Women-Mothers-Migrants from Guatemala in the Southern Border of Mexico

Mujeres-madres-migrantes de Guatemala en la frontera sur de México

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ABSTRACT

The concept of motherhood is discussed as a gender device that creates processes of disadvantage and vulnerability. The results presented in this article were generated and analyzed using the biographical method. Through the testimonies of six Guatemalan migrant women, it is shown how the individual experience is interwoven with the historical reality of a given time and space. It is concluded that motherhood, exercised in contexts of inequality, and during migratory processes, is mediated, regulated, and sanctioned by institutions that affect and determine the quality of life of women-mothers-migrants.

Keywords: 1. gender, 2. migration, 3. maternity, 4. southern border of Mexico, 5. Guatemala.

RESUMEN

Se discute el concepto de la maternidad como un dispositivo de género que crea procesos de desventaja y vulnerabilidad. Los resultados que se presentan fueron generados y analizados a partir del método biográfico. A través de seis testimonios de mujeres migrantes de Guatemala, se muestra cómo se entreteje la experiencia individual con la realidad histórica de un tiempo y espacio determinado. Se concluye que la maternidad, ejercida en contextos de desigualdad, y durante los procesos migratorios, es mediada, regulada y sancionada por instituciones, lo que repercute y determina la calidad de vida de las mujeres-madres-migrantes.

Palabras clave: 1. género, 2. migración, 3. maternidad, 4. frontera sur de México, 5. Guatemala.

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INTRODUCTION

The analytical and methodological dimensions that make it possible to identify and systematize gender systems as organizing principles of migration have been widened by way of feminist studies (Ariza, 2000; Gregorio Gil, 2004). Thus, we have come to notice that migration represents risks for both men and women; however, being a woman increases such risks, as besides assuming the role of documented or undocumented migrants, women also must face *economic, social, and cultural inequalities and demands*, both in their places of origin and those of destinations, linked as they are to "the feminine."

According to Gregorio Gil (2004), to look at things from this perspective results in a critical positioning before the economistic and androcentric biases that ignore gender inequalities when it comes to interpreting migration, also leaving aside the humane. That is to say, that it does not bring to the fore nor deems relevant the feelings and experiences of migrants in the process, even if these experiences impact their quality of life and are part of the development of History (Iniesta & Feixa, 2006).

This work will address the role of motherhood as a gender device that is directly experienced, felt, and related to the disadvantage and vulnerability processes in the lives of women-mothers-migrants. The first section will introduce the theoretical proposal built from feminist studies that address motherhood and migration. The second section will highlight the characteristics of the biographic methodology that, from case studies, will provide an overview of the social and historical processes of a given space and time.

In the third section, the study locations are profiled; it is noted that they belong to the municipalities of Tapachula and Suchiate in the state of Chiapas (Mexico), wherein more than 50% of the population lives in poverty and under precarious working conditions. These characteristics represent greater disadvantages for migrant women and men and are recognized as typical of South-South migrations.

From the stories of six migrant women from Guatemala, the next section will show how motherhood is mediated, regulated, and sanctioned by institutions when exercised in contexts of inequality. Within the context of migration, the exercise of motherhood determines the quality of life of women-mothers-migrants, impacts on their physical and mental health, their economy and social relationships, and intensifies their condition of vulnerability.

MOTHERHOOD AND MIGRATION

Besides being a biological fact, motherhood is a historical and social construct aimed to fit the needs of the political, economic, and demographic context of societies. It is inherently linked to women and is essential to the persistence and reproduction of the gender order; it directly or indirectly determines family structures, the ideology on women, the sexual

division of labor, and social inequalities (Chodorow, 1984). Through motherhood, women are not perceived as an end in themselves but as an aggregate or instrument to satisfy the needs of the other (Nussbaum, 2002).

Motherhood generates stereotypical images in which "the mother" must fulfill an ideal, that of "the good mother" (Marcús, 2006). According to Lamas (1995), this notion corresponds to "the myth of the mother." An "unavoidable" social mandate that commands "constant presence and closeness"; yet also the reproduction of children who are "good people," unconditional love, sacrifice and above all positioning "the other" or "others" as the axis of well-being and one's existence (Lagarde, 1997).

The mandatory compliance with this "love duty" stemming from its "naturalization" minimizes the relevance of the power relationships sustained by gender, economic, cultural, and ethnic inequalities. This situation stigmatizes the reality of those who do not properly fulfill this duty, those labeled as "bad mothers" (Lamas, 1995, p. 174; Palomar Verea, 2004; Cernadas Fonsalías & Pena, 2011), who are in turn socially loaded with blame, fear, and criticism, even being the focus of gossiping, all of this as a way of vital domination (Echeburúa, del Corral & Amor, 2001; Lagarde, 2011).

It could be assumed that the intersection of motherhood and migration would change the conditions (the economic and material circumstance) and position (their position in the prevailing power structure in society in relation to men) of women. Nonetheless, several studies have documented how women-mothers-migrants must deploy strategies (with their respective costs) to fulfill the socially assigned duties and responsibilities of their triple identity during the migration process (D´Aubeterre Buznego, 2004; Gregorio Gil, 2004; Marroni, 2010; Lagomarsino, 2014; Fuentes Gutiérrez & Agrela Romero, 2015; Hernández Cordero, 2016, among others).

Gonzálvez Torralbo, Medina Villegas, and Tapia Landino (2009) point out the permanence and stability of a "patriarchal gender structure" in the context of origin, which then remains throughout the process of national and transnational migration, even in the context of the receiving territories. By migrating, women may find new opportunities and goals, higher self-esteem, confidence, and the possibility of developing more equitable relationships, but this does not imply a transformation of the normative context.

