

Rebordering of migration in transit through Mexico. The case of Central American migration through the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara

Refronterización de la migración en tránsito por México. El caso de las migraciones centroamericanas por la Zona Metropolitana de Guadalajara

Rafael Alonso Hernández López^{a*}  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1233-9242>

Iván Francisco Porraz Gómez^b  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6424-5416>

Mariana Morante Aguirre^c  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7321-629X>

^a El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Mexico, e-mail: rahernandez@colef.mx

^b El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Mexico, e-mail: iporraz@ecosur.mx

^c Dignidad y Justicia en el Camino. A.C., Mexico, e-mail: marianamoranteaguirre@gmail.com

Abstract:

The objective of this article is to analyze how the increasing securitization and militarization of Mexican migration policies against irregular migration has led to recent reborderizations marked by the widening and multiplication of borders throughout the national territory, and attempts –disjointed– of governmentalization of migrations in transit. To achieve this analysis we focus on regions traditionally not considered border areas, in that sense we seek an interpretation of space policies (physical and symbolic boundaries) in the Metropolitan Zone of Guadalajara, Mexico. We discuss the spatial nature of power, demonstrating the mechanisms that transform certain subjects into authorized and unauthorized bodies to transit, remain or be recognized.

Keywords: Rebordering, migration in transit, Central Americans, governmentality.

Resumen:

El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar cómo la creciente securitización y militarización de las políticas migratorias mexicanas en contra de la migración irregular ha dado pie a recientes *refronterizaciones* marcadas por el ensanchamiento y multiplicación de las fronteras a lo largo del territorio nacional, y los intentos –desarticulados– de gubernamentalización de las migraciones en tránsito. Para lograr dicho análisis nos enfocamos en regiones tradicionalmente no consideradas zonas fronterizas, en ese sentido buscamos una interpretación de las políticas espaciales (fronteras físicas y simbólicas) en la Zona

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*Corresponding author: Rafael Alonso Hernández López, e-mail: rahernandez@colef.mx



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Metropolitana de Guadalajara, México. En el texto se discute el carácter espacial del poder, evidenciando los mecanismos que transforman a determinados sujetos en cuerpos autorizados y no autorizados para transitar, permanecer o ser reconocidos.

Palabras clave: Refronterización, migración en tránsito, centroamericanos, gubernamentalidad.

Introduction

The increasing securitization and militarization of Mexican migration policies against irregular migration has been widely documented by scholars such as Fassin (2011), Heyman and Ackleson (2009) and Casillas (2008) as well as by civil society organizations (REDODEM, 2015). In turn, there have been a number of institutional instruments to strengthen security in the area (Mexico-Central America): the Mexico-Guatemala High Level Security Group (Grupo de Alto Nivel de Seguridad México-Guatemala - GANSEG) and the Mexico-Belize High Level Border Security Group (Grupo de Alto Nivel de Seguridad Fronteriza México-Belice - GANSEF). In the context of relations with North America, there is the Alliance for the Security and Prosperity of North America (Alianza para la Seguridad y Prosperidad de América del Norte - ASPAN) and, with the United States, the Mérida Initiative, the objective of which is to “collaborate on regional security, strengthen security at the border of the three countries, and build a strong economic community model” (García & Villafuerte, 2014). More recently, the implementation of the Comprehensive Southern Border Program (Programa Integral Frontera Sur-PIFS)¹ has not only increased the surveillance of Mexico’s southern border² but has also caused it to expand, exposing migrants in transit to greater violence and forcing them to look for new routes and means of transport. These recent *reborderings* have been marked by the widening and multiplication of borders throughout the national territory as well as attempts to governmentalize transit migrations.

In places of transit seemingly far from the southern border, such as the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area (Zona Metropolitana de Guadalajara - ZMG), the *reborderings* have taken place in a local context—complex in and of itself—in which the presence of the state is not static or coherent and where different conceptions of security and citizenship are constantly being redefined and/or reconfigured. The actions of the federal, state and local authorities in the ZMG are based in social, political and economic imaginaries that operate on both global and local levels. To this end, focusing on regions that are not traditionally considered border areas is vital to not only understanding the spatial character of power and state processes but also to dismantling the mechanisms that transform certain subjects into authorized and unauthorized bodies.

