

Domination, Resistance and Border Crossing within the Trans-Mexican migratory context:

The dialogical relationship between
Institutional oppression and social opposition

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Abstract

The present investigation aspires to examine, understand and analyze significant processes of *domination* and *resistance* characterizing the journeys of Central-Americans who are coerced to travel unauthorizedly and embrace dangerous migratory processes across Mexico, while nourishing the hope of reaching USA.

It is within this complex panorama of unauthorized migration that *domination* manifests in the severity of the anti-immigration regime imposed by USA, expressed by strict visa requirements imposed to Central-Americans, functioning as an instrument to refrain undesired migratory flows from the *Global South*. The preventive hardening allowed by visa restrictions has been complemented by intensive processes of *securitization*, giving origin to one of the most surveilled frontiers in the world. Furthermore, political maneuvers of *borders' extraterritorialization* have helped consolidating a new frontier extending far beyond USA's confines, extending across the Mexican territory. Concurrently, Mexico experiences an increase in rhizomic processes of *militarization* intended to stop migrants, even before approaching the US border. In this sense, *domination* manifests in the socially detrimental consequences of US-Mexican politics that helped in developing an alarming humanitarian crisis, by denying these migrants access to basic rights. These circumstances positions them under conditions of marginality and exclusion, while coercing them to undertake unbearable journeys that are accompanied of serious risks of beating; exploitation; robbery; extortion; sexual abuse; kidnapping and murder. Suggestively, this is a latent reality made possible by the legislatively constructed condition of 'illegality'.

It is fundamental to approach a comprehensive understanding vis-à-vis the *power structures* that legitimized the existence of these excruciating journeys, as they are systematically endured by these migrants. Importantly, this paper efforts to move beyond the victimizing perspective, which depicts migrants as inert paws who suffer passively, the direct and indirect effects of anti-immigration establishments. Contrarily, this work rather endeavors to achieve a better understanding of the role played by these migrants who continuously engage in tenacious processes of *resistance*, aimed at struggling for the realization of their objectives. Accordingly, extensive ethnographic fieldwork in focal points of the trans-Mexican scenario, in conjunction with the employment of a multifarious methodological approach, afforded a relevant comprehension of important tactics and strategies designed by these migrants to confront, elude or bypass life-threatening circumstances and obstacles characteristic of the trans-Mexican routes. In addition, the wisdom, survival skills and coping strategies

required to withstand the journey's strenuous hardships remain alive within this community at all times. Specifically, the present research explores diverse approaches related to the trans-Mexican journey, considering for instance migrants' relationship with numerous and different territories, ecosystems and perils, characterizing the vast extension of Mexico and the places traveled by them, utilizing precarious means of transportation as a marginalized group. This analysis emphasizes the extraordinary manifestations of *agency* that flourish within migrants' ability to overcome insurmountable difficulties and obstacles, by creatively employing 'tools' provided by their identities, subjectivities and cultural backgrounds. These migrants utilize this knowledge by taking advantage of 'elements' provided by the local environments they transit and temporarily inhabit. It is attempted to examine herein migrants' engagement in practices of *resistance* individually and also, as a collective entity that consolidate robust *solidarity bonds* between people from different countries, who share analogous subjection to several forms of *domination*, making them participate in tenacious processes of *resistance*. Between members of this community, copious flows of information, suggestions, warrants and strategies are shared consistently, while shaping the appearance of a *culture of survival* that assists them along the dangerous Mexican routes. Concomitantly, mutual assistance and protection amongst migrants represent an important 'weapon' employed by these individuals along their everyday struggles for survival. Additionally, particular relevance is given herein, to collateral actors and *networks* who cover a crucial role in assisting these migrants morally and materially, by manifesting profound expressions of solidarity, fraternity, humanity and brotherhood that incisively nourish migrants' hopes, while also supporting them along their resolute processes of *resistance*.

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1) Introduction

The present investigation aims to analyze significant practices of *resistance* embraced by Central-American migrants in transit through Mexico. In this context, *resistance* manifest in social reactions that oppose distinctive forms of *domination*, being expressed within repressive US-Mexican anti-immigration and border enforcement measures that have been implemented lately, to impede undesired migratory flows from the *Global South*. Concomitantly, an increase in securitization and militarization enforced by USA and Mexico, worsened the situation of migrants, who are now forced to cross borders and territories unlawfully, while having to withstand the rigorous governmental surveillance designed to ‘defend’ certain international boundaries. Consequently, these migrants have been coerced to develop a range of survival and mobility strategies to endure the numerous life-threatening risks and dangers that characterize the trans-Mexican journey, while continuously nourishing the firm intention of reaching their destinations.

The above-mentioned social actions concerning this migratory process would be contextualized herein, as forms of *resistance* that oppose to political maneuvers and establishments, which dominate certain global frameworks and determine human mobility across international borders in an unequal basis. Importantly, the perseverance and willpower possessed by migrants help them accomplishing their objectives despite official impediments of movement condemning them to the status of ‘illegality’¹. Contiguously, migrants’ actions of *resistance* represent an indirect challenge to the anti-immigration laws imposed by the *Global North* and constitute an inferred critical opposition to the West’s authoritarian influence worldwide that amalgamate in the unfairness of its immigration systems.

The efforts of this investigation in defining the relation between *domination* and *resistance* within this problematic scenario of irregular migration begin with an attempt to contextualize the trans-Mexican social phenomena within relevant theoretical frameworks, to examine certain North-South power-relations of *domination* that impose restrained freedom of international mobility to these migrants. Accordingly, relevant studies conducted by researchers in these matters would assist in analyzing the social detriment caused by the strategies of *securitization*, *biopolitics* and *labor subordination* adopted by most Western governments in the contemporary era. Significantly, a careful inquire to the US-Mexican anti-immigration policy frameworks would sustain an examination of the social consequences

¹ Importantly, despite the widespread (mis)use of the expression ‘illegal migrant’, this formulation would be employed within this paper, solely to criticize the paradox intrinsic to its meaning. Accordingly, whilst an act can be juridically ‘illegal’ an individual itself cannot be defined as ‘illegal’ only as a consequence of entering a country without authorization. Furthermore, this definition also represents a serious form of stigmatization and criminalization, which is imputed to these migrants (International Council for Human Rights 2010: 16).

deriving from these politics, focusing on the vulnerability and marginalization that position Central-American migrants under unbearably travel conditions. The violent journeys endured repeatedly by these individuals makes them easy targets of illicit practices that violate their basic human rights. Furthermore, the analysis of various kinds of *violence* perpetrated against these migrants would benefit from pertinent theories to identify and elucidate, the visible and invisible forms of *violence* that these individuals have to withstand along their journeys.

Once the instruments and strategies of *power* in terms of repression, violence and danger are unveiled, their detrimental social consequences within the trans-Mexican context would become evident, and the first side of the dialogical relation between *domination* and *resistance* becomes visible.

Despite the severity of anti-immigration regulations and the numerous risks and dangers this journey involves, migrants should never be seen, as passive victims who drift confusedly towards their destination. Contrarily, most migrants exhibit a mesmerizing perseverance and tenacity in creating solutions to move ahead on their routes, while withstanding hazardous difficulties and overcoming overwhelming obstacles with the definite aim of realizing their objectives.

Subsequently, the second part of the analysis explores important practices of *resistance* incessantly performed by migrants, while at the same time, it would benefit from pertinent theories to better comprehend these processes and contextualize them within the theoretical framework of *agency*, *collectivity*, *opposition* and *resistance*. Remarkably, the present study would endeavor to perceive and gain a better understanding of the schemes, techniques and strategies employed by Central-American migrants to resist the escalation of institutional oppression that has been legislatively implemented within the territories of concern herein. Tentatively, the investigation also aspires to comprehend the role and value of *solidarity bonds* originating between migrants from different nationalities and members of the Mexican civil society who frequently show their solidarity by supporting them along tenacious processes of *resistance*. Accordingly, the proposed theoretical analysis would be supported by scientific methods characteristic of ethnographic research and participant observation, conducted on a year's fieldwork carried out in Mexico, along the main trans-Mexican routes crossing the capital Mexico City and the states of Tabasco, Chiapas, Veracruz, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California Norte. During the fieldwork periods, it was possible to share plenty of time and a considerable amount of personal experiences with Central-Americans, by volunteering at various shelters for migrants scattered along the country. This was combined with spending time at other focal points commonly transited by Central-American migrants, such as the southern and northern border

areas and its surroundings, as well as at abandoned and remote railway stations and their outskirts.



Image 1: Political map of the United States of Mexico

Particular importance should be given to the nature of those precarious means of transportation compulsorily utilized by many trans-Mexican migrants, as is the case of the numerous cargo trains that travel all along Mexico, which became famous amongst migrants with the univocal name of *La Bestia* (the beast). Additionally, alternative strategies of mobility have been designed by trans-Mexican migrants, in the struggle for avoiding, eluding or bypassing immigration check-points, border surveillance zones and areas under criminal gangs' control, where migrants are potential targets of violence and human rights abuses. Similarly, high relevance would be reserved to the inspection of vital survival skills necessary to withstand the numerous dangers of the journey, as well as the coping strategies that allow migrants to generate a minimal income, which could help them to afford the journeys' expenses. Notably, the important functions covered by diverse kinds of *networks* that help sustaining migrants morally, physically and sometimes financially, would also be explored within this paper.

A fundamental reason motivating the realization of this investigation derives from the necessity to divulge and clarify influential sociopolitical consequences that emerged since the escalation of

securitization and border enforcement processes that have been increasingly implemented by the US-Mexican governments and are visible in the alarming increase in human rights violations and deaths along the most transited migratory routes. Despite the endangering of the journey, Central Americans constantly design alternative strategies to overcome the numerous obstacles in route, while resisting the constraints imposed on their freedom of movement, as dictated by anti-immigration establishments implemented by the West. In this sense, the present investigation formulates an open critic to the widespread notion that catalogues migrants as potential threats, while the spreading of dominant discourses and ideological attacks have been ceaselessly perpetrated by numerous political parties and divulged by the mainstream media in receptor and transit countries. Concomitantly, migrants' *autonomy* and *agency* would empirically counterpose the perception of these individuals as inert pawns of the globalized market economy, whose mobility is strictly dictated by the unstable fluctuations of the international labour demand. Finally, this work manifests its opposition to the logics of victimization sustained by certain NGOs and academic circles of the Global North, that tend to depict and consider migrants, as defenseless and passive victims of this humanitarian crisis. Affirmatively, trans-Mexican migrants are to be regarded within the realms of this investigation as subjects of *right*, who constantly resort to an extraordinary agency, willpower and creativity, to resist States' oppression while fighting tirelessly to fight for their rights, when those are being denied by nation-states' authorities and governmental institutions.

2) Background

The present chapter aspires to give a frame of reference to the contemporary trans-Mexican migratory panorama, presenting some prominent factors that induce and often force Central-Americans to take the difficult decision of leaving their home countries. Among other considerations concerning the characteristics of the trans-Mexican migrants' community, which are considered necessary to gain a better understanding of the power relations defining important processes of *domination* and *resistance* within the context of concern herein.

There are distinctive factors determining the conspicuous migratory flows generating in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, the Central-American countries from where most trans-Mexican migrants begin their journey². Amongst these, the most remarkable are linked to the inheritance of militarist

² Despite an incisively lower percentage, Nicaraguan, Cuban and Dominican citizens recurrently transit the trans-Mexican routes. The main focus in this thesis, would be centered on migrants from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, as they represent the vast majority of migrants that travel the trans-Mexican paths. Significantly, important places of the trans-Mexican routes and especially the Mexican northern frontier are also

regimes sponsored by the US government, which fueled the armed conflicts that devastated the region during the 60s, 70s and 80s, leaving behind a scenario marked by political instability and corruption, compounded by widespread violence and high levels of criminality along the territories of these Central American nations (Menjívar & Abrego 2012: 1392-93; Johnson 2008: 6; Hiskey; Malone & Orcés 2014: 2-6; Arana 2001; 89-101).

Concerning the financial and economic spheres, it might be noteworthy to consider that these Central American States repeatedly endure the overwhelming burden imposed by economic authoritarianism and the financial supremacy of Western institutions, such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that mandatorily imposed sharp financial doctrines and neoliberal politics on these countries, as exemplified by the application of austerity measures, economic stabilization policies, market liberalizations and corrupt privatizations of the public sector. The sociopolitical consequences adherent to the implementation of these economic doctrines manifest in the high averages of unemployment, the increase of social inequalities and a considerable rise in the local cost of life, which have inexorably paralyzed the economies of these countries and consolidated the existence of unbearable living conditions for their underprivileged citizens (Stiglitz 2002: 1-6; Bucheli 2008; 533-554). As it will be explored a posteriori, the economic deprivation that perpetually enchains this region can also be connected to the consequences of certain international agreements that extensively opened the national markets to the indiscriminate penetration of multinational corporations, while not facilitating human mobility across nations and nevertheless on the name of globalization.

Due to its complexity, the multifaceted sociopolitical and economic Central-American contexts are difficult to depict but resemble the univocal profile of trans-Mexican migrants vis-à-vis the numerous and often coercive causes influencing Central-Americans' decision to leave behind their countries of origin. Analogously, it is problematic to comprehend 'how much' specific structural causes influence the decision to migrate and 'how much' this decision depend on autonomous and independent choices. Nevertheless, the tangible results of the autonomy of migration, in conjunction with push and pull factors characteristic of Central-American countries' panorama are bluntly visible in the multitudinous flows of men, women, adolescents, elders and even entire families that are compelled to endure the hazardous journey to the USA, while resisting the severity of the US-Mexican anti-immigration and border enforcement systems that criminalize them. Illustratively, quantitative data shows that during

'populated' by a considerable amount of Mexican migrants who attempt to reach the USA without authorization. Outstandingly, those individuals who have been deported from the US and left without money just on the Mexican side of the US border often remain stuck in these areas, with very few possibilities to cross the border ones more or return back home.

2014, the total amount of Central-American migrants deported from Mexico reached 105.303 incidences, wherein the majority were men and nearly a twenty-five percent was composed by women, including an amount of 18.003 expulsions of underaged minors, divided in 9.685 who were accompanied and 8.318 who were unaccompanied³. Significantly, these statistic data gives an approximate idea of the dimensions reached by the effects of one of the most transited migratory channels in the world. Furthermore, these data proportionate a better understanding of the heterogeneity that characterizes the community of trans-Mexican migrants. Nevertheless, it is relevant to underline the fact that the obtention of reliable quantitative data is a virtually impossible task, considering that the statistics available are incomplete or unreliable, as they do not include those migrants who succeeded in reaching the US border unperceived and the enormous amount of individuals who are detained and subsequently deported more than once during the same year.

In this context, it is considered relevant the illuminating metaphor formulated by Papadopoulus & Tsianos (2007: 3):

“ Migration is like big waves, they never appear precisely where they are expected, their arrival can never be predicted exactly, but they always come, they have a magnitude to reorder the whole given geography of a seashore, the sandbanks, the seabed, the maritime animals and plants, the rocks, the beach. ” (Papadopoulus & Tsianos 2007: 3).

3) Problem Formulation

The present investigation attempts to examine, understand and analyze, important strategies and tactics employed by trans-Mexican migrants to endure the radical endangering of their migratory process, while resisting the hardening of anti-immigration and border enforcement policies implemented by the US-Mexican governments to deter Central-Americans' international mobility toward the *North*. This analysis would thus aspire at comprehending and bringing out to the surface, the dialogical relationship and the continuous processes of *domination* and *resistance* characterizing the trans-Mexican migratory panorama, while considering their *raison d'être* and empirical manifestations

The examination of the oppressive structural complex where trans-Mexican migrants are situated during their journeys, would begin from a wider conceptual perspective focusing on the global establishments dictating and determining the possibilities of international mobility across nations.

³ Quantitative data collected from the official website of the INM; *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (National Migration Institute). Please, check internet bibliography for references.

Specifically, this section would consider the power structures discretionally encouraging or hindering different kinds of international migration, reflecting for example on the strategies of *global containment* and *securitization* that systematically confine the majority of the *Developing world's* population within the borders delimiting their countries of origin. Particular noteworthiness would be also appointed to the international relations and agreements that promote the cross-national mobility of determined goods, capitals, enterprises, multinational corporations, high-skilled workers and tourists, while concomitantly not facilitating and often preventing low-skilled workers' mobility across borders. Successively, the investigation would take under analysis the intense securitization and militarization processes undertaken by the US, while considering the conspicuous policy and legislative frameworks implemented to protect its national borders. Importantly, particular attention would be designated to the *borders' extraterritorialization* strategies embraced by the US and thus, to the crucial paper played by Mexico and its institutional authorities, in refraining Central-American migrants even before they can reach the US frontier. The subsequent sections would explore the empirical consequences of the US-Mexican politics, that are visible in the alarming jeopardizing of the trans-Mexican journey, examining such dynamics supported by the concepts of *Biopower*, *state of exception*, *humans' commodification* and *labour subordination*. Moreover, Scientific theories focusing on the various meanings and expressions of *violence* would successively assist in analyzing the detrimental sociopolitical effects deriving from the incessant process of migrants' criminalization and stigmatization.

The second chapter would focalize on the processes of *resistance* against the US-Mexican anti-immigration and border enforcement establishments, that are systematically embraced by trans-Mexican migrants during their perilous journeys. The investigation would first attempt to conceptualize the unlawful migratory experiences and border crossing strategies as forms of *resistance* against the unequal contemporary migration system, while reflecting on the indirect challenge that migrants' actions represent to States' sovereign power, authority and impositions. Particular relevance would be appointed to the concepts of *agency*, *autonomy*, *creativity*, *collectivity* and *collective action* to better comprehend important elements of trans-Mexican migrants' action and strategy.

Successively, the investigation would move to a deep analysis of the numerous tactics and strategies employed by trans-Mexican migrants to achieve their objectives. Specifically, sum importance would be appointed to the exploration of *mobility tactics* designed to avoid surveillance and life-threatening dangers along the route, collateral to the examination of *survival strategies* employed to withstand the countless necessities and difficulties of the journey. Furthermore, specific relevance would be given to

the crucial role played by *networks* and their important functions consisting in facilitating migrants' journey while supporting them morally, physically and sometimes also economically.

Finally, a focal aspect of *resistance* deserving special attention within this investigation concerns important symbolic elements and collective practices that decisively fortify migrants' perseverance while sustaining them materially and morally, in the endurance of the excruciating journey across Mexico. Few examples are constituted by the openhearted expressions of *fraternity* and *solidarity*, manifested by countless members of the Mexican civil society and determined social groups that permanently inhabit specific focal points where trans-Mexican migrants commonly transit. Concurrently, it might be noteworthy to consider the cruciality of the mutual and continual sharing of symbols, imageries, hopes and dreams between migrants, compounded by a constant interchange of narrations, informations, warnings, strategies and survival knowledge. Particular relevance would be hence appointed to the vital *solidarity bonds* consolidating circumstantially along the trans-Mexican routes, between migrants who find themselves in analogous processes of *resistance* and support each other for the realization of commonly shared objectives.

The abovementioned spheres of *resistance* would be analyzed herein benefitting from the coordination of diverse anthropological methodologies, employed on a year's of ethnographic fieldwork conducted on Mexican territory. Concomitantly, pertinent scientific theories would be brought within the analysis to better elucidate the important processes of *resistance* characterizing the contemporary trans-Mexican context.

The final objective of this investigation is thus to analyze and bring out to light, significant relations of *domination* and *resistance* within the trans-Mexican migratory panorama, in an endeavor to advocates for migrants' human rights and rise social awareness concerning the silent humanitarian crisis systematically lived by Central-Americans, while considering its structural causes and the numerous strategies embraced by migrants to withstand the marginalized sociopolitical condition they are relegated to. Furthermore, this paper aspires to promote a positive social change toward an end of migrants' stigmatization as *illegal persons, aliens, criminals, terrorist, threats*, or any stereotype instrumentally used to demonize low-skilled international migration while legitimizing the implementation of severe anti-immigration and border enforcement measures accurately designed to protect the interests of the West.

4) Research questions:

[In which ways do processes of *domination* manifest in the hardening of the US-Mexican anti-immigration regime?

[In which ways do processes of *resistance* manifest in the strategies employed by trans-Mexican migrants to reach their destinations?

5) Methodology

This chapter is intended to present the methodology designed to examine, comprehend and analyze, important dynamics that represent expressions of *domination* and *resistance* within the trans-Mexican migratory context. The ambition of embracing an investigation that concerns various aspects characterizing this complex panorama of unauthorized migration, would require the adoption of diverse methodologies and theoretical approaches, for the redaction of the two main chapters constituting the analysis' body.

5.1) Secondary data review, policy framework analysis and theoretical approach

The investigation concerning important processes of *domination*, would begin from a scrutinization of international agreements, national legislations, entry requirements and visa restrictions, anti-immigration and border enforcement policy frameworks, that have increasingly been implemented by the US-Mexican government to refrain low-skilled workers from the south. Each of these elements would be analyzed within this paper by employing scientific theories addressing the concepts of *security* and *containment*, amalgamating with notions of territorial militarization and *borders' extraterritorialization*. The sociopolitical consequences of the examined legislative and policy framework, would be subsequently explored by undertaking a profound review of secondary data concerning the trans-Mexican migratory context, benefitting from the numerous investigations *in situ* developed by Mexican and international researchers. Such preliminary research is considered essential as “ethnographers should explore all that they can about their topic or study population before moving on to the collection of primary data” (Whitehead 2005: 2). Additionally, relevant theories concerning *state of exception*, *biopower*, *labor subordination* and *humans' commodification*, would assist in comprehending and conceptually framing, the numerous forms of *domination* intransigently protracted against Central-American migrants. Furthermore, the concept(s) of *violence* would be successively employed to analyze the diverse and multi-faceted forms of oppression systematically endured by the

trans-Mexican migrants' community.

