

## MASTER THESIS

Titel der Master Thesis / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Phantom Victims: A Gender Perspective for Migrant Violence in Mexico“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien 2017 / Vienna 2017

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt  
Postgraduate programme code as it appears on the  
student record sheet:

A 992 940

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt  
Postgraduate programme as it appears on the  
student record sheet:

Internationale Studien / International Studies

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Markus Kornprobst





## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the effects of the rise of violence towards female migrants in transit through Mexico between 2006 and 2016. The study will attempt to conceptualize and clarify the actors and factors accountable for the extensive violation of migrant rights, particularly related to female migrant rights in the given period. The thesis first examines Mexico as a country of transit to Central American migrants and will offer a gender identification filter to study the feminization of migration and migrant women' status under Mexican sovereignty. The thesis will then offer a range of conceptions, theories and frameworks to locate migrants' circumstances within Mexican borders. Johan Galtung's model of violence serve as the theoretical framework upon which the further analysis of Mexico's rise of violence against migrant women will be developed. Subsequently, the study will assess the core elements accountable for the perpetration of violence and abuse against migrant women under the conceptions of violence proposed in Galtung's model, analyzing elements of systemic and individual nature. Finally, the thesis will outline the findings, analyze the compatibility of Galtung's model to the Mexican case and propose a reconfiguration of Galtung's Triangle of Violence apt for the case of Mexico, and will also posit a gender framework upon Galtung's conceptions of violence. Finally, the thesis will point to further research directions.

The expected contribution from this research will not only be made theoretical and empirical in nature, but will also attempt to give a face and personal narrative to the resulting numbers and measures.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Auswirkungen des Aufstiegs von Gewalt auf weibliche Migranten auf ihrem Weg durch Mexiko zwischen 2006 und 2016. Die Studie versucht, die Akteure und Faktoren zu beschreiben, die für die umfangreiche Verletzung von Migrantenrechten verantwortlich sind, insbesondere bezogen auf weibliche Migrantenrechte im Untersuchungszeitraum. Die Arbeit untersucht zunächst Mexiko als Transitland zentralamerikanischer Migranten und bietet einen Genderidentifikationsfilter an, um die Feminisierung von Migration und den Status von weiblichen Migranten unter mexikanischer Souveränität zu untersuchen. Anschliessend bietet die Arbeit eine Reihe von Vorstellungen, Theorien und Rahmenbedingungen an, um die Umstände der Migranten innerhalb der mexikanischen Grenzen zu lokalisieren. Das Modell der Gewalt von Johan Galtung dient als theoretischer Rahmen, auf den die weitere Analyse des Aufstiegs von Gewalt gegen Migrantinnen in Mexiko aufgebaut wird. Anschließend wird die Studie die Kernelemente, die für das systemische und individuelle Ausüben von Gewalt und Missbrauch gegen Migrantinnen verantwortlich sind, wie im Galtungs-Modell analysieren. Schließlich wird die Arbeit die Erkenntnisse skizzieren, die Kompatibilität des Modells von Galtung mit dem mexikanischen Fall analysieren und eine Modifizierung des Galtungschen Modells, das eine geschlechtsspezifisches Element enthält. Schließlich wird die Arbeit auf weitere Forschungsrichtungen hinweisen.

Der erwartete Beitrag aus dieser Forschung ist nicht nur theoretischer und empirischer Natur sondern wird auch versuchen, die Arbeit zu personalisieren.

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## INTRODUCTION

The increase of female migration from Central America in the last 15 years has met a rise in sexual and gender-based violence that is not just the expression of a crisis in the economy, society, or value perception, but the result of the process of constructing women as subjects.

The voyage through Mexico, as a transit country, is notable for its high risks and potential dangers. The various routes undertaken by migrants carry threats that are intrinsic to their very nature. “La Bestia” (*The Beast*)—a network of Mexican freight trains that are frequently used as means of clandestine transportation through the country—is a case in point of such insecurity; it is the source of a high number of accidents in which amputations and death are the order of the day. Nonetheless, there are also threats within the environment of violence that has been artificially created by actors and factors throughout the Mexican territory: the trend towards restrictive migration policies, the presence of diversified criminal organizations and the corruption of state officials have on the whole rendered transit through Mexico as amongst the most dangerous in the world, characterized by its high rates of abuses and human rights violations in the form of kidnappings, torture, human trafficking or murder. Women, while being exposed to natural and artificial dangers that are common to all migrants in transit, also fall prey to gender-based and sexual violence.

The fugacity and anonymity of female migrants in transit through Mexico today account for several unintended, but all the more egregious consequences. Firstly, female migrants become victims to elements and perpetrators of violence, which burgeon upon the migrants’ existence in a legal void of illegal status and use of illicit routes. Secondly, such evanescence and namelessness facilitate the simple concealment of such routes and figures from the public eye, thus sustaining appearances of order whilst veiling acts of abuse and violations of human rights. Female migrants transiting the Mexican territory, thus, become phantom victims in a network of violence that has increased in the decade between 2006 and 2016.

Thirdly, migrants' fugacity and anonymity implicates silence on concerns of governmental and criminal accountability, thereby immortalizing impunity. The Mexican government's response to violations of human rights of migrant women in Mexico is today characterized by a dual rhetoric of at once unshakeable commitment to the fundamental values of today's international human rights regime, with relative silence of such violations in the face its population and of the victims themselves. Fourthly, such absence of discourse in the political sphere is accordingly reflected in the sparse scholarship on the topic. It was not until 1970 and the second wave of feminism that women were finally recognized in the field as principal actors in migration, rather than as appendages to the figure of the male migrant—its infancy as a subject within the literature of migration, however, should not belie other structural obstacles to such research. Against the backdrop of government and institutional actors that impede attempts of elucidation on the subject, empirical research is also affronted by the difficulties in collecting data on illegal migrants, who in the face of human trafficking, kidnapping and extortion, choose silence instead of denunciation for fear of recrimination for their legal status.

Within said context, this thesis seeks to create a delineation of the many elements that surround and engender the environment of violence that has characterized the flow of migrants in the Mexican territory between 2006 and 2016 – it is within this context that the development of the present work will attempt to conceptualize and clarify the actors and factors accountable for the extensive violation of migrant rights. The expected contribution from this research will not only be made in theoretical and empirical aspects, but will attempt to give a face and personal narrative to the resulting numbers and measures.

The development of this study is situated within a temporal framework from 2006 until 2016. Considering the already difficult task of accounting and creating grouping of information on the dispersed and concealed migrants in transit, an attempt to limit the study exclusively to female migration would be severely disrupted. For this reason, within the overall presentation and examination of existing empirical data of migrants in transit,



each section of the study will provide a gender lens through which to analyze broader migration patterns.

The first chapter introduces Mexico as a country of transit and host to hundreds of thousands of individuals that flee their homes in Central American countries undergoing a series of expelling factors. Starting from an empirical description of the Mexican territory as passage towards the United States, this section moves to an analysis of historical, domestic and international elements that molded the country's position vis-à-vis migration. It will then attempt to individualize such inflows of migrants, into specific features of the individual and their position as subjects of abuses and violence. Furthermore, a gender identification filter will be provided, studying the feminization of the process of migration and migrant women's status under Mexican sovereignty.

The second chapter will offer a range of conceptions, theories and frameworks to locate migrants' circumstances within Mexican borders. Initially, violence will be defined under diverse conceptions—Christian religion, Social Darwinism, biological approach, and the sociological framework—all of which suggest different positions within the *objectivity-subjectivity* scale, to attempt to detect a causal relation with the emergence of violence. Once more, the nature of violence will be presented under a gender lens, introducing the notions and perpetuation of gender-based violence. Notably, the model developed in 1969 by the Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung, will be thoroughly studied as the foundation theoretical framework upon which the further analysis of the elements giving rise to violence will be developed. Subsequently, and through Galtung's model, actors and element will be linked to diverse theoretical approximations, where considerations will be made regarding systemic and individual factors, including a gender delineation.

The third chapter recognizes the core elements accountable for the perpetration of violence and abuse against migrant women under the conceptions of violence proposed in Galtung's model, analyzing elements of systemic and individual nature-- namely, migration policies (including the 2011 Migration Law and Mexico's 'vertical border'), drug-trade and criminal organizations, public officials, smugglers or *polleros*, society and the institutionalization of violence, poverty and patriarchy-- within and between direct, structural and cultural violence.

Lastly, the thesis will outline the findings, analyze the compatibility of Galtung's model to the Mexican case. Within this framework, a contribution will be made to Galtung's Triangle of Violence, to reconsider and reconfigure the centrifugal element of vulnerability. Additionally, this thesis posits a gender framework upon Galtung's conceptions of violence—one that allows for an intersubjective appreciation of gender as a social construction that molds the experience of migration. Finally, the thesis will point to further research directions.

## **CHAPTER I**

This section introduces Mexico as a country of transit and host to hundreds of thousands of individuals that flee their homes in Central American countries undergoing a series of expelling factors. Starting from an empirical description of the Mexican territory as passage towards the United States, this section moves to an analysis of historical, domestic and international elements that molded the country's position vis-à-vis migration, from two perspectives: the *systemic*—examining, namely, the geographical and political characteristics of the Central American corridor to the United States— and the *individual*, analyzing the transnational migrant as a figure that possesses specific features, which increase exposure to threats and abuses. Furthermore, a gender identification filter will be provided, studying the feminization of the process of migration and migrant women's status under Mexican sovereignty, in order to grasp the nature of female mobility across borders and, accordingly, appreciate the increasing vulnerability that gender implicates.

### **Mexico as a host of migrants in transit**

Mexico is the largest migration route in the world, hosting hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans in their journey between Central America and the United States. It serves as the migratory corridor between the attracting elements that pull migrants towards the United States, and the expelling conditions of Central American countries, which push them to migrate. Mexico has historically played a crucial role in migration due to its geographical location as a point of access to the United States, and its socioeconomic structure vis-à-vis Central America. In this respect, Mexico lives a threefold existence

within the process of migration: at once, a country of origin, a country of transit and a country of destiny<sup>1</sup>.

In its capacity as a transit country, Mexico serves as a road for flows of irregular migrants, with 75% seeking to reach the United States.<sup>2</sup> Information gathered by the *National Migration Institute* (INM) reveals that the substantial majority of the influx of undocumented migrants comes from the Central American Northern Triangle—namely, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—followed by Nicaragua and Ecuador, despite the latter countries’ geographical distance to Mexico in comparison to other Central American countries. Each year, the INM detains and returns hundreds of Central American migrants to their countries of origin; during 2006, the volume of migrants from the region represented 95% of the total number of individuals returned by the Mexican authorities. In 2016, the figures remained high, accounting for 81% of the total migratory movement through Mexico (See Table 1).

Country	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Ecuador</b>	850	862	808	293	496	546	697	916	1,166	865	807
<b>El Salvador</b>	26,930	16,364	13,576	10,355	10,573	9,098	12,397	14,610	23,131	35,390	34,265
<b>Guatemala</b>	84,657	53,598	42,689	29,604	29,154	32,896	40,060	31,188	47,794	83,745	63,016
<b>Honduras</b>	59,013	37,344	30,696	24,040	23,788	19,340	28,892	34,110	47,521	58,814	54,950
<b>Nicaragua</b>	3,666	2,370	1,605	949	833	751	683	792	1,180	1,564	1,339
<b>Others</b>	4,229	2,668	4,899	3792	5,258	3,952	5,777	4,682	6,357	17,763	34,218
<b>Total</b>	<b>179,345</b>	<b>113,206</b>	<b>94,273</b>	<b>69,033</b>	<b>70,102</b>	<b>66,583</b>	<b>88,506</b>	<b>86,298</b>	<b>127,149</b>	<b>198,141</b>	<b>188,595</b>

**Table 1. Events of foreigners presented to the INM by country of origin.**

<sup>1</sup> Oscar Castro, *Mujeres transmigrantes* (Puebla: Centro de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Antonio de Montesinos, 2010):11.

<sup>2</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, “Mexico’s missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform”. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 719.

Mexico is regarded as a country of destination by a small fraction of the total influx of Central American migrants. For example, between 45,000 and 75,000 Guatemalans seek employment in the southern part of Mexico, albeit temporarily. What is more, female migrants that envision Mexico as their endpoint typically access the labor market in the domestic, sex and informal service sectors <sup>3</sup>.

### **Evolution of migration in Mexico**

Though the stream of migrants through the Mexican territory has flowed for decades, migrant motivations, and the according classifications of their movements, have evolved from security to economic considerations. Generally, there are two major historical lapses in which to classify the migratory movements through Mexico: initially, during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, migration was directly associated with *forced international mobility*, as a result of armed and civil conflicts in the Central American region that entailed compulsory recruitment in rural areas, undifferentiated violence and political polarization. From the mid-1990s onwards, migration became closely related to *economic international mobility*, characterizing the subsequent flow of international migration with economic features<sup>4</sup>.

