

Leyes Cruelles - Lugares Violentos: Mexican Women's Testimonios
Along the Migration Journey

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Abstract

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Journey

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Women's stories of the immigration journey illustrate the high stakes of getting to the US in the first place. These show how national and transnational policies and consequential experiences of risk and vulnerability are strategically tied to particular places and peoples before, during and after the immigration journey. My work offers a bottom up approach in which hegemonic rules can be revealed and analysed critically; this work brings to light how experiences from the "other" are linked to particular national and transnational policies created in the name of US national "security." It shows broad forms of violence resultant from structures of inequality rooted in colonial power and contemporary neoliberal economy and policies. Testimonios from vulnerable migrants serve to uncover the hidden agendas and unfair detrimental consequences of these policies from people who experience multiple forms of vulnerability, even as they are constructed, in theory, as having 'chosen' to migrate.

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Dedication

To my uncle Antonio Mendoza Alvarez, my main inspiration for this work... we miss you!

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Lucero's Story:

Lucero, the seventh of ten siblings, is a young married woman with two very talented and lovely sons currently residing in the US. Her experiences of violence, risk and vulnerability in her home country and on the Mexico-US border were of such intensity that currently, although being coded as a deportable, vulnerable and highly exploitable body, she feels safer in the US.

Soon after arriving to the US,

“Varias veces me puse muy mal, muy mal de que todavía... Como traumada de tanta... Hay no! La delincuencia tan fuerte que había allá, todavía en la frontera y en el desierto la experiencia tan fea que pase...”

“Ahorita, ahorita vivo feliz. Este país es el mejor país que pude haber conocido yo. Yo me siento con una seguridad en este país que yo de por mi, no me iría, no me iría porque los últimos años que yo viví en México fueron, fueron muy feos; fuero que no podías ni dormir por estar mirando por las ventanas a ver que carro llegaba, quien eran, que estaban haciendo. No podías hacer nada, una desesperación. En el día no podías estar sola en tu casa.”

“Many times I got sick, very sick as [I was] still... like traumatized of so much... oh no! The horrible delinquency over there, also on the borderlands and in the desert the horrible experience I had...”

“Currently, currently I live happy. This country is the best country I could have found. I feel with so much security in this country that if it is for me, I would not live [form this country], I would not live because the last years that I lived in Mexico were, were very terrible; were that [one] could not seep because [one] had to be looking at the window to see what car arrived, who it was, what [he] was doing. You could not do anything, [it was] a desperation. During the day you could not stay by yourself in your house”
(Lucero, personal interview, 2013)¹

Lucero faced persecution in her home country

Lucero had a very short childhood. Her mother died when giving birth to her 10th daughter. At that time, Lucero was only five years old with three younger sisters. Unfortunately, her father was deeply affected by his wife's death. He became depressed, drank heavily and did

¹ Both the interviewed and the interviewer's first language is Spanish. Translations reflect deep knowledge of

not take responsibility for his children. The older siblings took turns in playing parental roles, while at the same time, were mistreated by their abusive father. One by one, as her siblings turned adulthood age, they migrated to the US, and the next one in line would take on parental responsibility. The remittances that her siblings sent back home, never reached any of the children's hands as her father spent it on alcohol. When sibling number six migrated to the US, Lucero was only fourteen years of age and was next in line to take care of her three younger sisters. She had just finished elementary school and was not allowed to attend middle school. Instead, she was at home full time to do all the housework. Although her father did have some wealth such as land, a few homes, cattle and other animals, she did suffer scarcity due to her father's careless behavior.

In year 2004, at age 19, Lucero married a middle class musician in her town. It was on the day of her wedding that she noticed the wave of violence reaching her little town, to which I will refer to as El Rancho.

“El día de mi boda fue cuando sentí que todo el desastre llegó ahí al rancho, al pueblo. Ese día de mi boda llegaron tres camionetas con gente, y ahí era donde iba uno de los que se llevaron a mi hermana...”

“The day of my wedding was when I felt that the whole disaster arrived there to the village, to the town. That day of my wedding, three trucks with people arrived, and there arrived one of the [guys] who kidnapped my sister...” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013)

Those who arrived in the trucks were part of Los Zetas, a powerful narco-cartel and/or contracted killers' gang. One of the members of Los Zetas, to whom I will refer to as sicarios, kidnapped one of her younger sisters a few months after her wedding. Lucero received multiple threatening messages requesting that her sister be delivered to the sicario.

“Hasta uno de ellos me mandó decir que si yo no le daba a mi hermana, me iba a aventar a la presa, que me iba a amarrar, me iba a matar y me iba a aventar a la presa, que por que se le hacía fácil eso para él.”

“Even one of them sent me a message telling me that if I did not give him my sister, he was going to throw me to the lake, that he was going to tie me, kill me, and toss me to the lake, because that was easy for him to do (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).”

Consequently, her sister faked interest and willingness to go with the sicario so that her family would not get hurt. One of her uncles ended up delivering her sister to the sicario. After this, Lucero did not hear anything from her sister for a month.

Feeling desperate and powerless, Lucero, along with her youngest sister who, very scared of being in El Rancho went to live with her in the city, prayed for their kidnapped sister’s wellbeing. When her kidnapped sister finally contacted them and was able to visit, 30 days later, she told of her suffering and did not want to live with the sicario, but she was with him under threat. The three sisters hugged and cried longing for the love and protection of their mother for a few hours until some members of Los Zetas came back and took her sister away once again.

During the following two years, Lucero made multiple attempts to take her sister back from the sicario. Getting the police involved worsened the situation. They were unable to catch the sicarios or get her sister back, and the danger for Lucero and her family increased. Numerous additional threatening messages, chases, and attempts to break into Lucero’s home took place. Lucero was extremely afraid to continue living in the city as she recognized that her family could not rely on police “protection” and knew that returning to El Rancho was not an option. Consequently, Lucero placed multiple locks and chains on the doors and windows of her house. To make things worse, some other members of Los Zetas killed two family members on her husband’s side out of misunderstandings and “revenge.” This meant that her husband was also in great danger. Although they were financially stable as her husband had a well-paid job as a musician and they owned a home in the city, as soon as she found out she was pregnant, she felt that security for both of them and her baby was more important. In December of 2006, unable to

rescue her kidnapped sister, she decided to migrate to the US along side her husband, her youngest sister, and five other members of her community who also received threatening messages from Los Zetas.

At the borderlands, Lucero tasted death

When they arrived at Tijuana and found some coyotes (“Mercenaries who sneak Mexican laborers [forced migrants] into America” (Conover 2006 p.9)) to cross the border, they had to wait for thirty days before they attempted to cross. During this time, they were lodged in a horrible hotel located in the most dangerous street of the city, according to the coyotes, and they were not allowed to leave the hotel.

On the morning of Lucero’s birthday, four coyotes arrived for them at the hotel. The coyotes told them not to bring anything as the trip was only a two to three-hour walk. The coyotes drove them to the border of the desert where their walking journey began. After walking for two hours alongside two unscrupulous coyotes, they arrived to a canyon where three robbers with weapons were waiting.

“Nos desnudaron todos completos, hombres y mujeres, para haber si triamos dinero. Nos quitaron lo mas bueno que traíamos... Eran cómplices con los [coyotes] que nos traían. Eran cómplices porque ahí empezaron a platicar y a tomar, y como traían pistola, pues nosotros no podíamos hacer nada.”

“They completely undressed us, men and women, to see if we had money. [They] took the best things we had... [They] were allies because they started talking and drinking, and because they had weapons, we could not do anything” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

After being robbed, they started to walk again. Five hours later, they complained about how long this, supposedly short, two to three-hour walk actually was. As a result, the coyotes verbally mistreated them. They walked the whole day getting tired, cold, hungry and thirsty.

“Caminamos diez horas, se nos hizo noche, empezó a nevar, eran un frío... pero frío. No traíamos ni abrigo, no traíamos nada. Después, nosotros gritábamos, pues desesperados

en el desierto, no sabíamos que hacer. Con hambre, a media noche empezó a darnos mucha hambre y sed.”

“We walked ten hours, it became night, it started snowing, it was so cold... very cold. [We] did not have [a] coat, [we] did not have anything. Thereafter, we screamed, desperate in the desert, [we] did not know what to do. Hungry, in the middle of the night we became very hungry and thirsty” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

To silence them, the coyotes violently struck one person. The coyotes were lost, having taken the wrong trail, they did not know what to do. In the meantime, Lucero had an intense and horrible pain in her whole body and bare feet, and for a moment she was left to die along with her unborn baby and husband in the middle of the cold desert.

“Y los pies... ya no los sentíamos de la nieve que nos llegaba tan alto, entumidos, este tiramos los zapatos: se nos rompieron los zapatos, los tiramos, veníamos arraiz, sangramos... todo lo que tu quieras mal. Yo empecé a sangrar mucho, y yo ya no pude caminar. Yo me quería tirar ahí en el desierto y... y el otro guía gritaba que ahí me dejaran, que siguieran los demás, y mi esposo se quedo con migo. Y yo le decía a él que siguiera porque yo sentía morirme del dolor que yo traía. Yo le decía que él se fuera, que me dejara ahí porque yo me iba a morir. Yo le gritaba, ‘vete! Que no te larguen! Que vas a hacer tu aquí solo?’” (muchas lagrimas).

“And our feet... we could not feel them because the snow that was so high, numb, [we] threw the shoes: the shoes ripped, [we] threw them, [we] were barefooted, [we] bled... all that you [imagine] bad. I started bleeding a lot, and I could not walk anymore. I wanted to laydown there in the dessert and ... and the other guide commanded in a loud voice to live me there, that the rest should continue, and my husband stayed with me. And I told him to continue as I felt like dying because of the pain I had. I told [him] that he should go, to live me there because I was going to die. I would scream, ‘go, do not let them live you behind! What are you going to do alone?’” (A lot of tears) (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

Soon after, all members of the group returned except for the coyotes, who did not agree with the decision to return, but came back a few hours later. A gallon of water her husband found nearby alleviated her pain. She intensively wished for the border patrol to find them. Her wish came true shortly after. The border patrol took everybody except the coyotes who ran as soon as they noticed the agents approaching. Although the coyotes shouted that everybody

needed to run from the border patrol, no one did. The migrants were united in solidarity through their fear and suffering.

Lucero and the whole group were incarcerated and then deported back to Mexico where their painful and deadly journey began once again under the guidance of less abusive coyotes.

Lucero feels “Safe” in the Destination: an anti-immigrant country

When Lucero arrived in the US, intense infections led her to lose her toenails and to be very ill. Two weeks after her arrival, Lucero visited a doctor who strongly suggested an urgent abortion because it was likely that her baby was going to be negatively affected by her infection. She was asked to sign a form so that she could be airlifted to a hospital in Spokane in order to have her baby removed. Lucero refused to sign thinking,

“Si había sufrido tanto en la frontera, si Dios quiso que no se me viniera, y aquí nomas sacármelo por nomas? Yo dije “no, no voy a firmar, no voy a firmar! Mi niño tiene que nacer bien.”

“If I had suffer so much on the borderlands, if God did not make me loose him, and here abort him just like that? I said, ‘no, no I will not sign, I will not sign! My baby has to be born healthy’” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

Lucero has worked in fields ever since her arrival seven years ago. Although this job is hard, she does not mind doing it as long as she feels safe in this country. She would not return to Mexico, and she will stay here as long as she can (implying as long as she does not get deported).

“Yo aquí me siento muy agusto. Aunque es sufrido trabajar en el campo, es duro, es duro para la mujer trabajar en el campo, pero a mi no me importa. Yo con que [mi familia] viva con esa seguridad que me siento aquí en éste país, no me importa trabajar. No me importa trabajar donde sea.” “... Mientras no me.... Me vaya [deporten]; porque planes de irme, no tengo.”

“Here, I feel very good. Although it is painful to work in the fields, is it hard, it is hard for the women to work in the fields, but I do not care. As long as [my family] is able to live with this security that I feel here in this country, I do not mind working. I do not mind

working anywhere. As long as I do not... do not live [get deported]; because plans to live, I do not have” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

Lucero’s experiences in the country of origin, the borderlands, and the destination raise a set of questions that I explore in this thesis. Specifically, why do women migrate? What are their experiences along the migration journey? And, How do they experience life in the US?

I argue that the high wave of violence in Mexico in the early 2000s, our current highly militarized border, and immigration reforms against non-white immigrants in the US affect women in unique ways. Even before the current wave of violence resulting from the US waged “war on drugs and terror”² in Mexico, women have been targets of physical abuse, kidnap, rape and murder particularly in northern states (Schmidt Camacho 2005). Ever since the current wave of violence, which resulted from “The war on drugs and terror” in the name of US national “security, violence against women has multiplied and spread to southern states, including Michoacán (Mireles 2014). This same militarized “war on drugs” serves to obscure violence against women because all deaths are linked to drug-related activities, which leads to devaluation of their lives and impunity regarding their deaths. Furthermore, this allows for their deaths to serve as evidence of the “effectiveness” of “The war on drugs” because the more people are killed, the more successful this war is said to be (Wright 2011). In our currently highly militarized US-Mexico border, women face multiple exposures including risks of rape, physical violence, abandonment, robbery, thirst, hunger, cold and dehydration. According to Pickering (2011) and Staudt et al. (2009), studies have shown that women are more likely than men to die due to exposure and have more painful deaths. All of this is due to our human-made, highly militarized zone that we call the US-Mexico borderland in which the rule of law is suspended

² This alleged war serves is a mechanism or a pretext for the US to maintain its hegemony and control over Mexico as well at to protect the ‘free’ economic market because agreements such as NAFTA generate high economic gains for the US. For more details, refer to chapter three: Origin, pages 18-33.

and the value of life is reduced to zero (or zoe) status (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 1998; Salter 2008); such border that is closed for immigrants in the name of national “security,” but nevertheless, open for capital (Newman 2006; Sparke 2013). In the destination, women’s bodies are coded as deportable, exploitable, vulnerable and individual (Pickering 2011). Their gendered bodies situate women immigrants in low paying and highly exploitative jobs, most often in the care sector (England & Dyck 2012; Momsen 2003). Attention needs to be paid to immigrant women’s testimonios of bodily detailed experiences in these three sites of the migration journey. Testimonios have the power to “expose brutality, disrupts silencing, and build solidarity...” (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012 p.363)³. Feminist theory and the Latin American tradition of testimonio bears witness to gendered suffering and violence, and engages politically by giving voice and full personhood to those who have been ignored or silenced (Alexander 2005; Geiger 1990; Silvey & Lawson 1999; Smith 1999).

Structural Risk:

While risk is mostly understood as uncertainty and could mean a lot of things, according to Lemke (2001) risk has been used as a tool to govern and to be governed in ways that seem natural. Risk and thus, security are contemporary forms of managing the populations from within through a simulated freedom. In other words, the state construct “normalized” subjects (civil society composed of white consumers) and “natural” risk (behaviors outside the norm) in forms that leads the population to “freely” behave in particular ways that will keep them safe with the assistance of the state. Risk thus, allows for the manipulations of conduct of conducts of the population, to what Foucault et al. (2009) refers as governmentality. Such conducts are meanly targeted to creating “normal,” healthy and productive populations in the benefit of the economy.

³ For more details about this approach refer to Chapter Two: Methodologies.

Thus, in this case, biopolitics serves to decide which populations are worth “protecting” and which ones are not; it helps in creating a divide of who lives and who dies (Lemke 2012), whose lives are worth mourning for and whose do not (Butler 2003). Because according to Lemke (2012), biopolitics imply that the death of some people leads to a better life for the population as a whole. In this case, race plays a major role in that the non-white, the subjects outside the “norm”, are the ones whose lives are not worth protecting but whose bodies are needed to be exploited in the benefit for the free and “natural” market. Coding the non-white as risky, therefore, has become a national and transnational practice. This helps to both, create a natural appearance of risky bodies and places as well as to create exploited bodies whose life are not worth protecting. National and transnational polices get created in the name of protecting the nation (the civil society, the white) from risky bodies while at the same time, policies are created to free the market and take advantage of such “risky” bodies and places.

In this thesis I analyze how historical and current discourses of risks towards the Mexican populations generate bodily suffering and segregation, making the non-white immigrant, that person who is not deserving of “protection” or that who must die. I look into how such risks have been perpetuated with the justification of, precisely, ending risk; but with the real intent to govern through an appearance of controllable risk (Ammore & Goede 2008) not only within the nation state (Coleman 2012), but also on the borderlands (Ines 2013; Nevins 2002) and places of origins (Corva 2008). There are two sides of such phenomenon, the US’s and the immigrants’:

On the US side, “risk is a construction, a way in which we govern and are governed” (Amoore & Goede 2008: 9). The main purpose of such a mode of governing is to fragment the human race and to generate an appearance of a controllable and securable risk. Thus there must be some humans framed as risky (the non-white) and others framed as needing and deserving

protection (the white) (Lemke 2011). Various discourses of risks in the US have justified national and transnational interventions and policies that allegedly would preempt risk and danger (Amoore & Goede 2008). Historically, the US⁴ has used various discourses of risks against non-white immigrants, especially Mexicans, in order to justify dehumanizing, exploiting and deporting such bodies. These immigrants have been framed as free subjects who make a rational decision to migrate due to economic gains they anticipate earning in the US (Durand & Massey 2001; Massey and Espionsa 1997). Such framings distract us from deeply rooted structures, which explain the main reasons why Mexicans immigrate in the first place. As Innes (2013) describes, these undocumented immigrants are responsabilized for their “irrational” decision to of “illegally” crossing the border and thus are deemed punishable for such radical “choice.” Depending on US’s economic needs and mode of governing, Mexican immigrants have been coded with various discourses of threats to the social order including discourses of invaders, job stealers, illegals, criminals, narco-traffickers and after 9/11, as potential terrorists (Coleman 2007; Nevins 2002). All these labels serve to code various forms of “risk” within and between individual bodies, and particular races, allowing for the mode of governing by biopower (health) and discipline (docile) (Amoore & Goede 2008). However, according to Amoore & Goede (2008), the real “risk” the US fear in this case are increasing unemployment and poverty resulting from these “abnormal” individuals who cannot claim fair wages and benefits, which does not favor consumerism and the market. Thus, when there is not enough demand for cheap labor, deportations take place in the name of safeguarding the nation (Nevins 2002).

The 9/11/2001 (hereafter referred to as the 9/11) attack has further served as an excuse to reinforce the border and more intensively scrutinize and manage mobility of people through the

⁴ Here, I refer to the US nation state government. More specifically, I refer to governmental institutions and individuals in power of decision-making.

usage of biometrics in the name of securing the border and with that, the nation state (Amoore 2006). As Amoore & Goede 2008 indicate, it is claimed that increasing police force and augmenting the application of “smart” technology (biometrics), both in airports and along the US territory border, will not only prevent but actually preempt terrorists’ attacks. Furthermore, according to the authors, it is argued such technology in combination with iron walls along the borderlands will decrease the risks the nation allegedly faces. However, ironically, the 9/11 attack did not originate from undocumented immigrants, nor did it come from international travels.

Moreover, in response to the 9/11 attack the US is (and has) creating transnational violence and risk. As Butler (2003) brilliantly points out, in the mist of this tragedy, instead of recognizing its own accountability and vulnerability and, through mourning, understanding the pain of loss other nations face in similar situations and thus how interconnected and dependent upon each other we are, the US promoted a biopolitical remedy. The US decided to further divide the human race, perpetuate and duplicate pain and suffering into other nations in the name of “security” by, supposedly, being able to preempt risk: by capturing and/or eliminating terrorists *before* they become terrorists. When there is an attack in the US, it is framed as a terrorist act; but when the US attacks, it is framed as a benevolent, legal act out of self-defense. Such war against terrorism has been enhanced with a stronger “war on drugs” and tougher immigration policies; these last two targeted towards Latin American countries, especially Mexico in the mid 2000s (Corva 2008; Maldonado Aranda 2012). While most of the consumption/demand of drugs takes place in the US, it is the supplier (and not the consumer) of such commodity who has been criminalized. It is alleged that the root, and thus the producer, of commodities damaging the populations who must be responsabilized (Corva 2008). Ironically,

the majority of the killings in Mexico due to the increased violence in the mid 2000s have been committed with weapons the US supplies (Mercille 2011). However, in this case, it is the consumer (and not the producer) of such commodity who is framed as the criminal. In both cases it is the “other” and not the “us” who is framed as the risky and criminal. With the excuse to fight such “crimes,” before these reach the US, the nation state provides monetary aid in order for Mexico to govern its populations with military force (Corva 2008; Maldonado Aranda 2012). Thus, the US is able to successfully create vulnerable populations not only at national levels, but also at international scales. Those “over there” become labeled as risky, irrational subjects who make free decisions to become narcos or to migrate illegally to the US in search for economic benefits.

On the non-white immigrant side, risk is experienced not only as a discourse. Risk becomes tangible and experienced on a bodily level at various intensities. In the case of Mexico (and the majority of Global South Countries), a combination of historical and current structural policies and interventions has created detrimental living conditions, especially in rural communities (Maldonado Aranda 2012). In this case, some have no choice but to either enter into the illicit business (Meraz Garcia 2012) or to migrate to the US in order recover their lost job and thus, avoid the risk of dying out of hunger and/or sickness (Sparke 2013). Basically these populations do not even count with the “appearance” of protection due to neoliberal policies that limit the Mexican government from providing that; instead, these policies require it to govern its populations by force as in the case of the so claimed “war on drugs.”

“The war on drugs and terror” serves as a pretext to code and to manage the Mexican (and other) populations in illiberal ways (Corva 2008). Although the Mexican government strives to divulge an appearance of protecting the lives of the populations through military

power, deep inequalities and structural violence continues to be unaddressed. Those involved in the “illicit” market were themselves, mostly, forced into this business (Meráz Garica 20012). Even some police and military officers end up getting involved in such for the same reasons. This has created unsafe and violent places leading to additional forced migration from Mexico (Wright 2011). Ironically, the sicarios are using the discourse, and reality, of risk to manage the population by requiring payment for “protection.” Also, civilians have armed themselves to protect themselves from the violence. In essence, the population must find ways to protect themselves; they can say, “I live because I protect myself,” instead of “I live because you (the government) “protect” me.” Thus in this case, risk has been used to manage the populations by perpetuating risk themselves (both the US and Mexican government), forcing the Mexican populations to commit violent acts (as in the case of the sicarios) due to unaddressed structural violence and inequalities. In fact the perpetuation of violence serves to mask such injustices and to code the population as risky instead. Many of those who emigrate fleeing from such violence, as in the case of about half of my participants, have suffered from both psychological and physical violence, pain, suffering and traumas in Mexico. They have encountered armed individuals, both police and civilians, everywhere in their daily lives and did not feel safe in their communities because they were afraid of being in the wrong place at the wrong time as shootings take place anytime and anywhere (cite). Furthermore, they have suffered from extortion, persecution, intimidations, and have witnessed kidnappings, assassinations and injuries of loved ones.