¹ The actions of the PIFS would be aimed at ensuring the security of the southern region of the country, the rail lines and the migrants, which are framed within three objectives: a) prevent migrants from putting themselves at risk by using the freight train; b) develop strategies to ensure the security and protection of migrants; and c) combat and eradicate the criminal groups that beset and violate the migrants’ rights.

² It is made up of the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche and Quintana Roo, which geographically border Guatemala and Belize, for 1 149 kilometers (Encuesta sobre Migración [EMIF SUR], 2012).

The objective of the present article is to provide an interpretation of the spatial policies in the ZMG. It applies a perspective based primarily on the theoretical contributions of Brenner (2004), Massey (2005), Foucault ([1976] 2003) and Chatterjee (2004) to a complex reality where economic and political logics and administrative structures are interwoven to marginalize migrants in transit through the ZMG or make them invisible.

From this perspective, the description used here is based on 19 554 interviews conducted by FM4 Paso Libre³ with migrants in transit through the ZMG, during the period from May 2010 to May 2015, presenting and describing the particular characteristics of the migratory flows that transform the western rail corridor into a space of transit migration. Furthermore, during the summer of 2014, interviews were conducted with public servants and the mayors of Guadalajara and Zapopan, both municipalities in the ZMG, and different visits were made to areas along the rail lines, in which both the physical and social spaces surrounding the tracks were documented.

The text is divided into three sections. The first describes the current characteristics and dynamics of the western route, where Dignidad y Justicia en el Camino, A.C. [Dignity and Justice on the Road], publicly known as FM4 Paso Libre, provides comprehensive humanitarian aid to migrants in transit through the ZMG. The second section addresses trends in reborderings, through processes such as the expansion and multiplication of borders and the (un)governmentality of migrants in transit. The third section outlines some conclusions as well as recommendations for the construction of a dignified and just route for migrants.

Migration in transit through the western rail corridor

FM4 Paso Libre is a civil society organization that has spent nearly ten years working with the migrant in transit and refugee population along Mexico's western rail corridor. More than 120 people, most of whom are young students, currently participate in the organization, and the work is carried out in five areas: *a*) comprehensive support (responsible for addressing needs related to physical and mental health and social, labor and educational inclusion, resulting from different factors at work in the city); *b*) connections (impact on local, state and national public policies, as well as networking, social advocacy to raise the local population's awareness of the migration phenomenon); *c*) legal aid (processing migration paperwork, reporting human rights violations); *d*) institutional development (project creation, procurement, administration and accountability); and *e*) research (documentation, analysis, discussion and dissemination of the problems observed during the daily support of migrants and refugees). All this takes place at the Migrant and Refugee Center, a space that provides free humanitarian aid (food, clothing, personal hygiene supplies, health services, shelter for 100 people, phone calls), which has helped more than 35 000 people over the last eight years.

³ The documentation of this material can be found in the report published by FM4 Paso Libre (2013).

Through this experience of providing support, it is possible to identify the changes in the dynamics and composition of flows resulting from migration policies, both external—particularly those of the United States—and internal, which have become, as mentioned above, more focused on the securitization and criminalization of migrant populations in transit through our country.

To understand the complexity of this situation, it is important to place ourselves spatially, in order to weigh the impacts of government policies that not only include a component involving action within the geographical national borders but also expand to reconfigure the national borders, at least symbolically. Our analysis thus centers on what we call the western rail corridor.

That corridor begins at the railway junction in the city of Irapuato, Guanajuato, and continues through important cities in Western Mexico, such as Guadalajara, Tepic, Mazatlán, Culiacán, Hermosillo, Nogales, Mexicali and Tijuana (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Rail corridors from the center of the country



Source: FM4 Paso Libre and Télécoms Sans Frontières, 2014.

This route offers the greatest security, not because there are no assaults, robberies, extortion or other human rights violations but because—in most cases—migrants make a cost-benefit calculation before they use it.

Until at least 2010, the western route received little media attention, and the number of migrants using it was relatively low. The route runs approximately 4 137 kilometers⁴, which is twice as long as the central and gulf railway routes, to Mexicali.

⁴ Taking as a starting point the south of the country, specifically the city of Tapachula, Chiapas.

Traveling along the longest railway route in the country involves several additional costs for migrants. Coupled with the issue of distance is the fact that this railway route crosses a large part of the Sonoran desert, which has one of the most hostile climates on the continent.