Within this broad historical spectrum, emerges a complementary system of classification based on precise motivational forces and comprised of four diverse, yet long-standing elements: urban growth, armed conflict, post-conflict and economic imbalances, and the contemporary period of transit and complexity<sup>5</sup>

Ties of urban growth to migration date to the period between the 1940s and the 1960s. The two decades witnessed temporary, seasonal and constrained population movements across the region. Alongside this urban growth and according migratory movements, the border between Mexico and Central America— primarily that with Guatemala— existed

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriela Martínez et al., “Trazando rutas de la migración de tránsito irregular o no documentada por México,” *Perfiles Latinoamericanos* Vol. 24, No. 45 (2015): 130, <http://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/perlat/v23n45/v23n45a6.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

as largely permeable space, in which lenient migratory regulations and paucity of enforcement, reinforced the cross-border movement of workers and goods.

With the onset of a new decade in the 1980s, emerged new challenges in the experience of migration, and accordingly, the status of migrants. The period witnessed a wave of heightened political turmoil and armed conflicts in the Central American region that expelled migrants from their home countries. Against this backdrop, armed conflict and migration merged into a marriage that bred an offspring of migrants seeking refuge from political instability. Within the next ten years, migrants' profile would evolve from that of refugees living a condition of forced mobility, to the status of irregular migrants in cross-border transit.

The 1990s witnessed migration, post-conflict conditions and economic imbalance, duly triggered by the inadaptability of deported and returned Central Americans to incorporate themselves in an environment of economic instability and labor scarcity prevalent in their societies of origin. These unrewarding conditions resulted in a reactivated and undocumented flow of migrants towards the United States. The motivations for migration evolved from humanitarian, to economic considerations, as individuals from the Northern Triangle re-incorporated themselves to the flow of human beings endeavoring to reach the US. Mexico's original posture in relation to migration was maintained until the mid-1990s while different reforms were designed to facilitate and legalize cross-border movements. However, as Mexican authorities sought closer ties with the Northern part of the continent—evident in the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement—politics and commerce came to dictate the migratory experience. As Mexican politics promoted the entry of business visitors, investors, technicians and professionals from the United States and Canada, Mexican migration policies and controls became stricter, hindering Central Americans' access to the territory. In this context, Mexico's orientation towards restrictive migration control was related to both social and political intraregional processes, and economic and political international interests from the countries in the north<sup>6</sup>. The establishment of the *National Migration Institute* in 1993, as a means of

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<sup>6</sup> Yaatsil Guevara, "Migración de tránsito y ayuda humanitaria: Apuntes sobre las casas de migrantes en la ruta migratoria del pacífico sur de México," *Journal of the International Association of Inter-American*

institutionalizing government efforts to manage migration, is amongst the most conspicuous examples of Mexico's shift in migration issues.

2000 marked a turning point in the profiling of the migratory process—from this year on, migrants would be the subjects of security discourses and subsequent policies, the currency of illicit economies run by criminal organizations, and political fodder for questions related to government accountability. The following historical junctures delineate the contemporary status of illegal migration in transit through the Mexican territory:

1. The aftermath of September 11, 2001 initialized a process of reinforcement of migration policies and an increase of migratory checkpoints not only in the US, but also in Mexico. In 2005, the National Security Council addressed migration as a security issue and incorporated the National Migration Institute—an evident externalization of the American discourse of migration as a securitization issue. Accordingly, border control in the Mexico-Guatemala-Belize frontier underwent a holistic and extensive fortification. The period also witnessed the creation of what is referred to as the “vertical border:” the dissemination of various migratory checkpoints along roads and railways transited by migrants
2. The period between 2006 and 2011 saw a brusque decrease of almost 40% of the total migrants detained by the INM (See Chart 1). Such a decline can be explained by the low labor demand in the American economy, the American economic crisis and subsequent slow recovery, and greater migration controls in the United States' southern border, which translated to increased budgets, technology and personnel allocated for migratory purposes on the North American front. These stringent conditions molded migrants' perception of risks in crossing the Mexican territory under an *irregular* status, on the one

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*Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2015): 66, <http://interamericaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/fiar-Vol-8.1-Guevara-63-84.pdf>

hand, and the shaped their perception of uncertainty in the face of a possible deportation from the US<sup>7</sup>.

3. As the Mexican population found itself immersed in the war on drugs at the beginning of 2006, criminal organizations engaged in the migratory experience, exploiting the flow of migrants as a lucrative activity—violence, kidnappings and extortion became the currency of their newfound business. Illicit and informal economies generated not only at the points of entry and departure from the Mexican territory, but also across various points within the migratory route undertaken by undocumented migrants.
4. The visibility of the social phenomenon of migrant vulnerability became clear after two emblematic events<sup>8</sup>. In June 2008, the kidnapping of 33 Cubans and four illegal Central Americans would expose the pattern of migrant kidnappings in Mexican territory—namely the accountability of transnational criminal groups, the presumed participation of INM officials, and a criminal network linking both. Nevertheless, it was the event of August 2010 in San Fernando, Tamaulipas—where 72 migrants from Central and South America were executed by *Los Zetas*, a drug-trafficking criminal organization that operates in the northern part of Mexico—that exposed migrants’ vulnerability in Mexico. The salience of the event attracted the attention of the international community, urging the Mexican government to act. Their response was the substitution of the main law governing migration, the 1974 General Population Law with the 2011 Migration Law, which sought to offer greater protection the rights of migrants in irregular transit.

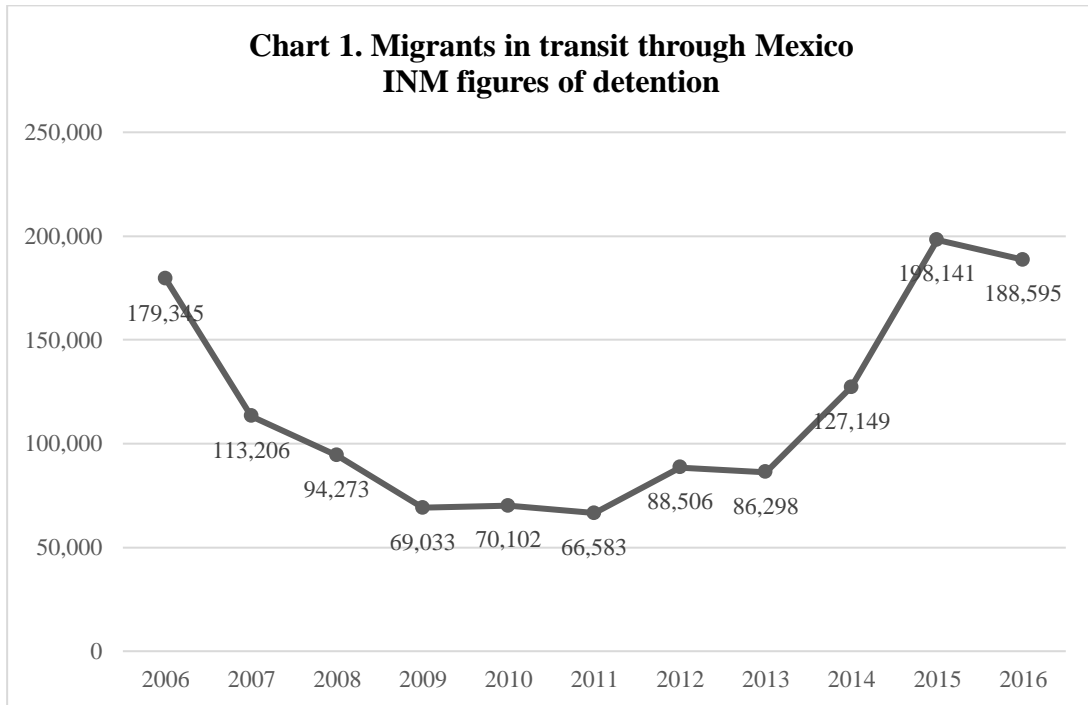
The historical delineation has underscored the various social, structural, economic and political factors, which have molded the route undertaken by migrants in transit until the mid-2000s. The decade between 2006 and 2016 witnessed the subsequent dispersion of migration routes, the diversification of the use of land transportation, the utilization of

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<sup>7</sup> Yulma Barrón et al., *Migración Centroamericana en tránsito por México hacia Estados Unidos: Diagnóstico y recomendaciones. Hacia una visión integral, regional y de responsabilidad compartida* (Mexico City: Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, 2014): 14, <https://www.comillas.edu/images/OBIMID/itam.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Gonzalo Carrasco González, “La migración centroamericana en su tránsito por México hacia los Estados Unidos”. *Alegatos*, No. 83 (2013):179.

various communication routes, the consolidation of strategic places in diverse stages and roads, and the intervention of organized criminals in trafficking networks<sup>9</sup> (Martínez et al. 2015).



## International migrant

### *Reasons to migrate*

From a global perspective, the United Nations Population Fund recognizes the forces mobilizing international migrants across borders: the quest for a better life, income disparities between different countries, labor and migration policies from both, country of origin and destination, political conflicts, environmental degradation, and the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon.

Reasons for migration from Central American countries should be viewed as a process underpinned by an intricacy of dynamics that are associated with migratory networks and other systemic factors, but also, have a prominent local component.

<sup>9</sup> Gabriela Martínez et al., “Trazando rutas de la migración de tránsito irregular o no documentada por México,” *Perfiles Latinoamericanos* Vol. 24, No. 45 (2015): 135, <http://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/perlat/v23n45/v23n45a6.pdf>.



The disruption of quotidian, ordinary life is one variable. Orozco et al. analyzed migrant communities of origins in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador to elucidate why such a high number of migrants had emigrated from the region in the period between 2010 and 2013. The study revealed that migrants leave due to low levels of economic and human development, and high degrees of violence: in this analysis, violence is defined by homicides in municipalities from which migrants leave.<sup>10</sup>

The specific case of Central American migrants allows to generalize a place of origin with combined factors of economic inequality, limited national resources, and the region's vulnerability to natural disasters. Regarding low levels of economic and human development, relative deprivation and sentiments thereof may also motivate migration.<sup>11</sup> Davis et al. states that relative deprivation exists when some households within a community express higher living standards in the form of larger, modernized houses and more landholdings. "Wealth inequity can create feelings of inadequacy thus providing a strong impetus to invest in international migration and the sending of remittances as a means to equalize living standard imbalances."<sup>12</sup>

Living conditions in Central American countries are precarious. There are constant determinants within the region, that create a common condition that acts as a trigger of migration across borders—economic crises, economic inequality among countries, the deplorable conditions of the country side, mining exploitation, salary gaps, high demand of cheap labor from the United States, family union, difficult access to education, inexistence of a public social security system, and the rise in delinquency—expose inhabitants of the region to live on the fringes of society, in misery and constant risk of death, with no plausible possibility to escape.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, there are purely social causes that foster migration, such as a tradition of emigration, the collective view of the United States as a source of unlimited supply of labor, the operation of complex social

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<sup>10</sup> Manuel Orozco, et al., "Understanding Central American Migration: The crisis of Central American child migrants in context," *Inter-American Dialogue*, (2014).

<sup>11</sup> D.S. Massey, et al., "Theories of international migration—a review and appraisal," *Population and Development Review* 19 (1993).

<sup>12</sup> Jason David, "Migration, remittances and smallholder decision-making: Implications for land use and livelihood change in Central America," *Land Use Policy* Vol. 36 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Ever Esther Osorio Ruiz, "La Bestia: muerte y violencia hacia migrantes en tránsito por México," Master's diss., Universidad Iberoamericana (2014).

and family networks that link places of origin and destiny, and which facilitate the migratory experience. <sup>14</sup> In this regard, the causalities of Central American migration towards the United States are related to the perpetuation of colonial policies, structures of corruption and power abuse, a global economic system in which Central American countries are located a disadvantaged, and a general scenery of criminal organization and violence.

*Routes*

The non-official nature of irregular migration movements in transit through Mexico imply an absence of objective data and information about quantitative and qualitative features surrounding migrant’s presence in the region. In this respect, Central American migration flows in transit through Mexico are dispersed, and its usage is not perpetuated on the same way or through the same strategies or routes, neither do they share the same risks—dispersed movements entail a number of vicissitudes and different experiences.

There are different possibilities when crossing the Mexico-Guatemala border, however, the two most recurrent points of entry for Central Americans are those in the Chiapas-Guatemala and Tabasco-Guatemala border; the southern routes are the narrowest and they expand and diversify as their move northwards (See map 1).

**Map 1** Main migration routes of Central Americans in transit through Mexico



For Central Americans migrating irregularly, their journey normally begins in the Soconusco, Chiapas and moves northwards to Oaxaca and Veracruz by train. “The Central American migrants and come to Mexico from Tecum Uman in Guatemala, crossing the river on rafts Suchiate (...) Between 2005 and the end of 2011 because of the damage caused by Hurricane Stan the route of the trains moved his home to Arriaga. Consequently, those who migrated by this route had to travel 259 miles to Arriaga another public road or on foot. Once on the train, you pass Ixtepec in Oaxaca and Medias Aguas in Veracruz cross Tlaxcala and Puebla and reach stations Xalostoc in Ecatepec, or Dairy in Tultitlán, in the State of Mexico”.<sup>15</sup>

Transmigration across Mexico can be achieved to maritime, air or land routes—by rail, on foot, by bus, in cargo vehicles, and in private cars— being the latter the most transited of all.