Such is the level of bodily risk and uncertainty about their physical safety in their home country, that they feel it is worth confronting a closed and much more dangerous border in order to search for long-term “safety and stability” in the US. Essentially, in order to reach a “safer”

place, they have to pass the proof of crossing a closed and deadly buffer zone. The US strives to provide an illusion of a “secured” closed border by highly militarizing and constructing walls along such territory in the name of national “security” (Nevins 2002). It has converted this piece of land into a deadly one for those who, due to their race, gender and structural poverty, are negated legal entrance into the US (Amoore & Goede 2008). Consequently, undocumented immigrants have witnessed and experienced physical and psychological pain and suffering on the borderlands. In this geographical site, immigrants are exposed to hunger, thirst, extreme weather, poisonous animals, sickness, armed robbery, abandonment, rape and death (Staud et al. 2009). Hundreds of immigrants die in this buffer zone every year (Pickering 2011), and those who survive are coded as risky bodies through a biometric border (Amoore & Goede 2008). In other words, those who flee from risk, often become coded as risky bodies themselves through the use of biometrics regulations, a tool of biopower: the power to make life which is concerned of managing, from within, the well-being and productivity of the population (Amoore and Goede 2008; Foucault 1995). Such tools are successfully facilitating the management of populations through the discourse of risk and the apparent of ability to provide protection (Lemke 2011). It is further creating vulnerable exploitative subjects in the benefit of the US capitalistic economy. In the case of my participants and community, while we, accurately, do not internalize the label of criminal, risky bodies (Fanon et al. 1965), we do, to some extent, internalize the idea that we are undeserving as we are in a country in which we do “not belong;” in a country that did not authorize our entrance. Ironically, a lot of us do not recognize that we are actually in our land; that the foreigner (the ruler) has converted us into “illegals” in our native land (Fanon et al. 1965).

Risk and mobility

I interviewed ten young women who migrated from Mexico within the last ten years. Although most of my participants miss their good life in Mexico previous to the wave of violence, none of them wish to return at the moment since they feel “safer” in the US, and some fear persecution in Mexico. In addition, they would never want to repeat their horrible experiences of pain and almost death on the borderlands.

Just like Lucero, at least half of my ten participants migrated to escape from the violence in Mexico, rather than migrating out of economic need (or to gain economic benefit), as most Mexico-US migration analysts would argue (Cohen 2004; Massey & Espinosa 1997). Their experiences of violence intensified on the borderlands due to exposure from not only the natural elements, but also from hunger, thirst, gendered intimidation, robbery, body pain and illness as well as physical and psychological mistreatment. Currently, they live in a state of limbo in the US, feeling unsafe here, there and in-between. Unprotected in the three places, they are trapped in a country that does not recognize their suffering as qualifying for political asylum. On the contrary, these individuals are coded as the illegal criminals who must be punished due to their “irrational” decision to immigrate crossing a border that only permits freedom of movements of capital, goods and desirable/global bodies (Mountz & Hiemstra 2013)

Not enough attention has been paid to the narrow list of forms of violence that qualifies an individual for political asylum in the US. According to the US Department of Home Land Security, in order to qualify for asylum in this country, a person must fear persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group, or due to political opinion (uscis.gov). This list ignores other types of risks and vulnerabilities sending communities face such as detrimental living conditions resulting from historical structures and the current neoliberal global market (Meráz Garcia 2012; Sparke 2013; Shrestha & Patterson 1990), and/or

persecutions and fear agrarian populations (especially women) face as result of the neoliberal transnational “war on drugs and terror” in the name of US national "security" (Mercille, 2011). In other words, this list ignores risks and exposures that ironically, have resulted from historical and contemporary, national and transnational policies and interventions imposed by the receiving countries themselves.

Unfortunately, when it comes to mobility due to risk, the current violence in Mexico has being under-recognized as leading to forced outmigration. The majority of Mexico-US migration studies argue for pull and push economic factors as the main, and usually the only, explanations for these movements (Ambrosini & Peri 2012; Ashby et al. 2013; Jones 1984; Massey & Espinosa, 1997). In addition, plausible refugee studies focus their attention on US approved/recognized conflicts such as the Cold War, the Vietnam War and the Yugoslav War, to name a few (Brun 2001; Lustig et al. 2008; Mountz et al. 2002), and leave out conflicts in other countries such as the current “war on drugs and terror” which has propelled forced outmigration from the affected countries (Maldonado Aranda 2012). Geopolitics play a big role in determining not only what type of violence, conflict and persecution will be recognized, but also from what country. Mexico strives to maintain a good relationship with the US. In fact, Mexico’s compliance with the US’s “war on drug” has contributed to an actual increase of violence (Mercille 2011). Such violence has, I would argue, contributed to forced outmigration of some agrarian communities and, for those who migrate to El Norte, to a journey filled with yet more risk, danger and vulnerability.

Risk, violence and persecution are some of the factors that justify forced migration (Mountz et al. 2002). Feminist research has drawn attention to injustices and violation of human rights towards asylum seekers by the receiving country (Lustig et al. 2008). Some scholars focus

on understanding the intersections of geopolitics and biopolitics in controlling forced migration mobility (Ashutosh & Mountz 2012; Brun 2001; Darling, 2009) as well as the painful limbo status forced migrants face during the long-term asylum request application process (Mountz 2010).

Another very important and well-elaborated analysis (Mountz 2011) demonstrates how discourses of chaos and crisis are utilized to justify securitization and control of both economic and forced migration at particular sites and times, depending on the economic and political circumstances of the countries in each side of the border; all with the central purpose of securing the sovereignty and supremacy of the global north; either to show superiority, power and control, or out of fear of “invasion” by unwanted bodies (Mountz 2010). My research contributes to this conversation by pointing out how discourses of chaos and crisis of national “security” have been used to justify particular place and race based policies to govern “the other” by force not only within the US nation state (Coleman 2012), but also on the borderlands (Nevins 2002; Staudt et al. 2009) and in their home country (Coleman 2007; Corva 2008). I argue that by breaking apart the immigration journey of forced migrant women, we can achieve a more nuanced understanding of the different gendered vulnerabilities that particular place based policies create during one immigration journey. We can further understand why some women migrate in the first place, for whom the border is closed and how immigrant women experience a life with multiple borders coded in their bodies at the destination. Immigrant women’s bear witness of different painful traumas, risks and vulnerabilities before, during and after the immigration journey. Looking specifically at women’s experiences also reveals how processes of producing national “security” narratives, militarizing the drug war and militarizing the border reproduce gender – in that women are made particularly vulnerable in these migration sites in which they

become subject to rape, persecution, robbery, physical assault, kidnap and death. Thus, it is crucial that we bring these untold stories to light; that we include such testimonios into our conversations of migration studies in order to empower subjugated, dominated populations and challenge main stream research in order to become stronger advocates of against unfair polices.

Looking Ahead:

In Chapter Two, I explain my methodology. Through a detailed historical narration of my own struggles as an insider to risks and vulnerabilities, I disclose how and why I developed this research plan. I then provide a brief and general background about my participants. And finally, I illustrate the methods used to gather and analyze my data.

The chapters that follow, break down the immigration journey. Each chapter represents one site of the journey as follows: Origin (chapter three), Borders (chapter four) and Destination-Conclusion (chapter five). Within a historical structural context, my analysis focuses on understanding how women experience risk and vulnerability in these three sites, and how and when such experiences are transformed in relation to enforcement of particular place based polices. In chapter three ‘Origin,’ I briefly contextualize the current state of violence in Mexico and demonstrate how most of my participants have experienced direct or indirect risk and vulnerability in the place of origin forcing them to migrate to the US in search of safety and protection. Chapter four ‘Borders’ provides a historical contextualization of the creation, marking and remarking of the US-Mexican borderlands showing how it has been transformed from a non-existent boundary, to a highly militarized one. I then focus on the border crossing experiences and on how the combination of the US policies to strengthen the border and the wave of violence in Mexico has lead to increased exposures, not only to natural elements and human needs such as extreme weather, dangerous animals, hunger and thirst, but also to armed

robbery, mistreatment and abandonment. And lastly, in chapter four “Destination-Conclusion,” I analyze how immigrant women experience life in the US and show that, when compared to experiences lived in Mexico by some of my participants, and the horrible experiences all had at the borderlands, Mexican women immigrants feel in limbo but also safer in the US regardless of anti-immigrant policies, negation of human rights and highly exploitative jobs that they all experience. In the conclusion, I tie and braid together what we learned from my participants’ experiences in the three sites and how these relate to different place and race based policies in the name of US national “security” and in support of the US capitalist economy.

Overall, I argue from a historical political-economy approach, that some populations live in constant fear and eternal limbo as a result of violence, discrimination and injustices that have resulted from historical and current national and transnational policies not only in the borderlands, but also in origins and destinations. I will also demonstrate how people’s experiences are obscured and invalidated through binary processes of racialization and criminalization (Mountz & Hiemstra 2013) instead of being recognized as qualifying for asylum protection, in order to create vulnerable exploitable bodies to serve our current capitalistic neoliberal economy.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGIES

Pre and Post Research

The Story of my Research Proposal: Feminist Methodologies

“Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance of scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social justice.”

(Hesse-Biber.et.al, 2004: 3)

In this I briefly describe my research interest and how it has been shaped and reshaped as a result of my position as an insider to my own analysis and my exposure to various feminist methodology approaches. This chapter is divided into two parts: before and after my research. The first part focuses on how my research interest took shape and describes my research plan. The second one exposes reflections and struggles confronted as a researcher in my community.

My plans for research have been substantially affected due to new emerging community events which have lead me to constant and deep reflection on my topic. I analyze several feminist methodological approaches and bring them into conversation with my proposed research about violence, displacement and migration. Some of the concepts and methodologies I discuss include: positionality, evidence of experience, translational feminist research, intersectionality, double consciousness, different types of trauma, oral histories, testimonios, and feminist praxis.

Positionality and Ethics

In reading (Smith 2012), I became conscious and paid more attention on how much academic work white, middle class scholars have conducted about the ‘other’. Keeping in mind that knowledge about the ‘other’ has been the main tool for colonizing practices, I understood the

importance of critically thinking how knowledge is produced and for what purposes. In learning about “What happens when the researched becomes the researcher?” (Smith 2012, p185), Villenas (1996) brought me into realizing that this is my position in the case of my own research on immigration experiences.

The inspiration for this research is a small town, to which I refer to as El Rancho. El Rancho is an agrarian, isolated and segregated community located in one of the poorest, less educated states in southwest Mexico (ángel vite Pérez 2007). People in this town have deep roots to this place as they have resided there for many generations. In addition, they widely practice indigenous socio-cultural and economic traditions. However, Mexican agrarian communities have been negatively affected by multiple factors such as colonization, neoliberal structural adjustment policies (SAPs)(Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996) and most recently, by an awful increase of violence, and El Rancho is not the exception (ángel vite Pérez 2007; Maldonado Aranda 2012). Sicarios (contracted killers) have invaded this and other agrarian populations ever since “The war on drugs” in the mid 2000s. As a result, a lot of people have been displaced from their agrarian hometowns ever since.

I used to visit El Rancho through age of 25 and last visited it in 2004. During my last journey to this community, I would estimate that there were about 1,000 people residing there. As for written demographic information about El Rancho, I found only two websites. One, registered in 2005, records about 800 residents, and the other, with copyright dated 2009, registers 606 occupants. While this information could be questionable, it shows a particular trend of depopulation in El Rancho. In the last eight years, I have heard multiple rumors about entire families abandoning this community to the point of becoming a “ghost town.”

I am an insider to this situation. My own community has been directly affected. I had a

relative who gained a political position in el Rancho in the mid-2000s. During his campaign, he was approached by the sicarios and was asked to withdraw his bid for office because one of their own was also running for this position. My dearest relative refused, and he won the elections. Soon after his election, the sicarios approached him and ask that he either, leave his position or join their gang. My relative refused to do either. He then received a threatening letter and was killed soon after. His lovely wife, along with eight adorable children of ages between five and twenty-two, had to leave this town as they were also threatened immediately after he was killed. The Mexican government did not support this family, and the US government denied a refugee petition for this family. Thus, they had no choice but to come to the US without documents seeking for protection and safety. After going through immense pain and eternal grief of losing their father and friend, they tasted death in the borderlands and currently live in eternal limbo in a country where they are highly exploitable and deportable. Just as this family, there are many other families who have suffered similar injustices in this and other similar agrarian towns in Mexico.

After reading Smith (2012) in which she emphasizes the importance of creating knowledge by the subjugated communities, for the benefits of these communities, I have been self-reflecting and deeply thinking and struggling in trying to find ways to help my own community. I have been debating with questions such as: how could I, as scholar and as a member of this agrarian population, help my community? How could I, as a community member, create knowledge about and for my community without putting anyone's life in danger? This situation is a critical question as the sicarios control what is known by silencing people. The biggest warning they always remind the community is to keep their mouth shut or else, they would pay with their lives. Silencing the population has worked for the sicarios so far. This

brought thinking, although I am an insider in this community, would anyone trust me and be willing to narrate their tragic story? What benefit would they gain with providing me this information? And more importantly, what would the risks be? This is where my own ethical part, as well as the one described by the US Dept. of Health & Human Services, play an important role. I cannot put my participants' or anyone's life in danger! As all these questions and conclusion came to me, I felt powerless and with my hands tied.

However, feminist methodologies include challenging mainstream knowledge by giving voice to the silenced populations, those who have been overshadowed and absent from these knowledge (Hesse-Biber et al 2004). Thus, it led me to consider how important it is to bring awareness about these injustices; to break the silences about so many killings and displacements that have been justified by the Mexican government with the excuse on “the war on drugs.” They often say that the increasing number of deaths show the success of the tactics they are using to combat this war; that the narcos (drug lords) are killing each other (Wright 2011). It is not uncommon to notice this same explanation in mainstream research about the current violence in Mexico (Carpenter 2010; Curtis 2004; Davis 2006). As a result, thousands of crimes have been committed with impunity, and displaced populations have been denied governmental assistance.

Evidence of experience and transnational feminist research

This mainstream knowledge and the way of framing certain population, made me realize the importance of not just analyzing experiences, but also why these experiences take place in the first place. Scott (1991) points out the importance of interrogating the process that leads to the creation of different subjects throughout history. She indicates that one must take into account different perspectives to analyzing experience. Scott (1991) argues that one needs not only to focus on experience, but also and most importantly, on why these experiences take place.

In order to do so, one must analyze the history of and the reason behind the construction of different subjects that allow for these experiences to take place. This has provided me with a new tool for my research. Considering political economic forces that, through history, have led to the creation of different subjects in ways that seem natural, inevitable and thus, unchallengeable; I intend to challenge this naturalization in my own investigations.

In thinking about how different populations have been historically framed, Alexander (2005) provides a valuable transnational analysis when she describes that colonial, neocolonial and imperial power is being imposed, not only in the nation but also across other countries. She explicitly argues that “The war on drugs” and “The war on terror” have served to impose western sovereignty across borders. “The war on drugs” has been militarily sponsored and financed by the US. Corva (2008) explains that the US has initiated this war not because they want to end the drug trade, but because this war serves as a pretext to protect capitalist’s interests and continue its neocolonial power over Latin American territory. The US decided that certain populations must to be governed and controlled in illiberal ways so that the capitalist system could be protected and continue to growth. This made me realize the importance of including analyses on how national and transnational policies, not only “The war on drugs,” but also the policies of border security and national laws have contributed to framing certain populations in subjugating and dehumanized ways. These laws label certain populations in ways that national injustices (such as negating basic human rights, keeping this population hungry enough so that they must accept highly exploitative jobs, as well as to increasing policies of deportations) against non-white immigrants seem normal and appropriate.

Therefore, my research includes analysis of how displaced populations experience violence and risk, not only in their hometown, but also in the border and in the US. In analyzing experiences, I consider the impact of not only social constructions of the subject, but also on how national and transnational policies lead to the creation of place based violence and to the framing of particular populations in particular ways. What does it mean to be categorized as criminal, illegal, people of color, poor working class for example? What role have historical economic structures played in framing certain populations in a dehumanized manner? How are certain population's integrated into circuits of Northern circuits of capital accumulation? Could we identify ourselves as something else that is not socially constructed? (Scott 1991). How have these categories being constructed through history and what are the consequences?

Early Research and Methodological Plans

In grappling with all these questions and issues of security and ethics for my research, I consulted with my advisor. We brainstormed, and I proposed the following. I know and have networks with several families who have been affected by this wave of violence. Most of them have migrated to the US. I proposed that perhaps, I do not need to go to El Rancho for my investigations but rather, interview those who have been displaced. Perhaps, they would be willing to tell me their stories as their entire family has been exiled from El Rancho. This way, it would be safer for both the participants and myself.

The plan was then to conduct an idiographic exploratory analysis (Babbie 2010) about the process of outmigration from El Rancho. The population for my research was to be composed by adults who out-migrated from El Rancho (my unit of analysis) on or after the wave of violence in year in the mid 2000s. My family and I have a very strong network with families

who meet the criteria stated above, and thus, I could interview. Some immigrated to the US, and others migrated to a big city in Mexico. They could also be my key informants in referring me to additional participants. I knew this was possible as the community of El Rancho is (or was) composed by extended families that have resided in this community for many generations back and thus, have very strong networks. Therefore, I would use a snowball approach in obtaining additional participants (Babbie 2010). We agree that I was to conduct in depth interviews either in person, over the phone or via Skype. The interviews questions were to be open ended. The focus was to obtain detailed stories or testimonios about the outmigration process without directly asking about risk or violence. Instead I was to search for these explanations directly or indirectly in their story. Providing/obtaining testimonios is a traditional Feminist Latin America approach in which the subaltern speaks from her/his bodily experiences of injustices; words become the most powerful weapon (Menchú & Burgos-Debray 1984). Some scholars have written their own testimonios in bearing witnesses of oppression and struggle at the university and/or western society (Acevedo 2001; Delgado Bernal et al. 2012). While many testimonios are provided by the actual researchers/scholars as an autobiography poems and other forms of expression (Acevedo 2001; Delgado Bernal et al. 2012; Menchú & Burgos-Debray 1984), some have conducted mediated testimonios, in which case those who provide testimonios do not have the means/tools to write and/or publish their own testimonios, and consequently scholars become mediators who listen write and bring to light such experiences in the form of testimonios (Sánchez 1995). This approach has been widely used in understating migrants' experiences including self-perception, constantly forming sense of identity and cultural interpretation (Silvey & Lawson 1999; Menchú & Wright 1998; Torres & Wicks-Asbun 2013). My work engages in

mediated testimonio. I bring to light testimonios of displaced populations from El rancho paying deep attention in order to read between the lines as according to Kitch and Fono (2012).

While this research is extremely important in that it reveals the ways in which danger produces migration, it is also fraught with risk. Specifically, I have to be concerned that this research does not become misrepresented, or that it is revealed to the sicarios because my parents still reside in El Rancho. For over twelve years, my parents used to spend only the winter months in this their native town. However, they have decided to stay there permanently ever since they retired two years ago.

Although the caution in my research is different, I felt I was doing the same as Nagar and Sangatina (2006), contemplating whether I should ‘play with fire.’ As I read this book, I realized that when trying to bring injustices to light and tell the truth there are possibilities for negative consequences. I wished I could do the same, gather a group of affected individuals and propose to write a book as collective authors. A book that could be written in both English and Spanish for it to reach our own community and break the silences that have given so much power and success to outrageous injustices. But then, I realized that the danger I am dealing with is not only about family honor and NGOs reputation, but it is a matter of life and death.

First Modified Methodological Plan

In light of the real dangers I discuss here, I decided to find out about another agrarian community who is grappling with same situation as El Rancho. This would keep both my participants and family safer as I would be an outsider and stranger to my new population. I do know two friends whose agrarian communities have experienced very similar situations. These communities have also being invaded by sicarios who are kidnapping and violently displacing

the populations. However, it also made me think on how much trust I would get from my participants, and whether I would find enough participants for my analysis. I reading Visweswaran (1994), I understood that I could easily be in this situation. In which some relevant information could be omitted by the participants due to lack of trust. What if some participants betrayed one another by disclosing certain “secret” information? I understand I could face the same situation when interviewing my own community. However, just as Smith, (2012) points out, there could be advantages of being an insider as there is more trust and accountability, I feel that as an insider to the community of El Rancho, I could obtain more accurate information and thus, truthful knowledge.

Cancellation of Original Research Plans

Being an insider to this topic has presented great risk and made it hard for me to continue with my original research plan. After receiving such news and my father being safe in the US, I went back to my original plan of interviewing population from El Rancho. However, first I asked my parents whether they agreed and whether they had any plans to go back as I needed to make sure no one would be at risk. At first, they said they would not go back. However, currently both of my parents are extremely sad for having abandoned their cattle, pets, plants and all their belongings. They do want to go back to a nearby city in which they have a little house. They hope to be able to recover some of what they feel have lost. Thus, definitely I would not dare to continue on with my original research.

New Research and Methodological Plans

Last month (in May of 2013), as part of the methodological assignments in class, I interviewed a woman who crossed the border without documents. The interview was very open. I

ask if she wanted to tell her story and give her testimonio about her experience when crossing the Mexico-US border. She was happy to share her experience in detail. It was evident that she was both excited and nervous about telling the story and providing her testimonio. She relied on memory when narrating her story and suggested that I should do an informal focus group with more women who have crossed the border without documents. She indicated that by listening to other stories, she would remember more details.

For this research project, I analyze the different types of risks and vulnerability Mexican immigrant women face during the immigration journey at three specific geographical sites: country of origin, the borderlands and the destination. I analyze stories from young women who have immigrated, without proper documentation, within the last ten year from México to the USA. In these stories I examine how risk and vulnerability was experienced before, during and after the immigration journey. I examine how these experiences are formed and transformed from place to place, focusing on the previously indicated cities.

The project involves ten participants. The populations consist of women who have crossed the Mexican-US border within the last ten years, from 2003 to the present. This allows me to go back three years previous to the formal declaration on “The war on drugs” by the Mexican president Felipe Calderon in year 2006. I have selected women in order to bring to light multiple layers (and intersections) of oppressions such as gender, race, class and citizenship. I was inspired by the way Alexander’s description of “neo-imperial” power which among other things include, “... the creation and maintenance of a permanent war economy, whose internal elements devolve on the militarization of the police and the resultant criminalization of immigrants, people of color, and working-class communities...” (2003: 234).

My methods involve obtaining detailed interviews/testimonios; and while there is nothing feminist about in depth interviews as these methods have been used in non-feminist research long ago the feminist movements, (Geiger 1990) what make my interviews feminist is the way I analyze the information (my methodologies) to fulfill the main purpose of this research. I not only bring to light silenced experiences, but also deeply analyze the history that led to these experiences in the first place following Scott's (1991) rationale. In performing this analysis, I examine how historical structural powers such as colonialism, neocolonialism and neo-imperial power in the form of transnational US national and policies, as described by Alexander (2005). I explore how they play a role in shaping certain experiences of risk and vulnerability differently in diverse places to include the nation, the border and in the home country. In addition, in following trauma as described and analyzed by Cvetkovich (2003), I analyze how trauma is experienced and embodied as both specific event(s) and also as every day life. Essentially, my research gives voice to unspoken/unseen experiences of various forms of gendered violence migrant women face across one migration journey. I seek to expose and compare different levels of gendered violence resultant from different place based national and transnational policies.