5.2) Ethnographic research

Importantly, an analysis of processes that are produced at the 'macro' level would be incomplete without an examination of the derivative consequences affecting the 'local' level, which are manifested in people's actions and witnessed by their words (Haesbaert 2011: 287-288; Abu-Lughod 1012: 47-148). The analysis of these consequences, compellingly required the embracement of an extensive fieldwork in Mexico, aimed at comprehending the processes of *resistance* undertaken by trans-Mexican migrants to oppose the forms of *domination* imposed by the US-Mexican governments. Amongst the main reasons that impulsed the employment of *ethnography* as a primary methodology for the investigation, there is a genuine attempt to depict the object of study from its own perspective, while avoiding to fall in the trap of *ethnocentrism* which unavoidably obscure a real understanding of important social dynamics and phenomena (LeCompte 2000: 152; Geertz 1985: 255). Moreover, an endeavor in moving beyond the mainstream logics of Central-American migrants' criminalization or victimization, perpetrated by various media, politicians, certain NGOs and academic circles, required to spend a great amount of time with members of the migrants' community, as to understand how these underprivileged individuals employ their *agency* and *creativity* to resist institutional oppression and cope with the numerous difficulties of their journey. Hence, it might be noteworthy to underline the cruciality of a continual contact with the sociocultural system under study, in conjunction with the employment of methods characteristic of ethnographic research such as participant observation and field notes collection, amalgamating with relevant semi-structured interviews and informal conversations' recording, photo-video data collection,⁴ and the employment of personal documents as is the case of a key informant's autobiography (Whitehead 2005: 3-7; Spradley 1979: 55-60; Brewer 2000: 58-71). As proposed by Geertz (1973: 23):

“ The important thing about the anthropologist's findings is their complex specificness, their circumstantiality. It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts [...] ”

4 All photos contained within this paper are personally taken

5.2.1) Multi-sited ethnography and the ethnography of the particular

Interestingly, in discordance with the anthropological proposition of limiting fieldworks within “*confined contexts*”, the ambition of doing ethnography with a community which is in constant movement as is the case of migrants, posed various challenges during this ethnographic fieldwork, as it was necessary to continuously follow the routes travelled by trans-Mexican migrants, instead of attempting to integrate within a permanently inhabited settlement. Due to the intermittent character of their journey, migrants might be considered as a *community on movement*, that along the journey take symbolic possession of the territories transited or momentarily inhabited. These territories appear thus dynamics, temporary, discontinuous and mobile, while becoming integrated in people's sociocultural experience in relation to time and space (Haesbaert 2011: 281-282). Hence, this research was undertaken employing the method of *multi-sited ethnography* (Marcus 1995: 95-99), by doing fieldwork in numerous focal settings of the trans-Mexican panorama, such as various shelters for migrants, border areas as for example the *Suchiate* river in the south-western part of Mexico, and the western border between Mexico and the US, as well as numerous railway stations and railroads scattered along the whole longitude of the country.



Image 2: Map of the shelter for migrants scattered in Mexico. The yellow circled were visited and supported through voluntary work during the period of ethnographic fieldworks

During the year spent working in Mexico, various approaches to the ethnographic research were employed for the purposes of the investigation, which allowed a gaze from different perspectives while leading to different results. Specifically, in a first phase of fieldwork various shelters for migrants

located in the states surrounding Mexico City, as well as in the northern and southern part of the country, were visited for short periods, with the advantage of having the possibility to talk with countless migrants and getting numerous viewpoints concerning the trans-Mexican migratory experience. Importantly, by having the opportunity to encounter a considerable amount of migrants, it was possible to observe the extreme heterogeneity characterizing the trans-Mexican migrants' community, while understanding how migrants' individual, personal and social characteristics, influence the experiences of *domination* and *resistance*, lived by different migrants. Specifically, the approach employed along the whole fieldwork would benefit from the *ethnography of the particular*, which emphasizes the cruciality of avoiding generalizations that risk to homogenize extremely variegated social groups. Contrarily, this approach underlines the importance of considering the specific peculiarities of the social group's members while attempting to understand how determined characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, physical condition, social position and sexual orientation, influence the experiences of different people in numerous relevant ways (Abu-Lughod 2012: 140-141, 147-151).

5.2.2) Extensive fieldwork and the importance of field relations

Significantly, the impossibility of spending a consistent amount of time with migrants that only reside within shelters for one or few days, denied the possibility of creating those crucial field relations based on confidence and closeness. As these 'bonds' are considered crucial elements for the collection of veracious data and the realization of an accurate ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 63-65), in the second stage of fieldwork the strategy employed to obviate this constraint, consisted in embracing a three months period of voluntary work in the shelter for migrants *La 72: Hogar/refugio para personas migrantes*, located in the village of Tenosique, Tabasco, close to the Mexican south-eastern border with Guatemala. During this period, it was possible to live day and night with the trans-Mexican migrants' community, while eating with them everyday the humble but extremely appreciated meals provided by local donations. Similarly, it was possible to experience the quotidian life of *La 72*, while supporting migrants through all the services provided by the shelter as for example medical attention and legal assistance, as well as counseling upon possible tactics to avoid interception when transiting next to the close migration check-points, or warnings concerning the dangers existing in the surroundings of the shelter, in the cargo train's railway station, and in the close village of Tenosique. Concomitantly, it was possible to learn numerous strategies employed by migrants in their previous

migratory experiences, as well as those invented for the next stage of their journey. Moreover, migrants who reach the shelter for the first time are subjected to an extensive interview held by the shelter's volunteers, which is aimed at understanding various aspects of migrants' biographies and experiences across Mexico, that are important to define whether the person might apply for refugee status or humanitarian visa.



Image 3: Running out from the shelter when hearing the trains' whistle which announce its arrival in the village



Significantly, besides acquiring an inestimable knowledge from the numerous stories shared by migrants who temporarily transit through the shelter, during these three months it was possible to tighten solid relations with various migrants who were residing in the shelter for extensive periods, while waiting for the resolution of their applications for refugee status or humanitarian visa (usually a minimum of

Image 4: Fray Tomás Gonzalez Castillo, The founder of La72, during a gathering with the migrants' community, at the shelter's eating area

three months). Importantly, the consolidation of these field relations is not usually an easy achievement, due to the unavoidable power relations existing between a humanitarian worker and the aid's beneficiary, as well as between a researcher and the subjects of his research. Similarly, these unequal power relations risk to widen the sociopolitically imposed divisions and disparities existing between a Western *me* and a constructed *other* (Abu-Lughod 2012: 131-138). The overcoming of the disparities between a white-European-anthropologist-volunteer, and Central-American migrants who were resorting to the support of the shelter, was a slow, step by step process in which the consolidation of the close relations tightened in *La 72*, probably represented the overcome of everyday expressions of fraternity, humanity, empathy, friendliness, solidarity and community, that were constantly nourished by a firm belief in considering and treating migrants not as topics of investigation or objects of humanitarianism, but instead as living and resisting persons, as well as no-consanguineous brothers who are as human as me, but denied the same rights and opportunities because of their nationalities. The considerable amount of time spent with these migrants and the trust relations consolidated, permitted access to an invaluable knowledge concerning migrants' experiences and struggles within the trans-Mexican context, as well as the possibility to reconstruct comprehensive biographies of those few persons who became much more than mere informants by the time, evolving unavoidably into friends, although the academic recommendations of 'keeping distance' from the studied subjects.⁵

5.2.3) Covered ethnography: becoming your subject of study

As previously introduced, the members of the trans-Mexican migrants community are not sedentary subjects, but they are instead individuals on constant movement who develop their migratory experience along numerous, different settings of the Mexican territory. For this reason, an ethnography conducted only in shelters for migrants was considered partial and shadowing significant other facets of the trans-Mexican journey. Hence, in spring 2015 a new phase of fieldwork began, characterized by the firm aim of following the same routes travelled by those migrants who employ the numerous cargo trains that travel on the Mexican western coast to reach the Californian or



Image 5: A day of celebration in La72

⁵ The relations with these few persons continued after the voluntary work period was concluded by employing social networks. Successively, some of these migrants transited across, or moved to Mexico City and were privately supported with temporary lodging, and help in integrating and finding employment within the city.

Arizonian border. This approach aspired to get an understanding of how migrants behave and relate to each others in contexts other than shelters, as well as being directed toward a comprehension of the strategies employed to survive in the dangerous areas characterizing their journeys. Moreover, the direct engagement in the unauthorized migratory experience allowed to look 'from the inside' of the topic investigated and to experience personally the severity and difficulty of the journey. Simultaneously, it permitted empathizing profoundly with numerous trans-Mexican migrants, while decisively narrowing the distance and disparity, existing between a researcher and the subject of study. To be more specific, this approach implied the direct involvement in a long, exhausting and life-threatening journey, undertaken by riding various cargo trains that travel on the railroad network that connects Mexico city with the bordering cities of Mexicali, Baja California / Calexico, California and Heroica Nogales, Baja California / Nogales, Arizona. A Considerable amount of time was spent with migrants on top of these precarious means of transportation, as well as in the abandoned railway stations during the interminable waits of the cargo train's departure. Importantly, this approach was previously avoided for the extreme risks involved in riding these trains and inhabiting marginalized railway stations that are commonly frequented by circumstantial criminals and drug cartels who employ these lawless areas for their illicit business, or attempt to profit from migrants' unprotected social condition. In this sense, the simple fact of being a West-European researcher traveling with technologic equipments such as videocameras, voice recorder and laptop, would depict me as an 'appetizing' target for criminals, constituting a serious risk not only for my own safety, but more importantly for the security of migrants who would travel with me while being subjected to collateral dangers. In order to overcome these difficulties, not without various hesitations I decided to start a *covered ethnography* (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 68-73; Brewer 2000: 93-95) and disguise as one of those Mexican migrants who attempts to reach the US border by using cargo trains, due to the lack of money for bus' tickets. Encouragingly, I was not alone in the journey, as the ethnography was conducted together with my husband, a Mexican anthropologist who also work on similar issues. Traveling with a close and trustful person provided in this sense an inestimable resource in terms of mutual assistance and reciprocal protection. Nevertheless, we were compelled to present ourselves as 'old friends', while hiding our real relationship for the whole period of the journey, due to the widespread *machismo* and homophobia dominating in Central America and in most northern states of Mexico⁶. Moreover, considerable problems derived from my skin color and foreign accent, that are

6 Importantly, members of the LGBT community who frequently escape xenophobia in their countries of origin and embrace the trans-Mexican journey are frequently subjected to severe forms of discrimination and violence, perpetrated

immediately identified by local people and Central-Americans as not Mexican. The solution to these difficulties required a long process of learning, organization and preparation, in which I had to create a new, credible, personal biography that would convince people of my Mexican nationality. Hence, I temporarily transformed myself in a 24 year-old poor guy from Mexican father and Iranian mother, who was brought to Mexico when he was fourteenth and lived in a degraded neighborhood of Mexico City, up to that moment. The choice of inventing an Iranian mother was not random. Accordingly, I could not say I was Italian because West-Europeans get easy access into the US and do not need to find hazardous strategies and tactics to cross international borders. Furthermore, the widespread idea that all Europeans are kind of wealthy (even if this was not the case), would pose me as an easy target of robbery, extortion or kidnapping. Additionally, during the time spent in Mexico an abundant number of people said that I looked somehow “Arabian”, probably because of my facial features, long beard and hair. Hence, the choice of presenting myself as a half Mexican – half Iranian migrant was particularly useful because it provided a reason for my strong accent and uncommon facial traits. Nevertheless, this transformation was an elaborate process that required the learning of few expressions in *Fārsi*, as well as some general knowledge of Iranian culture and traditions, politic situation and external relations with the US. Importantly, even when my alleged Iranian lineage was believed by people, to convince Central-Americans and even more locals that I was Mexican, constituted an arduous challenge that required a long preparation necessary to endure the quasi-interrogations continuously held by migrants or locals who were suspicious of my honesty and trustworthiness. Accordingly, following the advices of Central-American migrants who have to hide their real nationality when traveling across Mexico, I learned the national anthem, numerous information concerning my supposed city and neighborhood of provenience, and a general knowledge of Mexican history, politics and culture. Simultaneously, during this part of the fieldwork it was particularly important to imitate the dialect and slang commonly employed by *Chilangos del barrio* (people from low-class, usually degraded and dangerous neighborhood of Mexico City). In this sense, the experience and knowledge acquired along the extensive period of work in Mexico apportioned inestimable benefits for the credibility of the disguise and thus, for the realization of this stage of the fieldwork. Moreover, it might be possible to underline the cruciality of gaining access to people's ordinary language as to comprehend their interactions, attitudes, behaviors, jokes, hopes, songs, linguistically expressed feelings and the symbolic meanings, of numerous expressions commonly utilized by the subjects of study (Brewer 2000: 74; Abu-Lughod

by a wide range of different actors, which regrettably include in some cases also fellow migrants from Central America.

2012: 148). As proposed by Geertz (1973: 24):

“the whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is, as I have said, to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them”

A final arrangement required for the *covered ethnography*, was the creation of a believable 'uniform' that was composed by a pair of ruined shorts, a dirty t-shirt, broken shoes, an old wool blanket and a backpack covered by a garbage sack that contained few clothes, a sketchbook, and all the hidden equipment necessary for recording conversations, taking photos and filming videos when unseen. Significantly, This backpack was protected with utmost caution as containing extremely sensitive data, that in no absolute way had to be stolen by criminals or institutional authorities. Interestingly, our uniforms became more and more credible by the time, because they quickly dirtied by inhabiting railroads while getting soaked of the oil that cover the cargo trains' components and gearwheels.

The employment of this method led to extraordinary results as when we were accepted from groups of trans-Mexican migrants and considered as part of their community, those crucial field relations that usually require long periods of acquaintance, were instead tightened in shorter time due to a collectively shared feeling of *belonging* to a same community, amalgamating with the solidarity that arose between people who might be completely unknown, but who become as brother when sharing the subjection to analogous forms of *domination* and the embracement of univocal processes of *resistance*. The crucial field relations consolidated along the trans-Mexican routes represented an invaluable source of knowledge and awareness concerning important strategies necessary to survive the dangerous journey across Mexico, as well as ingenious tactics designed to cross the US border by exploiting the characteristics and specificities of diverse border areas along the line dividing then US from Mexico.

5.3) Ethics

Concerning the methodology employed, it might be relevant to present certain serious ethical dilemmas that continuously accompanied the ethnographic research and the writing process. Firstly, despite the incredible value of the conspicuous data collected by doing *covered ethnography*, in a certain sense I felt dishonest in hiding my real identity and living a perpetual lie in front of all people encountered along the fieldwork. It was not the just the fear of being discovered and subsequently risk my life, but

instead a profound sense of shame in cheating to people that I profoundly respect and admire for their tenacity. The problematic question was: “*am I lying for my own sake or to get valuable information easily?*” The first ethical dilemma disappeared with a negative answer to this question. Accordingly, the decision of doing *covered ethnography*, was more a forced option than an enthusiastic choice, due to the vital necessity to protect my own safety, delicate informants' data, and the study's informants themselves, within the dangerous and threatening settings that constituted the territories of this *fieldwork in contexts of violence* (Sluka 2012: 283-297; Kovats-Bernat 2002: 2-3; Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 1-23) Interestingly, whilst opening the opportunity of consolidating solid field relations, the employment of this method indirectly provided the experience and feeling of having to hide one's identity and the enormous difficulties that this task involves. Specifically, the constant need to conceal my real nationality, origins, destination, intentions, work, sexual orientation and in some occasions also my values, gave me an inestimable impression of how an 'illegal' migrant potentially feels when traveling unauthorizedly across territories and borders. Nevertheless, it might be relevant to underline that differently for Central-American migrants, we had certain powerful 'weapons' that in numerous occasions brought us out from incredibly arduous situations. Illustratively, when we found ourselves threatened of deportation or extortion by corrupted institutional authorities, we had the possibility to unveil our real identities, take out our valid passports in conjunction with our academic credentials, and subsequently start arguing with these authorities while menacing them of reporting their illicit conducts to our embassies, universities and the *national commission of human rights*⁷. Similarly, when in certain occasions we felt that the situation was too dangerous, we could opt to hire a room in a cheap hotel, instead of sleeping on the cold ground surrounding the abandoned railway stations.

The second ethical dilemma, concerns the delicate relation between an endeavor to advocate for migrants' human rights, and the risk of compromising their position by revealing delicate information about their identities or strategies. In order to obviate this problem, the real names and certain delicate personal testimonies of all informants were omitted from the text. Importantly, during the first two stages of fieldwork, all informants were perfectly aware of my research activities and no voice was transcribed or recorded without previously asking for an *information consent*. Differently, the settings and contexts characterizing the *covered* period of ethnographic research posed serious difficulties in respecting this essential ethical rule. Again, due to strict security reasons, it was necessary to record

7 In all probability, in front of criminals or drug cartels' members these same 'weapons' would turn out to be not only useless, but even counterproductive as in recent years migrants advocate, human rights' activists and researchers, have increasingly become the target of beating, kidnapping, torture and in certain occasions even murder (Jacques et al. 2008: 27-28; Vogt 2012: 274-279, 287-289)

relevant conversations covertly, while in most occasions the people met along the northern trans-Mexican routes would never discover our real identities. The narrations and conversations of those people who were not aware of being recorded, would not be directly reported in this paper, but instead only used to understand general tendencies, social patterns and behaviors. Nevertheless, with few of the people met in the last stage of the fieldwork, we had the opportunity to tie stronger relations and before to take different routes, we decided to reveal our real identities, explain our work, vision and values, while asking if we could use the recorded information or if they preferred that these records were deleted immediately. In these occasion, instead of getting furious for having been cheated, these migrants started to laugh loudly and after a first moment of astonishment and an uncountable number of questions, they said that we were crazy, showed appreciation for our work, and accepted to keep the records intact on the condition of not reporting determined compromising personal stories. In addition, various common and widespread strategies reported in this paper are regrettably already known by both, criminal groups and US-Mexican institutional authorities, while other strategies that are still a secret amongst few individuals, were distorted or directly excluded from this paper as to protect migrants' safety and security.

5.4) Methodological framework

As a conclusive point, it might be necessary to clarify that the whole body of data collected during the year of fieldwork was meticulously examined, analyzed and interpreted, by employing relevant anthropological methods. Accordingly, it was decided to employ all the variables of the *triangulation method* (Brewer 2000: 75-76; Sánchez Serrano 2004: 122-123). Specifically, *data triangulation* was employed by resorting to different source of information as was the case of preexisting secondary data; personal observations and field notes; direct testimonies, personal documents, interviews and pertinent informal conversations. Similarly, *methodological triangulation* was provided by the employment of diverse techniques and methods as for example doing ethnography as a researcher, an humanitarian worker and a disguised migrant, in various and different settings, while analyzing and interpreting the totality of the collected data by employing the *comparative method* (Leach 1988: 167-178), the *inductive method* (Redcliffe-Brown 1958: 46-58) and *pragmatic analysis* (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 38, 49-63; Brewer 2000: 74; Moerman 1988: 115). Additionally, A *theoretic triangulation* was undertaken by contrasting the extensive data collected, with numerous scientific theories and broader theoretical frameworks focusing on the themes of *autonomy*, *agency*, *collectivity* and *solidarity*.

Finally, by continuously sharing data and debating hypothesis with other analysts of the field such as academics, human rights' activists, my husband, shelters' founders and volunteers, it was possible to embrace a *researchers' triangulation*.

The mixture of this complex and multi-faced methodology aspires as a final objective, to reach a better understanding concerning the processes of *domination* and *resistance*, that characterize the trans-Mexican migratory context, while shaping the migratory experience of Central-American migrants.

6) Domination and unequal opportunities of human mobility in the age of security

To embrace an investigation concerning *domination* within a certain sociopolitical context, implies undertaking a deep analysis of the power relations that characterize it, collateral to the examination of the different ways *domination* is exercised and manifests within such context, and the factors legitimizing the exertion of power against specific social groups. Despite *domination* dynamics and processes are historically present worldwide, it is crucial to consider the specificities characterizing each context while avoiding generalizations upon the way *power* is exercised and *resistance* is endured (Scott 1990: 1-16).

Importantly, within this paper an important facet of *domination* is materialized by unequal opportunities of international mobility afforded to different individuals on the ground of nationality, and the social consequences derivative from such discriminatory politics.

Previous to the examination of these uneven border crossing possibilities, it might be relevant to reflect on the opportunities of *social mobility* that permit most of the *Global North's* population to get easy access to education, medical attention and employment opportunities, amalgamating with the relative social security conceded by certain welfare States and an often solid economic stability. Contrarily, Vigh (2006: 36-37; 2010: 146, 148-149) explores the *social moratorium* where most people and especially youth originating in the *Global South*, are stuck. This, manifests in utmost difficulties in sustaining one's personal and social needs, securing one's future or supporting economically one's family. Concomitantly, structural conditions enchaining these people to lack of access to recourses and concrete possibilities of *social mobility*, often force them to everyday struggles, necessary to satisfy survival needs, while the perspective of *social becoming* are infinitely reduced. Concomitantly, migration often represents one of the few possibilities to find new life opportunities. The panorama characterizing the globalization era makes the deepening of the power relations between *core* and *periphery* countries easily visible, while also shedding light on the wide disparities between the

possibilities afforded to their respective citizens, that consolidate hence, a constant widening of the *life-chance divide* (Duffield 2010: 66; Obi 2010: 135).