The journey across Mexico has been grasped as a highly risky, highly violent path. In this context, *La Bestia*, is the pinnacle of the figure of exposure of migrants in transit. ‘The Beast’, also known as the ‘Train of death’, is a cargo train that traverses the Mexican territory from North to South. Undocumented migrants from Central America ride the machine in order to arrive to the northern border. Migration routes attached to the train railways constantly vary: they depart from Tapachula and Comitán, Chiapas, and Tenosique, Tabasco, in order to arrive to Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas; Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; Nogales, Sonora, and Mexicali, Baja California. To to travel to the compete route, migrants may take up to 14 trains and travel for a period of three weeks or more before spotting the northern border. The main routes are those along the Gulf and the Pacific. Each train may hold between 200 and 500 migrants, but it is common to have an overflow of circa 1,500 migrants per journey.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the transport through train, road journeys normally entail the presence of a smuggler, or as they are called in Mexico, *pollero*. The *pollero* is a figure born from the migration boom and it’s the original conception from where smugglers and trafficking

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<sup>15</sup> A. Lexartza et al., *Central American Women in migration, an alternative perspective towards a homogenizing discourse on migration* (San Jose: CEFEMINA, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Humberto Márquez Covarrubias, “En lomos de la bestia. Travesías de migrantes centroamericanos en el infierno mexicano,” *Debate* Vol. 3, No. 9 (2017):32

networks evolved. Its role within border communities has become essential to domestic economies and their social dynamics on the one hand, while its figure has been contaminated by a tendency to hamper migrants' journey through a series of criminal activities.

Along the routes, there are migrant houses or shelter— operated by churches, supporting collectives, or NGOs—which provide housing, food, health care, and psychological and legal services.

### **Violence and vulnerability of migrants in transit**

*“If the condition of deprived, excluded and needy subjects characterizes the forced migrant in their country of origin, in transit, the situation of vulnerability increases.”<sup>17</sup>*

The distinctiveness of transnational migrants is dictated by the adversities implicit in irregular migration flows through the country (countries) of transit and the entry to the country of destiny. Irregular migration exponentially increases an individual's exposure to arbitrary and unregulated operations from migratory authorities or police forces, who frequently disregard migrants' rights, violate laws or hamper relevant processes of international protection. Additionally, migrants in transit are prey to risks specific to the different countries they cross, such as criminal groups and other adverse individuals.

The concept of vulnerability conceived by Kelly and Adger (2000) accentuates the migrant's ability to face threats by utilizing resources for the circumvention of possible crises across their journey<sup>18</sup>. Within a similar context, the notion of vulnerability developed by Castro (2010) is linked to unequal structures of power and reproduction, evoked from life conditions, marginality and disempowerment of subordinated human groups, which altogether create a condition of dispossession of the necessary resources to face and solve on a personal and social level the problems they may encounter<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Márquez Covarrubias, Humberto. «No vale nada la vida: éxodo y criminalización de migrantes centroamericanos en México.»

<sup>18</sup> P. M. Kelly et al., “Theory and Practice in assessing vulnerability to climate change and facilitating adaptation,” *Climate Change* Vol. 47, No. 4 (2000): 330.

<sup>19</sup> Oscar Castro, *Mujeres transmigrantes* (Puebla: Centro de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Antonio de Montesinos, 2010): 41.

According to Silva (2014), vulnerability can be analyzed from both micro and macro levels—at a micro level, it is defined by the characteristics of an individual or group manifested in terms of exposure to a threat, which derives from social and economic conditions enclosing the subject. Within the context of migration, vulnerability arises from the absence of social power and access to economic, social and legal resources<sup>20</sup>. From a macro perspective, vulnerability emanates from the impacts of its reproduction patterns, and from the incapacity of the weakest groups to confront, neutralize or benefit from them. In this context, the affected forces are delineated within legal frameworks, social insecurities, the market, assets, politics or culture<sup>21</sup>.

The condition of vulnerability is accompanied by poor risk-management skills— that is, to anticipate, resist and recover from potential risks— which in turn implies a level of susceptibility to harm in terms of social, economic, political, individual and human rights. In this context, one way to measure levels of vulnerability is in terms of risk – produced by actors and scenarios. When migrants encounter potential threats, the process of risk effectuates through the existence of latent harm, prejudice or loss<sup>22</sup>. Based on these circumstances, the intersection of risk and migration could be conceptualized as a process detonated by the possible contact of migrants with an object or person that holds a potential threat and danger, to the extent that it harms—sometimes irreversibly— the physical, emotional or psychological integrity of the individual, affecting the overall migration process.

For Bronfman, Leyva and Negroni (2004), the context of risk is defined by social, cultural, economic and political conditions arising from the interrelation of groups within a given geographical space, where situations of risk result from individual interactions<sup>23</sup> All in all, violence, vulnerability and risk-management possess the potential not only to shape, but also to terminate the experience of migrants in transit.

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<sup>20</sup> Yolanda Silva Quiroz, “Transmigración de centroamericanos por México: su vulnerabilidad y sus derechos humanos,” PhD diss., El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2014, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>23</sup> Mario Bronfman et al., *Movilidad poblacional y VIH/SIDA. Contextos de vulnerabilidad en México y Centroamérica*. (Mexico: Secretaría de Salud Pública, 2004): 21.

## **Violence and vulnerability of migrants in Mexico**

*“When crossing the Mexican territory, the undocumented Central American migrant assumes contrasting faces that can invoke contradictory categories like the one of “subhuman”, people whose human condition is question or denied by being submerged in the worst possible social and working conditions, and represent forms of subjects deprived of rights facing a climate of violence that can lead to the loss of life without major consequences.”<sup>24</sup>*

Crossing the US-Mexican border today is risky at best, lethal at worst. In 2011, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur collected different reports from migrants along other captives held in Mexico, which were all subjected to beatings, rape, gang rape, extortion, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking<sup>25</sup>. According to Barrón et al. (2014), the disposition to vulnerability is rather high when capacities to evade, resist, or face aggressions, and overcome damages are severely restricted<sup>26</sup>

In September 2009, the CNDH (National Human Rights Commission) developed a study based on risk-analysis that assesses the number of migrant corpses reclaimed from the deadliest zone in the USA-Mexican border. The study revealed that the risk of death in the delimited area was 1.5 times higher in 2009 than it was in 2004, and 17 times higher than in 1998<sup>27</sup>. A similar study was performed by the CNDH for a period of six months between 2008 to 2009: it accounted for 198 cases of migrant kidnappings, with an average of 33 kidnappings per month; in general, they found that there had been 9,758 persons that had been deprived of freedom, which in turn exposed an average of 1,600 kidnaps per month. As concluding remarks, it was estimated from the previous data, that the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, “Mexico’s missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform”. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 715.

<sup>26</sup> Yulma Barrón et al., *Migración Centroamericana en tránsito por México hacia Estados Unidos: Diagnóstico y recomendaciones. Hacia una visión integral, regional y de responsabilidad compartida* (Mexico City: Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, 2014): 22, <https://www.comillas.edu/images/OBIMID/itam.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Oscar Castro, *Mujeres transmigrantes* (Puebla: Centro de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Antonio de Montesinos, 2010): 12.

number of kidnappings per year could be around four hundred thousand, and the figure of victims could ascend to 18 thousand per year<sup>28</sup>

In 2010, just one year after the advisory study, the discovery of 72 bodies of Central and South American migrants who had been massacred by criminal organizations in San Fernando and Tamaulipas— a northern state with a 370 km stretch of the US-Mexico Border along the state of Texas—sent the international community into shock.<sup>29</sup>

On the whole, the perpetration of abuses against migrants has been facilitated by an environment of impunity that emboldens and intensifies the activities of criminal organizations, thereby extending and diversifying the latter's' actions. Such internalization of violence and abuse is evident in the face of criminal organizations' expansion into other sectors—fiduciary agents that exploit immigrants and their families by funneling money from their remittances into criminal networks are a case in point.<sup>30</sup> The report compiled by the CNDH, for example, revealed that in one six-month period during 2009, immigrants' families paid at least USD 25 million for ransoms.<sup>31</sup> Overall, the US-Mexican border lethally affronts migrants in transit: they face the risk of confronting criminal organizations, amongst other actors, who thrive from a condition of vulnerability, and concurrently germinate in the soil of the country's internalized violence.

## **Migrant women**

### *Feminization of migration*

The feminization of migration is the impact that the insertion and role of women, in masses, have had in the general migratory process, and the according customization of migration models. It is a concept used to explain the rising number of female migrants

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<sup>28</sup> CNDH, “Informe Especial de la Comisión de los Derechos Humanos sobre los casos de secuestro en contra de migrantes,” (2009): 10.

<sup>29</sup> Juan Carlos Pérez Salazar, “Así ocurrió la matanza de inmigrantes en México,” *BBC*, August 21, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, “The Dark Side of Globalized Migration: The Rise and Peak of Criminal Networks—The Case of Central Americans in Mexico,” *Globalizations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 302.

<sup>31</sup> CNDH, “Informe Especial de la Comisión de los Derechos Humanos sobre los casos de secuestro en contra de migrantes,” (2009): 12.

within time periods, describe variations in the role or prominence of women in migration flows, or to stress the growing proportion of women amongst general migrant populations.

Until recently, women were ignored from the study of migration patterns, placed on the sidelines of analysis of their role in economic, political, social, cultural and scientific development. “The neglect of women in migration theories is the reflection of the historical oblivion”<sup>32</sup>. Even within a neoclassical perspective, in which migration is explained through individual and rational decision-making, women were perceived as subjects of liability or mere companions of men<sup>33</sup>.

As of the 1970s, the process of female migration has undergone a significant shift in perspective from its traditional approach of “associated migration”— that is, as a prolongation of the male migration— towards the perception of women as a conceptual central axis, driven by structural and economic factors, cultural and symbolic elements, and public and private spaces. In this sense, gender became a *structuring structure* of migration—that is, more than a mere category that allowed for a differential analysis. As such, gender provides a focal point to analyze the complex problems that arise from the current migratory phenomenon, and shed light on possibilities for intervention thereof.<sup>34</sup>

Boyd and Grieco (2003) elaborate on the incorporation of gender as a structural structure in the migration processes. They consider three main stages where gender relations, roles and hierarchies have an impact on migratory movements. They outline different outcomes for women in namely the pre-migration stage, the transition across state boundaries, and the post-migration stage.<sup>35</sup>

The study of the causes of migratory movements has been addressed from different perspectives. From a neoclassical approach, the *Push and Pull* theory considers the comparison of conditions between the country of origin and the rest of the world, pushing

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<sup>32</sup> Sandra Morales Hernández, “Central American Migrants in Transit through Mexico Women and Gender Violence; Challenges for the Mexican State,” *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 161, (2014): 264.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Oscar Castro, *Mujeres transmigrantes* (Puebla: Centro de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Antonio de Montesinos, 2010): 37.

<sup>35</sup> Monica Boyd et al., “Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory.” *Migration Policy Institute*, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory>.



individuals away from their nations and pulling them towards more attractive opportunities—ideological, economic, social or political. The theory of the Dual Labor Market, on the other hand, adjudicates migratory movements to the demand of labor in modern industrialized societies, creating a gap to be filled by people outside their territory. The Network theory develops a context of migratory networks constituted by interpersonal relations that connect migrant, ex migrants and non-migrants to places of origin and destiny, creating useful social capital in the search for work across boundaries.

The concept of feminization of migration holds true for the Mexican case. When considering female migration during 2006 and 2016, for example, women represented 18% of the migrant flow, considering the cases of return by Mexican authorities. The volume of female migrants during the low-level flow diminished as well, although, once the volume was re-established, their participation increased. In 2010, they accounted for 15% of the total number of migrants, while the figure increased to 25% in 2016.

Year	Migrants		
	Men	Women	Total
2006	-	-	-
2007	98,822	21,633	120,455
2008	77,203	17,520	94,723
2009	57,688	11,345	69,033
2010	59,756	10,346	70,102
2011	57,423	9,160	66,583
2012	76,543	11,963	88,506
2013	72,323	13,975	86,298
2014	98,456	28,693	127,149
2015	148,930	49,211	198,141
2016	141,212	47,383	188,595

**Table 2. Migration flows by gender distribution  
(2006-2016)**

### *Violence against migrant women*

The increase of female migration from Central America in the last 15 years has met a rise in sexual and gender-based violence that is not just the expression of a crisis in the economy, society, or value perception, but the result of the process of constructing women as subjects.