The western route began to gain importance following a number of tragedies that befell migrants on the other rail corridors.⁵ Given this scenario of violence, migrants made an increasingly conscious decision to use the western route; although it was longer and had less humanitarian aid, there was a greater chance of surviving to continue the transit migration.

According to information collected by FM4 Paso Libre (2013),⁶ just over 50% of the migrants who use this corridor for security reasons argue that it is a method for avoiding the gulf and central routes, which are characterized by their dangerousness, due to organized crime. This decision was based not only on organized crime but also on violence from the authorities: robberies and the coercive force of the judiciary, which is manifested through the municipal, state and federal police and the immigration authorities.

Along the Pacific route, Guadalajara is one of the most important cities in the west and in the country, with important transit of people and goods. Guadalajara is also the epicenter of FM4 Paso Libre, the comprehensive humanitarian aid project for migrants in transit, through which, since 2010, it has been possible to track, record and document the transit migration of Mexicans and Central Americans that is described below.

First, despite the increasing feminization of migration in the world, particularly in Mexico (Acharya 2010; De Leon 2013; Toney, 2009), this route involves mostly males: 96.72% men versus 4.18% women. While these data reflect only the people who have passed through the center, rather than the entire flow, FM4 Paso Libre has calculated that 70% of the migrants traveling on the route pass through the center. The factors involved in making this a male-dominated route need to be investigated in greater detail, but it may be because the western route is much longer and has fewer shelters and support networks.

Another important consideration is that it is a route traveled by young adults, with an average age of 31 years. Contrary to traditional explanations about migration in transit through Mexico, the western rail corridor is the site of mixed migrations, in which foreigners and Mexican nationals coexist, traveling north and south or even trying to find suitable points to cross to the United States. In particular, the population from the Central American region represents 68% of the FM4 Paso Libre sample, and 46% of those are Hondurans. Mexicans, in turn, make up 30%. The rest comprises people of different nationalities (Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Haiti, Peru, Bolivia, etc.).

⁵ In August 2010, the case of 72 migrants, who were kidnapped, tortured, maimed, and killed, undocumented and unrecognizable. In April 2011, 193 bodies were found in clandestine graves, also in the municipality of San Fernando, Tamaulipas. In May 2012, 49 abandoned torsos were found in the municipality of Cadereyta, Nuevo León.

⁶ Source of the statistical data used in this section.

The modern state: Rebordering processes

The experience of migration in transit through Mexico presents a scenario in which—through the daily experiences of the subjects characterized above—it is important to provide foreground of the state's role in the configuration of the different transit dynamics as well as the ways in which citizens react to the presence of migrants in cities.

In *State/Space: A Reader*, Brenner, Jessop, Jones and MasLeod (2008) explain that the study of the Westphalian State has been marked by its naturalization. In these conceptions, the state is considered a static container in which economic and political processes unfold (Brenner et al., 2008, p. 2). However, beginning in the 1980s, a theoretical change in the study of the state questioned the relevance of analytical frameworks that consider it to be an immutable, coherent and closed entity. In turn, there has been increased critical attention on the changing spatialities of the state's power and political life as well as the development of new methodologies for its study.

Similarly, in *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, Brenner (2004) argues that while terms such as local, urban, and regional serve to separate territorial islands from social relations, they hide the deep mutual interweaving that exists between all the scales. Brenner, for example, explains that European nations experience a process of spatial restructuring. Although his analysis focuses on a different geography, it is still useful for analyzing the case of migration in transit through Mexico. For Brenner, the study of the state should be approached from ongoing processes “emphasizing...polymorphic geographies at a multiplicity of spatial scales” (Brenner, 2004, p. 7). He identifies the rebordering of the state as one of its most important spatial restructurings, referring to a process in which “[b]oundaries are thus no longer viewed as exclusively national demarcators of state sovereignty but are now understood as multifaceted semiotic, symbolic, and political-economic practices through which state power is articulated and contested” (Brenner, 2004, p. 7).

In this respect, the border is understood not as a territorial limit of the state but, rather, the practices directed at where migrants are located (Burrige et al., 2017). For these reasons, conceptualizations frequently used to explain the transit of migrants through Mexico as that of a vertical border (Casillas 2008; Torre-Cantalapiedra & Yee-Quintero, 2018) fail to capture the complexity, ambivalence and selective nature of the new immigration controls. To speak of a vertical border—as is the case with spatial metaphors related to borders—tends to disguise, domesticate and homogenize the spaces, giving an image of stability and permanence (Burrige et al., 2017), which does not reflect the reality of rebordering processes.