The status quo firmly imposed by Western countries is also characterized by a ceaseless exercise of control over their national borders, aimed at preserving the privileges of their own citizens while unrelentingly bereaving economically deprived and marginalized people of their legitimate freedom to cross international borders. The contemporary strategies of *global containment* implemented by Western governments are characterized by intense hardening of anti-immigration and border enforcement frameworks, amalgamating with vigorous processes of territorial militarization and frontiers' securitization (Duffield 2010: 55 ; Neumayer 2006: 72; Obi 2010: 145).

Appadurai (1990: 39), reflects on these tendencies focusing on the numerous measures implemented by Western governments to uphold strict control over difference within the national confines. Furthermore, he analyses recurring justifications for the implementation of these politics while considering the frequent resort to dominant discourses inciting and endeavoring for the defense of an allegedly menaced majority vis-a-vis threatening dangers originating from the inside or outside of a certain country, that constantly represent a fateful intimidation not only for States' authority and sovereignty, but also for the basic existence of a national purity, unity and identity (Appadurai 2006: 69-71).

Hence, the concept of *security* has gradually acquired multifaceted meanings, moving far beyond the idea of national defense against foreign military power. Accordingly, the shift of focus on the vital importance appointed to *societal security* has included unlawful migration amongst the most threatening risks that menace the general welfare of Western societies. The fear of irregular migration has been loudly promoted by most right-wing politicians and mainstream media, while a strenuous propaganda has been carried out in Western countries, alarming about States' scarce resources in terms of housing, employment, education and health provision, amalgamating with continue warnings concerning national unity and cultural difference (Wæver 1996: 14; Duffield 2005: 5; Neumayer 2006: 74).

The perpetual call to the end of immigration overture has recently justified its voice on the ideological framework of *socio-cultural racism* that base its doctrine on the impossibility of intercultural harmony and the incompatibility of diverse cultures that menacingly threaten the homeland's social cohesion (Duffield 1996: 175-176; Duffield 2005: 4). In order to consolidate and normalize dominant discourses that legitimize the implementation of severe anti-immigration regimes, sophisticated strategies have

been designed by Western governments and enforced with the support of local institutions and mass media, that uphold systematic practices of nativization, exotification and racialization towards immigrants, who become the constant target of sociopolitical marginalization while continually bearing an imposed sociocultural stigma (Gupta & Ferguson 1992: 14-15).

A drastic escalation of the Western anti-immigration politics has been abruptly brought by the 09/11's episodes. Following these events, the focus of concern shifted its direction towards the *war on terrorism* with a consequent revived attention on *security* issues and the international circulation of people who might potentially threaten the homeland's safety and stability (Vogt 2012: 122-124; Neumayer 2006: 74; Cunningham 2010: 331-332). The relentless perpetuation of dominant discourses asserting the tangled and inseparable relationship between terrorism, security, criminality and migration vis-a-vis the constructed fearfulness toward a menacing *other*, has created fertile ground for the implementation of severe anti-immigration and border enforcement establishments aimed at impenetrably fortifying the 'protection' of the West (Obi 2010: 128-130; Duffield and Weddel 2004: 21). Furthermore, the *security* vulgate has had profound stigmatizing effects on unlawful migrants, by constantly connecting this social group to a broad range of security concerns as for example drugs, organs and weapons traffic, human smuggling, transnational organized crime and obviously, terrorism (Boswell 2007; 89).

Following this analysis, it might be reasonable to consider that the contemporary international mobility panorama dominated by the 'rules' of globalization, is thus far from displaying a fluid, interconnected and borderless world where every person is free to travel all around the world (Keane 2003: 1-4; Ohmae 1990: 1-17). Contrarily, for most of the *global south's* economically deprived and politically marginalized populations, the possibilities of crossing international borders are extremely reduced. Hence, the opportunities of international mobility are currently dictated by global frameworks consolidating structures of inclusion and exclusion that bluntly depict the inequalities distinguishing a man from another, basing these uneven disparities on the criteria of nationality (Cunningham 2010: 333-334). Concomitantly, the evolution of borders and border dynamics might be considered as a manifestation of a *gated globalism* where human mobility across nations is discretionally admitted and where those whose freedom of movement is hindered, become subjected to continue processes of *domination* and structural practices of repression (Cunningham 2001: 382; Andrijasevic & Walters 2010: 2)

6.1) International human mobility, global capital and free market economies

A comprehensive analysis concerning international flows in the globalization era, requires meticulous reflections on establishments derivative from the imposition of neoliberal ideologies that determine *what* and *who* can move easily across international borders. Specifically, this section aspires to illuminate the way wherein *domination* manifests in international agreements that favorite the interests of financial, economic and political elites while not encouraging and often hindering the possibilities of human mobility for the economically deprived populations of the *global South*.

6.1.1) The dark side of international neoliberalism

Within the context of concern herein, a pivotal paper has been played by international treaties such as the *North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA), stipulated in 1994 by the US, Mexico and Canada, as well as the *Dominican Republic – Central America Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA-DR), agreed ten years later between the US and various Central-American countries. Despite the overconfident results promised by the neoliberal doctrine, the abovementioned treaties, in conjunction with the politics dictated by international organizations such as the WB or the IMF, have had degenerating consequences for the populations of the southern sides involved in these partnerships. Accordingly, the stipulation of these agreements led to openings of the Central-American and Mexican markets to the uncontrolled penetration of foreigner capitals and multinational corporations that acquired with these agreements, legitimate permission to exploit the vast bulk of the local resources, lands, populations (Vega 2003: 174-179; CIDH & OEA 2005: 15). Whilst an endeavor for the equalization of the economic situations amongst the signatory countries was enshrined in the objectives of NAFTA and CAFTA, the reality depicts a different panorama that materialize in the privatization of collective farms which was a necessary prerequisites to facilitate the purchase of local lands by foreigner investors. Furthermore, these agreements determined unrestrained deregulations of the agricultural sector, while the overture of the local food and seed markets to the fierce competition of US and Canadian corporations, generated catastrophic effects for the already deprived national economies of Mexico and Central America (Fernández-Kelly & Massey 2007: 99-100, 105-106). Hence, the dark side of these international treaties become visible in their negative social consequences, exhibited by an increased widening of social inequalities amalgamating with a sharp rise of the unemployment's average (Anguiano 2010: 196-205; Stiglitz 2002: 5). Following these agreements, an uncountable number of persons have been deprived of their lands, natural recourses and means of subsistence, leaving many of

them without any alternative option but trying to migrate and seek new life opportunities in another country.

Whilst fervently encouraging the international mobility of certain goods, enterprises and capital investments, NAFTA and CAFTA had no effects in promoting human mobility and guarantee international workers' rights. The dogmatic aspect of globalization and capitalism that divulge discourses enshrining allegedly unprecedented human interconnections worldwide and boundless freedom of movement, is thus contradicted by the incalculable number of people who are denied these privileges and whose international mobility is restrained by severe anti-immigration regimes (Friedman 2002: 27; Fernández Kelly & Massey 2007: 99; Obi 2010: 131).

6.1.2) Exclusionary visa restrictions

Within the dominant power relations that dictate which entities are allowed facilitated channels in getting access to foreign space, a discretionary selection is imposed on human beings vis-à-vis their nationalities and in some cases, their economic situation, employment position or political relevance. Specifically, it might be noteworthy to reflect on the parameters that determine whose entrance must be fostered for its potential in generating an economical, political or social benefit, and who on the contrary, is not welcomed within the national borders, representing thus a potential threat that must be promptly warded off (Neumayer 2006: 72). An explanatory example of these inequalities is portrayed by the contemporary *visa* system whose intrinsic function consist in promoting the profitable circulation of tourists, financial investors, international traders, high-skilled workers, scientists and certain academics. Concomitantly, *visa restrictions* represent an instrumental tool designed by the West and aimed at upholding the *national security* while detaining the mobility of the marginalized portion of the world's population (Neumayer 2006: 75-76, 78).

Within the context of concert herein, Neumayer's argument might be exemplified by the sharp contrast between the easiness of getting access to the US and Mexican territory for citizens of countries belonging to the *Shengen Area*, in opposition to the extremely strict requirements that represent the preliminary conditions to get a US or Mexican visa for Central-American passports' owners. Accordingly, people from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala who wish to apply for a US visa are first requested to pay an initial fee of one hundred sixty dollars for the application's revision. Subsequently, they have to demonstrate in front of the US institutional authorities the temporary character of their trip, as well as the possession of sufficient funds, necessary to cover all personal

expenses while abroad. Furthermore, the expedition of a US visa requires the provision of additional documentation such as pending charges certificate and proves of tax payment, juxtaposing with evidences of considerable economic incomes, immobile goods' possession or enterprises' management. Additionally, the candidate has to obtain from his employer a letter indicating the employee position, his salary and the duration of the working contract. In case the candidate is a student, he has to submit his latest academic reports, transcripts and diplomas, annexed to mandatory proves of economic solvency.

Paradoxically, a similar process and extensive documentation is also required to Central-Americans who aspire to apply for a Mexican visa. Whilst usually not being the favorite destination country where Central-Americans would typically migrate, Mexico has imposed rigorous restrictions on visas' emissions that often constitute an unsurmountable barrier also for those migrants who consider the Mexican territory only as the perilous route dividing them from their final destination. Concomitantly, the restrictions implemented by the Mexican government cover a pivotal role in fortifying the US border regime, by hindering legal crossing from the South while consolidating the preconditions to transform the unlawful journey coerced to Central-American migrants, in a dangerous and life-threatening tribulation (Rosas 2007: 98-99; Coutin 2005: 199). Interestingly, a peculiar exception to the obligatory visa requested to Central-Americans for entering Mexico, is represented by those people who own a valid US visa or those who can accredit permanent residence in the US, Canada, Japan, UK or any country pertaining to the *Shengen Agreement*.⁸

The power relations determining the strict requirements imposed for the obtention of US and Mexican visa hence deny the majority of Central-Americans the possibility to lawfully begin a migratory process while consequently coercing them to migrate in an institutionally constructed, sociopolitical condition of 'illegality'. Conclusively, one of the ways wherein *domination* manifest in the inequalities of getting access to foreign space might be elucidated by the illuminating considerations proposed by Neumayer (2006: 81):

“Visa restrictions allow states to facilitate the trans-national movement of some at the expense of deterring the movement of others. If mobility is one of its defining features, then as with many other aspects of globalization, its realization is highly stratified and subject to states’ monitoring, regulation, interference and control.”

⁸Data concerning visa requirements and restrictions were collected in the web pages of the US and Mexican embassies in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Please, see internet bibliography.

6.2) Hardening of anti-immigration policies and frontiers' extraterritorialization

The history of the anti-immigration and border enforcement systems shaped to prevent Central-Americans from reaching the US' territory has a long tradition and its evolution has jingoistically developed on the entwined action of national defense and *extraterritorialization strategies*. Concomitantly, the *raison d'être* of this politics has been systematically covered by scapegoats such as the *war on drug* and the *war on terror*, whose enshrined function for the homeland's security has punctually legitimized the detrimental social consequences affecting trans-Mexican migrants.

6.2.1) US' militarization in the age of securitization

Following a chronological order, an important phase characterizing the contemporary US frontiers' militarization can be linked to the presidency of R. Nixon, who determinedly inaugurated during the 70s, an imposing border enforcement's campaign that was allegedly aimed at deterring drug trafficking between the US-Mexican territories. Despite the exorbitant amounts of dollars invested on this maneuver, the intensity and constancy of drug's flows between the two nations was not reduced efficaciously while simultaneously, the *war on drug* began to erect and consolidate insurmountable barriers for unauthorized migrants (Correa-Cabrera, Garret & Keck 2014: 38). The successive decade was signed by the implementation of the *Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)*, whose primary scope was to reduce 'illegal' migration by further militarize and fortify the national frontier on a side, while imposing severe sanctions on employers who hire irregular migrants, on the other (Donato, Durant & Massy 1992: 140-142). Following the temporal timeframe, the 90s were characterized by a triplication of the investments on the *Immigration and Nationalization Service* decreed by the Clinton administration, materializing in substantial efforts to reinforce and strengthen the defensive belt dividing the US from Mexico. Few example are manifested in the duplication of *Border Patrol* agents policing the frontier, collateral to the erection of impressive fences, the construction of imposing walls and the introduction of sophisticated biometrics technologies such as heat/motion detectors and infrared night vision devices. During this prominent period of border enforcement, the abovementioned measures were put into effect through the implementation of various federal and state plans such as the *Illegal Immigrant Reform* and the *immigrants Responsibility Act*, compounded at the local level by the *Operation Hold the Lines* and *Operation Rio Grande* in Texas, the Arizonian *Operation Safeguard* and the Californian *Gatekeeper Complex* (Stuesse 2010 : 5; Correa-Cabrera, Garret & Keck 2014: 40-41;

Coutin 2005: 199).

A brusque change of paradigm in the US foreigner politics was brought by the beginning of the *war on terror* inaugurated after the 9/11's events and their effects in terms of anti-immigration policies' legitimation and justification. Clear examples are given by the introduction of the *Real ID Act* and the *Secure Border Initiative* that announced the erection of a 1000km long wall along Texas and California. Successively, president G. Bush and his administration decreed the *Secure Fence Act* that allowed the designation of six thousand national guards to support *Border Patrols* in securing the southern frontier while enacting the construction of an additional 1126km barrier aimed at hindering migrants' 'unlawful' entrance (Correa-Cabrera, Garret & Keck 2014: 41-42; Jaques et al. 2008: 13; Rosas 2007: 31).



Image 6: A section of the border between Mexicali, Baja California, and Calexico, California

The whole policy framework implemented to uphold the US security might be conceptualized as a shift from canonical forms of States' imperialist nationalism of expansion, to a kind of jingoistic *nationalism of defense* where particular emphasis is appointed to the management and control of borders viv-a-vis imminent threats that permanently menace the national security (Stuesse 2010: 27).

Whilst originating insurmountable obstacle for trans-Mexican migrants, these politics also cover the double function of creating and spreading a constructed *fear* amongst the civil society, while concomitantly reassuring citizens about the State's intention and capacity to contain and ward off any transnational entity that might threaten the national integrity or social unity. This *political economy of danger* irrevocably consolidates discourses and narratives that constantly highlight the cruciality of

national defense, thus auto-legitimizing the deployment of all possible recourses and strategies to deter any constructed external menace, regardless of the social consequences of these measures, which manifest in terms of increased and normalized violations perpetuated against migrants' rights (Obi 2010: 138, 141).

6.2.2) International borders' extraterritorialization: the role of Mexico

In the wake of the necessity to reinforce the protection of *fortress America* after the 9/11's events, the US strategy extended its field of action beyond the national borders, consolidating tied relationships and signing various agreements with certain Mexican governments that gradually 'sold' the national sovereignty to the US' hegemonic interests and security concerns. Specifically, as a result of the unequal power relations between the two countries, Mexico has been introduced within an international cooperation that dictate its direct and intensive involvement in the interception, detention and deportation of unlawful migrants directed to the USA (Jácome 2011: 28-29; Rosas 2013: 42-55).

Illustratively, it might be noteworthy to mention the 2001 *Plan Sur* agreed between president G.W. Bush and the newly elected Mexican president V. Fox. The agreement established the expenditure of eleven million dollars from the US to the Mexican government, whose allocation was directed at modernizing and expanding the border control system consolidated in the Mexican southern frontier. Amongst the provisions of the agreement, particular focus is designed to the improvement and increment of security strategies such as borders' patrolling and surveillance, compounded by migrants' inspection, identification, detention and repatriation (Johnson 2008: 15-16; Anguiano & Trejo Peña 2007: 50; Jacques et al 2008: 16; Vogt 2013: 13-14; Jácome 2010 28-29). A further hardening of the Mexican anti-immigration politics is connected with the *war on drugs* began in 2006 by president F. Calderon with the financial support and political pressures exercised by the US government. Justified by the alleged intention of combatting terrorism and drugs-weapons traffic, Calderon intensified the militarization of the southern frontier while giving birth to the *Policia Estatal Fronteriza*, a specialized armed force specifically instituted to operate in border areas (Vogt 2012 :130; Johnson 2008: 17). The same president agreed in 2008 the *Mérida Initiative* with the USA, by which one point four billion dollars were designated to the equipment and training of Mexican armed forces, and a supplement of the Mexican border system (Correa-Cabrera, Garret & Keck 2014: 39; Johnson 2008: 18; Barrantes Gamboa 2009: 79; Seelke & Finklea 2014: 7-9). Despite the initial agreement determined a three years time-lapse for the *Mérida Initiative*, the Obama administration converged in prolonging its duration

while transferring another million of dollars to the Mexican government under E. Peña Nieto's presidential mandate (Seelke & Finklea 2014: 7; Vogt 2012: 108-109). Resolutely encouraged by the US government, the same E. Peña Nieto originated in April 2014 the *Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur* (PFM). Despite the rhetoric employed within the plan enshrines assumed efforts to reduce abuses against migrants' human rights and the promotion of a safer transit across Mexico, perplexities arise from various aspects of the initiative as for example the creation of additional and sophisticated internal, official migration check-points, amalgamating with the decreed cooperation of federal, state and municipal authorities, that was promoted with an alleged intention of 'protecting' and 'assisting' trans-Mexican migrants. Hence, the PFM is further militarizing the Mexican frontiers and territories, while also appointing discretionary powers to armed forces that are not competent in migration matters, assuming an unreliable attempt to reduce corruption and abuses of force in the trans-Mexican migratory context (PFM: 2014; Donnelly 2014: 6-10; Wilson & Valanzuela 2014: 1-3).

Importantly, It might be valuable to consider that the declared intentions contained in the abovementioned policies and agreements include honorable objectives as for example fighting drugs and weapons international traffic, reducing violence and crime in Mexico and especially on its frontiers, or protecting migrants' rights. Nevertheless, statistics concerning the last decades, reveal that the levels of criminality and violence are instead reaching unequalled and perturbing levels although the promised results (Vogt 2012: 110-112; Correa-Cabrera, Garret & Keck 2014: 39; Barrantes Gamboa 2009: 79). Concomitantly, the sociopolitical consequences of the politics embraced by the US-Mexican governments are currently visible in the extreme dangerousness of the journey and the alarming increase in human rights' abuses perpetrated against these migrants, as explored in the following chapters.

The whole anti-immigration policy framework gradually implemented in Mexico to protect the US frontiers, as well as the visa restrictions analyzed in the previous sub-chapter, might be theoretically conceptualized as part of the widespread trends embraced by certain Western governments⁹, which consist in designing advantageous international agreements aimed at shifting the burden of irregular migration's control on neighboring 'developing' countries. These *borders' extraterritorialization* strategies visibly generate favorable results for various actors involved in the agreements. Specifically, Western countries can save considerable amounts of money by outsourcing the expensive

⁹ For a review concerning *extraterritorialization* policies implemented by EU countries, see: Multu & Leite: 2010; Basilen-Gaiche: 2015; Obi: 2010.

responsibility of operations concerning irregular migrants' surveillance, detention and deportation on third States. Simultaneously, the political elites of countries who accept the involvement in Western politics, openheartedly benefit from the magnanimous financial support appointed to these processes, while usually employing such economic subventions to increase both, the infrastructures necessary for the control of borders, and the monetary incomes of the State's political, institutional and bureaucratic apparatuses (Levy 2010: 94; Basilien-Gainche 2015: 104; Obi 2010: 137-140). Nevertheless, it is crucial to underline that the *extraterritorialization* policies originated for the protection and defense of Western frontiers, have contributed in shaping the contemporary landscape of exclusion and discrimination perpetually lived by unauthorized migrants, who have been consequently situated as the object of violent forms of policing and repression even before reaching their destination. Concurrently, for irregular migrants who are forced in crossing these *extraterritorialized borders* in 'peripheral countries', the probability of being victims of human rights' violations, detained in inhumane conditions or deported without the fulfillment of the required procedures, become alarmingly high (Basilien-Gainche 2015: 105; Jácome 2007: 28-29 Levy 2010: 109-115). Conclusively, it might be relevant to reflect on the concept of contemporary border proposed by Andrijasevic & Walters (2010: 2):

“Borders appear less as contiguous lines on the political map and more as zones, bands, intensities of control – and crucially, contestation.”

6.3) Landscapes of exclusion and exploitation

The analysis concerning important dynamics of *domination* within the trans-Mexican migratory context would benefit from the concept of *biopower* to examine the controlling and regularizing mechanisms implemented by States and dominant groups to uphold their status quo. According to Foucault (2003: 239-265), sovereignty allows States the hegemonic power and legitimate right of determining who *making live* and who *letting die* through the employment of specific *biopolitics* and coercive technologies that have been historically designed by States to maintain control over populations or determined social groups. Furthermore, the efficacy of *Biopolitics'* mechanisms resides in their intrinsic *power* of taking control over human beings' life while operating at the level of social relations between people and the environment in which they develop, or in the case of concern herein, migrate. A noteworthy supplement to Foucault's dichotomy is theorized by Rosas (2007: 82-83), who conceptualize a third category of those who must be institutionally subjugated by racialized

mechanisms of surveillance, policing, and control.