Under the framework of feminization of migration, Dimmitt (2013) exposes that a gender-awareness lens to the overall process of migration allows for disclosure of the consequences to female immigrants of the aggressions and threats faced by all migrants in Mexico<sup>36</sup>. Women are exposed to abuses common to all migrants— kidnapping, extortion, and physical violence— but they are also common preys of sexual- and gender-based violence. According to Marroni (2006), migrant women are subject to a pattern of abuse and vulnerability that extends from the domestic sphere, to their relations with authorities.<sup>37</sup>

Violence against women, recently conceptualized as gender-based violence, has been defined by the United Nations as “any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”<sup>38</sup>. According to Acharya (2005), gender-based violence increased by 50% in the period between 1995-2000, which at large shows that violence against women between the ages of 15 and 44, causes more death and disabling than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, or war<sup>39</sup>.

Women’s vulnerability has been largely attributed to their illegal immigration status and their gender condition, and has been a permanent subject of human rights violations<sup>40</sup>. In

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<sup>36</sup> Alyson L. Dimmitt Gnam, “Mexico’s missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform”. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 736.

<sup>37</sup> María da Gloria Marroni, “El fin del sueño americano. Mujeres migrantes muertas en la frontera México – Estados Unidos,” *Migraciones Internacionales* Vol. 3, No. 3 (2006): 11.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, A/RES/48/104 (1993).

<sup>39</sup> Arun Kumar Acharya et al., “Violencia y tráfico de mujeres en México: una perspectiva de género,” *Revista Estudios Feministas* Vol. 13, No. 3 (2005): 511.

<sup>40</sup> Sandra Morales Hernández, “Central American Migrants in Transit through Mexico Women and Gender Violence; Challenges for the Mexican State,” *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 161, (2014): 266.

this respect, it seems crucial to understand the founding circumstances that convert women into a target for violence in the Mexican territory: their condition as irregular migrants.

Though female migrants are exposed to aggressions common to all migrants, they may be the subject of threats that intersect a variety of forms of discrimination, ranging from gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and nationality, sexual abuses, deterioration of reproductive health and physical integrity. Migrant women are the vulnerable amongst the vulnerable, inasmuch as they are more likely to experience social risks, such as poverty, unemployment and subordination in their homes of origin; and have less individual and institutional capacity allotted to them. They are also the stigmatized among the stigmatized, as they are perceived to be willing to be trafficked and to work in any kind of activity, given their lack of options in their home countries<sup>41</sup>

In this vein, Añón (2010) argues the design of legal and social institutions coincide with the sex-gender system in as much as it establishes the differentiated manners of access to rights and resources, the social patterns of what it implies to be a male or female migrant, and articulates the expectations anticipated from each. The social system of sex-gender not only defines the differences between male and female migration from their origin as well as their destiny, but it also permeates all dimensions and living spaces of both genders. Power relations between men and women are attributed to spaces, tasks, preferences, rights, obligations, and values; these assignments define and constrain the possibilities for action and access to resources. Processes under the sex-gender system take very different forms in different social contexts but own two central features. It is a social construction that transcends all basic social dimensions, for even the many areas affected by it, the roots, structure or male domination is only one. Second, these are processes that also affect the main variables or social divisions, such as class, age, sexual orientation, and ethnic and religious identity. As a result, the inequalities resulting from said model are not restricted to individuals, but groups.

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<sup>41</sup> Jorge Martínez Pizarro, *El mapa migratorio de América Latina y el Caribe, las mujeres y el género* (Santiago de Chile: UN publications, ISSN: 1680-9009, 2003): 58.

According to Castro, migrant women are harassed from many different directions. On the one hand, they are persecuted by criminal groups for further kidnappings, lurked by every kind of merchant looking to attract them to increase their businesses; on the other, they are threatened by men they encounter— namely, smugglers, fellow travelers, police authorities, public officials, robbers, etc. They aim to exert the most extreme form of control over them, which in a society as androcentric and sexist as the Mexican, is associated with the arbitrary use of the female body.<sup>42</sup>

With that in mind, Dimmit (2013) has exposed different estimations regarding the recurrence of gender violence. While some account that six in ten women and girl migrants have experienced rape during their transit through Mexico, others estimate that eight in ten experience rape and other forms of sexual assault. These kinds of aggressions have become so widespread among women migrants, that they have resigned to perceive them as a mainstream sacrifice of their journey (or as expressed in a typical Mexican phrase: *they know what they are getting into* (“*saben a lo que van*”). Smugglers sometimes require women to take contraceptives prior to the journey. Anticipating such a cruel fate, however, women generally choose to take the contraceptive measures on their own—the “anti-Mexico” injection is amongst the most telling of means.

Concerning kidnappings, the previously mentioned study conducted by the CNDH (2009) assesses that from the interviewed migrants, 132 mentioned the presence of women in the kidnapped groups. Moreover, they registered the case of 157 kidnapped women, four of them in state of pregnancy; two of them were assassinated, others were raped, and one was forced to remain with the captors as the ‘wife’ of the group’s leader. The contemporary, heightened occurrence of migrant kidnappings has created conditions for widespread sexual violence against immigrant women<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Oscar Castro, *Mujeres transmigrantes* (Puebla: Centro de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Antonio de Montesinos, 2010): 138.

<sup>43</sup> CNDH, “Informe Especial de la Comisión de los Derechos Humanos sobre los casos de secuestro en contra de migrantes,” (2009): 17.

Migration also makes women more vulnerable to human trafficking. More than 20,000 individuals are victims of human trafficking in Mexico each year.<sup>44</sup>In 2004, between 6000 to 8000 women were trafficked inside the Mexican territory, while 5000 were destined to the United States and Canada.<sup>45</sup> The International Organization for Migration has provided assistance to victims of human trafficking since 2005, during which women represented more than 80% of the victims—most of them were Central American women that were prey to both sexual-and labor-trafficking<sup>46</sup>.

## CHAPTER II

This section will offer a range of conceptions, theories and frameworks to locate migrants' circumstances within Mexican borders. Initially, violence will be defined under diverse conceptions—Christian religion, Social Darwinism, biological approach, and the sociological framework—all of which suggest different positions within the *objectivity-subjectivity* scale, to attempt to detect a causal relation with the emergence of violence. Once more, the nature of violence will be presented under a gender lens, introducing the notions and perpetuation of gender-based violence. Notably, the model developed in 1969 by the Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung, will be thoroughly studied as the foundation theoretical framework upon which the further analysis of the elements giving rise to violence will be developed. Subsequently, and through Galtung's model, actors and element will be linked to diverse theoretical approximations, where considerations will be made regarding systemic and individual factors, including a gender delineation.

### Violence

In his work, Jimenez-Bautista explores the different conceptions of violence, constructed from a variety of theories and ideologies. The Christian religion, for instance, considers the human species to be stigmatized by the original sin, justifying the negative and violent actions undertaken by human beings. Individualism defends the tendency to think and act

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<sup>44</sup> International Organization for Migration. IOM and Mexico's National Human Trafficking and the Kidnapping of Migrants in Mexico (2010), <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-and-mexicos-national-human-rights-commission-sign-cooperation-agreement-fight-human>.

<sup>45</sup> Arun Kumar Acharya et al., "Violencia y tráfico de mujeres en México: una perspectiva de género," *Revista Estudios Feministas* Vol. 13, No. 3 (2005): 516.

<sup>46</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, "Mexico's missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform". *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 723.

independently of others, without being subject to general norms, to seek a personal benefit. Social Darwinism perceives natural selection as a method that favors the most violent individuals in their struggle with their equals<sup>47</sup>. The author himself considers the multifaceted character and ubiquity of violence as being delineated in various scales and scopes, manifested in wars, institutions, the army, the economy, politics, ideologies, family, education and culture.

Léroi-Gourham makes use of the biological aspect of human beings. He defines violence as the aggressive behavior that belongs to human reality, at least since the Australopithecines, which has persisted through the accelerated evolution of the social device. According to the author, violence is inherent to man as a natural being, thereby serving as means of subsistence.<sup>48</sup>

The Seville Statement on Violence, on the other hand, rejects this biological determinism. Instead, it portrays violence as an exercise of power, which is avoidable and must be addressed at its social roots.

The complementarity between the manners of constitution and organization of the society can provoke or originate the perpetuation of aggressive action—acting as a structural matrix of violence—and the concrete actions that result in an act of violence within specific situations—violence’s contextual trigger. The structural matrix of violence can then be regarded as a broad symbolic, ideological and organizational approach.<sup>49</sup>

The emergence of violence from a sociological framework is explained as the result of interactions between the individual and the society they live in, varying in a spectrum of complete individual accountability, to the prominence of the influence of society. Durkheim’s theory of collective violence, for example, exposes the relationship between the individual and the society as a function of the existent relation between the volume of collective consciousness, and that of individual awareness. When the collective consciousness exerts its power over the individual, the consensus is as perfect as possible,

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<sup>47</sup> Francisco Jiménez-Bautista, “Conocer para comprender la violencia: origen, causas y realidad,” *Convergencia, Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 58, ISSN 1405-1435 (2012): 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, “Los migrantes indocumentados: su vulnerabilidad y la nuestra,” *Migración y Seguridad: Nuevo Desafío en México* (2001): 150.

as they all work in unison; conversely, the more general and indeterminate the rules of conduct and thought are, the higher the individual reflection of their use and interpretation. In this specific theoretical frame, the patterns of human conduct and misconduct are not determined by the individual, but by the performance of social organizations.

Crozier and Friedberg, on the other end, stress the relevance of individual action. They suggest a perspective within the theory of rationality, where social structures do not have direct influence on an individual's actions, but rather delineate limitations. Thus, actors are those who, restricted by the constraints imposed by the system, have a margin of freedom that they strategically use in their interactions with others. In this way, violence is constituted as a mechanism of regulation of the social whole, where the recognition of the exercise of power is conducted through negotiations in socially-recognized strategies.

Other theories intend to offer models where the relation between individuals and the society are linked with different elements and exogenous factors, and to a certain extent, combine the different conceptions in the spectrum aforementioned. Botello and Valdés (2010), for instance, refer to the emergence of violence within three dimensions. First, there is the cultural or ideological sphere, through which the domination of an individual or social groups over others— based on social conditions, race, ethnicity, or gender— is justified. Second, violence relates to the sphere of rational choice as a method of achieving specific purposes. Lastly, there is a correlation between the rise of violence specific shocks in the social structure— namely, modernization, authority decline, or globalization—which implicate an imbalance of the actions of individual and social groups within their daily lives in society. In this context, Casillas (2011) exposes a clear relation between the organization and constitution of a society, and the individual's role within that society— a relation between a structural matrix of violence in a symbolic, ideological and organizational context, and the triggering source of violent acts.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, "The Dark Side of Globalized Migration: The Rise and Peak of Criminal Networks— The Case of Central Americans in Mexico," *Globalizations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 296.



Similarly, Wieviorka interprets violence through three main models. The *functionalist* paradigm refers to violence as the result of the disorganization and marginalization of social groups, or social crises and modifications. The *utilitarian* model considers violence as an instrument of rational choice, used to achieve a specific objective. The *culturalist* approach concerns the relations that give rise to a ‘culture of violence,’ the manner in which individual identities, linkages of solidarity and cohabitation are created, and how violence becomes an integrative element of these social networks<sup>51</sup>.

For the purpose of this work, the emergence of violence must also be analyzed under the lens of gender conditions. The specific individual and social factors that contribute to the persistence of abuses against women will be further assessed, but the specific environment in which said violence originates can be visualized under the Ecological Framework developed by Lori Heise (1998). This model conceptualizes gender-based violence as a multifaceted phenomenon that considers the interactions amongst persons, and situational and socio-cultural factors that could act as the main determinants of the issue. It considers four levels within a socio-ecological model: individual, relationship, community and societal. The *individual* level refers to the factors that arise from biological and personal history and increase the likelihood of becoming a perpetrator or a subject of violence. The *relationship* level concerns proximal social relationships, especially those between intimate partners and the family nucleus, and their overall influence on the individual’s formation as a victim or a criminal. The *community* level emerges from the community context where social relations are embedded, including peer groups, schools, workplaces and neighborhoods. Lastly, the *societal* level contains larger societal elements that legitimize the climate of violence and encourage its practice.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Nelson Arteaga Botello, “El espacio de la violencia: un modelo de interpretación social,” *Sociológica* 18, No. 52 (2003): 130.

<sup>52</sup> Lori Hesie, “Violence against Women: an integrated, ecological framework,” *Violence Against Women* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1998).

## **Gender-based violence**

The notion of gender-based violence was disseminated in Beijing under the auspices of the United Nations. It introduced the conception of ‘gender’ to refer to the traditional subjection to men in a patriarchal structured society<sup>53</sup>.

The linkage between violence and gender can be explained by the perspective of the sex-gender system. It is concerned with the social and cultural constructions of the sexual differences of bodies and social reproduction, which have established the domination of the masculine over the feminine<sup>54</sup>. Such a system is not static, but varies, depending on historical, social and cultural elements. Moreover, the concept of gender expands towards more than the mere conceptualization of women, referring to a social and cultural construction of the gender relations<sup>55</sup>.