Our hypothesis holds that one of the factors that allow the continuity of this normative framework is motherhood. Besides, from this one can generate and reinforce the conditions of disadvantage and vulnerability.

Fraser (2008) posited the influence of economic and cultural disadvantages. The author relates the economic ones to exploitation, marginalization, and deprivation, whereas she finds the cultural ones among those derived from dominant social groups that routinely render invisible, aim at imposing absolute values, or devalue and discredit certain categories of people. Both forms of disadvantage have their logic and require strategic responses.

The economic disadvantages require the implementation of *redistributive policies*, and those centered around cultural processes demand the *appreciation and recognition of underestimated groups*. According to Fraser (2008), for women gender is a two-dimensional social differentiation based on both economic and cultural disadvantages, and so it requires the joint implementation of redistribution and recognition policies.

For its part, vulnerability is not only present in the face of imminent, dramatic, or extreme risks, as it is also felt from the precarious living conditions of a person or a group of peoples. According to Vassilikou (2007), *vulnerability due to precariousness* tends to be common and an everyday occurrence; yet it is the cause of isolation, depression, loneliness, fatigue or tiredness, separation from loved ones, as it also makes it more likely to occupy undervalued or socially stigmatized working positions. This type of vulnerability is often poorly recognized politically (especially among migrant populations), because paying close attention to it implies long-term actions, and above all structural changes that allow for the exercise and fulfillment of rights.

METHODOLOGY SECTION

The results presented in this article are part of two mixed studies. The first one was carried out in 2012, and it took place in three coffee farms in the municipality of Tapachula, Chiapas (Ramírez Ramos, 2013), and the second one took place in 2017 in border town known as "Ejido La Libertad," a banana production site in the municipality of Suchiate, Chiapas (Ramírez Ramos, 2018).

This paper presents the results from the analysis of the Life Stories qualitative technique. This technique derives from the interpretative biographical method, collecting people's experiences just as they process and interpret it, their beliefs, attitudes, and values included (Sautu, 2004). The richness of this method lies in taking into account that the problems of an individual are not exclusive nor isolated. As agents of history, individuals move within a reactive framework that either aids or blocks, stimulates or paralyzes their actions (Ferrarotti, 2007). In this sense, it is deemed that:

> A life is a praxis that claims to itself social relationships (social structures), internalizing them, and then externalizing them again in psychological structures […]. Each behavior or individual act appears […] as the synthesis of a social structure [...] each individual is the totalization of a system […] (Ferrarotti, 1981, quoted by Tognonato, 1990, pp. 7- 8).

Life stories were constructed from six in-depth interviews, remarks, and informal conversations in which three moments in the lives of women migrants are inquired about: the beginning of the migration experience, the transit to the destinations and finally their integration to them. From active listening and the analysis of the collected information, it was noticed that motherhood is a determining experience in the life of these women.

The testimonies presented in this paper aim at displaying the point of view from which the interviewed migrant women talk about themselves and their experiences as pertaining motherhood in their society, community, or group (Reséndiz García, 2013), to document how individual experience is interwoven with historic reality (Sautu, 2004). Therefore, it is considered that:

> Each woman […] is a synthesis of the patriarchal world: of its regulations, its prohibitions, its duties, of its (social, ideological, affective, intellectual, political) pedagogic mechanisms internalized in her […]. Each of them can discover the others, and in every process of their life's women reflect the processes of history […]. In each woman […] it is possible […] to find the other, the institutions, society, and culture […] (Lagarde, 2011, pp. 43).

The analysis categories of this paper are the following: 1) the condition of women as mothers and migrants (age, place of residence, months or years after migration, willingness to return to their place of origin, education level, occupation in their place of origin and currently, working and migration status); 2) motherhood (reproduction: age at their first pregnancy, number of children, age of the children); 3) relationship status (marital status, number of unions, nationality of the partner, children from other partners); 4) care of the children (place of residence of the children, responsibility, and support in taking care of children); 5) gossiping as a mechanism of social coercion; 6) discrimination and motherhood, and 7) maternal dispossession.

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a part of the souther Mexican border, the state of Chiapas is a space wherein different migrant flows interact; among them, the transmigrant population of Central American origin aiming for the United States stands out. As a bordering space, the southern Mexican border also represents a (temporary, circular, or seasonal) labor node for those migrants who decide or find themselves in the need of living there indefinitely (Rojas Wiesner, 2017).

The migratory phenomenon in this territorial space has been already documented from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Among the different lines of analysis studying it, those exposing the inequalities derived from gender, nationality, migration status, physical features, and the stereotypes imposed on migrants during the migration process can be counted (Zarco Palacios, 2007; Rivas Castillo 2008; Madueño Haon, 2010; Martínez Cruz, 2013; Winton, 2016). There are also those that bring to light the precariousness of the labor markets and the lack of responsibility of States and markets in guaranteeing rights for the migrant population (Reyes Carrillo, 2009; Blanco Abellán, 2014; Nájera Aguirre, 2014; Rivera Farfán, 2014; Wilson González, 2014).

The analysis of this article centers around the experiences of six migrant women who participate in the labor market of the heterogeneous bordering space of Chiapas (in the

production of coffee and banana), migrant women who reside there temporarily, and permanently in some instances.

The results presented here are derived from two studies; the first one was carried out in three coffee farms in the municipality of Tapachula, in the Soconusco region, historically renown as a region of coffee production, thus seen as an important labor market with a yearly demand for skilled workforce (Anguiano, 2008; Ramírez Ramos, 2013; Nazar-Beutelspacher, Zapata-Martelo, Ayala Carrillo, & Suárez-San Román, 2014; Rojas Wiesner, 2017).