6.3.1) Discriminatory biopolitics and sociopolitical marginalization

Within the trans-Mexican migratory context, processes of *domination* and *Biopower* mechanisms manifest for example, in intense militarization and securitization of the US-Mexican territories and frontiers, that irrevocably force most Central-American migrants in embracing marginalized and perilous routes where they are constantly exposed to a variety of life-threatening risks and dangers. Accordingly, the rise in the number of *Border Patrols* securing the US southern frontier, compounding with the installation of numerous *official migration check-points* along the main official and unofficial trans-Mexican routes, compellingly deviate migrants' paths toward environments characterized by severe climatic conditions as for example the seemingly endless desert of Sonora, on the US-Mexican western frontier, or the Chiapanecan *Sierra Madre* and the vast tropical forest in the southern part of Mexico. The extreme natural environments characterizing these paths often represent a strenuous challenge that seriously difficult trans-Mexican migrants' journeys. Furthermore, these areas constitute the ecosystem of a variegated and sometimes lethal fauna, which persistently constitute an additional danger for migrants who are coerced in traveling by walk along these paths, as to avoid States' omnipresent surveillance. A visible effect of the US-Mexican border enforcement regime is thus manifested by the alarming number of unlawful migrants who lost their lives along the abovementioned marginalized routes as a consequence of dehydration and long-lasting exposure to fierce climatic conditions, amalgamating with several cases of deaths caused by the poisoning biting of deadly scorpions and snakes, or the degenerative consequences that might arise from mosquito-transmitted illness such as *Malaria* and *Dengue*, in case the sick person is prevented from getting prompt medical attention (Coutin 2005: 197-199; Jácome 2010: 9-10, 25; Eschbach; Hagan & Rodríguez 2003: 45-47; Ruiz 2003 6-7, 9).



Image 7: A view from La Bestia, of the empty land constituting the soaring desert of Sonora, in the north-western part of Mexico

A pivotal element, necessary for the regularization and controlling of international human mobility is represented by the antithetical dichotomy between citizens and non-citizens which determine the legitimate owning of sociopolitical rights to certain people in contrast with those who are legislatively denied such privileges. The *power* intrinsic within this dichotomy consists in the creation of social categories that are situated in opposition to 'normality' and excluded from the population's majority, hence consolidating the possibilities to implement specific policies aimed at obstructing or repressing these minority groups (Feldman & Ticktin 2010: 7-9; Fassin 2005: 375-376). Within the context of concern herein, trans-Mexican migrants systematically experience dynamics of exclusion and marginalization by for example, being denied the possibility to utilize regular means of transportation to undertake the journey, alongside with the impossibility of working lawfully in Mexico, as to earn some income to endure the travel expenses. Moreover, due to the fear of being accused in front of competent authorities of the INM (National Institute of Migration) and subsequently deported to their countries of origin, trans-Mexican migrants are also inhibited from reporting and denouncing abuses perpetrated against their basic human rights to the competent authorities, as well as looking for medical assistance in case of accidents along the way. Within the trans-Mexican context, the *transit* phase denotes a liminal time and space where migrants are legislatively deprived of their social and political rights, while simultaneously lacking from any kind of jurisdictional protection and thus, coerced to a condition of structural vulnerability that expose them as unprotected targets of illicit practices that violate their unalterable rights (Coutin 2005: 196; Vogt 2013: 764-765). As the protection of human beings' inviolable rights is a prerogative conceded only to citizens, trans-Mexican migrants represent an

alteration from the normal order of things. Therefore, as a consequence of their constructed sociopolitical condition of 'illegal aliens', trans-Mexican migrants are forced within a perpetual *state of exception* where law and right are boundlessly suspended and the perpetration of inhuman forms of violence against the migrants' community becomes ordinary and legitimate (Agamben 1998: 17-23; 2000: 19-21; 2005: 1-32).

6.3.2) Migrants' commodification and labour subordination

An illuminating analysis concerning certain dynamics of *domination* within the trans-Mexican migratory panorama has been conducted by Vogt (2013: 764-765), who examines this tangled context of irregular migration while framing it within the discriminatory logics of profit making, neoliberalism and global capitalism. Accordingly, the *biopolitics* and exclusionary mechanisms that intensify the vulnerability of trans-Mexican migrants are crating fertile ground to the consolidation of exploitative dynamics where migrants' labor, bodies and lives, easily become profitable objects of economic gain at the local and international levels. Illustratively, it might be noteworthy to reflect on the exorbitant incomes obtained by transnational organized crime groups through migrants' *commodification* and their coerced involvement in illicit activities such as forced labor and prostitution. Similarly, trans-Mexican migrants are also becoming the object of fruitful businesses based on illegal practices of extortion and kidnapping, as well as the national and international traffic of women, children and organs. (Johnson 2008: 10-11; Vogt 2013 765, 772-774; Meyer 2010: 3-4; Ruiz 2003: 15; Jácome 2006: 25, 32).

Importantly, it might be noteworthy to ponder on processes of migrants' *commodification* not only at the local level, but as economically profiting a wide range of international actors while being intricate within the logics and mechanisms of global capitalism. If on a side the flows of international remittances constitute the basis of various Central-American countries' economic income, on the other remittances conspicuously benefit certain multinational corporations operating within the sector of money transfer, as for example *Western Union* or *Elektra* (Coutin; 2005: 196; Vogt 2013:770, 775).

Further dynamics of *domination* developing from the uneven relationship between international migration and capitalism, become also visible in the numerous sociopolitical constraints that enchain most of those 'fortunate' migrants who survive the tribulation across Mexico and reach their final destination in the USA. Accordingly, having crossed the US political border represent for the majority of migrants the beginning of a new phase characterized by discrimination and exclusion that is tightly connected to their stigmatizing condition of 'illegal' and the quasi-impossibility to regularize their

migratory situation (Rosas 2007: 89; Coutin 2005: 200). The legal vulnerability coerced to trans-Mexican migrants consolidates their state of permanent precariousness while facilitating practices of labor subordination, exploitation and subjugation. Concomitantly, migrants' irregular condition profoundly favors the economic interests of US' corporations and private employers who can get easy access to a vast source of cheap workforce that is unlikely to complain for exploitative labor conditions, because of the imminent possibility of being denounced in front of the national authorities and consequently deported (De Genova 2013: 1184-1185; Fassin 2011: 6). Additionally, the condition of 'illegality' bereave migrants of their civil rights and the access to social benefits, as well as frequently depriving them of the possibilities to advance their careers or proceed with their studies, thus often inhibiting personal improvement and social mobility (Menjívar & Abrego 2012: 1183-1186; Coutin 2005: 201).

Conclusively, the intertwined relationship between the implementation of border enforcement policies and the welcomed acceptance of undocumented labor within the country, unveil the ambiguities hidden behind the US anti-immigration strategy. Whilst hindering the entrance of most migrants by employing severe *biopolitical* technologies and strategies that directly or indirectly threaten migrants' safety, the US continuously benefit from the existence of a conspicuous irregular workforce that is simultaneously exploitable in economic terms and denied of any kind of sociopolitical right (De Genova 2013: 1184-1185; Stuesse 2010: 27; Fassin 2011: 6). As to summarize the dynamics of *domination*, exclusion and subjugated inclusion, characterizing the trans-Mexican context, it might be useful to mention the illuminating paradox presented by Vogt (2013: 765):

“migrant vulnerabilities are produced at the intersection of regulatory politics of citizenship and the forces of capitalism their labor continuously serves. [...] That is, as undocumented migrants struggle to join a global labor economy, they become the life flesh of capital accumulation in global and local spaces”

6.4) Direct, structural and cultural violence

The final section of this chapter aspires to examine certain detrimental sociopolitical consequences impacting on the trans-Mexican migrants' community, which derive from the numerous processes and practices of *domination* illustrated along the previous sub-chapters. Importantly, this analysis would benefit from an instrumental theoretical framework, associated with the concept(s) of *violence*, as to elucidate the different manners in which *power* is exercised by dominant groups, and therefore affects

determined social categories. Additionally it might be relevant to reflect on the inextricable relationship between forms of *domination* that are institutionally imposed at the national level, vis-a-vis their consequential effects that manifest in the ways *violence* is experienced by individuals and communities at the local level (Nordstrom & Martin 1992 :5).

With the aim of better comprehending the alarming increase of violent practices perpetrated against trans-Mexican migrants and members of human rights' defense association (Jacques et al. 2008: 27-28; Vogt 2012: 274, 289; Vogt 2013: 776), the analysis would be supported by the *triangle of violence's theory* elaborated by Galtung (1990: 5), who design a typology of *violence* that attempt to define the different facets of this prominent sociopolitical phenomenon while elucidating their respective interconnections. Galtung utilizes the metaphor of an iceberg to illustrate how certain kinds of *direct violence* are easily visible as manifesting in violent actions that directly affect human beings' physical or mental integrity, representing hence only the iceberg's apex. Differently, the submersed parts of the iceberg hide several types of *structural* and *cultural violence* that silently generate annihilative consequences for the target social group, community or society, while not being facilely perceivable and thus contestable by the public opinion.

Numerous investigation concerning human rights' violations within the trans-Mexican migratory context, have already shed light on innumerable cases of *direct violence* perpetuated against members of the migrants' community by criminal organizations and institutional authorities alike. Illustratively, it might be relevant to remind the inhume practices of beatings, harassment, torture, extortion, kidnapping and murdering, that currently represent recurring menaces that trans-Mexican migrants might potentially encounter along their routes (Ruiz 2003: 15; Dudley 2012: 12-14; Jonhson 2008: 10-11).

Despite the importance of underling important forms of *direct violence* that systematically damage trans-Mexican migrants' safety and wellbeing, it might be also relevant to examine certain concealed form of violence that detrimentally affect migrants in indirect, but nonetheless agonizing and unbearable ways. Accordingly, Galtung (1969: 168-174; 1990: 4) identifies important kinds of *structural violence* that originate from political and economic structures whose intrinsic characteristics dictate the sociopolitical marginalization of a targeted social group. Concomitantly, this kind of *violence* operates through the implementation of norms and policies that direct or indirectly impose serious institutional hindrances in getting access to certain primary goods and services. Within the trans-Mexican context, detrimental forms of *structural violence* are made visible in the legislative

'illegalization' of trans-Mexican migrants who are thus being inhibited to seek for medical assistance or jurisdictional protection in case of need, as well as being subjected to the prohibition of lawfully get an employment, which systematically facilitate degenerative practices of labour exploitation. A further example illuminating an indirect kind of *structural violence* is depicted by the quasi-impossibility of successfully employ ordinary means of transportation to undertake the journey, that is due to the intense militarization of the main trans-Mexican routes and the derivative implementation of several immigration check-points. Consequently, the elevate probability of being detected and deported when traveling as ordinary passengers, indirectly force trans-Mexican migrants in using precarious transportation means that are not apt for human usage while constituting potential dangers for migrants' integrity (Vogt 2013 770-771; Jácome 2010: 4-5). As alternative options, migrants are limited to choose between traveling interminable distances by walk in precarious conditions and along impervious environments (Jácome 2010: 9-10, 25; Ruiz 2003 6-7, 9; Eschbach; Hagan & Rodríguez 2003: 45-47), or seeking the services of a professional smuggler, uncertain upon the accomplishment of the contracted obligations and potentially at risk of being robbed and abandoned, or delivered to organized crime groups (Ruiz 2003: 15; Vogt 2012: 168; Dudley 2012: 14-15). Significantly, one of the crucial consequences affecting the targets of *structural violence* is their structural subjection to *agency's* constraints (Farmer 2003: 40), as exemplified within the context of concern herein by the denial imposed on trans-Mexican migrants to get access to survival means, goods and services. Additionally, It might be relevant to consider that legislative and policy frameworks including unlawful migration as a threatening concern for the homeland *security*, consolidate irreversible processes that institutionally marginalize migrants and construct their sociopolitical vulnerability, while leaving them as easily exploitable individuals and unprotected from the numerous kind of abuses systematically perpetrated against their basic human rights (Vogt 2013: 745; Menjívar & Abrego 2012: 1386).

The perpetuation of inhuman forms of *direct violence*, as well as the institutional creation of precarious traveling and life conditions for trans-Mexican migrants, significantly benefit from the legitimizing effects developing from the perpetual protraction of insidious *cultural violence's* sociopolitical framework. According to Galtung (1990: 1-3, 6, 9), *cultural violence* operates through the formation and normalization of ideologies and dominant discourses that continuously denigrate and stigmatize determined social groups, while presenting them as imminent menaces in front of the civil society. Consequently, the effects of processes enacted by forms of *cultural violence* become visible in the social justification and legitimation of the imposition of *power* and the exertion of *violence* against a

targeted social group. Within the domain of unauthorized migration, as well as within the context of concern herein, a crucial manifestation of *cultural violence* is displaced by the perpetual sociopolitical construction of migrants 'illegality', which flourishes from criminalizing migratory laws and policies while successively consolidating with the persuasive anti-immigration propaganda loudly spread by mainstream media and right-wing political parties. Whilst the authoritative and sovereign *power* intrinsic within legislations serves to normalize unlawful migrants' stigmatization and discrimination (Menjívar & Abrego 2012: 1368), the constructed production of migrants' illegality benefits from the perpetuation of dominant discourses disseminated through intertwined and complex channels of language, text, rhetoric, image and symbol, that relentlessly impose the concept of 'illegality' as a regular framework of social normalcy (De Genova 2013: 1181). Moreover, 'illegality' represent the prerequisite for the perpetration of *direct* and *structural* forms of violence while concomitantly, it offers a socially acceptable reason for blaming migrants' of their own sufferance or death, constructing their misfortunes as the inevitable consequences of deciding to migrate without legal authorization (Coutin 2005: 200; Michalowski 2008: 8-9). *Cultural violence*, although not directly injuring migrants' bodies and minds, potentially affect them indirectly in a wide range of detrimental ways. Accordingly, the constant denigration and discrimination of unlawful migrants, compounded by their continual criminalization and dehumanization, potentially arise serious consequences in terms of systematic loss of self-esteem, self-depreciation, impotency, isolation, anxiety and paranoia (Nordstrom 1997: 166; Vogt 2013: 765, 770; Menjívar & Abrego 2012: 1368, 1383-1384).

6.4.1) Violence's intersectionality and viscerality

Two final considerations might assist in better depicting the panorama of *violence* contemporary characterizing the trans-Mexican context. The first point concerns the necessity of adopting an intersectional perspective¹⁰ as to avoid generalization upon the way violence is exerted against, or experienced by, different individuals vis-à-vis their age, gender, ethnicity, social condition or sexual orientation. Accordingly, all kind of violence mentioned above typically operate variably in relation to these parameters, which influence the probability of occurrence and intensity of determined violence's expressions (Rivas Castillo 2008: 19-21; Vogt 2013: 770). Illustratively, an act of *direct violence* such as sexual abuse is more likely to be perpetrated against women and girls, although cases affecting men

10 For a broader framework on the *Intersectional Feminist Theory*, see: Crenshaw 1991: 1241-1245; Shields 2008: 303-305; Abu-Lughod; 2012; Mørck 2006: 3

and children are not uncommon. Furthermore women concurrently fear to get pregnant from their abuser, thus being subjected to a mayor intensity of the risk. Similarly, there are differences in the way negative effects of *structural violence* affect diverse individuals as exemplified for instance, by the fact that being forced in riding freight trains or walking long distances along impervious paths, is less demanding for young people than the elders or women with infants. Analogously, imposed forms of *cultural violence* often construct and consolidate different stereotypes for men, who are typically stigmatized as members of criminal gangs, as well as for women, who are usually linked to the sexual market or labelled as bad mothers who cruelly abandon their children while leaving them behind, in their country of origin.

The second consideration concerns the target and impact area of violence. Importantly, violence does not affect its specific addressee only, as its annihilating and terrorizing effects viscerally spread amongst the members of the victim's community, thus rising collective imagery of violence, fear and sorrow (Nordstrom 1997: 88; Vogt 2013: 765). When violence is systematically protracted against a certain social group, a *culture of violence* is gradually developed by the narratives constantly shared amongst its members. Concomitantly, violence would become a central element of social reality and an unavoidable component of people's personal and community experience which hence goes far beyond the mere physical expression of violence (Scott 1990: xi; Nordstrom 1997: 123, 170-171).

Conclusively, it might be noteworthy to consider that *domination* often employs the tools of violence also to publicly demonstrate *power* and the consequences attending those who dare to challenge States' authority and sovereignty. As brilliantly elucidated by Nordstrom (1997:169):

“Bringing violent spectacles into the hearth of society and culture is intended to quash political will and social agency”

7) Resistance and border crossing: a conceptual and empirical perspective

The second chapter of this project would investigate important manifestations of *resistance* that are expressed in the ingenious strategies employed by trans-Mexican migrants to endure the severe forms of *domination* analyzed in the previous chapter, while reflecting upon the everyday struggles that are tirelessly embraced by these migrants with the aim of reaching their agonized objectives. The main reason for not limiting the investigation on the processes of *domination* characterizing the trans-Mexican migratory context, reflects a necessity to bring out to the surface and valorize the pivotal role

of migrants themselves in the development of their own stories, while highlighting the meaningful power intrinsic within the agency, creativity and willpower displayed by Central-Americans along this impervious migratory process.

An analysis which focuses solely on the themes of exploitation, labour subordination, marginalization and segmentation, would incur the risk of perpetuating discourses that construct the figure of migrants as pawns whose international movements are merely controlled by the unstable fluctuations of global capitalism and labour demand (Papadopoulus & Tsianos 2007: 9; Mezzadra 2004: 269-270). Similarly, a perspective that only consider processes of *domination*, expressions of violence or factors determining vulnerability, might lead to an interpretation of migrants as inert and passive victims that blindly drift within a humanitarian crisis. Subsequently, this view would legitimize a paternalist approach that present migrants as defenseless objects of humanitarianism, instead of primary actors and subject of right (Rivas Castillo 2008: 26; Mezzadra 2004: 267-268).

Alternatively, the approach emphasized within this work would underline the primary importance of migrants' *subjectivities* and their continuous interconnections that indirectly constitute a solid collectivity where its members constantly share informations, design strategies and protect each other, animated by the univocal desire of achieving a collectively shared objectives (Nordstrom 1997: 198-199). Hence, particular noteworthiness would be designated to the actions, behaviors, practices and rituals embraced by Central-Americans to pursue their desires (Geertz 1973: 17; Mezzadra 2011: 1). Concomitantly, central relevance would be appointed on migrants' capacity to examine the situations they experience, the territories they travel and the individuals they encounter along the journey, while acting accordingly and designing strategies aimed at avoiding or confronting the numerous risks characterizing the trans-Mexican panorama (Bigo 2010: 17-18; Long 2001: 16; Bakewell 2010: 6-7). Despite this approach meticulously focuses on migrants *agency*, *subjectivity* and *autonomy*, migration has not to be examined in dissociation from the economic, cultural and sociopolitical structures that characterize the journey. Contrarily, migrants' processes of *resistance* have to be analyzed as a creative manifestation of power 'from below', that tirelessly cope with these structures, within the context of Central-Americans' quotidian living conditions as 'illegal migrants'. As underlined by Rivas Castillo (2008: 10, 27-29), migrants uninterruptedly increase their knowledge upon these structures, while ceaselessly mediating, negotiating, enduring or sometimes making an useful employment, of these external influences. Simultaneously, migrants acquire and process information upon the context surrounding them, attempting subsequently to enable ambits of action within structures, moved by the

purpose of bypassing obstacles or taking advantage of favorable opportunities.

Importantly, whilst trans-Mexican migrants' agencies, individualities and subjectivities represent a pivotal element to be examined, it would also be relevant to consider them from a perspective that highlight the consolidation of a specific social group and transnational community whose members might be not nationally or ethnically affiliated, but still, they are united by a similar path toward the realization of shared objectives (Besserer 1999: 6-7; Mezzadra 2011 :16). Furthermore, the systematic exertion of systematic practices of *domination* against a certain community, constitute the basis for the creation of vital solidarity bonds and networks of reciprocal assistance that substantially support the community's members physically and emotionally, during their everyday acts and processes of *resistance* (Scott 1990: 128-134; Nordstrom 1997: 145-147; Nordstrom & Martin 1992: 1-4; Cunningham 2010: 9). Along the hazardous trans-Mexican routes, migrants from different countries continuously re-invent the concept of political community by sharing their knowledge, creating strategies collectively and protecting each other from the numerous menaces characterizing the journey (Papadopoulus & Tsianos 2007: 6; Rivas Castillo 2008: 30). Significantly, the approach employed within this paper would regard the trans-Mexican migrants' community as a collective political subject and an important social movement originated in response to States' control and repression. Far from considering irregular migrants as 'rebels' or 'revolutionary groups', this project would instead examine and valorize the quotidian acts of dissidence and contestation manifested within the tireless struggles and practices of *resistance* embraced by trans-Mexican migrants (Papadopoulus, Stephenson & Tsianos 2008: 202-203; Mezzadra 2011: 1-3, 8; Mezzadra: 2004: 4). Whilst this analysis would not concentrate primarily on forms of direct contestation and *open resistance* such as public demonstrations, protest marches and mass gatherings, that are nonetheless a vital feature of migrants' struggles, particular attention would be instead appointed to acts of *resistance* that primarily pursue the satisfaction of survival needs, while attempting to evade any immediate confrontation with the dominant group. These *everyday forms of resistance* cover a pivotal function in ameliorating the oppressed group's social conditions and are expressed in the everyday struggles embraced to endure the severe processes of domination imposed by States, amalgamating with the individual and collective strategies designed and put into action to reach a common purpose (Scott 1986: 86-94).

Within the sphere of unauthorized migration, it might be relevant to consider 'Illegal' migrants' continuous opposition and challenge to states' impositions, which manifest in the exertion of civil rights that are legislatively defined as a privilege reserved to 'legal' citizens. Specifically, if on a side migrants

attempt to be imperceptible and invisible in front of public authorities, on the other they become a constitutive element of the territories they are illegally transiting through or temporarily inhabiting, by for example working, assembling peacefully, moving 'freely' within national territories or crossing international borders (Vogt 2013: 196-197; Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 5; Mezzadra 2011: 15). Irregular migrants who find themselves on the perilous routes that cross the Mexican territory become part of a social movement where all members fight and resist together, united by the analogous subjection to severe forms of *domination*, but also affiliated by univocal dreams¹¹. *Resistance* give birth to alliances which have no established name, nor imposed rules, nor hierarchies. The *collective action* of the uncountable number of migrants who tirelessly oppose the border enforcement and anti-immigration regimes imposed by States', thus represents a powerful challenge to their sovereign authority, while constituting a non-violent, destabilizing and tenacious form of *resistance* (Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 9; Rosas 2007: 99; Nordstrom 1997: 143-144).

