

10 Strategic Invisibility as Everyday Politics for a Life with Dignity: Guatemalan Women Migrants' Experiences of Insecurity at Mexico's Southern Border

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Abstract³

The re-scaling of border control and the conflation of migration, crime, and national security in Mexico in the last decade have generated new practices of 'flow management' at the southern border with a differentiated impact on migrants. This chapter draws on research findings on Guatemalan im/migrant⁴ women (some of whom have been living in Mexico for generations) to examine the kinds of insecurity they face in daily life as migrants of Mayan origin.⁵ By engaging with the contextual and specific meanings of in/securities generated by the processes of 'othering' experienced by these migrants, especially those with an irregular status, the chapter focuses on the significance of the politics of everyday life and how in/visibility becomes a strategic field of struggle for them, both to ensure daily well-being and to avoid the risks of being detected and the punitive responses that follow. The chapter proposes that where the concepts of citizenship and rights are unlikely to be satisfied for those who need them most, the analytical lens must shift from a normative understanding of rights to the interface between the practices of border control and migrants' strategies. Understanding in/visibility is introduced as a strategy to help discern the power dynamics that affect their social conditions and the consequences for policy advocacy.

Keywords: Re-scaling border control, Mexico's southern border, Guatemalan women's migration, in/visibility, everyday politics.

10.1 Introduction

There is a consensus among migration scholars and human rights advocates that the recent strengthening

of the measures of containment and control of migratory flows in specific parts of the world has created new types of risks and vulnerabilities for migrants, though the experiences of discrimination they may face takes particular contextual forms and expressions (Anguiano/López 2010; FitzGerald 2011). Scholars have generally acknowledged that women migrants⁶ encounter situations of exclusion and discrimination

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3 This chapter is based on the findings of an IDRC-funded project 'Advancing the Rights of Migrant Women in Latin America and the Caribbean', project number 104785-003. The authors are grateful to Thanh-Dam Truong for her key role orienting and contributing to the writing of this chapter. They also want to thank Rosalba Icaza for her recommendations and inspired debates.

4 The word 'im/migrants' covers the following persons from Guatemala in Mexico. 1) Those who entered Mexico during the civil war in Guatemala in the 1980s, were granted refugee status, and became naturalized Mexican citizens, as well as women who arrived for other reasons and have permission to stay and work. 2) Those who entered in the 1990s primarily in search of economic opportunity and personal security but do not have the same protection, and may be classed as migrants with irregular status (or persons who have entered Mexico or remain in the country without authorization). 3) Those who are seasonal or frontier workers with or without regular status.

in distinctively different ways from men (Jolly/Reeves 2005; Bastia 2009; Gregorio 2012; Petrozziello 2012). The multiple and overlapping forms of identity-based vulnerabilities found in local situations of marginalization have yet to be addressed adequately in their own terms, and in relation to specific public policies. These forms are contingent on the specific character of a given local sphere of migration, producing layers of discrimination and insecurities that cannot be reduced to gender as a single cause.

The complexity of migration is clearly expressed in border areas where migratory processes are bearers of particular features of social exchange⁷ and political histories, and where new flows have become 'global' preoccupations (Sassen 2003; Castles 2010; Papademetriou 2011). Concerns over law and order are allowing states to choose specific border crossing-points and their vicinity, identified as vulnerable to illegal trade and migration and to organized crime, where Hobbesian measures of border policing are adopted. These are legitimized by the need to protect national sovereignty and control crime (Bigo/Tsoukala 2008). In the name of national security, such practices of border control tend to go hand in with processes of 'othering' (Pécoud/Guchteneire 2006) that underpin the fixing of territorial boundaries based on identities and belonging,⁸ field of access, and the scale of transgressions (Van Houtum/Van Naerssen 2001).

The southern border of Mexico is one example of such a border area. Known historically⁹ as a 'convergence area', it is generally considered to be a unified zone socially, culturally, and economically (Fábregas 1997; Castillo 2002). This border had been

fluid and open to a variety of movements (trade, agricultural workers, displaced people, families), though variations have depended on the intensity of exchanges and causes of displacements (Castillo 2003). Since the 1980s, these movements have become a 'problem' for the Mexican regional governments as a result of a combination of migratory flows - refugees from Central America fleeing direct violence caused by civil wars, followed by economic migrants driven by persistent socio-economic hardships in the post-war years in the 1990s. The porosity of this border also gradually made it accessible to long-distance migrants (also referred to as 'transmigrants') who pass through this border on their journey northward to the United States or Canada (Angeles 2010; Castillo 2010; Verduzco/de Lozano 2011). Since Mexico joined the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) in 1994, attempts to curb all forms of unauthorized migration that may affect the whole NAFTA territory have generated new types of global-local interactions and scales of border control. For many migrants, these interactions and scales of control have produced intersecting life-worlds and social fields of action for survival.

This chapter deals with Guatemalan im/migrant women, mainly in Chiapas and primarily with those without appropriate migratory documents.¹⁰ Some of them have been living in the state for over twenty-five years. It explores their manners of coping with the new control measures and how emerging forms of in/securities have affected their daily lives and social re-

5 The term 'Mayan origin' here refers to persons who are descendants of Mayans. Today many of them are mixed with other races but they still have some common physical features. Many of them still follow some traditions, customs and speak a variety of indigenous languages. Also, those who do not follow Mayan traditions are still considered as indigenous and are mistreated on the basis of their identity as socially constructed by other racial groups.

6 As shown by Hania Zlotnik, during the last forty years of the twentieth century the number of female migrants was almost equal to that of male migrants: 47 per cent in 1960 and 49 per cent in 2000 (Zlotnick 2003). In more developed countries, 51 per cent of all immigrants are women (United Nations 2009).

7 Even with gaps in information, it is estimated that nearly the half of migration processes are between South-South countries, and around 80 per cent of them "take place between countries with contiguous borders" (Ratha/Shaw 2007: 3).

8 From this perspective we will use also 'othering' to refer to discrimination, because it involves broad forms and practices of discrimination, abuse, and exclusion which are closely interconnected with ethnic and cultural factors. Within our framework, this concept involves Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' related to the practices and ways of discriminating against 'others' which are normalized within societies.

9 The region is part of the area sometimes called Mesoamerica, a "convergence area, in which the story is shared with Central American and Caribbean peoples" (Fábregas 1997: 349)

10 By women without appropriate migratory documents, we mean those women who do not have any immigration papers, as well as women who entered the country with an immigration document and are working even if they do not have authorization to work. The latter is the case for those women who entered with a *Migratory Form for Local Visitors* (FMVL) and are engaged in economic activity, such as traders, vendors, and domestic workers. It also includes women whose documents have expired.

lations. Conscious invisibility may be seen as a multi-purpose strategy: 1) to protect themselves against detection by the authorities or denouncement by persons in the communities in which they work or live; 2) to prevent their being potential victims of 'othering' due to their country of origin. In this sense 'invisibility' may be seen as a form of everyday politics to ensure daily well-being, as well as to avoid the risks of being found out and the punitive responses that may follow. Yet, paradoxically, this form of everyday politics also denies them access to basic social services and to some of the protection which they are entitled to, especially the long-term immigrants. By shifting the analytical lens from a normative framework of migrants' rights to the interface between the practices of border control and migrants' strategies for achieving well-being in everyday life, the chapter offers some reflections on the implications of migrants' strategic invisibility for future debates and actions.

