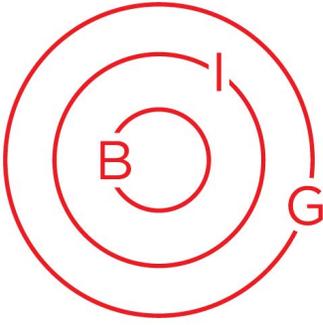




BORDERS IN GLOBALIZATION





Borders in Globalization Research Project 51

The Categorized and Invisible: The Effects of the 'Border' on Women Migrant Transit Flows in Mexico

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Since the 1960s, border controls have undergone a transformation and become more restrictive, driven by the security needs of the state. Whereas in the past border controls were typically focused on external, geographical and territorial demarcations, border policies have now become centred on internal security measures along with specific focus on the creation of categories or classifications of people. State control of migration, or migration management, has witnessed a similar shift where the categorization of individuals places certain people in more precarious situations. Border control and migration management present an interesting and inter-related relationship where border controls and enforcement represent a specific instrument within a state's migration management tool-kit. In this case, border control mechanisms automatically create categories for all migrants.

This paper takes as its starting point the categories that create increased vulnerabilities as soon as an international border is crossed: "unauthorized", "illegal", "irregular", "alien", "foreigner", which may place migrants in more dangerous and risky situations, impacting their mobility as well as their human rights. This danger may be more pronounced during the journey from the country of origin to the country of destination. The journey, or being in-transit, represents a limbo for migrants where their citizenship, and all the legal rights attached to this citizenship, has been left behind in the country of origin. Thus, given their 'unauthorized' status, they may be more prone to human rights abuses and insecurity while in-transit.

With regards to the securitization of migration, border control policies imposed by the state have come to define the relationship between the state and the individual body; when a body is classified in clandestine terms, migrants embody this illegality and must travel with it. Nowhere is this more evident than in Mexico, especially in the case of women migrants generally, and women migrant workers (WMWs) specifically. Over the past years, there has

been a steady increase in the number of Central American migrants entering Mexico in hopes of reaching the United States (U.S.). Every year hundreds of thousands of migrants enter Mexico to transit to the U.S. Between 90 to 94 percent of this transit flow originates from Central America – principally from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – and they mainly enter Mexico through the border zone in Chiapas (Diaz Prieto and Kuhner, 2014: 16). In 2014, the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) detained a total of 119,714 migrants from Central America of which approximately 40 percent were from Guatemala, another 40 percent were from Honduras and 20 percent were from El Salvador (SEGOB, 2014). It is important to note that this official number does not demonstrate the number of migrants who avoided detention and thus it is difficult to statistically measure the whole ‘unauthorized’ or ‘irregular’ population of migrants. It is equally difficult to estimate the number of women migrants that transit through Mexico in order to reach the U.S. – nonetheless reports place this estimate between 20 to 25 percent of the total transit population (Diaz-Prieto and Kuhner, 2014; Dresel 2012). This rise has great implications not only for the U.S., but increasingly for Mexico as it attempts to address this population influx. From a security perspective, border control logics, which have been implemented by the U.S., are progressively becoming the same border control logics practiced by Mexico where it appears as though the U.S. border with Mexico is extending outward, through Mexico, to the Mexican southern border with Guatemala. The humanitarian consequences of this border control on ‘unauthorized’ women migrants from Central America transiting through Mexico have been alarming.

This paper aims to examine how state border controls further marginalize Central American women migrants in-transit through Mexico and makes them more insecure while travelling and attempting to find employment en-route. It argues that rather than protecting ‘unauthorized’ migrants, border controls construct negative categories and create forced invisibility, which enhance danger and vulnerability while in-transit and disregard the

structural roots of this migration. Building on a research trip in 2014, this paper expands on observations from three months of fieldwork in Mexico as well as policy analysis. The research trip, combining field notes and semi-structured interviews, took place in states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, which serve as two prominent states along the migrant route to the U.S.-Mexico border¹. Section one provides a background of the concept of borders and the shift from physical borders to what may be referred to as bordering (Rumford, 2011). It delves into some of the current flaws surrounding the border logic implemented by the U.S. and how these logics are being adopted by the Mexican government, especially with the implementation of the policy *Programa Frontera Sur* (PFS). The second section examines how these border controls produce categories, which encourage the stigmatization of women migrants not only as they attempt to negotiate safe passage while they transit through Mexico, but equally as they attempt to find work. Section three delves into the problematic of invisibility where, given the ‘unauthorized’ migrant category, migrants live unprotected due to the constant state of fear experienced by their imposed clandestine hidden nature. Due to feeling the need to remain invisible and hidden, they are unable to access the appropriate human or labour rights channels, which may place them in more vulnerable situations. By producing these migrant categories and invisibility, the ‘border’ contributes to a shadow or illicit market as these women are often unable to acquire ‘legitimate’ or ‘regular’ forms of work.

What is the “Border”?

