Robinson (1999, 2006, 2010, 2011a, 2011b) and perhaps Ruth Groenhout (2004, 135ff.). This is to explicitly to ask about “what we ought to do here and now in the world as it is in the historical context in which we find ourselves” (2011, 178) rather than to imagine an ideal space with a radically different international institutional order. Still, this opens a much deeper space of engagement in the world than either traditional political science or traditional political philosophy. When Held discusses the 1999 NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia (Held 2008a, 40ff., 2008b, 9–11), her discussion includes both the decision to send troops and the long regional history of failures to care. As Robinson (2011b) has recently articulated, the relational ontology of the ethics of care asks about the ongoing production of vulnerability, exploitation, or autocracy. Such problems are fundamentally problematic within a liberal ontology of autonomous subjects. Thus rather than ask how the military might make individuals safe or be used in service of human rights, Held’s ethics of care questions why rules and international norms or agreements have participated in violence, and it connects these to situated normativities.

Two further threads through Held’s work can be of ready use to geographers. First, while geographers have long recognized that the ethics of care can be used to destabilize the

liberal ontology of the individual, Held provides stronger elucidation along these lines. For Held, care is a practice through which identities are mutually constituted and facilitated, at least in part (2004, 144, 2006, 14, 32), and “a relation in which carer and cared-for share an interest in their mutual well-being” (2006, 34–35). Pace some accounts, this is an appeal to universal experience—that of being dependent and cared for—*without* moving to universalizing theorizations (1995, 131–32, 2006, 21, 2010, 117, 2011, 185). Since we cannot move outside our historical, embodied, or perspectival contexts (2006, 39, 72ff., 102–04, 161, 176, 2008a, 153), universal accounts are illusory, but Held clarifies how one can talk about general phenomena in situated ways. Her work connects these questions to further questions of dependency and interdependence, and to the nuances of relations between individuals and groups (cf. 2002, 31, 2006, 46), in ways that—to paraphrase Kittay (2001, 559)—constitute the limit cases of the liberal individual who enters into societal “contracts” (2006, 80ff.).

Second, Held argues that care is fundamentally facilitative. This contrasts with Tronto’s well-known formulation that “the task of care is to maintain, continue, and repair the world so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto 1993, 145; cf. Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40). Tronto’s formulation has served as a basis for a number of investigations on care (e.g. Brown 2003; Haylett 2003; Cox 2010), and in many ways reaffirms the traditional Marxist division between “productive” labor and merely “reproductive” labor, that is, labor that serves to reproduce labor power. Care is therein less about building or producing a world, so much as setting conditions which allow the “continuation” and “repair” of the current world. In contrast, Held writes that:

If one accepts Marx’s distinction between productive and reproductive labor, and then sees caring as reproductive labor, as some propose, one misses the way caring, especially for children, can be transformative rather than merely reproductive and repetitious. . . . Care has the capacity to shape new persons Only a biased and damaging misconception holds that caring merely reproduces our material and biological realities while what is new and creative and distinctively human must occur elsewhere. (2006, 32; cf. Danby 2004, 24; Engster 2007, 17–18)

This conception, like Noddings's linkage of caring and growth, offers something different from the discourse of reproductive labor: in being mopped the floor does not shape new floor-subjects. Care thus is not about maintenance or sustainability, but about engaging the capacities for action. In its final cause, care is for building or producing a world, or new selves. The separation of productive and reproductive labor at heart presumes a division between relational and non-relational care practices. Even putatively "non-relational" (Duffy 2005) care practices like cleaning and food preparation are always performed in networks of relation, typically future-looking (Danby 2004). Thus they are likewise *productive* endeavors, though the temporal aspect can obscure this.

C. Engster

Of the care ethicists presented here, Daniel Engster (2004, 2006, 2007, 2010) is the closest to Tronto, with whom he shares a disciplinary approach (both are political scientists) and whom he thanks in the introduction to *The Heart of Justice* (2007). Like Tronto (1993, 2005, 2011; White and Tronto 2004), Engster is broadly interested in the uses of the ethics of care for institutions and institutional political forms. Engster's work seeks to set out the "basic institutions and policies of a caring society" (2007, vi), a goal that which geographers have also taken interest in (D. M. Smith 1998; McDowell 2004; S. J. Smith 2005; Lawson 2007; Cox 2010). His work is to be commended for its careful attention to feminist critiques of theories of justice, as well as for the ways that it provides policy proposals and guidance in a variety of dimensions of social life, from animal rights (2006) to personal relationships (2004), from economic justice to systems of economies, from family and media practices, from a caring government to a caring culture (2007). He is likewise to be commended for his attention to practices by which change can be effected (2010).

Engster argues for reformulating care theory as a theory of mutual obligation within an analytical, and fundamentally Kantian (2007, 25), theory of justice. For Engster, the role of care is much more limited than either Held's or Noddings's formulations: "caring may be defined as *everything we do directly to help individuals to meet their vital biological needs, develop or maintain their basic capabilities, and avoid or alleviate unnecessary or unwanted pain and suffering, so that they can survive, develop, and function in society*" (2007, 28–29, italics in original). Care is a foundation upon which complex social and political life rests—inextricable from it, but also only meaningfully intervening in that complex life through its negation, its absence. Thus care is only facilitative in its promotion of the "basic capabilities"; its reach and scope are limited.

