Changing mobility regimes and care: Central American women confronting processes of entrapment in southern Mexico

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Abstract

The humanitarian crisis of Central American minor migrants in 2014 and the massive migration enforcement in Mexico during its aftermath altered the mobility of people fleeing violence in Central America. Anti-immigration measures particularly affect women with children. Due to violence along migration routes and the lack of financial resources to migrate north, many of them must settle in southern Mexico. In this situation, accessing formal rights through refugee protection status in Mexico becomes an important survival strategy. However, this process of legalizing their immigration status requires time, knowledge, and the provision of care by other family members. This paper focuses on the experiences of refugee claimants in the southern Mexican town of Tapachula. Based on fieldwork conducted there in 2018 and drawing on earlier research from 2013 and 2014, this paper aims to analyse women's experiences and strategies and the role of care provision during this process. Findings highlight processes of re-victimization due to segmented labour markets and other aspects of structural and gender-based violence that impact women's agency during this process.

Key words: mobility regimes, care, refugee families, entrapment, survival strategies

1. Introduction

The current dire situation of Central American families trying to enter the United States has received a great deal of attention. Yet, this is only one small dimension of the difficulties and hardship migrant and refugee families face as they flee. Before people manage to reach the United States, they must cross many miles of Mexican territory on their perilous journey. Due to anti-immigrant policies, such as the Southern Border Plan pushed forward by the United States and implemented in Mexico in recent years, as well as generalized violence along migration routes, these families' transit through Mexico have become very prolonged. Additionally, these policies have a gendered impact on refugees and migrants in transit and result in processes of entrapment and temporary immobility of migrant families, particularly single mothers with children. The following research looks at the situation of Central American women refugees from Honduras and El Salvador in southern Mexico and the impact of entrapment processes on their ability to care for their families.[1]

The mobility of women from the Global South to the Global North, their insertion in care work in countries of destination, and the resulting care deficit in countries of origin, described by the concept "global care chains" (Hochschild 2000; Pareñas 2001; Yeates 2009), has been the subject of extensive study. Additionally, there has been research on the effects of anti-immigration policies and their impact on communities in the USA (e.g. Nuñez and Heymann 2007; Gilbert 2009). However, there has been very little research on the problems refugee and migrant women face in transit countries as a result of migration enforcement, such as the impact of prolonged periods of immobility and entrapment on their capacity to provide care.[2] Current migration enforcement measures hinder refugees and migrants from reaching their countries of destination quickly, raising the costs of migration and making temporary settlement in enclaves within transit countries an increasingly important part of the overall migration strategy. The southern Mexican border town Tapachula is one of these enclaves, where women stay until they find a way to move on. This article examines the experiences of women who look for refugee protection in Mexico and explores the impact of entrapment processes that limit the spatial mobility of women on their resources and ability to care. The interviews analysed for this article are part of a broader body of research that aimed to elucidate women refugees' access to justice in Mexico, conducted in 2018. Moreover, this work draws on data from earlier research conducted for my PhD studies about the experiences of Central American women in transit through Mexico during 2013 and 2014.

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1   I refer to migrants as persons who left their country in order to move to another. A refugee is a person that applies for international protection defined by the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1952 and national asylum law. However, a person can be a migrant and refugee at the same time. Scholars have criticised the distinction between migrants and refugees, as they are often made based on legal categories instead of social realities and can be misused for political purposes (see Crawley and Skleparis 2018; FitzGerald and Arar 2018).

2   An exception is the recently published work of Bélanger and Silvey (2019) that looks at the effects of forced (im)mobility on care, however, the authors understand care in a much narrower sense than the analysis provide here.

2. Background

2.1 Enclaves and the general context of migration enforcement in Mexico

Mexico constitutes the last stage of the migration corridor from the Global South to the United States of America. Migrants and refugees from all over the World have to cross Mexico along clandestine routes in order to enter the United States and request asylum.[3] Due to the increasing prevalence of organized crime groups on Mexican territory, traversing Mexico has become a dangerous endeavour. In this context, women and children are less mobile than men since gendered violence, human trafficking, and structural violence hinder their mobility (Durand 2011, CNDH 2011, Willers 2016, 2018). Additionally, the Mexican government concentrates migration control measures on the southern Mexican states, where most detentions and deportations of undocumented persons take place.[4] This contributes to the development of enclaves as a space of containment, immobility, and segregation that result from migration management policies in the Mexican south.