Section 10.2 highlights the key aspects of migration at the Mexican southern border, emphasizing those aspects that are central to the understanding of the situation of the women who are the subjects of this study. The concept of re-territorialization proposed by Brenner (1999), defined as the re-scaling of forms of territorial organization such as cities and states, is adjusted to refer to the re-configuration and re-scaling of organizational forms of boundary control that has been taking place in Mexico during the last decade and its implications for migrants in subordinate positions. Section 10.3 presents the stories of Guatemalan women im/migrants in Mexico, moving from a general profile to the individual motivational stories of a group of fifty-five women, and introducing some of the effects of the new practices of 'flow management' on their lives. Section 10.4, based on multi-sited research, illustrates through the women's narratives what such insecurities mean for them and the reasons for their conscious invisibility. In section 10.5 we examine the paradox of in/visibility in the politics of everyday life, with reference to similar cases discussed by other authors. The chapter concludes by linking the three layers of power affecting the women: the introduction of new concepts of 'border', the new concept of order in migration management, and the multiple processes of 'othering' the migrant population with respect to their identities. Migrants' rights advocates in Mexico need to work to deepen understanding of how strategic invisibility can be an effect of the contextual workings of multiple and interlinked forms of power so as to be able to translate their concerns into actions that can help the migrants achieve

an existence with security in daily life as a basic condition for achieving dignity¹¹ and rights. Moreover, it is necessary to find more appropriate mechanisms to support them while at the same time respecting their autonomy. In this regard, the adequate distribution of information becomes relevant to establishing *enabling conditions* towards individual processes of informed decisions (Baehr 2012). In other words, it is important to promote knowledge among the im/migrants so that social boundaries and individual fears do not become restrictions in the process of accessing legal identities and rights.

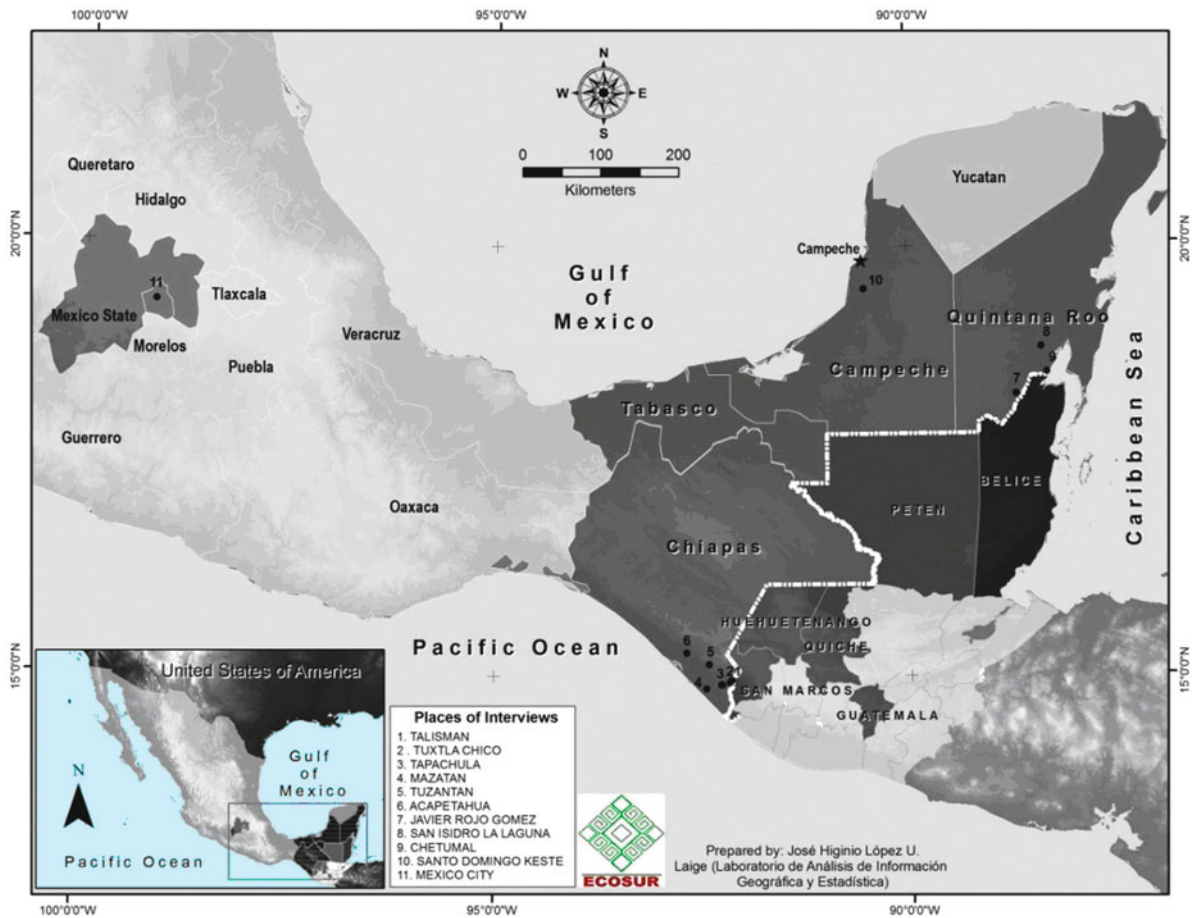
10.2 Contextualizing Migration at Mexico's Southern Border

Inter-regional migratory dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean are historically multi-layered. In recent decades these have become more complex for a variety of reasons. The most significant is the increase in the magnitude of movements from this region into the United States, and this has led to a re-scaling of forms of border control within the territory of the United States itself as well as areas it considers to be within its broader security perimeters, such as the Mexican southern border, with the state of Chiapas being the focal point of concern.

According to Villafuerte/García (2006), intense internal migration in Chiapas began in the second half of the twentieth century, stimulated by colonization of the Lacandona Jungle, the demand for labour for coffee plantations, and hydroelectric construction. This was followed by migration to the oilfields of Tabasco and to the tourist area of Cancun in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, as a result of economic crises, migratory flows from this region have extended to the north of Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The exacerbation of poverty levels and the neglect of certain sectors of the population by the government led to the formation of the Zapatista movement in 1994, and consequently to an increased presence of military forces in the region. In parallel, from the 1980s to the mid-1990s Chiapas became host to many Guatemalan refugees fleeing civil war in their own country, adding

11 Following Habermas, we use the concept of 'dignity' or 'a life with dignity' as the essential minimum required to live, which should constantly be considered as having an entrenched relationship with personal expectations of well-being (Habermas 2010). It is therefore a space where legal struggles for human rights and quality of life may be pursued.

Figure 10.1: Mexico's southern border. **Source:** Laboratorio de Análisis de Información Geográfica y Estadística de *El Colegio de la Frontera Sur* (ECOSUR). Permission was granted on 15 January 2013 by ECOSUR.



to the historical migration of Guatemalan seasonal agricultural workers and daily movements of residents along the Mexico–Guatemala border (Kauffer 2005; Rojas 2011). Due to the geographical characteristics of the area and the lack of institutional attention to the borderline, there are many unclear demarcations. The internal migratory dynamics in this area are such that many established immigrants move from one location to another without being aware of the border (Angeles/Rojas 2000; Castillo 2001).

In the last two decades, this border has seen more restrictive immigration measures due to a confluence of migratory flows. Following persistent post-war socio-economic decline and poverty, the flow of economic migrants from Guatemala into Mexico has intensified (Alba/Castillo 2012). In addition, Mexico's proximity to the United States has become a decisive factor in shaping the flows of migrants from different parts of the world through its southern border, mainly from 2000 when a statistical increase became appar-

ent (Morales/Lopez 1999; Angeles/Rojas 2000; Alba 2001; Rodríguez/Berumen/Ramos 2011). This reality was made visible in international forums, especially around the time of the preparation of the *United Nations Convention on Transnational Crime* (UNCTC) and its *Protocols on Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling*. In these forums emphasis was placed on the significance of the migratory flows through this border destined for the United States. Much less attention has been given to the transformations of the local sphere of migration around the southern border itself, and their impacts on migrants caused by the inappropriate construction of them as a homogeneous group.