International security discourse plays an important role in securitizing global migration by framing it as a ‘threat’ and ‘borders’ is an important partner in the global migration narrative. Our understanding of the ‘border’ as a physical space has gone through a

¹ The research, fieldwork and ideas contained in this chapter will form part of my dissertation research for the completion of my degree requirements at the Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA), Waterloo, Canada.

great transformation. Johnson and Jones (2011) discuss how the ‘border’ has changed in terms of place, perspective and performance. Historically, with regards to ‘place’, the border was understood in strictly physical geographical terms of fixed territorial lines demarcating one sovereign state from another. This fixed line, bounding a national territory, was to be militarily defended from enemy armies (Walters, 2006). In this sense, it was a traditional fixed line at the geographical edge of the state, typically with official ports of entry (POEs) whether on land, water or in airports. Similarly, the principal actor involved with the ‘border’ was the state. So in terms of perspective, the main actor, with respect to the question of ‘who borders’, was the state. This state-centric focus, typical of dominant International Relations (IR) theory, was responsible for viewing the border through a national security lens.

The concept of place began to be challenged in the 1990s due to the emergence of new global security ‘threats’, one being ‘unauthorized’ migration. In the IR literature, this migration threat was framed as one of “high international politics” that required state-centric responses due to the internal instability that this international security crisis would generate (Weiner, 1993). Indeed, migration was framed as a danger to domestic society, whether to cultural homogeneity, or to the social welfare system, and so the regulation of this migration, through border controls, was viewed as a protection of internal security (Huysmans, 2000). The state had to be pre-emptive and ensure that this migratory flow did not reach official territorial lines and thus the border started to shift – expanding externally and internally – promoting a ‘delocalization’ of the border (Walters, 2006: 193). If these ‘unauthorized’ migrants did reach and surpass the official border, they had to be monitored internally in order to be apprehended and, subsequently, deported. Essentially, the migration ‘threat’ blurred the lines between internal and external border security (Bigo, 2002).

Consequently, there was a shift from ‘borders’ to ‘bordering’ in that borders were no longer fixed lines but rather processes and practices occupying both internal and external

spaces (Rumford, 2011). Borders became virtual and non-physical, making it difficult to distinguish where they began and ended. They became technologies of pre-entry, entry and exit. Amoore (2011) refers to this border expansion as ‘spatial stretching’ whereby biometric technologies and risk profiling began to operate well beyond state borders. Entry extended all the way to pre-departure at the country of origin and bordering practices were equally exercised internally. As a result, borders are constantly moving internally due to the movement of border enforcement officials to internal checkpoints which can be within 100 miles of a POE (Mountz, 2011), to local cities in the U.S. with 287 (g) agreements or programs like Secure Communities, which are local-federal immigration partnerships allowing local police officials to conduct immigration enforcement (Coleman, 2012). Traveler status management is yet another example where those travelers who have entered a state may be tracked while inside to ensure they do not overstay.

Intertwined with the previous point is how there has been a ‘corporeal turn’ with respect to bordering practices (Salter, 2006; Amoore, 2006; Doty and Provine, 2011). Given the complexities of the border and the enforcement mechanisms practiced in the name of border control, this ‘spatial stretching’ really coincides with bordering process and practices that are associated with the personal body and to a great extent depend on the individual body in question. As a result, the inside and outside become so blurred that they no longer carry the same distinction because it is the individual who is perceived as a risk and a threat (Bigo, 2002). Rygiel (2013) refers to this phenomenon as the ‘corporability of mobility’ by which mechanisms are put in place in order to seek to control the individual body as it moves through space. In this regard there is an interconnection between bordering, mobility and the politics of bordering. Mobility becomes relational and politicized in that it is connected to the mobility and/or containment of others (Hyndman, 2001) and the border becomes a relationship between the state government and a particular body in question. This shift to

bodies explains how ‘bordering’ is performed or enacted by bodies on the move. As borders become virtual they are carried on bodies, may be materialized in a number of ways and are used to govern and control migration (Amoore, 2006; Squire, 2011).

The bodies of migrant women add a level of complexity to this bordering dynamic. Border control by virtue of assigning legal categories to individual bodies enforces the immobility of ‘unauthorized’ migrants. Critical feminist and feminist border thought illustrate that marginalized bodies are not only subordinated by categories such as ‘unauthorized’ or ‘illegal’. Their mobility is equally impacted by race, class, gender and ethnicity. Therefore, women migrants experience multiple layers of marginalization or what Ruiz-Aho (2010) refers to as “intersectional oppressions”. It is important to note those multiple vulnerabilities when discussing transit migration for Central American women migrants, because while it is true that they experience the border on their bodies, most are also coming from poverty and a *machismo* culture where structural gender violence is often the norm (ACNUR, 2015). Furthermore, during their transit, they are placed in a more vulnerable position simply by being a woman, as they are prone to sexual violence. This is a prominent issue as this type of gender subordination is often neglected in anti-colonial theories in favour of “national populist constructions of the oppressed subject (as in the collectivity, el pueblo)” (Ruiz-Aho, 2010: 354).