Methodology

I first conducted a pre-meeting with all my participants to explain the overall plan for the research. I did not mention that I would be looking for how risk and vulnerability is experienced because I did not want to raise concerns about the safety of my research participants as I discussed above. I let them know that the project is about their detailed stories before, during and after the migration journey. I then encouraged my participants to remain anonymous due to their current citizenship status. In following Nagar and Sangatana (Organization) (2006) methodologies of memory, I asked if each one could write at home in a diary/notepad an outline

as they remember their journey. These notes are to guide them in the shared conversations during our focus group, which I scheduled soon after. Also, I asked for them to think about whether and why they would like this knowledge to be shared, and with whom they would like it to be shared, and whether they would like to have a copy of their own in Spanish. For example, we might consider how could activist in our community use this knowledge to support and validate movements on immigration rights. Again, I have been inspired by Smith, (2012) in analyzing who will benefit from the knowledge being produced, and in being conscious that knowledge should be by the community for the community. Also I am inspired by the idea of mixing theory with practice as exposed by Swarr and Nagar (2010) in aims for collaboration between scholars and activists.

Second, focus groups took place in order to allow for the stories to be shared. This event took place at one of my participant's empty apartment. I provided snacks and refreshments for my participants. We discussed the following three open-ended questions. 1) How would you describe your life in Mexico? 2) How was your experience at the border? 3) How is your life currently in the US? With each questions I facilitated the conversation by intensively listening and reading between the lines.

Third, I conducted individual interviews to obtain detailed individual testimonios. This allowed each participant the opportunity to share her individual story. I used the same basic questions indicated above. I utilized the Latin American approach of testimonio(s) to uncover women's stories and experiences in detail. Both the focus group and the individual interviews were audio recorded.

I reflected and memoired soon after each event. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Spanish, and then relevant information was later translated into English. When reading Nagar, R., *Sangatina (Organization)* (2006), I realized I would be in a similar situation as I translated from Spanish to English. I understood the amount of responsibility I face in deciding how to do the translations. I hope that my interpretation, and then my translations do not influence the knowledge produced. I also understand the huge trust and accountability I have from my respondents and their families. I constantly reflected and made sure I transcribed and translated as accurate as possible. I further leaved all the quotes in Spanish to give life to my participants' own voices.

In reflecting on my positionality in this project, I hope to be able to practice Kitch and Fonow (2012)'s advice that our own preconceptions, as scholars who personally connect with our research topic, should be tested and addressed and our perspectives widened as we conduct research in situations with which we are familiar. This is a very interesting point, which I have been reflecting on. Thus, while I am a Mexican woman immigrant myself (an insider), my research involves topics I did not personally experienced: I did not cross the US-Mexican border without documentation (an outsider to this experience). I hope that including analysis of risk and vulnerability when crossing the border without proper documentation helps to expand rather than foreclose my analysis.

With this research, I hope to provide geographers, feminist and Chicano studies scholars with a holistic and broader understanding on how particular women have experienced risk and vulnerability differently in different places/spaces during their migration journey. In addition, this analysis provides important practical benefits such adding women's mediated testimonios of

embodied experiences of trauma risk and vulnerability to textual archives of feminist migration research. This study also contributes valuable tools for social justice movements by providing valuable information of how specific injustices (such as neoliberal reforms, transnational “war on drugs”, and impunity of crimes, political framing dehumanizing particular populations in the US) have contributed to particular experiences of risk and vulnerability.

Reflections During and after my Fieldwork:

Participants general background

In order to protect the identity of my participants, I provide broad information about them. I attempt to provide some general descriptions, but it is important to highlight that each one of my participants is unique, with complex experiences of joy, suffering and pain. My participants consist of ten brave, hard working, dedicated, loving wives and mothers who migrated within the last ten years. Most of them were very young (in their early twenties) and had no children at the time of immigration. The majority of my participants migrated from the same agrarian community, my own, and some were escaping the current violence in Mexico. All of them have been directly or indirectly affected by such violence. They currently reside in the US and the majority has worked in the orchards ever since their arrival. All of them feel safer in the US and wish the violence in Mexico would come to an end soon as most of them miss their life in Mexico previous to the violence, deeply miss their family and friends who still reside there, and thus, wish to return to Mexico one day.

Constraints for data gardening

While my plan was to provide my participants with note pads for them to take notes (in a diary form) in preparation for the focus group and interview, I realized their days are extremely

busy as they work in the fields seven days per week for long hours and have a family to care for afterwards. Thus, I did not add to their workload my request for note taking.

The day of my focus group coincided with a longer working day. At the time I scheduled the focus group event, most of my participants confirmed they would be able to attend based on their work schedule. However, the day of the focus group event, they were asked to stay longer as the employer had a big order of apples to supply. This is how the orchard employer(s) treat their worker; they are usually not notified in advance if they will need to work longer hours. Thus, only three of my ten participants were able to attend to the focus group event. It was a good event but again, with a small amount of participants. Consequently, I base most of my analysis on the individual interviews, which I was able to schedule at whatever time worked best for each one of them.

Interviews:

The interviews took place in each of my participant's home in the evenings. They lasted about one hour. I brought the three main open-ended questions as indicated above. I let them tell me their detailed story, and I listened intensively agreeing and encouraging conversation. I added a fourth questions after a few interviews, 4) If there were not borderlands (no barriers to cross), would you return to Mexico?

This was an amazing and painful experience. All of my participants relied on memory, and as they related their experience, their expression of suffering was palpable. The most intense interview was Lucero's; she was very open and trusted me with all the details of her painful life in Mexico and on the borderlands. A lot of tears formed part of the indescribable experience. After we finished she thanked me and said that sharing her painful history with someone she

trusts, made her feel good as she had never expressed most of her experiences with anyone. I, of course, am the most thankful to all of them for trusting me and sharing their unique and valuable knowledge of witnessing and living so many injustices.

Feelings of both an insider and outsider

I am very aware of feelings and limitations as an outsider! While getting ready for our interview, one of my participants was indirectly (in a joking form) told by her husband (who was about to leave us along for the interview), “be careful, I hope Yolanda does not deport you.” This comment made me realize that there was fear/insecurity of betrayal, and I felt huge responsibility. I hope none of them get deported because perhaps I would become a suspect of reporting them. This was extremely unexpected, and I assured my participants this was confidential. However, I realize how much trust my participants needed to place in me; that probably they felt they were risking their own safety here in the US by allowing this interview. This caution and my attempt to assure trust, limited my in-depth digging for experiences of insecurity/risk/vulnerability here in the US, as it was difficult to indirectly get into the “do you fear deportation” topic.

It was also very challenging to ask them about risks in Mexico, as I was not supposed to ask this directly. I had emphasized that the most important part was their experiences of risk in the borderlands. Several of my participants would just say, well you know how bad the situation is in Mexico, and I would say yes- as an insider I know what they referred to. I could not ask for an explanation of this because it could uncover (and perhaps be miss-interpreted) that I wanted more details of this particular topic. Again, this would be risky for my parents who, after all, have decided to go back to Mexico in September of 2013. Therefore, I relied on my ability to

read between the lines and silences. My position as an insider allows me to actually interpret these silences and read between the lines, hopefully in an accurate manner. What I am grappling with is whether I have the right, or how ethical it would be for me to uncover these silences...

Analysis and Writing:

I transcribed and color-coded each of the interviews. I made sure to use the pseudonym each of my participants selected. I analyzed and organized the interviews based on experiences in Mexico, the border and the destination. I wrote this document using the original quotes in Spanish and then translated these quotes. Spanish is my first language, and thus, I did the translations myself. I decided to live the original quotes as well as these are my participants' own testimonios, their voices.

CHAPTER THREE: ORIGIN

In this chapter, I discuss how migration from Mexico to the US has been historically understood through masculine lens as a free rational decision propelled by economic gains. I further illustrate how feminist migration analyses have richly contribute deeper understandings that include women's migration experiences through a more complex theoretical framing that goes beyond the simple economic rationalities. Then, I demonstrate how historical structural violence, contemporary neoliberal structural polices and free trade have resulted in economic constrains to such degree that leave many Mexican agrarian populations with mainly two options: to either migrate or get involved in the illicit market, either way, they end up breaking the law and thus, becoming "criminals." Next, I discuss the current violence in Mexico resulting from economic and political transnational policies aimed to protecting our current capitalistic global economy. Lastly, I provide women's testimonies and bodily experiences (enhanced with my own information as an insider to this community) to reveal how the current violence in Mexico, propelled by the US, has contributed to new forms of forced outmigration in Mexico.

Mexico-US Migration

The presence of Mexican populations in the US dates back to the actual formation and expansion of this nation when the US violently dispossessed Mexico from almost half its territory. After been defeated in the US-Mexico war in 1848, Mexico, under the presidency Manuel de la Peña y Peña, was forced into signing the Treaty of Guadalupe, which allowed the US's sovereignty power over physical territory to migrate south grabbing almost half of Mexico's northern region (Beezley 2011; Weintraub 2010). This phenomenon generated the first transnational social networks between Mexico and the US. Ever since this occurrence, many

more Mexicans have migrated north mostly from the western region of Mexico which includes the states of Michoacán, Jalisco and Guanajuato (Durand 2001; Peña et al. 2013). According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2011, about 33.7 million Mexicans resided in the US, 35 percent of which were Mexican born. Studies further show that in 1990, 45 percent of all Mexican immigrants were women. The percentage of Mexican women in the US increased to 47 percent as of 2011 (pewhispanic.org); see also (Davis & Winters 2001)

What factors propel Mexicans' migration to the US? More specifically, what explains women's outmigration decision before and after the mid-2000s high wave of violence in Mexico? Has this wave of violence being considered as a reason to out-migrate in analyses conducted on and post this period? How has this wave of violence affected women in particular? These are the main questions I explore in this section.

According to Segura & Zavella (2007), in the last 100 years Political and economic factors have propelled Mexicans migration to the US; movement to which women's participation has increase throughout time. During 1910 to 1939 period, which included the great depression and the Mexican revolution Mexicans, women accounted for about 5 percent of Mexicans migrants to the US. One of the highest wave of temporary migration was driven by the bracero program, a gendered and racialized US temporary work program designated to recruit male Mexican workers in order to fulfill US's demand for agrarian labor between 1942-1964 (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). During this time, women accounted for 7 percent of the total number of Mexican immigrants (Massey & Espinosa 1997). The number of migrant women increased to 20 percent as a result of the 1965 Immigration Reform Act. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 motivated migration of both documented undocumented women

migrants. Prior to IRCA, women accounted 25 percent of all undocumented Mexican; this number increased to 33 percent after IRCA's implementation (Segura & Zavella 2007)

Economic Migrant

Historically, Mexico-US migration has been classified as a movement droved exclusively by economic motivations. Several mainstream analyses conducted both pre and post 2006 have applied one or a combination of the following economic models or theories: neoclassical model determined by relative wage difference (Ambrosini & Peri 2012; Durand et al. 2004), rational decision model informed by the economic theory of individual free choice based on economic gains (Ambrosini & Peri 2012), labor push (supply) - pull (demand) factors resulting form global market forces (Hollifield 2004), the new economic labor model in which the decision to migrate is not made only by the individual member, but rather it is influenced/made by his/her family (Cuecuecha & Pederzini 2012; Durand et al. 2004; Hollifield 2004; Massey & Espinosa 1997; Sana & Massey 2000), and social capital or social networks model (Davis & Winters 2001; Massey & Espinosa 1997; Mutersbaugh 2002; Woodruff & Zenteno 2007). The more models the analysis combines, the more complex it is claim to be (Cohen 2004)

For example, some analysts have combined both neoclassical model and rational decision model to explain what motivates Mexicans migration to the US. These have concluded that economic benefits due to higher relative wages in the US are the main, and usually the only reason, Mexicans immigrate to the US (Ambrosini & Peri 2012; Massey and Espinosa 1997). Others have also included the push pull migration factors in their explanations arguing that the push factors - resulting from high supply of unskilled populations and consequently, cheap labor in Mexico, in combination with the pull factors -described as the high demand for unskilled labor in the US, are the principal explanatory variables of such behavior (Hollifield 2004). Combining

the neoclassical model (wage difference) with new economics labor model (migration decision made as a household due to failures of the market to provide insurance capital and credit) is necessary in order to obtain a holistic explanation as both models complement each other according Durand et al. (2004). This is another commonly used approach in trying to understand what motivates Mexicans to migrate (Escobar et al. 2003; Ochoa 2012; Sana & Massey 2000). However, these economic models (old and new) provide superficial outcomes because these assume that individual households and sending communities are well informed about their opportunities in the receiving country. In addition these do not consider other costs such as human suffering (by both the migrant and sending community) that comes with the migration trip. And finally these models ignore the consequences of historical geographically embedded processes of structural inequality and violence, which could richly add to the complexity of outmigration decision and consequences. Moreover, in the majority of the economic model studies, the absence of women's voices is remarkable.

For example, Massey and Espinosa clearly indicate in their 1997 study that they used only male participants for their study. In this analysis they prove accurate the neoclassical economics model where the migration decision is made based on wages difference between the two countries. But why are women's experiences not included in the majority of these economic models?

One excuse given for not including women's voices in many of these analyses is the argument that it is men, and not women, who mostly migrate. When analyzing women and migration, Duran et al. (2004) states that the main role of women is to remind home in Mexico taking care of the household and children. They argue that while some women do migrate, they are less likely to take the risk of crossing the border without documents and thus, have less

experience crossing the border. In fact, in their book cover for this analysis titled “Crossing the border: research from the Mexican Migration Project” it has the image of a Mexican looking man jumping the Mexican-US tall fence portraying the immigrant as male only. This excuse contradicts the above stated statistics that between 1990 and 2011 over 45 percent of all Mexican immigrants are women. This justification further devalues women’s migration knowledge and experiences. Duran et al. then generalize the reasons for migrating to the US by stating that Mexican migrants make the reasonable choice to migrate based on the economic benefits this trip will bring them. According to the authors, "Migrants are generally not destitute but in fact cross the border because the higher comparative wages in the United States help them to finance homes back in Mexico..." (2). They indicate that the motivation to self-finance a home (due to the failures of the market to provide credit) back in Mexico is likely the most important factor driving Mexicans to migrate to the US. Mainly the authors conclude that although immigrants are not poor, they came in search of better economic benefits.

Another possible reason for migrating to the US according to Sana & Massey (2000) is the failure of the market and government to provide retirement plans. According to the authors, combining the neoclassical and the new economics of labor migration (migration decision made as a household due to failures of the market to provide insurance capital and credit) is the only way to reach a complete explanation of Mexico-US migration. In this analysis, the authors provide an additional variable that should be part of the new economics of labor migration. According to the analysts, it is crucial to take into account the failures of the market (and government) to provide retirement plans as another motivation for Mexicans, who hold jobs in Mexico without retirement benefits, to migrate to the US in order to save for the old age and/or to claim retirement benefits. In this analysis, women were not consider due to “... low number of

cases...”(Sana & Massey 2000, p8) because, according to them, the number of trips are positively correlated with the possibility of obtaining social security benefits! This makes it sound as if the more times an immigrant crosses the border the higher the benefits he can obtain. Also, according Sana & Massey, “They [immigrants] may qualify for US social security payments directly by accumulating 40 quarters worth of payroll contribution” (10). However, according to the social security administrations, in order to qualify for social security benefits the worker must have legal status (*ssa.gov*) and their participants did not have legal documentation when they migrated to the US. According to Sana and Massey, only 58 per cent of the participants obtained legal documentation in their last trip. This means that the majority of trips took place without documentation. This is controversial as in fact, the more times a person breaks the law (by crossing without documentation) the higher the punishment/sanctions and the smaller the possibility of obtaining legal status (*uscis.gov*). Thus, would not be better to consider (or at least to include) those individuals with the least amounts of trips such as women?

Another commonly argued monetary incentive to migrate to the US is the economic benefit sending households/communities and the country as a whole gain when they receive remittances from their emigrated family member(s) (Cuecuecha and Pederzini 2012; Durand et al. 2004; Hollifield 2004; Massey & Espinosa 1997; Sana & Massey 2000). Such incentive tends to be explained by the new economics of labor model. Sending remittances back to Mexico is described as a positive factor contributing to the overall development of that country. It is argued that this is Mexico’s third main source of income after tourism and oil (Cuecuecha & Pederzini 2012). However, as Lawson (2010) vigorously demonstrates, while this model encourages migration and promotes thinning of borders through discourses of development and reduction of poverty in the sending community and the undeveloped country as a whole, it ignores important

aspects including; 1) the historical (and ongoing) role of such development projects in creating socio-geographies of “winners” and “losers” 2) the perpetuation of further inequality by choosing to mask who truly benefits from such migrations 3) immigrant as human being: it portrays migrants as exploitative objects (labor capital) and 4) care: it does not point out to the human suffering by both the migrant and the sending community, as a consequence of losing the care to and from such migrant - usually women as a result of international division of care.

Through an alleged structural analysis, Jones (1984) provides a neoliberal explanation by arguing that agrarian migrant communities are propelling migration themselves. Motivated by the immediate economic benefits they will obtain, sending households support family members - usually the father of the household for temporary migration. The income earned by this member facilitates a luxurious life style, which in turn requires this member to take more trips than originally planned. This also propels others to migrate as they see the economic benefit their neighbors sending household enjoys. Jones (1984) plausibly claims a Marxist perspective, that the migrants are blind and do not see their exploited position in the production chain.

All these analyses (pre and post 2006) agree for a rational decision to migrate based on economic benefits at various scales. However, the theories do not integrate analyses of historical relationships of socio, political and economic factors that could explain these movements, not as free choices, but in fact, as forced complex decisions. Also, the majority are male oriented studies and do not provide women’s experiences and reasons for out migration. While early migration was mostly by males due to patriarchal and gender roles ideologies, male-targeted jobs in the US and the presence of children in the sending family, currently both man and woman migrate almost at the same rate (Boehm 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). Therefore, including

women's experiences causes and forces of migration or non-migration, would provide broader and richer understandings of such movements.

Women's Migration

Fortunately, feminist research contributes plausible theories and approaches for analyses that reveal deeper and nuanced understandings of women's migration experiences and its consequences. Such framings consists of plausible combinations of political economic theories and analyses at various levels and scales including the body as the main scale of inquiry (Parrenas 2000; Silvey 2004). Geographers also argue that migration analyses must conceptualize forces of migration as a result of the embedded and embodied geographical patterns of accumulations through dispossessions resulting from historical (and ongoing) political economic processes and social construction of meaning through and within geographical spaces (Harvey 2003; Lawson 2010). These processes, most recently facilitated by the development discourse (Silvey & Lawson 1999) create ongoing uneven economic conditions and produce an international division of care supported and boosted by gender roles ideologies (Lawson 1998). Such phenomenon propels migration of women from "lagging regions" (including Mexico) in order to fulfill "leading regions" demands for care work (at exploitative wages) benefiting the already privileged society. This in turn leads to the creation of further inequality in which, not only the migrant care worker suffers, but also the community left with lack of such important care (Lawson 2010). In explaining why there are higher rates of GS women migrating to GN, feminist research brilliantly demonstrate that the demands for jobs have changed; while manufacture mining and field physical labor intensive jobs used to recruit male migrants, currently there is an increase demand for women's labor in the form of care and cleaning jobs, socially constructed as women of color jobs (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003). Thus,

under extremely restricted number of options, in order to provide economic support for their family, an increase number of women are migrating from poor countries, specially from the Philippines (Parrenas 2000) and many from Mexico and Latin America (Harrington Meyer 2000; Segura & Zavella 2007). In such cases, the migrant women rely on family members or hire a community member to provide care for the loved one(s) left behind for periods mean to be short but that could extend to 10 or 15 years (Harrington Meyer 2000); process to what Parrenas (2000) refers to as “international division of reproductive labor,” Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000) names it “transnational mothering” and Richmond (1994) explains that this process is part of a “global apartheid” phenomena. While this change of economies, commodification of care work and supply of such jobs targeted for women provide plausible explanations of why women from Global South (including Mexico) are migrating at greater rates, there is a new phenomena in Mexico, an increase wave of violence since the 2000s, which has been under-analyzed as a factor contributing to Mexican women’s decision to out-migrate.

For example, when analyzing risk in relation to women’s decision to out-migrate, studies show that women’s decision to migrate differs from men’s in that women avoid taking risks and will only migrate if risk can be minimized (Davis & Winters 2001; Durand et al. 2004). Risk is portrayed as both economic and physical. Having liquid household assets is important in order to mitigate risk at home and to afford paying for a coyote. Having strong networks that can guarantee finding a job in the receiving country is also crucial (Davis & Winters 2001). In addition, women face higher physical risk during the migration trip due to being exposed to sexual abuse and or being taken advantages due to their defenseless position (Davis & Winters 2001). Another important collection of essays addressing Mexican (and global south) migrant women reflects that some of the forces driving Mexican women to the US include a combination

of: consequences of globalization in intensifying poverty in these countries, augmentation of women-targeted jobs (temporary and exploitative), strong family/social networks, and women's resistance to patriarchal and matriarchal ideologies (Segura & Zavella 2007). However, given that the majority of these analyses took place before the wave of violence in the 2000s, my study will extend such conversation by analyzing whether and how the violence in Mexico has contributed to women's outmigration decision, how women experience such journey at the borderlands and finally how migrant women experience life in the receiving country. By drawing on broad feminist theoretical approach that includes contextualization of social political economic historical (and ongoing) processes which have resulted in deep structural inequalities (Lawson 2010; Shrestha 1989), in combination with empirical evidences or testimonios of bodily experiences of current violence in the origins -Mexico (Wright 2011a), the borderlands (Staudt et al. 2009) and the destination -The US (Momsen 2003), my thesis contributes this collection of feminism migration studies with deeper understandings on how Mexican women experience the migration journey in this age of violence and segregation in these three geographical sites.

In examining most recent empirical migration studies that include women in their analyses, it is noted that while historically mostly male have out-migrated in search for jobs in the US, many of them through the bracero program, leaving the women and children in the sending community to be in charge of the household (Peña et al. 2013), most recently (after the mid 1980s immigration reform) some women have joined their husbands in this journey in search for a better socio-economic life (Ochoa 2012). Further more, Peña et. al (2013) fund that women are migrating to reunify families. A great deal of these outmigration movements have been facilitated by the strong social networks the sending community has build over history in the northern country. In other words, women prefer 'safer' trips choosing to travel with

documentation or by paying a coyote and having a strong network. If women avoid the risky trip to the US, why are they migrating at almost the same rate as men? Has the wave of violence affected their decision to migrate?