Migration scholars have long studied the effects of ethnic enclaves on migrants' incorporation into labour markets in receiving societies. Research has highlighted both the positive and negative effects of socioeconomic and ethnic segregation of migrants in urban areas of host societies, mainly in the US context (Portes & Zhou 1993; Wilson and Portes 1980). Studies examined whether this kind of segregation results in closure of economic opportunities or provides a resource for accessing labour through networking with co-ethnics, with results indicating that this depends mainly on the quality of the networks and on the wider social context (Liu 2019: 601; Schüller 2016). However, in the context of this research, I use the concept of enclave defined by Turner (2010), as a space that emerges because of the effects of anti-migration policies and that results in spaces of temporary and involuntary settlement and immobility during transit migration, where migrants and refugees mostly cannot benefit from long-existing social networks with co-ethnics. Such conditions can be found on the margins of Europe and the United States, where potential migrants and refugees are forced to stay put by the extension of bordering practices into transit countries (Hess et al. 2017; Collyer & De Haas 2012). Tapachula, a town near Mexico's border with Guatemala, constitutes such an enclave, marked by the ambivalence of state control where severe migration control policies are implemented, while at the same time implicitly permitting exploitative forms of migrant labour (Turner 2010: 254).

The impact of immigration enforcement measures in Mexico is also visible by the fact that the numbers of deportations from Mexico have been rising in the aftermath of the crisis of the unaccompanied minor migrants in the USA in 2014. At the same time, the number of asylum applications submitted by refugees from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala have been increasing dramatically in Mexico, growing from 1,296 applications

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3   These include African countries, Caribbean countries, such as Cuba, and Asian countries, like India and Pakistan.

4   This becomes visible by analysing the numbers of detained and deported persons by the Mexican authorities. More than 50% of deportations are made from the southern Mexican states Chiapas and Tabasco (SEGOB, UPM 2018).

in 2013 to 11,736 in 2018 (SEGOB & UPM 2017, 2018: 12). In 2018 over 50 % of refugee applications were filed in the Mexican south, at the local office of the Mexican Commission for Attention to Refugees (COMAR) in Tapachula (Ureste 2019).

As a consequence of increasing numbers of refugee applications, there has been an effort by the UNHCR in cooperation with national and international organisations and NGOs to improve the support available to applicants.[5] In 2018, women, especially those traveling with children, received temporary shelter and financial aid from the local office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), while this was not the case in 2013 and 2014. However, this assistance is limited and does not cover living expenses for the whole application process. Additionally, due to the rising number of cases, waiting time has been extending and after the aid provision finishes, women are advised to look for work to maintain themselves. This drawn-out process affects women negatively, as this part of the Mexican Republic offers only precarious and informal job opportunities for refugees. Furthermore, stereotypes about Central Americans hinder their access to formal labour and keep them in subordinated positions (Martínez, Perez & Roldán 2011), which impacts their capacity to provide care.

2.2 Entrapment, gender and care

This article aims to demonstrate how aspects of migration and gender regimes impact on the possibilities of care provision of women and migrant/refugee families. As already noted, the migration of women from Central American countries is driven by gendered forms of violence (Carcedo 2010; Varela 2017) and at the same time events of gendered violence are part of the process of migration. There is a small but growing body of research documenting and showing the effects of violence experienced by women migrants and refugees during migration (Girardi 2008; Castro 2010; Willers 2016) and many reports by NGO´s (REDODEM 2016; AI 2010). However, research has not addressed the processes of entrapment and immobility, the emergence of enclaves, and the effects of the particular reception contexts on migrant women and refugees and their capacities to care.

The concept of gendered or gender-based violence I use to describe the violence experienced by refugee women, recognises a continuum of forms of violence against women and children based on gender differences. The particular vulnerability of refugee women and children to violence due to circumstances of flight and a lack of adequate policies in both countries of reception and transit has also been recognized by international organizations. For example, the UNHCR (2003) adopted a definition of gender-based violence based on the CEDAW (1993), defining it as; "violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.... While women,

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5   For example, legal advice on how to apply for asylum in Mexico was provided by human rights organizations. Another positive difference observed between 2013 and 2018 was the fact that detained women with children were released quickly from immigration detention when they filed their asylum application. Yet this is not a constantly applied practice and remains a constant critique and concern of Human Rights Organisations. Another critical point is the violation of the principle of non-refoulment by Mexican authorities (AI 2016).

men, boys and girls can be victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are the main victims" (UNHCR 2003: 10).