From this standpoint, gender violence is conceptualized as the result of power inequalities between male and female, as well as the product of the resulting conflict of reinforcing and sustaining the predominance of men. In the same way, Touraine develops the construction of female subjectivity, which attempts to break the traditional perspective of the relationship between men and women, and causes a reaction similar to a trigger for violence against women.<sup>56</sup> Thus, gender-based violence is not just the expression of a crisis in the economy, society, or value perception, but the result of the process of constructing women as subjects.

Carcedo et al. elaborate on the socialization of gender as the structural subjugation of women through ideological or moral statements that guarantee the authority of men over women, while establishing gender hierarchies and confining individuals to established

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<sup>53</sup> María de Lujan Piatti, “Violencia contra las mujeres y alguien más...,” PhD diss., Universitat de València (2014): 29.

<sup>54</sup> Teresita de Barbieri, “Sobre la categoría de género: una introducción teórico-metodológica,” *Debates en Sociología* 18 (1993): 150.

<sup>55</sup> Susanne Willers, “Migración y violencia: las experiencias de mujeres migrantes centroamericanas en tránsito por México,” *Sociológica* 31, No. 89 (2016): 169.

<sup>56</sup> Nelson Arteaga Botello et al., “Contextos socioculturales de los feminicidios en el Estado de México: nuevas subjetividades femeninas,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 72, No. 1, ISSN: 0188-2503/10/07201-01 (2010): 6.

sexual identities.<sup>57</sup> The process of gender socialization has specific historical and social connotations that vary from their place of origin; in general terms, however, it dictates the conduct, attitude and expectations appropriate to each sex. Altogether, this generates social norms founded on gender inequality and oppression, establishing gender socialization as a repressive and violent process<sup>58</sup>.

### **Galtung's Model of Violence**

In his work, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, Galtung (1969) defines violence as “present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below potential realizations”.<sup>59</sup> He visualizes violence in terms of the achievement or under-achievement of the satisfaction of basic needs, which he calls ‘realizations’—violence is then the fundamental cause of the difference between the potential fulfillment of basic needs and the actual access to resources. For instance, Galtung refers to the monopolization of resources by a group or class as reducing the potential level of realization as an element of violence in the system.<sup>60</sup>

The process of perpetuation of violence under Galtung's considerations presupposes the existence of three different elements—a subject, an object and an action—where the presence of a subject is not necessary, thus defining Galtung's classification of violence: personal, structural and cultural. *Personal* violence follows a subject-action-object pattern that can have both somatic and mental effects, which can be exerted verbally, physically or psychologically. *Structural* violence, on the other hand, evolves from a systematic arena that fosters inequality in matters of access to resources and distributions of power, and consequently, may engender unequal opportunities in, and chances for, life. It is then associated with social forces, such as institutions or intermediates, that perpetrate harm on people by restraining and preventing them from meeting their basic needs, beyond material or economic resources, but also considering education or health care. The

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<sup>57</sup> Patricia Muñoz Cabrera, *Violencias Interseccionales. Debates Feministas y Marcos Teóricos en el tema de Pobreza y Violencia contra las Mujeres en Latinoamérica*, (Tegucigalpa: Central America Women's Network, 2011): 38.

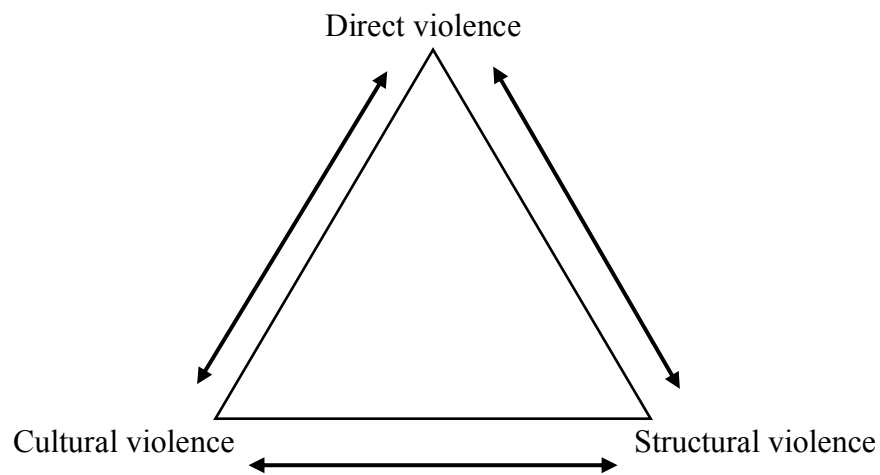
<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969): 168.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

*cultural* definition refers to the legitimization of violence through social behaviours and cultural practices, or what Galtung refers to as the ‘symbolic sphere, which entails areas of religion, ideology, language, art, and empirical and social sciences’—altogether justifying the perpetration of direct or structural violence.<sup>61</sup>

In this regard, the conception of violence corresponds to the aforementioned, whilst possessing the inherent potential to be avoided. Violence impedes, hampers or blocks the development of human beings and their potential enhancement of their capacities—hence not only direct violence, but also structural violence and their legitimization through culture, inflict ongoing obstructions to personal development. The interaction between the three types of violence conceived by Galtung fall into a cyclical pattern where each further develops the other (See Diagram 1).



**Diagram 1. Galtung's triangle of violence**

According to Galtung, violence can start at any corner in the direct-structural-cultural violence triangle: as structural violence becomes institutionalized and cultural violence becomes internalized, direct violence benefits from a quasi-obstacle-free path of perpetuation.<sup>62</sup> He further elaborates on the time relation of the three categories—where

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<sup>61</sup> Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 27, No. 3 (1990): 291.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 302

direct violence is an event, structural violence is a process, and cultural violence is an invariant, in order to differentiate their entry in time.

*Actors to consider under Galtung's model*

*Criminal Organizations*

The explanation behind the emergence and perpetuation of criminal activities has been addressed from different perspectives regarding the individual and the society. The Rational Choice theory and the Economic Model of Crime consider an individualistic approach within criminal organizations. They both refer to the possible outcomes resulting from a criminal activity conducted after a thorough examination of the potential results.

The *Economic Model of Crime* works with an ‘incentive-based model’ as a pattern of decision-making in situations of danger. It analyzes the individual’s rational choice considering the notion of utility, where individual decision-makers choose to engage in legal or illegal activities based on the expected utility from each activity and the opportunity cost, namely, a cost-benefit analysis.<sup>63</sup> The factors that delineate the rational decision-making are the estimated income from crime relative to earnings from legal activities, the risk of being apprehended, the extent of punishment, and the overall opportunities in legal activities.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, the *Rational Choice theory* considers organized crime members as possessing free-will and the ability to make rational decisions regarding their involvement in crime and wrongdoing after the consideration of the risk of detention and punishment, or risk assessment of the potential rewards from completing the acts in a successful manner. Sutherland attributed the learning of criminal behavior through the model of differential association, which links the stronghold of associations among individuals, with the propensity of innovation through criminal organizations. Distinct factors add to the abovementioned susceptibility to criminality, such as deprivation, limited access to legitimate alternatives, and exposure to innovative success models from existent organizations.

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<sup>63</sup> Ann Dryden Witte et al., “Crime Causation: Economic Theories,” *Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice* (2000): 3.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

*Organizational theories*, on the other hand, are based on the patterns of association of criminal groups and the extension of their network towards government officials, with economic and political support for their enterprises. In this regard, and relevant for the present study, Lyman and Potter consider said criminal enterprise as laxly structured, flexible and deeply adaptable to environmental impacts—a conception that will later be used as an analytical base for the study of the diversification criminal organizations over a period of time.<sup>65</sup>

#### *Authorities and government action*

Aguñada et al. conceptualize impunity as an asymmetry in the legal contract between the State and its citizens, where the State proves unable to administer justice as public policies and law enforcement weaken.<sup>66</sup> Muñoz-Cabrera (2010) relates the emergence of impunity with the States' actions, omissions, concealment of evidence, creation of bureaucratic obstacles, or the unnecessary prolongation of trials.<sup>67</sup>

The *Neo-institutional theory* elaborates on institutional weakness by explaining the preservation of rules, norms and habits that transcend the institutional culture through an informal order over the formally established procedures. In this manner, individuals that constitute an institution within a system of security and justice can internalize impunity, corruption and other devices recognized as legitimate stepping away from a normative into a positive level. Similarly, Aguirre Ochoa et al. (2015) expand on the relationship between the deficiency of legitimacy of local governments and the crime rate, stating that the institutional weakness of municipal bodies has allow its permeability to the incursion of criminal organizations in governing organs.<sup>68</sup>

Treviño-Rangel (2016) elaborate on the indirect effect of securitization of migration policies. The *theory of Securitization* refers to the treatment of international migration as

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Dinora Aguñada Deras et al. *Situación de Violencia contra las mujeres y seguridad ciudadana en el Salvador* (San Salvador: 2013. Nuestra mirada..., 2014): 22.

<sup>67</sup> Patricia Muñoz Cabrera, *Violencias Interseccionales. Debates Feministas y Marcos Teóricos en el tema de Pobreza y Violencia contra las Mujeres en Latinoamérica*, (Tegucigalpa: Central America Women's Network, 2011): 48.

<sup>68</sup> Jerjes Aguirre Ochoa et al., "Municipal weakness and crime: the case of Michoacan, Mexico," *Migration Policy Institute* Vol.8, No. 2 (2012): 928.

a matter of threat, by implementing a process in which the existence of a supposed threat entails the deployment of security measures, resulting in an increase of personnel, budget, and technology.

In his work, Izcara Palacios (2015) elaborates on the different nature of concealed violence—symbolic, quotidian and legal violence. *Symbolic* violence is exercised through existing structures of domination, making victims complicit of their own abuse.<sup>69</sup> *Quotidian* violence alludes to everyday practices and expressions of interpersonal aggression that foster the normalization of violence at a micro-level, and facilitate subordination.<sup>70</sup> *Legal* violence is unintentionally perpetuated and legitimized through the formulation and implementation of policies and regulatory documents that exacerbate the individual's submission to violent acts.

### *Society*

Patriarchy as a method of regulation of gender interrelations has been deeply rooted in Latin American societies and cultures. It has achieved such a normalized narrative, that gender-based violence has acquired a partial legitimization through cultural institutionalization. Bariero defines it within a system of domination where the concentration of wealth, power and culture rests in the hands of men.

Arnosó considers the foundation of the issue of gender-based violence beyond cultural features, and proposes a focal point on the universality of patriarchy, the differentiated social construction of gender and their mechanisms of control, and the reaffirmation and maintenance of privileges of power.<sup>71</sup> The author associates gender-based violence to the unbalanced power relations – manifested in social, economic, religious and political arenas—but also adjudicates its origins to social, structural and multidimensional elements. In this context, gender-based violence, as an instrument of power, cannot be isolated from other established systems— such as ethnicity or social status—thus,

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<sup>69</sup> Simón Pedro Izcara Palacios, “Violencia postestructural: migrantes centroamericanos y cárteles de la droga en México,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 56 (2016):15.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> M. Arnoso et al., “Mujer inmigrante y violencia de género: factores de vulnerabilidad y protección social,” *Migraciones* 32 (2012): 172.

suggesting variations in the acceptance and expression of violence against women in different cultural settings for patriarchy.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, Silva attributes the phenomenon of *social closure* to ethnically homogenous societies that entail a direct influence in the generation of processes of social and cultural isolation, which overall impede the assimilation or integration of migrants in societies of transit and arrival. By the same token, the existence of anti-immigrant ideologies in some sectors of societies exacerbates migrants' vulnerability on grounds of racial, gender, ethnic, socio-political and legal criteria.<sup>73</sup>

### **CHAPTER III**

This section will examine the different elements, factors and actors present in the environment of migrants in transit in the Mexican territory. The chapter will be divided in two parts, one dedicated to the understanding of the figure of an undocumented immigrant once inside Mexican jurisprudence, and the effects that policies regulating migration have on the individual in transit. It is crucial to define the position of migrants in Mexico in order to fully comprehend the starting point of vulnerability, which could later on be exacerbated by external factors and actors.

The second part will analyze individual and systemic actors— from criminal organizations, smugglers and corrupt officials to poverty, racism and a system of patriarchy. The section seeks to locate external elements incorporated within the process of transmigration and, thus, trace a context of correlation between them and the studied rise of violence to be developed in the conclusion.

#### **The figure of migrants in Mexico**

*“Fences grow taller, operatives become more frequent and technology is perfected to contain their passage. Still, the law of supply and demand prevail, and the rivers of*

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Yolanda Silva Quiroz, “Transmigración de centroamericanos por México: su vulnerabilidad y sus derechos humanos,” PhD diss., El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2014, 10.



*Latin American migrants in search for employment continues to flow towards the United States”.*<sup>74</sup>

Investigations about transit migration define the figure of immigrants in terms of their sociodemographic characteristics and contextual factors that emerge from broader processes—historical, social, economic, political and cultural. Vulnerability, then, derives and fluctuates from changes within that context, attributed to their living conditions, such as poverty, crime, anti-immigrant positions or impunity.<sup>75</sup> Considering the process of securitization of migration, numerous legal instruments have appeared to have an indirect effect as precursors of migrants’ vulnerability, such as the denial to legal status or modifications in the legal frameworks that regulate migration.