A crucial choice in Engster's characterization of the ethics of care literature is that he discards the relational ontology that is fundamental not only to Noddings and Held, but to many of the often-germinal accounts that precede him (Noddings 1984, 2002; Clement 1996; Bowden 1997; Kittay 1999; Groenhout 2004; Held 2004, 2006; Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005; Robinson 2006). However, in this he is similar to a stand of care-ethical thought in political science and political philosophy in which the importance of relational ontology is minimized or in which relational ontology is dispensed with entirely (e.g. Bubeck 1995; MacGregor 2004; Ben-Porath 2008; Sander-Staudt 2008; Levy and Palley 2010; Mann 2012). For Engster, "care theory derives our moral obligations not from some abstract quality such as autonomy or self-consciousness but rather from our relations with others as dependent social creatures" (2006, 525). That is, our histories as "care receivers, all" (2010, 304) (i.e. as formerly-dependent entities) have created reciprocal future obligations that we have a moral duty to fulfill. The question of caring policies and institutions is understood through this lens, moral obligations to a more just or less unjust society.

Underlying this, Engster takes the individual as a coherent unit of (removed) analysis (e.g. 2006, 522ff., 2007, 38, 2010, *passim*). It is an elegant, if disappointing, irony that in Engster's work even where the concept of autonomy is declaimed alongside feminist theorists, the praxis of the autonomous individual is avowed. For instance, in writing that "the group exists in care theory to support individuals and not the other way around" (Engster 2007, 99), Engster's work misses the deeper implications of relational autonomy that Held—to give one example—is attuned to. Within the relational ontology of both Held and Noddings, individuals are constituted by membership within groups, are constituted by fundamentally *group* practices that facilitate movement, growth, and change. In short, for relational ontology individuals and groups are—and are only—co-constitutive (cf. Held 2006, 100ff., 131, 2011, 187–88; Noddings 2010, 110–111; Robinson 2010, 137, 2011b, 54).

Indeed, the "gap" that Engster's work sees in the ethics of care literature—"no account of the basic institutions and policies of a caring society has yet been proposed" (2007, 4)—is precisely a liberal critique of nonliberal systems. It bears on Engster project that he never substantially engages with Noddings's basic criticism of top-down political theory. When speaking of his goal to synthesize emotions and rationality into a rationalist ethical system, for instance, Engster's work misses that "rationality" looks very different in a world without the unified subjects that Kant took for granted (2007, 38, 46–47). That refusal of engagement is a second break—alas unacknowledged—between Engster and theorists like Held and Noddings. At root, Engster's work takes the current conditions of possibility of the world for granted: states, governments, liberalism, capitalism vs. socialism, and so forth. Thus Engster's work perpetuates many of the liberal assumptions that the ethics of care is useful for critiquing. Engster focuses on political science questions within a liberal ontology—without substantive engagement across gender studies, feminist epistemology, and feminist science and technology studies, all of which bear on the project—to weigh the deep critique that the

ethics of care is capable of offering. An immanentist ethics of care refuses to give—and can never give—an ideal form for society, because such accounts are aporias.

Here I turn to a further ethics of care, that of the Patronas.

IV. The Patronas' Ethics of Care and Caring

In February 1995, two sisters watched a freight train pass by on the way home from grocery shopping in the Mexican state of Veracruz. As the train rumbled through their rural town, they saw migrants clinging to the cars, traveling north, towards the United States. The migrants shouted out “Madre, tenemos hambre!” as they went by, gesturing for food, but they passed by so quickly. The sisters felt like they should help, but everything had happened so quickly.

Bernarda and Clementina Romero did not forget that feeling. They talked with their mother that night, and then with their other sisters; they thought the migrants were other Mexicans, were people just like them. Today they call themselves the Patronas, a dozen or so women from La Patrona⁷ who provide food, water and clothing to migrants riding the freight trains north. During the high season in winter, they make more than 200 meals each day; they have brought migrants in need to local hospitals, and protected migrants from police extortion and violence. They hand off bags of food and clothing, and bottles of water—a pair of bottles tied together with a white nylon rope, because the rope is easier to grab. The trains sometimes travel upwards of 30 kilometers per hour, and they will never meet the vast majority of those to whom they give.

⁷ For clarity, I use “the Patronas” to refer to the women (who in Spanish call themselves “las Patronas”) and “La Patrona,” the common abbreviation, to refer to the town.

From their rural community of cinder-block houses, alternately dusty and muddy roads, and the smells of woodsmoke and engine grease, the Patronas have no knowledge of the academic ethics of care. Indeed, not all the Patronas are functionally literate. But I argue, with their approval,⁸ that academics can not only look to the Patronas' action as a practical example of the ethics of care, but also to the ways that the Patronas are *inventing* the ethics of care in practice. Here I follow up on the discussions of Noddings and Held to think through the Patronas' action through a localized spatial imaginary; the Patronas' action as productive rather than reproductive; and the Patronas' accounts as morally intersubjective in ways that trouble liberalism.