The second study was carried out in a bordering town known as "Ejido La Libertad" in the municipality of Suchiate, Chiapas, which specialized in banana production and export. Its location on the banks of the Suchiate river allows the entry and departure of migrant workforce, essential for said production (Ramírez Ramos, 2018).

According to the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2010), Tapachula and Suchiate are the first and second ranking municipalities in the state of Chiapas with the largest population born in another country (28,975 people in Chiapas; 9,865 people in Tapachula; 3,350 people in Suchiate).

The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, 2015) records both municipalities as having generalized poverty characteristics. 54.5% of the population in Tapachula is reportedly poor, whereas only 16.3% is considered not poor and not vulnerable. As for Suchiate, 68.6% is reportedly under conditions of poverty, and only 2.1% is considered not poor and not vulnerable (see Table 1).

Table 1. Percentages of the Population Living Under Extreme
Poverty, Moderate Poverty and not Poor nor Vulnerable Conditions
in the Municipalities of the Studied Area

Municipalities	Total Population	Extreme Poverty (%)	Moderate Poverty (%)	Not poor and vulnerable (%)
Tapachula	403,754	12.0	42.4	16.3
Suchiate	53,113	22.7	45.9	2.1
Chiapas Total	5,272,391	30	42.6	7.6

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Coneval (2018).

The location of these farms translates into a sort of isolation for those working there, as these places can only be accessed in private transportation or by foot, as public transportation is very limited there. Workers are transported by contractors, from bordering points, and into the farms, in private trucks or buses, which allows for Mexican migration authorities to hold some control on the number of workers employed in coffee production every year in Mexico.

Due to the physical characteristics of the territory, coffee farms are far from neighboring towns and services, those related to health included. The authorities inside of the farms are assigned by their owners and correspond to the figure of the foreman, who besides guaranteeing the production, administration of inputs, hiring of personnel, and other activities, also regulate social interactions. The official authorities of the Mexican State seldomly interfere in these spaces, remote as they are from urban centers; they are only present for some processes such as migration and labor regulation inspections.

At times, entire families travel to what is to become their new home during a period of approximately three to six months. Even if temporary migration prevails in the context of this production, cases were found in the studied coffee farms of families settled there, some for as long as 29 years (Ramírez Ramos, 2013).

The work they do will be better paid if the entire family participates in it, as most of the time they are paid on a piece-rate basis, that is, they are paid for the amount of work they do and not for periods of time or the number of people involved, and so the participation of women and children is key to this type of production.

Food and housing are provided by the farm owners, and this makes it so that the migrants working for them live under precarious conditions during their stay, even if for many of them these conditions tend to be better than those they live under in their places of origin.[6]

Conversely, "Ejido La Libertad" is a more active and heterogeneous space; people from different places in Central America live there. It is located on the banks of the Suchiate River and is made up of several banana production farms. There is no migration control mechanism in the passage from Guatemala to this town; people can move freely and cross the border without the restriction of any kind.

Unlike with coffee production, the work at banana sites is not temporary since "there is work the entire year." The salary allows workers to rent private spaces and so live for longer periods and even definitively in the town, develop closer relationships with the "original" population, and even moving back and forth their places of origin with greater ease.

From among the women surveyed in the banana production site (n=18), only 5.2% had been living there less than one year, while 33.4% had been there from one to five years; 16.7% from six to ten years, and 44.7% for over ten years. According to Mexico's National Population Commission (CONAPO, 2018), these figures are characteristic of immigration, as people "reside" in the studied location.

The heterogeneity of migration flows in the border area has been barely made visible by any government action. The public interest in the migrant population revolves around those migration flows that move through the territory and not in the migrant and immigrant

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[6] In 2014, 23.4% of the Guatemalan population lived in conditions of extreme poverty (Encovi, 2014).

population that works, participates in local development, stays and reproduces in Mexico under precarious conditions (Rivas Castillo, 2010). According to Vassilikou (2007), this contributes to making so that those who migrate and settle in the southern Mexican border find themselves "unable" to claim any social benefit or right.

The labor migration of men and women coming from Guatemala employed in both coffee farms and banana production sites located in the bordering space in Chiapas are inserted in a context of binational territorial precarity. This phenomenon can be termed south-south migrations, and its nuances are quite interesting.

Those who migrate do not necessarily improve their living conditions but are rather more likely to be exploited and suffer disease. They are also more likely to have lesser access to medical care, not only due to being migrants (and not meeting the affiliation requirements of the receiving countries, also not being considered for the care lists) but also because of the deficiency of the public health services (lack of infrastructure, staff, and medical supplies) in developing countries (Analítica Internacional-Grupo Coppan SC, 2007; OIM, 2014).

Normative structures also remain largely unchanged in Latin American south-south migration flows since Latin American countries often share a history of asymmetrical relations, violence, and unequal distribution of resources between genders (Chant, 2007).

In this context, the social distance between "nationals" and "the other/s" is a characteristic that exists, is sustained, and reproduces causing exclusion processes by means of attitudes of rejection or fear. In 2011 the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED, 2011) found that 67% of the Mexican population in the country considered, to different extents, that migrants caused divisions in the community. This perception was stronger among the population of the municipality of Tapachula (89.9%).

These attitudes converge with institutional policies that may at first appear contradictory since on the one hand, they aim at containing migratory flows, and on the other, they make borders more permeable for workforce without labor rights nor the possibility of demanding them; however, these policies make sense under the logic of capitalism.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Women-Mothers-Migrants

The following characteristics are shared by the interviewed women: they come from families under precarious working conditions in Guatemala (agriculture, manufacturing, selling candy) and their education level is null or very low (see Table 2).

