

## Mexico-Guatemala border mobility as represented in the everyday lives of Central American workers

### La movilidad transfronteriza México-Guatemala desde la representación cotidiana de los trabajadores centroamericanos

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#### Abstract

This study explores the human mobility experience of transborder workers who travel to localities in Chiapas for the purpose of working in a specific economic sector. The workers, who are primarily Central Americans, experience everyday life trajectories that are shaped by mobility practices linked to migratory, labor, and private spheres. From the social perspective of everyday life, the author seeks to analyze this sector's border crossing experience, which occurs in one of the most important regions with regard to population flow: the southern border between Mexico and Guatemala. A labor market has been formed in this region in which some social actors are able to construct ways of life based on their daily mobility and their recognition of a difficult and controlled spatial and temporal dimension.

**Keywords:** transborder mobility, everyday life, trajectories, Central American workers, southern border.

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#### Resumen

Este trabajo está centrado en explorar la experiencia de la movilidad humana de los trabajadores transfronterizos que viajan a localidades de Chiapas para trabajar en algún sector económico específico. Los trabajadores, en su mayoría centroamericanos, experimentan trayectorias de la vida cotidiana bajo determinadas prácticas de movilidad que involucran ámbitos migratorios, laborales y privados. Se busca analizar, desde la perspectiva social de la vida cotidiana, la experiencia del cruce fronterizo de este sector en una de las regiones más importantes en cuanto a flujo poblacional se refiere: la frontera sur entre México y Guatemala. Espacio en el cual se ha configurado un mercado laboral donde algunos actores sociales son capaces de construir formas de vida a partir de su movilidad

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cotidiana y su reconocimiento de una dimensión espacial y temporal difícil y controlada.

Palabras clave: movilidad transfronteriza, vida cotidiana, trayectorias, trabajadores centro-americanos, frontera sur.

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

An intensification of migratory flow often exists between neighboring countries, even more so in border zones where political actors, scholars, and society as a whole have paid special attention to human mobility, whether it is of a permanent or temporary nature (Herrera, 2006). Mexican border cities are generally thought of not only as places where transit to the U.S. occurs but also as zones of opportunity and improved financial gain within a migratory system that has been historically established in a localized and continuous fashion (Herrera, 2006, p. 31).

In the interest of exploring part of the spectrum of the southern border and becoming familiar with some of the actors found therein, the author investigates the border crossing experience of Central American workers who find themselves in contexts of daily transborder mobility. This phenomenon alludes to a certain spatial and social connection, not between nations but instead between two localities. That is, it is the result of a specific zone between two neighboring countries (Ojeda, 2009), as is the case with the region located in the border areas between Mexico and Guatemala.

This study is divided into four parts. The first part explains the theoretical references used and the triangulation that draws on the conceptual background from the sociology of everyday life and migration studies. The second part poses the research problem, thus establishing the object of study, and it provides a historical-contextual description of the region studied. The third part presents a few analytical profiles of transborder workers and the ways in which these workers act in everyday life based on their imagined and perceived representation of the border. Finally, a few conjectures are made regarding the transborder experience of workers who find themselves in extreme situations and vulnerable conditions.

## Transborder mobility and everyday life

The phenomenon of transborder mobility referred to in this study is that which is characterized by the daily mobility resulting from the flow of human beings from neighboring countries to localities adjacent to border zones. However, the conceptualization of and action linked with transborder mobility transcend notions of territoriality. That is, the border dynamic refers to more than a particular geographical area. Therefore, its migratory dynamic offers an alternative for observing the identity construction processes that give its actors a sense of certainty regarding their own behavior (Vila, 2000, p. 21).

Debates regarding daily mobility in border regions are intrinsically linked with research that addresses identity. Social mobility from one side of the border to the other reinforces the collective idea of moving up on the social scale such that the constant crossing and passing over from one side of the border “offers many possible mirrors that can be used

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<sup>2</sup> This study is part of the research conducted for the author's Master's thesis.

to generate images that can in turn be used to narrate one's self and others" (Vila, 2000, p. 82, translation by the author).

With the objective of investigating the particularities of border crossing in a specific sector, the author employs a theoretical-conceptual framework constructed using analytical categories from everyday life (Lindón, 1999) such as time and space. Through these categories, "everyday life has managed to impose itself as one of the universes where general aspects and the particular aspects of human construction can be explained" (León, 2000, p. 46). Following this same line of theory, Maffesoli (1979) emphasizes that everyday life constructs itself through spatial differentiation, social relations, and the temporality of practices. This last component marks the rhythms and rules that allow activities to occur (Heller, 1984; León, 2000; Lindón, 1999). Space makes human expression intelligible through understanding (Heller, 1984), and in this case, it includes the spheres of work, the home, and the borderline.

Work is inseparable from space and time given that it is "the activity of routine and simultaneously functions as that which lends order to other everyday activities" (Reguillo, 2005, p. 295). This being the case, the everyday practices studied here are closely linked with temporary labor generated by the movement of people in bordering localities between Mexico and Guatemala. These movements allude to a type of daily mobility that does not involve a permanent change of residence (Jiménez, 2009). In this sense, the border affirms itself as an important everyday scene for transborder workers who are also known as *commuters*: "people who cross the border daily to work in a neighboring country" (Martínez, 1994, p. 61), displacing themselves through a mobility of a circular or oscillating nature (Rojas, 2011; Rojas & Ángeles, 2012). This intraregional process is historical (Castillo, 2008; Durand, 2010; Rojas & Ángeles, 2012). It dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, when the states of the nation were created and the borders drawn. It can also be considered a daily and temporary process (Castillo, Lattes & Santibáñez, 1998; Ares, 2010; Rojas & Ángeles, 2012) that encompasses short distances (Morales, 2003). Martínez (1994; 1990) notes that workers (*commuters*) are considered permanent residents of the border. Although some continuously cross the dividing line with authorization and others cross at unauthorized points and without any type of documentation, the principle characteristic of daily border crossing is that it is the result of a dependency on work in the neighboring country.