I start with a question of responsibility. The Patronas are well aware of the trials and travails of life as a migrant; when in July 2011 they were given a package that included the 2009 movie *Sin Nombre*, about Mexican transmigration on trains, the Patronas had no interest in watching it: "We know already," one Patrona told me. "It's going to be bad, always bad." At the same time, they report that they help because "the people on the trains are taken advantage of [*han abusado de*]" and need assistance. Clementina, one of the two sisters at the tracks in 1995, recently told a reporter that "We help because it is our responsibility and we know that they are hungry, thirsty, cold, and they need guidance and help" (Arias Domínguez 2010).

While Held and Tronto both include "responsibility," their understandings of the term differ. Held invokes the "compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (2006, 10). As dependency characterizes all lives at various points—in infancy, for one example—responsibility is idealized as the relational aspect of caring for the dependent. Tronto sees responsibility as tied to questions of sociality and mutuality, embedded in large-scope politics. Thus, writing in the

8 During a return visit in January 2012, I explicitly asked a few of the Patronas how they felt about being made examples or case studies for theorization, whether by academics or politicians. They told me that what they cared about was that people would go out and "do things," but that they understood that such theorization was part of my job as an academic.

early 1990s, she asks “what responsibilities do members of society, or the federal government in the United States, have in helping to rebuild violence-torn South Central Los Angeles?” (1993, 132). The difference, to crib from Raghuram (2012), is the implicit spatial referent: for Tronto it is the distant, the faraway; for Held it is the nearby, the dear. Both argue that we can further be mutually responsible even outside of the conditions of infancy, infirmity, and so forth. But Held contends that responsibility is a reflection of the ways in which we come to constitute ourselves as social beings. We are beings who become responsible for each other.

What we see in Clementina is something closer to Held’s account of responsibility than Tronto’s. It is a nearby responsibility. Likewise, both Bernarda and Norma Romero Vasquez give accounts in which the moral relationships are *close* rather than remote. Norma has said that the Patronas’ action is personally important because

I have a son and I don’t want my son to immigrate in the future. On the train, there are children and one of those could have been mine...My son asks me: ‘Why do you cry?’ I cry because I have you and I don’t want you to suffer like they do. It feels really bad [she starts crying]...You don’t suffer, you have everything. You have food, a roof, a mother, a father. They don’t have anything. They leave their country and suffer a lot and that makes me so angry...Like I tell my son: ‘I don’t want you to be like them someday.’ Because I always fear that. (Dirdamal 2007)

In Norma’s statement that “On the train, there are children and one of those could have been mine,” she is equating the moral responsibility—in Held’s sense—she has to her family with that of the migrants. When further she says that “I tell my son: ‘I don’t want you to be like them someday,’” she performs the same equivalency in reverse, equating not the migrants to her son, but her son to the migrants. This is not a distant calculative or agonistic rationale in which the responsibilities to the migrants contested and eventually figured, but an engagement of *intimacy*. Even when Norma tells her son that “she doesn’t want him to be like them” this is not a simple distancing maneuver of “you” opposed to “them,” but must be contextually read as equating the suffering the migrants’ families, and especially their mothers, with her own. In this light, consider Bernarda Romero Vasquez’s statement that as Patronas

we want people to be humane [*humano*], to extend a hand to someone when s/he needs it. . . . When someone is hungry, it even pains you here. (Ruiz Condori 2011)⁹

When Bernarda says that the Patronas want others to “extend a hand to someone when s/he needs it,” the metaphor ties deeply to the literal extension of both hands themselves, and the metonymic aid that “extend a hand” implies, to the migrants as the train goes by. The Patronas are literally close to those they give to, even if only ephemerally, and they are literally reaching out to the migrants. Bernarda also spatializes the moral community in her statement that “when someone is hungry, it even pains you here [*aquí*].”¹⁰ While the specific referent of the “here” could be her own body, could be the kitchen where she gave the interview, could even be the town of La Patrona, the indication is of nearness, that both suffering and the means to relieve it are, in a phrase, at hand.

The reimagining of the space of responsibility as close rather than distant, and the consequent expansion of the moral community, contains an implicit politics of recognition. Noddings’s account of intersubjectivity, in which ethical receptivity and response come into being together, is richly attentive to the ways in which openness and recognition are political and normative commitments. This is described ably by one respondent, a migrant who, at the time of the interview, was residing in La Patrona. His recountings of his migration journey are filled with the foods he ate, tried to eat, was unable to eat: chunks of roasted iguana, rotting mango, a stolen chicken, bananas that slipped from his bag. Towards the end of his story, he says:

On all the route through Mexico, [La Patrona] is the only place where to you the locals are very [trails off]—the one place that there might be bread [*en que sea un pan*], a little bit of beans, some rice. For us this is so important. And for me, I have so much respect for the women. . . . Not just anyone has the mercy to give you a bite to eat, a taco, a tortilla, their worst bits [*su pacota*], just a taste. (Personal Interview, former migrant, 8/14/2011)

⁹ I was present during this interview—it occurred while we were preparing food—but I did not ask questions nor make more than cursory notes afterwards.