Table 2. Economic and Migration Characteristics of the Interviewed Women-Mothers-Migrants, by Interview Location

Location	Name	Speaks or understands an indigenous language	Education	Occupation in her place of origin	Current residence	Migration status	Current working status	Occupation in Mexico	Time since migration	Willingness to return to her country of origin
Coffee farm (CF)	Claudia	No	No	Domestic/ contract manufacturing	Guatemala/ Retalhuleu	Documented	Active	Coffee picking	4 months	Yes
	Berenice	No	No	Domestic	CF	Undocumented	Active	Coffee picking	4 years	No
	Rosa	No	No	Selling candy	CF	Undocumented	Active	Coffee picking/services	1 year	No
Banana production site (BPS)	Isaura	No	No	Day laborer (sesame and corn)	BPS	Undocumented	Active	Selling chicken	7 years	No
	Sofía	No	2nd grade, Elementary school	Unspecified, day laborer parents	BPS	Undocumented	Not working due to pregnancy	Banana packing	7 years	No
	Rubí	No	No	Domestic	BPS	Undocumented	Active	Banana packing	28 years	No

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Ramírez Ramos (2013 & 2018).

Only one of the women interviewed (a temporary documented worker on a coffee farm) relates as her place of residence where she is originally from, her apartment in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, and with that, her wish to return there. The other five women had been for more than a year in the places they worked at and expressed a lack of interest in returning to Guatemala; four of them even considered that such was not even a possibility, as all their family was living in the Mexican side of the border.

> […] I moved with this young man and we had a boy; the boy is 6 years now, […] he is the reason why I don't feel like going back to my country, because I'm practically alone now; my grandparents I lived with died, so I don't feel like going back there anymore, I'm more or less settled here, but we always feel unsafe because of migration issues and all that (Sofía, 21 years old, banana production site, personal communication, June 23, 2017).

According to Ayala Carrillo, Lázaro-Castellanos, Zapata-Martelo, Suárez-San Román, and Nazar-Beutelspacher (2013) and Ramírez Ramos (2013- 2018), the kind of work these women are employed in (coffee and banana production) can be considered as precarious and even as a form of "labor exploitation," as they lack any pre-established contract, involves long and strenuous working hours, is performed under extreme weather, risks the health of the laborers, who have limited access to health services due to their migration status, and is related to child labor.

> […] you have to be well behaved, so your boss sees that and they pay you more, because if you are lazy, how can they pay you more? […] they tell you that you're very slow, that you're a sloth; I mean, they are offensive like that […] they yell it to you, they're offensive, that means that you're very slow, that you're not worth it […] the only thing you do is looking down and try to perform better so they can pay you more and they don't offend you like that […] I don't have an exact time to leave, you have to finish the process before you can leave, so if I don't do it fast, I leave at night […] (Rubí, 34 years old, banana production site, personal communication, May 15, 2017).

> […] I worked two years [when I was 14] packing for a farm […], I started to work with borrowed papers, always in fear because the border patrol would visit the farms all the time, […] I borrowed a Mexican birth certificate and now my name was different, I worked with my cousin's papers […] (Isaura, 21 years old, banana production site, personal communication, July 4, 2017).

> […] If you have an accident, I mean, I have an accident and go to the Health Center looking for attention, and they tell me "the thing is that you are not from here, go to the General Hospital of your locality," that's why I don't go to the hospital (Sofía, 21 years old, banana production site, personal communication, June 23, 2017).

The situation grows complex for women at coffee farms, particularly when they have children and migrate with them. For these women, migrating to and working at these spaces represents work overloads, impacts on health, and even implies being blamed and blaming themselves for having their children work when they are still underage: "it is parents who

demand children to work, to cover their economic needs" (Manager, coffee, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

Blame, pain, and frustration also appear as feelings that cannot be expressed, in order not to affect those around.

> God brought me to this world only to suffer, when I was picking coffee on the top of a mountain, I could barely hold my tears and would ask myself why this was happening. I could not cry nor do anything, else I would discourage my children (Luis, 14 years old; Juan, 15 years old), they know that from now on I am their father and mother (Claudia, 33 years old, coffee farm, field diary, February 13, 2012).

Reproduction

The women we interviewed had their first child before turning 20 years old. Three of them became mothers before turning 15 years old (child mothers) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Reproductive Status of Women-Mothers-Migrants by Interview Location

Location	Name	Age	Age at first pregnancy	Number of children	Age of children
Coffee farm (CF)	Claudia	33	18	2	14 and 15
	Berenice	22	18	3	1, 3, and 4
	Rosa	14	14	Pregnant	Not applicable
Banana production site (BPS)	Isaura	21	13	4	1, 2, 5, and 9
	Sofía	21	14	1, 1 abortion and pregnant	6
	Rubí	34	19	2	14 and 15

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Ramírez Ramos (2013 & 2018).

These results relate to what Nazar Beutelspacher, Zapata-Martelo, Ayala Carrillo, and Suárez-San Román (2014) reported about Guatemalan migrant women working in the coffee plantations of the Soconusco; 52.8% entered common law union before turning 17 years old, and 31.4% did so before turning 20 years old. The authors describe these characteristics as a pre-transitional stage of fecundity, marked by unwanted pregnancies at early ages and minimal or no use of contraceptive methods.

According to Marcús (2006), these reproductive characteristics relate to contexts of marginalization, with the search for identity, a life project, and the quest for personal satisfaction; but they also are a strong indicator of economic and social disadvantages, and of a lack of professional and educational opportunities.