The U.S.-Mexico Border, Enforcement Logics and Flaws

As years have passed, migrants entering from Mexico have been increasingly securitized. Control and enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border has undergone radical changes in recent history. For instance, in his book *Operation Gatekeeper*, Nevins (2010) provides a useful historical trajectory of the shift in public perception with regards to

‘unauthorized’ migrants, which began to take hold in the 1960s. He notes that during the 1950s and early 1960s, border security and immigration were quite liberal in nature, failing to demand much political attention. In the late 1960s, however, a shift occurred where the perception of crisis began to emerge demarcating the U.S.-Mexico border as dangerous and out of control. Indeed there were several factors both contextual and agent driven that engendered these perceptions. First, the success of the Chicano civil rights movement in the late 1960s, especially along the borderlands, led many to fear a possible U.S. Southwest secession. Second, in the 1970s there was an economic downturn and energy shortage, which led to fear of unemployment and the perception that immigrants would take U.S. jobs. Lastly was the conservative Nixon administration, which had declared a war on drugs and crime and often perpetuated a link between migrants and the drug trade thus further criminalizing ‘foreigners’ (Nevins 2010, 78).

Similarly, Andreas (2003; 2009) and Duvell (2011) have noted how these security perceptions continue to evolve, distinguishing between border security controls pre and post September 11, 2001 (9/11). In the 1990s, national security interests focused on the external physical border, creating and fortifying border fences. Unauthorized migration was primarily treated as a law enforcement matter on the U.S. side of the border and included an escalation of border policing (Andreas 2009). After 9/11, however, the expectation of success was significantly higher and, unrealistically, deterrence was required to be 100 percent (Andreas 2003). Subsequently, there was a prominent transformation in terms of border control and enforcement, which encouraged the blurring of the lines between the external and the internal for the sake of national security. The governance surrounding the border was not only to be implemented at border crossings but also internally, whether through work raids, local-federal immigration enforcement partnerships and/or increased deportations (Nevins 2010; Doty 2010; Coleman 2012). De Genova (2002) argues that this internal control places

migrants in a constant state of ‘deportability’. By instituting internal control within everyday life, the migrant is forced into a ‘state of nonexistence,’ constantly fearing deportation. This form of productive power disciplines migrants to live in a state of uncertainty.

The endless security realized by the U.S. government along the southern border continues to implement progressively restrictive mechanisms in order to control mobility, which further contributes to the securitization of migrants and raises humanitarian concerns. Increasingly, the logic behind border security appears to revolve around three prominent trends all of which exhibit various flaws. First, there continues to be an intersection between immigration enforcement and crime control (such as drug enforcement) agencies, departments and/or information, which contributes to the criminalization of migrants. Similarly, it is not only the intersection of multiple departments and agencies but the inclusion of different levels of governance, from federal to states to local police. The U.S. security elite believe that this type of exchange will lead to more efficiency and more cooperation by focusing on the accumulation of data and/or intelligence. There appears to be an incessant obsession with acquiring more data, more surveillance, more intelligence, which will inevitably, in their minds, lead to more security. One example of this type of multi-level/multi-knowledge approach is the creation of the Border Enforcement Security Task Force in 2012. The Border Enforcement Security Task Force or BEST as it is aptly called is one of the newest creations of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the arsenal of border security. One of the main reasons why it has been touted as such a success is because these teams incorporate “personnel from ICE, United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATFE), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United States Coast Guard (USCG), and the U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO), along with other

key Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies.” (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012). These teams also include Mexican and Canadian counterparts.

The second trend in the border security logic is the reliance on scientific and technical knowledge, which promotes increasing technological advancement along the border. This technological infrastructure relies on multi-million dollar contracts being awarded to private security companies. In 2011, for instance, ICE awarded more than 1.3 billion dollars to approximately 1, 300 companies (FedSpending.org, 2011). The last prominent trend appears to be the constant overemphasis on risk governance, which focuses on trying to virtually create a vision of ‘zero risk’. It concentrates on trying to quantify risk using assessments that attempt to predict all possible future scenarios in order maintain security at the border (De Goede, 2008). This type of mentality causes a fixation to be placed on security technologies, such as biometrics, and the outsourcing of surveillance infrastructure (Muller, 2008).

In all, these border governance logics are flawed for several reasons. First, it may appear that the information sharing and data gathering by multiple agencies would in fact yield new forms of ‘official knowledge’ and amass impressive amounts of data. The assumption would be that the more data gathered the more effective the security for the homeland. Nevertheless, although in theory the collaboration of multiple levels of government may seem more productive, in practice, the actual implementation of this new knowledge depends on the site in question. Mathew Coleman (2012) has done extensive research on border security with respect to federal-local partnerships in the U.S. focusing on how programs like *Secure Communities*² are unevenly implemented at each locality regardless of the same federal policy objectives.

² Secure Communities was an immigration enforcement program from 2008 to 2014. Its objective was to “identify and remove criminal aliens and others who pose a potential threat to public safety” (ICE, 2014). Secure Communities was replaced by the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) in July 2015.

The second flaw speaks to the problematic of realistically being capable of managing and/or controlling uncertainty with risk assessment schemes. Managing through risk profiles while trying to achieve a utopian vision of ‘zero-risk’ is essentially impossible because knowing *all* of the ‘unknowns’ and predicting *all* possible future scenarios is inconceivable. Yet this governing logic builds upon the authority of risk consultants that rely and promote a representation of a world without risk and uncertainty; controlling for all contingencies (Amoore, 2006). This type of unattainable ‘zero-risk’ approach promotes a culture of fear within society where pre-emptive security is seen as necessary and the politics of exception become normalized. Within this context, there is also the concern of subjective knowledges where these forms of knowledge are based on a particular subset of actors who have the authority and power to categorize populations based on a determined degree of ‘riskiness’ that they believe particular groups and/or individuals pose (Rygiel, 2013).