In the ZMG, these rebordering processes have manifested in the expansion and multiplication of borders, in the consolidation of a double geographical imagination, and in the state's growing attempts to control/manage transit migration. These rebordering dynamics and processes are, of course, neither consistent nor coherent at all levels of the state, neither in its institutions, nor its actors. In contrast, they contradict and overlap to create institutional spaces and cracks that impact the trajectories of migrants in transit.

Expansion and multiplication of borders

From the experience of FM4 Paso Libre in the ZMG, the expansion and multiplication of borders has occurred through the implementation of a national policy related to strengthening the national security-migration link, ratified through economic and political agreements. Proof of this is the launch of the PIFs during the summer of 2014.

It has been widely documented that since the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States has increased the surveillance and militarization of its border with Mexico, as well as pressing other countries on the continent to do the same and prevent access by undocumented people to their respective national geographies, under the pretext of terrorist infiltration.

In 2008, as part of a strategy to combat organized crime, the Mérida Initiative was signed. To date (with its respective modifications), this program has served as a security mechanism that considers migration to be a priority. Its third pillar, “Create a 21st century border structure,” incorporated Mexico’s southern border as an area of interest. With this program, the United States has contributed \$24 million in equipment and technical assistance, including mobile kiosks operated by the National Institute of Migration (Instituto Nacional de Migración - INM), canine teams and the training—by US agents—of Mexican officers to patrol the borders (Ribando & Finklea, 2017, p. 22). These types of agreements consolidated migration as a matter of national security, which has resulted in the criminalization of migrants in transit through our country.

Despite all the actions to contain migratory flows, the Mexican migration policy was greatly challenged in the summer of 2014, when the so-called migrant children crisis received significant media attention. Through July of that year, the United States had apprehended more than 50 000 undocumented persons, many of whom were unaccompanied minors, largely from Central America. In this context, Mexico’s PIFs was presented on July 7, 2014, the purpose of which, according to President Enrique Peña Nieto, was to protect the migrants who are crossing our country and ensure the security of the country’s southern region and the rail lines. This would involve the implementation of three objectives: *a*) prevent migrants from putting themselves at risk by using freight trains; *b*) develop strategies to ensure the security and protection of migrants; and *c*) combat and eradicate the criminal groups that beset and violate migrants’ rights.

These objectives would be accompanied, it was said, by a prevention strategy that involved monitoring the rail lines—ensuring the state’s presence in order to prevent crimes—as well as strengthening its collaboration with the Central American consulates. In accordance with the above, regional visitor cards began to be issued in June 2014 but only for Guatemalan and Belizean citizens, without considering that the largest flow of transit migration in recent years has been by Hondurans. There were also announcements regarding developing intelligence actions to dismantle the organized crime gangs that run trafficking networks, human trafficking, and migrant extortion and kidnapping networks, strengthening the prosecutor’s offices for crimes against migrants, specialized government ministries and the participation of state human rights commissions, and establishing shelters operated by civil society.

The first lines of action covered by the PIFS were focused on investment in railway infrastructure, which opted for security measures, not for migrants but for the trains and the goods they transport. Consequently, there have been constant raids by the INM, supported by the Federal Police, the Army and Navy, resulting in increased vulnerability, greater exposure to risk, a diversification of routes and migrants once again being prohibited.

In this new scenario, the raids against migrants were justified under an ambiguous discourse of defending and protecting the migrants' human rights. Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, the Secretary of the Interior during the previous sexennium, stated weeks after the start of the program that the plan was not to attack or hurt but, rather, to prevent Central American migrants from boarding "the beast"⁷; the aim was, therefore, to protect them. In fact, and following the logic of the authorities, the success of the PIFS was felt only a few weeks after its implementation.

As a result of the ongoing operations implemented in that context, the number of migrants on the freight rail decreased considerably. The siege by the migration authorities played out not only on the rail lines; the operations expanded even to cities and towns where migrants ordinarily gathered to wait for the next part of their journey and were carried out in the vicinity of shelters, dining halls and humanitarian aid centers. The limits of the southern border gradually expanded to practically the center of the country, with migration checkpoints and military inspection posts along the major highways, in order to detect migrants traveling in minibuses, buses, cars and trailers, as found by the organizations in the country that work with the migrant population in transit.

