

NADA Solidarity with Refugees as a Hard Rain Falls

by Ryan Bemis, DOM
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I like to hike up into the Franklin Mountains above my home, the rugged high desert ridges that form the farthest western border tip of Texas, along a trail above a white giant Texas Star beaming south off of the mountainside towards Mexico, way up to a place where I can look down and I cannot distinguish where the international border line is. I can't see the Rio Grande river. I can't see the wall. I can't see that line where the United States becomes Mexico – I can't tell where "America" begins or ends.

I just see these two cities—El Paso and Juarez—blend together as one community. And I like to imagine, sitting up there, looking down, that we're all just one as a people.

And then I have to slap myself, wake myself up, because "We are one" is not reality in the borderlands, not reality in America. Unity is a dream right now. The border is real. It shapes the narrative of the people.

We are divided in America, right here, right now. This is palpable. And yet immigrants are coming here from around the world right now, fleeing war and extortion and pistols pointed at their heads, crossing jungles, over deserts, across oceans, leaving behind buried family, bringing with their babies in arms, arriving out of vulnerability, searching for safety.

Their hope: That we the people will welcome them in solidarity.

But instead they're too often called criminals. They're locked up, put into cages, or cast away and rejected. These are the realities of America.

Just dreaming about a better world from up on that mountain top looking down at the border doesn't do a thing. The ongoing human rights catastrophe of how we respond to refugees at the US-Mexico Border poses an existential challenge to our nation's integrity. It shakes us out of our comfort zone.

There's a lot of hard work to be done. [The NADA acupuncture model](#) opens the door for us to do some of this work.

Tens of thousands of migrants have traversed the continent arriving at the US border in recent months, begging for asylum. From Honduras and Cuba and Uganda and Venezuela and places that this globalized world has failed, their struggle to survive has driven them to the banks of the Rio Grande, to the desert, to the wall.

Walking over the bridge today, I see hundreds of migrants corralled in the custody of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), huddled under space blankets, the children and adults, with pieces of these tattered silver plastic sheets clinging to the razor wire

strung above the chain link fences caging them, rattled by the cold March desert wind. They sit on the dirt and the gravel. They wait their turn to be processed by a fugue of racist bureaucracy, out of which they are most likely to, in the end, be imprisoned or deported back to the very places they fled out of fear. Many are kids who have suffered human rights abuses, some are dying, at the hands these authorities. Many immigrants already in the US have been hiding from immigration agents lurking in the shadows of our neighborhoods since Trump took office.

None of this makes sense at all. At least to me. What does make sense in my intersection with this borderland reality [is sticking needles in the ears of people and creating circles for them to sit within a supportive community of care in silence](#). And teaching other people within these communities how to hold this type of safe space. A growing number of these refugees are sheltered within local churches who offer hospitality and healthcare to people under siege. We partner with them. As a full body acupuncturist, I have the opportunity to witness these non-acupuncturists--NADA-trained volunteers--find bold new ways to offer this model of care: for migrants camped out on this bridge, inside Sunday school rooms, on pews after mass, in an overcrowded shelter alongside 600 other refugees.

Who are these people sitting silently together with needles hanging from their ears? A Colombian man who escaped a civil war in his home decades ago. A Guatemalan woman fleeing violence, carrying her infant baby by herself. A Cuban man who traversed Panamanian jungles escaping bandits and panthers to cross America. A Rwandan man whose entire family was executed, and as the lone survivor has passed through a dozen countries en-route to the US/Mexico border.

[The NADA model](#) gives us the opportunity to check our “othering” of migrants at the door and be radically present for whomever is knocking. Having hundreds of people now trained in the NADA protocol throughout the borderlands, ready and integrated into local communities, the ability to offer acupuncture makes our community more able to respond with compassion, to be able to open that door and step into their own humanity.

We remember here in the borderlands the Latino roots of the spirit of NADA now some 45 years since [NADA rose out](#) of a place of poverty and injustice and racism in the Bronx, just miles from Lady Liberty’s all-are-welcome torch, where another Latino community survived hard times by digging into the grassroots, out of which they transcended their social reality and inspired an international movement of solidarity, and created an authentic acupuncture-based preferential option for the poor. It is this spirit of solidarity with the poorest of the poor, wherever we stand offering acupuncture in America, that keeps us grounded and focused as a hard rain falls across this land.

Ryan Bemis, DOM, serves as Executive Director of [Crossroads Community Supported Healthcare](#), a 501c3 Non-profit organization whose mission is to make acupuncture affordable and accessible to people of all income levels through the support of local

communities. [Donate through their GoFundMe Campaign](#) which supports their Refugee Care Program. To find more information on volunteering as a teacher for their community acupuncture school in Mexico, Promotores Descalzos (Barefoot Health Promoters), visit to <https://crossroadsacupuncture.com/borderproject/>