Overall, the concept of borders and all the diverse actors, institutions, technologies and knowledges involved in their creation and maintenance speaks not only to popular anxieties about an increasingly borderless world with the onset of globalization but also to the contradictions involved with state sovereignty. Brown (2010) discusses the escalation of wall building in a world that is increasingly globalized. One in which there is the simultaneous opening and blocking as well as one promoting universalization while at the same time pushing for exclusion and stratification. And the most notable contradiction is the relationship between sovereignty and borders where it is the weakening of sovereignty that generates “much of the frenzy of nation-state wall building today” but rather than being an expression of a sovereign nation-state, “the new walls are icons of its [sovereignty’s] erosion...they [walls] reveal a tremulousness, vulnerability...at the core of what they aim to express” (Brown, 2010: 24). Thus, despite the astronomical costs and its limited effectiveness

in terms of deterring migrants, borders continue to be legitimized by the political elite as an efficient form of governance.

Beyond the Frontier: Border Logics Applied at the Mexico-Guatemala Border

Equally distressing for border security governance is how similar border logics are being applied worldwide. Huysmans (2000) examines this ‘fortress mentality’ specifically in the European context where the EU focuses on clamping down on free movement at the expense of developing an appropriate response to the global issue. This fortress analogy has also been applied in the North American context and is clear when observing the border enforcement logics applied at the Mexico-Guatemala border. In the summer of 2014, the Mexican government implemented its latest iteration of border enforcement and securitization of migrants. It came at a time where the Mexican state was receiving intense pressure from the U.S. with respect to border security due to the media attention surrounding the humanitarian crisis of unaccompanied Central American children crossing into the southern U.S. Indeed, there was a significant number of unaccompanied children from Central America, which overwhelmed Border Patrol (BP) personnel, causing a media frenzy and public outrage in many southern states (Meyer and Boggs, 2014).

One of the major outcomes of the humanitarian crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border was increased pressure for the Mexican government to try and combat the ‘problem’ of irregular migrants, by working to secure the border with Guatemala and stopping this population within Mexico. The result was the implementation of *Programa Frontera Sur* (PFS) by the Peña Nieto administration in July 2014. Along with his Guatemalan counterpart, Otto Perez Molina, Peña Nieto agreed to implement this policy whose primary objective was to “protect and safeguard the human rights of migrants entering and transiting through Mexico and to regulate international crossings so as to increase the development and security of the region” (Presidencia de la Republica, Mexico, 2014). This objective promotes two prominent

narratives; one associated with the protection and human rights of migrants and the other connected to the reinforcement of security by enhancing regulation and creating orderly migratory movements.

Upon closer investigation, however, it appears that the program is more concerned with facilitating restrictive forms of border controls as well as applying comparable border enforcement logics witnessed in the U.S. context. When the program was launched, it came with five distinct line action items. Four of the five action items relate to border security and controlling migratory movements, all of course in the name of the migrant's security and protection. The largest claim to migrant protection is the use of a temporary visa scheme, the *Tarjeta de Visitante Regional* (regional visitor visa), which is meant to give migrants a temporary regular status to be able to move freely while on Mexican territory and thus be less prone to being victimized at the hands of organized criminal groups.

In theory, this temporary visa appears to offer some form of protection to transit migrants. Nonetheless, in practical terms, this visa has several shortcomings with respect to migrant protection. First, this visa option is only applicable to Guatemalans and Belizeans, which leaves a large proportion of the migrant population outside the scope of eligibility. According to official statistics presented by the INM, out of the total Central American migrants it detained in 2014 (119,714) only 47,794 were from Guatemala and 42 from Belize. The remaining numbers represent migrants from El Salvador (23,131) and Honduras (47,521), and smaller numbers coming from Costa Rica (31), Nicaragua (1,180) and Panama (15) (SEGOB, 2014). Of course given the nature of official statistics, these figures do not include individuals who were able to evade authorities. By examining these statistics, we may conclude that the temporary visa declared by PFS leaves a substantial portion of this transit flow without protection while in Mexico.

Even more flawed is the temporality and the spatiality of the visa itself. Of the small percentage that is able to acquire this visa, the protection afforded to them with this ‘regular’ migratory status is only three days long; a seventy-two hour window. After this timeframe, migrants from Guatemala and Belize are once again ‘irregular’ if they do not return to their country of origin. Furthermore, the mobility sanctioned with this visa is quite restricted as it only covers the southern states of Campeche, Quintana Roo, Chiapas and Tabasco (Presidencia de la Republica, Mexico, 2014). Given these restrictions, the primary objective of the policy does not appear to make sense. Protecting migrants while transiting through Mexico clearly implies that they are, in fact, in transit to another location (in most cases to the U.S.); so why restrict access solely to southern states? Likewise, the journey to the U.S. is at least 2000 kilometres long so a seventy-two hour window equally places them in a precarious situation as most migrants are unable to reach the U.S. in three days, which is already moot point as they are denied access to the northern states. Consequently, as the regional visitor visa is touted as a successful mechanism for the protection of migrants for the PFS, its primary objective instead should read as follows: “to protect and safeguard the human rights of [*some*] migrants entering and transiting through [*southern*] Mexico [*for a period of only three days*]”.