As a member of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA),¹² and subsequent to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, Mexico followed the United States discourses on national security and immigration control and revamped measures implemented since the 1980s, often conflating

the term 'security' with 'migration control' (Adamson 2006). Mexico's commitment to NAFTA implies an intensification of control measures to contain migrants entering the United States via Mexico, legitimized by Mexico's national security. These measures are along the lines of those adopted by the United States in its 'war on terror'. The Mexican territory was defined as part of the inner circles of the United States' homeland security perimeters, i.e. Mexico and its borders with Guatemala and Belize are now considered as the most southern external perimeters of the NAFTA trade zone (Castillo 1997, 2003; Cortés 2003; Alba/Leite 2004; Hernández 2008; Verduzco/de Lozano 2011). The links made between terrorism and the growing waves of organized crime in Mexico, especially the measures adopted to combat the drug trade and to dismantle organized crime, have also fuelled the violence surrounding these controls (Hernandez 2008). As there is a confluence of migrants of different types,¹³ the governments are confronted with different kinds of societal insecurity (drug trade, violent crime gangs, and so on) as interlinked phenomena with migration flows. This has enlarged and strengthened what immigration authorities call 'the administration or management of migration flows' in Mexico. The primary aim was the control and containment of crime of various types linked to networks in the United States, as well as irregular migrations (human trafficking and human smuggling) towards the United States.¹⁴

In Mexico, measures to contain and control transmigrants bound for the United States have had different impacts for several categories of migrants: 1) immigrants (persons already living in Mexico for a long period); 2) temporary workers (persons who enter only to work on a temporary (seasonal) basis); 3) commuters (those who live in Guatemala and enter Mexican territory for work on a daily basis, who may or may not have an identity document in conformity

with legal requirements). Immigrants with regular status must strictly comply with the procedures and requirements to renew their residence permit. Those who do not have regular status must apply for a residence permit as an immigrant. Temporary workers and commuting workers are permitted to enter as frontier workers or local visitors and regularize their presence through registration, the *Migratory Form for Frontier Workers* (FMTF), and the *Migratory Form for Local Visitors* (FMVL) respectively.¹⁵

Although immigrants with irregular status (without an identity document, or one which is not valid), some of whom have been living for more than twenty years in the country, have always faced the risk of deportation when found out, since 2008 immigration officials have become stricter in requiring immigration documents at border check-points. However, there is a tendency among immigration authorities to apply measures to contain migration indiscriminately, i.e. by targeting all those persons without a proper identity document (im/migrants with irregular status), irrespective of their histories of migration. Thus transmigrants with irregular status as a category can be

12 NAFTA was signed by Mexico, the United States of America, and Canada, and entered into force on 1 January 1994. This agreement offers the United States the most favourable position with regard to power and trade.

13 There is a confluence of international migrants – from Central America and from Chiapas to the United States; transitory and temporal migrants; internal migrants – between rural and urban localities of the same state; and regional and internal displacements caused by religious, social, or political conflicts. In addition, natural disasters and the construction of dams have also caused the displacement of many people into and through this area (Castillo 2003; Villafuerte/García 2006).

14 Since the late 1990s, the following migration control programmes or actions can be cited: the "Sealing the Southern Border" plan (1998); the "Southern Plan" (June 2001); the pilot plan between Mexico and Guatemala for "safe and orderly repatriation" (June 2001); the "Agreement for Swift, Safe and Orderly Repatriation of Salvadorian Migrants by Land" (May 2005); and the "Agreement for the Safe and Orderly Repatriation of Central American Migrants on the Mexican-Guatemalan Border" (June 2005). Furthermore, there have been various adjustments to the Manuals and Procedures for granting visas and migration permits in Mexico during the last decade. Other actions have explicitly responded to national security strategies that had contained migration flows, such as the "Sentinel Director Plan" (2003), the "National Security Act" (2005), and the "Merida Initiative" (2007). Furthermore, Mexico has signed some plans and agreements with neighbouring countries that have also affected migratory flows: the "Panama Puebla Plan" (2000, today called the "Mesoamerica Project"), and the high-level border security agreements between Mexico and Belize (2005) and between Mexico and Guatemala (2002, 2008).

15 During the mid-2000s, the requirements for applicants for different types of visas ('immigration forms'), either to enter, remain, or naturalize in Mexico, became more stringent. Lawyers (or 'brokers') who assist with immigration procedures, tourists, and immigrants informally interviewed in recent years have indicated that it was more difficult to obtain a visa to enter Mexico than the United States.

treated in the same way as long-time immigrants also with irregular status. Given the perception that transmigrants are a threat, possible criminals, or terrorists, long-time immigrants are also afraid of being affiliated with crime and terror, given the consequences. Therefore, immigrants with irregular status have no option but to limit their movements for fear of being caught by the authorities, or identified as being affiliated with criminal gangs. The limitation of their movement has also led to their social exclusion at a greater level of significance than before. In some contexts these people have to make themselves ‘invisible’, or to conduct their lives at such a level of discretion that they can pass unnoticed by the public (Castillo 2003).

The institutionalization of the perceived links between migration, crime, and terror, or migration and the threat to national security, became visible in 2005 when the Mexican government integrated the *National Migration Institute* (INM) into the National Security Council (Coria 2011).¹⁶ This had already been justified in the 1990s when the South Beta Group of Migrant Protection was affiliated with the National Institute of Migration’s Regional Delegation in Chiapas. This addressed gang violence against migrants in the border zone with Guatemala, specifically between Hidalgo city and the cities of Tapachula and Huixtla, and along the train route along the coast of Chiapas – a route frequently used for migrants’ movement. This problem worsened in the late 1990s during a time of increasing flows of Central American migrants to the United States and increasing Mexican migratory controls (Ruiz 2001, 2004). This has caused many migrants to seek alternative routes where they face greater risks of being assaulted, in other words greater danger and greater risks of violation of their human rights. Despite the various complaints that have been made, the concern is that official actions to combat criminals who attack, abduct, and murder migrants passing through Mexico have been rare and scarce (Amnesty International 2010). This shows that less emphasis is placed on the protection of migrants than on the protection of national security.

16 During this year 2005, many factors influenced this event: the great increase in the number of migrants, the emphasis on national security discourses linked to migration, and the increase of the phenomenon whereby transitory migrants have not only been exposed to, but increasingly been victims of, more extreme and inhumane forms of violence in Mexico carried out by organized criminal groups (Amnesty International Report 2010).