According to information from these organizations, the program had such an impact that in some cases, the aid provided to migrants dropped by up to 50% since its launch. This does not mean that migrants were no longer entering the country; rather, as mentioned earlier, they began to look for new alternatives, the majority of which were more risky, due to the need to hide from migration operations. Now the migrant population is improvising strategies, walking for days and weeks in uninhabited geographical spaces with extreme climates, in which—in addition to the natural vulnerability of these spaces—their vulnerability is enhanced by the impunity with which criminal groups attack migrants.

While it is true that there is no large-capacity migrant holding center in Jalisco, there is a center where people apprehended in the state of Jalisco, as well as some points near this geographical demarcation, are detained. This explains why the first operations recorded as part of the PIFS took place in this state, even though it does not have the infrastructure and sufficient conditions to house migrants. According to testimonies from migrants in transit and other people living along the rail lines, during the summer of 2015, the INM began to carry out up to two operations per week in the surrounding areas.

The scenarios described in this section reflect an increase in migration controls and the securitization of the migration policy, which have resulted not only in the multiplication of migration practices previously confined to the territorial limits of

⁷ "The beast" is one name for the freight train on which migrants travel. It is not a train designed to move passengers, but rather goods. The analogy with the beast is related to how horrific this steel machinery is, and how a single act of carelessness can lead to migrants losing their lives, or a limb.

Mexico but have also undergone a process of externalization (Burrige et al., 2017), namely, explicit efforts to involve more institutions—in this case, the Army and the Federal Police—and, of course, to extend throughout the national territory.

The double geographical imagination

The expansion and multiplication of borders is coupled with the selective nature of the borders, their function as tools to separate and differentiate, not only between different populations, but between goods and capital, and the migrant population in transit. However, contrary to what has occurred with the national migration policy, in these spaces, the federal authority is indifferent to the presence of migrants in the ZMG, except when they represent an obstacle to the free transit of goods and capital.

By law, the Federal Police cannot detain migrants in transit unless they commit a crime. The Federal Police's role in relation to migrants in transit in the ZMG has therefore been based on frequent extortion and aggression and on protecting the free transit of goods that are transported along the rail lines.

In the ZMG, the train enters through the municipality of El Salto, and before Las Juntas in Tlaquepaque, the Federal Police force migrants to get off the train so that it can enter the yards. However, along that route, it is often possible to observe Federal Police patrols next to the tracks, hidden in the bushes. A driver on one of the trains that enters the ZMG claims that the Federal Police are not actually interested in the migrants traveling on the train: "Well...they hardly ever make them get off, only when the train's cargo is valuable (...) They have to take care of the 'merchandise,' they don't care about the migrants, except when they can get something out of them. They force them to get off to protect the train" (Mayordomo, 2014).⁸

The same logic used by the Federal Police is replicated by Ferromex, the company that owns the largest railway route in Mexico, which crosses through Guadalajara. This company has hired private security to patrol the tracks along the train's route through Mexico.

In the ZMG, a resident of the community of El Verde, in the municipality of El Salto, where the train arrives, says:

People who work for Eulen frequently pass through here. The other day, three migrants were outside my house waiting for me to bring them water, and when I went outside, they were already asking them questions, but I told them the migrants were staying at my house and they had to leave (habitante de El Verde, 2014).

Both institutions, the Federal Police and Ferromex, shape a scenario in which migrants are transformed into a threat to the goods circulating through the country. In the capitalist system, there are no borders for goods; they are transported to other parts of the country and to the United States as symbols of progress and economic growth.

⁸ The driver's name has not been revealed, as the consent form he signed for the interview stated that his identity would remain anonymous.

The movement of migrants, however, is seen as a security threat. Doreen Massey (2005) has called this seemingly contradictory logic a “double geographical imagination,” where one is marked by mobility and borderlessness, while the other is marked by a strong border discipline. A double imagination works in favor of those who are already powerful. On the freight train, goods travel freely protected by the Federal Police and by Ferromex’s private security. The capitalist logic—underpinned by the state—legitimizes the right and power of companies to move their goods from one place to another with relative ease. However, the journey of the migrants who are traveling on the train has to be clandestine, exposing them to greater dangers without protection from the state, which, rather than assuming its responsibility to ensure the human rights and dignity of those in their territory, exposes them to greater vulnerability.