In recent years, migration and security policies have become increasingly intertwined. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States placed migration in a higher, more relevant position within security policies, aiming to prevent the entry of possible terrorists in the country. Said pattern of securitization has expanded to migration policies in Mexico and Central America.<sup>76</sup>

#### *Migration Law*

On May 25, 2011, Mexico passed the *Ley de Migración*, outdating the 1974 *Ley General de Población* (LGP), in what was referred to as the most sweeping change to Mexican immigration policy since the LGP was enacted by former President, Felipe Calderón.<sup>77</sup> Until 2001, the LGP governed over the rights of migrants in the Mexican territory; though it lacked a general provision for legal migration channels, it established strict enforcement efforts to deter migration from Central America. The restrictive migration regime of LGP drove immigrants into concealed routes and illicit migration channels, such as human

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<sup>74</sup> *México, tierra de migrantes*. Once TV (2009).

<sup>75</sup> Yolanda Silva Quiroz, “Transmigración de centroamericanos por México: su vulnerabilidad y sus derechos humanos,” PhD diss., El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2014, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Patricia Muñoz Cabrera, *Violencias Interseccionales. Debates Feministas y Marcos Teóricos en el tema de Pobreza y Violencia contra las Mujeres en Latinoamérica*, (Tegucigalpa: Central America Women’s Network, 2011): 150.

<sup>77</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, “Mexico’s missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform”. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 717.

smuggling, and increased their vulnerability in terms of kidnapping, sexual violence, and human trafficking.<sup>78</sup>

The 2011 Migration Law regulates migratory movements to, from, and through Mexico in its nature as country of origin, transit, destination and of return.<sup>79</sup> The law concedes and protects human rights to individuals, regardless of their migration status, and recognizes the Mexican state's responsibility to grant exercise of rights and liberties to foreigners in the territory.<sup>80</sup> It does not, however, provide regular status to migrants and fails to respond to the feminization of migration—two major obstacles to safe migration patterns. Moreover, it fails to address institutions and their permeability to corruption, on the one hand, and impunity of immigration and state officials, on the other hand.

The Migration Law's recognition of gender, albeit limited, consists predominantly in identifying women migrants as a particular vulnerable group.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Article 73 of the Migration Law addresses the protection of migrants in a situation of vulnerability, including women amongst the vulnerable groups. However, according to Dimmit, the regulatory document does not acknowledge that economic policy and criminal impunity reproduce women's vulnerability, while it also fails to design and modify existing structures in order to reduce the elemental factors that contribute to women's vulnerability to abuse as migrants.<sup>82</sup>

### *'Vertical Border'*

In the last two decades, one of the most notorious features of Mexico's position with regards to the Northern Triangle has been the reinforcement of operations of border control and containment of the influx of undocumented migrants in what has become known as the *Vertical Border*, traversing the Mexican territory from North to South.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 716

<sup>79</sup> Ley de Migración, Article 2, Paragraph 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Article 6, Paragraph 1.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Article 2

<sup>82</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, "Mexico's missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform". *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 737.

Mexican authorities, complying with the trend of migration restriction and securitization, established the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (National Institute for Immigration) in 2005, created detention centres for immigrants, and introduced the participation of security forces in the detention of undocumented migrants. By 2008, the Mexican Migration Institute accounted for 48 permanent detention centres and approximately 116 additional spaces for housing migrants on a national level.<sup>83</sup> Anguiano et al. suggest that the increasing number of detained individuals by Mexican authorities is the main indicator of such a trend. In 2004, migration authorities in Mexico detained 204,113 Central American immigrants—due to their lack of authorization or documentation for legal permanence in the country—while the American Border Patrol detained 54,626 immigrants from the same region.<sup>84</sup>

The materialization of such a tendency of migration control can also be underscored by examining programs and policies established post- 9/11. The *Plan Frontera Sur*—established in 2001 for the purpose of controlling the influx of migrants, narcotics and weapons and strengthen actions of interception of undocumented migrants from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to the southern borderline — allocated resources for the expansion and modernization of migration checkpoints, and the optimization of operations of identification, detention and repatriation of undocumented migrants.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in 2005 the *Sistema Integral de Operación Migratoria* (Integral System of Migration Operation) was implemented as a program to modernize processes of monitoring migration flows, repatriation, residence permits, citizenship and nationality. Likewise, the 2014 *Programa Frontera Sur* allocated resources for the fortification and growth of migration inspection centres, with the ultimate purpose of protecting and ensuring the immigrants' human rights.

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<sup>83</sup> Gabriela Díaz, “Mujeres Migrantes en Tránsito y Detenidas en México,” *Migration Policy Institute*, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mujeres-migrantes-en-tr%C3%A1nsito-y-detenidas-en-m%C3%A9xico>.

<sup>84</sup> María Eugenia Anguiano, “Políticas de seguridad fronteriza y nuevas rutas de movilidad de migrantes mexicanos y guatemaltecos,” *LiminaR. Estudios Sociales y Humanísticos* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007): 50.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

### *Migration Policies*

According to Mámara, restrictive migration policies have a direct effect in migratory patterns by reorienting the directionality, temporality, selectivity, voluntariness and composition of immigrations.<sup>86</sup> In this respect, Izcara elaborates on the nature of migration policies, and states that restrictive legal frameworks in matters of migration that emanate from a perspective of national security, rather than one of human rights, will generate and ensure the perpetuation of vulnerability and violence.<sup>87</sup> Thus, modifications and reinforcements of migration policies alter the conditions in which human mobility is produced, redefining the dynamics of the spatial mobility of immigrant population, and adjusting costs, risks and benefits of economic and social aspects.

In the Mexican case, the direct effect of such containment migration policies was an exponential increase in the detention and deportation of undocumented migrants, the diversification of immigration routes, the reproduction of human trafficking networks, an increase in the costs of relocation, and an increase in the level of vulnerability of migrants.<sup>88</sup> Migration flows in Mexico were displaced to less visible and usually uninhabited areas, causing their dislodgment into more dangerous and wild landscapes in the border geography.

Considering female migration, containment policies augment women's exposure to criminal organizations, prostitution and human trafficking by increasing their necessity for the use of illicit routes and the dependence on intermediary smugglers. What is more, their irregular status hampers their access to services, discourages report of abuses, and thus obstructs the process of criminal accountability.

### **The multifaceted origins of violence**

The study of violence against migrants can be developed from different points of origin and through different lenses. Nevertheless, as much as there is a range of individual and

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>87</sup> Simón Pedro Izcara Palacios, "Violencia postestructural: migrantes centroamericanos y cárteles de la droga en México," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 56 (2016):15.

<sup>88</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, "The Dark Side of Globalized Migration: The Rise and Peak of Criminal Networks—The Case of Central Americans in Mexico," *Globalizations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 299.

systemic actors, they all collude and become interwoven in an intricate network tinged by corruption, impunity and an absence of rule of law.

Violence against migrants can be regarded against a varied set of features—its extension across the society through a process of normalization and routine, its roots in shared social values which are further reproduced in formal and familiar relationships, achieving a degree of justification; the lack of recognition and identification of the diversity of harmful behaviors, causing an obstacle for their accountability and broadening the extent of impunity; and the perception of undocumented migrants as a subordinate social group.

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Female migrants' exposure to and risk of sexual- and gender-based violence flourishes in a triad of corruption of state officials, perpetrators that live with impunity, and criminal organizations who serve as the key actors in the direct victimization of women.

*Drug trade and criminal organizations*

*“Asystematicity is part of their system; circumstantial contact is part of their organic behaviour; daily territorial monitoring is part of their geographic presence; railway network and migration houses are their quintessential location of mass abduction.”<sup>90</sup>*

The landscape of intensified violence against migrants within Mexican borders can be attributed to a series of events that trace back to the involvement of criminal organizations: drug trafficking, the federal government's strategy against organized crime, and migrant smuggling, alongside its new ties with criminal networks of human-and arms trafficking. The previous elements can be observed as a sequence of events that have engendered today's environment of abuse. The process of criminal organization diversification implies an interference in the habitual channels of drug-trade—which entails an economic loss caused by the decline of drug-trade profitability and confrontations with both the army and other criminal organizations— and a quest to counterbalance it with other profitable activities. Thus, as Mexico's 'War on Drugs' intensified, so too, did the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>90</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, “Los migrantes indocumentados: su vulnerabilidad y la nuestra,” *Migración y Seguridad: Nuevo Desafío en México* (2001): 147.

expansion of drug rings—their activities transcended drug-trade and entered the lucrative markets of human trafficking.

In Mexico, the ‘war against drugs’ initiated by former president Felipe Calderón, facilitated the intensification of the link between organized crime and undocumented migration given the concurrence of both drug trafficking routes, and migrants’ geographical journey towards the United States. Central American migrants today indirectly contribute to drug cartels’ income in different manners, namely, through ransoms from kidnappings, transit quotas, incorporation in the ranks of organized crime, and trafficking for labor or sexual purposes. In this respect, the 2011 Migration Law acknowledges the pernicious relation that exists between organized crime and the correlating increased vulnerability of migrants to kidnappings and human trafficking. The law seeks to “[...] strengthen the contribution of migration authority to public, border and regional security and to combat organized crime, especially in the battle against migrant traffic and kidnaps, and human trafficking in all its forms.”<sup>91</sup>

Such tendencies to broaden the networks in which criminal organizations work— from drug trade to human trafficking, and exploitation of individuals for sexual and labor services—pose a wider range of threats to the migrant population than in previous years. Correa-Cabrera suggests that criminal organizations have acknowledged and taken advantage of the migrants’ condition of vulnerability, and used it to promote criminal activities, reduce the risk factor for members of criminal organizations, subordinate under-developed human-trafficking networks and create of channels of mediation that constrain government actions.

In a study performed by the CNDH in 2009, 198 cases of kidnappings were accounted for, in which 9,194 out of 10,000 migrants interviewed were abducted by criminal organizations in the period between September 2008 and February 2009. They found that 94% of migrant abductions were committed by organized criminal organizations. In order to emphasize the gravity of the issue, the study projected that the number of kidnappings could reach 400 in a year, and the number of victims could ascend to 18,000 per year. The

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<sup>91</sup>Ley de Migración, Article 2, Paragraph 8.

magnitude and incidence of these events can be directly related to the high revenues they represent for criminal organizations. The same study revealed that the ransom demanded by the criminal organizations varies between USD 1,500 and 5,000; thus, the 9,578 cases of unidentified victims represented an illegal profit of approximately 25 million dollars.<sup>92</sup>

Under a gender perspective, the same study revealed 157 events of female abduction, where “at least two were murdered, others were raped, and one was appropriated by the gang-leader as a trophy”.<sup>93</sup>For criminal organizations, a woman represents a profitable business:

*“Women are more profitable than drugs or armament. These items can only be sold once, while women are suitable to be sold multiple times.”<sup>94</sup>*

#### *Public officials*

The perpetration of severe abuses against migrants is expedited by impunity for perpetrators, and aggravated by the weak rule of law and an inefficient police force. The institutional system and regulations originating from government and authorities themselves have been permeated by criminal organizations through the illicit involvement or complete inaction of INM officials, and state and municipal police forces.

Silva (2014) indicates that migrant vulnerability is caused by the indifference of authorities in the country of transit or arrival, which manifest through various forms. Amongst them, the sporadic presence of inspectors in workplaces, poor monitoring towards the respect of labor and human rights, the criminalization of employment in such forms as sexual commerce, and the dispersion of asylum seekers. In this regard, legal status appears to be the determinant factor in the limitations of access to security, education, health care, housing, social welfare, criminalization, marriage, residence, labor and persecution. As such, it serves as the starting point from which other conditions and contexts of vulnerability surface.

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<sup>92</sup> CNDH, “Informe Especial de la Comisión de los Derechos Humanos sobre los casos de secuestro en contra de migrantes,” (2009): 12.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>94</sup> Jorge Martínez Pizarro, *El mapa migratorio de América Latina y el Caribe, las mujeres y el género* (Santiago de Chile: UN publications, ISSN: 1680-9009, 2003): 59.

In this vein, Silva further explains the various contextual factors are present in conception of vulnerability in relation to public officials, which can be classified as political, legal, economic, social and cultural. From a legal perspective, juridical frameworks create and increase migrant vulnerability in two forms: laws are limp in their defense and place migrants in circumstance of societal neglect, on the one hand, and are restrictive in the recognition of social and political rights, on the other hand, thus limiting their access to goods and services that the State grants to its citizens.