The definition divides violence based on gender into five categories: sexual violence, physical violence, emotional violence and other harmful practices, and socioeconomic violence; these divide in even more subcategories (UNHCR 2003: 17, 18). However, sociologists' and feminist scholars' analysis has insisted on the understanding of the underlying cultural, symbolic and structural differences that cause unequal power relations between men and women and that make violence possible (Dackweiler and Schäffer 2002). In this context, the understanding of Johan Galtungs model (1969) of violence is important because it emphasises both visible and invisible dimensions of violence (Dackweiler and Schäfer 2002). Additionally, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence helps to understand how violence becomes normalized and invisible even to its victims, while at the same time it is reproduced in social relations (Bourdieu 2007). Another important aspect of the analysis of gendered violence during migration and flight is the strategic use of sexual violence and rape in the establishment of territorial control and entrapment/immobility in zones of transit that are characterized by the prevalence of violent conflict and the influence of organized crime (Willers 2019). Finally, political violence experienced by migrants and asylum-seekers during the determination process is a further component of this continuum of violence that can be conceptualized as a liminal period of "legal non-existence" (Coutin 2007) when refugees and asylum-seekers are not yet recognized but forced to stay put in a hostile environment (Witteborn 2011; Mountz 2011) .

In this article, I understand care more generally as care circulation in transnational families, following the definition proposed by Baldassar & Merla: "as the reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over the life course within transnational family networks subject to the political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both sending and receiving societies" (Baldassar & Merla 2014: 25). This notion of care includes practices that do not only refer to direct personal care but other dimensions such as economic, accommodation, practical, emotional and moral (Baldassar & Merla 2014: 48). In this sense, care is an important element for migration and family-making across distance. In the same manner as care, family is understood beyond the concept of a nuclear family, focusing on the construction of transnational social fields at the level of families, households, and domestic spheres (Baldassar & Merla 2014:37). The functioning of transnational family networks depends on the capital available to each of its members and therefore on the social and political context its members are immersed in. Therefore access to resources such as finances, time and social capital are shaped by formal and informal policies of states (Baldassar & Merla 2014: 49) and the local particularities of places of reception. Thus, it is important to widen our understanding of how periods of forced (im)mobility in the intermediate or transit spaces of enclaves, as forms of structural and political violence, impact care circulation in families.

This said, women confront and respond to these different forms of violence through their agency. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 963), a person's agency is informed by their past experiences, expectations for the future, and orientations towards the present. In situations of entrapment, looking for refugee protection is one possible strategy to access care from state and non-governmental institutions and ensure survival and access

to mobility. Yet, as the further analysis shows, applying for legal status places many problems on asylum seekers.

3. Methods

The findings presented here are drawn from qualitative empirical fieldwork conducted in 2013, 2014, and 2018 in Tapachula, Chiapas. Data were collected through ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and problem-centred interviews (Witzel 2000) with 22 women who claimed refugee protection in Tapachula. Additionally, I conducted interviews with experts from non-governmental and international organizations. The interviews were transcribed and analysed with the help of qualitative software. The analysis followed a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1996). Interviewed women were approached at refugee shelters or human rights organizations. Participation was voluntary, and women were provided with information about the study and were asked to give their informed consent. To preserve anonymity, the names of all the interviewees have been changed.

While my research may not be representative, I noted a clear increase in women looking for refugee protection in Tapachula over the years. In 2013 I interviewed 13 women, but only 3 of them were looking for refugee protection. In 2014, 6 out of 7 interviewed women applied for refugee protection, and in 2018 all 13 interviewed were looking for refugee protection. Almost all interviewees were women, mostly single mothers, traveling alone or with children. Some of them had engaged in cross-border-work before; for example, coming to the Mexican south to buy merchandise for resale in their home countries. Others had migrated before, and some had relatives who lived in the United States, but for the most part, their bond to the receiving areas was not very strong. This shows that there is a strong presence of transnational multi-local families and ties are increasing between Central America and the United States, yet most of the interviewees would not have been migrating if it were not for experience of significant violence—either by organized or local crime groups or by their male partners—that pushed them to leave their country for their survival.