In a quest to understand whether increase violence in four Latin American countries, including Mexico, would lead to outmigration, apparently, Alvarado & Massey (2010) found out that in Mexico as violence increases, outmigration decreases. They argue that in his case, only middle class families have the resources to out-migrate while the poor agrarian communities, which constitute a high parentage of the population, cannot because they do not have economic means to do so.

Contrary to this finding, plausible critical analysis by Maldonado Aranda (2012) finds that agrarian villages in Michoacán have been displaced as a result of violence intensification. Furthermore, Boehm (2011) carefully illustrates how both returning migrants and relatives, who reside in Mexico, are often victims of the violence and kidnap because they are seen as a new income stream. Although not gender specific, these analyses brilliantly demonstrate how the increase wave of violence is a powerful contributing for the escalation of returning and new flows of Mexican migration to the US.

In the following section, I explore how historical, economic, political and social factors and processes have transformed Mexico into an unsafe country for many of its citizens.

Migration: As a result of deep historical structural violence and our global economy

During the last 500 years, Mexico has faced multiple violent conflicts that created and intensified economic, political and social inequalities both between countries and within the nation. As most global south countries, Mexico was physically colonized during the fifteen

century (Ballard 1987). Such colonizing period lasted about 300 years. During this time, Mexico's knowledge's and civilizations were destroyed, and the country was forced to be a Primary Export Dependent (PED) nation in charge of exploiting and exporting its natural resources to nourish Spain's industrial revolution. The land was appropriated, and the majority of entitlement was given to a few Spanish descendants elites. Creating thus, polarization of social, political and economic status (Shrestha & Patterson 1990). Tired of such injustices, Mexico declared independence from the Spanish crown in 1810. However, such independence did not mean real independence. After this "victory," the elite Spanish descendent government continued to rule and began its race towards a westernized modernization (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996). This ideology, in combination with US's expansion of its territory and the French colonial attempts, resulted in multiple political and economic, national and transnational conflicts. Some of such conflicts include the 1846 US-Mexico war in which Mexico lost almost half its territory (Weintraub 2010), the 1862 French revolution or La Batalla de Puebla (The Battle of Puebla) in which Mexico avoided French colonization, and the 1910 Mexican revolution against President Porfirio Diaz' 30 year long dictatorship, better known as the Porfiriato, during which time deep inequalities in Mexico further intensified (Beezley 2011). During the Porfiriato, economic and political power was placed in the hands of a select few, mostly Spanish descendants elites. The majority of population was set to believe itself as no longer indigenous, but as "mestizos" (mixed races mostly of Indigenous and Spaniards), history of Mexico was silenced, and the non-elite populations were further segregated and mistreated (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996).

In addition to being negatively affected by its own national policies, Mexicans have been hurt by international neoliberal policies which have resulted in enormous economic and political injustices (Sparke 2013). The US, supported by the UK, is the lead country to promote free trade

through political policies better known as Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) that would set the market free (liberal) by deregulating businesses' practices, eliminating barriers to trade, allowing privatization of public services properties and natural resources, and decreasing/cutting public spending and welfare. This new package of market freedoms has been imposed to Mexico and most developing countries around the world through different tactics varying from authoritarian approaches, military force, and conditions of compliance with lending institutions (Corva 2008). This last one has created detrimental living conditions for the Mexican populations and other developing countries (Shrestha & Patterson 1990).

By the mid nineteenth hundreds, the indigenous roots, agricultural strengths and autonomy were completely negated and Mexico was to be directed towards industrialization and western modernization project (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996). Mexico was determined to become a modern industrialized autonomous country and eradicate its PED status set by colonialism. In order to finance its industrializing project, Mexico was persuaded to borrow large amounts of international capital (which international banks had accumulated as a result of OPEC oil price increase due to the war and decrease demand by the US) at low, but also variable rates (Cornelius 1985). Soon after, in order to alleviate its own economic crisis of 1970s, which resulted mostly from its involvement in the Cold War, the US increased its national interest rate. In response, the international banks increased their rates affecting Mexico's interest rates and tremendously increasing its regular payment. Consequently Mexico fell into a vicious borrowing cycle in order to wage its external debt (Sheppard 2012 & Sheppard 2009). By the early 1980s Mexico's debt was constantly growing as a result. In addition, its low quality of industrial products (which could not compete at an international level) and high foreign technology dependence (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996) worsened the situation. By 1982 Mexico's economy

collapsed as it could not keep up with its external debt payments. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) - a lending institution strongly influenced by the US, intervened in order to protect its reputation as a lead guardian of the world's economy and protector of free trade. Even though Mexico had already generated enough payments to cover its original loan principal, the IMF became determined to prevent Mexico's bankruptcy by forcing Mexico into fulfilling its increased interest rate debt payments at whatever cost; even if meant diminishing Mexico's population already deprived quality of life. This institution imposed Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) as well as neoliberal market reforms as a condition to lend a small loan which would buy time to facilitate payment arrangements between Mexico and the international lenders (Morton 2003 & Sparke, 2013). In addition to negating participation from the rural poor and eliminating public benefits, these policies facilitate environmental damages and exploitation of natural resources and human labor in developing countries, affecting rural population the most (Barenjee 2008, p1559; Mercille 2011). As a result of protection the free market (through the globalization discourse) and the external debt (or "eternal debt," I would argue), Mexico suffered from additional neoliberal policies twelve years later.

In January 1994, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) entered into effect between the US, Canada and Mexico bringing with it additional SAPs and neoliberal market reforms further deteriorating the Mexican economic situation (Morton 2003; Young 1995). While one of the presumable intentions of this treaty was to decrease Mexico-US migration, it produced opposite effects due to detrimental living conditions originated from this agreement (McDonald 2005). NAFTA was established to further free the market by dissolving international borders for goods and capital. Due to the reduction of tariffs this treaty demanded, the US and Canada were able to inundate the Mexican market with their subsidized agrarian products

(Sparke 2013). Meráz García (2012) points out that as imported subsidized agrarian products became available in the market, a lot of farmers stopped growing their own corn and vegetables because it was cheaper to buy than to cultivate them. This phenomena lead to Mexico's increase dependency on imports from the US and Canada. Furthermore, the Mexican government could not afford subsidizing its agrarian producers as under the SAPs, Mexico is supposed to reduce/eliminate social spending in order to save for its regular debt payments. As a result, small, medium and self-employed Mexican agrarian producers could not compete and went out of business. Thousands of employees were laid off and forced to look for new jobs (Guerrero García Rojas & Magaña García 2013; Sparke, 2013). In the mean time, increasing demand for subsidized US products in Mexico, including agrarian products which was supposed to be Mexico's comparative advantage, was generating more jobs across the border (Young 1995). Without jobs and with lack of governmental social assistance in the form of education, unemployment benefits and employment opportunities due to SAPs, many are confronted to two main options: 1) change their agrarian practices and cultivate the one commodity with high demand in the US, marijuana/drugs or 2) risk their lives crossing the reinforced and extreme dangerous northern border in order recover their lost jobs. Consequently, in addition to becoming a net capital exporter country waging its debt, Mexico is now a Maquiladora (foreign owned factories) and bracero (manual laborer) land because Mexicans were left with only their arms' strength to sell so that foreigners might became rich (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996). "The country that invented corn now has to import it" (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996, p154). If Mexico would pay its whole debt now, it would be poorer than when it first acquired it (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996).

Hansen-Kuhn (1997) says, "In reality, the evolution of the Mexican economic crisis

illustrates the connection between NAFTA and the neoliberal economic policies promoted by the U.S. Treasury through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the early 1980s” (22). Further, it is argued that these phenomena did not only lead to Mexican economic crises, but also to current state of narco-violence (Meráz Garcia, 2012; Maldonado Aranda 2012; Morris 2012)

Geographies of Violence, Insecurity and Outmigration

In addition to economic crisis, Mexico is suffering relatively new events as a result of transnational policies. Multiple analyses conclude that ever since the mid 2000s there has been an augmentation of violence in this country (Astorga & Shirk 2010 Mercille 2011; Rios, n.d). Soon after Calderon took presidential position in 2006, under the pressure from the US’ “concern” that Mexico could become a failing state, he declared the “war against drugs.” As a result, Mexico has been hit by a wave of violence. The exact figure of homicides is unclear. There are some studies indicating that between 2006 and 2010 there have been about 28,000 deaths (Wright 2011), while others indicated that the figure is around 40,000 (Carpenter 2013; Mercille 2011; Rios n.d.). Either way, the number of killings is higher than those that resulted from the 1910 revolution (Wright 2011).

In order to understand these occurrences, vast research has been conducted by mainstream investigators or by researchers influenced by western ideologies. These analysts blame the drug cartels and the Mexican government for the current outrageous narco-violence and blindly support US interventions and thus, its hegemony over Mexico. For instance, Carpenter (2010) urges the United Nations (and thus, the US) to provide an assistance package/project of intervention to fight drug cartels in Mexico. Others analysts attribute the increase of drug related violence to Calderon’s new successful strategy to fight the drug-cartels Rios (2012). There is a

concern that the current increase of narco-violence in Mexico threatens the US population since it can result in “spill over” to the US territory (Astorga Almanza 1996; Astorga & Shirk 2010). Some scholars opposed NAFTA in Mexico, not due to its negative economic and political consequences on Mexico, but because of Mexico’s inability to obtain real democracy (which according to these scholars, is the main purpose of free trade agreements such as NAFTA) due to its deep and persistent corruption (Lupsha 1991; Paternostro, 1995).

On the other hand, critical scholars have accomplished plausible nuanced explanations by applying a political economic approach in their analyzes of the “war on drugs” the US-Mexico “war on drugs” (Bacon 2008; Banerjee 2008a; Corva 2008; Maldonado Aranda 2012; Mercille 2011; Wright 2011). Their work illustrates that the “war on drugs” is a mechanism or a pretext for the US to maintain its hegemony and control over Mexico as well as to protect the ‘free’ economic market because agreements such as NAFTA generate high economic gains for the US.

The “war on drugs” is an approach for capital accumulation by dispossession, to what Banerjee (2008) refers as narcocapitalism, an “...opportunity to earn and in the case of foreign capital to repatriate a reasonable return are the objectives which have shaped US policy towards Mexico, not a desire to address drug problems” (Mercille 2011, p1641). The 1961, 1986 and the 1988 U.N. Anti-Drug Abuse Acts, mostly influenced by the US, demand military discipline towards the “major” drug producers and distributors, rather than “major” consumers (the US itself). The global south is the producer and criminal whose labor is exploited while the drugs gains its highest value in the global north where final distribution and consumption takes place, just like with any other commodity in our current global market (Corva 2008).

Since the 1970s, US transactional neoliberal reforms aimed at protecting free market and

control Latin American populations have created illegal and criminal markets in Mexico. In 1971, President Nixon declared the “war on drugs” against Colombia Perú y Bolivia. This resulted in decrease of drug production by these countries, which opened the opportunity for México to become the producer and transporter of this commodity in such high demand from US consumers. In addition, due to the cancelation of the passage of drugs through the Caribbean, the Pacific Coast became the new path for the transportation of drugs. The south of Michoacán, with an extensive coast isolated from the government, turn out to be the perfect place to receive and transport the drug. (Maldonado Aranda 2012). This represented a new job stream for many.

After losing their job, thanks to free trade and not counting with governmental support due US implementation of SAPs, these populations face the pressure or what some call, the “free rational choice,” to illegally migrate to the US or participate in the illicit economy. Either action converts them into criminals; those who migrate to the US are flagged as illegal aliens, and those who participate in the drug economy become narco-criminals as constructed by the in the US in conjunction with the United Nations (Corva 2008; Meráz Garcia 2012; Mercille 2011). Militarization and trans-nationalization of the US’s “war on drugs” is a liberal technique for identifying populations that cannot be governed through the promotion of liberty and must be governed in other ways. In such cases, the state creates illiberal or criminal subjects through an illusion of free choice (Corva 2008). In other words as Lemke (2001) draws on Foucault (1979) to argue that individuals are judged and given full responsibility of their ‘own’ actions and decision under “an artificially arranged liberty” of free choice in which the roots causes of inequality and structural violence are not considered, on the contrary full neoliberal responsibility for their individual (or household) choices is place on individuals themselves.

With the excuse of the 9/11 attacks, the US has changed its political priorities to

strengthening US security by combating terror and drugs. Framing Mexico as a country friendly for the illicit markets has been a powerful tool for intervention with military force (Corva 2008; Delgado-Ramos & Romano 2011; Mercille 2011). “The war on drugs” is the discourse used to Mexico while for Afghanistan it has been classified as political conflict. Ironically, when comparing who produced more drugs the latest seem to better fit the illicit market description because 30 percent of income in Afghanistan originates from poppy production while it only accounts for 2.5 percent in Mexico (Carpenter 2013). In order to protect the free market (further neoliberal reforms) and continue to create detrimental living conditions which allow for degradation of agrarian populations and to produce additional cheap labor (Mexico is the main source of cheap labor migration), framing the problem as risky as possible for the US was needed to justify this war (Mercille 2011; Amoores 2006; Coleman 2007).

The US does not care about the drug production, trafficking and the violence that results from it. In fact, the US is fuelling it. It is not controlling the high demand of drugs in the US. 95 percent of cocaine consumed in the US has been transported through Mexico from South America, where the vast majority it is cultivated (Mercille 2011). Through its secretly implemented and obviously failed operation “Fast and Furious” to supposedly trap drug and war lords, the US is supplying large amounts of high caliber weapons to narco cartels. In fact, it was discovered that some firearms in possession of the cartels were paid for by the FBI (Dodson 2013). Although it is estimated that 87 percent of weapons used by the cartels originated from the US, the large gun supply, which is fueling the violence in Mexico and Latin America, continues to be deregulated. Furthermore, the US is providing economic and military training support, the most recent being facilitated by the Merida Initiative, to the Mexican government who is an active participant in the drug business and the US is aware of it (Mercille 2011).

Through the Mérida Initiative, which came into effect on 2007, the US is providing the Mexican government economic aid, not directed towards the much-needed creation of jobs public assistance and social services, but designed towards military strengthening and law enforcement. The purpose of this initiative is to deal with three main issues in Mexico: criminal organizations, justice system and border control/security. The last one justified by the fear of the “spill over” of crime to the US territory, but in reality the purpose of reinforcing the border is to prevent unwanted Mexican immigrants into the US. As of 2011, the US had provided \$1.8 billions to fund this war, the majority of which has been spent in equipment and technology for the Mexican military and law enforcement (Carpenter 2013; Chabat 2010a).

Such new equipment and training has been used to combat the narco-criminals and militarize agrarian communities. In order to “comply” with the anti-Drug Abuse Acts, the Mexican federal government is currently in permanent state of exception against its own population. According to Maldonado Aranda (2012) ever since the nineteen nineties (ever since the 1970s according to Mercille (2011)), the state violence supported by the US, articulating with other violence, has been directly felt in rural populations. Calderon has not only adopted previous president’s (Vicente Fox) strategy of arresting drug-lords, but has also intensified military involvement in compliance with Anti Drug Abuse Acts and “The war on drugs” and terror. This creates further violence as once a drug-lord is eliminated; other drug cartels fight to gain control of the newly vacant territory and drug route(s) resulting in further armed confrontations between the drug cartels and the military. The surviving cartels (better armed) and newly formed ones have become more powerful as result (Chabat 2010a; Rios n.d). This in turn has created extremely precarious communities as these armed battles usually take place in public

spaces, and both the military and drug cartels are committing homicides, kidnappings, tortures and robbery against innocent civilians (Carpenter 2013; Wright 2011).

There is controversy as to who is killing who. A large number of mainstream scholars, including the US government, believe the Mexican government's discourse which claims that these deaths are all linked to drug trafficking organizations; that whoever is not involved in drugs should not fear their safety because narcos are killing each other (Chabat 2010b; Rios n.d.; Shirk 2010). However, some critical analysts have challenged this discourse. It is argued that both narco cartels and the government are guilty for such crimes (Carpenter 2013; Wright 2011a). The Mexican government, encouraged by the US, is militarizing cities with the excuse of "The war on drugs". Civilians complain that they do not know anymore who is the dangerous individual, the narcos or the government, as both groups are killing innocent civilians. The reason being that Mexico is in state of exception against its own populations due to "The war on drugs," and the government proudly reports all these deaths as a proof of their "successful" battle against drug cartels (Wright 2011). Through this alleged success and thus, compliance with the US transnational "war on drug," the Mexican government secures its qualification for additional US aid through the Meridian initiative designated for military training and firepower investment.

Hence the US in conjunction with the Mexican government are in fact performing both biopower which leads to the devaluation or subjugation of the body, and bioplitics by operating power over life (Foucault 1995; Inda 2007). The government has successfully propagated the discourse that those who are being killed are involved in the illicit market of drugs, and therefore such lives are not worth keeping in accordance to transnational polices criminalizing those in the production particular drugs. This logic leads to high impunity of innocent civilians' deaths (Wright 2011). Therefore civilians feel extremely insecure in their highly militarized towns, an

approach supported and fueled by the US who provides weapons money and military training so that the Mexican population is govern in different ways; not as liberal, but as illiberal subjects or criminals who must be controlled with force (Maldonado Aranda 2012; Corva 2008; Mercille 2011). Although civilians try to believe the government discourse that only the narco related population are in danger, as the number of dead bodies increase and the awful ways of being killed worsens each year, civilian's level of vulnerability and distrust intensifies (Wright 2011a). This intensification of violence and risk has resulted in displacement of agrarian populations (Maldonado Aranda 2012) and has increased the number of (forced) returning and new migrants to the US in search for protection (Boehm 2011). However, such migrants ultimately get categorized as economic migrants who made the rational free choice to migrate in search of economic benefits.

I argue that labeling Mexicans immigrants as economic migrants, serves as a powerful distraction from the detrimental consequences that have come from historical structural violence and contemporary IMF/US neoliberal transnational policies on these immigrants' lives. Those agrarian immigrants who have risked their lives (or died in the borderlines) to come to the US have in fact been dispossessed and displaced (Hyndman 1997). Because we did not just make a "reasonable free choice," but have not other option, but to migrate to the US in order to survive. Thus, in this case, what is the difference between a recognized refugee and a Mexican "economic" immigrant? Are not both being forced out of their land? The irony here is that we beg for recognition and protection from the one nation who has created the unlivable and violent conditions in the first place! Such nation has propelled out-migration with the rational choice idea that individual immigrants just choose to leave only for economic reasons. However,

structural analyses of historical and contemporary relations could lead us to consider violence as a reason for outmigration; violence propelled in part by the US.

Testimonios of Life Experiences and Outmigration as a Result of Violence

Seven of my ten participants are originally from the same agrarian community, to which I am referring here as “El Rancho.” All of these families have a long history of residency in this agrarian community, located in a southwest state of Mexico. Unfortunately, neoliberal SAPs and free trade have produced unemployment and disadvantageous living conditions in El Rancho. Consequently, several community members of El Rancho welcomed cartel members because they were creating/offering jobs (carpenter 2013). With Calderon’s augmentation of military intervention to fight drug cartels by eliminating the main leader of the cartels (Chabat 2010c), by the mid 2000s El Rancho was becoming one of several disputed agrarian communities (territories and routes) in western Mexico and thus, a place of conflict and great danger for its residents. Andrea, an exceptional brave young woman who jumped the wall sixteen times and cruelty resides in the US with an amazing family and three adorable smart children, acknowledges how the current violence in Mexico affects every day life activities for ordinary people in Mexico,

“A las 10:00pm o a las 9:00pm ya no puede andar nadie en la calle [por que] se hace, a plena luz del día, la matazón y a plena luz del día a levantar a alguien y llevárselo.”

“At 10:00pm or at 9:00pm no one can be on the streets [because] during day light, the killings take place and during day light any one be taken away and the kidnaped” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

All, except for Lucero, describe their life previous to the violence in Mexico as modest, joyful and without pressure:

“Era bonita la vida en México; pero también era tranquila, no era como ahorita. Ahorita ya hay mucha balacera, mucho...peligro.” “En las tardes te podías salir a sentarte afuera,

o te ibas al jardín y salías a las 10 de la noche sin ningún pendiente. Saludabas a toda la gente y todo. Y ahorita ya no!”

“The life in Mexico was beautiful; but also serene, it was not like now. Nowadays, there is a lot shooting, a lot... danger. In the afternoons one could get out to sit outside, or one could go to the plaza and go out at ten at night without worrying; one could greet everybody and all; and nowadays not anymore!” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

“Mi vida...era divertida, vivíamos humildemente pero... vivíamos bien, sin presiones.”

“My life...was fun, we used to live modestly but... we lived well, without pressures” (Daniela, personal interview, 2013).

Pointing out how, in Mexico, it was not necessary to work in order to eat, as opposed to the US, was also a common observation among my participants.

“Acá si no trabajas, no comes, y en México es diferente por que en México trabajas lo tuyo y sabes que allá siembras tus tierras y con lo poco que te den, te estas manteniendo. [En México] la luz era todo los viles [facturas] que tenias.”

“Here if you do not work, you do not eat, and in Mexico is different because in Mexico you work your own [estate] and you know that there you cultivate your own property y with the little they give you, you are surviving. [In Mexico] the electricity were all the bills one had” (Grecia, personal interview 2013).

“Allá tienes tus propios animales, tienes tus gallinas, tienes... pos hay de todo, tienes tu carne, tienes todo, todo para comer, tienes las vacas para la leche, y aquí no, aquí todo tienes que comprar.”

“Over there you have your own animals, you have your own chickens, you have... well there is everything, you have your meat, you have everything, everything to eat, you have cows for the milk, and here you do not, here you have to buy everything” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

Violence as the Outmigration Reason

Nine of my ten participants have been directly or indirectly affected by the intensified violence in Mexico in unique ways. In the section bellow, I narrate three specific stories that illustrate the relationship between the current narco-violence, which has resulted from ongoing transnational socioeconomic and political processes, and out-migration (or forced migration) in Mexico. These stories challenge economic theories of migration as they shed light to complex

outmigration forces and brilliantly illustrate that women (and families) do not always just make a rational free decision to migrate.

Grecia's Story

Grecia had never imagined migrating to the US. All her extended and big family: grand parents, aunts/uncles and cousin live(d) in El Rancho and in places nearby. Her family had a home, a property, cattle and even a reliable truck. Her father used to grow several kinds of grains and vegetables including corn, beans and squash for home consumption. Her parents used to sell milk to some community members who did not have cattle as none of the stores had milk for sale. Her favorite time, as was for all of my participants from El Rancho including Lucero, was the last week of November – specially the last three days - of Las Fiestas del Pueblo (the town Saint celebration).

With her parent's support, Grecia got an opportunity to work at a Wal-Mart store as a sales associate in the nearest city and completed a teaching certificate, which would allow her to teach in small rural communities, through a program called CONAFE. She was able to teach in small rural communities nearby El Rancho for a few years until her father told her that she could not continue working “por tantos problemas que empezaron a haber” (“*due to so many problems that started to emerge*”) (*personal interview, 2013*)

Grecia remembers hearing some relatives who used to come to the US for temporary jobs and would tell her how much pressure it is to live in the US.

