**Excerpts from Bensman 1/20/22 Interview with Enrique Vidal of Fray Matias de Cordova**

Todd: What is the most common mistake that you see migrants in Tapachula make in these interviews?

Enrique: The Mexican authority always looks for the person to express their motives or economic necessity and when the person recognizes that it’s because of the economic need then the Mexican authority denies the refuge because it’s not one of the requirements. But that is basically a trap from the Mexican authorities because having an economic necessity does not exclude that as being one of the reasons *-if-* they had previously suffered from *other*of the requirements where they could be recognized as refugees.

Todd: Wait, wait a minute...

Enrique: And in other cases since they have other traumatic events for the people they need of a lot of psychological assistance to clear things in their memories so that they can remember what they went through in their country.

Todd: What do you mean by that?

Enrique: Yes, for example people suffered different acts of violence, sexual abuses, detentions and or tortures. It causes a big stress and can cause memory loss of dates when they suffered. Then the Mexican authority says it’s not believable, their cases, but in reality they are suffering from previous traumas of their situations.

Todd: So does your group help them remember the details of these qualifying traumas?

Enrique: Yes, based on the Psychological support we provide. So not only do we have a team of Lawyers we also have a team of psychologists specifically for this purpose. And finally, the people when they arrive to Mexico they feel persecuted by the Mexican authorities and sometimes they don’t provide them the trust in the interview.

Todd: Ok how often would you say your team helps them remember their traumatic situations, like give me ideas? How common is that?

Enrique: All the time.

Todd: So are most of the people you are helping people who already made the mistake of not telling the authorities their traumatic experiences that qualify?

Enrique: Yes, that’s how it is.

Todd: So most of the people you are helping have already been declined. Most of your clients have already been declined?

Enrique: well in reality most of the people contact us before recurring to the process and there is a minority of people that contact us once they have been denied.

Todd: Oh ok a minority.

Enrique: So basically we do a lot of prevention work, we provide the legal assistance before they began the process so that they do not commit an error in their process.

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Todd: Ok so know let’s move to the psychologists, who are they?

Enrique: They are also Mexican nationals that studied Psychology and they emphasize in Social Psychology not in Clinical.

Todd: Like counselors they can’t prescribe medicine or something like that.

Enrique: No, in general we recognize that the person might have several mental issues. With good psychological treatment and counseling, medication is not necessary.

Todd: But..but Primarily, these people are there to help them unearth buried memories. Is that accurate to say?

Enrique: What was that I did not understand that.

Auden: He’s basically asking that the Psychologist service is to unbury their memories.

Enrique: That. And to stabilize their emotional situation once they arrive in Mexico so that they can be in Mexico in a stable manner.

Todd: It’s very, um, what is the term? There’s a term I heard before about this whole thing of buried emotions.

Enrique: Terms? Well yes we have two terms that we use that recognize the impacts of a traumatic event, and the second one is the recognition of coping. They are medical terms.

Todd: They suppress, so this is about suppressed memory trauma making people suppress their memories...

Enrique: No not suppress. It is the contrary, like re-establish the trauma.

Todd: Unearth?

Enrique: And they can express in a dignified and relaxed manner [to Mexican immigration adjudicators].

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Enrique: By accepting a refugee status it prevents a detention or deportation process. But we have an immense number of cases of persons that are being detained and deported but have their refugee status in process. Which is violating their rights according to Mexican law and International treaties. And another service is to assist them in the Interview process for guidance.

Todd: But what kind of guidance.

Enrique: The interview is the most important part of the process because it’s the moment when the Mexican authorities listen to their cases and their motives as to why they left their country. Their motives have to be according to the international laws.

Todd: So you provide this? Do you have lawyers that are helping with this?

Enrique: Yes, we do have a team of lawyers assisting the cases.

Todd: Ok so these lawyers will be present during the interview or help them before the interview?

Enrique: Both, depending on the situation if we assess that they are vulnerable we provide them an assessment. And finally, when the people are rejected, we provide legal resources to appeal before the Mexican federal courts.

Todd: Why do these immigrants need legal help for their interviews? What kind of trouble do they face if they are alone?