I told my mom that I was pregnant and she told me to have an abortion, she doesn't know that still hurts me a lot, but I told her that me and my baby will be fine because I will work so that we have everything we need (Rosa, 14 years old, coffee farm, field diary, March 10 of 2012).

When I got pregnant [at 18 years old] my mom told "I already had enough children to support another one, you better take care yourself." When my children were born [she had twins] my mom told me "what are you going to do with two kids?" She told me to call my former bosses for them to take care of one of the babies, but having my baby in front of me, how could anyone believe I would leave him? (Berenice, 22 years old, coffee farm, field diary, March 18, 2012).

Marital Status and Violence

Although the prevailing marital status among these women is common law union, a certain instability in their relationships can be noticed (see Table 4). Only two of them have had a "solid" relationship with only one person. Those who have had two couples also have had a child or children with each one of them.

Table 4. Marital Status, Number of Common Law Unions and Characteristics of the Children of the Women-Mothers-Migrants, by Interview Location

Location of the interview	Name	Marital status	Number of marriages or common law unions	Children from different fathers	Place of birth of the children	Current residence of the children
Coffee farm (CF)	Claudia	Divorced	1	No	Guatemala	Guatemala/ Retalhuleu
	Berenice	Common law union	1	No	Guatemala/ Mexico	The oldest girl in Guatemala, two younger boys in Mexico
	Rosa	Single	0	No	N/A	N/A
Banana production site (BPS)	Isaura	Common law union	2	Yes	Mexico	BPS
	Sofía	Common law union	2	Yes	Mexico	Guadalajara
	Rubí	Common law union	1	No	Mexico	BPS

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Ramírez Ramos (2013 & 2018).

Freyermuth and Manca (2000) look upon this process as a mechanism that can be employed by some migrant women to find a stable partner, as well as economic and emotional support. However, children cannot guarantee that the couple will stay together. Facing the shortcomings of said mechanism, they find themselves exposed to being victims of abandonment, work overload (since besides assuming full responsibility for the care of their children and homes, they must also provide economically), economic problems, social rejection, sexual harassment, and even violence.

Within this context, the constant search for a couple results from complex circumstances. Lagarde (1997) pointed out that the meaning of life for women has been socially constructed from taking care of others, who would occupy a higher hierarchical position in the subjectivity of women and without whom women would be in a state of incompleteness.

According to Kabeer (2000), a society regulated by gender rules, where there is a clear sexual division of labor, where women are fully responsible for the reproductive work, where land, property, and other resources valuable for living in society are unequally distributed, and where adult males are seen as guardians of the family, mediators of the rights of women and key providers, the loss of male guardianship is associated with economic hardship and greater social vulnerability, and so it will always be better to be under male guardianship than living to live without it.

Nonetheless, this mechanism is very costly for some women, as it implies having to endure situations of violence in exchange for not being "alone" and so "neglecting" their children (as if having a couple would factually guarantee the well-being of children; this subject will be addressed to greater detail in the following section). Such is the case of Berenice:

Upon migrating to the coffee farms with her husband, Berenice began to experience infidelities and aggressions. At the time of this interview, Berenice pointed out that seeing the situation she was under, even her father-in-law would tell her: "well you should leave, you're not ugly and it's only one boy, you can start again." She did not leave, though, since she was pregnant again at that moment. Berenice narrated how her husband had hit her on different occasions, and she particularly remembered two of them; the first one is when he made her deaf for a week, and the other is when her husband took a machete and hit her on the nape with the handle. Her young son saw this and would later say "my dad hits my mom with a machete."

Looking for help on the farm against the violence her husband was inflicting on her was practically impossible for Berenice; her couple was the son of the foreman of the farm they were living in and she did not have any family there, besides that, everyone was the same in the farm, she stated. During our interview, Berenice stated that the people who know her would tell her: "don't be a fool, don't leave your husband, be sweet to him, be loving to him so he keeps supporting you, because otherwise what will you do without a man, your children

will be left without a father and will suffer alone, imagine how will you make it, if you leave him you would be a fool" (Berenice, 22 years old, coffee farm, field diary, March 18, 2012).

The story of Berenice displays how a separation socially means that women must fully take care of the children and legitimizes that men detach themselves from their responsibilities as parents as if these would end upon the dissolution of their role as husbands or partners.

According to de Alencar-Rodrígues and Espinosa (2014), altogether with family stereotypes, romantic love, the ideas of the submission and inferiority of women in relation to men, and the naturalization and justification of violence, the "unsafety" of being a woman "alone with her children" is another factor limiting the development of strategies to escape gender violence in relationships. This way, the idea of unsafety stemming from being "alone with her children" is a powerful resource through which women are tied down in unequal and violent unions, or to the constant search for male guardianship.

The fact that common law unions are the prevailing status also speaks to us about a lack of legal protection; it is from civil marriage that States determine that which can be properly termed a family, as well as the rights and responsibilities of each member (Nussbaum, 2002).[7]

Care of their Children, Complete Responsibility of Women-Mothers-Migrants

To those women we interviewed, the socially constructed idea that having a male couple is a factor ensuring the well-being of children is far from being a reality.

In the testimonies we documented, it can be seen how the women interviewed have experienced abandonment and lack of responsibility from the fathers of their children, even themselves coming from families with absent fathers (see Table 5).