Ares (2010, p. 31) proposes that "daily mobility or *commuting* develops from the primary home residence to the places that form the space of life." Therefore, the spaces of everyday life demarcate where practices are performed and the points of passage and residence that shape the habitual and migratory dimension of the mobility of persons whose lifestyle involves travelling a considerable distance daily between their place of residence and the workplace (Martínez, 1990). The daily transborder mobility referred to in this study is related to the work activities generated between neighboring countries and has two destinations: *a*) localities adjacent to borders and plantation zones and *b*) cities. This mobility is distinguished by its spatial and temporal characteristics. Its frequency is high and involves movement within the space that is visited daily. By contrast, migration is low in frequency and involves movement over long distances (Jiménez, 2009; Módenes, 2008).

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## The historical and current context of the border region

In the interest of developing more refined concepts, the author poses the following fundamental question: How should we define the border? Fábregas (2005) refers to the work of authors such as Alejandro Grimson to construct a concept of the border as a place where stories meet and the point of articulation between the state and its geopolitical division. According to Grimson (2003, p. 22), “borders can move themselves, fade, redraw themselves, but they cannot disappear, they constitute social life.” It is not in our interest to assign the border an unambiguous meaning, nor is it advisable to adopt a homogenous attitude regarding the diverse forms of daily mobility with which we coexist. This type of space also encompasses acts that make visible inequities, resistance, and hidden or explicit negotiations with power. Valenzuela (1998) notes that border studies give us a glimpse of the structures of domination and the forms of knowledge that can impose themselves or outlast these structures.

To speak of the border between Mexico and Guatemala is to speak of its history and modern configuration, the purpose being to give rise to a brief discussion of the historical configuration of the border to contextualize the existence of the current dividing line. To that end, we can refer to a key figure in the history of Central America: Justo Rufino Barrios. Rufino Barrios was an army commander in the Guatemalan revolution of 1871. He was president of the country from 1873 to 1885. He died on April 2 of the last year of his presidency as a result of the conflict between the unifying movement, which he headed, and opposing forces, which existed throughout a large part of Central America.

Toussaint (1997) speaks of this series of events that framed a watershed moment in the history of Soconusco. Barrios put up for sale strategic points in countries such as Honduras to gain the support of the United States (U.S.) and, with it, accomplish two objectives: “unite the five Central American countries into one political entity so that in the negotiations regarding the limits with the Mexican government, the arbitration of the U.S. may place Guatemala in an advantageous position” (Toussaint, 1997, p. 92).

History tells us that neither of these objectives was accomplished because the efforts of Barrios to obtain North American mediation to avoid conflict in the dispute over Soconusco elicited no sympathy whatsoever from the Mexican government. The border problem between Guatemala and Mexico further grew when, on the North American side, Secretary of State James G. Blaine supported the idea of keeping Barrios on the side of the U.S. so that he would not solicit the aid of other European powers. Simultaneously, Blaine was careful not to overcommit to Barrios’ campaign. Guatemala’s ambiguous stance represented a threat in the negotiations for territory. Mexico could obtain regional strength with the aid of the countries on the Isthmus and in this manner challenge the hegemony of the U.S.

Mexico’s demand for its right to claim Chiapas as part of its national territory received a favorable response. Barrios decided to cede the territory to Mexico without receiving any remuneration to concentrate his military and political forces on achieving his principle objective: the unification of the people of Central America. The final treaty was drawn on September 27, 1882, at which time Mexico was given a total of 27,949 km<sup>2</sup>. To resolve this conflict, the Suchiate River was used as the dividing line. The first families of the territories that remained on the Guatemalan side of the border made use of Clause V of the Boundaries Treaty to appeal to President Porfirio Díaz for repatriation and to request the land that they needed to establish their new homes and to farm (Fábregas, 1985).

At the present time, the cultural brotherhood that exists between the respective peoples living on either side of the dividing line is evident. Furthermore, the labor supply and demand for productive activities are important components of the geopolitical border of both nations. However, Campos and Odgers (2012, p. 19) note that the border region has factors that characterize it as a zone of economic inequality as a result of the historical formation of geopolitical boundaries and specific logics in intraregional sociocultural processes. Therefore, when we refer to the border as a particular region, we mean a region that borders these specific zones. Wilson and Hastings (2000, p. 9) refer to these regions as border areas, and propose that they are composed of three elements:

- 1) The border itself, that is, the borderline that, in legal and administrative terms, simultaneously separates and unites states;
- 2) *Frontier or border areas*, territorial zones of varying size that extend from one end to the other of the borderline. Within these, people negotiate a variety of behaviors and meanings associated with belonging to their respective nations or states; and
- 3) The physical structures of the state that demarcate and protect the legal borderline, composed of diverse agents and institutions such as surveillance devices, customs offices, immigration control, and the offices that issue visas and passports.

However, the process through which these border areas emerged was not free of obstacles. Fábregas (1985) explains that in the oldest settlements of the state of Chiapas, the dynamic of social interaction that imposed the establishment of the borderline found expression in the foundation of new settlements that date back to April 2, 1899. Currently, the length of Mexico's southern border is one-third of that of the northern border. The length of the former is 956 km, whereas the latter measures 3,185 km. The territory of Chiapas represents the largest part of the border region at 68%, that is, 654 km of borderline.

Together with historical transformation, migratory movements have changed. They are not the same as those of the 20th century. For example, 20% of the 60,000 Guatemalan refugees who fled during the armed conflict of the 1970s are now permanent residents (Casillas & Castillo, 1989; Guillén, 2005). Today, there continues to be an intense flow of people who view the zone as a place where they can be better remunerated for their work and improve their quality of life.