In her study, Silva (2014) relates the patterns of persistent violation of immigrants' human rights, to the fragility of the country's political and institutional landscape surrounding migration control, as well as the weaknesses of the system of state protection. The latter, she argues, is result of a socio-political context of international pressure for migration control, policies of security, the fight against organized crime, corrupt institutions and governmental agendas targeted at internal electoral processes.<sup>95</sup>

In this regard, the CNDH has recognized impunity and the deterioration of the rule of law as the fundamental incentives for the growing number of kidnappings.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Amnesty International (2010) displayed public officials' direct involvement in migrant abductions, as well as their awareness, and even cooperation in cases of kidnappings carried by criminal organizations.<sup>97</sup>

Article 70 of the Regulations of the 2011 Migration Law limits Federal Police's involvement in functions of migration control, verification and revision to the express request of the INM.<sup>98</sup> Yet, actions of omission, complicity and acquiescence with criminal groups are common practices in all three levels of government. In January 2007, twelve Guatemalan immigrants were kidnapped in Ciudad Ixtepec, Oaxaca—an event of great

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<sup>95</sup> Yolanda Silva Quiroz, "Transmigración de centroamericanos por México: su vulnerabilidad y sus derechos humanos," PhD diss., El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2014, 170.

<sup>96</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, "Mexico's missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform". *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 730.

<sup>97</sup> *Invisible Victims. Migrants on the move in Mexico* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2010):

<sup>98</sup> Regulations of the Migration Law. Article 22: "Public servants of the Institute who do not obtain the certification referred to in this chapter shall be removed from office in accordance with the applicable legal provisions."



notoriety given the involvement of Father Solalinde, the coordinator of the migrant shelter in Ixtepec. A joint network was soon discovered between the kidnappers, railroad staff, street sellers, local police and high authorities, including the claimed participation of the Governor of the state of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruiz.<sup>99</sup>

Hundreds of similar cases elucidate the existing network of corruption and extortion from the very authorities designed to give protection and ensure the exercise of migrants' human rights. Migrants have explicitly expressed fear of deliverance to organized criminal groups by authorities themselves, including INM officials, and municipal, state and national police forces. In this vein, state security forces have been identified as an element of facilitation for organized crime operations, while the law has been regarded as an ally that protects drug cartels.<sup>100</sup> Such a relationship between organized crime and the government in matters of migrant abuse was articulated by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, who elaborated on the lucrative nature of transnational migration for transnational networks of criminal gangs in joint venture with local, municipal, state and federal authorities. Altogether, they were directly related to the increase number of events of abuse against women and children in areas of transit.<sup>101</sup> He concluded that “the pervasiveness of corruption in all levels of government, and the close link of numerous authorities with criminal networks, will perpetuate incidences of extortion, rape, and assault of migrants.”<sup>102</sup>

### *Polleros*

The irregular status of undocumented migrants and the related institutionalized obstacles—namely migration checkpoints in the *vertical border*—have driven immigrants to transmigrate with support from a diaspora of agents within networks of human smuggling, which eventually evolved to human trafficking and criminal networks.

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<sup>99</sup> Meryt Montiel Lugo, “Habla el sacerdote que desenmascaró el caso de los 43 estudiantes mexicanos,” *El País*, September 27, 2015.

<sup>100</sup> <sup>100</sup> Simón Pedro Izcará Palacios, “Violencia postestructural: migrantes centroamericanos y cárteles de la droga en México,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 56 (2016):19.

<sup>101</sup> Human Rights Council (HRC), Report of The Special Rapporteur on The Human Rights of Migrants, Jorge Bustamante: Mission to Mexico, Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Report No. A/HRC/11/7/Add.224: 65

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

The *migration industry* has fortified accordingly—what is a strategy of survival for some, is the possibility of illicit business for others.<sup>103</sup>

While migrant women can be found traveling on train routes in Mexico, most of them opt for more clandestine means of transit—namely, with intermediary smugglers, or *polleros*, through networks of human smuggling. It is estimated that more than 65% of migrant women hire a smuggler to travel to Mexico.<sup>104</sup>

As Pizarro (2003) reveals, numerous cases of sexual abuse against migrants are contemplated as a price to be paid to smugglers and traffickers. The experiences range from *compañerismo* (companionship, in reference to sexual correspondence) with the *pollero*, to cases of rape or coerced sexual relations. In many instances, *compañerismo* and consensual sexual relations are considered a form of protection by migrant women.

Moreover, the reliance on intermediary smugglers, as a result of stricter migration policies, exposes migrant women to greater threats of forced prostitution and human trafficking. In this respect, Dimmit (2013) relates the involvement of smugglers in the supply of migrant women to organized criminal organizations, with the aim of forcing them into prostitution or domestic work in ‘safe houses’ where kidnapped migrants are held.<sup>105</sup>

Overall, the last decade has seen an overlap of the operation of smugglers, or *polleros*, with larger networks of diversified criminal organizations, resulting in an absorption of the traffickers’ empirical knowledge by more sophisticated networks—namely, drug-related criminal organizations<sup>106</sup>. From the networks of human smugglers, emerged a number of advanced organizations dedicated to specific tasks in this illicit division of labor: among the tasks are recruitment, relocation, patrol, monitoring, security, collection

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<sup>103</sup> Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, “Seguridad y migración en las fronteras de México: diagnóstico y recomendaciones de política y cooperación regional,” *Migración y Desarrollo* Vol. 12, No. 22 (2014): 162.

<sup>104</sup> Gretchen Kuhner, “La violencia contra las mujeres migrantes en tránsito por México,” *Opinión y debate. Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración* (2011): 20.

<sup>105</sup> Alyson L. Dimmit Gnam, “Mexico’s missed opportunities to protect irregular women transmigrants: applying a gender lens to migration law reform”. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2013): 719.

<sup>106</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, “The Dark Side of Globalized Migration: The Rise and Peak of Criminal Networks—The Case of Central Americans in Mexico,” *Globalizations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 300.

of funds, kidnappings and the use of migrants for movement of drugs.<sup>107</sup> Their success has become synonymous with their ability to traverse the recent criminal landscape.<sup>108</sup>

### *Poverty*

According to Jácome (2011), the condition of indirect violence experienced by migrants arises from the “constraining of individual agency of the migrant population and their physical marginalization within the Mexico’s territory.” The *constraining of individual agency* translates to the restrictions imposed on routine decision-making, namely, regarding their possibilities to return to their countries of origin, or their right to agency in the delineation of their destiny as migrants in transit. *Physical marginalization* arises from the absence of attachment, bonds and identity in transmigration territories.<sup>109</sup> Both conditions are multihued in nature, perpetuating themselves in varying forms of indirect abuses, such as poverty, hunger and health risks.

Conditions of vulnerability, threats and risks are exacerbated by a low economic status. Poverty—understood as the absence of adequate monetary resources—plays a crucial role in matters of survival, often dictating who lives and who dies. Such is the case in abductions, where kidnapped migrants, who do not possess the resources necessary to meet the requested ransom, are more exposed to physical abuse that could eventually culminate in homicide. Poverty, however, can assume a role beyond monetary issues. Indigence can transcend to health risks, where migrants are exposed to live and travel under deplorable conditions, and fall prey to the dangers of the natural landscape transport’s own risks.<sup>110</sup>

### *Patriarchy*

García et al. explain women’s subordination and condition of vulnerability beyond their relationships with men, and based on their associations with the social system as a whole. In a social complex historically-constructed over the foundations of power relations,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Steven Dudley, *Transnational Crime in Mexico and Central America: its Evolution and Role in International Migration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012): 15.

<sup>109</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, “The Dark Side of Globalized Migration: The Rise and Peak of Criminal Networks—The Case of Central Americans in Mexico,” *Globalizations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 307.

<sup>110</sup> Felipe Jácome, “Trans-Mexican Migration: a Case of Structural Violence,” Working Paper Series no. 2, London School of Economics (2011): 19.

women have been excluded from the public realm through a limitation of their rights, an obstruction of their access to resources, a violation of their liberties and their real or symbolic subordination to the power, interests and needs of others—parents, husbands, children, authorities, communities, national society.<sup>111</sup> In this context, power relations and the role of women in the public and private spheres have become common factors in the pattern of propagation of violence against migrant women. Accordingly, a wide spectrum of practices demonstrates the perpetuation of the submission of women in the migration realm: smugglers and truck drivers are payed through the development of household-related activities, or through sexual relations with female migrants. Such a pattern has adapted into the current environment of kidnappings and criminal organizations, where some women ensure survival through domestic chores in the safe house to which they are allocated, and others are forced into prostitution in the course of their abduction.<sup>112</sup>

Altogether, in their possibilities of labor reinsertion, women fall prey to discrimination and exclusion from jobs typically confined to men, whilst becoming visible and susceptible to exploitation, on the one hand, and invisible to bodies responsible for the supervision of the respect for labor rights.<sup>113</sup>

*Society and the institutionalization of violence*

*“Social silence is an accomplice that has systemic effects”.*<sup>114</sup>

Migration policies permeate everyday social relations through the materialization of preferences for what is national to what is foreign—namely people. According to Casillas (2011), the dynamics within Mexican communities along migration routes drive its inhabitants to identify with a particular feature of national identity, making them hostile to communities in transit, and to a certain extent, justifying abuses against them.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> María del Carmen García García et al., “Migración y Mujeres en la Frontera Sur. Una agenda de investigación,” *El Cotidiano* Vol. 21, No. 139 (2006): 36.

<sup>112</sup> Gretchen Kuhner, “La violencia contra las mujeres migrantes en tránsito por México,” *Opinión y debate. Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración* (2011): 21.

<sup>113</sup> Jorge Martínez Pizarro, *El mapa migratorio de América Latina y el Caribe, las mujeres y el género* (Santiago de Chile: UN publications, ISSN: 1680-9009, 2003): 60.

<sup>114</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, “Los migrantes indocumentados: su vulnerabilidad y la nuestra,” *Migración y Seguridad: Nuevo Desafío en México* (2001): 148.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Bustamante (2010) further develops on the dual dimension of vulnerability. While one emanates from the differences between national and foreign individuals in their relation to the State, or *structural vulnerability*, the second derives from a cluster of cultural elements, namely stereotypes, racism or institutional discrimination, or *cultural vulnerability*.<sup>116</sup>

In this respect, and within Mexico's environment of unemployment and insufficient salaries, local residents have learned to normalize theft, abuse, rape, prostitution and corruption as lucrative, low-risk activities. Though their involvement in activities of said nature has allowed a number of local residents to meet their life's needs, it has concurrently engendered a space for cultural and structural vulnerability that inhibits migrants' capacity to meet their own basic needs.<sup>117</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

### Results

The findings of the study reveal the presence of concrete elements in the rise of violence in Mexico between 2006 and 2016—namely, criminal organizations, smugglers, authorities, migration policies, poverty, and Mexican society and tradition of patriarchy—all of which can be situated under Galtung's model.

As explained in the previous chapter, migration policies have had the unsought effects of alienating migrants from a recognized legal status, thus not only restricting their access to resources, but hampering their will to report an abuse out of fear of deportation. Moreover, the reinforcement of ever stricter migration controls along usual routes and channels has coerced undocumented migrants to transit through concealed, extremely dangerous routes, that serve as a platform for their exploitation to the benefit of criminal organizations and corrupt officials. It is within this context that the figure of the undocumented migrant in transit through Mexico must be conceived; and it is within this frame that violence in all its forms—direct, structural and cultural—emanates. In other

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<sup>116</sup> Yolanda Silva Quiroz, "Transmigración de centroamericanos por México: su vulnerabilidad y sus derechos humanos," PhD diss., El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2014, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Rodolfo Casillas, "The Dark Side of Globalized Migration: The Rise and Peak of Criminal Networks—The Case of Central Americans in Mexico," *Globalizations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 301.

words, were such states of alienation and vulnerability not present in the condition of migrants, the other actors and factors would not be as forceful in their perpetration of abuse.

First, the study found that Mexican migration law has failed to allot legal status to the figure of the transiting migrant, thereby facilitating a legal void that propounds migrants' exposure to violence. The policies emanating from the securitization of migration in the post-9/11 period evolved from the restrictive migration regime of the 1974 Ley General de Población—which drove migrants into concealed routes and illicit migration channels, such as human smuggling, and increased their vulnerability in terms of kidnapping, sexual violence, and human trafficking—to the 2011 Migration Law, which failed to provide regular status to migrants and respond to the feminization of migration, on the one hand, and address institutions, their permeability to corruption, and pervasive impunity of officials, on the other hand. Migrants' legal nonexistence from such migration policies challenged their access to legal routes— displacing them into illicit migratory routes— and possible recourse to humanitarian resources. Furthermore, migrants' existence in such a legal void accordingly implicated a vacuum of documents and other records related to their experience in transit, which has engendered a space of impunity, as criminal accountability becomes untraceable. Migrants' fear of deportation—a direct effect of their lack of legal status upon detention—also feeds into such a space of impunity. Migrants' desires to report abuse by criminals or other actors, are trumped by their distress of prospects of deportation; thus, many will choose silence over denouncement of violence to which they are subject, in an attempt to swerve the return to their home countries.