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[7] According to the Judicial Branch of the State of Chiapas, 3,849 claims for child support were recorded in Tapachula from 2011 to 2016; that is to say, approximately 642 persons per year during that period were not undertaking the responsibility in supporting their children (Judiciary Council - Office of Statistics, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016). These claims correspond to the divorce proceedings recorded in the same period and municipality. We can look at marriage and so at divorce as exclusive instances that "enable" women to claim under the law the right to food for their children, even when the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States sets forth in its fourth article that "The State, in all decisions it makes and all actions it carries out, will safeguard and comply with the principle of doing what is in the best interest of children, thus entirely guaranteeing their rights" (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, 2020, p.10).

Table 5. Responsibility of the Partner in Taking Care of the Children
of Women-Mothers-Migrants, by Interview Location

Location	Name	Responsibility of their partners in taking care of children
Coffee farm (CF)	Claudia	No
	Berenice	Yes, although the partner's lack of commitment made her take all the responsibility for the care of children at first
	Rosa	No
Banana production site (BPS)	Isaura	Not for the first daughter
	Sofía	Not for the first son
	Rubí	No

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Ramírez Ramos (2013 & 2018).

In the face of this, the migrant women we interviewed have undertaken the care of their children as a part of their "what ought to be," before the lack of options derived from the little commitment and responsibility of their partners. Berenice, upon realizing she was pregnant and abandoned by the father of her children, decided to work to support them; Claudia, after separating from her husband and finding no job, and as he did not assume responsibility as a father, migrated with her children to work at the coffee farms, assuming the role of father and mother for her children from that point on. At the time of the interview, Rosa, faced with the uncertainty of whether or not she would be supported by the father of her child soon to be born, had one single certainty: she had to work so that her baby lacked nothing. Isaura found herself fully responsible for the care of her daughter when, aware of the existence of the child, neither the father nor his family "supported" her; then Rubí worked in banana production so that her teenage children could continue attending school.

And so, for these women taking care of their children is part of their "ought to be" and is socially perceived as something that exists naturally, without acknowledging the disadvantages and vulnerabilities as well as the physical and emotional impacts derived from the role of custom, the law, and institutions (Nussbaum, 2002).

However, the care that migrant women must provide for their children requires that they extend this task to other family members. This is the case of Rubí, who besides keeping with the well-being and good behavior of her children (raising them as good men), must also take care of her husband, an alcoholic man who had not supported her with the family expenses for over two years at the time, representing instead additional costs related to his living expenses and other concerns revolving around his health and well-being.

> First I felt a lot of pressure because I thought "this is why I have a husband, for him to support me"; but lately I rather ask God that nothing happens to him in the way, because sometimes he clocks in at 10 or 11 in the morning […] I'm all worried that someone comes to tell me that he got beheaded somewhere, I ask God that my children don't follow his way, […] that they don't go astray. I'm with him because I

still love him, I really do and I think that he will change for the better, my illusion is that he'll change for the better, and if someday he says he will not change for the better then he rather pick up and go, then; if not, there's no other way, I'll die by his side (Rubí, 34 years old, banana production site, personal communication, May 15, 2017).

The demands derived from the social construction of "love," not wanting to be "alone," that of being a "good mother" and a "good woman" have placed Rubí in a sort of lockdown. Lagarde (2011) calls it captivity, one from which it is difficult to get out, as loyalty, service, sacrifice, acceptance, and selflessness are qualities that are socially desirable and valued as inherent to women. These characteristics represent benefits for the rest of society and so those who do not meet said expectations become socially penalized.

Still, according to Lagarde (2011), the penalties imposed are private and operate as social coercion mechanisms that guard, keep, and reproduce the mandates established by the gender order. In this normative context, what is important is having a man around, regardless if he is an alcoholic or violent.

Gossiping as a Mechanism of Social Coercion

According to Chávez Arellano, Vázquez García, and de la Rosa Regalado (2006), gossiping can be defined as an act of violence that, devoid of physical aggression, still exerts moral pressure and severely damages the reputation, personal relationships, and self-esteem of those who are subject to it.

According to Vázquez and Chávez (2008), the central subjects under which gossiping revolves around are sexuality and the body. Through it, gender roles are meant to be transmitted and reproduced, and so gossiping operates as a form of control over those who do not live by this gender order.

As an example, there was a gossip about Rosa doing the rounds, that sexually linked her to her step-father and other men; the dissemination of this gossip, besides questioning the exercise of her sexuality, socially allowed for and justified the abandonment of her partner and future father of her child, legitimizing his neglect in relation to the child Rosa was expecting at the time of the interview.

I am three months pregnant and I got mad at my boyfriend. They told him I was going out with another guy and that I had sex with my stepfather, so I got mad and slapped him, and now I'm very scared because he won't talk to me anymore and I don't know if he'll be back with me (Rosa, 14 years old, coffee farm, field diary, March 10, 2012).

As for Isaura, being a young girl next to her partner (a man five years older than her) and the gossiping about her being that she was cheating on him, caused her partner to be violent against her. Isaura was aware of the abuse, however, she stated staying under those circumstances because of her children. These elements contributed to intensifying her vulnerability, limiting and worsening the options available to her.

> […] He liked to go out with different girls and I was a young girl, he used to say I was his daughter. Now they gossip about me and they told him that I have someone else, and I tell him that if I had someone else how would they know, he has treated me as bad as he wanted, and I took it because of my children, they are still young (Isaura, 21 years old, banana production site, personal communication, July 4, 2017).

Thus, it can be noticed how gossiping also operates as a mechanism that divides, creates distrust and even blocks the organization capacity among women themselves; the following testimony shows this.