Unfortunately, when looking at these contradictory and inconsistent policy mechanisms, this program does little to protect migrants who are transiting through Mexico. It does, however, promote and advance border security logics by enhancing state control over this ‘irregular’ migrant population. By intensifying border security and increasing enforcement so as to bring ‘order’ to migration flows in Mexico, this program reinforces the securitization of migrants and benefits the state by allowing it to have more access to knowledge of this population. It securitizes this population by viewing ‘unauthorized’ migration through a state security lens rather than as a human rights or humanitarian concern.

Given the level of violence experienced in these Central American countries, particularly in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, many migrants are forced to flee their homes and this should be viewed as seeking humanitarian aid (Human Rights Watch, 2013; UNODC, 2013).

Furthermore, by effectively promoting inter-institutional collaboration between different forms of authority including federal, state, and municipal security forces (a principal border security logic also practiced in the U.S.) it criminalizes ‘unauthorized’ migrants connecting them to policing and penal practices rather than asylum practices. For instance, one of the outcomes of this program has been the creation of a Gendarmerie of 5,000 Federal Police agents with military training in Tapachula, Chiapas (IACHR, 2015). The increase in enforcement personnel has resulted in a rise of internal border security, especially the surge of checkpoints and raids. Rather than ensuring the safety of transit migrants, many migrant organizations have condemned the actions of the PFS indicating that these enforcement operations are responsible for the increase of violence towards migrants by security agents and a rise of detentions and deportations without due process (Boggs, 2015; Tourliere, 2015; IACHR, 2015). Finally, the program endorses the acquisition and access to data and more sophisticated data-sharing among multiple government agencies. First, to obtain the regional visitor visa, the individual has to be willing to register his/her biometric data with the Mexican government. In addition there are guidelines set within the PFS for reinforcing intelligence networks in prominent transit zones in collaboration with other state authorities, increasing knowledge exchange between local, state and federal counterparts and developing a technological platform for effective real-time biometric data sharing of migration registries (Presidencia de la Republica, Mexico, 2014).

Categories, Vulnerabilities and Precarity

Women migrants fall into this precarious migratory system. Central American women migrants transiting via Mexico already face structural vulnerabilities even before they decide to venture north. Notable discrimination and social hierarchies with respect to gender are prevalent in Latin American culture and permeate most daily economic and social interactions. Given this experience of '*machismo*' women are typically viewed as less than their male counterparts. For many of these women, it is precisely these structural vulnerabilities that become a primary reason for leaving their country of origin. They leave to obtain better opportunities; not solely economic opportunities but also better social and educational opportunities.

Thus being categorized as a woman migrant already places them in a more vulnerable position vis-à-vis male transit flows. It is equally important to note that women migrants may also be travelling with multiple categories, which in turn leads to multiple vulnerabilities. They are not only categorized as women but may also be poor, indigenous, from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, etc.; multiple categories that differentiate based on gender, class, race and nationality and are all constructed in a subordinate manner (Hyndman, 2001). Added to this complex dynamic is the state imposed category of 'irregularity'. Whether the category is 'unauthorized', 'illegal', 'alien', 'irregular', or 'undocumented' border security enforcement policies like PFS, despite their claims of protection, force this category of women migrants to put their bodies, health and lives at risk in order to survive. As such, borders are ideological because "they are productive and generative of placing people in new types of power relations with others" (Anderson et al., 2012: 76). Risk profiles, for example, classify and categorize between the legitimate and illegitimate or between the 'trusted traveler' and the 'illegal migrant'. The experiences of bordering can be quite different depending on which category is assigned as some bodies are afforded more mobility than others. Thus, one is

either deemed a “safe-citizen” that needs to perform according to those bordering expectations (Salter 2004; 2008), or an ‘unauthorized’ migrant that needs to hide and run in order to avoid apprehension and deportation.

An ‘irregular’ migratory category situates the woman transit migrant in a more marginalized and insecure position because, as soon as they cross into Mexico, they enter an illegal space where the state has prohibited entry. They, in turn, occupy a clandestine or illicit presence (Coutin, 2005) within the Mexican territory and must navigate their journey with this illegality in their everyday life. This category of people lives with this boundary-producing border all the time as they occupy a space of ‘non-existence’ (DeGenova, 2002). As such, they experience the border in their everyday world because “the borderline is not just at physical entry points at ports, airports, and land crossings” it is a process that has the potential to be materialized anywhere (Nyers, 2008: 166–67). It follows and surrounds them as they travel with ‘illegality’ or without state authority. Living with this category is connected to an emotional state of constant fear where the woman migrant is persistently afraid; afraid of being caught by migration agents, afraid of being deported, afraid of experiencing violence, and in the case of employment, afraid of being fired as well as deported, all due to a state-imposed border category.