4. Results

4.1 Reasons for migration and its impact on the capacity to care

The reasons for women's migration and flight are very complex and have severe consequences on their capacity to provide care. Some women were looking for refugee protection in Mexico after suffering violent assaults by their male partner and because the state failed to protect them, others because of death threats by gangs such as the so-called "Ma-

ras", which control most of the territory of El Salvador and Honduras.[6] In other instances, women had to flee because death threats were put on their children if they failed to join the local gangs. In countries of origin where women carry most of the care responsibilities on their own, generalized social and gendered violence impact their ability to care for their children, since that, in turn, affects their ability to earn an income. Therefore, migration and flight are the logical choices they make in order to fulfil their economic responsibilities towards their children. As Maria put it:

> *I made the decision, as I was telling you, because of the problems I had, and I just couldn't stay in the country anymore because I was afraid this man would kill me, as he had already tried once. So, he could try again and I didn´t want to leave my children alone. I have nine children and just the thought they could be left alone scares me. Instead, if I work here in Mexico, struggling for them, I can carry them forward because when I get my papers I'll be free to work to help them. (Maria from Honduras 2018, 34 years old, 9 children)*

As the narration of Maria shows, leaving not only means staying alive, but also that the children will have a mother that can care for them economically. However, the experience of life-threatening violence affects women's capacity to provide care during their journeys since sometimes women have to flee literally only with the clothes on their backs.

Once women are forced to leave, they face difficulties arranging care for their families. Either they have to bring their children along because they are threatened as well, or they have to leave them with somebody they can trust. Since most women have more than one child, their situation becomes more complicated. Women know that the journey implies uncertainty in terms of safety and living conditions. Additionally, when women have to move, they lose the social capital provided by their local networks. After evaluating the possible risks for their children at home or on transit routes and possible alternative care arrangements, many women decide to bring at least one of their children.

While almost all the women interviewed travelled with children, many of them also left some children behind, since they were too many to bring with them on their own. Several of the interviewees who left children behind left them in the care of female kin, particularly sisters, which corroborates the findings of other studies (Hondagneu-Stoelo y Avila 1997). In Maria's case, it was her older children that helped her by taking care of the younger ones. She left all her children except for one.

> *They don't want to follow me to Mexico. One is 17, the other is 15 years old and the others are much younger. The others would follow me, but not the older ones. So, if they do not come with me, why would I bring the little ones? Who would help me take care of them? So I asked my sister to take care of them and told her I would help her when I start working. (Maria 2018)*

Maria, who had 9 children, decided to bring the child who needed the most care. Even though she had a younger baby, she said she would not have left her two-year-old son because he had been born with delayed psychomotor development and had a special need

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6   See for example Carcedo (2010) and Varela (2017).

for care that nobody else could meet. Another woman brought her youngest child due to the same concern, after she found a safe place for her older son. Others tried to bring all of their children. In general terms, most women regretted or were deeply ambivalent about their decision to leave their children in their home country because their children's well-being was a constant concern.

As mentioned before, the ability to provide and/or receive care during temporary settlement in Mexico is also informed by experiences and knowledge gathered in the past, which in turn influence their preparation for migration or flight to Mexico. In this sense, knowledge is an important form of capital. The interviews showed that women tried to plan their journeys and looked to gather relevant information about refugee protection in advance. Due to growing migration enforcement in countries of destination and transit, mobility becomes increasingly circular. Several women had former experiences of migration and deportations, which contributed to a learning process that informed their decisions.

But even when the women had not migrated before, experiences of migration retold by others are very present in everyday life, and inform women's decisions:

> *S: When you left Honduras, did you already know you would ask for refugee protection in Mexico?*
> *J: Yes.*
> *S: And how did you know about refugee protection?*
> *J: A friend who was here told me they were giving refugee protection here...*
> *S: And did she return to Honduras?*
> *J: She went back to get her children. So yes, she managed to get refugee protection here in Mexico. She is living at the northern border now. (Maria 2018)*

Interviews in 2018 showed that women had undergone a lot more preparation and background knowledge concerning support institutions, such as national and international human rights organizations for migrants and refugees. This is due in part to the improvement of the services for refugees in the region and to growing interregional coordination. On the other hand, it is also a result of the increasing number of women refugees and their sharing of this knowledge with those in their home countries. But as the extract above shows, the possibility of family reunification is also an important aspect of getting protected status for women.