> […] you can't even trust your own shadow, sometimes your girlfriends stab you in the back, they talk nicely to you but then talk bad about you; I'm the kind of person who pays no attention, I'm aside of all that, and I hear they are talking bad about me I just say "May God forgive them, who knows why they're talking bad about me," it's happened in the packing plant, sometimes because they say your boss is interested in you and it's because you follow orders, you work hard, you keep yourself active; but they say it must be that your boss is interested in you […] (Rubí, 34 years old, banana production plant, personal communication, May 15, 2017).

Discrimination and Motherhood

Discrimination (against themselves and their children) is another condition faced by the women-mothers-migrants interviewed; even if their children have been born in Mexican territory and are Mexican, they (women) remain undocumented, and prejudices and stereotypes are assigned to and reproduced about them, in relation to their condition as migrants.

Ramírez López (2011) points out that 56.2% of the native population (in a community in the state of Tapachula, a context similar to that of the areas we studied) considers that migrant women have no right to participate in the community, 78.3% believes that the children of these women have no right to the same medical care as their children (of the natives), and 77.8% that the children of migrant women have no right to the same education as the children of the native population, even if they are Mexican under the law.

These data contrasts with the idea posited by Bledsoe (2004), at least when it comes to south-south migrations, who points out that the reproduction of immigrant women in their destinations is a "strategic" action by which they aim at obtaining the benefits of citizenship for their children.

In contexts of overall precarity, looking upon the biological reproduction of immigrant women merely as a utilitarian action leaves aside the implications of migration policies and the normative and social restrictions faced by women-mothers-migrants, which prevent them from obtaining the benefits of citizenship for their children (as nothing guarantees that the children will access those benefits). According to Lerma Rodríguez (2016), more than actual benefits, the differentiated exercise of citizenship among the members of one same family may derive from greater poverty and inequality.

The following testimony shows how for Sofía being a migrant woman represents a boundary to her chances of accessing health services, which makes it impossible for her to give birth in Mexico (even if the father of the baby is Mexican), even if it were an emergency. This places her in an institutional void space that represents costs and great vulnerability.

> […] the first baby from him died, it was a girl, she died in the womb three days before being born, the doctor told me that she was strangled with the umbilical cord. This one [baby about to be born] we are very cautious because if there's any emergency or whatever, I have no access to the hospital here, I have to go to Guatemala, I would like my son to be born here but it can't be […] if I had any emergency, the ambulance would take me by the river; but everything costs money, I have to exchange Mexican pesos to quetzals, and it's very expensive (Sofia, 21 years old, interview, banana production site, personal communication, June 23, 2017).

Maternal Dispossession

Finally, what has been termed "maternal dispossession" was noted as a social coercion mechanism linked to gender and motherhood; this was conceptualized by Drouilleau (2011) as a way of taking away from women (above all women living in poverty) the possibility of taking care of and raising their children. This is done by arguing the supposed "disability" of these women to create conditions of well-being and quality of life without considering the requirement of preexisting structural conditions for this to take place.

Table 6 displays some of the characteristics of the interviewed women at the time when they experienced maternal dispossession. It can be noted that an unequal exercise of power was present in three of the cases, wherein women were positioned in a subordinate position before older men and other women (mothers or mothers-in-law). In this unequal exercise of power, age, economic inequalities, and migratory status (documented or undocumented), nationality and nationality of the father of the children, as well as the absence of support networks, were determining social categories that limited the possibility of women to defend their right to exercise their motherhood.

Table 6. Characteristics and Conditions which Enable the Maternal Dispossession of Women-Mothers-Migrants, by Interview Location

Location	Name	Age at first pregnancy	Migration status	Support Networks	Place of birth of the partner	Factor allowing for an unequal power relationship	Place of birth of the children	Current residence of the children	Who takes care of the children
Coffee farm (CF)	Berenice	18	Undocumented	No	Guatemala	The husband is son of the coffee farm's foreman	Guatemala	Guatemala	Paternal grandmother
Banana production site (BPS)	Isaura	13	Undocumented	Yes	Mexico	Relationship with a man five years older	México	BPS	Maternal grandmother
	Sofía	14	Undocumented	No	Mexico	Relationship with a man four years older	México	Guadalajara	Paternal grandmother

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Ramírez Ramos (2013 & 2018).

After a fight with her first couple (a Mexican four years older than her), the child of Sofía was taken away to live in Guadalajara (another state) by her mother-in-law. Unable to travel due to her undocumented status, and in fear of being deported, Sofía could not follow them and although she asked the municipal agent for help, she received no support. She was alone in the town she lived in at the time of the interview, as her entire family had migrated to the state of Colima (Mexico) and her only hope of getting her son back was that the boy "decided" to be with her.

> She practically ran away because when they took the boy from me […] they said that I was drunk, that I was in drugs and I was unable to take care of him […]; but […] things where not like that, as I told the municipal officer […], now that the boy is six years old, […] he is looking for me and they can't oppose that because he is grown now, he knows what he wants now (Sofia, 21 years old, banana production site, personal communication, May 24 of 2017).

Nazar Beutelspacher and Zapata-Martelo (2001) reported this practice as the strategy of some middle-aged (30 to 49 years) rural women who "abduct" their first grand-son/daughter from their daughters as a way of dealing with depression and loneliness. The authors point out that this is exclusively practiced with the grand-sons/daughters of their daughters and not of their sons, evidencing the power of mothers over their daughters. However, what we see in this case is something else from what the authors described, as the power is exerted by the mother-in-law over Sofía, a young undocumented migrant woman without support networks.