Transit Flows and Shadow Labour

Being in-transit presents an interesting situation for the woman migrant due to its dynamic nature. Defining transit migration is difficult because ‘transit’ may, and often does, change due to time and space. It is not a straightforward process of departure from the country of origin to arrival at the country of destination. Rather, it evolves in stages where expectations surrounding the journey prior to leaving home may differ significantly from the reality. This is especially true for women who are categorized as ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’ as they face added challenges due to their migratory status. For instance,

women may be robbed, raped, kidnapped (Isacson et al., 2014; Diaz Prieto and Kuhner, 2014; CNDH, 2009; 2011) or may simply run out of economic funds to continue their journey. These interruptions usually change the length of the overall journey as well as the trajectory of the trip and their plans must adjust to accommodate these new realities on the ground. Consequently, women migrants who may not have initially set out to work during their transit face challenges that may make them change course due to necessity and they must adapt to achieve the rest of their journey.

The increased fear experienced due to the categorization discussed above is intertwined with this complex transit journey. It is directly connected to their everyday activities, including finding work while in-transit. Unlike temporary foreign workers, women transit migrants do not have the documentation and/or the legal status to work while in Mexico. They are in-transit, which indicates a liminal state where they are simultaneously outside (in transition or not yet arrived), but also inside (travelling through) a national space (Chavez, 1992). In this sense they may be physically present but also economically and socially absent and most devoid of the state's protection (Coutin, 2005). It is unsurprising, therefore, that these women acquire work illegally in the shadow market. Since they are afraid of being caught and deported while in-transit, they engage in shadow labour. This heightened fear leads to precarious conditions and various forms of exploitation.

With respect to labour, women who are categorized as 'irregular' face discrimination in employment as their migratory status is directly connected to their employment status and the labour market to which they have access. For women transiting through Mexico, the consequences of this categorization affect 1) their ability to actually secure employment and 2) labour market access and labour precarity. First, women migrants may find it difficult to find employment even within the informal shadow market. Mexican nationals may discriminate against 'unauthorized' migrants because there is a stigma associated with

foreigners, especially from Central America (Interview with CEDH representative, 18-Sept-14, Xalapa, Veracruz). Typically speaking, ‘unauthorized’ migrants are perceived in a very negative light, especially given the pervasive national discourse, which frames migration as a security concern. One woman migrant describes her situation, which resulted in being refused work: “People discriminated against me as soon as I mentioned I was from El Salvador. One lady said that the woman working for her before stole from her so now she doesn’t trust them [migrants]” (Interview with Central American Woman Migrant in-transit, 27-Oct-14, Oaxaca, Mexico).

On the other hand, if women are able to procure employment within the informal sector, it is commonly in highly gendered job markets – either as a domestic worker, as a waitress at a restaurant and/or as a bartender in a bar. Likewise they suffer from labour precarity. These types of occupations deprive women of a variety of legal protections. Employers know that they do not have work permits and often use their fears of deportation against them. They may be exploited by their employers either by working long hours, not being paid what was verbally agreed to, which can involve being paid less or simply not being paid at all, and/or being fired without just cause.

In addition, women who work during their transit may be faced with a lack of knowledge about the laws governing labour in Mexico and, if they do have the adequate knowledge, are often too fearful of accessing judicial mechanisms and coming forward to make a claim against the employer. The same may be said for access to medical care. Most Central American women migrants who engage in employment during their transit are frequently employed in the informal domestic work sector, which is said to be “one of the most vulnerable labour flows” (IMUMI and ONU Mujeres, 2014). There are several factors that contribute to this vulnerability. First, many women may be live-in workers, which at first may seem advantageous because they would not incur living expenses. But this type of live-

in condition, in reality, promotes more labour rights violations – especially being exploited by working longer than agreed upon while being paid the same. Moreover, these positions are traditionally paid very low wages, and have no employment contract, receive no vacation or vacation pay, no over-time pay, and/or sick leave (IMUMI and ONU Mujeres, 2014: 15).

Lastly, there is the potential danger involved with occupations within the service sectors, such as working as a waitress or bartender. In the Mexico context, the lines between a waitress or bartender and a sex worker may become blurred, especially in the southern Mexico border zones. It is difficult to know the exact number of women that take part in the sex industry due to the negative stigma attached to this form of work and its hidden nature. Numbers are not accurately captured by official statistics and thus it is equally difficult to know which women enter the work voluntarily or are forced into it. Those that are forced into prostitution are those that usually work in bars and/or brothels along the border in Chiapas (IMUMI and ONU Mujeres, 2014: 15). This occupation places women in an extremely precarious position in that they are subject to physical and sexual abuse and exploitation. Nevertheless since sex work is not considered a ‘legal form’ of work or a legitimate occupation, labour rights are unattainable, even in theory.

The Invisible Woman Migrant

Travelling without the state’s authority also means that women transit flows need to become invisible. Since state border controls impose immobility and further contribute to marginalization, they make women insecure and vulnerable forcing them to become invisible in order to survive while in-transit. The state of invisibility poses several problems. Being invisible during the journey and not being able to freely access public spaces exposes the woman migrant to increased danger and risk by virtue of not being seen. The consequences involved with being invisible may include severe exploitation, heightened violence,

disappearances and even death. The transit routes that are accessed to avoid apprehension may be especially more violent due to their secluded nature.