At the societal level, the perception of migration as a ‘threat’ to national security also generates anti-migrant sentiments among the local populations. For example, according to the *National Survey on Discrimination in Mexico* conducted in 2010, which involved a nationally representative sample of 13751 households, 25 per cent of respondents consider that the Mexican government should control migration; 76 per cent believe that immigration causes divisions in Mexican society; 27 per cent would not allow an immigrant to live in their house; 38 per cent said that “Mexicans can build a great nation only if we have a similar culture and values” (CONAPRED 2011: 84). The same source indicates that there is a general belief among the population surveyed that the migrants’ presence has led to problems of insecurity because migrants often attract various types of criminals who attempt to kidnap or assault them. Long-time immigrants without a regular identity are affected by these attitudes in the communities where they work and live. There is a fear of denouncement that applies not only to their neighbours, but also to their employers, who want to evade responsibilities towards them. They also fear the mafias and criminals who can attack them, in addition to the fear of the consequences of being detected by the authorities as workers with irregular status. Despite the fact that Mexico has a significant proportion of citizens who are in favour of having foreigners in the country, testimonies from migrants who are Guatemalan, economically disadvantaged, indigenous, and/or migrants working in the agricultural and service sectors (as domestic workers and sex workers), have shown that they are often victims of ‘othering’ and exploitation (CONAPRED 2011). This type of abuse also goes unreported due to fear of losing one’s job or fear of being handed over to the immigration authorities. In conclusion, the survey emphasized that the discrimination and intolerance towards migrants revealed by the survey “directly confronts the discourse and imaginaries of a society that calls itself multicultural, hospitable, and generous to those coming from abroad” (CONAPRED 2011: 7).

Access to services and rightful treatment at work has become increasingly problematic for im/migrants in such a context. Although Mexico’s Migration Law of 25 May 2011 states that immigrants have access to various services and rights regardless of their immigration status, these rights continue to be denied at the local level (Articles 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 14).¹⁷ Several provisions of the new law on verification and migration control are already being implemented by the im-

migration authorities, while, as of July 2012, the relevant regulations that grant migrants rights without their having to prove their legal status still have not been published. In the current milieu of xenophobia and 'othering' among different groups in the Mexican population, the gap between the law and its implementation have forced migrants (including immigrant women) into self-chosen invisibility, not only towards immigration authorities but also towards people in their close environment. Additionally, within Mexican society, discriminatory attitudes towards the indigenous population persists, affecting the majority of the Guatemalan immigrant population in Mexico, many of whom have indigenous facial features and still wear traditional clothes and use their own languages.

10.3 Stories of Guatemalan Women Migrating to Mexico

According to the latest Mexican national census, the Guatemalan immigrant population represents a small part of the immigrant population in Mexico (INEGI 2010). Although their numbers have increased from 23967 to 35322 between 2000 and 2010, Guatemalan immigrants only accounted for 4.9 per cent of all recorded immigrants in 2000 and 3.7 per cent in 2010. This population has become important in Mexico's southern border region (Chiapas, Campeche, Tabasco, and Quintana Roo), where many people from Guatemala live. Small-scale studies have indicated a similar picture with a significant number of women immigrants and migrants (irrespective of their migration histories) exposed to a series of risks and who face 'othering', exclusion, and marginalization (Rojas 2002; Rojas/Ángeles 2008). This ill-treatment can be based on their migrant status (regular or irregular), class membership, gender, ethnicity, and even their geographical location and the length of their stay in the place of arrival, or on a combination of some or all of these factors. As López Sala (2005) notes, distinguishing between groups of im/migrants is necessary because strategies of invisibility may differ according to migrants' identity background and migratory history. Using the formal criteria of classification, Guatemalan women im/migrants in Mexico are distinguished as: 1) immigrants, 2) temporary migrants, and 3) commuters or residents on the frontier with Guatemala.

17 See this law at: <http://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5190774&fecha=25/05/2012> (15 October 2012).

The national census cited above indicates that in Mexico's southern border region, 43 per cent of immigrants are of Guatemalan origin, 56 per cent are women, and most of them (83 per cent) live in Chiapas. An estimate of temporary migration can be made from the data collected through the *Southern Border Migratory Survey*¹⁸— an ongoing survey that applies to some of the migratory flows on the border between Guatemala and Chiapas. In 2009, information was gathered on 324519 border crossings by temporary workers; 23.5 per cent had no immigration papers and 17.6 per cent of the total flow were women. As for commuters, the same EMIF-Sur survey gathered information from 190904 border crossings by residents in border regions: 15.0 per cent had no immigration papers; 83.3 per cent were working, but with papers that did not authorize them to work; and 42.6 per cent of the total flow were women (INM/CONAPO/COLEF/SRE/STyPS 2012).

To supplement this information, in our research¹⁹ we collected data through semi-structured personal interviews with Guatemalan women and with some key institutional informants. Various strategies were employed to contact the women from whom information was collected and the connections were established by key informants. Subsequently, to identify additional respondents a snowball technique was used with women already interviewed, local organizations, and ECOSUR networks. Initially, many women were reluctant to participate in the interviews through fear of deportation, but gradually as they came to know the researchers better they were more willing to share their experiences.

Given the proximity and historical interaction between Chiapas and Guatemala, the largest number of women interviewed for this project was from Chiapas and to a lesser extent from states where the census recorded Guatemalans (Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Mexico City). The majority of these women were im-

18 In Spanish, EMIF-Sur is used for Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Sur.

19 This chapter will present findings of the research conducted in Mexico by Martha Luz Rojas Wiesner and Hugo Ángeles, together with Cristina Robledo and José Bernal (Research Assistants), which is part of the "Advancing the Rights of Female Migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean" project, coordinated by Tanya Basok and Nicola Piper, and financed by the International Development Research Center (IDRC). The larger project was independently carried out in five countries: Costa Rica, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

Table 10.1: Profile of Guatemalan women interviewed. **Source:** Interviews with Guatemalan women in Mexico, 2009–2010, based on data from the IDRC Project.

Total women interviewed	55
Average age of women at time of interview	37 years
Age range of women at time of interview	13 to 64 years
Average age at time of first migration to Mexico	17.5 years
Age range of women at time of first migration to Mexico	6 to 38 years
Location of interview	
Chiapas	33
Campeche	9
Quintana Roo	8
Ciudad de México	5
Number of women according to migration status	
Immigrant or established women in Mexico	41
Temporary or seasonal migrant women	8
Border-resident women	6
Number of women by migratory legal status	
Women with appropriate immigration papers	16
Naturalized women	12
Women with irregular status	27
Number of women by region of origin in Guatemala	
San Marcos	22
Huehuetenango	9
Guatemala	6
El Petén	3
Quiché	3
Escuintla	3
Otros	9
Number of women by status of activity	
Women engaged in trade-related activities	16
Live-in domestic service workers	11
Women engaged in artisan/craft or support work	7
Women engaged in agricultural work	4
Women engaged in personal service industry (restaurants, cleaning services, etc.)	5
Professional, employed in administrative or office setting	5
Women engaged in unpaid household/domestic work	7
Principal motives for migrating to Mexico	
Economic motives	29
Fleeing political violence	13
Fleeing a situation of domestic violence	4
Family reunification or to raise a family	9

migrants, followed by migrants with the status of temporary workers and commuters predominantly from the Guatemalan border states of San Marcos, Hue-

huetenango, El Petén, and Quiché.²⁰ In Chiapas, the largest group of women came from San Marcos, while in Campeche and Quintana Roo, the women mainly

came from El Petén, Huehuetenango, and Quiché (see figure 10.1). As a group, the women immigrants came to Mexico for the first time between 1965 and 2008, and were between six and thirty-eight years old when they migrated (median age 17.5 years). On average, these women have been living or working in Mexico for almost twenty years – some reported that they have lived for over thirty years in some places²¹ in Mexico, and of these, some were still without immigration papers.