7.1) Mobility tactics

The analysis concerning important tactics of mobility within this context of unauthorized migration, attempts to get a better understanding of the ingenious and creative strategies designed and embraced by Central-American migrants with the aim of crossing the Mexican territory and the US' border, while trying to avoid, elude or bypass, the numerous and threatening menaces characterizing the journey. The analysis would consider relevant aspects detected through participatory observation and the direct testimonies narrated by migrants, on a year's ethnographic fieldwork carried out along the main trans-Mexican routes crossing the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz, Distrito Federal, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California. Hence, this approach would examine the differences in risks and opportunities emerging in diverse territories, appointing particular attention to the dynamics characterizing the proximities of the Mexican southern and northern borders, while considering relevant means of transportation utilized by trans-Mexican migrants. Importantly, the individual and collective strategies employed to cross dangerous territories and highly militarized frontiers would be empirically and theoretically analyzed herein, as representing crucial forms of *resistance* that illuminatingly display migrants' remarkable creativity, cleverness, solidarity, agency and willpower.

11 Importantly, within the whole paper the utilization of the words desires, objectives or dreams should not be understood as the evidence of the stereotypes that depict trans-Mexican migrants as all in desperate search of the *American Dream*. Contrarily, the reasons for migrating are multiple and frequently connected to contexts of displacement due to personal persecution, as well as the unendurable conditions of economic hardship dominating in the countries of origin.

The most prominent approaches adopted by Central-American migrants to cross the Mexican territory¹² consist in 'riding' the numerous cargo trains whose railway system connect the entire longitude of Mexico. Alternatively, migrants attempt to employ public buses while trying to pass unperceived as common Mexican travelers. Finally, migrants who possess the necessary networks and economic resource, often opt for the service of a professional *coyote*, a smuggler who transport migrants illegally in private mean of transportation. Additionally, Along various sections of the trans-Mexican routes, migrants are coerced in climbing imposing mountains, crossing tumultuous rivers and walking endless routes in marginalized zones and under the severe influence of harsh climatic conditions. Accordingly, all these 'traveling methods' are characterized by numerous variables that determine potential dangers or advantageous possibilities for trans-Mexican migrants, as would be explored along the whole extension of this chapter.



Image 8: Map of the Mexican railway network

6.1.1) Walking marginalized routes

¹² Second corridors as for example maritime routes would not be examined within this paper. For further details see: Casillas 2006: 25-26, 32-33

The following section would illustratively explore the strategies employed by numerous Central-American migrants to endure the life-threatening jeopardies scattered along the western side of the Mexican southern frontier, an area where in 2006 hurricane *Stan* destroyed various section of the old railroad transited by the freight train commonly employed by a conspicuous number of migrants at the beginning of the journey across Mexican soil. As the correct functioning and availability of this railway's section was reestablished in April 2014, Central-American migrants who could not afford the service of a *coyote*, and those who preferred to avoid the risk of being intercepted while traveling by bus, had no alternative choice but to walk approximately three hundred kilometers in unsafe and unprotected conditions, as to reach the Chiapanecan city of Arriaga, where the train would begin its northward course. Starting from the Guatemalan border itself, it might be noteworthy to consider that it frequently constitutes an hazardous obstacle, as demarcated by the *Suchiate* river which divides the bordering city of Tecún Uman from Ciudad Hidalgo. Here, just few hundred meters from the official migration check-case, a conspicuous number of drafts originated by wood and truck-tyres, constantly allows smuggler the unauthorized transit of goods, drugs, and migrants, that is protracted uninterrupted across the two countries. Certain migrants can afford the smuggler fee, but others who started their journey without economic resources, or those who have been previously mugged in Guatemala, often opt to challenge the river's impervious stream by swimming across the watercourse although the difficulty of the task and the risk of drowning. Within this first phase of the journey across Mexico, numerous migrants reported the cruciality of taking certain necessary precautions as for example avoiding long stays on the Mexican side of the river. Accordingly, while crossing the river migrants are easily detectable and thus, they frequently become the favored target of illicit practices perpetrated by members of criminal gangs or institutional authorities alike. A fundamental tactic contained in various testimonies, consists in being as invisible, imperceptible and fast as possible. Specifically, due to the thorny character of this frontier area, migrants prefer to avoid conversation with unknown people, while their minds and legs are quickly directed to the closest city where a shelter for migrants is located: Tapachula, located approximately thirty kilometers from the Guatemalan border.

An illuminating account of this area is reported by Jazmín, a twenty-seven year old, trans-gender migrant from Guatemala who has already embarked on the trans-Mexican journey nine times, acquiring a wide and clever experience concerning different routes that cross the longitude of the Mexican territory. Within a section of the autobiographic story that Jazmín decided to share and give me as a present, Jazmín recounts of her first migratory experience across Mexico, describing the hazardous

stretch walked in ten days from Tapachula to Arriaga. Along this route, Jazmín experienced for the first time the cruelty of the trans-Mexican journey, being robbed in various occasions by criminals, while living extreme hardships in terms of tiredness, sleepiness, hanger and thirst. Whilst expressing her emotions, fears, and expectations upon this arduous itinerary, Jazmín narrates about relevant strategies adopted to protect herself and proceed on her journey:

“ [After escaping during a night from a criminal assault, together with other five migrants from Central America] *After about an hour hidden, as we hadn't seen them around [criminals], we went back to the pathway and we had to cross a field by walking on our knees and hand palms. This was for us a security measure just in case our robbers were still looking for us. Fortunately when we went back to the railroad, there were no dangerous people anymore. We followed on our path, using the freight train's railroad as a guide toward our destination. [...] In this village [Matatepec, Chiapas], we met an other group of six migrants, who like us were looking for the path toward the USA. We agreed to proceed on our path [together] and we decided to organize in this way: each of us walked on a distance of about six meters from the other, and this was like a security measure so that thieves could not easily surround us. [...] With this security measure, if part of the group was assaulted, the other members had the possibility to get stones and poles to help those who have been assaulted by these unhappy persons. We went on with our walk, always following the railroad as a guide...*”

(from Jazmín's autobiography. Please, for more informations see Appendix, p. 85)

From this story, it is possible to extrapolate various circumstances frequently experienced by trans-Mexican migrants along these routes, amalgamating with important skills necessary for enduring or bypassing the threatening dangers of the journey. Of fundamental importance, are the ability to recognize potential menaces while being constantly awaken, alert and ready to run as fast as possible to escape perils. Being ready to hide oneself in thick and spiky bushes, waiting patiently till danger is no longer present. Becoming as imperceptible and invisible as possible, then, becoming brave enough to proceed along your path. Another interesting section of this story, remarks the ambivalent meaning and symbolism that railroads represents for numerous migrants: whilst having become famous for the abundant threatens hidden on their surroundings, railroads also represent a precise path toward the desired destination, a “*guide*” that orients migrants throughout unknown territories and lead them steps further toward the realization of their dreams. A third point of interest within this narration is expressed by the cruciality of not traveling alone, or even better, enduring the journey within a solid and trustful

group of individuals who share a common objective and protect each other against external threats. The necessity to gather and proceed along the route as part of a group, manifest the importance of *collectivity* and *collective action* as instrumental tools of *resistance*, that are employed to reduce external risks while incrementing the possibilities of a successful journey. Moreover, this account do not only highlight the functional paper of *collectivity*, but it also makes visible an essential human value commonly shared by numerous migrants who travel these perilous routes: *solidarity*. Accordingly, the last strategy outlined by Jazmín within this story, indirectly display migrants' endeavor in protecting each other by creating a tactic that permit mutual rescue and defense in case of problems, contrarily to the egoistic possibility of fleeing away and leaving other group's members in the hand of the enemy. The anthropological theories concerning solidarity bonds, collective strategies and mutual assistance's networks presented in the introductory chapter, might be relevant to better comprehend the ideas, behaviors and interactions expressed by the trans-Mexican migrants traveling with Jazmin along the Chiapanecan route that goes to Arriaga (Nordstrom 1997: 145-147; Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 6; Rivas Castillo 2008: 30).

7.1.2) Riding *la Bestia*

As previously mentioned, one of the most prominent strategies employed by trans-Mexican migrants to reach the Mexican northern frontier, is to 'ride' the numerous cargo trains whose railroads connect the whole longitude of Mexico. These old and precarious trains that every year allow a conspicuous number of Central-Americans the transit along Mexican territory, have become popular amongst migrants with the univocal names of *la Bestia* (the Beast) or *el Tren de la Muerte* (the Train of Death). According to migrants' narratives, *la Bestia* is fierce, indomitable, uncontrollable, dangerous and lethal. Its metallic gearwheels and mechanism already took the lives of too many migrants who failed in an attempt to board the train while it was still running excessively fast, or those who fell between the wagons, exhausted by tiredness and sleepiness. The time of departure of these cargo trains is irregular and uncertain. In the surrounding of the numerous railway stations visited and inhabited during the fieldwork, strategical places that provide refuge and shelter from sun and rain, literally become the 'home' of various groups of migrants who have few other possibility but to live as indigents on the railroad, patiently waiting for the train's whistle that announce the anxiously desired moment of departure. Numerous migrants complain about the trains' irregular schedules, being stuck in marginalized abandoned railway stations for days or even weeks, while waiting for the unpredictable

moment when *la Bestia* would take off. For migrants who utilize *la Bestia* as a mean of transportation, the migratory process across Mexico usually have a duration between two and four months in average, as it is constantly interrupted by the compelling necessity of getting down the train to look for respite, food and water, in the close villages. Similarly, these trains are frequently arrested for deep inspections by institutional authorities competent with migratory matters, as well as assaulted by members of transnational organized crime groups who menace with fire weapons and machetes, all those migrants' who attempt to resist these violent practices of extortion. As these life-threatening possibilities constitute a reality to keep firmly within one's mind, migrants have to be ready to escape promptly in order to save their lives, by jumping down the train when it is still running and trying to avoid serious injuries caused by a violent fall. On board of these trains, migrants travel extremely long, often uninterrupted routes in wagons which contain or previously contained toxic materials, glass or metals, whose residuals are constantly blowed by these steadfast passengers, due to the wind and the movement of the train itself. Concomitantly, migrants have to endure the harsh and extreme climatic conditions characterizing the different ecosystems of a country which is as huge as Mexico, while remaining always awaken and alert for trees' branches that might thrown the travelers down the train. Despite the quasi-coercion of employing *la Bestia* as a mean of transportation might be considered as a form of *structural violence* (Galtung 1969: 168-174; 1990: 4) that situates trans-Mexican migrants in a position of extreme incertitude and vulnerability, it might be relevant to examine the tactics employed by these migrants to resist against this indirect form of violence, as for example organizing strategies and taking precautions aimed at reducing the possibilities of contretemps and accidents. Accordingly, a pertinent account concerning this precarious mean of transportation would allow better understand the way wherein migrants cope with the numerous dangers implied with its utilization. The following story was reported by Julián, a thirty-two year old Honduran at his third attempt to reach the US, who was met in April 2015 next to the railway station of Tepic, Nayarit. Whilst generously offering his company and proposing reciprocal assistance for the twelve hours journey on the roof-top of the cargo train which would bring us to Mazatlán, Sinaloa, Julián narrates of a previous experience on *la Bestia*:

“ Two years ago I was in Puerto Peñasco [Sonora] with a Nica [a person from Nicaragua] that I had met on the railroads few weeks before. We've been waiting in that horrible station for nine interminable days as that damned train wasn't transiting... I've no idea of the reason for that. Finally we heard the train's whistle... It was like a beautiful melody to my ears, but... our happiness finished when we saw that the train wasn't arresting. It was only slowing down to cross

the village. We had no idea about what to do. We wanted to wait for a minor speed, but if we missed the opportunity to get on, who knows when another train would had passed again. So yeah... we decided to hazard while it was still moving... I tried to control my nerves, to focalize on the train's rhythms, its spaces, its speed... then, when the exact moment arrived, I resorted to all my legs' agility, so that the jump could reach the objective and my feet wouldn't go under the train... in the middle of its mortal wheels. With a last effort of my shoulders I was on, completely terrorized but still with all my limbs, gracias a Dios [thank God]. As it was already night and I was exhausted, I hoped I could rest a bit while my compañero [comrade] would take the first turn of guard, remaining alert for any problem. It wasn't possible! One hour and a half later the train stopped and we heard someone shouting from outside – Andale Cabrones! [come on bastards!], this train won't go any further, take the other one before it leaves!!! - We went down crazily and ran toward another train that was just whistling in that moment. We had no idea of where we were and what was expecting us on the other train. But you know what?! We were happy... we were still alive and still together... and we were also a step further on our routes. Hermanos [My brother, talking to my husband and me], in this journey lots of horrible things happen, we all know it... It's hard...tiring... and sometimes one would desist and going back home... but one has to be strong and struggle incessantly. If you want to realize your dreams, you have to fight for them! ”

(Julián, April 2015, Tepic, Nayarit, Please see Appendix p.87)

Julián's story might assist in illuminating general tendencies typically followed by most trans-Mexican migrants vis-a-vis the employment of *la Bestia* as a strategy to cross Mexico. A primary point of interest extrapolated from Julián's narration, brings the concepts of *solidarity* and *collectivity* back on the scene, by emphasizing the profound meaning and vital importance of traveling with someone you can genuinely trust on. The importance of helping and assisting each other in unfriendly environments during the interminable periods of 'stasis' when the required train does not run, as well as the mutual protection exhibited on top of *la Bestia*, manifest the relevance of solidarity bonds consolidated along the routes of this impervious migratory process (Scott 1990: 128-134; Cunningham 2010: 9; Nordstrom 1997: 145-147; Nordstrom & Martin 1992: 1-4). Additionally, as indirectly underlined by Julián, the process of waiting, boarding and riding *la Bestia*, compellingly requires the necessary capacity and ability to avoid serious accidents. From Julián's story and the abundant narratives heard from Central-American migrants along the trans-Mexican routes, it is possible to report fundamental skills that are necessary to endure the journey on *la Bestia*. Few examples are constituted by patience, courage, alertness, cleverness, promptness, physical and mental dexterity. Significantly, these talents are not

generally defined as only required to ride *la Bestia*, but as primary skills, essential to endure the numerous hardships characterizing the tribulation across Mexico. Inherently, it might be relevant to ponder on the fact that Julián is a young person on a good physical shape. In contexts analogous to the one contained in his narration, numerous individuals could not jump on the moving train successfully due for instance, to their age or physical condition, having hence to find alternative strategies as for example, employing a different mean of transportation or waiting for a train that arrests its course completely. Hence, these disparities might provide evidences to the proposals formulated by Vogt (2013: 770) and Rivas Castillo (2008: 19-21), concerning differences in the ways *violence* is experienced by diverse persons and in different contexts vis-a-vis certain characteristics such as gender, age or ethnicity, amongst other parameters. Interestingly, it might be noteworthy to embrace a collateral examination of the differences in the ways *resistance* is embraced by diverse people in relation to these same parameters.¹³



Image 9: Attempting to board the train moving on high speed

For Julián, as well as for numerous trans-Mexican migrants, *la Bestia* is not only a freight train in its physical expression. It represents instead a fundamental element of Central-Americans' migratory process and a symbol that is deeply charged of profound and ambivalent meanings. According to migrants narratives, *la Bestia* is “damned”, “miserable” and “lethal”, due to the extreme dangers that its utilization involves. Nevertheless, for numerous migrants *la Bestia* also represents a pathway, and sometimes the only available possibility to cross long distances while attempting to avoid interception, detention

and deportation. Simultaneously, the train's whistling symbolize for many migrants the opportunity to proceed on their journey, and the beginning of a new stage toward the realization of their dreams. Significantly, if on a side migrants are aware of the journey's extreme dangerousness, on the other they restlessly resort to all they strengths as to endure the quotidian struggles characterizing their hard migratory process.



Image 10: *La Bestia* departing from Arriaga, Chiapas, with around fifty migrants on board. A warrant on the tank wagon recites “Ammonium Nitrate: Inhalation Danger”

¹³ Further examples are proposed in the successive sub-chapters.



Image 11: A group of migrants who walked various kilometers from the village of Tenosique, Tabasco, to board La Bestia while avoiding the numerous institutional razzia increasingly performed by migratory agents, army, federal and local police in the village's railway station

As a conclusive point, it might be relevant to conceptualize the abovementioned stories and their relative contexts, within a broader theoretical framework composed by the notions of *domination* and *resistance*. Within the scenarios analyzed above, severe forms of *domination* manifest visibly in the legislative impediments that coerce an uncountable number of people in traveling clandestinely along marginalized routes and using precarious means of transportation, while also being exposed to systematic and outrageous violations against their basic human rights. Importantly, on the other side of the scene trans-Mexican migrants are not inertly observing the spectacle of their

humanitarian crisis. Contrarily, in front of this alarming panorama most migrants respond and oppose *domination* by demonstrating a powerful *agency* (Long 2001: 16; Bigo 2010: 17-18; Mezzadra 2011: 1-4; Bakewell 2010: 6-7) which manifests in the exceptional determination and tenacity that are expressed in the everyday practices of *resistance* undertaken by trans-Mexican migrants along these impervious routes. The silent and incessant processes of *resistance* embraced by Central-American migrants, thus become visible in the strong solidarity bonds flourishing along the trans-Mexican routes, which constantly nourish and consolidate the formation of a solid community composed by members of different nationalities, who determinately support and protect each other for the realization of a commonly shared objective. Furthermore, amongst members of the trans-Mexican migrants community, a conspicuous flow of knowledge, warnings, informations and strategies, is in constant circulation, leading to the creation of a collectively shared awareness which shape within this migratory context, a *culture of violence and survival* (Nordstrom 122-123, 204-208). Moreover, by collectively originating, sharing and employing ingenious strategies aimed at resisting the US-Mexican anti-immigration and border enforcement regimes, trans-Mexican migrants represent a pacific, undermining and threatening challenge to States' sovereign authority while concomitantly, their moving unauthorizedly across territories and borders indirectly express an univocal contestation to the inequalities imposed by the US-Mexican legislative and policy frameworks.

7.2) Survival strategies

The analysis concerning vital strategies of survival within the trans-Mexican migratory context, would embrace an exploration of the individual and collective tactics employed in diverse contexts by Central-Americans, in an attempt to avoid deportation to the country of origin on a side, and subjection to violations of their human rights, on the other. Additionally, this sub-chapter aspires to gain a better understanding of the coping strategies employed by trans-Mexican migrants to procure the basic means for the satisfaction of their most urgent needs and survival necessities.

7.2.1) Traveling by bus: the challenges of hiding one's roots

As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, various 'categories' of migrants are denied the possibility to travel on *la Bestia* because of diverse variables as for example traveling with infants, being physically disabled, or not possessing the required physical condition. Analogously, numerous migrants simply refuse to utilize cargo trains because of the imminent and life-threatening dangers involved in their employment. Consequently, a relevant average of these individuals prefer to conceive ingenious strategies in an attempt to cross Mexico by traveling on public buses. Importantly, as analyzed in the *domination* chapter, the Mexican territory has increasingly experienced an extensive militarization which leads to the systematic inspection of public means of transportation for part of institutional authorities that routinely arrest and inspect the buses, that from south to north cross the extensive longitude of Mexico. Consequently, irregular migrants who travel by bus need to hide their identities carefully, while attempting to pass unperceived in front of public authorities. According to the abundant narratives shared by numerous trans-Mexican migrants met during the fieldwork, to travel successfully by bus requires a meticulous planning and preparation, as exemplified by the following instances. Firstly, Whilst on the trans-Mexican routes most Central-American migrants frequently dress old, dirty and casual clothes, accompanied by a ruined backpack and a baseball hat to protect their heads from the sun, when deciding to disguisedly travel by bus, migrants resort to an extraordinary *inventive* and *creativity* in designing credible camouflages that would hide their real origins. Furthermore, most shelters for migrants receive donations in clothes from the local communities, providing trans-Mexican migrants the opportunity in getting access to a variegate set of clothes, that are useful to shape their 'masks'. Concomitantly, shelters' volunteers usually give important suggestions on the best ways to disguise and pass unperceived, when traveling by bus.



Image 12: The Roperia of La72 where migrants have access to a variegated provision of clothes

Illustratively, numerous migrants opt for utilizing fine clothes or wearing formal dresses, after showering and shaving fastidiously as to be 'elegantly prepared' for the journey. Other migrants prefer to dress work uniforms or outfits used by employees of publicly recognized Mexican private enterprises or public institutions. Adolescents and teenagers frequently wear local school uniforms while possibly traveling with an empty laptop case and an opened book in front of their eyes. Various women attempt to garner the traditional clothes typically used by working-class Mexicans or indigenous people, while trying to imitate their attires, hairstyles and utilize similar accessories. Similarly, in the Northern part of the country various male migrants reproduce the local 'cow-boy style', composed by boots, jeans, shirt and *Texana* hat. Following this trend, it might be possible to propose innumerable other examples of tactics, proudly described by trans-Mexican migrants. Nevertheless, it might be noteworthy to ponder on the possibility of employing an *intersectional* perspective by reflecting on the way personal characteristics influence the structuring of individual strategies, as revealed for example by the peculiar tactics employed by women and adolescents in the abovementioned accounts. On the contrary, certain ethnic characteristics might preclude or at least limit the utilization of buses as exemplified for instance, by the fact that Mexico has a low average of population with African ascendance, thus making Afroamerican migrants suspicious, in the eyes of public authorities.