The (un)governmentality of migrants in transit

The strengthening of the trends in rebordering work as we have seen: actions and strategies that take place in physical space (not necessarily confined to the territorial limits of a state) but that do not end with it, as they have a strong symbolic character that, in turn, accounts for the logic in which the state exercises its power over individuals.

Along these lines, in *Society must be defended: lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, Foucault argues that a new regulatory technology for power emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, no longer directed toward the body but toward the human race. In that sense, “biopolitics deals with the population as a political problem” for whom “regulatory mechanisms must be established to establish an equilibrium” (Foucault, [1976] 2003). The direct consequence of this process has been the governmentalization of the state, where the relationship established between the government and the populations is based on aid policies, rather than participation. As a consequence, this

[...] regime secures legitimacy not by the participation of citizens in matters of state but by claiming to provide well-being to the population. Its mode of reasoning is not deliberative openness but rather an instrumental notion of costs and benefits (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 34).

Following Foucault, this state is intrinsically racist; that is to say, a state in which threats—whether internal or external to the population and from the population—are created and justified, and the “imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat” (Foucault, [1976] 2003, p. 256). This elimination, Foucault clarifies, does not only mean “murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on.” This is the power of the state that can “live and let die” (Foucault, [1976] 2003, p. 257).

As a result, the type of political relationship that the state establishes with the population is different than the relationship established with citizens. As Chatterjee (2004) points out, many inhabitants are “only [...] ambiguously and contextually,

rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society” (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 38). But—and in this Chatterjee is emphatic—as populations, they have to be controlled and managed by government agencies, and the relationship that the state establishes with them is always contextual and temporary.

Foucault ([1976] 2003) and Chatterjee’s (2004) arguments present useful points for analyzing the case of migration in transit through the ZMG. First, the local authorities, confronted with the presence of migrants in transit in the city, are reluctant to recognize the nature of the subjects traversing the city as subjects of law, rather than merely aid. Migrants in transit traveling on freight trains, whether documented or undocumented, travel in “the margins” in clandestine means of transport along uncertain routes and therefore resist and escape the authorities’ efforts to count them, categorize them, and stabilize them in certain places. Moreover, their almost invariably temporary stay in the city makes it more difficult for the authorities to classify and control them. Second, the local authorities reject any responsibility for the lives of migrants in transit, and the types of relationships they establish with them—when they do—are based on fragile and temporary aid policies. Third, through racist logics, such as those explained by Foucault, the local authorities have framed migrants in transit as a health threat to citizens, i.e., as a biological threat.

In interviews conducted with the mayors of the municipalities of Zapopan and Guadalajara during the summer of 2014,⁹ it was clear that for the local authorities, the problem of migrants in transit is that it is impossible to know who they are, where they are, where they come from, and where they are going. When the Mayor of Zapopan was asked if he thought he was responsible for migrants in transit through his municipality, he replied: “Focusing attention on migrants becomes very difficult, first of all because we don’t know who they are. Yes, they are faces, but they are not names or surnames [...] nor have we physically located them in any space” (alcalde de Zapopan, 2014). In this sense, from the perspective of the local authority, control and categorization are essential to the provision of services.

Within the governmentalization of the state, being a face, a human being, is not sufficient to access services or even be recognized as a subject of law, as one also needs to have a name, an identity that the state can verify. During the same interview, the mayor was asked his opinion about the idea of establishing a transit migrant visa, to allow them to cross through Mexico. His response was:

That would help a lot, to have a standard, to have a clearer vision of where they are and what they are doing and to be able to add them to or include them in the legal framework...and we would also have a record of who they are, where are they going, what their plans are (alcalde de Zapopan, 2014).

Migrants in transit make the local authorities anxious because they cannot be recognized by their statistical instruments, necessary for the provision of care and services, which implies classifying them into certain categories and spaces. Precisely

⁹ The names of the mayors of the municipalities of Zapopan and Guadalajara have not been revealed, as the consent form they signed for the interview stated that their name would not be used and only the dates of their administration, i.e., 2012-2015, would be mentioned.

to that end, in 2016, FM4 Paso Libre, working with the independent congressman Pedro Kumamoto, presented a bill called the Hospitality Law to the Jalisco Congress (*El Informador*, 2016). This initiative was discussed alongside another bill presented by the congresswoman Juana Ceballos, a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional - PRI), called the Law for the Protection and Aid of Migrants in the State (Aquino, 2016). One of the most controversial points in the latter law was the adoption of article four, which established that migrants were required by law to show documentation proving their identity as requested by the appropriate authorities as well as to provide personal information and data requested by state institutions. The argument put forward by the congresswoman who made the proposal was precisely to be able to create identification and control mechanisms that would be necessary in order for migrants to access state services.