4.2 Effects of entrapment on care

Due to these powerful drivers of migration, women often have no time to prepare for their migration in advance, to organize help and mobilize necessary resources from family members. Additionally, women need to provide care to their children at home and/or the ones who travel with them. Migration enforcement along migration routes has also contributed to making the journey expensive and dangerous. Those who flee their home country are exposed to extortions and assaults: they must pay bribes to officials in the transit country Guatemala, or to bus drivers, who drop them off before reaching the checkpoints so they go round them on foot. Many women who might have planned to reach the United States to look for asylum or work, find out that they do not have re-

sources to get there. Most times, when they manage to get to Tapachula, they have already spent all the money available to them and find themselves without the means to continue onward. Additionally, there are many checkpoints in Mexico, and people learn that continuing along the migration route could lead to deportation back to their home countries. One of the interviewees explained why she took the decision to stay in Tapachula:

> I said to Griela[7]…, I told her I need your guidance, your help. And so they told me about UNCHR, that COMAR provides help and that UNHCR helps women, so I said: Let's get our papers because if I go just like that, I'm risking my life and my son's life as well (Maria 2018).

Applying for refugee protection means "getting papers". But though at first glance the application might seem like a solution to persecution and threats, the process of applying poses several challenges and risks to vulnerable populations that lack resources to support themselves during the waiting period. The UNHCR offers financial help for accommodation and/or food, but this help is only temporary, encompassing only a few weeks, and does not cover their needs during the entire process, which can take at least two and sometimes up to several months before they get approval to look for a regular visa and a working permit.[8] Additionally, the aid is discretionary and varies from case to case. In 2018, the UNHCR was providing discretionary access to a local food bank, but, since these kinds of services follow a co-responsibility approach for care receivers, they were not affordable for women without any resources. One interviewee who had received a pass to the food bank in order to get cheaper food for her child, reported the following:

> S: When you're looking for a job, do they ask you for your papers?
> J: Yes, they always ask me for my Mexican papers and when I tell them I don't have them, they say: "Ok, so come back when you have them." Always discriminating against immigrants.
> S: And aren't there any immigrants working?
> J: No, they are almost always from Guatemala and already have their papers,[9] or they are Mexican. One must try their hardest, right? I don't even have money for public transportation. They are asking me for 50 pesos at the food bank for milk, to sign me up and give me the access card. (Maria 2018)

The interviewee, alone with her little son and without work, could not afford to pay even a minimum fee of 50 pesos (2 Euros) in order to get cheaper food. Obviously, these kinds of programmes do not meet the necessities of women refugees who do not have the bare minimum to survive. Yet, other women with children were not even given the opportunity to get access to the Food-Bank-Program. Women interviewed were very aware of

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7   Name of a social worker at a Human Rights Organisation. All names were changed.

8   To attenuate the negative effects on refugees, the Mexican government assigned the expedition of a Humanitarian Visa for asylum-seekers, however, due to the increased number of applicants, there is a prolonged waiting time as well. In addition, many employers do not recognize this visa, even without a legal reason.

9   Many Guatemalans working as day-labourers in Tapachula possess a regional working permit (Tarjeta de visitante trabajador transfronterizo) or a regional migration permit (Tarjeta de visitante regional) that, even if does not allow them to work officially, is used this way.

who would help them and who would not want to help them, as there is a lot of jealousy about differences regarding treatment and assistance provided. Another women in need experienced sexual harassment by care providers.

> *S: Do you feel you have gotten help here or that institutions have explained what the process is like?*
> *E: Look, all institutions, the Fray Matías, COMAR, ACNUR, what is it called? The Jesuit Service, all institutions have helped me, even where I am in the shelter, but there are also people there who take advantage, as I was saying, people in charge there who take advantage of people like us (...) the director there, he imposes conditions on women. Yes, because I didn't have money to leave yesterday, or even to do the paperwork I did today at the Immigration office, (...). Where I see the director and asked whether he could help me because I needed money for the paperwork in Immigration and he said if I would go with him, he would help me, otherwise, no. And I don't think that's right. And as I said I had not come here to prostitute myself, I told him (...) So that's it, I'm going to have to leave [the shelter for migrants] today. (...) I'm only thinking about food for my son, right? Because adults can wait but children can't, children ask for 3 meals and if you don't feed them, they cry. (Martina from Honduras, 36 years old, 2 children)*