“Me decían, ‘allá... es... el reloj en la mano. Llegaba de trabajar a la casa a hacer de comer dormir y otro día a madrugar y el reloj, el reloj.’”

“*[They] would tell me, ‘over there... is... the watch in your hand. [I] Would arrive from work to the house to prepare food sleep and the next day get up early and the clock, the clock’*” (*Grecia, personal interview, 2013*).

Migrating to the US was never Grecia's plan.

“A mí nunca me llamo la atención [venirme] no se si sería que yo trabajaba, o vivía agosto.”

“I was never interested [in coming] I do not know if it was because I used to work, or I lived well” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

However, ultimately Grecia and her family had not choice but to migrate.

Grecia and her family have been deeply affected by the current wave of violence and when narrating her migration experience Grecia states,

“Nunca me llamaba la intención venirme [pero] por consecuencias de la vida pues ya no pudimos estar ahí [en El Rancho] y nos tuvimos que trasladar a Estados Unidos.”

“I was never curious to come [but] due to life consequences we could not stay there [in El Rancho] and we had to relocate to the US” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

Crossing the borderlands,

“Fue una experiencia un poco difícil por que... veníamos con una pena muy grande [y] ... una hermana venia mal, venia herida”

“It was a difficult experience because... we came with an enormous sorrow [and] one of my sisters was not well, she was wounded” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

⁵The enormous grief Grecia is referring to, illustrates how the wave of violence has profoundly hurt her family in such degree that ultimately forced them to out-migrate in search for safety and protection. Grecia is the fourth of eight siblings. She was born and raised in El Rancho where she lived until age of 22 when she, along with her family, was forced to out-migrate in 2008. Her family had resided there for many generations back, and it was well known and respected among the community members to such degree, that her father was encouraged and supported to become the town’s Commissary to which he was officially elected in 2007. Grecias’s father believed the discourse fueled by the government which became acknowledged in El Rancho at one point, that narcos are killing each other and therefore non-cartel members

⁵ The following part of the story comes from my position as an insider in this community.

should NOT be afraid (Wright 2011). As a consequence the phrase of, “si no te metes con ellos [miembros del cartel], ellos no se meten con tigo” (“*if you do not bother them [cartel members], they do not bother you*”) became very popular in this town.

However, this discourse soon proved to be wrong. Shortly after Grecia’s father acquired his position as Commissary, cartel members and/or sicarios give him two options, to either join the cartel or resign his title. He refused to do either. He actually told them to leave him alone, and he would leave them alone too. However, a few months later, Grecia’s father was killed while driving to a nearby town. Grecia and her youngest sister were present during this tragic event. As soon as her father noticed the sicarios approaching and their bad intentions, he hugged his daughters in order to protect them from the gunshots fired at them. Grecia’s father received most of bullet impacts on his back and one of the bullets did hit Grecia’s youngest sister’s leg. Extremely frightened, nervous, anxious and desperate with both her father and sister wounded, Grecia drove home as fast as she could, but her father was terribly injured, and she could not make it on time; her father died a few minutes before arriving to El Rancho.

Her father was not involved, in fact refused to participate, in the illicit market; decision that ultimately cost him his life. However, most likely his death made it to the list of murdered “narcos” to fulfill the ongoing discourse; that narcos are killing each other and thus proving the “successful” US transnational “war on drugs”.

Soon after the funeral, the whole family received threatening messages telling them to leave town. Dreading for the safety of her children, Grecia’s mother asked for protection from the Mexican government, request that was immediately denied. At that moment, Grecia’s mother had no choice but to migrate along with her children to the US in search for a safer place for her children.

Just as Lucero, Grecia (and her family) did not make a rational economic decision to migrate; instead they were forced to out-migrate. This forced movement resulted from physical bodily experiences of violence propelled by historical and contemporary structures resulting from national and transnational policies and the contemporary “war on drugs,” interventions aimed to protect the free market economy (Mercille 2011). These women and families out-migrated not because they were looking for economic advantages, but looking for safety and protection. Mariana (and her family) is another example of such phenomenon.

Mariana’s Story

Mariana is from an agrarian family who resides in a community nearby El Rancho. When Mariana married, she relocated to El Rancho where her husband resided. Soon after getting married, about 25 years ago, her husband opened a meat business in El Rancho from where they were able to survive. According to Marina,

“Después de que me case pues ya, teníamos carnicería, vendíamos carne y de ahí vivíamos.”

“After I got married, we had a meat store, we used to sell meat and from there we used to make a living” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

However, according to Mariana currently the delinquency is so high that it is hard to live in El Rancho,

“Ya ves la delincuencia allá esta muy fuerte. Para ir a vivir allá, no puede uno ya porque pues de lo poco que trabaja uno, le quitan la mitad... entonces no puede uno [vivir allá].”

“You see the delinquency there is very strong. To go live there, one cannot any more because from the small amount one makes working, they take away half... Thus, one cannot [live there]” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

⁶Soon after the wave of violence and arrival of cartel members in El Rancho, Mariana and her husband were approached by the cartel members in order to demand payments for “protection.” Several businesses owners, which consist mostly of small stores in people’s houses, in El Rancho received the same request. Payment for “protection,” became a requirement to keep their stores open. Eventually, the majority of businesses closed, including Mariana’s meat business, as they were unable to afford such “protection” payments. When Mariana and her husband refused to provide these payments, they received threatening messages asking them to pay or they would lose all of their properties. The conflict scaled to such high degree that at one point, part of Mariana’s home was burned out and Mariana, along with her husband and three children, had to flee overnight to the nearest city and in 2008. Soon after, they migrated to the US in search of a safer place for their children.

Mariana and her family have not returned to Mexico. In fact, ever since their arrival to the US, between 2004 and 2008, none of my participants, except for one: Elvira, have returned to Mexico. Elvira’s story clearly reflects the reason why all my participants, although wholeheartedly wishing to return, would not dear to do so at this moment.

Elvira’s retuning story

Elvira is the second of five siblings. She grew up in a very small agrarian community just outside El Rancho where her parents had property and cattle. Her dad used to cultivate the land and would never allowed her, or any of his five daughters, to participate in agricultural work due to socially constructed gender roles. According to Elvira, when she asked if she could go help farm the land, she reminded bout her role as a woman,

“[Mi papa] dijo que las mujeres eran pa la cocina, nada pal cerro.”

⁶ The following part of the story comes from my position as an insider in this community.

“[My father] said that women were for the kitchen, not for the meadows/fields” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

After being persuaded by her transnational social network, Elvira made her first trip to the US in 2004. A few years after getting married in Mexico, relatives residing in the US convinced her (and her husband) to come and see how life is like in the US. However, she did not like the US and wanted to return back to Mexico. She would repeatedly tell her husband,

“No! ya me voy a ir alcabo toy, toy [estoy] enfadada. Me vine de un rancho pa [para] estar en otro rancho...”

“No! I will live now because I am, I am bored. I came from one village to be in another village...” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

Although Elvira frequently expressed how much she missed her family (her mother and two sisters who continue to reside in Mexico) and her life in Mexico, her husband held her in the US for four years. In 2008, they decided to permanently return to Mexico as her husband too, missed his father and family who still resided there.

However, on her way to El Rancho, driving their own little truck, Elvira was terrified and worried due to the rumors she heard about the violence in Mexico. Elvira states,

“Yo cuando iba pa tras, cuando iba de aquí pa allá... yo sentía que se me iba a salir el corazón ahí llegando a El Balastare de ahí, de Pihuamo (una intersección donde empieza un camino de terracería de dos horas de camino en carro antes de llegar a El Rancho). Ahí me dio mucho miedo por que decían que a la gente la paraban en el camino (en la terracería) y que les quitaban las cosas que traían.”

“When I returned, when I was on my way from here there... I felt that my heart was going to pop out as we arrive to El Balastre, of Pihuamo (an intersection where a two-hour drive dirt road starts before arriving to El Rancho). There I felt very frightened because of the rumors that people would get stopped in the middle of the road (in the dirt road) an that they would be stripped off the things they brought” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

Luckily, they arrived safely to El Rancho.

Nevertheless, she did notice a drastic change in El Rancho resulting from the wave of violence. Elvira returned to Mexico in November in order to attend Las Fiestas del Pueblo which, as stated earlier, was the favorite event for all of my participants. Elvira narrates that as soon as they arrived,

“Ya miramos bien feo, ya estaban pasando todas las cosas de los matones esos.”

“It looked very ugly, the killings and all that were already taking place” (*Elvira, personal interview, 2013*).

The best event of the year, Las Fiestas del pueblo, was ruined,

“Ya no era lo mismo de antes, [había] poquita gente [ahora] y luego pues ya con miedo la gente se recogía temprano.”

“It was not as before, [there were] very few people [now] and all frightened people would go back home early” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

For instance,

“[En] los toros [habían] dos o tres personitas, y no pus ya dijimos, ‘yo aquí ya me da mucho miedo.’ El castillo [juegos pirotécnicos] lo quemaron temprano [y la gente decía] ‘ya vámonos’ por que pus no pueden quedarse muy noche.”

“[In] the rodeo [there were] two or three people, an so we said, ‘I here fell very frightened.’ The castle [fire works] got burned early [and the people would say] ‘lets go’ because one cannot stay too late” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

Although the plan was to return to live in Mexico permanently, the trip lasted only three months. According to Elvira, they could not stay in El Rancho because they could not work.

“No había nada ya ahí como pa trabajar en algo, ya no, no se podía por que ya la gente no dejaba. Ya no dejaban pues trabajar esas gente mala y pus ‘vámonos,’ dijimos ‘vámonos!’”

“There was nothing to work in, not anymore, one could not because the people would not allow it. Those mean people would not allow one to work and thus, ‘lets go,’ we said ‘lets go!’” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

⁷Not only were owners of some little businesses asked to pay a premium, but also those who sold cattle were forced to pay a percentage of that money. In fact, it was the buyer who was under pressure to pay only a portion of the price to the seller and to deliver the extra percentage to the cartel members. Additionally, various ordinary members of the community have been, under life threat (or extortion), required to pay a fee for “protection” as well (Archibold & Villegas 2014).

Elvira did not just made a rational economic decision to return to the US. After being the US for four years, she returned to Mexico to permanently reside there. However, she could not live there, and three months later she was forced to return. Elvira’s story clearly shows how unsafe and dreadful living conditions are for many agrarian communities, just like El Rancho. Life for in these towns is not the same. People are in constant fear, and finding jobs is more challenging than ever. Yet, instead directing funds towards social programs and creating much-needed jobs for example, Militarization of towns is encouraged and financially supported by the US. SAP force the Mexican government to decrease or eliminate social spending in order to wage the external debt; while simultaneously the US provides aid targeted to militarize towns with the pretext of “The war on drugs”. This approach in turn, creates drastic living conditions for populations in Mexico. Many of whom have not option but to migrate to the US and bring their arms’ strengths to provide cheap labor, supported by the discourse of ‘illegality,’ in favor of our global capitalism (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996; Hyndman 1997; Sparke 2006). Thus, including women’s experiences of outmigration, in a historical structural context, uncovers various forms of structural violence that leads to forced, not rational economic, outmigration. It reveals deeply rooted multilayered structural risk and allows to see, even those who migrate due

⁷ The following part of the story comes from my position as an insider in this community

to economic reasons not as economic migrants, but as forced migrants due to suffering and violence resulting historical national and transactional polices.

CHAPTER FOUR: BORDERS

“Border controls are fundamentally akin to a politics of apartheid concerned with preserving the wealth and resources of the north from those displaced from the south after years of (neo)colonial practices have stripped these lands of their resources.”

(Rygiel 2011, p4)

“Understanding borders and mobility is bound to be more expansive and complex if it includes the experiences and meanings of violence, security, globalization and human rights generated by women”

(Pickering 2011, p3)

Introduction

In this chapter I briefly situate the role of borders globally; followed by an analysis of the US-Mexico border and its historical transformation: from a blurry frontier in the early nineteenth hundreds to a current physical wall, “the wall of shame” (Ramos 2002) or “the wall of hate” (Staudt et al. 2009). This chapter focuses on borders because of the role they play in current neo-liberal global economy in both softening and hardening the US-Mexico border simultaneously: facilitating fast movement of goods, capital, services and privileged people (tourists, business travellers and wanted migrants) while at the same time, reinforcing and strictly controlling the movement of forced migrants (poor working class agrarian populations (Amoore & Goedege 2008; Hyndman 1997). I will then, focus on how the reinforcement of the border is intimately affecting forced migrants. In order to investigate experiences of vulnerability by women during the migration journey, I draw on testimonies of women who have crossed this “wall of shame” (Ramos 2002) and/or “devils highway,” (Urrea 2004) revealing through the lens of their unique bodily experiences during this “forbidden” journey the way risk and vulnerability affect women differently in different sites during their migration journey. As Lawson & England (2013) argue, when analyzing women’s experiences as a result of border enforcements, the global (national border politics) is deeply related to the intimate (body and care) (Lawson & England 2013); my

research contributes to this conversation by adding that women's experiences during the process of crossing the US-Mexico border lands (the global) are deeply tangled with crisis of care (local). This chapter explores the ongoing injustices certain populations face in which one type of violence leads to another. In other words, I reveal how some populations face greater danger in the borderlands than the violence that initially prompted their migration.

Borders

Defining borders is a difficult task. Borders have been referred to as complex, unfixed, social, political and economic ideologies; as human made boundaries and ideologies resulting from socio economic and geopolitical processes that serve to divide and control the global population (Ganster & Lorey 2008) both physically and psychologically. As a result, throughout history humans have partitioned the physical (and social) world at various scales using a variety of tools and concepts including fences walls maps (Newman & Paasi 1998) and social ideologies that function to separate the us/them, here/there, in/out, north/south, developed/developing, civil/uncivil (Amoore 2006; Newman 2006). Other scholars describe borders as multiple identities that humans cross and/or live in everyday (Ewing 1998), as ongoing unstable performances resulting from violent acts (Pickering 2011) described as living in between multiple borders, in the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987).

Some others place emphasis on the physical territorial border, such as the lines outlining nation states' territoriality and sovereign power, as simultaneously resulting from and further strengthening non-territorial boundaries (Beezley 2011; Hernandez 2010; Martinez et al. 1996; Nevins, 2002; Rosière & Jones 2012; Staudt et al. 2009; Urrea 2004; Vigneswaran, 2008). Such borders function to control and manage movement of populations. The execution of sovereign power at the territorial border justifies and normalizes the management of people's movement

through both biopower (power over the life at the level of the populations) and biopolitics control (power over life a level of the individual body) (Amoore & Geode 2008). Salter (2008) argues that, in the name of managing “risk”, state officials’ inspection at the border generates a constant state of exception “...which makes the ‘normal’ biopolitical control of government inside the territorial frontier of the state possible” (365). In this case, biopolitics smoothes the performance of a spatio-legal fiction of territorial sovereignty in each admission/exclusion decision made.

As Nevins (2006) points out, inclusion/exclusion decisions are based on socioeconomic and racial criteria. In this case, biopolitics has served to code certain populations at the level of the body (mostly non-white poor working class) as dangerous, risky, poor and as unwanted. These populations have been denied permission to cross international borders due to their “own” socioeconomic non-white racial status and thus, fitting the “risky” looking discourse by the sovereign nation state. As Amoore (2006) brilliantly describes, “subject to biopower, the crossing of a physical territorial border is only one border crossing in a limitless series of journeys that traverse and inscribe the boundaries of safe/dangerous, civil/uncivil, legitimate traveller/illegal migrant” (338). In other words profiling some populations as “risky” based on racial identities has led these populations to carry the border on their bodies. Amore (2006) describes this phenomenon as biometric border and point out that Dear & Lucero (2005) name it “La frontera portatil.” Pickering (2011) describes it as continuum extra legal border crossing, which has not beginning or end, goes beyond territorial border crossing and is policed by both state and non-state actors.

National territorial boundaries consist of both crossing and non-crossing zones controlled by migration politics in different forms. Crossing zones give the appearance of a free border in

which everything that crosses is safe and legal. This zone is described as a bridge of contact in which all physical crossing should take place so that the sovereign can monitor such movements. However, those who do not meet the criteria, the unprivileged non-white poor, working class, have no choice but to cross without legal documentation typically through the non-crossing zones. This zone consists of the major portion of the border region and also the minority of crossers (Ganster & Lorey 2008). The rule of law is suspended and the value of life of those crossing this zone is reduced to a bare life, to 'zoe' or non-value status (Darling 2009; Diken, 2004). This is not to deny agency by those crossing, but to point out the impunity of deaths and deep injustices. Basically in this case, the death of someone (keeping in mind that every year, hundreds of people die trying to cross such borders (Staudt et al. 2009)) will not implicate criminalization of the responsible actor (Agamben & Heller-Roazen 1998). In fact, responsible actors are usually not even acknowledged. It is usually the irresponsible unethical smuggler and/or crosser her/himself who is blamed for her/his own neoliberal decision to cross obscuring thus, the sovereign nations' own accountability for contributing and creating such deadly conditions. As Staudt et al. (2009) queries about the 421 deaths on the US-Mexico borderlands in year 2006, "Who is accountable for policies and practices that result in such deaths among North American people? The state would never accept responsibility for these deaths" (8)

However, there is proof for such accountability. This is rooted in the modern sovereign nation state who for its own economic gain generates and implements policies that lead dispossessed populations (from the Global South) to experience increase exposure to danger and death in their home country, on the borderlands and receiving countries (Global North); Staudt et al. (2009) refers to such policies as, "...policy-induced deaths" (4). As indicated in chapter three, the imposition of transnational neoliberal policies and freedom of the market forces have created

detrimental living conditions for some populations (mostly agrarian) in Mexico (Daza & Juárez 2009; Guerrero García Rojas and Magaña García 2013; Morton 2003; Young 1995) forcing them to migrate to the US (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996; Otero 2011; Ramos 2002; Sparke 2013). About 1.3 million Mexican farmers have been displaced as a result of NAFTA (Staudt et al. 2009). In addition, policies crafted to criminalize populations from the global south with the excuse of “The war on drugs and terror” (Corva 2008) in combination with initiatives (such as the Merida initiative of 2007) aiding militarization of Mexican citizens have made it unsafe for these populations to stay in their country (Mercille 2011; Maldonado Aranda 2012; Wright 2011) constraining them to migrate as well (Boehm 2011). Ironically, it is these same forced migrants whose admission to the US is denied due to their socio economic status. Furthermore, successful discourses linking (and blurring the distinction between) unauthorized border-crossing with drug smuggling, terrorism, crime and thus risk have facilitated and justified multiple policies and operations towards strengthening the border limiting the options to cross through isolated dangerous mountainous and/or desert zones (Hernandez 2010; Ramos 2002; Staudt et al. 2009). Thus, borders zones have been constructed as waiting tunnels, areas of suspension in which asylum seekers’ and undocumented immigrants’ movements are intensively controlled (Ashutosh & Mountz 2012; Conlon 2011; Hyndman & Giles 2011; Mountz 2011) and in where the value of the migrant or asylum seeker’s life eliminated - decreased to homo sacer or zoe status- as it gets banded from political rights (Diken 2004).

Borders also contribute to the creation of areas of exclusion perpetuating racialist otherness separating the “us” from “them” (Newman 2006; Amoore 2006), the Global North from the Global South, the citizen from the non-citizen (Drieskens et al. 2007; Mountz et al. 2013; Rosière & Jones 2012). Discourses of the “other” as inferior dangerous and terrorist have

facilitated such divide (Rygiel 2011; Amoore 2006). This image has further enabled the movement and expansion of the border both inside territorial boundaries and beyond national borders (Martin 2012; Mountz 2013; Nevins 2002). Furthermore, it has contributed to the imposition of national and transnational political projects such as “The war on drugs and terror” aimed at protecting the global economy (Rygiel 2011; Amoore 2006) and increasing control of immigrants movements by hardening the border through technopolitics (politics of creating both symbolic and literal barriers) such as the creation of walls and fences with the pretext of fitting drugs smugglers and terrorists, specially after 9/11/01 (Amoore & Geode 2008; Rosière & Jones 2012; Staudt et al. 2009). Hyndman (1997) and M. Sparke (2006) brilliantly explain the notion of a geopolitics of mobility creating borders more porous to capital including monetary aid directed to helping the very people (displaced migrants) for whom the borders are closed. Other feminist analyses have revealed how border management responds to a crisis of care by producing in ways that link global political-economic and embodied lives (Lawson & England 2014).

While border are human made, socially constructed, ongoing processes, unstable and extremely complex ranking from ideological to physical boundaries at various scales around the world (more specifically between the Global North from the Global South), for the purpose of the project, I will focus on the US-Mexico territorial border. Understanding border control politics: how, by whom and for whom this particular territorial border was created and is controlled, will provide an essential contextualization for analyzing how particular Mexican women experience crossing the borderlands, an important phase of the migration journey. “Border controls are fundamentally akin to a politics of apartheid concerned with preserving the

wealth and resources of the north from those displaced from the south after years of (neo)colonial practices have stripped these lands of their resources" (Rygiel 2011, p3).

My project will reveal how Mexican women experience crossing this particular buffer zone which has been converted into a deadly geographical space in the name of "protecting" US citizens and US sovereignty in general (Amoore 2006; Amoore and Geode 2008; Coleman 2007a). My participants have tasted the flavors of death in this phase of their journey because, as Pickering (2011) describes, forensic studies have found that women who attempt to cross this boundary die faster.

US-Mexico Border

"The wealthy areas of the world can increasingly be viewed as "off-shore" islands of development protected by walls and fences in an ocean of poverty."
(Rosière and Jones, 2012: 231)

As Rosière & Jones (2012) explain, the US has revived an immigration control practice that was assumed to have come to an end: the creation of physical walls. Currently the US-Mexico border includes a segmented wall, "wall of shame" measuring about 600 miles according to the US Customs and Border Protection. This wall currently scars both urbanized (mainly the south border of San Diego California and El Paso Texas) and non-urbanized zones where undocumented immigrants were observed crossing. Such wall was created through three main operations: Gate keepers from California, Hold-the-Line from Texans and Operation Safeguard in Arizona (Nevins, 2002; Rosière and Jones, 2012). While such geopolitical strategy has reduced zones for crossing, it has not significantly decreased the number of people crossing the border without documents. Every day dozens or hundreds cross this border without documentation. What is interesting, as Ganster & Lorey (2008) point out, is that this represents a very small percentage of the forty thousand people crossing the US-Mexico border legally

everyday. While Garster & Lorey (2008) argue that we should pay attention to the legal movements across this border, the small number crossing without documentation actually makes me point to this injustice more strongly. The majority of those crossing the border are granted with permits to do so, but the very few who have been deeply affected by historical structures are denied the privilege of a visa. What is the role of the US-Mexico border then if it allows for freedom of market forces and movement of the majority of people? According to Rygiel (2011) to generate vulnerable populations so they became cheap labor for the US economy. According to Amore & Goede (2008) it is to fulfill our current neoliberal way of governing an being governed thought risk discoursed for which some populations must be coded as risky ones. This in turn allows for intervention in the name of national “security” and “protection” of the neoliberal consumer. Ramos (2002) states that the role of border security is to control the movement of unwanted migrants who have been constructed as dangerous to the US and to stop the crossing of illegal commodities (malignly drugs). Nevertheless, both continue to cross this border due (in part) to the high demand for both cheap labor (Ramos 2006) and drug in the US (Mercille 2011). However, as Mountz (2013) states, "international migrants cross state boundaries and through this mobility are subjected to different local, national, regional, and international forms of regulation and law, depending on their location at any given time" (834).