Beyond the personal appearance, various migrants employ other 'preventive' tactics as for example remaining calm and avoiding to directly address the gaze towards agents, traveling within a group of Mexicans to pass unnoticed, or pretending to sleep. Recurrently, migrants are assisted by the solidary

and compassionate support offered by other Mexican passengers who would lie in front of authorities as to defend the migrant's safety. An example is offered by the personal story of Paulina, a 37 year old, middle-class lady from Santa Ana, El Salvador, who narrates of an old Mexican who protected her during the inspection of a bus that was traveling from Mexico City to Monterrey, Nuevo León. Paulina cheerfully recounts that when the bus was approaching an imposing immigration check-point, the old man who detected her anxiety and promptly understood that she was not Mexican, although she was wearing local clothes as for example a *rebozo*¹⁴. Subsequently, the old man reassured Paulina while whispering that she had to remain calm and pretend to sleep. When the INM agent (National Institute of Migration) reached their seats and asked for their identifications, the old man punctually showed his local driving license while resolutely asking the agent to speak lower as his wife had finally managed to sleep and they were coming from an horrible and interminable journey. The agent wished the man a nice journey and proceed with the identification of other 'suspicious' passengers. The *solidarity* of the old man, thus relevantly supported Paulina's process of *resistance*, while her accurate camouflage provided further evidences that assisted in avoiding any further questions from the INM agent.¹⁵

As the abovementioned 'preventive' tactics are now always successful, Central-American migrants need to be prepared for extensive and tricky interrogations aimed at discovering whether the person is actually a Mexican citizen or not. According to numerous testimonies, when interrogated most migrants attempt to reproduce Mexican patios and regionalisms, while also utilize words and expressions borrowed from local slangs, that are not commonly employed in Central America. Significantly, a prominent average of the migrants met, emphasize the importance of remaining as relaxed, serene and unperturbed as possible, when dealing with institutional authorities. Additionally, various migrants underline the cruciality of acquiring a substantial and comprehensive knowledge of a determined city and state in Mexico, which would be presented to the migratory agents who systematically undertake routinary inquiries upon the suspected person's provenience, that are typically followed by various tricky questions about that particular city or state. Similarly, an extensive acquittance of basic notions concerning the Mexican Union is defined by most migrants as an instrumental tool that is necessary to overcome possible institutional interrogations. Few example of these general notions that are commonly employed by migratory agents to scrutinize the veracity of people's stories, are related to the national anthem, geography, politics and culture. Ultimately, these

14 A typical scarf of big dimension, commonly utilized by Mexican women to bear their children or other heavy objects. It is also frequently used as a normal accessory by numerous Mexicans of all age.

15 For more informations about Paulina's story, please see Appendix p.90

migrants have to conceive a credible story concerning their journeys' destination and purpose, while appearing natural, trustworthy, resolute and secure of themselves, in front of the public authorities. For unauthorized migrants, as well as for numerous other subordinate groups, to be imperceptible, indiscernible and undetectable, is one of the most effective strategies employed during processes of *resistance*, to endure the restrictive politics of identification, repression and deportation increasingly imposed by States (Scott 1990: 133-134; Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tsianos 2008: 74-79; Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 4-6). Similarly, to hide one's identity and nationality is defined by most trans-Mexican migrants as a fundamental precaution that is necessary not only when traveling by bus, but generally in numerous contexts within their migratory process, due to the widespread presence of spies and informants that might transmit compromising data about migrants' locations and plans, to criminal groups or institutional authorities. Whilst the process of migrating unauthorizedly frequently requires profound and demanding transformations of migrants' form of appearance, aesthetics, way of dressing, accents, linguistic registers, biographies and culture (Coutin 2005: 198), the weapon of imperceptibility is one the most powerful means employed by numerous trans-Mexican migrants to reach their objectives. Importantly, during the process of migrating, Central-Americans do not 'abandon' their own culture by originating a new one for the purposes of the journey. Contrarily, culture and identity are deeply intricate within the person's self, being constituted by the values, habits, traditions and rituals that gradually shape the very essence of personal *being*, along the whole development of life (Geertz 1973: 44; Malinowsky 1944: 15-16). Nevertheless, If on a side culture cannot be eradicated or forgotten, on the other it can be hidden, accommodated, manipulated, transformed and reconstructed temporarily and often with strenuous efforts, with the aim of achieving specific purposes or surviving in hostile and dangerous contexts (Sánchez Alvarez 2013: 18-19). Additionally, as proposed by Papadopoulos & Tisanos (2007: 3-6), unauthorized migrants attempt to escape the severe forms of *domination* they are subjected to, by employing political practices based on the strategy of *becoming* and “reconstitute themselves in the course of participating and changing the conditions of their material corporal existence” (Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tisanos 2008: 81). Within the accounts reported up to this points, as well as in numerous other contexts along the trans-Mexican routes, migrants employ the sometimes arduous strategy of *becoming* something different from what they previously were, in a continuous effort aimed at moving further toward realizing their scopes. Illustratively, during their journeys trans-Mexican migrants might transform themselves by *becoming* fishes that swim across and against the rivers' stream; *becoming* quarries that shrewdly flee

from their predators; *becoming* imperceptible and identical trees in the middle of a forest; *becoming* camels who endure several days walking across the desert; *becoming* indigents who inhabit abandoned railway stations; *becoming* ordinary Mexican citizens who are traveling for work or to visit family; *becoming* knights who employ their *agency* to fight tirelessly for that realization of their dreams. Ergo, trans-Mexican migrants' strategies of *becoming* would be considered herein, as a fundamental part of their strenuous struggles and a visible expression of their tenacious processes of *resistance*.

7.2.2) Recognizing friends and evading enemies

Regardless of whether trans-Mexican migrants decide to travel by employing public means of transportation or to ride *la Bestia*, the embracement of both strategies compellingly requires the economic means necessary to cover survival needs, and in the case of those migrants who travel by bus, also the high cost of tickets. Due to the situation of economic hardship usually characterizing the journey of most Central-American migrants and the not infrequent subjection to practice of extortion and robbery, a strategy that is commonly employed to reduce 'travel expenses' and find refuge consists in resorting to the numerous shelter for migrants scattered along the main trans-Mexican routes.¹⁶ These non-governmental institutions fulfill a pivotal humanitarian, social and political work, by giving relief to trans-Mexican migrants through the provision of a safe and protected place to respite and gather, as well as offering a wide range of free services as for example lodging, nourishment, clothes supplying, medical attention and legal assistance. Conceptualizing the role played by shelters for migrants within the theory proposed by Archer (2010: 265), it might be possible to consider these organizations as *corporate agents*, whose endeavor and function consist in supporting and assisting trans-Mexican migrants along the quotidian processes of *resistance* embraced by these determinate *primary agents*. Whilst highlighting the pivotal paper covered by shelters, it might also be relevant to pinpoint that not in all villages a shelter for migrants is present, while where present, various of these institutions offer their services for a maximum of three days to each migrant. In addition, numerous migrants are denied the entrance within shelters for a variety of possible reasons, as for example being traveling with a *coyote*, being alcoholic or drug-addicted. Furthermore, few Christian sects which run shelters do not allow entrance to trans-gender individuals and persons whose tattoos are potentially connected to criminal groups. Moreover, as the areas proximate to numerous shelters have become increasingly dangerous due to the frequent presence of criminals and migratory agents, various migrants opt for

16 For more informations about shelters for migrants, their mission, role, and modus operandi see: Vogt 2013: 766; Coutin 2001: 56; Rivas Castillo 2008: 36

avoiding shelters' protection, while preferring to seek refuge in the environment surrounding railway stations and wait for the departure of *la Bestia* directly there. Hence, the sociopolitical marginalization enchainning trans-Mexican migrants, *de facto* compel a conspicuous number of persons to experience the ordinary life of an indigent, due to the frequent necessity of 'inhabiting' the routes that migrants are traveling through, while eating whatever possible thing offered by people's charity and being exposed to the severity of harsh climatic conditions. According to migrants' testimonies, to live in the street is unquestionably not an easy task, due to the extreme dangerousness of marginalized areas as is the case of the abandoned railway stations currently transited by cargo trains. Numerous migrants underline the importance of seeking refuge in places where they would not be easily detectable, but which do not constitute an obstructive 'trap' or a dead-end street. Analogously, most migrants declare that a vital attribute required to survive in the street, consists in having the ability to quickly identify the intentions of all people encountered along the way. Specifically, migrants need to detect as fast as possible whether a certain person's attitude express confidence and friendliness, or if it hides hostility and potentially harmful intentions. To have meticulous and vigilant *eyes* is thus a key skill employed to identify persons that might be helpful and open advantageous opportunities as for example mutual support and protection, or knowledge and strategies sharing. Similarly, numerous migrants emphasize the importance of recognizing and evade those people who might be interested in taking advantage of the vulnerability imposed by the sociopolitical condition of 'illegality'. This important awareness that was mentioned by innumerable migrants along the fieldwork, might be theoretically contextualized using the words of Nordstrom (1997: 88), who suggests that in contexts of risk, people negotiate survival by

“paying strict attention to the non-discursive nuances of behavior and action of those around them in order to determine when danger is approaching, who is trustworthy, and how to respond”.

7.2.3) Survival skills and coping strategies

An interesting point relates to the ingenious and creative strategies employed by a great number of trans-Mexican migrants, with the aim of achieving the basic means, necessary for the satisfaction of their survival needs. Amongst the most employed tactics, it might be relevant to remember the widespread practice of *charoleaer* (slang for begging) in the cross-roads or street-lights surrounding the abandoned railway stations, during the often interminable waits of the cargo train's departure.

Additionally, in the hope of getting some food and water, various migrants attempt to knock the doors of Mexicans, who not infrequently solidarize with migrants, by compassionately providing material and moral assistance to their underprivileged 'brothers' from Central America, who often share similar living conditions with the numerous Mexicans who live and survive unauthorizedly in the USA. Significantly, a considerable portion of the trans-Mexican migrants met, manifested a sound rejection to the practice of entreating alms, considering it as humiliating, dishonorable and shameful. In spite of these disquieting personal conflicts, numerous migrants embrace the practice of seeking charity, while courageously affirming that begging is frequently not a choice, but instead one of the few income generating activities allowed to individuals who are denied civil rights by law, and have to hide themselves continuously from States' repressive apparatus. In this sense, trans-Mexican migrants should in no way be considered as anomic mendicants who are defenselessly stuck in life. Antithetically, most of the migrants who find themselves in the compelling necessity to seek charity as a survival strategy, would be regarded herein as sociopolitically disadvantaged persons who resort to a powerful and tenacious *agency* as to find possible solutions for coping with life, within contexts where opportunities are denied by the legislative constraint of 'illegality'. If on a side numerous migrants complain about the necessity of begging, on the other most of them embrace this practice audaciously, being aware that the innumerable hardships they systematically experience and the deprived living conditions they are currently enduring, are a strenuous step which is temporary, but necessary to continue their journey and the struggle for the realization of their dreams.

An illuminating account upon the 'uncomfortable' strategy of entreating alms, was narrated by Jazmín during a conversation held in October 2014, while fulfilling a three months period of voluntary work within the shelter for migrants *La 72*, located in the village of Tenosique, Tabasco, close to the Mexican southern border with Guatemala. Jazmín recounts of the feelings and thoughts that were crossing her mind while having to seek charity to fight starvation, when traveling several days by walk along the Mexican routes of Chiapas, on her first attempt to reach the USA:

“While most Mexicans solidarized with us along the journey as if we were part of their family, some people refused to give us food, or even a glass of water. And let me tell you that this thing of having been denied a taco [typical cheap food] or a glass of water, feels really awful... And even more when hunger and thirst are unbearable. Certain times you wish you could force locals to give you food and water, but in my case I tried to be conscious that if I did that, I would put myself into trouble and more importantly, I would leave a bad perspective of migrants and for this reason,

people would mistreat other migrants that like me, will pass on these same place.”

(Jazmín, October 2014, Tenosique, Tabasco. Please, see Appendix p.85)

Whilst the situation of extreme hardship described in this story shares numerous analogies with the living conditions experienced by most migrants along the trans-Mexican routes, two important points might be extrapolated from this account. The first one concerns the crucial role of the Mexican civil society in relation to the strenuous processes of *resistance*, embraced by trans-Mexican migrants. As underlined by Jazmín, manifested by Paulina's story, and similarly expressed by most Central-Americans encountered along the fieldwork, in numerous occasion Mexican citizens offer an inestimable support to migrants in transit, demonstrating a profound sense of humanity, solidarity and collectivity, toward people who hail from different countries, but who often share a similar skin color, religion, language, culture or social condition, compounded by a parallel subjection to the severe forms of *domination* that are systematically imposed on 'third world' countries' populations. The generosity manifested by a huge number of Mexicans who feed, quench, shelter and give advice to Central-Americans in transit, not only represent for most of these migrants a vital material support, but it also symbolize an invaluable expression of solidarity that decisively nourish migrants' *hope*. The existence of a relevant amount of people who comfort and assist Central-Americans wholeheartedly and without expecting anything in change, silently communicate to these migrants that they are not alone in their struggle. For most trans-Mexican migrants who experience temporary, but unbearable living conditions characterized by a climate of constant fear, mistrust and danger, the fraternal acts of *solidarity* expressed by numerous Mexicans acquire a profound meaning that significantly fortify migrants' determination in withstanding the numerous hardships of the journey embraced in the struggle to begin a new life, or to allow a better future to those family members who remained in the country of origin. Within the trans-Mexican context, to manifest solidarity means to restore *hope*, in contexts where *hope* can be easily lost or deprived by grievous circumstances. To keep *hope* alive, has an inestimable worthiness because *hope* is what allows people the courage to abandon everything they had, or not had, while being uncertain of how a different and unknown future could be (Hage 2005: 470-471). Whilst being nourished by the desire of a more promising future, *hope* fortifies people's determination and tenacity in enduring the strenuous struggles of a difficult present (Turner 2014: 2-6; 15-18). *Hope* is a central symbolic element intrinsic within numerous conversations, idioms, song and stories that circulate amongst trans-Mexican migrants. By representing the essence that provide numerous migrants with the strength to move further on their journey, *hope* might be considered as a powerful weapon of

resistance that crucially sustain migrants during their tribulation across Mexico.

The second point of analysis extracted from Jazmín story, aspires to get a better understanding of the primordial instinct of survival that emerge in situations proximate to dehydration or starvation. Importantly, whilst the urgent necessity of satisfying survival needs might tendentially induce the perpetuation of illicit acts aimed at achieving some minimum means of subsistence, in most cases observed migrants' demonstrate a strong *consciousness* and *wisdom* by refusing the employment of negative coping strategies that might compromise the integrity, respectability and dignity, not only of their own persons, but of the trans-Mexican migrants' community as a whole. An idiom that was repeatedly heard during conversations with and between Central-American migrants cites: *no quemarle el terreno a tu proximo*, which means, *do not burn the field where your fellow will walk*. This significant *awareness*, that a relevant portion of the migrants met describe as a fundamental value, demonstrate a genuine solidarity toward people who are completely unknown but still, member of a same *collective subject* that conglomerates around an univocal struggle for life (Besserer 1999: 6-7; Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 9; Mezzadra 2011 :16).

As an alternative to the practice of begging or resorting to negative coping strategies, a surprising number of migrants design or 'borrow' ingenious strategies aimed at honorably earning few amounts of *pisto* (money) to withstand the hardships of the journey. Illustratively, amongst the income generating activities frequently observed during the fieldwork, it might be noteworthy to report the widespread practice of making colorful fake flowers from recycled aluminum cans, that are successively sold in the street. Similarly various migrants are incredibly talented in crafting bracelets and necklaces made of cotton threads or elastic bands, which are usually sold for an approximate price of ten Mexican pesos (\$0.70 US). In highly transited roads, it is often possible to observe migrants who wash cars' windshield, as well as a small number of jugglers who vigorously perform on the streetlights, asking for a free donation to the cars' drivers. Another strategy consists in going to local shops or restaurants, and ask for selling some of their products on the street, in change of a small economic cooperation or some food. Additionally, a considerable number of migrants use to visit the homes of locals and offer their workforce for any *talacha* that might be required from the house's tenants. The colloquial word *talacha*, which is often employed by migrants, denotes any possible kind of general labor as for example repairing the walls, cleaning, painting the house or cutting the grass, just to name a few. In relation to the last strategy exposed, it might be relevant to stress that various migrants declare a preference in seeking work instead of soliciting charity, when knocking the doors of Mexicans. Whilst

affirming that in this way they would 'deserve' their earnings by working hard and honestly, they also admit that in frequent occasions Mexicans offer them water, food and in rare episodes also some money unconditionally, when detecting the provenience of these persons and solidarizing with the difficult living conditions experienced by Central-American migrants during their strenuous processes of *resistance*.

In the attempt to conceptualize the relationship between the extreme circumstances of hardship systematically lived by trans-Mexican migrants, and the survival strategies recurrently employed to cope with their underprivileged living conditions, it might be relevant to explore the concept of *creativity*. Despite talking about *creativity* in contexts dominated by unendurable deprivations, widespread violence, precariousness and uncertainty, might appear paradoxical, during the fieldwork it was possible to witness and acquire a better comprehension of the astonishing way in which most trans-Mexican migrants resort to an extraordinary imagination, inventive and creativity, not only when conceiving coping strategies aimed at satisfying their survival needs, or designing disguises to travel by bus unperceived, but more generally along their whole migratory process and especially in situations of danger and risk. *Creativity* might be defined as a *power* that origins ideas and allows invention, by employing the tools provided from one's culture and traditions, to create the 'new'. *Creativity* flourish when people merge the characteristics of their personal subjectivities with the surrounding environment, while employing its constitutive elements to reshape their being and the world around them. *Creativity* imply a reconstruction of one's reality which is not random. It is instead influenced by people's identities, needs, attributes and desires, as well as by the rules, possibilities and constraints that characterize the environment wherein they are living (Sapir 1924: 418; Nordstrom 1997: 198-202). Importantly, In contexts of difficulty and life-threatening peril, *creativity* might become a powerful weapon employed by oppressed groups, in their struggle for survival. When sociopolitical exclusion and violence attempts to constrain migrants' agency while annihilating people's determination and tenacity, *creativity* can be used to resist and shape favorable opportunities, by conceiving new galaxies of meaning and opening unexperienced ambits of action¹⁷ (Nordstrom 1997: 12-15; Papadopoulos, Stephenson & Tisanos 2008: 153). To conclude, it might be illuminating to underline the relationship between *creativity and resistance* by referring to Nordstrom (1997: 13):

“creativity is [...] a core survival strategy and a profound form of resistance to political violence

17 Of course in determined context of physical constraint or armed menace, the possibilities to be creative and inventing successful solutions are extremely reduced.

and oppression. It is in fact [...] one of the most sophisticated mechanisms of asserting personal agency and political will in the face of intolerable repression.”

7.3) The role of Networks

This sub-chapter attempts to acquire a valuable comprehension of the pivotal paper played by *networks* within the trans-Mexican migratory context and specifically, of the ways in which Central-American migrants resort to *networks*, as constituting a decisive support along their journey across Mexico, and an important element of their tireless processes of *resistance*. Trying to be more specific, the analysis would subdivide the *networks* employed by trans-Mexican migrants, in the three conceptual categories of *defense networks*, *personal networks* and *circumstantial networks*.

7.3.1) Defense networks



Image 13: Mass gathering in front of the presidential residence in Mexico City

The expression *defense networks*, might be employed to define the whole body of independent associations who gather around analogous ideas, principles and values, while endeavoring collectively for the promotion of a determined cause (Keck & Sikkink 1998: 17-18, 26-27). Within the trans-Mexican context, shelters for migrants unquestionably cover a primary role amongst the defense networks commonly employed by Central-American migrants, due their profound commitment to the defense of migrants' human rights and the cruciality of the functions fulfilled by these institution, which decisively support migrants materially and emotionally along their hazardous journeys. Nevertheless, shelters are not the only actors on scene, as numerous other associations flourished in Mexico, Central America and the US, that solidarize univocally with the cause of trans-Mexican migrants, thus giving a *transnational* character to this important *defense network*. These associations, in cooperation with shelters, resolutely advocate for migrants' human rights by formulating public denounces of the unbearable living conditions and systematic abuses commonly experienced by Central-Americans, as a consequence of the severe anti-immigration regimes imposed by Mexico and the US. Similarly, relevant strategies employed by this *defense network* with the participation and cooperation of numerous migrants who engage personally in these political struggles, consist for example in launching awareness rising activities amongst the local communities; organizing mass demonstrations and blocking strategical border crossing check-points; taking part to public debates and pressuring authorities in taking action against the violations perpetrated against migrants' human rights. The conjoined political action undertaken by these institution, hence represents a determinate form of *resistance* that manifests in the firm endeavor to uncover, publicize and make loudly audible, the voice of this sociopolitically oppressed group, which is constantly silenced by mainstream media and political parties (Melucci 1999: 104; Keck & Sikkink 1998: 11, 36-38).

Interestingly, during the fieldwork it was noticed that various migrants do not resort only to associations involved in migratory issues. On the contrary, they often seek assistance and support from *defense networks* that work in diverse fields connected to other causes or social issues, as for example associations working with single mothers, unaccompanied minors, the economically deprived or the LGBT community, just to name a few.