¹⁰ Note that Spanish has three forms of “here” and “there” (*aquí* or *acá*; *ahí* or *allí*; *allá*), rather than English’s two. Of these, “*aquí*” denotes the location closest to the speaker.

When he says that the people in other towns he traveled through would not even “give you a bite to eat,” would not give the smallest pieces nor the worst bits, he is referring to a sort of double tragedy: a deep hunger during a difficult, at times harrowing journey and a situation in which his needs and his state of being in need are not just ignored but invalidated. To ask someone for their poorest bite of food and be denied is not only a story of material deprivation, but social deprivation as well. Noddings argues that “if there is a basic need addressed by care ethics, it is the need to be heard, recognized,” (2010, 181), and in the respondent’s story the food carries more than just the weight of a hungry belly. Again, this is an account that is deeply intersubjective. The migrant’s pain is in part from being kept from both close ties and, more importantly, even the minimum social ties of “mercy,” or even pity.

The ethics of care in all accounts points to the ways that such deprivation is socially produced (Robinson 2011b, 28), but even more, its deep attention to emotional life in the throes of differential power implicates the way that poverty and want are affective relations. The same respondent reports that his first impression of Mexico was that “the *entire* country is rich” compared with his home in Central America. He recounts that “so many left” from his town because “we had absolutely nothing.” The relational aspects of poverty and mercy are deeply important here because of the power relations present. Following one reading of the ethics of care, we might see the Patronas as “restoring” care to those like the respondent, with care understood as a type of labor of social reproduction (e.g. Engster 2007, 183); another, following both Noddings’s and Held’s view that care is fundamentally productive, might think to, and think through, the caring relationship that the Patronas’ action effects. The difference in these is subtle but important: if, as Held and Noddings argue, care relations are productive, then they cannot be dismissed as the restoration of some neutral state in which “productive” work can be done. Instead, the provision of food by the Patronas be-

comes a tool to effect the alteration of already-extant social relations, from one characterized by distance, coolness, and the ignorance of needs to one that is close, warm, and attentive.

This is not to say that such accounts do not produce subjects as well as relations. I turn now to a last anecdote, that of one Patrona describing her first time giving:

When I passed the bag [to the migrant] , he told me ‘thank you’ and ‘this is so great’ [*chévere*]. And can you imagine it, first he thanked me and I gave this lunch to him but this—I mentioned this look, this look of happiness of pleasure of wow! [*¡quiuibo!*], they’re eating something. And, well, in my hands they could—there was the ability to help them [i.e. the migrants]. That Sunday changed my life, completely. (Personal Interview, 8/11/2011)

A liberal story would argue that the Patrona’s account is about an individual discovering some preference or would perhaps argue that the emotional content of the story is superfluous or supererogatory. For the ethics of care, however, the stronger case is that the Patrona is discovering in that moment that her happiness and the migrant’s are mutually implicated. The respondent’s statement that giving “changed her life”—and she had reported the same earlier in the week preceding the interview—underscores less a literal fact by which subjective experience or life history is importantly altered and more a moment by which she comes to refigure herself as a subject. The respondent is speaking to a new kind of world view, in which the relations by which she understands herself and her life world have altered. She comes to understand herself differently as a moral subject. This looks deeply and significantly similar to Held’s conception of care as fundamentally productive—but here, of the *carer*. In the moment of the encounter, she is overcome with different species of recognition: first, one of doing a simple act of kindness of giving food. Next, a recognition that the migrant was not just eating the food but was enjoying it, and a recognition of herself in part of the production of that joy. Then her own recognition of the migrants’ need for food. And finally, she looks to her own hands, and recognizes that her ability to help was far greater than a simple satiation of a rumbling stomach or two. This is the production of an understanding, or the process of

coming to understand, how she and the passing migrants are mutually implicated as subjects, how they, in Held's words, "share an interest in their mutual well-being" (2006, 34–35).

Importantly, at the same time the Patronas often reinforce the notion that caring is a deeply gendered practice. This is also part of the ethics of care that they are inventing. The social milieu of the Patronas produces specific obligations for care that fall heavily on women, and the very content of what the Patronas do—i.e., giving food and clothing to young men on their way to find work—both symbolically and materially reenacts the duties of motherhood even for those Patronas who are not, and those who will never be, mothers. One Patrona is continually running back home, sandals clapping her heels, to prepare food or do the laundry for her (alcoholic) spouse. Another splits her days between shopkeeping, tending for her parents, and taking care of the repairs, cleaning, and chores at the outdoor kitchen where the Patronas prepare the food. Another Patrona splits time between the cane fields she owns and making food for the migrants, yet late at night her university-age son sends her out for tacos when he's hungry. The Patronas spend hours cooking, cleaning, preparing the bundles they will pass to the migrants. For those Patronas who are married, and those with children, these tasks are already prominent in their lives as expected duties and felt obligations. The gendered division of labor is persistent even in the action itself, where passing the bottles of water is gendered male, presumably because of the heavy wheelbarrow used to bring the full bottles back and forth.