Enrique: Well, there are a lot of barriers and I will explain some. Number one, there is a waiting list of approximately 3-4 months just to start the refugee process.  Then a second barrier is that the persons do not know the motives as to how they can be recognized as a refugee. For example, for everyone who has an unstable economic problem, the refugee will not be accepted, as that is not one of the requirements under the immigration process. However, when we interview the persons, we discover that they have motives as to why they fled their country due to violence or risks of tortures or detentions that may qualify for the refugee status.

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Todd: Oh ok. I have to ask you this you know that there are going to be people in the United States, probably Republican people who will read about what you do. They'll see this thing about repressed memories, helping to come up with details traumatic experience, and they are going to make fun of this and say that you are just coaching to get this lie this way. What would be your response to Republican types with things like this. You know they are going to say this. They are going to say this.

Enrique: Yes, they have told us before on other occasions.

Todd:   So what is your response

Enrique: Well I’d think in two responses. One of them... it’s necessary to gain a better understanding of knowing their situations in the country of origin. About their context in their country to understand the stories are not an exception but are happening to the majority of the population. It’s important to recognize that they are not an exception in their countries. and Number two is more of a psychological answer, which is maybe a lot of people who have faced the situations...to explain something that they [Mexican immigration adjudicators] will not believe happened. And it is more complicated to explain when you know they will not believe you. It’s hard to convince them.

Todd: Yeah yeah I think there will be Americans who will read this and say you are coaching immigrants to lie to get their refugee status ... What do you say to that?

Enrique: IF in the majority of the cases the people would be lying we wouldn’t be successful. The authorities would not approve of our cases as refugees. If we have a high percentage of success, it is because it the truth about what the people are saying. Because for a migrant, it is much more difficult to lie...and the authorities would find out about that. The other thing is that we have a very good relationship with the authority in charge of the procedures of refuge that is different of that of the Immigration Law. And this authority believes in us in our work and our organization.

Todd: Ok Ok . But you would dispute completely you are coaching these people to say what they need to say to get refugee status?

Enrique: yes of course we deny completely because the situation of the people is so dramatic is hard to lie in that type of situation.  Only a person that has lived and experienced those things has the capacity to explain them.

Todd: But you know the Mexican authorities that are hearing these stories don’t really have the resources to investigate the stories, do they?

Do they ever investigate? To verify the stories.

Enrique: Yes, well the Mexican authority in charge of the refuge that is called Commission Mexicana de aura a Refugio’s Mexican Commission for Refuge Help “COMAR" have a list of information about the situation in every country. This information is provided by de Secretary of External Relations of Foreign Affairs

Todd: But even American authorities don’t have the resources, when they hear a story of persecution and torture, they can’t possibly verify them. Even the Americans can't possibly verify the stories. They just... you know how it is ...they just say ok. They don’t have the ability to make an investigation on thousands of cases.

Enrique: Yes, well

Todd: And the Americans are rich!

Enrique: well one is that United States receives much more fillings from much more countries than what Mexico receives and Mexico is easier.

Todd: Ok well I think what else should I know about your operations do you have any number for me like how many you help or any kind of information like that.

Enrique: well before the pandemic in 2019, 18,000 people arrived to our offices in which we followed 3,000 people in their process individually in there filing as per the rest we gave collective assessment.

Todd: oh wow that’s a lot.

Enrique: yes, we have a lot of work

Todd: is it accurate to say the message and the teaching to deemphasize the economic need and increase the emphasis of the traumatic experience is accurate?

Enrique: well yes the more violence the person has experienced, generally they had to relocate within its country and, before losing their homes, they also lost their jobs. A person who is fleeing because of violence is also suffering financially.

Todd: yeah but I guess what I mean is… if a migrant tells the authorities I’m coming to get a better job… I don’t have job opportunity in Haiti or Guatemala and that’s the main reason I am going to the United States they’re not going to get in. They will be declined.

Enrique: Exactly

Todd: the information they get from you is… don’t say that as much as the other things as to why you left.

Enrique: Exactly but we have to explain why they can’t get a job because behind that reason violence had occurred and fear the return back to their country.