Guatemala is one of the most unequal countries in the world and its poverty level is among the highest in the region (Menjivar 2008; World Bank 2004). The three provinces from which the majority of women interviewed are from have poverty levels of above 50 per cent. In Mexico, the municipalities at the border are also extremely poor, as can be seen in the following index of general and extreme poverty: Tacaná (84.5 per cent and 32.2 per cent), Tajumulco (93.3 per cent and 48.9 per cent), El Quetzal (79.5 per cent and 26 per cent), and Malacatán (71.4 per cent and 18.7 per cent) (SEGEPLAN 2006). This mestizo population of indigenous ethnic origin and with a high percentage of illiteracy depends on informal work in agricultural and commercial activities. The combination of these factors contributes to their social exclusion. In this context it is not surprising that the main motivation for migrating to Mexico is economic. In Mexico, they were engaged in trade-related activities, as independent traders, trade employees, or peddlers. A smaller number was engaged in domestic work, in crafts or artisan work (personally or as assistants), while some were engaged in agricultural work, and others as personal assistants in professional, clerical, or administrative positions. We also interviewed a few women who had no gainful employment.

Regarding their immigration status, nearly half of the women interviewed have regular migratory status in Mexico, either because they have a certificate of naturalization or immigration papers. Those who had naturalization papers were mainly women who had sought refuge in Mexico during the early 1980s and

20 Guatemala is divided into eight regions, and each region is made up of one or more states that have a similar geography, culture, and economy; each state is divided into departments and municipalities. Currently Guatemala has twenty-two departments and 331 municipalities (Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, 2011: Administrative division of the Republic of Guatemala at: <<http://www.congreso.gob.gt>> (13 May 2011)).

21 The dots in figure 10.1 indicate the localities where the women were interviewed.

did not return to Guatemala after the peace agreements were signed in 1996. Not all women refugees were naturalized and some do not have identity or migratory documents. Women who continued to live in Mexico and who did not return to Guatemala were given government support to settle in Mexico and granted a small plot of land and naturalization, while those who returned to Guatemala after the conflict and later re-entered Mexico as economic migrants were without support. The rest of the women interviewed did not have identity documents or had insufficient papers to show their legal presence. The latter situation could refer to immigration papers expiring and migrants not yet renewing them, or to situations where immigration papers had been issued but do not authorize the migrant to carry out remunerated activities.

Fleeing poverty is the principal motivation for the majority of the women who migrated to Mexico. Olga,²² an immigrant without an identity document after eight years living in Mexico, is currently earning her living by washing other people's clothes.

I came to work because we have no money over there. Then I quit school because my father died and my mother stayed alone and so I came to work here [2001] when I was thirteen years old (Olga, 21 years old).

Besides economic reasons, escaping political or domestic violence is of significance. The majority of Guatemalan women have been exposed to a pattern of continuous violence, and this is a key factor in their choice to remain invisible. Maria Luisa came to Mexico fleeing gender-based violence in 1991. She has no identity document and is a widow and mother of five children. She left the three older children in Guatemala, and her two small children, five and eleven years old, who were now with her in Mexico, were not registered and were not attending school at the time she was interviewed.

This Tuesday my father called me to enrol my children because he was coming to collect them. I said 'No'. 'How come?' (he said)... I said to my boy, 'if you want to stay with my father, I leave this up to you, but my father is not going to take my girl from me.' Because my dad raped me, I don't want this to happen to my daughter... Then the next day, it was like Tuesday night, on Wednesday around 5.30 a.m. I threw two mudadas [clothes for two days] for the girl into a bag, two for me and two for the boy. With that I came here [to Tapachula]. I had nothing... Ah! and my ID card... I left

22 The names presented in this section in the transcript narratives are pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the women interviewed.

around ten in the morning from Guatemala. I came here around five in the afternoon, and it was when I came here with her [her mother was already living in Tapachula] (Maria Luisa, 36 years old).

Although patterns of violence were often linked to the several years of civil war, brutal violence against women was also widespread, particularly during the 1980s. Sexual abuse and murder of women during the civil war was common. The high levels of impunity for those crimes have contributed to the normalization of violence against women in Guatemala (Menjivar 2008; Carey/Torres 2010). Some women mentioned that during the war events in the 1980s, they were forced to live for long periods hidden in the forest of Guatemala, near the border with Mexico, to avoid the physical abuse perpetrated by Guatemalan military forces. Miriam, a naturalized immigrant, arrived in Mexico in 1985 fleeing the Guatemalan conflict. Currently she is married, but her husband is a migrant worker currently in the United States. They have four children.

They took refuge in the mountains. Then, we got to the same place and they were there, meaning we stayed with them because since they also were in the same place. And the same day in the afternoon the army arrived, and they attacked us and it was when fourteen people died, fourteen of my relatives (...) not my brothers, but cousins, uncles, in that place, killed by the army. And my two nephews, two nieces that I had, who were sixteen, fifteen years old ... were two cousins, my two cousins whose breasts had been cut off..., had been split in two, they had been treated like that (...) at that time as I say, I was very young still had ... I was not even thirteen (...) And we got out secretly, we fled [for Chiapas] (Miriam, 43 years old).

Many women indicated how the demand for immigration documents at the border controls has increased since 2008, while a small number said that they originally entered Mexico without being asked for any documents. It is important to note that according to these women the tightening of immigration controls in the state of Chiapas in 2012 has resulted in a series of 'operations', in which immigration officials have visited businesses, farms, and even a local news agency to search for, arrest, and deport workers with irregular status – actions that had not been previously recorded in the region. Juana is a migrant without papers, married and with two children. She arrived in Mexico in 1985 at the age of thirteen, fleeing an attempted rape by her father-in-law. She travelled with her brother, who helped her to search for a job.

Well, it was already many years ago but they didn't ask me for papers. They asked only him [the husband]. And

right now, you see that there are seals of migration, the soldiers and that ... and because of it I have not gone [to Guatemala] (Juana, 40 years old).

Since 2000, Mexican immigration authorities have carried out legalization programmes²³ for migrants, one of which ended in May 2011. These programmes aimed to support migrants with immigration procedures, principally by facilitation of the requirements needed to legalize or formalize their migratory status. Despite being written into the Migration Law, these programmes were limited in their scope and many migrants with irregular status in particular were unaware of them (Guevara 2011). Many of the migrant women interviewed still have irregular migratory status because they lack adequate information about the law for formalizing their stay, or because they lack financial resources, or support from social networks to do so, or simply because they continue to fear deportation if they attempt to solicit information from the authorities about the process. Because the campaigns of information do not reach the places where these women live – remote localities or marginal areas –, they can be easily deceived, threatened, and manipulated (by husbands, employers, neighbours etc.). Not being informed is one reason, but also their fear of deportation if they turn up to begin the procedures of regularization with the immigration authorities. Only few women know that there are some civil organizations that can guide or defend them.

On the whole, migrant women without regular status have many difficulties in maintaining a life with basic rights and dignity because of interlinked difficulties as a result being a migrant with irregular status, of 'indigenous' background, and of Guatemalan origin. This affects the type of work they can do and also their place of residence. Their place of residence in turn affects their access to adequate information. These factors cannot be sharply separated but are usually expressed jointly. They interact and change over time and within the context (Anthias 2008). As for the perception of 'othering', there is a difference between women who came as refugees in the 1980s and are now naturalized, and those who are more recent immigrants. The first group has closer ties to Guatemalan networks already settled in Mexico, while the second group is more exposed to Mexican society. The harsh side of 'othering' faced by Guatemalan women migrants who came to Mexico as economic migrants affects those who lack the minimum requirements for a life with dignity, i.e. economic and social

23 Programas de Regularización Migratoria.

rights such as access to health care and education – for themselves and for their children. They also mentioned abuses of favour and difficulties linked to violence, housing, and the preservation of their cultural identity.

Women with regularized migrant status and who are professionals were able to interact with people in the mainstream of the Mexican society despite their feelings of discrimination. Rocio, interviewed in Tapachula in 2009, was married without children. She works as a professional. Rocio has lived in Mexico for three years because of her Guatemalan husband's job.