The Patronas are also intentional about keeping their group, and thus the action, all women. While some local men and boys do participate,¹¹ such as the son of one Patrona who often drives the women to the bakery that they clean in exchange for day-old breads, men are not typically invited to participate in meaningful ways. More often, the Patronas call on the obligations of their male relatives when a "male" task needs to be done, such as moving

¹¹ I was also welcomed wholeheartedly; however, I did not participate in making any meaningful decisions during my time there.

the 25- and 50-kilogram bags of rice and beans that fill the storeroom. During my initial fieldwork in the summer of 2011, for instance, a teenage neighbor came out to watch nearly everyday, and would occasionally assist in moving food or wheelbarrows. He was not asked to participate more, despite obvious interest. In contrast, the first time a teenage student from the cabecera (head town) of La Patrona's municipio visited, she was encouraged to bring her friends.

The ethical framework of care in La Patrona is not separable from the wider scheme of gendered social relations. The ethic by which the Patronas operate is deeply connected to their social position as mothers—and in Bernarda and Clementina's cases, being interpellated as "mother" during the first encounter—whom the migrant entreat for aid. Norma's story valorizes her son's duties to his family and emphasizes the lack of family—that is, the contrast of the "You have food, a roof, a mother, a father" spoken to her son with the "they don't have anything" that follows—for the migrants in equal measure. Held argues that in acting we both become more aware of our interdependence and connections to others, as well as discover the fundamental limitations of transcendental ethical theories (2006, 23, 2008a, 146–47), and by this measure the ethics of care that the Patronas are inventing must be situated within their social worlds. In contrast to, for example, Engster's notion that "the basic principles of morality can be identified by reflecting upon the nature of human existence and the practices necessary to sustain human life" (2007, 11), these accounts of the ethics of care should be seen as fundamentally immanentist. That is, in contrast with theories that imagine an "outside" to social relations, immanentist theorizations deny such outsides, arguing instead that the relations themselves enable possibility; they argue that actions, capabilities, and relations co-constitute each other.

V. Conclusion

One might be tempted to read the Patronas' action, and the Patronas themselves, through the same lenses that geographers have traditionally used to interrogate caregiving. For instance, we might argue that the Patronas' work is care work because it is "collective provision either as a temporary input to facilitate return to the norm" of being fed, sustained, and so forth "or as a long-term input to approximate the norm" (Atkinson, Lawson, and Wiles 2011, 565). Or we might ask: Why these women, and why not the Mexican state? How do we see a movement of caregiving work, and how do the Patronas participate in global care chains? Popke has put it this way: "Reclaiming 'care' as a social, and thus political, relation is . . . a project rich with ethical implications" (2006, 505; cf. Porter 2006).

I want to reverse this, to turn the telescope around: claiming care as an ethic of its own is a project with deeply *political* implications. The goal here has not been to claim that such approaches are mistaken, but instead to open up geographic possibilities for the ethics of care. Fiona Robinson has written that "the ontological and normative categories of liberalism are remarkably persistent" (2010, 134), and it behooves us as geographers to think about how our own work has perpetuated—has indeed performed—such categories. McEwan and Goodman have argued that care is "fundamentally geographical," that it is "about 'feeling' as much as 'doing', it is about 'doing to' as much as 'feelings from'" (2010, 109). The geographical project of care looks not just at how care reflects contemporary social practice—importantly from "different centers" (Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009, 10)—but how, as Held puts it, how we think about ethics affects social relations and especially relations of power.

The Patronas and the theorizations presented here may open up discussion of academic discourses around care. To the extent that there exists a global "care deficit," as Arlie

Hochschild's (1995) widely adopted phrase puts it, we might question how the notion of the deficit intersects with capitalist and neoliberal discourses of inherently scarce resources. On one hand, we might argue that through their action, the Patronas articulate (or prefigure; cf. Franks 2006) a notion in which "scarcity" is an effect, rather than a precondition, of the enclosure of resources. This is to say that to a small extent the gift of rice and beans and bread undoes the enclosure that made them commodities in the first place. This suggests that caring practices, as many geographers have noted (e.g. McDowell 2004; Lawson 2007; S. J. Smith 2009; Cox 2010) may be potential tools for complicating or undermining neoliberal discourses and capitalist subjectivities. And indeed, the Patronas are, on the whole, quite aware of themselves as doing work that is anti-neoliberal. During fieldwork, more than one of the Patronas suggested that the migrants' deprivation was attributable to individualism and resource inequality—this rather than an inherent condition of the material world.

Secondly, Noddings's insistence that the most preferable form of morality is "natural caring" comports well with recent theorizations in affect studies about embodiments of normative practice through comportment, affective disposition, and habit.¹² She asserts that "emotion" is "clearly prior to language and the forms of cognition associated with language" (2010, 163), and she explicitly recognizes—and most likely is independently theorizing— notions of (e.g.) impersonal emotional states, the pre- or noncognitive, and affective atmospheres (2010, 167–68). The ethics of care can potentially position the subjective domains in Deleuzian and Spinozist approaches—characterized in part by the notion on one hand of a split between creative and reactive affects, and on the other by the ethical imperative to explore the capacities and capabilities of bodies—by paying especial fidelity to the ways that care *produces* subjects. As for Noddings selves are perpetually growing, as are the relations that

¹² See, for instance, Noddings's assertion that "natural caring is 'natural' in that it exists prior to formal moral thought" (2010, 45, italics in original, cf. 2010, 69); or her insistence that the basic "affect" (which she understands as closer to emotion than the Spinozist definition; see 1984, 132f.) of human experience is a "noncognitive joy" (2010, 167f., 1984, 6, 134).

constitute them (1984, 86, 2002, 31), the ethics of care may be one site of fruitful intersection between feminism and Deleuzian ethics (cf. Gilson 2011).