History

"...[border control] aims to change the status of people making them more vulnerable to labor market forces...produce differentiation and stratification of legal statuses and subjectivities."

(Rygiel 2011, p3-4).

The creation, expansion and strengthening of the US-Mexico territorial border reflects various historical and extremely complex processes and practices resulting from various social,

political and economic ideologies, interests and powers. The following description reflects a brief account of important events and unequal power relationships that construct(ed) this territorial (and social) boundary. The major event defining the US Mexican border is the Treaty of Guadalupe at the end of the US-Mexico war, one hundred and fifty years ago, in which the US extended its territorial sovereignty taking away about half of Mexico's territory, including all or part of the ten Mexican northern states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Utah, Nevada and Texas (Beezley 2011; Ganster & Lorey 2008; Martinez et al. 1996; Nevins 2002; Ramos 2002). Losing this war in 1848, further marked Mexicans as weaker inferiors and thus, as the "other" (Nevins 2002). Ever since this occurrence, the two thousand mile long physical border has been transformed from a blurry undefined buffer zone to our current highly policed and partially wall fenced border (Ganster & Lorey 2008; Hyndman 1997; Nevins 2002). At first, the concern was to retain cattle from crossing the border (and the smuggling of some goods). However, currently animals have more freedom than immigrants to cross this boundary. Nevis (2002) clearly illustrates this phenomenon when he narrates the experience of a family with children and two dogs attempting to extra legally cross the border. While the family was taken to the detention center, the dogs, which were running behind the border patrols' car were the family was taken, were able to freely run away.

Controlling the movement for people, through institutionalized national migration regulation, is a relatively new occurrence in human history. It has (and is) continually producing differentiation and classification of legal statutes and subjectivity (Rygiel 2011). With the rise of capital and nation state system dominance, national governments have become intensively involved in controlling who enters their territory since the nineteen hundreds. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe requires that both the US and Mexico mutually define and manage the

border by involving a third party, it is the US as a modern territorial state with higher political power (Mountz 2013) who with the excuse of protecting its territory and sovereignty has mostly taken jurisdiction over this task (and lately requiring Mexico's cooperation in this task). In the early twentieth century, the US, in order to fulfill its own insatiable economic desires and its obligations to protect its populations from what the US government defines as "risk," has resulted in periodic closings and openings of the border to Mexico-US migration. Over time, various discourses have portrayed immigration as either economic opportunity or as threat in service of US interests at that time (Amoore and Goede 2008; Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002). As a result, multiple acts/policies/reforms and programs have been produced in the last one hundred years through a combination of both geopolitics of containment (militarizing the border) and geopolitics of engagement (moving the border in and outwards) (Coleman 2007a). Such political interventions have led to our current highly militarized and controlled US-Mexico border and migration policing practices within and beyond the territorial boundary. For the purpose of this project, I focus my analysis on historical discourses and processes that have resulted in a highly controlled and risky US-Mexico territorial boundary targeted to particular populations; on those who have been affected the most by historical structures, and instead of receiving support, they are further segregated and deemed criminals, illegals and unwanted – but needed immigrants. I more specifically focus on how our current highly militarized border contributes to horrid and unique experiences for women who cross this boundary. I will reveal a particular role women play in this geographical zone as caregivers. In addition, I will show how women immigrants perceive state patrol agents, not as the perpetrators of risk at the borderlands, but as last minute saviors and rescuers of their life.

While the border was first drawn in 1848, it was not until 1910 that the US became concerned about unauthorized Mexican migrants and the label “aliens” was first used to describe Mexicans in the US. Before then, the border was only lightly patrolled and mostly to prevent Chinese immigration from crossing to the US; Mexicans could freely cross this boundary (Hernandez 2010; Martinez et al. 1996; Nevins 2002). It was in 1910 that La Revolución Mexicana took place, when the Mexicans rebelled against President Porfirio Díaz, a cruel dictator highly influenced and supported by Western development ideologies (Beezley 2011; Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996; Nevins 2002). By 1921, 1) the chaos in the border states 2) the presumed spill of risk across the border and 3) the high number of Mexicans immigration to the US in search for safety and social stability resulting from such revolution and the Guerra Cristera that erupted in 1920 were the main pretexts used by the US to justify including Mexican people in the Immigration Act of 1917 (the very first immigration act and formal immigration control which was at first targeted against Chinese immigrants only). This act was justified by a discourse of risk, of protecting the US from potential dangerous attacks through the border due to the WWI. It, in turn, justified increasing the number of border patrols and medical inspectors who determined, based on immigrants health and literacy level, whether the immigrant was allowed or denied entry (Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002).

Though, wars and revolutions lead the US to increase border enforcement against “risky actors,” economic crisis resulting after wars lead to mass deportations of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-US citizens. Unfair deportations were justified by anti-immigrants sentiment - blaming immigrants, and not the war, for economic crisis. For example, as a result of economic crisis brought by WWI about 100,000 Mexicans were forced to leave the US between 1920 and 1921. This phenomenon was followed by the formation of the Border Patrol in 1924. Oppressive

actions against immigrants intensified by the 1929 Great Depression. About one million Mexicans, including US born, were cruelly expelled between 1929 and 1935. Such horrendous acts were facilitated by the establishment of US border patrol and the strengthening of the US-Mexico boundary which converted Mexicans into “illegals” in their native lands; propelling social and legal distinctions (and criminalization) between “us” and “them” “legal” and “illegal” and “citizens” and “aliens” (Nevins 2002; Pickering 2011).

While the US employed a discourse of “risk” in the context of war to justify US actions to strengthen its borders, the shortage of labor resulting from US involvement in such and its practices of cruel massive deportations created the opposite effect – an open border in order to provide economic opportunity to US growers. By 1942, in order to fulfill its own need for labor supply resulting from mass deportations and its involvement in WWII, the US created the Bracero Program targeted to recruiting Mexican young male workers (Fernández-Kelly & Massey 2007; Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002). The implementation of this program resulted in an increase number of Mexican immigrants both with and without documentations, because farm employers preferred undocumented immigrants as it was cheaper and less complicated to hire them. The government supported and encouraged such actions in favor of US growers. There were no penalties for employers, and further, the government provided legal documents, action known as “drying out the wetbacks” for undocumented workers, making it easier to be hired by entering without documentation, and obtaining legalization soon after (Nevins 2002). The term wetback (or *mojado*), implies that Mexicans were/are “illegally” crossing to the US territory through the state of Texas by swimming across the Río Grande/Bravo, which divides Texas from Mexico, and thus, wetting their backs in the process. However, several members of my community wonder, ‘if we wetted our backs as we supposedly migrated by crossing the Río

Grande, then how wet did those who crossed the Atlantic Ocean got?’ Referring to Mexican migrants as “wetbacks,” served to further degrade and de-humanize Mexican migrants by propelling an image of “illegal” job stealers and invaders of the US territory. Thus, strengthening the social and ideological divide between “us” and “them,” and justifying the “wetback” period of high deportations and discrimination between 1944 and 1954 (Hernandez 2010).

In addition, both the 1950s recession as well as the Cold War ideologies against communism, gave rise to anti-immigrant sentiment once again, resulting in the official creation of an aggressive campaign know as “Operation Wetback”(or “Mojado”) in 1954, and with that massive deportations. In 1954 along, over one million migrants were rudely deported. Simultaneously, the number of accepted bracero workers increased, giving the state more biopower control in selecting who was allowed/denied entry. It is worth noticing that the bracero program ended ten years later (in 1964) as a result of decrease demand for braceros due to both: 1) increased regulations and thus, preference to hire undocumented immigrants and 2) increased incorporation of machinery in agrarian jobs and thus, less need for manual labor (Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002).

Soon after Operation Wetback and the end of the bracero program, political actors became concerned that the wetback label also provoked sympathetic sentiments among US citizens. This represented potential challenges for the management of cheap labor. Therefore, new narratives of illegals and criminal aliens replaced the wetback discourse (Hernandez 2010). The economic crisis of the 1970s in the US, intensified ongoing efforts to manage Mexican immigration through an “out of control” border discourse; justifying increasing the number of border patrols and making policing the border a “normal” institutionalized practice. Furthermore, continual political efforts supported by the media to disperse narratives of

Mexicans as “invaders,” “outsiders” and “illegal aliens,” fortified social divisions, successfully setting the stage for a war against “illegals” (Nevins 2002).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a tremendous increase in federal resources dedicated to policing the border. During the Reagan administration (1981-1988), funding for border enforcement grew 130 percent dedicated to increasing INS’ (Immigration and Naturalization Services) personnel as well as quality and quantity of infrastructure and equipment for immigration enforcement purposes. During this period as well as the following period (during the Bush administration in the 1990s), an “out of control” border and “The war on drugs” became popular political discourses, not only to justify a tremendous increase in the border patrol presence, but also to officially militarize the frontier by integrating the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in patrolling the border (Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002). While prohibition of drug trafficking and even “The war on drugs” were not new as it was initiated during the Carter administration in the late 1970s (who also proposed a border fence for the first time), the Reagan and the Bush administrations were able to permanently, and without question, associate border enforcement with criminal activity (Corva 2008; Mercille 2011). This, in combinations with intense social division between Mexicans and “Americans” (US citizens), fuelled by ideologies of national territory identity, pride and difference, established the foundation for the launch of Operation Gatekeeper of 1994 whose assumption was based on the idea that increasing border patrol agents, would decrease the number of people attempting to cross without documents (Drieskens et al. 2007; Nevins 2002; Ramos, 2002).

By the early 1990s, anti-immigrant sentiment propelled by politicians (and facilitated by the media) grew stronger, especially in the southern states. An increased number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border, led to a perception of a failed Immigration

Reform and Control Act of 1986 to control inflows of “illegal” immigrants. In addition, once again, immigrants, both documented and undocumented, were blamed for California’s budget crisis during this period and, eventually, for the entire country’s crisis. As a result, California attempted to launch its own immigration policies, such as proposition 187 named, “Save Our State” (SOS) in 1994. Therefore, and in order to gain a second presidential term, Clinton launched Operation Blockage in 1993 followed by Operation Gatekeepers in 1994. These have led to our current highly militarized and fenced border aimed at blocking the crossing of unwanted immigrants (and “illicit” goods) (Fernández-Kelly & Massey 2007; Hernandez 2010; Martinez et al. 1996; Nevins 2002). However, the politics around border management have not always been towards closing the border, there is simultaneously a strong desire to open or erase the same border. The difference is, for whom the border has been closed, and for whom (and what) the border has been opened. This, I will explore in the following subsection.

Contemporary Border/Borderless: Neoliberalization NAFTA and securitization

While there has been a wide consensus among developed countries to extend globalization by promoting borderless policies for the ‘free’ flows of capital goods and services, when it comes to immigration and refugees, these countries are exercising their sovereign power to prevent and eliminate ‘free’ flows of these population by reinforcing their borders (Newman 2006; Sassen 1996). Ironically, both operations strengthening the border and treaties erasing this same border, have been implemented in the same year. While Mexico entered into the neoliberal General Agreement in Tariffs and Trade (GATT) agreement in 1986, in this same year the US implemented its Immigration Reform Act and Control. Also, in 1994, while the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, the Operation Gate Keeper was implemented (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007; Nevins, 2002).

NAFTA's primary purpose is not to expand trade of goods, as it is discursively known, but instead to 1) tear down barrier for capital mobility and investment, opening opportunities for US investors, 2) increase Mexico's credit, "rescuing" Mexico from its debt crisis and making sure it pays its debt and 3) gain access to cheap labor. With this, NAFTA established economic integration as a "benefit" for the US, Canada and Mexico. However, it was narrowly targeted to benefit elite investors industries and politicians, and it did not consider benefiting workers and citizens. It further ignored both countries' political integration and potential consequences of the unequal development advancement between both countries (Fernández-Kelly and Massey, 2007). Such neoliberal agreement perpetrated privatization of agrarian lands and overflow of the Mexican markets with subsidized Canadian and US's goods, and with that displacement of hundreds of farmers who were forced to migrate to the US as a result (Meráz Garcia 2012). This shows that migration decision is not solely a "voluntary" movement but also a result of historical, social, political and economic effects on particular populations (Shrestha 1989).

The September 11, 2002 attack became yet another excuse to further restrict who enters the US territory by reinforcing both the crossing and non-crossing areas of the frontier in the name of providing national "security" (Coleman 2007b; Ramos 2002; M. B. Sparke 2006). This created tension between free trade and border security (Fernández-Kelly & Massey 2007) and further revitalized border enforcements, not only on the physical territory through politics of containment, but also inwards and outwards the borderlands through politics of engagement (Amoore 2006; Coleman 2007a), increasing transnational expansion of US political sovereignty (Coleman 2007b). Furthermore, the Obama administration has made border "security" and border control practices a national priority. This administration has deported the most Mexican immigrant, over two million since 2008.

While much important work has been done on the historical creation and controversies of the US-Mexico border (Amoore 2006; Fernández-Kelly & Massey 2007; Ganster & Lorey 2008; Hernandez 2010; Martinez et al. 1996; Nevins 2002), much less work has focused on understanding how women experience crossing such a highly policed and risky border (Staudt et al. 2009). Thus, in the following sections, I will uncover unique bodily experiences from women who have been forced to cross the US-Mexico territorial boundary. My work complements and adds to Staudt et al. (2009)'s analysis of women's experiences at the US-Mexico borderlands. Whereas they argue that women face, in unique forms, similar risks (such as extreme weather crime and unscrupulous smugglers) as men at the borderlands, which they illustrate with interviews of women who have crossed this borderland, I employ deeper testimonies to uncover a richer and more complex picture of women's experiences, not only on the borderlands, but also at the origin and destination. As a lifelong insider to an immigrant community, I have unique access to profound experiences of this journey.

US-Mexico border crossing experiences

Efforts to close the border have not stopped displaced populations from crossing without documents. Operations, such as Gate Keeper, aimed at controlling (and decreasing) immigrants from the south, have forced people to use more hazardous and isolated routes including deserts and mountains. Instead of stopping populations from crossing, reinforced vigilance has resulted in increased risk exposure and multiplication on the number of deaths due to thirst, hunger, dehydration, cold and/or crime in such highly isolated buffer zones. As a result, both the number of arrests as well as the number of deaths continues to increase every year (Boehm 2011; Ramos, 2002). As for example, according to Ramos (2002) and the INS, during the first two weeks of the year 2000 14,664 undocumented immigrants were arrested on the twenty-five mile long

boundary between Douglas AZ and Agua Prieta. Furthermore, it has been estimated that from 1995 to early 2000, there were over 717 deaths. And just in the year 2005, there were over 500 deaths, about half of which took place in the Arizona desert (Slack & Whiteford 2010).

Although there is some literature describing how men experience crossing the US-Mexico border without documents and these experiences tend to be assumed are the same for women (Conover 2006; Ramos 2002; Urrea 2004), there are fewer analyses about women's experiences of such journey (Slack & Whiteford 2010; Staudt et al. 2009). Some plausible feminists investigations have been conducted about women experiences in the borderlands, and other borders, as asylum seekers in refugee camps (Mountz 2011; Pickering 2011; Rygiel 2011). However, these do not include the Mexico-US borderlands as Mexicans usually (and in general) do not qualify for refugee status (Boehm 2011). Other work describes women's experiences before and/or after crossing territorial boundaries (Boehm 2011; Lawson 1998; Silvey 2007; Slack & Whiteford 2010) or in borderland cities, such as experiences of high violence and discrimination in Ciudad Juarez and/or California (Segura & Zavella e.t al 2007; Wright 2011). A plausible study does analyze experiences of women crossing the US Mexico borderlands (Staudt et al. 2009). My work adds to these critical conversations deeper bodily experiences resulting form the overall immigration journey. My unique position as an insider allows me with exclusive access to detailed and complex testimonies about traveling and surviving this journey. This investigation helps me to illustrate different forms of regularity and resultant vulnerability of gendered bodies during the migration journey and with that, unpack relationships of power over and through migrant bodies in particular territorial spaces of control and limbo (Silvey 2007).

Testimonios: limbo and suspension!

“Nos perdimos, nos quedamos sin agua, sin comida, sin nada.”

“We got lost, we were without water, without food, with nothing.”

(Grecia, personal interview, 2013)

“Borders should be studied, not only from a top-down perspective, but also from the bottom up with a focus on the individual border narratives and experiences, reflecting the ways in which borders impact upon the daily life practices of people living in and around the borderland and transboundary transition zones” (Newman 2006, abstract). While I wholeheartedly agree with this statement, I argue that we must also add to these conversations experiences of women who have crossed borderlands without documentation. This will help us reach a more nuanced understanding on how policies implemented on such borders, not only impacts daily life, but also contribute to highly traumatizing experiences to women who frequently, do not come out of a free rational decision, but are forced to migrate (refer to my previous chapter, Origins). Furthermore, it would also reveal the important role of women as caregivers in the borderlands and would demonstrate the contrasting view migrant women have towards border patrol agents (and policing practices): instead of been seen as the cause for their suffering in this journey, as those who close the border and suspend human rights selectively on them (Salter 2008), the border patrols are many times considered life saviors. Criminalizing and blurring the difference of who crosses by categorizing all who migrate as drug traffickers and terrorist, serves to control, discipline and dehumanize all immigrants including innocent displaced populations which are the majority of those who transverse such boundary. Thus, successfully converting them into “illegals,” “criminals” and silent subjects who will supply cheap labor and accept suspension of human rights in a pacified form. As Rygiel (2011)

brilliantly explains, "...[border control] aims to change the status of people making them more vulnerable to labor market forces...produce differentiation and stratification of legal statuses and subjectivities" (3-4).

As indicated previously, more than half of my ten participants migrated to the US because they feared for their (and their family's) safety in their hometowns. Many were directly or indirectly affected by the current violence, encourage and aided by the US. Unsupported and unprotected by the Mexican government, they had no choice but to look for safety in El Norte. However, ironically, in order to reach what they perceived as a safe country, they all had to confront a closed highly risky policed and militarized borderland and thus, travel through extremely remote and isolated borderlands in where they faced many kinds of trauma, pain and illness. It took the majority of my participants several attempt to cross, walking for various days under extreme weather conditions, confronting crime, being exposed to poisonous animals, walking without food water shoes coats and sometimes alone (due to abandonment by their guides) and thus, getting lost. Some of my participants got sick and several played caring roles as well on the borderlands. Looking for the border patrol after being extremely tired, sick and lost was a common survival practice among my participants.

Each one of my participants narrates extremely interesting, unique and profound experiences in each one of their attempts to cross. In the rest of this paper, have I created three categories to illustrate unique but similar experiences at the borderlands: 1) *Enforcing the Border* – This subsection illustrates how different forms of regularities result in vulnerabilities of gendered bodies. It shows for whom the border is closed, for whom the rule of law and value of life is suspended, and the resultants in un-penalized crime and un-criminalized death in this buffer zone of limbo in which the death of someone does not constitute a crime; 2) *Traveling the*

Border - This subsection shows the contradictory role and behavior of guides (or coyotes) and border patrols and the consequences on immigrants whose life threatening trip re-started multiple times; and 3) *Surviving the border* – This portion uncovers unique risks and vulnerabilities women confront in this journey as a result of border enforcement, how they survive when getting sick and/or lost and the unique role women play in the borderlands.

Looking at women’s detailed experiences, humanizes migrants – explains their mobility in terms of fear and violence. Looking at women’s testimonies and what they endure, reveals how and for whom the border is enforced and the consequences of vulnerability, suffering and death of particular bodies. It reveals how inhuman and extreme crossing this border has become as result of how political powers and processes have converted this part of our land into a dangerous, isolated buffer zone which excluded populations are forced to confront.

Enforcing the Border: Risky by whom?

“Ahí estaban como tres tipos con pistolas.”

“There were about three guys with weapons.”

(Lucero, personal interview, 2013)

Ironically, discourses of an “out of control,” “risky” border have facilitated reinforcement of the border and the creation of a truly risky borderland for vulnerable populations who are forced to emigrate from their homeland. In the late 2000s, while borders were being erased among twenty-seven European countries, the US was creating a wall and augmenting national military and law enforcement officers in its Mexico-US borderlands (Staudt et al. 2009). Such border securitization has not stopped Mexican populations from migrating to the US as it has not resolved the main reasons for migration (displacement due to neoliberal and transnational policies augmenting poverty and violence), but it has forced them to use alternative

isolated and longer routes (Ramos 2002). It is in these isolated routes that exposure to crime and death is mostly confronted.

Several of my participants were robbed when trying to cross through inhospitable isolated paths. As previously indicated, Lucero narrates how they were robbed at the borderlands,

“[Después de caminar] dos horas, llegamos a una barranca, ahí estaban como tres tipos con pistolas. Nos desnudaron todos completos, hombres y mujeres para ver si traíamos dinero. Nos quitaron lo mas bueno que traíamos.”

“[After walking] for two hours, we arrived to a canyon, there were about three guys with weapons. They completely undressed all of us men and women to see if we had money. They took away the best things we had” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

She explains that they could not do anything since the robbers had weapons and their guide was friend with the robbers. In addition, there was (is) not law that would protect them at all. Who would they report such crime to?

Grecia describes that soon after beginning their walking trip at the borderlands they got robbed at gunpoint,

“No aviamos caminado ni media hora, cuando nos salieron unos cholos y nos quitaron lo que traíamos, nos quitaron comida y agua.”

“We had not walk even half an hour, when some gangs appeared y took away what we had, they took away food and water” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

This contributed to a dreadful trip, not having water or food leded to them to becoming extremely hungry and thirsty in this journey.

After living through such experiences, my participants express feeling greater levels of fear and nervousness through their journey,

“Después de que nos asaltaron fue más el miedo que yo tenía.”

“After we got robbed it the terror I had augmented” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

However, these crimes go unreported and un-penalized. There is not one to report these to, these innocent immigrants do not have any type of legal protection due to the nation state's practice of sovereignty power to suspend the rule of law and reduce the value of life of those crossing this zone to a bare life, to 'zoe' or non-value status (Darling 2009; Diken 2004). This provides thieves (and anyone) with exceptional biopolitics (to take life or let die) over the bodies of innocent immigrants including women. Basically, these criminals can (and have) kill(ed) immigrants and never be convicted as criminals.

However, one must never forget who (and for whom) has both perpetuated the need to migrate in the first place, has created these detrimental crossing conditions for these same populations, and in the process creates vulnerable exploitable subjects.