(...) I believe that there is much discrimination for those coming from Guatemala. But I also understand as a Guatemalan, meaning that it definitely bothers me. Therefore I try to understand it, because there is always a reason. There has always been a rivalry between Mexicans and Guatemalans. I do not know why, I do not know if it comes mixed from the story, due to all that has happened, right? But yes, even if you try to understand it gives you courage... and you get angry and you vent your spleen, then. To some extent you try to understand why that happens, and try to talk to the person, but (...). (Rocio, 27 years old).

10.4 Understanding Strategic In/visibility

Reacting to situations of 'othering' and exclusion, many migrants prefer to face their problems alone or with little assistance. Although male migrants also face a similar situation, migrant women face a greater degree of risk and hence greater vulnerabilities due to their gender identity.²⁴ Depending on their resilience and their individual resources or those made available to them by others, migrants used various forms of agency to neutralize or resist the temporary or permanent particular situations of abuse and 'othering'. Here, we will concentrate on the narratives about invisibility or passing unnoticed, a strategy used by a large percentage of the women interviewed.

Some women are living in situations of invisibility because it is the best strategy for living or working in

24 Some theoretical agreements indicated that vulnerability is linked with undesired outcomes, due to being exposed to dangers that caused some damage. But vulnerability is also related to responsiveness as a resistance or resilience. In this last sense, the levels of responsiveness depend on the assets available to a person or to a family or group to face the risks and to overcome the critical situations and their consequences (Busso 2001; Naudé/Santos-Paulino/McGillivray 2009).

their current situation. Other women keep silent or try to move in an way that means they are unnoticed as a protection strategy when facing risks such as losing their jobs or housing, being deported, being involved in trouble, or being separated from their children by forced circumstances. Some women indicated their intention to avoid the establishment of friendly relations with other people in order to avoid any kind of problems. But this also denies them the possibility of having supportive networks or persons around, and locates them in an isolated and solitary living position. Yolanda, who was interviewed in Quintana Roo in 2009, was working as a domestic worker. She was divorced and with one son born in Mexico. She arrived in Mexico in 2001 because of her marriage to a young Mexican who was descended from a Guatemalan family. Yolanda had already started her process of regularization; however, she could not pay the fee required for the process. After the interview we were informed that she had been denounced to the migratory authorities by neighbours, and after that she disappeared.

I am a girl who wants to avoid problems. I don't get involved with people because I am afraid that they are going to accuse me of something. I have the fear that the police would come (...) Many people from here, the ones who live around here, say to me 'you neighbour, you just pass by always enclosed'. But like I said to you, it is to avoid problems, I like to avoid problems (Yolanda, 25 years old).

Some women are compelled to keep silent or hide their anger due to their fear of the same risks, which in many occasions are reinforced by external threats from people in their daily network. Further, some women consider visibility a pointless action, which lacks positive outcomes for them and can affect their sources of income. Lupita is a temporary farm worker and migrant with irregular status who was interviewed in 2009. She arrived in Mexico for the first time in 2003 to work on a farm with her parents. Lupita has a child two years old who was born on the farm where she works, but the midwife did not give her a birth record, so she registered her child in Guatemala. She was abandoned by her partner, and currently lives with her sisters on the farm, where they have seasonal work. At the time of the interview, she had no immigration papers and she indicated that she had never needed them.

He [the manager of the farm] has treated me badly, nothing more, I say. I think that's why he hasn't given me vacations; because, he says that he is the boss and that he decides who will get them [vacations]. There are

those for whom it has been slow to get their vacations, but I have never got them. I have had problems with him and he has already mistreated me twice. Once he gave me a shove. I had my baby in my arms and then he told me 'I'll send you to jail'. So I was scared, and I he took my job away... Then, since I didn't want to leave this place and because I don't have any work over there, I went back to ask him for work. At first he didn't want to hire me, but at the end he gave me a job. But only with him I have had problems. I'm ashamed [to speak] and afraid if he listens to me, he can hurt me all of a sudden, or something (Lupita, 20 years old).

Other women choose to go unnoticed leaving behind the traditions that identified them as indigenous. They do not wear their traditional dress and do not speak their original Mayan language. Some women also try to blend into their surroundings to circumvent the fact of being a focus of attention. Margarita is a self-employed woman who arrived in Mexico for the first time in 1981 when she was fleeing the Guatemalan violence. She is separated and has one son. At the time of the interview she had lived in Mexico for twenty years, of which eighteen had been spent in Campeche.

At first I used to say that I am from Chiapas. 'No, you are not from Chiapas, you are from Guatemala' (they said)... and like that until one day that I said 'No, even if I say as much that I am from Chiapas, I am not from there because it is noticeable in my way of speaking, of behaving, better no'. Honestly, 'Where are you from?', 'I am from Guatemala', I said, but when I said it, I said it with shame, or something like it. And I don't know, until now I ask 'Why did the father of my son leave me?' Ah, maybe this is the reason. As now he sought another (woman), I said 'No doubt perhaps because I am Guatemalan'. So, so, so in my mind I had this idea (Margarita, 40 years old).

Others prefer to keep quiet and to remain in secret situations of humiliation by others, or not to report incidents of abuse and violence due to their ethnic origins, because they are afraid of further damage. This is particular relevant in situations of domestic violence. Matilde, an immigrant who has lived in Mexico for twenty-six years, had no document certifying her status as an immigrant and the length of her residence. When she was interviewed, she was given advice about how to formalize her stay in Mexico. She was married and has three children. Since she was young, and after having been orphaned, she has had different problems with abuse. In order to have some extra income, Matilde works selling food she prepares herself, but she does so in secret as her husband refuses to allow her to work.

He gives everything for me, for his children, but when he is drunk he changes; he becomes another person, eh? ... At the beginning, before he would hit me he would say: 'pinche cachuca,²⁵ this is my homeland, here nobody will defend you' and thump, he would give me a slap... oh the bruises in the face. He would say that 'you are a...', 'you're the...'. he calls me 'india',²⁶ he humiliates me horribly... My mother-in-law said: 'Look, I don't want problems (...) don't you go denouncing Manuel, don't mess with my son, because look, we like you, you're a great woman'. Then my sister-in-law said: 'Look girl, if you call the police, you can be sure that you will lose us... you will lose the case because we are Mexicans and you are a foreigner' (Matilde, 35 years old).

Some women try to pass unnoticed by not using particular services or not claiming rights such as education or health. In the case of education, many women prefer their children not to go to school rather than handle the procedures and the documentation process required for school enrolment. Maria Luisa, cited above, said:

My mother filled me with fear, she said that they will take my kids, because she doesn't want us to be here. So, I did not want to go to do it, because I don't want that they take my children from me. But, now the woman owner of the house said I have to put them in the school, I agreed and said to her that I am scared, so she went to speak with Lorena and she already said that they will help me (Maria Luisa, 36 years old),

In the case of health, the women prefer to go to Guatemala because they will not be discriminated against because of their origin. Also, women often choose to receive medical attention by professionals in a chain of low-cost pharmacies, where their migratory status is not relevant to whether they are treated. When they travel for medical attention, it is important to point out how increased border control is affecting this possibility, particularly at the crossing-points where it is necessary to use the bridges connecting Mexico and Guatemala, and therefore to go through formal migratory procedures within official offices.

The truth, the truth is, I had not worried about asking if there is a health centre. Because, like when one goes, or something like that, they ask one for papers, and I don't have the documents for my children, so I don't go. I'd rather go to the 'Similares'²⁷ too (Lupita).

25 *Cachuca* is a degrading term used to refer to someone of Guatemalan origin.