Finally, we might also use the theorizations of Noddings and Held as a departure point for inquiries into the ontological status of (at least partly) phenomenological deficits, such as a deficit of care (cf. Brown 2003, 835). A key question here, following from Noddings's understanding of the terms, is whether it is possible to "lack" an experience, or even to describe such a "lack" without reifying, simplifying, or denaturing the experience. Likewise, care as a fundamentally productive encounter suggests the necessity for a further nuanced vocabulary beyond that of sufficiency or lack. Geographers and others working on care, and especially within the strong work on the feminization of care, have tended to presume that such "care deficits" are both conceptually coherent and rapidly proliferating with neoliberalism. When care is understood not as a restoring or reproductive activity, but a facilitative and effective one, the social world we theorize appears differently, and so too do the gendered ways in which care is delivered. Rather than a definitive answer here, I suggest that in the three related but distinct concepts of care, caring, and caregiving, the ways in which we clarify their distinctions and, more importantly, their connections are important for articulating how our research questions into the global practices of care are opened or foreclosed.

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Conclusion: Two Views of Care, Two Views of the Gift

In August 2011, I accompanied a pair of Nicaraguan migrants to the public clinic in Amatlán de los Reyes, about 5 kilometers from La Patrona. The clinic has a scraggly yard and an iron fence in front, and is a little larger than its neighboring houses, but otherwise it looks similar. By 10:30 am, the clinic was already full, so we waited outside, and then, when space opened up, in a waiting room of uncomfortable plastic-and-metal chairs. We were finally seen a little past noon.

We were there because one of the migrants could barely walk. While his friend kept quiet—migrants often keep quiet, because they cannot trust most people they meet—he talked. A lot. He said that that his leg had seemed to heal, but that it had recently worsened. Farther north, near Pachuca, the two migrants had been chased off the train by police, and he fell down a hole (*un pozo*) while running. Both were caught and deported from Mexico, but not given medical attention. Even when the two were finally released south of the Mexican border, the injured migrant had to hop (*saltar en un pie*) down from the bus.

They went without medical attention until the Patronas saw them near a stopped train, long after returning to Mexico. In Amatlán the doctor reported that the injured migrant's ankle had been broken, but now the bone had healed and there was little worth doing. The appointment took less than 15 minutes. After we returned to La Patrona, the migrant made sure, in his stories of the journey of Managua and elsewhere, that he expressed a deep gratitude to the Patronas—who seemed mostly annoyed by him and his talking. When the two migrants left—driven to Córdoba or Orizaba—the Patronas were visibly relieved to have their space and their quiet back.

The imaginary about gifts is of gifts to those we like, or “gifts” to those who might do us favors; but only rarely do we contemplate the gift to someone we dislike. In La Patrona, they give to all. Every migrant is cared for, to the Patronas’ ability

Care and the gift are deeply connected. Yet academics have tended to see them distinctly, rather than together. In care, feminist scholarship has long seen a deep normative character—one rarely present in academic discussions of the gift. Arlie Hochschild, for instance, defines care as

an emotional bond, usually mutual, between the caregiver and the cared-for, a bond in which the caregiver feels responsible for others’ well-being and does mental, emotional, and physical work in the course of fulfilling that responsibility. Thus, care of a person implies care about him or her. (1995, 332)

Hochschild’s work, not least her anthology *Global Woman* (2003) in collaboration with journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, has widely influenced scholarship on care, including feminist geography. In geography, these studies often direct readers and practitioners toward the creation of a “more caring society,” a society that extends care more often and more freely (e.g. Milligan 2000; Smith 2005; Kittay 2008; Lawson 2009; Cox 2010). These thinkers identify the institutional provision of care with an ethic of care.

Not all thinkers share such a perspective. Davina Cooper has critiqued both “the basic claim that care is good,” and implicit assumptions that care has an inherent normative character (2007). Writing of care practices within a women’s bathhouse, Cooper attempts to describe a circumference of care in which the expected or imputed normativity as a positive relation does not obtain. In the bathhouse, care may be self-involved, may be offered quid-pro-quo, may be emotionally disingenuous. Cooper thus proffers a practice-based definition of care, one that centers concern and attention. Cooper’s care is a practice equally of “concerns about” and “attentions to,” but can arise even as narcissism or as attentions to the

liberal, self-interested, self—yet nonetheless is always underlain by an emotional “mattering” (2007, 254–55)