In addition to being a region that receives migrants and one of the most economically developed parts of the state of Chiapas (Anguiano, 2008), Soconusco also represents a sphere of mobility of the Central American population. The city of Tapachula is deemed the most important urban center of this region. Simultaneously, it is considered one of the most vulnerable zones of Mexico (Arriola, 1995). Rivera (2014) explains that the everyday life of transborder families revolves around work. The sociodemographic characteristics of the workers and their families give meaning to working life, especially that of Guatemalans who regularly travel to Chiapas. Although this region is one of the most precarious border regions, Rivera (2014, p. 36) observes that the sociodemographic, labor, and migratory conditions of the transborder population and its families are not homogenous. Instead, these conditions are differentiated by the factors of duration of stay in the place of destination and type of work. Currently, the situation of extreme poverty of rural families relegates this population to a life of daily subsistence in which they work to feed themselves and reproduce their way of life. By contrast, urban families, despite their precarious conditions, have a greater range of work opportunities that keep them above the subsistence level.

The border regions acquire enormous importance for the movement of people. These regions are where the population flow is concentrated, implicating in particular the regions' neighboring countries (Morales, 2003). We should not forget that this zone is an area that is geopolitically demarcated. It exists not only by virtue of forms of surveillance and mobility control but also in virtue of the mobility of the actors who pass through it and shape it. The Mexican-Guatemalan border has become one of the main entry points for Central American migrants whose final destination is generally the U.S. In addition to being an obligatory point of passage for those whose destination is the U.S., in this border territory is formed "[...] a social, economic, cultural, and geographical neighborhood between peoples, communities, and regions" (Ángeles, 2004, p. 192).

The different municipalities of the Soconusco region (a total of 15) form a social space in which commercial exchange between inhabitants of either side of the border occurs, in addition to work migrations. These work migrations date back to the beginning of the 20th century, and their actors include Guatemalan men and women who work in the coffee plantations, domestic employees, and immigrants from Guatemala and other Central American countries who are employed in a variety of jobs connected to the service sector and construction. Furthermore, other migrant groups such as El Salvadorians and Hondurans form part of the population that generally leaves its communities of origin with the principle objective of passing through Mexican territory to reach the U.S. However, in this population, only a small proportion establishes itself in Soconusco for the purposes of work, primarily in the commercial, domestic, agricultural, construction, and service sectors or in bars and/or as sex workers (Fernández, 2006).

It is necessary to note that the results of the Survey of Migration at Mexico's Southern Border (*Migración en la Frontera Sur-EMIF Sur*) 2006-2011 historical series of the National Institute of Migration (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*) et al. (2013) allow us to observe a few fundamental elements pertaining to migratory flow. Of the migratory crossings from Guatemala to Mexico, with a total flow of 616,926,000 movements in the year 2011, 66.9% of those surveyed state that they stayed longer than a day in Mexico, and 33.1% stated that they stayed no longer than 24 hours. The main crossing points are Tecún Umán with 39.5% and El Carmen with 33.3%, these localities being located in the San Marcos department, Guatemala. The large majority (40.9%) are youths between 20 and 29 years of age, at the highest stage of productivity. A total of 81% cross with some type of migratory documentation, generally a local visitor Migratory Form (*Forma Migratoria de visitante local-FMVL*). This visa is now currently referred to as a Regional Visitor Visa (*Visa de Visitante Regional*), which does not give migrants permission to work and limits the visitor's stay to a maximum of 72 hours. A total of 18.8% cross the border without any type of official documentation. A total of 99% cross for work, their main destination being the city of Tapachula. However, there are migrants whose destinations are the plantations, *ejidos*, and ranches near this municipality. Of those surveyed, 53.2% hope to find work in the farming sector and 17.8% in the commercial sector, followed by the service sector (including domestic service) and other sectors such as industry (including construction).

The zone maintains an intense population flow with defined characteristics. It is eminently masculine, although in the last five years, an increase in women's participation has been noted among the population that has Chiapas as its destination. At the regional level, there is a job market that offers some opportunities. There is an offer of goods and services, and systems of commercial exchange have taken shape, driving relationships that transcend political-administrative limits and occasionally override formally established barriers. Ordóñez (2007) suggests that the combination of crossing points along the

Suchiate River<sup>3</sup> on both sides of the border cannot be exclusively regarded as a canal of illegalities, even though these do exist, when we consider the ease with which the river is crossed and the density of the population that does so. For this reason, it is necessary to highlight that other passage routes and unofficial crossing points that lie up river are used by actors to cross the border as quickly as possible and without being seen or detected (Vericat, 2007). Given this situation, the criminalization of undocumented migration has fomented new forms and routes for crossing the dividing line, thus changing the dynamic and the conditions of transborder mobility.

## Methodology

From a methodological perspective, research on international migration addresses two central dimensions of this phenomenon: space and time (Ariza & Velasco, 2012; Durand, 2010). Taking these dimensions into consideration in fieldwork, analytical categories are derived that propose a multi-sited study and a bifocal observation of itineraries and trajectories (Stephen, 2012). Categories articulate themselves harmoniously with two of the four ways of studying everyday life as described by Lindón (2000), these being sociality, micro-rituals, space, and time.

The present study is based on in-depth interviews conducted with workers (men and women) of Guatemalan origin who work in different economic sectors of the localities studied:<sup>4</sup> 1) agricultural, 2) commercial, and 3) domestic service.

Although the 20 interviews are not universally representative, the empirical material reveals subjective processes that originated from the experience of living on the border and crossing it consistently. Each person who was interviewed was aware of what he/she had lived in his/her transborder mobility and his/her corresponding work sector. The interview subjects used different types of references to construct their stories: family ties, objects, means of subsistence, and risks. Following the example of Ariza and Velasco (2012), each finding allows us to adapt the information registration strategy and review the contexts in which the migratory stories originate in collaboration with the interview subjects.