In the case of Berenice and Isaura, maternal dispossession appears with a variant, a seemingly "voluntary consent"; yet this consent should be closely looked at since in both cases lack of protection and fear intervene in the decision of these women to delegate the exercise of motherhood to other women (mother-in-law and mother, respectively). What other option did Berenice have, not living in her place of origin, without support networks, in union with the violent son of the foreman of the farm she works at? Or, what else could Isaura do, a migrant 13-year-old girl, pregnant by a Mexican man older than her, whose parents did not allow to be in union with her as they never accepted her? According to Barry (1998), the assessment of any action as voluntary depends on the quality of the options available, and in the cases presented here, the options are limited.

> My daughter is not living with me, she lives in Guatemala with my husband's family, they took her since she was very young. I do miss her, but it's better like that because they really take care of her over there and the girl is no longer comfortable here with me; I can't do anything anymore (Berenice, 22 years old, coffee farm, field diary, March 18, 2012).
>
> […] my in-laws didn't like me because I was just a girl [she was 13 when she got pregnant, and her in-laws did not allow the common law relationship with the father]. He left for the United States, […] my in-laws said that I still didn't have my mind

together, that I was still playing with dolls. I was already pregnant. I told my mom that I was having the baby and I did; she is 9 years old now and lives with my mom […] He didn't give a single peso, I still get nothing, he has never supported me, he knows I have the girl; but neither him nor his family has supported me. […] they are selfish, they want everything for themselves and not the girl. […] (Isaura, 21 years old, banana production site, personal communication, July 4, 2017).

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Knowing the experience of migration from the everyday, from the own voice of these migrant women, allowed not only to look at their experiences from the particulars of their cases (important as they are in themselves), listening to their voices also contributes to understanding the framework of the normative and contextual complex wherein said experiences take place.

From listening to them we can attest that women-mothers-migrants who insert themselves in the southern Mexican border through work, not only experience disadvantages of an economic nature related to labor precariousness, which is characteristic to south-south migrations, but they also face cultural disadvantages related to motherhood.

For these women-mothers-migrants, motherhood is a gender mechanism that favors conditions of vulnerability due to precariousness, same that, related as it is to what is ordinary and of the everyday, is of little to no interest to those who make policy. Motherhood during migration, according to the testimonies presented hereby, operates as follows:

1) As a gender control mechanism that keeps intact the power structure in which women-mothers-migrants remain subordinated in the relationships they establish at work, socially, and with their partners.

2) As a stereotype, that of the "good mother," where women are perceived within the image of "a woman who loves, sacrifices herself and gives herself to the care of others." This stereotype is idealized and "naturalized"; and so, fully complying with it not only impacts on the subjectivity of women-mothers-migrants. It also manifests in the form of violence, guilt, suffering, and self-renunciation; in addition, it determines their well-being and quality of life.

3) The stereotype of the "good mother" cannot be conceived without the presence of a partner, which in turn demands to socially fulfill the stereotype of the "good wife." This places women-mothers-migrants in a constant search for the marital union with a man, a union that in theory should guarantee care and well-being for them and their children, yet, does not, and on the contrary, it may become a violence generating factor.

4) Finally, motherhood is strictly regulated by gender rules under which stereotypes are established, allowing to differentiate between good and bad mothers. Complying or not with the stereotype of the "good mother" and so with that of the "good wife" puts women under

public scrutiny. Not complying with said stereotypes is a reason for penalties (for example, gossiping, discrimination, maternal dispossession) that serve as forms of social coercion. Fully complying with the stereotypes of the "good mother" and the "good wife" aims at guaranteeing and reproducing the hegemonic order of gender, functional and essential for the current model of development.

In 1984, Chodorow pointed out that the changes in production relations do not generate changes in reproduction relations. Although this remains true today, some things have undoubtedly changed, such as the possibility of looking at motherhood as a social and political reality that impacts the lives of women generating situations of disadvantage and vulnerability; also, to recognize and deconstruct the inherent link between motherhood and reproductive and care work, which is not an exclusive responsibility inherent to women but a collective responsibility that should be assumed by States, the market and the people (both men and women) (Ferro, 2016).

According to Nussbaum (2002), one first step towards achieving this goal is recognizing that the woman-mother-migrant link is a social construct regulated and sanctioned under historical and territorial rules, wherein States and the market hold determining influence. And so, it is necessary to acknowledge the individuality of women as holders of rights and an end in themselves, and not as mere instruments in the well-being of others; this is a political act of great importance.

Likewise, it is essential to make visible and appreciate how important the reproductive and care work (almost exclusively carried out by women-mothers) is for the market, as it represents not only the care and reproduction of human life but also the creation of (physically and mentally) healthy workers. Not acknowledging the reproductive and care work of women-mothers implies the bypassing of costs from capitalistic production to the domestic sphere (Carrasco, Borderías, & Torns, 2011). In this sense, acknowledging and appreciating the motherhood and the reproductive and care work that women-mothers carry out in migrations processes is a political, imperative, and necessary act.

Lastly, to prevent the reproduction of inequalities it is essential to acknowledge reproductive and care (of children in this case) work both culturally and under the law, as a responsibility that must be shared and undertaken by men and women. Thus, the exercise of motherhood and fatherhood must be immersed in a legal-contextual framework able to guarantee unlimited access to health services, labor rights, information, and legal advice, this way ensuring the food and care responsibility of parents to their children.

According to Fraser (2008), if any policy is to be complete (migration policy in this case), it should take into account the deployment of political actions a) of economic redistribution, able to ensure dignified working conditions, access to quality health services, and overall favorable living conditions for those entering the territory and contributing to the

development of the region, and b) that acknowledge and appreciate the role of gender in the life of women-mothers-migrants as a structuring element that creates disadvantages and vulnerabilities.

Translation: Fernando Llanas

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