26 The expression *India* is also used in a derogatory manner and has a strong discriminatory connotation.

Summing up, strategic invisibility as a practice appears to be very common among many Guatemalan im/migrant women. This strategy is sometimes chosen as a protection strategy, but in some cases it is a forced choice or due to fear of further consequences. Also, some women do not see any sense in making themselves or their situations more visible, because they will not receive positive or supportive responses from their social or institutional network.

10.5 Reflection on In/visibility as a Form of Everyday Politics

The study of women's migration has revealed that migrant women encounter situations of 'othering' in distinctive ways, whether their migration is within a country or between countries, or whether it is regular or irregular in character. As has been pointed out by a number of authors, civil society organizations, and international agencies, situations of discrimination have increased the major risks to and vulnerabilities of migrant women as a result of the strengthening of containment measures and migratory controls in specific parts of the world in recent years (Anguiano/López 2010; Dobrowolsky/Tastsoglou 2006; FitzGerald 2011). Paradoxically, while researchers and advocates work to make women migrants more visible, there are women migrants who do not want to be visible. From the perspective of rights advocates, visibility is the main condition for seeking recognition of the fundamental settings for life and liberties, while for the im/migrants invisibility is consciously chosen as a strategy to protect themselves against the authorities, or against people in their neighbourhoods or the communities in which they work, especially if they foresee any type of risk or threat on account of being a foreign or migrant person. In other words, invisibility for some women im/migrants can be a mechanism for avoiding contact that may be 'othering' or abusive to them, and also a way to avoid control and surveillance by others.

As a chosen option, this in/visibility can be a form of everyday life action with political and transformative significance, as captured by Kerkvliet (2005) with the term *Everyday Politics* (EDP), which he defines as the subtle or low-profile practices that influence the

27 This refers to the 'Similares' brand of pharmacies, which sell generic drugs at affordable prices and also offer medical attention for a cost approximately equivalent to US\$2.50. Many migrants use their services.

control, allocation, and use of tangible and intangible resources.²⁸ As noted by Kerkvliet (2009), even if the practice of invisibility is not associated with being 'political', it is a mechanism for resisting and challenging the normative regulations within one's environment. From this perspective, the subtle nature of the practice of invisibility becomes relevant within the context of the agency of the women im/migrants, because it is a way of resisting control by the authorities and contest the surveillance of others. As such, invisibility is a form of EDP that belongs to the typology²⁹ of resistance or defiance, as well as evasion (Kerkvliet 2009; Hobson/Seabrooke 2007). Understanding invisibility from this perspective allows the recognition of agency in the Guatemalan migrant women, returning to them a role in the realm of politics, with some possibilities for bottom-up adjustment. However, it is important to note that the chosen strategy of invisibility can also limit their opportunities for advocacy purposes (Kihato 2007). And in many cases, invisibility is not necessarily a protective measure against domestic violence, nor a challenge to increasingly restrictive immigration policies, but just a form of protection against daily life 'othering' and exclusion inside their communities. Some women revert to this type of strategy in particular situations, while for some women it is a form that becomes more permanent.

This dilemma between being visible and being invisible is related to what Andrea Brighenti (2007) has called the "field of visibility". This refers to a more complex phenomenon than just a single visual dimension. According to Brighenti, this field of in/visibility is the intersection of two domains - "the perception of relations" and "relations of power", which are usually asymmetrical, and therefore the visibility relationships are also unequal (Brighenti 2007). In this sense, according to the power locations the reciprocity of vision or inter-visibility can be imperfect and limited, because for example one domain can just choose not to

28 A more extensive definition is proposed by Hobson and Seabrooke (2007), who identified *Everyday Politics* as the "acts by those who are subordinated within a broader power relationship but, whether through negotiation, resistance or non-resistance, either incrementally or suddenly, shape, constitute and transform the political and economic environment around and beyond them" (Hobson/Seabrooke 2007: 15-16).

29 Besides 'resistance', other forms of everyday politics are: 'support, modification and evasion', and 'compliance' (Kerkvliet 2009). This classification was re-delineated by Hobson/Seabrooke (2007) as 'defiance, mimetic challenge', and 'axiorationality'.

see the 'other'. However, visibility can be a double-edged sword, which on one side can lead to empowerment³⁰ when it is closely related to recognition by others or to access to restricted resources or services. But on the other, it can also facilitate control, exclusion, and discrimination by others, creating an ambivalent situation for migrants. This is the case for migrant women in irregular situations, and women victim-survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Recognition is a form of social visibility with implications for minorities and for those who are socially excluded.

Often perceptions of visibility are distorted due to the entrenched social representations of marginal subjects, and so visibility and recognition are not related in a linear way: there may be different ways of seeing and being seen, and the social impact of this visibility will depend on who is more visible and in which social location they are placed (Brighenti 2007). Total 'visibility' may lead to total control, as explained in Foucault's discussion of the panopticon – a symbol of total surveillance (Gordon 2002). In addition, visibility can lead to regulation, selectivity, or stratification. So the relationship between seeking recognition or visibility and being controlled is a close one. This tension between achieving recognition and suffering control or discrimination generates complexity in the relationship between in/visibility and power, and therefore between migrants and their context. In these terms, visibility does not necessarily lead to relief nor does it imply better life while invisibility cannot only be seen or considered as a lack of power (Brighenti 2007).

Invisibility as a strategy for power is reflected in the cases of silence and secrecy. Secrecy is not only centred within power, but secrecy by others also creates the possibility to escape or oppose power (Brighenti 2007; Amster 2008). Silence and secrecy can be key survival strategies, can offer protection, and in some cases can create spaces to renegotiate harmful gender relations and practices. In this respect, it is important to discuss the role of in/visibility in empowerment processes. If we are to consider the active participation of migrants in processes that will allow them access to better conditions of life, and what that might imply in the current context of border controls heightened by international requirements, we need to first question in what manner in/visibility could con-

tribute to these achievements. Ghorashi (2010) has raised similar questions, noting that unless the assumptions of the dominant discourse are also challenged, visibility does not help much in the process of accessing rights. In many cases visibility can even reinforce 'the boundaries' in relation to migrants, as presented in her study of Islamic women in The Netherlands, where the migrants are constructed as the 'other' – as not belonging to the nation, but living within it (Ghorashi 2010). This construction of otherness implies that migrants are those who 'do not belong', but this occurs not only for the first generation of migrants but also for their descendants. Floya Anthias has documented this type of 'othering' using ethnic distinctions in the United Kingdom with second- and third-generation Greek Cypriots. According to the author, the Greek Cypriot young people occupy a very ambivalent and contradictory position within society; on the one hand, they are invisible in terms of discourses about ethnicity and racialization in the United Kingdom, and on the other, they are visible as a cultural group that is geographically concentrated in specific urban spaces that are considered 'multicultural' (Anthias 2002).

However, there are many critiques of the notion of everyday life as political actions. For the case of the migrants' in/visibility it is also worthwhile questioning the sense of agency of this strategy. It is important to examine in more depth through additional research the ambiguity of direct claims, the conscientious decision of these acts as political, and the limited possibilities for effective advocacy and social change (Escobar 2008; Gardiner 2004; Kerkvliet 2009). Here, the time factor matters because this bottom-up process requires a long time to attain changes and the life of each migrant person should be worthy enough to consider possibilities of collective action that could ensure faster outcomes with long-term settings. In other words, in/visibility may be effective as a strategy of survival, but it may not be enough to achieve stable settings for a better quality of life. Having a voice does not necessarily mean that assistance or a positive response will come in return. Also, having a 'voice' in other situations can be a positive way to fight back to negotiate rights. On the other hand, invisibility enables daily mobility with fewer risks and less surveillance by others. Besides the fact of feeling safe, from this hidden position women can achieve short-term minimum conditions for survival. Hence, the exercise of agency through silence and invisibility entrenches a complex paradox, because it allows short-term achievements as conditions for survival. But as a long-

30 Empowerment refers to the process by which those who have been denied the possibility of taking strategic decisions in life acquire such capacity (Kabeer 1999).

term strategy it could be untenable, because the minimal gains achieved on a daily basis do not necessarily become established conditions for the life of the migrants and it might entrench superior circumstances of exploitation and abuse.