Interestingly, it was the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos - CNDH) itself that, one month after the adoption of that law in October 2017, found it to be unconstitutional, as the aforementioned article violated the rights of the migrant population, specifically those referring to freedom of transit, personal integrity, personal security, privacy and protection of personal data.

The perception of illegality, linked to the need to surveil and control using different instruments, increases the vulnerability of the irregular migrants located in the city. For the Mayor of Guadalajara in office at that time (2012-2015), the legal status of migrants is a fundamental concern “because creating a series of official programs means accepting or encouraging the phenomenon of migration” (alcalde de Guadalajara, 2014). The racist character of the state is therefore manifested in the identification of an external threat that should not be encouraged or should be contained.

The racist character of the state is also evident in the local authorities' characterization of the migrants in transit: not only as a security threat but also as a health threat. In March 2013, a councilwoman on the Zapopan City Council¹⁰ presented an initiative to open a shelter for migrants in the municipality. According to the proposal presented at city hall, the aim of the shelter would be to provide humanitarian aid to migrants in transit: a place to rest, eat and take a shower. However, an additional concern was noted in the text of the initiative. According to the councilwoman, when she was drafting the initiative, the Jalisco Ministry of Health warned that migrants in transit from Central America represented a source of infection, as carriers of diseases that had already been eradicated in Mexico, but not in those countries. Migrants in transit thus also became a biological threat that had to be properly contained and controlled. When the councilwoman was interviewed, she said: “We need to know who is coming into our house, who is leaving, who has been vaccinated, who hasn't. Above all, we are thinking about the locals” (regidora de Zapopan, 2014). Thus, as Foucault described, state racism operates by creating an external threat, represented by the bodies of the migrants in transit, bodies from which citizens living in areas near the rail lines must be protected. This is how a symbolic border is drawn—based on a supposed biological threat—between those who belong and those who do not.

¹⁰ The councilwoman's name has not been revealed, as the consent form she signed for the interview stated that her name would not be used, and only the dates of her term, i.e., 2012-2015, would be shown.

There are several government initiatives in the municipalities of Guadalajara and Zapopan to construct migrant shelters in the ZMG. In fact, the construction of shelters has been one of the only proposals that municipal governments have presented related to migration in transit through the region. Shelters are essential for local authorities because they give them the opportunity to control and stabilize the bodies of the migrant population in a particular place. What is actually important is not the need for comprehensive humanitarian aid given the abandonment and risk to which migrants in transit through Mexico are exposed but, rather, to provide spaces that do not break with the established social imaginaries and preserve the city from unauthorized bodies.

These proposals, such as that of public shelters for migrants, are tenuous (none have become solidified); for the local authorities, support for migrants can only be based on an aid model. For the Mayor of Guadalajara, “The participation of the municipal authority could only be of a humanitarian nature, and it has to do with establishing some measures to support those in this situation, but it could only be aid” (alcalde de Guadalajara, 2014). This statement highlights the fragile, circumstantial and temporary nature of any involvement by the local government related to migration in transit.

To date, neither state laws nor municipal regulations have taken the necessary actions to align their regulatory frameworks with the provisions of the 2011 Migration Law and the 2014-2018 Special Migration Program, nor have any programs or projects that comply institutionally with the mandate in the Constitution been established. According to the Mayor of Zapopan, “[...] I don’t want to call it neglect but, perhaps, indifference from the INM. The federal government has never provided any programs to the municipalities” (alcalde de Zapopan, 2014). It is precisely through this institutional indifference that authorities at all levels—exercising the sovereign power referred to by Foucault—decide to ignore migrants as political subjects, denying them a political existence and delineating a symbolic border between citizens and the rest. As a result, the authorities assume no responsibility for transit migration, which works to make it invisible.

