

# **“Mi casa es tu casa”**

## **Refugees in Mexico and at UDEM**

Thomas Buntru  
Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico

# **“Mi casa es tu casa”: Refugees in Mexico and at UDEM**



# Mexico: A Haven for Persecuted People

1920s

- Christian Arabs from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine
- Dissolution of Ottoman Empire
- New Arab nationalism
- Carlos Slim



# Mexico: A Haven for Persecuted People

1930s and 1940s

- Europeans fleeing totalitarian regimes
- Spain: Republicans, anti-fascists
- Soviet Union: Anti-stalinists (Leon Trotsky)
- Germany: Jews, socialists, anti-fascists
- Gilberto Bosques Saldívar, Mexican Consul in Marseille during WW II
- Many artists and intellectuals: Kati y José Horna, Anna Seghers, Leonora Carrington, Eva Sulzer, Margarita Nelken, Wolfgang Paalen, Alice Rahon, Benjamín Péret, ...





# Mexico: A Haven for Persecuted People

1950s

- Europeans fleeing post WW II economic hardship, among them many European Jews
- U.S. citizens fleeing McCarthyism
- Latin Americans fleeing dictatorial regimes, especially Guatemalans and Cubans
- Fidel Castro



# Mexico: A Haven for Persecuted People

1970s and 1980s

- South Americans fleeing military right-wing dictatorships (Argentina, Chile, etc.)
- Major contributions to higher education and academic culture in Mexico by South American intellectuals and academics

# Mexico: A Haven for Persecuted People

1990s

- Influx of Eastern Europeans looking for new opportunities after collapse of the communist regimes in their countries
- Great contributions to science and the arts
- Central Americans fleeing violence and economic hardship in their countries







# Mexico: A Haven for Persecuted People?

2000s and 2010s

- Venezuelan economic and political refugees
- In Monterrey alone: more than 10,000 Venezuelans
- Central Americans trying to reach the U.S.
- Many stay in Mexico
- “La caravana”
- Significant increase in asylum petitions (ACNUR/UNHCR)
- Abuses against migrants by government officials and organized crime





# UDEM: Origin and Philosophy

Founded in 1969 by  
5 religious congregations.

Humanism, openness,  
service.

A model of liberal arts education.

“Man finds fulfillment  
only in service to his  
fellow men.”



# UDEM: Community Engagement

UDEM received the Changemaker Campus designation in social innovation education by Ashoka U.



181 community service projects in 79 different organizations.

Community and social development programs:

**CESADE**



Factor 360

Emprende Mujer





## **Programs for Scholars at Risk at UDEM**





# Habesha Project

- Founded in 2014 by Adrián Meléndez, Mexican lawyer and philanthropist
- Directed at displaced Syrians
- Habesha provides plane tickets, Spanish language and Mexican culture course in Aguascalientes, placement at participating Mexican university, and
- MXP 4,000.00 monthly stipend



# Habesha Project

Participating Mexican universities:

- ITESO (Guadalajara)
- UNAM (Mexico City)
- Universidad Anáhuac (Mexico City)
- Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes
- **Universidad de Monterrey**
- Universidad del Valle de México (Mexico City)
- Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico City)
- Universidad Latina de América (Morelia)
- UPAEP (Puebla)





# Habesha Project: DAR

**Origin:** Suggestion by UDEM student federation who learnt about Proyecto Habesha

**Meaning:** Arabic: house, home / Spanish: give

**Background:** Civil war in Syria

**Objective:** Give a second chance to students from Syria, so that they may continue their studies and have better opportunities for successful careers

**Beneficiaries:** Students from Syria who are supported by the NGO Proyecto Habesha (currently there are two at UDEM)





# Habesha Project: DAR

**Requirements:** Letter of intent, personal history, high school diploma, recommendation by university and NGO, interview, approval by SRE (visa) and SGob (immigration)

**Benefits:** Full tuition scholarship, housing in Residencias UDEM, health insurance, academic counseling, UDEM buddy, PPF

**Source of funds:** UDEM operational budget

**Maintenance of scholarship:** GPA of 85, full academic load (36 credits), no failed class, no withdrawals, participation in service learning events of Habesha UDEM, comply with Habesha regulations and code of honor, participation in intercultural dialogs, graduation



# Habesha Project: DAR

## Student voices:

“At first, my family was not so sure whether it was a good idea for me to go to Mexico, because of its reputation, but now they are happy to see me thrive and continue with my studies in a very protected environment.”

“People here are very friendly, and I was surprised about the great cultural diversity.”

“The initial culture shock was strong, but I have overcome it. The most difficult aspect was getting used to the food here.”

“We feel very welcome at UDEM and are very grateful to both UDEM and Proyecto Habesha.”



# ReconoceR

**Origin:** Alejandro González Iñárritu as guest speaker at “UDesign”

**Background:** Situation of “Dreamers” in USA

**Beneficiaries:** Undocumented, 17 to 25 year-old students from Mexico and Central America living in the US under the threat of deportation; currently there are 8 students at UDEM; 4 more will be admitted in Fall 2019

[www.becasreconocer.org](http://www.becasreconocer.org)





# ReconoceR

**Conditions:** Proof of legal situation in the U.S. and documented financial need

**Requirements:** 1,100 points on PAA, two essays (life experience, professional aspirations), interview

**Benefits:** Full tuition scholarship, housing in Residencias UDEM, health insurance, academic counseling, semester abroad

**Source of funds:** Seed money from Alejandro González Iñárritu plus other donations

# ReconoceR

## Student voices:

“I thought that going back to Mexico would be a step backward for me, but it has turned out to be a huge leap forward.”

“In the U.S. I did not dare to speak out because of my legal situation. Now I feel free and able to achieve my goals and flourish.”

“My self-perception has improved tremendously.”

“The adaptation process has not been easy. You feel that you speak the same language, yet you don’t understand the culture.”

“I am Mexican, but at the same time I am not from here.”

“Sometimes I feel that I’m not from here; that they don’t want me here.”

“Most of my friends are international students.”

“I learnt about the program through “Dream in Mexico”. They also helped me with the whole process.”

“After my parents saw how I was thriving here, they decided to move back too.”



# Other Initiatives at UDEM

- Contributing membership in Scholars at Risk Network (first and only Mexican member in SAR)
- Membership in IIE (Scholar Rescue Fund)
- Linde Scholars (50 students)
- Formar para transformar (students that develop social entrepreneurship projects, 30 students)
- Atidi Scholarship Fund (Jewish students in need from Latin America, 3 students/year)
- Harp Helú Scholarship (indigenous students from southeast Mexico, 10 students)
- Fideicomiso Fernando Bustos Barrena (graduate programs in educations for seminarists in need)
- Nuestros pequeños hermanos (full scholarships for orphans, up to 3 students per year)





THANK YOU!