Women's responses to situations of 'othering', such as their invisibility, cannot be considered in opposite terms as positive or negative strategies. They should be analysed in reference to their social location and the structural conditions that generate complex processes of migration, which turn into incentives for the women's decision to exercise their own agency by becoming invisible (Parpart 2009). Therefore, invisibility and/or silence are specific strategies for survival just as much as visibility. The former is useful for protection and for achieving daily needs, while recognition, and therefore visibility, can offer the possibilities of accessing better life conditions and also rights in the long term (Parpart 2009). There are links between the conscious decision to become invisible or to pass unnoticed, and the ability to exercise agency and seek formal recognition of rights. The question of making women visible is challenged by the conditions under which they live and their strategies of fighting for it. Making women visible does not mean an end to their problems. Thus we cannot just propose the necessity of making them visible precisely because for many women invisibility has been a question of survival.

The in/visibility paradox has especial relevance to the terrain of accessing rights and formal protection, because to raise awareness of rights it is necessary that certain sectors speak out about their lack of substantive rights. In the context of human security, social justice should entail the philosophical perspective of the 'right to have rights' proposed by Hannah Arendt, which means guarantees for the safety conditions of vulnerable individuals regardless of their legal migratory status (Oman 2010). Women migrants' conditions of life need to go beyond 'gender' as a dichotomous variable and to examine its situational and relational character, revealing the social meanings of access to rights from the perspectives of the women migrants themselves. Given the increasingly restrictive conditions limiting their mobility, the claim to rights cannot yield positive results unless supported by other actors (social networks, civil organizations) which initiate processes that would make their experiences visible, and guarantee that their voices are heard by the state and other actors responsible for gender justice initiatives and processes (Molyneux 2008).

In the field of rights, much progress has been made in Latin America from research and advocacy. However, there are still many restrictions and biases involved in accessing these rights and achieving social justice in practice. During the last three decades of the twentieth century many initiatives were undertaken in Latin America to advance the rights of women, and these are also linked to those for the advancement of international migrants. In this respect, Molyneux (2008) pointed to three classes of crucial initiatives in the campaign for the rights of women in the region. Firstly, movements were launched for 'the right to have rights' in situations where people sought to restore democracy following authoritarian regimes. Thus, the language of rights has become a way of demanding justice and recognition. Second, ideas of citizenship that linked the state to passive subjects, that is, citizens as receivers, were re-examined. These ideas were replaced with ideas of 'active citizenship' that highlighted participation and agency, and favoured a more substantive form of citizenship – one that was more participative and socially responsible. Third, as a result of the first two initiatives, feminist movements began to see citizenship as a way of overcoming social exclusion. During the nineties, these three initiatives were reinforced and supported by an international development agenda that emphasized rights, women's empowerment,³¹ and participation (Dagnino 1998; Kabeer 2007; Molyneux 2008).

Considering that the achievement of social justice implies the access to rights, it is important to review how from reflecting on invisibility as a form of women's agency it is possible to identify alternative forms of support for migrants that respect their autonomy. If in/visibility is a question of survival, it is important to offer migrants the conditions required to make it as an informed decision. Many women argued that invisibility allows them to attain what they aspire to, namely a job, housing, children; "leaving their party in peace".³² However, their range of expectations could be limited by the lack of information, which delineates a minimal spectrum of possibilities for them. Perhaps, if they have access to more information on what they are entitled to get in terms of rights, services, and protection, many of these women will amplify their perspectives and possibilities so that

31 Women's empowerment is understood as a woman's ability to act and create change in the world.

32 'Viviendo su fiesta en paz' is a common expression used in this region of Mexico, which means to do things without generating trouble.

they can realize longer-term conditions for a life with dignity. In other words, if women do not know what they are entitled to, they will not expect it. But if they are informed about their rights as well as the procedures for accessing them, perhaps their exercise of invisibility will be more strategic in its nature.

10.6 Conclusions

This chapter has shown how the re-scaling of border control in Mexico has affected Guatemalan im/migrants along Mexico's southern frontier. The meaning of borders, usually confined to territorial limits, can be extended to the construction of the 'othering' of social boundaries (Van Houtum/Van Naerssen 2001). Discourses on migration processes based on the 'fear' and 'threat' of crime and national security affect the horizontal relationship between migrants and people in their social networks, generating additional dimensions of vulnerability for the migrants by stressing the differences. The emphasis on the threat of crime linked to migration and border control policies has triggered social processes of 'othering' that have severely impacted everyday life and the survival experiences of Guatemalan im/migrant women, mainly those migrants who have irregular status. Migrants, particularly women, become more vulnerable to abuse, violence, and insecurity in a variety of daily relationships: employer-employee; neighbour-to-neighbour; inter-group relations; husband-wife. The re-scaling of forms of border control aims to create orderly management of migrations, as Mexico's new Law of Migration guarantees the socio-economic and civil rights of immigrants even for those with irregular status. But local social dynamics of power linked with gender, ethnicity, and economic features are such that the new law remains unreachable for many Guatemalan im/migrants.

Many women im/migrants who have faced multiple forms of insecurity tend to select a strategy of invisibility to conserve their daily survival in subtle ways, which include a commitment to protecting their children and families by safeguarding dignified conditions that many of them have not achieved themselves - i.e. without physical, mental, or verbal abuse. In this sense, invisibility becomes a relevant form of empow-

erment, an everyday exercise of politics of resistance to enable access to the minimum conditions of life. Also, the practice of invisibility is the result of their own search for personal locations where they can feel safe and autonomous. Ironically, this strategy of invisibility can be counterproductive for them, because in a context of lack of information, it prevents them from access to the benefits of the new migration law that could ensure more long-term conditions for a better quality of life. Dignity for migrants has a public dimension derived initially from their legal existence in Mexican society, but many migrants remain ignorant of and out of reach of civil organizations advocating their rights. So far, given the discourses and local spheres of power, Guatemalan women migrants, mostly with irregular status, must face multiple dimensions of insecurity derived from recent discourses and practices that focus on the link between 'irregularity' and national insecurity. As a result, there is an impediment to their achieving dignity and rights, especially for those living in remote rural areas and in marginal urban zones where information and formal procedures are not accessible.

In such instances, it is important to pay attention to the interface between the normative framework of im/migrants' rights and the dynamics of the local sphere of migration that obstruct the *enabling conditions* for women im/migrants to achieve a legal existence on their own account and which respects their autonomy. In this sense, information is an important instrument for creating the conditions needed to break down the dominant relationships of subordination, where women can adopt in/visible strategies through processes of informed decision. Enabling conditions should be built through the dissemination of more information about their rights as guaranteed by the new Migration Law, which can help migrant women to construct better long-term conditions for their future and that of their children. The construction of these enabling conditions remains a big challenge for society, a challenge which should be addressed by the joint efforts of social institutions and civil organizations, the media, and even the academic world, as well as by strengthening the practices of public officials, policymakers, and those involved in the migrants' networks.

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