Image 14: *Viacrucis del Migrante*. A symbolic pilgrimage held in April 2014 where approximately 1300 migrants took participation



Image 15: *Caravana de las Madres*: protest march where family members of migrants disappeared while transiting the trans-Mexican routes, undertake a journey across Mexico in search of their missing relatives

Additionally, the participation of a considerable amount of migrants in the political actions organized by *defense networks* to protest against the criminalization of international migration, demonstrate that numerous migrants do not only resort to *everyday forms of resistance* aimed at meliorating their current situation or satisfying their most urgent survival needs, but at times they also engage personally in practices of *open resistance*

that forthrightly oppose and contest States' authority, while endeavoring for an incisive sociopolitical change (Scott 1986: 86-94). Inherently, it might be noteworthy to remark that when trans-Mexican migrants embrace practices of *open resistance*, they hazardously expose themselves to the public eye, increasing the risk of being identified, detained and deported, while protesting openly for their cause.

7.3.2) Personal networks

The second analytical category, *personal networks*, refers to the preexisting social links such as *family* and *community*, that in various occasions assist migrants in crucial moments of their migratory process. Accordingly, these personal connections have been defined by academic circles as fundamental

elements of the migration experience, which often provide an inestimable *social capital* in all phases of the migratory process, influencing decisions and strategies employed even before the beginning of the journey, along the itinerary across transit countries, and once destination has been reached by migrants (Castles & Miller 2003: 278; Mezzadra 2011: 6-7, 11-12). Importantly, in the contemporary era the communication with *personal networks*, decisively benefits from the widespread instrumental employment of new media and social networks that permit long-distance, quick communication (Castells 2007: 248-252; Haesbaert 2011: 286) Within the trans-Mexican panorama, Central-Americans frequently resort to *personal networks* to get advice upon the easiest routes to follow, from family members or compatriots who already 'survived' the journey and currently live in the US. Similarly, in certain difficult moments migrants might also contact their *personal networks*, asking for a generous economic support to endure the hardships of the journey. Finally, a precious information commonly imparted by *personal networks* is related to the service of *coyotes* (smugglers). Accordingly, numerous migrants affirm that having the contact of a reliable and trustworthy *coyote*, as well as the necessary economic means to cover the expensive costs of smuggling services, represents an enormous vantage which gives high probabilities to undertake a safe and successful journey. Contrarily, most migrants underline that accepting the services offered by one of the numerous *coyotes* who frequently approach migrants and propose them advantageous opportunities by using intriguing promises of work, or transit across Mexico, often represent a serious risk due to the uncertainty of whether the *coyote* would accomplish his service, or if he might abandon his 'clients' in the desert, or consign them to criminal groups or institutional authorities in change of economic compensations. On the ground of this ambivalence, *coyotes* might represent for trans-Mexican migrants both, an opportunity to reach their destination successfully, and a risk to decree their own deportation or subjection to serious violations of their human rights. Nevertheless, the strategy of recurring to the knowledge and suggestions provided by *personal networks* cover in this, and numerous other contexts, a pivotal function in reducing the probabilities of unforeseen difficulties and accidents along this impervious journey. Significantly, during the fieldwork it was possible to notice that *personal networks*, although being extremely important for the reasons previously explored, in numerous occurrences they turn out to be unreliable, uncertain, misleading and illusory, while their erroneous suggestions and unkept promises frequently lead to severe consequences for the safety of migrants or the realization of their objectives.

A relevant account that manifest the importance, but also the unpredictability of *networks* is presented by Ana, a 25 year old, trans-gender girl from San Pedro Sula, Honduras. According to the personal

story she recounts during the first of numerous conversations held in Mexico City, life in Honduras was unendurable because of the continuous form of discrimination and social exclusion that are systematically experienced in Central-America by members of the LGBT community, amalgamating with a structural lack of employment opportunities within her country of origin. For these reasons, at the beginning of January 2015 Ana began to think on the possibility of leaving her home and start the unauthorized journey toward the USA. Nevertheless, as it was her first migratory experience, she was quite scared and unsure and thus, she decided to call a cousin who was living in California and ask her for suggestions about strategies and average cost of the journey. The cousin enthusiastically answered that Ana had just to dress nicely or even better, using a revealing outfit, then, take a bus from Tapachula, Chiapas, to Mexico City, while pretending to sleep in case of migratory inspection. Furthermore, the cousin wholeheartedly promised that once in Mexico City, she would put Ana in contact with a *coyote*, send her money to pay the cost of his service, and receive her once arrived in the US. Reassured by her cousins' encouragement and commitment, Ana bravely decided to start her journey and prepared herself to meticulously follow the instructions received. As she grievously narrates:

“The whole journey was alright and even if the bus was arrested in four migration check-points, no migratory agent 'woke me up' to ask for my identification. When I was in Puebla [approximately 150km from Mexico City], I tried to call my cousin but there was no answer. I thought she was just working, or sleeping, or who knows... But I tried again and again and again... Up to a moment when she turned her telephone off. Once in Mexico City I was scared, alone, desperate... I looked for an internet point within the bus station to see if my cousin was on facebook and you know what? She had blocked my profile. With that, I understood she didn't want to help me anymore... I felt alone and lost in this enormous city. I didn't know where to go, so I decided to take a metro directed to Zona Rosa [Mexico City's most prominent gay area]. There I looked for someone who could help me in this situation and after having walked a bit, I came across a LGBT rights' defense organization. They told me that they weren't a shelter but that I could sleep in their offices for a night and that if I wanted, they could help me to start the process to apply for refugee status here in Mexico. Moreover they gave me the contact of an other Central-American who was currently in Mexico City. That's how I met Jazmín! [The same person of the previous stories]. She came at the association the next day and even if I was totally embarrassed and ashamed, she was incredibly kind and we soon became friends [With a big smile on her face]. She told the volunteers of the

shelter where she was staying about my situation, and they accepted to give me accommodation for some days without any previous interview or canalization [part of the difficult process to get access in the shelters of Mexico City only]. Moreover she also brought me to the place where she works, and I was hired there as well!!! Even if now we haven't a stable place to stay anymore, we're still together [the shelter allowed them to stay for fifteen days, after that Jazmín and Ana began to sleep in the car park of the supermarket where they worked, and frequently came at my place to take a shower or sleep more comfortably]. Now, I feel that I'm not alone anymore and this helps a lot in enduring the hard conditions that we're living. I hope and I know that one day we'll have enough money to get a flat together and finally live a life without preoccupations and discrimination”

[Ana, February 2015, Mexico City. Please, see Appendix p.91]

From Ana's story it might be possible to better comprehend the relevant function covered by the numerous *defense networks* that incessantly shelter and assist Central-Americans in transit across Mexico. Furthermore, by deciding to seek help in the city's most relevant LGBT area, Ana confirms the importance of employing one's subjective characteristics to design personalized strategies to cope with the difficulties of life. Furthermore, the strategy conceived by Ana in a moment of fear and disorientation, demonstrate how *agency* permits to reflect on one's current situation and take action accordingly to find possible solution to problematic circumstances (Mezzadra 2011: 1; Bigo 2010: 17-18 Long 2001: 16; Bakewell 2010: 6-7). In addition, Ana's unfortunate story also represent a typical example of the numerous occurrences when *personal networks* result to be inconsistent, leaving numerous migrants in precarious and uncertain situations. Differently, in the case of Ana's narration, as well as in most storied heard from migrants, a crucial role is fulfilled by those tight *solidarity bonds* that flourish circumstantially between people who share similar personal characteristics, analogous subjection to severe forms of *domination*, or participation in univocal processes of *resistance* (Cunningham 2010: 9; Rivas Castillo 2008: 32; Nordstrom 1997: 145-147; Nordstrom & Martin 1992: 1-4; Scott 1990: 128-134).

7.3.3) circumstantial networks

The third category examined, *circumstantial networks*, comprehend all those relationship consolidated with various actors who 'inhabit' focal points on the main routes employed by trans-Mexican migrants, representing an inestimable source of knowledge that most migrants assimilate and put into action as to

'survive' the threatening landscapes characterizing the trans-Mexican panorama. Specifically, this section would analyze important *networks* that originate in the space surrounding the abandoned railway stations where most Central-Americans spend considerable amounts of time during the often interminable waits of the cargo train's departure. Importantly, these stations are defined 'abandoned' as in 1997 the trains that used to transport individuals across the country were suspended as a consequence of the national railway company's privatization, imposed by presidential decree in 1995. Nevertheless, these same stations are extraordinary 'alive', as constituting a populated territory that is stably inhabited by indigents, homeless, alcoholics, drug-addicted, *pandilleros* (criminals), fugitives and outlaws, besides of course, migrants who employ cargo trains as a strategy to travel across Mexico. In these marginalized territories of *federal propriety* that are usually located at the cities' peripheries, no law imposed by States applies, no institutional authority interferes with 'local business', no institution guarantees individuals' protection or safety. For these reasons, railway stations systematically became strategical places for the perpetuation of illicit activities that constantly remain silently invisible to the public eye. The numerous and diverse persons who inhabit these railway stations temporally or permanently, conjointly constitute what might be considered as a *parallel society* regulated by protocols, norms and values, that follow different rules from those that structure social relations in most ordinary contexts lived by the privileged part of the world's population. Within a lawless territory as is the case of these railway stations, the concepts of justice, community, solidarity, offense and defense, acquire peculiar meanings that migrants need to learn as to survive within these dangerous territories where the *law of talion* dictate the functioning of social relations and a lack of respect to the wrong person possibly means death.



Image 16: The desolated railway station of Mazatlán, Sinaloa. The bridge on the background constitute the territory and shelter of a parallel society that permanently inhabit the area



Image 17: The 'abandoned' railway station of Empalme, Sonora

While inhabiting various railway stations located in the north-western part of Mexico in company of various migrants met along the route, it was possible to observe the way wherein migrants relate to each other, and with the members of the *parallel society* in which they temporary live. Furthermore, during the 'eternal' waits of *la Bestia's* departure, several migrants were instructing my husband and me, upon important rules to follow in this context dominated by a prevailing climate of uncertainty and danger, underlining the behaviors and attitudes that might compromise one's position within the hosting *parallel society*, while potentially leading to serious repercussions or accidents. Concomitantly, numerous migrants emphasize the possibility of being integrated within part of these *parallel societies*, acquiring in this way an invaluable knowledge and a robust protection against external menaces. Accordingly, various migrants underline the importance of respecting the stable micro-communities where they temporary inhabit, while attempting to demonstrate their harmlessness and apportioning some kind of cooperation to these *parallel societies*. The meaning and symbol of openheartedly sharing the scarce food possessed, a glass of soda, some *tortillas* (cheap Mexican flour wraps), a cigarette or a joint, acquire profound and transcendental meanings in these unpredictable contexts, often assisting in the creation of important solidarity bonds and the consolidation of a genuine sense of community.¹⁸ Significantly, migrants pinpoint to the values of humbleness, respectfulness, collectivity and solidarity, when referring to the attitudes necessary for having peaceful stays during their intermittent journey.

18 On the contrary, not all migrants are pacific, honest and respectful of the local communities where they transit. In this sense, the bad conduct of a small part of the migrants' community frequently leave a negative impression of the community as a whole, in the territories where Central-American commonly transit.

The suggestions proposed by these trans-Mexican migrants, represent an illuminating example of how most people who inhabit lawless contexts dominated by *Chaos*, behave and relate to the surrounding world following unwritten and complex codes of *human ethics*, instead of employing a *dog-eat-dog* mentality (Nordstrom 1997: 12-13). Additionally most migrants considered crucial to manifest direct or indirectly to the permanently settled communities inhabiting railway stations, that they are just transiting through their territory because there is no other option and in the meanwhile, they would not create problems of any kind, or lack of respect any member of the local community. In this sense, it might be interesting to ponder on the fact that migrant do not only employ non-discursive languages to understand the intentions of those people around them (as explored in the previous sub-chapter), but they also manipulate and employ purposefully their own tones, gestures, expressions and attitudes, with the aim of transmitting and demonstrating their peaceful intentions to the people around them.¹⁹

In case migrants achieve being accepted within these communities, precious benefits might arise from these newly tightened *circumstantial networks*. Accordingly, the *parallel societies* permanently inhabiting railway stations, frequently include migrants within their system of mutual protection and support, providing a solid shelter against external menaces during the waits of the cargo train's departure. Furthermore, people who reside stably in these railway stations, constitute an extraordinary source of knowledge concerning the local realities where they inhabit, as well as often representing a no institutionalized *school of survival* in the context of street life. Significantly, by residing permanently in railway stations' areas, the members of *parallel societies* have access to a profound knowledge concerning the surrounding environment, which is not available to people who are just transiting across unfamiliar territories. The common practice of sharing this *local* knowledge with trans-Mexican migrants, underlines the crucial function of *rumors* and *gossip* within contexts where awareness is a necessary instrument to survive, but only ambiguous and uncertain information circulate amongst people (Scott 1990: 144) Furthermore, *Rumors* and *gossip* are considered highly relevant because their communicative power do not only report what previously happened, but it also depict what might possibly happen within a certain context of uncertainty and disorder. (Turner 2010: 116-118; Feldman 1995: 230-231). Illustratively, The members of these *parallel societies* frequently instruct migrants upon the train's usual time of departure and the railroad's sections where boarding *la Bestia* is less physically demanding. Similarly, they often provide useful information about the best

19 Interestingly, in particular occasions it is considered more advantageous to transmit and demonstrate one's hostility or pretended lethality, as to intimidate potential enemies while warning them of the real or alleged possession of weapons and the consequences that any offense would bring about.

areas to *charolear* (begging), and the location of shelters for migrants or other *comedores* (soup kitchens); Likewise, a vital awareness frequently shared with migrants concerns those dangerous areas that are controlled by ruthless criminal groups, constituting hence strategic locations where migrants are systematically assaulted, robbed or kidnapped. The important value given by trans-Mexican migrants to the advices provided by these *circumstantial networks*, demonstrates how in violent contexts, *knowledge* is an essential resource of vital utility, while its diffusion might be considered as a primary activity that shape and fortify significant processes of *collective resistance* (Nordstrom: 1997: 208).

8) Conclusions

In conclusion, this investigation has now addressed the vital importance relating to dialogical processes of *domination* and *resistance* within the trans-Mexican migratory context and unveiled the complexities of this multifaceted panorama that constantly transforms its features throughout space and time, as exemplified for instance by the sudden amendments and hardening of migratory legislations that led to the increase of obstacles upon migrant mobility and indirectly substantiated the creation of alternative strategies of movement that continue aiding this community to reach its shared objectives.

Considering the nature of the social phenomenon studied herein, it has become evident that the circumstances of political oppression predominating hitherto, condemn migrants to the realms of invisibility and a socially disadvantaged reality that tends to be publicly legitimated by the normalization of discourses, which endeavor to demonize and even criminalize irregular migration, not only in the Americas, but in most corners around the world. Nevertheless, If *domination* manifests in the US-Mexican exercise of governmental authority to deprive Central-Americans of their human and civil rights, *resistance* manifests as its resolute counterpart, finding expression in the tireless struggles embraced by these migrants to overcome the lack of legitimate rights, that have been denied by discriminating migratory legislations. Significantly, the meanings and implications contained within the conception of *resistance* comprehended as a social struggle, uphold real and pervaded sentiments of emancipation that represent symbolically profound meanings for the life and future of all those people who engage within.

Importantly, it has now been examined the ways in which *domination* becomes visible within the severe forms of repression and persecution against the trans-Mexican migrants' community,

materializing on the social consequences presented herein and reflect on the detrimental effects caused by some of the previously analyzed institutional regulations, which endeavor to stop migratory flows from the South. Ultimately, the hardening on migratory regulations could be considered as an *governmental utopia*, taking into consideration that no matter how much governments try to stop irregular migration, this is a social phenomena that existed for millennia and Central-Americans would never stop migrating, despite strenuous national efforts and the enormous costs on human-life. significantly, The promulgation of legislative and policy frameworks that allegedly attempted to meliorate the social conditions of these migrants have proven to result adverse, as it has been demonstrated within the present study that these legislations have in fact, worsened the situation in terms of increased violence and social exclusion, reflected on the migrant community's denial of rights and inherent vulnerability. Subsequently, the criminalization of Central-American migrants and their relegation to the sociopolitical condition of 'illegality', deny thousands of people the possibility to cross borders and territories lawfully and invalidate their civil rights by a matter of fact. Illustratively, the social consequences of migrants' criminalization, manifest in the prohibition to travel ordinarily across Mexico and in the brutal detentions performed by Mexican authorities, which coerce most trans-Mexican migrants to transit marginalized routes by walk and utilize precarious means of transportation, as is the case of *la Bestia*, the cargo trains that although being characterized by serious life-threatening risks, have proven to represent an instrumental mean and sometimes the only opportunity for numerous trans-Mexican migrants who are denied the ordinary roads that longitudinally cross Mexico.

Relevantly, the present investigation sustains that the practices and processes of *domination* characterizing the trans-Mexican context, manifest in the whole body of policy and legislative frameworks that have been meticulously designed to impede entrance into the US territory and exclude the vast majority of Central-American citizens. To clarify, it is relevant to note that the infiltration of a small percentage of unauthorized migrants results on a profitable contribution to the US national economy, which benefits from those hard-working migrants who have survived the trans-Mexican journey and settled in the US without any possibility to meliorate their social condition of 'illegal persons' who live and work in the USA, alas without enjoying legitimate civil rights.²⁰

Reiteratively, the evidence points at one of the most prominent expressions of *domination*, manifesting within this context in the multiple forms of *violence*, systematically experienced by members of the migrants' community as both direct and indirect consequences of the US-Mexican anti-immigration

20 For more informations about processes of *domination* and *resistance* on the USA-Mexican border, and within the territory of the USA, please see Appendix 2

regime.

Significantly, the analysis of the detrimental social consequences of the repressive strategies increasingly adopted by the US-Mexican governments, led to important reflections about the annihilating effects that severe anti-immigration establishments have on the community of trans-Mexican migrants. Nevertheless, besides shedding light on the relentlessly silent occurrence of this humanitarian crisis systematically experienced by Central-American migrants, the findings of the ethnographic fieldwork that yielded important results, afforded a significant understanding upon the position taken by these migrants within the already examined nature of this humanitarian crisis. Accordingly, the approaches that victimize these migrants and tend to depict them as inert subjects of humanitarianism, were contradicted by migrants' perception of themselves and their extraordinary tenacity, inventive and willpower, which continue allowing these people to overcome overwhelming obstacles along their journeys. Simultaneously, the governmental logics of criminalization and stigmatization imputed to trans-Mexican migrants as potential threats, was contravened during the realization of this research by the meticulous analysis of migrants' tireless struggles that are recurrently nourished by the firm aim of getting access to a respectable and honorable work and the means to sustain a lifestyle distinguished by the elements that define human dignity, while enabling them to help their family members back in their countries of origin.

Affirmatively, this investigation concludes that the particularities characterizing the astute strategies designed by Central-American migrants to oppose and contest oppressive institutional *domination*, represent strenuous processes of social struggle that materialize particular shapes of social *resistance*, while also demonstrating the inefficiency of governments in most cases, to offer palpable protection and support to these migrants and specially those who have been displaced from their homes. Along the trans-Mexican routes, most migrants demonstrate their extraordinary *agency*, by manifesting their autonomy and independence, which become visible in their ability to reflect on the current situation and act in accordance with the predominant circumstances. Central-American migrants continuously endeavor to find possible solutions by employing the instruments afforded by their origin, identity, subjectivity and culture, amalgamating with the utilization of other elements that belong to environments where these migrants transit and temporarily inhabit. Illustratively, After having explained in the analysis the manner wherein the condition of unauthorized migrants originate the necessity to be imperceptible or undetectable, and the ways Central-Americans are compelled to hide their origin and nationalities, it has proven remarkable the strategy consisting on posing as someone

other than themselves in order to cross Mexico unnoticed, or temporarily 'becoming' something different, as to overcome determined obstacles and obstructions along the journey.

Crucially, it has now been explored the ways wherein trans-Mexican migrants are constantly menaced by diverse life-threatening risks, evidencing that even though these migrants face and confront innumerable adverse circumstances, they are outstandingly astute and clever individuals who employ their *creativity* resourcefully, in an effort to create survival and mobility strategies to bypass the numerous 'obstacles' of the routes they travel, which bring them closer to the realization of their dreams and objectives. Significantly, the evidence demonstrate that these migrants are going far beyond the obstacles and vicissitudes encountered along the way, manifesting their wisdom and shrewdness, being exhibited subjectively by their personal actions and tactics, although *resistance* has been proven to be embraced by these migrants not only on an individual basis, but also as a strategical process that is univocally undertaken with perspicacity by a relevant amount of migrants, who perform hence as a collective entity. Notoriously, along the course of this investigation, it was possible to witness and comprehend the inestimable value of *solidarity bonds* that circumstantially tighten migrants from different countries, considering that they continuously find themselves traveling on the same dangerous routes and facultatively create solid alliances of brotherhood, distinguished by distinctive set of values that enshrine their vital and mutual support which assist them throughout the endurance of quotidian struggles characterizing this journey. Concomitantly, it became evident through the research process of this investigation that these solidarity bonds account for the existence of a solid sense of *community* comprised by members who are not affiliated on the grounds of nationality, but profoundly united as a small and independent social nucleus that distinguishes for its own wisdom, common sense and system of values. Characteristically, it constitutes a sort of *society in movement* on its own that possess its individual symbolism and self-perception which serves as sustainment of a commonly shared reality in the wake of seeing realized an univocal objective. Illustratively, the analysis and interpretation of the data collected throughout a year of fieldwork suggests that these solidarity bonds are fortified by the continuous sharing of symbolic imaginaries, narratives, ideas, values and practices that assist in the consolidation of a commonly shared sense of belonging and collective identity, while sustaining collective agents who engage in those processes of *resistance* that have now been analyzed throughout this investigation. Additionally, the mutual assistance, commonly shared wisdom and knowledge circulation provided by these solidarity bonds, represent an important form of *collective resistance*, characterized by the synergic actions performed by the members of the trans-Mexican migrants'

community who continuously share information, advices and strategies, which instruct each other on how to cross international territories and borders unnoticed by the authorities. Importantly, the continuous designing, employment and sharing of innovative and sophisticated strategies that conglomerate in a process of collective resistance, have proven to represent an indirect but considerable challenge and contestation to the impositions dictated by the US and Mexican governments.