As the examples make clear, women with children are particularly exposed when lacking resources, because they depend on aid offers such as for shelter and food, to be able to provide care to their families. This highlights how refugee women continue to suffer gendered violence due to a lack of attention to their basic needs and a limited, gender sensitive approach of the assistance provided. Negotiations with those in charge of international aid organisations, government institutions, and other care providers can be seen as part of the street-level-bureaucracy (Lipsky 1969), where women have to negotiate their everyday survival and the survival of their children on a personal level. Moreover, the absolute precarity contributes to an atmosphere of envy, mistrust and non-solidarity among refugees who find themselves in the same situation. These findings are similar to the analysis of other transit contexts, such as in northern Africa and Turkey (see Stock 2012, Suter 2012).

Another problem women noted they faced was insecurity. Women felt unsafe because they met people they were fleeing from. Due to the proximity between Tapachula and their countries of origin and its role as a point of entry, almost all those arriving from Honduras and El Salvador had to wait there for a response to their asylum applications:

> *My goal was not to stay here. It was to cross over to the United States if I had the chance. Do you know why? Because when I got here to Chiapas there were four of these people [members of organized crime groups] at COMAR getting their papers sorted out. So we, me and another girl, she came with me to file a complaint at the district attorney's office. Most of all, I can no longer stay at the shelter because they may go there, I mean, some of them, as we're talking about groups. So that was my goal, then. Well, in the beginning I did want to stay here, but now they're all spread out (everywhere) (Martina from Honduras, 36 years old, 2 children, 2018)*

The interviewee had come with her 8-year-old son, trying to escape persecution by drug gangs in Tegucigalpa, when she saw members of this organization in the Mexican

Commission for Refugees trying to apply for asylum in Mexico. Several women reported this kind of situation and asked to be moved to safer spaces, but this in turn requires another application. In the meantime, women fleeing are exposed to potential encounters with their persecutors.

Once women have run out of aid from organizations and other resources, they are instructed to look for work, but the labour market in Tapachula is particularly restricted. There are strong ethnic niches and salaries are very low (Martinez/Pérez/Roldán 2011). Even if there is a high demand for migrant labour, many of these niches are already occupied by migrant workers with a longer trajectory of migration in the region, such as temporary workers from Guatemala (Rojas Wiesner 2012). Furthermore, for refugees it is almost an impossible endeavour to find a regular job in Tapachula due to lack of working permits or discrimination by employers. Additionally, the lack of access to day-care for women refugees who travel with children limits their possibilities to find work.

When migrant and refugee women are excluded from access to the regular labour market, the only possibility to earn money is by accessing the informal market, where they are subjected to a double exclusion because of their irregular status and the existing stereotypes about Central American women based on their country of origin. As previously noted, while Guatemalans are seen as "trustworthy, domestic caregivers" (Pintín-Perez, Rojas & Bhuyan 2018), Hondurans and Salvadorans are seen as "easy" and "sexualized", which leads to their stigmatization and affects their chances of finding work outside these ethnic niches (Martinez, Pérez & Roldán 2011). As a result, they can only find irregular, low-paying jobs, mainly in the local sex industry which thrives on Central American migrant women who lack the ability to continue onward (Fernández-Casanueva 2018).

As the analysis reveals, during the asylum application process in Tapachula, women face uncertainty, discrimination, and dangers of revictimization. Women refugees need to receive care either through remittances from family members or through support provided by NGO´s and other institutions in order to be able to complete the asylum process. Otherwise, women and their children are exposed to situations that jeopardize their health and well-being, such as hunger and targeting by criminal groups and human traffickers. This difficult situation for refugee applicants in Tapachula contributes to high rates of discontinuation of the application process. Moreover, many try to move on without permits, which in turn leads to numerous deportations back to their home countries.

5.   Discussion and Conclusion

Care and care circulation have been analysed as a resource for transnational families that enables their members to migrate to find better jobs and living conditions that benefit all their members. Yet, in cases of increasing migration enforcement and violence as drivers for migration, care provision by families is seriously affected. On one hand, migration due to violence in countries of origin limits the ability of women to plan their flight and migration, on the other, due to the negative effects of overall violence in countries of origin on family economies, there is less capital available to provide care in the form of financial support for family members forced to leave the country. Particularly in cases of forced

mobility, women and children need to receive care in order to find the stability necessary for their survival. Finally, women as mothers, often single mothers, are responsible for the care of their children on the journey as well as for those they have left behind. This double need for care - for themselves and for their children - complicates women's possibilities to provide care during entrapment processes.