Cooper’s intervention accords with Nel Noddings’s distinction between caring and caregiving (see “Care, Spatial Ethics, and Las Patronas of Veracruz”). For Cooper and Noddings, “needs” are deeply problematic, if not self-contradictory, because they are situated within a social and political field that is often deeply different from the physical, biological, or “objective” characteristics that they are purported to have (Cooper 2007, 251–52; Noddings 2002, 53ff., 2010, 180–81). To attend to “needs,” as the institutionally-driven literature suggests is the basis of care, is also to naturalize a particular configuration of social forces. Again, for Noddings, attending-to-needs is characteristic of caregiving, and is essentially a reactionary moment. Yet the longstanding notion of “bad care” in ethics of care scholarship (Tronto 1993, 105; Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005, 444; Held 2006, 56) suggests that care ethicists have been moving toward a conception of the term in which caregiving can and sometimes does reinscribe and reinforce existing structures of power. It may be fruitful, then, to follow Noddings in understanding caring and caregiving differentially, and to follow Cooper’s practice-based definition in which the term care is a generalized, non-normative practice of meeting the always-already reified, yet always lived, needs of individuals.

In this thesis, the study of the Patronas presents two distinct ethics of (this) care at work in the same community and at the same time. This invocation of the ethics of care should not be understood as one of a multiplicity of ethics which bear on care practices—liberalism and neoliberalism both rely on practices of care for the perpetuation of capitalism, as Marx understood. Instead, it is an invocation of different realizations of care practices in the world. The town of La Patrona sees within it both a clientelistic care and an ethics of care that the Patronas themselves invent.

Virginia Held has argued for five unifying features of ethics of care, and in defining clientelism as care I draw on this synthesis. First, she sees a “compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility” (2006, 10). Second, care is an epistemology that embraces emotion and emotional life as mattering. Third, the ethics of care is particularistic, recognizing the moral importance of everyday social forms like the family, friendship, and community life. Fourth, the ethics of care rejects a distinction between public and private. Finally, the ethics of care assumes a relational ontology, where life is characterized by dependence on many others rather than autonomy from them. As Held puts it, the ethic of care “often calls on us to take responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone” (2006, 14–15).

Clientelism works similarly in *La Patrona*. The Deputy’s attempts to render the Patronas as her clients—and the attempted change in economic subjectivity initiated by the Rotarians—are made via provisions both of material goods and of care. Such attempts are less about the Deputy threatening the Patronas so much as tries to convince them, or perhaps bribe them, to take up their own subjectification. When the Patronas toy with the idea that they have “earned” rewards for their action, a subjective field comes to exist around how, and what with, the Patronas ought to be rewarded, even without the establishment of a particular patron-client relationship. That is, the subject field of clientelism sets the terms, rather than the relationship; the relationship is contingent rather than necessary. Yet the subject field also grounds such a contingent relationship in emotional registers of care and responsibility—albeit of a much different valence from those envisioned by Noddings or Held.

The Patronas’ ethic of care is distinct. Certainly the autonomous subjects that Rotarians envision do not accord with the relationality that the Patronas report experiencing. The Patrona who found her happiness mutually implicated with that of the migrants (see “Care, Spatial Ethics, and *Las Patronas* of Veracruz”) suggests a deep challenge to liberalism. But it

also suggests a relationship between caring (in Noddings's sense) and conceptions of giving. The clientelist gift, or "gift," involves a gift articulated through the production of scarcity and is meant to foster a relation of both dependence on the giver and a clientelist subjectivity on the recipients. It is given by already-liberal subjects. The Patronas' gift is also articulated through want, but a confluence of material and social lack. It has no "equation," but is a caring practice in exactly Noddings's distinction: an engagement with, and a responsibility for, others. Insofar as subjectivities are altered, it is a mutual alteration rather than a unilateral one. Even more, it is a disposition, a habit of bodies. The receptivity to others that characterizes Noddings's description (1984, 19), the quality of availability or disposability, is deeply absent in clientelist care. The logic of clientelism is such that it is largely contractual, even if affective; it is fundamentally *quid pro quo*. The Patronas' ethic of care, in contrast, is simply *quid*—and in being so, as Noddings has argued, "invites us to participate in the creation of new relational selves" (1990, 124).

The Patronas' interactions with both the migrants and the politically powerful are important precisely because subjectivities are "in play." They are in play in both cases because they can be non-capitalist, non-liberal, and often non-calculating subjects. This is not to say that the Patronas cannot or do not act "rationally," as "rational" agents, some of the time. But it is to assert that the everydayness is a site of both politics and politicking. The Patronas' gifts are not self-serving, but, as Lewis Hyde puts it, erotic; they are "an emanation of Eros," are "gifts that survive their use" (2007, 22). The Patronas' gifts are not (only) food, water, and clothing, but solidary recognition, mutuality, and presence. As the Central American migrant who settled in La Patrona tells it, the social deprivation of the migrant's journey is the difficult and painful state, not the recognition and mutuality that the Patronas collectively assert. It is not obligation that he finds painful, but the very "free" state of a lack of intersubjective responsibility.