The condition of invisibility is quite prominent in Mexico. With respect to women transit migrants, the consequences of invisibility may be broken up into three issues: the mode of transportation used while in transit, the migration agents used to facilitate the journey, and the sex and gender-based human rights violations encountered while en-route. First, the very nature of invisibility positions women migrants outside conventional means of travel. The mode of transportation chosen, therefore, attempts to be hidden. Traditionally, migrants, especially those that did not have the economic resources for alternate transportation, boarded the freight train known as '*La Bestia*' (the Beast). The freight train '*La Bestia*' is a commercial cargo train with multiple northbound routes. It stretches from the Mexico-Guatemala border all the way to the U.S.-Mexico border. This mode of transportation was used in order to access a hidden transit route. The irony, of course, is that as more migrants continued to use this transportation route, it also became more known as an established transit corridor (Coutin, 2005). Both criminal organizations and state authorities became familiar with these routes and transit migration became an economic market to be exploited. Criminals, for instance, prey on the migrants that board the train. Criminal groups often board the trains and demand that migrants give them \$100 US to continue their journey. If they do not comply, they are often beaten, thrown off the train and left for dead (Isacson, 2014; Interview with Central American transit migrant, October 2014, Oaxaca, Mexico).

According to the Mexican government, one of the primary reasons for implementing the PFS was to stop these human rights abuses along the train route. Once the PFS was realized, however, there was an enormous increase in the amount of raids occurring along the train route by INM officials and other state authorities. The result has not been positive for women migrants. The intensity of raids along the prominent train route means that migrants

now have to find alternate and more secluded routes – often in deeply wooded rural areas of the interior, far from any type of protection. Currently, this transit flow is even less visible and more vulnerable than it was prior to the PFS (Boggs, 2015). Transit migrants continue to experience severe abuses that are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. By being pushed into ever more secluded areas, migrants become easier prey for criminal groups who capitalize on this invisibility, target migrants who venture into rural areas, and either rob, kidnap or extort them. In recent months, not only has there been a surge in the amount of robberies experienced by migrants (Boggs, 2015; Meyer and Boggs, 2014), but there has been public outcry from human rights organizations like Amnesty International (AI) which claim that Mexico has become a “mortal trap for migrants” and urges the “Mexican authorities to investigate the atrocious increase of violent attacks against undocumented migrants by criminal groups” (AI, 2015; BBC, 2015). According to the AI press release, more than 200 migrants were targets of a brutal attack, and several were killed by armed groups in two separate attacks [in a couple of months] (AI, 2015; Avila Perez, 2015).

Women migrants also fall victim to abuses by Mexican state actors. In 2009 and 2011, the *Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (CNDH) (National Commission of Human Rights) in Mexico published reports indicating that federal, state and municipal authorities were responsible for human rights violations including robbery, kidnapping and extortion. Similarly in 2013, a prominent Mexican non-governmental organization (NGO), *Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes* documented in their report testimony by migrants in-transit who had been assaulted by Mexican authorities. One woman migrant expressed that she was assaulted by municipal police forces in Tuxtla, Chiapas while trying to transit north. She stressed that she was taken in their patrol car to a wooded area where she was physical assaulted, robbed of all her money and her documentation (Interview with Central American Woman Migrant, October 2014, Oaxaca, Mexico). After the

implementation of the PFS, there have been numerous reports from NGOs and migrant shelters that abuses by authorities continue unabated during these raid and enforcement operations, where not only do soldiers increasingly take part in operations, but frequent violence is used to detain migrants (AI, 2015; La Prensa, 2015; IACHR, 2015). International organizations have equally expressed their concern over the human rights violations occurring in Mexico. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in a press release, explicitly urged the Mexican government to “implement international standards regarding the use of force in immigration control operations; investigate, on its own initiative, acts such as those described above; punish agents responsible for human rights violations; and provide reparation to the victims of these violations”(IACHR, 2015).

Coyotes: The Good and the Ugly

Not only does the forced invisibility cause the use of these modes of transportation, it equally creates the need for migration agents to facilitate the process of transit migration. Specifically migrants have to hide their presence even prior to departing from their country of origin by hiring a *coyote* or a *pollero*. Coyotes/polleros are migration facilitators who charge a fee in order to help smuggle migrants through Mexico and into the U.S. As soon as the decision is made to hire a smuggler, the migrant enters into this clandestine and invisible space as these migration agents do not operate in public spaces. Their ‘unauthorized’ category and the arduous, hidden journey through Mexico make it almost impossible to survive and arrive in the U.S. without the assistance of coyotes/polleros.

Hiring a coyote/pollero may have several advantages and disadvantages for the woman migrant. One advantage is that many women migrants attempting to transit are unfamiliar with the territory and unaware of the best transit routes to reach their destination. This is especially the case since the implementation of the PFS in 2014, which has pushed

migrants into different remote spaces. Since for many women migration to the U.S. is a survival strategy, most would be unable to move without the aid of a smuggler. Coyotes are knowledgeable and provide a service for these women; it is their business. One of the main problems with this business for the woman migrant, however, is how this type of business has evolved into one which is connected with organized criminal groups. This reality increases the insecurity and potential for human rights abuses for women migrants who essentially are taking a gamble and hoping they can trust these migration agents in their migration process.