As the present research shows, entrapment as result of anti-immigration measures is a growing problem for Central American refugees in the Mexican south where migration from Central America is concentrated. Migrants and refugees, particularly women, who, due to gendered and sexual violence face particular restrictions on mobility, encounter multiple experiences of violence such as threats of deportation, human rights violations, and forms of gendered and sexual violence perpetrated by different actors. This leads to a process of adopting strategies for survival, such as attempting legalization of their status in Mexico. However, circumstances of accessing refugee protection are very difficult to face under conditions of reception in the Mexican south. Limited access to resources, such as humanitarian aid, and restricted access to the labour market leads to processes of pauperization and potential revictimization.

Given all this complexity, entrapment is not an absolute condition. Under circumstances of limited autonomy and prevailing uncertainty about the process of refugee application itself, onward mobility is a necessary consequence for many women and their children. Poor living conditions and a general atmosphere of danger contribute to women resuming travel as soon as they are able to. However, people who decide to discontinue their refugee applications and move on in despair risk being detained and deported, which works as a deterrent to others in the same situation.

Furthermore, refugee women also acquire particular knowledge about labour-market opportunities and differences between various social spaces for temporary settlement. The different regions of Mexico offer varied living possibilities for refugees, since they are shaped by different levels of migration enforcement, showing a clear North/South pattern that includes major migration enforcement in the South and less in the North, extending to better working opportunities and fewer labour market restrictions to the undocumented. Women's agency, informed by their experiences and acquired knowledge, is an important factor that helps them face adverse situations and manage to fulfil their care responsibilities. Nevertheless, as Moser (1996) has pointed out, it is important to underscore the limitations of the agency of the refugee population and their ability to cope in the absence of organized forms of social policies, which may counteract the spread of violence and promote a family's survival. Further research is needed to analyse the changing impact of continuing migration enforcement, refugee protection policies, and local conditions of refugee reception on this population.

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Information in German

Deutscher Titel

Die Auswirkungen des Wandels von Mobilitätsregimen auf Fürsorgepraktiken: Zentralamerikanische geflüchtete Frauen im Süden Mexikos vor dem Kontext von Immobilitätsprozessen

Zusammenfassung

Die humanitäre Krise geflohener zentralamerikanischer Minderjähriger im Sommer 2014 und die darauf folgende massive Verschärfung der Migrationspolitiken im Transitland Mexiko, hatten enormen Auswirkungen auf die Mobilität von zentralamerikanischen Geflüchteten in den letzten Jahren, insbesondere auf Frauen mit Kindern. Als Konsequenz aus der allgegenwärtigen Gewalt gegen Migrantinnen, der Migrationskontrollen entlang der Transitrouten sowie von fehlenden finanziellen Mitteln, müssen viele Frauen vorrübergehend im Transitland Mexiko siedeln. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist die Suche nach einem Zugang zu formalen Rechten im Kontext von einer Anerkennung als Geflüchtete eine wichtige Überlebensstrategie. Doch dieser Prozess verlangt neben Zeit und Erfahrung auch Verhandlungsgeschick und Hilfestellungen wie Fürsorgepraktiken von Familienmitgliedern und NGOs. Die vorliegende Forschung analysiert die Erfahrungen von asylsuchenden Frauen in der südmexikanischen Stadt Tapachula. Sie beruht auf Feldforschungen in den Jahren 2013, 2014 und 2018 und stellt die Erfahrungen von Frauen, ihre Überlebensstrategien sowie die besondere Rolle von Fürsorgepraktiken während dieses Prozesses in den Mittelpunkt. Dabei zeigt die Analyse auch Reviktimiserungsprozesse durch verschiedene Aspekte struktureller und geschlechterbasierter Gewalt auf, welche die Handlungsoptionen der geflüchteten Frauen negativ beeinflussen.

Schlagwörter: Mobilitätsregime, Pflege- und Fürsorgepraktiken, geflüchtete Familien, Immobilität, Überlebensstrategien