Importantly, trans-Mexican migrants are not alone in their fatiguing processes of *resistance*, as demonstrated by the numerous expressions of solidarity and fraternity manifested by national and international volunteers who tirelessly work in shelters, as well as political activists and academics who resolutely advocate for migrants' rights. Furthermore, the present investigation recognized the complexity of the vigorous struggles endured by trans-Mexican migrants and the inherent value given by the recurrent symbolic and material support provided by vast portions of the Mexican civil society that unconditionally solidarize with Central-American migrants and nourish their hope and self-determination through genuine acts of thoughtfulness, solidarity, fraternity and humanity.

Significantly, the symbolism of *hope* amongst migrants represents a vital feature within processes of *resistance* embraced by them, as it supports and sustains these socially disadvantaged individuals at the time of taking difficult decisions during their life-paths, or whilst struggling vigorously for something unanticipated to happen, just as something that is unknown but nonetheless, deeply soaked of meaning for those who believe in it. Contiguously, *Hope* also constitutes an important element that impulses people to leave everything behind in search of a more promising future or in the attempt to escape from an unbearable present, by taking a leap in the dark in the search for existential mobility, which could unchain them from the feeling of 'going nowhere in life', taking into account that after all, this is not about turning on the light, but above all it is about shutting down the darkness. In other words, this is a search that would fulfill the inherent necessity and desire of any human being, by awarding meaningfulness and purposefulness to their existence in this world. A search that within the trans-Mexican migratory context compellingly requires the embracement of tenacious and relentless processes of resistance.

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11) Appendix: Ethnographic informations

- *Jazmín*:

Jazmín is a key informant of this investigation and our field relation has a duration of nine months. during this period we had uncountable conversations about any possible topic and, as she was enthusiastic about this investigation, she agreed to allow several semi-structured interviews that were carefully transcribed or recorded. Furthermore she gave us an invaluable present: a copy of her autobiography where she narrates her whole story, since she was kicked out from her home at the tender age of seven because she already felt a girl despite she was biologically a boy, toward her first traumatizing migratory experience in El Salvador, and the successive experiences in Mexico and the USA.

The first account at page 44 is extrapolated from her authobiography, in a section were she recounts in detail her first migratory experience across Mexico, beginning from the superation of the Guatemalan Border by crossing the *Suchiate* river, up to her deportation from Yuma, Arizona, after an interminable and exhausting journey. Differently, The second testimony at page 57 is extracted from an interview held in October 2014 on the garden surrounding the shelter for migrants of Tenosique, Tabasco, while she was residing and I was working within *La72*. In this interview, Jazmín was asked specifically of the survival skills and coping strategies employed on the trans-Mexican routes.

Jazmín was met the first time at the beginning of September 2014, in the shelter for migrants *la72*, in Tenosique, Tabasco, where a three months period of voluntary work was being carried out. Jazmín arrived at the shelter together with another trans-gender girl from Guatemala, on the 9th of September. When Jazmín reached the shelter, she was tired and dirty as coming from the 60km long walk dividing the Guatemalan frontier of El Ceibo with the village of Tenosique. She dressed short jeans, a pink t-shirt and she walked visibly uncomfortably as her shoes were various sizes smaller than her feet. During the first interview that is routinely held by voluntary workers when a migrant reach the shelter for the first time, Jazmín told me that they had been robbed close to the frontier by a group of circumstantial criminals that took their few money, cellulars and even Jazmín's shoes (the shoes of the other girl were older and were not stolen). She narrates that along the way they knocked at the doors of some isolated homes and asked for a bit of food and water to locals. An old women cooked them some eggs and gave an old and small pair of shoes to Jazmín, "*better than nothing*", she said. following a short break, they continued their journey without any other unforeseen difficulty and reached the

shelter in Tenosique after approximately fifteen hours. During the first interview she told me that she had already crossed Mexico several times, and previously lived in the US for two years, as well as three years in Mexicali, Baja California, both without legal authorization. In this occasion Jázmin was decided to apply for refugee status in Mexico and after meticulously explaining me of the unbearable forms of discrimination lived in Guatemala, as well as the serious death menaces against her person, I told her of the possibility to start the application process for asylum in Tenosique, while residing within the shelter for the minimum of three months required for a resolution (all these particular cases have to be first presented to the shelters' founders, who decide if the person can remain at the shelter for the time required).

During the period where I cohabited with Jázmin and all the migrants transiting and temporarily inhabiting in *La72*, it was possible to know her person deeply, while observing her incredible tenacity, determination and spirit of justice, demonstrated in everyday words, actions and attitudes toward other people and fellow migrants. The reasons that contributed to the creation of our strong field / friend relation, probably resides in the fact that I could see her as she is and as she see herself, and even more for the person that she is independently of her appearance or sexual orientation. Similarly, as she was aware I was gay and also a queer activist, she knew she could count on my defense in case of any problem with locals or the same shelter's hosts. Illustratively, few weeks before the end of my voluntary work, a group of *Mara* (a transnational organized crime group), took symbolic possession of certain territories close to the shelter, starting to create several troubles and demonstrating particular hostility to any member of the LGBT community. Specifically, Jazmín was directly death-menaced by a member of this organization and while most migrants would keep the silence and flee as soon as possible, she decided to report the menaces to the public authorities and asked me to accompany her to the local police station, despite an awareness of the probable serious repercussions of our actions.

When my voluntary work period was to conclude, Jazmín's resolution was still not ready and I had to tell her goodbye, following my route to Mexico City, after having left her my e-mail and phone number in case of necessity. She called me on December 30th (fifteen days after my arrival in Mexico City), and told me that her application for refugee status was rejected because she had been previously deported from Mexican territory. She continued by saying that she left Tenosique few days before, and traveled by using several local buses on specific secondary routes that she already traveled and knew perfectly, to reach Mexico City. In that moment she was in Puebla (Approximately 150km from Mexico City), and asked me if we could host her for some days at our place, as she wanted to settle in Mexico City,

find a temporary accommodation in a shelter, look for a job, and save some money to rent a room in the city. She stayed at the very small flat where my husband and me were living for two weeks, as finding accommodation in a shelter of Mexico City is not as easy as in the rest of the country. After a long search she moved to a shelter in the southern part of the city and found an exploitative job as warehouse worker for a supermarket owned by a French multinational corporation. In June 2015 she is still living in Mexico city without legal authorization, but found a better job, and had the possibility to rent a room together with other three refugees of Salvadoran origins that she knew from the shelter of Tenosique. Importantly, one of the biggest joy of this fieldwork was to reflect on the difference between the moment when I saw Jázmin for the first time: dirty, scared, exhausted and with small shoes; and the way she currently looks after so many struggles that were required to finally settle in Mexico: nicely dressed, embellished, using make up, having a respectable job, but most importantly, extremely happy to live in a city where she can be what she is without being excluded or discriminated by a xenophobic society.

- *Julián*

This section is extrapolated from a conversation held in April with Julián, in the outskirts of the railway station of Tepic, Nayarit. In this occasion, my husband and me, we were waiting for the cargo train's departure and decided to approach a group of migrants who were respiting under a small tree. We met the group approximately at 11 a.m. and spent the whole day in their company as the train departed approximately 9 hours later. The group was composed by three components, Julián, an other Honduran in his fifties, and a young Guatemalan, who met each other along the route and were traveling together as to reduce external dangers. Furthermore, there were two local indigents living in the station, who were chatting with these Central-Americans and giving advices upon a specific place where the train's boarding was easier. When we approached them with the scapegoat of asking informations about the train's departure, a climate of mistrust was in the air as the older men was particularly suspicious of our honesty, and they asked me countless questions before accepting that I was really an half-Mexican migrant, traveling along their same routes. Once the uncertainties disappeared, the group invited us to eat some rice and beans that they had bought, after begging for a while close to the station, and were particularly happy when we added some chiles and *tortillas* (flour wraps) to the commonly shared meal. Significantly, along the soaring day spent together, our relation was getting stronger and stronger and we felt like knowing these people from centuries and having the possibility to trust them

completely (in the sense that we felt they accepted us within their group, and had no harmful intentions at all. Nevertheless, the personal stories they narrated unveiled dark sides in the past of certain members of the group).

Importantly, Julián was extremely friendly and talkative, asking innumerable questions upon my alleged Iranian origins and our past in Mexico City. Simultaneously, he was enthusiastic in talking about his personal and migratory experiences, while giving us invaluable informations concerning border crossing strategies, survival skills, tactics to avoid accidents or dangers while riding *la Bestia*, and numerous other advices to better endure the trans-Mexican journey. A relevant trait in Julián's character, was constituted by a surprising ability to present and explain strategies meticulously, demonstrating an incredible ability of schematization and analysis. Amongst his words, there were some recurrent expressions that got firmly impressed in our minds, as for example: “*you have to use your head on these routes*”; “*one has to be strategical to endure this journey*”; “*don't give anything for granted, think carefully on all the risks and opportunities around you*”. Significantly, along the day Julián narrated of all his previous migratory experiences, but while it was possible to record covertly the conversation when he recounts of the migratory experience embraced together with his 19 year old son, where only the son could cross the US border, it was instead impossible to record the testimony reported in this paper, which was instead transcribed few minutes after the end of the conversation, while going to a shop with the scapegoat of buying some cigarettes.

The train finally departed in the night, it was easy to board as it was not moving and we all climbed a same wagon that previously contained some kind of metal, whose powder covered the whole floor of the wagon (this specific wagon had a drawer like shape with one meter and a half high metallic walls). Despite we organized specific turns of guard to remain alert in case of danger, none of us could sleep in the whole journey as it was extremely cold, and the railroad between the states of Nayarit and Jalisco is famous for their dangerousness. The journey seemed unending and at some point our safety was seriously threatened. Specifically, after about two hours riding the train, *la Bestia* stopped its course in a little village where the train remained immobile for about forty-five minutes. During this time, a person in his thirties approached our wagon and asked if we had any joint to sell. The answer was negative, as we all knew that possessing any kind of drug along these routes is extremely dangerous due to the numerous institutional controls, as well as because of the drug monopoly owned by cartels' members, who would easily kill anyone who is suspected to start its own business in their territories. The person seemed satisfied of our answer, and said that he had some weed but needed a rolling paper

to fabricate the joint. As we had numerous papers, we decided to give him a whole pack as a gift, just to show our friendliness and appreciation for his willingness to share some ritual joints with us. When he boarded the train, it was possible to see a gun hidden in his pants. No one said a word about that. Despite our anxiety, this person was really friendly and asked Julián and me to open our palm-hands, where he put some handful of weed and asked us to roll two joints. He said that he could not prepare them by himself, because four fingers of his left hand had been recently cut by some “*bastards*”, as he furiously said. Despite this person did not say much about his story, he seemed to enjoy the conversation and slowly began to disclose more informations and being more and more relaxed in talking with us. He said that he would travel with us, up to a certain point of the journey. When my husband asked him where he was directed, the answer was sharp: “*I'm going to take my revenge!*”. After few ours the train stopped again in another village, and a young guy jumped on the train and started to talk almost without breathing, narrating an unbelievable story in which he was looking for a girl whose location was completely unknown. We were all suspicious, as this guy was sometimes looking at our backpacks, thinking to be unperceived. Furthermore, a long knife's handle was hidden behind his shirt, while the blade was covered under his jeans. We were almost frozen but tried to appear as unperturbed as possible, to take time and think on a possible solution. Just before the train departed again, the first guy who previously joined us took his gun out of his pants and put it in front of the recently arrived guy's face. He loudly said “*You! you're a fu__ing thief, and I'm from the Linea [the notorious cartel of Sinaloa]. Run away, now!*”. The circumstantial criminal fled as fast as an antelope and we were fortunately safe. Incredibly, we were saved from a criminal, by another criminal. The member of the *Sinaloa Cartel* who protected us from the menace represented by the circumstantial criminal, abandoned the train at the next stop, after having hugged us, wished a safe journey and a “blessed” life. When he descended the train, we could see that he recollected a big haversack (probably full of weed) that he had previously hidden somewhere between the train's gearwheels. After this episode, the rest of the journey followed without any other complication and we arrived the next morning in Mazatlán, Jalisco. There, we remained for few days to do fieldwork in the city, while Julián and the rest of the group followed their northward path.

Interestingly, during the last period of fieldwork in the northern part of Mexico, we spent one week doing research in the shelter for migrants *Angeles Sin Fronteras*, located in the bordering city of Mexicali, Baja California. On the third day in Mexicali, we randomly met Julián and his Guatemalan comrade again, along a secondary street of the city, and we were genuinely happy to see that both

groups reached the frontier unharmed and safe. After reciprocally recounting of the last parts of our journeys, we decided to unveil our real identities and tell the truth about our investigations. As mentioned in the methodology section, Julián and his friend started to laugh loudly after a first moment of astonishment, then, they firmly affirmed that we are completely crazy in undertaking such dangerous journey without being really intentioned to reach the US. Nevertheless, they were genuinely enthusiastic by our commitment in advocating for Central-Americans' human rights and for this reason, they accepted to give us an information consent, with certain limitations on determined conversations. Today, Julián is reunified with his son, and they currently live and work in a restaurant of Las Vegas.

- *Paulina:*

Paulina was encountered in May 2014, within the shelter for migrants *Jesus Buen Pastor del Pobre y del Migrante* of Tapachula, Chiapas, where one week period of voluntary work and investigations was being carried out. When Paulina was met, she had been recently deported to El Salvador, after 3 years living in Houston, Texas, divided from her son and loosing her job, and the flat she was renting in the US. Nevertheless she was determined to start again from the beginning and decided to travel the whole longitude of Mexico by bus, supported economically by her sister who was also living in Huston. During this interview, Paulina was asked of her opinion concerning the Mexican civil society and specifically, of the attitudes and behaviors of those Mexicans encountered along her migratory experiences. Paulina appeared resolute in her answers, claiming that most Mexican encountered were incredibly thoughtful and helpful. Specifically, she was particularly enthusiastic about those Mexican of low economic recourses, who frequently share the little they have with Central-Americans who are completely stranger and unknown. After few considerations on the value of sharing food, water and suggestions, Paulina decide to narrate the reported story as to exemplify the solidarity and fraternity demonstrated by vast portions of the Mexican Civil society.

Interestingly, Paulina also described the disguise used when traveling by bus meticulously, as well as the designed biography concerning her south-eastern Mexican origins. Significantly, she emphasized having chosen that specific location as alleged place of origin, due to the high average of an indigenous population, whose skin color is similar to Paulina's one (Central-Americans' skin color is usually slightly darker than Mexicans').

-Ana:

This section was extrapolated from a conversation held in a cozy gay bar of Mexico city, which constituted an extremely uncomfortable setting to hold an interview, due to a not too loud but quite disturbing pop music from the 80s, amalgamating with the going and coming of people in the bar. Nevertheless, this interview was unforeseen and quite unexpected as Ana was completely unknown before that moment. Accordingly, a Tuesday morning of February 2015, I received a call from Jazmín where she kindly requested to meet my husband and me, as she had to ask us a big favor. When I told her to come at our place, she proposed instead to meet in a bar of *Zona Rosa*, as she would come with a friend from Honduras and did not want to “invade” our flat. Hence, when we reached the bar that evening, Jazmín introduced us to Ana and began to explain the problems that they were currently experiencing. Specifically, she recounted that the period allowed to them by the shelter *Casa Tochan* in Mexico City, had concluded few days before, and subsequently they were sleeping within the indoor parking lot of the supermarket where they worked, as one of the night security guards solidarized with them and allowed them to sleep in that dark space. Whilst underlining that the parking lot was extremely cold and uncomfortable, Jazmín and Ana also expressed their preoccupations concerning the numerous and routinely switching security guards of the parking lot, who were all man and most of them were completely unknown. After explaining the whole story, they finally asked us the possibility to come at our place every now and then to take a shower. As we genuinely trust Jazmín and know that she would not bring dishonest people at our place, we accepted their request, while adding that when they felt really tired, they could come at our place after work, eat a healthy home-made dinner, and sleep on the sofa bed in the living room, that was surely more comfortable than the parking lot. Furthermore, we were conscious that they worked six days a week from 9a.m to 8 p.m., in similarly exploitative conditions, and the minimum we could do was to offer our little place as a shelter, so that they could at least respite decently after hard working days. Since that moment, they came at our place quite often and we had the opportunity to consolidate a strong field relation with Ana, as well as recording various interviews on audio support.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned this section was extrapolated from the first conversation held with Ana in the abovementioned occasion. When we asked Ana how did she reach Mexico City, she began to explain the whole story from the beginning and we promptly asked the permission to take out our sketchbook and transcribe the narration she was to recount.

Today, Ana is back in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, as one of her sister got seriously sick and she had to

assist her in their country of origin. Nevertheless, she is already working to save money as to start again the journey to reach Mexico City.

12) Appendix 2: Border crossing strategies: The 'last' obstacle?

Before to conclude this paper, it might be relevant to consider that the processes of *domination* and *resistance* characterizing this complex panorama of unauthorized migration are not limited within the perimeter of the Mexican territory. Accordingly, for those tenacious Central-Americans who survive the approximate 3.500km that constitute the longitude of Mexico, having reached the US border represent an inestimable achievement as it symbolizes the outcome of various weeks or months, marked by extremely deprived living conditions and the endurance of exhausting struggles. Nevertheless, the tribulation across Mexico represents only the first step of Central-Americans' migratory experience as the impotent US border still divide migrants from the realization of their objectives. While doing fieldwork in the proximities of Mexican north-western frontier, it was noticed that amongst the main topics repeatedly encountered in migrants conversations, the possible strategies to cross the US border covered primary importance. According to their narrations, the border is not an uniform and identical line separating the two countries. Differently, each section has its own characteristics, obstructions and weakness, that migrants have to investigate meticulously as to avoid being detected, detained and deported by the US' *Border Patrol*, after the excruciating efforts that were necessary to finally reach that point. The exceptional *agency* and *creativity* possessed by most migrants is proved also in these context through the invention and reciprocal sharing of ingenious strategies designed to reach the US soil unperceived. Illustratively,²¹ certain migrants opt to swim along a specific part of the of the sea close to Tijuana, Baja California, as to bypass the border while bringing along a plastic bag with touristic clothes to disguise once they reach a crowded holiday area of the US southern cost. Alternatively, a strategy commonly employed in the city of Mexicali, Baja California, consist in erecting human pyramids that are used as a stair to climb the five meters fence delimiting the US border. Once on top of the barrier, they utilize a rope firmly held from a comrade on the other side, to descend on US territory without getting injured from the fall. When the other side is reached, having a *personal network* who is waiting for you represent a considerable advantage, otherwise migrants often throw their old clothes away, dress formally and try to reach the crowd that is waiting for the bus in Calexico, California, hoping to pass unperceived in front of the numerous Border Patrols who

21 The details of these strategies would not be reported to protect migrants' information and safety

constantly monitor the area.

Approximately 150km eastward from Mexicali, close to Sonoita, Sonora, the border has no high, metallic barriers, but instead a fence of wooden pales that is easily crossable by migrants. Regrettably, this whole frontier area is controlled by the *zetas* (a notorious and fierce criminal cartel), who systematically demand from five to seven thousands pesos (\$400 US Approximately), as a 'tax' for crossing the border unauthorizedly. Those who cannot pay are forced to introduce a backpack filled with twenty-five kilos of marijuana within the US territory, and walk with such an heavy burden for approximately five days across the searing desert of Arizona. The reward for having successfully transported the backpack while seriously risking to be arrested by the US authorities, merely consists in the permission to enter the US without having been previously killed by the *zetas*.

Additionally, numerous migrants recount that the frontier delimiting the state of Chihuahua is particularly *caliente* (hot), due to the problematic presence of numerous organized crime groups and drug cartels that represent a life-threatening danger for the safety of trans-Mexican migrants. From the Chihuahuan bordering city of Ciudad Juarez, the impetuous river known as *Rio Bravo* begins its eastward course along the border, that concludes its water stream by flowing into the *Mexican Gulf*. Regrettably, this river already became the tomb of an alarming number of migrants who failed in the attempt of swimming across its indomitable stream.

In view of the numerous perils and risks characterizing each of the border crossing strategies previously mentioned, once again most migrants would resort to the tools provided by their agency, individualities and cultures, in conjunction with the priceless experience acquired during the journey, and compounding with the solidarity bonds and networks tightened along the route. Subsequently, migrants would employ the amalgamation of these 'weapons' to succeed in their processes of *resistance*, while hoping of overcoming the imposing and seemingly insurmountable obstacle symbolized by the US border, in the determinate struggle to realize their objectives.

Interestingly, the possibilities of further research concerning the complex trans-Mexican migratory panorama are multiple, and a relevant point to investigate would focalize on the experiences lived by those migrants who realize their goal of reaching and residing in the USA. Accordingly, even if migrants manage to cross the US border and bypass the numerous migration check-points located approximately between seventy and two hundred kilometers from the US southern border, this inestimable victory doesn't mark an end to the incessant processes of *domination* that systematically discriminate, exclude and repress Central-American migrants, who even when residing in US territory,

would be constrained to the clandestine life and the denial of rights, that are legislatively imposed by the status of 'illegality'. Analogously, migrants' powerful *agency*, *creativity* and *determination*, would continue to support the endless processes of *resistance* constantly endured by Central-Americans to survive the life conditions experienced by most 'illegal' persons residing in the US, while keeping on struggling for the realization of their dreams.