Second, the study found that Mexican migration policies have pushed migrants into alternative routes of transit, thereby exposing them to organized crime, corrupt government officials and networks of smugglers that propound their exposure to violence. Amongst the most egregious manifestations is the Vertical Border with its according reinforcement of operations of border control and containment of the influx of undocumented migrants through the dissemination of checkpoints. Migratory routes along the Vertical Border constitute the acme of alternative channels: they are illicit, concealed from the public eye, operated by criminal organizations and smugglers, and pose further dangers inherent to the natural landscape itself. In transiting through such

illicit routes, migrants face the aforementioned elements and actors, which accordingly propound their exposure to violence.

These two findings—namely, that Mexican migration law has failed to allot legal status to the figure of the transiting migrant and pushed them into alternative routes of transit, thereby facilitating a legal void that propounds migrants' exposure to violence and its perpetrators—demonstrate an initial and fundamental state of vulnerability for migrants transiting Mexico from which—and without which—the exposure to and effects of violence would not be as forceful. Evidently, vulnerability, as a state in which migrants transit, is not unique to the case of Mexico-- this is a common characteristic in the phenomenon of international migration. Yet the presence and combination of direct and indirect violence, with their relevant actors, is distinct to the migratory experience in Mexico.

Within this framework of exacerbated exposure to violence, emerge direct and indirect forms of violence, and accordingly, their actors.

The study found that the various perpetrators of direct violence--criminal organizations, smugglers and government officials-- have fed into this core of vulnerability.

The rise of violence in Mexico between 2006 and 2016 can be directly associated with the ongoing War on Drugs, which began in 2006. Amongst the War's first effects was the diversification of organization crime. Criminal organizations found themselves in economic decline the government's impediment to their usage of traditional drug-trade routes, on the one hand, and resurgent conflicts with the Mexican army and other criminal groups that depleted their resources, manpower and territorial stronghold, on the other hand. Against this backdrop, criminal organizations sought alternative channels for business, namely in the form of illicit migratory routes, that pushed the business model from drug-related activities, to human-trafficking, in which women served provided the most significant profit.

Moreover, such diversification of criminal organizations transcended to the smuggling networks of polleros, and subsumed the latter as a sub-branch of the organization's illicit business. This, in turn, multiplied the risks associated with the polleros' trips. Smugglers,

thus, became a source of increased risk, but also a preferred means of transit compared to riding The Beast or walking through a desert.

Government officials also serve as a source of direct violence by robbing migrants, subjecting women to sexual-or gender-based violence, and delivering migrants to groups of organized crime. What is more, this direct violence thrives from an environment of impunity in which, as aforementioned, migrants' fear of deportation silences denouncement of abuse, on the one hand, and officials' authority within the system grants them indemnity, on the other hand.

The study has found that the role of women in this migratory experience is underpinned by indirect violence, normalized through cultural violence and subsequently exacerbated by direct violence.

With regards to cultural violence, the study has found that patriarchy directly answers the question of female migrants' role as actor and subject of violence through Mexico. Domestic patterns of submission are reflected in the migration realm, as women fall prey to discrimination and violence in the forms of rape, prostitution and trafficking based on their gender.

With regards to indirect, structural violence, the study underscored that poverty constrains a migrant's individual agency to delineate their future, often dictating possibilities for the payments of requested ransoms-- and thus life or death-- or for the evasion of unfavorable health conditions. With regards to xenophobia--a second form of indirect, structural violence--the study has found that the Mexican society's proclivity for the nation(al) over the foreign exacerbates discrimination towards migrants in the labor market, for example, and concurrently remains silent in the face of explicit direct and other indirect violence.

All in all, the study has found that Galtung's Triangle of Violence can generally apply to an analysis of the Mexican case of increased violence towards migrant women in transit between 2006 and 2016. However, the analysis has revealed that Galtung's focus on objective, systemic factors of direct and indirect violence fails to consider the individual experience of the female migrant. Moreover, it falls short in its classification of vulnerability as one component amongst many of structural violence. The study has found

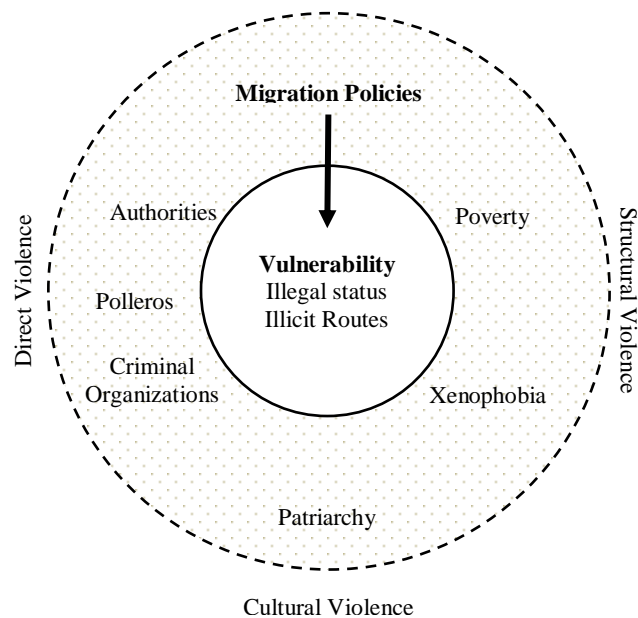


that institutional vulnerability is not just an element of Galtung’s definition of structural violence in the Mexican case, but a centrifugal force in Mexico’s network of violence as related to migrants in transit.

**Contribution**

Thus, this thesis proposes the privileging of institutional vulnerability in Mexico’s network of violence towards migrant women in transit, and as the foundation for the other elements of direct, indirect and cultural violence. The thesis posits a reconfiguration of Galtung’s Triangle of Violence from one in which vulnerability, as Galtung defines and places within the limitations of structural violence, is repositioned at the core of Mexico’s experience of migration. Thus, the visual representation of violence, as a triangle where the process of violence can begin in any of the corners of structural, direct and cultural violence, is reshaped to allot a centralized treatment of a branch of structural violence, which the thesis proposes shall be called ‘vulnerability.’

The following diagram of the reconfigured model for violence against transit women in Mexico demonstrates the centripetal force of an initial and fundamental state of vulnerability from which—and without which—the exposure to and effects of violence would not be as forceful, as delineated in the findings.



The model establishes migration policies as a starting point for migrants' formerly-discussed legal non-existence-- namely through their illegal status and use of illicit routes--and their initial state of vulnerability. As Galtung proposes, the three forms of violence perpetuate each other in a dynamic cycle. For the purposes of this case, however, the model adjusts Galtung's focus on systemic classifications of violence--which accordingly clusters single elements therein-- to accent the individual elements and their dynamic interplay in this network of violence.

The elements of violence discussed in the study can be positioned within the model as direct and indirect perpetrators of violence. As seen, the model allows for the visual representation of the elements' interaction with, and exploitation of, the core of vulnerability. It configures direct violence and indirect violence on opposite sides, with cultural violence underpinning the structure. Organized criminal organizations, *polleros* and authorities are considered perpetrators of direct violence under Galtung's definition; poverty and xenophobia are considered elements of indirect violence that engender further indirect violence; patriarchy is considered an element of cultural violence. Each inflicts violence through unilateral exertions that directly exacerbate the core of vulnerability. For example, organized criminal groups exploits migrants' use of illicit routes for kidnappings, and poverty's push of migrants with fewer resources towards smugglers. Each element also inflicts violence dynamically through the association with other elements. For example, government authorities cooperate with organized criminal groups for the delivery of detained migrants, while poverty and patriarchy work in conjunction to force women into prostitution.

The Mexican case of violence against women in transit between 2006 and 2016 underscores the role that gender plays in molding and magnifying conditions of vulnerability. Therefore, this thesis offers a gender lens to add an intersubjective filter to Galtung's objective model.

Galtung discusses the unequal distribution of power as a form of structural violence only. By applying a gender lens, however, it is evident that the unequal distribution of power transcends Galtung's classifications of structural violence, to implicate cultural violence in the form of patriarchy, and direct violence in the form of sex-trafficking, rape and

prostitution. As such, applying a gender lens, namely through the theory of the objectification of women-- allows for the analytical appreciation of gender as the foundation for direct, structural and cultural violence.

The thesis argues that upon an analysis of female migrants in transit through Mexico, Galtung's model should accordingly integrate gender as social construction that typifies power relations. Such an intersubjective approach offers a filter through which to analyze the more subtle nuances of identities that are absent from Galtung's objective approach. It assumes a dynamic of mutual production in which violence creates and gives meaning to gender identities, which successively create and give meaning to violence. Accordingly, gender creates and defines violence against migrant women in Mexico, and violence produces newly-defined gender roles for migrant women in transit. Moreover, it assumes that gendered language and gendered perspectives delineate and dictate the potential for violence, and thus, peace. Thus, violence against migrant women in Mexico can be understood and constituted through the gendered language latent in its culture of patriarchy.

### **Further research**

The thesis has revealed the presence and role of particular elements in the rise of violence in Mexico between 2006 and 2016—all of which can be situated under Galtung's model. Its findings demonstrate an initial and fundamental state of vulnerability for migrants transiting Mexico from which—and without which—the exposure to and effects of violence would not be as forceful.

From this starting point, the thesis proposes a reconfiguration of Galtung's model of violence to one in which vulnerability assumes a centripetal force, and systemic classifications of violence are adjusted to accent individual elements and their interplay therein. Moreover, it offers a gender lens to add an intersubjective filter to Galtung's objective model.

The thesis, moreover, has proposed a reconfigured model of violence based on Galtung's Triangle of Violence, in which vulnerability assumes the initial and fundamental focal point, from which other elements violence of violence directly and indirectly interact. Noting that Galtung's objective objective model falls short in recognizing and assessing

individual, intersubjective elements of violence, the thesis has also proposed a gender lens to understand the specific experience of migrant women in Mexico's network of violence.

Against the backdrop of said finds and conclusions, the thesis sets the ground for further research on the topic and related subtopics that have been discussed in the study, but not developed holistically.

Thus, it points to the following areas for future research.

Firstly, the concept of vulnerability as related to violence should be further analyzed and tested in relation to other regional and cultural contexts, in addition to variables of non-vulnerability and non-violence.

The study's focus on what was referred to as 'vulnerability' sets the grounds for a comparative analysis between individuals under the conditions of vulnerability-- illegal status and the use of illicit routes-- and those exempt from one or both of the predisposed considerations. The aim would be to examine the extent of the perpetuation and forcefulness of violence in the different cases. For example, a study comparing Central American migrants in transit through Mexico, and the mobility Mexican immigrants towards the United States, in which-- while both flows of migration would share the common use of illicit routes-- one group would drastically reduce this work's conceptualization of vulnerability by possessing a legal existence.

Another analysis to test the concept of vulnerability could compare the impact of violent elements on vulnerable and non-vulnerable figures, such as migrants in transit and legal residents of the transiting country. The aim of such research would be to fortify the theoretical conceptions of vulnerability, and thus non-vulnerability— and related empirical cases.

Further, research on gender and its links to violence directed towards migrant women is encouraged. The role of patriarchy in migratory movements and its different stages— countries of origin, transit and destiny—should be further assessed. One analysis foresees a comparison between migration flows from and/or to countries or cultures that exhibit heightened degrees of female objectification. For example, a comparative analysis of migration from Central America to the United States, and from Central Africa to Europe

could serve to uncover convergence and divergence of elements that contribute to and detract from gender-based violence against migrants. Such research would also to fortify the theoretical conceptions of vulnerability, and thus non-vulnerability— alongside conceptions of gender-objectification and related empirical cases.

### **Closing Remarks**

Though Mexican migration law identifies women as amongst the most vulnerable, it fails to address the primary factors contributing to their susceptibility to abuse. Failure to provide legal migration channels or address the role of organized crime in their extortion, and the maintenance of punitive enforcement structures only encourage conditions that place women in positions of vulnerability to sexual & gender-based violence. Moreover, institutional weakness of municipal bodies today has not only allowed its permeability to the incursion of criminal organizations in governing organs, but has also tied impunity to state's omissions, concealment of evidence, creation of bureaucratic obstacles, and the unnecessary prolongation of trials related to female migrants. What is more, female migrants transiting through Mexico today confront a business of organized crime that exploits the government's dual rhetoric and profits from their bodies. Their experiences along migration routes are proof of a normalized environment of violence and impunity. The Mexican society's proclivity to *other* the figure of the migrant, alongside a culture of machismo, only systematizes such abuse towards women in transit.

It is the hope of this work that uncovering the variables that have led to the drastic rise in violence against migrant women in Mexico, and applying relevant models to understand their interaction therein, will not only contribute to the current paucity of scholarship on the topic, but most importantly, shed light on questions of sexual and gender-based violence that today plague the experience of women in transit.

While irregular migrants have been decriminalized in words, their treatment is still that of criminals at best, merchandise at worst. In a marketplace of words that carry the weight of violence itself, bankrupting the language that brands female migrants as invisible victims may be the first step in redirecting their route away from neglect.

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*On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit  
this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received  
unauthorized assistance on it.*

-Ana Lucía García Cantú