Before embarking on our analysis, it is necessary to describe the methodological strategy used in the present study. In principle, the primary objective of portraying the experience of border crossing was followed, as this is determined by transborder mobility. To that end, priority was given to the description of the profiles of the workers in extreme situations, the interpretation of the border as imagined by the actors, and the relationship between shared experiences in the three spheres of everyday life that were deemed most important: the work sphere, the migratory sphere, and the private sphere. We hold that these spheres reflect the story of the actor as migrant, worker, and individual.

<sup>3</sup> The last 75 km of the Suchiate River forms the border between Mexico and Guatemala. The river flows down from the Guatemalan Sierra Madre, and a smaller part flows down from the Chiapas side. Two dollars or 10 quetzales is the price paid to cross the river on rafts made from tires and wood. Migrants can also cross via bridges, whether they are the international bridge located between the city of Talismán and El Carmen or the "Dr. Rodolfo Robles" bridge located between Ciudad Hidalgo and the city of Tecún Umán.

<sup>4</sup> The bounded space where the methodological instruments were applied was within the border region and composed of five localities including the municipalities of Tapachula and Ciudad Hidalgo and the locality of Talismán, which are all in the state of Chiapas. The other two localities are the city of Tecún Umán and the municipality of Malacatán of the San Marcos department. A total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted; it should be noted that five were cartographies of the border created by the actors themselves. The names of the interview subjects were changed to preserve their anonymity.

Through discourses, the profiles present themselves while simultaneously alluding to the spatial-temporal trajectories present in the territorial and sociocultural dimensions. This section shows the results of the material of the five cartographies created (one per actor), each of which narrates the regularities and differences in the discourses by self-explaining its representations of the border and the routes in two of the 10 established crossing points between Mexico and Guatemala. One crossing point is between the localities of Ciudad Hidalgo, Chiapas, and Tecún Umán, department San Marcos. Another crossing point is between the localities of Talismán, Chiapas, and El Carmen, department San Marcos.

For geographers, unlike maps, these cartographies are changing representations that are created simultaneously as the landscape is transforming. In this study, we worked with cartographies that reflect the symbolic representations of the territory inhabited by the actors who participated in the fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> Vélez, Rativa, and Varela (2012, p. 65) affirm that the cartographic process and social maps, as products, are themselves pedagogical and demonstrate a great capacity for gathering qualitative information. By applying this technique, priority is given to spaces for reflection, which in turn reinforces territorialities, and discourses are strengthened from the lived experience of everyday life. The academic richness of cartography presents an opportunity to articulate a theory of inhabited space that becomes evident when social mapping is transformed into a participatory process.<sup>6</sup> In recent decades, more effort has been made to apply this methodological tool, particularly within the social sciences. To apply cartographies is to speak a common language by using the iconographic representation of maps. In other words, they imply representing perceptions of reality through expressive mediums such as drawing. In methodological terms, cartographies seek to situate time and space as analytic categories that are inseparable from each other when addressing questions relating to territory. In the words of Barragán (2014, p. 31), the primary objective is to “take action to achieve a situated knowledge that may indicate how to propose alternative social orders or revive traditions that provide other ways of understanding the world and territory.” That said, the social cartographies presented in this study also reveal social relations with other actors and provide forms of spatial representation.

## Daily routes of the transborder dynamic

In localities such as Ciudad Hidalgo in the state of Chiapas and Tecún Umán in the San Marcos department, workers or *commuters* experience a series of dynamics that transcend their everyday lives. The first case is that of Guadalupe, an 18-year-old woman born in Tecún Umán, San Marcos department.

The first time that I crossed I was 16 years old. I wanted to earn money and not keep working in the fields. My father said that the only work at home was planting corn and that if I didn't like doing this, I should go to Tapachula to become a domestic employee like all the rest. (...) Now, I go home at the end

<sup>5</sup> These cartographies or social maps were not developed manually (on paper) because the proposal was to use tablets to inspire trust through play. However, the use of color was omitted because the everyday working life of the actors left them with limited free time.

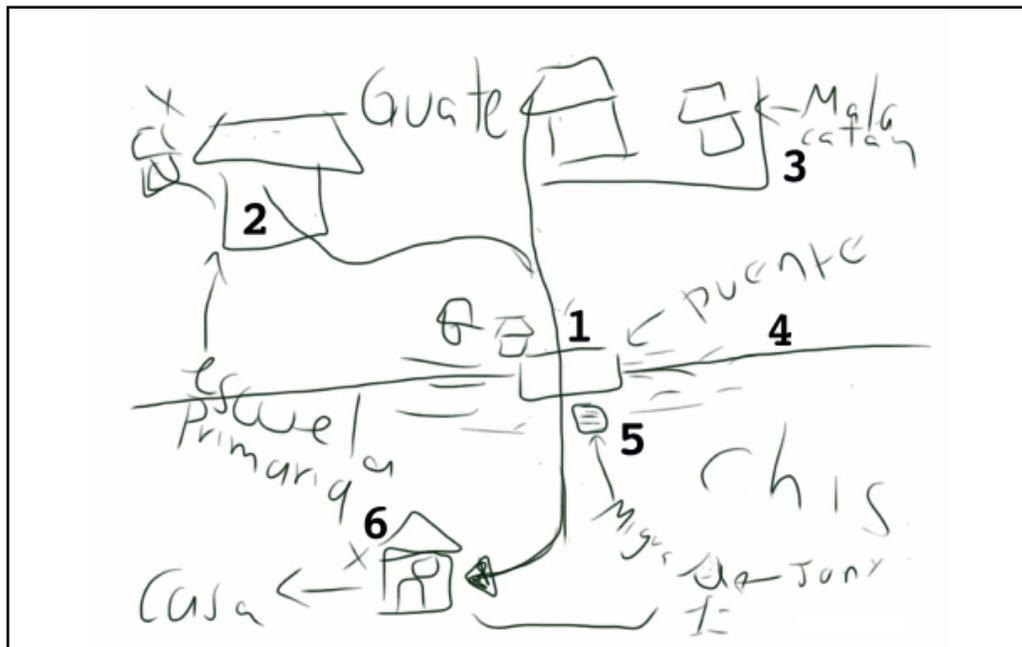
<sup>6</sup> In Bogotá, Colombia, in 2006, a proposal called Participative Cartography was developed to demonstrate that communities have their own representations of space.

of every month to see my mother, but I do not cross [the border bridge] alone. I go with my cousin, and between the two of us, we watch out for ourselves in case somebody tries to hurt us (...). (Guadalupe M., Tapachula, Chiapas, June 5, 2012).