This suggests, if not a challenge to Derrida's argument for the impossibility of the gift (1992), at least a decidedly different perspective from his. In his attempts to render the capital-S "Subject" as a contingent, historically situated, small-s "subject," Derrida claims that giving and taking are always mutually implicated. But he does so within particular bounds of (small-s) subjecthood (Silk 2004). Even in writers and writing he perceives the impossibility of the gift:

As an identifiable, bordered, posed subject, one who writes and his or her writing never give anything without calculating, consciously or unconsciously, its reappropriation, its exchange, or its circular return--and by definition this means reappropriation with surplus-value, a certain capitalization. We will even venture to say that this is the very definition of the *subject as such*. (1992: 101)

The "consciously or unconsciously" calculating mind that Derrida posits is itself a reflection of the conditions of possibility for subjecthood. Simultaneously, however, Derrida naturalizes an "operation of capital" by attributing such to the subject's mental state whether or not the subject is aware. While a "conscious" calculation or calculability is verifiable by a subject herself, and "unconscious" calculation is adamantly not, and requires a universalizing claim by which the difference in subjects is subsumed. It is likewise a deep-seated assertion that reckoning, comprehending, naming, and fundamentally knowing are of a piece with acts of figuring or calculation. The key move is actually the zeroth: the repeated slippage between gift exchange as an inexact economic form and gifting as the discursive strategy by which that inexactness is made economically facilitative. That gifts partake in economies means, for Derrida's analysis, that they are products of calculation, that they therefore are inextricable from "capitalization."

In contrast is the aphorism that Hyde attributes to Thomas Jefferson: "The merchant has no homeland" (2007, 149). Hyde finds a decisive difference between the gift and the commodity: gifts are communal and associated with others, commodities individualizing and

associated with alienation and freedom (2007, 86). Gifts are not objects, but relationships—this is why they can be inexhaustible—and denaturing them is the move that makes them “impossible.” To argue of a relationship-less gift is to argue something like a four-pointed triangle or a shoe made of epistemology, but it does not invalidate the gift. One cannot negate the actual existence of the gift; one can only negate discourses around it. What Derrida shows convincingly is that the gift does exist but is not “free”—much less the departure from Mauss than Derrida believed he was making.

There is even more at work here. John O’Neill also notes another type of gift, one he calls the “meta-gift” (1999). These are social relations constituted by many but which have such distributed agency that one can only recognize the gift without the giver—gifts like language. Hyde argues that art is such a meta-gift even as it exists within market economies. Gibson-Graham’s work can deepen O’Neill and Hyde: capitalism is far from “a thing with no outside,” but is instead not only historically contingent but also a relation that coexists with any number of other economic relations simultaneously (2006).

This thesis has argued that neoliberal subjects, those who calculate their own social lives, are far from ubiquitous. Indeed, the Patronas’ are of political interest for groups like the Rotarians because their economic subjectivities (Gibson-Graham 2006) are under suspicion (to say the least). For migrants, it is not an act of calculation in the gift, but an act of recognition. The two are distinct. For Derrida as for liberalism—not to conflate these—the question of the Patronas’ action is why they do it. In the ethics of care that inform the analyses here, the first problem is that the question is to be reversed. As Noddings puts it, it is not caring that needs to be justified, but not-caring (1984, 95, 150ff.). We need to justify a lack of sociability, not sociability.

For sociability produces us. Subjects are products of relations; rationality is not the condition of possibility of these relations, nor a necessary product of it. The “need to be

heard, recognized,” as Noddings puts it (2010, 181), is not the same as a “need to be calculated,” as it would be if calculation and recognition were fungible, were substitutable. They are not. Why the Patronas give—and, fundamentally, why they care (whatever the term means)—is intractable unless one resorts to a universalizing “unconscious” that is both unsailable and metaphysically foundational. The Deputy’s gifts are certainly calculating, and the Rotarians’ collective intent extends beyond the object of the purifier. To take such “care” for granted, as not requiring explanation, naturalizes it. The political project here is to naturalize the Patronas’ care instead.

This political project is far from pedantic. For the migrants that pass through La Patrona, the hardship they’ve come from is so severe that the hardship they’re going to—al otro lado, on the other side, in the U.S.—looks like paradise. The migrants understand how risky their situation is. They are regularly afraid. The Nicaraguan migrant who had been injured is not atypical. As he initially told the Patronas: Worse happens.



Figure 1. The train.

Or, to put this another way: When you see the migrants on the train, sheltering under cardboard; when you see them limp because their broken ankles have not shealed; when you see them wash their feet and hands; when you hand them bags of heavy clothes because they have no idea

that at the highest tunnel between La Patrona and Puebla it is well below freezing; when they hang off the sides of the train and yell and enjoy things for the moment that they have to enjoy, before they must watch out again not to be kidnapped or, for the few women traveling by train, raped, once the train has stopped; when you see a train where the folks get off and you see the faces terrified by something that happened along the line, when you can see it in their eyes and the ways they move their bodies, and you know that the stories of the Zeta kidnappings are not a joke; when you talk to the migrants going either direction and you—you—realize that whatever they earn is always divided up, always remitted, that they give to the families that they can only go back and see on pain of completing (or not) their journeys north again; when they fall and get back on the trains; when they are thankful for being recognized as people, just that; when they drop the food and bottles and you can tell that their hearts drop for a moment with the plastic bag; when the bags burst instead of hold; when they hide instead of eat; and when they thank you and bless you for the kindness, it is hard not to want them to find what they are after.

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