Unfortunately for migrants, the business of coyotes/polleros has undergone a change in Mexico in the last ten to fifteen years (Interview with Migration Research Expert, 30-Sep-14, Veracruz, Mexico). Traditionally these migration facilitators were from the same community, were known and trusted among those individuals who resided in these neighbourhoods. People knew that the coyote had completed the journey north in the past and had helped many migrants on their road to the U.S. Currently, however, many traditional coyotes have been co-opted (either by threat or force) into a more sophisticated system of coyotes, which has direct links to criminal groups (Interview with Migration Research Expert, 30-Sep-14, Veracruz, Mexico). They operate as a network with several coyotes involved in the transit journey. As a result, migrants will meet and encounter many individual coyotes throughout their trajectory. Each coyote will be responsible for a specific region and can navigate it well. Since the group of migrants are passed off from one coyote to another, there is a lack of established trust in this relationship. It is strictly a monetary transaction. In addition, it is important to note that escalating border controls have increased both the need for coyotes but also the price of acquiring their services. As the pathways through Mexico become more dangerous and violent, the services of a coyote become more expensive to account for the risk involved. The average price for these services now ranges from \$5,000 US to \$10,000 US (Interview with Migration Research Expert, 07-Oct-14, Veracruz,

Mexico). Consequently, it has become common practice for migrants to take out loans in order to pay these fees (Coutin, 2005).

The lack of trust experienced by women migrants with regards to the coyote relationship may translate into abuses involving abandonment, kidnapping and extortion. First, due to their “intersectional oppressions,” women may be perceived as weak by their coyotes and thus more disposable when compared to the rest of the migrant group. Generally speaking, some women may be at a physical disadvantage, for example, when having to outrun state authorities. Coyotes make it very clear at the beginning of the arrangement that if anyone is unable to keep up with the rest of the group, they risk being left behind. Women travelling with children may be especially insecure since they are more likely unable to keep up with the rest of the group (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2013). Second, kidnapping combined with extortion is also a reality faced by many women migrants. Coyotes may try to take advantage of these women by extorting more money from their families than was originally agreed upon during the business arrangement. In this scenario, women are kidnapped and taken to safe houses where they are kept until a ransom of money is paid for their release (Migrant Shelter Administrator, 11-Oct-14, Veracruz, Mexico; Meyer, 2010).

Sexual Violence

Perhaps the most salient danger women transit migrants are exposed to during their journey through Mexico is sexual violence. Due to their sex, these individuals are victimized in very gender specific ways. Furthermore, given their state-imposed invisibility, this particular transit flow is unable to acquire any social justice despite the fact that their human rights have been gravely violated. Sexual violence is increasingly common along the transit route and the main culprits are not only criminal gang members or coyotes, but may also consist of male migrants, migration officers, police officers and/or security agents on the freight train. Sadly, this reality is becoming so common that being sexually assaulted has

become the norm when discussing women transit migrants in Mexico and was pointed out by several interviewees (Interviews with NGO representatives, migrant shelter administrators, migrants in-transit). This ‘new normal’ becomes an important mental and physical preparation for women migrants prior to departure in that many women take some form of contraception prior to starting their journey (Interview with Central American Woman Migrant in-transit, 29-Oct-14, Oaxaca, Mexico).

Equally disturbing are two links that have been associated with the increase in sexual violence. One is the connection to forced disappearances and human trafficking. Women, while en-route are disappearing and being forced into prostitution, especially in Tapachula, Chiapas - the southern border zones. They work in bars and traffickers often exploit their economic vulnerabilities promising more lucrative employment (Interview with NGO Director, 13-Nov-14, Mexico D.F; Prieto Diaz and Kuhner, 2014; Rodriguez and Davies, 2012). Moreover, a “significant number of them [women] are minors and they often suffer from extortion by various authorities” (ONU Mujeres, 2015: 15). The *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* highlighted this problem as a principal area of concern in Mexico and called for a harmonization of criminalization initiatives between federal and state level mechanisms as well as measures be put in place for prevention and prosecution (CEDAW, 2012). The other connection relates to sexual violence and kidnapping. Kidnapping and extortion have been identified as consequences of invisibility. Nonetheless, women migrants who are kidnapped are also often subjected to sexual abuse by their captor(s). According to the CNDH (2009: 6), the “sexual abuse and the frequent cases of rape are persistently associated with events of kidnapping of women migrants.”

Conclusion

In summary, Mexico presents an interesting case for examining border controls and transit flows, especially with regards to women migrants. The close geographical proximity to the U.S. border increases the pressure for the Mexican government to secure its 'borders' whether external or internal. Adopting similar border logics, however, has allowed the Mexican state to better control the 'unauthorized' or 'irregular' migrant population in the name of human rights and orderly migratory movements. The reality on the ground is quite different. Not only has the border enforcement controls implemented by the PFS caused more violence and insecurity for women migrants with respect to their transit, but it has also caused marginalization, vulnerability and precarity in the gendered labour market. This paper has argued that the main reasons for these effects are that these border controls construct and promote negative categories as well as forced invisibility, which enhance risk and danger for the woman migrant who is transiting through Mexico trying to reach the U.S. for better life opportunities.

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