Aware of her practices, conditions, and the structural norms of being a domestic worker on the Mexican southern border, she has acquired an array of options different from those she was subject to when she was with her parents in the countryside. However, for the five cases represented, the type of flow, the migratory quality, the work activity, and the inequalities are determinants of the actors' vulnerability (Kauffer, 2012, p. 87).

In Figure 1, Guadalupe indicates to us the spatial division of her representation of the border. In this division, we can observe the union and separation of imagined territories and the self-perceived route that draws on the elements that form her transborder mobility.

Figure 1: Social cartography drawn by Guadalupe M.



This is the bridge there on the border of Talismán (1); close to the bridge are some little houses. (2) There is also a school close to where I pass; I studied there. (3) There are a lot of houses on my way here. (4) This line is the river, here is Chiapas, and above it is Guatemala. (5) The migration agents cross the bridge over here; they are on this side, the Chiapas side. (6) Here is my house and me on the Chiapas side. (Guadalupe M., Tapachula, Chiapas, June 5, 2012).

Guadalupe's story reflects Heller's (1984) concept of home, a fixed point in space that is familiar and habitual, and the basis for all action. In the case of Guadalupe, we can clearly observe the notion of space in her spatial references and forms of orientation in these surroundings. The border region marks the limits within which social actions are motivated by experiences that have occurred within this determined space. Nonetheless, the border can be conceived from different perspectives. It is multidimensional.

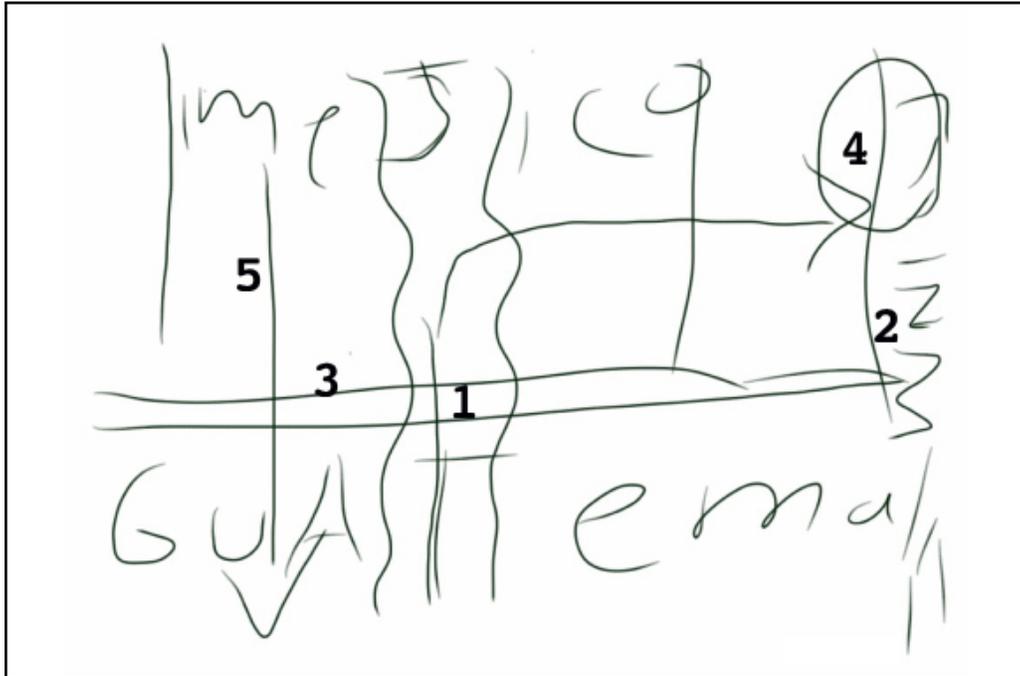
Grimson (2003) speaks of the perspectives from which the border is studied and its multiple dimensions—one that is nationalist and another that questions this nationalism. The second perspective distances itself from the first and questions the supposed naturalness of areas defined on the basis of state sovereignty. This explanation of a geopolitical story that joins the citizen with his/her territory gives shape to the artificiality of border landscapes and the idea of natural borders that constitute powerful dividing lines.

In our analysis, the border is mobile. It does not remain in one place, and for this reason, actors reconstruct it into a border that is not, strictly speaking, a territory; as Grimson (2003, p. 14) notes, "it is no longer the customs line but rather the limit of identity." In Guadalupe's discourse regarding her representation of the border, a strong reference to her country of origin can be noted. The shape of the drawn figure itself should be noted, that is, whether the country of origin is in the upper or lower part of the drawing and whether or not it is separated from the country of destination. An identification with the Mexican side is noted in her statement "my house and me on the Chiapas side" (Guadalupe M., Tapachula, Chiapas, June 5, 2012).

Michel Foucault describes border culture using the term *heterotopia*, which means chaos and implies a perpetual act of self-definition that gradually deterritorializes individuals (1994, p. 23). Although the dividing line is marked, it represents a porous border with social identities that are very present and distant from national borders. It is a place, as it were, of encounter between dominant and subaltern cultures (Grimson, 2003).