Several of my participants experienced abandonment by their guides (to whom I refer to as coyotes as well). On some occasions, their guide just left them in the middle of the desert. Lucero relates how the coyote abandoned the whole group in the borderlands when migration approached them,

“El (coyote) fue el único que corrió y ya no supimos de él. Y si nos agarro migración.”

“Him (coyote) was the only one who ran and then we did not know anything about him. And yes the border patrol apprehended us” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

While this would lead one to point out how unscrupulous coyotes are, (and may be the case sometimes) one must also acknowledge that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) severally penalized such job; and this could explain why coyotes run as soon as they see border patrols approaching the group. It is one of ICE's strategies against coyotes (or human smugglers as ICE calls them) to “pursue legislation to increase penalties against organized smugglers and provide additional criminal offenses to better address spotters who assist criminals with smuggling aliens and contraband” (ICE 2014). Ones again, humans

(immigrants) and contraband (drugs) fall under the same category. Thus, reinforcement of the border has made it hard and more dangerous for both migrants and guides.

Traveling the Border: risk for whom?

‘Este cayó al pozo y el guía no lo esperó y ahí se quedó.’

‘This one fell to a hole and the guide did not wait for him.’

(Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

It is evident that guides do play a big role in this journey. All of my participants relied on coyotes to guide them through the borderlands. However, these coyotes know that neither themselves nor immigrants have any legal protection and that the value of life is suspended in this crossing zone and thus, behaved as such. Grecia describes that during her third attempt to cross the borderland, the coyote threw them (herself and her four siblings) in the middle of the dessert while he was still driving.

“El [coyote] nos dijo que nos bajáramos, íbamos corriendo [el carro estaba corriendo], nos dijo que porque iba a hacer sus necesidades, y ya después nos dijo que porque atrás de el venían otras torcas y decían que eran los que robaban a la gente. Ósea se los quitaban y ya luego pedían rescate por ti.”

“The [coyote] told us to get off, we were running [the car was running], he said that because he was going to do his [restroom] needs, and then latter he said that because behind there were coming other trucks and it was said these kidnap people. Essentially, they would take the people away from the coyote and latter they would ask for payment to release you (the kidnapped)” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

When they refused to get off the car, the guide yelled at them so they had to jump off of the car with noting and risking their very life.

“Cuando se bajo mi hermano y luego mi hermana, el pequeño quedo colgando. Entonces yo me asuste mucho y yo me avente con él [para protegerlo] y pues rodamos los dos. Y ahí [en el carro] se quedo todo, la comida y el agua.”

“When my brother got off and then my sister, the youngest one was hanging. Then I got extremely scared and I jumped with him [to protect him] and so we both rolled over.

And there [in the car] every thing was left, the food and the water” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

As a result of the transnational “war on drugs,” drug related gangs such as “Los Zetas” have moved to the northern borderlands of Mexico in order to secure border territorial control (Hall 2013). These gangs do tend to kidnap immigrants who attempt to transverse via isolated “prohibited” zones where the rule of law is suspended (Wright 2009). In this case, Grecia and her younger siblings were abandoned in the dessert and thus, exposed them to greater risk of kidnap as the coward coyote dumped them in the middle of the dessert.

Even some guides acknowledge that there are unscrupulous coyotes. Andrea tells that when they saw dead people on the road their coyote would tell them,

‘Este cayó al poso y el guía no lo esperó y ahí se quedó.’

‘This one fell to a hole and the guide did not wait for him’ (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

For the majority of my participants, it took more than one attempt before they were able to successfully cross the borderlands, risking their life multiple times. While on average it took them between two to four tries, I must point out that it took one of my participant’s twenty attempts at various parts of the borderlands before she was able to finally cross.

“Nos fuimos pa la frontera en los últimos de Enero y logramos pasar asta a principios de Marzo. Dure todo el mes de Febrero ahí, nomás no en esa misma frontera; ósea anduve por el cerro de día y de noche, brincando barandales, los barandales era por Mexicali, por donde caminamos por el mote fue por Agua Prieta.” “Ese barandal me lo brinque diez y seis veces, diarias. En cuanto cruzábamos la calle ahí estaba la migra ya esperándonos!”

“We went to the borderlands at the end of January and we were able to cross until beginning of March. During the whole month of February there, but not in the same part of the borderlands; in other words, I tried through the isolated areas day and night, jumping fences, the fences were through Mexicali, through Agua Prieta is from where we walked through isolated areas.” “I jumped that fence sixteen times, every day. As soon as

we crossed the street, there was the border patrol waiting from us already!” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

Andrea narrates that the border patrol got to know her and even explained that they were able to see them at distance and easily knew when they were coming thanks to cameras and binocular lenses he had. The state patrol would tell her,

‘Desde que vienen en la calle fulana así’ dijo ‘nosotros los estamos viendo que ya vienen, es conocido.’

‘Ever since you are coming from the so and so street like this’ he said ‘we are seeing that you are coming, is well known’ (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

At one point, Andrea asked the border patrol to just let her stay in the US and he said,

‘Imagínense que ustedes no vinieran, que íbamos a hacer nosotros? De que íbamos a vivir nosotros? No, no podemos,’ [él] dijo ‘pero vas a ver que si vas a pasar, tu síguele intentando.’

‘Imagine that you did not come what would we do? How would we survive? No, we cannot’ [he] said ‘but you will see that you will pass, you keep trying’ (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

The border patrol further told Andrea that the more people they apprehend, the more they get paid,

“Que a según los que agarraran así les pagaban.”

“That according to how may they apprehend, that is how much they get paid” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

Thus, as for jumping the Wall Andrea counted sixteen times, “Conté las diez y seis veces” (“I counted sixteen times”) as each time she was caught, the process was the same. She was droved to jail, all her information was obtained and her fingerprints were taken (as if she would be able to change the tip of her fingers or something) every single day for sixteen days; but it was all for reporting purposes.

Thus, having people risk their life crossing the border is even encouraged by the border patrol as this generates job security. They know that the migrants are not criminals or dangerous but playing the game of patrolling and ‘securing’ the border generates a well-paid job; it is more about securing a job than ‘securing’ the border as the more people they caught the more they get paid as this reflects their good performance and merit. According to the Office of Personal Management (OPM) 2014, law enforcement state patrols are paid in accordance to the Federal Wage System (FWS) based on their experience and time with the agency and also receive promotions according to their performance and merit within the agency. One of the strategies for overall improvement in performance is, “Using performance results as a basis for pay, awards, development, retention, removal and other personnel decisions” (OMP.GOV 2014). Thus, for the border patrols, it is all about business/jobs, not matter how much people suffer and risk trying to cross such territory.

Grecia, after her third failed attempt in which she found out she was pregnant, told her oldest brother (a US citizen waiting for them in the US) that she, and her other four siblings did not want to come anymore; that they had suffer a lot already.

“Entonces yo ya hable con mi hermano le decía que nosotros ya no queríamos venir; que ya aviamos sufrido mucho, que ya no queríamos este... venir para acá.”

“Then I talked with my brother and told him that we did not want to come anymore; that we have suffered a lot, that we did not want to... come here anymore” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

But after her brother insisted, she agreed to try one last time. Keeping in mind the reason why Grecia and her siblings had to migrate to the US in the first place also explains why her US citizen brother insisted that they try one last time even if this meant risking their life ones again in the borderlands. Staying in Mexico would also mean risking their life anyways (and for a longer term).

Surviving the Border – Pain and Fear for whom?

“Yo le gritaba, ‘vete que no te larguen, que vas a hacer tu aquí solo?’”

“I would scream, ‘go, do not let them live you behind! What are you going to do alone?’” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

Although both women and men are migrating at about the same rate through the US-Mexico border, women are almost three times more likely (than men) to die out of exposure on this borderland (Staudt et al. 2009). While at the border, some of my participants were to be let die when they got lost or were too tired or too sick to continue walking. Thanks to the US political discourses categorizing all immigrants as criminals and risky populations who threaten the safety of the nation (Fernández-Kelly & Massey 2007), their life had not value in this geographical zone (Salter 2008) and thus, for the guides, it was not worth waiting for. No one would be held responsible for their deaths any ways. In some cases, their guide (coyote) persuaded the rest of the group to just keep walking and abandon them.

Lucero was pregnant and got dehydrated, sick with infection and so much pain in her body and bare feet that she could not walk anymore.

“Y el otro guía gritaba que ahí me dejaran que siguieran los demás, y mi esposo se quedo con migo. Y yo le decía a él que siguiera porque yo sentía morirme del dolor que yo traía. Yo le decía que el se fuera, que me dejara ahí porque yo me iba a morir. Yo le gritaba, ‘vete que no te larguen que vas a hacer tu aquí solo?’” (Muchas lagrimas)

And the other guide shouted to live me there that the rest should continue, and my husband stayed with me. And I told him to continue as I felt like dying because of the pain I had. I told [him] that he should go, to live me there because I was going to die. I would scream, ‘go, do not let them live you behind! What are you going to do alone?’ (A lot of tears) (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

Lucero was pregnant and got sick, this shows the uniqueness of women’s suffering as result of a reinforced border and as a result of the nation-state’s biopolitics to controls immigrants movements and crossing routes as well as the use of biopower to negatively code

particular bodies to the point of devaluation their life to zoe status. The coyote was influential enough to make the other migrants abandon her for a brief moment until they rebelled against the coyote and returned to where they have left Lucero and her husband. They could have continued walking but this shows their humanity. They opted to resist by returning and helping Lucero although the coyote did not follow them. Thus, even though the nation state promotes its western ideologies of lies through criminalizing discourses against immigrants, the colonized (immigrants) do not always see as such (Fanon et al. 1965).

Grecia describes that at the borderlands, she felt a level of fear she had never experienced before!

“[Sentía] bastante miedo, un miedo que yo nunca había tenido.”

“I felt a lot of fear, a fear I had never felt before” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

It is important to point out that, as indicated earlier, Grecia had actually experienced a traumatizing and horrid event in her hometown, where she witnessed father’s assassination! But yet, she states it was at the borderlands that she experienced the highest level of fear. Her fear was so high, that somehow her jaw got frozen (locked wide open) and she could not close her mouth or moves her jaw.

“Seme cayeron las quijadas y duramos como una hora que no se me podía serrar la boca y así tuvimos que caminar porque que el señor que nos traía no... no se paraba a mirar lo que me estaba pasando y hasta que mi hermano dijo que ya no íbamos a seguir, que nos íbamos a quedar ahí.”

“My jaw fell open and it lasted like an hour that my mouth would not close and we had to walk like that because the man that was bringing us would not... would not stop to see what was happening to me and finally my brother said that we were not going to continue, that we were going to say there” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

Grecia tells that after the coyote abandoned them (her and her four younger siblings), they walked for hours and got lost; it got dark, they could hear wolfs, it started to rain and get very cold. Grecia got sick with asthma. She could not breathe and eventually not even walk; it

was then that some of her siblings walked to the nearest road looking for the border patrols while Grecia waited sitting in the middle of the desert.

Again, this reflects the horrifying consequences that our enforced border (in combination with suspension of the rule of law and devaluation life) brings to women's bodies. Women do face greater risk, especially pregnant women such as Grecia and Lucero. According to

Several of my participants were very frightened as they encountered death people and poisonous animals.

“Se miran las... las cabezas, se ven los huesos de la gente...”

“One can see the... the heads, one can see the bones from people...” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

“Se hoye platicas, se hoyen como ruidos de animales que dice uno, ‘hay dios mío santo, que será eso?’ nomas arriesgado a que no pises una culebra. A veces decía le coyote ‘quédense quietos porque va una culebra!’ y se quedaba uno quietecito.”

“One can hear conversations, one can hear noises from animals that one say, ‘oh my holy god, what could that be?’ Just risking to step on a snake. Some times the coyote would say ‘stay still because there is a snake!’ and one would stay very still” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

And who is responsible? Oh yes, no one as the rule of law is suspended and the death of someone does not constitute a crime in this zone; this is not even a crime! But how could the sobering have such a power to make exceptions of the law and exempt itself from it, and take away political life? According to (Fanon et al. 1965) this is all based on western ideologies and lies to prevent the dispossessed colonized from claim what is legitimately (her/his).

Andrea relates that definitely in this trip people risk their life,

“Es riesgosa la vida del, del camino si... ves tú este... como mochilitas de ropa y ves como ya como puros huesitos así en posos.”

“The life of the, the road is risky yes... you see... like backpacks with clothes and you see like only bones like this in holes” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

In the case of Thalía's experience she states,

“Pasaron como dos noches caminando por el cerro, por el desierto sin agua, puro caminar, nomas había muchas espinas, había cadáveres de gente que estaba muerta y muuucho frio en la noche. Ya mejor queríamos que nos agarraran.”

“It lasted like two nights waking trough hills, through the dessert with water, just walking; just there were a lot of thorns, there were death bodies of people and it was veery cold at night. We rather wanted to be caught by border patrols” (Thalía, Personal interview, 2013).

Reinforcing the border had made the immigration journey so hard and painful that in some cases immigrants would turn themselves to the ICE officers in order to avoid dying on the border.

Lucero was in so much pain and felt like dying that she wanted to be found by the border patrol,

“Yo lo que quería es que nos encontrara migración porque nosotros ya no aguantábamos, ya no aguantábamos era demasiado.”

“What I wanted is to be detained by the border patrol because we could not resist, we could not resist it was too much” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

Grecia, on her third attempt to cross was abandoned along with her four siblings, got sick with asthma and thus, started to look for the border patrol agents.

“Mi hermano salió a la carretera, pasaba una patrulla y no se paraba, paso otra y no se paraba... y estábamos nosotros cerquitas ya de la línea y este... hasta que uno se vino de la línea, de allá donde estaba la caseta. El se vino, en su troca se vino y ya le pregunta a mi hermano que qué pasaba, y ya mi hermano le dijo. Entonces ese señor le dijo a mi hermano y a nosotros que si hermanos nosotros de nuevo; nos dijo ‘de nuevo ustedes?’ Por cierto que fue muy este, atento, buena persona porque se quito su chaqueta de el y me la puso y ya de ahí me llevaron a un hospital.”

“My brother went out to the main road, one police car would pass and not stop, another one would pass and not stop... and we were close to the border line and so... until one came form the line, from there where the office (check point) was. He came, on his truck he came and then he ask my brother what was going on, and then my brother told him. Then this man told my brother and all of us if we were again; he said ‘you again?’ By the way he was very, cordial, good person because he took his coat and put it on me and from there I was taken to the hospital” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

Thus, while the border patrol has made of this piece of territory a risky zone in the first place, they ultimately are, in many cases, seen as the “heroes,” as life saviors, as the good guys. This reveals that the nation state has successfully created and governmentalized differentiations and subjectivities of deserving/undeserving, legal/illegal subjectivities.

Thalia explains that it rained on them and it got extremely cold for two nights that they wanted for ICE officers to find them.

“Estaba haciendo mucho aire y estaba bien frío, y luego nos llovió bastante, hasta que ya una noche ya mejor queríamos que nos agarraran, mejor ya con miedo y todo. Hasta que si nos agarraron.”

“It was too windy and it was very cold, and then it rained on us a lot, until finally at night we wanted to be apprehended, we preferred as we were scared and all. Until yes, we were apprehended” (Thalia, personal interview, 2013).

Given that it is more likely for women to die on the borderlands due to exposure (Staudt et al. 2009) and have more painful deaths than men (Pickering 2011), their extremely painful bodily suffering and deep fear of dying at the borderlands is well supported. Each time they wanted to be found by immigration officials, they would just walk to the nearest big road and/or make noise or just keep walking and not run when they saw lights approaching. Then, they would be taken to jail and back to Mexico, and their journey back to the dessert, mountains, wall or canal would begin again.

Several of my participants also provided and received care (work) while at the borderlands. Some played the role of mothers and protectants during the trip.

Border enforcement and biopower selection of who deserves to enter and who does not has created crisis of care on the border. Grecias’s mother and only one of her eight children have “legal” permits. Therefore, Grecia and four of her siblings traveled the border alone. Grecia, who

was not even twenty-one at that time, was the oldest and felt great responsibility for her siblings, especially for her injured sister and her ten-year-old brother.

“Desde que salí [de mi pueblo] tenía bastante miedo. Después de que nos asaltaron fue más el miedo que yo tenía. Me sentía... pues yo era la mayor de mis hermanos... pues me sentía con mucha responsabilidad. Yo sentía la responsabilidad de ellos en mí. Y como mi hermana venía herida, pues se lastimó y empezó a sangrar y... fue cosas que no hallaba ni que hacer.”

“Ever since I took off [from my town] I was very afraid. After we got robbed, I was more frightened. I felt... well I was the oldest of my siblings... Thus, I felt with a lot of responsibility. I felt the responsibility of them in me. And because my sister was wounded, well she got hurt and started bleeding and... it was something I did not know what to do” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

Some provided care on the borderlands as they were asked to cook before and after crossing the territorial border. They did not even question such request, as women they felt the obligation to cook for the men in the house.

Grecia relates that while waiting in a house in Tijuana, she was intimidated as there were a lot of men in that house. She cooked for them providing thus, an essential household care-work.

“[Yo] tenía miedo cuando estábamos allá en la casa esperando por que había muchos hombres y pues uno de mujer, estas con miedo por que no conoces a nadie. Y luego me pusieron a cocinarles. Les cociné unos camarones a la diablo a ellos y luego les cociné unos camarones con chiles, agua-chile que le dicen.”

“[I] was afraid when we were there in the house waiting because there was a lot of men and one as a woman, one is scared as one do not know anyone. And then they made me cook. I cook camarones a la diablo for them and then I cook camarones con chiles, agua-chile that is how they call it” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

Mariana recounts that soon after crossing the borderlands, she was taken to a house where she was asked to cook.

“Nos llevaron a una casa, y otro día nos compraron lonche para que yo preparara la comida. Y dos días que estuvimos ahí nos compraron mucho lonche para que yo hiciera de comer.”

“They took us to a house, and the next day they buy us groceries for me to prepare food. And two days that we stayed there they bought a lot of groceries for me to prepare food” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

When asked if someone else helped her prepare food Mariana said,

“Nada mas yo”

“It was just I” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013)

Thus, women do play a gendered role of care on the borderlands and thus, their experiences are different than men’ in aspect as well.

All of them are thankful to God for allowing them survive through this journey; which they hope not to repeat and that no one would ever have to cross the way they did.

“Cruzar por el cerro, no, no se lo recomendaría a nadie... arriesgas todo, arriesgas la vida.”

“To cross thought isolated areas, no, I would not recommend it to anyone... you risk everything, you risk you life” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

However, sadly, every year hundreds (or thousands) of people forcefully engage in this journey, and as efforts to reinforce the US-Mexico border increase, so does the number of deaths in this particular geographical area. As Ramos (2002) states, as long a there are jobs in the US and there is lack of jobs in Mexico, people will continue to migrate. I further argue that as long as the wave of violence continues to affect entire families in Mexico, people will continue to migrate in search for a safer place in the US. It is crucial that we understand how the combination of historical interventions (such as colonialism and modernization) as well as current polices (such as neoliberal trade, “The war on drugs” & terror, and border reinforcement) have affected particular populations in ways that makes their home-place detrimental to live in, and at the same time constrains this very same population’s abilities to look or safer places as they are constrained to face a closed and dangerous border. Furthermore, although I have not

words to accurately describe the level of pain suffering and fear my participants experienced during this journey, it is important to tell these stories and understand the bodily experiences of traumas and violence women suffer at the Mexico-US borderlands.

CHAPTER FIVE: DESTINATION/CONCLUSION

“For when you domesticate a member of [your] own species, you reduce his output, and however, little you might give him, a farmyard man finishes by costing more than he brings in. For this reason the settlers [decide] to stop the breaking-in halfway; the result, neither a man nor animal, is the native [the colonized, the other]”

(Fanon et al. 1965, p16)

As opposed to mainstream arguments that categorize all Mexican immigrants as labor immigrants, the majority of my participants do not fit this category. My participants were forced to migrate as they have been directly or indirectly affected by the high violence in Mexico, which sprung in the mid 2000s as consequence of the aggressive “war on drugs and terror” declared and waged by the US in the name of national “security” after 9/11. Hoping to find safety and protection in the US, my participants almost lost their life in the process encountering the risky borderlands. Did they find the protection they were yearning for? According to several of my participants they have. When asked, how would you describe your life here in the US? They responded,

“Aquí, aquí me siento mas segura... Ya mas tranquila, ya todo aquí...”

“Here I feel more secured... more calm now, everything here now...” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

“... estoy mas agusto aquí, como mas protegida aquí, por una parte.”

“...On one hand, I like it better here, [I feel] more protected here.” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

“Aquí me siento muy agusto, yo vivo muy agusto. Trabajo, tengo mis niños... ah, nos paseamos, no vestimos y no me da miedo de nada. No me da miedo de que... de nada.”

“Here I feel very good, I live very good here. I work, have my children... ah, we go out, we dress and I am not afraid of anything. I do not fear anything of... of nothing” (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

It might sound surprising to hear that some Mexican immigrant women feel protected here, in the US, given how inhospitable the US is towards Mexican (and other non-white)

immigrants (Boehm 2011; Colema 2012, Martin 2012). However, in order to understand how immigrants experience life in the US, it is important to see what propels people to migrate in the first place and what their migration experiences are during their journey. This relational comparison of different sites along the migration journey allows for a more nuanced understanding of how immigrants experience life in the US. Hearing untold stories from people who have endured this complex and inhumane journey helps reveal how our current (national and international) highly polarized society and economy, mostly due to historical and current political interventions and policies in the benefit of capital, affects segregated populations at the scale of the body, with different intensities, on a daily basis.

The US: a “safe” destiny?

In the last century, non-white immigrants have been discriminated and heavily deported or recruited in accordance with capitalist needs of cheap labor (Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002). Most recently, after the 9/11/2001 attack, there has been an upsurge of “geopolitics of engagement” which consists of expansions in border security practices beyond the actual territorial border (both inwards and outward the borderlands) resulting in an extension of US hegemony over immigrant’s movement with the excuse of national “security,” but in reality with the hidden agenda of benefiting our neoliberal economy (Coleman 2007a). Domestic counterterrorist or “security” acts involving, what Martin (2012) brilliantly refers to as, “Catch and Remove” practices have been moved inside the country. Such national immigration acts target non-white immigrants whose image has been attached to narratives of dangerous, risky and potential terrorists bodies (Amoore 2006). This, in turn, has intensified a status of permanent vulnerability and exposure to dehumanizing treatment both on the borderland and inside the US territory. In other words, the usage of biopower to code particular bodies as criminals, dangerous

and terrorists has, in effect, resulted in increasing detainable immigrants. Such biopower coding serves to implant the border on non-white immigrants' bodies who end up carrying the border on their bodies (Mountz 2010) converting the border into “La Frontera Portatil” as Pickering (2011) describes when citing Dear & Lucero (2005). Subsequently, non-white immigrants live in an eternal extralegal crossing in which the border is everywhere, has no beginning or end (Pickering 2011). Most importantly internalization and naturalization of illegality, criminality and danger discourses has converted non-white immigrants into vulnerable and exploitable subjects for the benefit of the US capitalist system (Boehm 2011; Fanon et al., 1965). These discourses have further served to justify negating non-white immigrants basic human rights within (and beyond) the US territory. While undocumented immigrants contribute to the wealth of the nation by paying taxes, adding to the social security fund, earning exploitive low wages and being active consumers; they are denied benefits such as unemployment, social security, or welfare assistance (Ramos 2002). As for example, undocumented immigrants have been exempted from the recent Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act also known as “Obama Care” whose goal is to benefit the population by improving the quality and affordability of health care insurance (HHS.gov/HealthCare).