Accordingly, state practices at the local level have been based not on the persecution of migrants or the establishment of greater migration controls but on efforts to categorize, name and identify the migrant population, to maintain and locate them in a specific space. The practices of the state—its governmentalization—are therefore translated into tactics to make them visible, which according to Tazzioli and Walters (2016), are techniques for controlling and detecting migrants’ movements. In other words, at the local level, state institutions have focused on making visible, categorizing and stabilizing the migrant population in order to have control over it, as well as to be able—if appropriate—to eliminate the biological threats that, it is argued, they may come to represent.

Final considerations

The dynamics of migration in transit through Mexico—in this case, through the ZMG—highlight the existence of specific practices of the state’s rebordering, which

are visible through the implementation of actions and policies such as the PIFS and economic-military agreements such as the Mérida Plan as well as through institutional discourses that are assumed and internalized by individual subjects—"citizens"—to mark boundaries between "authorized" and "unauthorized" bodies, between subjects of law and those who are not.

This rebordering has involved different political, institutional, economic and sociocultural processes, also manifesting in the multiplication and expansion of borders, a drastic increase in programs that seek to regulate and control the flow of migration through Mexico, and a marked increase in migration operations and border control stations, all of which have resulted in greater danger and invisibility for migrants in transit through Mexico.

The new migratory controls also operate by differentiating and separating the migrant population in transit through the ZMG. Coupled with the national immigration policy—linked to the policy of the United States—in cities, the practices of the authorities are carried out in a disjointed manner, responding to a logic of control: not to deport or prevent migrants from arriving in the United States but, rather, to first ensure that they will not remain in the city and then be able to categorize them, recognize them, and eliminate the biological threats that they could—from the state's point of view—represent. This leads to a denial of their status as political subjects and therefore subjects of rights. These practices mark a clear line between bodies authorized to be in the city and move freely through it and unauthorized bodies, migrants in transit through the ZMG.

The consolidation of a double geographical imagination designates both the goods that are transported and freight trains as subjects of protection, granting them the freedom to move throughout the national territory, while migrants are subjected to rigorous border discipline. Goods are consolidated as symbols of progress, while migrants in transit through the country become bodies that must be expelled, controlled or discarded.

This results in a framework in which the state's actions are not stable, coherent or static and where different political, economic and sociocultural imaginaries lead to contradictory practices, which become more complex in a scenario like that of the ZMG. In other words, the state's actions reflect a dissociation between the functions of the border and its practices, by expanding the borders to territories such as the ZMG. The multiple intentional efforts to extend the border have pushed migrants toward invisibility and toward traveling increasingly dangerous roads and routes.

The rebordering processes of the state described here intersect to build spaces where the vulnerability of migrants in transit is intensified, while simultaneously revealing the fragility and porosity of these practices.

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Rafael Alonso Hernández López

Mexican. PhD in Social and Humanistic Sciences from the Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas - CESMECA-UNICACH; Coordinator of the PhD in Migration Studies at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte - El Colef, Tijuana headquarters; Member of the National System of Researchers, level I. President of the Citizen Council of the INM. Research areas: international transit migration, refugee seekers and refugees, migrant day laborers and human rights in migration. Recent publication: Anguiano, M. E., Hernández, R. A. & Villafuerte, D. (2018). *The world through borders: The difficult journey or migrants in transit*. Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, CESMECA.

Iván Francisco Porraz Gómez

Mexican. PhD in Social and Humanistic Sciences from CESMECA-UNICACH; Research Associate at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Tapachula unit, in the Migration Studies and Transboundary Processes Academic Group, Department of Society and Culture; Member of the SNI, candidate level. Research areas: youth, return migration, violence in southern Mexico and Central America. Recent publication: García, M. del C. & Porraz, I. F. (2018). Fenomenología de la violencia del siglo XXI en El Salvador: la juventud sin lugar. *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos, Universidad de Costa Rica*, (44), 341-366.

Mariana Morante Aguirre

Mexican. Master's degree in Latin American Studies and Master's degree in Global Politics, both from the University of Texas at Austin; Research Assistant at Dignidad y Justicia en el Camino, A. C. (FM4 Paso Libre). Research areas: transit of undocumented migrants through urban areas, spatial practices around the city and sociocultural imaginaries. Migration policies and their effects on the transit of undocumented migrants, access to justice, open justice and transparency policies in Mexico. Recent publication: Delgado, A. & Morales, M. (2018). Tensiones entre seguridad nacional y acceso a la información pública. Un recuento del recurso de revisión en materia de seguridad nacional ante la Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación. *Revista del Centro de Estudios Constitucionales*, (6), 295-340.