Figure 2 was drawn by Adela, a 36-year-old homemaker, a mother of three adolescents, and a street vendor in the city of Tapachula. She is from Malacatán, Guatemala, a municipality of the San Marcos department, where education and health indices are even lower than those of Tecún Umán (United Nations Development Program [UNDP] (*Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo [PNUD]*), 2011).<sup>7</sup> She has been immersed in precariousness and a lack of access to basic rights that is a product of the structural violence of the region. In Tapachula, she is a *canastera*, which is the name given to all of the women of her trade who work carrying enormous baskets full of clothing on their heads without using their hands. Adela's experience is representative of the women who work on the southern border and who pass through Guatemalan localities on their way to Tapachula on a daily basis. In this respect, it is Adela's everyday life that defines the space of her routine. It should be noted that it is through these spaces of routine that the particularities of human constructions can be explained (León, 2000, p. 46).

<sup>7</sup> This document, which contains the human development, poverty and inequality, literacy, educational coverage, health, and security indices in the department of San Marcos, Guatemala, was produced by the UNDP.

**Figure 2: Social cartography drawn by Adela R.**

(1) This is the bridge; on this side, there is a small entrance you can pass through, and it is half on the Mexican side and half on the Guatemalan side. (2) Here is where they check everything, our ID; it is the customs and migration office in Talismán. (3) Here is the river that passes below us. (4) There in Mexico is where they check; they check us, and if we don't have an ID, they makes us go back, they don't let us pass. (5) We don't have problems going back to Guatemala because we are from there. It's our country. (Adela R., Tapachula, Chiapas, July 9, 2012).

In the above narrative and in the following narratives, a common routine space can be elucidated that alludes to migratory surveillance and manifests itself as a permanent point in these social cartographies.<sup>8</sup> Another element that stands out is the collective distinction of an “us, ours, or we” and a spatial difference marked by words such as “here,” that is, a discourse that alludes to and identifies who is from one place and who is from another. According to this logic, being able to cross or not involves confronting a border composed of risks on the part of the transborder actors. As Morales notes (1996), we live in a time and space where borders are everywhere; they draw limits and keep people inside and outside of an area (physical or symbolic) that is both inclusive and exclusive, marking the end of the “safe” zone and the beginning of a zone of risk.

This observation leads to the following question: On which side of the Mexican-Guatemalan border is the zone of risk? Josefina, a 51-year-old woman who works as a domestic employee in Tapachula, has a different perception of the border. She left the

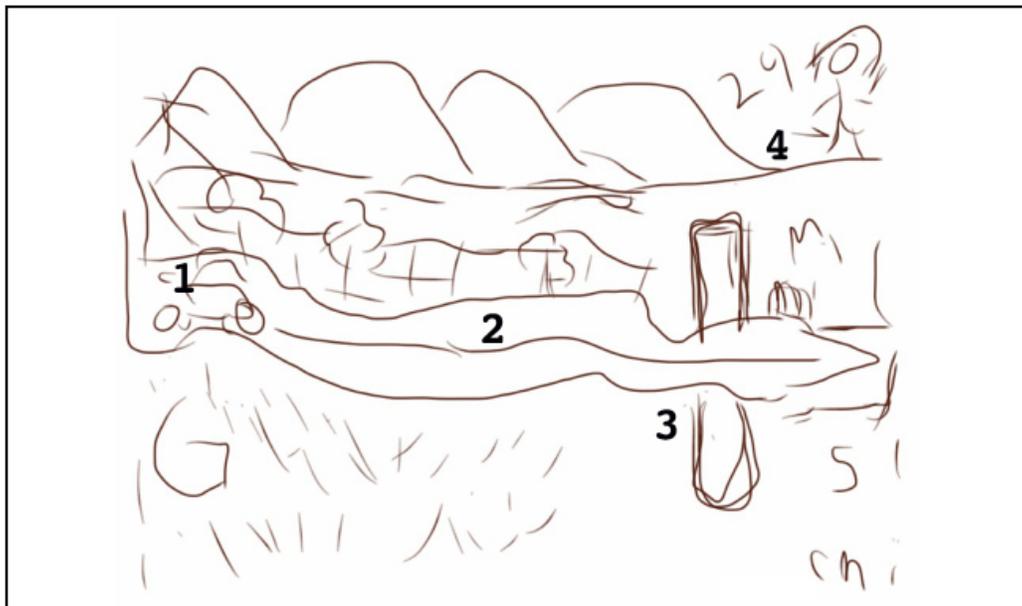
<sup>8</sup> For geographers, unlike maps, cartographies are changing representations that are created as the landscape itself is transforming. In this case, cartographies function as paraphrases of the symbolic representations regarding the territory in which the subjects develop and express themselves.

capital of Guatemala at the age of 24 due to personal circumstances and has not returned since. Unlike the temporal mobility that characterizes the previous cases of actors who possess permits for crossing the border, Josefina has only had limited access to migratory resources.

I decided to leave Guatemala at any rate because when I make a decision, I stick to it. Why look back? My uncles were angry and told me: “If you go, you no longer have a family,” and they meant it because that is when our relationship ended. I crossed over into Mexico with a 72-hour permit, and now, I have been here for 27 years without going back. And so, it is better to say that I am Mexican so that I won’t have problems with the migration agents. (Josefina G., Tapachula, Chiapas, December 20, 2012).

In the cartography drawn by Josefina (Figure 3), we can observe significant elements that revolve around the experience of living on the border.

**Figure 3: Cartography drawn by Josefina G.**



(1) My journey began when I got on the bus, on the highway, looking at the landscape, the mountains. The road was lined with mountains on either side, and most of it was unpaved. (2) It is a big highway, the highway between Guatemala and Chiapas. Here is the bridge where you are supposed to pass over. (3) This side is Chiapas; this is where I am now, and when I passed through here, I entered a little house where they asked me for my papers; here is the migration office. (4) Here I am, I was 24 years old, I was skinny with long hair that reached down to my waist, and here I am now at 51. I should draw myself with a cane. (Josefina G., Tapachula, Chiapas, December 20, 2012).