Furthermore, expanding antiterrorist, border security discourses into the nation has allowed for an expansion of actors involved in immigration policing practices with the excuse of fighting terrorism. As for example, the Wake and Durham county initiative 287g, and the Secure Communities program, allow non-federal agents and police to check on immigration status and, some times, to act as immigration agents (Coleman 2007b) (Coleman 2012). In addition, DHS encourages citizens' involvement in policing immigrants by emphasizing negative discourses against Mexican immigrants and by providing contact information to report any suspicion of

“illegal aliens” presence. Furthermore, border policing has been expanded from being a matter of immigration control managed by Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) to also include (or been replaced by) a matter of national “security” with the excuse of the domestic “War on Terror” managed by the Department of Homeland Security (Nevins 2002). Reframing of border policing towards preventing terrorist attacks, justified increasing funding and efforts targeted for such; which in turn has propelled the creation of vulnerable spaces, detainable and deportable populations due to the complexity of involved networks and barriers (Martin 2012). Boehm (2011) explains that such phenomenon has resulted in an “age of deportation.” The Obama administration, beginning in 2009, has until now, deported about two million non-white immigrants, establishing the Obama administration as having deported the highest number of immigrants (Rosenblum & Meissner 2014) mostly of Mexican origin (Boehm 2011). “Deportations...[is one of] the main methods used by capitalism to increase its wealth...and to establish its power” (Fanon et al. 1965, p101).

My participants have been negatively affected by local anti-immigrant practices. As soon as my participants arrived to the US, they became aware that the danger of crossing the border(s) had not ended as they were (are) permanently carrying the border on their bodies. When they arrived to a house in a southwest state, the coyotes told them to avoid making noise or going outside due to surveillance by neighbors and thus, risk of deportation.

“Nada mas no salir [nos dijeron] porque como era en, en este en Tucson, era bien peligroso; que si salías al patio de la casa... mmm los vecinos te echaban la migra y te echaban para afuera. Entonces tenias que estar puro adentro de la casa...”

“Just to not go out [they told us] because it was in, in Tucson, it was very dangerous; if you would go out to the house patio... mmm the neighbors would get ICE agents and they would deport you. Thus, one had to be only inside the house...” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

“Te meten en los carros al garaje hasta adentro te sacan. Encerrados y las ventanas las tienen tapadas por dentro [de la casa], y si tu quieres algo, ellos solo van a salir, nadie mas sale de los que vivan ahí, nadie.”

“They get you in the cars all the way into the garage, then they take you out. Locked and the Windows are covered inside [of the house], and if you want something, they go out only, no one else gets out of those who live there, no one” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

Cuando veníamos, de Tucson para acá decía el señor [guía dijo,] ‘Pídanle a Dios un milagro porque si nos sale la migra, nos van a regresar.’

When we were coming, from Tucson to here the man [guide said], ‘Beg a miracle from god because if the ICE agents appear, they will return us’ (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

Elvira relates that as they were traveling northbound towards her destination, she felt great relief and a sense of safety.

“Y ya llegamos aquí, y ya cuando veníamos de Oregon pa ca [suspiró] y me sentía en paz. Pero si, llegamos aquí y ya [nos sentimos] bien tranquilos.”

And then we arrive here, and then when we were coming from Oregon here [sigh] and I felt calmed. But yes, we arrived here and [we feel] very serene” (Elvira, personal interview, 2013).

However, even on their current destination, they do fear deportation as they come and go to work, Andrea describes as she talks about deportations.

“Oía mucho en la tele que en las mañanitas llegaban [agentes del ICE] y eso. Si le da a uno mas miedo cuando vienes del trabajo da miedo que se pongan [agentes de migración] por ahí y te paren. Eso si me da pendiente, eso si me da miedo.”

“I used to hear a lot in TV that in the mornings [ICE agents] arrive an all that. One feels more frightened when one is coming from work, it is scary that [immigration agents] could wait for you somewhere and detain you. And that worries me, that does scares me” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

One of her greatest fears is leaving her children if she gets deported. She constantly wonders,

"y si no llego yo, que va a hacer la baby city con ellos? A quien se los va a entregar?"

“And if I do not arrive (return), what will the baby city do with them? To whom will she deliver them?” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

Another comment by Daniela supports the complicity of the state and capital in oppressing migrants,

“Me acuerdo que una vez dijeron en un rancho donde estábamos trabajando que estaba la migra; que no saliéramos, que no nos dejaran salir del rancho que porque aquí estaba la migra. Y me recuerdo que bien asustados todos! Y dice el mayordomo, ‘no se anden creyendo, no es verdad’ dice ‘si fuera cierto, este, nosotros ya supiéramos.’”

“I remember that one time [they] said in an orchard where we were working that ICE agents were there; that we should not get out, that we should not be allowed to get out from the orchards because ICE agents were here. And I remember that we all were very afraid! And the supervisor said, ‘do not listen to that, it is not true’ he said ‘if it was true, we would already know” (Daniela, personal interview, 2013).

Thus, my participants constantly experience vulnerability and fear of deportation due to carrying the border on their body. Such vulnerability and fear reflects a type of neoliberal discipline and punishment towards immigrants, which criminalizes those who make a “free” choice to break the law. It is implied that they make an “irrational” and “radical” decision to migrate without documentation instead of going through the formal legal process. Therefore, becoming permanent “criminals” in the process “illegal” migration. These judgments about migrants, that proliferate in the media and popular culture, are expressions of neoliberal governance that serve to obscure the nation state’s complicity with capitalism (Innes 2013). It masks historical and current structures that, in order to supply capitalism with exploitable labor in the US, generate forced migration and at the same time, negates “legal” admission of such forced migration based on racial, gender and socio-economic status (Amoore 2006; Rygiel, 2011). As a result, my participants have become dependent on exploitative labor for agrarian production in the US.

Some of my participants describe how hard their seasonal agrarian job is, which adds to their unpaid domestic care work.

“El trabajo de la temporada es muy a la carrera, que nos se ni las horas que pasan, ni los días. Para mí son muy a la carrera porque en la mañana me tengo que levantar a las tres de la mañana, llevar a mis niños a las cuatro a cuidar e irme a trabar. Llego al trabajo y todavía allá a la carrera a trabajar y todavía regañada a veces porque me quedo atrás. Regreso recojo mis hijos, a hacer descomer y lonche y preparar todo para otro día.”

“The seasonal job is so demanding, that I do not even realize the hours or days that go by. For me these go by very fast because in the morning I have to get up at three in the morning, take my children to the baby city at four and go to work. I arrive to work and even there I have to work fast, and then I get in trouble because I get behind sometimes. I then comeback pick up my children, go prepare food and lunch and everything for the next day” (Thalía, personal interview, 2013).

“Te levantas que a las dos de la mañana y córrele a arreglar lonche y córrele a arreglar los niños y córrele que el reloj está pasando. Y en las tardes llegas y vienes pensando ‘hay dios mío que voy a hacer de comer, y ahora que voy a echar de lonche y hay y hoy que le voy a echar a los niños?’”

“[You] get up at two in the morning and run to prepare lunch and run to prepare the children and run as the clock is ticking. And in the afternoons [you] arrive and you are thinking ‘oh my god what will I prepare for dinner, and what will I pack for lunch and what will I pack for the children?’” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

Mariana emphasizes job dependency in the US due to low wages and high living costs.

“Aquí si no trabajas, no comes, y pues es difícil la vida aquí.”

“Here if you do not work, you do not eat, and so it is hard life here” (Mariana, personal interview, 2013).

Andrea explains how tight her family’s budget is, to the point that they cannot miss a day of work; that if bad weather prevents them from working, instead of enjoying their “free” day, she is worried about how she will pay the bills,

“Envés de estar agusto estas pensando, ‘eeeh me va a ser falta ese día [salario] para [pagar] los biles.’”

“Instead of enjoying you are thinking, ‘eeeh I will need that day [wages] to pay the bills” (Andrea, personal interview, 2013).

Grecia understands what prevents them from getting a better job.

“La mayoría pues trabajamos en el campo por la... nomas pues que nosotros no contamos con los documentos necesarios para tener un trabajo mejor.”

“The majority of us work in the orchards because... just because we do not count with the needed documentation to obtain a better job” (Grecia, personal interview, 2013).

These testimonios corroborate other immigration studies about structural injustices towards Mexican migrants (and other non-white migrants) in the US. However, although they do fear deportation and are being deeply exploited, some express that they do feel safer in the US and do not mind working hard as long as they feel safe.

“Pues es de todos los días a trabajar y trabajar... pero pues me siento mas agusto y mas segura. Prefiero aquí, morir trabajado y no... tener miedo.”

“Well [life] here is of every day work and work... but I feel better and more secured. I prefer to die working here and not... be afraid” (Elviara, personal interview, 2013).

“Y aquí me siento muuuuy agusto. Aunque es sufrido trabajar en el campo, es duro, es duro para la mujer trabajar en el campo, pero a mi no me importa. Yo conque viva con esa seguridad que me siento aquí en el país, no me importa trabajar. No me importa trabajar donde sea nomas con que yo viva agusto y si este... que estén bien mis hijos.”

Here, I feel veery good. Although it is painful to work in the orchards, is it hard, it is hard for women to work in the orchards, but I do not care. As long as [my family] is able to live with this security that I feel here in this country, I do not mind working. I do not mind working anywhere just as long as I live calmly and that... my children are well (Lucero, personal interview, 2013).

My thesis has asked the following questions: how do Mexican women experience risk and vulnerability before during and after the immigration journey? How are such experiences attached to particular places as a result of particular policies being attached to such geographical locations? How do these experiences formulate immigrants' perception of risk/safety? Despite all of the challenges of living as an undocumented, racialized and targeted person in the US, my respondents still feel safer in the US than in their homeplaces or in the borderlands. Despite all of the surveillance, policing, low wages and vulnerability, my respondents spoke of the relative

safety of the border patrol guards and of life in the US. This finding powerfully reveals the forms of violence, risk and insecurity that people are experiencing in their origin places and also during the migration journey. Their words are a powerful response to theorists who maintain that Mexico-US migration is primarily a choice by people seeking work.

Origins

As I discussed in Chapter three, in Mexico, detrimental living conditions affecting several agrarian communities result in forced national and international migration (Boehm 2011; Maldonado Aranda 2012). Historical and current structures of colonialism, neoliberal policies and global economy have generated unemployment and inability for some agrarian communities to survive (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis 1996). Thus, forcing many to either get involved in the illicit business (drug production in response to the US demand) (Meráz Garcia, 2012) or to migrate to the US in search of work (Sparke 2013); becoming “criminals” either way. Most recently, after 9/11 due to the US intensively declared and waged “war on drugs and terror” in the name of US security, the Mexican government is in permanent state of exception and can kill any citizen as long as his/her death is linked to narco-related activities, in order to automatically criminalize and diminish the value of life to zero (Corva 2008). In fact, the more people are killed, the more successful such war is claimed to be. This has created a situation in which any one can kill someone and use the same excuse. Thus, Mexican citizens live in constant state of fear (Corva 2008; Mercille 2011; Wright, 2011).

Some people receive threatening notices after having a family member killed as in the case of Grecia, who never planned on migrating but, after her father was killed, her mother received treating letter(s), lacked government protection and thus, had not choice but migrate to the US along with her children in search for safety. Some local businesses owners, such as

Marianna, suffer from extortion and, if unable to make payments, are obligated to live their towns to protect their life. Some returning immigrants find that it is not safe to live in Mexico anymore as in the case of Elvira. Furthermore, women have been especially affected; now any male can kidnap the women they want. In essence especially those allied to a narco-gangs and contracted killers have been kidnapping women as they count with support and collative power of the gang (Wright 2011); as it is the case of Lucero's sister who was kidnapped by a sicario. Various Mexican media reveal that the kidnap of daughters and wives is the main reason for communities to revile against such narco-related gangs; giving rise to the current autodefensas groups who call themselves comunitarios or vigilantes as these groups are formed by community members. Their purpose is to protect the community from sicarios' violence (Mireles 2014). Although these autodefensas have successfully provided protection, historical and current structures deter their full success; poverty and lack of governmental support induces a few members of these autodefensas into becoming sicarios themselves. Thus, some inhabitants in Mexico now fear both the government and sicarios, including some members of the autodefensas who have become sicarios (Archibold & Villegas 2014). This deadly and complex violence has produced displacement of agrarian communities, especially in the state of Michoacán (Maldonado Aranda 2012). Sadly, this same violence has not been formally recognized in the US. As a result, migrants are classified as "voluntary" labor immigrants and have not chance to even be considered for political asylum despite the violence and insecurity they experience as migrants (Boehm 2011).

Borderlands:

Far from being considered for refugee status, immigrants are criminalized during the migration process. As I explained in chapter 4, in the last one hundred and sixty years the US-

Mexico territorial border has been formed and transformed from a non-existent border to a highly militarized zone (Beezley 2011; Hernandez 2010; Martinez et al. 1996; Urrea 2004; Ramos 2002). This border has been open and closed in different periods in accordance to capitalist's needs of cheap labor (Nevins 2002). The invention of various negative discourses and narratives has justified numerous immigration acts, operations and policies against non-white immigrants, especially Mexicans, in order to create exploitable subjects for capital accumulation (Fanon et al. 1965). Some of the most significant operations and acts include: the 1954 "Operation Wetback" due to an alleged "out of control" border, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which criminalizes violators of immigration laws, 1994 "Operation Gatekeeper" which gave raise to the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) aimed at preventing "illegal" crossing by detaining both documented and undocumented immigrants, and increasing the level of crime of "illegally" crossing from an aggravated felony, to penalized crime (Hernandez 2010; Nevins 2002). In other words, anti-immigrant discourses such as "wetbacks" "illegal-alien" and "criminals" have justified interventions and acts that in turn further strengthen such discourses. And most recently bio-politics has facilitated the discourse governing in the name of "security." The 9/11 attack has become a tool to justify coddling non-white immigrants as risky, potential terrorists (Amoore 2006; Coleman 2007a; Mountz et al. 2013). Which in turn has become the excuse to increase military power and strengthen the US-Mexico border.

It is here, in this newly created and highly militarized borderlands governed by "those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, "the others" (Fanon et al. 1965, p40), in which through use of biopower, the rule of law is suspended and the value of life of those crossing the border without documents - the original inhabitants - is diminished to

zoe; suspended from any protection and further exposed to death; furthermore, anyone can kill an immigrant and not be deemed guilty (or zero value) (Salter 2008). My research participants, who have been constructed by these broader processes as “the others”, do not qualify for legal permit to enter due to their socio-economic and non-white status. As Fanon 1950 brilliantly explains, our world is divided between those who belong to a given race and those who do not belong in which economic structure plays a major role; the white is wealthy and the wealthy is white. Consequently, they have no choice but to transverse such deadly zone especially for women who have more painful deaths (Pickering 2011) and are more likely, than men, to die due to exposure (Staudt et al. 2009). Immigrants are forced to *travel* the border usually various times as when apprehended by INS, they start this deadly crossing again. Traveling the border exposes them to various struggles and risks including hunger, thirst, extreme weather, abandonment, robbery, fatigue, sickness, deep body pain, fear and death. To *survive* such border, it has required a variety of actions from rebelling against coyotes to seeking border patrols who will both make them safer, but will also send them back to the beginning of the border. As a result, my participants tasted the flavors of death in this lethal zone multiple times. Survival has been proved more challenging for women as they face extra vulnerability and risks. They are exposed to rape, robbery and physical violence (Pickering 2011; Segura and Zavella, 2007). In addition, women are more vulnerable to the extreme weather they face in this buffer zone and to the long rough walks they are forced to perform making them more likely, than men, to suffer and die due to exposures (Staudt et al. 2009). Furthermore, my participants’ stories uncover the various ways in which women do the additional work of caring for others in this journey. Additionally, women are often only able to access the lowest paying jobs upon arrival as race, undocumented status and gender combine to further marginalize them (Silvey & Lawson 1999; Segura and Zavella, 2007).

This shows the higher level of punishment over women bodies, and the extra borders coded on their bodies, that result from our current highly militarized borderlands. It further demonstrates for whom the border is closed and who is the most hurt by antimigrant racialized policies in the name of national “security.”

Conclusion

While risk could mean many things, the idea of risk has become a discourse used as a tool for contemporary biopower and biopolitical governance. In the US, the populations has been set to believe that there are risky bodies, both inside an outside the state, and that the US government provides the much needed “protection” (Amoore & Goede 2008; Lemke 2011). In order to justify national and transnational polices in the name of national “security,” the US has successfully coded the global south and non-white immigrants as risky populations. This has lead to further fragmentation of the human race (Butler 2003; Rygiel 2010). The US citizens have internalized this idea of difference and superiority, the idea that they need the US government to protect them from such different “risky” populations (Lemke 2011). Transnational polices such as “The war on drugs and terror” (Butler 2003; Corva 2008), border reinforcement operations such as the Operation Gate Keeper (Nevins 2002) and national anti-immigration acts (such as Catch and remove) accompanied by increased formal and informal surveillance both in the borderlands and inside the US territory (Marti 2012) have all been imposed in the name of national security to, supposedly, preempt crimes - to catch criminals before they commit the crime – and with this, to protect the US citizens (Amoore & Goede 2008).

However, instead of pre-empting crimes, such polices have created: 1) detrimental, unsafe, highly violent places in Mexico (and other global south places) (Boehm 2011; Maldonado Aranda 2012), 2) a deadly buffer zone which forced Mexican (and other) immigrants

must cross (Mountz 2013), and 3) unfair exploitative living conditions for non-white, undocumented immigrants, whose bodies have been coded as risky and thus, end up carrying the border in their bodies (Amoore 2006).

Women's voices and embodied experiences are too often hidden from view. Seeing immigrant women's experiences of the immigration journey, within historical structural context, allow us to see how bodily experiences of risk and vulnerability are transformed in each geographical location of their migration journey. The intensity of risk and vulnerability experienced before and during the immigration journey propelled my participants to feel safe in the US. But at the same time, they do live in constant fear of deportation and vulnerability. Although, the border has been coded on Mexican women's bodies and travels along with them, the way and intensity in which polices are executed and thus, the consequences of such are also attached to particular geographical spaces and bodies. Breaking apart the migration journey, as I have done here allows us to look at distinct iterations of violence in origins, the borderlands and destinations. My analysis combines historical analysis with the testimonies and powerful experiences of these women, and this reveals the powerful role of the Mexican and US governments and of globalized capitalism in the production of vulnerable migrant persons.

In Mexico, historical and current transnational policies such as colonialism, neoliberal structural adjustment policies, our current global economy, and "The war on drugs and terror" in the name of US national "security" have created detrimental living conditions resulting in forced migration, which has been wrongfully understood as neoliberal rational migrations in search for "better" jobs. In addition, apart from the government, the sicarios themselves use this "risk" strategy. The sicarios themselves are asking for payment to protect citizens from other sicarios. Also, autodefensas are requiring for business owners and those selling cows to contribute a

payment to pay for these organizations that are to provide security. Mainly, citizens are been self-responsiblized for paying for their own “protection,” alleviating the government from its own accountability and responsibility.

The creation and reinforcement of the US-Mexico border, in the name of US national “security,” has resulted in a deadly territorial buffer zone in which the value of life and rule of law is suspended (Salter 2008). Forced migrants have no choice but to travel through the border zone various times getting exposed to the punishment of death and/or criminalization. Surviving this border has required payment for an expensive guide in order to minimize the risk of getting lost. Surviving the border has also required resistance, support and unity among immigrants; it has further required asking for the ruler’s intervention. Finally, surviving the border successfully converts immigrants in the US into exploitable, deportable, vulnerable “risky” bodies themselves who contribute their labour to enrich the already rich. Essentially, historical structures and contemporary polices imposed, in the name of US national “security,” in Mexico, the US-Mexico border and in the US have and are producing violent places (in Mexico), a deadly buffer zone (the border) and vulnerable, exploitative deportable populations in the US. It further aids in the continual fragmentation of the human race and in the masking of historical and current injustices resulting from such polices.

In the case of my participants, the safety of their family, by avoiding exposure to extreme bodily risk in Mexico and especially on the borderlands, is the main reason for my participants’ desire to stay in the US. Although they deeply miss their family and friends, some wish never to go back again as they reiterate how unsafe it is for them to live in Mexico, and how horrible, risky and hard it was for them to cross the borderlands. Others including Mariana, Thalía and Elvira, who deeply miss their family and their life in Mexico prior to the violence, would like to

go visit their family, but only if they acquire legal documentation as they would want to comeback due to the high crime in Mexico and do not want to risk their life, once again, in the borderlands. Andrea and Daniela hope that the current violence in Mexico will come to an end by their retirement age as they wish to live there once they retire. This fear of the current violence is well documented. Boehm (2011) brilliantly illustrates how returning migrants have become a profitable source as they are often kidnapped and released in exchange of money. Having faced various forms of dangers and vulnerability during one immigration journey, my participants currently live in a mode of eternal fear and vulnerability trapped in a place they perceive as safer.

Women's stories of the immigration journey illustrate the high stakes of getting to the US in the first place. These show how national and transnational "security" policies and consequential experiences of risk and vulnerability are strategically tied to particular places and peoples before, during and after the immigration journey. My work offers a bottom up approach in which hegemonic rules can be revealed and analysed critically; this work brings to light how experiences from the "other" are linked to particular national and transnational policies. Testimonios from vulnerable migrants serve to uncover the hidden agendas and unfair detrimental consequences of these policies from people who experience multiple forms of vulnerability, even as they are constructed in theory as having 'chosen' to migrate.

I lend my voice to Ticktin (2008) who argues for a politics of inclusion and unity; to recognize that we are all humans with political power; to furthermore, recognize multiple forms of suffering rooted in structures of inequality and violent histories. Thus it is important to bring to light and to acknowledge sufferings from structural inequality, exploitation and oppression, which have now become the "norm" due to "exceptions" of particular immediate sufferings

granted in the name of care and compassion (Ticktin 2008). My goal here is not to argue for the recognition of an exceptional, unique suffering from immigrant women, but for acknowledgment of broad forms of violence resultant from structures of inequality rooted in colonial power and contemporary neoliberal economy and policies. Seeing the depth and width of these injustices will help in understanding the need to engage the political in all of us (immigrants, global south and advocates) in order to accomplish long-term structural change, justice and equality.

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