Currently, the border is conceived of from multiple experiences such as inequality, insecurity, conflict, and solidarity. Josephina’s story and cartography do not involve the frequent, temporary, and short-distance circular mobility that characterizes the everyday lives of the so-called commuters or transborder workers. Instead, they involve

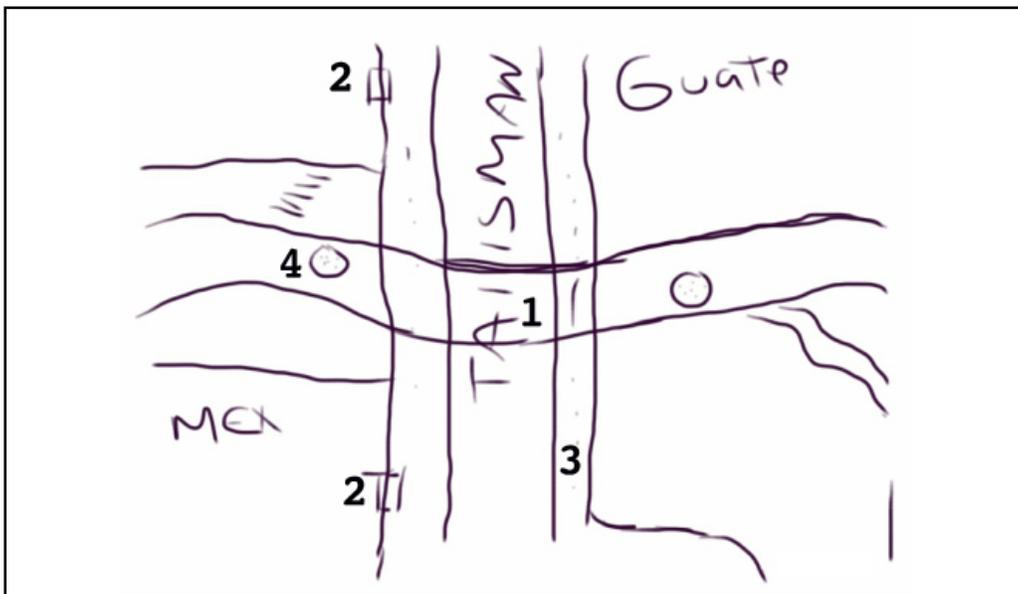
unidirectional migration, with the city of Tapachula, Chiapas, as the destination point. Nonetheless, her case does hold particular interest for this exploratory study because it brings to our attention the relationship between migration, work space, and the border as a zone of vulnerability. This can be observed through the use of another fundamental concept: the migratory experience. Ibarra (2014) describes this type of experience as unique and relevant. In other words, each person experiences it differently.

In the agricultural sector, we have the case of Ramón, a 42-year-old man born in Tonicapán, Guatemala.<sup>9</sup> Ramón is a seasonal worker in the plantations of the Soconusco region, working during the coffee, sugar cane, papaya, and bananas harvests.

I know what I am doing because, when I cross to the other side, the migration agents stop us and say: “Where are you from?” I tell them that I am from Guatemala. “And your papers?” I show them my papers, and they leave me alone. (...) That’s why I always pass over on the bridge, never the river. Those who don’t have an ID cross over on the river. (Ramón H., Tecún Umán, Guatemala, May 27, 2012).

Ancheita and Bonnici (2013) note that the current systems of migratory regularization for migrants (workers and visitors) are relatively recent and reflect Mexican policy designed to manage migratory flows across the southern border. Transborder workers do not seek to obtain documents only because they want to stay and live in Mexico, form a family, or normalize their migratory status. Instead, what they desire is the freedom to work. In other words, work continues to be one of the primary factors driving this type of migratory process, as demonstrated by the testimony of Ramón (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Cartography drawn by Ramón H.



<sup>9</sup> A cold climate zone surrounded by rivers and mountains in which winds and fog form. This climate allows for the cultivation of a great diversity of annual, permanent, or semi-permanent crops including basic grains such as corn, beans, vegetables, and fruit trees.

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I prefer to pass over on the bridge (1). Even if I have to pass through the revision area, I have to do it because of the work available there. (2) This is the Guatemalan migration checkpoint, and this is the Mexican one. (3) This is the bridge; there is one side where the cars pass and another side where the people pass. (4) The rafts are pulled in the river by the rafters (*camaristas*); they leave from Talismán and arrive in the municipality of Malacatán, or vice versa. (Ramón H., Tecún Umán, Guatemala, May 27, 2012).

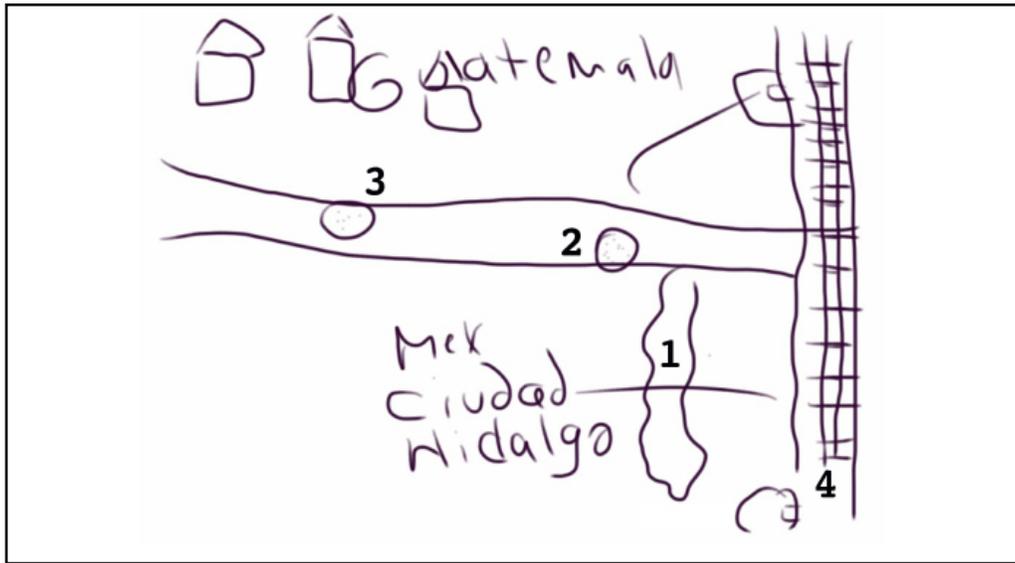
In all of the cartographies, it is possible to identify rhythms, temporal horizons, and everyday cycles, all of which are dimensions of time that impact the “ways of structuring activities in time and, most importantly, ways of organizing everyday life” (Lindón 1999, p. 149). The social rhythms of time allude to the duration of events, which involves the periodicity of activities, the intervals between continuity (regularities) and discontinuity (changes). Temporal horizons represent two perspectives of time: the construction of the past (memories, collective memory, and history) and the anticipation of future events (hopes, visions of the future, and ideas of progress). Everyday life cycles involve repetitions or events that become routine.

Temporal horizons allow us to delve into the diversity of relationships that actors have with time and to observe what time-frame they use to find meaning in their experiences. An example of this is the case of Carlos and his wife, two merchants in Tapachula who do not have any type of documentation to qualify for their regular stays in the city. Nonetheless, they cross the border river on an almost daily basis, embarking in Malacatán and arriving in the Chiapas municipality of Metapa. The couple emphasizes that if in the future the situation were to change, they are ready:

We cross here [Malacatán] because it is close to our house; it is isolated and not well-known. (...) We have to get up early because we cross the river first, although in the place where my wife and I cross, we don't have any problems. (...) We don't have papers because we have never needed them to cross, and so, this doesn't worry me. (...) I wait and continue in this way until now because, otherwise, we would have to find a way to continue crossing because there is always some place to cross. The migration agents are not on guard everywhere. (Carlos C., Malacatán, Guatemala, June 7, 2012).

In representing their daily mobility, some of the transborder actors become aware of their ability to generate spaces of action within the realms of their possibilities, which are generally limited (Rivas, 2013). These limitations are due to the context of criminalization of the migrant population in the region studied and due to the lack of a human rights perspective (Villafuerte & García, 2014) on the conditions in which the process of transborder mobility unfolds. Figure 5 shows the struggle against the obstacles that present themselves in an adverse spatial and temporal context.

Figure 5: Social cartography drawn by Carlos C.



There was a market here (1), but they took it down because drugs were being trafficked on this side. The majority passes over on the bridge, but we pass over on the river (2); it's more difficult, but we do it because it is better. (3) When we pass over on the raft, as soon as they know that you are a foreigner, they want to charge you 20 quetzals or more. (4) Here is the migration checkpoint on the bridge. (Carlos C., Malacatán, Guatemala, June 7, 2012).

## Conclusions

In this study, the theoretical foundation was used to analyze the empirical material. For this reason, it is important to note the close relationship between theory and the reality under study. The perspective of everyday life turns experience into a pillar of analysis for the spatial spheres and temporal references of the actors.

In the cases presented here, the different localities of the border region served as the reference points shared by the majority of the actors. Geopolitically, the Suchiate River is drawn as a natural border line, and the different bridges are perceived, in the words of the workers, as places of “supposed or necessary” crossings or as a “little entrance to pass through.” These spaces are also imagined in an inverse fashion by the actors. That is, for some, the bridge represents the line that divides home from work and Guatemala (or their respective place of origin) from Mexico. The river becomes the way in which they cross the border on a daily basis, imagined as both a clandestine and isolated place, as the blind spot and the strategic point.

Regarding the factor of time, the actors used phrases such as “after passing over the bridge” as references as though the act of crossing were divided into a “before” and “after”: before crossing the bridge or river and after crossing it. Similarly, we could observe how the everyday cycle is fulfilled in phrases such as “coming back is no problem.” It is of key importance to observe how time forms part of a discourse that is radical, limiting, and deterministic, expressed in statements such as “I always pass over on the bridge, never on the river.”

In the migratory spheres of private and migratory life, it was possible to identify spatial and temporal orientation reference points (here and there, over here, on this side, here I am and now I am, me always-never). It was found that the spaces alluded to by the actors become orienting references present in phrases such as “my house, on the Chiapas side,” “here is the river that passes below us,” “the majority passes over on the bridge, but we pass over on the river.” All of these references are derived from ways of crossing a border that are characterized by the mutations and continuities that make it a pressing problem.

This study made it possible to ascertain which are the most weighted discursive elements and which enunciations reoccur. Through the cartography exercise, three nodal elements were found in the transborder trajectories for the majority of the interview subjects: the migration checkpoint, the bridge, and the river are a vital part of their everyday experience. The element of the migration checkpoint is the most suggestive, this being represented as control and surveillance, which is experienced more intensely in border areas. Border crossing takes the migratory documentation required to arrive at the temporary destination point as strategic artifacts (in space and time). The lack of documentation makes it possible to experience other ways of experiencing mobility. The testimonial phrase “migration agents are not on guard everywhere” acknowledges a rupture or an exercising of agency amid precariousness, in addition to a certain ingenuity on the part of the actors, manifested in their ability to journey back and forth over the border.

To contribute to the description of the experience of daily transborder mobility, it is important to question the meanings that attach themselves to everyday routes and itineraries. The priority of this study was to gain a more up-close perspective of Central American workers as protagonists of their own migratory processes (Rivas, 2008). The transborder actors presented here are expert navigators of the border who either carefully comply with its regulations or unabashedly defy them. They view the border not only as a geopolitical line but also as the region in its entirety. They possess knowledge of the space, the actors, and the spoken language in the border localities between Mexico and Guatemala.

These approaches have allowed us not only to consider what other factors are involved in this type of temporary migration, determining its persistence and the changes in border movements, but also to make some conjectures regarding migratory conditions, thus permitting us to take a closer look at the experience of border crossing within the context of the work and daily mobility of a specific and predominant border region between Mexico and Guatemala.

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